

China's Military Objectives and Operational Experience in the Middle East

by [Grant Rumley \(/experts/grant-rumley\)](#)

Apr 19, 2024

Also published in U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Grant Rumley \(/experts/grant-rumley\)](#)

Grant Rumley is the Meisel-Goldberger Senior Fellow and Director of the Diane and Guilford Glazer Foundation Program on Great Power Competition and the Middle East at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



Articles & Testimony

A security expert provides an in-depth assessment of Beijing's military activities, funding, and strategic intentions in the region, including recommendations to prevent these efforts from harming U.S. alliances and interests.

The following is an excerpt from Q&A remarks prepared for a commission hearing on “[China and the Middle East \(https://www.uscc.gov/hearings/china-and-middle-east\)](https://www.uscc.gov/hearings/china-and-middle-east).” To read the full testimony, [download the PDF \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/7380?disposition=attachment\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/7380?disposition=attachment).

The Commission is mandated to make policy recommendations to Congress based on its hearings and other research. What are your recommendations for Congressional action related to the topic of your testimony?

1. Support defense modernization efforts in the region. For a variety of reasons, several countries in the region are looking to develop their own defense industrial bases. In pursuit of these ambitions, countries have sought a combination of foreign investment, diverse suppliers, and external partnerships that include technology transfers, research and development, and co-production agreements. U.S. security cooperation is notoriously inflexible when it comes to the latter. China and Russia, on the other hand, are perceived to be more flexible. Further, some U.S. partners see Washington entering into creative defense agreements with other countries—whether that is the AUKUS arrangement with Australia and the UK or INDUS-X with India—and perceive a general lack of interest in similar agreements in the Middle East.

For the U.S., shedding this inflexibility and sharing technology with regional partners is one way to reinforce the security partnership beyond simply committing military resources on the ground. To date, the U.S. has been wary of

such commitments given select countries' ties to China and the subsequent risk to proprietary U.S. defense information. Yet a defense technology sharing arrangement, if done carefully, could accomplish two objectives at once in both boosting the defense relationship with the partner country while also adding another structural constraint—i.e. the requisite safeguards on U.S. information—on a third-party country's relationship with Beijing.

2. Coordinate China-related messaging to regional countries with global partners. Regional partners have heard the U.S. talking points regarding China for years. Some are receptive, others are not. Some view the U.S. as a non-objective actor in this domain, given the U.S. competition with China. One way to circumvent this phenomenon is for other global partners, in particular those with experience dealing with China, to convey their own experiences and subsequent warnings to Middle Eastern countries. Some of these countries, like Japan or Singapore, have established relationships in the Middle East and a history of navigating China's practices. Coordinating their messages to countries in the region could foot-stomp U.S. talking points. Congress should—in the course of its engagement with such U.S. partners—emphasize the importance of imparting these lessons to third-party countries around the world, including in the Middle East.

3. Synchronize efforts between the legislative and executive branches to limit China's influence in the Middle East. In January, the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party asked the Department of Commerce to investigate the Emirati firm Group 42 Holdings (G42) regarding its reported ties to China. This followed years of bipartisan concern from the executive and legislative branches regarding the firm—which is led by the UAE's national security advisor—and its relationship with China. A month later, G42 announced that its investment arm had divested entirely from Chinese companies. The episode is an example of the potential power that unified, clear, and patient messaging can have in addressing China-related concerns with U.S. partners. Congress and the administration should expand efforts to identify specific China-related concerns in the region and coordinate subsequent messaging.

Grant Rumley is the Meisel-Goldberger Fellow in The Washington Institute's Diane and Guilford Glazer Foundation Program on Great Power Competition and the Middle East. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Coordinated Iran Sanctions Require Coordinated Enforcement](#)

Apr 19, 2024

◆
Matthew Levitt

(/policy-analysis/coordinated-iran-sanctions-require-coordinated-enforcement)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[The Middle East's Perilous Moment: Policy Implications and Escalation Risks](#)

Apr 18, 2024



Dana Stroul,
Zohar Palti,
Farzin Nadimi

[\(/policy-analysis/middle-east-s-perilous-moment-policy-implications-and-escalation-risks\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Russian-Iranian Cooperation and Threats to U.S. Interests](#)

Apr 17, 2024



Dana Stroul

[\(/policy-analysis/russian-iranian-cooperation-and-threats-us-interests\)](#)

TOPICS

[Great Power Competition \(/policy-analysis/great-power-competition\)](#)

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](#)

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](#)