

Transcript

Jonathan Fulton: Welcome to the China MENA Podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Fulton, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a political scientist outside University and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. A recurring theme throughout this show has been that Middle Eastern countries have complex relationships with China. Nothing is as simple as the headlines would have us believe. The Sino-Israeli bilateral relationship is particularly complicated. Dense economic relations have to be considered against the deeper and much more important Israeli relationship with the U.S. And while China does a lot of business with Israel, its support for Palestine in international forums puts a ceiling on political cooperation with Tel Aviv. To understand the dynamics of the China-Israel relationship, I'm joined today by Assaf Orion. Assaf is a senior researcher at the Institute of National Security Studies and the director of the Diane and Guilford Glazer Israel China Policy Center in Tel Aviv, Israel. Prior to joining IAC, he had a 32-year career in the Israeli Defense Forces, where in his final posting he served as the head of the strategic division in the IDF General Staff's Planning Directorate, responsible for strategy and policy planning, international cooperation, military diplomacy, and liaison to the neighboring militaries and peacekeeping forces. Since then, he's been keeping busy thinking, writing, and working on Israel-China relations. Assaf, welcome to the show.

Assaf Orion: Thank you, Jonathan. And thanks for inviting me.

Jonathan Fulton: Of course. Pleasure. So can we start with just a general overview of the Israel-China bilateral relationship. Which issues are at a high level of engagement, and which issues are underdeveloped or nonstarters at this point?

Assaf Orion: Historically speaking, we should understand the different chapters in Israel-China history from its beginning. It was overshadowed by the Cold War, in which it was very clear that Israel was on the Western side of the blocs. From 1979, when China turned to reform and opening up under Deng and the US established its diplomatic ties, actually, Israel was encouraged by America to support China in defense and military aspects. After China was defeated in its war in Vietnam, so then began a chapter of about two decades of military and defense relations, which were augmented by diplomatic ties between Israel and China only in 1992. The end of the nineties, however, following the third crisis in the Taiwan Straits actually marked an inflection point in the military ties because following two crises on defense exports, one, the Falcon early warning plane and the second, these harpy loitering munitions. These generated a crisis between the US, which finally suddenly woke up to China as a possible military rival in Taiwan and then turned to Israel and said, Hey, Israel, why are you arming my potential rival? And in 2007, these crises culminated in a legal step in Israel. And since then, there is a law of defense, export supervision or oversight, and basically no more military or defense exports to China since then. If we move forward to the decade of 2011 and onwards, the Netanyahu years, you know, these were a booster phase of economic relations and Mr. Netanyahu was the prime minister defined those relations as a marriage made in heaven. And this culminated in 2017 establishing a comprehensive, innovative partnership between Israel and China, which actually focused on technology, innovation, cooperation, and so on, followed by a lot of Chinese activity in Israel's infrastructure and investment, mostly in technology. In recent years, I would say that you can see the watershed line beginning in Washington in 2017. And in December, the Trump administration published its national security strategy, which basically said two main things. One, China is my number one problem. Two, technology is at the center of this great power competition. And Israel in recent years, and more so under its new government now facing another election, actually took a cool down or a chill down approach of a more cautious approach to its relations with China. So all combined, I would say, the effect of great power competition and COVID has seen a slowdown in many aspects of our cooperation.

And as I was, quote, quoted in some papers at the beginning of August, the honeymoon is over. But this is not to understand that there is a divorce. But unless infatuated relations, I would say, and more cool headed in a sense. When we look at the actual indexes, we can see growth in the volume of trade, basically in goods. We can see our export. Israel's export to China peaked in 2018 and is struggling since it's not going beyond the level of 2018. And on export services, it's very important to understand the scale. While Israel is exporting \$17 billion a year to America in services now it exports only 170 million. So you can see 1% of what we are doing with America. We do business with China on services. So I think it needs to be understood, this relationship is a developing relationship, deeply affected by the great power relations when the sun is shining on the US-China relation. Well, it was easy. When there are, it's more clouded and stormy. We are also getting our coats.

Jonathan Fulton: So that's consistent with what we've seen here in the UAE. I think that point that you mentioned, the national security statement from the Trump administration in late 2017 was really the point where you could see a lot of countries having to recalibrate and think about their relationship with China in different terms. I think it's also interesting how he framed it because again when we keep seeing these raw numbers and you see just a big spike, you know, this huge growth in China, Israeli trade or investment. And it looks so impressive. But like you say, you know, measured against, you know, a comparative approach really does show how, you know, deep or shallow, it actually is. So just, you know, I think it's another good point to put, you know, the COVID effect that we've seen a lot of that around the region, a lot of what China has been doing and infrastructure contracting has slowed down because of that. But what do you see in the near term, like in the short, you know, the years ahead? Do you think China and Israel are going to get back to that pre-COVID pre-Trump era level, or is it really cooling down?

Assaf Orion: I think not all of it is due to what's happening between China and America. Much of it is coming from China itself. Like the peak of Chinese investment in Israel was in 2018 and since then a drop. And we believe that this has more to do with China's own policy on capital flow than on bilateral issues between Israel and China. Tourism, we saw growth up to a point of 170,000 Chinese tourists per year, which was nice. But again, if we take it as in proportion. Israel pre-COVID enjoyed 3 million a year. So it's not a huge tourist group. But at the same time, after COVID, there was a shutdown. So you hardly see great delegations as they used to be, much less Israelis are going to China to do business and so on. So much of it is zero COVID and China's own closing up, not opening out now are chilling effects of these. We see more contentious aspects in technology, not because of the Trump administration, but because Israeli CEOs are thinking about their prospects, saying, okay, if I want to go to the West and I plan to market in America, having Chinese investment in my company is a liability and not a game. So they are much more cautious in that. And I would add that Israel's part of the reconsideration, I think, is awakening to the fact that it's not this. The challenge with China relations is not just not making America angry, as many people framed it, but China's own intricacies of how it's doing business and things that come with having relations with China. And if we read, well, what's going up or going on in the world, you should now also keep your eyes on the influence of corruption issues. Although China is not alone in that, we are quite good at it ourselves. There are issues of intervention in political systems, of espionage, and technology theft. Definitely technology theft and espionage are something that Israel should take care of and be cautious of, as should every serious or responsible country. So since China went to implement it strategically, the military-civil fusion so every civilian application can be and will be used by the state security apparatus. It puts more constraints on exports of such technologies. We see the difficult or problematic space expanding from narrow military and defense to dual use and of course, emerging technologies, which are not technically dual use by the old Wassenaar

definitions. So the whole export control regimes are being challenged. And still, even with all those caveats and difficulties, we see prospects to benefit from China's markets and so on as many countries, including the US do. And definitely, when you look at Israel's relative advantages in food technology, medical and health technologies, water technologies, and things that are connected to the climate crisis, all of these, I think, are still on the benign side that even if in a very contentious competition between the US and China, this should be, as we say, kosher to continue and even to develop. So we need to be sharper, better understanding the differentiation, parts of what we won't do with China, like military and military applicable issues, like things we do with China because they are benign and things that we need to spend more time to figure out and understand. And I think we're not alone in this. The whole Western hemisphere is actually looking for answers, for better solutions, for better definitions. You know, just a traffic light of red, green, and yellow is not rich enough to capture the complexity of reality here.

Jonathan Fulton: Yeah, that's a good way of putting it. No, I think you're right. You know, when you described earlier about the honeymoon stage, it sounds like, you know, the more experience you have in any bilateral relationship, the more the glow starts to fade and you start to understand each other better and you see what you should be thinking more seriously about. And that seems to be what you're describing here. I think we're seeing that in a lot of places. So one thing you mentioned, there's a lot of infrastructure construction that's been taking place in Israel with Chinese companies. This is interesting to me because I've been studying the BRI for several years and it seems the countries that have played the biggest role in the BRI are those that connect beyond just, you know, those countries where projects link that country to other countries. You know, in China, the bureau is all about connecting markets and connecting across regions. So for the longest time, Israel, you know, geographically has this natural advantage with this eastern Mediterranean position. But within its own region, it wasn't really connected to two neighboring countries in a very meaningful way. And of course, since the Abraham Accords, we've seen that starting to change pretty dramatically as Israel sees its connections across the Middle East start to intensify. Do you think this experience that Israel's had with China on infrastructure construction can develop into projects that link Israel with its regional partners in Belt and Road type things?

Assaf Orion: It's a very good question, but I suggest, you know, before stopping because BRI is the great catchword, the Silk Road, with all the romance of history returning, it's returning to a point where Marco Polo started in Italy. But we now hear that BRI is in Latin America and Africa, where the Silk Road never, never reached. Yes. So the Arctic. So when we speak about the Belt and Road, I think we need to differentiate the real facts from the brand, and in the early years since 2013 when it was launched, it was like an unbelievable brand. Everybody spoke about it. Everybody wanted to have a share in the wealth and prosperity. It brought in the glamor of, you know, the silk in the Silk Road. It was quite the festival. But I believe over the years, it became a more toxic or at least problematic brand. You can see that our previous governments spent a lot of time speaking and romancing about the BRI and Israel's potential, and even municipal-level mayors said, Oh, my city will be part of the BRI, you know, becoming this center of the universe. No, you were a small town on the outskirts of Western Asia. So the brand, I think, is in decline. And I would also point to the fact that China itself initiated another initiative, the Global Development Initiative, which is a non-BRI, but dealing with development, which tells us something that China already identified, that the brand has been maybe tarnished or at least less successful. And if you look at the pace of countries joining BRI, it's on the decline like it again, it peaked in 2018 and now you see people stepping away from that. When we move from branding and, you know, images to actualities, yes, Israel is in dire need of heavy infrastructure and it saw China come and compete here for desalination, roads, railroads, light

rails and tunnels, ports, and everything. This again, China's I would say participation in Israel's infrastructure peaked twice in 2015 and 19. And since then, we see a decline to a point that they actually compete less. In the past, there was a talk about the railroad from a lot on the Red Sea to the center of Israel on the Mediterranean. There were also some talks, very visionary, if not fantastic, of a railroad through Jordan to Saudi Arabia and connecting us to the Gulf. Definitely, China is a huge engine for such heavy, heavy infrastructure, and should there be rails to connect, I guess that Israel will try to connect, whether we call it BRI or not, which I'm skeptical of. It depends much on our next government and we are now heading into our fifth election. So you should check before you decide, you know, every year, half a year or a year. So with heavy infrastructure, I think there is still potential for China. The Chinese contribution to what the region needs. But we also need to recall that the BRI is also about the digital Silk Road and communication. On this, I've seen more enthusiasm in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and Qatar, I think like Huawei and ZTE infrastructure. Israel is much more conservative, not to say a total outlier in communications security. And unlike others, including the Five Eyes, we don't have a by date to clean up our network from Huawei as the UK and the U.S. and others, because we don't have Chinese components, core components in our cellular networks from the second generation, not only fifth that is now we're building. So if the BRI regionally it comes with a communication package, I am not sure that Israel will connect and subscribe to that. That being said, President Biden visiting Saudi Arabia also included some proposals for 6G and 5G development and deployment, which seems to be competing with what China is proposing. So I think we're seeing the competition still in place. And as I said, we became a bit more toxic. And it actually spurred some approach that I call the Chastity Belt and Road because there is an expectation that you won't touch anything in China. And I think this expectation is a bit overemphasized.

Jonathan Fulton: You're always one for the pithy phrase itself. The Chastity Belt and Road, I'm sure that's going to be the tagline, was absolutely recorded. Yeah, yeah. I think that's a good point. I mean, so yeah, the Belt and Road really where there's a lot of branding going on. But you know, beneath that was the fact that Chinese state-owned enterprises were really good at doing these overseas infrastructure construction projects. And, you know, we saw this, you know, one of the things that we didn't hear a lot about after the, you know, meeting that into the GCC feud was, you know, talk of recommitting to this Arabian Peninsula railway link. And you can see, you know, like you mentioned this, the red mad or talk of this land bridge, you really can see how if Xi Jinping goes to Saudi Arabia this December or next March, whenever he does go, I wouldn't be surprised if there's a lot of energy for Chinese SOEs to get involved in those types of projects and this could be something that could be beneficial for Israel, BRI or not. You can see how, you know, there would be some synergy there.

Assaf Orion: But just know on infrastructure in general, I think we need to differentiate between things. They come, they build, and they leave like our port and where they stay and operate, which means more dependence, reliance, and access that needs more care and attention.

Jonathan Fulton: But, you know, just when you mentioned the port, I mean, the port Haifa, of course, is something that got a lot of media attention. But this kind of fits in with it, right? That port links up with a lot of other Chinese-managed ports in the Mediterranean, in the Red Sea. This is something that really does link up different markets and ports. So I don't know. Could you tell us a little bit about that? I know we didn't discuss the Haifa port beforehand, but I think it's something that especially American audiences often point to and think of, you know, an Israeli vulnerability in the relationship with China.

Assaf Orion: Yeah, Haifa Port, which is actually the Haifa Bay Port, which is an 800 meters wharf in the Haifa Bay Port complex. And it was after many years of hardship in Israel, throughputs through the two ports. We had a high finance loan. Our government in 2011 decided to try to double the volume by privatizing, actually going against the union labor unions of the ports which are holding the country by its throat. So Israel said, okay, let's double and privatize the two new ones, one in the south, one in the north. In the south, as I said, in Ashdod. A Chinese company built it and left. And now it's run by a Swiss, Dutch company. In Haifa, another company built it and the Shanghai International Port Group operates it, which means some cranes are in Haifa and they're loading and unloading container ships in Haifa. It means that about 8 to 10 Chinese, the management crew is here working with 100 Israelis with a lot of security authorities. Potential to check whatever we see. And the great buzz of the Haifa port was created at the 2018 conference. That was the three years after the tender was signed with no American competitors even bidding. So in this conference, a former Navy admiral, US Navy admiral, said, you know, if the Chinese operated, the Sixth Fleet might not be able to come to port calls in Haifa because of espionage issues. Now, you could argue about the value of cranes for espionage. I'm not belittling it just for the proportion of the same company. Producing those cranes is holding a 70% market share globally. And if a Chinese crane inhibits the use for US Navy, well, maybe. Maybe the battle for the seas or the oceans is already won. And I don't think that's correct. But why should I make an effort and explain it? Instead of mentioning that since it started operating on September 2021, three port calls by US Navy ships already occurred in Haifa. And I think it says a lot about what America and the American Navy really think about this actual threat. So there's a huge strawman there. But I don't think we should dismiss China's challenges to advanced high-tech democracies. And we understand by reading the current national security strategy, the previous national security strategy, and China's own stress on technology, we just saw some nominations into the Politburo with a heavier weight to technology people and space people, the Cosmos Club, so to speak, at the expense of economy for economists. So we understand that technology is a big thing. We also remember that Israel is a big technological player punching above its weight. And this is why China is seeking a comprehensive, innovative partnership with us. So if the main focus is technology and safeguarding Israel's technology, is it making sure that it doesn't leak or we don't lose it to China and so on, and so forth. We should focus our efforts on countering the tech transfer and tech loss to China rather than running after the Haifa port flare. It depends on which homing system you are. So reading the books about Chinese industrial espionage and quest for foreign technology, there's a great book by Routledge on Beyond Espionage, where we understand that there are like 30 methods of tech transfer, some of them legal, some of them illicit and so on and so forth. Well, Haifa ports and investments are just two. And we need to take a systemic approach looking at all 30.

Jonathan Fulton: That's really helpful because, you know, what we see is, you know, again, a lot of headlines about how, you know, China is going into Haifa and it's going to really, you know, subvert a lot of what Israel or the U.S. strategy in the region. And I think you just gave us a really good counterargument. I'm kind of switching tracks, just looking domestically within Israel. You know, you've mentioned a few times the endless election cycle, which must be exhausting. How does China feature in the domestic discourse in Israeli domestic politics? Is there a sense among the public that more engagement with China is a good or a bad thing? Or do people even think much about China?

Assaf Orion: China is not a great election issue. If there is a good election issue, we're mostly about our own tribal camps and so on and so forth. Israel is a country living under many security threats, existential military defense, and so on and so forth. China is not an enemy. China is not a military threat. China is hardly even a defense issue. So it enjoys, I would say, an

exceptionally good image in Israel. Their reputation is good. It's rather amiable in this sense. But we also need to look at the trend back in 2019, after, I think, consecutive years of governments in Israel being very supportive of China relations. It was like Eldorado. You know, go and make money in China. And looking at the Pew poll from 2019, in America, there were about 66% negative positions in China. And then Israelis, there were 60-something percent positive to China and 26 negative. In 2022, the Pew poll showed that America, even more, when went even more negative to 82 or 84% negative. And Israel corrected, I would say, to 48 positive and 46 negative. So it's now a more balanced view on China, like 20 points decline. I think China did a lot of self-damage in the world for fear and diplomacy in being hard-handed on Australia and Lithuania. America has a voice in Israel when we are talking about, okay, 66% positive to China and Israel in 19. America is above 80, 83, 88. It's not by mistake that President Trump says, oh, I'm so popular there. I could have been the prime minister. America is very popular and loved in Israel. So I think it's something that informs itself from world events. But we should also remember that Israel is very Middle East-focused. There's hardly good coverage of what's happening in East Asia. China is not a big thing in our press. You don't see much of it, much news about it, and perhaps mostly in the economic magazines, but on the geo-strategic aspects, very little presence. So on the whole, since it's not coming from the threat flank, it's still considered as an economic partner, a promising economic partner, and even its regional policies of supporting the Palestinians in words and helping Iran circumvent sanctions and developing weapons systems that some of them, Israel was on the receiving end of. We were hit by a Chinese model missile produced in Iran and shot or launched by Hezbollah. In 2006, we lost four men on a missile boat. So. I would say the image is more or less benign with growing awareness of the threat of risk and of implications to our relations with the US. That's very clear. If there's one thing you would ask Israelis is that doing anything with China today needs to be done with your eyes in the rearview mirror of what North America thinks about it. And as we know in mirrors, objects are closer than they appear.

Jonathan Fulton: That's great. So you mentioned a couple of things I want to go into. You know, Palestine is one of them. You know, China has a special envoy for the Israel-Palestine issue. They've offered at different points to act as a mediator to varying degrees of interest. It's issued lots of statements in the United Nations and the press. In response, we've heard some pretty frank comments from Abbas on China. Remarkably frank comments about what he thought of China and what China could do. And we've also heard lots of Israeli dissatisfaction with Chinese rhetoric and actions on this issue. I was trying to see this issue from an Israeli perspective, like, does anybody think that China has the answer to this problem? And, you know, when China injects itself into this, is it seen as useful or otherwise?

Assaf Orion: One of our colleagues in the Rand Corporation, Andrew Scoble, once wrote about China in the Middle East as being an economic heavyweight, a political lightweight, and a military featherweight. On the Palestinian issue. Where do you see the political overtures? The positions, I would say, are so stale. You think you're back in 1964. It resonates with the old support for the liberation movements of the mid-sixties. I think it carries a Maoist legacy and this automatic yes they're saying the right things about both sides' rights to live in peace and so on. But they already recognize the state of Palestine. And whenever there are condemnations to be done, they usually come our way. All votes in the UN are against us. And when you look at the opportunity side, once in a while, China publishes a four-point plan, five point plan. All the plans are the same. The level of political heft actually doing the heavy lifting needed for negotiations is not there. China is not even doing what Japan is doing and trying to promote infrastructure for the Palestinians and Israelis. Infrastructure for peace is very limited. And when you look at the actual political activity, diplomatic activity, they hold conferences in China, fanfare, conferences between irrelevant Palestinians and irrelevant Israelis like this is hardly even the track too, I

would say, two and a half. So. I don't think that besides when Abbas goes and lauds China for standing by the Palestinians. Yes, but is standing there with his hands in his pockets, it's not doing anything. It doesn't want to stick its neck into a very problematic, you know, a very complex problem set. He doesn't want to pay the cost of failure because, well, when you're hosting complicated negotiations, you need also to explain the failures and not just the. And the victories or the wins. You don't see great money dangling to promote, you know, economic stabilization because China is not a great donor. I'm an investor, yes. With economic logic. But it doesn't just donate the way the U.S. does. You would never see a Chinese Marshall Plan building any other nation in a serious way unless they're building their own future business and infrastructure. So I think that their participation in the so-called peacemaking is very symbolic. And the Palestinian Authority, which is not really in the business of making peace. Not that I think that the conditions now on our side are suitable, but they are totally unsuitable right now. And it's good to have China as a declaratory friend somewhere to go to say, yes, the American you know, the American role is incredible, unreliable. So bashing is great when you go to Beijing. But do they really expect China to bring Israel to be able to mediate effectively, and to be seen as an honest broker by both sides? You know what? China standing by Iran too closely, saying nothing when Iran attacks its neighbors. Not really a good starting position. So I think we need to be different in our approach and expectations from China. China is not a security guarantor in the Middle East. China is an interesting business and infrastructure partner. Yes. Very. Politically? It depends on whether it serves its purpose or not. And it's not the end for heavy lifting or peacemaking or negotiations.

Jonathan Fulton: Okay. Well, that's perfect, because when you mentioned Iran, that was the other thing I want to bring up from your previous comment. You know, China's had this kind of balanced approach where, you know, we'll work with both sides and have very intense regional rivalries. And of course, it's worked with Iran in this comprehensive strategic partnership and in bringing it into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. I've often argued that its engagement with the GCC is much more meaningful than what it does with Iran in real terms, whether in economic terms or political terms. But it does prop up Iran in a way that probably people in Israel find problematic. So this, you know, China's approach to the Middle East in general, does it how do you see it affecting Israel's regional interests? Is it a source of support or subversion, or is it something in between?

Assaf Orion: As much as it's, and let's say, promoting infrastructure and economy and promoting stabilization through economic prosperity, I think is positive. As much as it's you know, it's nonpartisan, it's not taking sides. It's sort of neutral. It's navigating between sworn enemies. One visit includes Xi Jinping's visit in 2006 and 16 included Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran. Saudi Arabia and Iran are not in a love story. These are sworn enemies, existential enemies, and being able to walk both sides of the Gulf and having comprehensive strategic partnerships with both. And yes, I agree that the volume of trade between the Gulf states and China is much more formidable than Iran. But geo-strategically, let's look at and let's look at what China does. Yes. It supported the JCPOA in a way. Yes. It doesn't push Iran. It doesn't have to use sanctions as a good coercion leverage because Iranian oil is cheap and China needs it. So China buys it big time. I would point to the concerns in Israel about the military and defense clauses in the new agreement, which we saw the drafters of two years ago because we know that Iran was already supported by China in its nuclear project in the Isfahan uranium conversion facility and in other parts. And I already mentioned missiles. So in this sense, helping Iran out of isolation and helping it circumvent the pressures to come to a better agreement the longer, stronger, or whatever is unhelpful. When Iran is attacking Saudi Arabia in 2019 or throughout the years that the Houthis bombarded Saudi Arabia and even the Emirates. You didn't hear China in public say Iran, why are you going after energy security? That is,

tankers and oil fields and so on, which is of vital Chinese interest? And why are you launching and destroying assets of our other comprehensive strategic partners? Maybe they said it quietly, but we don't see China as a great restraint or restraining power. And the last point, I think we need to spend some attention and time on the new emergencies of the actual east bloc of China, Russia, and Iran. When Iran is joining Russia's war in Ukraine and China is more or less adopting Russia's narrative about the war, blaming the US blaming NATO, trying to sidestep the question of using military force to infringe on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. All of these are high principles of Chinese foreign policy. So you see more or less the emergence of a block around the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but also even just the trilateral path between China, Russia, and Iran is something that you can just say, okay, they are just doing business. It's beyond business. You see naval exercises by Iranian, Chinese, and Russian vessels and navies near Iran. That's what's going, you know, beyond just holding hands in the General Assembly. It's very real. And the deeper it grows because of Russian necessity and isolation, because Iranian necessity and isolation and China's own more assertive, more aggressive sometimes, and military buildup, we will end up seeing more. And we do see already more Chinese weapons systems flying around the Middle East, China helping Saudi Arabia to promote uranium extraction. China helping Saudi Arabia with ballistic missile development and solid propellant, which means that China is ushering in the nuclear arms race of the Middle East following Iran now growing to be a threshold state. So in this sense, I think that it's very evident that there is a gap between China's role as an economic player in the Middle East or a big one at that. And it's defense and political-strategic involvement, which is still pretty lightweight. And just one caveat we see, I think, the early buds of Chinese military presence in the Middle East, in the Djibouti port. We heard about or read about Al Khalifa with Gwadar across the Gulf. I think China is slowly moving in to have more assets. I wouldn't go as far as those who push the theory that it's displacing the United States or replacing it because I don't think they're providing those services, but certainly, they are making themselves ready to use military force one day.

Jonathan Fulton: So if this has been really, really fascinating, really fun for me, I always enjoy talking about regional affairs with you. But we've gone on already taking too much of your time. I'd encourage all of our listeners to check our profile page and ask because we've got links there to all of his recent articles which are always very insightful and very useful. Do you have anything you've published recently that you'd like to share and promote?

Assaf Orion: Yes. I recently published a piece in Mosaic magazine called "No Israel is Not Falling into China's Orbit", trying to diffuse a lot of wrong assertions about Israel, and China relations and making a more factual approach to address it. These are complicated and complex issues, and they really deserve attention to facts, figures, trends, and nuance. Not just are you with us or against us, or, as we sometimes say, my way or the highway.

Jonathan Fulton: Nice. There you are again with the biff. Listen, that article is really good. The day it came out, my inbox lit up. People, you know, all over the Middle East in Washington were sending it to me and saying, oh, are you going to check this out? Really good article. We'll put a link to that on the show page. Assaf, thank you so much. Look forward to chatting with you again soon. To our audience. Thanks for joining us.

Assaf Orion: Thank you.

Jonathan Fulton: For the audience, thanks for joining us. Follow us on social media. Subscribe, review and rate us on iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcasts. And we'll see you next month with another episode. Thank you very much.

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