

Focus
September 2023

**Proposed Iran-Saudi Gulf Maritime Security
Cooperation: An Alternative to I2U2?**

Syed Fraz Hussain Naqvi and Maria Mansab

Proposed Iran-Saudi Gulf Maritime Security Cooperation: An Alternative to I2U2?

Syed Fraz Hussain Naqvi* and Maria Mansab**

Abstract

The recently proposed Iran-Saudi Maritime Security Cooperation plan introduces a groundbreaking shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. This proposal presents the Persian Gulf at the epicenter of the regional political, economic, and security proceedings. Paving a path distinct from the dominant International, Intelligence, Unmanned, and Underwater (I2U2) approach, largely orchestrated by the US and its allies to bolster maritime security, this proposal presents a potential game-changer. Therefore, it is imperative to critically analyse this proposition while taking into account the longstanding Iran-Saudi rivalry, the complex geopolitical scenarios in the region, the nuances of regional security and its potential global maritime security implications.

Keywords: *Rapprochement, Gulf Maritime Security, I2U2, Iran-Saudi, Mediation, Regional Security Framework*

* The author is currently an Assistant Research Officer Iran Program at the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. He has over a dozen research papers and research essays, published both nationally and internationally in renowned and Scopus-indexed journals and magazines, to his name. He has also contributed an international book chapter. His areas of expertise include Iran, the Middle East, Foreign Policy, Counter Terrorism, Astro Politics and Political Islam.

** The author is an M.Phil. scholar and currently working as an Intern at the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. She has published wide range of articles in national and international news blogs and journals.

Introduction

After nearly eight years of diplomatic impasse, the Saudi-Iran rapprochement provided the framework for conflict resolution in the Middle East. The aforesaid was reinforced by the Saudi delegation's visit to Yemen and Syria's return to the Arab League. These developments prompted a speculation that, following decades of conflict, the Middle East could initiate a new beginning and cooperation that could lead to the establishment of a regional security apparatus. The reopening of embassies and the mutual consensus of both states to strengthen the maritime security of the Gulf contributed to the consolidation of Saudi-Iran relations. Given the existence of an already formalised mini-lateral alliance known as the I2U2, the formation, and subsequent sustainability of such an alliance is dubious. The participation of the US and Israel, Iran's longstanding adversaries, in I2U2 could be a stumbling block to the formation of another Gulf Maritime Security Alliance particularly when an Arab country, i.e., the UAE, is a member of the I2U2. In addition, the fact that China mediated the rapprochement suggests that China could conceivably be a part of the aforesaid maritime alliance. Such a scenario would inevitably bring Sino-American competition to the Middle East, and both I2U2 and the proposed Gulf Maritime Security Alliance could act as rivals. If Israeli efforts to isolate Iran fail, the regional states, which are predominately Muslim, could form a regional security apparatus that would place the proposed maritime alliance at the forefront of regional security proceedings.¹ Iran and Oman have already conducted several joint naval exercises in the past. Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq and Pakistan are now interested in the maritime cooperation. According to Iranian media reports, the US Navy has resigned from the UN-led maritime coalition in the Persian Gulf.² Navy commander Shahram Irani reportedly stated that Iran, Saudi Arabia, and three other Gulf states, namely the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain, plan to establish a naval alliance that would also include Iraq, India, and Pakistan.³ Although he did not provide specifics, he

stated that the countries of the region have realised that it was only through cooperation that they could achieve security.⁴

This article therefore analyses the possibilities for the formation of such a maritime alliance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the paper explicates the Sino-US competition in the Middle East through this rapprochement. Lastly, the article also highlights the benefits of such an indigenous alliance for the Middle East and its significance for Pakistan.

A Historical Glimpse

Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two major regional contenders, have a history of tenuous relations resulting in an intense power struggle that has shaped the Middle Eastern political landscape for years. This contentious relationship, deeply ingrained in ethnic, religious, and political differences, frequently manifests through proxy wars and diplomatic chess games. Fueling this animosity are their ideological standpoints; Iran's Political Islam stands in stark contrast to Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy. The feud between Iran and Saudi Arabia also has a long and complex history. It goes beyond the simple religious rivalry, with politics, nationalism, regional hegemony, and economic competition contributing to their fraught relationship. In the year 1979, Iran experienced a groundbreaking transformation with its Islamic Revolution. Its subsequent aim to disseminate these revolutionary principles beyond its borders rattled Saudi Arabia to its core. The monarch ruler in Saudi Arabia perceived this as a direct challenge to his rule. Iran's nuclear program added fuel to the fire in the long-standing dispute. KSA has raised alarm bells over Iran's potential path towards nuclear armament in line with Western countries. Iran, on the other hand, stood firm on its stance that its nuclear ambitions are rooted solely in peaceful objectives.

To understand the Saudi-Iran rivalry, it is necessary to dive into the depths of history. Iran, once known as Persia, and Saudi Arabia have been two distinct entities since antiquity, shaped by contrasting sociocultural and geopolitical landscapes. This resulted in the ensuing of Arab-Persian rivalry between the two

states. In modern history, the relations between the two were relatively amicable until 1979. The revolutionary ideology of Iran along with the Persian legacy instilled the aspirations of becoming the regional hegemon that threatened Saudi Arabia's position by virtue of its standing as a 'custodian of two holy mosques' and 'the birthplace of Islam.'⁵ The saga of rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia took a potent twist during the Iran-Iraq war that unfurled between 1980 and 1988. In this volatile period, KSA placed its weight behind Iraq, adding to the brewing tension with Iran. Saudi Arabia provided Iraq with tanks, artillery, and various other forms of military equipment to enhance Iraq's military capabilities. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia extended diplomatic assistance to Iraq in many international forums, including the Arab League, where it expressed condemnation of Iran's activities and affirmed its solidarity with Iraq.⁶ Towards the end of the 20th century and the early 2000s, numerous efforts were made to temper this feud through diplomatic overtures with the aim of restoring a sense of normality in relations. These endeavors include the facilitation of dialogue and negotiation between Saudi Arabia and Iran through GCC including high-level diplomatic gatherings and conversations. Periodically, Saudi Arabia and Iran have also engaged direct bilateral dialogues. The primary agenda of these talks generally revolves around addressing regional conflicts. However, these discussions have not yielded a more comprehensive resolution to the ongoing state of hostilities.⁷

Furthermore, any hope for peace proved transient as the tension between the nations was stoked afresh with the 2003 invasion of Iraq led by the US, inadvertently handing Iran a greater sway in the regional dynamics.⁸ In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, KSA, and Iran engaged in a struggle for geopolitical dominance in Iraq and Lebanon by employing proxy actors. The exacerbation of pervasive instability in these nations was further intensified by the support provided by both governments to various groups and political organisations. The onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 introduced a layer of complexity to the existing dynamics between Iran and Saudi

Arabia. KSA provided support to multiple rebel factions, while Iran extended its support to the Assad administration. Lastly, Iran's nuclear aspirations further exacerbated the tensions as KSA perceived Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities as a move towards expansionism and a threat to the regional status quo.

Understanding the Potential for Cooperation

One of the key concerns surrounding the proposed cooperation between Iran and KSA is its feasibility, given the longstanding distrust and bitter rivalry between the two nations. These elements, amplified by differing political structures and religious affiliations, make the cooperative venture a formidable challenge. However, the recent socio-economic transformation taking place in KSA, encapsulated in its Vision 2030, and Iran's apparent openness to fostering relations with the world, hint at the potential for a thaw in their frosty relationship. Significant strides have been made to bridge this divide, with the Saudi-Iran détente symbolising a dramatic twist in the Middle East's political narrative. This thaw has laid the groundwork for potential conflict resolution and opened doors for cooperation in a region that has been grappling with unrest for a long time.⁹

Notable steps, such as the diplomatic visit by the Saudi delegation to Yemen and the Arab League's decision to reinstate Syria, underscore a potential shift from a narrative steeped in conflict towards a harmonious regional security framework. The reopening of embassies between Saudi Arabia and Iran, coupled with their mutual agreement to enhance Gulf maritime security, further cements the foundations for renewed cooperation. The proposed Maritime Security Cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia presents an intriguing paradigm shift in global security dynamics promising profound implications for the region and beyond. The Strait of Hormuz, a strategic maritime chokepoint in the Persian Gulf, serves as a vital artery for global oil trade. An alliance between Iran and KSA to manage its security could drastically influence the dynamics of the international energy market with repercussions echoing through global economies.¹⁰

This security alliance's potential impact extends beyond economic considerations. The cooperation could lead to a significant shift in the power dynamics of international relations, fostering a more multipolar world, where multiple nations hold significant influence rather than a few global powers dominating the stage. It could encourage other regions to seek similar regional security collaborations, promoting a more cooperative, localised approach to address security concerns and reducing reliance on external powers for regional security. Such a shift could fundamentally reshape global geopolitics. The potential for enhanced regional stability is another intriguing prospect of this proposed alliance. The Middle East especially the Persian Gulf region, has long been a stage for various conflicts both originating within its borders and from outside influences. The proposal for a security alliance between Iran and KSA, the two pivotal powers within the region, could potentially herald a new phase of remarkable tranquility. This could offer a welcome change from the long-standing, erratic cycle of conflicts that have become almost synonymous with the region's history. This cooperative alliance has the potential to facilitate dispute resolution and keep disagreements from boiling over into full-scale wars.¹¹

However, this optimistic scenario does not gloss over the associated risks. The historical discord between Iran and KSA cannot be overlooked. Years of conflict, driven by political, religious, and ideological disparities, have deepened the distrust and animosity between these nations. Therefore, the proposed alliance is laced with potential pitfalls - even a minor provocation could potentially explode the situation, leading to heightened conflict. The perception of this alliance by other regional powers, particularly Israel and Turkey, is another crucial factor to consider. Should these nations perceive the Iran-Saudi cooperation as a threat, they might respond with countermeasures, such as increased military preparedness or formation of counter-alliances. A potential surge in regional discord is a pressing concern. This could push the Middle East's already shaky security situation closer to the edge of conflict.¹²

While Iran has historically exhibited a hesitancy to allow any regional entity to exert influence over the dynamics of the Persian Gulf, it, itself, endeavors to uphold its authority and exert control within its proximate surroundings due to its perception of being a pivotal actor. The discourse around the management of critical maritime passages, namely the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb, mostly centers on the geopolitical implications associated with exerting authority over these strategic locations. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the methods through which control is implemented and its capacity to be utilized as a means of coercion. The utilization of this control as a geopolitical tool may yield substantial and detrimental ramifications for global trade, economies, and the maintenance of peace and security, notwithstanding the observation that control does not invariably impede economic advancement. This underscores the need for regional diplomacy and conflict resolution as crucial measures in mitigating such catastrophes.¹³

Furthermore, this alliance could bring a tectonic shift in the region's power dynamics causing ripples that would prompt regional and global powers to rethink their strategies. The shockwaves of such a rearrangement could reach far beyond the Middle East. It could provoke realignments of alliances, trigger arms races, or even spark conflicts, adding to regional instability. Therefore, any attempt at fostering such an alliance must proceed with caution, taking into account the potential ripple effects it might create.

Weighing the Impact of Existing Alliances and Emerging Players

Despite the aforementioned positive signs, the formation and sustainability of a Gulf Maritime Security Alliance, rooted in the Saudi-Iran *détente*, remains uncertain due to an already existing mini-lateral alliance named 'I2U2'. Since 1979, Iran has consistently maintained adversarial relations with both the US and Israel. This could potentially lead to the perception of any new coalition as aggressive, posing further challenges to the pursuit of

diplomatic solutions. Second, the UAE holds a prominent position as a member of the I2U2 and plays a substantial role within the Gulf region. After the Abraham Accords, the UAE has established strategic ties with both the US and Israel. Therefore, aligning with an alternative coalition that opposes the goals of the I2U2 might potentially strain these diplomatic relationships and hence, this makes the inclusion of the UAE into the proposed maritime alliance dubious.

Lastly, China's involvement as a mediator in the *détente*, alongside the observable tilt of Gulf States towards Beijing opens the possibility of China's inclusion in the proposed maritime alliance. If this comes to fruition, it could drag the Sino-US rivalry into the Middle East, thereby spurring a competitive dynamic between the I2U2 and the new Gulf Maritime Security Alliance.¹⁴ The rivalry between China and the US in the Middle East is characterised by complexity and dynamism and carries substantial consequences for regional and global security. Both the states possess significant economic stakes in the Middle East, particularly regarding energy resources. China plays a prominent role as an importer of oil from the Middle East, while the US aims to uphold its influence in the region to safeguard its energy interests and alliances. Therefore, the potential success of the Gulf Maritime Security Alliance will be contingent upon its ability to navigate the complex dynamics of the Sino-American competition. If the organization can effectively manage the conflicting interests of its members while also attracting the participation of other entities, such as China, in economic cooperation, it has the potential to strengthen its position in the region. The creation of a new alliance can influence regional dynamics by attracting additional members and potentially diminishing dependence on preexisting coalitions like I2U2.

Analysis of Implications

The geopolitical implications of such cooperation could be vast. Economically, shared responsibility for security would likely lead to decreased military spending, freeing up resources for both

countries. Additionally, safer maritime routes could facilitate trade and bolster regional economies. The successful collaboration between Iran and Saudi Arabia could signal the beginning of a fresh age of diplomacy in this region. This, in turn, might open doors to more regional partnerships, dial down the sectarian discord, and potentially smooth the path towards peace in the turmoil-stricken lands of Yemen and Syria.

From the security aspect, envision a joint maritime partnership ensuring a safer passage for vessels, combating piracy, and standing as a steadfast deterrent to any looming military threats in the Strait of Hormuz. This could also lessen the sway of external powers that often tangle the region's geopolitical threads. Economically, it is a potential win-win for both countries. By sharing the burden of maritime security, they could channel the saved military expenditure towards domestic growth and development. This could also act as a catalyst for more diplomatic dialogues, possibly warming up relationships in the region. This camaraderie between KSA and Iran would resonate a powerful message of unity in diversity, potentially easing sectarian tensions.

Reactions of Other Countries

According to Cmdr. Tim Hawkins, spokesperson for the US 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces, it is illogical that Iran, which is widely seen as the primary source of regional instability, expresses its intention to establish a naval security alliance aimed at safeguarding the same waters that it poses a threat to.¹⁵ Hawkins emphasized the significance of actions by expressing the intention to enhance defense measures in collaboration with partners in the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz. This reaction is, somewhat, in line with the statements made by the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, and the US National Security Council Coordinator, John Kirby, who both laid emphasis on Iranian role in the region and stressed upon the de-escalatory measures by Iran.¹⁶

Though the UAE has not issued any official statement but it has announced its withdrawal from the US-led task force protecting Gulf shipping, which has been subject to renewed

tanker seizures by Iranian naval forces in recent weeks.¹⁷ This development is viewed as disappointing by the UAE on the US-led task force that has failed to prevent the attacks in the Persian Gulf. For that, it could be possible that the UAE might join the Gulf Maritime Security Alliance to mitigate the naval issues with Iran and to seek the alternative guarantor in the form of China that has also welcomed the proposal. Nonetheless, it is yet to be seen whether UAE could partake in such an alliance given its already existing membership of I2U2.

India has a significant interest in the stability and security of the Gulf region due to its energy reliance and its large expatriate population in Gulf countries. Another major factor is the Indian investments in Chahbahar Port of Iran. However, there are no official statements regarding India's interest in joining the Gulf Maritime Alliance. Apart from that, since India has close association with the US and Israel, its inclusion in the Gulf Maritime Alliance proposed by both Iran and Saudi Arabia is dubious. It is because of the fact that Iran's primary objective from this naval cooperation is to thwart the foreign powers from the region.¹⁸ The prospective participation of both China and Pakistan also hinders the entrance of India into such an alliance. Therefore, if this alliance is materialized, India would be a 'weak-link' in such a multilateral cooperation.

Comparison with Existing Frameworks

Existing maritime security frameworks, such as Combined Task Force 150, operate under the leadership of external powers, primarily the US. An indigenous framework, led by Iran and KSA, could garner more local support and have more legitimacy in the eyes of regional actors.

CTF 150 was established to execute counterterrorism and maritime security endeavors inside the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, and North Arabian Sea regions. The aforementioned phenomenon pertains to worldwide endeavors led by foreign actors, mostly the US, to uphold maritime security and counter acts of piracy, terrorism, and other illicit undertakings

within these crucial maritime transit areas. The primary objective of Counterterrorism Task Force 150 (CTF 150) is to proactively impede and discourage terrorist entities from utilizing the marine environment for unlawful activities. This entails the surveillance and interception of maritime boats suspected of carrying illicit goods or providing financial support to terrorist activities. CTF 150 aims to augment marine security inside a crucial international commerce zone. The organization carries out maritime patrols to prevent and address various dangers, including piracy, smuggling, and human trafficking.¹⁹ These activities have the potential to disrupt trade routes and adversely impact the global economy. Stability Promotion: CTF 150 aims to cultivate a favorable atmosphere for regional collaboration, economic progress, and the unimpeded movement of goods and energy resources by undertaking operations to uphold security and stability in the area.

CTF 150 carries out ongoing maritime surveillance activities within its designated operational zone. Throughout these investigations, vessels are observed and then boarded to conduct inspections on their cargo and verify their adherence to international norms and rules. Counter-piracy is a prominent goal pursued by CTF 150. Furthermore, it engages in collaborative efforts with local fleets and maritime law enforcement authorities to augment their operational capabilities. The training and exchange of information contribute to the strengthening of regional forces' ability to effectively address challenges related to maritime security.²⁰ CTF 150 regularly engages in coordination efforts with other task forces within the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), including CTF 151, which is primarily dedicated to countering piracy, and CTF 152, which focuses on enhancing maritime security in the Arabian Gulf. This collaborative approach ensures a holistic strategy for safeguarding maritime security in the region.

Due to the non-regional nature of CTF 150 and the presence of the US in it, the Iranian mistrust and apprehension is inevitable. Furthermore, CTF 150 is also aimed to secure the Gulf countries from the perceived Iranian threat and to safeguard the

US interests. Once, the Gulf Maritime Alliance is materialized, the threat perception for the Gulf states could be subsided. Similarly, such a framework, being indigenous, could garner more acceptance and legitimacy. It would also send a message of self-reliance, highlighting the capability of regional actors to maintain their own security.²¹

Roadmap for Successful Cooperation

CBMs and Dissolving Mistrust

Iran and Saudi Arabia must bridge their mutual mistrust through confidence-building measures, diplomatic dialogues, prisoner exchanges, and the de-escalation of proxy conflicts to have successful relations. Mediation by neutral countries could be beneficial in the initial stages.²² Building trust is essential for this cooperation to materialize. Confidence-building measures can range from engaging in shared economic projects to the promotion of art and culture that could cement people-to-people ties.

Risk Mitigation Strategies

Potential risks, such as failure to uphold cooperative agreements or external sabotage, could be mitigated through detailed, legally binding agreements with clear penalties for non-compliance. External powers could be involved as guarantors to the agreement. This could be done by either having any external state as a guarantor or devising any institutional mechanism for the legality of such agreements.

Role of International Community

The international community could facilitate cooperation by providing a neutral platform for dialogue, helping draft agreements, and providing guarantees. In essence, the utmost respect must be accorded to the sovereignty of the regional framework avoiding any unwarranted meddling. The UN with its worldwide reach and mandate, could be instrumental in endorsing and backing this accord, providing it with the necessary credibility.

If navigated successfully, the cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia could pivot the geopolitical fulcrum of the Middle East, birthing a region that is more stable and economically vibrant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed Iran-Saudi Maritime Security Cooperation is a complex proposition, filled with potential benefits and fraught with considerable risks. Though the allure of regional equilibrium, potential global financial benefits and a shift towards a world with multiple influential players is indeed persuasive yet the risk of stoking the fires of conflict and adding to regional instability can't be dismissed. Every step towards nurturing such a partnership must be taken with a solid grasp of historical nuances, skilled diplomacy in traversing the geopolitical terrain and above all, a sincere pledge from both nations for peaceful coexistence. The international community must play a constructive role, supporting the alliance where necessary while also providing checks and balances. Careful monitoring and management by global leaders, policymakers, and scholars will be crucial in steering this ambitious proposal towards a path of peace, cooperation, and shared prosperity.

At the same time, this proposal offers an opportunity to think beyond traditional security frameworks and explore localized, context-specific solutions to regional security challenges. It calls for innovation and courage in diplomatic engagements, providing a chance to rewrite the narratives of the region which were long characterized by conflict and mistrust. The Iran-Saudi Maritime Security Cooperation could potentially reshape the region's future and significantly impact global geopolitics. An important development in this situation is the participation of China as a mediator in the détente, in addition to the noticeable shift of the Gulf States towards aligning with Beijing. The implementation of this intervention initiative by China has the potential for its incorporation into the envisioned maritime alliance. If this scenario materializes, it has the potential to include Sino-U.S. competition in the Middle East, thereby generating a

competitive relationship between the I2U2 and the newly formed Gulf Maritime Security Alliance.

Notes and References

- ¹ Daniel Estrin, "A non-invite, a mind-your-own-business response — Biden and Netanyahu tensions rise," *NPR*, 29 March 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/29/1166776967/biden-netanyahu-israel-us-tensions-rise>.
- ² David Axe, "The Iranian Navy Stands no Chance Against the US Navy," *The National Interest*, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/iranian-navy-stands-no-chance-against-us-navy-195526>.
- ³ "Iranian talk of new naval alliance puts focus on regional buy-in," *Amwaj*, 2023, <https://amwaj.media/media-monitor/iranian-talk-of-new-naval-alliance-puts-focus-on-regional-buy-in>.
- ⁴ Adam Gallagher, Sarhang Hamasaeed, and Garrett Nada, "What You Need to Know About China's Saudi-Iran Deal," *United States Institute of Peace*, 16 March 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/what-you-need-know-about-chinas-saudi-iran-deal>.
- ⁵ Ali Harb, "Iran-Saudi Arabia deal not a setback for US, analysts say," *Al Jazeera*, 16 March 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/16/iran-saudi-arabia-deal-not-a-setback-for-us-analysts-say>.
- ⁶ Bruce Riedel, Katherine Harvey, "why is Saudi Arabia finally engaging with Iraq?" *Brookings*, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-is-saudi-arabia-finally-engaging-with-iraq/>.
- ⁷ Amna Nawaz, "What's next for Iran and Saudi Arabia as nations take major step toward reconciliation," *PBS News Hour*, 6 April 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/whats-next-for-iran-and-saudi-arabia-as-nations-take-major-step-toward-reconciliation>.

- ⁸ Ildus G. Ilishev, "The Iran-Saudi Arabia Conflict and its Impact on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation," *Wilson Centre, Middle East Program*, 2016, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/the_iran_saudi_arabia_conflict_and_its_impact_on_the_organization_of_islamic_cooperation.pdf.
- ⁹ Hashim Abed, "Unravelling the true meaning of the Saudi-Iran peace deal," *Wavell Room*, 30 March 2023, <https://wavellroom.com/2023/03/30/saudi-iran-peace/>.
- ¹⁰ Shazia Anwer, "CPEC, Arab League Summit, and opportunities available to Pakistan," *DND*, 1 June 2023, <https://dnd.com.pk/cpec-arab-league-summit-and-opportunities-available-to-pakistan/291962>
- ¹¹ 'How has the Saudi-Iran divide affected the Middle East?' *Al Jazeera*, 7 April 2023. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/how-has-the-saudi-iran-divide-affected-the-middle-east/ar-AA19A6my>.
- ¹² Apoorva Iyer, "Iran-Saudi Arabia Agreement: Impact on Middle East Security." *London Politico*, March 2023, <https://londonpolitica.com/middle-east-watch-blog-list/iran-saudi-arabia-agreement-impact-on-middle-east-security>.
- ¹³ Susanne Koelbl, "What Iran Wants for a New Deal." *Spiegel International*, 5 April 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/analyst-on-tehran-s-nuclear-game-what-iran-wants-for-a-new-deal-a-f3e281a9-85bd-439e-9af4-1344944c97a4>.
- ¹⁴ Alexander Ward, "'Win-win': Washington is just fine with the China-brokered Saudi-Iran deal," *Politico*, 6 April 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/04/06/china-saudi-iran-deal-0090856>.
- ¹⁵ Angles Helou, "US says Iran's claimed naval alliance with Saudi, Gulf nations defies reason," *Breaking Defense*, 2023, <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/06/exclusive-us-says-irans-claimed-naval-alliance-with-saudi-gulf-nations-defies-reason/>.

- ¹⁶ "US on Iran-Saudi Rapprochement and China", *The Iran Primer*, March 15, 2023. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/mar/15/us-iran-saudi-rapprochement-china#:~:text=U.S.%20national%20security%20and%20foreign,of%20the%20National%20Security%20Council>.
- ¹⁷ Lisa Barrington, "UAE says it has stopped taking part in U.S.-led Gulf maritime coalition," *Reuters*, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/uae-says-it-withdrew-us-led-maritime-coalition-two-months-ago-2023-05-31/>
- ¹⁸ Ismail Sari, "Is Iran Establishing a Joint Naval Force with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman?", *Politics Today*, 8 June 2023. <https://politicstoday.org/joint-naval-force-iran-saudi-arabia-uae-oman/>
- ¹⁹ "Task Force 150 Holds Change of Command," *U.S. Central Command*, 2022, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/News-Article-View/Article/3101250/task-force-150-holds-change-of-command/>
- ²⁰ Megan Eckstein, "Combined Maritime Forces establishes new naval group to patrol Red Sea region," *Défense News*, 13 April 2022, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2022/04/13/combined-maritime-forces-establishes-new-naval-group-to-patrol-red-sea-region/>.
- ²¹ Pepe Scobar, "Iran and Saudi Arabia: a Chinese win-win." *INTEL-DROP*, 7 April 2023, <https://www.theinteldrop.org/2023/04/07/iran-and-saudi-arabia-a-chinese-win-win/>.