

Iran's Forward Diplomacy and The Emerging Geopolitics of the Middle East

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The withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East has prompted the Arab states to seek new alliances to reduce its vulnerabilities in a volatile world. The geopolitical fault lines between East and West have shifted westward, from Iran to Saudi Arabia, and the new agreement between Iran and these countries has enormous potential to shift the region towards cooperation. Given the uncertainties, the significance of it can only be determined over time. As a result, Middle Eastern states have shifted their foreign policies and established new working relationships while maintaining the existing ones. This is the essence of geopolitics for small and medium-sized countries: spread your reliance on others as much as possible to protect your interests and enhance your freedom of action in a turbulent world. This is a sensible insurance policy. This article examines the region's new geopolitical landscape and its implications for war and peace.

Iran-Saudi Arabia Peace Deal: New Geopolitical Trends

The notion that history has an endpoint, as promoted by neoconservatives in the unipolar 1990s, is flawed, as it is in an endless process of renewal. The single handshake between Iran-Saudi Arabia represents the burial of trillions of dollars spent over four decades dividing and ruling West Asia.

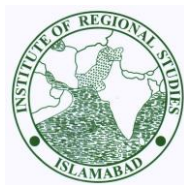
A proxy war has been raging in several countries throughout the Middle East for years between the two most powerful Sunni and Shia Muslim countries. They are leaders of opposing spheres of interest: Iran of a Shia sphere that includes Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, as well as Sunni Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and Saudi Arabia of a Sunni sphere that includes Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. The fallout from the rivalry has been felt

throughout the region. Saudi Arabia and Syria are now in talks to reestablish relations, similar to how Al-Assad's assistance from Iran changed the course of events in Syria. Assad's isolation is thawing as a result of the Saudi-Iranian agreement. Saudi Arabia has stated that increased agreements could result in Syria rejoining the Arab League. Israel, which wishes to normalise ties with Saudi Arabia, hits military targets in Syria that support Iran frequently. In Russia-mediated talks, Saudi Arabia and Syria are on the verge of resuming relations. The emerging agreement could push the United States back to the sidelines as Middle Eastern geopolitics underwent a significant change.¹

Lebanon's stability has suffered as a result of the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Lebanese-Saudi relations soured after the election of Michel Aoun in 2016, who has ties with the Hezbollah-backed by Iran.² As Lebanon's economy deteriorated, Riyadh withdrew its billion-dollar investment in the country. This agreement will pave the way for Saudi Arabia's economic investment in Lebanon and the development of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Several Iraqi political parties receive funding and have ties with Iran, and some post-Saddam leaders have lived in exile in Iran. Paramilitary groups affiliated with Shia political parties have also received funding and training from Iran. However, anti-Iran sentiment is spreading in Iraq, opening the way for Saudi Arabian influence, especially as Baghdad strives to reconnect with its Arab neighbors.³ This agreement may have an impact on the formation of a consensus between the Iranian-backed Iraqi government and the Saudi-led opposition.

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The accord is mainly prompted by Saudi Arabia's security fears about the border raids by the Houthis, who are supported by Iran. One of the most significant events since the agreement has been Iran's vow to cease sending military weaponry to the Houthis in Yemen. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has pledged to fund a \$3 billion economic rehabilitation of Yemen.⁴ There is an indication that this deal is paving the way for the de-escalation of proxy warfare in the region.

When Iran is regionally and globally isolated, the deal arrives. Iran has been under strong international sanctions meanwhile the United States one-sided exit from the JCPOA. The accord provides Iran with a ray of hope for lessening its seclusion by repairing relations as well as addressing its economic issues. As a result, the agreement could be an attempt to shift world attention away from domestic squabbles and depict itself as a peace-loving nation in the aftermath of protests and economic crises.⁵

Is The JCPOA Becoming Obsolete?

The JCPOA is still inactive, and Iran views the current state of peace as a chance to mend fences with Saudi Arabia to increase its prospects of resurrecting the accord. The government also believes that the latest peace agreement will encourage the existing US management to restart the nuclear deal as soon as possible. The accord directly affects the JCPOA. Saudi Arabia has remained an outspoken opponent of Iran's nuclear program, placing pressure on Europe and the US to make further concessions. As a result, Iran considered it a tactful win because the accord was publicised at a time when the JCPOA negotiations were deadlocked, with speculation widespread that the nuclear program pact would never be renewed. Meanwhile, it allows Iran to continue engaging with the region's nations while also providing chances to lessen international disapproval of its nuclear program, notably from Middle Eastern countries.⁶

After the Iran-Saudi agreement, regional pressure on JCPOA has decreased. Iran and Saudi Arabia are likewise struggling to obtain nuclear technology. If Iran obtains nuclear technology, Saudi Arabia would undoubtedly pursue it. Saudi Arabia is

diversifying its economy, thus nuclear technology is essential for its green energy transformation.

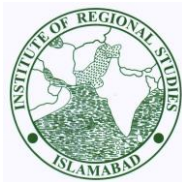
Unrest in the region might have a substantial impact on China's interests in terms of energy, security, and BRI; since the deal, there has been growing anticipation that China will convene a meeting to discuss the JCPOA with all parties concerned. However, up to this time, China has mainly exhibited a commercial interest in the region.

The Deal: An Opportunity or Threat to Israel?

Iran was concerned about reports that Saudi Arabia was considering normalising relations with Israel. Before the Abraham Accord, the regional undercurrents were different because the majority of the Gulf monarchs refused to recognise Israel. Following the Abraham Accord, however, numerous countries, including Bahrain, Morocco, and the UAE, normalised relations with Iran, directly affecting its standing in the region and hastening its seclusion. By signing the pact, Iran addressed its fears regarding Israel's and Arab states' collaboration in targeting its nuclear program.⁷

This arrangement also helps the United States put compulsion on Israel. It is well known fact that the Israeli Democratic Party is more linked with American Democrats. During Israel's battle with Hamas in 2021, President Biden asked for a cease-fire, undercutting Netanyahu's authority. Numerous democrats also encouraged President Biden to be forceful and perilous of Israel's policy decisions.⁸ As a result of Washington's skepticism of Netanyahu's cabinet, Neftali Bennett ascended to prominence, finally forcing Netanyahu to quit. Netanyahu traveled from Israel to the United States during the Obama administration to convey his disagreement to the JCPOA. In contrast, Obama rejected Netanyahu's apprehensions and even disapproved his speech to the US Congress.

Now Netanyahu has returned and is instigating significant internal contention and division, the US has once again been able to undercut its authority and sustenance base. As a result, the new Saudi-Iran peace agreement reminds Israel that it is dependent on America and that inattentive behavior will not be accepted. Since the deal, Israel



has been the most concerned country. The joining of forces of two key regional supremacies, one of which is a passionate opponent, undermines and endangers the security and existence of Israel. The Palestinian issue is currently making a strong resurgence. And this will have a big impact on Arab society as well as Arab leaders' mentalities. It's almost as if we've gone back in time. We've returned to a period in Middle Eastern history when the Palestinian question was crucial.

Is the Deal Sustainable?

China mediated the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. "It's a relatively low-risk and high-reward activity for China to engage in because the Chinese are not committed to any particular outcome." "Better diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran will lessen the chance of regional violence and tensions." "That benefits China, the United States, and regional actors alike." China has a "clear interest" in fostering regional relations and stability because for Beijing, which buys energy from Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Gulf is a crucial supply of energy. After all, "a conflict in the Persian Gulf would affect China's energy supply and economic interests." As a co-belligerent in regional battles, the United States is increasingly taking sides in those conflicts, making it extremely problematic for the United States to play a conciliatory role.⁹ "China has avoided being drawn into the war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and as a result, it could play a peacemaking role."

The question now is whether the peace treaty between Iran and Saudi Arabia will hold. China brokered the Iran-Saudi peace deal to engage in diplomatic and political partnerships with other countries. Since China has always opted for an inward-looking policy and refrained from interference with others, it has adopted the notion of a peaceful rise and a non-interference policy toward others. Now China is engaging in diplomatic, political, and economic partnerships with other countries, therefore adopting a role of mediation for its global needs. This is not the first time China has served as a peacekeeping nation; previously, China has also participated in peacekeeping efforts. In the instance of Libya, China supported the UN-backed

Government of National Accord (GNA) and vowed economic engagement; in Yemen, China urged the international community to respect Yemen's sovereignty. In 2017, he was instrumental in arranging a meeting between the Houthis and the UN Special Envoy, and he also spoke out against human rights crimes in Yemen. It has chosen multilateral settlement mechanisms for world disputes and has acted as a mediator, in contrast to the West's policy of forcing its value systems on indigenous people.¹⁰

This agreement is not unilateral because it includes the interests of all states, including Saudi Arabia, which wants to diversify its economy. The agreement answers the Kingdom's security worries, as they had previously funded proxy conflicts in the Middle East. The agreement offers Iran an indication of optimism for diminishing its remoteness by restoring ties and addressing its economic problems, while China has its interests and stakes in the Middle East due to its energy demands and the BRI project. The goal of establishing an alternative to the US-led global order, which China sees as a more multilateral approach to global security, is the driving reason from a strategic standpoint.¹¹ Because the United States' influence in the Middle East and around the world is dwindling, states will increasingly seek out China and Russia for peace accords and discussions. As a result, it can be concluded that this deal is a multi-party mediation with regional holding stakes in general and state interests in particular, and thus this deal is sustainable

Conclusion

To summarise, the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia represents a much-needed step towards regional peace. As a result, since the declaration, there has been growing confidence that it will pave the way for negotiation between the two states to find a solution. To address the many proxy wars. Reopening their embassies is thus a significant step towards reestablishing ties. As a result, to have a meaningful impact that helps the region, both Saudi Arabia and Iran must continue to modify their answers over time. Additionally, it might open doors for Saudi investment in Iran, which would help the country's economy. As Iranian oil could be

introduced to the mainstream market, it could also stabilise energy production and price.

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