**Realignment in West Asia**

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March 27, 2023

Saudi Arabia and Iran have been regional rivals for quite some time. The Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran led to further deterioration in relations between the two countries. During the Iran-Iraq war, Saudi Arabia supported Iraq. The relations faced a setback when there was an uprising in Bahrain for which Iran was accused which led to the Saudi intervention with force. The Saudi fear has been that Iran is trying to have a regional hegemony by controlling the Middle Eastern countries through its proxies. The rise of the Arab spring, conflict and civil wars in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and over Iranian nuclear advances, led to an escalation in the region.

In 2016, the execution of a Shia cleric in Saudi Arabia led to protests in Tehran where the KSA embassy was attacked, resulting in a breakdown of the diplomatic relations. The drone and missile attacks by Iran backed Houthis from Yemen on Saudi installations and ships also worsened the relations. On 10th March 2023, the world was stunned when the news of an agreement was published across the globe between Iran and Saudi Arabia brokered by China. Both the countries have agreed to restore diplomatic relations and reopen embassies. Let us examine the implications of the agreement on the two countries and the region. It will reduce the likelihood of confrontation and chances of war in the Persian Gulf.

[President Alvi condemns Israeli aggression against Palestinians](https://www.nation.com.pk/05-Apr-2023/president-alvi-condemns-israeli-aggression-against-palestinians)

The recent escalation was over the issue of Yemen where Houthis (backed by Iran) took control of most of Yemen. This led to an intervention by a Saudi led coalition against Houthis in Yemen. Resultantly the Houthis resorted to drone and missile attacks on Saudi installations and ships carrying oil through the Persian Gulf. However, this agreement will likely restore peace in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia is the largest trading partner with China. China is the largest buyer of Saudi oil and peace in the region will help with the easy shipment of oil to China. China also has good relations with Iran and during the recent visit of the Iranian president to China, 20 agreements were signed. China has been advocating the lifting of US sanctions on Iran and is likely to invest in Iran in near future. Beijing has emerged as a major political diplomatic and peace promoter in the region. By all means, China has replaced the US in [West Asia](https://www.nation.com.pk/tag/west%20asia) and Middle East. Iran which has been trying to end its diplomatic isolation has got an opportunity to come out of it. The Saudis may invest in Iran which will create job opportunities. Iran is likely to get an opportunity to expand its ties with Gulf countries and may also improve its deteriorating ties with the European Union.

[Foreign vets give new lease of life to ailing elephant at Karachi Zoo](https://www.nation.com.pk/05-Apr-2023/foreign-vets-give-new-lease-of-life-to-ailing-elephant-at-karachi-zoo)

Another important impact this deal is that Israel will not be allowed to use the Saudi air space in case of an attack on Iran. Earlier there was a looming threat on a possible air attack on Iran by US and Israeli air forces using the Saudi air space. The long-time interference in Lebanese affairs will also be addressed. In the past, the Lebanese government criticized the Saudi led coalition intervention in Yemen which led to a diplomatic confrontation. Now the agreement has been welcomed by the Lebanese government and Hezbollah. The agreement is a serious blow to Israel which was expecting a deal with Saudi Arabia against Iran. Israel has normalized its relations with four Arab states and more recently through Abraham Accords with UAE and Bahrain. Israeli former prime minister Naftali termed the agreement ‘serious and dangerous’ and a fatal blow to create regional alliance against Iran.

The agreement is also set back for the US, although it termed the agreement ‘a good thing’. The concern of the US is the growing influence of China in the region. The big question is that, will it (US) check or take counter measures to reduce Chinese influence in the region? The US is the guarantor of the security for Saudi Arabia, therefore the US will not lose its importance in the region because of its military presence in Qatar and Bahrain. Another important question is, what will be the future of a nuclear Iran? Iran is considered to be some months away from making nuclear bomb. Israel and the US are determined not to allow Iran to develop nuclear capability. The credit for the diplomatic break through between the two countries goes to the leadership of China, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The agreement will certainly contribute to peace and stability in the region.