

# Q#1 Reapproachment of KSA & Iran.

## Implications & Measures. in Middle East

- March 10 → both agreed to restore diplomatic ties & open embassies in Tehran & Riyadh by May 2023.
- China → the deal broker.
- Move a significant deescalation in the tensions.
- Both states affirmed "respect for sovereignty of states" & non interference in internal matters.
- China hosted → 6-10 March.
- After decades of enmities & formal cutting of ties in 2018, this deal evidence of common desire to solve through talks & dialogues. (Saudi Foreign Minister).
- April 2001 security agreements → commitment for drug trafficking, crime, terrorism.
- 1998 → agreement → cooperation in economy, commercial, scientific, communication, environmental & sports.
- This deal optimism for Iran economy, rial strengthened in value by more than 10%.

## ● Iran & Saudia: a timeline of conflicts

- Iranians predominantly Shiite & Saudia Sunni have been regional rivals since Iran's 1979 revolution.
- Saudia monarchy, based its legitimacy on Islam felt threatened by the Islamic Republic, which condemns monarchies as illegitimate form of gov.

### Political Tensions on Regional Issues.

In Syria, Tehran supported the president while Riyadh funneled money to Syrian opposition groups.

(United States Institute of Peace, Iran & Saudia restore ties, 6 June, 2023)

- In Yemen Iran aided & aided Houthis while Saudi military launched an air war in 2015 to prevent complete takeover by Houthi Rebel.
- 2016 Saudi Arabia executed Nimr al Nimr & Iranian protestors set fire to Saudi embassy in Tehran.



- Saudi opposed Iran's nuclear & ballistic missile advancements.

~~2019 Riyadh blamed Iran for missile attacks on two major oil facilities in Saudi.~~

**Iraq dialogue: A falaise ora new light.**

2021 Iran & Saudi began sporadic talks mediated by Oman & Iraq. Four round of talks - Both countries couldn't reach an agreement but opened a new path to lead out from years old rivalry.

(At Jazera, Iran & Saudi from rivalry to approachment.)

## **CHINA'S ROLE AS A MEDIATOR**

- After little interest of Iraq's administration to play a role of mediator, frustrated by the halt in diplomatic ties, Saudi asked Beijing to assume the role of mediator when president Xi Jinping visited Riyadh in 2022. December

- Agreement - Potential to help deescalate conflicts, specially in Yemen & China's desire to play an active role as a mediator (international mediator)

"This world has more than just like the Ukraine question & still many issues affecting peace & people's life"

(Wang-Yi).

## **China Strategic Interest & Symbolic Victories**

- Strategic Side = Beijing needs to maintain the free flow of oil from the region

- Deal signals Beijing's role in global affairs as GSI (Global Security Initiative) & Xi's coronation

for a third term in power this fall → China a diplomat aimed at building an alternative to US dominance in global affairs

- China needs stability in Gulf → 40% of its crude oil - Saudi & Iran being two poles of power have supported opposite



sides in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq & Syria

- Some have speculated Iran-Saudia deal broader employment for petrouman & oil transactions in yuan, opposed to dollars.
- U.S. restricted Chinese access to western technology & market

### Peace plan for war in Ukraine:

This deal comes on the heels of China's so called "peace plan for war in Ukraine" - → a proposal much ballyhooed in Beijing that more or less amounted to a recapitulation of anti U.S. talking points.

- China emphasizes "noninterference & sovereignty in domestic affairs" make Beijing an interconnector for Riyadh & Tehran.

### Multilateral approach of China & BRICS.

- Represents China's position, as more multilateral approach.
- Saudia & Iran interest in joining BRICS.

- China an emerging leader & responsible force. <sup>economic bloc & potential</sup>
- Iran Saudia deal eq. of China's <sup>great power</sup> growing clout & the ability to lead.

~~Robert Gates~~ (Adam Gallagher, what you need to know about China Saudi-Iran deal, 16 Mar 2023)

### China's Power Play.

- In brokering the deal China showed that it could truly be a major player in ME

"China is a cupid that brought the two sides together"

(Simon Henderson)

- Beijing stepping up in region in other ways also.  
↳ expressing interest in hosting summit of all Gulf countries

- China gained stronger allies in Saudia & Iran & also able to undermine Washington, in their eyes.

- Chinese looking for interests to inc. their influence & strengthen alliances with key Gulf partners.



## Low Risk & High Reward For China.

Both Saudi & Iran on opposing sides & engaged in proxy war conflicts.  
U.S. not good relation position with Iran.  
China is in good position to broker an agreement.  
It is low risk & high reward for China to engage in as because Chinese aren't committed to any particular outcome.  
Better diplomatic relations reduce conflicts & tensions.

(Robert Mogeilnicki, interview with

China → clear interest. (Al Jazeera)  
↓ improving ties & relations with Gulf region to provide with stability.

2019 → Saudi oil facilities were targeted

↓ 14% inc. in oil price

"The Worst Case Scenario" → Conflict in Persian Gulf effect energy supply & economic interests

## • IMPACT OF SAUDI IRANIAN RAPPROACHMENT ON MIDDLE EAST CONFLICTS

- Chinese sponsored agreement → restore diplomatic ties between countries
- Countries efforts to mend the fences was public knowledge. Oman & Iraq previously had a role but China's role → unforeseen.
- Joint trilateral statement → geopolitical shift & China greater role in a region where U.S. has long been dominant.

- While this joint trio may help reduce the intensity of regional competition but the prospect of swift solutions to conflicts remain slim.

- The competition agendas of Tehran & Riyadh have devastating wars in Yemen, Syria & still lead to instability in Lebanon & Iraq. (International crisis group,

• Gulf States.

19 April, 2023)



- Roadmap for re establishing diplomatic ties
- Reduce intense hostility.
- Saudi finance minister: ready to invest in Iran very quickly.
- Technical delegations to open embassies.
- Lessen tensions → Kuwait, Oman & UAE → deal move to stability, prosperity
- "Positive first step" A Senior Qatari official → told Crisis Group
- Bahrain welcomed the decision
- Relation b/w Gulf & Iran improved
- Recent rupture states back 2016 Jan., Iranian protestors attacked Saudi embassy after execution of Nimr al Nimr.
- Oman, Qatar & Kuwait remained engaged with Tehran.
- Saudi, Bahrain supported U.S. President "max. pressure" policy → sanctions on Iran.
- All Gulf states except Bahrain ready to restore ties with Iran.
- Litmus test of success → if the both sides keep interfering in domestic politics of countries across region.
- Iranian alleged attempt to stir up rebellion among Saudi minority Shiite population.
- Likewise Iran accused Gulf of facilitating the presence of U.S. & Israel at its door step.
- This deal → open doors to security dialogue among Iran, Iraq, Gulf states.
- This dialogue → venue for states to discuss & address security concerns.
- China reportedly offered to host a meeting b/w Gulf & Iran in Beijing sometimes later in 2023.
- Such is logical but nothing has been agreed to as of yet.

• Iraq

IRAQ PLANTING SEEDS FOR THIS DEAL.

- Iraq share long border with both countries
- Is home to thousands of Sunni & Shiites.
- Iraq intelligence services headed by Mustafa al-Kadhimi.



passing msgs between the two sides initiative in 2019.

- Kadhimī → 2020 → face to face talk in Baghdad

Five negotiation sessions.

- At fifth meeting → a roadmap for settling their differences & ceasefire in Yemen.

- The sixth meeting not held due to security situation in Baghdad.

- Baghdad trying to bring assertive neighbours close together.

- Iran being bigger enjoys close religious, cultural & economical ties with Iraqis.

- IRGC support armed groups → operating inside Iraq → may be responsible for attacks on Saudi in 2019 & 2021.

- Iraqi Sunnis → tribal, trade & religious ties with Saudis.

- Riyadh exercises its influence through Sunni tribes & political parties.

- Iraq arena for regional dialogue → Negotiations essential in clarifying both sides concerns.

### VIEWS FROM IRAQ

- Views from Iraq → mixed.

- Many Iraqis sceptical → Iran will change its policy regarding Iraq.

- Some welcome it as a potential to reduce tensions.

- Others believe it a potential investment by Saudi to inc power grip, fuelling widespread anger.

- Some believe U.S militance in Iraq may again lead to violence.

(International crisis group,

Impact of Saudi-Iran

rapprochement on M.E,

19 April - 2023)

Heiko Wimmer

### IRAQ PLAY ROE

#### WAY FORWARD

Economic partnership with Saudi & Iran.

- Iraq invites Saudi to invest in agriculture & industry of Southern provinces 2020.

- Deal with Saudi for electricity grid connection (2022).

- Beijing agreement encourages these tracks to support Iraq reconciliation mission.



## Israel

- Israel's leadership sees → Iran nuclear program international sanction, ← threat to Jewish state diplomatic isolations.
- Israel prefers cooperation with West & Gulf Arab states
- Israel sees deal as concern → build regional anti-Iran coalition → main driver of Abraham Accords.  
(Giorgio Cafiero, 5 April 2023, How will Israel respond to Saudi Iran détente?)
- Saudi recent move to become a dialogue partner of SCO as Iran an observer state → add to Israel anxiety + Kingdoms decision to host Hamas delegation.
- A growing concern of isolation will cause Israel to ratchet up its threats against Iran nuclear program.
- Israel effort to confront Iran & undermine 2015 nuclear deal → has backfired as U.S. withdrawal from "max pressure" strategy
- Israel sees turmoil closer to home.
- Even if relations as bet. Saudi & Iran improve, core foreign policy required by Israel for relations with KSA.
- Israel & U.S. → do not see Saudi Iran relations as an obstacle to Israel Saudi relations but if hurdles appear, they are bcz of Saudi demands of U.S. in exchange for normalizing relations with Israel. The price for normalisation includes security guarantee & support from Washington in developing civil nuclear program.
- Israel attacks on Palestine → still looms large → raising the political cost for normalisation

## Lebanon

- Saudi Iran rivalry → hurdle that would allow political elites to meaningfully address the devastating crisis that have ravaged its economy
- Lebanon → another era of paralysis & polarization in between the two camps. One led by Hizbollah (Iran's influence) & the other partially supported by Saudi.
- External actors & Lebanese players → reason of non-functional & unstable gov.
- No president since past months & legislative assembly non functional.



- Politicians & Analysts → cautiously optimistic that Beijing could facilitate an agreement to resolution of Lebanon's domestic crisis.
- But some feel Yemen & Iraq given more attention than Lebanon.
- Hizbollah → satisfied → Iran isolation end & end to unshakeable alliance of Saudi & US
- Riyadh interest curbing regional confrontation through Summits.
- Restoring Syrian President → will act as power broker in Lebanon.
- Hizbollah → Beijing agreement → "controlled competition" rather than peaceful cooperation
- Hizbollah G.S → 14 April → regional balance of power has shifted in favor of Iran & allies
- Even if Saudi-Iran deal is to provide the way for Lebanese presidential deadlock

the melt in economic is to remain unlikely

A representative of party from 2019 - told Crisis grp.

"Would the new election of president help solve economic crisis of course not."

### PRESIDENTIAL VACUUM

- No head of state
- Hizbollah grp powerfully Iran backed & House speaker - constitute Shiite base → announced support for Christian politician Frangieh → but was left with 65 votes due to opposition grp
- Qatar, Egypt, US, France, Saudi → met in Paris to resolve deadlock.

### UNWAVERING SHIA

#### POSITION

- Hizbollah support Frangieh as "patriotic & centrist figure who will not stab the resistance in the back".
- Saudi-Iran deal came change Hizbollah choice of candidate

(Arwa Ibrahim, 21 April 2023, Lebanon's political impasse continues despite Iran Saudi deal)



## 1WAY FORWARD

Some believe Iran Saudi deal facilitate an agreement on voting for Hasbollah's candidate & Saudi allies could win military chief position

## • SYRIA

- Saudi & Iran mend ties after diplomatic rupture have shaped geopolitics in M.E
- After years of conflict the exhausted region moving towards deescalating tensions (MONA Yacoubian, USIP).

## A NORMALIZATION

### PEAK

- Saudi leadership reportedly to open embassy in Damascus.
- Hinted at former president Bashar al Assad readmission to upcoming Arab League
- More than decade price of Assad remaining power has included 135,253 people detained, 15,000 killed under torture, 200,000 civilians killed (Syria Network of Human Rights).
- UAE, Oman & Bahrain have opened their embassies
- Normalization seems to be currency of the day & give some leverage on the road on Syrian behaviour in certain case.
- Another Saudi interest → stop of Syrian made captagon proliferation on Saudi streets → worth billion of dollars with cross border smuggling facilitated by Iran linked groups.
- To counter weight Iranian influence in Syria → Saudi may be restoring ties with Damascus

## IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN

### SYRIA

- This deal seems to be give & take for Saudi as Iranians will stop being supportive of Houthis in Yemen & Saudi will not be in the way of Iran remaining in power in Syria.
- Iran's military presence a strategic depth in continuing shadow war with Israel.
- As Iranian force comes down under Israeli drones &



attacks in Syria so revenge is to be likely launched from Syrian or Iraqi soil.

Aliaa Medina, what does Chinese brokering Saudi Iran deal mean for Syria, Apr. 2023

## SYRIAN COMPROMISE ON

### KEY ISSUES

- This deal may speed up normalization of relations b/w Syria & Arab League.
- Efforts backed by Moscow, Damascus refusal to compromise on key issues → safe return of refugees, accommodation of parts of opposition & refusal to remove Iranian & Hezbollah forces from region.

### SYRIA'S MEMBERSHIP

- On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 news broke → Syria in advanced talks with Egypt for diplomatic relations.
- Some suggest Iran still views Syria as a key piece of its "axis of resistance".
- Cairo, Rabat, Doha, Sana'a → making out unlikely for now that Arab League will restore Syrian Membership.
- 16 April 2023 → Arab foreign minister meetings. Some countries' ministers wary of Syrian unconditional normalization & hosting of Iranian forces.
- rapprochement between Damascus & Arab countries do not seem likely to trigger a significant financial engagement by wealthy Gulf countries that could restore Syria's infrastructure.

### ● YEMEN

- Deal coincides with 8<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saudi militancy to remove insurgent group Ansar Allah, "Houthis", & failed without achieving anything. None goal was achieved.
- Today Houthis strong grip on Sana'a - North western Highlands.
- Yemeni allies deeply divided over political & military agendas.



- Jan 2023 → Oman as a broker facilitated back channel contacts between Saudi & Houthi → direct talks as Saudi visited Sanaa → signing ceasefire agreements.

- For Riyadh the deal seems sustained momentum towards the exit from Yemen it seeks → Both parties might seek it as regional security arrangement.

- Long way for comprehensive solution.

- Iran has not indicated to offer concessions to supply of weapons to Houthi.

- Both Houthi & gov → present this deal as initial welcome boost to their own positions.

- 14-17 April → more than 800 prisoners have been exchanged

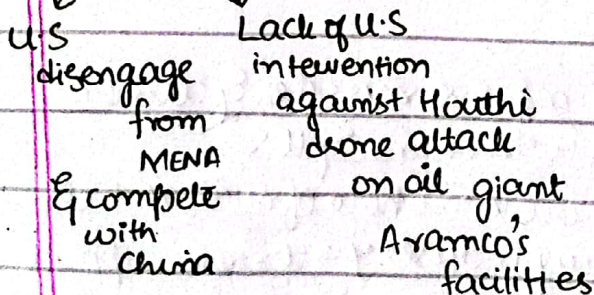
- In April Saudi invited members of Presidential Leadership Council → discuss roadmap Riyadh has been negotiating with Houthi

- Roadmap into phases that will fully open the country. blocked roads. also allow payments of salaries to civil servants.

## ● CALCULUS IN RIYADH & TEHRAN

### Calculus in Riyadh

① Perception of changing priorities of U.S & diversifying security fulfilment



② Diplomatic deterrence with Iran

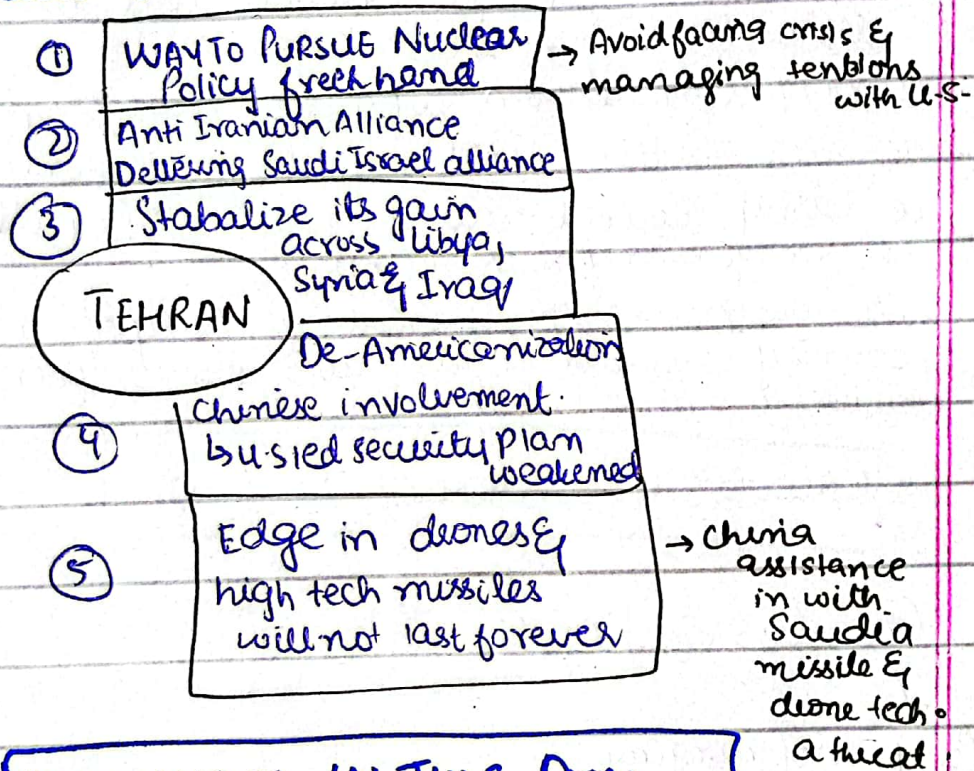
③ No interest in Gulf region - Donot want to be part of escalation that will undermine its security

④ Saudi's biggest concern Ghitte & U.S talks donot address this concern



- ⑤ Iran won't put restrictions of missile program but normalization of relations is the regional stability tool
- ⑥ Saudi priority social & economic transformation as in VISION 2030 → a window for regional stability
- ⑦ Economic & Strategic security interest with China.
- ⑧ Rivalry is costly hence stability of region what matters most.

### Calculus in TEHRAN.



### CHALLENGES IN THIS DEAL

→ Security tensions.

- Saudia influence
- Riyadh continue to improve missiles & drones capabilities working with China & U.S
  - Saudi tend to know know how of nuclear tech.
  - Strengthen military industry → U.S arms supplier.

- Tehran's reaction
- ↳ Hence a threat to Iran & threat to security & Iran influence
  - Iran skeptical for these consequences → expect U.S from this region.

### IRAN NUCLEAR TENSIONS

Iran threshold nuclear state.  
Iran to return to deal consider this unconstructive gesture



- View as regional offensive-defensive balance
- Tehran will continue the policy of qualitative improvement of axis of region resistance's operational capabilities.

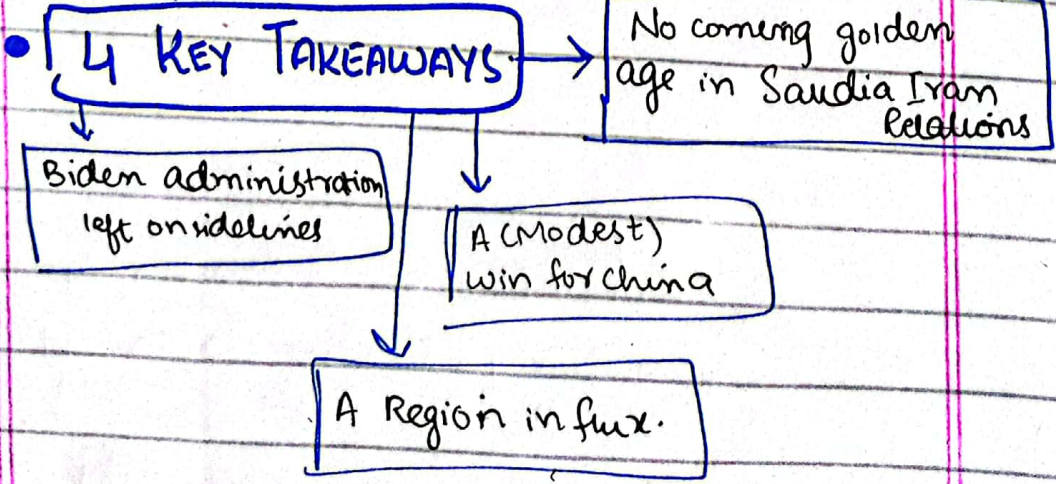
- Iran support to Saudi peace talks is a demonstration of Iran's power instrument here
- Tehran view Yemen → strategic corridor → access to Saudi during hypothetical conflict.
- Yemen is viewed as asset in logistic burden & deterrence of the kingdom

### NUCLEAR DOSSIER

- Dynamics b/w Iran & US & Israel on other hand variable in determining the outcomes.
- If Iran-US talks fail - Saudi fear of Iran getting weapons will force Saudi to make own nuclear weapon that will contribute to Iran's nuclear calculus.
- The complex of US-Iran-Saudi-Israel nuclear conundrum → remain in place.
- Deterrence → core policy to calm tensions

### → Domestic & External Spoilers.

- Domestic → both countries benefited from demonization of other
- Voices of skeptical Iraq → cause the suspiciousness of usefulness of this deal.
- In Iran conservative powers unite & support the deal.
- External spoilers → Israel → sharp criticism on deal.
- A blow to Israel for teaming up with Arab to against the threat of Iran.
- This agreement did not resolve Iran & Saudi security issues.



( Aaron David Miller, 4 key takeaways from China Brokered deal, FP.com )