

Current Affair

Q: Saudi-Iran negotiations brokered by China show that Beijing is ready to adopt the role of mediator. Critically evaluate the statement and analyze why China would be a better mediator than US.

Ans

China as a Mediator in Saudi-Iran Negotiations - China as a Better Mediator than US.

The two major power houses of Persian Gulf namely Saudi Arabia and Iran ~~are~~ are engaged in decades old ~~secretati~~ secretarian and diplomatic conflicts. However, these conflicts further intensified since 2016, when Riyadh executed prominent Shia scholar.

Since then both countries are into diplomatic cutoff and proxy wars against each other. But this seven-years

_ _ _ 30

long crisis eased by the announcement of KSA-Iran Peace Deal. This deal was brokered by People's Republic of China. The deal was possible by China's active diplomatic efforts. This deal ~~was~~ is a great boon for China as it makes China a better mediator. Before this it was a common perception that world super power United States of America is the only option when it comes to mediation role in a Middle-East. However, Beijing proved this notion wrong by successfully mediating between Tehran and Riyadh. Hence, China proved to be a better mediator than US.

→ Role of China in Saudi-Iran Negotiations:

Prior to assessing the role of China in Saudi-Iran

— 1 — 1 — for

negotiations, we will first look into the nature of conflict between the two Gulf powers houses.

a. Background of Saudi-Iran Conflicts:

The sectarian conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran is decades old. This conflict intensified in 2016 when Riyadh executed a famous Shia scholar Nimr-al-Nimra. After this the Shia community protested against Sunni ruled ~~and dominated~~ KSA. This led to the closure of embassies by both Iran and KSA. This state of affairs resulted in a serious sectarian and diplomatic stand off between two states. Both countries are also actively engaged in proxy wars against each other.

b. Negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran:

— | — | — : 305

In 2021 Iraq and Oman hosted peace talk between Riyadh and Tehran but they ended without any result.

c. China as a Mediator in Saudi-Iran Negotiations:

The rift between KSA and Iran is decades old, series of efforts were made to normalize relations between the two states but all ended in vain. However, China played a significant role in the restoration of diplomatic ties between KSA and Iran. Given below is the role of China as mediator in Saudi-Iran negotiations.

• Visit of Chinese President to KSA:

In December, 2022 Chinese President Xi Jinping payed a visit to KSA, where he recieved a warm welcome. Both

111 35

Both China and Saudi-Arabia signed a MoU of worth billion of dollars. Beijing and Riyadh also signed Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement. During the visit secret talks for peace between Iran and KSA were held.

- Visit of Iranian President to China:

In February, 2023 Iranian President Ebrahim Raisani visited China. Talks regarding restoration of peace between KSA and Iran were held but were kept secret.

- Announcement of Saudi-Iran Rapprochement:

On March 10, 2023 both Tehran and Riyadh announced the normalization of Diplomatic ties.

1 1 2018

- Main Points of Saudi-Iran Peace Deal:

Main points of Saudi-Iran peace deal are.

- (a) Both countries will respect the sovereignty of each other.
- (b) Both countries will not interfere in each other's internal matters.
- (c) Both countries will open their embassies in each other's country.
- (d) Both countries will resume Trade and Investment Agreement signed in 1998.

d. Reaction of US to Saudi-Iran

Deal:

Apparently America welcomed the Peace Deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran. But this deal put America in an awkward position.

As prior to this deal it was ~~that~~ ~~th.~~ it was only Washington that can offer a good office for

restoration of ties between rival countries but China successful mediation efforts proved the wrong.

→ China as a Better Mediator than US:

Points given below explain that China would be a better mediator than US:

(a) China's Unbiased Role as Mediator make it More viable Option:

In past US was the only country that could offer a good office for mediation. But over the years it started to take sides. Instead of being mediator US became party in conflicts and when it comes to Saudi-Iran conflict US always supported KSA.

On the otherhand China never took sides and has worked hard to

— | — | — 05

avoid entanglement in the region. Due to China's unbiased role in mediation between KSA and Iran other Middle-Eastern countries are also looking for Chinese support not only in development and economic arenas but also are seeking military assistance from China.

(b) China Prioritizes Interest over values:

America and old colonial powers of west stumbled Middle East into regional quagmire.

On the other hand China is reinventing how great powers operate. China always prioritizes interests over values. As it has signed deals and agreements with regional rivals. For instance, in June, 2020 China signed a twenty-five years long Strategic Cooperation Agreement with Iran, to avoid any entanglement

and to protect its economic interests China accentuated its ties with the rival countries of Iran in Gulf like KSA, UAE, Bahrain etc.

Another example is: China has boasted of its warm ties with both Israel and Palestine and invited envoys of both countries to Beijing for peace talks.

(c) China as an Excellent Mediator in Saudi-Iran Rapprochement:

The Saudi-Iran deal is a spectacular triumph for Beijing in terms of diplomacy. The trust that China earned from both sides as an irreplaceable trades partner for both KSA and Iran helped it to end seven-year long crisis between two Gulf power houses.

_ _ _ 35

(d) China is Providing Alternative Concept of Security:

Over the years Washington has maintained its diplomatic and military dominance in the Middle East, to an extent that there is a general perception that there is no substitute to America when it comes to defense and security.

On contrary, China is proving this perception wrong by providing security alternatives to regional ~~countries~~ countries directly and indirectly, undermining the US dominance in Middle East.

* GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE:

China is attempting to offer an alternative concept of security as compared to the traditional concept of national security that is offered by Western countries.

Global Security Initiative (GSI) is idea of Chinese president Xi Jinping that

(4)

1-1-2025

was unveiled in ^{April,} 2022. The idea offers a new security framework for Middle East.



Fig: GSI - New Security Framework for Middle East.

• GSI Utility in Middle East:

China pledges to use GSI to support Middle Eastern countries to;

- (a) Strengthen dialogue
- (b) Improve relations
- (c) Consider each others security concerns
- (d) Strengthen the internal forces for safeguarding regional security.

11 Oct

(e) Supporting Arab League and other regional organizations to play a constructive role for peace and development in the region.

(e) China Stays Out of Regional Conflicts:

US wars in Middle East were fought with incompetence which has weakened its influence and clout in the region.

On the other hand, China has adopted a different approach and tries to stay out of regional conflict. This makes China an attractive mediator.

(f) China ^{did} not Entered into Armed Conflict in Middle East:

Washington has always been into armed conflicts in Middle East, which has turned

— 1 — 1 — 35

the region into a war zone with majority of country its countries involved in direct wars or proxy wars against each other and US actively supports the allies.

However, China is trying hard to avoid entanglement in already war stricken region and has successfully proved this notion by resolving Saudi-Iran bilateral conflict without deploying a single soldier.

PRESENCE OF US AND CHINA IN MIDDLE EAST - A COMPARISON

US in Middle East	China in Middle East
WAR	PEACE
COLOR REVOLUTION (e.g. Arab Spring)	SECURITY & STABILITY
SANCTIONS	COOPERATION.

forementioned arguments show that China being more focused on peace and development ~~can be a~~ ^{can be a} better mediator than USA who is more focused towards waging war in Middle East in order to protect its own interests.

Conclusion:

In short the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran that has been brokered by China proves China ^{as a} better mediator as compared to US. As China has always focused on economic development to avoid entanglement in Middle East where as US is more inclined towards military options to be used in Middle East. However there is a great room for cooperation between US and China when it comes to peace and development in the Persian Gulf.