China’s Efforts to Bring Political Stability and Economic Prosperity in the Middle East: The Case of Mending the Saudi-Iran Ties

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Abstract

The history of international relations reveals that the security of the geostrategic interests of major powers had been associated with the stability of the concerned region. Almost the whole current political scenario of the world reflects the same views. However, the case of the United States (US) is quite the opposite as it seems to secure its interests but not pay attention to the welfare of the concerned regions. This research presents an innovative model in this connection in which an attempt has been made to explore the strategies of one of the major powers i.e. China that has strived to restore political stability to gain economic prosperity in the Middle East. The research emphasizes China’s strategy for mending the Saudi-Iran ties that have widened its opportunities to build cordial relations with the regional states, especially concerning ensuring peace.
activities in the region. It has elaborated on China’s strategic partnership initiative through which it has minimized the non-productive US influence in the Middle East and has cashed countless opportunities to enhance its economic and political support. Specifically, after the recent Saudi-Iran rapprochement, China can now build diplomatic capitals on both sides of the Persian Gulf. Anyhow, after ensuring a peaceful environment in the Middle East, China has emerged as the most influential power that can guarantee regional security along with the security of its geostrategic interests as well. The research suggests that the deal will be helpful for the regional states to get themselves out of the longer period of instability and economic exploitation at the hands of the United States (US).

Keywords: China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Political Stability, Economic Prosperity.

Introduction

Analysis of the first quarter of the twenty-first century concerning the Middle East concludes that Iran and Saudi Arabia have been going through a ‘Cold War’ as there is no record found of a direct war between them. Because of the prevailing security dilemma between the mentioned they have been in a struggle for power or a tug of war for which they have been and are fighting proxy wars in Yemen, Lebanon, Bahrain, Syria, and Iraq. The sectarian divide and the temptation of both states to attain more power are supposed to be the principal causes behind that rivalry (Jahandad and Mustafa, 2022). The roots of the Saudi-Iran conflict can be traced back to the Iranian Revolution of 979.

1 After the revolution, the pro-America autocratic government was replaced with the radical Islamic regime that dismayed the US and Saudi Arabia. The new regime launched a strong opposition to the institute of monarchy, pro-America foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States. Immediately, after the revolution, Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province experienced a serious unrest among Shia Muslims in November 1979 who were celebrating the holiday of Ashura (10th Moharram). This presumed religious procession got the shape of a
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and the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s\(^2\). Politically speaking, both the parties have differences in foreign policy; Saudi Arabia is recognized as the regional status quo power while Iran pretends to be revolutionary and has a deeper influence on the political sphere of the states in the Gulf and Middle East. In the context of foreign policy, the cordial relations between Saudi Arabia and the Western powers compelled Iran to highlight the US as its most dangerous enemy which has been searching for opportunities to minimize its influence in the Persian Gulf. Further, both states possess different ideologies as Iran is a Shi’ite state (Partisans of Hazrat Ali (R.A) the fourth Caliph of Islam) and tried its best to defend the Shi’ites’ objectives while Saudi Arabia is a conservative Sunni state (who recognizes all the four caliphs of Islam as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’s rightful successors) (Mohammed and Moorthy, opt.).

Shortly speaking, the year 2011 was marked by the changed political scenario in West Asia and North Africa. The Jasmine Revolution of 2011 in Tunisia proved a regime changer in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Egypt. Most importantly, the Syrian Crisis, another offspring of the revolution, was being described as ‘the eye of the storm of regime changes in the Middle East’. In the episode of this political procession as some of the protestors were found holding the pictures of the lead revolutionist, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and some were displaying the signs of denouncement of the Saudi government and the US. The Saudi authorities tried to disperse the protestors that prolonged the riots for 3 days. Later, the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) was drafted to quell the riots which resulted in the deaths of high number of civilians and considerable damage of properties. The Saudi government held Iran responsible for all these problems.

\(^2\) The presence of Western powers, especially the United States, in the Gulf at the time of Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) influenced the diplomatic approach of the regional states towards Iran. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was the major example in this regard as it took a step to break its diplomatic relations with Iran in April 1988 under the US pressure. Hence the US purpose to isolate Iran in the region seemed successful by dividing the regional states.
crisis, the United States (US) supported the anti-Shia alliances to overthrow the Iranian-backed government of Bashar ul Asad in Syria. It was the Syrian crisis that permitted some other foreign forces like China and Russia to compete with the US and to intervene in the political affairs of the regional states (Tian, 2018) surely to overcome the unbridled political chaos and economic turmoil. China and Russia began to support Iran and its alliances while the US assured its economic and military support for Saudi Arabia (the most influential state of the Sunni bloc) and the Sunni factions in regional states which had become the victim either of civil war or political disarray.

Later, a civil war broke out in Yemen in 2014 when the Iranian-backed Houthis (a rebel group in Yemen) took control of most of the country. The Saudis intervened to restore the government which worsened the situation as it had led to the ‘years-long cycle of escalation’. In 2019, Iranian drones attacked the Saudi oil company Aramco and destroyed its processing facilities (Wu, 2021). In 2021, Houthis, reportedly, used Iranian missiles and rockets and targeted Saudi officials and civilians. Riyadh responded with aggression and targeted the Houthis which caused the loss of many civilian lives in Yemen (McFaul, 2023). All these developments caused colossal damage to the economic and political sphere of the Middle East. Particularly, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been aligning themselves with one power or another to support their respective ideological allies. The Saudi Kingdom, with its allies, moved towards the US which has been devising aggressive policies while making the use of force. Comparatively, China examined the results of the US policies in the Middle East that helped it to formulate some moderate policies of non-interference in the polity of the states through which it can retain peace in the region. Once peace is restored in the Middle East, China will perhaps promote economic and diplomatic ties to make even the project of the Belt and Route Initiative (BRI) successful in making the regional people more prosperous on a top priority basis.
So, in this age of changing geopolitical dynamics, especially concerning the Middle East, there are some perceptions about the rise of China in the region. One set of scholars argues that China has become the chief competitor of the US in the Middle East in search of resources and influence. The second group of scholars opines that a ‘tectonic shift’ in the global order is solely responsible for the rise of Asian powers in general and China in particular which would impact the future of international relations. Kevin Rudd views, “We are witnessing a geopolitical equivalent of the melting of polar ice caps” (Shafqat, 2017). The third school sees the decline of the US, ‘a global hegemonic power’, responsible for shifting the bipolar world to a multipolarity one. The emergence of democracies like the European Union (EU) has created a vacuum for China and other Asian powers to fill. The fourth party examines that the rise of non-state actors in the Middle East has forced the Arab leadership to be dependent on China’s military aptitude in dealing with the terrorists. Beijing has set an example of eradicating terrorist groups like Uighur militants (2009) at an internal level and has shown solidarity with its international partners in dismantling all those militants in the region who have weakened governance and made the states fragile (Shafqat, 2017).

The fifth school perceives the rising US-China convergence as a more logical reason behind the success of China in the Middle East. The US series of Annual Strategic Dialogues (ASD) with China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, and South Africa has caused a strong sense of addressing the shared problems, interests, and differences. Resultantly, both China and the US have built mutual trust for resolving problems concerning the South China Sea and its impact can be seen in the regions affiliated with them. The sixth school of thought tags the concept of “constructive realism-common purpose” as a major tool behind China’s rise in the Arab world. Intellectuals in China and the US suggest that chaos in the global order is soaring day by day and military interventions would only aggravate it. Therefore, the best
way to get rid of chaos is the promotion of harmony through
dialogue, peaceful negotiations, and a shared vision of the
management of global order (Shafqat, 2017).

Shafqat’s presentation of all these schools of thought can be
endorsed while examining the current situation in the Middle
East where the US seems to be losing its strategic position
among its most trusted allies like the Kingdom of Saudi
Arabia. Unlike the US, China’s emphasis on devising peace-
promoting strategies has enabled it to turn the tables in its
favor. Further, after the restoration of peace in the Middle
East, China will be able to enhance its economic voyage to
the boundaries of Africa and Europe through its BRI
initiative. The recent mediation of China for the Saudi-Iran
rapprochement can be the best accelerator for the economic
gains of China in the Middle East. But the reader should bear
in mind that China seems accelerating its efforts in the region
first to restore a peaceful environment and then to boost the
economy of the regional states.

More recently, the Chinese leadership has been quite
satisfied with the fruitful results of the rapprochement.
Tehran has improved its relations with the Kingdom of Saudi
Arabia. The deal has driven a “wave of reconciliation” in the
region and China has assured its continuous support to Iran
for addressing the issues concerning core interests (Al-
Jazeera August 21, 2023). Further, these results reflect that
China will, of course, explore the development path that
suits the conditions of the states in the Middle East. It will
keep on striving to strengthen communication and dialogue
which is the foremost tool to promote unity and self-
improvement and most importantly for inculcating a sense
of good neighborliness and friendship. Hence, with the
expansion of China’s geostrategic interests, the deal can be
predicted as a step toward economic prosperity, social uplift,
political stability, and the promotion of harmony among the
regional states.
The Rapprochement and a Pathway to Political Stability and Economic Uplift of the Middle East

History unveils that China’s economic engagement in the Middle East began in the 1990s when it shifted its focus from the world revolution to economic modernization. Especially, the presence of energy resources in the region paved the way for China to establish strategic relations with the regional states and it took no time to become the largest importer of crude oil particularly from Iran and Saudi Arabia. Now, Iran and Saudi Arabia are the largest trading partners in China. Such an economy-centric approach helped China ‘to be qualified as a reliable mediator’ (Zhou, 2023) for the Tehran-Riyadh deal. This mediation has produced long-term security for Chinese interests in the Middle East which may range from economic to strategic ones.

However, since the beginning of the 21st century, the economic miracle of China has almost ended the domination of the Western powers in international politics specifically concerning the Middle East. China has added flavor to the old power structure and has decorated a “one-directional” theatre in the international arena and has enlightened a ray of hope for a stable, peaceful, and balanced future of international relations after sharing power with the countries victimized by the US and other Western powers. China’s favorable economic and political alignment, significantly with the Middle Eastern countries, has rekindled the hope of establishing regional “relative stability” (Sevilla Jr., 2017). Now, these states are considering China as the best guarantor of their security that can minimize their dependence on the US.

It is the difference in policy-making that guarantees the security of the strategic interests of the major powers in the particular region. This difference can be seen in the policy formation of the US and China. In the case of the Middle East, the US adopted the policies of dividing the regional states either on an ideological basis or on the issues of territorial borders that did not allow itself to address its
strategic objectives effectively. It initiated a war against Iraq in 2003 and imposed sanctions on Iran which caused a setback to the economic affairs of the region. On the other hand, with the middling approach, the Chinese policymakers have been perceiving the Iran-Saudi conflict as a stumbling block in the way of launching their respective strategies for the restoration of peace in the region. Therefore, China has been trying to mediate an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia for the restoration of diplomatic and economic relations since January 2021. This development caused a big geopolitical shift in the Gulf region. Riyadh showed an inclination toward the talks with Tehran at the same time when the Al-Ula Summit (2021)\textsuperscript{3} was held to end the blockade of Qatar and mend the rift within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) restored ties with Iran, and Kuwait, the largest importer of Chinese products, also returned its ambassador to Tehran (Haghirian and Scita, 2023).

A series of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia took place in Iraq and Oman and other regional powers like Kuwait and Pakistan attempted to arrange such talks several times. As far as China’s attempts in this regard are concerned, it presented a proposal to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in October 2020 for the stability and security of the Gulf region. While presenting the proposal the Chinese diplomat argued that a multilateral effort would make the region “an oasis of security” (Haghirian and Scita, 2023). It was a soft signal from China that it would provide legal cover to its allies in the Middle East at international organizations just for the sake of regional security. After the proposal, the Chinese diplomats kept on sticking with the arrangement, tools, techniques, and sources through which they could bring Tehran and Riyadh on the same page. They organized diplomatic talks through which they tried their

\textsuperscript{3} It was the summit in which an official agreement was signed among the blockading countries including Qatar to end the rift of three years and seven months. The summit confirmed the official restoration of the diplomatic ties of Egypt, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates with Qatar.
best to make things understandable for both strategically important states. The Chinese leadership did not hesitate to pay numerous visits to the concerned capitals to prepare the respective leaders for negotiations and waited for a suitable opportunity to cash.

Finally, China’s efforts bore fruit, and Saudi Arabia and Iran declared the restoration of their diplomatic relations on March 10, 2023, in Beijing. The announcement was based on the trilateral statement which mentions that both states would reopen embassies within two months (Gadzo, 2023) and would achieve bilateral cooperation in different fields. The diplomatic ties between the negotiators were severed in 2016 when the Saudis executed a Shia cleric Nimr Baqr al-Nimr who was suspected to be the mastermind behind the sparked anger and protests in the Easter Province of Saudi Arabia (Dadouch, Hudson, and Parker, 2023). Anyhow, the Tehran-Riyadh rapprochement is seen ‘as a step toward reducing long-standing tensions and moving towards a peaceful resolution of conflict in the Middle East’ (Siddiqa, 2023). Photo1

China has mediated the deal with the prime motive of promoting security in the region and then creating an environment of cordial relations among all the states in the Middle East. The gist of the deal is as follows:
“The three countries announced that an agreement has been reached between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which includes an agreement to resume diplomatic relations between them and re-open their embassies and missions within a period not exceeding two months, and the agreement includes their affirmation of the respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states. They also agreed that the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries shall meet to implement this, arrange for the return of their ambassadors, and discuss means of enhancing bilateral relations. They also agreed to implement the Security Cooperation Agreement between them, which was signed on 22/1/1422 (H), corresponding to 17/4/2001, and the General Agreement for Cooperation in the Fields of Economy, Trade, Investment, Technology, Science, Culture, Sports, and Youth, which was signed on 2/2/1419 (H), corresponding to 27/5/1998. The three countries expressed their keenness to exert all efforts towards enhancing regional and international peace and security” (China Embassy, 2023).

This peace deal was welcomed by all the major stakeholders in the Middle East including the US and its allies. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel criticized the deal and suspected that it would not be in the best interest of the Middle East. Not to speak of the strategic threats to the minor powers in the region but it has also rung the alarm for the US. Those who object to the rapprochement are terrified of the inclusion of Saudi Arabia and Iran into the communist camp. Therefore, they argue that Saudi Arabia is having a hedging strategy as it has denied the cooperation neither of China nor the US. It has managed to maintain its relationship...
with China as an economic partner and the US as a major security partner. But developments like the Saudi-Iran rapprochement, have made Riyadh suspected in the eyes of the US policy-makers as a reliable strategic partner in the Middle East. They smell a fear that China’s aspirations are not limited to trade rather it has attained a diplomatic tempo to strengthen its position in the region. It is unleashing a fusillade of conferences, envoys, and peaceful proposals. Saudi inclination toward Beijing is not just because it influences Iran ‘but because Beijing has positioned itself to seize just this sort of opportunity’ (Singh, 2023). The rapprochement, mediated by China, has caused a threat to border security for Israel as well. Henry Kissinger, a renowned American diplomat and political theorist, argues that China’s growing role in the Middle East is going to have a greater impact on the decisions of Israel. Now, the Israeli leadership will be even more careful of a preemptive military strike against Iran as it will become a nuclear power shortly with the cooperation of China. Further, Kissinger notes, “Pressure on Iran will now have to take into account Chinese interests” (Ignatius, 2023).

A group of pro-America writers and analysts look China’s active participation in the political and economic affairs of the Middle East just for the security of its geostrategic interests but facts and figures suggest something else. They opine that as far as China’s geostrategic interests in the Middle East are concerned, it has been staging things from very early years in the better quarter of the twenty-first century. While addressing the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCFF) in 2014, Xi Jinping expressed China’s interests in the Middle East “as a 1+2+3 cooperation framework”. That means China would be promoting its ties with the Middle Eastern states based on three key areas. First, it would enhance its cooperation in the field of energy and sign various agreements with oil and gas-rich countries for the exploitation of these natural resources. Second, Jinping stated that China would ensure the provision of infrastructure to the regional states so that they could
flourish in finance and trade activities. Third, China would sign Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with these states to magnify the cooperation in the fields of nuclear technology, high-tech industries, and space and renewable energy (Stanzel, 2022; Fulton 2019; Wu, 2021). Again in 2017, Jinping officially announced two principles of China’s foreign policy toward the Middle East. Firstly, he declared an innovative form of international relations purely based on ‘win-win cooperation’. Such types of relations would feature mutual justice, fairness, and respect. Secondly, his emphasis was on establishing ‘a community with a shared future of mankind’ that would aim at decorating a beautiful world where all human beings could enjoy peace, security, and prosperity. He viewed that the only success of China was hidden in the observance of the policy of the broader framework based on the mentioned principles (Wu, 2021).

As an answer to the arguments of these writers one can enunciate that China has constantly been formulating foreign policy while considering the security of its geostrategic interests as well as the stability of the concerned regions since the 2010s. Now if it has tried to mend the Saudi-Iran relations it has pro-Middle East and pro-China motives behind it too. The China-brokered deal between Tehran and Riyadh has increased the power competition in the Middle East and forced the United States (US) to reemphasize its regional policy. Both the Saudi and Iranian leaderships have perceived China as a more neutral mediator and the Chinese consider themselves as reliable friends of these. Currently, having strategic relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia China is the largest trading partner for these as well. One thing worth mentioning is that China’s sponsorship of the Saudi-Iran rapprochement does not mean that it will attain the status of a guarantor; in case Iran breaches the deal Beijing will not intervene (Jalal, 2023). However, such diplomacy of China will boost its soft power and prestige and will be working for stability in the region. If it gets successful it will make the same practice to influence other regions including Africa and Europe.
Access to the Saudi-Iran oil is another dimension of China’s efforts to amend the ties between these. For its continued growth and geo-economic interests China has increased investment in Saudi ports by the Red Sea, especially Jeddah. For supporting its Belt and Road Initiative China has recently announced a $12.2 billion Riyadh-Beijing joint venture for an integrated refinery and petrochemical complex (Jalal, 2023). In addition to that, China’s involvement has questioned the credibility and reliability of the US role in the region and this is the objective that Iran shares.

“Riyadh, like Abu Dhabi, has been disappointed by what it perceives as inadequate U.S. security guarantees vis-à-vis drone attacks launched by Iranian proxies into the kingdom, especially following the attacks on Abqaiq and Khurais in September 2019. As a result, the Saudi leadership appears to have reassessed its view of the risks and opportunities in the current regional landscape and chosen to leverage its relations to further its Vision 2030 goals by partly playing the great powers off against one another to maximize benefits and improve its bargaining position vis-à-vis the U.S., including on the issue of nuclear power” (Jalal, 2023).

As far as China’s security of strategic interests is concerned, it has adopted a two-pronged strategy to make its policies effective in the Middle East. First, China has generated balanced and sustainable relations with the regional states. By supporting development-oriented logic it has built strong strategic relations while avoiding the political conflict among and between various states. Currently, as a sincere mediator of the Saudi-Iran rapprochement, it is supposed to be enhancing regional security is a clear signal toward the negation of the importance of the US that has been found
launching the ‘strategy of pursuing wars, imposing sanctions, and political pressure, and providing contingent military aid to allies’ (Saleh and Yazdanshenas, 2023). China has promoted partnership diplomacy to strengthen these strategic ties. It has signed agreements with 13 regional countries under the titles of “comprehensive strategic partnership” and “strategic partnership”. United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran have become a part of the “comprehensive strategic partnership” agreements which has made China a sweet spot in the Persian Gulf. Further, the introduction of the “two wheels two wings” initiative in 2018 helped China to reach international waters through the supply chain and business clusters in the Persian Gulf. In this way, China has succeeded in securing its commercial interests. Meanwhile, Iran cannot attract Chinese FDI due to the re-imposition of sanctions ‘after the Trump administration withdrew from the nuclear deal’. However, it does not mean that China is going to deny the importance of Iran in the region; it has signed a future-oriented multidimensional 25-year deal with Tehran (Saleh and Yazdanshenas, 2023).

Briefly speaking, China and Iran signed this 25-year agreement in March 2021 for $ 400 billion. Leaked information reveals that foreign ministers of both states ensured cooperation in energy, economic, infrastructure, trade, and military assistance. Military cooperation was specified for the eradication of extremism and terrorism in the region. It was still unlikely that China would sell Iran military equipment even after the termination of the arms embargo in the JCPOA of 2020 (Rozsa, 2021).

According to Jonathan Fulton, a senior fellow at Atlantic Council, China’s more than 40 percent of crude oil imports from the Gulf are conditioned with the stability in the Middle East. He appreciates Beijing’s strategic partnership diplomacy through which it has built diplomatic capitals on both sides of the Gulf (Nereim, 2023a).
Secondly, China seeks to balance and check the US influence in the region without initiating military measures or the deployment of troops. For that purpose, China has diverted its attention towards strengthening its ties with the states which are not US allies and Iran would never miss the opportunity to seize.

“On the other hand, Beijing attempts to exploit voids created by declining US involvement in the Middle East, widening the gap between Washington and the regional partners. China considers the US network of allies and partners to be a threat so it currently seizes upon any opportunity that emerges to weaken it” (Saleh and Yazdanshenas, 2023).

China has always been using its stance on the development of Third-World countries quite effectively while justifying its relations with specific states. It has tried its best not to violate the rules and regulations of international platforms. For example, China has obeyed the principles of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and thus its economic interests in the Middle East lie at the heart of its non-proliferation policy. Facts and figures reflect that China imports almost 50 percent of its oil from Iran and it has invested a considerable amount of money for the exploitation of oil and gas in Iran. But when an analyst talks about rules and regulations, he/she would find that China voted for the United Nations Security Council sanctions on Iran which could not even restrain China from cutting its economic ties with Iran (Wu, 2017).

Alongside the economic gains through BRI, China has the potential to ensure the security of its strategic interests to influence the regions beyond the Middle East. The Gulf States can support China as an effective strategic partner in this regard. For instance, it was due to the geostrategic position of the Gulf States that China built a base, named Peoples’ Liberation Army Support Base, in Djibouti in 2017 near a US one. The base was established for having a focus on antipiracy activities (Loft, Curtis, and Ward, 2022). A
Washington-based policy expert views the Chinese involvement in mending the ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran as a challenge to waning American dominance in the Middle East because the US is not supposed to be the Guarantor of regional security. On the contrary, ‘China is ready to offer weapons, technology, and investment with no strings attached’ (Nereim, 2023b).

There are many perceptions about the success of China in the Middle East particularly based on the difference in role from the corners of China and the US. It is a common thinking among the readers and analysts that the US had huge footprints in the region but it could not manage to bring Riyadh and Tehran on the same page. For the security of its minor interests in the region, the Americans had forgotten the long-term impact of the rapprochement between the two mentioned. Instead, they sided themselves with Saudi Arabia and kept on ignoring to build diplomatic ties with Tehran. On the contrary, China picked no side and positioned itself as an equal-opportunity consumer of hydrocarbons from all the influential countries in the region (Tharoor, 2023). This approach made China able to break a deal between two leading states i.e. Saudi Arabia and Iran. Now, this deal has allowed China to step into the geopolitical vacuum in the Middle East and it has attained the status of ‘strategic actor’ there.

Some of the America-based analysts perceive that China will soon dominate the political affairs of the Middle East too. They are quite logical with their arguments because the other regional powers are also diverting their attention towards Chinese policies while blaming the US for its unsatisfactory performance regarding regional development, peace, and security. It is worth mentioning here that the brokered deal between Tehran and Riyadh was not an overnight phenomenon but it took at least two years and it was equally shepherded by the other regional states prominently Oman and Iraq (Tharor, 2023). Such an inclination of the Middle Eastern states toward China suggests that within no time
China will figure a major shift in the regional dynamic. Undoubtedly, China’s emergence in the Middle East as a competitor to the US will also help the regional states to attain peace which was once destroyed by the American aggression.

The Chinese leadership has successfully resolved one of the most burning issues in the region i.e. civil war in Yemen where Iran and Saudi Arabia have been competing with each other perhaps due to sectarian differences or different international alliances. Events show that since December 2022, most probably due to Beijing’s influence, Tehran has admitted backing the Houthis and has stopped sending those weapons. Additionally, Iran has pledged not to attack Saudi Arabia directly or indirectly. All these signals are a clear signal toward the restoration of peace in the region and it will take no time to ‘negotiate a peace agreement in Yemen by then, too’ (Ignatius, 2023).

On the other hand, the Saudi-Iran deal has created so many fears among the Israeli leadership that it has caused a setback to the Israeli efforts to erect an anti-Iran coalition in the Middle East. According to the composition of the Abraham Accord\(^4\) (2020), Israel wants to add Saudi Arabia to the list of those countries with which it normalizes relations. Israel frets that the dormancy of the US has given China a space to throw a political and economic lifeline to Iran. Recently, Saudi Arabia has become a “dialogue partner” of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which Iran is an observer. Then the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted the Hamas delegation and after the deal, Israel was attacked with rockets from Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria which were, reportedly, coordinated by Iran. All these developments in the Middle East have added to Israel’s anxiety and raised

\(^4\) The accord was mediated by the United States to normalize the relations of Bahrain and United Arab Emirates with Israel. As part of the agreement, both Bahrain and UAE recognized the sovereignty of Israel enabling the establishment of full diplomatic ties.
Israel’s concern in the region (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Conclusion

In short, China has succeeded in bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two traditional and ideological rivals, on the same page which is the first step toward attaining stability and security in the Middle East. Most probably, in a peaceful environment, these influential states in the Middle East will be able to sort out the problems of Yemen and Syria in particular and the whole region in general. Meanwhile, China has emerged as a strategic competitor to the United States (US)-which has been devising aggressive policies to maintain its influence in the region. Now, China, perhaps with its various economic and strategic goals, has formulated policies that are in favor of the Middle East as well as its own. Analysis of all these developments in the Middle East suggests that China’s intentions are clear as it has decided to restore peaceful environment in the region which can, to the larger extent, be supportive for boosting its economic activities there. Surprisingly, it was the result of all such policies favorable for the Middle East that within no time in 2015, China emerged as the biggest importer of crude oil and 50 percent of its supply was coming from the Middle Eastern states. Similarly, the recent mediation of the Saudi-Iran ties, the two most influential countries in the region, is no less than a landmark that has earned a bright future for China’s BRI that will be linking Asia to Europe and Africa. If China keeps on sticking to such policies in handling the Gulf States, which are dominating the international markets of energy, soon it will see itself at the center of global trade networks.
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China-finalized deal marks the beginnings of a multipolar Mideast - The Washington Post


