

# Iran-Saudi rapprochement matter of US, Europe concern: Turkish expert

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN - Dr. Bilgehan Alagoz says Iran and Saudi Arabia have engaged in a win-win diplomacy, noting their rapprochement is a matter of American and European concern.

After three days of intensive negotiations hosted by China, Iran and Saudi Arabia finally clinched a deal on Friday to restore diplomatic relations and re-open embassies, seven years after ties were severed over several issues.

The deal, brokered by China, was announced all of a sudden on Friday.

Both sides have agreed to resume diplomatic relations between and reopen their embassies and missions within a period not exceeding two months. The agreement also includes their affirmation of respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states.

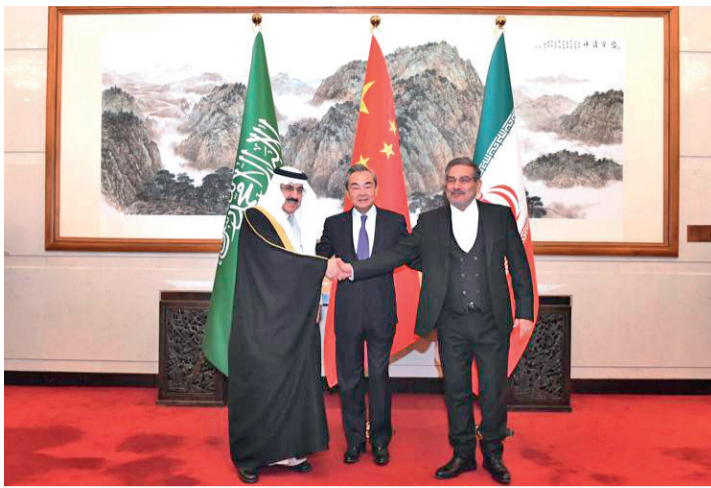
According to the agreement, they also agreed that the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries shall meet to implement this, arrange for the return of their ambassadors, and discuss means of enhancing bilateral ties.

To know more about the global and regional impacts of the agreement between two regional rival oil-producing powers brokered by China, the world's biggest oil-consuming country, we reached out to Dr. Bilgehan Alagoz, Director of Foreign Policy Program Center for Iranian Studies-Ankara (IRAM).

**Here is the full text of the interview:**

How will the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran as two regional powers and rivals affect the US and European pressures on Iran?

I do not perceive a direct connection between Iran's relations with Europe and the United States and its relations with Saudi Arabia.



The two most significant states in the Persian Gulf are Iran and Saudi Arabia, and their power struggle constitutes an essential element of their bilateral relationship. They have nonetheless engaged in win-win diplomacy. For instance, the two countries engaged in a heated argument over the continental shelf in the 1960s. But in 1968, both countries decided that diplomacy was preferable and reached a deal. The same was true in Iraq in 2006 and 2007, where hostilities between the two countries were very strong. The visit of the Iranian president to Saudi Arabia, though, helped to ease the tension. In this regard, Iran's diplomatic interactions with Saudi Arabia have far more experience than Iran's interactions with Europe and the US. Since the pressure from Europe and the USA on Iran is a result of Iran's nuclear activities, I do not believe that the reconciliation of Iran and Saudi Arabia will directly result in a change in policy for them.

Differences and creating differences among regional countries have always been a tool in the hands of extra-regional powers to drive their own interests and goals in our region. Can this agreement be a hurdle for the regional policy of the US and the Europeans?

The fact that this agreement was reached with China's involvement is, in my opinion, what makes it so noteworthy for Europe and the USA. We are aware that, particularly, the USA views China as its major rival in world politics and hence puts special emphasis on the "Asia-Pacific" region. The US military's withdrawal from the Middle East has long been a topic of discussion. Those who hold this opinion assert that the US no longer places a high priority on the Middle East in terms of its interests. But it is clear that China, its most significant challenger, is gaining ground. With this most recent development, China is entering a new phase in which it can actively contribute to the Middle Eastern conflict's resolution for the first time. The Iran-Saudi rapprochement is currently, in my opinion, of concern to the USA and Europe because it is a definite sign of China's expanding influence in the region.

Saudi Arabia, as the US's old key regional ally, is trying to diversify its international allies and partners and is challenging Washington, why? Is it a matter of mistrust?

During the Trump era, relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States deepened considerably. The

Biden era, however, caused trouble from the very beginning. Biden's description of Saudi Arabia as a pariah and his words targeting Mohammed bin Salman caused disappointment on the part of Saudi Arabia. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has a balancing policy against the USA. It is developing relations with Russia and China in this perspective. Saudi Arabia is China's largest oil supplier. Despite the situation in Ukraine, it maintains a balance in its relations with Russia and forges strong bonds within the OPEC+ system. All of these can be evaluated in light of Saudi Arabia's balancing efforts against the regional policies of the US.

What are China's motives for doing its best to settle the gaps between Iran and Saudi Arabia?

Throughout the past 20 years, the rise in China's energy consumption has been a major driver of all energy trends. By 2050, China will continue to import more oil than any other country in the world, according to the estimate. Saudi Arabia is primarily the highest-ranked trading partner in this transaction (although Russia ranked first last year, it is believed to be a conjunctural development). On the other hand, a 25-year Comprehensive Partnership Agreement between Iran and China marked a new phase in the two nations' relations, which occurred in March 2021. A significant aspect of the relations between the two nations is also revealed by the fact that Iran serves as China's local ally in Iraq, a country to which Beijing accords tremendous importance. China was, however, under pressure from each nation to reduce its ties with the other. To limit relations with neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia was not in China's best interests given the current situation, though. China took the lead in this reconciliation because of this.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](http://tehrantimes.com))

## Frozen ice melts: China bridges Iran-Saudi ties in the new era

By Prof. Yuan Zhang, Amir Mohammad Esmaili, and El Houcine Zraidi

Under the agreement announced on Friday, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore diplomatic ties after seven years of tensions. The agreement seems to have potentially wide implications for MENA region as well as global dynamics.

The tripartite statement was issued in Beijing signed by Ali Shamkhani, the representative of the Supreme Leader and Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran; Mosaed bin Mohammed Al-Aiban, the National Security adviser, Minister of State and member of the Council of Ministers of Saudi Arabia; and Wang Yi, member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party.

As a result of the talks, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume diplomatic relations and reopen embassies and representatives within two months. The foreign ministers of the two countries will meet each other to implement this decision and make the necessary arrangements for the exchange of ambassadors.

The different dimensions of this agreement have been examined by Chinese, Iranian and Arab IR scholars and politicians. In this article, first, Prof. Yuan Zhang discusses China's role in MENA security architecture. Then, Amir M. Esmaili scrutinizes the role of Iran in regional and global dynamics, and in the last part, El Houcine Zraidi investigates how and in which ways the Saudi-Iran agreement might transform the Arab World.

### China and MENA security architecture

On the Chinese side, Chinese President Xi Jinping's active initiative to support the development of good neighborliness between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran marks a major step forward for peace in the MENA region, highlighting the increased state autonomy of the region and signaling that China's "Global Security Initiative" (GSI) is receiving a strong and practical response from the MENA powers. It also means that China's "Global Security Initiative" is receiving a strong response from the MENA powers.

The speech of Wang Yi, who presided over the closing ceremony of the Iranian-Saudi dialogue in Beijing, well explains the significance of restoring diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia for the current world, namely that the improvement of relations between Iran and Saudi

Arabia opens the way to peace and stability in the MENA, and is a new model for resolving conflicts and differences between countries through dialogue and consultation.

Earlier, in December 2022, President Xi attended the first China-Arab States Summit, the China-Gulf Arab States Cooperation Council Summit and paid a state visit to Saudi Arabia. In February 2023, President Raisi of Iran paid a state visit to China. These visits laid an excellent foundation for the Joint Trilateral Statement. In fact, as early as the beginning of the 13th Five-Year Plan, in January 2016, at the invitation of King Salman of Saudi Arabia, President Sisi of Egypt and President Rouhani of the Iran, President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to the above three countries from January 19 to 23.

During that visit, China announced the establishment of comprehensive strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively, which provides a more solid foundation for deepening mutual political trust, promoting mutually beneficial cooperation and strengthening humanistic exchanges. In President Xi's speech at the headquarters of the League of Arab State in 2016, President Xi put forward Chinese proposals on the MENA question, "Where should the MENA be headed?", pointing out that root causes of the turmoil in the MENA lies in lack of development, and the ultimate solution will depend on development, taking dialogue as the "golden rule". This provides a new way of thinking to promote the MENA peace process.

China supports MENA countries to strengthen dialogue, attach importance to people's livelihood and development requirements, advocate taking care of the reasonable security concerns of all parties, strengthen the internal forces of safeguarding regional security, and support regional organizations to play a greater constructive role, which are China's consistent solutions to prevent and resolve regional security challenges.

The security concept advocated by China does not deviate from the international system that adheres to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN and practices true multilateralism. This is concretely demonstrated in the tripartite joint statement by emphasis on adhering to the principles and objectives of Charter of the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and international conventions and norms.

China can play a strong mediation role in the MENA peace affairs. China is playing a construc-

tive role in MENA affairs? respect their sovereignty and dignity in the meantime.

The Beijing Dialogue has become a successful exercise in the strong implementation of the Global Security Initiative. China has proved that it is fully capable of fulfilling its role as a well-meaning and reliable mediator and host of hotspot issues. China is a true friend of the MENA countries.

The release of this significant news that Saudi Arabia and Iran have reached an agreement, which coincides with China's "two sessions", enhance the diplomatic profile and diplomatic status of China, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Beijing Dialogue proves that the MENA countries can gradually emerge from the internal regional quagmire and play a greater role in world politics.

### Iran and new power dynamics

Iranian scholars and politicians have discussed Iran-Saudi Arabia agreement from different perspectives. This part seeks to discover and categorize Iranian different perspectives toward the Iran-Saudi Arabia agreement with China's mediation.

#### 1. President Raisi Look East policy

Following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, assanation of General Soleimani, EU dissolution of INSTEX, and the maximum pressure campaign, the new administration in Tehran came to decision to pursue a combination of "neighborhood policy" and "Eurasianism policy" in its foreign policy orientation. Mohammad Jamshidi, Deputy Chief of Staff for Political Affairs to Iran's President, for instance believes that "Good neighborly and brotherly policies with Eurasian integration create economic and security benefits free from foreign intervention." Ali Bahadri Jahormi, Iran's government spokesperson, also argued that "the historic agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in China" should be considered as the result of a "series of purely Asian negotiations that is capable to shape regional relations without foreign interference."

#### 2. Tehran and Riyadh positive response toward China's global initiatives

As a comprehensive economic plan, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is approaching its own 10th anniversary this year. Subsequently, a new circle of systematic and interconnected initiatives called "The Global Security Initiative" and "The Global Development Initiative" have been proposed by China, which is based on Chinese concept of "Building a Community of a Shared Future for Mankind".

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](http://tehrantimes.com))

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## SPORTS

### Football expert Maziar supports Iran U20 team

From Page 1 ▶ "Of course, I believe that Iran could have won the game against Iraq with some better tactical and individual decisions, but overall, the coaching staff of the team can earn passing grades because of their performance on the team.

"We should not forget that due to political sanctions against Iran, the country's football federation cannot provide any friendly game requested by the national teams head coach in all categories, from youth team to the senior one," added the head coach of U14 Iran football team.

When asked about the plans that the Iranian football federation should have for the U20 team, Maziar answered, "Football youth teams need stability in their coaching staff. In these teams, the development of the players should be more important than the results. The football community must be more patient regarding such teams and let their players and coaching staff work on long-term projects to make a new generation in the country's football. This happens in developed countries and we should follow their paths.

"The support of the U20 team and their participation in various international tournaments should continue so that the talented players of this team can help Iran's national teams in higher age groups, such as U23 and senior national team," concluded Maziar.

### Nassirshahal appointed Iran weightlifting coach

TEHRAN - Navab Nassirshahal has been named as new coach of Iran national weightlifting team.

Nassirshahal, 33, will be assisted by Bahman Zare and Vahid Rabiei in the national team.

Saeid Alihosseini announced his resignation as coach of Iran in late January.

Nassirshahal has previously worked as assistant of Sajad Anoushiravani in 2016 Olympic Games.

He will have to lead Iran in the 2023 Asian Weightlifting Championships which will be held in Jinju, South Korea in May.

Nassirshahal competed at the 2012 Olympic Games in London, where he won a silver medal in the 105 kg division, behind Oleksiy Torokhtiy of Ukraine, but was later upgraded to the gold medal following Torokhtiy's disqualification for doping.

The weightlifter participated in the same event at the 2014 Asian Games and the 2015 World Championships, but failed to set a mark in the clean and jerk in both cases.

### Javanmard named 2022 Asian Para Games Chef de Mission

TEHRAN - Iran's National Paralympic Committee (NPC) managing director Kamal Javanmard has been named as Iran's Chef de Mission for the 2022 Asian Para Games.

Sitting volleyball coach Hadi Rezaei was Iran's Chef de Mission for the 2018 Asian Para Games and 2020 Paralympic Games.

The fourth edition of the Games will be held in Hangzhou, China from Oct. 22 to 28.

Iran finished in third place in the previous edition behind China and South Korea.

### Enayati parts ways with Naft Masjed Soleyman

TEHRAN - Reza Enayati parted company with Naft Masjed Soleyman football club.

Enayati was appointed as head coach of the Iranian top-flight club as a replacement for Ebrahim Ashkesh in late January but failed to help the team move up in the table.

Naft Masjed Soleyman sit 15th in the 16-team table of Iran Professional League.

Farzad Hafezi has been appointed as interim coach of the team.

### Arash Miresmaeili remains Iran judo president

TEHRAN - Arash Miresmaeili remained president of Iran judo federation for a four-year term till 2027.

In the elections held at the Iran's Academy Olympic in Tehran on Monday, he was elected unopposed as president by securing 54 votes out of 55 votes cast.

As an athlete, Miresmaeili won the gold medal in two World Judo Championships, the first one in 2001 in Munich, Germany, and the second in 2003 in Osaka, Japan.

He has also won three gold medals in the Asian Championships.

Miresmaeili represented Iran in the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece.

### Iran's women's futsal runners-up at Nowruz Games

TEHRAN - Iran's women's futsal team finished in second place in the first international Nowruz Games for Women.

The Russian team won the title, beating Team Melli Banovan 4-0.

The 2023 Nowruz Games started on Saturday in Tehran, capital of Iran and will run until Monday.

Over 500 athletes from 20 countries, including Iran, compete in nine sports for three days.

The athletes from Iran, Armenia, Afghanistan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, Kuwait, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Tunisia, Russia, Armenia, the UAE, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Palestine, Thailand, and Nepal partake in athletic, riding, Chogan (polo), Karate, Kabbadi, futsal, powerlifting, fencing, and judo competitions.

### Iran depart for AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup 2023

TEHRAN - Iran left Tehran on Monday for Thailand to compete at the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2023.

Team Melli have been drawn in Group B along with the UAE, Malaysia and Uzbekistan.

Iran will start the campaign on Thursday with a match against Malaysia.

The 10th edition of the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup will be played in Pattaya, Thailand, from March 16 to 26.

#### Draw

**Group A:** Thailand, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia

**Group B:** UAE, Iran, Malaysia, Uzbekistan

**Group C:** Japan, Lebanon, China, Indonesia

**Group D:** Oman, Palestine, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic

### Sanat Naft held by Malavan: IPL

TEHRAN - Sanat Naft football team shared the spoils with Malavan in a 1-1 draw in Iran Professional League (IPL) Matchday 23 on Monday.

Struggling Sanat Naft, headed by Abdollah Veisi, needed the win to move up the table but just earned a one point in their home game.

Ahmad Shariatzadeh scored for Sanat Naft in the 20th minute but his goal was canceled out by Mehran Ahmadi two minutes later in Abadan.

In Isfahan, Zob Ahan defeated Nassaji 1-0, courtesy of a goal from Mohammadreza Soleymani in the second half.

Sanat Naft are 15th in the table with 13 points out of 23 matches.