

# Next Stop: Abu Dhabi

Iran's Shamkhani due in UAE ▶ Page 3

## Op-ed **T** Is the United States being isolated?

By Ehsan Etesam

TEHRAN – Despite all the doubts, butts and ifs that are hovering around, the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is considered by many as a significant diplomatic achievement not just for the two sides, but also for the entire region.

It also significantly highlighted the role of China that brokered the agreement on March 10.

The agreement was welcomed by many countries inside and outside the region, but shortly after the news broke out, a very strong and loud trend started to emerge and that was the notion of "credibility".

It is not hard to read the intentions of China to act as a mediator to bring peace back to a region which is of significant importance, especially for those who are familiar with China's economic ambitions and its race with the U.S. to win the title of first economic power. To economically grow bigger, a safe West Asia is vital for China. And so is for Iran and Saudi Arabia. ▶ Page 5

## If Iran invited to China-PGCC meeting, Tehran will seriously consider it: diplomat

TEHRAN – A Foreign Ministry official says if Iran is invited to a joint China-Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) meeting, the Islamic Republic will "seriously" study it, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

In recent days a report surfaced that China plans to hold joint meeting with the PGCC members with a participation of Iran.

Alireza Enayati, director of the Persian Gulf department at the Foreign Ministry, "If this issue is raised officially or an invitation is made, Iran will surely study it." ▶ Page 2

## Challenging task lies ahead of Iran football

By Masoud Hossein

TEHRAN – The difficult task lies ahead of Iran national football team in the future since the team need to be rejuvenated as soon as possible.

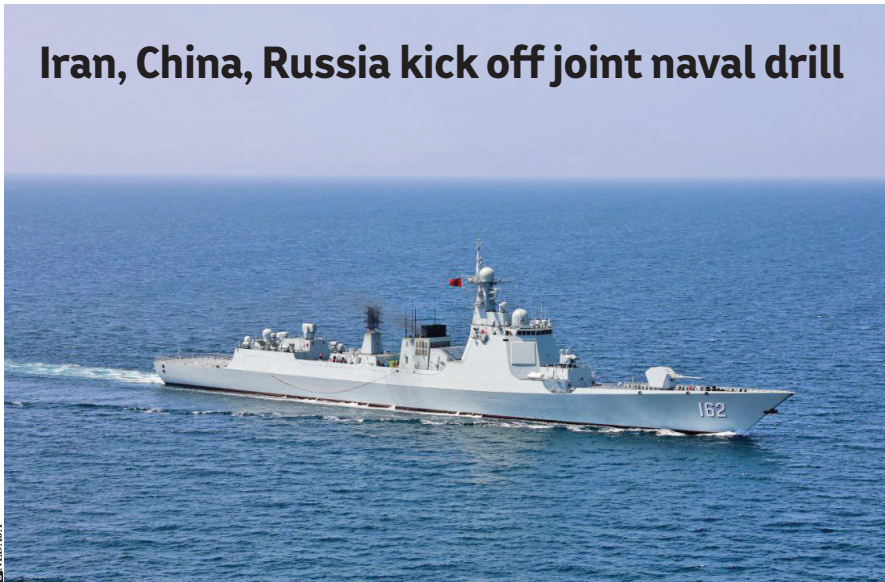
Iran football team were the oldest out of any team at the 2022 FIFA World Cup, with an average age of 28.9. This was over four years older than the team with the youngest squad, Ghana, with an average age of 24.7.

The teams are focusing on the 2026 FIFA World Cup and there is an opportunity for them to inject some fresh blood into their sides in the three-year period.

Amir Ghalenoei was appointed as Team Melli coach on Sunday and will officially take the helm when he faces Russia in a friendly match on March 23 in Tehran.

Karim Ansarifard, Ehsan Hajsafi, Ramin Rezaeian, Vahid Amiri, Rouzbeh Cheshmi and Shoja Khalilzadeh, who were members of Team Melli in Qatar World Cup, should be replaced by the young players and Ghalenoei must build a new team for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. ▶ Page 3

## Iran, China, Russia kick off joint naval drill



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TEHRAN – Military forces from Iran, China, and Russia launched joint military naval drills in the Gulf of Oman on Wednesday, according to the Chinese Defense Ministry.

"Following the consensus reached by the militaries of China, Iran and Russia, the navies of the three

countries will hold the Security Belt-2023 joint maritime exercise in the Gulf of Oman from March 15 to 19, according to a news release from China's Ministry of National Defense on Wednesday," the Chinese Defense Ministry said in a statement.

The statement said, "The Security Belt-2023

exercise is developed from the two joint maritime exercises held by the three countries in 2019 and 2022. The Chinese military dispatches the guided-missile destroyer Nanning to participate in the exercise on such subjects as aerial search, maritime rescue, ship parade and others." ▶ Page 3

## Iranian crude oil output rises 17,000 bpd in February: OPEC

TEHRAN- Iran's crude oil production increased 17,000 barrels per day (bpd) in February to reach 2.554 million bpd, according to OPEC's latest monthly report.

As reported, Iranian heavy crude oil price also increased by \$0.32 in the mentioned month to stand at \$81.88 per barrel.

According to the report, the country's average heavy crude price was \$81.72 from the beginning of 2023 up to the report's publishing day, in comparison to \$89.22 in the previous year's same period. OPEC Basket prices also rose by \$0.26 to \$81.88 a barrel in February.

Based on OPEC data, the country's average

crude output in the fourth quarter of 2022 stood at 2.567 million barrels per day indicating a 2,000-bpd rise compared to the figure for the third quarter of the year.

Iran's oil production in 2022 increased by seven percent compared to the previous year, according to OPEC's first monthly report released in 2023. ▶ Page 4



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## Women in Ardabil welcome new year with Su Usti ritual

The Su Usti ritual in Ardabil is performed annually a few days before the new year by young women and girls to seek the rule of clarity and light.

Holding scissors, brooms, and clay jars, participants reach the historical bridge of Yedigöz in Ardabil and cross the Baliqlo River three times, believing that on this day, their needs and intentions will be fulfilled.

## Sialk hills, the story of 7,500-year-old ziggurat

TEHRAN - Date back to around 6000-5500 BC, the Sialk hills were hidden by farmland until a flood did so; no one else was aware of it.

Although it may initially appear that this location is only in ruins, if you look closer, you can hear the ancient artifacts conversing with you. Learn more about this city, its culture, and its people by reading the following.

Narratives say that people in Kashan called

this mysterious area of the city "The Cursed City" and no one dared to approach this terrifying location before a severe flood that led to the discovery of Sialk hills.

Perhaps it wouldn't be accurate to refer to this structure as "hills"; in reality, it is a ziggurat, a rectangular stepped tower that is occasionally topped by a temple and is made primarily of clay.

## Report **T**

## Rivers, the main artery of life

By Mehdi Garshasbi

Rivers, which mainly originate from the mountains, are important elements that shape ecosystems. According to the Iranian culture, "where there is water, there is prosperity."

Throughout history, all human settlements such as cities and villages have been formed along rivers.

The respect and reverence they had for water have caused the formation of different cultures and civilizations throughout history.

Every year on March 14, people throughout the world mark the International Day of Action for Rivers to bring attention to how important rivers are to our daily lives.

Environment enthusiasts conduct workshops, seminars, and activities to celebrate this day to raise awareness and spread the message. ▶ Page 7

In fact, the overflow revealed a wide variety of tools and potteries in interesting shapes. Roman Ghirshman, a renowned French archaeologist and expert on ancient Persia from the Louvre museum, eventually traveled to Iran to begin excavation on this special historical site with his team. As a result of his findings, a large part of the Sialk hills treasure is now held in Paris's prestigious museum. ▶ Page 6

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## Tehran Papers **T**

In the following column, we take a look at some important contents and views in yesterday's Iranian newspapers.

## A few points regarding ties between Iran and S. Arabia

While it was said that Saudi Arabia is preparing to normalize relations with Israel, the sudden change of the playing field from Tel Aviv-Riyadh to Tehran-Riyadh was surprising. ▶ Page 2

## Op-ed **T**

## Endogenous forces key to shaping regional peace

By Prof. ZHANG Yuan

The MENA has long been considered as a region in turmoil, and the problems of security deficit, trust deficit, governance deficit and development deficit have long plagued the governments and people of the MENA.

For any country to achieve smooth and sustainable development, it needs not only a stable and united domestic social environment. ▶ Page 2

## Iran says Israel protests indicative of identity crisis

TEHRAN – Nasser Kanaani, the spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, has reacted to massive protests in Israel, saying they are emblematic of identity crisis.

Kanaani said on Twitter that the huge rallies against the Zionist regime's judicial changes for the 10th week as a testimony to "the hidden identity crisis at the spider's den," according to Tasnim.

Pointing to the street rallies that have been held in Tel Aviv and other regions of the occupied territories for the past ten weeks, the spokesman said, "This is only one of the aggregated crises in Israel."

He further reminded the Zionist regime that its rootless foundation will collapse with a gust, citing the verse 41 from surah Al-Ankabut of the Holy Quran. ▶ Page 3

## China suggests connecting Iran's Kanoon children with space stations

TEHRAN – The Chinese cultural attaché in Tehran has suggested connecting members of Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults – Kanoon with Chinese astronauts at space stations.

Joe Xie Hao made remarks in a meeting with Kanoon Deputy Director in Cultural Affairs Farhad Fallah. Kanoon announced on Wednesday.

The institute gave no additional details about the suggestion.

Joe pointed to Kanoon's decision to establish a Chinese Language Department at its Iran Language Institute two years ago, and said that the Ministry of Education of China is ready to collaborate with the institute by sending Chinese language teachers and educational materials, and providing Iranian students with Chinese language scholarships at Chinese universities. ▶ Page 8

## TEHRAN PAPERS

## Etela'at: A few points regarding ties between Iran and S. Arabia

In the following column, we take a look at some important contents and views in yesterday's Iranian newspapers.

from page 1 ▶ In an analysis Etela'at mentions several points about resuming Tehran-Riyadh diplomatic ties;

1- Saudi Arabia and Iran are competing over the volume of production and price of oil. Changing the policy of the two countries can strengthen their new ties.

2- Iran and Saudi Arabia have their own allies in the region and the world, the U.S. and Israel have always created conflicts in the countries allied to Tehran and Riyadh. Changing the strategies of Iran and Saudi Arabia coupled with maximum use of their resources and power can bring peace to these countries.

3- The United States and the West have always been mediators to resolve disputes around the world emphatically in West Asia, but for the first time, the East and China took the initiative.

## Arman-e-Melli: U.S. will not open its fist

The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is an important event, but it does not mean that this can solve all other problems, Arman-e-Melli says in a commentary.

The agreement is part of a puzzle, and other political and economic measures must be taken to complete the puzzle. If this does not happen, the agreement will definitely not be able to answer all the challenges.

Negotiations to revive the JCPOA, and the de-escalation process in Iran's relations with the West, especially the United States, can be the next steps that lead to both the revival of the JCPOA and Iran's accession to FATF.

The reality is that there is a gap between the U.S. policies and practices, and the Americans will certainly not open their fists so easily to be put in a new position in the process to (possibly) revitalize the JCPOA. If they want to control Iran's nuclear program, there is no way other than reviving the JCPOA.

The U.S. and Europeans' reaction to the Tehran-Riyadh deal can be a positive sign of the regional policies of the United States since one of the problems that are always raised in the negotiations between Iran and the West is Iran's regional influence.

A part of Iran's regional influence is due to the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and as much as Iran and Saudi Arabia can solve their problems at the regional level through dialogue, this will definitely have an impact on the negotiation process between Iran and the West. Iran's missile power can practically be removed from the negotiation table.

## UAE won't let any party to threaten Iran from its soil: ambassador

TEHRAN - "The United Arab Emirates government is against any damage to Iran and guarantees that no one can use our soil to attack Iran," the UAE envoy to Tehran said on Wednesday.

The UAE ambassador to Tehran, Saif Mohamed Obaid Jaseem AlZaabi, made the comments in a meeting with Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Iranian parliament speaker.

At the beginning of the meeting, Ghalibaf wished success to AlZaabi in his new term of responsibility in Tehran, saying, "There is no doubt that the countries of the Persian Gulf region should have a warm and intimate relationship with each other historically, geographically, culturally, economically and politically, and this is the reality of our region."

The speaker recalled that the policy of the 13th government and the 11th parliament in Iran is to develop relations with neighboring countries, describing the United Arab Emirates as one of Iran's major trading partners.

He warned the UAE side against the danger of U.S. presence in the region, stressing, "The intervention of powers such as the United States leads to tensions because they only seek their own interests and undermine the security of the region."

Ghalibaf said that Iran-UAE relations would benefit regional stability.

The Iranian speaker also warned about the presence and plots of the Zionist regime in the Persian Gulf region to undermine its security.

Ghalibaf went on to tell AlZaabi that "I hope your efforts will be a beginning of the development of relations between the two countries because there is a will in the governments and peoples of

## IRAN: West Asia on the path to reducing tensions

Western countries are reducing hostilities with Iran. Although Western governments try to hide it in their declared policies and pretend to continue the past policies, the news about the exchange of prisoners between Iran and the United States and the visit of Biden's Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens to Qatar are a sign of the failure of the past policies and the need for reform.

Talks between Iran and Bahrain and Iran and Egypt are also underway to resume relations.

Zionists consider the developments to be the result of the resumption of relations between Tehran and Riyadh. After Saudi Arabia did not allow the Israeli delegation to enter its soil, some Zionists reported a new blow from Abu Dhabi to the Tel Aviv cabinet after canceling Netanyahu's visit to the UAE and the possibility of canceling the contract to purchase defense systems from the Zionist regime.

Political observers believe that what can be seen in the new approach of some Arab countries with Iran will lead to stopping or slowing down the normalization of the relationship between these countries and the Zionist regime.

## Etela'at: Will Erdogan's two decades of power end?

Etela'at writes: Two months before the elections, new polls show that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is about 10% behind his main rival in the upcoming elections. Turkish citizens, who have been dealing with a large-scale economic crisis in recent years, doubt Erdogan's rule more than before due to the earthquake in southern Turkey.

The residents of the earthquake-affected areas mostly supported Erdogan in the last elections, but the disaster in these areas and the government's mismanagement in providing aid have fueled skepticism about the government's competence.

A poll published by Aksoy Research company showed that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is 55.6% ahead in comparison to 44.4% for Erdogan.

It seems that after 20 years of undisputed rule by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the upcoming elections could jeopardize his position.

Erdogan's opponents have promised to restore the parliamentary system once again if they win the elections. Erdogan, who has been the president since 2019, is determined to run again in the upcoming elections.

the two countries to expand their relations."

"We are very pleased that your bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia are forging. These relations are generally forged among neighboring countries, the countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, especially with the UAE," the UAE envoy said.

"We hope that the relations with other countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and Bahrain will be completed in light of talks between Iran and the UAE," AlZaabi also said.

Referring to the visit of a high-ranking delegation from Iran to the UAE, he said, "We are confident that such trips will be effective in emphasizing and confirming the relations between the two countries, and we hope that they will develop more than before."

Further, by presenting the official invitation of the Speaker of the UAE Parliament to the Speaker of the Iranian parliament, he expressed hope that Ghalibaf's upcoming visit to the UAE will lead to further expansion of bilateral relations.

"The UAE government is against any damage to Iran and provides all guarantees that no one can use our country to attack Iran by being in the UAE in terms of military, security, intelligence or in any other [form of presence]," the diplomat said.

"The UAE believes that the region's security should be maintained as a whole and cannot be divided into different parts. The Islamic Republic of Iran is considered an important country in ensuring the stability of the region, and we believe that in this region no other country can secure our interests," the ambassador further noted.

(Source: MNA)

## If Iran invited to China-PGCC meeting, Tehran will seriously consider it: diplomat

from page 1 ▶ Enayati was a member of the Iranian negotiating team who attended the intensive talks with the Saudis mediated by the Chinese.

After five days of talks in Beijing, Iran and China agreed to restore diplomatic ties, which had been cut in 2016. The talks were led by Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), and Saudi Arabian national security adviser Mujafer bin Mohammed Al-Aiban.

China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, described the deal as a victory for dialogue and peace.

Enayati said the agreement in China set the stage for cooperation and there is a hope that Iran and Saudi Arabia can interact with each other within the framework of "good neighborhood."

There is a hope that "hand of friendship" between Iran and Saudi Arabia will create a "bright prospect" for cooperation, economic development, establishment of "peace and security" and "spread of security in the region," the veteran diplomat told IRNA.

He added Iran hopes to establish and improve relations with neighbors and the countries in the region.



Beijing agreement is result of two years of talks in Baghdad and Muscat

Enayati, who is also assistant to the foreign minister, also said the Beijing accord is the "product" of two years of negotiations hosted by Baghdad and Muscat.

"I consider it necessary to insist that the Beijing negotiations that led to declaration of agreement to resume relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is product of the negotiations of the last two years which took place in Baghdad and Oman."

These negotiations "fully" paved the ground for such an agreement, he said. "Surely, if such efforts had not been made in the past, the ground for such a measure would not have been provided in Beijing."

The diplomat also thanked the Chinese government and officials of the country for hosting and making arrangements for the talks.

## Saudis sought negotiations about Yemen

Enayati also said the Saudi side sought dialogue about Yemen in the negotiations but the Islamic Republic

has a clear stance on Yemen and believes that the conflict in the country is a "Yemeni issue" and the Yemenis themselves are aware of their problems and "know how to deal with the issue."

He added, "We have always been insisting that the Yemen issue has a political solution."

## Venue of talks between Iranian, Saudi foreign ministers will be determined in coming days

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud are scheduled to meet to implement the agreement made in Beijing and decide about the exchange of ambassadors between the two capitals.

On whether a "third person" will attend the meeting between the two chief diplomats, Enayati said, "It depends on the conditions or the place where the talks will take place."

He said it is not still "exactly clear" where the talks will take place. The diplomat added he is of the opinion that the venue of the talks will be determined in the "future days."

"The agreements have been made and now we have entered the implementation stage."

## Endogenous forces key to shaping regional peace

from page 1 ▶ but also a peaceful and stable external environment. Security issues are transnational in nature, and their resolution requires transnational thinking. Adopting a cooperative and win-win security path requires a consensus on peace and stability among countries within the region, and taking into account the security concerns of neighboring countries while pursuing their own security.

In early March 2023, at the initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping, an Iranian delegation led by Admiral Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, and a Saudi delegation led by Dr. Mujafer bin Mohammed Al-Aiban, Minister of State and National Security Advisor, held talks in Beijing. On March 10, with China's mediating efforts, Iran and Saudi Arabia reach a deal to reopen embassies. The joint trilateral statement by the three countries was issued, announcing an agreement to resume diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The three countries announce their affirmation of the respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states. Both countries also agree to implement the Security Cooperation Agreement signed in 2001, and the General Agreement for Cooperation in the Fields of Economy, Trade, Investment, Technology, Science, Culture, Sports, and Youth that signed in 1998.

The Chinese academic community is enthusiastically praising The Joint Trilateral Statement by the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The improvement of bilateral relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia has opened a new chapter for peace in the MENA. Iran and Saudi Arabia have resolved their differences through dialogue and negotiation, proving that the internal forces of security in the MENA are the key forces shaping the future of regional peace.

## Security, stability and development are the world's major trends

It should not be any external force that truly understands the people, except for the people themselves born and raised there. The analytical framework of the existence of exclusionary and antagonistic camp divisions in the MENA is often the result of the inertia of cold war

thinking in the outside world and the result of extremely simplistic theoretical assumptions. Theoretical assumptions do not mean that they accurately represent the real facts, let alone the will of the people of the region with regard to the regional situation.

The fixation on the MENA as a volatile place of sectarian, ideological, and ethnic conflicts, and the long-term repetition of this judgment, has led to the formation of human thinking inertia, while conflict confrontation slowly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## The path to achieving security should be one of peace and justice

The path is one of mutual understanding and consultation and dialogue among countries in the region when problems are encountered, of building step by step a framework for collective, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security in the region, rather than inciting hatred and dividing enemy camps with the logic of eliminating the opponent.

The U.S. policy of strategic contraction in the Middle East brings the opportunity for regional countries to exercise regional ownership more fully, and there should not be other external powers "filling the power vacuum". To achieve self-directed security and development, there must be a unanimous will to stabilize and find a relative balance between the interests of all parties, in addition, responsible world powers in international organizations must actively provide or sponsor platforms to promote peace talks, while the key to the implementation of all ideas and plans is always the endogenous willingness to participate in the path.

The MENA has always been a region owned by the people of the MENA. The restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar and between Iran and Saudi Arabia are proof that confidence in reconciliation is not only within the GCC, not only within the Arab states, but can also happen between regional big powers. Cohesiveness for stability can be born across ideologies and across regimes. A cohesive and autonomous MENA can address global challenges in the new era, and should not be mired in the war, turmoil and hatred that have led to development setbacks anymore. In the spirit of mutual respect,

## Riyadh-Tehran agreement can have positive regional repercussions: think tank

TEHRAN - The Saudi-Iranian normalization agreement mediated by China has been welcomed by many countries as well as political scholars, academics, and think tanks.

The agreement, signed on March 10 in Beijing, has set the stage for Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic ties within two months.

Analysts believe that the agreement between the two powerhouses in the Middle East will help stabilize the situation in the region.

That the deal has been brokered by China has promoted the status of China in the eyes of the world in comparison to the U.S.

"It is a significant development,

but not just because of the positive repercussions it can have in the region but also because of who mediated it (China) and who didn't (the U.S.)," the American think tank Quincy Institute said in a commentary.

Following is an excerpt of the article:

The Saudi-Iranian agreement to normalize relations is good news for the Middle East since Saudi-Iranian tensions have been a driver of instability in the region. Reduced tensions between Riyadh and Tehran can have positive repercussions in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and perhaps most importantly, Yemen.

Saudi-Iranian tensions have had

many ups and downs in the past 40 years, but this is the first time they have agreed to lower the temperature through Chinese mediation. By not taking sides in the Saudi-Iranian conflict, China has emerged as a player that can resolve disputes rather than merely sell weapons to the conflicting parties.

Unfortunately, the United States has adopted an approach to the region that has disabled it from becoming a credible mediator. Too often, Washington takes sides in conflicts and becomes a co-belligerent - as in Yemen - which then reduces its ability to play the role of peacemaker.

While many in Washington will

dialogue on an equal footing, communication to understand each other's core concerns, and consultation, solutions to any difficult problem can slowly be found.

From poverty and weakness to the second largest economy in the world, China's development experience is to adhere to the road of peaceful development. Country being stronger by relying on the hard work of its people and the maintenance of peace, not on military expansion and colonial plunder. When all countries in the region take the road of peaceful development, people in the region can live together in peace and develop together with dignity.

## What is the jointly establishing of a new security framework in the MENA need?

The least that can be answered unequivocally is that the Middle East security architecture should not be a reprint of the U.S.-designed NATO model. The U.S. vision for integration in the Middle East is to create ties between U.S. allies and partner countries that encompass not only politics and economics, but also security, and to advance a more integrated air and missile defense architecture to prevent and resolve the challenges of the 21st century. The United States is betting on a more integrated Middle East, and that integration is a political, economic and security convergence between U.S. partners under U.S. leadership, excluding Iran and targeting Iran as an adversary. The Middle East version of NATO under the Trump and Biden administrations aims not only to suppress Iran's economic capabilities through economic sanctions, but also to reduce Iran's military capabilities. The so-called "Arab NATO" or "Middle East NATO" launched by the U.S., like what the U.S. did in Afghanistan and Iraq, is a creator of regional instability.

China is and will be a promoter of security and stability, partner for development and prosperity and supporter of the MENA's development. China supports MENA countries to increase dialogue, attach importance to people's livelihood and development requirements, advocate accommodating the reasonable security concerns of all parties, strengthen the internal forces to maintain regional security, and support regional organizations to play a greater constructive role.

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

view China's emerging role as a mediator in the Middle East as a threat, the reality is that a more stable Middle East where the Iranians and Saudis aren't at each other's throats also benefits the United States.

What should worry American decision-makers is if we become so deeply embroiled in the conflicts of our regional partners that our maneuverability evaporates and our past role as a peacemaker is completely ceded to China.

Washington should avoid a scenario where regional players view America as an entrenched war maker and China as a flexible peacemaker.