

# China's Breakthrough in the Middle East

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*China's rise as a global power has had profound effects on world politics, economics, and security. Its growing influence and strategic interests have led to increasing involvement in the Middle East, a region that is of critical importance to the world's energy supply and has long been plagued by conflicts and instability. One area where China can play a significant role is as an honest broker between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two of the region's most powerful countries. China's brokering a deal between longtime Gulf rivals is a broader sign of a changing global order. During talks in Beijing on Friday, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies within two months. The agreement also stipulated affirming "the respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states". Iran and Saudi Arabia have a long history of rivalry and tension. The two countries have competing interests and geopolitical ambitions, and their competition has led to numerous proxy conflicts in the region, particularly in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.*

The Chinese as an honest broker bring together Saudi Arabia and Iran. On the other hand, the United States' aim has been to bring Saudis to join with Israel in a military block against Iran. We need to look at who is really trying to create a zone of peace for our time. Incredible that China was able to broker resumption of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Chinese style is to embrace diplomatic and political resolutions to conflict rather than the military one that Americans prefer. The grand entry of China in both diplomatic and strategic terms displaces more than 70 years of American domination in the region. China's win-win approach to all of its bilateral relationships is the central factor motivating the majority of the nations of Eurasia to welcome China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) project. As opposed to the American engineered destabilization efforts and interventions in the Middle East, China on the other hand desires stability and peaceful cooperation amongst regional powers particularly between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Iran like many countries now has been continuously suffering under American sanctions which attempt to isolate Iran from the international community. Hence, it makes perfect sense why a country like Iran would look East in order to escape the pariah status that Washington wants to give it. KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) is acting pragmatically

according to realpolitik in its recognition of the obvious changing global geopolitical dynamics. Tehran-Riyadh rivalry has been the cause of deep instability, conflicts and violence in the region and beyond for several decades now. Considering this, sensible minds in Beijing, Tehran and Riyadh foresee a future of common prosperity once these tensions are managed and reduced. Regional countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen that have been horribly affected by the Saudi-Iranian rivalry could now look forward to more peace, stability and prosperity. The geo-sectarianism that has violently consumed the region finally has the potential to be mitigated in favor of geopolitical cooperation. Also, China sees Eurasian Integration through BRI and the Middle Eastern region is the centre of it and which acts as a bridge between Asia and Europe. The US has always wanted complete domination and hegemony of Middle Eastern oil reserves and the military supremacy of the state of Israel.

China's role as a mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia can help ease tensions and promote stability in the region. China has traditionally maintained good relations with both countries, and its non-interference policy in the internal affairs of other countries has earned it the trust and respect of many countries in the Middle East. Moreover, China's economic and strategic interests in the region give it a stake in promoting stability and preventing conflicts. China has also sought to increase economic ties with both countries, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to create a network of infrastructure projects across Eurasia. In some ways, Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia was the culmination of a breakthrough of peace talks that China had been meditating on for some time. This deal was brokered under the guidance of the new superpower of the Middle East, China which is the potential game changer not only in Middle Eastern politics but also globally. The geopolitical ramifications of these new developments for countries like Pakistan can be the improved relations with Iran since historically Pakistan remained firmly within the Saudi camp.

The US is less interested in bringing about peace in the Middle East and more interested in stoking divisions and selling arms to one side and trying to contain the other. Hence, what's happening actually is the shadow of the US and its footprints in the Middle East is reducing but the footprint of China is expanding. However, the main difference here is that when the US was dominant in the Middle East it was a confrontation between the two most important countries in the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran, while China is interested in bringing about peace in the Middle East. While no one expects all of the disagreements between the Saudis and the Iranian to disappear overnight, this still is a huge step in the pursuit of peaceful and mutually respectful negotiations over long-standing differences. However, the Palestinian question remains as a case study for the both countries to stand against inhumanities and violence committed by the colonial settler Israel.

The clear shift in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in terms of more cooperation and commitment with China, Russia and recent engagement with Iran it appears that the divide between the West and the Rest is going to become stronger and deeper. As Martin Jacques predicts in his book "When China Rules the World " it could quite possibly and dramatically change the rules based international order. Iran and Saudi Arabia can build on this partnership and if they bring peace to Syria, Lebanon and Yemen as a result of this new dialogue then perhaps there is a new dawn in the Middle East but if they just mean they exchange ambassadors and nothing more beyond that then things will be business as usual.

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Featured image: Rubble aftermath of a Saudi airstrike on a Yemeni neighborhood in 2015. (Source: Almgdad Mojalli/Voice of America)

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