



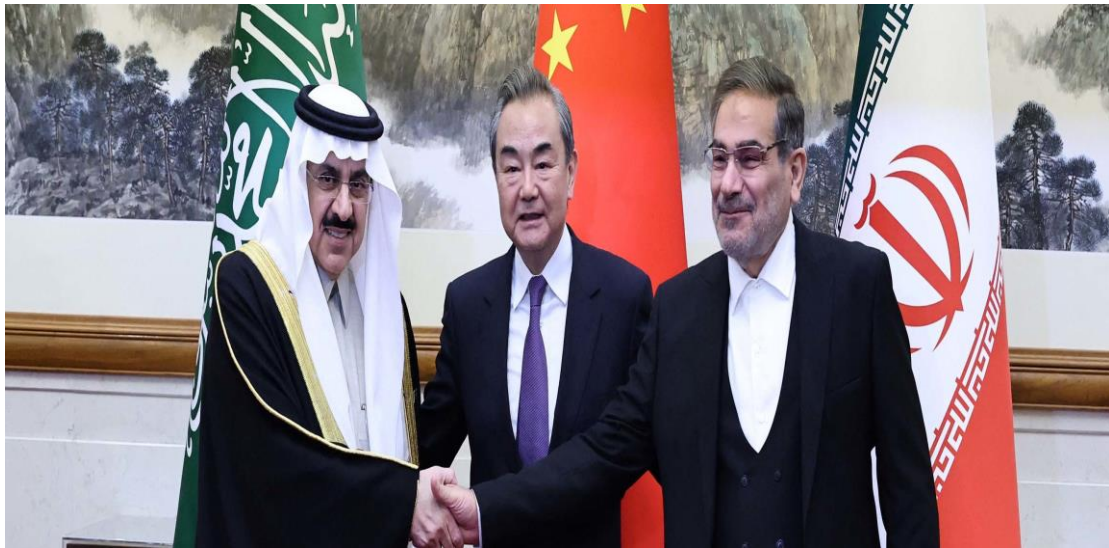
Policy Paper

Regional consequences of the Saudi Arabia - Iran reconciliation: what does it mean for the Kurds?

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Regional Consequences of the Saudi Arabia - Iran Reconciliation: What Does It Mean for the Kurds?



Is the United States' role marginalized?

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Executive summary

Iran and Saudi Arabia are two influential regional actors in the Middle East; Their conflicts threaten regional and global security. On 10 March 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to normalize relations and reopen embassies in each other's capitals. The agreement came [after years of hostility](#), as it appeared [Chine has successfully normalized](#) the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran; resuming relations between the two countries is expected to have widespread consequences for the Middle East. Will the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran solve the outstanding problems in the region? What historical, political, and economic signs does the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia remind the Kurds of?

The normalizations in the Middle East and their impact on global security complexity

The state is the most powerful actor in international relations. What makes actor A move towards B and C is a matter of interest and promoting security. For example, if Saudi Arabia suffered a security crisis as a regional actor from the beginning, global security has added another problem simultaneously. In other words, the actions and motives of actors in international security are largely up on the regional level. This means an actor's security concerns are primarily generated by their neighbors and kin. The security of each actor in a region interacts with the security of other actors. Thus, re-stabilizing the world's major problems requires regional security architecture and reconstruction; This reminds us of one of the most prominent theories by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever within the framework of the [Copenhagen School of Security Studies](#). The theory assumes that security interdependence is critical in creating a regional aspect-based tone.

On this basis, the Iranian elites believe that the agreement will serve the Iranian economy significantly; Above all, it will cause to increase in the value of Iranian currency [Tomen]. Politically, this is a great opportunity for Iran, which has been marginalized and sanctioned internationally for its support for Russia during the Ukraine war, from which Iran can use improved regional relations to promote

political and diplomatic openness to the world. As well as, alongside China's prominent role, Iraq has played a role in normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Former Prime Minister Mustafa Kazemi and former and current Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein have played this role since 2020: Saudis and Iranians have met several times at the Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein's home. Also, Hussein visited the King of Saudi Arabia "Salman bin Abdul-Aziz" and the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi.

In September 2020, the US-led Abraham Accords began normalizing Israeli relations with the UAE and Bahrain. In November 2021, [Turkey and the UAE normalized](#) relations after more than a decade of tensions. As well as, Turkey and Israel subsequently normalized political and diplomatic relations after 12 years of suspension. Recently, after a year of Beijing's efforts and mediation, Riyadh and Tehran agreed to restore their ties.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, produces more than 11 million barrels daily; it [exports 7.44 million barrels daily](#). Moreover, Iran has attracted world attention over its nuclear weapons and regional interference. Since the victory of the Islamic Republic of Iran's revolution in 1979, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been at odds, from Yemen to Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Saudi Arabia has always tried to appear as the leader of the Sunni Islamic world because of the holiness of Mecca and Medina. Iran appears to be the only representative of 150-200 million Shiites worldwide, mostly in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, and eastern Saudi Arabia. Below, I will focus on one specific area:

Khuzestan between Saudi Arabia and Iran

[Khuzestan](#) is one of Iran's 31 provinces in southwestern Iran, bordering Iraq and the Arabian Gulf (Which Iran calls the Persian Gulf). Its capital is Ahvaz, and it covers an area of 63,238 square kilometres. The population of Ahvaz in 2016 was more than 1,000,000 people, mostly Kurds, Arabs, and Persians, with Kurds making (up 50%), Arabs (35%), and Persians (15%) of the population.

Throughout the region's history, identity struggles, sectarian wars, and attempts to secede from Iran have existed. After World War II and during the Cold War, the Arabs, in particular, felt that they had done nothing worth mentioning without restoring Khuzestan. This region is the throat of the Gulf, Iran's breathing tube, and the route for exporting oil and all commodities to South and East Asia.

When Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan signed the Baghdad Pact in 1955 under the auspices of the United Kingdom to prevent the spread of communism ideology and Soviet hegemony. Iraq, as a founding member of the Baghdad Treaty, withdrew from it on March 24, 1959, following Abdul Karim Qassim's coup in 1958 and the change of the Iraqi system of governance from monarchy to republic. This development complicated the situation.

Iran supported the Kurdish rebellion "September Revolution 1961" for 14 years to distract Iraq and the Arab nation from the Kurdish issue and the revolution and forget about Khuzestan. Iran was largely successful in preoccupying successive Iraqi governments with the Kurdish issue. However, the September Revolution, led by the late Mala Mustafa Barzani, had a national message and legitimate demands for the self-determination of Kurdistan. The Kurdish question pushed Saddam Hussein to urge Iranian "Sha" and signed the Algeria Agreement in 1974 to end the Kurdish revolution, in which Iraq gave up parts of its water border in Shat al-Arab to Iran. Five years later, Saddam Hussein withdrew from the agreement, and the Iraq-Iran War broke out (Saddam Hussein ignited it). After eight years of War with Iran, Iraq had achieved nothing, so it attacked Kuwait to hide its defeat. Thus, it was the Kurdish issue that caused the Second Gulf War. Throughout that time, Saudi Arabia has spent tens of billions of dollars to support Iraq to prevent Iran from succeeding.

Throughout the Cold War, regional actors have consistently used the Kurdish issue against each other because of the Kurds' absence as a modern unified power. The simplest example is the issue of the opening of radio as a means of mass communication at the time. The regional countries started radio stations against each other:

In 1941, the British opened the Kurdish section of [Radio Jaffa](#) to oppose Nazi Germany.

During the reign of former Egyptian President Jamal Abdul Nasser, a Kurdish radio station was opened in Cairo in 1957. As well as, In the fall of 1958, in response to Nasser, the Shah of Iran opened a Kurdish radio station in Kermanshah. Then Kurdish radio was opened in Moscow. Finally, The Kurds opened the Voice of Kurdistan Radio (Dangi Kurdistan) in 1963 with some basic equipment and started broadcasting in Balakayati mountainous area. Thus, each of these states has exploited the Kurdish voice against those deprived of their rights according to their agenda.

What does the agreement include for the Kurds?

Regarding normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Egypt, Iraq, the UAE, and Oman immediately welcomed and supported the reconciliation. Iraq has hosted several talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran since April. 2021.

Kurds generally struggle for their rights in four states: Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. However, it has only a semi-autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq (according to the Federal Iraqi Constitution- 2005). In 2023, the Kurdish issue will likely move forward if internal changes occur in Iran and Turkey! As for the Kurdish administration in Syria (Rojava), it would be in danger of Turkey's incursion at any time.

For the Kurdish entity in Iraq, it is proven that from 1958 to 2023: the Kurds themselves were not present, and their case was traded. Moreover, the Kurds needed a unified voice and vision to build from within and seek recognition abroad. The Kurdistan Regional of Iraq is still divided between the two major ruling power (PDK) and (PUK). As well as, four Islamic parties are running for power in the KRI.

Indeed, The histories and plans of the regional actors are different. Iran always has its agenda and does not go with the Turkish project in the region. Furthermore, whenever relations between Israel and Turkey are normalized, it will be detrimental to the Kurdish issue in Syria. In the 1990s, relations between Turkey and Israel



strengthened, leading to the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. Similarly, the normalization of Turkey's relations with the UAE will not be in the first stage, but in the next stage of their relations, "if it continues, " will be against the Kirkuk and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region issue. Because after October 16, 2017, Turkey mistakenly handed over Kirkuk to Iran.

Turkey and the UAE have played a major role in the Kurdistan Region's energy sector. However, the UAE is not geographically located in the Mediterranean basin but plays a significant role in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). This has shown an extreme condition since Turkey is a major state in the eastern Mediterranean but has not been allowed to participate in the natural gas alliance in the region! Will Turkey and Iran allow the Kurdistan Region to reach the Mediterranean energy map? The United States must respond.

The normalization of the relationships between UAE and Turkey in Nov. 2021 and the normalization of Israeli relations with Arab countries under the Abraham Accords led Iran to [intimidate the Kurdistan Region with Iranian ballistic missiles](#) that damaged the house of the founder and CEO of the Iraqi-Kurdish oil company KAR Group "Sheikh Baz Karim Barzinji" in Erbil (Which owns 60% of the Kurdistan energy pipeline), followed by pro-Iranian forces shelling the Kormor gas field for several times, UAE's Dana Gas company operates that. Nevertheless, the KRI's official leaders played an active role in the world, especially at the meetings of the KRG's Prime Minister Masrour Barzani during his visit to the UK in April 2022. As well as the KRG's President Nechirvan Barzani and Prime Minister Masrour Barzani have visited the UAE five times between 2021 to March 2023. Moreover, Deputy Prime Minister of the KRG "Qubad Talabani" received numerous VIP delegations in Kurdistan and during his participation in [Delphi Economic Forum](#) held from April 6 to 9, 2022, in Greece.

It has made the Kurds themselves aware of their matter at the chessboard. Above all, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein is a Kurd and one of the pioneers who has played

a role in normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudis and Iranians have met at his house in Baghdad more than four times.

Is the United States' role marginalized?

In recent years, USA-Saudi relations have collapsed relatively, as we can assume that Saudi Arabia is the main point of weakness for the US and the west in the Russia-Ukraine war. The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, an anti-Saudi government critic, writer for the Washington Post, and former director and editor-in-chief of al-Arab News, occurred on October 2, 2018, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. This has exposed Saudi Arabia to criticism from the United States and the Trump administration. Also, When Europe faced an energy crisis due to the War in Ukraine, Saudi Arabia [decided to cut oil production in coordination with Russia](#) as part of OPEC Plus in October 2022. This has further strained relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The Biden administration promised to respond "methodically" with what it perceives as outright rejection and cooperation with Moscow. As well as, bipartisan calls emerged in US Congress to suspend security assistance to Saudi Arabia. Riyadh, for its part, insists it acted only in its economic interests.

While the US foreign policy is not always clear; Therefore, it often fights its agendas through its proxies [Its allies] in different regions. For the United States, the issue of reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not excluded from two scenarios:

First, US policy in the Middle East is marginalized. Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iraq, have repeatedly signed major deals with China, China's economic hegemony and bonds have quickly covered the region and promoted the Silk Road. China buys 1 million barrels of Iraqi oil daily and is [building 1,000 schools in Iraq](#). Chinese companies operate about 55 per cent of Iraq's oil fields; the Chinese have received a license [to develop a \\$7 billion FAO refinery in Basra](#) in 2021. Also, the trade value between Saudi Arabia and China reached \$320 billion between 2017 and 2021. By the end of 2022, Saudi and Chinese companies signed 34 investment agreements as part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia, in the presence of Investment Minister Khalid A. Al-Falih and representatives of

government agencies related to the sectors in which the agreements were [signed](#). There is no other way to say, "Welcome to the experience of the Chinese world".

The second scenario is unlike the first; the main goal of the United States was to keep Iran away from China and Russia, and it has done so through Saudi Arabia. According to this scenario, it is a methodological mistake to forget that the United States and the West ultimately protect Saudi Arabia in general. The US Patriots protect Mecca, Jeddah, and Riyadh. Without the United States, Iran and the Houthis would have cut off power from Saudi Arabia. Eastern Saudi Arabia is predominantly Shiite, and Iran and its Shiite movement greatly threatened Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and other countries must think about who showed them how to extract oil and sell it. Aramco company sells hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of oil annually with the USA and Europe's assistance. Some people know that turning their back on the United States will cost them a lot!

From this perspective, nothing is without the knowledge of the United States in the Middle East; the US is not evacuating from the region; it is doing the opposite. Since the Chinese companies are aiding Iran in supplying drones to Russia. As a result, the US administration persuaded China through its Saudi agent not to give Iran tools to manufacture drones in exchange for Saudi Arabia dealing with China for hundreds of billions of dollars. So, It is important for the US administration that Iran abide by the peace deal with Saudi Arabia, "[The USA welcomes](#) the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia," the White House said.

Conclusion

First, defusing regional conflicts in the Middle East is a step toward peace and stability, but its global impact seems weak. China, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, North Korea, India, Russia, Britain, France, and the United States have nuclear weapons. Most of these countries threatened to use them, especially Russia, due to the implications of the Ukrainian War.

Second, the unipolar system needs to be more balanced in international relations. Regional and global events are developing quickly and dramatically. This makes international actors look at diplomatic agreements and economic bonds tactically.

Third, Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with China and the issue of reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia still need the knowledge of the United States. The United States supports any agreement in the region to the extent that it keeps Iran away from Russia and China.

Fourth, the attitudes and policies of the Shiite ruling elite in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen will change as Saudi and Iran reconcile. Hezbollah is also rethinking its positions and policies. At least, the Shiite rulers in Iraq, who are close to Iran, do not think of centralism or dictatorship. This is a good opportunity for the Kurds as Iran is preoccupied with its internal problems. On the other hand, if the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran goes ahead, it will affect the energy sector of the Kurdistan Region because Iran and Saudi Arabia have a great and historical influence on Iraq. The Kurdistan Region is involved in two sensitive issues: energy and combating terrorism and violence by expanding the region's coexistence area. Thus, a strong and wise authority must cope with regional events and think deeper about social, economic, and political construction at the domestic level.