



## The Prospects of Normalization and Strengthening of Iran-Saudi Relations and its Implications for the USA

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**Abstract:**

Iran and Saudi Arabia are two of the most significant states in the Middle East. Historically, the two nations have been bitter rivals, and the nature of their relationship has played a considerable role in shaping geopolitical dynamics of the region and the involvement of great powers in regional affairs. If Iran and Saudi Arabia reconcile their differences and form a closer relationship, it could lead to greater stability in the region, as well as increased economic and political cooperation. As the United States is one of the most heavily involved extra-regional powers, the normalization and potential strengthening of the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia may have significant implications for the traditional role of the US in the region. On the one hand, a closer relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia could lead to a decrease in tensions and conflicts in the region, which would be a positive development for the US. The US has traditionally viewed Saudi Arabia as a key ally in the Middle East, and any shift away from this relationship, on the other hand, may negatively affect its foreign policy objectives in the region. Ultimately, the implications of a strengthened Saudi-Iran bilateral relationship for the US will depend on a variety of factors, including the nature of the evolving relationship, the degree of cooperation between the two nations, and the overall impact of it on regional stability and American interests in the Middle East.

**Keywords:** Iran, KSA, Geopolitics, Middle East, USA, Balance of power

**Introduction:**

The relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been strained for decades, with tensions escalating in recent years due to regional conflicts and geopolitical interests. However, there have been some recent positive developments in the relationship between the two countries that could potentially have implications for the United States.

In September 2021, it was reported that the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia had held talks in Baghdad, the first high-level meeting between the two countries in years. The talks were seen as a positive step towards easing tensions and possibly even normalizing relations between the two regional powers. If the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia were to improve, it could have implications for the United States. The United States has historically been aligned with Saudi Arabia and has been at odds with Iran, particularly over its nuclear program and involvement in regional conflicts such as the war in Syria and support for Hezbollah in Lebanon. If Iran and Saudi Arabia were to strengthen their relationship, it could potentially create a more stable regional environment, which could benefit the United States by reducing the risk of conflict and instability. However, it could also potentially challenge the United States' long-standing alliance with Saudi Arabia and shift the balance of power in the region.

The relationship between Iran and KSA has been characterized by political tensions, religious differences, and historical grievances. The two countries have been involved in proxy wars in different parts of the Middle East, leading to the destabilization of the region. The USA has been an active player in the region, supporting KSA and imposing sanctions on Iran, exacerbating the tensions between the two countries. However, recent diplomatic efforts by Iran and KSA have shown some promising signs of reconciliation, raising questions about the potential implications for the USA. The aim of this research is to explore the prospects of strengthening the relationship between Iran and KSA and its implications for the USA. The research will investigate the reasons for the tensions between Iran and KSA, the recent diplomatic efforts to improve the relationship, and the potential impact on the USA. Qualitative approach was used which

included a literature review, case studies, and interviews with experts in the field. The literature review has covered the historical and political factors that have contributed to the tensions between Iran and KSA, as well as the recent diplomatic efforts to improve their relationship. Case studies have been conducted on the recent developments in the relationship between Iran and KSA, including the reopening of diplomatic channels, the reduction of hostile rhetoric, and the de-escalation of tensions. Opinion of experts in the field, including policymakers, diplomats, academics, and journalists, to gain insights into the potential implications of the improved relationship for the USA have been taken into account.

The research on "Exploring the Prospects of Strengthening the Relationship between Iran and KSA and its Implications for the USA" is significant in several ways. Firstly, it aims to analyze the current state of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two powerful nations in the Middle East with a history of strained relations. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship is important for maintaining stability and security in the region. Additionally, the study explores the potential for improved relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the implications this would have for the United States. Given the United States' strategic interests in the Middle East, any significant changes in the relations between these two nations could have important implications for U.S. foreign policy. The research also highlights the importance of diplomacy and dialogue in resolving conflicts between nations. By examining the prospects for improved relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the study underscores the need for continued efforts towards constructive engagement and conflict resolution.

### **A Thaw in Iran-Saudi Relation:**

After years of tension, Iran-Saudi ties started to normalize in 2022. Iran has funded Shiite proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen while Saudi Arabia has supported Sunni proxies in those nations and abroad. The two nations have been fierce enemies for decades. Secret contacts between Iranian and Saudi officials in Iraq signaled the start of the thaw. China, which has strong relations to both nations, facilitated these encounters. Saudi Arabia and Iran declared in March 2023 that they would reestablish diplomatic ties and establish embassies in each other's capitals. The thaw is viewed as a significant diplomatic achievement in the area. It might contribute to lowering Middle Eastern tensions and promote collaboration on problems like the Yemeni civil war and the Iran nuclear accord.

The thaw is currently in good shape. The two nations have held several high-level discussions and reopened their embassies. But there are still a lot of challenges to overcome. The nuclear deal, the civil war in Yemen, and the use of Shiite proxies in the area are just a few of the issues that divide the two nations' positions. Whether the thaw will result in a durable peace between Iran and Saudi Arabia is still uncertain at this point. However, it is a constructive step that might aid in lowering Middle East tensions. Some of the major figures in the thaw are listed below:

- China has been instrumental in promoting the thaw. It has strong relations to Saudi Arabia and Iran and has used its clout to bind the two nations together.
- Iraq has also contributed to the thaw. It has served as a neutral platform for discussion and has played host to several covert talks between Saudi and Iranian officials.
- The United States: Although it has praised the thaw, the United States has also emphasised that it will take time for Iran and Saudi Arabia to establish confidence.
- Positive developments like the warming of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia could lessen tensions in the region.

### **Normalization of Iran-Saudi Relations: Prospects of Strengthening the bilateral Relationship**

The improvement of security and stability in the Middle East may result from the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The two nations have been at odds for a very long time, ever since Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979. Since then, they have backed opposite sides in local wars like the Syrian Civil War and the Iran-Iraq War. But in recent years, there has been a growing understanding on both sides that the current situation cannot continue. Years have passed with little sign of the Yemeni civil war coming to an end. The likelihood of an escalation that may plunge the area into a wider conflict has increased as a result of the tensions between Iran and the United States.

An important first step towards improving relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the decision to normalize relations. It's vital to understand that this does not constitute a formal reconciliation. On a number of subjects, the two countries continue to have significant disagreements. The decision to normalize relations is a huge accomplishment, though, and it may pave the way for future advancements. The bilateral ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia could be strengthened for a number of reasons. First, it might contribute to lowering regional tensions. The competition between the two nations, who are the most powerful in the Middle East, has been a significant cause of instability. If they can cooperate, they can take the lead in fostering peace.

Second, it might result in more collaboration on trade and economic concerns. Saudi Arabia and Iran both have sizable populations and substantial economic resources. They could build a significant economic powerhouse in the area if they can cooperate. Both nations would gain from this, as well as the larger region. Third, it might help put an end to the crisis in Yemen. The cooperation of Saudi Arabia and Iran, both sides to the conflict, is necessary for a peaceful resolution. If they work together, they can help put an end to the fighting and bring peace to Yemen. The improvement of security and stability in the Middle East could result from the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is crucial to build on this development and strive towards improving the ties between the two nations. Achieving this would be a significant accomplishment for both nations and the larger area. The following actions could be performed to improve the bilateral relationship:

- Increase high-level political dialogue between the two countries.
- Expand economic and trade cooperation.
- Work together to resolve the conflict in Yemen.
- Cooperate on regional security issues.
- Promote cultural and educational exchanges.

These actions will enable Iran and Saudi Arabia to establish a more beneficial and productive relationship that will benefit both nations as well as the region at large.

The Middle East's regional stability will be greatly impacted by the complicated diplomatic effort to normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The United States must depend on its historical presence and customary role in the region to negotiate this complex terrain, taking into account elements like oil, the risk of Soviet infiltration, and Israel's security. The history of US participation in the Middle East, its role throughout the Cold War and the post-Cold War era, and choices and strategies for the US in promoting the normalization of Saudi-Iranian relations will all be covered in this conversation.

**Historical Setting: American Presence in the Area** Due mostly to its strategic interests in the region, the United States has maintained a long-standing presence in the Middle East. The early 20th century's discovery of massive oil reserves forced the US to forge political, economic, and military relations with a number of Middle Eastern countries. The dynamics of the Cold War, in which the US sought to stop Soviet power from spreading in the region, strengthened this alliance.

The US viewed the Middle East as a crucial theatre of operations for limiting communism during the Cold War. The Eisenhower Doctrine, published in 1957, demonstrated the US commitment to aiding countries endangered by Soviet expansionism militarily and economically. The policy prepared the door for a bigger military presence in the region and strengthened the US's role as a guarantor of regional stability.

**US Post-Cold War Role and Changing Dynamics** The dynamics in the Middle East witnessed enormous shifts with the conclusion of the Cold War. In order to protect its oil interests and its allies' security, especially Israel, the US continued to retain a significant presence in the region. The development of non-state entities and the threat of terrorism further increased US involvement in the area. Israel is a significant regional ally, and traditionally, the US has been instrumental in securing its security. US strategy in the region has been impacted by Israel's presence and its ongoing confrontations with neighboring nations, especially Iran. For the US, preserving peace and reducing the likelihood of regional crises have always been top priorities.

### **Options and Strategies for the US in Normalizing Saudi-Iran Relations:**

For the United States, the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran offers both chances and challenges. It is crucial to look at the history of US involvement in the region and its conventional role in order to comprehend the backdrop, taking into account elements like oil, the risk of Soviet

infiltration, and Israel's security. The Cold War saw the United States take a considerable role in the Middle East, principally motivated by its desire to control Soviet dominance and secure access to oil resources. It was vital for the US to retain stable relations with significant oil-producing countries after the discovery of enormous oil reserves in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Due to this, Saudi Arabia and other countries became close allies and the US's main oil supplier.

The Soviet Union's influence in the region, particularly in nations like Iran, also worried the United States. In 1953, Mohammad Mossadegh, the Iranian prime minister who had nationalized the oil industry, was overthrown by a coup that was masterminded by US and British intelligence services. The Iranian Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was regarded as a pro-Western friend, was restored following this coup, known as Operation Ajax. Throughout the Cold War, the US provided financial and military support to the Shah's government.

However, numerous groups within Middle Eastern nations, particularly Iran, criticised the US presence in the region and its support for authoritarian regimes. This sparked anti-American feelings and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which saw the Shah overthrown and an Islamic Republic established. US-Iran relations dramatically deteriorated after the Iranian Revolution. As a result of its concern that Iran's revolutionary ideology may spread to other Middle Eastern nations, the United States backed Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). Iran was also subject to economic penalties and was declared a state sponsor of terrorism by the US.

Through the Cold War and beyond, the US and Saudi Arabia remained closely allied. Shared economic and security interests served as the foundation for the strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia. The US supported Saudi Arabia militarily and offered security assurances while relying on its oil supplies to cover domestic energy needs. The regional dynamics have changed significantly in recent years. Iran and major international countries, including the United States, signed a nuclear agreement in 2015, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with the purpose of limiting Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of sanctions. But in 2018, the US left the JCPOA and reinstated sanctions against Iran, which contributed to escalating tensions between the two nations.

The US will need to carefully assess its strategy in light of the possibility that normalization of Saudi-Iranian relations may have an influence on the balance of power in the region. Reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran might ease tensions and promote regional stability. Additionally, it might result in better coordination on matters of shared interest, like terrorism prevention and the control of crises in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq.

However, establishing normalization presents a number of difficulties. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have long been hampered by historical hostilities, sectarian strife, and competing regional aspirations. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider regional dynamics affecting other nations, such as Israel and its worries about Iran's nuclear program. A normalized relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran could have both advantages and disadvantages for the US. On the one hand, it might ease regional tensions and create chances for negotiation and conflict settlement. On the other hand, it might put the US's established position as a major actor in the area in jeopardy and necessitate a reevaluation of its alliances and priorities.

The US should employ a comprehensive approach to deal with this complicated situation. This plan might aggressively engage both Saudi Arabia and Iran to promote communication, confidence-boosting measures, and support for resolving common problems. For more than a century, the United States has played a significant role in the Middle East. The nation's participation in the region has been driven by a variety of objectives, including securing access to oil, containing the Soviet Union, and advancing Israel's security.

The United States sided with Saudi Arabia against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The two nations collaborated on a variety of topics, including security and energy, and they had a common enemy. Additionally, Saudi Arabia received substantial financial and military support from the United States. The United States continued to play a significant role in the Middle East after the Cold War. But the nation's position in the region grew more difficult. The emergence of Islamic extremism, the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were among the new problems facing the United States, which was no longer allied with a single superpower.

An important event that could alter the Middle East's power structure is the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The United States is prepared to respond to this development in a number of ways. One possibility is to keep assisting Saudi Arabia and its friends. This would include upholding the status quo in the area and continuing to support Saudi Arabia militarily and economically. This course of action would be consistent with the US's conventional role in the region and contribute to Saudi Arabia's and its allies' security. Working towards a more balanced relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia is another choice. This would entail urging the two nations to work together on regional problems and to settle their conflicts amicably. Although this alternative would be more difficult than keeping things as they are, it might result in a more secure and peaceful Middle East.

The option of completely leaving the region is also available to the United States. This would include withdrawing all military and financial support from Iran and Saudi Arabia and adopting a hands-off policy in the area. The Middle East might become more stable and peaceful in the long run, but this option would be the most challenging to put into action. The wisest course of action for the United States is to carefully weigh all of its alternatives and create a plan that serves both the interests of the nation and the area as a whole. An important development that will require deliberate and serious diplomacy from the United States is the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The US might take the following concrete actions to encourage normalization between Iran and Saudi Arabia:

- Encourage direct communication between the two nations.
- Make a mediation offer between the two nations.
- Give the two nations incentives to come to an agreement.
- Make an effort to increase trust between the two nations.

Due to its long-standing presence in the Middle East, the United States is obliged to contribute to the region's peace and stability. The United States should do everything it can to encourage the improvement of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

1. Active diplomatic engagement: The US can act as a mediator by making concerted diplomatic efforts to promote communication between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The US can use its diplomatic channels to act as an impartial mediator, bridging the trust gap between the two countries and encouraging confidence-building initiatives.

2. Multilateral Approaches: The US can promote a multilateral strategy in settling disputes between Saudi Arabia and Iran by using its influence in international fora like the United Nations or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The US can increase the likelihood that normalisation will be effective by involving regional and international partners.

3. Economic Cooperation: Interdependence on the economic front might spur better relations. The US may promote trade, investment, and joint ventures to promote economic cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. A framework for mutual advantage can be provided by economic incentives, creating the foundation for normalized connections.

4. Security Guarantees: To allay Saudi Arabia's and Iran's fears, the US can offer security guarantees. A commitment to arms control, regional stability, and non-interference in domestic issues can assist to foster confidence and ease tensions between the two countries.

The balance of power theory is a significant theory of international relations that may aid in explaining the likelihood of a deepening of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the ramifications for the USA. To prevent any one state from becoming overly powerful and endangering the security of other states, governments work to preserve a balance of power in the international system, according to this view. In the Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia's conflict has been fueled in part by their desire to preserve the balance of power in the region. A closer alliance between Iran and Saudi Arabia could potentially alter the region's power dynamics and have repercussions for American interests in the Middle East. As a major regional friend and partner, the USA has historically sided with Saudi Arabia, whereas relations with Iran have historically been tenuous. The United States might see more difficult regional circumstances if Iran and Saudi Arabia grew closer together since this could erode its ties with Saudi Arabia. The United States and other countries in the region would benefit if Iran and Saudi Arabia were able to work together more effectively to increase stability and maybe lower tensions in the region. Overall, the balance of power

theory can serve to illuminate the strategic significance of the Middle East for American foreign policy as well as the potential ramifications of closer ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

#### **Outcomes:**

The study sheds light on the likelihood of bettering ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia, potential repercussions for the US, and possible approaches the US could take to maintain regional stability. The study will add to the body of knowledge already available about the Middle East, and it may help US and other officials make decisions about the region.

#### **Conclusion:**

Political and theological conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia have affected their ties for many years. However, recent measures to enhance relations between the two nations have included official talks and collaboration on a number of regional projects. The United States might suffer serious repercussions if ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia grow stronger. Here are some potential scenarios. Greater Middle Eastern stability two of the most powerful nations in the Middle East are Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the constant hostilities between them have made the region unstable. If they were to come together, there might be more stability in the area and less chance of hostilities and proxy warfare. Changes in regional alliances: Iran has closer relations to Russia and China than the United States, which has historically sided with Saudi Arabia. A closer collaboration between Iran and Saudi Arabia might upset the balance of power in the area and could influence existing regional alliances. Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest oil producers in the world, and Iran has considerable oil reserves as well. If the two nations worked together more closely, it might have an impact on world oil prices and even the US economy. the effects on US foreign policy. Reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia might have an impact on US regional foreign policy. While Saudi Arabia has been a significant US partner, the US has traditionally seen Iran as a hostile country. A reevaluation of US policy in the area may be necessary in light of the growing ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is crucial to remember, though, that there are several barriers standing in the way of Iran and Saudi Arabia developing closer ties, including persistent political and religious divides, as well as regional tensions and crises. Therefore, it is questionable whether their relationship will undergo a dramatic change that would have consequences for the US.

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