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Evaluating the Achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia from the 2023 Beijing Agreement and the Probable Scenarios of Bilateral Relations Based on This Accord

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ABSTRACT

This article evaluates the strategic implications and achievements of the 2023 Beijing Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. By examining the historical trajectory of Iran–Saudi relations since the 1979 Revolution, the article contextualizes the 2016 diplomatic rupture and the subsequent efforts toward rapprochement. It analyzes the internal and external factors that both enabled and constrained the revival of diplomatic ties, including the role of regional conflicts, changing international dynamics, and the ascendance of economic pragmatism in Saudi foreign policy. Special attention is given to China's mediation and its broader strategic posture in the Middle East under the Belt and Road Initiative. The study reveals that while Saudi Arabia has derived tangible security and economic benefits from the agreement—such as regional de-escalation, improved investment climate, and reduced confrontation risks—Iran's gains have remained largely symbolic and fragile. Persistent asymmetries in expectations, unresolved security concerns, and Saudi Arabia's limited responsiveness to Iranian priorities have challenged the sustainability of the accord. The article concludes that without institutionalized mechanisms, mutual concessions, and renewed diplomatic dialogue, the current détente is unlikely to last. The Beijing Agreement, while significant, must serve as a starting point for more comprehensive negotiations addressing the structural sources of mistrust and rivalry. This study is guided by the following research question: What are the achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the 2023 Beijing Agreement? The hypothesis of this study is that although both countries have attained certain diplomatic gains through the agreement—mediated by China—these achievements are primarily tactical and lack structural depth. As such, their sustainability depends on continued bilateral dialogue, mutual concessions, and the institutionalization of future commitments. The analytical framework of this study is based on neoclassical realism, which explains foreign policy by considering both international pressures and domestic political factors. This approach helps to understand why the outcomes of the Beijing Agreement are unequal and why the future of Iran–Saudi relations remains uncertain and fragile.

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Introduction

A review of the background of relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia since the 1979 Revolution clearly reveals that Saudi Arabia, as one of the largest and most influential countries in the West Asia region, has consistently perceived Iran as a threat from the very beginning of the Islamic Republic's establishment. Based on this perception, throughout all the ups and downs in bilateral relations, Saudi Arabia's definitive foreign policy stance has been, first, to engage with Iran in competition outside of official territorial boundaries, and second, to focus on undermining and containing Iran from within by employing various tools.

Conversely, Iran has, over recent decades, portrayed Saudi Arabia as the leader of the reactionary Arab regimes and has made persistent efforts to depict the Kingdom as an ideological enemy and a proxy dependent on external powers, governed internally by a politically dictatorial system.

In parallel with this prevailing distrustful view across numerous issues, a historical review of the two countries' official relations nonetheless indicates that both sides have consistently attempted—despite the emergence of serious disputes—to preserve the framework of formal diplomatic relations and never fully closed the door to direct dialogue, even in the most critical circumstances. Supporting this argument is the fact that, despite Saudi Arabia's explicit support for Iraq during the eight-year war against Iran, its participation in maximum pressure policies aimed at weakening Iran in recent decades, its declared positions that provoked sectarian and religious tensions, and its accusations implicating Iran in plots that directly threatened Saudi national security, neither Tehran nor Riyadh took steps to fully sever diplomatic relations. On the contrary, even since the Pahlavi era, whenever bilateral ties were strained to the brink, the central point of contention was not a civilizational rivalry, but rather disagreements over the administration of the Hajj pilgrimage, Saudi management of the rituals, and Iran's deep-rooted mistrust regarding Saudi conduct during the pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, one major exception stands out—marking the starting point of this article's analysis of future scenarios in Iran–Saudi Arabia relations: the execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia and the subsequent events in Iran, which led to the severance of political ties between the two countries in 2016. While this event was a major catalyst for the breakdown in relations, ignoring the sequence of events leading up to it could mislead any strategic calculation and result in flawed forecasting—particularly in the context of the forward-looking assessments that this article seeks to present.

Literature Review

The March 2023 Beijing Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia marked a pivotal turning point in the long-standing adversarial relationship between the two states. Brokered by the People's Republic of China, the agreement has attracted significant attention from regional and international scholars, particularly with respect to the evolving strategic posture of Tehran and Riyadh, as well as China's emerging role as a diplomatic mediator in West Asia.

A number of recent studies have analyzed various dimensions of this agreement. Scholars have emphasized China's status as a non-Western mediator, framing the Beijing Agreement as part of its Global Security Initiative (Shen, 2023; Zhao, 2023). In an article published in the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, China's diplomatic posture is described as a “test case” of pragmatic and non-interventionist engagement—where strategic ambiguity and economic interdependence offer leverage without direct involvement. These studies argue that Beijing's neutrality and economic influence provided the political space for both Tehran and Riyadh to enter a de-escalatory process.

Meanwhile, Middle Eastern scholars and policy institutions have explored the domestic and regional motivations behind the rapprochement. A report by the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (Al Sulami, 2023) interprets Saudi Arabia's willingness to negotiate as a shift from confrontational regional behavior to pragmatic engagement, aligned with Vision 2030 priorities such as economic diversification, political stability, and international image management. On the Iranian side, researchers like Barzegar (2023) and Azizi (2023) have argued that Iran's engagement with Riyadh is part of a broader recalibration of foreign policy in response to domestic unrest, external sanctions, and mounting regional pressures.

Western analysts have also provided insights. Neil Quilliam (Chatham House, 2023) views the agreement as a form of "tactical de-escalation" rather than structural transformation, citing the absence of institutional frameworks and the continuation of proxy competition in Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. Bruce Riedel (Brookings, 2023) similarly warns that the sustainability of the agreement depends more on political will from both sides than on Chinese guarantees—something historically unstable in Iran–Saudi interactions. In Europe, Marc Pierini (Carnegie Europe, 2023) considers the agreement a symbolic setback for Western diplomacy and evidence of the gradual reconfiguration of global conflict mediation dynamics under China's influence.

Although policy commentary on the subject has expanded, few studies have applied a **neoclassical realist** framework to examine the asymmetry in post-agreement benefits. This article seeks to contribute by analyzing how domestic political constraints, ideological orientations, and threat perceptions continue to influence Iran–Saudi engagement even under favorable structural conditions. By combining updated empirical evidence with theoretical clarity, the study offers an original contribution to the scholarship on Middle Eastern diplomacy and international relations.

Theoretical Framework

To analyze the dynamics of Iran–Saudi Arabia relations following the 2023 Beijing Agreement, this article employs the framework of Neoclassical Realism. Developed by Gideon Rose (1998), this theory maintains that although the international system's structure defines the general constraints within which states operate, foreign policy outcomes are shaped by domestic-level factors. In other words, between systemic pressure and state behavior lies an intermediate layer—consisting of leadership perceptions, regime type, elite cohesion, and internal political and economic imperatives.

The assumptions of Neoclassical Realism are reflected throughout this article. On the one hand, structural changes—such as the gradual retreat of U.S. influence from West Asia, the emergence of China as a neutral mediator, and Saudi Arabia's strategic setbacks in conflicts like Yemen—have created a permissive international environment for rapprochement. On the other hand, the responses of Iran and Saudi Arabia to this structural opportunity have been asymmetrical. As discussed in the article, assertive nationalism under Mohammed bin Salman, concerns over regional instability, and the need to rebuild Saudi Arabia's international image have pushed Riyadh toward engagement with Tehran. Conversely, Iran's ideological commitment to the Axis of Resistance, historical distrust of Saudi intentions, and domestic security concerns have led to a more cautious and conditional approach from Tehran.

Thus, Neoclassical Realism provides an effective framework to explain why the Beijing Agreement constitutes, at best, a tactical breakthrough rather than a strategic transformation. As emphasized in the article, the durability of this *détente* depends on the institutionalization of mechanisms, mutual threat perception management, and a reassessment of internal priorities in both capitals. This theoretical approach therefore enables a more accurate understanding of the persistent gap between international structural opportunities and domestic-level constraints in shaping Iran–Saudi Arabia relations.

From the 2016 Diplomatic Severance to the Foundations of Renewal in 2022

Following the accession of Salman bin Abdulaziz as King in 2014 and Mohammed bin Salman as the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia in 2017, the Kingdom's foreign policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran became increasingly confrontational. This shift was further reinforced by the election of Donald Trump in the United States and the subsequent implementation of Washington's maximum pressure campaign. These developments, along with the tragic deaths of hundreds of pilgrims during the 2015 Hajj and the execution of prominent Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr—which was followed by attacks on the Saudi embassy in Tehran—ultimately led to a severance of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Nevertheless, changes in the international environment—particularly with the election of Joe Biden, Saudi Arabia's failure to achieve its strategic objectives in conflicts such as Yemen and Syria, and the mounting security costs imposed by Iran—encouraged both nations to initiate a series of dialogue sessions and negotiations hosted by Iraq and Oman. Moreover, Iran's perception of Saudi Arabia as a key actor fueling the unrest of 2022 further underscored the importance of continuing diplomatic engagement from Tehran's standpoint.

However, prior to entering the final round of negotiations in Beijing, several key questions loomed in the minds of Iranian policymakers, requiring resolution before any formal agreement could be reached. The first question was whether, considering the historical trajectory of Iran–Saudi relations, direct and substantive negotiations with Saudi Arabia would serve Iran's national interests. The second question concerned the specific concessions and objectives Iran hoped to secure from the negotiations, as well as the extent of flexibility Tehran was willing to show in response to Saudi demands.

In response to these questions, it appeared that the protracted and frequently interrupted rounds of dialogue in Baghdad and Muscat highlighted the presence of both enabling and constraining factors influencing the likelihood of a successful agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The main **enabling factors** can be outlined as follows:

- **Saudi Arabia's failure in Yemen:** Riyadh's inability to achieve its military goals in Yemen, coupled with the intensification of attacks by the popular government based in Sana'a on Saudi military and economic targets, motivated the Kingdom to seek political solutions to reduce tensions along its southern border. From the Saudi perspective, negotiation with Iran was viewed as a strategic means to de-escalate conflict in the surrounding environment.
- **Iran's need to ease regional and international pressure:** The intensification of regional and international pressure under Trump's maximum pressure campaign—and its continuation under Biden—prompted the Islamic Republic to consider de-escalation and dialogue with Saudi Arabia and other regional rivals as part of a broader effort to consolidate its internal strength, counterbalance U.S. influence, and support national reconstruction and economic recovery.
- **Iran's need to consolidate regional gains:** The relative calm that had returned to several conflict zones across West Asia—until the onset of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm—presented Iran with new challenges regarding the political, economic, and social consolidation of its regional achievements in Iraq, Yemen, Palestine, and Lebanon. At the same time, regional rivals were attempting to contest Iran's influence in these arenas. Thus, engagement with Saudi Arabia could serve as an opportunity to delineate spheres of regional influence and stabilize Iran's strategic footholds.
- **Shifts in the global environment caused by the war in Ukraine and the 'Look East' policy:** The international ramifications of the Ukraine war—including rising energy prices, the U.S. preoccupation with security challenges in Eastern Europe, the shift in focus toward

the East, and a relative U.S. withdrawal from West Asia—led Saudi Arabia to adopt a more balanced security strategy aimed at reducing regional tensions and diversifying its international partnerships. This created an opening for potential success in negotiations between Riyadh and Tehran. It also gave Iran the opportunity to accelerate the decline of U.S. regional influence by supporting such de-escalatory dynamics.

Despite these facilitating factors, there were also serious **constraints** that hindered the negotiation process:

- **The stalemate in JCPOA negotiations:** The United States' reluctance to make the necessary political decisions to return to the nuclear deal had led to a stalemate, raising the risk of renewed tensions in West Asia. From Tehran's viewpoint, rising tensions in specific regional arenas could be used as leverage against Israel, the U.S., and Western powers. As such, de-escalation with Saudi Arabia might limit Iran's maneuverability and weaken its pressure tools. Conversely, from a Western perspective, a successful Iran–Saudi reconciliation could redirect Iran's strategic focus toward confronting other Western allies—particularly Israel—rather than Riyadh, a shift not entirely under Saudi control.
- **Saudi Arabia's aggressive nationalism:** Since the rise of Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has witnessed the emergence of a new form of assertive nationalism, intended to rally the population around the ruling family. A key element of this nationalism has been the Yemen war, which served as a unifying narrative and cast Iran as the primary “other” and even an enemy. Thus, despite its costs, the continuation of conflict with Iran has had domestic political utility for Riyadh by fostering national unity and legitimizing leadership.
- **The anticipated return of the U.S. Republican Party to power:** The close relationship between Saudi leadership and the Republican Party—along with historic tensions with the Democrats—prompted Riyadh to anticipate a political shift in Washington. Many Saudi policymakers viewed a Republican return to power as a signal for renewed strategic autonomy and a return to aggressive realism in foreign policy. This expectation reduced their willingness to commit to long-term, structural negotiations with Iran.
- **Iran's unwillingness or inability to offer concessions desired by Riyadh:** Iran's support for its regional allies is grounded in ideological affinity and mutual respect for autonomy. This two-way relationship contrasts with the hierarchical patron–client dynamics that characterize Saudi ties with its own allies. As a result, Iran neither desires nor is capable of offering the kinds of concessions that Saudi Arabia demands—doing so would undermine the broader cohesion of the “Axis of Resistance.”

Taken together, these enabling and constraining factors contributed to the prolonged and interrupted nature of negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad and Muscat, making the prospect of an agreement increasingly elusive. However, the emergence of a new variable—a credible mediator—significantly accelerated the decision-making process on both sides. In March 2023, with the mediation of China, Iran and Saudi Arabia reached an agreement, which was subsequently publicized in a tripartite joint statement issued by all three countries.

China's New Approach to the Middle East and Its Mediation Between Tehran and Riyadh

Until the past decade, China maintained a relatively limited presence in the Middle East, both due to its unique political and diplomatic worldview and under pressure from Western powers aiming to contain communism and prevent Arab nations from aligning with any global or regional actor outside of the United States. However, with the transformation of the regional geopolitical order, Arab states began rethinking U.S. hegemony—particularly in the wake of excessive pressure and coercion by Washington during the Trump administration. More significantly, China itself recalibrated its global posture, with a renewed focus on active

presence in strategic regions under the Belt and Road Initiative. As a result, China's engagement in the Middle East has grown considerably.

Unlike the typical Western approach, China has pursued its policies in the Middle East with strategic prudence. Rather than adopting a uniform and centralized framework, Beijing has implemented a mosaic-style approach: maintaining favorable relations with diverse countries while strictly adhering to a non-interventionist stance in their domestic affairs. In terms of foreign policy, China has consistently encouraged diplomatic dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts at all levels. Its emphasis on mutual understanding and compromise has been instrumental in building strong relations with Middle Eastern states. Beyond substantial economic investments, China's neutral and balanced positions have earned it deep respect and appreciation from the region's governments (Chen, 2016).

In the case of mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, this intelligent and impartial foreign policy approach was precisely what made both countries optimistic about China's role as a neutral facilitator. At the same time, it is important to note that China also enjoyed solid economic relations with both sides.

On the Iranian side, China maintained strong ties throughout the Trump-era maximum pressure campaign and beyond, eventually signing a 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement with Tehran after several rounds of negotiations. Moreover, China became Iran's largest oil purchaser during the post-JCPOA period.

On the Saudi side, the dynamic was somewhat different. Beyond overall trade volumes and the landmark development in 2022 that made Saudi Arabia the top oil exporter to China for the first time, the most significant factor has been the emergence of advanced digital and military technologies—and the increasing interest of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, in accessing such technologies via China. Chinese companies have established a visible presence across various sectors of Saudi technology and infrastructure.

One notable example is China's collaboration and joint investment with Saudi firms to develop anti-drone technologies—indicating Riyadh's interest in acquiring systems for counter-unmanned aerial systems (C-UAS) and integrated air and missile defense (IAMD). These are capabilities that the United States had long denied to Gulf states. In this context, both Saudi Arabia—which sought to reduce its overdependence on Western powers—and Iran—which has viewed China as a strategic partner, particularly during times of intensified Western hostility—were persuaded that China's initiative could deliver a viable agreement that would have been unachievable under the auspices of any other global power.

Saudi Arabia's Gains from De-escalation with Iran

Saudi Arabia has long structured its foreign policy around four concentric spheres: the Persian Gulf, the Arab world, the Islamic world, and the broader international domain. From the Saudi perspective, the Kingdom's foreign policy is founded on stable geographic, historical, religious, economic, security, and political principles. These principles include good neighborliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, fostering relations with Gulf states, and supporting solidarity among Arab and Islamic nations. (Al-Azodi, 2014)

Despite these formal definitions of Saudi foreign policy, an analysis of the Kingdom's actual engagement across these four spheres reveals anything but harmony. In fact, longstanding cultural, religious, and political differences have historically generated tensions and conflicts within and between these networks. The idealized notion of a unified Arab or Islamic bloc often overlooks the diverse and competing interests that have historically led to discord—even warfare—among the members. (Gallarotti, 2013)

If we evaluate Iran–Saudi Arabia relations through the lens of these four Saudi-defined spheres, it becomes clear that, in each case, their relationship has been characterized more by

rivalry and tension than by cooperation or reconciliation. This adversarial dynamic is not confined to the first three spheres. Even within the fourth—Saudi Arabia's broader international engagements—Riyadh, in its efforts to secure global opportunities for internal stability and prosperity, inevitably encounters Iran as a challenger. Iran holds fundamentally different views on key strategic issues, including the U.S. presence in the Middle East.

Recent regional developments—particularly the Syrian crisis, the intensification of Iran–Saudi competition, and the subsequent shift in Saudi policy under King Salman toward a more assertive foreign policy as revealed in the Yemen war—have all highlighted the deep-rooted contradictions between Saudi Arabia's strategies and the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran across all levels of foreign policy.

Given these clear tensions, many analysts considered the prospect of reconciliation or peaceful alignment between Tehran and Riyadh—especially after the full diplomatic rupture—to be remote and unrealistic. However, what eventually unfolded told a different story. It reflected a significant shift in Saudi Arabia's strategic thinking—particularly in its perception of the geopolitical playing field and in how it defines long-term national interests.

Arguably, the most critical element in this shift was Saudi Arabia's transition from an aggressive foreign policy posture to one more centered on economic pragmatism and trade. From Riyadh's perspective, warming relations with Iran could reduce tensions in the Middle East, promote stability and security, and create a more favorable environment for regional economic growth. Political stability and reduced risk are crucial for attracting foreign investment. Yet, the persistent rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran had long imposed destabilizing effects across the region—impacting Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. On a broader scale, this instability also threatened three key pillars of Saudi Arabia's economic transformation agenda: energy security, international transport security, and investment security—all of which are prerequisites for the success of the Kingdom's economic leap plan.

It thus appears that, following the failure of its expansionist and aggressive foreign policies—from Syria and Yemen to Qatar and Lebanon—Saudi Arabia has sought to reposition itself, shifting from the stance of a hawkish power to that of a peace-oriented actor. Now, through economic tools and pragmatic diplomacy, the Kingdom seeks to present itself as a global leader. This strategic reorientation is clearly reflected in the Saudi Vision 2030, where economic and social objectives are given far greater weight than traditional political or military concerns. The document signals a clear intent: exhausted by the burdens of geopolitical conflict, Saudi Arabia aims to become a global commercial hub that connects three continents through strategic economic partnerships with major global players.

In line with this economic outlook, Saudi Arabia needed to resolve several key files that could not be settled without Iran's involvement or at least its consent. Within this context, the Beijing Agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia served multiple Saudi interests: it shielded Riyadh from the risks of direct confrontation with Iran; facilitated an honorable exit strategy from the protracted conflict in Yemen; and, given China's role not only as a mediator but also as a guarantor of the agreement, it offered Riyadh a mechanism to restrain Iran from actions that might jeopardize its national security in the domains of energy trade, international transportation, and investment climate.

Iran's Gains from De-escalation with Saudi Arabia

Given the aforementioned factors, it can be argued that Saudi Arabia is currently pursuing the practical dividends of the Beijing Agreement with the aim of managing regional tensions and structuring its bilateral rivalry with Iran. Riyadh seeks to achieve short- and medium-term goals through this agreement. On the other hand, it appears that while Saudi Arabia has significantly

benefited from the broader implications of the Beijing Agreement, Iran has, thus far, gained little in tangible terms from the reestablishment of diplomatic ties.

A closer examination of the shared areas of concern between Iran and Saudi Arabia reveals that Riyadh has either lacked the capacity or demonstrated insufficient willingness to address the core issues. Although the external appearance of the Beijing Agreement reflects a conciliatory and peaceful approach between the two nations, its underlying layers expose a fragile framework—one that may not endure unless further mechanisms are established to resolve deeper disputes.

From Iran's standpoint, several key issues were expected to be addressed as part of the Beijing Agreement. However, no substantive responses have yet been received from the Saudi side. The continuation of the agreement under such conditions remains subject to criticism and contention.

The first and foremost issue concerns Bahrain. Although raising concerns about the status of Bahrain's Shiite population in the presence of Saudi officials would likely provoke strong sensitivities, Iran has viewed the situation as linked to broader regional dynamics. Given the concessions Saudi Arabia has sought in the Yemen file, it would be reasonable to expect a reciprocal openness from Riyadh regarding Bahrain. According to Article 18 of Bahrain's 2017 Alternative Sentencing Law, courts are authorized to substitute imprisonment with alternative penalties. While a maximalist Iranian position might demand the release of political prisoners—especially leaders of the Al-Wefaq Society, such as Sheikh Ali Salman—at the very least, the implementation of this law for the society's secretary-general and other members should have been prioritized. Saudi disregard for the Bahrain issue, while simultaneously seeking Iranian cooperation on Yemen, indicates an asymmetry in expectations and a lack of reciprocal flexibility.

The second issue that should have been established as a fundamental condition of negotiations involves the cessation of Saudi support for terrorism and any financial or intelligence interference in Iran's domestic affairs. In this regard, two specific threats have been central to Iran's concerns: the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK) and domestic separatist groups. Riyadh should have clearly understood that any provocation of the MEK—by any means—constitutes a red line for Iran. If Tehran obtains credible evidence of such support, the fragile agreement may collapse and be rendered null and void. Considering that Saudi Arabia is a key financial backer of the MEK, any Iranian retreat from this demand would undermine the credibility of the normalization process.

Another pressing concern is the spread of Wahhabism, especially in Iran's southern provinces such as Khuzestan. Saudi-sponsored Wahhabi influence has been a catalyst for separatist movements and domestic unrest. Moreover, it has provided a conduit for foreign intelligence operations and the recruitment of espionage assets from among Iranian expatriate communities. The failure to seriously address hard security concerns in Iran constitutes one of the major oversights of the Beijing Agreement—an omission that threatens the sustainability of the agreement even at an unconscious level.

The third issue that ought to have been prioritized in negotiations was the formation of a regional cooperation framework, particularly involving the crises in Yemen and Iraq. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia undoubtedly has significant interests. Although the autonomous nature of Ansarullah's decision-making limits Iran's ability to fully dictate outcomes, Tehran remains capable of offering constructive mediation—provided that Riyadh takes reciprocal steps. Such engagement could help both resolve the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen and establish a relatively stable political order there. From Iran's perspective, any initiative it undertakes must be matched by corresponding Saudi actions; unilateral Iranian efforts would be unacceptable.

In Iraq—another focal point for Iranian concerns—Saudi Arabia must cease all forms of destabilizing activities, particularly the incitement of Sunni tribes and communities against the central government, and any covert attempts to resurrect ISIS or similar entities under new guises.

Lastly, the issue of media warfare and psychological operations conducted by Saudi Arabia against Iran remains a largely unaddressed area in the Beijing Agreement. Persian-language outlets such as *Iran International* and *Independent Persian*, which are heavily funded by Saudi sources, have emerged as major players in shaping public discourse inside Iran. These media operations, while difficult to regulate through binding clauses, nevertheless represent a critical area of influence. Since it is practically impossible to verify and negotiate every media output with Saudi Arabia on a daily basis, the absence of provisions to restrain such warfare further highlights Iran's limited gains from the agreement.

Conclusion

Political scientists often define “power” as the ability of an actor to influence other actors within the international system. In the realm of international relations, power has been conceptualized in various ways. Modern discourse generally refers to state power, which is understood as a function of military and economic capabilities. States possessing significant levels of power are categorized along a continuum—from minor powers, intermediary powers, and regional powers, to major powers, superpowers, and hegemons—based on their influence within the international system.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as two influential regional powers, have consistently pursued strategies to enhance their respective elements of national power in an attempt to elevate their standing on the global stage. While Iran has emphasized military strength, Saudi Arabia has focused on expanding its economic leverage. These parallel trajectories have unfolded against the backdrop of a rapidly transforming global geopolitical landscape—marked by China's rising economic power, Russia's military assertiveness in Ukraine, and the increasing contestation of Western hegemony by various global actors. In this context, both Tehran and Riyadh have undertaken deliberate efforts to redefine their positions in the emerging international order.

Following a seven-year diplomatic rupture rooted in strategic tensions and foreign policy conflicts—many of which stemmed from this broader global transformation—Iran and Saudi Arabia eventually reached a *détente*. In late 2022 (Persian calendar year 1401), with China's mediation, the two countries agreed to resume diplomatic relations and reopen their respective embassies within two months. Nearly a year after the signing of the Beijing Agreement, it is now possible to evaluate the outcomes of this accord with greater clarity.

Based on the findings presented in this study, the Beijing Agreement can, at best, be described as a tactical improvement in bilateral relations. While it yielded significant benefits for Saudi Arabia—most notably a degree of assurance that Iran would pose fewer challenges to its strategic interests—the agreement has resulted in limited concrete gains for Iran. In fact, from Tehran's perspective, the accord remains fraught with unresolved issues that pose serious obstacles to the long-term normalization of relations.

Accordingly, the most likely scenario for future Iran–Saudi relations under the current framework is one of fragility and impermanence. Despite China's commitment to preserving the agreement, the current architecture does not appear robust enough to support sustained diplomatic engagement over the medium to long term. For the Beijing Agreement to endure, it must serve as a foundation for broader negotiations and new, more comprehensive accords. Substantial revisions and additions will be required—particularly in areas that have proven contentious or imbalanced over the past two years.

In short, only through renewed diplomatic dialogue, mutual flexibility, and the institutionalization of balanced commitments can there be hope for sustained normalization under the framework of the China-brokered agreement. Otherwise, given the clear asymmetry in benefits and Iran's limited gains, the preservation of the status quo seems highly unlikely.

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