



### [China Continues to Expand Presence in the Middle East as they Announce they are Holding a Summit Between Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council](#)

China's recent involvement in mediating an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been seen by analysts as a sign of a "changing global order." Following talks in Beijing on Friday, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic ties and reopen their embassies within two months, while also affirming the "respect for nations' sovereignty and the non-interference in states' internal affairs." China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, played a key role in the negotiations, with Iranian state media publishing pictures and videos of him standing between Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, and Musaad bin Mohammed al-Aiban, Saudi Arabia's national security advisor. Wang emphasized China's responsibility as a large country and its commitment to playing a positive role in resolving conflicts. The resumption of diplomatic ties comes after a history of geopolitical conflict between the two countries, with both sides supporting opposing factions in various Middle Eastern conflict zones. While discussions between authorities in Iraq and Oman have been ongoing since 2021, no agreements have been reached yet. According to Robert Mogielnicki, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf State Institute in Washington, DC, China is taking a more active role in the region and is well-positioned to mediate an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, particularly as the United States and Iran do not have particularly cordial relations. Mogielnicki further explained that China has not committed to any specific conclusion, making it a low-risk and high-reward venture. The better diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran will decrease regional tensions and the likelihood of confrontation, which is advantageous not only for China but also for the United States and other regional players, Mogielnicki added. Additionally, as China imports energy from Iran and Saudi Arabia, it has a clear interest in strengthening ties and maintaining stability in the region, said Sina Toossi, a non-resident senior fellow at the Center for International Policy in Washington, DC. The 2019 Houthi attack on Saudi oil facilities temporarily halted the nation's oil output, leading to a global oil price increase of over 14% over the weekend, the largest surge in over a decade. According to Toossi, the worst-case scenario for China would be if a conflict in the Persian Gulf affects its economic and energy security.

According to Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute, the United States' credibility as a mediator is waning as it continues to take sides in regional conflicts and implements divisive policies. In contrast, China has refrained from taking sides in the Saudi-Iran crisis and is therefore well-positioned to act as a peacemaker. This achievement comes as reports emerge of increasing tensions between Israel and Iran, with the US historically supporting Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran. This shift in global order suggests that nations such as Saudi Arabia now have alternative choices for political and economic partnerships. As a crucial source of trade, politics, and military ties, China and Russia are attractive partners for these nations. Sina Toossi, a non-resident senior fellow at the Center for International Policy, believes that the Saudi Crown Prince's original confrontational policy towards Iran has given way to a desire for coexistence, particularly as the U.S.'s support becomes less unconditional. However, it is

important to note that the recently normalized relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia will not necessarily resolve their enormous geopolitical disagreements, as both countries have taken sides and fought proxy battles in numerous Middle Eastern conflict zones. Nevertheless, there is now an opportunity for expanded and prolonged communication that might help bridge these disparities, as mentioned by Toossi.

China's diplomatic gains in the Middle East are indicative of a changing global order that presents new opportunities and challenges for regional players. China's role as a mediator in resolving conflicts in the region highlights its growing presence and interest in the Middle East. As China continues to strengthen its ties with the region, it may play a more prominent role in promoting stability and resolving conflicts, which will benefit everyone involved. In the wake of Saudi Arabia's oil well bombing, the United States, under former President Donald Trump, had made it clear that it would not engage in any wars in the Middle East, thereby reducing its credibility as a mediator in the region. While the Biden administration tried to restore its relationship with regional allies, its further involvement in the conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia has made it more difficult for the U.S. to play a peacemaking role, allowing China to take advantage of the situation and extend its reach into the region. Despite their recently restored diplomatic ties, Iran and Saudi Arabia still have significant geopolitical differences, and it will take prolonged communication to bridge these disparities. The trilateral statement released on Friday mentioned the security and cooperation agreements signed by the two countries in 2001 and 1998, suggesting that they are trying to rebuild their spirit of cooperation, which necessitated economic, security, political, and high-level diplomatic collaboration.

China's involvement in mediating between Iran and Saudi Arabia is unusual given its traditionally low political profile in such matters. However, China's comprehensive strategic partnership with both nations, its increasing dependence on Middle Eastern energy sources (with half of its oil coming from the region), and its interest in promoting stability and peace make its involvement understandable. China's growing trade and investment in the region, including through its Belt and Road Initiative, also gives it an economic and political component as an outside influence in Middle Eastern diplomacy. While some may view China's actions as a means to hedge against potential U.S. sanctions on its oil supply, others see it as an opportunity for better foreign relations and multi-polarity in the region. However, the deal could hinder efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East and potentially give China a greater security role in the region. As new approaches arise, it will be important for foreign relations to adapt and find new ways to bring about diplomatic solutions from the U.S.