

THE STRATEGY OF RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA IS AN IMPORTANT STEP TOWARDS PEACE AND STABILITY IN THE REGION

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Summary

This research dealt with the transformations of the Iranian-Saudi relations, which witnessed great tension during the recent period, as the factors of those tensions were reviewed and analyzed in detail, and this research focused on three main axes. The first axis dealt with the reasons that pushed the Saudi-Iranian relations to rapprochement in the recent period, which includes recognition of the Iranian reality and a joint dialogue between the two parties. The second axis touched on the factors that led to strained relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which include the struggle for regional influence in the Middle East, religious and sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shiites, interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries, and conflict over regional issues such as Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. The third axis dealt with the transformations that occurred in the Iranian-Saudi relations during the recent period, and analyzed the positive effects that would be reflected in the region in the event of the continuation of this rapprochement. The obstacles that could face this convergence were also analyzed. In the end, it was emphasized that the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran is an important step towards peace and stability in the region, and that the two parties must continue dialogue and negotiation and overcome differences to achieve the interests of the people in the region in general.

INTRODUCTION

The Arab and Islamic world is witnessing a state of constant tension and conflicts, and among these important regional conflicts is the permanent tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, recent events have raised hopes for some that the two sides could reconcile.

This hope comes after Saudi policy has shifted in recent years toward Iran, as the kingdom has begun to move increasingly toward rapprochement. This new rapprochement indicates that Saudi Arabia and Iran are beginning to understand the extent of the damage caused by the permanent conflicts between them on the Islamic State in the region.

It is important to understand how this rapprochement could affect the entire region, and what are the benefits of rapprochement between the two sides.

With regard to the impact of rapprochement between the two sides on the region, the most important expected results are increasing political stability in the Middle East, reducing tension and armed conflicts, and enhancing security and stability in the Islamic countries in the region.

Among the benefits related to the rapprochement between the two sides, it can lead to an increase in trade and investment between the two countries, and thus it can contribute to the development of the economies of the two countries. In addition, this convergence can help in cooperation in other areas such as scientific research, education and culture. The rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran is an important step towards peace and stability in the region.

First- Transformations in Iranian-Saudi relations:

1- History of transformations in Iranian-Saudi relations

Iranian-Saudi relations go back decades, but have witnessed major shifts over the past decades. In the period after the Iranian revolution in 1979, relations between the two countries witnessed severe tension, as Iran launched a war on Iraq supported by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Arab Gulf states.



In the following decade, relations between the two countries turned for the worse after the killing of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in the assassination in 2005, as Saudi Arabia accused Iran of involvement in the incident, and the two countries exchanged accusations and criticisms. ()

However, relations between the two countries have witnessed an improvement in recent years, especially after Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince, assumed his duties in 2017, when he announced a shift in Saudi foreign policy and an attempt to improve relations with Iran.

Among the most important events in Iranian-Saudi relations in recent years was the diplomatic confrontation between the two countries after an attack on Saudi oil facilities in 2019, as Saudi Arabia accused Iran of being involved in the attack, while Iran denied the accusations.

However, relations between the two countries have witnessed an improvement in the recent period, as the Saudi Foreign Minister announced in 2021 the Kingdom's willingness to negotiate with Iran on the nuclear file, which indicates an improvement in bilateral relations. ()

2- The struggle for regional influence in the Middle East:

Saudi Arabia and Iran compete for influence in the Middle East, and conflict in a number of regions such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and the Arabian Sea. These conflicts sometimes turn into armed conflicts between the two sides.

The Middle East region is witnessing a struggle for regional influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as the two countries compete for hegemony and influence in the Arab and Islamic countries. This competition revolves around many political, economic and religious issues, such as the struggle over oil, gas, land, and religious and security interests.

By supporting armed movements and allied regimes in the region, such as the Syrian regime and the Houthis in Yemen, Iran is trying to achieve its political and strategic goals. Saudi Arabia considers Iran a security deterrent in the region, and seeks to support official Arab governments to face Iranian challenges. However, the influence of the two countries differs from one country to another and is influenced by several factors, such as religion, sect, history and culture. ()

There are many studies and articles that shed light on this conflict, including:

3- Religious and sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shiites:

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran are affected by religious and sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shiites. Iran encourages Shiites in the Muslim world, while Saudi Arabia views itself as a center of Sunni Islam and tries to maintain this influence. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have also been greatly affected by religious and sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shiites. These differences can be summarized in the following points:

- The Shiites see that they are the legitimate heirs of Islam, while the Sunnis see that they are the people of the Sunnah and the community who represent the majority of Muslims.
- There are differences in religious beliefs between Sunnis and Shiites, such as the belief in the Imamate and other intellectual and ideological currents.
- Historically, there was competition for regional influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which escalated with the Iranian revolution in 1979, when the region witnessed many conflicts and political crises.
- The differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran intensified after the civil war in Syria and Yemen, in which the Saudis saw that Iran supports the rebellious parties in those countries, and thus threatens regional stability.
- Tensions have increased between the two countries in recent years, which is reflected in Saudi Arabia's accusations against Iran of masterminding the attack on two oil facilities in the Kingdom in September 2019, which Iran strongly denied. ()

The religious and sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shiites are among the biggest differences that have caused political, military and social conflicts in the Arab and Islamic region. ()

The conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran revolves around the religious and sectarian differences between the Sunni and Shiite communities. Saudi Arabia is concerned about Iran's influence on the Shiite community in the Arab region, which forms part of the population in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria,

Yemen and Bahrain, and believes that Iran seeks to expand its influence by supporting the Shiites in the region.

Iran, on the other hand, views Saudi Arabia as an influential Sunni state in the region, and feels challenged by Saudi Arabia's support for Sunni allies in Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. They see this as an attempt by Saudi Arabia to maintain its influence and thwart Iran's expansion in the region. ()

It is interesting to consider that the religious and sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shiites are what caused the political and military conflicts in the Arab and Islamic region, but the dialogue that is taking place between the two countries at the present time constitutes an important step towards easing tension between the two parties and achieving peace and stability in the region, and this is what will be the orbit We searched. ()

4- Interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries:

Both countries accuse the other of interfering in the internal affairs of Arab countries, especially with regard to countries where the majority of the population belongs to the Shiite sect, such as Iraq and Bahrain. The Saudis believe that Iran supports Shiite groups in the region in general, while Iran accuses Saudi Arabia of interfering in the internal affairs of Arab countries and encouraging terrorism. ()

Interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries is one of the hot issues that raise controversy in the Arab and Islamic region. Saudi Arabia and Iran top the list of countries accused of interfering in the affairs of other countries. These accusations are related to the existing political and religious differences between the two countries, as each country wants to expand its influence in the Arab and Islamic region. ()

Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of supporting Shiite groups in Bahrain, Iraq and Lebanon, with the aim of expanding its influence and interfering in the affairs of Arab countries. Saudi Arabia asserts that this interference poses a threat to the security of the region and violates the sovereignty of other countries. Meanwhile, Iran accuses Saudi Arabia of financing terrorist groups in the region, such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, and undermining regional stability. ()

Iran denies the accusations leveled against it regarding its interference in the affairs of Arab countries, and says that it is providing the necessary support to the Shiites in other Arab countries, in order to defend their rights and protect their national interests. Iran also affirms that it does not seek influence and interference in the affairs of other countries, but is rather keen to enhance stability and security in the region. ()

Experts' opinions differ on the reasons behind interference in the affairs of other countries. Some of them believe that these reasons are related to the desire to expand the influence of the state and increase its regional influence, while others believe that the reasons lie in the religious and sectarian differences that have deepened between Arab and Islamic countries, which prevent cooperation and joint coordination between countries. ()

5- Conflict over regional issues, such as Yemen, Syria and Lebanon:

Conflict over regional issues, such as Yemen, Syria and Lebanon, is another important factor in the tension in Iranian-Saudi relations. These issues are linked to the struggle for regional influence in the Middle East, which the two countries are engaged in through their support for the opposing parties and the alliances supporting them. In Yemen, tension is growing between the two countries due to Iran's support for the Houthis, who are launching attacks on Saudi Arabia, while Saudi Arabia supports the legitimate government in Yemen. The conflict in Syria and Lebanon also increases tension between the two countries, as Iran supports the governments and forces loyal to it in the two countries, while Saudi Arabia supports the opposition in Syria and seeks to strengthen its alliance in Lebanon.

Among the sources pointing to this factor is the report "Iranian-Saudi Relations: Differences and Common Interests" issued by the Center for Gulf Studies at the University of Queensland in Australia, which indicates that conflict over regional issues is one of the main factors in the tension in relations between the two countries. The report also points to Iran's support for the Houthis in Yemen and its interventions in Syria and Lebanon as factors contributing to the exacerbation of tension between the two countries. ()



Second- Analysis of the regional and international impact of the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement:

This axis can be addressed to study the impact of the new rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the region in general, and on relations with other Islamic countries. It is possible to pay attention to studying the importance of the Iranian role in the region, the relationship between the new rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the position of other countries in the region on that. ()

1- American concern and its role in the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement

The role of the United States of America is considered one of the main factors that contributed to the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement. American anxiety has heightened the tensions of logic Persian Arab, prompting the United States to stimulate common interests between the two countries. From this standpoint, the previous US administration adopted a policy of strengthening alliances between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the alliance between Iran and Russia. This move has resulted in improved relations between the two countries in recent years. ()

2- The conflict in Syria and its impact on the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement

It cannot be denied that the Syrian conflict played an important role in the regional transformations and the rapprochement of the Iranian and Saudi states. Saudi Arabia adopted a policy of support for the Syrian opposition, while Iran supported the Syrian regime and helped restore control over some crucial areas of the country. However, the negotiations that took place between the two countries in 2018 led to the improvement of relations between the two countries, and the achievement of joint security and economic gains. ()

The region In the year 2001 and until now, the region has witnessed many transformations that affect the relations between countries. The shift in Iranian-Saudi relations is considered one of the most significant in the region. In this part, we will discuss the factors influencing this transformation.

3- The struggle for influence in the region

The Middle East region is considered an arena for the struggle for influence between many countries, and the struggle for influence played an important role in changing the Iranian-Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia is trying by various means to maintain its influence in the region, while Iran is trying to expand its influence in the region and the region, and this struggle for influence may lead to rapprochement or distancing of relations between countries.

4- It focuses on the factors influencing the regional transformations that support the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement. It can be said that there are many factors that helped in this transformation, the most prominent of which are:

A- Changing political priorities:

Political priorities in the region have changed due to the changes that have taken place at the international level, which prompted countries to modernize their foreign policy and act in a way that serves their national interests. In this context, Iran and Saudi Arabia have moved in a balanced way between preserving their interests and preserving regional stability, which made them move towards rapprochement.

B- The effect of regional transformations:

The region witnessed many regional transformations, most notably the war in Syria and Yemen, and the threat of ISIS to regional security. This made countries focus on cooperation between them and strengthening relations to address these challenges.

C- Changes in international relations:

International relations have changed dramatically in recent years, the most prominent of which is the United States' withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran and its adoption of a new policy towards the region. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has been affected by regional and international changes, and has shifted to a more open and communicative policy. ()

D- Political and social transformations in countries

Political and social transformations in countries affect the relations between them, and the regional countries have witnessed major political and social transformations during the last decade, which led to their impact on Iranian-Saudi relations. For example, the situation in Iraq, Syria and



Lebanon has changed due to internal conflicts, and this change has greatly affected the Iranian-Saudi relations. ()

There is no doubt that the internal factors of both Iran and Saudi Arabia had a significant impact on the transformations in the relations between them. Among these internal factors: ()

1- The religious factor: The religious factor is considered one of the main factors in relations between Islamic countries, as Iran and Saudi Arabia are among the most important Islamic countries in the region. Religious differences between Shiites and Sunnis are considered one of the factors that greatly affected relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as Iran is a Shiite country, while Saudi Arabia is a Sunni country. These religious differences have led to an escalation of tension between the two countries, and have intensified the regional competition between them. ()

2- The political factor: The other political factor is considered one of the main factors in the transformations in the Iranian-Saudi relations. The relations between the state and the Iranian government and the Saudi government are considered one of the main factors affecting the relations between the two countries. These relations have been greatly affected by the differences in political positions between the two countries, as Iran is trying to expand its influence in the region, while Saudi Arabia is trying to maintain its regional influence, which leads to a collision between the political interests of the two countries. ()

3- The economic factor: The economic relations between the two countries are considered one of the factors affecting the transformations in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The economic factor is one of the main factors affecting relations between countries, specifically between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Studies indicate that economic relations between the two countries were improving between 2003 and 2011, but they deteriorated significantly in the subsequent period due to political and social conflicts in the region. This deterioration affected the political relations between the two countries and caused an escalation of tension between them. ()

It is also mentioned that economic factors are not the only factor affecting relations between the two countries, as there are other factors such as cultural, religious and political factors that affect these relations.

It is worth noting that economic factors played a decisive role in determining the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as the economic relations between the two countries are witnessing great fluctuations and fluctuations. The economic relations between the two countries have been greatly affected by the international sanctions imposed on Iran, which harm the various sectors of the Iranian economy, while Saudi Arabia relies heavily on oil exports to achieve its economic revenues. ()

Thus, any economic changes in one of the two countries will affect the relations between them. These economic fluctuations have led to negative effects on the political relations between the two countries, through differences that arise due to trade and other issues Economic help between them. ()

4- Regional competition: Countries in the region compete for regional and political influence. This rivalry has led to regional conflicts, including the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

5- Internal conflicts: The internal conflicts in the two countries affect the relations between them. Iran has witnessed many political transformations over the years, including the Islamic Revolution and Khomeini's assumption of power in the country. Saudi Arabia has also witnessed major changes recently, including Prince Mohammed bin Salman's assumption of power and his launch of a series of economic and social reforms. ()

Third - Future prospects for the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement:

This axis could be about possible scenarios for the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement in the future, and the study of the obstacles and factors that could affect the continuation of this rapprochement. It is possible to pay attention to the comparative analysis between this convergence and the experiences of convergence in other regions of the world. ()

1- Common interests: One of the most important factors that could push Saudi Arabia and Iran to rapprochement is the common interests between them. For example, there could be an agreement between them regarding oil production, setting its prices and controlling global markets, in

addition to enhancing cooperation in other areas such as regional security and combating terrorism and organized crime. ()

2- Common challenges: Saudi Arabia and Iran face many challenges at the domestic and regional levels, such as the growing Iranian influence in the region, the Syrian and Yemeni wars, and religious extremism. Therefore, the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement could seek to mitigate these challenges and work together to overcome them. ()

3- Obstacles that must be overcome: Despite the common challenges and common interests, there are many obstacles that must be overcome to achieve Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, such as political, religious and ethnic differences, and political currents hostile to rapprochement between the two countries. In addition, international, regional, and domestic pressures may hinder this convergence and make it difficult to fully achieve it. ()

4- Regional cooperation: Iran and Saudi Arabia can enhance regional cooperation in various economic, political and security fields, thus enhancing stability in the region. There are opportunities to increase cooperation between the two countries in the economic, energy, transportation and trade fields.

5- Bilateral dialogue: Bilateral dialogue between Iran and Saudi Arabia can help reduce political tensions and enhance understanding between the two countries. A report published in the newspaper "The Guardian" indicates that there are indications of rapprochement between the two countries in recent years, which opens the door to the possibility of bilateral dialogue between them.

The war in Yemen: The war in Yemen is one of the most important international issues that concern the two countries, and cooperation between them can help find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Yemen. A report published on the "Eurasia Review" website indicates that there is some evidence that Iran and Saudi Arabia are seeking cooperation to end the war in Yemen.

6- The Gulf crisis: The Gulf region is witnessing a political crisis between the Gulf Arab countries and Iran, and rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia could lead to an improvement in relations between Iran and the Gulf states. A report published on the BBC website indicates that there are indications of an improvement in relations between Iran and the Gulf states in light of the rapprochement between Iran and Russia.

Recommendations about the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement can be divided into three basic dimensions that must be approached:

1- Religious and cultural dimensions: It is possible to study the religious and cultural dimensions in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and to analyze the role that religion and culture play in shaping relations between the two countries. For example, it is possible to ascertain the extent of the impact of sectarian and intellectual conflicts on the relations between the two countries, and to determine the extent of the influence of religious foundations on the rapprochement of the two countries.

Religious and cultural dimensions play a decisive role in the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Iran is a Shiite Islamic republic, while Saudi Arabia is a Sunni Islamic monarchy, meaning that there are deep religious and cultural differences between the two countries.

In order to settle these religious and cultural dimensions, dialogue and communication must be exchanged between the two sides, and appropriate channels for mutual understanding and cooperation must be opened. This can be through diplomatic and sports visits, and cultural and scientific exchanges between the two countries, and this can reduce differences and enhance mutual understanding between the two sides.

On the religious side, the two countries can work to enhance religious dialogue and mutual understanding between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, by establishing joint religious forums and issuing statements and calls for peaceful coexistence between Muslims.

Moreover, the two countries can work on internal reform in the areas of religion and culture, by promoting religious and intellectual freedoms, developing education, culture and media, and enhancing cultural and religious awareness in the young generation.



Finally, the two countries must work to overcome political differences and tensions, by establishing meaningful and direct political dialogues between officials in the two countries, working on exchanging economic and investment incentives, and developing partnership and cooperation.

Iran and Saudi Arabia: Religion, Politics, and Foreign Policy by Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar.

"The Shi'a-Sunni Divide: Islam's Internal Divisions and Their Global Consequences" by Linda S. Walbridge.

"The Saudi-Iranian Conflict and the Middle East" by Simon Mabon.

"The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and the Future of Middle East Security," by Emile Hokayem. This book can be found at: <https://www.brookings.edu/book/the-saudi-iranian-rivalry-and-the-future-of-middle-east-security/>

"Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict", by Taali F Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabar. This book can be found at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/iran-and-saudi-arabia-taming-a-chaotic-conflict/2A10348CF4EFE9C06D1F0A6A8F1C692F>

2- Economic and political dimensions: It is possible to study the economic and political dimensions in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and to analyze the role played by the economy and politics in shaping the relations between the two countries. For example, trade exchange between the two countries can be analyzed and whether there are opportunities to improve this exchange, and the political and strategic foundations of the two countries' relations can be analyzed.

Of course, I can give a more detailed answer about the convergence in the economic and political dimensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

▫ Economic Cooperation:

Economic cooperation between the two countries is one of the main ways through which rapprochement can be achieved. This can be achieved through the exchange of natural resources and the development of trade and economic investments. It is worth noting that the two countries possess rich and diverse natural resources, such as oil, gas and minerals, which provides opportunities for cooperation in this field.

▫ Political cooperation:

Political cooperation between the two countries can help solve some common regional issues, such as the conflict in Yemen or the Syrian crisis, and this requires cooperation between the two sides through peace talks and continuous dialogue. This could contribute to lowering tensions between the two countries and reducing differences.

▫ Cultural cooperation:

Cultural cooperation between the two countries can contribute to improving relations between the two peoples and enhancing mutual understanding. This may include organizing cultural exhibitions and conferences, and exchanging cultural and student visits.

These steps must be reciprocal and equal, and this requires great efforts from both countries to convince the other of the need to work together. These efforts can be costly and time consuming, but the results are achievable

3- Geopolitical and security dimensions:

It is possible to study the geopolitical and security dimensions in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and analyze the role played by geopolitics and security in the form of relations between the two countries. For example, regional conflicts involving the two countries can be analyzed, and the extent to which these conflicts affect relations between the two countries can be analyzed. Regional and international security can also be analyzed and the role it plays in shaping relations between the two countries.

There are also many geopolitical dimensions that can be worked on for rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and among these dimensions:

▫ Improving diplomatic relations: Saudi Arabia and Iran should work to improve diplomatic relations, for example by resuming full diplomatic relations and reopening embassies in both countries.



- Open and frank dialogue: Saudi Arabia and Iran must start an open and frank dialogue between them, focusing on outstanding issues and problems that hinder their relations, including issues of regional and international security, and economic and trade affairs.
- Work to reduce tension in the region: Saudi Arabia and Iran must work to reduce tension in the region, and work together to solve conflicts and problems that hinder relations between them, through cooperation in various economic, commercial and cultural fields.
- Regional cooperation: Saudi Arabia and Iran should work to strengthen regional cooperation between them, by participating in regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Organization of Persian Speaking States.
- Avoiding external interference: Saudi Arabia and Iran must avoid external interference in each other's internal affairs, by working to enhance mutual trust and regional cooperation

CONCLUSION

Iranian-Saudi relations are heading towards improvement and rapprochement after years of tension and regional conflicts. The two sides realized that it is important to cooperate and understand each other to achieve stability and peace in the region. With the changing regional and international conditions, it has become clear that war and hostility are not the best option for dealing with regional crises, and that it is necessary to seek understanding, dialogue and joint action to enhance stability in the region. The rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a positive and important step towards achieving peace and stability in the region, but there are still many challenges facing Iranian-Saudi relations that need to be resolved before reaching a stable and solid state.