



Smoke rises during an airstrike on an army weapons depot on a mountain overlooking Yemen's capital Sana'a, on April 20, 2015.
● KHALED ABDULLAH/REUTERS

Yemen's peace: Prelude to new order in Mideast



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EXCLUSIVE

Saudi Arabia and Iran have taken steps toward establishing peace in Yemen, with sources reporting that Riyadh has expressed its intent to end the eight-year-long war and initiate peace negotiations. The Yemeni conflict began in 2015, when Saudi Arabia led a coalition of allied countries to launch a devastating war against Yemen's Ansarullah, resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians.

Many experts in international relations had predicted that the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia would lead to the first signs of rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh toward establishing peace in Yemen. Now, those predictions appear to be coming true, as reports indicate that Riyadh has conveyed its desire to wind up the war and establish peace to the Presidential Leadership Council linked to the resigned Yemeni government. Mohammad Abdul Salam, the lead negotiator of the Sana'a government's team, has also stated his commitment to ending the conflict and the blockade of Yemen. Meanwhile, Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a member of Yemen's Ansarullah political bureau, has disclosed that an agreement has been reached between Riyadh and Sana'a, which encompasses all issues, including the ceasefire and achieving all-inclusive and enduring peace that benefits both sides.

Bukhaiti said that the agreement will be accomplished in two phases, one before Eid-ul-Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, and the other in the not-too-distant future. He also announced that the United Arab Emirates has initiated its withdrawal from

Yemen, with all its military divisions. However, reports suggest that the UAE may intend to annex some Yemeni islands, which has been vehemently opposed by the Yemeni government. "We emphasize that we will never countenance the UAE's presence in any section of our territory," Bukhaiti stressed.

Key regional powers

The achievement of peace in Yemen portends a fresh era in the Middle East. This era is anchored on the amicable agreements reached between the two formidable governments of the region: Iran and Saudi Arabia. Following seven years of estrangement, the foreign ministers of both countries convened in Beijing on Thursday to hold constructive talks, culminating in a joint statement.

Davoud Aqaei, a professor of international relations at Tehran University, expounded in an interview with Iran Daily that Tehran and Riyadh are key regional powers, both wielding extensive political influence and possessing formidable military, financial, and security resources.

"If these two powers engage in rivalry and discord, the region will be faced with challenges and tension. Conversely, if they foster cooperation, the entire West Asian region will trend toward interdependence and tension reduction," Aqaei said. "Saudi Arabia, having expended vast amounts of petrodollars in the Yemeni conflict with little to show for it, has now been afforded an opportunity to extricate itself from the Yemeni quagmire through the restoration of diplomatic relations with Iran," he added.

The university professor

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holds a sanguine view on the future of regional developments following the normalization of ties between Tehran and Riyadh. He opines that "the attainment of peace in Yemen will yield significant dividends, with its ripple effect extending to other countries in the region."

Failures of anti-Iranian coalitions

The recent progression of events in the region has been in stark contrast to the Western front's endeavors, spearheaded by the United States, as it has not been detrimental but rather advantageous for Iran. Hitherto, the US and Israel had been attempting to isolate Iran and to bar it from participating in regional decision-making. US President Joe Biden's visit to Israel and Saudi Arabia in September and Israel's bid to normalize relations with Arab nations had been an endeavor toward establishing an anti-Iran coalition in the region. Nevertheless, the situation has since taken a different turn.

Hanif Ghaffari, a regional affairs expert, affirms that a fresh equilibrium is being forged in the Middle East, displaying Iran's predominance and augmented role, while Israel is plagued by external and internal pressure and somewhat dejected.

Amir Mousavi, a strategist, echoes the same views in an interview with Iran Daily, reminding that all coalitions formed against Iran and its allied countries have come to naught over the past 12 years. All plots ranging from an international coalition against Iran to a united front against Bashar al-Assad's legitimate government in Syria, campaigns Hezbollah and Hamas, and a regional coalition against the Yemeni people, none of them have succeeded. It is, in fact, the Islamic Republic of Iran that has gained strength and continued to play its positive role throughout the region. Firouz Dolatabadi, a former

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diplomat and erstwhile ambassador to Türkiye, has corroborated the aforementioned stance and attested to Iran Daily that the termination of hostilities in Yemen cannot only be ascribed to the restoration of Tehran-Riyadh relations, rather it was Saudi Arabia's decision to draw nearer to Iran which resulted from Riyadh's prolonged indecisiveness during the Yemeni conflict.

Dolatabadi further expounded that Riyadh's protracted plans for growth were eclipsed by the Yemeni conflict, and all of Saudi Arabia's major undertakings were under the constant threat of Ansarullah's strikes, which prompted Saudi Arabia to extend an olive branch to Iran in order to resolve this dire state of affairs.

He posited that this episode demonstrates the futility of the coalition-building efforts against the futile attempts to ostracize the Islamic Republic.

Region at nexus of stability

Presently, it appears that the nations situated in this particular locale have arrived at a pivotal moment in their pursuit of reinforcing stability and fostering a greater degree of regional collaboration.

According to Amir Mousavi, an analyst specializing in strategic affairs, there are numerous cases that Tehran and Riyadh need to closely investigate in order to arrive at a comprehensive solution. Mousavi underscored the termination of hostilities in

Yemen and identifies Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, and Palestine as places where stability should be restored, and internal divisions resolved through the constructive engagement of Tehran, Riyadh, and other regional stakeholders.

Notably, he highlighted the Saudi authorities' newfound rational understanding of regional developments.

Mousavi further added that positive regional developments are on the horizon. Iran and Saudi Arabia have their respective spheres of influence comprising supporting countries and organizations. These competing factions have been engaged in an expensive rivalry for many years. However, it seems that they have decided to supplant their adversarial tendencies with a more collaborative and constructive approach. Consequently, the reunion between Tehran and Riyadh would give rise to interactions among groups of countries that have hitherto expended their resources and efforts on antagonism.

Mousavi also anticipated that in the future, Saudi Arabia may even soften its stance on the Lebanese Hezbollah.

First manifestation of peace

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, a distinguished scholar in the field of international relations, expounded on the diplomatic triumvirate of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China in an interview with Iran Daily. He deemed this alliance a successful endeavor for the advancement of the West Asian region, and highlighted the normalization of relations as the first tangible manifestation of peace in Yemen.

Falahatpisheh acknowledged the formidable influence wielded by both Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region, and opined that if they can amicably address each other's apprehensions, then cordial engagement would supplant antagonism. He further asserted that Iran,

despite its positive contributions to the region, must still maintain an upper hand in managing its affairs vis-à-vis the West.

In its foreign policy, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always underscored dialogue and interaction as the means to resolving regional disputes. Tehran has been an ardent advocate of fostering collaboration among neighboring countries. Iran's steadfast adherence to its principles appears to have borne fruit, as the West Asian

region is now charting a course of enhanced regional cooperation, rather than one of escalating tensions.

The cessation of hostilities in Yemen heralds the dawn of positive developments, which shall flourish under the aegis of cooperation and interaction between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other regional powers. Indeed, a new paradigm is emerging in Middle East, one that has dashed the hopes of anti-Iran coalition builders.



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud meet in Beijing, China, on April 6, 2023.
● IRNA



A boy holds shrapnel from a missile at the site of an attack in Marib, Yemen, on October 3, 2021.
● ALI OWIDHA/REUTERS



A car falls while being lifted by a crane at the site of a Saudi-led airstrike in Yemen's capital Sana'a, on September 21, 2015.
● KHALED ABDULLAH/REUTERS