

Recognizing Raisi's stellar contribution to China-Iran friendship

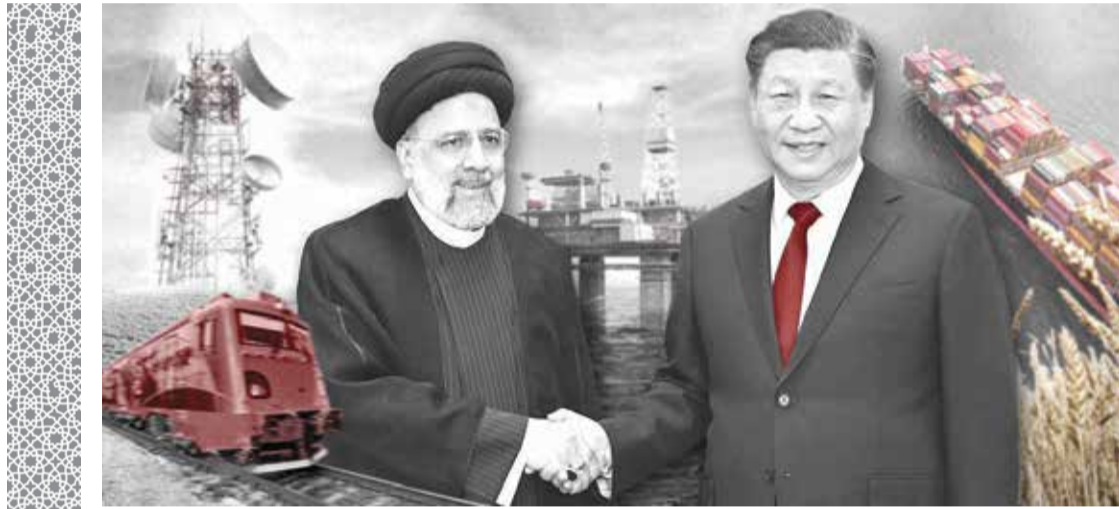


By Hannan Hussain
Scholar

OPINION

On May 20, Iranian officials confirmed President Ebrahim Raisi's tragic death in a helicopter crash in the northwestern East Azerbaijan province. It marks the departure of a polished statesman. Raisi helped guard Tehran against external interference while deepening its pragmatic relations within and beyond the Middle East. In China, he will be remembered as a dependable friend who brought two strategic partners even closer. His contribution to time-tested China-Iran ties merits profound recognition for several reasons.

Look at Raisi's landmark visit to China early last year. He worked with China to expand multisector engagement through a dozen cooperation documents. In the same year, bilateral trade clocked an impressive \$14.6 billion. Expanding cooperation in agriculture, trade, tourism, healthcare, and energy underscored a deeper commitment to upgrading Iran's comprehensive strategic partnership with China. Raisi concretized and communicated that understanding in his exchange with Chinese President Xi Jinping last year, sending a powerful message on long-term priorities. "Iran's commitment to deepening and upgrading the



In this illustration, Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi (L) is seen alongside his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

Iran-China comprehensive strategic partnership is unswerving and will not be affected by any changes in the international and regional situation," he affirmed. Going forward, that sense of resilience carries profound meaning for Chinese-Iranian ties. Despite threats of rising unilateralism, unwarranted sanctions, and recurring conflicts in the Middle East, China-Iran relations under Raisi set a powerful example for common development and world peace. Tehran amply reciprocated Beijing's willingness to implement their 25-year comprehensive cooperation plan and embraced important strides across the energy, trade, and infrastructure sec-

tors. On the multilateral front, China and Iran's support for regional diplomacy and economic development remains another hallmark, given Tehran's full-member entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. In Raisi's own words, multilateralism is a principal "guarantee for realizing justice". As such, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) scored tangible dividends for the people of Iran during his tenure, reflecting high-level engagements to support Iran in developing ports, railroads, and other long-term infrastructure. China is also seen as a pivotal contributor to Iran's future development endeavors, including the production of

15,000 megawatts of renewable power, high-speed transit projects, and other big-ticket connectivity pursuits. All this speaks to the deepening spirit of win-win cooperation under Raisi with the second-largest economy. Iran continues to enjoy a unique geographical position and status under the BRI framework, and the late president's legacy of strategic engagement leaves ample groundwork for his successor to build on. Looking ahead, Iran's political structure will endure in the face of difficulties. Iran's interim President Mohammad Mokhber is in charge until an election is held within 50 days, and Tehran's foreign policy priorities — including

towards China — will reflect continuity for several reasons. First, it is the nature of Raisi's rule itself: His leadership achievements were popular among Iranian conservatives and the religious elite, and bolstered his prospects of re-election. Among those achievements was the historic China-brokered Saudi-Iranian agreement. It helped shore up common ground between two major Middle Eastern powers and proved that diplomacy could trump deep-seated historical divisions. Future progress on reconciliation is likely to propel China and Iran's pursuit for enhanced "regional and international peace and security" in a region facing recurring conflicts. Second, the China-assisted Saudi-Iranian detente served as a powerful endorsement of Raisi's foreign policy of building trust in neighbors. That vision stands to strengthen as Iran eyes further opening up and constructive engagement in the Middle East. Moreover, Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has also declared Tehran's ingress into key multilateral groupings as a "very good achievement". Thus, Beijing's support for Tehran's regional integration will continue to benefit the broader vision behind Raisi's foreign policy vision. In conclusion, Raisi's statesmanship had a remarkable impact at the domestic, regional, and international levels. It successfully reinforced China-Iran ties as catalysts for peace, common development, and win-win diplomacy.

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US responsible for Raisi's death



By Hakki Öcal
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OPINION

As Aristotle said, we must explain the phenomena using the simplest possible hypothesis. When people have been sanctioned since 1979, almost 200 times against government entities, their treasury, financiers, banking institutions, technical facilities, and their facilitators and transportation companies, by the United States — in cooperation with several members of the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Canada — mostly for lame excuses, then you need no explanations beyond this to cast light on Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's helicopter disaster. It was reported that the Bell 412 helicopter that crashed near Varzaqan, Iran, while traveling from the Khoda Afarin Dam to Tabriz, killing Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, other officials, and three crew members, had not been serviced for the last 30 years. It was a four-blade utility helicopter manufactured by Bell Helicopter in 1994; it was flying in bad weather conditions and heavy fog.

The Iranian president was part of the authority that decided not to escalate the Israeli provocation to spread its war on Gaza to the region. On April 1, conducting an airstrike on the Iranian Embassy



A screengrab provided by Iranian state television shows the late president Ebrahim Raisi (L) with Mohammed-Ali Ale-Hashem, the late Friday Imam of Tabriz, on board a helicopter in Iran's East Azerbaijan province.

complex in Damascus, Syria, destroying the building housing its consular section, Israel killed 16 people, including eight officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and two Syrian civilians. Iran had the right to retaliate against this barbarous attack that spilled into open war between the two countries, long fought through backed groups and Israeli assassinations and strikes. Iranian Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei publicly stated that Israel must be punished. Raisi's response clearly sent Israeli leadership a clear cease-and-desist message, keeping the reciprocity as harmless to the civilians as possible. Iran sent a long-range ballistic missile, for the

first time in history, from Iran to Israel. **Debunking speculation on incident** We have to dismiss all the speculation asserted without evidence. Neither the US nor Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, "the Butcher of Gaza," needed to teach Iran yet another lesson by killing its president. It would not be a lesson but an open invitation to a war that would engulf the entire region, including those nations that had already elected to normalize their relations with Israel. Despite US President Joe Biden and Netanyahu's recent theatrical squabble about the arsenal, the war cabinet in Israel would not dare to set

ablaze the Middle East just six months before the US presidential elections. Since the renewal of the sanctions in 1995, then-US president Bill Clinton "found the actions and policies of Iran constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security of the US". By prohibiting transactions with respect to the Iranian oil resources, the US denied the Iranian people the option to buy and sell merchandise, produce or retrieve spare parts, and contract services for not only the president's but health and human services' helicopters, too. Raisi's crash is the sixth fatal helicopter accident this month. Most of those recent sanctions were declared on flimsy arguments and excuses



The helicopter thought to be carrying Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi takes off at the Iranian border with Azerbaijan after the inauguration of the dam of Qiz Qalasi, constructed on the Aras River, on May 19, 2024.

that are weak and difficult to believe; they actually serve to punish the innocent Iranian people. The US should wake up and understand that it is the biggest loser in the Middle East. The blood of Raisi, Amir-Abdollahian, other officials, and the three crew members is on the hands of the US presidents and secretaries of state and treasury who signed those sanction documents. That seems to be the simplest and the most reasonable explanation for the distressing helicopter accident and Iran's aviation crisis.

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