

# Raisi cements regional ties, economic gains follow

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## INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Iranian foreign policy took a decisive turn under the late president Ebrahim Raisi, who zeroed in on fostering relations with neighboring countries. In recent years, there has been a flurry of diplomatic activity between Iranian officials and their counterparts in the region, who have been rubbing elbows frequently. The frequency and intensity of these diplomatic interactions drive home the importance of regional cooperation for Iran's foreign policy agenda.

Iran Daily conducted an interview with Seyyed Reza Sadrolhosseini, a regional affairs expert, to discuss the effectiveness of this foreign policy and shed light on the driving forces behind the government's commitment to building strong regional alliances.

**IRAN DAILY:** What national and regional factors influenced the decision by the government of president Raisi to prioritize relations with neighboring countries?

**SADROLHOSSEINI:** For any nation, fostering good relationships with its neighbors is a cornerstone of political wisdom and essential to safeguarding national security. In Iran's case, Islamic ethics also play a role as it emphasizes the importance of forming strong bonds between Tehran and its predominantly Muslim neighbors. Additionally, Iran's constitution and the recommendations of the late founder and the current leader of the Islamic Republic strongly encourage regional cooperation.

With this in mind, president Raisi shifted the focus of his government's foreign policy to tackling shared challenges and bolstering economic relations with neighboring countries. Over the past three years, both the late president and the late foreign minister diligently pursued this approach, reaping significant



Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi (front-R) talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at an Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 11, 2023.  
● IRNA

rewards and solidifying the foundation for continued collaboration.

**Could you provide striking examples of accomplishments stemming from the policy of strengthening relations with neighboring countries?**

First off, significant strides were made in resolving misunderstandings and differences with certain neighboring countries, which were previously fueled by external influences.

Secondly, a major diplomatic breakthrough was achieved with the normalization of ties between Tehran

and Riyadh, a crucial player in the region, the Islamic world, and the Arab sphere. This rapprochement has paved the way for further diplomatic successes.

Thirdly, economic relations with neighboring nations have seen marked improvements during the past three years. As per official statistics, Iran's exports to its neighbors jumped by 30%, and overall trade relations witnessed a 36% uptick in the first two years of president Raisi's time in office.

Another feather in the cap of this policy is the masterful handling of the

Iran-Azerbaijan crisis. Even though an individual attacked the Baku embassy in Tehran for personal reasons, we witnessed a reduction in diplomatic ties between the two countries. Meanwhile, some countries tried to over-emphasize the border challenges, even expecting the two Muslim countries to go to war with each other.

However, the government of the late president and his diplomatic apparatus skillfully de-escalated tensions between Tehran and Baku. The case in point is the fact that the very last trip of the late president and foreign minister before their tragic air accident was taken to inaugurate a large joint dam on the Aras River. As another testament to the strengthened relations, the reopening of the Azerbaijani Embassy in Tehran is on the horizon.

Adding to this list of accomplishments, we can highlight the resolution of challenges with Iran's eastern neighbors, particularly Afghanistan. Relations between Iran and Afghanistan had hit rock bottom due to US interference during Ashraf Ghani's government. However, ties have since bounced back, with Iran's exports to Afghanistan experiencing a substantial boost.

Iran's readiness to engage in dialogue and address disputes over maritime borders and joint energy fields with countries such as Kuwait should also be recognized as another triumph of the government's neighborhood policy. Moreover, within this relatively brief period, Raisi's government tried to regain the trust of nations like Armenia, Turkey, and Pakistan across various sectors, including security, energy, and economics.

The high-profile attendance of foreign delegations, particularly from neigh-



boring countries, at the ceremony paying tribute to the late president and his accompanying delegation serves as a testament to the Islamic Republic's enhanced standing and the positive role that it plays in the region.

**How did the government seek to implement the neighborhood policy to successfully overcome misunderstandings?**

The government followed a strategic approach rooted in interaction and dialogue, aiming for mutual benefits while ensuring mutual respect and security. The late foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian adeptly enacted this policy, prioritizing the expansion of economic relations. Of course, Iran's government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs remained steadfast in upholding Islamic and revolutionary values throughout the de-escalation and interaction processes with neighboring countries.

**While president Raisi underscored not seeking to tie economic issues to specific foreign policy matters, it appeared that economic collaboration became an essential aspect of our approach to foreign policy. Were the government and foreign ministry effective in leveraging foreign policy for economic cooperation?**

From the outset, foreign minister Amir-Abdollahian stressed the im-



Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi (L) waves to workers aboard a platform at Phase 11 of the South Pars Gas Field in the Persian Gulf on August 28, 2023.  
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