

Iran's ambassador to Saudi Arabia to Iran Daily:

Tehran-Riyadh ties open new avenues for regional cooperation

With the development of relations with neighboring and regional countries being one of the main pillars of the late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi's foreign policy agenda, how far has his government progressed in achieving these goals? What impact has the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia had on the broader regional dynamics and Iran's ties with other regional countries? What trajectory are the relations between Tehran and Riyadh following, and what specific objectives are they aiming to accomplish? We put these questions and more to Alireza Enayati, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Saudi Arabia.

By Mostafa Shirmohammadi
Editor-in-chief

INTERVIEW

IRAN DAILY: How would you assess the significance of the presence of a large number of high-ranking officials from various Middle Eastern countries, including a high-level delegation from Saudi Arabia, the inaugural visit of Egypt's foreign minister, and the attendance of Bahrain's foreign minister at the funeral ceremonies for the late president and foreign minister in Iran?

ENAYATI: Following the tragic crash that led to the loss of the president and the foreign minister, we received an outpouring of condolences from officials across the Middle East. All the countries in the region, including Saudi Arabia, conveyed their sympathies through messages to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber. After the funeral, several delegations made their way to Iran. The visits by officials from these countries, including Bahrain, signaled their solidarity with Iran during this difficult time and reinforced the spirit of good neighborliness. They demonstrated that neighbors stand united in times of adversity. We set up a memorial book at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Riyadh, which was signed by over 100 visiting delegations.

The foreign policy agenda of the current Iranian government has been centered on revitalizing relations with neighboring and regional countries. To what extent has this approach, which emphasizes intra-regional cooperation, resonated with the nations of the region?

At the outset of President Raisi's government, a clear framework for regional foreign policy was established, rooted in the principle of good neighborliness. This principle was consistently emphasized by the late president during numerous multilateral and bilateral meetings. Guided by this approach, the Foreign Ministry, as the executive arm, leveraged its full capacity to implement this vision both on the ground and at the intellectual level. We took strides in conceptualizing the regional agenda of the government and codifying its implementation framework. During his regional tours, the late foreign minister promoted the concept of intra-regional dialogue under the banner of a "regional dialogue assembly." This initiative garnered a positive response from many countries.

Owing to the regional policy pursued by the government, the notion of neighborhood has evolved from a mere geographical concept to a political, economic, social, cultural, commercial, governmental, and popular construct.

This paradigm shift has paved the way for a new direction in the Persian Gulf region. Using such practical initiatives, intra-regional cooperation and a reliance on endogenous security can reshape the traditional perspectives that have long been associated with this region. This idea can be realized with the participation of the eight countries bordering the Per-

sian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Strait of Hormuz. Together, these nations can usher in an era of growth and prosperity within a cooperative framework.

It appears that the improving relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are setting a precedent for other Arab countries to follow suit and embark on a path of enhanced engagement with Iran. How accurate is this assumption?

The significance of Saudi Arabia for the countries within the region, including Iran, is undeniable. The Saudis themselves are well aware of their position and the role they can play in shaping regional dynamics and within the Islamic world. Moreover, from the perspective of Saudi Arabia and the countries in the region, Iran holds a prominent standing in the region and the Islamic world, and this comes with a corresponding sense of responsibility.

As such, the cooperation between these two major and influential countries in the region and the Islamic world can forge a positive and promising future for the entire area through partnership and alignment with other regional nations, including Iraq.

The empathy and cooperation among the countries in the region are a direct outcome of the neighborhood policy championed by the late president over the past three years. This policy impetus marked the restoration of the relationship between Tehran and Riyadh, setting in motion a dynamic trajectory of engagement across various sectors.

At the same time, Iran's relations with other countries in the region, including Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman, have witnessed a significant leap forward, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

As Tehran and Riyadh work to develop their bilateral relations following the reopening of diplomatic ties, what specific goals are they pursuing? Earlier, the Saudi foreign minister alluded to the strategic aspect of the relationship between the two countries. Have concrete steps been taken to advance this goal from an economic and diplomatic perspective?

The relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia has the potential to be enhanced and deepened across various levels, each building upon the other. At the bilateral level, we are witnessing expanding ties in certain areas, while in others, further efforts are needed to fully realize the relationship's potential. The indicators of relations across diverse fields—political, security, economic, commercial, cultural, and consular—vary, with some areas showing more positive progress than others.

These relationships can also be defined and advanced at the multilateral level. One avenue for cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia could be through engagement with countries in the Persian Gulf region or by fostering multilateralism with nations, both within and outside the Persian Gulf. For instance, we can look at enhancing ties between the two blocs of North Iran and South Iran, as well as fostering cooperation between the countries of Central Asia and those within the Per-



Iranian Envoy to Riyadh Alireza Enayati (L) submits his credentials to a Saudi Araba Foreign Ministry official on September 5, 2023.



A Saudi delegation headed by Minister of State Prince Mansour bin Miteb pays tribute to the late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi and foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran on May 22, 2024.
● alarabiya.net

sian Gulf Cooperation Council.

These countries have already been developing their bilateral relations and are exploring ways to further collaborate in the form of regional unions. However, such cooperation hinges on the involvement of Iran. For example, goods from Persian Gulf Cooperation Council countries can be transited through Iran to reach Central Asian markets and vice versa. Iran serves as a link connecting the Persian Gulf with Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Given the recent events surrounding the Gaza war and the US unwavering support for Israel, it appears that Iran and Saudi Arabia share similar stances in this regard. How do you assess the significance of this shared stance?

Iran and Saudi Arabia can find common ground and pursue collaborative efforts within the Islamic world, particularly when it comes to fostering unity among Muslim nations and the broader Islamic Ummah. The issue of Palestine transcends the region and is a concern for the entire Islamic world. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have sought to prioritize this issue, elevating it as a global demand and recognizing it as the foremost concern for both

the Islamic world and humanity at large. The proposals put forth by Iran and Saudi Arabia, such as organizing meetings of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, underscoring the need for all-out support for the Palestinian people, and strongly condemning the Zionist regime, reflect a shared commitment. The characterization of the Israeli invasion and brutal attacks as a form of genocide in Palestine and taking legal action to hold the Zionist regime accountable are testament to the concerted efforts of Islamic countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, through various meetings and diplomatic engagements. This cooperation undoubtedly played a key role in rallying support for the Palestinian people and raising international awareness about the obligations of the global community.