

Saudis view relations with Iran as 'strategic, essential': **Ambassador**

Tehran-Riyadh security talks ongoing

INTERVIEW

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been on different paths in their relationship over the last two years or so. Before October 7, 2023 — when the Zionist regime started attacking the Gaza Strip and subsequently escalated acts of aggression against Lebanon and Syria, culminating in the 12-day war between Israel, the US, and Iran — Tehran and Riyadh were working hard to patch up their ties with a focus on bilateral issues. Over the last year, broader issues such as the fate of Palestine, the dangerous plans of the Zionist regime for West Asia, fears of the tensions spilling over, and the region getting stuck in a quagmire of military and security crises have become new driving forces for cooperation between the two sides.

How far can the scope of cooperation between Tehran and Riyadh be stretched under current conditions? Does the rapprochement we witness today have enough staying power to continue? These questions were put forward to Alireza Enayati, ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Saudi Arabia, in an interview:

Alireza Enayati



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Two or three months ago, you confirmed that Tehran and Riyadh have set out on a new track of relationship; an experience that seeks to pull this relationship out of prior stagnation. Exactly which areas does this new phase and this fresh chapter cover?

ENAYATI: It has been about two years since the start of the new phase of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This relationship took shape in March 2023, and by late September of that year, the ambassadors of both countries headed off to their new posts simultaneously. I arrived in Riyadh in the morning, and Mr. Al-Anzi, my esteemed counterpart, checked in in Tehran in the afternoon.

Since then, we have kicked off cooperation in multiple fields and have expanded and deepened the relationship; notably in continuous political and international dialogues across various arenas, especially on the issue of Pales-

tine, which took on special conditions after the October 7 event. These consultations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have persisted consistently in support of and defending the rights of the Palestinian people. Consequently, several meetings of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, called for by Iran, were held, receiving full backing from the Saudis, enabling a series of meetings at the level of leaders, foreign ministers, and executive committees.

These meetings stem from the new type of Iran-Saudi relationship, and the consultations have gone beyond just formal meetings. They included numerous phone calls and meetings between high-ranking officials of the two countries. The late president Raisi, the late foreign minister Amir-Abdollahian, the First Vice President Aref, and the current Foreign Minister Araghchi all visited Saudi Arabia; In every one of these five meetings,

joint sessions were held with Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia. These sessions covered a broad range of bilateral, regional, Islamic world, and international issues.

Therefore, over two years, frequent contacts have been carried out between the last two presidents of Iran and Mohammed bin Salman. All these areas have been unlocked under the revival of Iran-Saudi relations.

In defense and security sectors as well, good dialogues exist between us and the Saudis. Khalid bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's minister of defense, paid a visit to Iran and met with the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution. In this visit, both bilateral and broader regional matters relating to Iran-Saudi relations were discussed.

Regular contacts have been kept up between the chief of staff of the Iranian Armed Forces and the Saudi minister of defense, showing significant progress in this area as

well. We are effectively witnessing many breakthroughs in political, security, and defense arenas.

A common perception exists since the Beijing agreement (which you mentioned) that Saudi Arabia really wants to move on from the bitter chapter of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. As an ambassador, what signs can you point out to people in confirmation or denial of it?

You hit a very important point. We must look beyond theoretical concepts and see if this has materialized in practice or not. Theoretically, Iran entered the negotiations with firm determination, whether in the five rounds in Iraq, parallel talks in Muscat, or detailed discussions in Beijing. Iran was serious, and based on this seriousness, the desired outcome was hammered out, leading to the March 2023 announcement of resuming relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

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In talks with the Saudi side, both during my ambassadorial meetings and numerous high-level encounters, we have picked up on their view that Saudi Arabia considers relations with Iran strategically important and deems them essential for peace, stability, and guaranteeing security in the region.

Iran, during both its previous and current governments, has emphasized developing the principle of good neighborliness, and this has been pursued within the framework of principled neighborly relations. This resolve is clearly reflected in statements by officials of both countries. Hence, the Islamic Republic of Iran's perspective is fully based on expanding and deepening relations with Saudi Arabia and other neighbors under the principle of good neighborliness and advancing these ties.

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Such statements have been continually passed on from Saudi officials at the highest levels to the Iranian side. While these words exist in theory and discourse, we have also witnessed tangible events. For example, after the 2016 cut-off, religious visits like Umrah, previously halted, resumed with the relationship renewal. Last year, over 200,000 Iranian pilgrims undertook Umrah in Saudi Arabia.

Another example is the resumption of scheduled commercial flights between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Now, three to four weekly flights operate from Dammam to the holy city of Mashhad, indicating expanding ties.

Economic statistics from bilateral relations are not very satisfying. In your opinion, what is the main challenge? There is a general cooperation agreement between us and Saudi Arabia, approved in 1999 and signed by officials of the time. Could you explain what follow-ups have been carried out so far? Is the same agreement with the same terms still the yardstick for our commercial



The late chief of Iranian Armed Forces Mohammad Bagheri (L) welcomes Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman in Tehran, Iran, on April 17, 2025.

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