



Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman Al Saud (L) meets with the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in Tehran, Iran, on April 17, 2025, to deliver a message from the King of Saudi Arabia.  
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and economic work? And fundamentally, what programs does the Islamic Republic of Iran have to boost economic and commercial relations with Riyadh?

I mentioned some areas in terms of developing relations, but in the economic and commercial sectors, cooperation indicators have not taken off noticeably. Despite all the talks and efforts that have been made, we cannot yet talk about a significant trade volume between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This does not mean efforts have ground to a halt; Rather, boosting the economic ties is time-consuming, and its fruits take time to show up. Nonetheless, over the past two years, several economic and commercial measures have been rolled out. Many visits by Iranian officials to Saudi Arabia have taken place within international summits, and meetings with Saudi ministers of economy, finance, investment, and commerce have taken place, all emphasizing developing economic relations. This shows that the Saudi side also has this matter on its agenda, but execution requires time, and we hope it pays off soon.

Are sanctions one of the main obstacles, or are there other obstacles at play as well?

Let me pick up from the previous question by saying that the agreement to avoid double taxation between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been initialed, and we hope it will be signed soon. Also, drafts of documents concerning mutual investment protection, customs cooperation, and road transport have been put forward by Iran to Saudi Arabia. This shows that serious steps have been taken on the economic front, but tangible results have yet to come through as we expect.

Could you shed some light on the issue of sanctions?

Yes, sanctions are indeed one of the challenges, but in our talks with our Saudi brothers, we have stressed that not all economic activities of Iran with other countries fall under sanctions. Some parts may be subject to sanctions, but the entire economic apparatus is not held back. Iran has commercial cooperation exceeding €20 billion with many countries in the region and beyond.

Is this figure applicable to current conditions?

Yes, this volume of cooperation with neighboring countries exists under current circumstances, indicating there are areas where sanctions can be sidestepped and cooperation expanded. Efforts in this regard are underway. In Dr. Araghchi's recent trip to Saudi Arabia and meeting with the crown prince, regional as well as economic and commercial issues were brought up, with emphasis on gearing up these areas. We hope these discussions will soon yield tangible outcomes so that the economic and commercial sectors can keep pace with political, security, defense, cultural, and scientific fields. Saudi Arabia has now opened scholarships for Iranian students, and at least three Iranian students have been officially taken in at the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, where they are currently studying. This matter was also raised and emphasized during the visit of the Iranian minister of education to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, multiple branches of Iran-Saudi relations exist that we hope will bear fruit, benefiting Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other countries in the region.

Back in 2015, during the JCPOA era, certain behaviors from Saudi officials were perceived as opposition to the deal. Now that efforts to revive the JCPOA or a similar agreement are in progress, Saudi Arabia seems to have come around to accepting it. As the ambassador, do media speculations that Saudi Arabia is willing to host indirect talks between Iran and the US hold water? Have you been offered any proposal? And what is Saudi Arabia's stance on de-escalation between Iran and the US at this juncture?

Saudi Arabia, according to its officials, advances its policies with a priority on preserving peace, stability, and calm in the region and strives to cool down regional tensions and keep things peaceful. My impression is that Saudi priorities right now are maintaining calm, peace, and regional stability. On this basis, we have seen Saudi backing of Iran's recent nuclear talks.

Has any proposal for hosting indirect talks been put on the table by Saudi Arabia? Because several countries have been floated as options.

If I say I'm not aware, please chalk it up to a lack of information on my part.

Discussions in the last few months during indirect Iran-US talks have focused on forming a regional nuclear consortium. While this idea was still very raw — and of course, the Israeli and US aggression that took place has pushed this issue to the sidelines — do you think there is a basis for cooperation on peaceful nuclear energy between Iran and Saudi Arabia?

Well, I believe this is a fully technical matter and my answer cannot cover all its dimensions, but in brief, it is as you described — a kind of cooperation within a consortium framework. Under what conditions it will be is for experts in the field to say. Yet, another very positive point comes into play, which makes collaboration possible: the idea of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. This idea was put forward by Iran before the Islamic Revolution, then Egypt joined in, and it has since appeared as a guideline

in regional cooperation. Recently, Iran has reiterated this idea. It could foster regional cooperation in the area of opposition to weapons of mass destruction in West Asia in general, not just the Persian Gulf — meaning the circle is broader. It could also discipline unfounded fears about Iran's nuclear program by emphasizing this proposal or initiative in the region and through regional collaborations. I think there is room for cooperation here as well.

Is the idea you mentioned currently being actively discussed between Iran and Saudi Arabia? Are there ongoing consultations?

Specifically, no; thoroughly, no. But as a concept, it is indeed on the table. However, Iran and Saudi Arabia have not yet sat down to hammer out details on this topic.

Following the Israeli and US aggression, different reactions emerged from the region and beyond. Some reactions were disappointing, others hopeful signs of better days ahead. You were in Riyadh at the time — how would you describe Saudi Arabia's response to the aggression? And as a closing note, could you share a memory from those 12 days and

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In the regional media arena, Iran's action during the imposed 12-day war was regarded as legitimate defense, and Saudi media and officials took positive stands defending the Iranian people and condemning the aggression. This was an important milestone in bilateral relations.

Saudi Arabia's approach at that time?

The first contact was made by the Saudi foreign minister with his counterpart, Dr. Araghchi, extending condolences and sympathy and expressing support for Iran. On the morning of the aggression, Jassim Al Budaiwi called me and said they sympathize and condemn the attack, and they were waiting to touch base with Dr. Araghchi to personally offer condolences and issue a statement.

Saudi Arabia immediately put out a very strong statement that explicitly used the word “aggression,” not just “targeting”. Staunch words like “strong condemnation” and “denunciation” were used.

Later, the crown prince held a phone call with Dr. Pezeshkian, followed by a detailed statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When the Americans attacked Iran, the Saudis again issued a statement condemning it. Officially and through their declarations, Saudi Arabia went all in condemning the aggression. Afterwards, the Cooperation Council and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, headquartered in Saudi Arabia, also rolled out statements condemning this aggression.

Saudi domestic media regarded Israel's attack on Iran as a continuation of the 1948, 1956, and 1973 aggressions, stressing Israel's aggressive nature.

In private Saudi TV networks, which tried to remain balanced and respect both sides' views, this stance was also evident. I conducted interviews with several private Arab networks, and the defense of Iran and condemnation of the Zionist regime were fully covered.

I think on the ground, with the strength and initiative of our armed forces, commander-in-chief, army, and IRGC, we were able to put the enemy in its place. In the regional media arena, Iran's action was regarded as legitimate defense, and Saudi media and officials took positive stands defending the Iranian people and condemning the aggression. This was an important milestone in bilateral relations.

Apart from the official position, was there any effort by Saudi Arabia to call off the aggression, given its ties to the United States?

I believe such efforts were probably made behind the scenes.

The full interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



US President Donald Trump (L) greets then-Saudi ambassador to the United States Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz at the White House on June 6, 2018. The two reportedly held a secret meeting on July 3, 2025, to discuss Iran and broader Middle East security following the Israeli-imposed 12-day war against Iran.  
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