

**DIPLOMACY, WITH A CHANGE IN TERMS
OF REFERENCE***The Hindu*Paper - II
(International Relation)

Mediation is rarely a spontaneous act; more often than not it is preceded by quiet efforts to seek a meeting point between differing viewpoints of individuals or organisations. It figures in Article 33 of the United Nations Charter among means of 'Pacific Settlement of Disputes'. but in legal terms is different from Good Offices and Arbitration. A good instance of this was recently witnessed on the global stage. The question of motivation can be debated.

Agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia

In a joint statement on March 10, 2023, by Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China (sitting at a table in the shape of an isosceles triangle), the three countries announced that an agreement has been reached between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran covering a resumption of diplomatic relations between them and a reopening of their embassies and missions within a period not exceeding two months. The agreement affirmed their respect for the sovereignty of states, noninterference in the internal affairs of states and said the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both countries shall meet to implement this, arrange for the return of their Ambassadors, and discuss means of enhancing bilateral relations. Iranian National Security Adviser Ali Shamkhani is from the Office of the Supreme Leader in Iran and lends credibility to the accord.

One agreement and seven achievements

A commentary in an Iranian newspaper on March 11 depicted the event as 'One agreement and seven achievements' –

1. It listed the latter as Tehran's willingness to engage in dialogue.
2. Failure of U.S.'s effort to isolate Iran.

3. Strengthening of the alliance of Islamic Countries.
4. Failure of Israeli efforts against this agreement.
5. Failure of U.S. effort to show the Iranian public that it has no choice but to agree to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with America.
6. Beijing's successful entry in West Asian relations,
7. Failure of dreams of 'regime change'.

American and Israeli reactions

U.S. reactions, apart from unconcealed surprise, reflected the change in terms of reference in international diplomacy. Equally surprised was Israel, the other major player in the region, which saw it as a fatal blow to the effort to build a regional coalition against Iran. One commentator said 'China brought Saudi Arabia together with Iran at a time when Israel had hoped that the United States would bring it together with Saudi Arabia'.



Henry Kissinger told David Ignatius of The Washington Post that 'I see it as a substantial change in the strategic situation in the Middle East. The Saudis are now balancing their security by playing off the U.S. against China.'

Aaron Miller, who served for long as a State Department adviser on Middle East, said the development 'demonstrates that [the] USA's influence and credibility in the region has [have] diminished and a new sort of international regional alignment is taking place which has empowered and given both Russia and China newfound influence and status'.

The background

The backdrop to the event is noteworthy. Bilateral efforts have been underway since early 2016 to ease tensions that had developed specifically between Tehran, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, and generally within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in relation to Yemen and Syria. The Emir of Kuwait and the Sultan of Oman initiated steps that were responded to by Iran. Talks were also held in Baghdad and during Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to China in February. All concerned were worried about the attacks on shipping and energy facilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates and the longer term implications of the regional conflicts that were underway. These together 'brought home the risks of being on the front line of confrontation'.

The official visit by China's President Xi Jinping to Saudi Arabia in December 2022, also saw him attending the first ChinaArab States Summit and the ChinaGCC Summit. The theme of his address was 'Building on Past Achievements and Jointly Creating a Brighter Future of ChinaGCC Relations'. China and the GCC, he stressed, should be partners for common security: China will continue to firmly support GCC countries in safeguarding their security, and support the efforts by countries of the region to resolve differences through dialogue and consultations and to build a gulf security architecture. China, he said, 'welcomes the participation of GCC countries in the Global Security Initiative (GSI) in a joint effort to uphold regional peace and stability'.

The speech laid stress on five priority areas:-

1. 'energy cooperation'
2. 'finance and investment cooperation'
3. 'innovation, science and technology'
4. 'aerospace cooperation'
5. 'Chinese language and cultural cooperation'

An Action Plan for 2023-2027 was agreed upon. A comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement with specific agreements and some memoranda of understanding were also signed. It said the two supported 'each other's core interests'. The Chinese side 'commended the efforts made' by the Kingdom to serve Chinese Haj and Umrah pilgrims. The statement stressed the importance of deepening joint cooperation with regard to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and on attracting Chinese expertise in Saudi megaprojects. The two sides signed 'a harmonizing plan' between the KSA's Vision 2030 and the BRI. It is reported that a China GCC summit in Beijing is being scheduled.

Central point

China's mediation efforts have resulted in the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is important in the context of regional stability and the changing dynamics of international diplomacy.

What is mediation?

Mediation is a deliberate attempt to resolve differences between two parties, and it plays an important role in international relations. China's recent mediation effort that led to the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran is in the news.

Article 33 of the UN Charter

Article 33 of the Charter states that any dispute which may endanger the maintenance of international peace and security must first be addressed through negotiation, arbitration or other peaceful means and states that the Council Parties shall use such means for resolving its disputes.

Diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran

About 7 years ago in 2016, both of them broke their diplomatic relations, and the tension between the two increased so much that the clouds of war started looming in the Arabian Peninsula. In fact, in 2016, 47 people, including prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr, were hanged in Saudi Arabia on charges of terrorism. After this, the protesters in Tehran entered the embassy of Saudi Arabia. Diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran ended after this incident.

There is a difference between the ideology of Shia and Sunni

There are two types of Muslims in majority in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Among these, Iran is Shia while Saudi Arabia is a majority country of Sunni Muslims. Most of the Muslims in the world are Sunni and they consider themselves better than Shias. That's why the practical relations between these two countries were not that sweet, now that China has mediated between the representatives of both, there are signs of improving their relations.

The Indian stand

India's reaction to this development has been restrained. Apart from historical linkages, the region is in India's proximate neighbourhood and within its security parameters. It is the principal source of hydrocarbon imports, and increasingly of investments. It is also an important destination for manpower exports apart from being a major trading partner including projects. The official policy has focused on bilateral relations and avoidance of involvement in bilateral and regional disputes. Given these priorities, India has consciously refrained from speculative ventures in alternate security architectures apart from supporting cooperative security and freedom of waterways and of navigation. The region should not be viewed in competition with China without the latter's economic and military capacity nor should India consider itself a surrogate for those who have been outplayed, at least for the moment, in power games for transitory affections.

Expected Question

Que. Which of the following is not a member of 'Gulf Cooperation Council'?

- (a) Iran
- (b) Saudi Arabia
- (c) Oman
- (d) Kuwait



Answer : A

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: China's mediation managed to bring Saudi Arabia and Iran to the negotiating table. Throw light on its importance and implications in international diplomacy. How will this development affect India? Analyze

Answer Format :

- ❖ Give details of the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran mediated by China.
- ❖ Discuss its importance and implications in international diplomacy.
- ❖ What will be the impact of this agreement on India?
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.