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[info@vajiraoinstitute.com](mailto:info@vajiraoinstitute.com)

# TODAY'S ANALYSIS

(26 September 2023)

## TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- SAUDI ARABIA - IRAN PEACE DEAL
- YEMEN CIVIL WAR



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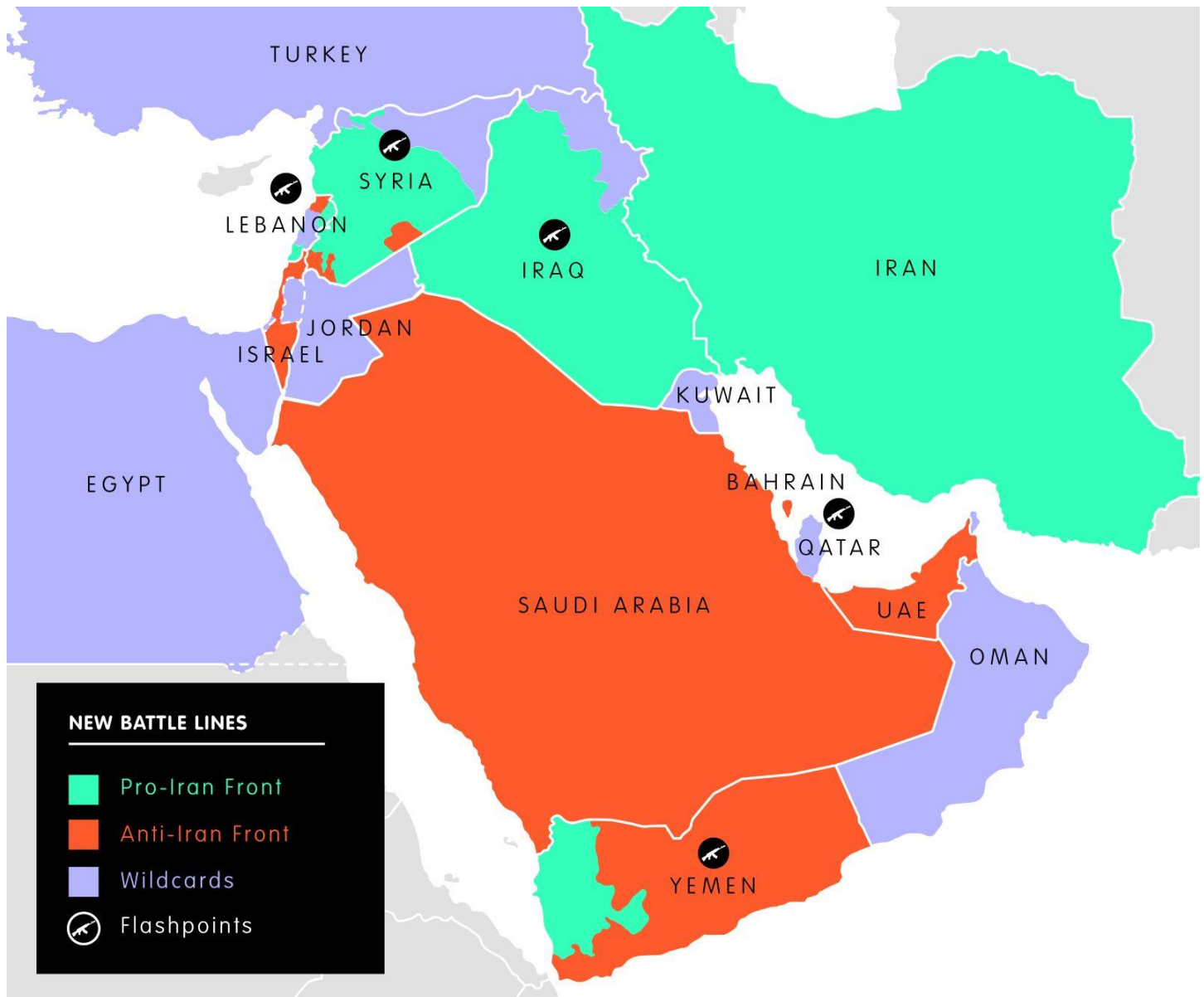


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## SAUDI ARABIA - IRAN PEACE DEAL



Saudi Arabia and Iran, two of West Asia's major powers that have **been at odds with each other for decades**, agreed to **restore diplomatic relations** recently in an agreement brokered by China.

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## SIGNIFICANCE

- The agreement addresses the **most serious regional confrontation**.
- It will pave way to **reduce regional tensions** and establish the foundation for further dialogue on improving relations and engaging on contentious issues.
- The deal could also have **far-reaching implications on regional geopolitics**, from peace in **Yemen** to stability in **Lebanon**.

## ABOUT THE DEAL

- Saudi Arabia and Iran **started directly talking to each other in 2021** and had held multiple rounds of negotiations thereafter, first in **Iraq and then Oman**.
- However, **no breakthrough was achieved** as issues that divide the two countries like the wars in Syria and Yemen, and Saudi concerns relating to Iran's mobilization of Shia communities in the region against the Arab states were left unaddressed.

## CHINA'S INTERVENTION

- **Saudi Arabia and Iran**, represented by their national security advisers, **signed agreement in Beijing, China**, to re-establish diplomatic ties, respect each other's sovereignty and maintain non-interference in the other's domestic affairs.

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- This agreement **ends seven years of diplomatic estrangement** between the two Gulf neighbours.
- The deal has been **necessitated by mutual interests of both nations**.
- For instance, **Saudi Arabia**, which is undergoing rapid changes, **wants peace in its neighbourhood**.
- Also, **Iran**, which is under the **U.S.-imposed sanctions**, wants more diplomatic and economic openings.

## WHY WERE THE RELATIONS ESTRANGED?

- Rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran dates back to **pre-revolution Iran (1979)** when they competed for **regional dominance**.
- After the 1979 revolution, which brought down the Iranian monarchy and turned the country into a Shia theocratic republic, **sectarian and ideological flavours** were added to the mix.
- Formal ties between the two collapsed in **2016** after the **Saudi embassy in Tehran** was overrun by protesters following Riyadh's execution of a revered Shia cleric.

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- In recent times, it had turned into a cold war with both sides confronting each other in **proxy wars** in **Syria and Yemen**, carried out **media campaigns** of extraordinary mutual hostility, often on sectarian basis.
- The two have on occasion come close to **direct conflict**, particularly in 2019 when suspected **Iranian agents attacked Saudi oil facilities**.

## CHINA'S NEW AVATAR

- China has been involved in multilateral peace talks such as the **2015 Iran nuclear deal** (from which the U.S. unilaterally withdrew in 2018).
- But this is the **first time Beijing is using its leverage** directly to bring conflicting parties to reconciliation.
- Also, unlike the U.S., which has hostile ties with Iran, **Beijing enjoys good ties with Tehran and Riyadh**, as a leading oil buyer and trading partner, respectively.
  - This has hence put China in a **unique position** to bring two of the region's most significant powers closer.

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- This new approach of China was signaled by its academics two years ago.
  - They indicated that China was looking at greater political involvement in the region on the basis of “**quasi-mediation diplomacy**”.
  - It was to **promote China’s broad commercial, diplomatic and political interests** rather than its hard security concerns.

## THE INTERESTS

### China as an Attractive Partner for West Asia

- China has substantial energy, trade, investment and technology-related ties with West Asia.
- It is the region’s largest buyer of crude oil, a major trade & investment partner.
- It is also rapidly expanding its role as a technology-provider in most countries.

### China’s Interests in West Asia

- Stability in West Asia, a **major energy source**, is essential for China, which is the world’s largest oil importer.
- West Asia is also crucial for the realisation of China’s **Belt and Road Initiative**.

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- The Gulf states are important for China's logistical connectivity, investment, consultancy and contracting partnerships.

## INDIA'S STAND

- China affirmation that its role in West Asian affairs is likely to get more active and substantial may **pose challenges for Indian diplomacy**.
- However, India should keep the **management of its ties with China as its diplomatic priority**.
- India will also need to engage with China in West Asia, as **both nations have a broad gamut of shared interests** in energy security, free and open sea lanes, logistical connectivity, and above all regional stability.
- Hence both can work together to further mutual and regional interests.

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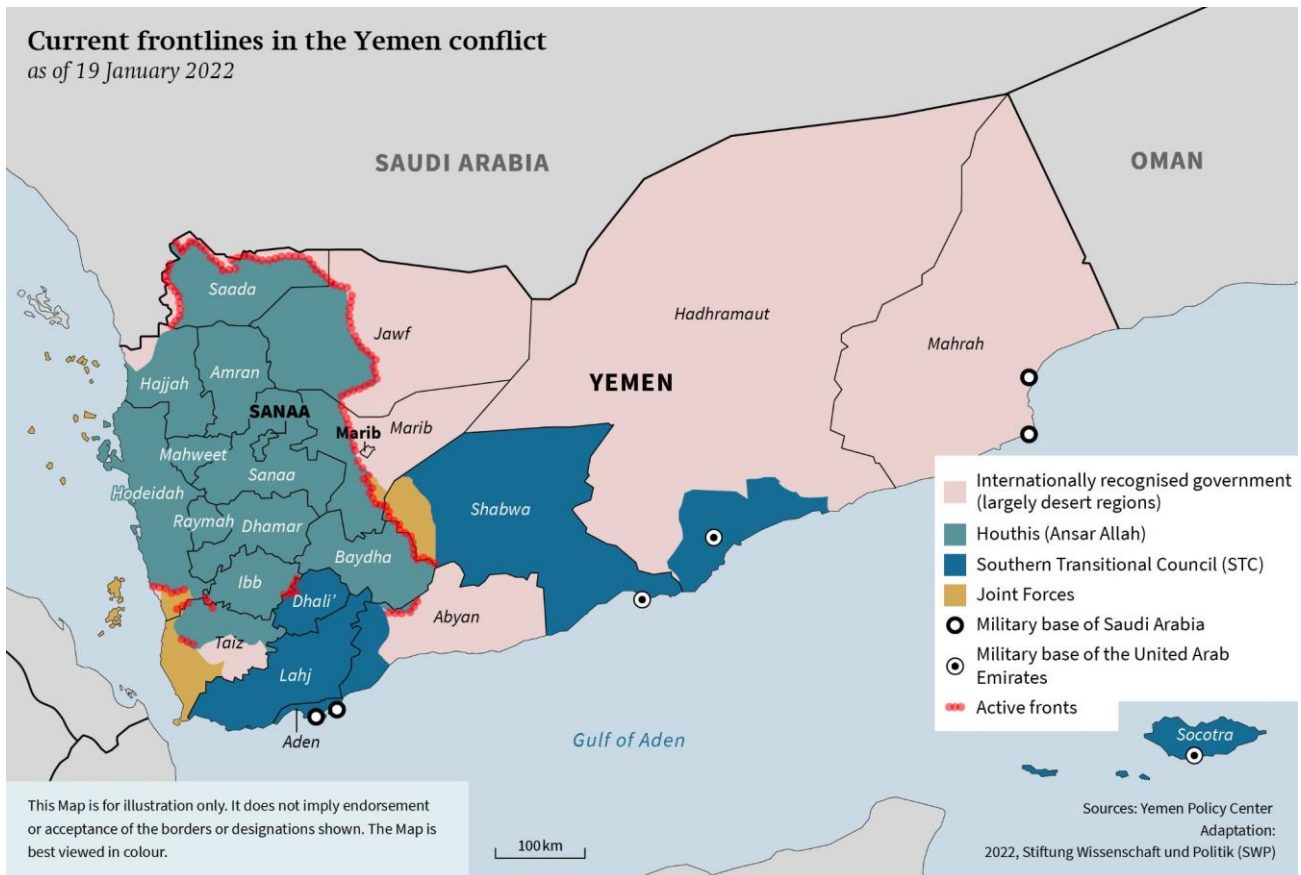


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# YEMEN CIVIL WAR



After **eight years** of crushing **civil war** in Yemen, a new round of talks has raised a glimmer of hope for a breakthrough in **one of the world's worst** humanitarian crises.

## BACKGROUND

- The wave of protests known as the **Arab Spring** did not take long to arrive in Yemen after the Tunisian Revolution (**2011–2012**).

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- **Yemen**, only unified since 1990, was a **poor country** with a government widely acknowledged to be **corrupt**, with a large number of **weapons in private hands**. It had **deep divisions that persisted** between the north and south.
- By 2011, the country was **already facing challenges** from al Qaeda-linked militants and separatists in the south and Zaydi Shia Muslim rebels in the north.

## THE BEGINNING OF CIVIL WAR

- In September 2014, the **Houthi insurgency** (An **Iran-backed Zaydi Shia force**) transformed into a full-blown civil war as Houthi fighters swept into the capital of Sana'a.
- The rebels continued to apply pressure until the **internationally recognised government was ousted in January 2015**.
- The **Houthis declared themselves in control of the Yemeni government**, dissolving the Parliament, and installing an interim **Revolutionary Committee**.
- The then **President (Hadi)** escaped to Aden and declared himself Yemen's legitimate president and proclaimed Aden as the country's temporary capital.

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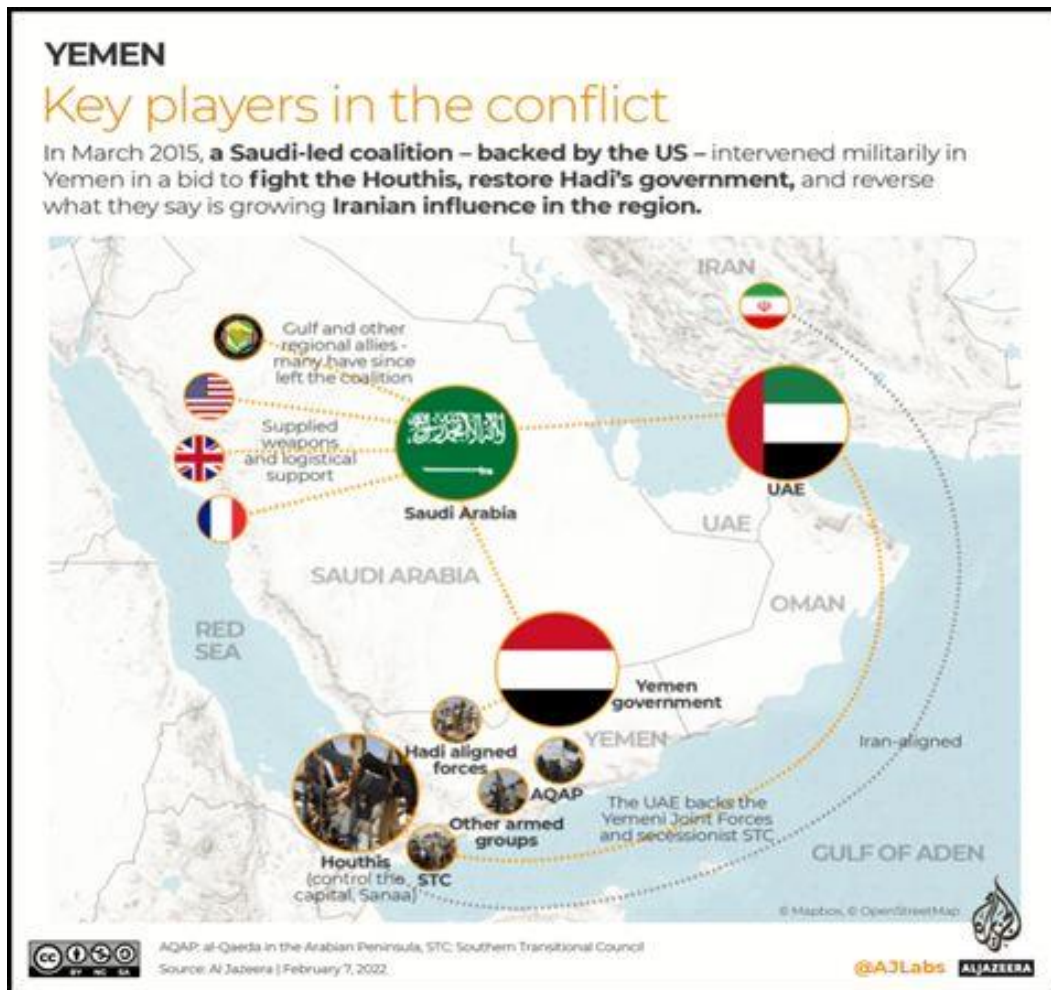


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- The **Saudi-led coalition** intervened in 2015 in an attempt to restore the (Hadi) government, launching a devastating **bombing campaign** that lasted years.



- **What has changed now?**
  - A surprise rapprochement/resumption of harmonious relations between two regional powers, **Saudi Arabia and Iran** - who fed a **proxy conflict** that worsened the war.

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- **Who is at the talks?**

- The negotiations in Yemen's capital, Sana, bring together **Saudi Arabia** and the **Houthis**.

- **What are they trying to achieve?**

- Negotiators are seeking the reinstatement of a **truce** and a **complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Yemen**.
- The negotiators also want to pave the way for broader talks **to resolve Yemen's multifaceted political conflict and repair its demolished economy**.

- **Why does the peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran matter?**

- Both Riyadh and Tehran are keen to prove that their diplomatic efforts were instrumental in bringing calmness to Yemen.
- Saudi officials are eager to end their military involvement in Yemen, which has been **expensive and damaging to the kingdom's international reputation**.

- **Will these talks end Yemen's conflict?**

- Without genuine support within the country, among the Yemenis themselves, a political resolution cannot take root.

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