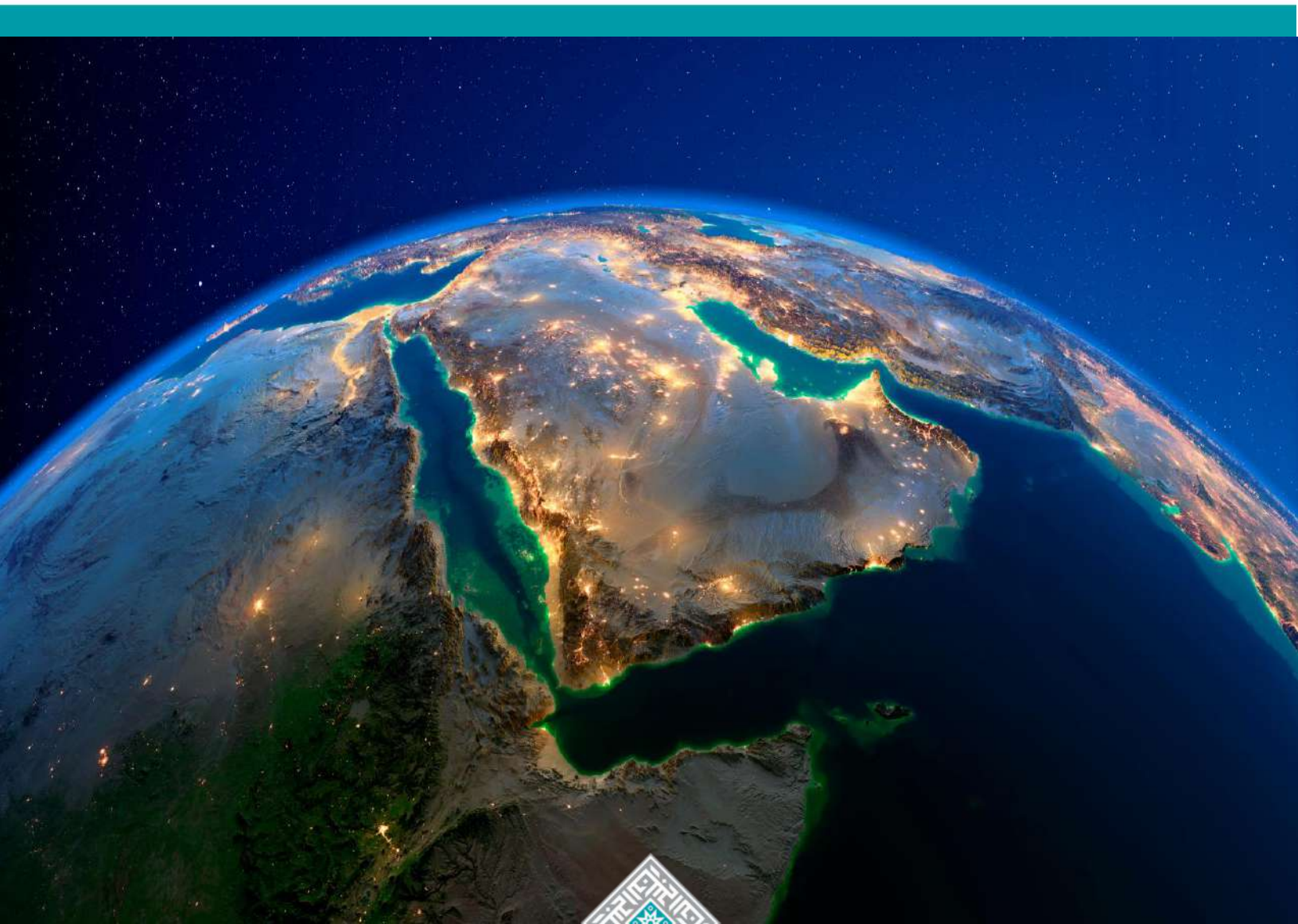




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Saudi Foreign Policy Moving Forward: Security, Sovereignty, and a Path to De-escalation

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Saudi Foreign Policy Moving Forward: Security, Sovereignty, and a Path to De-escalation

Saudi foreign policy is guided by two closely linked objectives: safeguarding the Kingdom's national interests and contributing to regional security and stability. The current US-Israel-Iran conflict has made both objectives more urgent. Threats emerging from Yemen and disruptions to navigation through the Strait of Hormuz directly affect Saudi Arabia, placing pressure on its security, trade, and energy infrastructure, while increasing uncertainty across the wider region.

For Riyadh, the question remains how to address these immediate threats while helping shape a sustainable regional outcome for the current crisis. Saudi Arabia has strong partnerships, including with the United States, and values the security cooperation they provide. At the same time, partners may approach the conflict with different priorities and different views of what constitutes a successful conclusion. The Kingdom must therefore assess proposed courses of action against their likely effects on Saudi security and broader long-term regional stability.

Seven months of conflict have demonstrated the limits of relying on military pressure alone to produce a durable settlement. The ambitious US objectives concerning Iran's leadership or its unconditional surrender raise difficult questions about the political and security conditions that would follow. Any transition without a clear and broadly accepted political framework could create uncertainty over governance, and the implementation of any security commitments. For neighboring states, this could carry risks of internal fragmentation, displacement, and further regional instability. Any proposed outcome must therefore consider how an immediate end to hostilities can lead to a stable political order within Iran and more predictable relations with its neighbors. For the Kingdom, any approach to the conflict should account for the risks of prolonged instability, further attacks, and disruption to the region's economic lifelines. The most useful outcome would be one that reduces those risks and establishes clear, sustainable commitments.

This consideration is central to Saudi Arabia's relationship with Iran. The two countries are neighbors and will continue to share a region after the present conflict ends. Riyadh has no interest in an Iran whose prolonged instability generates new threats for surrounding states. A stable relationship, based on mutual respect and the peaceful management of differences, would better serve the interests of both countries and the wider Gulf.



Building that relationship requires practical changes. Saudi Arabia needs assurances that its territory and infrastructure will be secure, that armed groups will not be used to threaten the Kingdom or neighboring states, and that international waterways will remain open. It also seeks an approach to Iran's nuclear activities that prevents further escalation. Progress on these issues would create the conditions for stronger diplomatic and economic ties.

The rapprochement announced in Beijing in 2023 offers a solid foundation on which to build, as Saudi Arabia and Iran affirmed the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Those commitments remain relevant because they provide a shared basis for addressing the sources of mistrust. Continued dialogue, whether direct or supported by regional partners, can help translate them into measures that reduce tensions and prevent miscalculation.

Saudi Arabia's approach is therefore to combine a clear defense of its security with an open diplomatic channel. It can work closely with international partners to strengthen deterrence and protect freedom of navigation while supporting efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. Cooperation with the United States remains important in this regard, particularly where it provides effective support for Saudi and regional security. Riyadh's own assessment of the region's needs should also help shape discussions about the conflict's end state.

The Gulf countries have an important role in that discussion. Their circumstances and policies are not identical, but all have an interest in secure borders, reliable maritime access, and relations based on respect for sovereignty. A coordinated Gulf position can convey both the seriousness of current security concerns and the opportunities that would follow a sustained reduction in tensions with Iran. This could also create conditions for a regional security framework involving the Gulf states and Iran, built around non-interference, maritime security, regular dialogue, and mechanisms to manage crises. Such a framework would require gradual, reciprocal steps, beginning with practical cooperation on shared concerns and developing as confidence grows. The prospect of improved relations should remain available, with progress grounded in tangible commitments and conduct that builds trust.

This is especially important for the waterways on which the region and the wider international economy depend. Developments in Yemen and the Red Sea affect Saudi security, just as disruption in the Strait of Hormuz affects the Gulf as a whole. Their implications extend beyond the region, with consequences for global energy supplies, international trade, supply chains, and shipping costs. Ensuring freedom of



navigation is therefore a shared international responsibility that requires coordinated efforts by regional states and international partners. Addressing these challenges requires maritime security cooperation alongside diplomatic efforts to reduce the conflicts that threaten shipping. Protecting navigation is both an immediate security priority and an essential condition for regional stability and global economic resilience.

Saudi foreign policy moving forward will seek to maintain this careful balance: safeguarding the Kingdom's people, territory, and economic infrastructure while preserving opportunities for dialogue with Iran. Through continued engagement with regional and international partners, Riyadh can help advance an outcome that addresses shared security concerns and reduces the risk of further escalation. A durable settlement will require credible commitments that build confidence among the countries most directly affected and provide a foundation for lasting regional stability.

Saudi Arabia's policy in the period ahead will focus on safeguarding its national security and economic interests while keeping diplomatic channels with Iran open. A more constructive relationship will depend on Tehran respecting its neighbors' sovereignty, refraining from actions that threaten them, and upholding freedom of navigation. Progress will require patience, clear expectations, and tangible steps that demonstrate these commitments in practice.

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