



Saudi Arabia-Iran Relations

For Prelims: Houthi rebels in Yemen, Israel and the Palestinian issue, Geographic Location of Middle Eastern Countries, West Asia.

For Mains: Role of India in Saudi-Iran Relations, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests.

Why in News?

Recently, Saudi Arabia has **mass executed 81 people**, including seven **Yemenis and one Syrian national** for crimes related to **terrorism and other capital crimes**. This has prompted the **Iranian government to suspend talks with the country**.

- Both countries have had tense diplomatic relations since a long time ago.
- Regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, which **severed diplomatic ties in 2016, launched direct talks hosted by Iraq in 2021 as UN (United Nations)-led efforts** to end a war in Yemen stall. They have held **four rounds of talks** in Iraq.



Which one of the following countries of South-West Asia does not open out to the Mediterranean Sea? (2015)

- (a) Syria
- (b) Jordan
- (c) Lebanon
- (d) Israel

Ans: (b)

What is Background of Saudi Arabia-Iran Conflict?

- **Religious Factionalism:** Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have been sour in part because of religious differences, which go back centuries. They each follow one of the two main branches of Islam.
 - Iran is largely Shia Muslim, while Saudi Arabia sees itself as the leading Sunni Muslim power.
- **Leader of Islamic World:** Historically, Saudi Arabia, a monarchy and home to the birthplace of Islam, saw itself as the leader of the Muslim world.
 - However this was challenged in **1979 by the Islamic revolution** in Iran which created a new type of state in the region - a kind of revolutionary theocracy - that had an explicit goal of exporting this model beyond its own borders.
- **Regional Cold War:** Saudi Arabia and Iran - two powerful neighbors - are locked in a fierce struggle for regional dominance.
 - Uprisings across the Arab world (after the [Arab Spring in 2011](#)) caused political instability throughout the region.
 - Iran and Saudi Arabia exploited these upheavals to expand their influence, notably in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, further heightening mutual suspicions.
 - Moreover, external powers like the US and Israel have a major role in exacerbating conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- **Proxy Wars:** Iran and Saudi Arabia are not directly fighting but they are engaged in a variety of proxy wars (conflicts where they support rival sides and militias) around the region.
 - For Example, [Houthi rebels in Yemen](#). These groups can acquire greater capabilities which can cause further instability in the region. Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of supporting them.
- **2016 Flash Point:** Many Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in the Iran following Saudi Arabia's execution of the Shiite Muslim cleric **Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr**.

What can be the Possible Impact of Normalization of Relations?

- **Resolution of Israel-Palestine Conflict:** Warming of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia may have a positive impact in dealing with [Israel and the Palestinian issue](#).
- **Stabilization of Oil Market:** Iran and Saudi Arabia share a common interest for [stable oil prices](#) given the importance of the market to their economies.
 - Normalization of relations would ensure steady oil revenues for all producing countries and more predictability to economic planners in both Saudi Arabia and Iran.

PYQ

Which of the following is not a member of 'Gulf Cooperation Council'? (2016)

- (a) Iran

(b) Saudi Arabia

(c) Oman

(d) Kuwait

Ans: (a)

Way Forward

- **Role of India:** Historically, India has good diplomatic relations with both the countries. Stabilization of relations between the two countries may impact India in a mixed way.
 - On the negative side, higher oil prices will affect the balance of trade in India.
 - On the positive side, this could provide easing of investments, connectivity projects across the region.
- **Reciprocity by Iran:** Iran still needs to make a mark in its diplomatic efforts by publicly supporting a cease-fire in Yemen.
- **Easing of US Sanctions:** Clarity on [US sanctions over Iran](#) is of prime importance, if Iran-Saudi Arabia relations are to get normalized.

PYQ

What is the importance of developing Chabahar Port by India? (2017)

(a) India's trade with African countries will enormously increase.

(b) India's relations with oil-producing Arab countries will be strengthened.

(c) India will not depend on Pakistan for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

(d) Pakistan will facilitate and protect the installation of a gas pipeline between Iraq and India.

Ans: (c)

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