

Arab-Iran Amity Is a Geopolitical Reality

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The forthcoming first visit by Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi to Saudi Arabia on November 13 marks a milestone in the rapprochement between the two countries mediated by China in March. The relationship is fast acquiring a qualitatively new level of solidarity in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

This marks a shift in the tectonic plates in regional politics, which has long been dominated by the United States but no longer so.

The latest China-UAE initiative on Monday to promote a ceasefire in Gaza was rounded off with an extraordinary spectacle of diplomacy at the UN headquarters in New York as the two countries' envoys read out together a joint statement to the media. The US was nowhere to be seen.

The events since October 7 make it abundantly clear that the US attempts to integrate Israel into its Muslim neighbourhood in its terms is a pipe dream — ie., unless and until Israel is willing to turn its sword into plowshares. The ferocity of the Israeli revenge attacks on the people of Gaza — “animals” — smacks of racism and genocide.

Iran knew all along the bestiality of the Zionist regime. Saudi Arabia too must be in a chastened mood following the wake-up call that it must first and foremost learn to live in its region.

Raisi is heading for Saudi Arabia against the backdrop of a historic shift in the power dynamic. King Salman invited Raisi to speak on Israel's crimes against the Palestinians in Gaza at a special summit of Arab states, which he is hosting in Riyadh. This signifies a profound Saudi realisation that even its willingness to be involved in the Abraham Accords under American persuasion has alienated the Arab public.

There is a fallacy in the western discourse about a Russia-China-Iran axis in West Asia. This

is a nonsensical misinterpretation. A consistent three-fold foreign policy principle that Iran pursued right from the Islamic Revolution in 1979 is that, one, its strategic autonomy is sacred; two, the countries of the region must take their destiny into their own hands and solve regional issues themselves without involving extra-regional powers, and, three, foster Muslim unity howsoever long and winding that road might seem.

This principle had severe limitations due to force of circumstances — principally, in the conditions engendered by the colonial policy of divide and rule pursued by the US. Circumstances were even deliberately engineered, such as the Iraq-Iran war, where the US encouraged the regional states to collaborate with Saddam Hussein to launch an aggression against Iran to stymie the Islamic revolution in its infancy.

Another painful episode was the Syrian conflict. There, again, the US actively canvassed among regional states for a regime change in Damascus with the ultimate objective of targeting Iran by using the terrorist groups that Washington incubated in Occupied Iraq.

In Syria, the US brilliantly succeeded in pitting the regional states against each other and the result is plain to see in the ruins of what used to be the throbbing heart of Islamic civilisation. At the peak of the conflict, several western intelligence agencies were freely operating in Syria assisting the terrorist groups to rampage the country whose cardinal sin was that, like Iran, it too consistently put primacy on its strategic autonomy and independent foreign policies through the cold war and post-cold war eras alike.

Suffice to say, the US and Israel met with great success in fragmenting Muslim Middle East by exaggerating the threat perceptions and convincing several Gulf Arab states that they faced direct threats or even attacks by Iranian proxies, as well as alleged Iranian support for dissident movements.

Of course, the US capitalised on it by selling huge volumes of weapons and more importantly, to finesse the petrodollar as a key pillar of the western banking system. As for Israel, it directly benefitted from demonising Iran in order to draw attention away from the Palestine issue, which has all along been the core issue in the Middle East crisis.

Suffice to say, the rollout of the Iran-Saudi-China agreement has reduced the hostility that existed between Riyadh and Tehran for the better part of the recent decades. Both countries sought to build on the momentum generated by the success of the secret Beijing talks with regard to their commitment to non-interference. It must be noted, however, that the relations between Gulf Arab countries and Iran had already improved significantly over the last two years.

What western analysts miss is that the wealthy Gulf states are fed up with their subaltern life as sidekicks of the US. They want to prioritise their national life in directions they choose and with partners who respect them, eschewing any zero-sum mindset, unlike in the Cold War era, for reasons of ideology or power dynamic.

That is why, the Biden Administration cannot accept that the Saudis today work with Russia on the OPEC+ platform to fulfil their commitment to extra voluntary oil supply cuts, while also negotiating with the US on nuclear technology, and at the same time moving on the diplomatic track with Beijing to douse the fire set ablaze in the Levant a month ago from spreading to the rest of the West Asian region.

Evidently, the Saudis are no longer rolling with pleasure at the prospect of a US-Iran confrontation. On the other hand, Saudis and Iranians have a shared concern that their new thinking with primacy on development will dissipate unless there is regional stability and security.

Thus, it is sheer naïveté on the part of Washington to bracket Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran as one grouping — as Blinken did during his latest visit to Tel Aviv on Monday — and juxtapose it with the rest of the region. The canard that Hezbollah and Hamas are “terrorist” movements is about to be exposed. Truth be told, how are they any different from Sinn Féin, which was historically associated with the IRA?

Such naïveté underlines the absurd US-Israeli-Indian venture to create a West Asian QUAD 2 (“I2U2”), which today looks laughable — or the quixotic plot hatched in New Delhi recently during the G20 summit to get the Saudis on board the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor project, with the fond hope that it “integrates” Israel and creates business for Haifa Port, isolates Iran and Turkey, rubbishes Russia-led International North-South Corridor and shows the middle finger to Beijing’s Belt and Road. Whereas, life is real.

Taking all things into account, it is the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s regional tour to Israel and his summit with a select group of Arab states in Amman over the last weekend that has turned into a defining moment in the Gaza crisis.

The Arab foreign ministers point blank refused to buy into any of the invidious proposals put forward by Blinken with malicious intentions to preserve Jewish interests — “humanitarian pause” instead of ceasefire; refugee camps for the people from Gaza escaping from Israel’s horrific, brutal attacks that would be funded with Arab money but would eventually lead to Jewish settlements in Gaza; contours of a post-war arrangement for Gaza that will leave the debris to be handled by the Palestinian Authority and reconstruction to be financed by the Gulf states while Israel continues to dominate it in the all-important security sphere; preventing Iran from going to the rescue of Hezbollah and Hamas as they are put into Israeli meat grinders of American make.

It was rank hypocrisy. The Arab foreign ministers spoke up in one voice to articulate their counter proposal to Blinken’s — immediate ceasefire. President Biden seems to see the writing on the wall, finally — although, intrinsically, he continues to be the world’s number one Zionist, as someone once called him, and his motivations are largely borne out of his own political survival as the 2024 election draws closer.

Be that as it may, the high probability is that it is now a matter of time before the global community insists on stopping the Israeli apartheid state on its tracks. For, when Muslim countries unite, they call the shots in the emerging multipolar world order. Their demand that a settlement of the Palestine problem brooks no further delay has gained resonance, including in the Western Hemisphere.

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