

TIMELINE: REGIONAL MILESTONES IN SAUDI-IRANIAN RIVALRY

1979

Islamic Revolution

The Islamic Revolution in Iran establishes a theocracy challenging Saudi Arabia's leadership of the Muslim world. Since then, rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh has spilled over into the region in countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria.



2011-present

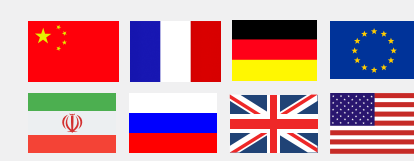
Syrian uprising and war

Saudi Arabia arms opposition groups, while Iran backs Bashar al-Assad, who is expelled from the Arab League and diplomatically isolated.

2014-present

Yemen war

Iran backs Houthi rebel forces and Saudi Arabia backs government forces.



2015

Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA)

Iran signs a deal with Western powers to curtail its nuclear program in exchange for an easing of economic sanctions.



2016

Execution of Nimr al-Nimr

Saudi Arabia executes Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr, leading to the storming of the Saudi embassy in Iran and the rupture of Tehran-Riyadh relations.



2018

US exits JCPOA

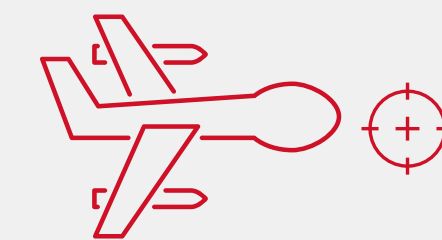
Following US President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran, the US exits the JCPOA and reimposes sanctions.



2019

Oil facilities attack

Saudi oil facilities are attacked by drones, allegedly of Iranian origin, shutting down 50 percent of the country's oil production. Several commercial ships and oil tanker vessels are attacked in the Gulf. Trump's lack of response marks an inflection point for Saudi's security strategy, and Riyadh opens up to other major powers like China.



2020

Soleimani assassination

The US kills Iranian Quds Force Commander General Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in Iraq.

2021

Iran's "Look East" policy

Iran doubles down on its policy to "Look East" (initially formulated in 2005) and focus on its own neighborhood, rather than Western powers.



March 2023

Saudi-Iran deal

The agreement, brokered by China, ends seven years of diplomatic estrangement, auguring an ease of tensions.



April 2023

Saudi-Syrian rapprochement

Media reports that Syria and Saudi Arabia will reopen their respective embassies, and that Assad could be reinvited to the Arab League.

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