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## The Influence of the Saudi Factor on the Implementation of the <25-Year Plan between China and Iran>: An Analysis Based on China's Balanced Diplomacy in the Middle East

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### Abstract

*This research, within the broad context of the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran", conducts an in-depth exploration of Saudi Arabia's attitude and its influencing factors. It also offers a detailed review of the historical thread of China's previous Middle East policies, particularly analyzing China's diplomatic strategic choices between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The article initially systematically examines the origin and strategic significance of the "Belt and Road Initiative", maintaining that it not only conforms to China's long-term policy orientation and cooperation framework in the Middle East but also provides a robust support for the mutually beneficial and win-win development path between China and Iran. Simultaneously, it serves as an important platform for mutual support and joint efforts in the face of strategic pressure from the United States and constitutes a key strategic pivot for China in the Middle East, a region of significant geopolitical significance. Subsequently, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the long-standing hostility and intense geopolitical competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Facing the potential challenge of Saudi Arabia's non-cooperation, China can adopt strategies such as multilateral dialogue mechanisms, deepening regional cooperation frameworks, and flexibly applying diplomatic mediation to promote a delicate balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia, resolve internal regional conflicts, safeguard its core interests, and facilitate overall regional stability and development.*

**Keywords:** *The 25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran, Diplomatic Policy, The Relations between China and Iran, The Reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, The Factor of Saudi Arabia.*

### Introduction

At the landmark occasion of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations, the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran jointly concluded the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" in 2021. This act signified Iran's position as an important strategic partner of China within the framework of the "Belt and Road Initiative". Meanwhile, China also remained firmly at the core of Iran's "Looking East" diplomatic strategy, and both sides were the crucial pivots in each other's strategic blueprints (Fan,2021). This cooperation plan is rich in content and extensive in scope, spanning three major dimensions: the construction of political mutual trust, the advancement of strategic coordination, and the deepening of economic cooperation. Specifically, it encompasses multiple key fields such as the development of oil resources, the utilization of mineral resources, the upgrading of the industrial system, and the optimization of the transportation network (Zheng,2023). The signing of this agreement not only demonstrates the solid cooperative

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foundation between China and Iran in the traditional energy domain, but also indicates the in-depth cooperation and joint exploration of the two sides in the frontier fields such as infrastructure construction and industrial technological innovation. Of particular note is that the plan also incorporates topics such as public health crisis response and counter-terrorism cooperation, highlighting the resolute determination and broad perspective of China and Iran to seek more extensive and deeper strategic synergy in the face of global challenges (Observe,2021). This act undoubtedly infuses new vigor into the relations between the two countries and sets an exemplary model for the international community in promoting regional stability and global prosperity through multilateral cooperation.

For China, this agreement signals that the bilateral relations between China and Iran have entered a brand-new historical phase, and the relationship between the two sides has officially been elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership. This measure undoubtedly lays a more solid foundation for the future cooperation between the two countries. Furthermore, Iran, as a regionally significant power with considerable influence globally, the conclusion of this agreement provides an indispensable supporting framework for China's strategic arrangement in the Middle East. This not only strengthens China's geopolitical presence in the region but also paves the way for China and Iran to jointly exert a more constructive and influential role in regional affairs (Xinhua News Agency,2016). Additionally, this agreement embodies China's steadfast commitment to providing long-term and strategic support to Iran's economy. Such a commitment not only facilitates Iran's further improvement of its domestic industrial system and enhancement of its self-development capacity, but also provides a vigorous impetus for Iran to optimize its import and export trade environment and promote sustainable economic development.

For Iran, it not only offers an effective way to deal with the economic predicament caused by US sanctions, but also opens up new possibilities for it to diversify its economic structure and upgrade its industries through deepening cooperation with China (Liu,2020). The Iranian government has accorded an extremely high appraisal to the signing of this agreement. Foreign Minister Zarif even extolled it as a "landmark 25-year strategic roadmap", a statement that profoundly discloses the profound influence of the agreement on Iran's future development. Further, the Iranian Ambassador to Brazil also expressed full affirmation of the agreement. He opined that the 25-year plan between China and Iran will not only vigorously promote the deepening and development of the bilateral partnership, but also "lay a solid foundation for constructing a new 'world order'" (Observe Network,2021). This viewpoint not only embodies Iran's deep comprehension of the strategic value of the agreement, but also foretells that the cooperation between China and Iran will exert a more extensive and profound influence on a global scale, contributing novel forces to the adjustment and reconfiguration of international relations.

However, the Middle East has not been so serene. For a considerable period of time, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been engaged in a profound and intense contest in multiple dimensions, such as regional power domains, proxy strategies, and religious sectarian disputes. International observers commonly hold this opinion: Saudi Arabia tends to utilize the strategic presence of the United States in the Middle East as a lever to achieve the aim of checking the rise of Iran (Niu & Li, 2023). However, as the US political landscape witnessed a diplomatic policy transformation from the Trump era to the Biden era, combined with the dual geopolitical shocks of the Ukraine crisis and the Israel-Palestine conflict, the position of the United States regarding its security commitment to its "Middle East allies" has gradually become equivocal. In this

context, Iran's regional influence has markedly intensified. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has initiated a profound reflection on and adjustment of its security strategy (Niu & Li, 2023). A noteworthy trend is that Saudi Arabia is endeavoring to explore the path for easing relations with Iran. This trend not only mirrors the dynamic changes in the regional power balance but also embodies how state actors make strategic adjustments in the complex and mutable chess game of international relations to deal with the uncertain factors of the external environment.

As a crucial pillar in the global economic system, China adheres to the core principle of "neutrality and equilibrium" in its diplomatic practices, devoting itself to forging harmonious economic and political bonds with various countries. In 2023, through diplomatic mediation, China built a communication bridge between Iran and Saudi Arabia, successfully facilitating the historic breakthrough of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, signifying a substantive and positive achievement after years of tortuous negotiations (YU,2023). This action not only showcases China's strategic deliberation in guaranteeing the stability of its own energy supply chain and adeptly evading the risks of regional conflicts but also manifests its sagacity in diplomatic arrangement, which is flexible and pursues equilibrium. Nevertheless, even though the diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have been resumed, the profound competitive posture between the two countries has not dissipated. On the geopolitical chessboard, the fundamental divergences and historical grudges between the two sides still persist, which implies that the tense atmosphere in the region has not been fundamentally mitigated. Particularly in relation to the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran", Saudi Arabia adopts a prudent and complex attitude, being concerned that this plan might strengthen Iran's influence in the Middle East and subsequently pose a potential threat to Saudi Arabia's national security and strategic interests (Ding,2023).

Hence, this study conducts an in-depth exploration of Saudi Arabia's response attitude towards the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran", and aims to analyze the potential effect of this response on the implementation process of this cooperation plan. Specifically, this research is dedicated to explaining, through a rigorous analytical framework, how Saudi Arabia's stance delicately affects the deepening and development of the China-Iran cooperative relationship. Further, it examines how this reaction brings about a series of challenges and opportunities for China in pursuing a diplomatic balance strategy in the complex geopolitical pattern of the Middle East.

### **The Background and Significance of the "25-Year Plan between China and Iran"**

The "25-Year Plan between China and Iran" is a profoundly forward-looking and comprehensive agreement framework, aiming at deepening the political mutual trust, strategic synergy, and economic development bonds between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran in multiple dimensions. This plan not only encompasses multiple key domains such as the economy, energy, finance, security, and culture, but also heralds a new epoch of cooperation between the two countries. On the economic front, the agreement presupposes that China will inject up to 400 billion US dollars of investment into Iran over the next quarter of a century, with a focus on core sectors such as energy development, infrastructure construction, manufacturing upgrading, and high-tech exchanges. The aim is to promote the diversification and modernization of Iran's economy through the dual impetus of capital and technology (Observer Network, 2021). Meanwhile, the two sides will establish a special financial mechanism to facilitate currency swap and cross-border trade settlement, further reducing transaction costs and enhancing the flexibility of economic interaction. Energy cooperation, as the cornerstone of the

bilateral relationship, has been clearly stipulated for long-term and stable oil supply arrangements, including crude oil supply agreements under preferential conditions and the establishment of oil reserves and re-export facilities within China. Simultaneously, a pipeline network for natural gas and oil extending from southern Iran to Syria and Lebanon has been planned, aiming to construct a new pattern of regional energy security (International Institute for Iranian Studies, 2021). In the domain of military and security cooperation, the plan accentuates the profound collaboration between the two sides in aspects such as military training, national defense research and development, and strategic dialogue. It particularly highlights the resolve to jointly confront regional security challenges, especially by strengthening judicial coordination, sharing of security intelligence, and the interlinking of defense forces, to effectively combat terrorism, extremism, and any form of separatist activities, and to safeguard regional peace and stability (International Institute for Iranian Studies, 2021). In the aspect of cultural and people-to-people exchanges, this document advocates an in-depth exploration of the commonalities in the long and rich historical cultures of the two countries and formulates a long-term blueprint for people-to-people cooperation, encompassing multiple dimensions such as education, art, and exchanges in science and technology. The aim is to promote the sustainable development of bilateral relations through the mutual understanding and connection among the people. It is worth noting that although the specific implementation details of this agreement are yet to be gradually disclosed, its core value lies in providing a macro guidance framework for the extensive and in-depth cooperation between the two countries in the future, rather than an immediate executable contract or specific quantifiable targets (Beijing Daily, 2021). This agreement is perceived as a major milestone in the history of Sino-Iranian relations. It is not merely a collective response to external pressures (such as unilateral sanctions from the United States), but also a crucial step in elevating Iran's international standing, promoting multilateralism, and facilitating prosperity for both parties and the region. Through this all-encompassing cooperation framework, China and Iran are jointly commencing a new journey of major country relations founded on mutual respect and win-win development.

The "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" embodies profound strategic connotations. For both Iran and China, it has opened up vast cooperative prospects and is anticipated to exert far-reaching influences. The conclusion of this agreement is regarded as a mutually beneficial strategic conception, not only adding a significant negotiating leverage for Iran in its diplomatic consultations with the United States but also markedly enhancing its position and influence in the global political landscape (Liu,2020). For China, being Iran's largest trading partner and crude oil importer, the establishment of this cooperation framework undoubtedly offers a solid foundation for guaranteeing the stability of its energy supply. Simultaneously, it also alleviates, to a certain extent, the economic pressure imposed on Iran by the unilateral sanctions from the United States (International Institute for Iranian Studies,2021). In addition, with its unique geopolitical advantages in the Middle East, Iran has further strengthened its influence base in the region through deep cooperation with China. Specifically, as a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Iran has gradually extended its geostrategic reach into the Middle East and achieved effective spread of its influence (China International Development Cooperation Agency, 2021). Even more profoundly, the contents of the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" extend beyond the mere economic and energy domains and reach into the realm of military and security cooperation. This multi-dimensional cooperation structure offers Iran a more solid backing and support when confronted with the diplomatic and military pressures exerted by the United States, allowing it to handle challenges on the international stage more composedly and safeguard its

own security and interests.

Additionally, the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran" is highly congruent with the macro-strategic framework of China's "Belt and Road Initiative", with the aim of expanding and enhancing China's presence and influence dimensions in the Middle East region. Iran, as an indispensable key nodal country along the "Belt and Road Initiative", its peaceful and stable development process possesses profound philosophical significance and practical value for the deepening implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the construction of the grand blueprint of a community with a shared future for mankind. This cooperation agreement extensively encompasses core cooperation domains such as energy, infrastructure construction, manufacturing, and technology transfer, which precisely are the priority development directions within the framework of the "Belt and Road Initiative", embodying the depth and breadth of strategic synergy. For example, the co-construction projects of infrastructure within the China-Iran cooperation framework, such as the expansion of highway networks and railway systems, are in perfect accordance with the concept of transportation infrastructure interconnection emphasized by the "Belt and Road Initiative", providing a solid physical foundation for promoting regional integration (Phoenix television, 2021). Concurrently, the profound cooperation between the two sides in the energy domain, particularly in the upstream and downstream of the oil and gas industrial chain, constitutes a significant component of the energy cooperation landscape under the Belt and Road Initiative. It not only facilitates the optimal allocation of resources but also intensifies the interdependence between energy security and economic development. Particularly worth noting is that the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" explicitly advocates for supporting the principle of multilateralism and upholding international fairness and justice, which is highly consonant with the open, inclusive, and win-win philosophy upheld by the Belt and Road Initiative, showcasing the philosophical contemplation of seeking consensus and common development within the global governance system (Lu,2016). Through this long-term strategic collaboration, China can not only effectively expand its geopolitical and economic influence in the Middle East region, but more crucially, it promotes the process of economic integration with countries along the "Belt and Road," enhances regional interconnectivity and mutual dependence, and lays a solid foundation for building a closer economic community with a shared future. In summary, the "China-Iran 25-Year Plan" not only serves as a strong support for the strategic layout of the "Belt and Road" initiative, but also represents a vivid practice of exploring the goal of common development and mutual benefit through deepening bilateral multidimensional cooperation. It highlights the philosophical wisdom and practical path of constructing a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation at its core in the context of the new era.

### **The Diplomatic Deployment of China in the Middle East Region**

In recent years, China's diplomatic strategy in the Middle East has manifested increasingly sophisticated and multi-dimensional traits. The quintessence of its diplomatic philosophy lies in promoting the tradition of friendship and consensus, reinforcing mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation mechanisms, and striving to achieve common prosperity and development in the region. Simultaneously, it adheres to the international principles of fairness and justice, contributing to the promotion of enduring peace and stability in the Middle East. China is profoundly cognizant that maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, preventing the escalation of\*\*\* peaceful settlement of disputes through diplomatic negotiations and political dialogues are inevitable choices that conform to the common interests of the international

community. As a core node and strategic location of the "Belt and Road Initiative", the Middle East not only holds a pivotal position in the international cargo transportation network but also serves as a key hub for global economic and trade exchanges (Wang,2022). In view of this, China has expressed a strong willingness to deepen the level of economic co-operation with Middle Eastern countries and to build closer economic ties. Particularly in the field of energy cooperation, China and the Middle East form a natural complementary relationship: the Middle East's abundant oil resources are an indispensable link in China's energy supply chain, and have far-reaching significance in guaranteeing China's energy security, driving its economic development, and maintaining the stable operation of industrial production. At the same time, the co-operation between the two companies is not limited to the traditional energy sector, but is actively expanding into new frontiers of renewable and clean energy such as solar, wind, hydropower, nuclear and hydrogen. For example, the Hassal photovoltaic project implemented by China's LONGi in Qatar is so large that it will be the third largest single photovoltaic plant in the world, while the cooperation between Saudi National Petroleum Company and China in blue hydrogen and synthetic fuel technology heralds the deepening of the two sides' cooperation in the path of energy transformation (Niu.2022). Furthermore, the cooperative sphere between China and Middle Eastern countries has extensively expanded to multiple domains such as financial investment, technological innovation, and cultural communication, striving to drive the bilateral relationship to evolve in a more balanced and comprehensive direction. This array of measures not only embodies China's profound commitment to peace and development in the Middle East region but also showcases the practical exploration of promoting common prosperity through multilateral cooperation in the backdrop of globalization.

On the extensive platform of political cooperation, China, with its distinctive role and sagacity, has actively facilitated the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran and witnessed the gradual relaxation of relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, as well as between Turkey and Egypt. This series of diplomatic endeavors not only provides the potential to alleviate the profound contradictions in the two regions but also conforms to the contemporary trend where regional countries pursue stability and development internally and peaceful coexistence externally, laying a solid foundation for promoting all-round peace and development in the Middle East (Liu,2023). Particularly notable is that in 2024, through China's persistent mediation, 14 major factions within Palestine came together and jointly signed the "Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Enhancing National Unity of the Palestinian People" (Li,2024). This historic reconciliation accord has bestowed precious hope of peace upon the Palestinian people, who have endured the afflictions of war and division for a long time, signifying a novel historical stage in the Palestinian liberation cause. Through these practices, the core concepts of China's diplomacy in the Middle East have been manifested: namely, facilitating political settlements through proactive mediation, resolving conflicts via peaceful means, and propelling the attainment of lasting peace and prosperity in the Middle East region. China steadfastly holds that dialogue and negotiation are the preferred approaches for addressing regional hot-button issues and actively advocates for promoting stability and development in the Middle East through peaceful means. Simultaneously, when handling complex regional problems, China resolutely supports the United Nations as the recognized main channel of mediation by the international community and enables it to play its irreplaceable role (Huang & Jia,2019). China contends that regional peace and stability should be maintained by facilitating dialogue and negotiation, implementing constructive control strategies, and accommodating the reasonable concerns and legitimate rights and interests of all parties. The active involvement of the United Nations is not merely a manifestation of upholding international order and the rule of

law but also an indispensable and crucial guarantee for ensuring the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of the states concerned.

Additionally, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Development Initiative advocated by China have garnered extensive recognition and empathy among Middle Eastern countries. The public opinion in the Middle East has commonly observed that in light of the significant influence of the United States in the region, countries are actively exploring paths to enhance their diplomatic autonomy, with the aim of attaining a new diplomatic equilibrium and endeavoring to reconstitute a new framework for the regional order (Xin,2023). Over an extended period, the Middle East has been among the regions most frequently intervened in by external forces. Numerous countries within this region have been deeply embroiled in persistent conflicts and turmoil, being unable to advance national development and prosperity within a stable milieu. In this context, the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative timely put forward by China precisely align with the pressing demands of Middle Eastern countries, thereby earning positive feedback and enthusiastic responses from the various countries in the Middle East (Xin,2023). The reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, this accomplishment not only facilitates the relaxation and conciliation of relations among countries in the Gulf region and even throughout the Middle East, but is also gradually transforming the long-standing political ecology dominated by conflict and confrontation in the region.

The "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" can be deemed as a profoundly significant strategic act for China to deepen the layout of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in the Middle East region. This initiative profoundly reflects China's diplomatic strategic contemplation, which aims to broaden its regional influence territory by strengthening cooperative relations with Middle Eastern countries. This plan not only establishes a more solid foothold for China in the Middle East's geopolitical pattern but also vigorously promotes the deepening and practice of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in this region. The collaboration between China and Iran this time is not only regarded as a direct response and challenge to the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States, effectively undermining the diplomatic efforts of the United States to isolate Iran. Simultaneously, it also constitutes a philosophical reflection and practical challenge to the current international order dominated by Western values. Just as the political elites of Iran have expounded, the "25-Year Agreement between China and Iran" not only injects new vitality into the deepening of the bilateral partnership but also lays the cornerstone for constructing a new "world order" based on Eastern wisdom and values (Observer Network, 2021). This nascent order emphasizes the respect and integration of Eastern cultures, presenting a stark contrast to the current beleaguered and increasingly extremist Western values. Through in-depth cooperation with Iran, China not only showcases its strategic independence and autonomy in the Middle East but also actively endeavors to shatter the long-standing monopolistic control of Western countries over the affairs of this region.

Furthermore, the focused investment in infrastructure and energy domains within this cooperation plan not only precisely aligns with the urgent demands of Iran's economic development but also creates expansive prospects for Chinese enterprises to explore overseas markets, presenting a paradigmatic model of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. For Chinese enterprises, the China-Iran cooperation plan has constructed a stable overseas platform in the realm of infrastructure construction under the "Belt and Road Initiative", laying a solid bedrock for their internationalization process. The profound expertise and remarkable competitiveness that China has amassed in infrastructure construction fields such as railways, highways, and power, through in-depth collaboration with Iran, can further unleash its potential

on the international stage. This cooperation not only enables Chinese enterprises to seize novel business opportunities but also accumulates invaluable operational experience in the intricate international milieu, which holds profound significance for enhancing their adaptability and competitiveness in the global market. This process profoundly embodies China's diplomatic philosophy of taking pragmatic cooperation as a strategic pivot and actively shaping the image of a "responsible major power" in the Middle East region. China is undertaking concrete actions to facilitate the establishment of a new framework of international relations founded on mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation, with the aim of continuously consolidating and elevating its strategic position and influence within the global governance system through such in-depth cooperation. Such measures further manifest China's proactive participation and contribution in the process of global economic integration and offer a vivid practice for promoting the concept of building a community with a shared future for humanity, being willing to actively exhibit its Eastern wisdom and intrinsic value.

### **The Current Status of Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran and Its Implications for China's Diplomacy**

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran presents a profound and complex historical context, with geopolitical games spanning numerous significant historical periods in the Middle East, constituting an indispensable element of the region's political dynamics. The sources of the tense situation between the two countries are deeply rooted in multiple dimensions such as religion, ethnic identity, ideological differences, and conflicts of geopolitical interests. From the perspective of religious doctrine, Saudi Arabia, as the major bastion of Sunni Islam, has fundamental differences in faith with Iran, which is dominated by Shia. This disparity not only serves as an important foundation for the protracted confrontation between the two countries but also is the key to understanding their diplomatic interactions. The outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 signified a sharp deterioration in the relations between the two countries, and the competition for leadership and the interpretation rights of Islamic doctrine within Islam has grown increasingly fierce (Mamchii, 2023). Saudi Arabia, as a country that holds the two sacred cities of Mecca and Medina, has long regarded itself as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world, and its religious status and influence cannot be underestimated (Tu,2013). In contrast, the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran not only toppled the pre-existing regime structure but also established an Islamic Republic system with the Shia sect at its core. The emergence of this political model undoubtedly presented a direct challenge to the conservative religious order and leadership advocated by Saudi Arabia. The anti-imperialist and anti-monarchical ideas inherent in the Iranian Revolution were aimed at subverting the monarchy perceived as "unjust and corrupt", fundamentally undermining the legitimacy basis of the rule of the Saudi royal family (Mabon,2018). In the case of Saudi Arabia, it adheres steadfastly to its traditional monarchy system and perceives any form of revolutionary ideology as a threat. Consequently, it demonstrates an extremely vigilant and hostile attitude towards Iran's attempts to export its revolutionary model and enhance its regional influence.

In the aspect of geopolitics, Saudi Arabia and Iran, as two major forces in the Middle East, have been continuously engaged in a subtle game regarding regional dominance. Saudi Arabia, relying on its abundant oil resources and strong ally relationships with the United States and other Western countries, has constructed an international cooperation network based on energy diplomacy (jalal and et al,2023). Relatively speaking, Iran not only possesses considerable oil reserves but also has developed a significant military potential. Particularly, its advancements in nuclear technology and ballistic missile domains have added crucial weight to its geostrategic

stance (Jalal and et al,2023). In the geopolitical hotspots such as Syria and Yemen, the two countries have respectively supported opposing camps. This opposition in strategic choices not only deepens the gap between them but also further exacerbates the conflicts and contradictions between the two sides (Ahmed & Moorthy,2019). Nevertheless, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not an unvarying confrontation but rather a historical narrative replete with twists and turns. In 1988, on account of the unrest in the Shiite-inhabited areas and the reverberations of the Iran-Iraq War, the diplomatic ties between the two nations plummeted to the nadir. Not until the dismemberment of the Soviet Union in 1991 did an opportunity for detente present itself, enabling the diplomatic bridge to be reestablished (Baidu,2023). Nevertheless, the wounds of history have not thereby been fully healed. The event of Saudi Arabia's execution of a Shiite cleric in 2016 once again triggered the sensitive religious nerves of both sides, resulting in another breakdown of diplomatic relations (Modebadze,2018). Up to 2023, even though the two countries ostensibly resumed diplomatic engagement, the profound deficiency of trust, historical grudges, and fundamental divergences in religious doctrines have presented unprecedented challenges and tests for the genuine amelioration of their relations. The interaction between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not merely a microcosm of the contestation of geopolitical powers but also an embodiment of the complex relationship interwoven with historical remembrance, religious philosophy, and national interests.

### **The Implications of the Reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia in 2023**

The historical reconciliation reached between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023 is driven by and deeply rooted in a multiplicity of factors and considerations. It not only involves geopolitical gaming and interwoven economic interests but also reflects the complex and nuanced mediation efforts of the international community. From a broad geopolitical perspective, the protracted standoff between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the Middle East geopolitical stage has exerted a profound influence on and reshaped the regional stability architecture. As the two major powers representing the Sunni and Shia Muslim worlds, their drawn-out strategic contention over regional leadership, the intensification of sectarian disparities, and the frequent occurrence of proxy conflicts have not only failed to pacify regional disputes but have exacerbated intra-regional tensions, posing a serious challenge to the internal cohesion of the Gulf Cooperation Council and offering opportunities for external forces such as the United States and Israel to intervene, further complicating the geopolitical ecosystem of the Middle East (Liu,2024). In the economic dimension, the need for reconciliation is particularly pressing. Facing the heavy burden of domestic economic structural adjustment and transformation, Saudi Arabia has gradually recognized that the traditionally relied-upon security guarantee provided by the United States is no longer an impregnable cornerstone. Hence, it tends to alleviate the negative impact of external geopolitical tensions on the domestic economy by easing relations with Iran (Ding,2023). Meanwhile, Iran is also ensnared in the dual predicament of a fiscal predicament and diplomatic isolation, and there is an urgent need for it to break through the isolation via reconciliation and infuse new vitality into its domestic economy (Ding,2023). In light of the fact that both countries are crucial actors in the global energy landscape, their reconciliation is not only of paramount significance for stabilizing the global oil market and ensuring the security of oil export channels, but also lays a potential path for in-depth cooperation and joint development in the energy domain among Middle Eastern countries, with the prospect of facilitating the overall prosperity and sustainable development of the regional economy.

Additionally, China has assumed an essential mediatory role in facilitating the reconciliation process between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Through a succession of elaborately orchestrated

diplomatic initiatives, China has successfully propelled the normalization process of the relations between the two nations. Concretely, the attainment of the landmark "Beijing Agreement" in March 2023 is not merely a direct consequence of China's diplomatic mediation endeavors but also signals the conclusion of the seven-year diplomatic severance status between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Rahimi & dazmand,2024). This agreement not only exerts a profound impact on the political landscape of the Middle East, portending the reconfiguration of regional power balance and dynamics, but also accentuates China's escalating influence and contribution within the global security governance system (Alnuaimy & Al-Obaidy,2024). Nevertheless, notwithstanding the fact that this reconciliation has paved a new way for alleviating regional tensions, a series of intricate and unresolved issues, such as the conflict in Yemen and the Syrian crisis, still linger between Saudi Arabia and Iran. More conspicuously, if Iran succeeds in developing nuclear weapons capabilities, its military prowess and regional strategic deterrence would undergo a qualitative leap, presenting a direct and grave challenge to Saudi Arabia's leadership within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The Saudi side is apprehensive that a nuclear-armed Iran might adopt a more assertive and expansionist regional policy, thereby undermining the geopolitical influence and strategic depth of Saudi Arabia and its allies in the region (Al-Saidi & Haghirian,2020). In view of this, sustained dialogue and mutual concession between Saudi Arabia and Iran have emerged as indispensable avenues for addressing the aforesaid profound contradictions. The two sides are required to establish a long-term and stable communication mechanism in order to gradually bridge the differences and enhance mutual trust. Simultaneously, it should not be overlooked that the geopolitical deliberations and intervention potential of extra-regional powers like the United States and Israel might introduce additional complexity and uncertainty to this reconciliation process, constituting potential external challenges. Hence, how to maintain one's own interests while balancing internal and external relations and promoting regional peace and stability will be a profound philosophical and practical subject that all relevant parties must confront.

### **The Diplomatic Objectives and Core Interests of Saudi Arabia**

The strategic core of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia still lies in ensuring the stability of the royal regime. Based on this, the country is dedicated to elevating its position in the Middle East. While guaranteeing the secure and unhindered export of oil, Saudi Arabia is vigorously promoting the economic development of other industries, striving to achieve the diversification of its economic structure. In reality, the Saudi authorities have profoundly recognized that sole reliance on energy exports is hard to sustain the country's long-term development. Hence, through the "Vision 2030" strategy, it aims to expand cooperation opportunities with the international community in multiple economic domains. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has proactively adopted measures to attract foreign direct investment and vigorously develop its domestic industry and tourism (China Petroleum News Center,2024). As of 2024, the economic contribution of Saudi Arabia's non-oil industries has approximated 50% of its gross domestic product (GDP), a remarkable policy outcome (Chu and et al,2024). Naturally, Saudi Arabia is also keenly conscious that the realization of economic diversification development must rely on a stable geopolitical and international environment as a support.

Hence, Saudi Arabia has adopted a diversified diplomatic strategy to attain its pre-defined goals. To begin with, given that it is impossible to completely extricate itself from the sphere of influence of the United States, Saudi Arabia will persistently extend an olive branch of cooperation to the United States at the political level and sustain the cooperative relationship between the two. Secondly, as a core member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saudi

Arabia enjoys an unrivaled advantage over other member states in terms of economic and military prowess. Consequently, Saudi Arabia is committed to further strengthening its influence and appeal within the GCC. Just as Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has emphasized, the GCC should endeavor to narrow internal differences, unite as one, and jointly forge ahead towards the path of prosperity (Hu & Wang, 2021). Concurrently, Saudi Arabia also aspires to mold the Gulf Cooperation Council into a regional collective security organization to efficaciously tackle the security challenges commonly confronted by all member states (Zhao, 2015). This is essentially a strategic move by Saudi Arabia to expand its influence and enhance the cohesion of the GCC member States. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia maintains a high level of vigilance against Iran, whose growing power has forced Saudi Arabia to view Iran as a long-term regional rival. In particular, the expansion of Iranian influence in places such as Yemen and Syria has already undermined Saudi Arabia's interests to some extent. For this reason, Saudi Arabia needs to keep a constant eye on and address potential threats from Iran. Finally, Saudi Arabia is committed to weakening the influence of Europe and the United States in the region by strengthening its relationship with China and Russia, thereby enhancing its economic resilience. Specifically, Saudi Arabia has deepened its cooperation with China in petrochemicals and new energy by selling some of its shares and signing large-scale investment agreements, and has used this as a way of obtaining financial support from non-European Union countries in order to strengthen its economic and trade position (Liu, 2025). Concurrently, Saudi Arabia has also fully exploited the OPEC+ mechanism to intensify cooperation with Russia, thereby not only consolidating its status within the OPEC+ organization but also allowing it to assume a dominant position in the global energy supply pattern (NetEase, 2024).

With regard to China's attitude towards cooperation with Iran, Saudi Arabia displays a complex ambivalence. Saudi Arabia recognises that China's presence in the Middle East presents certain opportunities for its interests, and that the two sides share common interests to pursue and room for cooperation in certain areas. However, Saudi Arabia is at the same time concerned that China's increased cooperation with Iran may not be to its advantage. Such cooperation may weaken Saudi Arabia's position and influence in the Middle East while strengthening Iran's economic and military power. Of particular concern is Saudi Arabia's long-standing high level of vigilance over Iran's nuclear capabilities, and its belief that China's strategic cooperation with Iran could potentially put Saudi Arabia under pressure on nuclear energy issues (Guanha.cn, 2024). Notwithstanding, Saudi Arabia will not alter its strategic attitude towards China on account of this. Saudi Arabia is profoundly cognizant that adopting an aggressive stance towards the closer relationship between China and Iran might result in its exclusion from the mainstream tendency of cooperation and development in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia explicitly realizes that China does not assume the role of a disruptor in the Middle East but endeavors to offer channels for communication and exchange for all parties to the greatest extent possible. For example, in the incident where Iranian protesters rushed into the Saudi Arabian embassy in 2016, China maintained a strategically neutral stance and exerted an active mediating function (Houghton, 2022). Naturally, Saudi Arabia will also appraise China's role circumspectly. Once a genuine conflict of interests erupts between the two parties, Saudi Arabia will seek a strategic equilibrium with the United States to safeguard its own interests. The presence of such strategic counterbalances renders the relationship among Iran, China and Saudi Arabia fraught with certain uncertainties and complexities.

## **The Reaction of Saudi Arabia to the "25-Year Plan between China and Iran" and Its Potential Influence on the Plan's Implementation**

The "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" has elicited extensive attention and in-depth discussions from the Saudi government, academia, and media circles. Based on the information disclosed by Saudi media, there are marked divergences in the attitudes of various circles in Saudi Arabia towards this plan. This phenomenon reveals that Saudi society holds complex and diverse cognitive stances towards Iran's ascending posture and the development process of China-Iran relations.

### **A Moderate Attitude That Focuses on Balance and Opportunities**

On March 27, 2021, the Saudi media timely and objectively reported the news of the signing of the "Comprehensive 25-Year Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" (Arab News,2021). The overall reporting atmosphere remained temperate, with no fierce rhetoric or excessive reactions. These media analyses indicated that although the relationship between China and Iran has deepened, this is not equivalent to China's abandonment of its strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia. In fact, there are numerous convergences in the interest demands between China's "Belt and Road Initiative" and Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030", offering powerful external support for Saudi Arabia's economic transformation (Wan,2022). Therefore, the stability of the relationship between China and Saudi Arabia has effectively mitigated Saudi Arabia's apprehensions regarding the alterations in the geopolitical configuration and the potential geopolitical risks possibly engendered by the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan" between China and Iran. Concurrently, the Saudi side contends that this cooperation plan is more perceived as a diplomatic tactic employed by China in response to the continuous provocations from the West, and its direct influence does not encroach upon the fundamental interests of Saudi Arabia (Ding,2023). Furthermore, the crucial role that Saudi Arabia plays in the fields of energy and geopolitics is likewise an indispensable strategic interest for China.

### **The Intense Attitude Concerning Strategic Imbalance**

Not all within Saudi Arabia adopt a moderate and pragmatic position. Certain Saudi media reports have manifested profound apprehensions regarding the agreement reached between China and Iran, worrying that Saudi Arabia might thereby be placed in a risky situation. For example, Al Arabiya TV of Saudi Arabia made a comment indicating that the closeness of the relationship between China and Iran may not receive support from all Iranians; the opposition forces within Iran consider that the Iranian government's action is equivalent to surrendering national interests, such as the "Turkmenistan Treaty", to China (Chen,2021). Furthermore, this collaboration has the potential to upset the power equilibrium in the Middle East and undermine Saudi Arabia's strategic standing in the region. With the support of China, Iran's influence in the international community is destined to escalate. Additionally, China's advocacy for Iran in the UN Security Council might mitigate the pressure exerted by the United States on Iran. Consequently, Iran will play a more prominent role in global competitions and subsequently generate spillover effects on the Middle East region (Ding,2023). As the main competitor of Iran within the region, Saudi Arabia is profoundly worried that China's intervention might result in an imbalance of regional power (Observer Network,2024). Saudi Arabia adopts a cautious and skeptical attitude towards whether China can genuinely maintain a neutral stance in a potential dispute between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

## **Constraints on the Plan Implementation Resulting from Saudi Arabia's Response**

The domestic response of Saudi Arabia might exert a direct and substantive influence on the "China-Iran 25-Year Cooperation Plan". When the plan proceeds smoothly and attains remarkable achievements, the intense opposition that might occur within Saudi Arabia has the potential to transform into specific opposing actions. Specifically, a profound divergence might emerge between the Saudi royal family and the elite, thereby stimulating the conservatives to actively undertake political lobbying activities. It is widely known that the members of the Sudairi faction in Saudi Arabia have consistently adopted a tough stance towards Iran (Liu & Liu,2020). By contrast, the Saudi royal family tends to hold a more pragmatic stance. On the premise of safeguarding its own economic interests, it is willing to have contact with Iran and support the cooperation between China and Iran (cerioli,2023). However, once the "25-Year China-Iran Cooperation Plan" encroaches upon Saudi Arabia's oil export interests, the conservatives might seize this opportunity to unite with Saudi businesspeople in exerting pressure on the government and the royal family, demanding the adoption of unfavorable measures against China-Iran cooperation. Additionally, Saudi media have been shaping a negative image of Iran for a long time. For example, the media owned or supported by Saudi Arabia frequently "deliberately depict Tehran as a destructive and even malevolent entity" when constructing the social discourse system in Yemen, thereby highlighting Saudi Arabia's own positive image (Rod & Himmer,2023). Therefore, when the China-Iran cooperation makes headway, these media might indoctrinate the Saudi public on the grounds of economic threats and security risks, thereby triggering the antipathy and fear of the Saudi public towards it. In reality, the image of Iran held by the Saudi public is beset with deep-rooted biases. Relevant investigations indicate that only approximately 12% of the Saudi public adopt an optimistic and positive attitude towards the development of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Liu & Zhao,2020). And reviewing the changes in the Middle East in 2011, there was a precedent of demonstrations by the Saudi people (Liu & Zhao,2020). Therefore, it cannot be excluded that under the influence of the media and the conservatives, there is a possibility that the Saudi public will not adopt excessive behaviors against the China-Iran cooperation and even exert pressure on the Saudi royal family and the government.

For China, it is possible that Saudi Arabia might thereby seek diversified partners more actively and alleviate the pressure generated in the region due to the cooperation between China and Iran through the diversification of diplomatic strategies. For example, India, as one of the countries with a relatively fast-growing global economy, has a vast demand for energy, and the Middle East is increasingly prominent in its strategic development planning. Hence, strengthening cooperation between Saudi Arabia and India can truly constitute an effective strategy to address the impact brought about by the cooperation between China and Iran. Particularly in recent years, under the leadership of the Modi government, India has significantly enhanced its diplomatic connections with Gulf countries, among which Saudi Arabia is regarded as its primary partner, and the cooperation potential in the fields of energy and investment between the two sides has been significantly elevated (Ashwarya,2023). On the contrary, for China, Saudi Arabia is strategically important as its key energy supplier. If China's co-operation with Iran offends Saudi Arabia, it cannot be ruled out that Saudi Arabia may use economic means to impose sanctions on Chinese companies that work closely with Iran.

## **The Challenges Imposed by Saudi Arabian Factors on China's Balanced Diplomacy**

During its participation in international affairs, China has consistently upheld a balanced diplomatic strategy. To guarantee that its own interests are not infringed upon, this diplomatic strategy is often demonstrated in practice by striving to maintain a neutral position in regional conflicts. Consequently, when confronted with Saudi Arabia's persistently tough stance towards Iran, China has fallen into an extremely challenging and complex decision-making predicament. China has to sustain the strategic mutual trust and economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia, while also keeping friendly exchanges with Iran, and simultaneously strive to avoid being embroiled in the conflict whirlpool in the Middle East. This complex situation exerts an influence on China's overall strategic layout for the Middle East within the framework of major power games. Hence, the attitude held by Saudi Arabia towards China's cooperation with Iran undoubtedly disturbs the diplomatic neutrality principle and the flexibility of diplomatic activities that China is supposed to adhere to.

As the reconciliation process between Saudi Arabia and Iran advances, the more aggressive stance and psychological barriers on the part of Saudi Arabia are expected to be mitigated, presenting China with an opportunity to alleviate diplomatic pressure in the region and lighten the diplomatic burden as a regional neutral. Meanwhile, the smooth advancement and implementation of Saudi Arabia's autonomous diplomatic strategy is inseparable from China's support and collaboration. Specifically, there is a high degree of compatibility between Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" plan and China's "Belt and Road Initiative", and the cooperation potential between the two sides is immense with broad prospects. Furthermore, during Saudi Arabia's holding of the G20 rotating presidency in 2020, the two countries jointly promoted global cooperation in combating the epidemic and jointly supported the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), making active contributions to reducing the debt burden of low-income countries (CCTV,2020). However, it is noteworthy that in the course of its cooperation with China, Saudi Arabia might take into consideration the position and sentiments of the United States. This factor presents certain diplomatic uncertainties and challenges to China.

### **Possible Countermeasures for China: Continuously Deepen Balanced Diplomacy**

Since Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the 'three no's' principle at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in 2016, the principle has become a core guideline of China's foreign policy in the Middle East region (Guangming Daily, 2023). Upholding the diplomatic notion of friendly cooperation, China sustains excellent cooperative relations with nearly all countries in the Middle East. In its interactions with Saudi Arabia, the two sides have launched numerous cooperation projects, and Saudi Arabia has even conducted investment layouts in the northwest region of China (China Development Zone Network, 2023). Regarding Iran, the two sides not only undertake cooperation in the economic domain but also strengthen coordination and collaboration within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and are dedicated to promoting the quality improvement and efficiency enhancement of the BRICS cooperation mechanism, contributing political wisdom and solutions for the countries of the Global South (NetEase, 2025). Evidently, on the economic front, China not only deepens strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia but also actively aids Iran in coping with the political challenges brought about by the US blockade, showcasing a fair, neutral, and impartial diplomatic stance. Facing pressure from the United States, China inclines to effectively counter the divisive strategies implemented by the United States in the Middle East through measures such as security dialogues (Beijing News, 2023). Meanwhile, China makes full use of

frameworks such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to endeavor to promote unity and cooperation in the Middle East and construct a cooperative network to thwart the divisive intentions of the United States. Consequently, whether in the economic field or the political realm, China has consistently upheld a balanced diplomatic strategy, actively mediating conflicts, enhancing political mutual trust, and striving to achieve mutual benefit, win-win outcomes, and common development between China and Middle East countries.

### **The Influence of the "25-Year Plan between China and Iran" on China-Saudi Arabia Relations**

In reality, at present, the exchanges and interactions between China and Saudi Arabia are rather frequent. The Saudi side has continuously adopted a pragmatic stance and deepened the cooperative relationship with China. From the dimension of political interaction, the Saudi government has highlighted on numerous occasions that the China-Saudi Arabia relationship is a strategic partnership founded on mutual trust and cooperation, and this relationship has a profound foundation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025). The two nations have reached broad consensus and achieved a high degree of congruence in both the political and economic domains. Concurrently, the continuous intensification of economic cooperation has created a stable diplomatic environment for both countries. Despite the signing of the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan" between China and Iran, which ostensibly seemed to draw China and Iran closer and might potentially impact the cooperative relationship between China and Saudi Arabia, in actuality, China has not decreased its energy procurement from Saudi Arabia. Quite the contrary, Saudi Arabia has further augmented its investment in China. This phenomenon indicates that the current relationship between China and Saudi Arabia has not suffered the slightest fissure due to the emergence of the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan" between China and Iran; instead, it showcases the stability and tenacity of their bilateral relationship.

The underlying causes for Saudi Arabia's continuous maintenance of its relationship with China might perhaps be attributed to the following aspects:

*Seeking a Diversified Diplomatic Pattern and Shedding Sole Reliance on Europe and the United States. As China has come to the fore on the international stage, Saudi Arabia has acutely discerned that this is a historical juncture to break free from excessive dependence on a single major power. Through deepening the China-Saudi Arabia relationship, Saudi Arabia is able to gradually promote the realization of its national strategic goals and implement a balanced diplomatic strategy between China and the United States, thereby strengthening its discourse power and influence in the Middle East and on a global scale.*

*Ensuring Economic Interests and Facilitating Economic Diversification Transformation. The proposition of Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" indicates its determination to break away from the confinement of a sole energy-based economy and embark on a new phase of diversified economic development. The Chinese market, with its colossal potential and expansive prospects, precisely conforms to Saudi Arabia's expectations for economic transformation and has emerged as a crucial touchstone for testing the efficacy of its diversified economic development.*

*Maintaining Regional Security and Stability and Addressing Complex Geopolitical Challenges. The geopolitical situation in the Middle East is extremely complex, with a series of destabilizing factors such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Syrian civil war, and the threat of terrorism interwoven, presenting a formidable challenge to Saudi Arabia's national development. Hence,*

*Saudi Arabia has profoundly realized that only through the establishment of a diversified international cooperation network can it effectively guarantee its own security. China's policy concepts regarding the Middle East are in line with Saudi Arabia's security demands. Saudi Arabia can rely on China, a major international power, to actively facilitate the advancement of regional peace and stability processes.*

### **Possible Strategic Dispositions for China**

Firstly, China will persistently intensify multilateral dialogue and cooperation mechanisms. Since US President Trump assumed office, his "America First" policy orientation and the imposition of additional tariffs on multiple countries undoubtedly manifest a unilateralist and zero-sum game thinking mode, which constitutes a latent threat to global stability and development (Jaramillo and et al,2025). In this international context, China will utilize multilateral platforms such as the United Nations, the Group of Twenty (G20), and the League of Arab States more actively to broaden the channels for international exchanges and cooperation, with the aim of preventing the uncertainties resulting from a potential "new Cold War" situation between China and the United States. The development and refinement of multilateral mechanisms not only offer robust support for China to carry out more extensive economic and energy cooperation under the principle of equality and mutual benefit, but also present China's amicable image as a responsible major power, augmenting the trust and recognition of China within the international community. This initiative is positively significant for alleviating the tense relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, promoting stability and security in the Middle East region, and creating a more conducive external environment for China's strategic development, ensuring the safety cornerstone for its long-term development.

Secondly, it is anticipated that China will deepen the regional cooperation framework with the Middle East. The Belt and Road Initiative, as China's premier economic cooperation strategy and platform, is of self-evident significance. China will, taking this platform as the foundation, further enhance the interconnection and communication mechanisms with various Middle Eastern countries and promote the simplification and facilitation of trade processes. Essentially, this action will enable Saudi Arabia and Iran to integrate into the community of interests in the Middle East and form a more closely bound regional cooperation network. When Saudi Arabia and Iran collaborate under this framework, the long-standing fissures and differences between them are expected to be mitigated, thereby laying a more stable external environment foundation for the cooperation between China and Iran.

Thirdly, China might exhibit a more flexible strategy and undertake the role of a mediator at opportune moments. China's foreign policy has consistently adhered to the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and this notion has been persevered in and manifested throughout long-term practice. In actuality, China has few precedents of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries during the course of cooperation, and this untainted diplomatic record has garnered it credibility in international affairs. Consequently, when it pertains to the disputes between Saudi Arabia and Iran, China possesses certain advantageous conditions as a mediator. The recent reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran precisely constitutes a forceful testament to China's successful assumption of the mediator role. Naturally, in the event that Saudi Arabia harbors misunderstandings or discontent regarding China's 25-year cooperation plan with Iran, China is highly likely to adopt an active and proactive mediation strategy to placate the Saudi side and safeguard regional stability and harmony.

Ultimately, China might be dedicated to reinforcing its risk-resistance monitoring mechanism in response to the complexity and mutability of the current international environment. A static diplomatic strategy frequently leads a nation into a passive position. In the subsequent progress of the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran", China will persistently maintain a high degree of monitoring and vigilance over the situation in the Middle East. Specifically, China might initially closely monitor the security posture of Middle Eastern countries, particularly the dynamics of the bilateral relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and accordingly make flexible adjustments and formulate policy responses that conform to its own interests. Secondly, China will actively implement the soft power diplomatic strategy, promoting communication and mutual trust among the people of various nations through multiple dimensions such as cultural exchanges, educational cooperation, and technological interactions. The objective is to allow the bridge of dialogue to take root in the hearts of the people, thereby effectively circumventing the radical sentiments among the public that might be triggered by government and media guidance. For example, many leading Chinese technology enterprises (such as Huawei and Tencent) have augmented their investment in Saudi Arabia, facilitating its technological innovation and transformation and upgrading (Ren,2025). Meanwhile, the number of higher education institutions in China that offer Arabic language programs has surpassed 50. After Egypt, universities in Arab countries like Sudan and Tunisia have successively established Chinese language departments and provided Chinese language courses. The "Chinese language craze" has become a prevalent trend in the Arab world. As of now, China has established 12 Confucius Institutes and numerous Confucius Classrooms in 9 Arab countries, further enhancing the depth and breadth of cultural exchanges (Ding & Chen,2018). Consequently, China will uphold the notion of all-domain cooperation, laying a firm foundation for future in-depth collaboration, with the intent of effectively circumventing any potential negative influences from the Saudi side and ensuring that the cooperative relationships between China and Iran as well as the Middle East region are more stable and durable.

## Conclusion

Overall, the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran" signifies a new pinnacle in the cooperative rapport between China and Iran, profoundly embodying China's strategic vision of meticulous engagement in the Middle East. Through a multi-faceted and profound cooperation framework encompassing economic, political, and security domains, this plan not only furnishes a strategic fulcrum for both nations to effectively counter the intense pressure from the United States but also facilitates the construction of a more stable and secure strategic configuration between the two sides. To a certain degree, this plan has erected a solid protective bulwark for China's strategic layout in the Middle East. Nevertheless, it must not be overlooked that the historical animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran casts a veil of uncertainty over the implementation of the "25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between China and Iran". Of particular note is the potential movement of radical forces within Saudi Arabia, which might constitute an unfavorable element to the amicable relations between China and Iran. Facing this complex scenario, China is anticipated to capitalize on the historical juncture of Saudi-Iranian rapprochement to perpetually fortify dialogue and communication mechanisms, deepen its cooperation network with countries in the Middle East, and employ flexible diplomatic tactics to endeavor to advance the overall stability of the Middle East. In this process, China will be dedicated to seeking a balance point that maximizes the interests of both Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is foreseeable that the dynamic evolution of the future Middle East situation

will persistently test China's wisdom and practical capacity in balanced diplomacy, while concurrently offering new development opportunities for all relevant parties on the path of win-win cooperation, jointly crafting a fresh chapter of regional prosperity and stability.

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