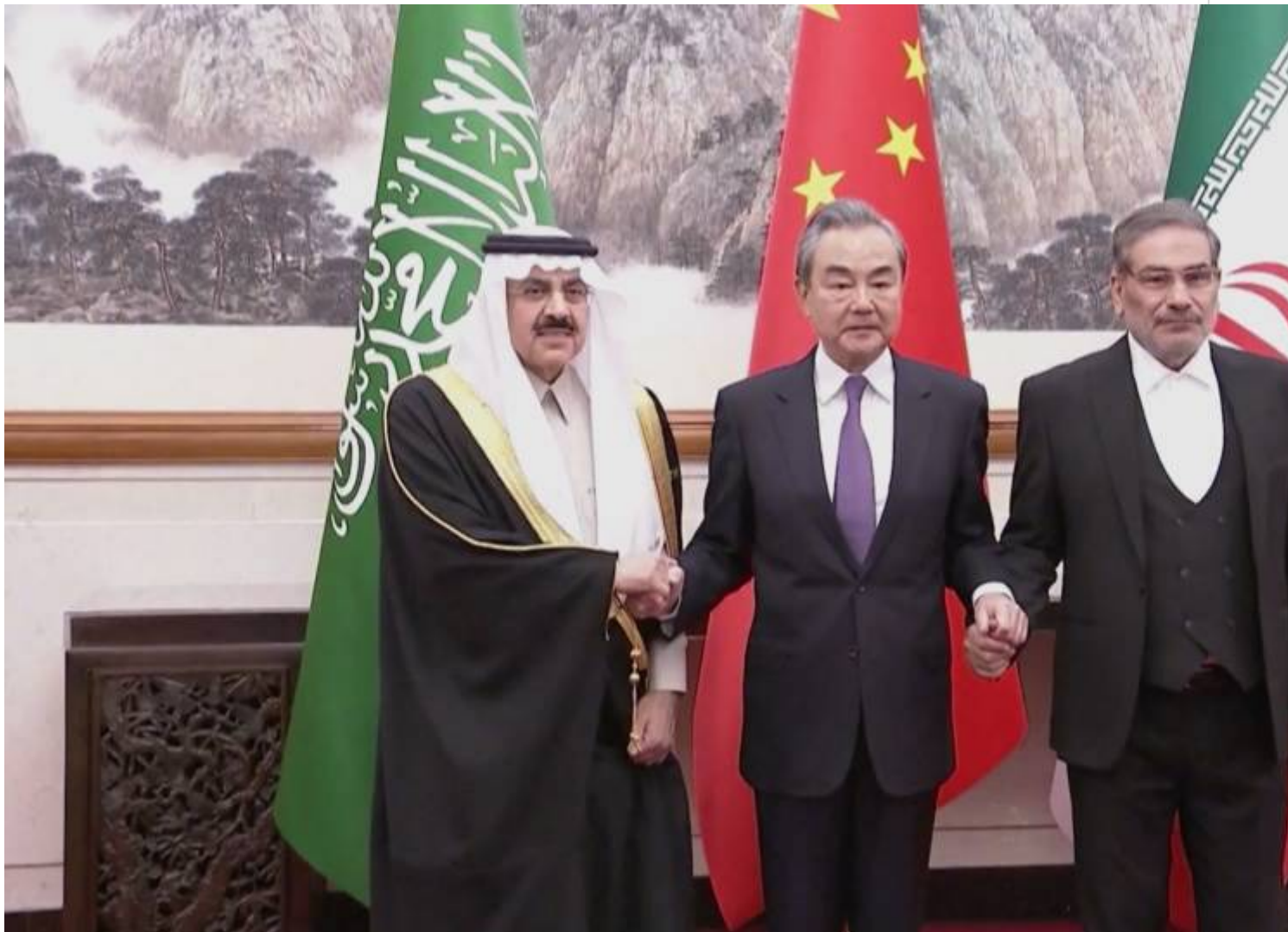


Iran and Saudi Arabia sign China-brokered normalization deal



Iran and Saudi Arabia have agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations in a deal brokered by China and signed in Beijing. The agreement ends a seven-year dispute between the two countries, who plan to reopen their embassies within two months.

Beijing, March 13 (RHC)-- Iran and Saudi Arabia have agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations in a deal brokered by China and signed in Beijing. The agreement ends a seven-year dispute between the two countries, who plan to reopen their embassies within two months.

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, who represented Tehran at the talks, told reporters: "At the end of the talks, we reached a conclusion, to start a new chapter after seven years of breaking off relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, while considering the matters of the two countries and the security and future of the region, to prevent meddling from extraregional and Western states and consistent meddling of the Zionist regime in the region."

The news comes at a time of heightened tensions between Washington and Tehran, and Washington and Beijing. The White House cautiously welcomed the deal while denying it signaled China's increasing global influence, as National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said the U.S. would not be "stepping back" from its role in the Middle East.

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