

**SAUDI ARAB – IRAN RIVALRY: IT’S IMPACT ON OIC’S EFFICACY  
(2014-2020)**

By

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## Table of Content

Thesis and Defense Approval form.....	ii
Candidate Declaration Form.....	iii
Table of Content.....	iv
Acknowledgement.....	vii
Dedication.....	viii
List of Abbreviation.....	ix
Abstract.....	xi
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the problem.....	3
Objective of the study.....	4
Research Questions.....	4
Literature Review.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Research Methodology.....	19
Significance of the Study.....	20
Delimitations.....	20
Organizational Structure.....	21
<b>1. Chapter 1: Causes of Saudi Arab-Iran Rivalry .....</b>	<b>22</b>

1.1	Hassan Rohani’s Regime.....	23
1.2	US-Iran Nuclear Deal.....	24
1.3	King Salman’s Regime.....	27
1.4	Chain of Stressful Events in Middle East.....	29
1.5	Impact of Execution.....	31
1.6	Tehran Parliament Attack, 2017.....	32
1.7	Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition.....	32
1.8	Drone Attack on Saudi Aramco Oil-Processing Facility.....	35
1.9	16th Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers.....	36
1.10	Emergence of GCC-Israel Relation.....	36
1.11	Strategic Competition between Iran and Saudi Arab.....	37
1.12	External Forces Role in Region Politics.....	39
1.13	Economic Competition in the Region or Regional Power Struggle.....	40
<b>2.</b>	<b>Chapter 2: Power Politics in the Middle East and OIC .....</b>	<b>42</b>
2.1	Competing Interests of Extra Regional powers.....	44
2.1.1	US Interests in the Middle East.....	44
2.1.2	Russian Interest in Middle East.....	45
2.1.3	China’s Interest in Middle East.....	46
2.2	Some Reflections on Regional Conflicts.....	48
2.2.1	State Sponsored Conflicts.....	49
2.2.2	Non-State based Conflicts.....	52
2.2.3	One-sided Conflicts.....	54
2.2.4	Geographic Extended Conflicts.....	55
<b>3.</b>	<b>Chapter 3: An Assessment of OIC’s Efficacy.....</b>	<b>59</b>

3.1 Geo Political and Strategic Importance of OIC Member States.....	60
3.2 Strength of Muslim World.....	61
3.3 Economic Power of Member State.....	62
3.4 Impediments in the Working of OIC.....	62
3.5 Kashmir Issue and OIC.....	63
3.6 High Politics in the Organization.....	65
3.7 Afghan Problem and OIC.....	66
3.8 US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Challenges for OIC.....	67
3.9 Role of OIC in the resolution of Iran-Iraq War.....	69
3.10 Impact of Saudi-Iran Tension.....	71
<b>4.Conclusion.....</b>	<b>74</b>
Recommendations.....	78
<b>5.Bibliography.....</b>	<b>83</b>

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate my work to my elder sister Late Mehwish Hashmi. I always kept myself motivated by her wish to explore the world beyond my limits. A special thanks to my Parents giving me time and courage to stand alone and pursue my dreams. It was impossible to come at this stage without their unconditional support. And it is impossible to not to take name of my friends and colleagues for motivating me when I needed.

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I hope this work may some way contribute well in the already existed knowledge and research.



## **Abbreviation**

OIC	Organization of Islamic Republic
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arab
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
PLO	Palestine liberation organization
RSCT	Regional security complex theory
EU	European Union
AU	African Union
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian
SAARC	South Asian Organization for regional cooperation
RSC	regional security complex
UN	United Nations
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MBS	Muhammad Bin Salman
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting countries
IMCTC	Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
UK	United Kingdom
UAE	United Arab Emirate

BRI	Belt and Road initiative
IS	Islamic State (Organization name)
PKK	Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (The Kurdistan Workers' Party)
AI	Ansar al Islam
KH	Kata'ib Hizballah
UNSC	United Nation Security council
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir

## **Abstract**

*This study aspires to analyze the enigma of Saudi Arab-Iran rivalry and its impact on OIC. The conflict and rival relations between Iran and Saudi Arab is increasing day by day. These two states where have so many difference, shares so much in common too. Both states are in the same region of Middle East and a neighbor to each other. Moreover, with the effort and agreement of both states, they had voted for the common platform of Muslim world. So, in 1969 along with other 26 states the Organization of Islamic Conference was formulated later named as Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The platform was made after criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem. The organization was originally designed for Muslim solidarity, mainly protecting the Islamic holy sites, supporting the Palestinian cause, eliminating racial discrimination, and cultivating economic cooperation. The hostility among the two nasty rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia has surrounded a number of Middle Eastern countries and many regional and international Islamic organizations, like, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Due to Iran-Saudi Arab rivalry the neutral platform of OIC lost its strength and become the advocate of dominant powers. The work is discussing the linkage of power seeking dominant players of Middle East and its effects on OIC.*

**Keywords:** *Efficacy of OIC, Power Politics, Middle East, Saudi Arab-Iran, Rivalry*

## INTRODUCTION

This study is examining the rivalry of two prominent powers of Middle East namely Saudi Arab and Iran and its effect on the functioning of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Unequivocally, the Middle East is in chaos for many years. The two powers of the Middle East, i.e. Saudi Arab and Iran, are endangering regional peace and security. The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arab (KSA) have long rival relations consisting of forty years. In these forty years of rivalry both the states never left any option to show off the power to each other. Right after the Iranian revolution, these two states got into worse relations upon the ideological differences. Prevalently a person in Iran belongs to Shia sect whereas Wahabbism is largely in practice in KSA. The stark Ideological differences are not only spurring regional tension but also affecting the unity of Muslim Ummah which has been reflecting in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) since its inception.

Ironically, it was just an ideological mismatch but over time this disparity kept on increasing and other factors started fueling the rivalry. According to a famous political analyst Dilip Hiro, Saudis view this division as a Shia-Sunni conflict while Iran's clerics see this rivalry between Islamic Republic and an ill-conceived government, the KSA. Apparently, the core reason behind the confrontation among the two is sectarian difference; however, economic struggle and political divide is also visible between the two. Saudi Arab leading and commanding manners were a challenge for Iran therefore; they perceived them as a threat. Right after the Islamic revolution Tehran challenged the leadership of Kingdom for Muslim world. The history of their relationship after the Iranian revolution provides the evidence and reasons behind this extreme tussle.

Surprisingly, no individual mediator or any organization could solve the issues between the two. Although Saudi Arab and Iran are together on the platform of OIC, yet the gap is widening day by day. Certainly, OIC could not de-escalate the tense situation because of interests of great powers viz. United States (US) and Russia. It is therefore long debated issue that why OIC could not mitigate tension and scholars are presenting different causes of this rift. A group of scholars calls it an ideological issue whereas some are taking it a geopolitical and geostrategic issue.

Przemysław Osiewicz points out the ideological difference between these two countries by saying that their ideological variance shaped their policies internally and externally.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand another leading scholar namely Ali Fathollah Nejad proclaims that sectarianism is not the reason behind Tehran and Riyadh rivalry. He maintains that both states have hegemonic ambitions and they are fighting many proxy wars for regional dominance and to maximize their position in the Middle East specifically and in the Muslim world in general.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, OIC was designed to collectively protect the interest of Muslim Ummah. This organization initially tried to fill the gap which appears after the First World War and with the end of Khilafat, Ottoman Empire. Everyone knows the confrontation of two rival powers of the Middle East. For it, OIC could not do significantly in this regard to work for the trouble of the Middle Eastern region. Regardless of the member's power, OIC designed as a body to regulate the countries in their framework. When it informed it aimed to enhance and strengthen the bond of unity and solidarity among the Muslim people and member states.<sup>3</sup> It also aims to promote confidence and encourage friendly relations, muted respect, and cooperation between states and other states.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, OIC issued a resolution on November 17, 2016, in which KSA accused Iran of supporting terrorism in the region.

The tension continued to increase and blocs formation could not end. It was expected that OIC member states will collaborate; however, difference of interest among the member states barred them to find solutions of issues they are facing. The study is being framed to analyze all the hiccups in the way of OIC and its efficacy in the resolutions of conflicts between two Islamic powers in Middle East.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study is analyzing the enigma of Saudi Arab-Iran rivalry and its impact on OIC. The conflict between the two Middle Eastern powers i.e. KSA and Iran kept increasing with

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<sup>1</sup>Przemysław Osiewicz, "Ideological Determinants of the Current Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in the Middle East," *Przegląd Politologiczny*, no. 2 (2016): 122.

<sup>2</sup> Ali Fathollah-Nejad, "The Iranian–Saudi Hegemonic Rivalry," *Iran Matters* 25 (2017). <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/iranian-saudi-hegemonic-rivalry>

<sup>3</sup> OIC, "13th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference Istanbul Declaration on Unity and Solidarity for Justice and Peace" (Istanbul, Turkey, April, 2016). <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=13&refID=5>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

every passing year. It had started since the Islamic revolution came into the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. From that day forward, the revolutionary state lost its majority relations including the KSA. This ideological divide increased and went beyond the imagination. The hegemonic ambition between these two Middle Eastern powers (KSA and Iran) fueled the tension. Saudi Arab considers Iran a potential threat in the region therefore it has an anti-Iran bloc in the region. While Iran has some different kinds of threats from US-supported state Saudi Arab. Iran considers Americans encroachment in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and its military existence a risk for its national security. The hegemonic ambitions of KSA made Iran apprehensive and spurred regional and global pressure. Due to this rift different alliances have become visible. To combat any of the forthcoming threat, Iran is trying to increase its capabilities and taking strict decisions to protect its stance and position. Thus, the growing capability of Iran is a constant threat to Saudi Arab and its alliance. Although Iran is facing long time economic sanctions due to which it is suffering from financial distress but the behavior and political stunts of Iran can be a threat for regional hegemon.

After 2014, many of the bad events between Iran and Saudi Arab widened the gap, situation and relationship of both states more antagonistic. For instance, in October 2014 KSA sentenced Nimr Baqir Al-Nimr to death and beheaded in 2016, the relations got worsen. Later it continued due to their other political variance. The most talked event the nuclear deal, between Iran and the US also took place in this period. These problems needed a platform through which these issues can be sorted out. The Muslim world intended to fill this kind of gap between them with the formation of OIC earlier in 1969. OIC achieved to solve the problems of Muslim countries. Apart from it, this body was entitled to remain neutral and as a problem resolver between countries. The organization initiated with the aim that it would be the collective voice of Muslims and would also work for unity. Unfortunately, it could not take place practically and it could not decrease or mediate between Saudi Arab and Iran so far. The suspension of membership of Syria in OIC triggered the rift once again. In this background the study is being made to find the avenue of cooperation between two Muslim powers in the OIC. However, the fundamental question is that how will Iran and Saudi Arab cement their relations in future?

## **Objectives of the Study**

This study has following objectives;

- To examine the different factors behind Saudi Arab-Iran's rivalry specifically from 2014-2020.
- To analyze the Saudi Arab-Iran's rivalry and its impact on the OIC.
- To find out the various causes of the failure of OIC in the resolution of issues of Saudi-Iran.

## **Research Questions**

1. Why are Saudi Arab and Iran entangling with each other in Middle East?
2. How is Iran and Saudi Arab's rivalry impacting on the efficacy of OIC?
3. Why has been OIC unsuccessful in the management of issues instigated by Saudi-Iran rivalry?

## **Literature Review**

The existing literature on the subject is scarce. However, number of books and articles has been published on the issue of Saudi-Arab-Iran rivalry. The caveat is to find the linkage of power seeking efforts of two regional powers and its effects on OIC. Therefore, this study endeavored to gather the published material and to establish a link of Saudi Arab-Iran's rivalry with the functioning of OIC. Plethora of articles and books have been examined, some are below.

Dilip hiro recently wrote a book in which he examine and evaluate the core reasons behind the rift. Dilip Hiro in "*Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arab, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy*" (2019) maintains that it's been four decade of rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arab. He declares it the Islamic cold war for getting influence. They both see each other with different angle. It is a Shia-Sunni divide. Saudi Arab takes this rivalry as Shia-Sunni difference while Iran views Saudi Arab an illegitimate monarchy. Now this stiffness converted in to geopolitical competition. Iran is stronger in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon while Saudi's have their influence and intervened in Yemen. It isolated Qatar and has links to destabilize Lebanon. The writer had discussed this toxic relation in the book and question that is this Islamic cold war will end anyway? Hiro also discussed the

character of Muhammad bin Salman who have intensification of totalitarianism in regime. He has the intensification of anti-Iran Muslim region.<sup>5</sup>

Simon Mabon has a book under the title of *Saudi Arab and Iran: Power and Rivalry in the Middle East (Library of Modern Middle East Studies)* published in 2013. In which the author argues that relations of Muslim world got change right after the Islamic revolution of 1979 of Iran. This new regime of Tehran triggered the bitterness between Saudi Arab and Iran. The author also examines those identity group which more led the countries towards sour relations those identity group could be religion based or ethnicity differences or consist of different tribal groupings. By examining these group he identified internal insecurities have clear and wide impact on the external policies of states. They do increase the risk impact the ideological and geopolitical competitions among the two rival Middle Eastern powers.<sup>6</sup>

The article “*Study of Factors Affecting Saudi-Iranian Relations and Conflicts and Their Resulting Behavior Pattern*” by Mahdi Alikhani and Mehdi Zakarian. In their article, they elaborate that Tehran and Riyadh are of two players who have importance as a regional power of the Middle East. The regional order of the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean based on their relationship because of having a special place. The nature of their relationship is dynamic and changed throughout times. In the late 90s, due to internal, regional, and global events and developments, Iran and KSA witnessed a transition from disagreements to ease of tensions under the supervision of Hashmi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami. But right after this period both Iran and Saudi Arab turned in to competitors, stiffness, and disagreements. The author of this article used the library method to understand the Saudi-Iranian relationship. The author has discussed those factors that influenced their relationship and cause of tension. The cut off of diplomatic ties between them is also explained. How the attack on the Saudi embassy did cause trouble in their relationship? The author explained that they have different identities as Iran has Iranian Islamic identity while KSA has an Arabic Islamic identity. They have differences in their ideologies and have two opposite disciplines Shiite and

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<sup>5</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy* (Oxford University Press, 2019). (Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East* (IB Tauris, 2013).



Sunni. They have different types of ties with the superpower, the difference in the division of power in the region. These are those factors which indicate the difference in the pattern between them.<sup>7</sup>

*“Rivalry in the Middle East: The History of Saudi-Iranian Relations and Its Implications on American Foreign Policy”* is written by Derika Weddington. In which she explained the historical background of the rival relation of two Middle Eastern powers. She elaborated that before the Islamic revolution the state of Iran and Saudi Arab were great allies and had a mutual understanding and been an important part of the American policy of 1979. This US policy was for the saving of its interest in the region and to fill the gap created due to the British existence. But right after the 1979’s revolution, the scenario had changed into a hostile relationship. This divided the two sides and the US openly supported the Kingdom against Iran. The ups and downs in the relationship remained between Iran and Saudis. The rapprochement came among them after the death of their supreme leader in 1989 even when the US wants to put Iran in quarantine. The researcher of the study explained the Obama regime and the US-Iran relationship. It was the time when this rift increased due to making ideological influence over the Middle Eastern Region. Now the indifferences changed from political to ideological. But the US applied soft policies and put Iran on the table of negotiations. Iran was appreciated for it and a deal of Nuclear was done between Iran and P5+1. But the deal takes Saudi Arab far away from the agreement. They had a concern that this development would thaw the icy relationship of the US and Iran and it will stand as a competitor for Saudi Arab in the region.<sup>8</sup>

Madawi Al-Rasheed and Pejman Abdol Mohammadi presented two different prospects of rivalry and politics of the Middle East in their research titled *Saudi Arab and Iran: Beyond Conflict and Coexistence*. They maintained that the Kingdom seems that Arabia is in a defensive situation opposite of colonialist, aggressor Iran. Kingdom considers Iran a theocratic state perusing. The only thing kingdom is doing is balancing regional orders.

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<sup>7</sup> Mahdi Alikhani and Mehdi Zakerian, "Study of Factors Affecting Saudi-Iranian Relations and Conflicts and Their Resulting Behavior Pattern," *J. Pol. & L.* 9 (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Derika Weddington, "Rivalry in the Middle East: The History of Saudi-Iranian Relations and Its Implications on American Foreign Policy" (Missouri State University, 2017).

Saudi legitimates their selves in the Yemen war against Houthi in Yemen used by Iran. The Kingdom of Arabia is satisfied to preserve the regional order while Iran has the opposite thought of having influence and project revolution. While explaining about the idea of Iran's politics and orders in the Middle East as being isolated by the world community Iran has nothing to do with this version that what will world reaction upon its doings. Although, Iran wants to create relations economically as well as politically with the region and out of the region's country but because of the sanctions facing by Iran restrict it to behave in this manner. The author also explains that the influence over the GCC made Iran limited to act in the region so Iran is considering the options beyond the region for economic development. Further, the researcher expressed the rivalry situations in the region on the grounds of Middles Eastern country. Other than that international response to the rivalry in which Europe, the US, and Russia.<sup>9</sup>

The article journal "*The Impact of Syria's Crisis on The Rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arab in The Region: Iran's Point of View*" by Atefeh Baghishad bad. In which he elaborated that from histories Iran and Arabia are seeking an influential position in the Middle East. Specifically after the Islamic revolution of Iran this rivalry appears even more prominent and as a competitor of each other. Many of the events played a role in increasing their competitiveness in which the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Syrian war are a way more important events in the history than anything. The author of the study refers to many scholars who wrote that the Syrian war participated very much in their rivalry. More about the fact he says that after Saddam's fall Iran's influence has more increased in the Middle East. The race between Iran and Kingdom in establishing their sect government in Iraq created more space and competition as well as hostility. In which Iran gets success in establishing Shiite government over there. The author said that as revenge Saudis supported the Jihadis group in Syrian even succeeded to capture many areas of the state. Referring to scholars he argued that Saudi Arab successfully facilitated the downfall of the Assed regime which supported by Iran. Presenting an overall review of the article the author examined the impact of the Syrian crisis and the IS emergence's impact on their relationship. The author analyzed the power of both states in creating

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<sup>9</sup> Ribale Sleiman-Haidar and Jack McGinn, "Saudi Arabia and Iran: Beyond Conflict and Coexistence?," (2018).

chaos and struggle in maintaining their orders. The author of the research article divided the study into three sections in which number one discussed the relationship of Iran – Arabia in the war of Iran-Iraq. The next section explained Saudi Arab's impact on the Syrian crisis. The third part of the article talked about Iran's reactionary behavior on the Syrian crisis and consequences.<sup>10</sup>

As 2013 approaches the world the Middle-eastern region faced many changes in this regard. The newly elected president Hassan Rohani holds the office. What sort of changing being happened after it and how Iran reacted to them? Many scholars discuss this. An article "*Iran under Rouhani: Still alone In the World*" by Thomas Juneau. In which the author argued the important characteristics of Iran's place in the region and the global balance of power. In this way, the writer explained the strategic loneliness of Iran. Further, he looked into that attitude which designed its Iran's bilateral relations. However, the efforts made by Rouhani to sort out the nuclear stand-off among Iran and P5+1. The author explained that Rouhani promised its nation to uplift the living standards and will work for economical ease. It made the nation agreed that development only comes with removing the international sanctions. So with the collaboration of their supreme leader, they concluded the nuclear deal in its return Iran got economic Relief. But still, there was also the mistrust there that what would happen if it not going right and according to the deal. The author declared Iran a stiff and hard to talk in this article argues that to reach on the conclusion was difficult due to its static behavior. Yet he also expressed that both sides had an odd interest with each other. While discussing the deal's reaction with the world, the author had discussed the dual reaction of Saudi Arab. He said that at first the kingdom was happy but in practice, it shows unhappiness with the conclusion. However, it was also good for Kingdom as Iran would limit its nuclear program but on the other side, the thaw which was melting between the west and Iran was unacceptable to him. Secondly, Arabia had fear for the startup of residual of a possible nuclear program in the future. While Israel openly opposes the deal by saying Iran is not able to trust. Israel projects Iran's President Hassan Rouhani as "Wolf in the sheep clothing" and declared the deal a great mistake. He considers that this deal would

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<sup>10</sup>Atefeh Baghishadbad, "The Impact of the Syria's Crisis on the Rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Region: Iran's Point of View," *Journal of Global Studies* 6 (2016).

legitimize the Islamic states' posture in the region. According to the author, it is Israel which is responsible for putting tight sanction on Iran. Therefore, President Obama also faced many challenges internally. So the author concludes that internal and international pressure becomes hurdles in maintaining relations with Iran. And Iran is still in strategic loneliness.<sup>11</sup>

Athina Tzemprin, Jugoslav Jozić, Henry Lambare's in their article "*The Middle East Cold War: Iran-Saudi Arabia and the Way Ahead*" says that the Middle Eastern Regional powers i.e. Saudi Arabia and Iran are engaged in rival relation since long time. Their relationship shaped the geopolitical scenery of Persian Gulf. Due to which their bordering countries have made more often a battle field of them. Arab spring has also carried out a drastic change in the region. The religious fragmentation further polarized when minorities started resisting against the ruling elites. Moreover, another crucial factor in their bitter relations were the nuclear deal with P5+1 ease the sanction over Iran which made it more stronger candidate in the region. The opposite of Ahmadi Nejad, the hardliner, Rohani paved the way for Iran to talk to global power and make their role easier as regional player.<sup>12</sup>

Paul Aarts and Joris van Duijne in their work "*Saudi Arabia after U.S.-Iranian détente: Left in the Lurch?*" argues that thawing the relationship among Iran and US increased the rivalry of Iran and Saudi Arab. In this scenario, Arab countries along with the support of Kingdom projected Iran's policy a threat to Sunni Arabs all over the region. However, US and Kingdom enjoyed warm relation since long time but the normalization phase between Iran and US didn't please Kingdom. According to the researcher, Arab states saw the normalization process a need of US. As he need to play constructive role in Iraq, Afghanistan and for Israel. They concluded this phase of ease on the cost of Arab countries. The researcher further believes that this rapprochement will not prove a

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Juneau, "Iran under Rouhani: Still Alone in the World," *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (2014).

<sup>12</sup> Athina Tzemprin, Jugoslav Jozić, and Henry Lambare, "The Middle East Cold War: Iran-Saudi Arabia and the Way Ahead," *Politička misao: časopis za politologiju* 52, no. 4-5 (2015).

nightmare for Arab states rather a balanced image will emerge. The writer sees positive aspect behind the US-Iran détente phase.<sup>13</sup>

In the research article “*Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and US Policy*” Fürtig Henner’s says that the Gulf was shaped with the action of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arab. The 2003 war of Iraq completely changed the dynamics of region. The indefinite presence of US in the region made the trio a square. However, actually US have usurped the role of Iraq and used its stage for its own interest. Thus it has become an artificial triangle consist of Iran, Saudi Arab and US. The researcher argues that US and Iran has become the most influential actors of the region.<sup>14</sup>

In the book, “*International Relations in the Middle East*” Simon Mabon’s chapter “*Islam and foreign policy in the Middle East*” He explained the role of Iran and Saudi Arab in the shaping the political atmosphere of Middle East. The Islam which has to be the point of convergence becomes the point of divergence due to ideological mismatch. The whole region due to this difference becomes a political playground. Iran and Saudi Arab took advantage of this power void and tried to make according to their identities. The author explained in his book that to understand this politics one should understand that how religion is playing decisive role in their policy making and politics. For understanding, the author has divided its work in to four categories. The first part of the work analyzes the relationship before the Islamic revolution in Iran. Second part of the chapter examined the first decade of Khomini regime. The third part studied the rapprochement after khomini’s death and the fourth part of the chapter investigated the Iran’s politics after Arab spring.<sup>15</sup>

Yoel Guzansky and Sigurd Neubauer wrote an article on “*Saudi Arab and Iran's Uneasy Friendship*”. This article was written in 2015 so the happenings of this time are discussed in this article. The author argued that this year had changed so much. The election of

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Aarts and Joris Van Duijne, "Saudi Arabia after Us-Iranian Détente: Left in the Lurch," *Middle East Policy* 16, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>14</sup> Fürtig, Henner. "Conflict and cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The interregional order and US policy." *The Middle East Journal* 61, no. 4 (2007)

<sup>15</sup> Simon Mabon, "Saudi Arabia and Iran: Islam and Foreign Policy in the Middle East," (2019).

Hassan Rohani who sees that tensions should be reduced and talks can be done. Even Tehran had a visit to the kingdom on the condolence of King Abdullah. The nuclear deal came which undermined the Kingdom role in to the region.<sup>16</sup>

The research article “*Ideological Determinants of the Current Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in the Middle East*” by Przemysław Osiewicz wrote that Saudi Arab and Iran had ideological difference between them which actually shaped their foreign policy. He also argues that they both presents two different political system and have different approach towards foreign policy<sup>17</sup>

The book “*Epoch of Saudi-Iranian Cooperation and Rivalry*” is written by Banafsheh Keynoush which was published 2016. In this book the author describes that in 1964 it was Shah Faisal who have all Saudi powers in his hands. On the opposite side Shah of Iran was excited to make smooth relation with Saudi Arab. The point of convergence at that time was Communism. Faisal was intending to work against Communist expansion into the Muslim world. Shah was pleased with the idea and projected that modernized Iran would be a strongest pillar of region. But actually King Faisal was tired with Shah’s declaration. After it struggle for the mutual platform tied both the states in to a relation which resulted in the form of Muslim world league and Organization of Islamic organization (OIC). It was a collectively initiated by both leaders in 1969, Morocco.<sup>18</sup>

OIC made to regulate the Muslim region and to sort out the problems related to Muslim world. Moreover, it designed to enhance the confidence and strength among the Muslim countries. It aimed to promote and encourage friendly relation. But in actually it acted in opposite way. A research article “*Sectarianism and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)*” by Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Shahram Akbarz adeh. In which they argued that its effectiveness was provoked when the Syrian membership suspended in 2012. It also considered that it will create rift between two states when the membership

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<sup>16</sup> Yoel Guzansky and Sigurd Neubauer, "Saudi Arabia and Iran's Uneasy Friendship," *Foreign Affairs* 28 (2015).

<sup>17</sup> Osiewicz, "Ideological Determinants of the Current Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in the Middle East."

<sup>18</sup> Banafsheh Keynoush, "Epoch of Saudi-Iranian Cooperation and Rivalry," in *Saudi Arabia and Iran* (Springer, 2016).

given. The turkey summit fueled the situation more in this regard. This paper stated those entire factors which increased interstate rivalry and approach of OIC towards these tensions. The writes states that the identity politics was the major reason behind increasing of the tension. Both of the states saved and projected their geopolitical agenda and that is what jeopardized the efficacy of OIC. The idea of unity of Muslim under the umbrella of OIC vanished.<sup>19</sup>

The Author Andrew Scott Cooper in his book *“The oil kings: how the US, Iran, and Saudi Arabia changed the balance of power in the Middle East”* explained the recent controversy of Mecca incident in 2015 in which thousands of pilgrims died due to stampede. Another incident in 2017 due to crane toppling caused 107 people death. In which majority of the people were belonged to Iran. As a reaction, Many Muslims blamed Saudis for the mismanagement and an inevitable outcome of year of greed. Iran strongly reacted and demanded kingdom’s crown price Shah Salman’s apology. People of Iran protested outside of KSA embassy because Iran received huge number of casualties. However, Riyadh blamed Persian Gulf politicizing and exploiting the tragedy for political gains. He more argued that Arab spring of 2011 again fueled cold war of Kingdom and Iran. The grouping of Sunni population provoked other group to settle in an organize way to combat the threat of Sunni group’s dominance. In the proxy wars they took opposite part against each other. Oil politics become frontline in their rivalry when Saudi Arabia increased the flow of surplus crude oil in the international market to bring Iran unprecedented economic pressure as Iran already facing international sanctions. On the other hand the author pointed out that no political reform in Kingdom and internal dissatisfaction of Saudi Arab people. Overextended economy of Saudi Arab is alarming on which International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlighted the possible decline of Saudi economy in coming five year if the situation flows similar. The Author also argued the similar situation back in 1978 in Shah of Iran’s regime. The lavish spending could not gain the strength. No political reforms brought Shah of Iran near the revolution. Moreover, the instability at its southern border due to Yemen is also creating difficult situation. On the eastern front, having majority Shia population Saudi Arab is facing

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<sup>19</sup> Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Sectarianism and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation," *Territory, Politics, Governance* (2019).

resistance and agitation which can lead towards disturbance. As per the author, it is now not efficient for Saudi Arab to use oil as weapon anymore. However, US will remain vulnerable in this regard due to the unrest and revolutionary situation of region.<sup>20</sup>

Ibrahim Sharqieh wrote an article entitled as “*Can the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Resolve Conflicts?*” in which he argues the strength and capacity of OIC in resolving the matters straining the way for cooperation. Initially, the writer had explained the historic efforts of OIC as mediator. The case studies of Philippines, Thailand and Somalia are discussed. He also argued that OIC’s ability to impact over conflicts in the Middle Eastern region in three areas that is cultural competency, moral power and partnerships. He also addressed the challenges of OIC inn which he explained that the missing political will. Another thing he highlighted that duplication of mediation efforts due to regional and global organization. Many of the member states are engaged with many regional and international organizations which influence their actions. Moreover, the author concludes its study with some of the recommendation regarding capacity building and inter-organizational cooperation by which OIC can do a more positive and productive role in the clashes with Muslim community.<sup>21</sup>

Abdullah al-Ahsan in his article “*Conflict Resolution in Muslim Societies: Role of the OIC*” writes that the recent situation of extremism in Muslim states is a result of failure of Muslim nationalistic leaders. The youth of these states have been suffered from misery and desperateness. In this situation OIC is the only political institution which denotes the whole Muslim world. OIC, which showed great concern in resolving matters of Muslim states in its early years. PLO-Jordan, Pak-Bangladesh matters are the examples of it. But gradually lost its strength and capacity to resolve the matters for example Iran-Iraq is one of it. Due to its inefficiency in the recent situation of Islam-o-phobia and extremism, the

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<sup>20</sup>Andrew Scott Cooper, *The Oil Kings: How the Us, Iran, and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East* (Simon and Schuster, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Ibrahim Sharqieh, "Can the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Oic) Resolve Conflicts?," *Peace and Conflict Studies* 19, no. 2 (2012).



author ask that whether OIC can start a new attempt to resolve conflicts of extremism keeping in view the basis of the teaching of Holy Quran.<sup>22</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework**

Every conflict of international relations can excellently analyze through using the available lens of International relations. These lenses provide a pathway to understanding the behavior of the doings of states. So, Iran and Saudi Arab's conflict and its impact on OIC's functioning can analyze under the framework of Regional security complex theory (RSCT) by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security* (2003). Ironically, Human history has witnessed the evolution of threats and survival. The survival of humankind remained always on the priority. The culture of fear remained part of society from primitive ages. Man kept on discussing the survival techniques time to time. With the passage of time protection form threat and survival become more inclusive in their policies. With the advent of modernity, threat for survival increased that much that one could imagine.

To understand what kind of threats are forthcoming, International relations introduced different lenses to understand the logics of states' behavior. Regional Security complex theory is one of those phenomenal work through which one can easily understands the logics and politics of a states within the region. With the emergence of nation state system the security concerns kept increasing. 20th century saw their neighbors cautiously. The security dilemma took the place of previous threats. The threat at the door step becomes the priority of states' interest. Therefore, states made some rules for the dealing with each other. The fear of near remains constant for the survival. So, Regional security complex took the limelight of regional politics. States considers regional threat immediate and deadliest. The study by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever explained this concern in detail in their work "Region and power: The structure of International security" about the complex security of regions. Before going into the detail to understand the Iran-Saudi rivalry and its impact on the OIC's efficacy it is necessary to define the Region and security complex.

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<sup>22</sup> Abdullah al-Ahsan, "Conflict Resolution in Muslim Societies: Role of the Oic," in *Qur'anic Guidance for Good Governance* (Springer, 2017).

## **i. Middle East as a Region**

Different discipline defines regions differently but according to International Relations regions typically considered a group of states located in the same geographical area specifically. According to Oxford dictionary “a large area of land, usually without exact limits or borders” They regions are not specified through nature but these are made intentionally. The states have interaction primarily within the region. Region is important because states remain in contact economically, politically, military with each other on different levels. The relations and tensions outside of the region have low threat than internal. Every state in the region acts in a way to get the influential states in the region and to increase its power within the area. Usually, it is consider that those who have stronger impact regionally acts well externally or on global scale. Middle East as a region has its uniqueness and strategic importance which have made it way more interesting for international powers. Having massive reserves of oil, this region remains in constant foreign interference. Apart from strategic depth, this region has a spiritual center for Muslim, Christians and Judaism. Any conflict of this region has enough potential to destabilize the international stability. Therefore, this region has so much importance in many dimensions. Keeping the sensitivity of the regional relations and to avoid any conflict states worked together and formatted regional integrated platform through which regional peace and order can be regulated. European Union (EU), African Union (AU), Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN), South Asian Organization for regional cooperation (SAARC), and many other were being made to maintain the regional order. So, for Buzan defines region is “a distinct and significant sub-system of security relations that exists among a set of states whose fate is that they have been locked into close geographic proximity with one another.”

## **ii. Regional Security**

It is the most debated phenomenon and a major factor of state’s concern. It point toward peace and constancy. Buzan refer the term pursuit of freedom from threat. Although, humankind keeps on confronted with Terror, destruction, and threatening situation in diverse ways. The dictionary define word “Security” in these aforementioned word that

“the state of being free from the danger or threat” Hans Morgenthau refers security, a derivation of power. The realist school of thought prefers the term security to “National Security” and it revolves around realism. National security is above all and the primary interest of every state. Furthermore, it aids rest of the national interests. Idealist considers that the elimination of war as the forerunner of security. The meaning of political terminologies kept on changing with the happenings of different political event. Similarly, the meaning of security changed after the Cold war. Many other factors were included in the definition of it. After Cold war world witnessed unipolar system in which all powers are for US. The securitization problem lost its individuality and become a general problem. Hence, the problem of regional security raised a new dilemma between the regional actors. The regional security took the importance which made world security more complex. Hence the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever simplified the definition of regional security. States become region oriented more. So, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever explain regional security “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together.” These linkages provide the stage for wellbeing as well as threat too. Wellbeing and cooperation means that the security of region can bring the units under one umbrella for secure future politically, economically and militarily. Whereas, threat means that more power seeker in region can prevail threatening environment and security dilemma. This insecurity creates confusion, compromises the regional peace and stability, and leads towards complexity of regional security.

### **Regional Security Complex Theory**

It is a conceptual framework that covers the new emerging structure of global security. The scholars Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in their book *Regions and Politics: The structure of International Security*, Chapter; *Security complexes: a theory of regional security* explains the changing dynamic of politics and security systems. They discussed the Huntington’s theoretical framework of “Clash of Civilization” (1993) and tinted that the work provides the idea of clash of large civilization i.e. Islam, West, and Asia. He argued that these civilizations would in contact of clash with each other on the fault lines. On the contrary, Buzan and Waever emphasize on the clash of regional powers with each other. They highlighted that the fear in contemporary times is more near. Because States’

primarily contracted each other within the region their security interactions are internal. The threat has reduced the distance and it is now in the neighbor. He also refers towards insulators like Afghanistan, Turkey, and Burma. These are those states who have occupied by one or more units. Buzan and Waever argue that Huntington's system is settled from the perspective of US while their works announces the first priority is regional. Huntington ignored the significance of region and they say that undermining the region's role would cost high. RSCT says that global security is not now the individual unit's concern this is regional security that is the concerns of countries. Mostly the action take place in regions and, it is the region where international and regional security interchanges.

Moreover, this theory also discusses the role of super power in regional security complexity. They say that superpowers have massive capabilities and overrated power that they can affect the regional security and make the complexity more critical. They have the power to play a decisive role in the politics and security. They way superpowers use to effect the regional security is "Penetration" it means that the great power enters in to regional politics through the loops holes. The loop holes mean that the rivalry of two states allows the superpower to penetrate through that loop hole and plays pivotal role. For example Indo-Pak rivalry allows US to penetrate into to the region and take the charge. Similarly, in the case of Middle East due to the hostility of Saudi-Iran, it allows US to penetrate into the political and security relations and make the regional security more complex. The alignments and bloc divides the peace and stability of the regions in to different poles.

So, Iran and Saudi Arab's conflict can analyze under the framework of Regional security complex theory (RSCT) by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in *Regional and Power: The Structure of International Security*. As the theory stats that international security can be analyze with regional perspective. Moreover, it says that international security has the basis of regional security. The complexities of regional security would too make the international security complex. Thus, it can be said that their hostility and rivalry is apparently regional but it has affects internationally. Many of the integrated platform's efficacies compromised due the tough relationship of them. The scholars of RSCT in the

book talks regarding the term Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism. This means “All Muslims should constitute a united community, namely the Ummah, which cuts across differences in status, tribe, and ancestry.” The Middle Eastern region has this identity movement over centuries. It has impact but the Westphalia system compelled the Middle Eastern states to dysfunctional the trajectory and made space for state system. This sentiment penetrated into the policies of Arab and non-Arab states. Right after the Islamic revolution of Iran, the aggressive leadership, and politics of Iran processed the Pan-Islamism into the region. Hence, for gaining the massive support, political strategies and stunts interplayed. Likewise, the leadership sentiments of Saudis ran high for the region. So, the geopolitical games started played by both the side. The overlapping interests, mutual security region, and threat from each other complexes the regional political and security environment. Along with it the outsiders used the loop holes and penetrated into the politics of region. According to RSCT, States primary interests are into the regions and they have their first threat into the region. So, both Riyadh and Tehran have to face off each other for their political ambitions first in the region. This faceoff will create conflicts and differences. For this reason, the existed platforms for problem solution of Muslim states get immobilize. So, OIC’s stage being used to get their desires by the influential powers of the organization. Therefore, regional threats from each other become the reason of dividend Muslims states. And in this, OIC could not approach the problem effectively. The regional security complex (RSCT) came into existence after the end of Second World War. It became the most complex security region having twenty countries with different perception of security. The difference of perspective, especially Saudis and Iranians compromised the peace and stability of region. Having common hegemonic ambitions, Tehran and Riyadh have created complex security scenario for rest of the nations in regions.

Moreover, the OIC, which initiated with the idea of a conflict resolution platform for the Muslim world have lost efficacy and its aim due to the complex security scenario of the Middle Easter region. This theory indicates that it is the security that set their patterns of interactions, policies and politics. OIC and any of the other organization could not do anything. States are realist for their interest they do not compromise over their security

and interest. Hence, OIC failed to achieve its objective so far specifically in the case of KSA-Iran's hostility. Because it is considered being a typical conflict formation in terms of amity and enmity, where the politics of security shaped mainly by interrelations between the regional powers.<sup>23</sup>

## **Research Methodology**

Research falls under positivist school of thought taking into account the empirical analysis of Saudi-Iran rivalry vis-à-vis its impact over Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). The research is carried out through deductive method as usually used in political studies. The study investigates KSA-Iran ties in special relation to efficacy of OIC for the period of 2014 to 2020. Research undertakes qualitative approach to understand the problem under investigation.

This research primarily focuses on qualitative methodology. It makes use of secondary sources for collection of data based on library sources. As study utilizes mainly library and online sources, instruments of collecting data are digital library sources (Jstore, Taylor, and Francis etc.), official websites, various uniform resource locators (URLs), and so on. The study focuses secondary sources including from books, journal articles, magazine articles, websites, etc. Secondary data from the current study aimed to a systematic analysis. The collected data used analysis which depicts the whole plot of the study. Furthermore, in the research the background information gives clear picture of the history of the rival relationship of Iran and Saudi Arab and to understand the reasons that how their rivalry is impacting the efficacy of OIC. Ideological differences, regional hegemony, political stunts, proxy wars, OIC's weakness, dominant powers of the regions influencing OIC's working, extra regional powers role are all measured.

This analytical study examined the behavior of the two bitter competitors of Middle East and their ambitions behind the tug of war between them. The impact of the Tehran-Riyadh unpleasant relations on the political atmosphere of region generally and Muslim world specifically are measured by the secondary source through the analysis. In this

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<sup>23</sup> Barry. Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40.

regard, the political, economic, religious, security factors are discussed that are the vital elements in their nasty relationship. Moreover, these elements are influencing the working of OIC as an independent stress less organization of the Islamic world. This all analyzed by secondary data analysis method.

Additionally, the historical events that have played a vital role in increasing the tension between Iran-Saudi Arab are analyzed in detail especially after the 21<sup>st</sup> century started. Hence, the targeted time period is 2014-2020 so the analysis focused the events that have took place after 2014. These events have participated increasing the vicious relations of two states. These events not only participated in escalating the tension but also highly obstructed the working of OIC. In this way OIC lost its effectiveness and trust at greater extent. So, to examine this entire situation the study utilizes content analysis method to carry out data analysis. To address qualitative research, various research techniques i.e. observational method, case studies are used including descriptive and exploratory.

### **Significance of the Study**

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arab shook the entire region's peace and stability. The rift is increasing day by day along with new happenings. The reason behind this research is to figure out those factors which triggered the situation for the Middle Eastern region risky. Along with it, the researcher would find out the facts of the cold war between Iran and KSA which made OIC a handicap. The researcher would try to examine the role of OIC in conflict resolution and what things OIC can do and had done in this regard. The organization of Islamic Cooperation always jingled for joint efforts for the peace and stable environment for Muslim states. How much OIC remained successful in this regard is another question that will be discussed in this research. Through the analysis of the data, the researcher will figure out the reason for the failure of OIC and how the OIC jeopardized and used power to manipulate the neutral platform.

### **Delimitations**

This research intends to investigate the efficacy of OIC with the context of Iran and Saudi Arab's relations during 2014 to 2020.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study divided into six sections including four chapters. The first part is Introduction which provides an overview of the study.

First chapter of the study "Causes of Saudi Arab-Iran Rivalry" is showing the causes of enmity between Saudi Arab and Iran. It covers historical, ideological, political and economic factors of the long-standing rivalry between the two regional poles.

The **Second** chapter "Formation of OIC: Determinants and Challenges" has examined the factors behind the formation of OIC. It also analyzed the various challenges to the formation and the functioning of OIC.

The **Third** chapter "Power Politics in the Middle East and OIC" demystified the real motives of regional and global powers in the Middle East and its impact on member states of OIC.

The **Fourth** chapter "OIC: A Failure as an Organization of Islamic Cooperation" focused on the failure of OIC. It should link with the KSA-Iran Rivalry.

The last part of study is comprises at Conclusion, findings and some recommendations.



## CHAPTER 1

### CAUSES OF SAUDI ARAB-IRAN RIVALRY

This chapter shows that the Iran and Saudi Arab is in worst relationship for many years. This rivalry increased day by day with the outbreak of different incidents. The Rivalry has roots in the history of these states. The ideological differences along with the other strategic and geopolitical reasons favored the intensity of hostility. To understand their rivalry this chapter will specifically focus on the causes and reasons of their worst relationship. Saudi Arab is conservative Sunni absolute monarchy established in 1932 whereas, Modern day Iran is Twelver Shia constitutional monarchy came into existence after the Islamic revolution in 1979. The ideological mismatch becomes the first reason of difference between them while Iran is anti-America since the revolution. These two states have blessed with the wealth of Oil and gas. Saudi Arab is successfully leading in oil pricing while Iran after revolution got sanctions and focusing on high prices.

Saudi Arabia and Iran are busy in the fierce struggle for regional supremacy in the Middle East from longtime. There are many reasons for which two states indulged in conflict with many grounds. Initially, the religious factor kicked the situation. However, this religious factor divided the interest of different units of the Middle East. Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran becomes the house of Shiite and the Saudis supported Sunnis ideology. The history tells that Saudi Arab, a monarchy system and birthplace of Islam seemed itself as a supreme leader of the Muslim Ummah in general and in the Middle East specifically. The challenge came into their way with the advent of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 in Iran. This enormous force rapidly started working beyond the borders. Soon, the revolution turned into an ideological challenge for Saudi Arab and poking it on different grounds. Many of the Middle Eastern countries emerged having a strong community of Iranian ideology. Apart from Iran itself, Iraq has 61-80%, Bahrain has 41-60%, in Kuwait 21-40% community of the Shia population. <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Marcus, "Why Saudi Arabia and Iran Are Bitter Rivals," BBC News 18 (2017).  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42008809>

Apart from the religious factor in the recent few years, the numbers of the significant event contributed to increasing the rival relation between the two states. The political uprising of Arab states produced a vent of peace and stability in the region as a whole. Both the blocs used the space to show off their political influence and power to each other. The Syrian, Yemen, and Bahrain were the playground and proxies of different powers including the two regional historic rivals. Fast forward to 2014, with the background of Arab spring and the uprising in the Middle East, many other events played a significant impact and contribution in increasing the enmity amid Iran-KSA.

### **1.1 Hassan Rohani's Regime: New political Settlement in Iran**

The president of the Islamic Republic of Iran elected President Mr. Hassan Rouhani usually seems to be the moderator. He took office in 2013, domestically supported personal freedom, and access to information, freedom, and supporter of women's rights too. He remained as a diplomat in his career therefore knows the diplomatic relation with more understanding. In his career, he worked to improve the relationship with a reconciliatory letter with other countries. He also wrote a letter to the President of US Barak Obama for negotiations with the explanation of Iranian Stance. This moderator reelected a second time as well in 2017, unlike Mohammad Khatami and Ahmadinejad. The aim of increasing the influence regionally, he remained constant even in the foreign policy which is the part of Iranian strategic culture since 1979 and because of the centrality of the supreme leader in foreign policy matters, which maintained the consistency. Rohani's idea was to become regional influential power can be achieved with its strong and stable economy. Unlike his previous government his government understands that the economy is not only a domestic matter but also a strong pushing factor in the formation of regional power because, under his consideration, the economic strength is a national power.<sup>25</sup> The change and flexibility of Iranian policy in the Rohani's regime have impacted the economic and political betterment to some extent. But the perception and trust deficit between the Arab states needs more effort in this

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<sup>25</sup>Suzanne Maloney, "Rouhani Report Card: A Year of Economic Stabilization and Suspense," Markaz (blog), Brookings Institution, 19 August 2014  
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2014/08/19/rouhani-report-card-a-year-of-economic-stabilization-and-suspense/>

regard. Therefore, Saudi Arab never trusts Iranian intension in the region. It depends on the perception each one has about one another. The situation turned worse when Iran supported and backed the Assed's regime in Syria and factions were supported by Saudi Arab. The ultimate guarantor of the Middle East (the US) widely accepted in the gulf region is wisely pulling back from the region. This retreat is creating a space in the sphere of power. This space has to fill ultimately with one of the regional powers of the Middle East. The fight for the regional status is the aim of Iran and Saudi Arab therefore, Rohani's policy towards Saudi Arab and other powers seems flexible than the previous ones but the historic rigidity in their ideology and strategic interest halts the way to be as flexible and approachable as others in the world. It was Rohani's regime when "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" (JCPOA) in 2015 was done, on the other hand, the stagnation of relation in 2015 after the death of Nimr-al Nimr and the Attack on the Saudi Embassy had shown that the normalization is not as easy as it was considered by Rohani's regime.

The foreign policy of Iran can be summarized into a sentence that it has the strategy to resist the domination of the US and normalize the relations with other world powers. The most important and core factor of their policy is to strongly resist Israel and support those forces who are creating problems and confusion for them i.e. Hezbollah in Syria and Houthis in Yemen. Additionally, Iran has to counter the forthcoming and existed threat of IS, Al-Qaida, and other terrorist groups that are putting Iran's interest in danger. On the other hand, Iran also recognizes the confrontation of Saudi Arab in the region. The whole politics and interest revolve around their strategic interest that dissects each other. Hence it is proved that the rift between them is not just ideological but more geopolitical and struggle for advantages over each other in the field of politics, military, and economy.

## **1.2 US-Iran Nuclear Deal; Saudi Arab's Reaction**

The Nuclear deal framework was a preliminary framework that brokered between the US and Iran in 2015 along with P5+1(permanent members of UN). Under this initiative, a Join Action Plan was announced between the two sides. Generally, it was a good gesture from both sides with goodwill to end the nuclear race. The US chooses to end its three-decade-old tension in the region. But on the other hand, it alarmed the regional allies of

the US i.e. Israel and Saudi Arab. Israel openly wanted to choose aggression over a reconciliation approach while Saudi Arab took a different language to tell the US that the consequences can be seen if the deal materialized. Saudi Arab's expression while maintaining the covert diplomatic relation with Israel shows a great reaction against Joint efforts between the US, Allies, and Iran for nuclear program revocation. The Kingdom had concerns over joint action plans and increasing Iranian influence and interventionist approach in the Middle East. This added fuel to fire as tension grew between KSA and Iran. Because the Iranian nuclear program was not in their limelight the actual reason is that they are concerned with their increasing regional role for supremacy through using their offshore wings and doing terrorism inside the region. The US umbrella would help Iranian illegal and realist approach and would create extra tension. As a result of the deal, Kingdom was worried that the removed sanctions would end their isolation. The activation of Iran in the international arena would enhance their strength on another level which would be a threat to Riyadh's security and regional status as well. Amid this ongoing political settlement, the regime changes in the Kingdom put more fuel into it. The new hardliner regime in Saudi Arab alongside Israel got successful in convincing the Trump administration to end the deal. In 2018, Trump's government unilaterally withdrew from the treaty and put economic pressure on Iran. This situation put the peace into a dangerous cycle which led the scenario in an odder situation where military action could happen. Although, the deal was as ordinary as other arm control treaties usually, but it seems quite successful in this manner that they had revoked the Iranian nuclear program for some time. Many things needed to be fixed at that time but the shuffling of government, and with the advent of new hardliner government in America decided to end the treaty due to vagueness apparently. But certain other things compelled the US to withdraw. The opposition of Israel and Saudi's reservations and foreign policy choice convinced the government of the US to reconsider the ideal nuclear treaty. The withdrawn and sanctions over Iran remained failed to cease the Iranian growing influence and activities in the region.

Apparently, the nuclear program of Iran is not a direct threat to the US, but the Kingdom and Israel have a solid reason to worry about the nuclear program. For Saudi Arabia, if Iran get develop Nuclear weapon, it will upset the balance of power of the region. This

is a danger to the regional status and position of Kingdom. While Israel's security and stability depends on military might of Iran. Both the sides, however, tried their best and get successful when the US unilaterally withdrew from the treaty. Although the Trump administration was ready to receive any dialogue calls from Iran but could not receive them and the situation with the new happenings and events halted the way towards dialogue. Because the Trump administration could talk to President Kim of North Korea then there is no hindrance to talk to Iran for betterment. So, it was widely considered that the US should avoid taking Israel and KSA's advice over Iran.<sup>26</sup> On ending the peace deal with Iran, Saudi Arab stated that it will work with the US and the rest of the international community to address Iran's nuclear program along with its ballistic missile program that threatening regional peace and stability. Because Kingdom alleged that ease of economic sanctions would highly support Iran to destabilize regional security and would support more easily to the terrorist groups. The new US government, however, criticized the treaty because it was not covering Iran's ballistic missile and role in Syria and Yemen. Additionally, the treaty had not covered the time beyond the ending limit. Therefore, Saudis called it the "Flawed Agreement"<sup>27</sup>

President Joe-Biden has given a signal that America will revive the nuclear deal with Iran it must consult Saudi and Gulf countries' concerns into account. The Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said "Primarily what we expect is that we are "Primarily what we expect is that we are fully consulted, that we and our other regional friends are fully consulted in what goes on, vis a vis the negotiations with Iran,".<sup>28</sup> The US returns to the Joint comprehensive plan of Action (JCPOA) would make happy the allies of the US as they openly criticized them for the unilateral withdraw. On the other hand, it had created so many concerns for regional rivals along with its allies. While in this situation to make realize the US, the FM Faisal clarified that previously no consultation had created distance and mistrust. The inclusion of regional stakeholders would help to mend the

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<sup>26</sup> Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky, "Saudi Arabia and Israel Are Pushing Us to Confront Iran. Trump Shouldn't Take the Bait," (2019), <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/21/opinions/israel-saudi-arabia-iran-opinion-miller-sokolsky/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> "Makkahal-Mukarramah Pact on the Promotion of Islamic Solidarity," news release, 2012, <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=29&refID=8>.

<sup>28</sup> "Us N-Deal with Iran: S Arabia Says Gulf States Must Be Consulted." The News, December 6, 2020. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/754493-us-n-deal-with-iran-s-arabia-says-gulf-states-must-be-consulted>

relations and regional stability with more efficient protocols for Iran. The Kingdom also highlighted the ballistic missile attacks by Houthis, the Iranian-aligned rebel army in Yemen. Both west and Riyadh believe that Iran is assisting them to acquire technology which they denied<sup>29</sup> needs to cover in the new expected agreement with Iran.

### **1.3 King Salman's Regime: New political Settlement in Iran**

After the death of King Abdullah in 2015, Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud accessed the throne. The crown prince gets changed from Muqrin to Muhammad bin Nayef to Muhammad bin Salman. Saudi Arab always has a cautious foreign policy. The increasing revolutionary waves in the Arab World become the main concern along with the Iranian threat. The new government in Kingdom tried to balance the internal challenges and regional stability. Riyadh portrays itself as the leader of the Arab world by saying the Custodian of Holy places and heavily depended on oil rent. It has many weaknesses i.e internal challenges religious or political, weak military power but compensates for its weakness with vast reservoirs and alliance with the US. With time the reliance on the US become less as self-sufficiency in defense and security made the Kingdom more confident.

The new government under Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS) considers that gaining the power behind the throne as a major goal of KSA. With Iranian aggression, it cannot be possible. The reliability and quality relation have influenced regional security. The principle of foreign policy changed right after Iran actively started penetrating the Arab spring. Saudi Arab's foreign policy is now aggressive rather cautious. Saudi Arab had incorporated other aspects too by creating different alliances, proxy wars, increase in economic strength, development of Wahabbism approach, Normalization of relations to roll back the Iranian influence in the region. Saudi Arab has concerns that the slight exit of historic security guarantor the US had created a vacancy for Iran to be filled. Due to the increased space of power in the region, Saudi Arab trying to reduce and compete with the regional rival so that it would not have any future consequences. Riyadh's foreign policy towards Iran can sum up into a few points. At first, KSA considers that the US

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<sup>29</sup> Seyed Hossein Mousavian and Mohammad Reza Chitsazian, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Middle East: A Grand Strategy," *Middle East Policy* 27, no. 3 (2020): 110.

maintained regional security whereas; secondly the normalization of Israel would create an envelope around Iran and its allies. The recent normalization of Gulf countries shows the gradual change in their strategic interest just because of countering the Iranian growing penetration in the region. The last point is the confrontation of Iran and its allies Syria, Yemen, Hezbollah, and other forces which they are using to tackle and influence the region.

The nature of MBS foreign policy is more political-economic revolutionist inside of state as well as outside. He remained defense ministry, therefore, at first; he focused on the security situation internally and externally and adopted aggressive policies towards Iran. MBS is very aggressive in its policies is adopting hard strategies to stop the penetration of Iranian influence. The new strategies include the proxy games, alliances, and association with regional and extra-regional entities, increasing economic strength to curb Iran. So, currently, the foreign policy of Saudi Arab is on common grounds which intend to be the only superior arbitrator in Arab and regional affairs and be the main point of entry for all international powers in the region.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, the airstrike in Yemen in 2015 illustrated that Saudi Arab is now fully committed to root out Iranian influence and show its strength. It was considered that the power show would gain political influence but the balance of power in Yemen remained as it was earlier. So, competition between Iran and Saudi Arab has become a feature of their relationship. Both sides want to make their ideological order in the region. Saudi Arab is now focusing on every aspect internal, regional, and international. The removal of many princes and holding a strong say on domestic politics, modernization of KSA reflect its internal game while in the region proxies and increasing Iran's role is the main concern. While on the international level he is trying to increase his role in East Asia, Russia, and the European Union. Moreover, the regional game, increasing role, and power growth are highlighting the conflict future of the Middle East.

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<sup>30</sup> Mohammad Ali AGHAMOLAEI and Ahmad JAVANSHIRI, "Saudi Arabia's Conflict Policy against Iran, During the Bin Salman's Government," 5 (2020): 261.

#### **1.4 Chain of Stressful Events in Middle East**

The Islamic cold war received a series of events that fueled the tension to great extent. The US rapprochement toward Iran generated hostility more. The situation compelled more to ally with historic rival Israel. The Nuclear deal cleared the way among them. This rift between two Islamic powers grown more with the incident of Hajj Pilgrims in 2015 at Mecca. In which 717 pilgrims suffocated or crushed during annual Hajj including Iranian diplomat was also included. The cause of the disasters remained disputed and officially KSA announced 769 deaths and hundreds of injured. The Mina incident flamed the tension between the Kingdom and Iran. At that time both the states were facing each other in the proxies of Syria and Yemen. The reason for increasing tension between them was that the Iranian losses were huge in any of the nationals. On the incident, Iran demanded Saudi Arab for a fair investigation and called all Muslim states to put pressure to get the cause of the incident. Many conspiracies were revolving about the incident including the US is behind the deadly incident but officially Iran urged to investigate the incident and question the management of Riyadh for Hajj.

The historic rivals Saudi Arab and Iran both have some similarities and differences; the differences had escalated so far that generated a cold war between them. Both have an Islamic setup internally but differ in the system of government. Similarly, the approach is different too. Iran is increasing its military capability and developing Nuclear to deter the immediate neighbor and other regional and international rivals too. While on the flip side, Saudi Arab is advancing its alliance alongside the US for security purposes and to target Iran. The changing foreign policy towards Israel is also showing how Saudi Arab is determinant to achieve its strategic interest. Both the states depend on their oil resources, but Iran has more dependence on it. Therefore, KSA keeping prices low to deter and stop Iran from gaining economic capabilities. In the past mutually they established the platform of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting countries (OPEC). The prices would only impact Iran as they do not have an alternative while Saudi Arab would see low consequences in this regard. Later the proxy wars contributed more to their bitter relation. There was a time when after Rouhani came into power it was considered that the normalization would happen and ease the tension between them.



But on January 2, 2016 Saudi Arab announced the death sentence for Iranian Shia Cleric Sheikh Nimr-al-Nimr. He was charged because of doing strong opposition to Saudi Royals. The part of Saudi Arab “Qatif” where the Shia population uses to live started the protest the verdict. The strong opposition was shown from the Iranian side and they asked Saudi Arab in case of execution they would have to pay the high price. After it, a series of cross statements got started and a foreign policy crisis had occurred between them, Saudis called Iran state sponsors of terrorism while the Supreme leader threatens that they will be caught their neck. The crisis increased after hundreds of protestors attacked the Saudi embassy in Tehran. Iran’s authorities took the incident seriously and called it unjustifiable.<sup>31</sup> This event, however, provoked the Shia population all around the region. Gulf monarchies were supporting the Saudi stance especially Bahrain, where they had already resistance internally from the Shia population. In reaction to the Tehran attacks, Saudi Arab announced to cut ties with Iran even the air and trade links too. While Iran stated that cutting down the ties would be a big mistake. The bitterness kept on increasing because along with Kingdom many other states United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Bahrain cut off the ties. The escalation of tension created a huge misunderstanding between them, and the region’s security became more vulnerable. The geopolitical conflicts transformed into sectarian conflict more. Even KSA approached Pakistan for military assistance in any case of aggression. The difficult time period for the relation of afraid the world that the confrontation would cost peace. One thing was obvious that the war would not only hit regional peace and security hard but also it would impact the world, especially war between the two major oil suppliers. Clearing the situation and taking on the war consequences deputy Crown prince at that time and a defense minister MBS stated that “is somebody who is not in their right mind. Because a war between Saudi Arab and Iran is the beginning of a major catastrophe in the region and it will reflect very strongly on the rest of the world. For sure we will not allow any such thing.”<sup>32</sup> While on the other side, the US responded to the increasing situation that an affirmative step to deescalate the tension and asked both sides to solve the diplomatic crisis through dialogue.

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<sup>31</sup> Par Rohollah Faghihi, "Iranians React to Nimr Execution, Saudi Embassy Protests " Middle East Eye 2016. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/about-middle-east-eye>

<sup>32</sup> Angus McDowall, "Rupture with Iran May Not Have Been Saudi Aim, but Riyadh Has No Regrets," Reuters 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-iran-regrets-idUSKBN0UL25W20160107>

## **1.5 Impact of Execution**

In the KSA the growing tension with Iran could affect the stability of its regime. The young generation started questioning the Royal hardline. The modernization of Saudi Arab in the regime of MBS was the result of the Arab spring. To curb the dissatisfaction around the Middle Eastern Arabian countries MBS government took radical steps to satisfy the masses. Meanwhile, the rift which was increasing day by day created concerns for the people of Saudi Arab. But the attack in Tehran on the Kingdom's embassy legitimized the actions of the government. Another thing which showed that despite increased pressure of Iran to release Nimr-al-Nimr, they executed along with 46 other declared terror sponsors in the state. This showed Riyadh's strength and position internally and externally.

While on the flip side, Iran saw internal challenges too apart from external aggression. The divide into the hardliner and Rohani's approach highlighted the division. Rohani's government is a moderator who wants to held talk and normalization of relations even with their historic rival Saudi Arab. But the supporters of Ayatollah showed that they are not ready to compromise an inch to their long-standing interest. The nuclear deal of Iran with the US and world power shows the flexible behavior of Rouhani. At the incident of the Saudi embassy, the hardliner justified the attack while Rouhani stated it unjustified. So, the division was highlighted. Apart from execution, the Hajj incident fuels badly the hostility. It again halted diplomatic relations. Iranian witnessed visa problems for Hajj and Saudis even insisted on a third-party airline for pilgrims. It again provoked Iranian on which they stated that any abnormality and special treatment would not tolerate. So the proxies on different grounds were being fought.

Eventually, the execution had tinted again the sectarian rift of Sunni and Shias in the region particularly in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. This rift would be there until the conflict ground may not be sorted it will continue and the proxy environment would keep ongoing.

## **1.6 Tehran Parliament Attack, 2017**

In 2017 simultaneously two attacks on the Tehran parliament blown up the situation once again. It was carried out by the Kurdish forces belongs to the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL). It injured and killed almost 17 civilians. The investigation by Iranian forces stated that the accused belonged to the Wahhabis network. So many statements came out accusing the US, Israel, and KSA of the twin events. One of the prominent names of Iran commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafri stated that the blast was carried out on Riyadh's demand. It was a Saudi Desired attack on Iran. In return, a missile attack had been done from Iran to the Head- Quarter of ISIL to give signals to the terror groups and their network behind the scenes. The internal reaction was not as much retaliatory as it seemed to be. The supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini said that these were only firecrackers and these small crackers could not end the will of the Iranian people to curb the fight against terrorism. Moreover, President Rohani stated that these attacks have further strengthened belief and determination for the war against terrorism.

## **1.7 Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC): An Aggressive Politics**

The aggression on both sides always remains there. Gradually, different techniques keep on playing from both sides to counter each other deterrence. Similarly, the Islamic Military counter-terrorism coalition of the Muslim world made to counter the growing threat of ISIL in the region. It was first announced by MBS as a defense minister in 2015. Saudi Arab became the joint center of IMCTC. There were 34 member countries later many other states joined the platform and the number increased by 41. The scope of the coalition even extends, and south Asian state was offered to be a part of it. Pakistan's Ex-Chief of Army staff Gen. Raheel Shareef was named its first commander-in-chief. Most of the members were also part of OIC too. The objectives of the coalition were to protect the Muslim countries from all the terrorist groups and regardless of sect and name. The coalition also asserted that it would work in the line of UN and OIC. The defense minister MBS affirmed that the force would fight against terrorism in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, and Afghanistan for peace and stability. He said, "There will be international coordination with major powers and international organizations in terms of operations in

Syria and Iraq."<sup>33</sup> Regional leaders highlighted the importance of the alliance to root out the terror factor. The alliance showed that Saudi Arab was trying to fill the escape security guarantor of the Middle East. When the US was busy dealing with Iran Saudi Arab arranged its security fence together with other Arab powers. This strategy showed the defensive political approach of Saudi Arab.

Likewise, other events, this alliance too created a new low among the relations of Saudi Arab and Iran. Iran perceived this alliance as a joint venture against him. Other events like the Mecca stampede; execution of Shia clerics, Embassy attack participated too to increase the rift. But ironically, Saudi Arab was facing a terror threat from ISIL. Both ISIL and Iran challenged the ideological front in parallel ways. Both challenged the theological superiority of its political system. But the threat has different levels for KSA. ISIL is way stronger and swears a threat to KSA and its hegemony in the region. This situation shows that KSA has multidimensional threats alongside Iran's conventional threat.

Due to the dominance of Sunni states in the alliance, it seemed a sectarian coalition. But there were some of the Shia dominant countries who aligned with them which ultimately reduced the criticism. Moreover, some of the states had good relations with Iran too. But on the flip side, the absence of Iran and Iraq from the alliance made it controversial and makes the speculation true to some extent.

As mentioned above, that series of events had participated to enhance the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arab. Saudi Arab and Iran are locked in a tussle for influence in the Middle East. In the same way, in November 2017 when the Houthis' Al Masirah TV stated that a Burkan H2 ballistic missile had targeted a summit at the Saudi capital. According to the official Saudi Press Agency, it was launched to hit the civilians and populated areas. The coalition representative said that it is proved that "continued involvement of the Iranian regime in supporting the Houthi armed group with qualitative capabilities in clear and blatant defiance" of two UN Security Council resolutions to

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<sup>33</sup> Noah Browning and John Irish, "Saudi Arabia Announces 34-State Islamic Military Alliance against Terrorism," Reuters, December 15 (2015). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-security-idUSKBN0TX2PG20151215>

threaten regional and international security.<sup>34</sup> In return, Riyadh continued its airstrike over rebels. The coalition tightens up its blockade of Yemen in reaction to the missile launch, saying it required to stop the trafficking of arms. Hence, both are also conflicting for influence in Iraq and Syria. The Crown Prince, MBS, has labeled that Iran's supply of missiles to the Houthis as "direct military aggression" that might be an act of war while Iran had rejected the allegations.

So, the rivalry is fueled by such events from time to time. Another trick that has been done by Saudi Arab funded a Persian language channel which was apparently initiated by the UK base businessman with the name of Iran international news. In 2018, the ambassador of Iran complained to the media regulator because of Iran International's interview with a separatist group. According to one source, Saudi Arab gave \$250 million to help the launch of Iran International, which has no commercial advertisement.

In May 2018, the withdrawal from the nuclear deal by the US triggered another level of tension not only in the region but across the globe also. When the Trump administration announced withdrawal, two states were happy with the decision. Saudi Arab welcomed the decision by saying that the Kingdom would work with the US to revoke the escalation of the nuclear race. He also highlighted the through the deal Iran has gained many economic edges to continue destabilizing the regime especially developing missiles and providing them to that terror groups. Kingdom has concerned that Iran's program is a danger to the peace and stability of the world. Trump's government criticized the deal because it does not cover Iran's ballistic missile program which is a threat to regional and the world equally. The deal was considered insufficient to cover each aspect. On the other hand, the international community massively criticized the withdrawal of the deal. Even the close allies of the US criticized the withdrawal and declared the act as a violation of JAPOA. At that point, Germany, France, and the UK announced that they would continue the treaty regardless of unilateral withdrawal. On it, Iran stated that he would fulfill his obligation but would not do another agreement. Iran warned that he can go to the pre-JAPOA situation with full zeal and would not make another agreement. In a May 10,

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<sup>34</sup> "Yemen Rebel Ballistic Missile 'Intercepted over Riyadh," (BBC, 2017).  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42412729>

2018, letter to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Foreign Minister Zarif wrote that “if JCPOA is to survive, the remaining JCPOA Participants and the international community need to fully ensure that Iran is compensated unconditionally through appropriate national, regional, and global measures”<sup>35</sup> In a combined declaration provided by British Prime Minister Theresa May's office, France, Germany, and the UK requested the US not impede other nations as they try to implement the deal and insisted Iran to "show restraint" and remain fulfilling its own responsibilities.

### **1.8 Drone Attack on Saudi Aramco Oil-Processing Facility**

On September 14, 2019 drones were utilized to assault the state-claimed Saudi Aramco oil handling offices at Abqaiq and Khurais in eastern Saudi Arab. The Houthi development in Yemen asserted obligation, binds it to occasions encompassing the Saudi Arab intervention in the Yemeni Civil War and expressing they utilized ten missiles in the assault dispatched from Yemen, south of the offices. Saudi Arab authorities said that a lot more missiles and drones were utilized for the attack and began from the north and east and that they were of Iranian assembling. The US and Saudi Arab have expressed that Iran was behind the attacks while France, Germany, and the United Kingdom together expressed Iran bears obligation regarding it however, Iran has denied any inclusion. The circumstance has worsened the Persian Gulf tension. The attack raised the political instability of the region the situation become more doubted when the US blamed Iran for the attacks. On it, the King of Arabia stated that they can answer any attack, while on the other side US assured KSA that America would help the kingdom to figure out the culprit. Alongside, the Trump administration clarified that they are no more dependent on Middle Eastern oil but would sit with the Riyadh administration to work against the threat. As a reaction to attacks, the US again imposed sanctions over Iran to purchase dollars to restraint them from getting powerful any future strikes. The international bodies, the UN secretary-general condemned the attacks and highlighted the vulnerability of regional security. Trump's administration assurance clear signaling that the US would stay allied with its biggest arms purchaser and oil producer when it comes to Iran.

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<sup>35</sup> Mohammad Javad Zarif (FM of Iran 2013-21), interview by MARGARET BRENNAN, April 20, 2018. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/discussion/2018/apr/20/zarif-new-york-nuclear-deal>

Although Houthis acknowledged the attack, but the US secretary of state Pompeo stated that U.S officials believe Iran itself might have been "the staging ground."<sup>36</sup> Consequently, KSA called for international investigation quoting with the Riyadh can figure out the actor behind the scene and have the capacity to answer any aggression. The US has deployed its forces in Saudi Arab which has enlarged the US military presence in the region. Now again the security sphere went into the hands of the US "the ultimate security guarantor." So ultimately, cards are in the hand of the U.S. and Trump.<sup>37</sup>

### **1.9 16th Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers**

The extraordinary session of the foreign minister was called to condemn the attack on oil reservoirs in Jeddah, KSA right after the attacks. In the declaration, OIC members strongly condemned the attack on Aramco facilities and declared aggression against the security and stability of Saudi Arab. They affirmed that OIC members fully supported and stand by Arabia in all the acts and measures. Moreover, the session promised that every member to continue their efforts against the growing threat of the region. The session urged the Security Council to take lift radicle steps to avoid and prevent hold accountable those culprits after investigation as the security of Saudi Arab is a symbol of Security of the Muslim world. This session was attended by just a representative, not by the foreign minister Zarif. The US and Saudi Arab was openly accusing Iran for the attacks Tehran called them laughable accusations and rejected the claims. Furthermore, Tehran's spokesperson said that this is not new to get this type of accusation from Washington.

### **1.10 Emergence of GCC-Israel Relation**

Iran's regional influence gained momentum after the Arab spring of 2011. The Arab spring provided Iran space through which he spread his influence over the entire region. The expended activities of Tehran in the region made Gulf countries more depended on US as a security guarantor. Moreover, Saudi Arab's political and aggressive approach is not hidden. In this way Israel is more relaxed that the region is busy in their internal

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<sup>36</sup> NAHAL TOOSI, "Trump's Deference to Saudi Arabia Infuriates Much of D.C.," POLITICO2019. <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/09/16/saudi-trump-oil-iran-1498147>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

matters while this increased aggression between Gulf States provided opportunity to Israel to normalize their relationship with Arab countries. In the time of nuclear deal KSA had covert diplomatic relations with Israel as a reaction of US rapprochement towards Iran. Hence, with the trump administration Israel has started enhancing normalization of relation with Arab Countries. Unsurprisingly, Israel can support any of the group against Tehran to let him down. Due to the turmoil in Middle East the communication level increased ever in the history of Israel and KSA. Later, nuclear deal more fosters Israel to have ties and direct relations with Kingdom. After the formation of alliance and back channel diplomacy, Riyadh funded sectarian strategies in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq against Tehran's influence. The open reconciliation can be witnessed through the recent normalization of relation amid Israel and UAE, Bahrain and Oman. Netanyahu's visit to Oman and his representative visit to UAE and a schedule Bahrain visit had opened the covert relationship and help brought more Gulf countries nearer to Israel. In the context of geo-strategic competition, both the sides are investing to gain maximum dominance and protection against the increasing threat from each other. Israel working on "Periphery Doctrine" combines with non-Arabs while Iran perceives the Arabism threat massively.<sup>38</sup>

### **1.11 Strategic Competition between Iran and Saudi Arab**

The strategic interest of Tehran and Riyadh had deep roots in the history. Both the side remained in opposition with each other. The clarity in the conflict came with the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 which ended the long phase of affair between west and Iran. The sectarian difference divided the region into two ideologies that ultimately effected the surrounding of their neighbor and regional states. Soon the ideological mismatch went behind and economic interests and to gain regional supremacy struggle filled the place. In the war of Iran and Iraq in 1988 in which Saudi Arab supported Iraq financially and militarily. Apart from the Iran-Iraq war both the states were engaged on another place that was Lebanese civil war, Afghan war and the cold war between US and Soviet Union. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Iraq war of 2003 allowed Iran to increase its

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<sup>38</sup> Nora Maher, "Balancing Deterrence: Iran-Israel Relations in a Turbulent Middle East," Review of Economics and Political Science (2020): 16.



influence in its neighbor. Those increasing roles threaten Saudi Arab at large scale. He considers Iran have imperial behavior which would downturn the gulf order.<sup>39</sup> Many of the sources of friction had quoted above but the core reason behind this power struggle is their strategic interest in the region. The economic competition between Iran and Arabia become the main reason of rift. The dominance over oil market is the ultimate objective of their strategic interest. Both are the biggest oil producers and have abundance in their stock. In 2015, after when Iran normalized its relation with west and other powers the phase of stabilization increased the Arabian concerns that resuming the oil export Iran could give him a tough time. This behavior increased the economic competition in the region.

Apart from economic grounds, these two powers are competing in over all the region of Middle East which has started from Iraq to Qatar and Yemen to Syria.<sup>40</sup> The consequential engagement is in Yemen, in which Mansur Hadi-led government and Hauthis armed movement is included beside their allies. The government has the support of Saudi Arab while Iran is supporting the opposition there. Apparently it is a civil war but widely seen as a proxy conflict between Arabs and Persians blocs. Thousands of people have been died in the conflict but the internationalized conflict is not coming to end. Consequently, US is providing intelligence and logistic support to Saudi led alliance. The space of power had invited many terrorist groups there to fill the space. A United Nation group of Experts professed they had no absolute proof that Tehran had been providing the Hauthis with solid funding. The Hauthis have in any case verified that they are no-one's proxy. Iran has repeatedly denied supplying weapons to the Hauthis.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, in Syria the conflict was internal in nature between Assed regime who do not want to leave the government while the on the other side it is opposition with the support of internal and external forces. It is a complex kind of conflict that involves several nations, terror groups and organizations. Almost 470,000 people have been died so far in

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<sup>39</sup> Ribale Sleiman-Haidar to LSE, 15 June, 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/06/15/saudi-arabia-and-iran-beyond-conflict-and-coexistence/>

<sup>40</sup>Patrick van der Heiden and Alex Krijger, "The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry," *Atlantisch Perspectief* 42, no. 2 (2018): 14.

<sup>41</sup> Michelle Nichols, "U.N. Investigators Find Yemen's Houthis Did Not Carry out Saudi Oil Attack," Reuters, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-un-exclusive-idUSKBN1Z72VX>

the ongoing conflict. Some of the states Iran and Russian backed the Assed's regime while Saudi Arab along with its western support backed opposition groups. A third force that is frightening are terror groups and organization including Al-Qaida, Jihadi groups Al-Nusra and sunni Islamic militia is there busy in the friction. In simple word Syrian has become the ground for the power show of different forces. Saudi Arab along with US is openly investing strikes to topple down the Assed's regime. In this war Iran is entitled in giving the support to Hezbollah and Hamas while Saudi's are baking IS and Wahhabis groups.<sup>42</sup> Many of the proxy wars between them have designed the politics of Middle East. The growing tension day by day is increasing the threat of conventional war between them. Although both sides are not in the favor of war but the happenings of Middles East and excessive interference of external forces and their interest may bring them on the brink of war.

### **1.12 External Forces Role in Region Politics**

The regional insecurities are increasing with rapid changing and happening of events in Middle East. In pre-2013 time period US played a role of security provider for the region but in post 2013 the politics of Middle East had changed when US tried to decrease its role. The JCPOA is an example where US tried to approach Iran to settle the problem and escape from the region. The dynamic relations this time made worried to the other regional allies of US. Kingdom and Israel saw the deal a threat to their security and highlighted the no credibility of Iran. Alongside, they strongly criticized the provision and quality of deal amid them. The void which was created was filled with Turkey and Qatar too. Turkey emerged stronger and diplomatically active in establishing ties inside the region. Similarly, many other groups arose as a threat to the regional security as well as internationally.

Correspondingly, apart from US, Russia had also penetrated into the region. It had made strategic alliance with Iran to make relationship and missing role of Russia highlighted. While Russia has showcased its self-confidence inflowing the Syrian war, it remains indefinite if it has the resources and ability to fetch the civil war to an end and nurture

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<sup>42</sup> Dr. Farhat Konain Shujahi and Muhammad Shafiq, "Evaluating Iran-Saudi Strategic Competition in Middle East: Implications for Regional Security," NDU (2018): 146.

stability in the country.<sup>43</sup> The Middle East saw different blocs where US supported KSA along with other Arab countries and Israel while on the other side Russia and later Turkey supported Iran too. The regional power shift dramatically shifted from one to another with the abrupt event. The continuous dynamism and intervention into the regional order of Middle East shaped politics of region. However, the external power remained failed to materialize the solution for the peace and stability of region rather show of power becomes the routine of the region. The global security leader US even remained fail to regularize the peace and order due to in large uneven approach.<sup>44</sup>

### **1.13 Economic Competition in the Region or Regional Power Struggle**

The discovery of Oil reservoirs transformed the importance of Middle Eastern Region. The half of the known oil deposits belong to this particular region. The distributions of reserves are not equal however the region depends on their deposits very much. Among them Saudi Arab is blessed with huge reservoirs and the biggest oil producer and supplier. On the flip side Iran has potential too but facing oil embargo and sanction therefore it could not took benefits as much as KSA is taking from the reservoirs. Similarly, Iraq, Kuwait and other small states have deposits too. Saudi Arab is by far the region's main producer and exporter having for approx.42percentage of production from the Middle East, Similarly, by Iran 19%, UAE 11%, Iraq 6%, Kuwait 11%, Qatar 4%, Oman 5%, and Syria 2% in year 2003. Currently, 60% of exports from the Middle East meant for Asian markets. The region supplied 29% of crude oil to USA in 2001.<sup>45</sup> Not only the Oil but region is rich in coal, chrome, Sulphur, magnesium and other minerals but also, the biggest attraction is the oil of the region. The oil having states collectively made a platform Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) which is responsible for the regularization and settlement of oil price in the world in 1960. According to current estimates, 79.4% of the world's proven oil reserves positioned in OPEC Member Countries, with the bulk of OPEC oil reserves in the Middle East,

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<sup>43</sup> Ellie Geranmayeh, *Regional Geopolitical Rivalries in the Middle East: Implications for Europe* (Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 2018), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Karim Makdisi et al., "Regional Order from the Outside In: External Intervention, Regional Actors, Conflicts and Agenda in the Mena Region," *MENARA Methodology and Concepts Papers*, no. 5 (2017): 4.

<sup>45</sup> Mustafa Balat, "The Position of Oil in the Middle East: Potential Trends, Future Perspectives, Market and Trade," *Energy Sources, Part A* 28, no. 9 (2006): 827.

amounting to 64.5% of the OPEC total.<sup>46</sup> According to the International Energy Agency, until 2030 world oil intake will increase by about 60%. Although it has not considered important that who own the most demanding resource of world but in case of Middle East it does matters. The region is puncture of hostility, tension, and political struggle to gain dominance on each other and a playground of different regional and extra regional power therefore, always remained in vulnerable situation and could not take benefits from its huge resources.

The states of the region especially Iran and Saudi Arab's relations are directly influencing the energy assets of the region. The friction between Sunni and Shia, oil politics, West and radicalized Muslim world, bordering issues are the problems of this region. The region is heavily depended on oil reserves. Their infertile relations can impact the world's economy and security.

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<sup>46</sup> EN OPEC, "Opec Share of World Crude Oil Reserves, 2017," (2018).  
[https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/data\\_graphs/330.htm](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm)

## CHAPTER 2

### POWER POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND OIC

This chapter illustrates the power politics of Middle East. The regional as well as extra regional power's interest makes it more important in the global arena. This region has unique characteristics of history, ideology, revolutions, and diversity of religion and culture. Also, the governmental structure of this region has variety too. From absolute monarchy to ideological, secularist, conservatives are there in the region. These different aspects have impression on the Muslim world as a whole and on one of the most important organization of Islamic world OIC. The ambitious states of Middle East made this region even more important to study in detail. In 20<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of politics in the Middle Eastern region emerged more than the cultural or geographical existence.<sup>47</sup> This region is the host of biggest civilizations e.g. Islam, Christianity, Judaism. Interaction of this region with the surrounding regions always remains in the history. However, after world war-I and cold war the region become a focal point for international powers as well. The major change in the political ambitions was seen after the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979. The clear contrast popped out in front of everyone and opportunists like US took advantage of situation of Middle Eastern indecisive political atmosphere. American foreign policy and all other doctrines brought by US prove that all this game was played to control the Middle Eastern oil. Moreover, supporting Gulf war gives evidence that US wanted to maintain hegemony on oil of the region to curtail the challenges from third world. It seemed that the politics of region remained in some other hands and the regional actors remained busy in keeping engage each other. This complex political environment made this region even more difficult to understand.

On the other hand, it can be said that with the advent of Modern day state system, the Middle Eastern region has faced rivalries on ideological differences, competition,

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<sup>47</sup> Bayram Sinkaya, "Introduction to Middle East Politics: Leading Factors, Actors, and Dynamics," ResearchGate (2016): 2.

jealousy and the ultimate goal of being regional leader. Therefore, the loopholes offered the extra regional powers i.e. US, European powers and Russia to penetrate into the region. When the regional players seeks help and support from outsiders it offers penetration and involvement of these powers in the regional affairs thus it exploits the situation for their own benefits. Middle East has been the house of different idealistic and realist power. Prominently, the historic rivals Saudi Arab and Iran are visible but other emerging powers of the Middle East are involving in shaping the political setup of the Middle East. Apart from Iran and KSA, Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, UAE, Israel is also playing a significant role in shaping the political environment of this region. The role of extra-regional power is also very important in this regard, which includes the US, Russia, China, Pakistan, India, and other European states. These states are in conflict and cooperation on many grounds for the balance of power in the region. The Middle East is the epicenter of conflicts and long chronicles of wars. So in the region political and strategic advantages on each other is the ultimate goal of regional powers as well as for the extra regional power.

OIC has tried to keep itself engaged in mitigating the issues between the regional Muslim powers. Largely, Saudi-Iran rivalry has taken over the working and functioning of OIC. Keeping in mind the several events of Middle East it has witnessed that OIC's platform is being used by the major dominant and funding members. While in some cases the weak reconciliatory efforts of OIC had made it more ineffective. For instance the Iraq-Iran war was initially mediated by OIC. The first impression looked very functional as an organization but soon it lost its strength due to biasness. As the Gulf States were openly opposed Iran and not taking name Iraq as an aggressor state. Moreover, the annulment of plea for the neutral venue by Iran vibrantly highlighted that OIC will remain fail to bring solution of the problem. Similarly, in 2016 OIC issued a resolution accused Iran for terrorism in the affairs of other states. While the silence over the execution of cleric Nimr-Al-Nimr activated the new phase of rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arab.<sup>48</sup> Hence,

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<sup>48</sup>Ildus G Ilishev, "The Iran-Saudi Arabia Conflict and Its Impact on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation," Viewpoints, no. 104 (2016): 1.

the power politics have facilitated the sectarianism and conflicts<sup>49</sup> which impacted the efficacy of OIC. Syrian war moreover added extra regional power in this phenomenon and aggravated the issues more. Furthermore, the diversity of ethnic and religious nationalities in Middle East has caused confrontation of states and inviting outsider to play role in the power politics of region.

## **2.1 Competing Interests of Extra Regional powers**

The Middle East has remained ground of competition during 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries between European powers and Russia (Czarist Russia).<sup>50</sup>In the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the European powers started to decline in Middle East. In this time period US emerged as a strong player and did many defense treaties with Middle Eastern states. In reaction Soviet Union had made policy of alliance for the region. Due to Suez Canal crisis it gave opportunity to deploy its forces and make strong presence in the region.

### **2.1.1 US Interests in the Middle East**

The Eisenhower and Carter doctrine explain the US interest in the Middle Eastern region. According to the Eisenhower doctrine the security and stability of the region to gain economic benefits were the objectives while Carter doctrine says that outside intervention (to deter USSR) in the region will consider attack on US. However, the interests of US have evolved time to time. As per Carter doctrine, the area of Middle East an area that contains more than two-third global oil which need to safe from hostile forces.<sup>51</sup>US was a chief importer of crude oil from the Middle East mainly Gulf States. Oil has remained very important commodity for the major power therefore Britain has expressed the presence of US power into the region for free flow of oil. The interests of the US and European powers are purely economics while the existence of Iran is a threat for the security, stability and for any interruption of oil flow. Iran is moving forward to gain nuclear power which indicates threat for the interests of US in the region. Therefore, US

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<sup>49</sup>Saman Zulfqar, "Competing Interests of Major Powers in the Middle East: The Case Study of Syria and Its Implications for Regional Stability," *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2018): 123.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Michael T Klare, "Oil, Iraq, and American Foreign Policy: The Continuing Salience of the Carter Doctrine," *International Journal* 62, no. 1 (2007): 34.

maintain its cooperation with Israel to keep them superior over others while Israel help US set back Iran's nuclear program before JCPOA. Moreover, they share so many values in common which make them even more necessary for each other.<sup>52</sup>

The new Joe Biden's administration has somehow managed to tilt from its economic benefits to pure strategic and political interest. Biden administration has announced Yemen War a humanitarian crisis and destruction at strategic level.<sup>53</sup> Now US have no dependence on Saudi oil yet it has strong reason to keep KSA as ally for the facilitation of counter terrorism and for the balance of power against Iran in the region. Keeping a side all conventional interests of US in the region now the focus is more strategic, like US has become energy secure, Israel have now more strength and stability politically and strategically. The ultimate objective now seems to counter increasing influence of China and Russia. Therefore, the Biden administration is still maintaining the close relation with their allies. Besides, to containment of IS, Al-Qaeda and other militant group it is necessary for US to remain active in the region.

### **2.1.2 Russian Interest in Middle East**

Due to the Chenchan war, Russia received extreme criticism specifically from Middle Eastern region. However, Russian in the name of 'war on terror' crashed the opposition with military operation.<sup>54</sup> Normalization of relations among Muslim world and Russia was materialized, when it opposed the US invasion in Iraq. Later, in 2003 Russian was given an observer status in the OIC. This has changed the opinion of Muslim states towards Russia and its policies.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, Russia have multisided interest in the region i.e. arm sale, energy and investment. Despite the differences on many grounds it enjoys economic relations with Israel as well. President Putin himself declared, "We see active military economic ties advancing our national interest, both political and

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Byman and Sara Bjerg Moller, "The United States and the Middle East: Interests, Risks, and Costs," *Sustainable Security: Rethinking American National Security Strategy* (2016): 15.

<sup>53</sup> Dr Julie Norman, "Middle East Balance Key to Biden's Foreign Policy Aims " Chatham House, 21 April 2021. <https://americas.chathamhouse.org/article/middle-east-balance-biden-foreign-policy/>

<sup>54</sup> Roland Dannreuther, "Russia and the Middle East: A Cold War Paradigm?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 3 (2012): 543-60.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*



economic.<sup>56</sup> Apart from the pure economic interest, Arab spring have given Russia a full scale opportunity to increase its strategic role in the region.

Steven A. Cook in his paper argues that Russia has clear view that the Arab spring brought instability in the region. The restoration of Assed's regime has affected the USA and Allies. Egyptians are already disappointed with USA, while Mubarak's demise brought Moscow and Egypt near to each other. On the other hand, military ties brought more closely. Therefore, Egypt purchased nearly \$3 billion worth of Russian arms consisting of helicopters and warplanes. This activity have arose another concern that Russia is going to settle its military existence in Cairo.

It is not only the Egypt but Turkey is another state present in the orbit of Russia. A long list of Turkish concerns has come between US and Turkey which offered Russia to come closer with Turkey. The defense agreements amid Turkey and Russia increased the distancing between US and Turkey. While US terminated Ankara's participation form F-35 program and applied sanctions. Similarly, Russian intervention has impressed other Gulf countries too. The King Salman's visit to Kremlin has expressed Saudi's increasing interest in the Russia. Both side leaders visited each other but at the same time Russia is keeping Iran in its relation too. Here, the complexity of relationship and overlapping interest makes the Middle East even more confused and indecisive.

Unlike Saudi Arab, UAE is also coming close to Russia with the same concerns over Russian-Iran relation and wanted to tilt Russia towards GCC countries. While Gulf countries also thought that US is now less interested in the region and Russia is a sensible option. However, the possible agreement could not be materialized.<sup>57</sup>In short, Russian taking lessons from the missteps of US use its alliance for its strategic interest. Like US invaded Iraq over non-existed threats after which it left the ground without solution. This created a power vacuum led the region in the hands of ISIS. On the other hand Kremlin

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<sup>56</sup>Edward Levitzky Stephen Blank "Geostrategic Aims of the Russian Arms Trade in East Asia and the Middle East," *Defence Studies* 15, no. 1 (2015): 64.

<sup>57</sup>Joseph Trevithick, "Russia Says UAE Could Help Build Su-57s as Gulf Nation Puts F-35 Ambitions on Hold," *Drive*, November 18, 2019. <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/31083/russia-says-uae-could-help-build-su-57s-as-gulf-nation-puts-f-35-ambitions-on-hold>

knew that US is now reducing its role in the region therefore, a golden opportunity to gain and make alliance in the region is the goal of Russia.<sup>58</sup>

### **2.1.3 China's Interest in Middle East**

China's core interest in the region is its energy resources. It has beaten US as the largest importer of energy resources in the region. In 2019, China's crude oil imports came from Organization of the Petroleum Exporting countries (OPEC) nearly 55%. It imports increased with KSA from 0.5 million b/d to 1.7 million b/d till 2019.<sup>59</sup> While nearly half volume of oil import with KSA, China is importing from Iran that is the new hit which poses a challenge to US. Biden administration is however; ready to resume nuclear deal talks with Iran but Iran demands removal of sanctions before talks. In this regard, China also supports the demand of Iran and criticized the illicit sanction be removed as soon as possible.<sup>60</sup>

Additionally, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by the China have increased the sphere of interest in the region. US to some extent unable to stop the expanding influence of China in the Middle East and beyond. Under the banner of BRI, China is financing many of the Middle Eastern as well as Central Asian countries and beyond by constructing ports specifically in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and in Israel.<sup>61</sup> To pursue this project China is investing heavily on these projects. Billions of dollars are spending on different kinds of infrastructural and developmental projects. Another aspect of its interest is the stability and security of the region where China is expending its wealth and time. China considers the security and order of the region is necessary for its future goals as well. And the security situation would directly hit the internal security of China itself. Therefore, it is playing very carefully in the Middle East.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Steven A Cook, Major Power Rivalry in the Middle East (Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Preventive Action, 2021), 10.

<sup>59</sup> Jeff Barron, "China's Crude Oil Imports Surpassed 10 Million Barrels Per Day in 2019," US Energy Information Administration (EIA) 23 (2020). <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=43216>

<sup>60</sup> "China's Iran Oil Imports Seen Hitting New High in March, Curbing Opec Output Options," ed. Middle East & Africa (Reuters, 2021). <https://www.reuters.com/article/china-iran-oil-int-idUSKBN2BM1B2>

<sup>61</sup> Zulfqar, "Competing Interests of Major Powers in the Middle East: The Case Study of Syria and Its Implications for Regional Stability," 132.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

According to the research of Steven A. Cook the interest of China in the region is beyond the energy resources. Trade volume between Middle Eastern regions has increased significantly due to Beijing investing huge infrastructural project around the Middle East. China seems this region a vital point if it wants to become center of trade world trade, good and services. Therefore, it developed relations with twenty one countries of Middle East to pursue its BRI project. Chinese interest is justifiable because the Middle Eastern region covers main choke points of the world. And it needs a smooth flow of its trade from these routes. This strategic interest is visible from the geopolitics and planning of China.<sup>63</sup> However, China has kept maintaining the balance of act between Iran and Saudi Arab. China has low military and political profile trying to create atmosphere of neutrality. It also emerged as a new comer in the region without making any trade and economic promises with either of the side. On the other side, Iran and Saudi Arab are not in the position to take side against the emerging economic power.

China is skillfully playing its card and making balanced relationship for example, it promised to do bilateral trade of 600 billion dollars with Tehran while, 70 Billion dollars with the Kingdom offering it ARAMCO's 5% Share. On the other hand, China's strategic relationship with Iran shows its stricken neutrality on one side and it wants to keep US focused on Persian Gulf and not the South China Sea. Recently, US new Biden's administration is focusing on dialogue and diplomacy with Iran which will possibly reduce the tension between US-Iran. But some analysts believe that China's increasing relationship with Iran is because it wants to undermine US policies. Despite of its huge investments and increasing economic ties China has lot to do to make region feasible in every aspect. Because the leaders of Arab states want to sustain their security ties with US.

There is another aspect that in comparison of Iran and Saudi Arab, Iran is more feasible for China as it offer more benefits in terms of BRI but KSA has little to offer. On the flip side, Saudi Arab would also feel threaten with the tilt of China towards Iran. Saudi

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<sup>63</sup>Steven A Cook, Major Power Rivalry in the Middle East (Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Preventive Action, 2021), 12.

Arab's policy of isolating Iran will be damaged if Iran-Sino extends any cooperation. It would also challenge the Chinese role of mediator between Iran-Saudi Arab.

## **2.2 Some Reflections on Regional Conflicts**

Middle East has remained in a series of conflict especially over the past two decades. The ideological difference have laid the foundation of rift and set the conflict trends of Middle East. Syrian war, Yemen conflict, Iraq insurgency and the constant Palestinian issue kept the trend of conflict in practice since years. Apart from the state based conflicts the non-state conflicts also participated to increase the intensity of security. Syria has been the hardest hit country by non-state conflicts; in 2019, five different non-state conflicts were recorded in the country.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the feelings of enmity between Iran and Saudi Arab have shaped the security order of Middle East. The gist of some major Middle Eastern conflicts is as follows:

### **2.2.1 State Sponsored Conflicts**

Iran and Saudi Arab have shaped the political environment of Middle East. Both states chose different sides in the situation to take political advantage of the Middle Eastern states political upheavals and designed the whole scenario. This is how the two rival states are making the regional environment and showing the power and dominance in the region. So, The State based conflicts which generally known as civil wars,<sup>65</sup> The Middle Eastern Region has history of state based conflicts. The non-state actors remain more active in state based conflicts. Different paramilitary organization with the support of different blocs plays their side of game in the region, so these conflicts have different reason. In the case of Yemen the actors were government and Ansaarullah, the reason for their rift is enhancing the power and political influence over the states. While in the case of Kurdistan, Kurdish forces and Turkish government confronted one another over the territory. The instances shows diversity of purpose for state based conflicts. Keeping in mind the meaning of state based conflict, Middle Eastern region have witnessed this kind

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<sup>64</sup>Júlia Palik et al., "Conflict Trends in the Middle East,1989–2019," Conflict Trends in the Middle East,1989–2019 (2020): 25.

<sup>65</sup>Júlia Palik, Siri Ass Rustad, and Fredrik Methi, "Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2019," (PRIO, 2020), 8.

of conflict since years. However, historic rivals have taken the advantages of these state based conflicts.

Yemen conflict which was began in 2014 between Ansaarullah commonly known as Houthi and Yemeni government led by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi alongside allies and supporters. Houthis revolutionary committee declared to over throw Hadi government and enlarge the control. The Houthi movement is principally led by Zaidi Shia while the Hadi belongs to Sunni Sect. Being a President of Yemen Hadi government faced many challenges i.e. separatist movement, loyalties of security to Abdullah Saleh (Ex. Authoritarian) and other social problems of corruption, unemployment, and food crisis. Houthis (known as Ansaarullah) emerged as the biggest challenge to fight with. In the era of President Saleh, the Houthis rebellion approach kept him engage in his time period while in Hadi's government; it took advantage of its weakness and captured the northern sides of the state where they were already very strong since years. Their influence over the territory increased and illusion with the rebellions masses took side that eventually increased the occupation till capital Sanaa. Iran was accused for being in the support of Houthis while on the other hand government was backed by Saudis along with other Sunni states. Apart from it, US predictably conspired with KSA. The uprising and wining position was humiliating for Riyadh so they launched a full-fledged war which was accompanied by its definite allies UAE, Bahrain and other traditional partners.<sup>66</sup> In return, Houthis started ballistic missile attacks on KSA.

The blame game continued from KSA and US towards Iran and the third party, the militant groups took advantage of chaotic situation. Al-Qaida and Islamic state (IS) carried out deadly attack in the south of state especially in Aden. The fight of gaining power over the territory crossed the limits and cost huge life loss and in terms of finance too. These attacks considered that would end in some weeks but it followed years. These attacks also allowed the coalition to make blockade of Yemen which opened the ways for many other problems of food, inflation and a worst humanitarian crisis. While the biggest consequences were that Iran, Hezbollah and Ansarullah came closer. The opposition

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<sup>66</sup>Riedel Bruce to Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?, December 18, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/12/18/who-are-the-houthis-and-why-are-we-at-war-with-them/>.

forces also faced clashes with each other. After which Houthis emerged as the strongest element of state control forces. Eventually Yemen war arose as an issue for world because it increased the regional tension and rivalry. This can be seen easily that actually it is the power struggle game between Shia-Sunni led forces majorly supported by Iran and Saudi Arab respectively. Yemen war once again highlighted that how Muslim world is divided due to the ideological mismatch of two important Muslim entities. The strategic location of Yemen is another point of divergence because the state of Yemen lies on the strategic strait (Strait of Bab Al Mandab) that connects Red sea to Gulf of Aden which is the passage of world's largest oil Shipment was a tough challenge for KSA.

Hence, all sides were responsible for the worsening situation of Yemen war but on the other hand deteriorating situation in Yemen raised the question on the credibility of OIC. The neutrality of the organization was missing in the matter of Yemen war. The peace deal could be materialized as a first and foremost option but OIC's platform was being used by influential members. The summit of 2016 of OIC directly accused Iran for spreading terrorism which stressed that the functioning of OIC is affected by powerful members. Because OIC was made to support solidarity in the Muslim world and to mediate for mutual difference in which the Shia-Sunni issue is the biggest one. The coalition force of Arab counterstrucked in Yemen which also painted the narrative that the military force was made to fight for the geopolitical interest of KSA specifically and Arab countries in general. Therefore, many member states continued to highlight the ineffectiveness of OIC and the need to start a new alliance for the solution of problem.<sup>67</sup>In consequence of Yemen war, OIC remained a silent viewer for humanitarian crisis brought by both groups.

On the other hand, Turkey and Kurdish forces are another example of state based conflicts. The Kurds are fighting for their piece of land while Turkey is busy in securing its stability and defense from Kurdish force occupying northern Syria. The reason behind this fight dates back in August 10, 1920. Under which it was decided to give Kurd people their own separate land yet the reality was opposite. The population got divided into

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<sup>67</sup>Islamic Republic News Agency, "Oic 'Dead'; Pakistan, Iran Need Find New Muslim Alliance: Diplomat," (2017). <https://en.irna.ir/news/82657740/OIC-dead-Pakistan-Iran-need-find-new-Muslim-alliance-diplomat>

different states of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Turkey receives the biggest chunk of population as their part. Having their own linguistic, culture and recognition they demanded hyphenated identity which Turkey is not ready to give them separately. In Syria Kurdish forces emerged as a strong proponent of state and stood against the Islamic State (IS). With the support of US and its allies Kurdish democratic forces accompanied with western power and fought to root out IS from Syria. Upon this Turkey felt threat from their empowerment and increasing influence. Alongside Turkey had faced long time fight with Kurdish workers' party (PKK) who backed Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Turkey had long been branded PKK as terrorist.<sup>68</sup>

While on the other hand, Turkey has received millions of refugees in the result of Syrian civil war. They considered that the increasing influence of Kurdish forces is a strong threat to the security and peace while the amount of people in the shape of refugees was a constant burden for the economy too. The PKK have involved in armed conflict with the forces of Turkey since its inception. Either side are involved in deadly attack for instance PKK bombed many of the cities of Turkey while the government had burnt many of the villages and did massacred to root out PKK. The skirmishes continued until the peace deal occurred in 2015 but it could not last killing on both side. Turkish government threw large scale operation against PKK. Turkey addressed US and warned not to back Syrian Kurdish as it would send the forces in Syria in order to clean its bordering areas. Meanwhile turkey initiated two major operations in 2018 and 2019 respectively and gained the control over territory occupied by PKK for quite a long time.<sup>69</sup>

### **2.2.2 Non-State based Conflicts**

It is a kind of conflicts that does not involve states directly in conflict known as non-state based conflicts.<sup>70</sup> According to Uppsala conflict data program that the use of arm that results in 25 deaths per year either consists of organized or unorganized groups called

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<sup>68</sup> Marlies Casier, "Designated Terrorists: The Kurdistan Workers' Party and Its Struggle to (Re) Gain Political Legitimacy," *Mediterranean Politics* 15, no. 3 (2010): 1.

<sup>69</sup> "A Timeline of the Pkk's War on Turkey: 1974-2019," (TRT World, 2019).  
<https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/a-timeline-of-the-pkk-s-war-on-turkey-1974-2019-30618>

<sup>70</sup>Therése Petterson, "Ucdp Non-State Conflict Codebook," Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University ([http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/nsos/ucdp-non state-181. pdf](http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/nsos/ucdp-non%20state-181.pdf)) (2014): 2.

Non-State Conflicts.<sup>71</sup> Middle East has experienced non-state conflicts in significant amount after 2011 Arab spring. This region has witnessed highly organized actors for the sake of their own perceived agendas. There are ranges of groups that work in the shadows of the larger Islamic mass engagements and assist as strategic paramilitary allies for more proven Violent Non State Actors (VNSAs) such as Hamas or Hezbollah. The nature of their association usually deliberately covered to grant some level of political protection to the political wing of its parental group. There are additionally a few organizations that go about as domestic specialists, for example, Iran, or transnational organization like Al Qaeda. Ansar al Islam (AI), and Kata'ib Hizballah (KH) have been recorded by the US State Department as the terror groups worked for 10 years.<sup>72</sup> The major groups that were functional and still pursuing its agendas in Middle East having support of allegedly different regional non state powers are Hizbollah, Hamas, Al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and official known as Islamic State (IS). Hamas is a Sunni Islamic group operates for Independent Palestine from Israeli occupation formed in 1987 and from its inception counted as Islamic militancy and a user of violent tactics.<sup>73</sup> On the other side, Hizbollah is a Shia Islamic Lebanese group for their political rights as well as to contain the Israel's deterrence which formed in 1982. Over the time, the organization has changed from Islamist movement to state within state in Lebanon for the liberation.<sup>74</sup> This group works as political wing and military also. Their militarily experience is the result of their Syrian war participation. Israel's biggest concern in Syria is Hezbollah with the strong support of Iran. On the other hand Al Qaeda's is a Sunni Salafi Jihadi extremist group formed after the outbreak of Afghan war. This group declared terrorist group by United Nation Security council (UNSC) and the whole world after that world experienced the biggest wave of terrorism in the world. For which US announced "War on Terror" against their terror activities.

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<sup>71</sup>ibid

<sup>72</sup>Christopher P Dallas-Feeney, "Violent Non-State Actors in the Middle East: Origins and Goals," *Regional Security in the Middle East* (2019): 185.

<sup>73</sup> Rashmi Singh, "The Discourse and Practice of 'Heroic Resistance' in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Case of Hamas," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 4 (2012): 531.

<sup>74</sup> Hussain Abdul-Hussain, "Hezbollah: A State within a State," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 8 (2009): 68.



Furthermore, ISIL or IS is again Sunni Salafi Jihadi group spinoff from Al Qaeda in 2014 and focused the old agenda of Al Qaeda “The Global Caliphate”. For the expansion of Caliphate across the globe offensively is the purpose of this terror group. UNSC warned against designated Terrorist organization for their slaughtering video and extremist activities. This group operated in organized way in the Syria against the forces of Government. In return international coalition launched airstrike campaign which caused mass killing. In fact, Syria has emerged one of those states experienced this kind of conflict vastly. Many Syrian insurgent groups remained involved and caused the death in large number. In the year 2011, pro-democratic protests got started. This unrest was fueled as a part of Arab spring and neighboring turmoil. The reason being the agitation was social problem through which majority population were suffering. The protests were crushed with force which tuned the demand of protestors into resignation. The opposition forces and the protestor accompanied weapons in their struggle against Assed’s regime. This chaotic situation led the state towards civil war. The extra states elements funded the opposition forces while the power space welcomed other jihadist groups such as ISIL, Al-Qaida, and Syrian Kurds who were struggling since long. These forces increased the concerns and threats. Millions of civilian get killed by attacks.

The Assed’s government were highly and openly supported by Iran, Russian and later Turkey as well. After the failure of his effort for mediating between Tel Aviv and Damascus, President Erdogan felt betrayal. By 2008, Syrian, Iran, and Turkey’s relation went on peak which showed that turkey had tilted from western bloc to opposite camps.<sup>75</sup> While on the flip side, Arab and Sunni coalition along with Western powers backed the opposition forces. As the matter of fact, Syrian government sustained but the large parts are still in the hands of rebels. The major part of the Syria is still in the control of Assed’s government while Kurdish forces have occupied eastern part majorly. Apart from it, rebels, Turkish backed Rebels, IS group have controlled some of the parts. In the year of 2020, Russia, Turkey brokered an agreement for ceasefire. This engagement has controlled the chaos to great extent but it was not permanent. The Security Council has tried to mediate between opposition forces and government but the opposition is firm in

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<sup>75</sup> Özden Zeynep Oktav, "The Syrian Uprising and the Iran-Turkey-Syria Quasi Alliance: A View from Turkey," *Turkey-Syria Relations: Between Enmity and Amity* (2013): 193.

stepping down Assad regime as a settlement. Nonetheless, a committee has formed to constitute new constitution for the state to ensure transparent elections. The involvement of foreign forces in Syria does not allow leaving this matter in the hand of Syrian people as it has made a concern of world peace and stability too.<sup>76</sup>

### **2.2.3 One-sided Conflicts**

According to UPPSALA University's department of Peace and Conflict Research, one-sided violence is referred as the use of arms against the civilians either by the government for their interest or by the formally organized group which cause death more than 25 people. This type of violence has occurred all over the world including Middle East. There are many states which have witnessed one-sided violence in which Somalia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, and Colombia.<sup>77</sup> Especially Middle East had faced number of violence act between 1989 to till date.<sup>78</sup> Mostly non states actor remained involved in one sided conflicts whereas, governments of different states have also been the reason for it. Syrian War is the significant example in this regard in which have many groups, including IS and affiliates kept involved in this kind of conflict.

### **2.2.4 Geographic Extended Conflicts**

Middle East has remained the battle ground of different powers over many years. Predominantly, Iran and Saudi Arab have fabricated the entire situation by participating directly or indirectly in the matters of weak political states. There is another kind of conflict that explains how both rival states have participated in the wars of other states to fulfill their ambitions. Conflict geography deals with conflicting interest of different actors and non-state actors over space, land, resources, or political authority. When it comes to geographic extended conflicts it means that those conflicts that crosses its geographical limits and enters into another territory. Syria, Yemen, and Iraq is the significant example in this regard. Prominently, Syrian has faced multi-type conflicts in which state based, non-state based, one sided and geographical extended conflicts are

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<sup>76</sup>"Why Has the Syrian War Lasted 10 Years?," (BBC News Services, 2020).

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>

<sup>77</sup>Ekaterina Stepanova, "Trends in Armed Conflicts: One-Sided Violence against Civilians," SIPRI Yearbook 2009 (2009): 39.

<sup>78</sup>Júlia Palik et al., "Conflict Trends in the Middle East, 1989–2019," 26.

included. The case study of Syria simplifies and gives accurate knowledge of these conflicts. Keeping in view the geographical versatility, Syria bounded by Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. The surrounding areas covered with entirely different ethnic groups make it more challenging. One unit is ruling different ethnic group over the land of Syria that make political scene difficult there and it is the biggest challenge for them alongside the humanitarian crisis. The humanitarian crisis has implication inside and beyond the state implications.<sup>79</sup> By examining the civil unrest in the country and preserving unity in the country is another challenge. Regional and ethnic fault lines continues to overlay that further worsen the situation. This challenge turned the civil unrest into proxy war that divided the whole Middle East into blocs. It has divided in to four dimensions starting from protesting against the Assed regime. The addition of free Syrian Army transformed the uprising into civil war. Extremist groups around the world started joining Rebels. Syrian civil war accompanied by Jihadist and Kurdish groups and a fully-fledged proxy war got started.

Iran in the back started sending its cargo with number of officers to support Assed regime. The Arab League and OIC have given out declarations accusing Hezbollah as well as leading to a war of words amid the group and Gulf officials.<sup>80</sup> In 2018, Morocco broke diplomatic ties with Iran over reported Hezbollah ties to the Polisario Front. While on the other side Arab states started sending financial assistance and weapons to counter the Iranian influence. Different groups backed by Iran i.e. Hezbollah and other were by Gulf Arab states. The sectarian divide of the country's masses multiplied the problems. Soon Obama Administration sent its assistance to the rebels of Syria. USA alleged Assed's government for the use of chemical weapon and declared a danger for its security. On it Russia proposed Syria to avoid any US Strike dismantle Chemical weapon to international world.<sup>81</sup> On the other side surprisingly Al-Qaeda and IS rivalry fueled the situation. US again announced to strike against IS to control the security situation into

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<sup>79</sup>Elizabeth Ferris, Kemal Kirişçi, and Salman Shaikh, Syrian Crisis: Massive Displacement, Dire Needs and a Shortage of Solutions (Brookings Institution, 2013), 3.

<sup>80</sup> Matthew Lewitt, "Hezbollah's Regional Activities in Support of Iran's Proxy Networks," Middle East Institute (2021): 5.

<sup>81</sup>Stephen Kalin and Arshad Mohammed, "Russia Proposes Syria Chemical Weapons Deal to Avert Us Strike," Reuters, Beirut/London 9 (2013). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-idUSBRE9880HY20130909>

their hands. The activism of Kurdish forces near the Turkish border alarmed Turkey which caused the inclusion in Syrian crisis. However, this has increase Turkey's threat for border security and integrity and projects of border security was announced.<sup>82</sup> While the Turkey and US were allies but the priorities complexes and confused the situation. Russian involvement for the support of Assed turned the security sphere more difficult to identify which side the conflict would end. With the Iranian and Russian support Assed succeeded in getting back some of the occupied cities. Now the Assed regime sustained but the conclusion is still unclear.

However, OIC kept condemning the use of chemical weapon, humanitarian crisis and the occupation of Israel over Golan Heights but the real outcome was not enough. Golan Heights situation deteriorated since 2012 when Syria entered tanks in demilitarized.<sup>83</sup> Millions of people become refugees in the neighboring countries. Apart from Syrian crisis, Yemen, Iraq, and other Muslim issues need multilateral options to resolve this crisis. In this scenario the functioning of OIC becomes crucial. Up till now OIC's role remained limited to declarations and reactionary statements demanding international community to do something for the solution.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, Muslims sees OIC still a platform from where they can raise the voice. With the Syrian and Yemen's crisis huge number of people displaced and faced troublesome after leaving their indigenous lands. Especially in case of Syrian refugees many of the states refused to host refugees due to the threat of Islam phobia, security threat, and space for militancy. However, it is simultaneously, recognized that refugee camps and worse can provide armed militant with territory resources, and camps themselves so therefore, be deemed a security threat.<sup>85</sup> The Gulf countries also refused to accept the arrival of Syrian refugees. Although GCC were part of the crisis so it was impossible for them to host them. It was

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<sup>82</sup>Asli S Okayay, "Turkey's Post-2011 Approach to Its Syrian Border and Its Implications for Domestic Politics," *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2017): 839.

<sup>83</sup>Satoru Nakamura, "Saudi Arabian Diplomacy During the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis: Domestic Pressure, Multilateralism, and Regional Rivalry for an Islamic State," *Journal of Tumnoil and Japanese Respon* 13, no. 2 (2013): 24.

<sup>84</sup>Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Oic)," in *Immigration and the Current Social, Political, and Economic Climate: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (IGI Global, 2019), 123.

<sup>85</sup>Lewis Turner, "Explaining the (Non-)Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan," *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 3 (2015): 4.

another challenge of OIC to tackle with. However, OIC pressurized international communities to accept the refugees but remained failed to make realize that these are human before Muslims. Humanitarian crisis should be the priority. But those Syrian refugees suffered the most in this entire situation, the drowning incident of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea cannot forget. Human trafficking and illegal border crossing remained leftover options of the displaced persons. The less effective role of OIC was due to its donors, the GCC. Saudi Arab has its political influence over OIC to isolate Iran.<sup>86</sup> Although many of the meetings and condemnation statements were issued by the OIC's official yet the limited and less effective role limited to statements could not resolute the problems.<sup>87</sup> The last nail in the coffin was the decision of suspension of Syria from OIC closed the door of conflict resolution.<sup>88</sup> The controversial role of OIC halted the way for solution of problem particularly in the case of Syria.

The largest Muslims' organization OIC could do a very little to solve the problems and misunderstanding among Muslim world. Different decisions and resolution on conflicts have just made controversial this organization. The major funding members' core interest seems more superior to the objectives of organization. Hence, OIC remained ineffective to mitigate clashes and reconciliation.

Throughout the history, OIC has witnessed many challenges and setbacks while mediating. In some cases like Iran-Iraq war in 1980, OIC materialized the agreements to sort out mutual differences but left the efforts too early which caused an obstruction in making OIC a successful organization. Reaching an agreement is important but to implement the agreement is equally important. Therefore, OIC need to root out the problem by implementing the agreement. Moreover, OIC has aimed to resolve the conflicts but not to hit the sovereignty of a country nonetheless, but OIC need to balance amid principle of sovereignty of the internal affairs of the countries. Only in this way, this obstacle can avoid. Additionally; quick response to the conflicts is highly needed by

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<sup>86</sup>Shahram Akbarzadeh and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Impacts of Saudi Hegemony on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Oic)," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 31, no. 3 (2018): 307.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Asma Alsharif, "Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Suspends Syria," *Reuters* Mart 1 (2012).  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-islamic-summit-idUSBRE87E19F20120816>

the OIC because the long standing issues offer extra regional powers to enter in to the conflict. In this way, the resolution becomes more complex and difficult to achieve.

## CHAPTER 3

### AN ASSESSMENT OF OIC'S EFFICACY

This chapter specifically focuses on the functioning, workings and strength of OIC as a sole organization of Muslim world. It also demonstrates the importance of OIC member country in the world. Gradually, the efficacy of OIC declined due to different events and crisis so, this chapter analyzes that how this organization suffers from different factors. OIC formed with the aim to bring harmony and peace in the Muslim world with the membership of 57 Muslim states in 1969. The OIC have projected one of the successful plans of Muslim world but due to many problems the organization has difficulties to perform well as a crisis resolver.<sup>89</sup> So, this chapter will highlight the efforts made by OIC and how much the Organization could do to solve internal problems as well as matters related to Muslim world. Moreover, it will explain in which areas the OIC have remained failed to achieve positive result. Muslim world have strong and strategic advantages therefore, the Muslim world and OIC can be resilient in any economic or political crisis. Unfortunately, OIC have remained almost fail to solve the Muslim world's internal problems. The bitter relationship of Saudi Arab and Iran is the biggest example in this regard. Other than this, OIC have done very little to the threats that Muslim world is facing. Kashmir issue in this regards is one of the biggest example to elaborate. However, the role of OIC seen in the early years of establishment but in recent time there is less effective role of OIC in peace making and protection issues of member states. OIC host all Muslim states in which Iran and Saudi Arab's dominant position is visible. There are now new expressions present in the OIC like Turkey, Morocco, Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan but the conventional dominion powers are still dominating the i.e. Tehran and Jeddah.

The objective of the organization can easily understood from the 10 year Action plan which adopted in 2005. The emerging phenomenon of Islam-o-phobia is the latest

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<sup>89</sup>SESRIC, "Achieving Peace and Security in a World of Turmoil " (2019). <https://sesric.org/publications-detail.php?id=472>

concern of the OIC.<sup>90</sup> Many other essentials of Organization was the part this plan. Indeed a full-fledge kind of work has been done in documentation but the practical has no visibility. The USA invasion over Iraq and the deliberate silence of OIC have raised so many question marks over efficacy of OIC.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Afghanistan attacked by US after 9/11 and the silence continued. OIC itself had to convene the issue in the limelight but the ignorance highlighted that it have lost its strength. Therefore, the Muslim States see towards international community for any resolution. Instead Muslim should see OIC as first approach for their resolutions. The reason to not understand as prior platform is that OIC could not sustained its credibility as a problem resolver. There are number of such event that Muslim states were facing while OIC's role was just as spectator. So the Organization remained approximately failed to fulfill that potential and join other regional and international bodies to establish effective mechanism and to achieve its objectives. The OIC lacks a clear framework for dealing with issues.<sup>92</sup>

### **3.1 Geo Political and Strategic Importance of OIC Member States**

It is interesting to notice that strategy, geography and politics play vital role in international politics. Fortunately, OIC member states has blessed with the exclusive geo strategic advantage. The strategically important waterways and choking points crosses controlled by Muslim world majorly. Furthermore, the Muslim world blessed with rich natural resources especially Oil and Gas. The important straits of the world i.e. Gibraltar, Suez canal, Red sea, Persian gulf, strait of Hurmoz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Malacca and many other are exclusively controlled by Muslim world. The oil transportation that is the backbone of today's civilization transported through these passages. These choking point one day blockage can loss in trillions. Persian Gulf considered as the largest source of world's oil production with two third proven oil and one-third world's estimated proven

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<sup>90</sup>OIC, "Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of the Oic Ten Year Programme of Action " (CONAKRY, REPUBLIC OF GUINEA: OIC, 2013). [https://www.oic-oci.org/subweb/cfm/40/fm/en/docs/rep/cfm\\_40\\_som\\_rep\\_typo\\_v2\\_en.pdf](https://www.oic-oci.org/subweb/cfm/40/fm/en/docs/rep/cfm_40_som_rep_typo_v2_en.pdf)

<sup>91</sup>"The Muslim World after 9/1," (California USA RAND ORGANIZATION 2004). [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND\\_MG246.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND_MG246.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> Turan Kayaoglu, "A Rights Agenda for the Muslim World: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Evolving Human Rights Framework" (paper presented at the APSA 2013 Annual Meeting Paper, American Political Science Association 2013 Annual Meeting, 2013), 3.



natural gas reserves.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the Strait of Hurmoz passes almost 20-25% million barrels of global oil shipment per day.<sup>94</sup>

Whereas, Strait of Malacca that connects Indian Ocean to South China Sea and reaches Pacific Ocean lies between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. This specific route is the key choke point in the world. Approximately, fifty thousand transit vessels transit through this route. In case the route closed it would require way longer route than anything to reach at destination. This analysis shows that OIC members have very important strategic location. That means Muslim world if unite can turn the world according to their wishes. Moreover, Muslim world is not only hosting choke points of the world but also have important land and air zones. For instance, Turkey and is a connecting point between Asia and Europe. While Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan owns highly strategic location as these states give passage to connect Russia with Indian Ocean. Therefore, the international powers are deliberately keeping the states of OIC in their alliance and control so that the Organization could not produce positive changes and solidarity.

### **3.2 Strength of Muslim World**

Military capacity is one of the important elements of national power. If talk about the military capacity Muslim world. Muslim world owns military strength of 4.59 million which is more than NATO's strength that is 3.05 million.<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, the strength of Military is approximately equal to permanent five members of UNSC. Moreover, the man power is enough that is suitable for the military forces. Muslim world spend huge amount of money on defense to combat their possible threats as equal as NATO Permanent Five.<sup>96</sup> Having strong military capacity, Muslim world have influential ability to dominate in the international arena.

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<sup>93</sup> Graham Evans, "Persian Gulf, Economic Aspects " in Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Persian-Gulf>.

<sup>94</sup> Dennis Blair and Kenneth Lieberthal, "Smooth Sailing-the World's Shipping Lanes Are Safe," *Foreign Aff.* 86 (2007): 7.

<sup>95</sup> Allied Command Operations (ACO), "The Power of Nato's Military," <https://shape.nato.int/page11283634/knowning-nato/episodes/the-power-of-natos-military>.

<sup>96</sup> Hashmat Ahmad Shahid, "The Oic's Potential, Capabilities and Constraints for International Conflict Resolution," *jstor* 31 (2011): 114-15.

### **3.3 Economic Power of Member State**

Although, OIC member states are rich in natural resources and for economic development the natural resources plays essential role. But the overall GDP of OIC member states is just impressive as it has the potential. Having important mineral resources, strategic location and rich in human resources Muslim world is not as efficient as it ought to be. It is happening due to competition amid Muslim world instead of cooperation. According to latest statistic of 2021, in the top 50 higher GDP states there are only 10 Muslim countries lies in the list which is equal to the France.<sup>97</sup> Apart from it, huge human resource can be used for great benefits if the level of education improves. Similarly, the governmental structures of Muslim world have their own design. Military dictatorship, hereditary monarchy, and authoritarian system of government is the part of Muslim world especially in the Gulf region. As far as other international peacekeeping organizations are concerned, OIC always supports these especially UN.

### **3.4 Impediments in the Working of OIC**

OIC members have massive capability and capacity to run the order in their favor but the deficiency of turning this ability into their strength is an obstacle in this regard. The reason of this failure is competition, non-cooperation and disunity of member states with each other. While OIC could not be done anything significant to bring these distant states closer to each other. On the other hands the OIC members are facing multi-dimensional challenges. These challenges are inter states, intra states and OIC states with other non OIC states. The organization has remained almost alien in this case. There are many cases in the history in which this organization had to spoke openly and vibrant actions needed but the superficial approach of conflict resolution made the organization a total disappointment. The incomplete organizational structure is another big reason of the lazy working of organization. OIC seems exclusive indecisive when it comes to conflict resolution. This organization has neither political structure nor mandate to make decision a binding force. The Islamic Summit once in three year and Foreign Minister Council in

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<sup>97</sup>Times Statistics, "Projected Gdp Ranking," (International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook (April - 2021), 2021). <https://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-capita-ranking.php>

every year meet and take out decision on mutual understanding that does not bind either of the member or any state.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the performance is not up to the mark.

Another challenge confronting the OIC is that the Muslim world is engaged with many other regional or international organizations. The duality of loyalty due to their personal interest had affected the working of OIC. It is obvious that no one can dictate a country but the efficient contact groups with authority and neutrality can bring positive results. The OIC charter considered the internal conflict of any member state as their internal problem and refrain from interfering into the matter of other states. It shows that OIC lacks in proper mechanism for conflicting states even some of the conflicts interstate or intrastate conflicts would lead towards escalation to international level. Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Sudan, and the bitter relation of Iran and Saudi Arab are the examples in this regard.

### **3.5 Kashmir Issue and OIC**

From the beginning OIC preoccupied with the Arab issues but in mid-1980s Pakistan emerged as another major member state of OIC.<sup>99</sup> In result, Kashmir issue got the limelight and become the regular agenda of OIC and many of the resolution have been passed in solidarity with Pakistan over J&K. But, OIC the sole representative body of Muslims in the world had long history of condemnation and statements. Kashmir issue is one of the best examples in this regard. India tried its best to gain observer status in OIC but could not get the membership. The guest appearance of India in 2019 OIC's foreign minister meeting was justified under this stance that its presence is the representation of 185 million Muslims residing in the land of India. Generally, OIC has remained supportive against the atrocities in Kashmir under Indian occupation. But the statements after statements culminates that it has become a ceremonial. The illegal act of revocation of Article 370 highlighted that OIC need more strength and power to annul the illegal and illegitimate actions of Indian government.

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<sup>98</sup>Giacomo Cavalli, "The New Organization of the Islamic Conference Charter," *Perspectives on Federalism* 1, no. 1 (2009): 10.

<sup>99</sup>Zafar Imam, "Oic and the Kashmir Issue: Options for India," *International Studies* 39, no. 2 (2002): 191.

On the other hand Indian always tried to show the world that Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is its internal matter. OIC has always given statements and vows against the atrocities of India in the Kashmir but it has no ground work. Moreover, Indian had rejected the voice of OIC by saying that a state which have a long record of radicalization, extremism and a land of difficult living for minorities. Apart from it, India has strong relationship with many of the OIC countries that have influential standing in the organization. Ties with Emirates and Kingdom in the recent years got significant status. Even in 2017, UAE's Crown Prince Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed has invited Prime Minister Modi in the event as a special guest. The visit of Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman to India in 2019 has more contributed the closeness of gulf state to India. Many other states like Bangladesh, Maldives have pretty good ties with India and cannot compress their relations for Kashmir cause, but are the members of OIC.<sup>100</sup>

The healthy relationship of India with OIC members has made organization even more indefensible. So, the strongest statement always came from Pakistan upon which India allegedly says that the grouping led by a country which have conflicting internal problems with its own minorities. Indian itself wants to be the partner state of OIC stating millions of Muslims as its mass population. Due to Pakistan's voice against India have made it impossible to take the permanent membership of OIC. Likewise, the efforts to take non-permanent member status at UNSC India are using its friendships and partnerships to culminate the Kashmir issue on international level. Fortunately, India's own initiative of revocation of article 370 and other human rights violation has internationalized the Kashmir issue as never before.<sup>101</sup> On the flip side, India is predicting a challenge from Joe Biden's Administration over the human rights violation in J&K.

The recent meeting over Pakistan's concerns of human rights violation in J&K of OIC has shown some interest. The Foreign Minister of OIC contact group released statement over the deteriorating situation of Kashmiri people and the action took against the nationalism of Kashmiri people in the form of Citizenship Act and revocation of Article

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<sup>100</sup>Roy Shubhajit, "What Is Oic's Stand on Kashmir, and How Has India Responded?," The Indian Express 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-kashmir-india-and-the-oic-7074514/>

<sup>101</sup>Shah Khalid and Shah Kriti M., "Kashmir after Article 370: India's Diplomatic Challenge," Observer Research Foundation, no. 259 (2020): 6.

370. As a reaction Indian blames that OIC have double standards that support the narrative of Pakistan under the cover of human rights and termed as interference in Indian internal affairs. Moreover, India rejected OIC's move to send fact finding teams to Kashmir to investigate the human rights violations.<sup>102</sup> It has maintained that OIC have no locus standi in matter strictly internal to Indian keeping in mind the Kashmir as their integral part.<sup>103</sup> Hence, OIC seems failed for any resolution of the Kashmir Issue. However, if the resolution over Kashmiris self-determination is not materialized than the cut off diplomatic ties cannot be avoided. The 57 member countries have very strong power altogether, and India cannot afford to end the ties with 57 Muslim states of OIC. Hence, pressure can be maintained to achieve the objective. It can only be done if the mutual differences of Muslim world are mitigated.

### **3.6 High Politics in the Organization**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> OIC summit at Makah, a Communiqué issued in which the actions and atrocities were highlighted and demanded UN investigation over human rights violation and the shown support to the self-determination right to the people of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>104</sup> On which India categorically rejected reference of OIC and justified actions by saying it internal matter of India. Further they explained that OIC have no standing internationally as a body for India to admit their decisions. But on the other Hand UAE invited Sushma Swaraj to address OIC's foreign ministers' conference which skipped but Pakistan as a protest.<sup>105</sup> However, contact groups has been made to analyze the situation but it need to be stressed that these contact groups could not made any progress near the solution.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> AK Pasha, "Indo-Oic Relations Perspective and Trends-I," Journal of Peace Studies 1, no. 3-4 (1994): 3.

<sup>103</sup> "Oic Has No Locus Standi on Internal Matters, Including J&K," The Indian Express 2020.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/oic-india-kashmir-6476450/>

<sup>104</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE, "Hand in Hand toward the Future," news release, 19 May, 2019, <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=4496&refID=1251>.

<sup>105</sup> "Oic Has No Locus Standi on Internal Matters, Including J&K." Express News Services, January 5, 2020 <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/oic-india-kashmir-6476450/>

<sup>106</sup> Cheema Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal, "Resolving Kashmir Dispute Analyzing Various Approaches," Margalla Paper 20, no. 1 (2016): 32.

Similarly, the relationship of Arab states with India is weakening OIC day by day. UAE, KSA the major game players are in a strong strategic relationship with India which is fading the impact of OIC. The organization has consisted of all Muslim states in which Gulf States are majorly playing the role of making decisions within the organization. Therefore, the interest of the states remains in conflict with the working of organization. In this way it is impossible to take any step against India. Thus, the condemnations process of OIC has remained in fashion since years.

### **3.7 Afghan Problem and OIC**

Afghanistan a crossroad of Central Asian Republic had a stormy history. Afghanistan never witnessed permanent peace and order and remained in conflict time to time. From Alexander the Great to US invasion, Afghanistan remained in chaotic situation.<sup>107</sup> In 1979, the deteriorating relations between Kabul and USSR turned into full scale war. The continuous resistance from Afghanistan Mujahedins who controlled larger area of the state<sup>108</sup> this situation invited US in Afghan-USSR war. With the help of Pakistan and Saudi Arab, US succeeded in defeating USSR due to which, paid huge ransom in the shape of disintegration. The Geneva accord restricted both USSR and US to interfere in the internal matter of Afghanistan. On the flip side, OIC the sole Muslim representative body, which shown hope to Muslim world that it will bring solution for their problems but gradually shrunk its performance. Unfortunately, Muslim world is richest in oil and supply but have little unity. In this case, OIC remained failed in joining these countries in harmony. Since its inception OIC have did little to solve any problem and bringing the solution. It been 52 years now, held dozens of conferences, emergency meetings, made contact groups but outcome is null. After the collapse of the Taliban regime, OIC could not do anything about US attacks on Afghanistan and in this regard it did not declare its stance.

Recently, in February 2021, the Ambassador of OIC to Kabul Mr. Huseyin Avni Botsali discussed the Afghan Peace Process with Foreign Minister (FM) of Kabul. However, the Minister praised the position and help for the peace and end of hostilities in the country.

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<sup>107</sup> Milton Bearden, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires," *Foreign Aff.* 80 (2001): 17.

<sup>108</sup> K Wafadar, "Afghanistan in 1980: The Struggle Continues," *Asian Survey* 21, no. 2 (1981): 172.

The FM of Kabul asserted that OIC can play important role for the achievement of Islamic solidarity and consensus against the violence and war in Afghanistan.<sup>109</sup> On which OIC representative assured their support. But, visibly there is nothing OIC could do to solve the Afghan problem apart from oral assurances and condemnation as in the case of Kashmir.

### **3.8 US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Challenges for OIC**

The US invaded Afghanistan in 2001 along the support of its allies. The war-on-terror remained active in Afghanistan for almost 20 years. Now, US have started withdrawal which is likely to be end in the month of July. The withdrawal has been started surprisingly without any resolution and Taliban claiming capturing almost 70% of the Afghanistan while government has only 30% or less captured area. Taliban's spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid is assuring traders and native people to remain calm as their security is guaranteed.<sup>110</sup> Before final wrapping up of US forces from Afghanistan, Taliban's have gained way more area under their control even the bordering area connects Pakistan. This control is showing that the neighboring countries are needed to reconsider their relationship with Afghan Taliban. OIC in this regard seem quite and not responsive at all. The clear silence have again raised question over the strength and credibility of OIC. The power struggle in Afghanistan have given an opportunity to OIC to play decisive role but the complete silence over Afghan –Taliban shows that OIC is not as strengthen and credible as it need to be. In the Makah declaration OIC has only stressed all the parties and stakeholders to work together for urgent and lasting peace. They also repeated the assurance of assisting Afghan people in achieving long lasting peace, development, and stability.<sup>111</sup> In practical, the performance is zero and OIC is absent in the peace making process of Afghanistan. Being a Muslim state, it is the duty being a sole Muslim representative organization to be the first in the response while OIC looks so

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<sup>109</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Acting and Deputy Foreign Receives Oic Ambassador to Afghanistan," news release, 02/02/2021, 2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.af/news/2557-acting-and-deputy-foreign-receives-oic-ambassador-to-afghanistan.html>.

<sup>110</sup>Saadullah Akhtar, "Taliban Claims Capturing Key Afghan Border Crossing with Pakistan," Al Jazeera and news agencies 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/14/taliban-claims-capturing-key-afghan-border-crossing-with-pakistan>

<sup>111</sup>OIC, "Oic Urges All Afghan Parties to Effect a Lasting Ceasefire and Contribute to Fighting Coronavirus," news release, 30/03/2020, 2020, [https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t\\_id=23302&t\\_ref=13970&lan=en](https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=23302&t_ref=13970&lan=en).

strange in the peace making process of Afghanistan. In a recent situation when the rise of Taliban is a reality. OIC has urged Afghan leadership to ensure Afghanistan does not become a safe haven. Moreover, it have talk about the humanitarian crisis occurred when US announced it's withdrew and thousands of people tried to flee Kabul. Afghanistan is a Muslim country and have problem since years. It is OIC duty to bring this issue in the limelight and discuss the possible solution of their problems. The collective effort of OIC is however, seems poor. Because it is their member states that are paralyzing it's functioning. The rivalry of Iran and Saudi Arabia impacting the working of OIC, For instance, back in 2014, When US decided to withdraw its forces, Saudi Arabia would build Islamic complex in Afghanistan<sup>112</sup>which considers as the rival project of Iran's Islamic University of Khatam al-Nabeyeen by a Shia Cleric back in 2006. Therefore, a general point of view prevails that these kind of religious projects are more likely to curb each other's influence in Afghanistan. Both the states are so much interested in the Afghanistan but their different fears halting the way to settle Afghan problem and OIC looks in active in this case.

The (OIC) is the only one in which Saudi Arabia and Iran share membership, its fourth Summit held in Mecca in August 2012 became an opportunity for Pakistani and Afghan presidents to make appeals for endorsing peace and stability in Afghanistan. The presence of both within the same organization means that the OIC has not been able to effectively diffuse tensions in the Muslim world, especially as to what concerns differences centered on understandings of Islam in everyday life. Differences arose during that summit when the pan-Islamic group voted for the suspension of Syrian membership regardless of protests from Iran. It has requested by the Muslim world to work in partnership with the UN in bringing peace in Afghanistan.<sup>113</sup>

In the Recent development of Afghanistan, a slight hopeful scene can be seen when OIC arranged an extraordinary foreign Minister conference in Pakistan regarding

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<sup>112</sup>Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "The Persian Gulf and Afghanistan: Iran and Saudi Arabia's Rivalry Projected," PRIO Paper, Oslo: PRIO. Der GIGA Focus ist eine Open-Access-Publikation. Sie kann kostenfrei im Netz gelesen und heruntergeladen werden unter< [www.giga-hamburg.de/giga-focus](http://www.giga-hamburg.de/giga-focus)> und darf gemäß den Bedingungen der Creative-Commons-Lizenz Attribution-No Derivative Works 3 (2013): 48.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.



Afghanistan's socio-political situation and human right crisis. The session was expression of solidarity with the people of Afghanistan who are suffering since long. The conference held to seek the solution of deteriorating condition of and humanitarian calamity under the new political order of Afghanistan. In the session it stressed that economic cooperation continuation is necessary to improve situation. Likewise, health and refugees issue, impact on the neighboring countries, economic meltdown in Afghanistan also discussed. It was also highlighted the Afghan women participation need to materialized, end of militancy and no more safe havens for terrorist. But what actually OIC have decided to end the chaos and for human rights violation and crisis is still unclear. Through the platform of OIC, appeals from the international community was made further they decided that under IDB a humanitarian trust will establish<sup>114</sup> to access the masses and help the Afghan people. It is now time to observe what OIC will do to combat the socio-political crisis of Afghanistan.

### **3.9 Role of OIC in the resolution of Iran-Iraq War**

Iran-Iraq had a full scale war when Iraq crossed the border in 1980 and abrogated the agreement of 1975. On this cross border violation United Nation Security Council passed a resolution 479 in which ceasefire was demanded from both sides. There was lack of diplomatic communication which increased the distrust among them and appeared to be a reason for the conflict. Iraq's offer of diplomatic communication was rejected by Iran. Initially it was the conflict over Shat-Al-Arab but the other bordering issues contributed for the escalation. Consequently, Iraq claimed the jurisdiction over Khuzestan and highlighted the fear of export of Islamic Revolution of Iran outside of the Iran. Because, Iraq was having secular leadership while other Gulf monarchies also raised the same. In this regard, OIC was the first quick responder to the eruption of war. In a week OIC arranged a good-will mission along with high influential member states of the time. Pakistan's Zia-ul-haq, Presidents of Guinea, and Gambia chaired the Islamic committee. These personalities were appointed because they all were neutral and had good relationship with both parties. But some of the OIC member countries took side in the

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<sup>114</sup> OIC, "Extraordinary Session of the (Oic) Council of Foreign Ministers on the "Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan"" (Islamabad, Pakistan, 2021). <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=8653&refID=4260>

war due to which the committee lost its neutral position. The influence even without participating in the committee by the Arab countries shows that how powerful countries negates the importance of OIC as an institution for Muslim world.

It is observed that richer countries always influence the organizations and regimes to design the process of conciliation according to their wishes.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, in the case of Iran-Iraq war Gulf States were taking Iraq's side openly and avoiding taking Iraq's name as an aggressor one. This showed that OIC's neutrality was compromised due to the influential powers. Another example in this case study is that in spite of Iran's plea to keep neutral venue the Islamic peace committee's meeting held in Taif, Saudi Arab. Ultimately, Iran boycotted the summit and Saddam Hussein's speech was marked as an official statement of summit. These actions through the platform of organization that specifically made to bring Islamic countries together lost its strength and spirit. As a reaction Iran, refused to meet members and demanded to treat culprit according to Quranic punishments. The aforementioned details of Iran-Iraq war it is proved that a golden chance has been lost by OIC as a successful capable organization to mitigate the internal Muslim world issues. Moreover, OIC has no military capability to enforce peace hence another deficiency is highlighting here.

Iran accepted to do negotiation with the President of Gambia in individual capacity when the committee lost its worth and trust as a mediator. This outwardly occurred due to lack of institutional credibility. However, in the beginning it considered that OIC would achieve its goal but due to political pressure and influence it lost the opportunity to gain peace. It could be the ideal arbitrator but the lack of trust and pressure from Arab countries troubled the process. So, it can be said that OIC had initially played very active role in the conflict resolution. The formation of peace committee had highlighted the seriousness of the organization for the resolution. OIC emerged as an ideal arbitrator for the conflict on which some of the scholars argued that the nature of the conflict highly influence the mediator. Because Iran was arguing that the resolution should be according to the principle of Quran so it culminates that except OIC nobody can bring peace

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<sup>115</sup>Jane Ford, "A Social Theory of Trade Regime Change: Gatt to Wto " *International Studies Review* 4, no. 3 (2003): 118.

keeping Quran as supreme law.<sup>116</sup> This ideal situation has raised the status of OIC but unfortunately, OIC could not sustain the pressure of the influential states and lost the chance to stand as a conflict resolution organization.

The failure of OIC is another factor but the inception of mediator and a peace committee to settle the dispute was an outstanding effort. Apart from it, to make a committee acceptable to either of the side was another milestone. But the influence of dominant Muslim powers made all the effort cipher. To not call out Iraq as an aggressor state opened the way for future aggression which later shown by Iraq in 1990 by invading Kuwait. The regional politics also become the reason of the failure of OIC as an ideal mediator. OIC not only failed in the resolution of Iran-Iraq War in 1980-88 and Iraqi invasion in Kuwait in 1990 but also showed little settlement on the issue of Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Afghanistan etc. Still, after failing to bring peace between Iran and Iraq, nobody can negate the strength and potential of OIC if it follows its principle in its true spirit.<sup>117</sup> In this regard to point out the driver of conflicts and to put it out is the need of the time. Thus, OIC need to learn from its mistakes of the past for the sake of benefit of Muslim world.<sup>118</sup>

In Short, keeping in mind the above situations, it can be concluded that the peace and order especially in the OIC region can only be achieved with the cooperation of Muslim world with each other as well as international cooperation is also needed.<sup>119</sup> solid security dialogues and cooperation will not only permit the OIC governments to excellently tackle security matters, but will also pave the ground for resolving mutual clashes and moving to a prosperous future. Not only cooperation in terms of politics but the security relations between the member countries are also needed.

#### **a. Impact of Saudi-Iran Tension**

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<sup>116</sup> Saikou Kawsu Gassama, Mansoureh Ebrahimi, and Kamaruzaman Bin Yusoff, "Oic's Conflict Resolution Approach: The Iran and Iraq War (1980-1988) as a Case Study," *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 8, no. 7 (2018): 410.

<sup>117</sup> OIC, "Charter of the (Oic) " (Jeddah2018). [https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p\\_id=53&p\\_ref=27&lan=en](https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=53&p_ref=27&lan=en)

<sup>118</sup> Saikou Kawsu Gassama, Mansoureh Ebrahimi, and Kamaruzaman Bin Yusoff, "Oics Conflict Resolution Approach: The Iran and Iraq War (1980-1988) as a Case Study," *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 8, no. 7 (2018): 415.

<sup>119</sup> SESRIC, "Achieving Peace and Security in a World of Turmoil ". <https://sesric.org/publications-detail.php?id=472>

Iran- Saudi Arab rivalry dates back in the ancient times. If go fast forward, than Shah Ismail stretched his sphere from Baghdad to Afghanistan, and approved “Twelver Shia” Islam as a religion of the state. Hence the up-to-date identity of Iran predates of 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>120</sup> Where, Saudi Arab’s first state, “Emirate of Diriyah” dates back in 18<sup>th</sup> century. The final Ibn-Saud’s Kingdom of Saudi Arab appeared in 1924, after the disintegration of Ottoman Empire. An Islamic revolution in Iran once for all changed the political landscape of Muslim world. Iranian Revolution changed the priorities, friendship, and relationship of Iran at once. On the other hand, Wahabbi’s Islamic believer of KSA coalition with US brought more distance between them. Many of the Middle Eastern events i.e. Iraq’s invasion, Haj demonstration, Iran-Iraq, Gulf Crisis war fueled the situation even worse. However, Saudi-Iran Détente period was also seen in the regime of President Rafsanjani. When KSA created distance himself from the US, Iran applauded the show of power. Through-out 1997, Abdullah worked to consolidate his position and asked Rafsanjani to visit kingdom.<sup>121</sup> But the reconciliatory phase could not long lasted. Once again many of the regional and bilateral events folded the whole efforts and brought them in conflicts. This bitterness not only halted their bilateral social, political, and regional relationship but also paralyzed Muslim world’s organization, The OIC. The organization which has strict policy of neutrality and not to side when it came to disparities among them. But gradually OIC kept losing its independent nature and objectivity. The emergency summit of OIC in 2012 is one of the examples. Saudi Arab sees OIC from the lens of geopolitics since its inception. Took advantage of its dominance as compare to other Arabian states, The Kingdom charted the goals that OIC pursue under its directions.<sup>122</sup> Iran initially paid slight consideration to the OIC so, it become easier for the Saudi Arab to for leadership goal. So, Riyadh dominant role paved the way for being hegemon of the region as well as the Muslim world. For the extended influence, funding becomes the tool for Saudi Arab. As per hegemonic studies, strong and powerful states use its resources to extend the influence on the weaker states or for the promotion of their interest, on the name of securitization, using their aids as a tool for

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<sup>120</sup> Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy*, 351.

<sup>121</sup> Gwenn Okruhlik, "Saudi Arabian-Iranian Relations: External Rapprochement and Internal Consolidation," *Middle East Policy* 10, no. 2 (2003): 114.

<sup>122</sup> Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, "Impacts of Saudi Hegemony on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Oic)," 302.

the needy countries. The highest level of securitization can be found in US foreign aid.<sup>123</sup> Likewise, the leg pulling of these historic rivals to each other is only giving damage to the strength of OIC. The core powers of OIC influenced the organization by funding and supporting. There is no renunciation that OIC has potential and power as an organization of Muslim world, but there are several challenges that are halting the way as an independent organization for mutual benefit of Muslim world. Muslim unity for the functioning of OIC is the most important factors of all. The changing nature of relation between Israel and Muslim world is abolishing the need of OIC. On the other hand, the unresolved issues of Iran and Saudi Arab and an anti-policy for each other only restrict reconciliation and settlement of problems that could lead towards progress of Middle East as well as Muslim world in the broader scale.

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<sup>123</sup> Stephen Brown and Jörn Grävingholt, "Security, Development and the Securitization of Foreign Aid," in *The Securitization of Foreign Aid* (Springer, 2016), 238.

## CONCLUSION

Extensive research on the issue makes it clear that Saudi Arab and Iran both want to maintain their hold over the Middle Eastern region and to lead Muslim world. However, both are rivals to each other. Keeping in view the whole situation from the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 till date, it is visible that Saudi Arab has more points than Iran. KSA have remained successful in keeping the Gulf countries as well as other Muslim states in its orbit. The reason behind the strong engagement of Muslim states with Saudi Arab is the Holy places and enjoys strong ties with monarchies of Middle East. If limiting the relationship in the regional sphere it can be said that GCC countries played an important role shaping the regional peace and security. Saudi Arab seemed successful to great extent in limiting the role of Iran and their ideology. The different events expressed that how KSA have tried to contain the Iran in its small sphere. And Iran has remained busy in giving extension to its alliance circle for its political interest.

### **Findings**

The Rohani regime and the recent President Raisi regime in Iran have new challenges external as well as internal. The economic stagnation and proxy wars in the region are one of the main challenges of Iran. This engagement could pave the way to bring peace in Yemen, recover economically and politically Syria, Iraq and to protect Lebanon from total collapse. However, the new hardliner Iranian President Raisi had history of giving execution to the political prisoners during revolution period. With this history, no political rival in the country shown mixed impression besides, he has mountains of internal challenges as well as international. The famous foreign policy magazine writes that Iran is heading towards normalization of relation with KSA, and engagement for negotiation just to show their people that they are not isolated. The economic stagnation is due to the America's hostility not because of unnecessary involvement of Iran in regional affairs. However, President Raisi has strong support of hardliners in Iran and the supreme leader. But the condition at domestic local level is deteriorating because people of Iran are protesting against economic immobility and support to militias from Lebanon to Yemen while having shortage of money at home.

On the other hand, Iran is not ready to associate everything with the nuclear deal. It does not want to rein its militias and not ready to change in the nuclear agreements. As America is willing to add its long distance ballistic missiles in nuclear deal but Iran is not ready to acknowledge the changes in the deal. Iran has strong influence in some of the regional states i.e. Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Tehran has remained successful in weakening Sunni-led opposition groups in Syria. Houthis are at winning side while Iran has successfully settled proxies in Lebanon and Iraq. Thus, it proves that Iran has enlarged its influence over the region. But another challenge for Iran is economic vulnerability. Therefore, the new Iranian government is trying to negotiate with historic rival and other world to let the public project this impression that they are not alone. Besides, if the nuclear deal will not materialize the de-escalation would not be achieved. The hardliner Raisi had quoted Iran's regional policy as the source of security in the region. Hence, he reaffirmed the policy of standby with the oppressor anywhere in the world. This shows that the strict conventional policy of Tehran would be there and no compromise policy will be the part of their politics. The inaugural speech was also attended by the representative groups of Hamas and Hezbollah allegedly claimed as terrorist organization by the west. So, on one side Iran is apparently trying to dialogue with Saudi Arab and normalization of relation with the west, and on the other hand not ready to take back step from the militias assistance. This duality is increasing confusion and dangerous situation in the Middle East specifically and for the unity of Muslim world in general.

Keeping this analysis in mind, it shows that even if the new hardliner government of Iran is flexible for the dialogues, the conventional rivalry is still there which halted the way of peace and stability in their relationship. So until the complete peace comes into their relationship, it is impossible for OIC to work for mutual progress transparently. On the flip side, if the relationship between two historic rival comes at positive stage it hope that not only the security and stability situation of Middle East will improves but the changed political condition of Afghanistan would also get the limelight as it needed.

As far as the Saudi Arab's policy is concerned it is now more mature, realistic, and shifting from America. Usually Saudi Arab avoids entering in to direct war and using its deep pockets and diplomatic influence to get maximum gains. KSA have majorly

changed its policies again recently. For example in 2017, MBS ruled out all the possibilities of any dialogue with Iran while after four year he changed its tone and policies. In a television interview he (MBS) expressed that Saudi Arab wants to have dialogue with the neighbor and good relationship. In the same interview he said that we are working on mutual benefits and overcome all the difference. On the other hand Iran need to change its behavior and should agree to sit for reconciliation. This vision have expressed that there is a hope so the way will appear.

The shift of Saudi policy for Iran has many reasons. Firstly, it is widely expressed by the US the declining interest in the Middle East. US have stopped its assurance to the security of Saudi Arab. The policy shift was visible since the nuclear deal was done by the Obama administration and called on KSA to settle its matters with Iran. Similarly, Even Trump's government declined confrontation on Saudi Oil facilities. Later the initiative took by the KSA government to talk Iran was destroyed with the attack on General Soleimani. Secondly, the nuclear deal is on the agenda of US once again. Now this shift needs to redesign the strategies and policies of Saudi Arab for Iran. KSA is already exhausted with the continuous competition in the region and almost remained failed to contain Iran to that extent that it stops escalations. Saudi Arab is now considering the new policies for Iran within the region, in which to set good ties with Iran are the main element. Therefore, it is now important for Saudi Arab to finalize its plan to make Iran agree for negotiations and do agreements. Saudi Arab has more focusing on Vision 2030 and trying to change the attitude towards Iran by latter strategy.

Thirdly, Saudi Arab is trying to end the war in Yemen as it is costing Riyadh \$100 billion from 2015-18. Saudi Arab itself is facing no support for Yemen due to the economic, human and status or reputation cost. But on the other hand Houthis are no stopping for which it is important for Saudi Arab to have talked with Iran so that the Tehran would use its influence over Houthis to stop the escalations. There are several reasons for which KSA would call the negotiations and talks. The successful proxies by the Iran have expressed that Iran is not an easy job to handle. Moreover, the strategic ties with China making Iran more powerful in front of other states especially in Middle East. But same is the case with Tehran too. The situation and economic condition after Pandemic have



increased worrisome situation as Iran is facing severe economic crisis due to sanctions. This can lead masses towards internal resistance. So, Tehran is also in that phase where it needs to talk with international community as well as Saudi Arab too. Furthermore, to set the proxies need some cost. Iran is paying that cost which is directly hitting its already fragile economy. The fear of internal resistance is also there. Similarly, those militias that getting support from Iran are also facing the difficulties as Iran direct interference is not liked by the people. In this condition it is difficult for Iran and Saudi Arab to open any other front against each other.

Yet, Iran and Saudi Arab are all set to tie the knot for mutual benefits. Their mutual understanding will not only help to keep control over the security and order of Middle East's political situation but for the Muslim world too. The talk between Iran and Saudi Arab are complicated because of the Iran's Shia militias in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. Also, the ballistic missile program on which Iran is not ready to negotiate is a hurdle. Besides, the regional matters of Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon are some of the issue on which both countries can conclude some agreements. This matter would be sorted out on the basis of give and take. For example, Yemen is a priority for Riyadh, Iran would get Syria and Lebanon on the cost of Yemen. It can be said that Iran may give KSA a safe exit from Yemen and ask for the Syrian regime return to the Arab league. However, Iraq itself is trying to balance its ties with both the states.

With this kind of initiatives Saudi Arab aims to reduce the tension in the region and increase its support and relation with the countries. This time Saudi Arab is using its soft power and changing the policies towards regional countries to maintain the natural power in regional specifically and Muslim world in general. It seems so early to make decision about any future success or failure of any talks. The talks are yet in the initial phase and nobody has idea about the content of talks. Moreover, any changing situation can reshape the situation and normalization. Moreover, the talks should be institutionalized and OIC should take its responsibility in making normalization easier for both of the states.

In spite of many years, OIC is still struggling hard to become as the effective mouth piece of Muslim world. It had failed to achieve its objectives on many fronts. Palestine issue, Kashmir and Rohingya Muslims issues are still on the agenda of OIC with no solution.

There are many causes of OIC failure which have become the hurdle in the functioning of OIC.

As far as the OIC is concerned, the organization which expresses itself neutral is widely divided into two divisions. The one who are in Middle East and speaks Arabic are Arabs and rest of the member having no these qualities are Ajams. Majorly, OIC is been funded by the Arab states especially Saudi Arab so the OIC mainly focuses on their issues which are directly or indirectly offend Saudi Arab and its interest. Many times it was witnessed that whenever the interest of funding members come in conflict with Organization's neutrality OIC takes a step back and stay silent and inactive. For example, in the case of recent atrocities in Kashmir, OIC on the will of KSA remained silent simply because it does not want to hurt mutual trade relations with India. On the other hand most of the times the organization remains divided on issues. Many times this difference of opinion based on individual interests. That halted the way to reach on the resolution.

Moreover, the organization lacks in the military that make its resolution more powerful. In 2015, KSA Islamic Military counter Terrorism force was made to combat against terror groups and ISIL. However, many of the member states were part of OIC but it was not the military wing of OIC. Besides, the powerful west always influences the working and functioning of OIC by pressurizing or using those member states that in a way of another depends on USA. For Instance, Non-Arab states sees USA as economic support while Arab states depends on the west for their Oil trade. This had made OIC ineffective and mal-functioned to greater extent.

### **Recommendations**

There are lots of steps OIC can take to make it more attractive and effective. It need to prioritize the interest of Muslims Ummah and need provision of strong political and economic will so that it will be able to resolve the important issues that are there in Muslim world since years. The member countries especially the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) who shares big portion of the Muslim world economically and politically must play their role in making OIC efficient organization. The interest of Muslim world as a whole should be the priority rather than personal or individual one. It requires to

avoid any move either politically, diplomatically and economically on the cost of prolong Muslim Issues for example Palestinian issue. In this regard, the recent Normalization of relation amid Arab states and Israel on the cost of many decades old issue of Palestine would be negated which need to be avoided.

It also needed to back as a unified force by its members against all the problems Muslim world is facing. They should speak in one voice for all the solutions and resolutions. It needs to maintain the credibility by becoming strengthened which can be achieved if the mutual problems will sort out. Moreover, OIC needs to highlight on global scale about the duality of international organization that remain also fail to stop human rights violation in many Muslim countries. It is the duty of the organization to highlight the occupational forces internationally using media power. Additionally, mutual indifferences need to be deescalates so that the collective benefits would gain.

Consequently, OIC need to be active so it would be able to achieve founding objectives. To gain these objective the organization need a strong backup support by its members. It is a surety that cooperation, mutual understanding, unity, and with the rich Muslim countries' help will takeout significant impact and solution for the problems of Ummah that is struggling to cope with plenty of problems. On the other hand, economic independence of Muslim states can give opportunity to the Ummah to gain political weightage too. For it, OIC need to increase its socialization and economic interrogational plans to bring near the Muslim countries to solve mutual differences and work for the future benefits.

Unfortunately, the rivalry of Tehran and Riyadh had not only shaped the political and security atmosphere of Middle East but also jammed the efficacy of OIC to greater extent. Although this bi-polar tug of war between two Middle Eastern powers is the reason of Muslim Ummah's division but one cannot ignore the UAE, Israel, Turkey, Qatar and other as these have issues have complex the situation so much. The conflict of Yemen and Syria is the biggest reason for the division of Muslim World so it needs to end to avoid any further destruction.

Keeping all the analysis in mind, following are some recommendations

1. Under the supervision and on the platform of OIC, it is necessary to make grand bargains which bring the two rival states to the table of discussion and negotiations for the settlement of regional issues in general and their mutual difference specifically.
2. Confidence building measures should be made between them in which other Muslim countries needed to include their role so that the situation brings into normalization. It can be achieved using diplomacy as a tool because for ease in tension and escalation can only be reduced through diplomatic ties.
3. Before normalization of relation with Israel, Muslim world needs to sit together giving the importance to the platform of OIC and mitigate those issues using middle ways. Common threats like terrorism, extremism and the prevailing concept of Islam phobia should be discussed with open heart. It will allow both the blocs to come closer towards each other.
4. A peace deal in Yemen and Syria need to be materialized. Stakeholders are needed to sit together to solve internal and external issues. Peace deals are the ultimate solution of any conflict so, decade old issues of Yemen and Syria should be solved by peace deal specifically between KSA-Iran.
5. The terminologies of “Shia-Sunni” need to be avoided that breaks and damages any reconciliatory efforts to a greater extent and deepens the relation.
6. International powers who are taking advantages of differences among the Muslim states need to be fixed. A mechanism needed through which all the Muslim states issues of mutual interest using the stage of OIC. In this regard, OIC needs to upgrade and increase efficiency of its offices keeping in mind the fundamental objective of the organization. This unity will fill all those gaps which the external powers use to enter into the matters of the Muslim world.
7. To increase the capacity and trust of OIC, the platform needs to revisit its policy and approach towards prolonged issues of the Muslim world. In which Palestine, Kashmir, Yemen, Syria and others are prominent. It will increase the trust and cooperation between all Muslim states.

8. The foremost need is to recognize the freedom and human rights violation especially with the Muslim anywhere in the world. This will express the world, OIC as a sole representative body of Muslims.

9. OIC lacks in organizational structure. It needs to mend those deficiencies which will impact the performance. Like, a social and economic council is needed where their objective of mutual cooperation for development would materialize. Moreover, a military wing is the utmost desire of organization. As whenever, any issue in which a coalition forces needed. Another reason to make military under the umbrella of OIC would allow organization to use against those evils where adherence of law would needed. The structure of UN and EU should keep in mind for any up gradation. However, an alliance called Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) initiated, but once again the internal difference made is more controversial than beneficial.

10. Work for the development and progress of developing Muslim countries should be on the priority list. KSA and other countries having rich resources as a power have responsibility to look after those struggling countries. In which Islamic development Bank can play decisive role. Political exploitation should be avoided in this regards.

11. Iran needs to end the aggressiveness to culminate the tension not only regionally but organizationally as well. Coming on the table should be the solution of every problem. The recent tilt towards each other by Saudi Arab-Iran is significant change in this regards. This process need to progress as soon as possible. OIC can make its credibility by mediating between the two historic rivals. Although it seems difficult but where there is will there is way.

12. Moreover, the fundamental purpose of the organization should keep in mind while making bold decision by the states. Otherwise, the legitimacy of the organization will get compromise and the need of such platform will end.

As a matter of fact, the regional hegemony, maximum political gains, economic benefits, and power remain the reasons of conflict and rivalry between Iran-Saudi Arab. It did not disturb the regional peace and order but also affect the efficacy of OIC as an independent Muslim world's organization. OIC's credibility declined as a problem resolver by getting

influence with the powerful Arab states. On the other hand, the egoistic approach of Iran further shut the door of reconciliation. This distance increased with the events that happened time to time between them especially those which had ideological aspects. But the ultimate solution of every problem comes with the dialogues or reconciliatory process. Their differences are favoring the opportunists who are always there to take advantage of any chance. Muslim unity and progress is also associated with their relationship because these two represent two sects of Islam. The acceptance of each other as important powers of the Muslim world would mitigate the difference because it has occupied not only their whole policy but also the sole organization of Muslim world which have remained failed to curtail and manage the problems of Muslim world. Furthermore, if OIC wants to turn its image into reality and weightage in the global affairs it is necessary that capacity ought to match vision. Its relationship with other international organization and actors should not affect the capacity and significance as Muslim world's gate.

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