

**SAUDI ARABIA-IRAN RIVALRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN
AND ITS ROLE IN RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT
(2015-2020)**

By

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in International Relations (IR)

To

Department of International Relations

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

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Dedication

I dedicate this humble endeavor to the people of Palestine, in honor of their struggle.

Abbreviations

AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRP	Baluchistan Republic Party
CAR	Central Asian Republics
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CGI	Center for Global Innovations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
CPPB	China Petroleum Pipelines Bureau
CSIS	Center for Strategic & International Studies
ECO	Economic Corporation Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FM	Foreign Minister
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
FY	Fiscal Year
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HoA	Horn of Africa
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IMCTA	Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Alliance
INC	Indian National Congress
INSTC	International North-South Transport Corridor
IP	Iran Pakistan
IPIS	Institute of Political and International Studies
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran

JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MBS	Muhammad Bin Salman
MDAA	Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCR	Neo-Classical Realism
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OAPEC	Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
PML(N)	Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz
PPP	Pakistan Peoples Party
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
RCD	Regional Cooperation for Development
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
SEATO	South East Asian Treaty Organization
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communications
TAPI	Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India
TNFJ	Tehreek e Nifas-i-Fiqah-i-Jafria
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNO	United Nations Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WEF	World Economic Forum
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction

Abstract

This study focuses on the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and its implications for Pakistan. It has been observed that the rivalry between the two states is rooted in political, historical, ethnic, and religious ideologies. These diverging interests have shaped the behavior of the two states in their interaction with each other and within the Middle Eastern region. Building on the theoretical premises of Neo-Classical Realism, this study has applied qualitative research methodology to get a conceptual clarity of the issue. While employing the historical, descriptive, explanatory, and analytical methods of qualitative research methodology, this study sees the changing dynamics of bilateral relations as shaped by domestic and international factors. Given Pakistan's close ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran based on religious affiliation and geographic proximity, respectively, it is argued here that the nature of the Saudi-Iran bilateral relationships, as well as their foreign policy approaches, have directly or indirectly affected Pakistan. Through the prism of the Balance of Interest theory, Pakistan's foreign policy is to balance its relations with two rivals and simultaneously work on strategies to mitigate the tension between the two. However, due to the sectarian divide and race of hegemony in the region between the two states, Pakistan has been struggling to settle the internal challenges linked with sectarianism, extremism, and economic snags.

Key Words: *Saudi Arabia, Rivalry, Iran, Pakistan, Middle East.*

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Introduction

This research study brings forth the conceptual understanding of the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh, their vital interests in the politics of the Middle Eastern Region, their implications for Pakistan, and the balancing role Pakistan played in mitigating their rivalry. Despite their shared religion, region, and history, Riyadh and Tehran are in a permanent state of struggle, dubbed the New Proxy War in the Middle East. Both Middle Eastern superpowers assert themselves as regional leaders. Not forgetting, associations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) were friendly before the Iranian revolution in February 1979. Under the twin pillar ideology, both states served the United States (U.S.) interests in the region. In the past, despite their differences in faiths, ethnicity, and nationalities, Tehran and Riyadh did not confront each other based on identity politics but instead united on the geopolitical/geostrategic front. Therefore, the first part of this study analyzes the genesis of the rivalry and, in modern times, the factors that dragged both states at daggers drawn.

However, following these developments in hindsight, Pakistan is in a consistent dilemma owing to the persistent geopolitical competition between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it has extensive socio-religious ties and shared security and economic interests with both countries. Many scholars believe Pakistan should avoid the skirmishes between the two to balance its position. However, a visible tilt has been observed in Islamabad's relations in the periodical clashes between Tehran and Riyadh, which caused a high cost in the form of a sectarian rift within the country and faced criticism at the international front for meddling in the regional disputes. Pakistan has been facing economic challenges for decades and needs the support of both Tehran and Riyadh. It is essential to mention that Tehran and Riyadh are Islamabad's supporters in many respects. Both have maintained their economic, security, and political ties with Pakistan. However, their rivalry has reached the verge where the friend of Riyadh is considered the enemy of Tehran and vice versa. In this setting, it has

become challenging for Pakistan to have neutral relations with these two states and to act as an arbitrator to dilute the contention between these arch-rivals. This arch-rivalry has affected their relations, the greater political affairs in the Middle Eastern Region, and other states connected geographically or economically. The entire region has been impacted by the arch-rival states' domestic and foreign affairs due to the divergence of their interests.

Notwithstanding Pakistan's efforts, achieving a balance between Tehran and Riyadh has become a daunting task because of the complexity of their relations. Pakistan has a significant Shia population and also borders Iran. Hence, any disagreement can cause sectarian clashes within Pakistan, which is threatening the national integrity of Pakistan. It has also political and economic repercussions for Pakistan. Latest advancements are taking place in the region, and more significant changes are taking place in Iranian policies in terms of its relations with the West and its nuclear policy, which are directly impacting Pakistan. As far as Saudi Arabia, there is a huge religious respect for it within Pakistan. A large number of the population considers that it is their religious duty to protect the holy sites within Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, huge funding for religious seminaries in Pakistan is coming from Saudi Arabia, illuminating religious affiliation. Hence, it is easy to determine that Pakistan has an equal association with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Pakistan would be a significant facilitator in reducing tension between the two and bringing regional stability. Overall, this study examines the regional dynamics of Saudi-Iranian relations since the arrival of the Arab Spring, as well as their political consequences for Pakistan and Pakistan's balancing act and efforts to reduce tensions between the two nations. An effort has been made to examine the state of Islamabad's bilateral relations with Tehran and Riyadh from 2015 to 2020, analyze the effects of ideologically motivated proxies, and investigate the current regional scenario to assess Pakistan's alternatives for dealing with the two states.

Significance of the Study

This research aims to explore and examine Saudi Arabia-Iran animosity and its implications for Pakistan, along with the balancing role of Pakistan in navigating between the two rival states while not compromising its national interest. In the realm of international relations under neoclassical realism, the pattern of the two rival states' behavior could be explained better. In comparison, Pakistan's interaction with the two states is explained under the balance of interest theory. This research study signifies the action of Pakistan for Muslim states. It underlines that despite immense challenges, Pakistan continued to avoid sides and tried to maintain a balanced relationship with both countries. This research dissertation demonstrated that Pakistan has the potential to be a mediator. The study contributes to existing knowledge by highlighting the unique role of Pakistan in different eras. Fortunately, the political situation is creating opportunities to re-establish relationships. After Pakistan's unfinished peace efforts, Iraq and Oman have recently attempted arbitration. This research primarily examines the causes of the Saudi-Iran conflict, the ramifications of their rivalry on Pakistan, and its rapprochement efforts.

Statement of the Problem

In the current period, the region of the Middle East is considered the most vulnerable. This region is rife with war, battlegrounds, and riots since it comprises two influential states with divergent ideologies and governmental systems. This thesis aims to determine the origins of their antagonism and how their relationship creates blocs of power in the region, in addition to identifying explanations that may go beyond sectarianism to comprehend their conflicts in the past and weak governments today. Pakistan, as the only Muslim state with nuclear power, holds a unique status among Muslim nations. However, it faces challenges because of the deteriorating economy, and it seeks financial support from the Middle East's Persian and Gulf flanks. Now, the conundrum is how Pakistan would avoid the influence of these two regional powers on its domestic affairs and foreign policy. Islamabad's balancing act in reducing the

antagonistic relations and establishing cordial ties with Riyadh and Tehran would be helpful for its national integrity and external relations. Further, the novelty of this research is how Pakistan contributes to the resolution of this deadly conflict.

Research Questions

The research questions are as under:

1. What are the factors behind Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry?
2. What are the implications of Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry for Pakistan?
3. How has Pakistan balanced Saudi Arabia and Iran conflict and played role in resolution of the conflict?

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyse the factors attributed to Saudi Arabia-Iranian rivalry.
2. To ascertain the implications of Saudi Arabia-Iran on Pakistan.
3. To investigate the balancing role of Pakistan in resolution of the Saudi-Iranian conflict.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research employs historical, descriptive, explanatory, and analytical methods. Both primary and secondary data are used for analysis. The analysis is made after gathering information from documents, books, articles, and discussions with practitioners. Many experts were interviewed, and opinions were examined. The data sources help understand the contemporary antiquity of Iranian-Saudi relations and thereby provide the ability to comprehend the present scenario analytically. Official records, interviews, research publications, research reports, comments from necessary parties, print and electronic media

news, and opposing perspectives related to the topic have all been utilized to understand the topic's full breadth. To further explore the nuances of the topic, a large number of books and periodicals were consulted.

The primary sources include in-depth interviews with eminent scholars and foreign policy experts, statements from the Saudi Arabian King, the Iranian President, and Pakistan's higher officials gathered from relevant websites/sources. Further, conference proceedings, Pakistan's parliamentary debates, annual defense reports, National Security policies, drafts of agreements and treaties, and relevant documents were examined to present an objective analysis. As the topic is related to contemporary politics, many personal interviews were conducted with renowned and eminent experts in international relations and the Middle East. This helped define what they think and say, intending to collect primary information and make argumentation more valid and reliable along with official documents, biographies, etc.

The study is generally limited to the Saudi-Iranian competition, rivalry, and challenges for Pakistan's security and economy. In addition, information is acquired from secondary sources and evaluated by comparing primary data. For instance, information is gathered from several books, journals, and strategic as well as political pundits' articles, "Stockholm International Peace Research Institute" SIPRI Yearbook, the reports, and pieces of works of American renowned institutions i.e. Brookings, Stimson Center, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Atlantic, RAND Corporation and Center for Global Innovations (CGI). Further, studies from reputable organizations like the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, South Asia Analysis Group, International Strategic & Security Studies, and Observer Research Foundation are consulted for secondary resources. The Institute of Strategic Studies, Institute of Policy Studies, Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Strategic Studies Institute, and Institute for Strategic Studies Research and Analysis are among the prestigious Pakistani institutions whose articles are also used. Prestigious

American periodicals, including World Politics, American Journal of International Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Analysis, and International and Global Security, additionally augment these secondary materials. In the context of Pakistan, the Dawn, Express Tribune, the News, and Observer, among others, have been utilized. In the context of Iran, the Middle East Institute, the International Institute for Iranian Studies, and Iranian Strategic Studies have been consulted by the King Salman Center for Local Governance for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This provides ample fresh information on the contemporary debate on the growing Saudi-Iran rivalry. This research used data from articles related to Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan, along with brief policy papers, also considered online news websites. These websites also cover current events and advancements on the subject.

The document analysis technique was used to identify and illustrate trends in the different periods of Iranian-Saudi relations. Document analysis is qualitative research in which the researcher examines documents to add context and meaning to the studied issue.

Literature Review

Examining the title “Saudi Arabia- Iran Rivalry: Implications for Pakistan and its Role in Resolution of the Conflict (2015-2020),” extensive literature exists on the Saudi-Iran conflict. However, the changing nature of regional security architecture demands further inquiry. Also, minimal attention has been given to the role of Pakistan in the resolution of the Saudi Arabia-Iran Rivalry. Therefore, this literature review is bifurcated into two themes. The first theme involves tracing the trajectory of conflictual relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran and further analyzing the rivalry between KSA and Iran. The second theme focuses on Islamabad’s relations with Riyadh and Tehran amid their rivalry and the ramifications of their rivalry on Pakistan. Significantly, the literature review explores these two themes, revealing a notable lacuna in the existing body of knowledge concerning the role of Pakistan in the Saudi-Iran rivalry.

The existing literature indicates several causes of disagreement between KSA and IRI. Several books on the historical background of conflict illuminate the relations between KSA and IRI before 1979. In this regard, a book by Saeed M. Badeeb, *Saudi-Iran Relations 1932-1982* (1993), explicates the historical perspective to conceptualize the strangled relations between Riyadh and Tehran. Over half of the century's relationship concerning the two states, KSA and IRI, has passed through ups and downs on multiple fronts. Starting from the 1920s, both the states under the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran and King Abd-ul-Aziz started working on national progress and development. The political aspects include various elements that have altered the political narrative and discourse, impacting the relations between the two states. These states of affairs include the monarchy's role, ethnicity, and Sectarian divide between Sunni and Shia. Regarding the religious aspect, the pilgrims and the delegates coming to Mecca and Madinah have been discussed. The trajectory of oil production and exploration, the difference of opinion on the exploration, and the exploitation of these resources have been entailed. Lastly, the author narrates the issues from military confrontation to regional security dynamics.

Frederic Wehrey, Theodore W. Karasik, and Alireza Nader: *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy* (2009),¹ examine how Saudi-Iran relations have stretched throughout the Middle East since 2003, detecting the causes of contention and cooperation between the two states. Understanding and influencing this relationship will be a crucial part of U.S. struggles to support stability after the pulling out American military from the Iraq and to control the regional impacts of Iran's nuclear goals.

Dilip Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy* (2018),² There has been a leadership contest between Riyadh and Tehran in the Islamic world. The Sunni-Shia rift and their shared pasts are at the heart of the current crisis between Saudi

¹ Frederic Wehrey, Theodore W. Karasik, Alireza Nader, Jeremy J. Ghez, and Lydia Hansell, "Saudi-Iranian relations since the fall of Saddam: Rivalry, cooperation, and implications for US policy," *Rand Corporation*, 2009.

² Dilip Hiro, "Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the struggle for supremacy," Oxford University Press, 2019.

Arabia and Iran. While Iran's clerical regime sees it as a fight between their Islamic Republic and an unconstitutional monarchy, Riyadh sees it as a competition between two major Islamic sects. Due to these fundamental differences, Saudi Arabia's assertive Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman has destabilised Lebanon, isolated Qatar, and deployed proxies in Yemen, while Iran has increased its influence throughout the Middle East, especially in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Dilip Hiro analyzed the deteriorated relation of the two giants of Middle East, dating back its genesis and predicting this Islamic Cold War would culminate anytime soon.

Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Power and Rivalry in the Middle East (2015)*³, following the 1979 Iranian revolution, relations between Middle Eastern states were reconstructed and reviewed. The ties between Arabia and Persian flank of the Middle East were one of the hostile one. The theocratic government in Tehran ties with Riyadh has been inimical conflicts since it came into power, which both states have been frequently manifested themselves in regional crises for instance in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain. The author has analysed the different strata in the political landscape of the Middle East in terms on ethnicity, sect and tribal groups living in Saudi Arab and Iran and their influence on the domestic and foreign policies of the respective countries as well. Therefore, this his work is essential for anyone investigating foreign relationship and political and economic diplomacy in the region since it analyses this intense and frequently tense association and its bearing on the broader Middle East.

Stephen. P. Cohen, *The Future of Pakistan (2011)*⁴, has been the avid writer on South Asia, particularly focusing on the civil-military dynamics. There are many scripts written on the relations as well as the development, evolution and future implications keeping in view the

³ Simon Mabon, "Saudi Arabia and Iran: Power and Rivalry in the Middle East (2015)",

⁴ Stephen P. Cohen, "*The future of Pakistan*," Rowman & Littlefield, (2011).

geostrategic and geopolitical contours. The historical developments of Pakistan's relations with neighboring states have seen a myriad of phases in the form of convergence and divergence of interests since the inception. The multiple factors include political, social, economic, and military challenges, which have been confronted with great effort. On the bilateral front Pakistan India, the states have always shown antagonistic behavior towards each other, which has created a great deal of mistrust. On the other hand, the Afghan factor also comes into play to develop divergent interest of both archrival states. The issues linked with militancy and extremism have remained the central point of discussion at the global level whenever Pakistan has been brought into the limelight of discussion. The development of relations with the U.S. has also been inconsistent and shaky. He narrates that the reservoir of patience is needed for developing strong ties with the U.S. Similarly, Pakistan-China relations have also been discussed which is showing a trusted partnership. The issue remains with the re-engagement policy and options available for moving further. In the changing political dynamics, Pakistan is in a state of dilemma for developing policies for re-engagement with the regional as well as extra-regional powers. The state of the affairs is that Pakistan needs to look into the prospects and challenges for shifting its alliance of changing the engagement policy keeping in view the changing political dynamics at the global level. Lastly, the researchers are needed for bringing more and more comprehensive strategies for developing strong ties in the foreseeable future.

Ibrahim Fraihat, *Iran, and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict (2020)*,⁵ examined unfriendly ties between Tehran and Riyadh are chief contributors to Middle Eastern political volatility. The book entails tenets based on which author convinced that the peace between the two rivals on the Middle East could be feasible. To develop a framework for a peace agenda, the author extracts the major tenets, tactics, and conflicting patterns between these two states since the advent of U.S. in Iraq i.e., in 2003, by interrogating professionals, major stakeholders

⁵ Ibrahim Fraihat, "Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict," Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

and former officials from the Gulf area. Such situation dragged the entire region into the deteriorated and fatal indispensable gap to decrease the gulf between the two giants of Middle East in terms of civil war, economic downfall and political turmoil.

Banafesheh Kaynosh, *Saudi-Iran: friends or foes (2016)*,⁶ The author enunciated that in the development of ties and conflict between the two states, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the role of the U.S. has become so instrumental that it becomes impossible to study the relationship between the two without the role of the U.S. The book's main idea is the strategic significance of the relationship between the two states and their implication in the changing political dynamics of the Middle Eastern Region. The strange relation can be conceptualized based on the theoretical framework, such as the balance of power; this theory rightly highlights the aspects of a shift in balance through the contours of power. The tussle has been witnessed in the form of a compelling argument that states have always tried to explore their interests and exploit the weaknesses of the opponent party. Historically, it has been noticed that the states have observed a wide array of friction in their relations, which has been linked with the 'Nixonian Twin Pillars.' The roots of development in the relationship and its changing political dynamics have led the history, and the current rivalry is an apt example of a case in point. In developing this state of affairs, both states have equally contributed in the form of ambiguous decision-making processes and widened mistrust. Ultimately, the influential and those in the power corridor have a significant role due to their influential status and the directives of the external powers to the decision-makers.

Alex Vatanka, *Iran and Pakistan: Security, Diplomacy and American Influence (2015)*⁷, the author is of view that Islamabad and Tehran's anti-American policies has severely harmed the U.S. interests not only in this region but also beyond. Author threw light upon the various

⁶ Banafesheh Kaynosh, "Saudi-Iran: friends or foes," Palgrave Macmillan; 1st ed. 2016 edition February 5, 2016.

⁷ Alex Vatanka, "Iran and Pakistan: Security, diplomacy and American influence" Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

commonalities between the two states which comprises of three hundred million populations. Pakistan –Iran relationship evolved with the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and problems now exist between Sunni Pakistan and Shi'i Iran, the two nations have a history of cooperation in areas of considerable strategic significance to the U.S., including Afghanistan, nuclear proliferation, and terrorism. Nonetheless, much of this history of collaboration, conflict, and ongoing relationships have gone unexplored. Alex Vatanka provides the first extensive examination of this long-standing and complicated connection.

Talal Mohammad, *Iranian-Saudi Rivalry Since 1979 In the Words of Kings and Clerics* (2022),⁸ analysed The largest Wahhabi state in the world, Saudi Arabia, and the largest Shia state in the world, Iran, are situated on opposite sides of the Persian Gulf. However, their relationship is one of the most complicated in the entire world. Even by the states' elites themselves, this is typically attributed to sectarian differences. This book demonstrates how these elites use sectarian and nationalist references and tropes to disparage one another and advance themselves in the eyes of their respective constituencies in the region in their official speeches, newspaper editorials, and Friday sermons. Using discourse analysis, Talal Mohammad examined these sources from politics, religion, and journalism. He makes the case for a recurring pattern of mutual misrepresentation, in which each portrays the other as the “Other” to advance and justify a particular political agenda by drawing parallels between what has been produced since 1979. The Iranian Revolution, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Afghan War, the overthrow of Saddam, the Arab Spring, Mohammed bin Salman's ascent, and the fight against ISIS are just a few of the significant events covered in the book. The author makes the case here that the discursive othering serves as a propagandist function that supports

⁸ Talat Mohammad, *Iranian-Saudi Rivalry Since 1979: In the Words of Kings and Clerics,* Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

more fundamental political and geopolitical considerations, in contrast to how Saudi-Iranian rivalry has traditionally been understood, primarily regarding sectarian or geopolitical factors.

Kim Ghattas, *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East*,⁹ (2020) transpire a paradigm-shifting reinterpretation of Middle Eastern modern history, Black Wave tells the largely untold tale of the rivalry between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran, a rivalry sparked by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and which over the course of four decades has profoundly altered the culture, identity, and collective memory of millions of Muslims.

S. Shoaib written the book *Factors in Pak-Iran Relations: Post-Cold War Era* (2011). The book examines the factors that have influenced the relationship between Pakistan and Iran in the post-Cold War era. The author analyzes the historical and political context of the relationship, including the role of religion, culture, and regional geopolitics. The book also explores the economic and strategic factors that have shaped the relationship, such as trade, energy, and security cooperation. Overall, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex and evolving relationship between Pakistan and Iran, and its implications for regional and global security.

Simon Mabon, *The Struggle for Supremacy: Understanding the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry*¹⁰ (2022), One of Mabon's primary goals in writing this book is to persuade readers to avoid reducing this rivalry to a simple Sunni-Shia or an Arab-Persian divide, which has frequently been the dominant narrative. It would be complex to categorize it into just one group. The literature has not adequately addressed what this conflict means for local politics, even though much of the discussion has focused on three factors: power politics, religion, and how the two interact. Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen are the five empirical case studies on which

⁹ Kim Ghattas, "Black wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the forty-year rivalry that unraveled culture, religion, and collective memory in the Middle East," Henry Holt and Company, 2020.

¹⁰ Simon Mabon, "The Struggle for Supremacy in the Middle East", Cambridge University Press, 2023.

Mabon focuses in the book. The case of Bahrain, where the Shia majority has long been persecuted because of their alleged ties to Iran, is the focus of his presentation. This oppressive narrative reflects Saudi efforts to impose a worldview on Bahrain. Bahrainis began protesting in the streets in 2011 to call for an end to the corruption of the Al-Khalifa regime. The Saudis feared that democratic reform would prompt the Saudi Shia population to call for political reform as well as bring an Iranian presence to the Arabian Peninsula's shores. Despite being a Sunni minority, the Al-Khalifa attempted to dominate Bahrain's political landscape in response by decimating the protest movements and framing them as results of sectarianism and Iranian manipulation.

Muhammad Shahid Amin, *Pakistan Relations with Saudi Arabia*¹¹ (2021), the book provides an overview of the historical, political, and economic relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It covers the period from the early days of Pakistan's independence to the present day and examines the key factors that have shaped the relationship between the two countries. The book discusses a range of issues, including the role of religion in the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's support for the Saudi monarchy, and the impact of regional and global politics on the bilateral relationship. It also explores the economic ties between the two countries, particularly in the areas of energy and investment. Overall, "Pakistan Relations with Saudi Arabia" provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex and multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and sheds light on the broader dynamics of the geopolitics of the Middle East and South Asia.

Anoush Ehteshami explores the complex dynamics between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two significant players in the region, in his book "Competing Power Brokers of the Middle East: Iran and Saudi Arabia."¹² The political, economic, and religious elements that influence the

¹¹Shahid, and Adam Saud, "CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS IN CENTRAL ASIA: IMPEDIMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PAKISTAN," *Pakistan Journal of Social Research* 4, no. 2 (2022): 717-726.

¹² Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Competing Powerbrokers of the Middle East: Iran and Saudi Arabia," Vol. 67. Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2008.

rivalry between these two regional powers are thoroughly examined in this book. The author has identified three turbulent episodes in Iranian history: The Islamic Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the peace accord between Egypt and Israel. A number of the book's events are outlined and analysed. Ehteshami examines the ways in which Saudi Arabia and Iran use various power projection techniques, including soft power, exploiting religious identities to further their goals, and backing ideological proxies. In "Competing Power Brokers of the Middle East: Iran and Saudi Arabia," the author provides a thorough examination of the disagreement between these two regional giants. It expands on prior research in security studies, international affairs, and Middle Eastern politics. Nonetheless, filling in the blanks regarding non-state players, modern advancements, and internal issues would offer a more comprehensive view of this intricate and dynamic struggle.

The book "Competing Radicalism: A Comparison of Saudi and Iranian Foreign Policies After 2015"¹³ by Mahjoob Zweiri provides a thorough and insightful analysis of the Gulf crisis that transpired in 2017. Rational choice theory was applied by Mahjoob Zweiri to compare and contrast the foreign policies of Saudi Arabia and Iran after 2015. The rational actor model and rational choice theory can provide light on the role of rationality in the two countries' foreign policy decision-making. The book contains more than just recount incidents and policies adopted by the Middle Eastern giants. Zweiri explores the social, political, and intellectual backgrounds that influence the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and Iran. He explains how the drive for regional hegemony, sectarianism, and power conflicts in the region all play a part in the dynamics between the two nations. The book's primary focus on the 2017 Gulf crisis may be one of its drawbacks. Even though this incident is sufficient to serve as a crucial case study,

¹³ Mahjoob Zweiri, and Majed Al-Ansari, "Competing Radicalisms: A Comparison of Saudi and Iranian Foreign Policies After 2015," *The 2017 Gulf Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (2021): 229-246.

the analysis might have been enhanced by a more thorough look at the historical background and current changes in Saudi and Iranian foreign policy.

Mehran Kamrava's book "The Modern Middle East"¹⁴ offers a useful blend of historical viewpoints and present analysis, providing a concise and comprehensive summary of the creation of the contemporary Middle East. The book examines the impact of elements like religion, culture, and economy while providing a comprehensive view of the historical and political development of the area. This book provides a nuanced viewpoint on the opportunities and difficulties that have shaped the region's modern-day trajectory. *The Modern Middle East* addresses a wide range of subjects, such as the establishment of states, nationalism, colonialism, authoritarianism, and the effects of outside forces on the area. With skill, Kamrava dissects the intricacies of cultural dynamics, socioeconomic shifts, and regional politics, offering a comprehensive picture of the complexity of the Middle East. Kamrava provides an overview of the history of Islam and its significant influence in the area in a succinct manner. He examines the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, the difficulties of establishing independence and a state, the birth and ferocious spread of nationalism, the two Arab-Israeli Wars (1967 and 1973), the Iranian Revolution, the two Gulf Wars, and other events, including the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Following the ramifications of these historical occurrences, Kamrava delves deeply into three crucial issues: the difficulties associated with economic growth, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the problem of democracy. He also looks at concerns like water scarcity, pollution in the environment, and population expansion that will affect the future. Though the book offers a thorough and perceptive examination of the political, social, and economic factors of the region, the cultural and social aspects have not been thoroughly explored.

¹⁴ Mehran Kamrava, "The modern Middle East: a political history since the First World War," Berkeley, CA: University of California press, 2005.

Arshin Adib Moghaddam's book, "The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy,"¹⁵ presents a unique perspective on the politics of the Persian Gulf region by integrating cultural elements into the analysis. This literature attempts to synthesize the critical study of culture with empirical analysis of conflict in the Persian Gulf. The book engages with the extensive literature on Persian Gulf politics, which includes works by scholars such as Mehran Kamrava, F. Gregory Gause III, and Kenneth Pollack. These scholars have examined various aspects of the Middle Eastern region's politics, including state rivalries, security dilemmas, and the role of external powers. It is said that the post-Second Gulf War dynamics in the region demonstrated the development of an anarchic culture and disagreement about its restrictive elements. Two significant events strengthened conflictual norms: first, the rise of neo-conservative strategic theories following the September 11, 2001 attacks, particularly unilateralism, and pre-emption, which led to the war of Iraq in March 2003. Second, there was a growth in political Islam of neo-fundamentalists who resisted any talks with the 'West' and threatened the stability of ruling conservative governments, especially in Saudi Arabia. Concurrently, a conflictual process contested the character of regional anarchy. Once Mohammad Khatami was elected in 1997 and Iranian foreign policy was reoriented towards détente and discussion, Iran and the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states began an ongoing process of mutual trust-building. Incentives for cooperation were strengthened in the administration of regional issues by this new dynamic.

The book aligns with the literature on cultural and identity studies, particularly within international relations. Scholars like Alexander Wendt and Benedict Anderson have emphasized the role of culture and identity in shaping international politics. Moghaddam's work applies these insights to the Persian Gulf, shedding light on how cultural factors influence the region's political dynamics. The book employs critical approaches, including post-

¹⁵ Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "The international politics of the Persian Gulf: a cultural genealogy," Routledge, 2006.

colonialism and constructivism, to analyze the Persian Gulf's international politics. This approach aligns with the broader literature on critical international relations theory, as represented by scholars like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. This study has shown how the distinction between political idiom and political action was blurred as nations were forced to act out what was continually reified and reproduced as the primary source of national identity. Pre-emption and unilateralism are similar to Iranian revolutionism and pan-Arabism regarding their behavioural prescriptions. All three concepts demand hegemonic, transnational, and even expansionist foreign policies from those who represent them.

Fred Halliday and Raymond Hinnebusch's book, "The Nexus of International Relations Theory and Middle Eastern Studies," explores the intersection of international relations theory and the study of the Middle East. The book engages with the broader literature on applying international relations theory to specific regions. Fred Halliday and Raymond Hinnebusch's book, *The Nexus of International Relations Theory and Middle Eastern Studies*, comprehensively explores the intersection between international relations theory and the study of the Middle East. The book delves into the Middle East's complex political, social, and cultural dynamics. It offers insights into how these dynamics can be understood and analyzed through the lens of international relations theory. The authors examine various international relations theories, including realism, liberalism, and constructivism, and assess their applicability to the Middle East. They argue that these theories have primarily been developed in Western contexts but can still offer valuable insights into the region's politics and international relations. The book covers a wide range of topics, including state sovereignty, regional conflicts, the role of external actors, and the impact of globalization on the Middle East. It also explores the complexities of the region's identity, religion, and ideology and how these factors intersect with international politics.

One of the book's key strengths is its ability to bridge the gap between academic disciplines. It encourages scholars and students of Middle Eastern studies to engage with international relations theory and vice versa. Doing so promotes a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the Middle East's role in the global arena. While the book offers valuable insights and a solid theoretical framework, it leaves room for further exploration. It could benefit from more in-depth case studies illustrating how different international relations theories can be applied to specific Middle Eastern conflicts and issues. Additionally, given the rapidly changing nature of international relations and the Middle East, an updated edition would be valuable to reflect recent developments in the region.

“What is Iran? Domestic Politics and International Relations in Five Musical Pieces” by Arshin Adib Moghaddam¹⁶ is a book that explores the multifaceted nature of Iran's political landscape and international relations through the medium of music. This book takes a unique and unconventional approach to exploring the complexities of Iran's domestic politics and its international relations. Adib-Moghaddam, a scholar specializing in Iranian and critical studies, examines five musical pieces and analyzes the Iranian cultural, social, and political implications. In the initial chapter of Iran in the New World Order, the author sheds light on the policies of U.S. President Obama, Trump, and Biden regarding the Iran and Israel factors. The author has transpired the U.S. sanctions implications on Iran amid the COVID pandemic and the military aspect, i.e., the assassination of General Soleimani and the escalated situation. He sketched a picture of Iran through five musical pieces, mainly antagonistic to Western thoughts and media depiction. The author has shared a conversation between the Shah, Khomeini, and Oriana Fallaci, and in light of this interview, the author has drawn an analysis of leadership in Iran. The borders between good Iranians—those who shared their ideologies—and others were established by both the Shah and Khomeini. There was no tendency to adopt

¹⁶ Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, “What is Iran?: Domestic politics and international relations in five musical pieces,” Vol. 15, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

a pliable understanding of political rivals as respectable rivals who might be incorporated into the political system to promote agreement and social cohesion.

The book's first section examines Iran as a global entity from a post-national standpoint, establishing the foundation for the argument that Iran resists categorization and the authoritarian politics that go along with it. The idea of the nation's internal political processes is covered in Chapter Two, and the Iranian state's strategic preferences are examined in Chapter Three. The influence of right-wing ideas on Iran's ties with the U.S. and Israel is examined in Chapter Four, while Chapter Five explores Iran's interaction with the region and Eurasia. This approach embodies the essence of Critical Iranian Studies. Including musical analysis and references adds depth and richness to the narrative, providing readers with a captivating reading experience. However, the selected songs offer valuable insights, and a broader examination of additional cultural and political aspects would have enhanced the book's overall scope.

Christin Marschall's book, "Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami"¹⁷ examines Iran's foreign policy in the Persian Gulf region during a critical period in its history. The book covers the period from the Islamic Revolution in 1979, which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power, to the presidency of Mohammad Khatami in the late 1990s. The book likely delves into how the revolutionary ideology of the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini influenced Iran's foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. This includes discussions on anti-imperialism, anti-Western sentiment, and the export of the Islamic revolution. The book covers the views that Arabs and Iranians have of one another, explores the concept of Islamic revolution, looks at the Iran-Iraq conflict, investigates the Gulf issue, and evaluates President Khatami's election. According to the author, Iranian policy has changed from being ideological to being pragmatic over the course of twenty years. The author contends that by following its past development, we might learn more about its likely future course.

¹⁷ Christin Marschall, "Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami," Routledge, 2003.

In “Independence without Freedom,” Rohullah K. Ramazani¹⁸ offers twenty of his most important and perceptive book chapters and articles together with a brand-new preface and afterword. When taken as a whole, these articles offer strong evidence that a conflict between the U.S. and Iran is improbable. R. K. Ramzani’s book delves into the complexities of Iran’s foreign policy and its quest for independence in the international arena. It likely examines the historical, political, and ideological factors that have shaped Iran’s approach to foreign relations. The book may address Iran’s desire to assert its sovereignty and autonomy, particularly in the face of external pressures and historical influences. In the volume’s preface, Ramazani describes his early interest in Iran’s engagement in the world, which was sparked by the country’s severe effects from World War II and Iran’s crucial decision to free its oil industry from British rule. He discusses the reasons for America’s poor understanding of Iranian foreign policy in the afterword, outlines the fundamentals of his own approach to researching Iran (especially with regard to the nuclear issue), and outlines the main engines driving Iran’s international endeavours. *Independence without Freedom* is going to be a valuable tool for everyone interested in learning about the forces and circumstances that shape Iranian policy in the world arena.

Beside books number of scholarly articles were also analyzed to augment the understanding about the Saudi Iranian conflict and Pakistan’s role in this regard an article by Shahzad Raza, *Crisis in Yemen: Threats of another Proxy war in Pakistan (2017)*,¹⁹ enumerates that in 2015, the parliament of Pakistan made a decision to remain detached from the crises in Yemen. This neutrality in the fighting between the opposing forces within the Yemeni crisis has been finalized after a joint sitting. It was stated that the protection of the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia will never be compromised at any cost. On the other hand, Pakistan needs to look into

¹⁸ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, “Independence without freedom: Iran’s foreign policy,” University of Virginia Press, 2013.

¹⁹ Shahzad Raza, “Crisis in Yemen: threats of another proxy war in Pakistan?,” *Conflict and Peace Studies*: 17.

the issue of lingering on without any sort of proper solution. It has been notified that both states have issues in case of any tilt towards the other state. Moreover, sectarian tendencies are also exposed to the threat making the situation more and more vulnerable for Pakistan. The sectarian divide in history has created trouble as well if the situation persists the issue of the rising extremism and militancy on the basis of sectarian divide seems the only outcome. In this way, the internal stability and security as well as the economic vulnerability are linked with the rising issues within the Middle Eastern region and Yemen in particular. The workable solution in this category seems to be the element of neutralization of the sectarian factor and reforming the madrasah system, modernizing the course content as well as the syllabus and bringing a strategic balance in relation to the ties between both the states i.e., Iran and Saudi. The most important element is the missing narrative at the national level. The national narrative must be defined forever to protect the sovereignty of the state in the long run. In this way, the internal sectarian divides can be dealt with once and forever.

Bruce Riedel, *why do Saudi Arabia and Iran compete for Pakistani support?*²⁰ (2016), shed light on the factors behind the Saudi Iranian competition to gain Pakistan's support. Pakistan has been the stage for Saudi-Iranian competition for decades. The rivalry for the young minds of Pakistanis, who make up roughly 80% of the population, feeds sectarian conflict in the nation. Picking sides in the Saudi-Iranian Cold War would be very destabilizing, and responsible Pakistani politicians want to prevent further polarization. Instead, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif gives tepid assurances of support for the Kingdom, keeps open communication with both Tehran and Riyadh, and makes it clear that he is willing to act as a mediator between the two.

²⁰ Bruce Riedel, "Why do Saudi Arabia and Iran compete for Pakistani support," *Brookings*. Available online: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/01/11/why-do-saudi-arabia-and-iran-compete-for-pakistani-support/> (accessed on 15 June 2022) (2016).

Aamir Saleem and Syed Mussawar Hussain Bukhar, *Saudi-Iran Rapprochement and Challenges for Pakistan*²¹(2022), stated that the dynamic relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran has implications for both the region and the world. However, this relationship is not solely based on religious differences. Significant factors include multi-ethnicity, Arab versus Persian dominance, and differences in the interests of regional and international players. The two regional powerhouses have pushed the neighbouring states into a variety of alliances. Due to its security issues, economic worries, and religious and sectarian fault lines, it has consequences for Pakistan. The current political climate is fortunately creating opportunities for mending fences. Following Pakistan's unfinished attempts at reconciliation, Iraq has recently launched its most recent arbitration effort. This essay examines the reach and implications of the current effort at rapprochement as well as the effects of Saudi-Iranian conflict on Pakistan. The author is of view that achieving peace is harder than it seems because relationships are complicated. In order to maintain Pakistan's relevance in terms of security, escalation levels should ideally stay above a minimal threshold of total peace and below a threshold at which a dispute requires precise positions. Therefore, rather than mediating conflicts, diplomatic efforts should be focused on de-escalating them.

Fatima Raza, *Pakistan-Iran Relations in the Evolving International Environment*²² (2020), stated that the two neighboring states, Pakistan and Iran, have a lot of potential and resources to maximize productivity and prosperity. Nevertheless, unfortunately, the neighboring states have remained unable to explore the potential to its fullest. Though the state has amicable, solid relations with each other, the state of affairs is that with all their resources and potential, they remain unable to exploit it to gain maximum benefits. The situation is linked not only to bilateral relations but also to the surroundings, the environment, and other regional actors,

²¹ Aamir Saleem, and Syed Mussawar Hussain Bukhari, "Saudi-Iran Rapprochement and Challenges for Pakistan," *Margalla Papers* 26, no. I (2022): 98-107.

²² Fatima Raza, "Pakistan-Iran relations in the evolving international environment," *Strategic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2020): 79-97.

which have their roles to play in the relations between the two states. The convergence and divergence of interests have a lot more to do with the changing dynamics of regional and global affairs. It has been observed that the JCPOA has altered the state of affairs, and many states, including Pakistan, have found themselves in limbo owing to the security concerns linked with Iran. These changes reflect the role of extra-regional actors such as the U.S. in the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iran. The role of the U.S. has remained evident in shaping and shifting the relations between the two states. Other factors include the Riyadh-Iran tussle, the Afghanistan war, and Pak-Saudi relations.

Moreover, the historical roots of engagement have made bilateral relations more problematic as the respective alliances have remained oppositional forces. Therefore, the relations remain void of trust. The development of relations based on new alliances and according to the changing political dynamics can adjust the trust deficit. The hour needs to resolve the issues at the interaction level between the two states. In forging relations, both states need to look into the affairs at the bilateral level and minimize the role of external forces. At the global level, the pandemic has taken the globe in a devastating manner, which has provided new avenues of cooperation among diversified states. Pakistan and Iran can adjust or adapt to the changing state of affairs.

Similarly, Pakistan needs to look into the prospects of developing relations so that the immediate neighbors do not get in trouble with water. Relations with other states must be developed so that Pakistan learns from past mistakes and does not repeat them. In addition, the changing dynamics at regional and global levels must be identified for sustainable relations to be developed in the long run. The need of the hour is to develop ties based on the economic opportunities for durable relations between the two states.

Arif Rafiq, *Pakistan's Resurgent Sectarian War*²³ (2014), stated that the developments in the Middle Eastern Region are creating more and more insecurities through the increased level of conflict and confrontations. The developments in the region have a direct link with the sectarian division within Pakistan. The sectarianism and its networks have got deeply rooted owing to the crises in the Middle Eastern Region. The conflict and violence rising in the form of Sunni and Shia militant groups have got escalated more and more in the last decade. The data show that approx. Two thousand three hundred deaths have been recorded from 2007 till 2013 with additional deaths of fifteen-hundred in FATA region. The local population is involved in the violence and the sectarian element comes into play for framing the regional security apparatus and trans-border terror activities. Historically, the incidents of the 1970s and 1980s reflect that the violence was carried out by the Sunni Deobandi militants, which mostly targeted the Shia minority groups within the Pakistani territory. In the wake of these militant and terror activities, foreign elements and extra-regional forces came into play for expanding the conflict and escalate the conflict. The historical perspectives as explained by most of the author states that the role of external actors has been the real source of the conflict within. And, the sectarian aspect is more linked with the role of foreign involvement to a greater extent. It is right to an extent, but, sectarianism is not only linked with the external forces only, the power brokers having narrow political interests or vested interests inside the state and system have also contributed to widening the gap on sectarian lines. The sectarian divide must be dealt with in a structural way so that the violence on sectarian fault lines comes to a grinding halt. Pakistan cannot afford to see an Iraqi-style sectarian clash, which is ultimately threatening the existence of the state. Such a step can further radicalize the militant segments along with the consolidation of the state as an ugly majoritarian state.

²³ Arif Rafiq, "Pakistan's Resurgent Sectarian War," *United States Institute of Peace*, 2014.

Mohamed Bin Huwaidin, *The Security Dilemma in Saudi-Iranian Relations*²⁴ (2015), the term “security Dilemma” first appeared in the writings of John Herz, Herbert Butterfield, and Robert Jervis in the 1950s. It is a crucial idea in the realm of international affairs since it diagnoses the terms war and conflict. This research of Herz titled as “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma” has been regarded as the pioneer work on Security Dilemma. As per Herz point of view, individual either states or groups have various insecurities in terms of foreign invasion and to avoid that one protects to being attacked. To get protection, more strength and power has been acquired by the entities to nullified the effect of greater might. This research paved the way for application of the international theory to better understand the relations of the states.

Afshon Ostovar, shared views in an article *U.S.-Iran Escalation in the Age of COVID-19*²⁵ (2020), published in Foreign Policy Research Institute, explain what happened on the evening of March 11, when around eighteen 107mm Katyusha rockets hit Camp Taji, which is close to Baghdad. Three troops tragically died in this attack—two Americans and one British soldier—while fourteen more soldiers were injured. The guilty party was quickly recognised by U.S. and coalition troops as Kata’ib Hezbollah, a group backed by Iran. U.S. forces reacted against the organisation early on Friday morning (Iraqi time), attacking many locations linked to the Iraqi militia all around the country. Examining this occurrence and its possible effects on Saudi-Iranian relations in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic is warranted.

It contends that the existence of a security challenge has influenced the relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is a security dilemma in the two states’ relations since both are seeking policies that increase their relative benefits in order to make them secure; nevertheless, this is creating a scenario in which both states are less

²⁴ Mohamed BinHuwaidin, “The security dilemma in Saudi-Iranian relations,” *Review of History and Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2015): 69-79.

²⁵ Afshon Ostovar, "US-Iran Escalation in the Age of COVID-19", 2020.

secure. The growing competition and tensions between the two regional heavyweights are jeopardizing the balance of power and heightening the prospect of war between the two governments. The constructivist interpretation is used in the paper as the cause of friction between the two states, which leads to a security dilemma.

Research Gap

A bulk of literature on Saudi-Iranian rivalry covers multiple aspects such as history, religion, geopolitics, etc. However, this study goes beyond these mentioned aspects while focusing on the contemporary key literature on the subject by looking into the political patterns prevailing at the domestic, regional, and international levels, pointing to the significance of neoclassical Realism in multiple dimensions such as:

Many studies may focus primarily on Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry but may not adequately consider Pakistan's perspective on and management of its role in the conflict. Examining Pakistan's perspective, goals, and geopolitical ramifications can be crucial to the research. Studies often highlight bilateral tensions, but the impact of the competition on broader regional stability is poorly understood. One line of inquiry would be assessing the overall impact on regional security and examining any possible spillover effects, especially in South Asia.

Considering the historical ties between Pakistan and both countries, it could be beneficial to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of third-party mediation. Further investigation into Pakistan's potential role in mediating the issue may be required. Neo-Classical Realism emphasizes the importance of internal factors in shaping a state's foreign policy. It is necessary to conduct further research on how domestic power dynamics in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran influence national interests and decision-making in these nations in light of their rivalry.

Employing the Balance of Interest theory, there might be a gap in our understanding of Pakistan's strategic alignment to preserve the balance of power in the region. Future studies should focus on the specific calculations and driving forces behind Pakistan's efforts to

maintain the equilibrium between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Based on the Balance of Interest theory, there might be a study gap in our knowledge of how trade interactions, energy dependency, and economic interests influence Pakistan's regional stability. Investigating the role of economic factors in Pakistan's balancing act between Saudi Arabia and Iran is crucial.

Delimitation

This research study is a modest attempt to address the major components of Saudi Arabia and Iran's rivalry by focusing on their battles in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Due to the breadth of this topic and the complexity of the political and historical components of the struggle between these two governments in the region, this study does not address the political aspects involving all western and regional nations (U.S. and China).

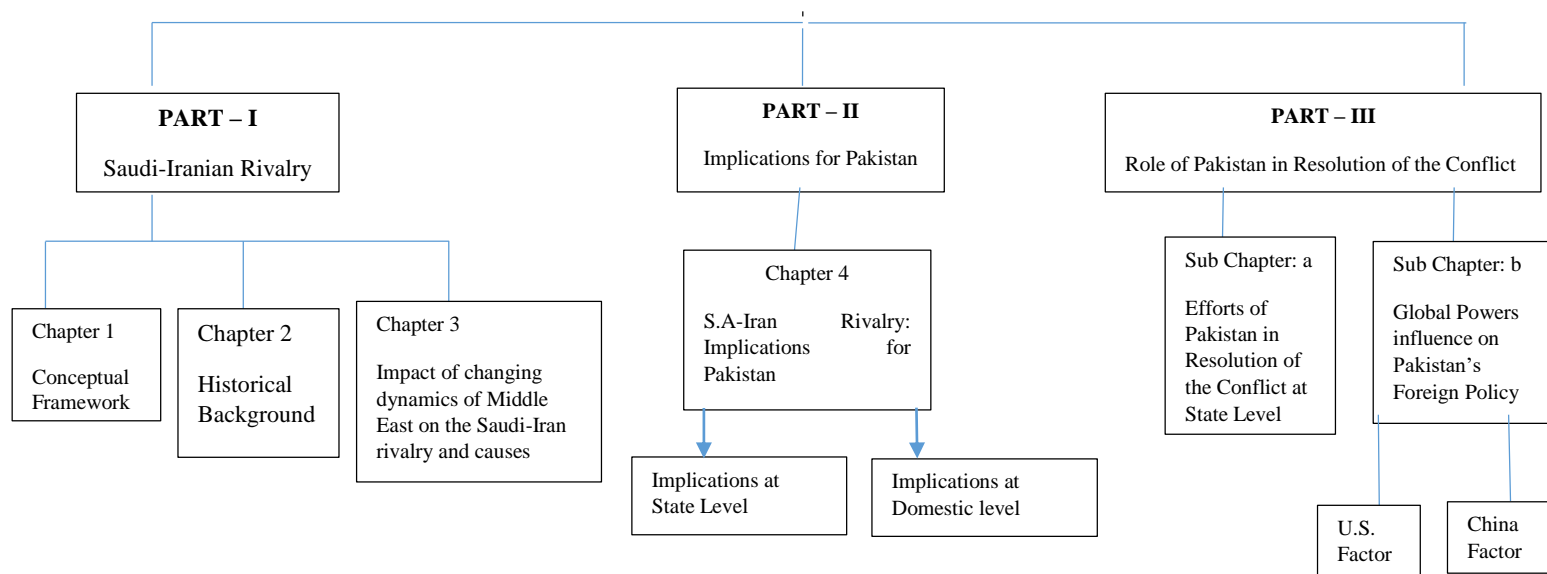
Indeed, the topic examines a broader picture of the competition in the entire region, including Iran and Saudi Arabia's connections with Gulf countries, as each of these states affects the relations between the two competitors both directly and indirectly. Due to time constraints and the breadth of the subject, this study will focus solely on the current dynamics of Saudi Arabia-Iran relations and Pakistan's role in the Resolution of the Conflict. The time bar began in 2015 and expired in 2020.

Organizational Structure of the Study

This study is divided into three sections; first section discusses the Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry in historical and contemporary perspective. Second part sheds light on the implications of Saudi-Iran rivalry on Pakistan. Third part covers balancing role of Pakistan in the mitigation of tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The section also mentions the limitations of Pakistan's efforts due to the influence of international system. Introduction gave a gist of the research, covering statement of problem, objectives of the study, research questions, research methodology, significance of the study and delimitation.

Figure-1 : Study Organization

Saudi Arabia-Iran Rivalry: Implications for Pakistan and its Role in the Resolution of the Conflict (2015 – 2020)



PART 1

Chapter One “Conceptual Framework” discusses theory which explains the nature of rivalry between Saudi Arabia-Iran under the Neo-Classical Realism and Balance of interest theory explains foreign policy of Pakistan towards these Middle East giants and role of Pakistan from neutrality to mediatory.

Chapter Two “Historical Background of Saudi-Iranian Rivalry” provides details the historical background of Saudi-Iran relations since the inception of the both giants of Middle East. The two states were ally of United States till Islamic revolution 1979 in Iran. This chapter gives an insight about the nature of the two states relations in history and discusses determinants which led to cordial relations between the two in Gulf/ Middle East in the pre-Islamic Revolution era.

Chapter Three “Impact of Changing Regional Dynamics of Middle East on the Bilateral Rivalry of Saudi-Iran”, this chapter illustrates Saudi-Iranian rivalry in the contemporary dynamics of Saudi-Iran relations under series of instances under heading of Situational Analysis: Proxy wars, Saudi Concerns over Iranian Nuclear Deal, Concerns over Afghanistan,

Iranian Concerns over Saudi led Islamic Military Alliance, Qatar Crisis and Saudi-Iran Rivalry, Futuristic Approach of Saudi Arabia and Politics over OPEC policies. At the end of the chapter a brief causes of Saudi-Iran rivalry have been discussed. The rivalry encompasses not only sectarian aspect but also struggle for geo-political and geo-economic dimensions discussed in detail.

PART 2

Chapter Four, Saudi-Iran Rivalry: Implications for Pakistan explicates an insight that why the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is of a concern to Pakistan in terms of implications. The implications are divided into sub-sections i.e., implication at domestic level and at global arena.

PART 3

Chapter Five “Balancing Role of Pakistan in the Resolution of the Conflict: State Level Efforts and International Influence” shed light on the role played by Pakistan in diminishing the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Particularly emphasis is on the period from 2015-2020. It also endeavors to determine why and how major global powers influence Pakistan policy towards Middle East particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Conclusion of the study presents key takeaways and major findings.

Key Terms/ Operational definitions

The Arab Spring: Arab Spring is the sequence of anti-government popular demonstrations that swept the Middle East in early 2011. Initiated in Tunisia in December 2010, the protest swiftly spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and many other neighbouring nations, where social and economic problems, authoritarianism, and corruption were held in common contempt. However, they experienced varying degrees of success.

Iranian Islamic Revolution: In Iran, a popular movement in 1978-1979 led to the overthrow of the monarchy on February 11, 1979, and the formation of the Islamic Republic.

Joint Comprehensive Action of Plan: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a comprehensive agreement encompassing One hundred fifty-nine pages with five annexes, was finalised on July 14, 2015, between Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany). Later, on July 20, 2015, the United Nations Security Council approved the deal with Resolution 2231. Ensuring that Iran complies with the JCPOA's nuclear-related obligations and meets the agreed-upon criteria is the responsibility of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). President Trump delivered a major statement on May 8, 2018, announcing that the U.S. re-imposed nuclear sanctions on the Iranian government and withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Twin Pillar Policy: The United States faced a strategic problem as a result of Britain's decision to remove its armed military force from the Persian Gulf and to offer independence to its ten protectorates along the east coast of the Arabian Land. In lieu of direct engagement, the United States sought to strengthen its allies, KSA, Iran as local powers capable of protecting the domain from the spreading of Soviet dominance. As the *twin pillars* of U.S. strategy, some states were urged in the 1970s to purchase billions worth of the precocious armaments. Iran adopted the two pillars doctrine more enthusiastically than Saudi Arabia and militarily intervened in Iraq and Oman with U.S. approval.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation: The international organisation of Islamic cooperation established in 1969 which consist of Fifty-Seven Islamic states. This organisation define itself as the manifestation of the true representation of Muslim world.

Horn of Africa: The Horn of Africa (HoA) is the eastern most peninsula on the African continent. The region's English name is derived from the horn-shaped land feature near the continent's easternmost tip. Near the southern edge of the Red Sea, the peninsula extends

hundreds of kilometres into the Gulf of Aden, Somali Sea. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia are internationally recognised countries in the Horn of Africa, whereas Somaliland is not.

Resolution of the Conflict: It is possible to argue that conflicts arise from both objective and subjective variables, including rivalry for external resources like land, power, or prestige, as well as conflicts between the interests, values, and internal beliefs of opposing parties. In this situation, resolving a dispute means coming to an agreement between the parties in order to stop hostilities from breaking out or the military from getting worse.

PART 1

SAUDI ARAB-IRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides a conceptual framework to understand the enduring nature of rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and its implication on Pakistan and Pakistan's role in the resolution of the conflict. The conceptual framework is comprised of neoclassical realism and balance of interest theory. The objective of this chapter is two folds; first, it explains the complexity of Middle Eastern region through the prism of neo-classical realism. Second, the chapter explicates the balancing role of Pakistan under Balance of Interest theory in Saudi-Iran rivalry by looking at its internal and external matters effecting its foreign policy.

Why Conceptual Framework is Relevant?

The topic, "Saudi Arabia-Iran Rivalry: Implications for Pakistan and its Role in Resolution of the Conflict (2015-2016)" has been divided into three parts. First part discusses the Saudi Arabia-Iran Rivalry, and the second part dissects the implications of their rivalry on Pakistan and third part analyze the Role of Pakistan in the Resolution of the Conflict. For the first part the conceptual framework is best is Neo-Classical Realism while for the Pakistan's perspective Balance of Interest approach has been deployed to understand the balancing role of Pakistan keeping in view its internal and external matters.

Neo-Classical Realism

Neo-Classical Realism's intricate approach, which considers systemic and domestic elements, makes it appropriate for analyzing the competition and rivalry between KSA and IRI. In this particular instance, multiple factors are involved, which make NCR a more suitable lens to evaluate their rivalry:

Unit-Level Determinants: Neo-classical realism considers internal elements, including domestic politics and leadership opinions. It is critical to comprehend how domestic political factors and leadership perceptions influence foreign policy choices in the Saudi-Iranian

competition. For instance, foreign policy choices of leadership in Iran before and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, similar to the de facto king of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Bin Suleman, have brought a shift in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia to bring more Westernization. In the same pattern, the domestic politics of both countries influence their foreign policy.

Systemic Constraints: Neo-classical realism considers how systemic elements affect how states behave. Neo-classical realism theory explains how alliances, external pressures, and regional power dynamics play a part in Saudi Arabia and Iran's conflict. The global political order has an immense impact on regional and inter-state relations. Major powers like the U.S., China, and Russia have been major players in the Middle East.

Neo-classical realism strongly emphasizes security issues, which are present in the rivalry between KSA and Tehran. A vicious cycle results when one state reacts as it considers the other's activities to be dangerous. For instance, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed between P5+1 and Iran was considered a threat by Saudi Arabia. On the contrary, the security alliance of the Islamic Military Coalition against Terrorism (IMCT) was created, which excluded Iran and other Shia-majority Muslim countries. Neo-classical realism investigates how nations, according to their appraisals of dangers and capabilities, balance against or align themselves with other powers. The geopolitical calculations of Saudi Arabia and Iran reflect this dynamic.

Security challenges: The rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh demonstrates the security challenges that neo-classical realism highlights. A cycle of competition and tension is created when one state reacts in kind to activities it views as threatening to the other. Neo-classical realism investigates how nations, according to their appraisals of dangers and capabilities, balance against or align themselves with other powers. The geopolitical calculations of Saudi Arabia and Iran reflect this dynamic.

Neo-classical realism considers a state's capacity to learn from its experiences and change its tactics. It is instructive to look at how Saudi Arabia and Iran adapt their foreign policies based on past interactions.

In essence, neoclassical realism's blend of systemic and domestic factors and its focus on leaders' perceptions and adaptive behavior makes it well-suited for analyzing the complexities of the Saudi-Iran rivalry.

Balance of Interest Theory

For multiple reasons, the Balance of Interest theory is suitable for comprehending Pakistan's relationship with the conflict between KSA and IRI. The most essential factor for Pakistan in choosing a balancing role is its strategic location. Pakistan shares borders with Iran and geographical proximity with Saudi Arabia, placing it in a strategically significant geographic location. Pakistan strategically controls its connections with these countries based on its geographic location, which may be examined using the balance of interest theory.

Pakistan's fluctuating economy also compelled Pakistan to opt for the balancing position in the Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry. Pakistan has economic ties with Saudi Arabia. The notion of balance of interests enables an analysis of Pakistan's efforts to preserve equilibrium to obtain economic advantages from both countries while avoiding undue alignment with any of them.

Given the demographic makeup of Pakistan's population and to avoid internal rift, violence, and extremism, it is imperative for Islamabad to avoid siding with either Tehran or Riyadh. Pakistan seeks to balance its partnerships in order to protect its security interests, given the security problems in the region, including terrorism and sectarian strife. The idea aids in comprehending how Pakistan handles these security issues from the perspective of KSA and IRI's conflict.

Pakistan participates in several regional organizations, and the balance of interests theory aids in analyzing how it does so to advance its goals and handle the challenges brought on by the

enmity between Riyadh and Tehran. The balance of interest theory explains how states pursue their goals through pragmatist diplomacy. Pakistan may contribute to regional peace and prevent itself from being unduly involved in the tensions between KSA and IRI by striking a balance. It is also in Pakistan's national interest. Essentially, balancing interests offers a structure for evaluating how Pakistan strategically matches its foreign policy with Saudi Arabia and Iran, considering diplomatic, security, and economic factors to preserve a delicate balance within the competition.

1.1 Saudi-Iranian Rivalry under Neo-Classical Realism Lens

Neo-classical Realism (NCR) deals with the foreign policy, features, and contours of foreign policy. This foundational analysis of the foreign policy is imbibed in the international relations where the internal matters of the state are equally important. These multi-folded dimensions of foreign policy make the decision making a complex situation, in which the decision making at foreign policy level often goes wrong. The right or wrong aside, it is considered as something that is the inherent part of foreign policy decision making process. Referring to the same notion, Gideon Rose highlighted these lines that the theory and foreign policy on systemic issues is prone to error many times during the entire process.²⁶ Therefore, there is a dire need of taking under-consideration some of the parameters of the unit-level intervening variables to handle with such sort of errors or mistakes. These intervening variables comprise the thought and perception of the decision-makers as well as the internal political dynamics of the state. Such dimensions divulge the fact that the decision maker or policy maker has to consider the shift in political out manoeuvring at both national and global. This determines the robust form of theoretical assumptions that bridges the gap through geographical, cognitive and temporal dimension.²⁷ In this way, the interpretation comes as a challenge to the liberalist school of

²⁶ Gideon Rose, "Review: Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No.1 (1998), 152.

²⁷ Michiel Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities," *International Studies Review*, 17 (2015), 698.

thought and constructivist school of thought that the internal dimensions and external dimensions make the unit level analyzing much more exclusive in nature.²⁸

Moreover, the neo-classical realists put forward another set of alternative thought that it is not always the structure at global level that predefines the decision making. Exclusively, balance of power refers to the preponderant power for the sake of establishing an international norm, the NCR school of thought states that these decisions are endorsed by the states, which provide them with both prospects and challenges at the same time, which is found in the set of predefined geopolitical context or nature.²⁹

In the same vein, it is not the international dimension or external factors that define or determine the prospects and challenges rather the defining moments in the transition of transformation of international political dynamics can be viewed in the form of the perpetual layer of policy making and decision making that put a great impact in operationalizing the state structure.

To make it comprehensible, this can be stated that the level of internal political dynamics or process works as the transmission belt that helps in channelizing, mediating and redirecting the policy outcomes in the backdrop of the response from those international factors or element. Following these aspects, it can be enunciated that the material structure or materialistic approach in the global political dynamics are not sufficient enough to define or determine the contours of state behaviour.

²⁸ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik. "Is anybody still a Realist?" *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (Fall 1999), 59.

²⁹ Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism," 635.

Figure-2 : Neo-Classical Realism Model



There is a need to look into the significant role played by the internal political dimension as well as the decisions taken by the policy makers or leaders of the state. In addition to that the decision-making process remains the defining factor for making allies as well as developing the threat perception about the arch-rivals.

Historically, the realist school of thought remained at the height of exemplifying the events. Throughout World War, I and World War II, realist core beliefs and assumptions made a great deal of sense. The end of World War, II and the emergence of the Cold War period also remained the impetus to the Realist school of thought where the balance of power was found in the form of a bipolar world. Late in the 1980s and early 1990s, the events unfolded in history gave a perplexed thought to the core assumptions of Realism. The Realist school could not figure out what had happened in the aftermath of the disintegration of the USSR. With the disintegration of the USSR, the Cold War period came to an end. But these incidents could not be explained by the realists, some of the scholars of this school of thought started narrating that this is degenerating the realist school of thought and others were trying to find ways and means through which they can manage to explain the core assumptions of Realism. This complex nature of explanation in itself is the determining notion of the perplexing level of understanding of the realist's school of thought. However, the scholars had to make some assumptions based upon those lines where the core beliefs and assumptions of the realists' school of thought must not have been challenged.

The current study is more oriented towards the argumentative description of the traditional realist paradigm for bringing it with conformity to the academia and decision-makers. The emphasis is on the aspects of deductive reasoning as well as testing the advantages edge of the neoclassical realism in consideration of the said topic. The neoclassical realist core assumptions are more important determinants in this regard. As the discussion follows with the adversary of the KSA and Iran, the geographical proximity and ideological foundations all become part and parcel of this discussion. To say the least, all the factors in one way or the other way come into play owing to the powerlessness and influential role of countries.

This term “Neo-Classical” has been brought into academic discussion after it was coined by Gideon Rose in the year 1998.³⁰ The difference of argument becomes crystal clear from the assumption that the driving factors of the policy rests with both internal as well as external dimensions. The internal political dynamics have equal contribution in forming the foreign policy orientation. The prospects and challenges in the international domain cannot be glossed over at any instant. Moreover, the external political circumstances also impact either directly or indirectly the state’s behaviour and action towards other states in the comity of the nations. Therefore, the state needs to pledge for the ongoing situations as well as future opportunities and threats following the same external and internal dimensions. The course of action must come in synergy with the shift in both internal as well as external political dynamics. In this perspective, the key aspect is that these internal and external aspects may have direct and indirect impact upon the state’s behaviour. So, the powerful states both at regional and international level can exert or influence the affairs in their own favour. In the aforementioned case, the rivalry of Saudi Arabia and Iran may be taken for the conceptual understating of the affairs. Both the states are regional powerful states, they have the privilege to influence the other states within the Middle Eastern Region. It can be observed that at times, the changing

³⁰ Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy,” *World politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144-172.

political dimensions within the internal affairs of a state have got expansion so much so that the entire region got engulfed in the similar state of affairs. This analysis takes a neoclassical realist approach to elucidating the dynamics underlying increased tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. According to this viewpoint, the interplay of international, regional, and domestic factors shapes Saudi and Iranian foreign policy. The escalating tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran are seen as a result of broader structural factors, particularly the regional structure's multi-polarity and the waning influence of U.S. hegemonic control in the Middle East.

These structural conditions are exacerbated further by the rise of Saudi nationalism in their leadership and society. This staunch nationalism notion depicts the Kingdom as destined to take the lead in opposing Iranian expansion in the Arab world. According to the neoclassical realist perspective, Saudi-Iran tensions are deeply rooted in broader structural shifts in the international and regional order, as well as the evolving domestic narrative within Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In 2011, the revolutionary protests in Middle East are an evident instance, where the unfolding of a single event in a state to overthrow the higher officials from the power corridor became the forerunner of the civil war, which to date is getting worse with the passing of time³¹. The beginning of the unfolding of this event is an example of the internal dimension where the internal political instability and toppling of one government resulted into the unfolding of similar type of provocations in all other states as well. In this civil war, the regional powers namely KSA and Iran played their role in the opposite camps. Both the states backed up the minorities falling in their own camp against the potential majority of the other camp. The structural analysis puts further the argument that the power tussle is not a short-term process. But the rival states keep on battling for the power competition for a longer time period.

³¹ James L. Gelvin, "The New Middle East: what everyone needs to know," Oxford University Press, 2018.

They take along with them the rivalries of the past and their stratagem is designed based on those old grudges and rivalries. Besides this conflict and confrontation between the oppositional states, the inappropriate power-sharing experience further deteriorates the already complex situation. Moreover, there is not a unidirectional phenomenon rather there are multi-faceted dimensions to these conflicting natures. They have their compelling means of doing things. Neither these conflicting natures come to a conclusive and decisive end nor do the arch rivalries consider this aspect of peace development their prime concern keeping in view the complex nature of changing political dynamics at regional as well as global levels. They are only focused on the way things serve their interests. In the pursuit of their core interests, they narrow down the scope of cooperation to the extent of gaining their benefits only. Therefore, the pursuit of interests remains adherent to the only ways and means, which are detrimental to their core desires and interests. State, on top of everything, always keeps their own set of priorities beyond any doubt. Now, the defining moment can only come if the core issues are understood and conceptualized to wriggle out of the dilemmas. This can be done only through the identification of the core issue and observing the systematic as well as international and domestic constraints, which must be identified. They have the long-term effect of bringing change like the relationship between the arch-rival states. The domestic and systematic troubles rooted in the way of sound relations need special attention to resolve to bring an end to the nature of conflict and confrontation. Therefore, the neoclassical realists are trying to observe the nature of challenges that are the real predicament in the case of Iran and Saudi rivalry within the Middle Eastern Region. The disorder in the region at the circumstantial level, the instability within the state and the asymmetric nature of the balance of power or power-sharing are some of the core reasons, which need a greater vision to look into to bring the rival states to a point of decisive end, where the disorder can be shifted into some proper order within the region. The external element being the first aspect of challenge has a real level of challenge and prospects. And, the next level is linked with the domestic nature or the internal affairs of the

state. The internal attributes make the ruling ideological connotation the significant element, the other dominant factor is linked with the ethnic and national aspects adding that the religious feature sets the pattern of any state according to the dominant religion, which is followed by the majority of the people within that state. These elements set the stage to portray the level of complexity and competition between both the rival states. Riyadh and Tehran have religious inclinations on the top of everything. Moreover, the ethnic and national inclinations add more and more complexity to the level of fundamental interaction between these states and the countries in the Middle East.

International Level of Analysis

The series of the events that unfolded in the time of history illustrate that the states have remain resilient towards the attitude of the other states as well as to the surrounding conditions. In the historical premises of the rivalry between Iran and KSA, many such events have taken place which have further exacerbated the opponents for greater time. The revolution in Iran stands on top which have changed the course of history. It was the known fact that the USA had a closer tie with the dynasty such as Pehlavi dynasty before the Iranian revolution. Moreover, it was the same force of U.S. which helped in toppling the regime of Muhammad Mussadeq in 1950s.³² The consequence of this occurrence, Raza Shah Pehlavi became the king of Iran, who had very closed connections with the west. Particularly, the decisions made by him had a great influence upon the situations within Iran. Lately, Imam Khomeini was sent to exile on the same basis of connection of Shah of Iran with the U.S. It is not an exaggeration to state that the forces of people and the will of the people had no value in such a power tussle. The powerful has also decided about the fate of the people in the long run. This has happened in case of the pre-revolution period, whereas the post revolution period has a different story to tell. The Iranian

³² Mark Gasiorowski, "US foreign policy toward Iran during the Mussadiq era," In *The Middle East and the United States*, Routledge:2018, 47-63.

forces took control over everything, even the embassy of U.S. remained under a captive state for Four hundred forty four days.³³ At that time, the U.S. and Iran were on the diverging points of concern. The U.S. and Iran could not get into cordial relations after the revolution of Khomeini. In this way, the parting away of relations between Iran and U.S. is an evident development for the overall political dynamics of the region and excellent example of external power influence. The Middle Eastern Region has observed many flexes in the meantime. From the overthrowing of Mussadeq to the Iranian revolution, and from the Iran-Iraq war to the Arab Spring, a lot of changes at internal and global levels have set the instruction of action of the future. Such as the case of dismissal of Assad Government is evident to narrate the ambitions, despite the salafi requests to the Saudi governments through satellite channels, Saudi Arabia supported and funded free Syrian Army groups to make them capable to achieve the Saudi interests in the region at rapid pace.³⁴ The states have come closer with the extra-regional forces but the same state has parted away from the powerful states with the changing of events. The ups and downs of relations have also brought a shift in the development and deterioration of relations between the states. Not to talk about the extra-regional forces, the powerful states at the regional level have not remained strict and stick to their policies. In case of Iran and KSA rivalry many of the other states have followed the suit depending upon the foundation of various associations may it be ethnic-nationalistic and religion-political bases. The course of pattern has been set in case of Iran and KSA rivalry, both the states are the regional powers at one side. And, on the other side, they are trying their level best to influence the other states to follow their suit.

In the incidents that took place later, the issues have been highlighted that the rivalry of Iran and U.S has reached its new height. The damage inflicted by the Iranian missile to the American

³³ Miad Nakhavali, "DIPLOMATIC, CONSULAR AND POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND UNITED STATES," *European Scientific Journal* 9, no. 14 (2013).

³⁴ Bassel F. Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2013), 32-46.

bases came in response to the assassination of Qasim Suleimani, who is one of the high profiled figures of the Iranian military force taking the lead in all sort of overt and covert operations. The response and strike of missiles have not resulted into casualties, but the usage of missiles and such sort of attacks have taken the challenge between the two states to a newer height.³⁵

This situation and such incidents are a real challenge in circumstances where the challenges and problems are all-time high because of the multiple-level challenges at the domestic as well as regional levels. The argument becomes crystal clear from the assumption that the driving factors of the policy rests with both internal as well as external dimensions. The internal political dynamics have an equal contribution in shaping the foreign policy orientation. On the contrary, the prospects and challenges in the international domain cannot be glossed over at any instant. Moreover, the external political circumstances also impact either directly or indirectly the state's behaviour and action towards other states in the comity of the nations. Therefore, the state needs to pledge for the ongoing situations as well as future opportunities and threats following the same external and internal dimensions. The course of action must come in synergy with the shift in both internal as well as external political dynamics. In this perspective, the key aspect is that these internal and external aspects may have direct and indirect impacts on the state's behaviour. And, on the other side, the powerful states both at regional and international levels can exert or influence the affairs in their favour.

Moreover, the security parameters are unfolding various incidents such as the issue of the regional security paradigm which is rooted in the history of internal and external state of affairs. The challenges at multiple levels include the shooting down of the Drone and bringing it down with the help of cyber security experts who got control of the device and then brought it down safely. Some of the other events include the air strikes against the paramilitary forces and the

³⁵ Ian Bond, "A more dangerous world': US killing of Iran's Soleimani Stokes Fear of Regional Conflict," *Centre for European Reforms*, January 3, 2022, <https://www.cer.eu/in-the-press/%E2%80%98more-dangerous-world%E2%80%99-us-killing-irans-soleimani-stokes-fears-regional-conflict>.

increased level of tension between the U.S. forces and the allies of the U.S. in the region. Later, the enactment of JCPOA and the U.S. withdrawal from it without prior consent or notification only reflects the implicit reasons for the escalation of conflict and confrontation within the Middle Eastern Region. As stated here, the enactment and withdrawal in a sequence paved the way for the re-imposition of the economic sanctions which have been signed in the early years of this century. The economic sanctions were re-imposed in the aftermath of Trump's coming to the President's office in the USA.³⁶ These escalations aside, the real rise of tension is not linked with the entry of Trump to President's office rather the conflict and confrontation got deep rooted in the wake of the Iranian change. The chapter of historical background is considered as the cornerstone development in the history of Iran, where the dynasties came to an end and with the end of dynasties, the theocratic regime came to power. This theocratic regime changed all the political and ideological basis of Iran. Iran in the pre-revolution time used to be the part and parcel of U.S. and its allies. But the post revolution period changed everything for good.

This same development of theocratic Iran altered the course of history of the Middle Eastern Region. The tug of war between Iran and KSA reached a new height. Both the regional powers started to increase the power muscle to becoming the leader of the Middle Eastern Region. Both the states started flexing muscle for getting the position of leadership role in the regional affairs. The states started to develop their own political structure for the region based upon their own wishes. These developments were resulting into bi-folded challenges. First, the states started enhancement of geographical rivalries at a greater speed. Secondly, the region started getting divided based on ideological and sectarian lines. Therefore, it was an attempt to

³⁶ Ryan Pickrell, "Here's What Trump, his Advisers, and the US Military were Talking about Striking after Iran Shot Down a US drone," Business Insider, September 22, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-us-planned-to-strike-after-iran-downed-us-drone-2019-9>.

consider the intersection of in-group, domestic, and ideology lines, an approach both countries have enforced in encouraging different territorial players for the pursuit of national benefits.³⁷

The area of competition started emerging on the surface with the increased level of rivalry and competition. At the same time, the multifaceted divisions emerged in widening the gap between the regional powers. The conflicting interests overlapped with the alma maters such as the regional blocs and international alignment policies in the cold war time period. The formation of such regional and international alliances created a security paradox to both Iran and KSA. The establishment of blocs and regional alliances resulted in the deteriorating security apparatus of the Middle Eastern Region. Furthermore, the military muscles were shown by both the states in stepping foot in the region, which caused a security threat in the region in general and Riyadh and Tehran in particular.³⁸ Moreover, the dilapidated image of the Saudi Arabia, has led to global critique and agnosticism towards Saudi Arabia in America, may consequence in a decrease in its noises to secure Americans arms, hence debilitating an important relation vantage vis-à-vis Tehran.³⁹

In the religious realm, the states have remained adherent to their belief such as Shia or Sunni cult. This inclination has brought two different shades of religious orientation in the shape of sectarian dominancy. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is more inclined towards the monarchy and conservative Wahhabi religious dimensions and the followers remain strict in their belief as well as practice. On the other hand, the Shia dominancy factor in the constitution of Iran orchestrates the Shia sect, which represents the interpretation of Shia dominant concept. Similarly, the fact that the cities such as the city of Makkah and Medina are in Saudi Arabia, which makes the state more favourable to all and sundry. On the contrary, the Iranian claim

³⁷ Ofira Seliktar, and Farhad Rezaei, *Iran, Revolution, and Proxy Wars* (Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan Cham, 2020), 14.

³⁸ Thomas Juneau, "The Enduring Constraints on Iran's Power after the Nuclear Deal," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 134, No. 1 (2019), 45.

³⁹ Natan Sachs and Tamara Cofman Wittes, "Saudi-Israel relations: The Curious Case of a NEOM Meeting Denied," *The Brookings Institution*, November 25, 2020.

that the Saudi Arab has developed strong ties with the West, which in itself is a challenge, and to come into the tenets of Islam, the state must remain out of any sort of alliances and making allies with the Western states. This revolutionary agenda is taken forward at global level among all Muslim countries across the globe.⁴⁰ This affirms that the competition is found in the geopolitical nature as well as the ideological foundations of both the states, which results into creating a security paradox, or a security dilemma. This security dilemma on the top of everything is considered as a survival risk for both states.⁴¹ For the security tenacity, the internal security of Riyadh majorly depends on U.S. support in the form of Arms import and supply. It is therefore, Saudi Arabia became biggest arms importer and has increased its arms import up to 192% from 2009-2013 to 2014 to 2018.⁴² It has been observed that both the states are indulging in the strategies of alliances and engagement at various levels. But the point of concern is that they are not joining the same camps, and history is the witness of the fact that the states have always joined the opposite camp in all situations. Therefore, these states are the arch-rivals of each other in all domains.

1.1.1 Regional Level of Analysis

Consider the challenges that emerge in the consequence of Arab Spring, the states made own engagements with the similar states. This engagement speaks volume of the nature of adversary in case of the arch rivals. The states have always appreciated their own ideological foundations to the extent that it negates the other notion of the other. For this reason, they promote their own version of the religious ideologies and suppress or oppress the oppositional forces at all levels. The GCC was formed with the intention of gaining political leverage, motivated by the monarchical systems of the member states, their Arab ancestry, their common religious affiliations as Sunnis and Muslims, and concerns about Iran's revolutionary, Shia, and non-

⁴⁰ Seliktar and Rezaei, "Proxy Wars," 24.

⁴¹ Juneau, "Iran's Power after the Nuclear Deal," 47.

⁴² Alexandra Kuimova, et. al, *Trends in International Arms Transfers* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018),1.

Arab character. The GCC's persistent reliance on American security guarantees is a frequent and serious weakness.⁴³

The Arab Spring had its way of dealing, Saudi Arabia considered it as a threat in many ways. But, at the same time, Iran used this Arab Spring to flex its muscles for the greater cause of the Middle Eastern Region. Saudi Arabia was fearful that this escalation was going to bring more and more instability to the region. But, for Iran, this same instability was beyond doubt an opportunity because Iran used this civil war to enhance its geopolitical positioning in the changing political dynamics of the region. Therefore, the interest of one state always remained in sharp contrast and contradiction with that of the other, so it can be said that the reason for staying in the opposite camps is the divergence of their interests. In the same case, the Iranian forces easily managed to get its geopolitical weightage in their favour. The divergent views and interests are quite evident from the fact that the states are struggling against each other for their increasing role as influential actors in the regional political dynamics. The fact is that these skirmishes and conflicts are the forerunners of the long-term consequences, which stem from the deep-rooted ideological and socio-political foundations or grounds. Iran has easily managed to surpass the instability through increased footing in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.⁴⁴

1.1.2 Domestic level of Analysis

There are different levels of analysis for developing the conceptual understanding of the framework. In this perspective, it is vital level deal with the internal political dynamics of the state and its affairs. This has been considered that the external political dynamics such as the changes in surrounding conditions have direct as well as indirect impacts and have their value, yet the structural variables can have their own level of impact, the domestic level or internal

⁴³ Yoel Guzansky, "Strategic Hedging by Non-Great Powers in the Persian Gulf," in A. Klieman (eds), *Great Power and Geopolitics* (Cham: Springer Link, 2015),252.

⁴⁴ Bassel F. Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2013), 33.

affairs are equally important in this regard. One cannot ignore the domestic level of analysis, as the most powerful states have shaped their policies under the pressure of internal political dynamics as well. The areas such as domestic political affairs, the level of instability, the security matrix and survival of the state machinery all have their domestic specifications.

Furthermore, the states have always been influenced by internal matters such as the public opinion of the general masses, the agenda setting of media outlets and the security matrix all are consolidated in the internal domestic affairs at some level. The need of the hour is to identify the domestic determinants which are the driving forces to impact foreign policy decision-making.

At the domestic level, the two giants of the Middle East i.e., Saudi Arabia and Iran face sectarian conflicts, economic recession, armed militias, an ethno-religious quagmire, war-affected traumatized societies in neighboring states, terrorism, religious extremism, issues of good governance, which reflects in their foreign policy choices as well. The assassination of Sheikh Nimr-al Nimr a famous Shia cleric by Saudi Arabia in 2016 brought a massive agitation by the Shia residing in Saudi Arabia and Iran condemned this act of Saudi Arabia. Such events at the domestic level influence or shape the policies of a country towards others.

1.2. Balance of Interest Theory and Relation between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran

NCR helps in understanding Saudi-Iran rivalry besides that Pakistan's balancing role in this situation has been the result of the implications of Saudi Arabia and Iran rivalry explained in the chapter four. It highlights the gravity of matter which several times curbed Pakistan not to go against either Iran or Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the work of Patrick James further explicates that states under Balance of Interest work to protect their national integration. In the same line, Pakistan tries to safeguard its interests by restricting its explicit actions for Iran or Saudi Arabia.

Balance of interests is a neoclassical realist theory. It explains the states behavior/ foreign policy formulation. The ideas presented by Schweller in his two books: *Unanswered Threats* and *Deadly Imbalances* has played crucial role in synthesis of the balance-of-interests theory and considered as *magnum opus*. Schweller presented the notion of balance of interests as state-oriented and static or rigid. The major elucidation of the balance of interests are described in the work of many scholars as Banchoff⁴⁵, Roth⁴⁶, Doran⁴⁷ and Resnick⁴⁸. Balance of interests is classified as realist theory because it deals with foreign policy formulation. It is evident that, due of States' interests, states adopt different policies from each other on several events despite unvarying international system. In pursuance of national interests' states adopt different approaches against power and in conflict situation rather make uniform efforts to curb it. To comprehend the states action, it is essential to grasp the degree of cohesion in the society and leadership impact which accumulatively reflect the states action.

In similar fashion, theory of balance-of-interests explains the range of foreign policy adopted and practiced by the states. States are distinguished from each other on the basis of national interests that is reflected through their foreign policies. Besides difference in the national interest of the states which help to formulate their own foreign policy. The states transpire diversity in terms of achieving their national interests, through both acknowledging the power-maximizing aspirations of revisionist states and the security-maximizing objectives of status-quo states.⁴⁹

In order to attain logical consistency and tackle the issue of relative gains in an anarchic system, Schweller opine that realist theory requires a basis based on the supposition that some states

⁴⁵ Thomar Banchoff, "German Identity & European Integration", *European Journal of International Relations*, vol 5(3)(1999): 259-90.

⁴⁶ R. Aron, *War and peace: A theory of international relations*, trans. R. Howart & A. Baker Fox, *Weidenfelt and Nicolson*, 1966.

⁴⁷ Michael Doran, "The closed rule" *Emory LJ Vol 59* (2009): 1363.

⁴⁸ Evan N. Resnick, "Strange Bedfellows: U.S Bargaining Behavior with Allies of Convenience", *International Security Vol 35*(3) (2010), 144–184, doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00026

⁴⁹Schweller 1996: 115

seek expansion beyond security concerns or that there is a significant probability of future aggression.⁵⁰ This position asserts that wars do not naturally occur as a result of anarchy, vehemently rejecting structural realism. Basically, conflicts are not inevitable; rather, they depend on certain factors, like states looking to expand in areas unrelated to security or showing signs of aggression. This position vehemently opposes structural realism, claiming that anarchy is not the natural outcome of wars starting naturally. Essentially, states seeking expansion unrelated to security or exhibiting potential aggression are among the specific factors that make conflicts contingent, rather than inevitable.

The fifth axiom of balance-of-interests theory holds that the degree of state's and society's cohesion and motivation is critical in determining foreign policy. Crucially, this factor does not pose a problem for realist theories that incorporate the balance of interests. The theory central tenets remain the persistence of the focus on states rather than transnational actors and the application of the logic of consequences rather than appropriateness. The relevance of the idea of a balance of interests within this theoretical framework is further supported by its close ties to the tradition of classical realism. Points of similar notion also found in the work include Wight (1978 [1946]) on seeking gain⁵¹, Kissinger (1957) on alliances⁵², and Wolfers (1962) with respect to aggressive and threat-perceiving states⁵³. In a word, with these traits and its emphasis on foreign policy, balance-of-interest theory is neoclassical. The balance-of-interests theory:

“Elite consensus and cohesion primarily affect the state's willingness to balance, while government/ regime vulnerability and social cohesion affect the state's ability to extract resources for this task. The combination of these four variables determines the degree of state coherence . . . [A] appeasement and other forms of under-balancing will tend to triumph in the absence of a determined and

⁵⁰Schweller 1996: 120

⁵¹Colin Wight, “Critical dogmatism: Academic freedom confronts moral and epistemological certainty”, *Political Studies Review* 19, no. 3 (2021): 435-449.

⁵² Henry Kissinger, “Missiles and the Western Alliance”, *Foreign Aff.* 36 (1957): 383.

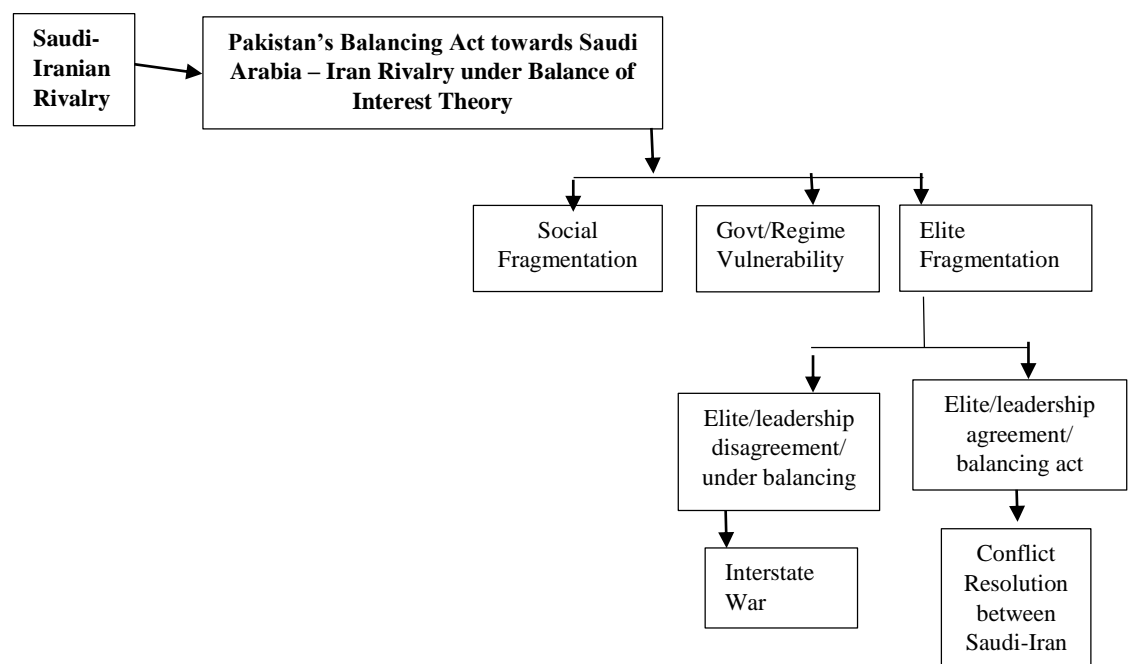
⁵³ Glenn Snyder, “Prisoner's Dilemma and Chicken Models in International Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1971): 66-103.

broad political consensus to balance simply because these policies represent the path of least domestic resistance and can appeal to a broad range of interests along the political spectrum.”⁵⁴

A defending state’s internal circumstances have a greater or lesser extent, impact on the possibility of using balancing to manage a conflict.

The international structure and changes in these global affairs have a direct or indirect impact on all the states across the globe, Pakistan is a developing state and is no exception at all. The changes in the regional political affairs within the Middle Eastern region have a greater level of influence and impact on the formulation of foreign policy goals of Pakistan. The change and shift in foreign policy interests and goals are inextricably linked with change and shift at the societal fabric, leadership/elite decisions and regime/government vulnerabilities.

Figure-3 : Pakistan’s Balancing Act under Balance of Interests Theory



Having said that the role of Pakistan in Saudi Arabia Iran rivalry can be gauged in the interests and implications for the state in dealing with the public opinion and government vulnerabilities.

The balancing act as foreign policy orientation of Pakistan in the case of the Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry can be conceptualized in the theoretical framework of Balance of Interest, where at the

⁵⁴ Randall Schweller, “The balance of power in world politics” *In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2016.

domestic level societal fragmentation, leadership/elite strata and the Government/regime vulnerabilities accumulate to formulate the foreign policy. In the case of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, the same developments can be observed where the foreign policy is shaped and shifted following the changes at the regional as well as global level of affairs. On one side, the role of regional powers and on the other side the role of extra-regional powers have altered the course of action of the foreign policy orientation.

From a Pakistani perspective, the Saudi-Iran rivalry can be analysed using the Balance of Interest Theory, which can shed light on Pakistan's positions and actions in this complex regional conflict. With the help of this theoretical framework, it is convenient to investigate how Pakistan manages its foreign policy by assessing and balancing its interests within the larger dynamics that exist between Saudi Arabia and Iran. To preserve a delicate equilibrium amid the tensions between these two major regional powers, Pakistan's approach is shaped by several factors, including religious affiliations, security concerns, geopolitical considerations, and economic ties.

Keeping in view the changes in the political dynamics within the Middle Eastern region, Pakistan finds itself in a political quagmire and the point of concern is that the state has also played a mediatory role in wriggling out of the crises between the two states in the past. Therefore, balance-of-interests aptly enunciates the state foreign policy which is affected by the societal fabric, elite/leadership opinion, and regime vulnerabilities.

It is evident from the history of Pakistan's ties with Middle Eastern giants i.e., Saudi Arabia and Iran that Pakistan's balancing act is due to its interests. The societal/demographic make-up of Pakistan suggests that tilt towards any of the states i.e., Saudi Arabia and Iran would affect sectarian fault lines. In past whenever regimes in Pakistan were strangled in an economic crisis Saudi Arabia had extended its support when Pakistan was under U.S. sanction especially when Pakistan had tested its Nuclear program. Besides this Saudi Arabia has supported

Pakistan whenever Pakistan's Economy was on the verge of collapse. On the contrary, Iran and Pakistan share a border, culture, and religion and instability in a country has a spillover effect on the neighbouring state. The enmity between KSA-IRI has implications for Pakistan keeping in view the challenges Pakistan face at the societal level and government vulnerabilities. Therefore, it is in the utmost favour of Pakistan to take no side of any country but to play a mediatory role to dilute the rivalry between Saudi Arab and Iran. Therefore, the theory of balance of interest best suits to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SAUDI-IRAN RIVALRY

The history of Riyadh and Tehran helps in the comprehension of the dynamics of their relations. The struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran spans centuries. Since the Safavid dynasty emerged in Iran, sectarianism boomed, and the contention between Saudi-Iran got into the limelight. The Wahhabi school of thought had further exaggerated a discriminatory line between Shia Muslims and Sunnis. To explain the history and delineate the future relationship between the two giants of the Middle Eastern region, it is indispensable to investigate the chronological events and factors which led to the deterioration of their relationship. This chapter tries to explore the past events of the arch-rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran. The initial segment of this chapter narrates how these states were becoming part of the comity of nations. In the historical development, the phase of their existence has been discussed along with the initial stages of early relations. The decisive change in bilateral relations can be witnessed thoroughly in the form of the unfolding of the events in general pre-revolution and post-revolution of Iran in particular. The research has been done in such a way that the events along with their impacts on the changing dynamics of political developments have been mentioned. The specific six days of war brought a new chapter to the affairs where the Shah of Iran was determined to expand the territory of Iran upon the withdrawal of the British from the Middle East. The independence of Bahrain, the territorial dispute, and Iran's claim stating that the island is their part took the rivalry to a new juncture where the regional influencing aspect came into play. This chapter discusses in detail the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary developments to highlight the ingrained political manifestations with time. The Pan-Arab nationalism, the Gulf War, and the Arab Spring have later on solidified the path of divergence for good between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

2.1 The Beginning Era of Rivalry in Early Years

The beginning of this rivalry can be traced back to the times of the great Ottoman Empire. This Ottoman Empire brings in the differences based upon the sectarian lines. Following the same, there is a need to comprehend the process of emergence of both statehood and rivalry among these states. In this regard, the chapter is an attempt to explore the origin of statehood as well as the genesis of rivalry among the states.

2.1.1 Formation of Iran

Shah Ismail was the forefather of Safavid Dynasty (1502-1736) in Persia.⁵⁵ But under the ruler Shah Abbas-I of Safavid dynasty, Persia underwent a tremendous change and the credit of modern Iran as nation state is headed to them. Major changes, which are prevailing in contemporary Iran, for instance Shia Muslim concept and border demarcation and unification of Persia, are also the legacy of the Safavid Dynasty. In 1501 Shiism was declared as state religion and a new beginning in the history of Iran. After the revolution in France in 1789, a revolutionary wave had shaken the Europe and resulted in the Nation States. In nineteenth century the world influenced by the Western thoughts, Political and Administrative structure, among them was Iran.

Iran has, in fact, a history of eschewing official submission to European domination. By the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, Britain and Russia created spheres of influence in Iran, essentially partitioning the nation into areas where their respective imperial powers had substantial influence. Nonetheless, Iran maintained a semblance of independence during this time. Britain tried to establish a protectorate over Iran in 1919, but both foreign opposition and Iranian nationalist forces opposed the plan.⁵⁶ Iranians resisted this action in an effort to uphold

⁵⁵ H. Roemer, "THE SAFAVID PERIOD," *In The Cambridge History of Iran*, edited by Peter Jackson and Lawrence Lockhart, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 189-350 doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521200943.006.

⁵⁶ Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations the Middle East in International Relations Power, Politics and Ideology*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 2005), 83.

their national sovereignty and thwart foreign meddling. The episode highlights Iran's historical attempts to declare its independence in the face of external pressure from European powers, which is a larger theme.⁵⁷

In the 19th century activists and intellectuals intended to bring reforms but faced strong objections from Monarch who is reluctant to abolish dynastic politics and were in power for a long time. Post-1918 development in Middle Eastern region was shaped by a combination of internal and external factors, necessitating a balanced analysis. The states in the region maintained some degree of autonomy, if not full independence, despite the international dominance shaping the strategic context. Their relationships with one another and the creation of foreign policy positions that reflected the views of their home public opinion were examples of this autonomy. The regional politics that developed in the years following 1945 were partly shaped by these interstate relations in the years following 1918.

In the twentieth century, the efforts of the public, activists and intellectuals, were born fruits and the first revolution in Iran was taken place in 1906. This revolution is also called the Constitutional revolution and a Parliamentary form of government on the analogy of the British is established. Despite the revolution bringing change in the political landscape, the new Pahlavi dynasty (1925-79) failed to fulfil the promises and another revolution was waiting ahead. During the reign of Mohammad Raza Pahlavi, the son of Reza Shah, the foreign involvement in the domestic politics of Iran mobilized and the adoption of Western culture deteriorated the situation and a huge opposition from the public leads to the Islamic Revolution in Iran in February 1979. Ayat Ullah Khomeini overthrown the throne of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and a theocratic political system established.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Rasheed Ahmad Chughtai, President Islamic United Council, Islamabad, interviewed in person, on November 25, 2022.

2.1.2 Saudi Arabia Acquired Statehood

In 1744 the nation-state of Saudi Arabia came into being with the subsequent establishment of the Emirate of Diriyah. The earlier Saudi regime of 1744-1818 and the second realm of 1824-1891 failed to consolidate the peninsula and different tribes.⁵⁹ Abd al-Rahman Al Saud, the last Saudi dynasty leader, was exiled to Kuwait. His son Abd-al Aziz ibn Abd al Rahman Al Saud regained Riyadh and became the third Saudi dynasty leader. He asked for military assistance to recapture the Hasa area from Ottoman Empire from the British during 1903-1906. At last, in Hasa, he defeated the Turk officer. After the Second World War when the Sharif of Mecca rebelled against the Ottomans Empire, with the back of the British and French, the situation deteriorated for the Ottomans.

After a struggle of Seven years in Hasa, he defeated the Turk military and gained support from the British and France in 1916, which were reluctant initially.⁶⁰ Further, Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Makkah, had led a revolt against the great Ottoman Empire under the slogan of pan-Arabism for the independence of the Arab peninsula. However, the revolt resulted in favor of Saudi Sharif's in the Middle-Eastern and tied down thousands of Ottoman troops, thereby supported to the Ottomans' World War I downfall in 1918. Furthermore, headed to the emergence of different states. It is evident that with the help of Western powers Saudi Arabia succeeded to emerged as a state.

Saudi Arabia was unable to expand into the Syrian desert due to geopolitical limitations, such as French and British control over Iraq and Syria, but it was able to annex two-thirds of Kuwait's territory through the Treaty of Uqair in 1921. Furthermore, three Yemeni provinces were acquired by Saudi Arabia in 1934 as a result of the Treaty of Ta'if. Despite these changes in territory, the Saudi state did not become largely under British rule, despite being restricted

⁵⁹ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A history of Saudi Arabia*, (London: Cambridge university press, 2010),30.

⁶⁰ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 82.

by British power on the Peninsula's edges. The Saudi government was able to maintain some autonomy in its decision-making and actions during World War I, in part because of a small subsidy that it received for its cooperation.

In conclusion, the Middle East's social and political movements multiplied due to a variety of factors, including the rise of nationalism, the chaos of World War I, the creation of a new state structure, and opposition to secularisation. Middle Eastern politics entered a more intensive and transformational phase as a result of this combination of internal and foreign influences. It does not change the reality that the underlying dynamics had been simmering within these regimes and communities, even though a large portion of the drama and radicalization may have been inspired by outside sources.

2.2 Saudi-Iran Relationship Pre-Islamic Revolution Period

Following World War I, the Arabs were deeply concerned about two main issues. First, there was the idea of "taqsim," or partition, which called for the split of the Arab world into several states. This idea ran counter to nationalism's goals of bringing the Arab people together. Second, Arabs developed serious concerns about the large-scale immigration of European Jews to Palestine, which was motivated by Zionist ideals. Zionism and the partition both developed into significant causes of nationalist animosity.

The Iranians' perception of indirect Western control was heightened by the perceived, albeit not entirely accurate, reality of covert intervention; many believed that Reza Khan had ascended to power with British assistance in 1921, even though this support was limited.⁶¹ Despite the nuance of the situation, the perception of foreign interference contributed to the Iranians' perception of indirect Western influence in the Arab world. These concerns were exacerbated by additional grievances, including Western control over the Arab world's oil

⁶¹ Enayatollah Yazdani, and Rizwan Hussain, "United States' policy towards Iran after the Islamic revolution: An Iranian perspective," *International Studies* 43, no. 3 (2006): 267-289.

revenues, support for conservative regimes like in Saudi Arabia, the maintenance of military strongholds in Suez and Aden, and backing for Israel after 1945.⁶²

Iran suffered specific repercussions from World War II. Iran tried to establish relations with Germany to balance the influence of the British and Russian governments. But this tactic turned out to be excessive. Britain and Russia demanded that German advisers be removed from Iran in the wake of the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 and the possible threat of a German advance towards the Caucasus oilfields.⁶³

Iranians were forced to submit, and in late August 1941, British and Russian forces took control of the country. Reza Shah, the governing monarch, was consequently expelled and his young son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi II, was crowned as the new ruler. Iran experienced a period of political unrest and economic strain beginning with this occupation. Diverse political groups contested the monarchy and one another during this period, creating a convoluted and unstable political environment.

In 1941, with the help of USA, Britain and France, Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi acceded the power in Iran.⁶⁴ The relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran remained cordial until 1943. In protest due to discriminatory behavior against the Shiite Muslims, the Iranian pilgrim was executed by Saudi Arabia for throwing at Kaabah excrement. In this connection, both nations ceased diplomatic relations in March 1944.⁶⁵

The cold relations thawed, on October 15, 1946, upon writing a personal letter by King of Abd al Aziz to the Reza Shah. He emphasized the revival of Saudi Arabia Iran relations on a brotherhood basis. Hence era of peaceful relations started in early 1947. The ties of Saudi

⁶² Halliday, *The Middle East in the International Relations*, 92.

⁶³ Louise Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

⁶⁴ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 92.

⁶⁵ Rasheed Ahmad Chughtai, President Islamic United Council, Islamabad, interviewed in person on November 25, 2022.

Arabia and Iran witnessed cordiality from 1947 to 1950. The relationship further augmented between the two countries when Shah's invitation to King Saud of Saudi Arabia to pay visit Tehran in 1955. The relations strengthened because of the convergence of interests. Both states were Western allies and the developing their oil industries. The economics of both states observed a spike, and trade ties strengthened. The significant points of convergence of interest between the periods of 1950 to 1967 between Tehran and Riyadh were regional politics to international security and oil and sectarian politics. Their economies depend on oil and gas; therefore, both states join hands to cooperate.⁶⁶

During the 1950s Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser propagated popular notion of Pan Arabism also brought Riyadh and Tehran again on the same boat. Nasser emphasized the reformist approach of Islam and the emancipation of oppressed nations under the colonial imperials. Initially, Saudi Arabia supported Egypt and criticized Iran as an autocratic state. Nevertheless, later, the Saudi Monarch felt threatened due to growing Pan Arabism. To save the throne, Tehran and Riyadh signed a pact to combat the threat of Egypt, despite the relations were not friendly.⁶⁷

The Suez Canal crisis of 1956 had shaken the ties between Riyadh and Tehran, as the Reza Shah Pahlavi decided to side-line and remained neutral.⁶⁸ The decision of Shah was motivated by the fact that Nasser was against the Shah regime. In 1960s a White Revolution transformed the political system of Iran from Monarchy to Parliamentary. This White Revolution served two purposes. Firstly, it was to please the western ally i.e. America and second, to dilute the protests across country because of the upsurge demand of people for the Parliamentary system. This modernization of Iran along with oil wealth made Iran a close ally of USA. The Shah

⁶⁶ Saeed M. Badeeb, *Saudi-Iranian Relations: 1932-1982*, (London: Centre for Arab and Iranian Studies, 1993), 51.

⁶⁷ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, Press, 1996), 9.

⁶⁸ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 94.

already encountered strong and well-organized opposition in the 1960s, mostly directed against his domestic policies, such as the modernization programme codified in the “White Revolution” or his choice to provide legal immunity to U.S. military personnel. This domestic discontent was a part of a broader movement against the regime’s alleged growing reliance on “Western” powers and cooperation with Israel. In 1960 the establishment of Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the competition and cooperation further deepened between the Iran and Saudi Arabia. The reason of establishment of OPEC by the oil rich countries was to effectively manage the petroleum supply, prices and policies in international market.

In 1968, the establishment of the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) by Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait strengthened the position of Saudi Arabia in a bargaining post vis-a-vis Iran. OAPEC’s key role is to extend cooperation in developing the petro industry.⁶⁹ The security threat from the Nasser brought Saudi Arabia near to the U.S., and to curtail Soviet influence in the Middle East, the USA also required more states to join its bloc. After the Arab-Israel War of 1967, the situation gradually turned in favor of Saudi Arabia to attract Western through petrodollars.

Among the poor and lower-class strata of the society in Iran, the Soviet influenced communist ideology was popular and stood against to the Shah Reza. Shah Reza counter the threat of Communism by normalizing its relations with Soviet. An economic agreement was signed between Iran and Soviet in January 1966.⁷⁰ Under this agreement Iran had pledged to provide natural gas of worth Six hundred million U.S. dollar and in return Soviet funded Iran to establish a heavy large steel complex in the city of Esfahan and Shiraz respectively.

⁶⁹ Ragai El Mallakh, “Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries: history, policies, and prospects,” *Annual Review of Energy*, Vo. 2, No.1, (1981), 1.

⁷⁰ Marshall I. Goldman, “The Soviet Union”, *Daedalus* Vol. 104, No. 4, (Fall, 1975): 135.

Reza Shah played this card during the Cold War, and Shah could bargain with the USA vis-a-vis the Soviets to get advanced armament and give Iran a distinct position in the region. Hence, the Shah was able to adopt an independent foreign policy without the intervention of foreign powers. On the regional level, in 1962, the South Yemen Coup aided by Nasser and the Omani separatists shaped the cooperation and competition between the two giants of the region.

The power and leadership struggle between Riyadh and Tehran dragged the whole region into chaos. Therefore, both powers played dexterously in the matter of region. The Saudi King smelled the situation not in favor due to Egypt backed the Coup in South Yemen; therefore, they sought help from USA and Iran.⁷¹ Hence, this situation brought Iran and Saudi Arabia convergence of interest because they considered Egypt a threat.

2.2.1 Impact of Six Days War

On June 5, 1967, the threat from Nasser vanished as the Six Day hostility between Israel and the Arabs. The war concluded in six days with victory for Israel due to arm support from the USA.⁷² The British withdrawal in 1971, from the East of the Suez Canal created new regional competition and confrontation. Riyadh and Tehran reacted differently to the announcement. Saudi Arabia, in public, supported this announcement but requested the British to stay in private and pledged to bear all military expenses.

On the contrary, Shah expressed his immense happiness. Shah was determined to expand the territory of Iran upon the British withdrawal from the Middle East.⁷³ The British withdrawal raised two issues; firstly, the freedom of Bahrain and second, territorial clashes on Abu Musa, and the Greater and Lesser Tunabs Islands between UAE and Iran. Iran claimed Bahrain as its part and the islands as their part. Saudi Arabia was more interested in the issue of Bahrain but

⁷¹ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 99.

⁷² Tamara Brill, "The Three-Year War of Attrition-A Direct Result of Israel's Victory in the Six Days of '67?", *Academia*, 6.

⁷³ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 103.

could not do anything because Iran was militarily strong. Hence, Saudi Arabia refrained to confront Iran on this front.

2.2.2 The Twin Pillar Policy

Upon the British announcement of the withdrawal of from the region, the Arabian States were worried about their security, for which they were reliant on the British. On the other hand, the USA was involved in the Vietnam War. Hence, it was difficult for the USA to replace the British. Considering the scenario, President Nixon had proposed a Nixon doctrine called ‘Twin Pillar Policy.’ Under this doctrine, the USA sought stability and peace in the region through cooperation with Tehran and Riyadh and to curtail communism expansion in the region.⁷⁴

The policy framework was announced in June 1969. This doctrine paved the way for the USA to be involved in the Middle East’s affairs. Under this policy, U.S. military support and assistance were extended to those countries that served the USA’s purpose in the region. On the other hand, the oil abundance in the Middle East was a massive attraction for the USA to remain in this region.⁷⁵

In this situation, Iran had an edge over Saudi Arabia to serve as the leader in the region because Iran had sufficient military and weapons to serve the said purpose, while Saudi Arabia lacked advanced weaponry as well as professionals to serve as a protector in the Gulf region which mitigated its significance in the region. Under the Twin Pillar Policy doctrine, both states were allowed to purchase weapons from the USA. This was beneficial for the USA to sell arms in return for petro-dollars. Iran, under the Shah regime, thoroughly benefitted from the Nixon Policy. He used this to serve two purposes; first, to ensure access to free navigation in the Gulf; to prevent and protect the oil installments from damage; lastly, to protect the region from

⁷⁴ Banafsheh Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran Friends or Foes?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 9.

⁷⁵ Toby Craig Jones, “America, Oil, and War in the Middle East,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol 99, Issue 1, (June 2012), 208.

foreign invasion. Hence Iran was proclaimed as the Guardian of Gulf States.⁷⁶ In this regard, Shah had inked many agreements with the Gulf states, which were on the Continental Shelf boundary delimitation between Saudi Arabia and Iran; In September 1969, an agreement with Qatar, in June 1971 with Bahrain, in July 1974 with Oman, and in August 1974 with UAE. During 1960s no evidence of competition, confrontation between the two Middle Eastern giants Saudi Arabia and Iran were found since Iran had more manpower as weaponry but the Saudi Arabia came into after the oil crisis of 1973. Due to the financial power Saudi Arabia got preference over the Iran with military muscles.

Twin Pillar policy further exploited the weaknesses and brought Iran and Saudi Arabia face to face on several levels. After the British forces left the Persian Gulf in 1971, there were many concerns about possible communist subversion that could destabilise the region. However, a decade of relatively stable relations was ensured by Saudi Arabia and Iran's agreement. Regional states prohibited the use of heavy military force and emphasised the importance of diplomacy between 1968 and 1978. The development of complementary norms and legitimization played a key role in the regional society's consolidation. To maintain the status quo in the area following the British soldiers' withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971, the West looked to Saudi Arabia and Iran as regional proxies. The Twin-Pillar norm complemented both Saudi Arabia's and Iran's regional roles by guaranteeing global-systemic commitment to their ideals for preserving regional stability. Because of this arrangement, they felt "psychologically at ease," which allowed them to institutionalise cooperation and pursue their alliance inside OPEC without being overly concerned about resistance from the United States. The Six-Day Arab Israel war on October 6 had changed the scenario. Arab states expected that Saudi Arabia will abandon its oil to USA to stop the USA assistance to Israel so that Saudi Arabia use its oil as political weapon. On 20th October 1973, King Faisal sanctioned an oil

⁷⁶ Andrew Scott Cooper, *The Oil Kings How the US, Iran and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 57.

embargo till March 1974. Those states with friendly relations with Israel i.e. America and Netherland were sanctioned absolute embargo.⁷⁷ The oil embargo raises the Saudi influence among oil manufacturing country in the world and a friction within OPEC between Riyadh and Tehran started growing. Riyadh adopted a strategy of gradual production and prolonged supply of oil because it had huge oil reserves.

Religion remained a significant factor in the relations between Tehran and Riyadh. Before 1977 Sect was considered vital in devising the foreign policy of Riyadh, while in Iran during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, religion was considered a personal matter and had nothing to do with internal or external policies of Iran. Iran witnessed an economic boom in the 1970s, but there was significant internal pressure opposition to the Pahlavi autocratic rule from religious leaders because of new western ideals. Demonstrations and protests broke out in different cities, led by religious fundamentalists. The cherished clergyman Ayatullah Khomeini, the opponent of the Pahlavi regime, voiced against the foreign intervention and adoption of Western culture instead of Islamic rules and regulations.⁷⁸ The civil war erupted in different cities of Iran, and the Thirty-Seven years of rule of Reza Shah ended in January 1979. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the political arena also changed. Iran adopted anti-American policies. The relations further deteriorated when in Tehran, Sixty-Six Americans were captured while the U.S. embassy was hostage. Iran not only adopted anti-American policies but also condemned the Soviets for its invasion of Afghanistan.

2.2.3 Skirmishes during Hajj Impact Over Saudi-Iranian Relations

Hajj is one of the most important pillar of Islam. Keeping in view the same, the two cities Makkah and Madinah have great importance in the religion. The pilgrims all over the world perform Hajj, to which Iranians were not an exception at all. Therefore, Tehran made use of

⁷⁷ Cooper, "*The Oil Kings*," 140.

⁷⁸ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 104.

this journey of Hajj as an instrument to achieve its own political aims and ambitions. But the incident of 1987 changed the entire scenario when the Saudi security agencies put to death Four Hundred Fifty Iranian pilgrims. This was the turning point of the conflict and the confrontation reached to all levels high. Furthermore, this same incident caused a troubling relation between both the states. On this occasion Khomeini stated, “even if [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein could be pardoned, Saudi Arabia could never be forgiven.”⁷⁹

From the early era of twentieth century, the pilgrimage had been the bone of contention between both the states. Later, with the emergence of Shia clergy and theocratic state in the aftermath of the Iranian Islamic revolution many more challenges came to the fore. A lot of other challenges started to rise after the revolution.⁸⁰ After the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the rise of Imam Khomeini as the supreme frontrunner of Iran the annual hajj pilgrimage became the real source of tension and skirmishes. Many such incidents took place where the security forces had to intervene in the fight for bring a solution while performing hajj. Following the same, in 1987 a deadly scuffling took place where the Saudi forces had no option but to deploy a number of forces to bring in security. The scuffling took a heavy death toll. These security forces had been deployed for stopping the Iranian people from protesting.⁸¹

In this scuffling, almost four hundred fifty people were killed, and the reaction was obvious in Iran, where they had made the Saudi embassy a hostage and one of the Saudi diplomats had been killed in the same vein. The worsening relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia reached the lowest ebb when, very next year, Saudi Arabia banned the Iranians to perform the Hajj. This tense situation remained high as the states were not willing to come to some terms for bringing stability in their relations. This tension continued till the 1990s, when Iran got a severe

⁷⁹ Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The Gulf War and the New World Order* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 1994), 306.

⁸⁰ Martin Kramer, “Khomeini’s Messengers in Mecca,” in *The Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996), 169.

⁸¹ Kramer, “Khomeini’s Messengers in Mecca,” 174.

earthquake; the devastating impact was seen by Saudi Arabia as a difficult time for the entire nation. Therefore, Saudi Arabia started assisting the Iranian counterparts in times of need. The destructive natural catastrophe asked for humanitarian assistance from all. To which Saudi responded quickly and assisted them. At that time, the President of Iran was Rafsanjani, who was vigilant enough to bring normality in relations between the two states. In this normalisation process, Oman acted as a mediator between the two states.

During the next year in 1991, a treaty was signed, and the banning of Hajj for Iranian people had been removed, which was helpful in bringing stability and normalcy in their relation with each other. This treaty also brought to an end the lasting conflict of Twelve years. As stated earlier, Oman played the role of mediator in bringing both the states towards normalcy.⁸² The development has been observed as the real *modus vivendi* in normalcy of their relation and strengthening of the bilateral relation. Moreover, the peaceful performing of Hajj started again in the signing of the treaty.

During the next two decades, the Hajj performing kept on a normal pace. But, in 2015, Iranian clerics stated that the two Pilgrims of Iran had been assaulted by the Saudi authorities at the airport. In the same year, a stampede in Mena caused a huge casualty. According to various sources, the casualties were as high as Seven Hundred Sixty-Nine and Four Thousand Seven Hundred as per the Saudi and Iranian media sources.⁸³

Ayatollah Khomeini narrated that the “incompetence of the Saudis and their failure to provide security for the pilgrims in the house of God in reality showed that this government is not capable of managing the two holy mosques.”⁸⁴ This came as a sudden surprise to the Saudi and they took it as a harsh response and the bilateral relations got deteriorated again in

⁸² Kramer, “Khomeini’s Messengers in Mecca,” 173.

⁸³ “Saudi Arabia Hajj disaster death toll rises,” *Al Jazeera America*, October 19, 2015.

⁸⁴ Arash Karami, “Khomeini Calls for International Investigation into Hajj Stampede,” *Al Monitor*, September 7, 2016.

the wake of this confrontation. In this perspective, the Saudi authorities sanctioned the ban again on the Iranian people to perform Hajj. And they were debarred from this religious obligation once again. The escalated debate took serious turns in the same year, but in the following year, both the countries came to some terms and decided to remove ban on the Hajj pilgrimage. In 2017, the Saudi authorities decided to uplift the ban reducing the tension to a greater extent. This agreement of uplifting ban was signed in the same year.⁸⁵ This reflects the ups and downs in the relation between both the states, they have been at dagger drawn since the beginning of times. The relations never remained smooth owing to many other reasons as well, they can be studied in the coming discussion as well.

2.3 Saudi-Iran Relations: Post 1979 Scenario

The collaboration between Riyadh and Tehran were found in different fronts, for instance to contain Communism and radical nationalism, preservation of regimes, and supply of gas and oil. The religious factor was not given any significance neither in foreign policy nor in domestic politics before the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Gulf States generally and Saudi Arabia particularly was sensed as the hindrance for the export of Iranian revolution to its immediate neighbors. Both states were competition for the leadership of Muslim Community in the world. According to Khomeini, Iranian Islamic revolution is not bound within Iran, rather this movement ought to be blow-out in all around the Muslim world.⁸⁶

Saudi Arabia perceived the Islamic Revolution in Iran as the threat of export of revolution. Iran openly proclaimed that the dynastic politics in Islam is prohibited, which threaten the sheikhdom of Gulf along with the Al-Saud of being illegitimate. The threat not only targeted

⁸⁵ Margherita Stancati, "Iranians to Participate in Hajj in Saudi Arabia After Ban," *The Wall Street Journal*, March, 17, 2017.

⁸⁶ Henner Fürtig, "Iran and the Arab Spring: Between Expectations and Disillusion", *GIGA Research Programme: Violence and Security*, No.24 (Nov 2013), 6.

the leadership position of Saudi Arabia in Middle East but also affected the hierarchy within family. Saudi Arabia in order to consolidate its influence on Gulf States, established an alliance in 1981, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) a security alliance to propel the Iranian threat.⁸⁷

2.3.1 Iran-Iraq War

The relations of Iran-Iraq were soured after the Islamic Revolution in Iran's secular Baathist regime in Iraq. Iran's rivalry was around Shat Al-Arab waterway, but the conflict turned a severe shape when Iran endeavored to export to Iraq the Islamic Revolution. The bilateral relations between Iraq and Iran were not cordial. Saddam Hussein came into power in Iraq, in 1979 the Shah of Iran de-throned. Iraq invaded Iran on September 22, 1980.⁸⁸ There were four main objectives behind the Iraq invasion of Iran such as;

(a) To get back the territory of Saif Saad and Zain al-Qaws; b) Acquisition of Shatt al-Arab Island; c) To return the controversial Islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunab to the United Arab Emirates; d) To resist the Iranian revolution to export and mangle the Arab neighbor states' affairs.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein denoted the invasion of Iran in terms of Pan-Arabism to get support from the Arab countries. This created a colossal mistrust between Tehran and Riyadh, and which resulted in the deterioration of the ties and in 1988, struggle for power and regional hegemony has been embarked.

The Iran-Iraq war responded to the revolution transmission in other Arab countries. This war, along with the alliance of the GCC countries, led Iran to be isolated or with few allies in the Middle East, i.e., Hezbollah in Lebanon, Libya, South Yemen, and Syria. The situation further deteriorated when Saudi Arabia economically supported Iraq with a loan of forty billion dollars

⁸⁷Yoel Guzansky, "The Gulf Cooperation Council: From Cooperation to Unity?," *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East: Between Iran and the "Arab Spring,"* ed. Yoel Guzansky et.al. (Palgrave Pivot, London 2015): 20.

⁸⁸ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 106.

to strengthen its army. This move of Saudi Arabia to assist Iraq was a core shift in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia to contain Iran. During Iran-Iraq War so that to hit the Iranian economy, Saudi Arabia was an influential figure in OPEC and inundated the market with oil. Hence oil prices crashed in the market. This badly affected the economy of Iran during the Iran -Iraq war.

Abdul Basit, Research Fellow at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore stated that in 1979 two events which had changed American foreign policy towards Asia; first, in February 1979, the Anti-American government in Iran and Islamic Revolution in Iran led to the deterioration of its link with one of its allies in the Middle East, while the USSR invaded in Afghanistan in December 1979 was another factor which dragged the attention of America towards Asia particularly, South Asia.⁸⁹

In fact, the USSR and the USA expressed concerns regarding Iran's alignment after the Islamic Republic was established there in 1979. Iran chose to pursue an independent course in defiance of these worries. Under the banner of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian leadership fiercely denounced the USSR as the 'Little Satan' (sheitun-i kuchik) and the U.S. as the 'great Satan' (sheitun-ibozorg). Iran emphasised its commitment to an independent and Islamic position and urged Muslims to rise against both superpowers rather than siding with one.⁹⁰

During the USSR invaded Afghanistan, Riyadh supported the USA and joined hands to quell the Soviet expulsion from Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia supported financing the Mujahedeen in the mid-1980s. The Saudi role in Afghanistan gradually changed after the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989.

Iran was at odds with both the U.S. and the USSR by the end of 1979. The American government became enraged with Iran as a result of the American diplomats' detention in Tehran, which increased tensions between the two countries. Iran further enraged the USSR by

⁸⁹ Abdul Basit, Research Fellow at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, interviewed via WhatsApp on November 25, 2022.

⁹⁰ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 106.

opposing the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan at the same time. Iran pursued an independent foreign policy in the turbulent political environment of the time, as evidenced by its complex geopolitical position and defiance of both superpowers.

Furthermore, till 1997 trade and flights resumed. The ties further warmed as in Tehran, Saudi Prince Abdullah attended the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit. In 1979, the first Saudi official to visit Iran was Prince Abdullah. In return, in 1999, President Khatami of Iran visited Saudi Arabia.⁹¹ The diplomatic ties between the two giants deepened. Both stated inked a bilateral Security Pact in 2001 on drug trafficking and terrorism. Hence the period 1990 to 2001, cordial relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran were witnessed.

2.3.2 The Gulf War

On August 2, 1990, over a year after Ayatollah Khomeini's death, Saddam invaded Kuwait.⁹² As it was known to all that the U.S. was at the back of Iraq during the war against the Iranian forces. But the Kuwait war is totally a different war where the entire purpose of Iraq was to get control over the oil enriched country. In this perspective, USA was not intended to take a step forward to provide an aid to Iraq. On the hindsight, it was right that the war between Iraq and Iran that was fought from 1980 till 1988, the USA was working hand in gloves with the Iraqi forces against the Iranian military. But the Kuwait invasion was to capture Oil and USA was not in favor of Iraq to impose her own will in this regard.

It was the same invasion where U.S. had to carry out a covert operation which was named as Operation Desert Storm. Through this operation, U.S. attacked the Iraqi forces and expelled them out of the Kuwait territory.⁹³ In the wake of this attack, UN gave a deadline to the Iraqi forces for withdrawal from the territory of Kuwait to avoid further escalation of war. The

⁹¹ Gawdat Bahgat, "Iranian-Saudi rapprochement: Prospects and implications," *World Affs*, 162 (1999): 108.

⁹² Majid Khadduri, and Edmund Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf, 1990-91: The Iraq-Kuwait conflict and its implications*, 2001, (United State of America: Oxford University Press), 3.

⁹³ Lawrence Freedman, and Efraim Karsh, "How kuwait was won: Strategy in the gulf war," *International Security* 16, no. 2 (1991): 5-41.

estimated forces were Nine Hundred Thousand, which were deployed at the border to stop the Iraqi forces from furthering ahead into the war zone. In this way, U.S. thwarted the expansionist design of Iraq under Saddam Hussain. The deadline was not noticed by the Iraqi forces, to which U.S. responded promptly through the military action.

It was the same period when the international actors started to state this notion that the Iraqi forces were going to use Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Some of the news referred to the fact that the Iraqi forces possessed chemical as well as biological weapons, which they were going to use against Kuwait to subjugate them. Following these news headlines and rumours, international organisations such as UNO came to the fore, and within hours they brought the parties to the negotiation table for a ceasefire agreement. The coalition forces also participated in the fight against the Iraqi forces. These coalition forces had very little destruction, and on the other hand, Iraq had tens of thousands of death casualties. These unprecedented incidents showed the miserable conditions in the Middle Eastern region. Furthermore, the old reliance of Iraqi forces upon the U.S. was shattered as the coalition forces were fighting against the Iraqi forces.

Iraqi troops were forced to leave Kuwait during the Gulf War of 1990–1991, as a coalition led by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was funded, among other countries, to liberate the country. On February 21, 1991, the conflict came to an end. Tehran was uneasy about U.S. forces in the area even though it maintained its official neutrality in the conflict. Iran most likely made the strategic decision to remain neutral in order to dissuade future military threats. Despite this official position, there were views in Iran that felt the intervention against Iraq was justified, especially in light of the prior support Saudi Arabia and the U.S. had given Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War.

Interestingly, Gafaar Al Laghani, a senior Saudi diplomat, stated that the Kingdom thought Iran's neutrality in the Gulf War was "honourable." Tensions were nevertheless not avoided

by this perception. A mob attacked the Saudi diplomat, who lost an eye, when he was sent to Tehran to reopen the Saudi embassy. The embassy had been closed after Iranian pilgrims were killed by Saudi security forces in 1987 on suspicion of inciting riots in Makkah. This episode demonstrates how complicated and persistently tense regional dynamics can be, even in the face of diplomatic efforts.⁹⁴

The Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Gulf War had multiple impacts on the Middle East region, such as: a) In the wake of these wars and confrontations, both Iran and Saudi Arabia started to gain more and more strength in the form of enacted radical strategies. On the other hand, Riyadh and GCC got nearer to each other, and they were on the opposite pole against the Iranian counterpart. An arm race got started with the aim of getting more and more influence and control in the region; b) Following these developments, there has been an emerging non-state actor, which got influential growth after the Arab Spring in 2011; c) the nuclear program of Iran was among all above the most worrying aspect. This enrichment has impacted power balance in the Middle Eastern Region. Additionally, that the nuclear program can alter the entire situation in the Middle Eastern Region, as it is considered a challenge to the prevailing peace and security of the region; d) The historical development has seen a sharp difference with the ideological shift after the Iranian revolution of 1979, the political sway, the power shift, and the authoritarian mechanism of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards; e) In the wake of these developments, both the states have tried their level best to lead the Muslim countries at global level.

At the helm of the affairs, the news was in air that the GCC along with Saudi Arabia and Iran are going into a traditional sort of warfare owing to the peripheral states such as Bahrain and Abu Musa Island. But the fact is that these states have tried to avoid and camouflage a direct conflict and confrontation with each other. They have always tried to refrain from direct

⁹⁴ Banafsheh, Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends or Foes?, 11

conflict. This depicts that the concept of Clausewitz suits and fits in the case of Middle Eastern conflict, where there is much more speculation and doubt. They are creating a messy situation in the region. To say the least, the conventional conflict and confrontation have transferred to the newer level, where generational warfare has altered its form, shape, and manifestation in its entirety.

Having said that, internal strife can largely escalate. Similarly, the region has become prone to conflict and confrontation owing to the oppositional forces, which are paramount and detrimental in bringing both peace and stability. But the dilemma is that the states are trying to increase their own sphere of influence in the region. Moreover, it seems that they have less concern about the stability and peace in the region, and they are more concerned with the narrow political interest of increasing their own sphere of influence in the Middle Eastern Region. In addition to that, any miscalculation or misinformation can escalate tension in the form of the installation of military forces, which can have far-reaching consequences of confronting and conflicting natures. In the twenty-first century, it is quite easy to manipulate facts and change the perception of the general masses through social media.

2.3.3 Arab Spring 2011

The incident of 9/11 turned global politics in a different direction. The invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003 was also considered the fight against terrorism. President George W. Bush, President USA, on January 29, 2002, made clear that the U.S. would not differentiate between Terrorist organizations and States and, with a coalition, invaded Iraq to remove the terrorist outfits in Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destructions. Saudi Arabia did not initially support the American invasion because the situation broke down the Iraqi government, and the collapse led to the dominance of Iran in Iraq by supporting the Shi'as government.⁹⁵ But USA did not pay heed to Saudi suggestions. The Iranian perusal of secret nuclear program was also

⁹⁵ Keynoush, "Friends or Foes?," 12.

disseminated in August 2002. Saudi Arabia did not consider the nuclear weapon perusal threat for its sovereignty, but a threat for power imbalance and regional hegemony of Iran. This notion further strengthens when Mahmud Ahmadinejad in August 2005 sworn power as President. In this way détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran broken.

In December 2010, a popular protest emerged from Tunisia, spreading further to neighboring countries. This phenomenon is called Arab Spring. The protests remained successful in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, misbalanced the power in the region, and challenged the monarchy. Saudis were anxious about their power group and authority. Therefore, they feared political protests on their lands. This civilian agitation resulted in overthrow of Saudi ally Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak. On the contrary, Al-Saud had to counter the Shiite, which was 5-7% of their population.⁹⁶

Amid the Arab Spring, Iran exported Shiites to the Arab countries, and Bahrain was one of them. Tehran misread the Arab Spring and considered it an extension of Iran's Islamic Revolution ideology. Nevertheless, soon Iran realized the fatal repercussions of Arab Spring and shifted its policies in its allies' states, i.e., Lebanon, and Syria, to defensive mode.⁹⁷

In summation, the chapter has investigated the historical contours for exploring the rivalry through their past experiences. Starting from their formal inception as modern nation-states, Saudi Arabia and Iran started influencing other states as well. With the passage of time, the incidents reflected the fact that these two states are determined to influence themselves as regional powers. The six days of war and the expansionist agenda of Iran made it clear that these states are flexing their muscles into regional political affairs for exerting their influence. The situation emerged in a different context as far as the pre-revolution and post-revolution periods are concerned. The decisive change in bilateral relations can be witnessed thoroughly

⁹⁶ Bayan Perazzo, Policy brief on "Being Shia in Saudi Arabia," Institute of Gulf Affairs, 2.

⁹⁷ Banafsheh, Friends or Foe?, 18.

in the form of the unfolding of the events in general and the pre-revolution and post-revolution of Iran in particular. Furthermore, the Gulf War and Arab nationalism have diverted their interests towards the opposing poles. The unfolding of these events reflects that these have given both states ways to look forward towards the greater interests, keeping in view the political landscape of the region.

The decisions made by the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Iran regarding their foreign policies are closely linked to a number of external factors, most notably the substantial U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf. This fact serves as a reminder that their foreign policy is not merely a reflection of their personal philosophies, leadership philosophies, or tastes. Rather, the substantial state wealth of both Iran and Saudi Arabia enables them to base their foreign policy decisions on “reasons of state,” with state authority frequently dictating choices about leadership.

Although these states’ foreign policies may be impacted by domestic developments, there is a complex interaction between internal and external factors. Internal unrest is a possibility for both Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the possibility of a regime collapse is not eliminated. As such, the question of how domestic dynamics impact their mutual foreign policy becomes pivotal.

These states national interests and policy choices are increasingly influenced by a confluence of strong internal and external forces. This complex interaction demonstrates how foreign policy is formulated dynamically, with the influence of both external and internal factors adding to the difficulty of the decision-making process.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPACT OF CHANGING REGIONAL DYNAMICS OF MIDDLE EAST ON THE BILATERAL RIVALRY OF SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN

The current chapter discusses the dimensions of conflict and confrontation between the two states in the contemporary dynamics of the Middle East, where competition and rivalry keep on surfacing in the unfolding of the historical perspectives, this chapter analyzes and further enlist the underlying causes of the conflict and confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The chapter comprises the competition and confrontation between the Persian flank and Arabian flank of the Middle East is evident in the form of proxies and confrontation. It seems quite hard to foresee any peace solution in the escalating situation. The entire political dynamics is shaped in the wake of the relation between these two regional powers. The rivalry between these two states is based on religious linkages, cultural differences, historical legacies and geopolitical proximities. In this chapter, research has been carried out on the engagement in terms of proxy politics of Riyadh and Tehran in fighting within the Middle Eastern Region. The driving factor of this proxy war is found in the sectarian fault line. The chapter goes on to elaborate on the proxies and confrontations in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon respectively. In addition to that the Saudi-Iranian altercations in Syria have been discussed, which is linked to the rise of civil wars after the Arab Spring. In the chapter ahead, the epi-center of this sectarian disenfranchisement has been highlighted through a thorough discussion of Bahrain. Moreover, the issue of Palestine has also been discussed where the stance of IRI and KSA added that the leaders of Saudi Arabia wanted a peaceful settlement through peace negotiations and diplomatic ventures. At this important political juncture, a point of convergence over the issue of Palestine is noticed, where both are looking for a peaceful settlement in the form of government by the Palestinians. Notwithstanding, the divergence of interests is observed in the

case of Afghanistan's issue. The Iran Nuclear Deal, The Qatar Crisis, and Saudi military alliances have also been included in this chapter. Lastly, the chapter puts forward Vision-2030, as initiated by Saudi Arabia based on regional pragmatism.

According to Javed Rana, Senior Journalist/ Foreign Analyst at Press TV, Iran, "conventionally the enmity of Saudi-Iranian has been on many fronts more particularly on sectarian fronts both countries have been promoting their sects in Muslim countries particularly in Pakistan and that is why Pakistan has been a site of violence of different militant groups who have been working on religious grounds. This has been a traditional pattern, but now with the Saudi Arabia getting so called moderate, it is trying to modernize and westernized. Things are changing now rivalry is also changing, it was in 2016, when the Iranian ambassador stated that the Saudi Arabia has been under the supervision of USA and Israel, which resultantly becomes a security threat and security concern to the Iranian decision makers. In addition, it can be stated that the long historical conflict and confrontation is evolving into a proxy warfare."⁹⁸ The second category links with the chaos of the Middle Eastern Region. Saudi Arabia and Iran, the two largest powers in the area, feed the fires of regional strife. Their rivalry spanning over many years shows no sign of abating. Considering the rising number of civil wars, failed nations, and terrorist organizations ravaging the area, the answer for achieving regional stability remains obscure. Should the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran continue, it might lead to a greater engagement by large powers, which could start a worldwide battle. The current chapter explores the factors behind Saudi-Iran rivalry in contemporary political dynamics.

This chapter further investigates the aspects of power tussle and struggles for hegemony in regional affairs. In connection to the regional and external tussle, the internal political nature has also been shed light on to find the traces of the state's involvement in the internal matters

⁹⁸ Javed Rana, Senior Journalist/ Foreign Analyst at Press TV, Iran, interviewed via Whatsapp on December 6, 2022.

of the arch-rival state. These bi-folded factors prove the fact that both states have furthered a threat perception, which is rooted in the state's foundation, as they come to interact with each other, or these states are taken as influential players within Middle Eastern Politics.

To understand the factors behind Riyadh and Tehran rivalry, it is instrumental to diagnose the causes of their contention also enlist the factors of contention behind Saudi-Iran rivalry.

Saudi-Iran Rivalry in the Contemporary Dynamics of the Middle East

An outline of how the Saudi-Iranian rivalry impacts current dynamics in the Middle East follows geo-political competition, sectarian divide, regional security architecture, politics over OPEC, and regional interventions. The rivalry is a long-standing, intricate geopolitical conflict with major ramifications for the Middle East and beyond. Saudi-Iranian confrontations manifested on different playgrounds, which led to deterioration of the situation, and they were supporting opposite sides of each other. Iran supported the opposition in those countries where the pro-Saudi regime was in danger, the same as Saudi Supported that opposition where the government was an ally of the Iranian regime. The proxy wars were going on different grounds, i.e., Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. One of the main drivers of instability, war, and rivalry for influence and power in the Middle East today is the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Following are the grounds for Saudi-Iran manifesting their rivalry through proxy wars:

3.1. Situational Analysis: Proxy Wars

The phenomenon of Arab Spring had dragged the entire region of Middle East into a political turmoil. The two giants i.e., Saudi Arabia and Iran had approached this phenomenon differently. Earlier Iran supported the Arab Spring and considered it as a part of its greater Iranian Islamic Revolution.⁹⁹ Iranian perception was right because it was initially alluded to

⁹⁹ Naysan Rafati, "Iran and the Arab Spring," *Economic and Political, Weekly*, Vol. 46, No. 50 (December 10, 2011), 52.

that the Arab Spring is against pro American and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and could be replaced by Islamic government.¹⁰⁰ Hence Iran supported the Arab Spring and hypothesized it as the Islamic awakening.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, Iran denounced to extend its support to the protest in Syria and called it Israel and American conspiracy to change the regime of Bashar al-Assad.¹⁰² On the contrary, Riyadh was against the Arab Spring since its inception because it challenges the authoritarian regime in Middle East. It was considered as a threat to the Saudi regime. Riyadh was implicated in stumbling protests in neighboring state, i.e. Bahrain. Riyadh extended military assistance to the Bahrain ruling family, the Al-Khalifas, using Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) podium.

This fear of sectarian clashes led to adoption of such policies in the Gulf monarchies that deprived the minority community i.e., the Shi'ite population. Analysis of the events gives an insight that sectarianism was not the reason. The institutional repression was due to lack of social, political and economic reforms hence certain groups were benefitted over others and a divide was precipitated.¹⁰³

Milani analyzed the situation:

“Sectarianism, or the co-called Sunni-Shia schism, is not the cause of this lingering cold war. The reality is that the two countries have been engaged in a relentless rivalry for power, or expansion of influence in the region, for decades. This is not to belittle the importance of sectarianism. Rather, it is to suggest that sectarianism is only one of the many tools at the disposal of the two countries for achieving their strategic goals. In this sense, sectarianism is not the cause of the cold war between the two countries; it is rather a symptom of the conflict.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Jubin Goodarzi, “Iran: Syria as the First Line of Defence,” in *The Regional Struggle for Syria*, edited by Julien Barnes-Dacey and Daniel Levy (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2013), 25.

¹⁰¹ Mohsen Milani, “Why Tehran Won't Abandon Assad(ism),” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2013): 84.

¹⁰² Milani, “Tehran Won't Abandon Assad,” 97.

¹⁰³ Benedetta Berti and Jonathan Paris, “Beyond Sectarianism: Geopolitics, Fragmentation, and the Syrian Civil War,” *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2014): 23.

¹⁰⁴ Mohsen Milani, “Iran's Regional Policies One Year After the Nuclear Deal,” *Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy*, Working paper, (2016):3.

It is evident that both Tehran and Riyadh for their own interest playing the sectarian cards to divert the threat to respective regimes in both countries. Despite both states adopted non-sectarian policies but the sectarian card was found to be an effective tool to demonstrate its power among their allied states.¹⁰⁵ Hence the sectarianism was considered as a path to attain power and garner support. Syria and Iraq were two major battlegrounds of this sectarian conflict.

The conflict in Syria and Iraq is viewed through sectarian lens but it is not true. The quagmire of Syria and Iraq is not simple. Several players are involved for their own interest. Beside Riyadh and Tehran, non-state actor like Islamic State (IS) is also involved with their own ideology and interests. Hence IS factor may bring Saudi Arabia and Iran on a page because IS not only threat for Syria and Iraq but also for Iran and Saudi Arabia. For example, an analyst Christopher M. Blanchard stated:

“IS leaders claim to have established a caliphate to which all pious Sunni Muslims owe allegiance, and they directly challenge the legitimacy of the Al Saud family, who have described themselves as the custodians of Islam’s holiest sites and rulers of a state uniquely built on and devoted to the propagation of Salafist interpretations of Sunni Islam.”¹⁰⁶

I.S. perceived as the common enemy of both Riyadh and Tehran. The better relations between Tehran and Riyadh may reduce the tension in Syria and Iraq but the adoption of violence tactic is not possible to stop.”¹⁰⁷ I.S. denounced the Al-Saudi legitimacy and declared war on the Kingdom. I.S. has supported numerous attacks on security forces and civilians within the Kingdom since 2014. The expansion of I.S. in Iraq, Syria, and inside attacks raised Saudi concerns, except for Iran, seeking a solid partnership with the USA, opposition forces in Syria,

¹⁰⁵ Emile Hokayem, “Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War,” *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 6 (2014): 60

¹⁰⁶ Christopher M. Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service Report No. RL33533* (November 2019), 24.

¹⁰⁷ Hokayem, “Syrian Civil War,” 61.

and the Sunni population in Iraq. Keeping in view the Saudi Arabia Iran rivalry, extended proxy wars in different countries must be taken into account, in order to understand and analyze the gravity of the tense relations between Riyadh and Tehran.

3.1.1 Situation in Iraq

Riyadh and Tehran both had experienced the Baghdad aggression, (i.e. Iraq attack on Iran and Kuwait). It is perceived by both giants that a strong Iraq is not in benefit for either country, because a strong Iraqi government aggression was witnessed by both states. A puppet government in Iraq is the desire of both Saudi Arabia and Iran which is in their vested interest. Saudi Arabia supported U.S. to rebuild the regime in Baghdad with the hope that the section of the people to who is pro Saudi Arabia (Ba'ath) would be part of the new regime. But unfortunately, Ba'ath party was restrained by the U.S. to involve in the political rebuilding process of Iraq. Saudi Arabia expected that this section (Ba'ath) to be part of new Iraqi government and serve kingdom interests against Iran.¹⁰⁸ Under the leadership of the Saddam Hussain who belongs to Ba'ath party gave a tough time to Iran. Saudi perceived it as a mean to curtail Iranian hegemony in Middle East.¹⁰⁹

The exclusion of the Ba'ath members from the new government setup had several reasons but the major factor was its affiliation with the Saddam Hussein's government. Hence the validity of the government could be questioned by the Kurdz and other sections.¹¹⁰ Ba'ath was basically a Sunni majority political party, which make it a natural ally of Saudi Arabia. U.S. refrained Ba'ath to take part in political landscape of Iraq just to appease the Kurdz. This move of U.S. upset Saudi Arabia therefore, despite having several interests in Iraq Saudi Arabia backed out

¹⁰⁸ Keynoush, "Friends or Foes?," 176.

¹⁰⁹ Keynoush, "Friends or Foes?," 178.

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security," Congressional Research Service, *Report No. RL31339* (2009).13.

to support politically and militarily to the Baghdad but extended humanitarian aid to the protracted conflict.

According to the Dr. Lubna Abid Ali, Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad ‘Saudi Arabia’s primary objectives in Iraq are: first, preventing Iraqi instability and war from jeopardizing the territorial sovereignty and internal security of KSA; second, to protect from the Iraq’s Sunnis from governing Iraq Shi’ites; and third, limiting Iran’s regional influence.’¹¹¹ According to Abdul Basit, Foreign Policy Analyst at GTV, is of view that, ‘Iran neither wanted a strong nor weak government in Iraq. It is considered in favor of Iran to have an inclusive government in Baghdad under the leadership of the Shi’ite faction so that Iran would exert its influence.’¹¹²

The United States’ policies in Iraq frustrated Saudi Arabia.¹¹³ The ‘De-ba’tification’ from the political arena proved to be lethal, further dividing the population into sectarian lines. The elected Prime Minister in the 2005 Elections in Iraq was a Shi’ite which further airs the fire. The rebellious movement started by Sunnis against Shi’ites.¹¹⁴ The United States could not realize the consequences of the de-Ba’tification from the political and military arena. Sectarianism is considered an amalgamation of ethno-religious beliefs and exploitation of identity between Sunni and Shi’ites. Moreover, politicians began using this sect card to shape national and international policies.

It was observed that the Iranian militia works in Iraq to provide training and transmit the revolutionary regime ambitions. Iranian Quds Force of Revolutionary Guard Corps was involved in such activities. As per a report published by the American military authority, since

¹¹¹ Dr. Lubna Abid Ali, Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, interviewed in person, on November 14, 2022.

¹¹² Abdul Basit, Research Fellow at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, interviewed via WhatsApp on November 25, 2022.

¹¹³Shahram Chubin, and Charles Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia relations and regional order* (London: Routledge, 2014), 79.

¹¹⁴ Juan Cole, “The United States and Shi’ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba’thist Iraq,” *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4, (2003): 566.

2006, the Quds forces working in Iraq have been financed annually by Iran with a colossal amount of Seven Hundred Fifty Thousand to Three Million U.S. dollar in weaponry. Such tremendous financial support bore fruits to Iran in terms of cordial bilateral relations between Iran and the Iraqi regime, which was further augmented by the former Prime Minister of Iraq, who called it strategic relevance to bilateral ties.

Within Iraq the different segregated groups were provided with a negotiation table by the Iran and facilitated the agreement between them. Hence including populist leaders Muqtada al-Sadr and Maliki, through consensus between different groups, the Shi'ate led Coalition Parliament formation was possible. The U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq was facilitated by Iran. Iran cajoled and coordinated to all the key stakeholders and builds a consensus. Iran backed militia was favorable for Iranian interests but on the other hand it was detrimental for the integration of Iraq. The trained and Iranian backed militia was involved in attacking U.S. forces and Sunni population in Iraq.¹¹⁵ For instance, among them a notoriously famous militia was Sadr's Mahdi Army consist of Six thousand members. This group was charged with allegation to have advanced weapons and in 2008 this group was disbanded. Other groups were Asaib al Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah actively persuading Iranian interest. Saudi Arabia was unable to maintain any significant position in the Iraqi parliamentary set up.

Iraq soon became a fertile land for the proxy wars between Tehran and Riyadh. Iraq under the leadership of Saddam Hussein started war against Iran and then it attacked Kuwait. When Iraq attacked Iran, it was supported by U.S. on the contrary, U.S did not support Iraq in war against Kuwait because in Kuwait case U.S. led coalition was against the Sunni monarch of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. It was a transition period in Iraq when a Sunni leader was replaced by Shi'a

¹¹⁵ Joseph Felter, and Brian Fishman, "Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and" Other Means," *Military Academy West Point*, (NewYork: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008).

leader, and it was like Iraq moving out from the sphere of influence of Riyadh towards Tehran. It was a sad reality for Riyadh.¹¹⁶

Iran manipulated the newly elected government in Iraq to increase its influence in the Middle Eastern region. That influence was not rest only upon the ideological front, but the ties brought an economic boost. Tehran and Baghdad joint hands on different oil projects, and the bilateral trade volume surged about eight billion U.S. dollars annually. The Saudi-Iran rift in Iraq made this area vulnerable to non-state actors, which further dragged the fragile economy into a failing situation.

In 2010, Nouri al-Maliki was re-elected and remained the Premier of the state. He started the political assassination of the high-profile Sunni leaders, including Tariq al-Hashmei, the Voice President. He was expelled, and then a death sentence was issued. Maliki aimed to build a majority strong Shi'ite government by assembling adherents inside the country's most elite political institutions. Maliki was able to develop a ruling scheme of unrestrained absolute authority by gaining control of the key Iraqi institutions like the Election Commission, the Central Bank, and the Judiciary, allowing him to suppress political competitors while protecting his loyalists. The Sunni majority has reacted strongly to anti-Sunni raids and power consolidation in the hands of the Shi'ite leader. On the contrary, the Sunni members of the administration snubbed meetings of the Cabinet division and called for a no confidence vote. Such action failed to gain any significance but led to harsh reactions from the government. This further deprived the community of the political clout in the government. Maliki's actions, on the other hand, sparked widespread protests among Iraq's Sunni population in 2012.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Kelsey Hampton, "Doctrinally and Politically Opposed on the Battlefield in Syria: Iran and Saudi Arabia's Cold War in the Middle East," in *Tenth Biennial Graduate Student Conference-Conflict Studies and Global Governance: The New Generation*, Boston, Vol. 6, (2014), 6.

¹¹⁷ Stephen Wicken, *Middle East Security Report-II, Iraq's Sunnis in Crisis*, (Washington: The Institute for the Study of War) May 2013. 9.

In December 2012, upon the direction of the Maliki militia attacked the residence of Rafia al-Issawi, the “moderate” and Sunni Finance Minister. This assassination attempt on key Sunni members provoked a Sunni uprising, reigniting sectarian bloodshed, with hostilities between Sunni and Shi’ite factions worsening. Concerns about targeting Sunni political opponents prompted Iraqi Sunnis to demonstrate in 2013. For almost six months, many Sunnis joined the protests in regions such as Ninewa, Diyala, Kirkuk, ad-Din, Anbar, and Baghdad.

When U.S. soldiers withdrew from Iraq, the demonstrations became a more profound expression of Sunni Iraqis’ many unsolved complaints; after protestors threw rocks, in Anbar, in January, the Security Forces opened fire upon a demonstration. The disparity in treatment of Sunni communities and unequal distribution of power promulgated a massive protest amid the Arab Spring. To secure its regime, Maliki strengthened his security forces to crush any demonstration against his government. Upon the direction of Maliki, the provincial elections in different provinces were halted. In response, a massive demonstration in the region of Hawija was observed. The Iraqi Security Forces raided the protest, and around two hundred people lost their lives, and many were injured. As the protests failed to fulfil their demands from the government, people started using force. Despite having a share in government by the Sunni population during the tenure of Maliki, Iraq was dragged into a sectarian conflict.¹¹⁸

Since the inception of the government of Maliki’s regime, target-based discrimination and exploitation of Sunni Muslims was common despite minority status of Sunni Muslims.¹¹⁹ The majoritarian rule was promulgated since the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Shi’ite leaders were benefitted. Meanwhile, the Iraqi soil got ready of another proxy war in form of sectarian perspective. Iran and Saudi Arabia started to support the fraction that supports their notion. More regional players are investing in Syria and Iraq’s future as the battlegrounds continue to

¹¹⁸ Renad Mansour, “The Sunni Predicament in Iraq,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2016), 11.

¹¹⁹ Fanar Haddad, “A Sectarian Awakening: Reinventing Sunni identity in Iraq after 2003,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2014): 150.

expand rather than shrink. Sunni Shias conflict in Iraq has opened another avenue for Riyadh and Tehran to influence in Iraq and struggle for regional supremacy. The use of Sunni-Shia sectarianism has badly damaged and degraded the socio-political and economic fabric of Iraq which is an ideal condition for the nourishment of extremists.

The overt and covert support of Saudis in Iraq through donation and volunteering has been evident, but Saudi denounces such activities. The empowerment of Shi'as in Iraq had also intensified the tension between the Saudi government and Shi'a populace which led to massive protests. Saudi Arabia did not send an ambassador to Iraq and maintained that it was due to Iranian influence and presence in Iraq. Therefore, Saudi Arabia refrained from appointing a resident ambassador to Iraq. The diplomatic ties between Baghdad and Riyadh were initiated in 2004. Saudi Arabia realized that the cut-off ties would push Iraq toward Iran; hence in 2010, negotiations were taken, and the Saudi embassy was re-established in 2016.¹²⁰

Iraq's diplomatic efforts have created an additional element in this conflict, notably the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which was mediated by China. The fact that Baghdad is acting as a mediator highlights its aim to bring about political stability within the country and draw in outside capital in order to promote more equitable regional influence. But even with these diplomatic gestures, doubts persist about Iran's determination to drastically reduce its influence in Iraq. Tehran is aware that lowering its presence might jeopardise its strategic interests in the area, therefore it keeps strengthening its military and economic connections with Baghdad.

Despite these calculated actions, Iraq still confronts significant obstacles that exacerbate the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iraqi political environment is still extremely fractured, and security issues are still brought on by the ongoing existence and actions of militias with

¹²⁰ Maya Carlin, How Iraq is balancing the Saudi-Iran rivalry, Center for Security Policy, 18 April, 2021. <https://centerforsecuritypolicy.org/how-iraq-is-balancing-the-saudi-iran-rivalry/>

Iranian support. The fragile state of Iraqi economy is underscored by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's attempts to strike a balance between these outside forces and domestic economic challenges. Baghdad finds Saudi economic participation especially appealing due to the country's financial challenges, which are made worse by volatile oil prices and political unrest.

3.1.2 Situation in Yemen

The Gulf has always been the most crucial battleground between adversaries Saudi Arabia and Iran, while Saudi Arabia has great affinity with Gulf Sheikdoms. Iran instigates the Arab based Shi'ite populations in order to exert force on Gulf states regime on topics that are crucial to Iran. Yemen, Saudi Arabia's immediate neighbor, has been a state in which the kingdom has actively sought influence. Criminals, smugglers, terrorists, and rebels frequently use the 700-mile border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, which is notoriously porous.¹²¹ Riyadh had generously supported Economy of Yemen and a wide range of financial and political support was extended by the Saudi Arabia amid the political crisis in Yemen.¹²²

The two Middle East giants brought their differences in Yemen crisis between the opposition of government Houthis and the government of Yemen and supported the factions which serve their interests. The Houthis arose from a moderate theological movement called as the Believing Youth, which was created in 1992.¹²³

Given the Analyst Ahmed Addaghasi, the Houthis movement was initially linked with the Shi'ite sub-sect Zaydi sect with a broad educational and cultural vision. The populace with said sect mainly resided in the region of Sa'ada, in due course alienated, with one section became upon 2003 U.S. invasion in Iraq, war cry against the anti-American and anti-government sentiments. The situation escalated, and the first civil war broke out in 2004. The Houthis

¹²¹ Andrew Terrill, *The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and the Future of Middle East Security* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), 2011), 14.

¹²² Terrill, *The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry*, 18.

¹²³ Saeed Al Batati, "Who Are the Houthis in Yemen?," *Al Jazeera*, August 21, 2014.

rebels, also famous as Ansarallah, were considered a threat to the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen. In 2010 a ceasefire was observed after six years.

It is in the cardinal foreign policy of Saudi Arabia to protect neighbouring Yemen. Saudi Arabia suspects instability in Yemen sponsored by Tehran is to dominate the Shi'ite Crescent in the region. Yemeni government and Saudi Arabia both accused Iran of instability in Yemen. The leadership in Iran has spoken out in support of the Houthis, calling for Islamic unity. Many scholars believed that Iran is extending military, technical, and financial assistance to the Houthis, keeping in view the geo-strategic location of Yemen. The members of Houthis further augmented these claims in different plate forums. The Shi'ite community in Yemen and the government relationship started deteriorating in 2009 when KSA intervened in Yemen. Yemenis had penetrated different villages in Saudi Arabia by November 2009.

Saudi intervention was initiated with prior consent from the Yemeni government, which was pro-Saudi Arabia.¹²⁴ After the 1991 Gulf War the military engagement of Saudi Arabia was one of the most significant military engagements. Saudi Arabia used heavy military and air power to crush Yemen's Houthi forces. On the contrary, Iran has further augmented its ties with the Houthis faction and extends support to the Houthis forces. In February 2010, at last, the war was concluded; both parties observed a ceasefire when Houthis withdrew from the territory of Saudi Arabia. Tehran and Riyadh have been involved in the Yemen crisis in the fight to influence the region.

The Arab Spring arrival in 2011 and it also spread to Yemen as well. Ali Abdullah Saleh, the President of Yemen, was an authoritarian leader and enforced strict laws for the economy and society. Many of his relatives monopolized the tobacco industry, real estate, and hotel tourism. Saleh and Saudi Arabia used payoffs to secure loyalty among those outside the family. Saudi

¹²⁴ Tyler B. Parker, "Transforming Yemen? Divergent Saudi and Emirati Intervention Policies." *Middle East Policy* 28, no. 3-4 (2021): 169.

Arabia poured money into Yemeni tribal networks daily to keep its people pleased and submissive. Yemen was once called as “Golden Sparrow,” but the Yemen conflict dragged Yemen into politico-economic turmoil. The Yemeni government’s earnings have been spent mainly on the ruling elites, not public welfare and infrastructure. Yemen has a thirty-five percent unemployment rate, and over half its populace is illiterate.

Yemen also became home to non-states outfits like Al-Qaeda in Arab. Saleh lost control over the country after the Arab uprisings in Yemen,¹²⁵ which led to a political uprising in late 2011. Saudi forces defeated Houthis rebels in 2011 even though the Houthis movement had evolved into a well-organized and disciplined militia in 2011. When the 2011 upheavals in Yemen happened, the Houthis movement altered its manifesto;¹²⁶ it started massive protests of youth in Sana’a for economic wellbeing and economic equality rather than to promote the sectarian cause for which it was established. The dispute between the two Middle Eastern giants has also gotten quite “hot” due to the political instability followed by Arab Spring.

3.1.3 Situation in Lebanon

Lebanon is another example of the Saudi Arabia-Iran proxy war in the struggle to influence the Levant. History of the civil war in Lebanon can be trace back from 1975 to the early 90s and the demography of Lebanon is the best example of a multi-cultural and ethnic society, comprised of Muslims, Christians, and Druze as prominent groups. Multiple factors, i.e., external, and internal factors, are responsible for Lebanon’s deteriorated state. In Lebanon, Hezbollah is a group often known as a “state within a state”¹²⁷ because it controls the

¹²⁵ Leonid Issaev, Alina Khokhlova, and Andrey Korotayev, “The Arab Spring in Yemen,” in *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century* (Springer, 2022), 685.

¹²⁶ Ginny Hill, *Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 334-336.

¹²⁷ Michael T. Kindt, “Hezbollah: a State within a State,” in *The World’s Most Threatening Terrorist Networks and Criminal Gangs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 124.

communication networks and the security to protect Lebanon against Israeli and West influence in Lebanon.

Hezbollah is considered a terror outfit and an ardent supporter of Iran. The commander of Hezbollah was alleged to run social organizations for the welfare of the Shi'ite Muslims in Lebanon. It is speculated that Iran supports Hezbollah in Syria and exerts influence. Iran backed Hezbollah with military, financial, and logistic support. The leadership in Hezbollah's called for the expulsion of Western powers and Israel from Lebanon's territory and declared the Israeli state to be destroyed. It further showed conformity with the Iranian stance in Lebanon. Iran has reaped significant benefits from Hezbollah's expanding power, particularly after its stance against Israel. As an outcome on a broader lens, the Hezbollah started operations with Iranian back.¹²⁸

Lebanon was considered an essential state for Saudi Arabia, and Riyadh was often involved in low-profile activities in the politics of Lebanon. Through Media, Saudi Arabia got access to the politics of Lebanon. An important propaganda tool was the Al-Hayat daily. Moreover, the Lebanese Prime Minister, Hajj Hussein al-Uwani, had the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia title. He became the tool for Riyadh to inculcate the Arabism and Wahhabi doctrine amid the civil war in Lebanon.¹²⁹

It is also noticeable that Saudi Arabia, through its influence, helped the fifteen years of civil war to conclude in Lebanon to an end. The Ta'if Agreement of 1989 was output of Saudi negotiation in Ta'if city Saudi Arabia to resolve Lebanese affairs. Saudi Arabia has made significant contributions to the rehabilitation of Lebanon. The Saudi influence was further augmented by the appointment of Rafiq al-Harir as Prime Minister of Lebanon; he possessed

¹²⁸ Jubin M. Goodarzi, "Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment," *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2013): 34.

¹²⁹ Muhammad Shoaib, "Evolving Saudi Foreign Policy Post Arab Spring," *Journal of Strategic Affairs*, No. 1, No. 2 (2016): 56.

dual nationality, i.e., of Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. Throughout the tenure of Rafiq al-Harir, Saudi Arabia has played a vital role in Lebanon's economic and political restructuring.

Analysts believed that Rafiq Hariri had links with Saudi Arabia; therefore, until his assassination in 2005, Saudi Arabia had influence in Lebanon politics and Hezbollah backed by Iran was considered behind the assassination of the Rafiq Hariri.¹³⁰ It is believed that after the assassination of Hariri the sectarianism backed by Saudi Arabia and Iran flourished.

One important aspect of the larger regional geopolitical dynamics is the struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Lebanon. Sectarian identities, political power, and regional conflicts have its deep roots. Due to this competition, which has caused instability in the country, Lebanon has been a focal point for regional countries looking to increase their influence. The course of this competition will be determined by regional developments, how wars like the Syrian Civil War turn out, and how well international players are able to defuse tensions and advance stability in Lebanon.

3.1.4 Situation in Syria

The phenomenon of the Arab spring brought instability in Syrian like it did in other Middle Eastern states. A civil war broke out against the Bashar al-Assad government was blamed for corruption and wide scale violence of Human Rights. Massive Protests have been started against the regime of Bashar al-Asad for social and economic freedom and justice. Thousands of people took to roads in different cities i.e. Aleppo, Damascus, and Homs in Syria

The situation had deteriorated by April 2011, and Assad launched a considerable drive to expel anti-regime opposition troops. He used the notorious Shabiha militia and police forces to launch a savage assault on Syrian protestors, killing hundreds of people and injuring thousands

¹³⁰ Hannes Baumann, "The "New Contractor Bourgeoisie," in Lebanese politics: Hariri, Mikati and Fares," *Lebanon: After the Cedar Revolution* (2012): 131.

more. The Free Syrian Army was formed in July 2011 by the belligerent group used to resist the Assad regime. The civil war turned into a brutal civil war by 2015.

The situation has started deteriorating, and a favorable condition has been induced for non-state actors like ISIS. To substitute the Assad regime with a democratic regime protest in Syria have started which later on converted into a civil war. The involvement of Riyadh and Tehran further fueled the fire. Assad proclaimed himself as the protector of the minorities and played a sectarian card to secure his position. In this way, Assad controls the Sunni Corporate elites by imposing strict rules and a monetary check. Syria, an ally of Iran, is the central Iranian force projection in the Levant. Iran had utilized the Syrian territory as a channel to provide logistic aid, funding, arming, and training to Hezbollah and Hamas.¹³¹ An Iranian-led alliance, the “Rejectionist Axis,”¹³² includes Hezbollah, Iran, Syria, and Hamas is considered anti-Israel and anti-West, Shi’ite Alliance. For Iran, to have a stronghold in the Levant, Syria is of utmost importance, fall out of the Assad regime may turn out to be disastrous for Iranian ambitions. As Geneive Abdo analyzed, “*Without Assad’s loyalty, the second line of defense-Hezbollah and Hamas-would crumble.*”

Iran supported the Syrian regime by sending its Quds forces and providing equipment to the Shi’ite population to suppress the protests Assad’s regime. The Saudi Arabia-Syrian relations were strained during the 1970s, and both were suspicious and disdained each other’s activities. Since the onset of Arab Spring, the Saudi government has taken a harsh stance against Assad’s regime. Saudi King Abdullah initially criticized the Assad regime for violation of Human

¹³¹ Geraint Alun Hughes, “Syria and the Perils of Proxy Warfare,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2014): 527-528.

¹³² Rola El Husseini, “Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (2010): 803.

rights,¹³³ and later, in August 2011, as a symbol of protest because of his policies, the Syrian ambassadors were propelled from Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

Following Saudi Arabia's lead, the Syrian ambassadors to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain were removed in August 2011 in a gesture to protest these policies further. Riyadh has supported the anti-government fraction with material and military aid in Syria. The military equipment and weaponry from Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia to Syria have been supplied through Jordan. The Saudi Wahhabi Mufti asked Sunnis worldwide to support the Syrian anti-regime group. The Saudis in Mecca ensured their remote support. Saudi Arabia used the Wahhabi doctrine as a soft power in war-torn countries. It is believed that to achieve its interests in the states, Saudi Arabia collaborated with the Sunni majority countries, for instance, Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia's role in bringing together disparate opposition factions has helped Syrian rebels gain ground against regime forces and battle Hezbollah in the border areas of Lebanon. Syria has been turned into one of the most significant proxy battlefields for the Sunni-Shia variance due to infiltration by the KSA and IRI. According to a research study, there are six to seven thousand foreign militants, primarily Sunni, fighting alongside Assad in Syria and seven to eight thousand Shi'ite fighters from abroad fighting for Assad against Sunni forces. Both Tehran and Riyadh extended the Syrian crisis into a Sunni-Shi'ite rivalry.¹³⁴

Mateen Haider, Political and Foreign Analyst/Journalist at GTV, shared his views on Saudi-Iran rivalry that this is, in fact, a geostrategic power struggle over the Middle Easter region as well as Islamic World, and this struggle has been manifested by both giants by sending military equipment, finances, troops, and sectarian religious rhetoric. The spillover impact of the

¹³³ Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Rethinking Foreign Military Interventions to Promote Human Rights: Evidence from Libya, Bahrain and Syria," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2015): 552.

¹³⁴ El Husseini, "Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal," 810.

conflict goes beyond the concern countries boundaries and also provide favorable environment for ISIS, which put Syria in severe politico-economic turmoil.¹³⁵

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Syria has had a substantial influence on the course of the civil war, extending its duration and intensifying its effects on the surrounding area. The resolution of the war, the impact of external players, and the capacity of regional powers to come to an agreement will all have an impact on the future course. Finding a regional balance of power that fosters stability rather than prolongs war and resolving the larger Saudi-Iranian rivalry would probably be necessary in order to resolve the Syrian crisis.

3.1.5 Situation in Bahrain

The proxy war between Riyadh and Tehran also affected Bahrain. Bahrain has been remained as a bone of contention between both Iran and Saudi Arabia, as evidenced by their respective strategic calculations and conduct. The instance of Bahrain affords enough opportunity for ideological and geopolitical analysis of the connection between Tehran and Riyadh. First, the Kingdom of Bahrain considered as the epicenter of “sectarian disenfranchisement” on the peninsula.¹³⁶ 70-75% percent of Bahrain’s population subscribes to Shi’ite Islam, who are believed to have ties to Iran. On the contrary, ruling Al-Khalifa family subscribes to Sunni Islam and has significant ties to Riyadh. Second, due to the strategic location of Bahrain’s it has been remained significant for both Tehran and Riyadh. Looking into the demographic make-up of Bahrain, it is evident that the ruling royal family met with multiple challenges at front of political and security arena.

¹³⁵ Mateen Haider, Political and Foreign Analyst/Journalist at GTV, interviewed via WhatsApp on December 11, 2022.

¹³⁶ Frederick Wehrey, et. al, *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy* (California: RAND Corporation, 2009), 53.

In 1820, Bahrain claims were made by the then-Persian rulers. Iranian newspaper Kayhan, editor Hussain Sharit Masdari, claimed Bahrain as the part of Iran.¹³⁷ Despite multiple challenges, it looks like that this is part of a wider game with Iran. As a result of the British retreat from the Gulf, Iran had the chance to show its authority over the territory, and it promptly revived the Persian assertion to declare sovereignty of Bahrain.”¹³⁸ While Saudi Arabia rejected this notion, though. Bahrain was, in fact, one of the positions in which KSA and Iran disagreed before to 1979. When the shah argued that Bahrainis should be permitted to select their own destiny, the issue was addressed this allowed a United Nations to learn that the masses of Bahrainis demand freedom.

Saudi Arabia also has significant links with Bahrain, which originate in part from the Al-Khalifa's tribal connections in Saudi Arabia and partly from financial cooperation made possible by the selling of oil. In addition, Bahrain serves a crucial function for Saudi Arabia, acting as a release structure for societal tensions resulting from the stringent adherence of Wahhabi theology. So, numerous Saudis often cross the King Fahd Road on Fridays to consume alcoholic beverages at bars and clubs. However, Saudi Arabia is also deeply concerned about the Al Khalifa's response to the Shia issue in Bahrain since the political accommodation of the Shia community may lead to a rise in Iranian influence within the country. The significance of Bahrain to Saudi Arabia extends beyond the specified providing of assistance for the Al Khalifa,¹³⁹ despite the fact that this remains a crucial concern. Instead, Bahrain's significance is dual. First, there are geopolitical concerns regarding the expansion of Iranian dominance in the region. Given the close proximity of Iran to the kingdom, the Al Saud to foreclose an escalation of Iranian involvement in Bahrain, and they view the Al Khalifa's

¹³⁷ Frederick Wehrey, Theodore W. Karasik, and Alireza Nader, *Saudi-Iranian Relations Saudi-Iranian relations since the fall of Saddam: Rivalry, cooperation, and implications for US policy* (California: RAND Corporation, 2009), 54.

¹³⁸ Simon Mabon, "The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 2 (2012): 84.

¹³⁹ Oz Hassan, "Undermining the Transatlantic Democracy Agenda? The Arab Spring and Saudi Arabia's Counteracting Democracy Strategy," *Democratization*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2015): 490-495.

stability as essential to this end. As a result, Saudi Arabia's support for the Al Khalifa includes funding items on Bahrain's national budget and purchasing Boeing 747-400 of King Hamad's.¹⁴⁰ The Al-Saud has not only supported the ruling royal of Bahrain financially and ideologically but also to further augment their ties the son of King Hamad (Ruling Royal of Bahrain) married to daughter of King Abdullah. Second, Bahrain's significance arises from Saudi Arabia's concerns regarding sectarian allegiance of the Saudi Shia population mainly residing in the Eastern Province and the Shia population of Bahrain. Thus, for the Al Saud, the empowerment of the Shia people in the Eastern Province may result from the rise of Shia authority in Bahrain. Saudi concerns towards Bahrain are not a recent infatuation but this was started back in the period of Shah of Iran. In fact, planning for this project began in the 1960s, when the Shah maintained Iran claims to Bahrain. With the 1979 Iranian Revolution and Khomeini's determination to propagate the revolution, however, suspicions of Iranian meddling in the area, particularly in Bahrain, grew. In 1992, Shahram Chubin emphasized this mistrust of Tehran intentions, stating that the Saudis "require assurances that Tehran accepts the notion of non-interference in the domestic matters of other countries which is a cardinal principle in any regional cooperation perspective." The Saudi leadership is apprehensive and believes that Iran bears the burden of proving its authenticity.¹⁴¹ Following the 1979 revolution, the pace of building of the causeway accelerated substantially. Despite the notion that the road's goal was to strengthen economic relations, it appears that its construction was intended to facilitate the Al Khalifa's escape in the event of difficulties. In fact, according to Simon Henderson, the rising security threats was the concern which stimulated the Saudi to support Bahrain militarily.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Henderson, "Iran's Shadow over Reform."65.

¹⁴¹ Shahram Chubin, "Iran and Regional Security in the Persian Gulf," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1992): 72-73.

¹⁴² Henderson, "Iran's Shadow over Reform."

In the Middle East, Bahrain was among the most afflicted states because of the widespread uprisings known as the Arab Spring. This is due to two factors: first, the majority population in Bahrain subscribes to the Shi'ite sect of Islam, and second, the indulgence of both KSA and IRI in the proxy conflict in Bahrain. In 1999, the succession of kingship transferred to Hamad Al Khalifa from his father, which led to a civil uprising in Bahrain, which later further escalated because of the Arab Spring. Upon his accession, King Hamad introduced a series of reforms but failed to implement them, which led to discontent among the public. Upon the arrival of Arab Spring, the situation further deteriorated in Bahrain, and people staged protests on February 14, 2011, a day of rage.

The protest demanded the introduction of democracy and political reforms to transfer power to the elected representatives. It was not a demand of any sect, and it was a peaceful demonstration. But the response from the state was heavy, which further infuriated the public.¹⁴³ The protestors captured the Pearl Square in Manama and many people got injured and several died. Bahrain under the GCC Security clause asked for the help to tackle the protests. Saudi led GCC forces extended support to Bahrain. The civil strife and political instability provided the fertile grounds for Saudi Arabia and Iran to engage in proxy war. The troops were deployed under Peninsula Security Shield Force which increased the Riyadh's dominance in Bahrain and fueled the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh.¹⁴⁴

Iran to support the Shi'ite population and funded the protests in Bahrain.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand Saudi support the ruling royals Al Khalifa. In order to evaluate the KSA IRI involvement in Bahrain, it is evident that both states face security challenges at domestic and regional level.

¹⁴³ Matthew Gray, "The 2011 Bahrain uprising: Its sources, impact and lessons." In *The Arab Revolution in Context: Civil Society and Democracy in a Changing Middle East*. Melbourne University Press (an imprint of Melbourne University Publishing), 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Slackman, "The Proxy Battle in Bahrain," *New York Times*, March 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/weekinreview/20proxy.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁴⁵ Mostafa Sultani, "Welayat-e Faqih from the Viewpoint of Ibn-i Fahad Helli," *Political Science*, Vol. 7, No. 25 (2004): 159-173.

Perhaps it is arduous to estimate the level of Iranian relations with the Bahraini opposition groups. Furthermore, the majority Shi'ite population get tilted towards Iran if they came into power.¹⁴⁶ On the contrary, the Saudi sphere of influence bit compromised in Bahrain. The Saudi led GCC forces are stationed in Bahrain which reject the above statement. Hence, one must consider the rationale of security perspective while dealing with Tehran and Riyadh's involvement in Bahrain.¹⁴⁷

One important effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in Bahrain has been sectarian tensions. Both regional powers have used the Sunni-Shia split to further their own goals, creating societal divides and a polarised political atmosphere. The Shia community in Bahrain has experienced prejudice and political exclusion, which has exacerbated social instability and discontent with the administration. Bahrain's foreign policy and diplomatic ties have been moulded by its support of Saudi Arabia against Iran. It has improved Bahrain's standing in the Gulf Cooperation Council and its ties to other Arab nations with Sunni majorities. Western nations, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, who see Bahrain as a crucial ally in thwarting Iranian dominance in the region, have also endorsed this alliance.

In the future, a number of factors will determine how the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in Bahrain develops. These include efforts to address Bahrain's internal political grievances and sectarian divisions, as well as the role that international actors play in reducing regional tensions. In the midst of persistent regional rivalry, Bahrain's stability and security will depend greatly on its capacity to overcome these obstacles.

3.1.6 Palestine Issue

Within the few days of the Iranian revolution in 1979, Yasser Arafat came to Tehran in his private plane. His optimism was reflected in such a way that this revolution will be the

¹⁴⁶ Mostafa, "Welayat-e Faqih"72.

¹⁴⁷ Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East* (London: IB Taurus, 2012) 65.

cornerstone in further liberating the Palestinian people. Moreover, he thought that the time has come where the liberation movement is going to speed up. Following the same thoughts and ambitions his views at that time were expressed in this way “I felt as though I were landing in Jerusalem,” these words were uttered by him to an interviewer of Iranian Media channel.

The success story in Iran was observed as a beginning of a new era of liberation, where the oppressors will be toppled through the effort of the people. At that time, handing over the Israeli trade representatives, these words were enunciated. “Today we are seeing the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and tomorrow we will be victorious in Palestine,” these were the words of Yasser Arafat.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, he stated that this leadership of Imam Khomeini will help the Palestinian people to get free and independent state for themselves. They will no more be suppressed and oppressed by the Israeli forces. In the same context, Imam Khomeini wanted to expand the horizon beyond any sect to all Muslims across the globe. To which, Palestinian people were no exception at all. In the pre-revolution period, the main agenda of global appeal beyond sect was through this identification of the Palestinian crisis. Imam Khomeini took this problem as one of the most important aspects to create an impactful revolution across the globe. It was the same idea that the issue of Palestine came to the forefront in the consequence of the revolution in Iran, 1979. Since then, the Israeli-Palestinian crises have remained at the forefront as a bone of contention between the two rival states.¹⁴⁹

After scores of years, the decision made by U.S. President Donald Trump must be an eye-opener for both states, as he has declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel. But the two regional powers are obsessively occupied in the fight of influence within the Middle Eastern Region. This tug of war of getting influential in this region has adversely affected the overall say of the Muslim Ummah at large. In the international lobbying, the extra regional actors seem too much

¹⁴⁸ Ofira Seliktar and Farhad Rezaei, *Iran Revolution, and Proxy Wars*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020),56-58.

¹⁴⁹ Riccardo Alcaro, “Friends and Foes of a United States-Iran Nuclear Agreement,” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2013): 93-101.

involved and concerned with the developments, but the regional influential actors have little or no concern in this regard. From King Fahad to King Abdullah, all the leaders of Saudi Arabia wanted a peaceful settlement through peace negotiations and diplomatic ventures. Saudi Arabia has always favoured a peaceful mechanism for resolving the issue. KSA has not aided any military support against the Israeli forces. They have tried their level best to bring a peaceful resolution that can be a solution to Palestinian conflict amicably. This determines the position of Saudi Arabia as one of the peacebuilders and regional leaders that can negotiate peacefully for the settlement of the displaced people of Palestine. KSA did not support military expeditions in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. In the backdrop, Iran has been continuously supporting Jerusalem to become the part of Palestine, but a little has been done so far. Besides this, the same motive reflects the regional concern and regional ambition of the Iranian leadership. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' has been established with special purpose. Moreover, the militant organisation groups and other organisations such as Hizbullah have been backed up by the Iranian forces. This shows the fact that Iran, in the wake of these developments, has a greater influence in the region. The advantage Iran is getting becomes obvious, as during the fighting of Hizbullah versus Israel in 2006, Israeli forces had to step back. And they did not declare their success in the fight against Hizbullah.¹⁵⁰

The two rival forces seem to have a point of convergence over the issue of Palestine. The states are trying to raise the issue of self-government of the Palestinians against the brutal forces of Israel.¹⁵¹ Both the states are found on the same page for the wish of independence to the Palestinianns. For the case in point, Saudi Arabia intended to establish a united front after Iranian revolution. After the visit of Arafat, many media forums got it to the headline that the KSA seems to applaud the revolution on various accounts. This convergence is important for

¹⁵⁰ Sarah E. Kreps, "The 2006 Lebanon War: Lessons Learned," *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2007): 7.

¹⁵¹ Anthony Carty, "Israel's Legal Right to Exist and the Principle of the Self-determination of the Palestinian People?," *The Modern Law Review*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (2013): 164-167.

bringing consensus among Muslim Ummah and the regional rivals. This coming closer was the part of making the impact against the non-Muslims soon after the revolution. But the converging of these two states could not hold water for many times to come. However, at that time, the Saudi newspaper, Al-Nadwa threatened the internal forces and extra-regional forces that any step against Iran will be dealt with serious concerns by Saudi forces as well;¹⁵² the statement was followed by the fact that Zionists are the enemy of all the Muslims. From King Fahad to King Abdullah, all the leaders of Saudi Arabia wanted a peaceful settlement through peace negotiations and diplomatic ventures. Saudi Arabia has always favored a peaceful mechanism for resolving the issue. Saudi Arabia has not aided any military support against the Israeli forces. They have tried their level best to bring a peaceful resolution that can be a solution to Palestinian conflict amicably. This determines the position of Saudi Arabia as one of the peace builders and regional leader that can negotiate peacefully for the settlement of the displaced people of Palestine.

From U.S. to Iran, they are now working on two prolong prospects, on one side, they had strong linkages with the West. And, on the other hand, they are bent upon defeating Iran with the help of U.S. Some of the rumours have been in air that the Saudi Arabian forces went in a close connection with Israeli forces. They have made special arrangement for security collaboration with Israeli forces to counter Iranian military expeditions in the region. At the time of declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israeli,¹⁵³ Saudi Arabia was preoccupied in the humanitarian aid to the Yemeni people. U.S. termed this highly disappointing and threatened Saudi Arabia for any sort of such developments in the future. In the wake of the development, Saudi Arabia gave the hint that this making of capital can strengthen the cause of Iran to favor

¹⁵² May Darwich, "The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2018): 140-42.

¹⁵³ Abdul Rashid Moten, "US Embassy in Jerusalem: Reasons, Implications and Consequences," *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2018): 20-22.

Palestinian people. All of the people will consider this move as a step to downgrade the effort of Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, Iran can become the real torchbearer of the Palestinian cause. Many of the Muslim countries will consider Iran as the genuine leader of the Muslim Ummah after this declaration. This move of Iran gave her a great strategic and diplomatic edge, which was further strengthened by the OIC, where the top-notch level of Iran was present. Who gave the idea that the East Jerusalem must be made the capital of Palestine, and none of the higher officials of Saudi Arabia participated in the conference.

Iran has been the supporter of Shiite militias in Iraq and elsewhere, this strategic partnership with the minorities and sect related affiliation gave an advantages edge to Iran for gaining popularity as well as popular support of the general masses.¹⁵⁴ Not to talk of the Shiite sect, the minorities belonging to the different sects started praising their effort globally. The militia organizations such as Hizbullah came to the fore with daunting support to the Iranian forces, and it was the stated argument of Trump that these groups started chanting Death to America and down to America etc. In one of the media talks by Hassan Nasrullah, he emphasized and aspired the Muslims to get united against the Israeli government and forces.¹⁵⁵ He encouraged all to contribute in fighting against these forces. Many of the videos got viral, where people came on air stating that they are fully supporting the Palestinian people and Lebanese against the aggression of the Israeli forces. These motivated people are making the point clear that they are implicitly supporting the cause as forwarded by Iran, which clearly states that down with Israel and death to Israel. In the past, such a step would have been met with enthusiasm and support from across the region. Nevertheless, majority of the Arab world has turned against Iran. Hezbollah's decision to join in the Syrian conflict alongside Iran, aiding an authoritarian dictatorship in its ruthless crackdown of a Sunni-majority country, has weakened the

¹⁵⁴ Javed Rana, Senior Journalist/ Foreign Analyst at Press TV, Iran, interviewed via Whatsapp on December 6, 2022.

¹⁵⁵ Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*, Verso Books, 2007.

organization's claim to leadership in the battle against Israel. Two years after the 34-day conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, a poll conducted in 2008 revealed that Nasrallah was the favorite and popular leader in the Arab world,¹⁵⁶ followed by Assad and then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The day when Shiite leaders had such cross-sectarian popularity has passed—at least for the time being. The draw of Jerusalem persists. It was originally referred to as 'the bloom of all cities' in a song by the Lebanese diva Fairouz, and it is the only issue that can still unify people throughout the Arab and Muslim world. Iran and Saudi Arabia are currently hampered by their geopolitical rivalry in regard to the holy city, though. And the Palestinians are once again on their own.

To conclude, even though Saudi Arabia and Iran both profess to be in favour of the Palestinian cause, their competition has impeded attempts to bring about Palestinian unity, statehood, and a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. It will need regional collaboration, internal Palestinian reconciliation, and international diplomatic efforts that go beyond the Saudi-Iranian competition to resolve this crisis and realise a two-state solution.

3.1.7 The Horn of Africa

As per as the conflict and confrontation are concerned, both the states Saudi Arabia and Iran have been entangling with each other and the involvement of Saudi is more obvious in case of the Horn of Africa. As compared with the interference of Iran, Saudi Arabia is more deeply involved in the horn of Africa. The region is in the vicinity of the Saudi Arabia, which makes the state an important stakeholder to show her sphere of Influence. In this category, Riyadh is driven closer to the horn of Africa because Iran is far away from this region. The geographic proximity makes this state more politically and strategically viable for getting involvement in the alma-maters. Historically, many developments have become the bone of contention in the

¹⁵⁶ Aurélie Daher, *Hezbollah: Mobilization and Power* (Hurst: Oxford University Press, 2019),86.

Middle Eastern region such as the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.¹⁵⁷ With all these conflicts and confrontations, Saudi Arabia remains reluctant to push forward towards getting more and more involvement as an archrival of Iran. On one hand, Iraqi and Iranian expansionist agenda, Iranian revolution, and other military expeditions make Riyadh uncomfortable, and on the other hand, the Saudi Arabia is more specifically interests in protecting and propagating Saudi Arabia's interests in HoA. The core interest is protecting and representing the Muslim Ummah at international forums. Saudi Arabia was more interested in spreading the Wahabi sect at global level.¹⁵⁸ In the later attacks such as the 9/11 gave an altered perspective, where the terrorists got more recruitments and publicity at global level. In the wake of such developments and intense international pressure from the extra regional actors Saudi Arabia had no option but to bring those linked organizations to a grinding halt. The strong international lobby influenced Riyadh so much so that Riyadh decided to quit all the implicit funding to the fragmented sections in the name of religion. These organizations were blacklisted by the worldly powers and terror financing and terror sponsoring were strictly scrutinized at all international forums.

3.2. Saudi Concerns over Iranian Nuclear Deal

Riyadh intends to work on its nuclear plan in consequence to the Iranian nuclear program. The USA, Russia, France, the U.K, China, and Germany initiated a nuclear agreement with Tehran on July 14, 2015. Key allies of the USA, i.e., Israel, Saudi Arabia, and even hardliner fraction in USA and Iran, have severely criticized the deal. The key ally of the U.S., Saudi Arabia, regarded the deal with Iran on the nuclear facility as the “stamp of approval” from the U.S. and declared its nuclear program ambition to build 16 nuclear reactors.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Pierre Razoux, “The Iran-Iraq War,” (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 567-570.

¹⁵⁸ Yi Li, “Saudi Arabia’s Economic Diplomacy Through Foreign Aid: Dynamics, Objectives and Mode,” *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2019): 110-122.

¹⁵⁹ A. K. Pasha, “Saudi Arabia and the Iranian nuclear deal,” *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2016): 387-388.

Iran's nuclear plan was considered a means to drag the Middle East region into a nuclear race. It was also apparent that Iran's nuclear ambitions increased the number of hardliners and conservative group tendencies in Iran, especially after Mahmud Ahmadinejad's success in the 2005 elections. The Iranian nuclear program was started during Shah's regime in the 1970s. Nevertheless, Shah was not agreed to acquire nuclear technology. Later, during the reign of Ahmadinejad, the matter of gaining nuclear technology was raised. During the Shah regime, the U.S. encouraged Iran to build a nuclear facility, but the Shah of Iran was reluctant and not interested in acquiring nuclear power. Initially, Iran intended to develop nuclear power reactors, fissile manufacturing material, and uranium enrichment tanks, but later, it surrendered it due to revolution. In 2005, when Ahmadinejad came into power, he brought the nuclear topic to the to the forefront.¹⁶⁰

Acquiring nuclear technology was considered a nationalist issue for Iran. When Ahmadinejad took office, he tried to revive the ideology of Khomeini. Iran, which benefited enormously from the collapse of Iraq but was still surrounded by foes, became determined to obtain all the technologies needed to build a nuclear program. The nuclear program would serve as deterrence while also giving Iran an enormous diplomatic, military, and political edge and prestige. Iran declared that its nuclear program is for peaceful means. Moreover, as per the International Atomic Energy report, Iran hides its number of nuclear facilities and intends to gain nuclear technology, and the uranium enrichment was also surging beyond the threshold level. Iran takes another step toward nuclear enrichment every year. In Iran, for example, in 2006, Tehran successfully sublimated uranium ore into gas, which may be utilized in the reactors for nuclear reactions and bombs.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Robert G. Patman, "The Upsides and Downsides of the Iranian Nuclear Deal," *New Zealand International Review*, Vol. 40, No. 6 (2015): 3-4.

¹⁶¹ Gary S. Samore, "The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Definitive Guide," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, August 3, 2015.

Tehran declared it would terminate its “voluntary” collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency and resume total enriched uranium production in 2007.¹⁶² Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency were not given access to inspections and were also denied access to numerous locations that were estimated to be part of Iran’s nuclear stockpiles. Tehran capitalizing on the opportunities its vast land provides, scattered its nuclear reactors across the country, including, of course, underground storage to evade detection. Nuclear technology, specifically proxy wars, have dominated strategy in the nuclear age.

These goals are expected to threaten their regional adversaries; hence proliferation may occur in antagonistic pairings, triggering a series response. Because there are so many unstable factors on the contemporary battlefield, the threat of nuclear war is growing more serious. “Nuclear proliferation is unavoidable; at best, it can be managed, not halted,” it has been declared.

The Arabs think an Iranian obtained nuclear technology it would be seen as an Iranian (anti-Arab) and Shi’ite (anti-Sunni) capacity. Superpowers would not like to risk conflict with a nuclear-armed country. Moreover, if the Iranian nuclear technology is developed, sanctions imposed by other countries will not affect Iran’s sponsorship of radical terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Shi’ites are currently hoping to join Sunnis in their fight against the ultimate foe in the West. The danger is that if the Iranian Shi’ites succeed in developing the nuclear program, the Gulf States’ balance will be drastically upset. Nuclear non-proliferation has been an important segment of Middle East politics for many years. Riyadh and Tehran are both signatories of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).¹⁶³ It is commonly believed that KSA is under the nuclear umbrella of the U.S. because of its alliance with it. “The United States and Saudi Arabia... face a common enemy [Iran]...cooperation is essential to keeping both of our

¹⁶² Mohammad Javad Zarif, “Tackling the Iran-US Crisis: The need for a Paradigm Shift,” *Journal of International Affairs* (2007): 73-94.

¹⁶³ Eric S. Edelman, et. al, “The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran: The Limits of Containment,” *Foreign Affairs* (2011): 66-68.

countries safe...the United States would pledge to defend its friends and allies in the region from Iranian aggression,” at the Nuclear Security Summit, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in April 2010.¹⁶⁴ When the U.S. attacked Iraq, Iran seized the chance to achieve its objective of acquiring nuclear power. Experts believe that Saudi Arabia will be forced to start or restart its nuclear facility development if Iran acquires nuclear weapons.

Saudi Arabia is concerned that it may turn a pledge in Iran’s quest to turn the Islamic World’s only sovereign nation. Hegemony over the Middle East region and Islamic leadership would eventually give Iran unrivaled strength, which other world leaders would be unwilling to challenge. Saudi Arabia, a rival state, seems unconcerned that Iran may use the bomb against Saudi Arabia or target the U.S. or Israel. The deterrence theory remains valid. KSA and other prominent countries will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear technology.

The increasing ambition of Iranian nuclear technology acquisition and Ahmadinejad’s more aggressive public language and foreign policy statements¹⁶⁵ have compelled Saudi Arabia’s ruling establishment to rethink its Middle East strategy and consider its nuclear alternatives. Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, while responding to a question about Iran’s oil control, said, “this would be reasoned an act of war and would threaten international peace and security. We hope this announcement is fake, but if it is, it would be dangerous”. Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal declaration implies that sovereignty and territorial integrity are emphasized regardless of any bilateral agreements between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The Saudis are “terrified” by Iran’s nuclear program.¹⁶⁶

Based on Saudi reactions, the underlying danger is that Riyadh would take a nuclear ‘shortcut’. Riyadh has known since 1988 that it had purchased nuclear weapons from countries like China

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Cirincione and Alexandra Bell, “The Nuclear Pivot: Change and Continuity in American Nuclear Policy,” *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 155, No. 3 (2010): 34-36.

¹⁶⁵ Seyed Hossein Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir* (Washington D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 236.

¹⁶⁶ Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, “Iran, Saudi Arabia and Modern Hatreds,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2018.

and possibly Brazil. Saudi Arabia bought intermediate-range ballistic missiles from China in 1988. According to certain speculations, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have a secret nuclear weapons deal.¹⁶⁷

Pakistani experts are thought to be supplying nuclear intelligence to Saudi Arabian scientists. It is suggested that if Saudi Arabia pursued nuclear power, it would buy nuclear weapons or build them. David Albright states, “The Saudis would be the first of the world’s nuclear powers to have bought rather than developed the bomb.” There are also speculations that Riyadh and Islamabad have an accord that Pakistan will safeguard Riyadh interests if Saudi Arabia deems nuclear weapons vital and Pakistan will station nuclear weapons on Saudi soil.

This is feasible, given that Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan’s nuclear program. Riyadh and Islamabad have traditionally maintained cordial bilateral ties, which have only become more assertive in recent decades. Riyadh recognises that the world will again experience nuclear proliferation due to Iran’s nuclear program development and reluctance to comply with IAEA directives.

According to the magazine, satellite photographs revealed dozens of underground silos, suggesting that Saudi Arabia intends to stock up on long-range missiles, mainly from Pakistan. Upon discussion on the charges of Saudi Arabia’s possible nuclear proliferation aided by Pakistani experts, the U.S. instantly refuted them, stating that Saudi Arabia had signed and ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and that Pakistan shared their worries about nuclear proliferation. “I do not believe that the Saudis believe that they had some relationship with Pakistan that, in extremism, they would have claimed to get nuclear weapons from Pakistan,” says Gary Samore, President Barack Obama’s non-proliferation adviser. Unfortunately, the NPT contains significant flaws. It is critical to recognise that, despite its

¹⁶⁷ Nicholas L., Miller, and Tristan A. Volpe, “Abstinence or Tolerance: Managing Nuclear Ambitions in Saudi Arabia,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2018): 40-46.

close connections with the U.S., Saudi Arabia would pursue every option available to prevent Tehran if and when the Iranian bomb is built.¹⁶⁸

Hence a way of thought pervades many Arabian countries' nuclear proliferation policies. Whether Saudi Arabia seeks nuclear proliferation or not, it is clear from its military spending that it is extremely worried about its internal security and is working to bolster its army. KSA spent a massive amount of its revenue on defense purchases from the West. According to a report disclosed by U.S. Congressional Research Service, in 2008, Riyadh had transferred around \$8.7 billion on armament purchases.¹⁶⁹ In 2009, Saudi Arabia purchased advanced weapons like fighter Typhoon aircraft and six Airbus A330 MRTT tanker/transport from Europe. Moreover, according to the consensus assessment from Military Technology, Riyadh's need to encourage a deterrence policy against Iran's Nuclear boom is evident from its expansion of missile defense.

There are also reports of Billion-dollar deals with Russia to provide S-300 missile defense systems, which Iran previously purchased. Saudi Arabia is in a critical situation since it is a wealthy and powerful country that, while maintaining close relationships with the U.S., will pursue relations and actions outside of U.S. engagement to preserve national security. Thus, a chaotic area controlled by the arms race mentality that dominated much like the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union has resurfaced between competing powers Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Upon the question on Pakistan's response to the nuclear negotiation between Iran and the P5 +1, Marvin G. Weinbaum stated, "Pakistan's position on the nuclear negotiation with U.S has been to by and large stay out having developed its own nuclear weapons it's hard for Pakistan to say that Iran should be precluded from becoming at least a power with nuclear energy

¹⁶⁸ Naser Al-Tamimi, "Will Riyadh get the Bomb?," *Middle East Quarterly* Vol.23, No. 2, (2013).

¹⁶⁹ Robina Khan, et. al, "Iranian Nuclear Program: Impacts on Saudi-Iran Relations," *Political Social Sciences Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2019),61.

capacity or even to say that it be denied its own weapons program below the surface though Pakistan has every reason to be concerned about a full-fledged Iranian nuclear capability after all it has already two neighbors with nuclear capacity and it would prefer that it not have third.”¹⁷⁰

In reaction to the JCPOA, Saudi Arabia has fortified its partnerships with regional nations that oppose Iran, such as Egypt and Israel. In an effort to strengthen its defences against any Iranian threats, Riyadh has also pursued deeper military collaboration with the U.S. Saudi Arabia, Israel, and its Gulf allies were against the JCPOA talks and are still pushing for a more stringent approach to Iran's nuclear programme. Riyadh has been seeking guarantees from the U.S. and other Western nations that any upcoming accord will take a more thorough approach to addressing its concerns.

3.3. Concerns over Afghanistan

Both the states are neighboring state, with this geographic proximity, some of the other neighboring states are getting direct as well as indirect impacts. In case of Afghanistan, the long war against terrorism has come to a grinding halt with the withdrawal of U.S. forces at large. But, the issue of convergence and divergence of interests remains the same as anywhere else. Both the states are having divergent ideas and interests for the case in point. In order to comprehend the divergence of interest, it is necessary to look back to historical glimpses, stated earlier the KSA supported the freedom fighters and the mujahideen during the cold war period.¹⁷¹ But what really happened at the end of cold war, the disintegration of USSR brought the end to Bi-polar world. With the end of this chapter, the uni-polar world with U.S. as the sole superpower came to the forefront as the torchbearer of liberal democratic norms and liberal

¹⁷⁰ Marvin G. Weinbaum, Director, Afghanistan, and Pakistan Studies, at the Middle East Institute, interviewed via WhatsApp on August 17, 2022.

¹⁷¹ Adelaide Petrov-Yoo, *Explaining America's Proxy War in Afghanistan: US Relations with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia 1979–1989* (Massachusetts: Clark University, 2019), 71.

democracy.¹⁷² The states that were aiding and supporting the freedom fighters were left over with their own preferences and choices. This happened to Pakistan as well as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia when the forces withdrew from Afghanistan. The closed nexus of the U.S. with the forces in Afghanistan to contain the Communist Russia was no more there. In this situation, the left-over states were Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which needed to take care of the same people who were the freedom fighters. With this, the terrorists of 9/11, Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 incident, and Al-Qaeda hideouts were targeted by the U.S. The war against terrorism began, and Pakistan as well as Saudi Arabia got fewer choices. The terrorist organisations had deeply penetrated the neighbouring states, such as Safe Havens in Pakistan. Similarly, with the global war on terror, all Muslim states got highlighted by the terrorists because all of the terrorists were religious followers.¹⁷³ This apathetic situation got worse with every passing day and these terrorists started getting fragmented into more and more sub-groups giving different names to those militant outfits. On one hand, this dilemma tilted the situation in favor of Iran. The Iranian state was having no involvement in the crises, and this became an advantages edge to strengthen its geo-strategic and geo-political positioning in this war-torn zone.

3.4. Iranian Concerns over Saudi led Islamic Military Alliance

The effectiveness, scope, and ultimate objective of a Saudi-led Islamic counter-terrorism alliance are all being questioned. It looks to be directed at both Iran and extremists. In the first high-level convention of this Alliance was held in Saudi Arabia and with top defense officials from more than forty Muslim countries in attendance.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Nomi Claire Lazar, *States of Emergency in Liberal Democracies* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65.

¹⁷³ Kimberly A. Powell, "Raming Islam: An analysis of US Media Coverage of Terrorism Since 9/11," *Communication Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2011): 104-112.

¹⁷⁴ Rory Miller, and Sarah Cardaun, "Multinational Security Coalitions and the Limits of Middle Power Activism in the Middle East: the Saudi Case," *International Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 6 (2020): 1519-1520.

In December 2015, Saudi Arabia launched the partnership to combat terrorism, citing the “Islamic State” (I.S.) as a sickness damaging Islam’s name. In his opening speech in Riyadh, the *de facto* prince was of the view that every member state has to play its part to eradicate the terrorism and extremism, which is the biggest risk of staining our beloved religion, Islam. According to the Saudi government, the coalition began with thirty-four countries with forty-one members. So far, no action has been taken. It was never obvious what the purpose of the military coalition was; along with its output, it would exert any influence. These problems and the Alliance’s goals remain now that the Islamic State has been largely destroyed in Iraq and Syria. Saudi officials say that it is still in progress. Washington stressed the Muslim coalition to be proactive in battling the ideology of extremists and terrorists. The Alliance is a chance for prince Muhammad Bin Salman, who has cemented power over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to prove himself in front of Muslim leaders.

Riyadh is a part of the U.S. led coalition combating ISIS, although it has played only a minor role. Instead, it is mired in a conflict in Yemen with Houthi insurgents,¹⁷⁵ which it claims are backed by Iran. Some detractors see the Alliance as a public relations stunt, comparing Saudi Arabia’s king role to a fox guarding the henhouse. It has been noted that Riyadh’s Wahhabism ideology led to aggressive radical groups such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State.¹⁷⁶ Billions of dollars have been funneled across the world to promote a conservative style of Sunni Islam that conflicts with Shi’itism.

To distance itself from its reflection as a supporter of extremism, Riyadh wishes to portray itself as a frontline fighter against terrorism and extremism. Therefore, the battle against terrorism is the primary manifesto of Muhammad bin Salman’s political agenda in illustrating himself as a modest and modern leader of a “new Saudi Arabia.” However, rights groups claim

¹⁷⁵ Sandra De Jongh and Martijn Kitzen, “The Conduct of Lawfare: The Case of the Houthi Insurgency in the Yemeni Civil War,” in *The Conduct of War in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2021), 259-264.

¹⁷⁶ Bader Al-Ibrahim, “ISIS, Wahhabism and Takfir,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015): 410-415.

that the Saudi administration remains repressive; raising the question regarding its participation in a counter-terrorism alliance is unreasonable and could go wrong. Saudi Arabia approved a new anti-terrorism decree with a comprehensive and ambiguous meaning of terrorism, adding to these worries. As per the new definition introduced by the Saudi Arabia, terrorism, which included criticism against King and Saudi monarch and other non-violent activities, is now classified as “terrorist” under the new legislation. “The definition of Saudi to the terrorism was to contain Iranian influence in the region and propagate Iran as a terrorist state.”¹⁷⁷

The crown prince’s purge to solidify his power coincides with these changes. There is also the issue of whether a varied group of countries can agree on anything let collaborate. While naming al-Qaida and I.S. as foes is easy, coalition participant countries have diverse perspectives about the different non-state actors. Despite Qatar being a founding member of the Islamic Alliance against terrorism but did not attend the inaugural ceremony. Riyadh and its Arab partners have severed relations with Doha, isolating the country over allegations of extending financial aid to terrorist organizations and relations with Tehran. Other coalition members, like Turkey, have stepped in to help Qatar.¹⁷⁸

Qatar has immense strategic significance for the United States because it has sensitive U.S.-based intelligence headquarters through which the U.S. can monitor the Middle East. The former army chief of Pakistan, Raheel Sharif, was nominated as the Alliance’s commander-in-chief. The exclusion of Iran from the Alliance and the selection of former Pakistan’s army chief as the Commander-in-Chief dealt a blow to the bilateral ties between Tehran and Islamabad.

It was also observed that the alliance created a gulf between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslim countries because the alliance included only countries with a majority Sunni population. Hence, a rift

¹⁷⁷ Mohammad Marandi, and Mehrdad Halalkhor, “America and Securitization of Iran after the Islamic Revolution 1979 till 2013; Continuation or Change,” *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2016): 89-92.

¹⁷⁸ Gregory Gause III, “Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War,” *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, No. 11 (2014): 2-6.

between Sunnis and Shiites was created in the Middle East. The coalition does not include Riyadh's Shiite archrival Tehran, which has aided the Syrian government in its war against externally sponsored terrorists and non-state outfits. Syria is not a member either. Iraq was also not invited to become part of the alliance because of its Shi'ite majority portfolio, cordial bilateral ties with Tehran, and its support for Tehran to fight against the anti-U.S. alliance. Riyadh attempted through this alliance to exert more influence in the Middle Eastern region, although it is battling for Middle East influence with Iran, notably on the soil of Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon.¹⁷⁹

3.5. Qatar Crisis and Saudi-Iranian Rivalry

Birth to the Gulf crisis emerged when a news story referenced comments allegedly attributed to Qatar's Emir Tamim, causing fury in Gulf countries. Following that, Qatar was linked to various disruptive State and non-State groups in Saudi and Emirati-owned outlets, portraying the country as a regional security danger. According to a report in Al-Arabiya, the palace of the Emir of Qatar was protected by troops deployed by Iran, and the troops belong to Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.¹⁸⁰ The media campaign led to the Gulf Cooperation Council breaking diplomatic ties with Qatar and striking unprecedented economic sanctions on the country in its thirty-six year history. While UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, suspended ties and their ambassadors withdrew from Qatar as a gesture to break the diplomatic ties for around nine months.¹⁸¹ In March 2014, this stalemate went further, with maximum pressure on its leadership and economic sanctions aimed at hitting Qatar, where it hurts more. Riyadh's aggressive move toward Doha surprised the GCC states, creating a diplomatic and political rift

¹⁷⁹ Bassel F. Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2013): 39-46.

¹⁸⁰ "Iran Revolutionary Guards 'Protecting Qatar's Sheikh Tamim inside his Palace," AL Arabiya News, (June 7, 2017).

¹⁸¹ Mahjoob Zweiri, *The 2017 The Gulf Crisis: an Introduction*, (Singapore: Springer 2021), 5.

between them. The rift began when Doha adopted an independent foreign policy, which Riyadh considered a revolt by Doha.

Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi was also dis-launched by the agitation across Egypt. The U.S. media reported that in November 2013, Egypt leaders were in contact with Qatar and gathered in Doha. Saudi King Abdullah criticised Tamim and apprised him to change foreign policies and make them consistent with the rest of the Gulf countries for regional security concerns. Riyadh further emphasised that Doha signed a treaty to remain aside and adopt a non-intervention in the affairs of the Gulf States. Upon the non-observance of the said agreement, GCC countries took punitive measures against Qatar, cut their diplomatic ties, and withdrew their ambassadors. The matter ultimately settled down in November 2014 after Qatar acceded to concessions. Some of these concessions included:

Immigration of Emirati dissidents from Qatar, Qatar ensures to act according to the GCC internal security pacts and cooperate regarding intelligence sharing and enforcement issues. The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, and Emir Tamim restored their ties and paid a visit to each country. Moreover, in September 2015, Qatar detached troops of around 1,000 in war-torn Yemen in compliance with the security agreement. *Prima facie*, the ties between Qatar and the GCC have been restored.

The gulf between Qatar and KSA further escalated by role of U.S.¹⁸² U.S. President Obama adopted policies to have equally cordial ties with all Gulf countries. On the contrary, Trump's policies excluded Qatar and focused more on the Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Jared Kushner was appointed Trump Advisor to the Middle East during the Trump administration. During his tenure, Jared augmented his relations with UAE and KSA. The opinions of these two key allies were considered in every crucial matter regarding the Middle East.

¹⁸² Mohammad Asif, "Growth and Sustainability Trends in the Buildings Sector in the GCC Region with Particular Reference to the KSA and UAE," *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, No. 55 (2016): 1267-1273.

The economic pressure and damage in monetary terms incurred by Qatar because of its besieged neighbours' inability to access their land, maritime, or aerial areas were only temporary. They were rapidly alleviated when several countries came to its aid. Compared to Qatar's financial reserves, the additional expenditures of employing long air and naval routes are minimal. Qatar's political-economic relationships with neighbouring and far-flung countries, including major ones like Iran, Turkey, and India, surpass the short-term expenses of paying high for air transport fuel and other expenditures related to the blockade. Furthermore, they bolstered the country's strategic position.

Saudi Arabia demanded thirteen points from Qatar, and one of them was to shut down its media network, Al Jazeera. Qatar must cut ties with the Al-Alkhwa group and halt its aid to al-Nusra in Syria. Lastly, Qatar was ordered to cut off bilateral ties with Iran, despite its dependence on the vast gas fields it shares with Iran, which provide nearly all of Qatar's revenue. It also had to pay reparation for the nuisance and agree to frequent surveillance for the next ten years to ensure it followed the terms. Qatar would have to identify itself with Saudi Arabia and its supporters "militarily, politically, socially, and commercially, as well as financially." This would entail less independence in international policy and domestic control.¹⁸³

As a result, the Saudis turned their rage on Qatar, assuming they would win easily. It was evident that Doha and Riyadh both were involved in financially supporting the al-Nusra, despite knowing its affiliation with al-Qaida, because it was battling against Bashar's regime in Syria, which Iran backed. Recently a divergence of interest between Doha and Riyadh was on whether or not to support Islamist Organisations. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was joined by the United Arab Emirates to condemn Qatar severely and tried to isolate it mainly from the Gulf region and generally from the international arena. Saudi Arabia tried to pressure Qatar

¹⁸³ Abdul Rezak Bilgin, "Relations Between Qatar and Saudi Arabia After the Arab Spring," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2018): 113-134.

through the OPEC forum by fluctuating the oil prices, which in return inflicted an irreparable loss to Saudi individuals and government revenue than Qatar.¹⁸⁴

We must look at economic data to understand the fundamental reasons for the disagreement between Qataris and Saudis. The foreign investment of Qatar, along with the foreign reserves, is high, while Saudi kings have to pay a considerable amount for public debt servicing, which dragged 2018 Saudi Arabia into default. The massive amount of Saudi money was spent on the terrorist organization running in different areas, for instance, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. The Saudi funding did not bear any fruit and was defeated by the Iran-Russia-Syria nexus at every front of proxy war in the Middle East.

3.6. Futuristic Approach of Saudi Arabia

In the wake of the international crises of the oil and decline of the value of currency of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Prince namely Muhammad Bin Salman has made a pledge for his own way of dealing things. His popular name has been echoed as “MBS” which is Muhammad Bin Salman. He has planned for a new vision that is known as “Vision-2030”.¹⁸⁵ The main aim and purpose of this project and its launching can be linked with the changing trend in the global political dynamics as well as the issues and challenges that are linked with the economic opportunities and economic threats to Saudi Arabia. Vision 2030 is more an orientation of the cultural ostentation and cultural orientation of MBS. He has observed that the precarious situation in petrol and industries may become more prone to hazards and threats with the changing global dynamics. There was a need of a vibrant society to bear away the threshold of this precarious situation. MBS has featured “Vision 2030” - a comprehensive programme to introduce reforms to modernize the society and boost economy of the Saudi of reform that

¹⁸⁴ Kristin Diwan, “Clerical Associations in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates: Soft Power Competition in Islamic Politics,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 4 (2021): 955-961.

¹⁸⁵ Daniel Moshashai, et. al, “Saudi Arabia Plans for its Economic Future: Vision 2030, the National Transformation Plan and Saudi Fiscal Reform,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2020): 399-400.

aimed to create a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and a culture of ambition within the Kingdom.¹⁸⁶

On a similar account, there is a need to look into the implicit and explicit dimensions of the policies furthered by Muhammad Bin Salman. On one hand, the Kingdom is staying strictly towards the ideological premises of the sect based upon Wahabism after Salafiism. Next, the trend that this vision 2030 puts forward can be an eye-opener for all and sundry. As it is the mirror reflection of western values and culture, a question arises here that the KSA needs to rethink over the traditional and conventional modes of living of the cultural and historical roots of its ancestors or need to redefine its goals and visions in such a way that this becomes the amalgamation of both cultures. In such a situation. The head of the state must investigate the process of changes that can take place as a ripple effect of this vision. Moreover, the adaptability of these new and modern means is coming on the stake of the old means, or they are going to confluence each other or amalgamate into one for acculturation of the norms, values, culture, and traditions. The outcome of Vision 2030 might impact the Middle East's power dynamics and have a substantial impact on the United States' continuing conflict with Iran. Saudi Arabia may serve as a model for other Middle Eastern countries grappling with issues like social constraints, economic limitations, and government corruption if Vision 2030 is successful in executing Western values and cultivating a balanced, prosperous economy in addition to a more open society that welcomes foreigners.

The agenda and goal of this vision rests with the aspects of more and more foreign direct investment, which would become helpful in enhancing the economic growth. The element of privatization is also linked with this factor that the ownership to individuals and private companies can enhance and develop confidence to the international investors to go for more

¹⁸⁶ Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, Express Tribune Vision 2030: how far has Saudi Arabia come?, December 26, 2022. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2392846/vision-2030-how-far-has-saudi-arabia-come>

investments in the form of trade and commerce, this will become helpful in reducing the reliance upon oil related substances.¹⁸⁷

Economically speaking, Vision 2030's failure would suggest that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has difficulty diversifying its economy and lessening its reliance on oil for prosperity. Saudi Arabia may become a weaker and less effective ally in opposing the Islamic Republic of Iran given the unstable nature of oil prices and the slow but noticeable tendency among developed countries to reduce their dependency on oil. Together, the Gulf States—Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—produce around 30% of the world's oil and have 57% of the world's reserves of crude oil, or seven hundred fifteen billion barrels. Iran is home to over 11.1% of the world's oil reserves (one hundred thirty two billion barrels) and 15.3% of the world's natural gas reserves (970.8 trillion cubic feet) in the region.¹⁸⁸

Furthermore, the historical confrontation of Iran with the neighboring states cannot be ignored, as in the case of its oil refineries and tankers issues. Some of the confrontations of the past link with the strategic positioning in three straits. The control and command in Strait of Hormuz and other two chokepoints have remained the apple of discord between Iran and her adversaries. It has been witnessed that the hegemony and control of these straits have remained as the core reason of conflict and confrontation. Even, during the times of Shah, the dispute between the Iranian authorities with that of the United Arab Emirates reflect the same fact that these geo-strategic spots have created trouble in the region.¹⁸⁹

From April 2004 onwards, the U.S. Navy forces started attacking the bombers found in the vicinities of the oil shipping factories. Such sort of threat has emerged in history as well, where the major oil supply routes have gotten threatened from the oppositional forces as well as

¹⁸⁷ Hilal Khashan, "Saudi Arabia's Flawed "Vision 2030"," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2017), 1.

¹⁸⁸ "Statistical Review of World Energy," *BP*, June, 2005.

¹⁸⁹ B. ozturk, R. ozkan, "The Proceedings of the Symposium on the Straits used for International Navigation," *Turkish Marine Research Foundation*, (Istanbul, Turkey, 2002. Publication Number: 11), 57.

opponents. In the same vein, similar types of threats have come to surface in Asia against one of the most significant chokepoints, which is the Strait of Malacca. So, following the same, it can be stated that the free navigation mechanism needs these two various options, such as: One fear is that a non-governmental organisation such as al-Qaeda would plan to use weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) or dirty bombs, or even suicide attacks by divers or small ships, to disrupt trade in the Strait. The potential for a neighbouring state to endanger the Strait's transit by amassing military might be another cause for concern. However, for the foreseeable future, it is anticipated that the U.S. Navy's substantial naval supremacy and presence in the Persian Gulf would deter any nation with naval capabilities from initiating a large-scale conventional attack on ships in the Persian Gulf. As of right now, there isn't a clearly visible burgeoning naval force that has the ability and the will to contest America's duty to defend the Strait of Hormuz. In June 2004, there was an incident at Abu Musa Island where an Iranian fishing vessel was fired upon by the UAE navy.¹⁹⁰

3.7. Politics over OPEC Policies

Iran's ties with its neighbours in the Arabian Peninsula changed with the arrival of the Khomeini period. Nonetheless, these relationships within the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) were mostly unaltered from the Shah's time. Due to the intensifying conflict between Iran and Iraq, ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as other Arab members of OPEC have been very strained since the summer of 1987.¹⁹¹ The two countries compete to see who can dominate the Gulf. Iran says that its military strength during the time of the Shah gives it the right to be in charge. Because of its importance in OPEC in the 1970s, Saudi Arabia has been trying to take over the region. Under the Shah, Iran made a stronger case that it was the strongest military power in the region. But Khomeini has made it

¹⁹⁰ Dagobert Brito, Amy Myers Jaffe, "Reducing vulnerability of the Strait of Hormuz," *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran* (2005), 210.

¹⁹¹ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 56.

hard for Iran to back up its claim. From the point of view of oil power, In the 1970s, Saudi Arabia's claims to Gulf dominance were more convincing. The legitimacy of Saudi Arabia's claim to leadership in the region was similarly murky in the 1980s, when the world experienced a prolonged oil glut. In resource-rich states like Saudi Arabia and Iran, the state is viewed as the provider of essential social and economic goods, and this view informs both the structure of power and the institutions of governance.¹⁹²

Saudi Arabia has spent a lot of time and energy since the Iranian revolution trying to strike a balance between its relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran, its ambitions to be the head of OPEC, and its status as the most powerful country in the Gulf. There is general agreement that, of all the OPEC members, Saudi Arabia is the most powerful.¹⁹³ This is because of the size of its proven oil reserves, its willingness to be a 'swing producer,' and its long-term efforts to find ways for OPEC and non-OPEC states to work together to control production and keep prices stable. In the 1980s, the leadership of OPEC became less important, but a strong oil market in the 1990s makes it likely that it will become more important again. This conflict is still not over. Saudi Arabia and Iran have been thinking about security issues since the late 1980s.

Two separate aspects of Iran's behaviour under the Khomeini dictatorship seem to be emerging: an "economic Iran" that participates in OPEC and a "political Iran" that functions outside of the organisation. Iran exhibits a practical attitude and is prepared to work with other oil-producing nations on economic issues. Iran continues to fight despite being a member of OPEC, which also includes Iraq, with whom it has been at war since September 1980, and a few Gulf governments that have aided Iraq in this struggle. The conflict itself further

¹⁹² Emma Borden and Suzzane Maloney, "The Political Implications of Transforming Saudi and Iranian Oil Economies," *Brookings*, June 16, 2016.

¹⁹³ Cooper, *The Oil Kings*, 129.

exacerbates tensions between the Gulf oil states. Iraq and Iran both want output caps that are at least as high as each other's.

Iran had to argue for more production because it had to pay for a war. It also broke production limits and lowered prices throughout the 1980s to meet its ever-growing need for hard currency. In the 1980s, OPEC's production quotas didn't work because Iran was so aggressive about prices and production.¹⁹⁴ It's important to remember that other oil states have been doing a lot to copy Iran's aggressive behaviour. As a result of all of these actions and the rise in production in countries outside of OPEC, OPEC was unable to raise prices.

The Gulf is a very dangerous place because the war is getting worse, there is still too much oil, and the Khomeini regime's political speeches are very harsh. Worrying is that neither superpower can change how things are going. Maintaining a balanced relationship with Iran is challenging for Saudi Arabia because of Iran's unwillingness to end the conflict or lessen political tensions. As a result, it is anticipated that OPEC meetings would grow increasingly heated. The ongoing oil glut and growing hostilities inside OPEC may lead to the organization's breakup, which would be bad news for all of its participants.

Discussing the foundational basis of the topic in the previous chapter, this research has focused on the engagement mechanism and the engagement policies of both states. It has been observed that these states have utilised all available means to engage in proxy wars within the Middle Eastern Region. Undoubtedly, the states have made inroads through their own cult and tilt of religious affiliations. The sectarian-based affinities have played their part in unfolding the proxy wars in the entire region. The wars in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon have exemplified the thing that the sectarian divide can give air to the nature of conflict and confrontation. Though the rise of the Arab Spring is not specifically linked with the sectarian fault lines, yet the regime change agenda has found its manifestation and visible impact through the sectarian divisions.

¹⁹⁴ Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 59.

All the discussed wars and confrontations have commonalities in the means and sources, as they are evolving in a similar pattern, where the role of regional actors and extra-regional actors is coming into play in a similar fashion. This detailed background of the issue shows that Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalry was not locked in different ideologies, but they both are prisoners of history, and despite all optimal solutions and available platforms, they are unable to work together amicably. Further, their animosity impacts the other Muslim countries.

Adding that the epicentre of the disenfranchisement within the conflict of Bahrain makes strong sense of the real nature of politics. Contrary to that, peace negotiations and diplomatic ventures in resolving the issue of Palestine through peaceful settlement and negotiation are commendable jobs. But this life is as short as a thin line, where the dilemma in the next state, namely Afghanistan, gives their strategic positioning at divergent interests. The series of divergences seem to dominate the overall state-level relations; may it be the Iran nuclear deal, the Qatar crisis, or the alliances of the military force, all are more diverging aspects in their entirety. At the end of this chapter, Vision 2030 has been pointed out, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has furthered its pragmatic approach at the regional level. It is commonly perceived by the public that Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry has a sectarian root; in fact, their rivalry has multiple dimensions.

Causes of Saudi-Iranian Rivalry

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran can be viewed through the lens of Neo-Classical Realism as a complex interaction between internal, systemic, and external variables. Neo-Classical Realism holds that domestic variables like leadership perceptions, state capabilities, and social dynamics also influence how nations behave when it comes to foreign policy, even though systemic issues like the balance of power in the international system are crucial. It is commonly perceived by the public that Saudi Arabia Iran rivalry has sectarian root, in fact their rivalry has multiple dimensions. The rational of this is to discuss the causes of their rivalry.

Systemic Variable: Competition for Regional Hegemony

Bilateral and international conflicts have been dominated by power politics. Similar to the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran, where power politics play a significant role. Power politics holds that the unequal distribution of resources and capacities is the root cause of war and conflict. Whether in a bilateral or multilateral disagreement, states seek comparative advantages over other countries in order to increase their resources and capabilities. This pursuit of relative profits necessitates the utilization of all available instruments, resources, and skills. States utilize economics, ideology, religion, diplomacy, institutions, and public opinion for the sole goal of exercising power. Two or more powers contend for regional hegemony in a regional environment. For this reason, states around the area create “Cold War” fronts for “Power Struggle.”¹⁹⁵

Several scholars believe that Saudi-Iran have defensive approaches, in this context the security dilemma has led both countries towards competition and rivalry to enhance their capabilities to address their security concerns.¹⁹⁶ Both states need to maintain their sphere of influence across the middle eastern regional countries. Kenneth waltz believes that states defensive approach aims to maximization of power and to enhance its capabilities by building up arms and advance military equipment to counter the rival country.¹⁹⁷ The realist approach prescribe that both states to maintain their defensive policies by acquiring military capabilities to balance the region and their presence within the middle eastern region. Though Iran and Saudi Arabia are not directly engaged in conflict, they are indirectly involved in a number of regional nations,

¹⁹⁵ Simo, Laakkonen, et. al, “The Cold War and Environmental History: Complementary Fields,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2016): 380-384.

¹⁹⁶ Azeem Gul, Rizwana Karim Abbasi, and Syed Arslan Haider, “Iran and Saudi Arabia’s Strategic Rivalry and the Middle Eastern Security: An Assessment,” *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2021): 17-19.

¹⁹⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1993): 44-46.

including Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Qatar.¹⁹⁸ The ultimate objective is regional hegemony and relative gains, which is a notion of power politics.¹⁹⁹ In the confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Revolution or religious differences are not the exclusive nor decisive reason. Not even after the Islamic Revolution does the rift begin (1979).

After the Islamic Revolution, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran deteriorated steadily. Saudi Arabia, which viewed itself as the head of the Muslim World, felt insecure as a result of the revolutionary leader's pledge to propagate revolutionary ideas. In the immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, Saddam's Iraq declared war on Iran. Saudi Arabia provided Saddam with Twenty-five billion dollars in financial assistance and urged other Arab nations like as Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates to follow suit. The 1987 Hajj incident, in which over four hundred people were murdered as a consequence of a fight between Shi'ite pilgrims and Saudi security forces, further strained ties.²⁰⁰ Two-thirds of the four hundred pilgrims slain were Iranian nationals. The protests in front of the Saudi embassy in Tehran resulted in the death of one Saudi diplomat due to injuries. As a result, diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were severed. Saudi Arabia prohibits Iranians from receiving visas to fulfil the Hajj duty. Since then, ties between the two nations have become heated, particularly in the 2000s when both countries fought each other on several battlegrounds around the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia and Iran engage in direct conflict rather than through intermediaries and partners. Iran, Russia, and non-state allies such as Hezbollah Lebanon support Bashar al-Assad, but Saudi Arabia and the United States backs Syrian opposition organizations. Houthis rose to

¹⁹⁸ Vrushal T. Ghoble, "Saudi Arabia–Iran Contention and the Role of Foreign Actors," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2019): 47-50.

¹⁹⁹ Hassan Ahmadian and Payam Mohseni, "From Detente to Containment: The Emergence of Iran's New Saudi Strategy," *International Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (2021): 790-793.

²⁰⁰ Gwenn Okruhlik, "Saudi Arabian-Iranian Relations: External Rapprochement and Internal Consolidation," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2003): 119-121.

power in Yemen by toppling a pro-Saudi administration. As a result, the Saudi king declared war on Yemen and accused the Houthis of being Iranian agents. On September 14, 2019, Houthi militants assaulted a Saudi Aramco oil facility.²⁰¹ The Saudi administration assigned guilt to Iran, although Iran denied the charges. As a response to Saudi Arabia's continued engagement in Yemen, the Houthis have claimed responsibility for these assaults.²⁰² Iran has greatly strengthened its influence in post-Saddam Iraq, which Saudi Arabia views as a grave threat because Iraq is a buffer state between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Following the murder of General Qasem Soleimani, Iran has attacked U.S. outposts. This demonstrates that Iran has the potential to strike Saudi Arabia in the event of an escalation, as it already has the access and capability to attack Iraq. Moreover, both seek to exert their political influence over Iraq. Similar circumstances exist in Bahrain, where both nations back opposite parties. The Saudis back the Bahraini government, which has maintained a strong stance towards opposition parties such as the Wifaq party. The majority of these opposition organizations in Bahrain are Shi'ite. The difficulty in Bahrain is that the majority of the population is Shiite, yet Sunnis control the government. Therefore, the government pursues severe policies targeting the largely Shiite populace. Nearly eighty-five percent of Bahrain's population is Shia and is allegedly sponsored by Iran. In conclusion, it is true that Iran and Saudi Arabia are constantly on opposite sides. Saudi Arabia opposes Iran wherever it goes, and vice versa. Whether domestic turmoil or international activities, this is the essence of the war between the two nations. Saudi-Iran relations are structured by anarchy, states are not reliable to global politics, they are not friends or foe, states reveal themselves as foe only when it has security concerns towards rival country.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski, "The Tactics and Strategic Consequences of the Attack on Oil Installations in Saudi Arabia," *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych* (2019), 54.

²⁰² Jeremy M. Sharp and Ida A. Brudnick, "Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention," *Congressional Research Review* (2015).

²⁰³ John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. ed. by Timothy Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 78.

Involvement in Internal matters

The governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran blame each other for internal turmoil. Due to the presence of religious minorities, both nations confront security challenges. The majority of Arabs reside in the Iranian province of Khuzestan, which borders Iraq and is populated primarily by Arabs. It is significant to note that the majority of Iranian Arabs are Shi'ites, yet they desire to keep their national identity as Arabs. There are also separatist elements, like the Al-Ahvaziya organisation, which Iran believes is backed by Saudis and Western supporters. Moreover, according to the Iranian government, the violent separatist Baloch groups known as Jundullah and Jaish-ul-Adl are also sponsored and funded by Saudi Arabia, as both ideologies are predominately Wahabi. Therefore, the Iranian government claims that Saudi Arabia and its supporters are responsible for the country's internal turmoil.²⁰⁴ Saudi Arabia asserts that Iran discriminates against its Sunni people. Similarly, Iran asserts that Shiite residents in the eastern portion of Saudi Arabia, Qatif, and other locations are abused by Saudi authorities. The Saudi government believes that this Shiite community is supported by Iran in order to cause turmoil inside the kingdom; hence, Shiites residing in Qatif and other cities of Saudi Arabia have endured even more hardships after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. As a result, social unrest broke out in Qatif and other locations, ultimately leading to Shiite activists being persecuted by Saudi security forces. The 2011 Arab Spring demonstrations significantly aggravated the situation in Saudi Arabia. However, the most contentious and overt instance of discrimination against the Shiite minority was the 2011 arrest of Shiite leader Nimr al-Nimr, who had pushed his group, Hezbollah Al-Hejaz, to participate in a nonviolent demonstration against Shiite prejudice. Later on January 2, 2016, the Saudi authorities killed Al Nimr.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, "Sectarianization: Mapping the new politics of the Middle East," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2017): 10-13.

²⁰⁵ "Freedom in the World 2017-Saudi Arabia," *Freedom House*, April 15, 2017.

As a result, protesters attacked the Saudi embassy in Tehran, and diplomatic relations between the two nations were severed once more. Another outbreak of Qatif Unrest erupted in 2017 and is ongoing between the Saudi government and Shiite parties such as Hezbollah Al-Hejaz. Iran therefore accuses Saudi Arabia of mistreating its Shiite community. Evidently, Iran and Saudi Arabia engage in a blame game even for domestic instability. Both countries impose restrictions on members of the opposing sect, while other groups like as Al-Qaeda exploit the situation. It indicates that it is not required for both countries to be accountable for each other's domestic issues, as terrorist groups also commit assaults against both nations.

Threat Perception

Beside the power struggle and regional hegemony another significant source of competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran is to grapple the menace of the security threat. In 1950s, John. H. Herz first introduced the concept of security dilemma. In the Middle Eastern region, the inadvertently, a cycle of power buildup based on mutual mistrust is established, in which 'no one can ever feel completely secure.' Iran's nuclear program is a factor that exacerbates the current security issue between Saudi Arabia and Iran, for instance, pursuing fast military modernization. WikiLeaks diplomatic cables reveal the Saudi's threat perception of the Iranian nuclear program,²⁰⁶ which it insists is used solely for peaceful reasons. According to a document that got a lot of attention around the world, in April 2008, General David Petraeus, and Ryan Crocker, American military commander in the Middle East and the U.S. ambassador to Iraq respectively met with senior officials of Saudi Arabia. In that meeting, the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., Adel Al-Jubeir said, 'he [King Abdullah] told you to cut off the head of the snake.' he further enunciated that Saudi strategic priority is to contain the Iranian influence in the Iraq with the help of U.S." The Iranian nuclear program is viewed as a severe

²⁰⁶ Peter Salisbury, "Yemen and the Saudi-Iranian 'Cold War'," *Research Paper, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. 11 (2015)81.

threat that must be resisted by Saudi Arabia, albeit public and elite opinion is not always aligned. Other Iranian threats, though, are deemed more serious. The Saudi administration sees any involvement in the Arab Peninsula as a greater threat since it affects the Kingdom's domestic security and thus the state in its existing form, led by the Al Saud. A prospective Iranian nuclear weapon, on the other hand, does not constitute an existential threat to the Kingdom.²⁰⁷ The security threat led both states Saudi Arabia and Iran to modernize their military program. The Iranian justified its military program because of the security problem in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, both countries have been modernising their military forces quickly, Iranian primarily justified its modernization due to U.S. threat. While the Saudi justification to modernize the military revolves around Iran.²⁰⁸ In perspective of the Saudi-Iranian conflict is both regime has been facing internal security threats which considered as threat to the regime, therefore, to safe their own regime both states move their domestic insecurity to the foreign level so that they may enjoy a certain level of insecurity at foreign level and safe regime. In this situation of this "insecurity dilemma," Saudi Arabia and Iran have become more involved in regional conflicts abroad in order to protect the security of their regimes at home.

Domestic factor: Sectarian Strife/ Ideological Conflict

In the geopolitics of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iran are rivals. The long-standing Arab-Ajam (non-Arab) divide, which stems from historical cultural and ethnic conflicts between Arabs and Persians, has a significant impact on the Saudi-Iran rivalry. Despite its historical ethnic roots, this division has deep theological and political ramifications and plays a vital role in contemporary Middle Eastern affairs. Iran's Shia Islam and Persian identity stand in stark contrast to Saudi Arabia's Arab identity and Sunni Islam. This divide feeds conflicting

²⁰⁷ "Power Struggle in the Gulf: An Assessment of the Saudi Threat Perception Towards Iran's Nuclear Program," *IFAIR*, March 25, 2012.

²⁰⁸ "2010 Arab Public Opinion Poll: Results of Arab Opinion Survey Conducted June 29-July 20, 2010," *Brookings Institution*, August 5, 2010.

ideologies, with Iran attempting to increase its power by assisting Shia populations and opposing what it perceives to be Arab governments with Western allegiances, while Saudi Arabia frequently positions itself as the defender of Arab culture and Sunni Islam.

People have argued, especially before the Arab Spring, that Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East has little to do with its ideas. Ali Fayad, the head of a Hezbollah-affiliated think tank in Lebanon called the Consultative Centre for Strategic and Documentation Studies, said that 'The Palestinian cause and resisting Washington's hegemonic plans in the region are at the core of Iran's foreign policy. and that "the two issues are not particularly Shia in nature.'" In fact, the majority of Sunni Arabs have placed the blame on both, claims Fayad. Iran's foreign policy is Sunni in this way. We can infer from this that the Islamic Republic's foreign policy has transcended the sectarian issue. Shia politics, however, have started to predominate Iran's foreign policy discourse and actions ever since a Shia-led government was established in Iraq. This is particularly true now that Syria and Bahrain have gained in visibility as a result of the Arab Spring. It is true that the Saudi government frequently viewed Iran's attempts to expand its influence in the Arab world—in Iraq, Lebanon, among Palestinians, and in Arab public opinion in general—through the lens of the balance of power politics, not sectarian identities, and disliked using the sectarian card in previous Middle East crises. But three things that happened recently seem to have changed this view. The first is for a Shia-led central government to be set up in Baghdad that works closely with Tehran. The second is that small but persistent protests by the Shia minority in Saudi Arabia have led to unrest inside the country. Morgan Byrne-Diakun believes that pundits and policymakers continue to use the word "sectarianism" to describe the ongoing tensions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in the Middle East.²⁰⁹ It is easy to assume that Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia are at odds simply because their populations adhere to different sects of Islam; however, there are legitimate

²⁰⁹ Morgan Byrne-Diakun, "Iran v. Saudi Arabia: Sectarianism, Realism, and Foreign Policy in the Gulf," *George Town Security Studies Review*, 1. (February 29, 2016)

historical and contemporary grievances between these groups. Given the complexities of the Middle East, this explanation may seem appealing, but in reality, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is motivated by much more pragmatic concerns about national security.

It's the beginning of a sectarian civil war in Syria, with both sides appealing for assistance from other groups for the same reason. Since the start of the Arab uprisings, it appears that Saudi Arabia has "made a deliberate decision to increase the relevance of the Sunni-Shia divide, to bolster funding for their allied powers and to disconnect Iran and its partners in the Arab world," referring to the role of sectarian identity in Saudi foreign policy. There are many factors at play in the competition with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, including the two countries' respective political identities. In contrast to Saudi Arabia, whose legitimacy is grounded in their care of Islam's two holiest sites, dynastic privilege, and a close relationship with the U.S., Iran's ruling philosophy since the Islamic Revolution has been anti-monarchical, populist, and quasi-democratic and tries to draw its ruling authority from the position of the Supreme Leader and the Shi'ite clerical elite.²¹⁰ When it comes down to it, the ideological politics of Saudi Arabia and Iran's rivalry "gives both sides the means to galvanise more material and non-material resources, to give their policies more legitimacy, to get more individuals to back them, and to expand the scope of their policies." The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has evolved over time. Understanding the dynamics of their past interactions is helpful for understanding their current behaviour. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia consider themselves to be the quintessential Islamic states. Based on this claim, they have always competed for regional and global power in the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia, which follows Sunni Islam, has always tried to influence Sunni Muslims. On the other hand, Iran, which follows Shi'ite Islam, has a huge following among Shi'ite Muslims all over the world. Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain are mostly made up of Shi'i Muslims, and there are also large Shi'i populations in Lebanon, Yemen, and

²¹⁰ Banafsheh, *Friends or Foes?*, 22.

Kuwait. Most of the other states in the Middle East are mostly made up of Sunni Muslims. About 37-40 percent of the world's Shi'ite people live in Iran, and they make up 90-95 percent of the country's total population.²¹¹

Since the revolution in 1979, Iran has been trying to get the Shi'ite people of the Middle East to rise up against their monarchical rulers. 'Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was Iran's first supreme leader, helped Shi'ite militias and parties outside of Iran.' Furthermore, Saudi Arabia formed its own alliances, the vast majority of which are Sunni in nature. These include the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism (IMCT) and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Counter in addition, Saudi Arabia forged its own Sunni-dominated alliances. Both the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition and the Gulf Cooperation Council fall into this category, coalition Against Terrorism. Iran was kept out of both of these alliances on purpose.

Leadership Choices

The ascent of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) in Saudi Arabia signalled a dramatic change in the country's strategic aims and leadership style. With an aggressive foreign policy, MBS has sought to oppose Iranian dominance in the Middle East. His moves to confront forces backed by Iran in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, boycott Qatar, and launch a military intervention in Yemen are indicative of a more assertive posture. The Vision 2030 plan is one of MBS's internal reforms that aims to modernise Saudi Arabia's economy and lessen its reliance on oil. To bolster support within the country and deflect attention from any possible domestic unrest, these measures also need the continuation of a strong patriotic and anti-Iranian discourse. This entwining of aggressive foreign policy with home reform is a prime example of how internal factors influence leadership decisions under neo-classical realism.

The government of Iran has also strengthened its internal legitimacy through its foreign

²¹¹ Mateen Haider, Political and Foreign Analyst/Journalist at GTV, interviewed via WhatsApp on December 11, 2022.

policies. Iran has been presented by the Revolutionary Guards and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the leader of resistance against Saudi and Western hegemony, as well as the protector of Shiite Muslims. Iran has both geopolitical and ideological reasons for backing proxy organisations in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. During his presidency, President Hassan Rouhani demonstrated how internal and foreign politics interact. In an attempt to ease domestic economic strain, Rouhani made the pragmatic decision to lessen economic sanctions through the 2015 nuclear accord (JCPOA). But President Trump's enforcement of maximum pressure sanctions and the U.S. exit from the accord forced Iran to adopt more conservative policies, illustrating how outside influences may influence internal decisions and leadership styles.

Neo-classical realism holds that the Saudi-Iranian competition is significantly impacted by the leadership decisions that are based on local political circumstances rather than being the result of systemic anarchy. While responding to the possibilities and challenges provided by the international system, leaders in both nations utilise foreign policy to bolster their positions at home. Understanding this interaction is essential to appreciating the longevity and fervour of the Saudi-Iranian conflict.

Conclusively, the categorical description of the Saudi-Iranian conflict has been mentioned for clarity of the concepts, and later on, the underlying causes of the conflict and confrontation between the two states have also been mentioned, respectively, for the sake of developing a sound understanding about the focused dimensions in the above-mentioned study. The underlying causes of Saudi-Iranian rivalry can be traced in the form of deeply rooted foundations.

Figure-4 : Causes of Saudi-Iranian Rivalry



It seems that the power tussle and fight against each other are not coming to a grinding halt. Both the states are flexing their muscles at regional level, and they are having an implicit design of getting dominancy in the political contests of the Middle Eastern region. The external political turmoil and the internal nature of this conflict both have their own types of repercussions, which have altered the entire political nature of the region as a whole. The hegemonic designs of the state have brought a quagmire to the already dilapidating political situation. The crisis after crisis makes it clear that these states are not only exerting pressure in the regional contexts but also these states are making inroads in the internal affairs of the other states as well. The interference has created a troublesome situation as discussed in the chapter. This has resulted in the threat perception where the activities of one state are having a direct threat to the activities of the other state. Such a dilemma is worsening the security perception level, proving the fact that these interactions of the states have influential role to play in the altercation of the political nature of the Middle Eastern Region. For this reason, both Riyadh and Tehran are dependent on third party to pacify the balance in the region. They are somehow attached their concerns with other state's partnership with their rivalry role. Pakistan, in this regard, appears an actor inked with both poles and the most affected and concerned country. Besides Pakistan Bahrain and Iraq has also played a crucial role to act as bridge between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Recently, China has played a role of peace broker between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

PART II

SAUDI ARABIA-IRAN RIVALRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

CHAPTER FOUR

SAUDI ARABIA-IRAN RIVALRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

This research chapter shed light on the implications of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry for Pakistan. Given the significant role both Saudi Arabia and Iran play as major stakeholders in the Middle Eastern region, Pakistan's interests in this context are quite apparent. With Saudi Arabia, Pakistan shares deep-rooted historical, economic, and military ties; Saudi Arabia has been a major economic partner and source of energy for Pakistan, as well as a significant destination for Pakistani workers who send home valuable remittances. Pakistan also values its military and security cooperation with Saudi Arabia, which enhances its strategic presence in the Gulf region. On the other hand, Iran is Pakistan's neighboring country, sharing a long border and cultural and economic connections. Driven by economic incentives and the need to stave off financial collapse, Pakistan's goals and interests can heavily influence its foreign policy decisions. To mitigate domestic sectarian divides and leverage foreign direct investments effectively, Pakistan is compelled to adopt a balancing role in the ongoing Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Moreover, Pakistan's interests with respect to both these regional powers are deeply interwoven with its broader foreign policy orientation. The failure to achieve desired national interest outcome results in various implications.

Having said that, the implications can be framed into two dimensions. The first phase is linked with the domestic implications for Pakistan. In this category, the economic dependency of Pakistan comes to the fore as the most significant implication at the domestic level. Secondly, the sectarian conflict and its rise in the form of militarism and extremism have been highlighted. Thirdly, the role of Saudi Arabia as well as Iran has been argued in the form of the involvement

of both states in the domestic affairs of Pakistan. Fourthly, the challenging contours of security measures have been mentioned, and lastly, Pakistan's quest for securing the energy sector and energy security has been explored. In the second category, the implications for Pakistan at the global level have been analyzed. This part includes the nexus of Iran and India resulting in a security challenge for Pakistan, the ties of India with Saudi Arabia with its repercussions for Pakistan, and the Afghan Ordeal from distrust to apprehension, which have been explained in detail for determining the impact and influence on Pakistan's foreign policy. The implications for Pakistan have been discussed comprehensively, keeping in view the developments at the state level, regional level, as well as global level. Furthermore, the geostrategic positioning of Pakistan has been vividly identified in the aftermath of the changing political dynamics at the international level because of the effective policy orientations of the regional powers and extra-regional powers. Pakistan seems to be fighting for her influential position in the political doldrums of the Middle Eastern region.

4.1 Implications for Pakistan

Saudi Arabia-Iran Rivalry: Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan's foreign policy options revolve around friendly relations with all Muslim states across the globe. Throughout the history of Pakistan, the foreign policy goals have been set in such a framework that the maintenance of friendly relations with all Muslim countries remains intact in policymaking, policy formulation, and policy implementation.

The initiation of these foreign policy goals was not only the need for time but the need for the state to be the Islamic Republic. In this regard, the behaviour of external policy is stated "the State shall endeavour to preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic unity," in Article forty of the written constitution.²¹²

²¹² Foreign Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, <https://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-policy-2/>

As the independent state came into being in 1947, the main concern remained attached to the formulation of the constitution. The early challenges aside, focussing on building friendly ties with all the Muslim states in the international arena remained on the top priority list. The objective of foreign policy is confronted with formidable challenges, as it is an uphill task to accomplish the country's external policy goals. To this universal role, the challenges for achieving the foreign policy objectives of Pakistan were not an exception. Therefore, closer relations with Muslim states passed through a turbulent face, such as the divergent interests of various factions increasing vulnerabilities rather than strengthening ties. The unfolding of various levels of conflict and confrontation among the states is one of the reasons for this challenge faced by Pakistan to deal with the notion of building friendly ties with the states; wars such as the Iran-Iraq War, the Syrian conflict, and the Yemen crisis only added injury to insult in the wake of political turmoil in the Arab Muslim world.²¹³ Following such unintended wars, conflicts, and confrontation, the best suitable policy had been doing nothing and staying neutral, where the tilt at any side could have catastrophic outcomes in the long run. Similarly, in the wake of Saudi-Iranian rivalry, the options for Pakistan's foreign policy makers have been limited and constrained by the prospect of changing internal and external political dynamics. Saudi-Iranian rivalry aside, the need of the hour is to look into the conditionality through which Pakistan looks towards both the states. In the case of Iran, the state has a border linkage with Pakistan being its neighbour. It has been noticed that whenever Pakistan finds itself troublesome having financial constraints, KSA takes a step forward with tremendous economic assistance for Pakistan.²¹⁴

Furthermore, the enormous numbers of Pakistani immigrants living in KSA who are significant contributors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Pakistan through investing money are

²¹³ Maryam Nazir, "Post 9/11 Geopolitics of the Middle East and Pakistan-Iran Bilateral Relations," *Policy*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2017): 45-50.

²¹⁴ Marvin G. Weinbaum and Abdullah B. Khurram, "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: Deference, Dependence, and Deterrence," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (2014): 220-225.

back in the form of remittances. These reasons are the driving factors for Pakistan's remaining neutral in the rivalry between the two states. Therefore, Pakistan needs a holistic approach to the rivalry between these states. At the same time, balancing relations with both states is only possible through remaining vigilant in times of crises and conflicts. The tight rope of neutrality is needed to maintain un-shattering relations with both states. On the other hand, these states significantly influence and impact Pakistan's decision-making process. The state institutions always consider their rivalry in developing relations with either state. Furthermore, at times, the relationship with one state needs to be scrutinised, keeping the relationship with the other counterpart in view. The ideological differences and confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia are not limited to the region; they also extended to the Muslim world countries. The region of South Asia has continued to be a centre for power politics and rivalry through proxies and lobby groups. Pakistan is always a battleground of hostility between these two rival countries.²¹⁵ According to Mr. Marvin G. Weinbaum, Pakistan had faced repercussion in multiple dimensions due to Saudi- Iranian rivalry. It has been manifested in Pakistan's economy, politics, societal fabric along with religious divide within country.²¹⁶ Saudi Arabia offered Pakistan for economic assistance on a condition to support it on various political and security issues and priorities. Pakistan has deployed its military support for Saudi Arabia to protect the holy places.²¹⁷ Iran showed its reservations and concerns over the imprisoned support on Yemen issue.

In order to analyse the implications of Saudi Arabia-Iran conflict it has been divided into two categories: first implications at domestic level and at global level. As per Neo-Classical Realism perspective the domestic factors are significant to shape the foreign policy behaviour

²¹⁵ Muhammad Imran Mustafa, Dr. Ghulam, and Muhammad Rizwan Bhatti, "Geopolitical Dynamics of Afghanistan and Concerns of Regional and Global Actors vis a vis Pakistan," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2020): 798-803.

²¹⁶ Marvin G. Weinbaum, Director, Afghanistan and Pakistan Studies, at the Middle East Institute, interviewed via WhatsApp on August 17, 2022.

²¹⁷ Weinbaum and Khurram, "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia," 226-227.

of the state. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the implications of Saudi-Iranian rivalry on Pakistan



4.1. Implications for Pakistan at Domestic Level

4.1.1 Economic Dependency

Pakistan is a developing country having fragile economy which has always faced difficulties from the eastern border. In this scenario, Islamabad always appearance a quandary of balancing relations to meet its security and economic necessitate. KSA is a leading route for Islamabad's economic requirement in terms of oil and energy needs. While Iran is also economically equipped country and willing to support Pakistan as Saudi Arabia do. In this complex situation that put push Pakistan to follow very careful and realistic approach towards both countries. Economic assistance, i.e., the Saudi petrodollar, reached out to help Pakistan whenever the fragile economy came under crisis, i.e., depleted foreign reserves and imbalance of payment and cash stripe. Because of Pakistan's high dependency on KSA, it is also evident that KSA greatly influences Pakistan's political leadership and foreign policy. The remittances overseas Pakistanis sent back in 2013 were \$3.8 billion, with an increase of 24% in the past ten years.²¹⁸ Pakistan exported rice, footwear, clothing, and fabrics to Saudi Arabia worth Four hundred and eighteen million dollars and stood twentieth in the market during 2011-2012 because of 2020 statistics, the Exports volume increased up to Five hundred and Sixteen Million dollars. Saudi

²¹⁸ State Bank of Pakistan, Workers' remittances cross \$13bn mark for the first time in Pakistan history, July 10,2012, 2. <https://www.sbp.org.pk/press/2012/Remittances-11-Jul-12.pdf>

Arabia secured thirteenth out of one hundred and ninety-seven countries and rice as a significant export. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia exports mainly petrochemical products along with fertilizers. In 2020, the Saudi exports to Pakistan are about \$730.02 Million. In contrast, the trade volume between Riyadh and New Delhi rose to Twenty billion dollars during 2010-2011, while Pakistan's trade volume was eleven billion dollars only combined with Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia has been considered a foreign direct investor in Pakistan, but now its investment has decreased gradually.²¹⁹ KSA was at the top among Arab countries in granting aid to Pakistan, and it was one hundred thirty million dollar during the 1970s. In contrast to West countries and Iran, it was not a colossal aid amount. During the 1980s, a sharp upraise was observed in aid to support mujahedeen in the Afghan war. A 1.5 billion dollars²²⁰ had flown from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan between 2006 and 2010. Nevertheless, this aid did not move directly to government accounts. Instead, it was sent in the form of donations to support religious institutions and insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the 1970s, the phenomenon of migration toward Saudi Arabia from Pakistan surged to earn bread and butter in Saudi Arabia. Pakistani working population in Saudi Arabia was highest in number during the mid-1980s and was a source of remittances to maintain a foreign exchange. The number of migrants rose to a million, and the maximum was employed in multiple sectors, i.e., doctors, accountants, and engineers. Over time, the number of Pakistani workers has decreased and replaced by Indians, Bangladeshi and Nepalese. This decrease could be sensed because of change in geopolitical and financial benefits of Saudi Arabia in the region. The arrival of Nawaz Sharif in the Prime Minister's Office in May 2013 gave a fresh breath to KSA,

²¹⁹ Zahid Shahab Ahmed, and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Pakistan Caught between Iran and Saudi Arabia," *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2020): 346-349.

²²⁰ Farhat Nasreen, "Pakistan US Coalition in the War Against Terrorism: Implications for South Asia," (PhD diss., University of the Punjab, Lahore, 2013), 56.

and the PMLN government delayed the IP gas pipeline project despite Pakistan struggling with an energy crisis.²²¹

Amid the corona virus pandemic, the global economy was poorly affected, and Pakistani overseas remittances from Saudi Arabia remained a significant source of foreign economy. As per State Bank of Pakistan statistics, an amount of \$18.78 billion had been sent by overseas Pakistanis, a 5.5% increase in remittances was observed from July 2019 to April 2020 than last fiscal year, and \$4.4 billion was sent from Saudi Arabia alone.²²² The statistics shared by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Pakistani workers are more than one-hundred five thousand in the Middle East, while one hundred five thousand serve in Saudi Arabia.

4.1.2 Influence on Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Saudi Arabia is among the countries that have considerable influence, besides the U.S. and China, upon the decisions, discourse, and direction of Islamabad's foreign policy as well as domestic politics. Saudi Arabia-Pakistan bilateral relations were so deep that Saudi Arabia had developed links with political and religious elites along with military establishments, and they claim themselves as "movers and shakers of Pakistan's domestic affairs."

The Saudi factor played a crucial role in bridging the gulf between strained civil-military relations in Pakistan. The WikiLeaks disclosed a cable in 2009 in which Saudi Ambassador Adel al-Jubeir claimed that in Pakistan's affairs, Saudi Arabia is not just a mere observer but a participant. Pakistan-Saudi relations remained cordial under every political and military leadership except when the Pakistan People's Party came into power during 2008-2013; Saudi Arabia did not trust the PPP's socialist, secular, and anti-establishment approach. The trust

²²¹ Shuja Nawaz, *The battle for Pakistan: The bitter US Friendship and a Tough Neighbourhood* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), 81.

²²² "Pakistan's Remittances from Saudi Arabia Remain High Despite Economy Slowdown," *Arab News*, May 13, 2020.

deficit was further deepened when, in 2013, the PPP government signed a gas pipeline agreement with the Iranian government. However, it had not affected Saudi links with the military establishment of Pakistan. In April 2015, the Saudi break-in relations with military and political stakeholders in Pakistan were first observed when Parliament refused to detach troops to the Saudi-led war against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, also called Operation Decisive Strom. Pakistan took a neutral stance in the KSA-Yemen war.²²³ This neutrality seriously halted Pakistan-Saudi relations at this critical juncture. Pakistan's military establishment took a unilateral decision so that relations did not further spoil. Pakistan Army decided to detach thousand more soldiers in Saudi Arabia to secure Pakistan-Saudi military ties. The purpose of the mission was denoted to train the Saudi Military but not to fight on borders against Yemen. The point to ponder was that the Military had decided without prior consent from the government and through its media wing, Inter-Services Public Relations; the information had proliferated by the Armed forces.

In January 2017, KSA initiated an Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Alliance, also called Muslim NATO, by Pakistani analysts.²²⁴ The former Chief of Army Staff, Raheel Sharif, became the first Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Alliance despite criticism by the opposition and government. This shows military activism to build bilateral relations. A civilian Ambassador of Pakistan, Ambassador Raja Ali Ejaz, was replaced by the retired military general commander Lt-Gen (retd), Bilal Akbar, in Riyadh to side-line civilians from interacting with the Saudi government. This situation created a rift in civil-military relations, as the army single-handedly dealt with the situation without informing the government.

²²³Yemen conflict: Pakistan rebuffs Saudi coalition call, BBC news, April 10, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32246547>

²²⁴ Ghulam Qumber, Waseem Ishaque, Saqib Riaz, *Islamic Military Alliance (IMA) – and Pakistan*, Global Regional Review (GRR), 136.

In another instance in the 2019 Kuala Lumpur (KL) Summit, which is not an alliance of Muslim countries nor does it have the institutional authority to influence foreign policy, unlike the OIC or GCC. Rather, it is a platform that the Malaysian government has set up for leaders of the Muslim world to talk about different matters that affect their people. One of the seven key issues of the Kuala Lumpur Summit is “Peace, Security & Defence.” However, the main objective is to enable networking amongst leaders of Muslim nations worldwide instead of just a few. All fifty-seven OIC members received invites from Malaysia to take part.

surprisingly, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan was the one who first proposed that Pakistan, Malaysia, and Turkey join a “strategic alliance” to combat Islamophobia.²²⁵ He brought up this concept at a trilateral meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad during the 74th United Nations General Assembly in September in New York. The KL Summit, which takes place from December 18–21, is attended by a number of Muslim nations, including Iran, Qatar, Turkey, and Indonesia. Both Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi of Pakistan have declared that they would not be attending the 2019 Kuala Lumpur Summit.²²⁶ Qureshi stated that concerned about the possibility of a ‘split in the Ummah’ following the KL Summit were Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Qureshi further said that the two powerful Arab Gulf governments see the KL Summit as a possible competitor to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Pakistan's sudden reversal just serves to confirm the widely held view among geopolitical observers that the two most powerful members of the Gulf Cooperation Council have a significant impact on Islamabad’s foreign policy, particularly with regard to its relations with Muslim countries. On the other

²²⁵ Zaki Khalid, Strategic Ramifications of Pakistan’s About-Face on KL Summit, December 19, 2019, <https://insider.pk/opinion/strategic-ramifications-of-pakistan-about-face-on-kl-summit/>

²²⁶ Asad Hashim, ‘Neutral’ Pakistan pulls out of Malaysia summit of Muslim nations, Aljazeera, December 18, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/18/neutral-pakistan-pulls-out-of-malaysia-summit-of-muslim-nations/>

hand, by criticising India's activities in Jammu and Kashmir, Ankara and Kuala Lumpur have put their relations with New Delhi in jeopardy, while the Arab Gulf nations have noticeably refrained from criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindutva regime.

It is hard to see what Pakistan has to gain by caving in to unwarranted pressure from the Arab Gulf states. These adverse events, which carry major strategic ramifications, are undoubtedly the result of inadequately thought out foreign policy counsel and badly judged decision-making. In order to avoid making the same mistakes again, Pakistan's Foreign Office has to take a close look at the current state of affairs.

4.1.3 Sectarian Rise

In the wake of the conflicting nature of historical development, the threat remains adherent to the internal as well as external dimensions of Pakistan. One State's external affairs impact the other State's internal affairs. Similarly, in the case of Pakistan, the external dimension remained more prone and vulnerable due to the ideological confrontation of the Cold War and the Iran-Saudi rivalry furthered by the sectarian cleavages. Therefore, the internal affairs have suffered because of the external shocks that affected Pakistan's internal security issues.²²⁷ The historical geopolitical divergent interests between Tehran and Riyadh the champions of Sunni and Shia Islam respectively, posed a significant challenge or threat for Pakistan foreign policy options.²²⁸

The issue linked with external affairs and religion is also used for acquiring vested interests by various actors. The researchers have repeatedly proved that the religious element is only a playing field card to get vested interests for personal gain. The Saudi-Iranian rift can be gauged through the lens of sectarianism. Religion has been used as a tool for political maneuvering.

²²⁷ Zulfarnain Khan, "Sectarian Rise in Pakistan: Role of Saudi Arabia and Iran," *Researcher in Government and Public Policy*, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan (2016), 32.

²²⁸ Zulfarnain Sewag, "Sectarian Rise in Pakistan: Role of Saudi Arabia and Iran," *South Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2015): 17-18.

The states, along with proxies in the form of non-state actors within Pakistan, have firmly rooted in the societal-level confrontation. The critical factor is that the societies living together for centuries have gotten this layer of sect-based division in the form of the Shia-Sunni divide. Both the states are working to propagate their version of Islamic interpretation. The states are propagating their version of Islam at a regional and global level. Pakistan has fallen victim to the ideological confrontation between two sects, Shia and Sunni. That is to say that the strategic and ideological foundations have directly and indirectly started to have far-reaching implications for Pakistan. From both sides, like-minded people have started bandwagons for their vested interests and personal gains. Religion, as stated earlier, is used as an instrument to attain more and more out of everything. The contemporary dynamics in the political and economic sphere have added insult to injury. The chapter begins with the affairs at the international level. The Iranian revolution of 1979 and the intervention of the USSR in Afghanistan gave an ample opportunity to like-minded people to grow on both sides.²²⁹ The role of internal actors and external actors equally contributed to the issues of the sectarian divide, namely Shia and Sunni communities. Over time, this hostility grew to such an extent that the manifestation was observed in the form of mass killings on a sectarian basis. In the aftermath of 9/11,²³⁰ this sectarian fault-line was exploited to such an extent that the long-term consequences started making an indelible mark in history. Over time, this sectarian divide has widened the gap between the two major sects of Islam. This sectarian divide is witnessed in major cities and every length and breadth under the circle of sectarianism. From low-level skirmishes to mass killings have become the practice noticed by all and sundry. People who used to live in peace and harmony have distanced themselves just because of sect-based discrimination. The social bondage and synergy of the old days seem to be missing in our

²²⁹ Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 74.

²³⁰ Shamshad Ahmad, "Post-9/11 Foreign Policy of Pakistan," *Criterion Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2013), 41.

societies. It is an unfortunate incident that the rivalries of these states have kept no stone unturned to add fuel to the fire. The changing socio-economic and political trends can be gauged in the same vein, where arch rivalries back the sectarian fault line. Moreover, both the states are working for vested interests where countries are stressful to increase their influence and counter the threat perception of the other State. This sectarian difference is the root cause of the bitter roles of these states in local and external policies. It is quintessential to state that the Wahabi School of thought²³¹ came to the political arena where they reflected their version of the religion as the true belief, in contradiction and contrast to the atheist ideology and within the religion, there was a divide based upon Sunni and Shias.²³² The sect-based conflict started during the period of the cold war when a Deobandi cleric stated that the Shia sect was un-Islamic. In a similar context, one of the leading preachers of Islam, Israr Ahmed, a renowned religious scholar and pro-Saudi cleric, gave affirmation through his preaching.²³³ The pro-Saudi cleric, in his preaching, labelled Shia practices as un-Islamic.²³⁴

In hindsight, the confrontation in one state had a ripple effect on the neighbouring state. This happened in the case of the invasion of the USSR in Afghanistan. The direct and indirect implications could be gauged in the wake of the progress and development of the war in Afghanistan. The foreign aid, financial assistance, and training of freedom fighters were done through the neighbouring state of Pakistan. Nevertheless, the haunting effect of the decade kept Pakistan in close contact with the regime in Afghanistan. The dilemma of a war-torn country kept Pakistan intact that followed the rise of sectarianism as well as extremism in Pakistan, which is to say that this followed by Talibanisation that stretched sectarian rise in Pakistan. Most of the things, such as sponsoring, supporting, defending, and supporting morality, are

²³¹ Firdaus M. Yunus, and M. Hasbi Amiruddin, "Tension Between Schools of Thought: Aswaja and Wahabi in Aceh," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2021): 187-190.

²³² Lasse Lykke Rørbæk, "Religion, Political Power, and the 'Sectarian Surge': Middle Eastern Identity Politics in Comparative Perspective," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2019): 32-38.

²³³ Moonis Ahmar, "Sectarian conflicts in Pakistan," *Pakistan Vision*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2007): 10-15.

²³⁴ Zulqarnain Sewag, "The intra-sunni conflicts in Pakistan," in *Faith-based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan*, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016), 323-329.

sponsored by the KSA and Iran. The day-to-day speeches and sermons of Friday have identified that the clerics often refer to one of the two states for taking things under consideration in daily affairs. This aspires the general masses to build good relations with the state owing to its sectarian affinity. Furthermore, the intense fighting war between Iran and Arabs has provided ample space for the non-state actors to grow faster and more robust. Resultantly, the ripple effect of this war has caused disastrous implications for the neighbouring state in the form of suicide attacks, target killings, and blasts at religious rituals. As mentioned earlier, the association has brought solid social bondage and deeply penetrated society through citing and reciting the aspects daily. Furthermore, the entire society has started behaving as sponsors of those states.

In some cases, the sentimental and emotional quotes captivate the commoners' minds, which is a launching pad against the other sect. All these nuances have come through the deliberate choices of the past. The freedom fighters in Afghanistan, supported by religious and ideological identities, got so profoundly entrenched in the later decades that the attachment could not be withdrawn even on superficial levels. Various factions, such as Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, can be quoted in this framework, which originated due to the Afghan chapter.²³⁵ The funding and support of these groups became necessary because of the countering mechanism of the growing influential role of Iran in the post-Soviet Afghan chapter, which was desired to be crushed by the U.S.-Saudi-Pakistani beneficiaries or benefactors. It was in the aftermath of the incidents in Afghanistan. The non-state actors started to multiply, and their close coordination and association with the localities began, where local people were looking forward to extended cooperation through foreign assistance. This external and internal nexus played very well in the form of a growing madrassah system, extremist groups, and trained personnel in those training institutions. Whether it was Al-Qaida or the Taliban, the people of

²³⁵ Anne Stenersen, "The Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan-organization, Leadership and Worldview," *Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI)* (February 5, 2010).

Pakistan made the sectarian associations,²³⁶ which was more a transition through the defining characteristics of the Shia and Sunni divide in an exact similar phenomenon of national-ethnic sectarian divergence. The madrassah system had been divided into the sectarian lines. The Iranians financially supported Shia Madaris in Pakistan.²³⁷ Similarly, the Sunni were funded by the KSA.²³⁸ This gave a launching pad for fighting a back-to-back war in the form of proxies of the states working at their back. the apparent outcome was the unending series of sectarian clashes over the length and breadth of Pakistan. This proxy war carried a hateful attitude against the opponents based upon biased religious and political divergence.²³⁹

Pakistan became the epicentre of the ideological fighting between the capitalists and the communists in the backdrop of the Soviet invasion. May it be the Iranian revolution, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, or the Islamisation policies of General Zia, all combined in one loop to pop up hate and sectarian difference within Pakistan, it is also true that the Sunni dominant state aside, Shia forces started actively working in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. Nevertheless, most Sunni states restricted Shia practices following the incidents mentioned earlier. The curtailing freedom of Shia practices added fuel to the already burning fire. The hostility rose to newer heights, and many incidents started on the tit for tat bases. The following decades are crystal clear examples of the incidents as a resultant outcome of the incidents of the 1979 onwards episode. It has been stated that 1996 was when Iranian forces stopped Shia fuelling because of the counterproductive forces and their active participation in border regions of Iran.²⁴⁰ The French Scholar Mariam Abou Zahab stated that the blocking of

²³⁶ Naumana Kiran and Mohammad Iqbal Chawla, "Countering Sectarian Extremism in Pakistan: A Study of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi," *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2020).

²³⁷ Saima Afzal, Hamid Iqbal, and Mavara Inayat, "Sectarianism and its implications for Pakistan security: Policy Recommendations Using Exploratory Study," *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (JHSS)*, ISSN: 2279-0837, ISBN: 2279-0845. Volume 4 (2012): 21-24.

²³⁸ Madiha Afzal, "Saudi Arabia's hold on Pakistan," *The Brookings Foreign Policy Brief* (2019).

²³⁹ Madiha Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege: Extremism, Society, and the State* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 75.

²⁴⁰ Zulqarnain Khan, "Sectarian Rise in Pakistan: Role of Saudi Arabia and Iran," 32.

financing resulted from those counter-attacks in the border regions.²⁴¹ In another dimension of this conflict and confrontation, it has been stated that the foreign aid from Saudi Arabian created an intensely aggravating situation and fuelled the sectarian hate in the Pakistani land. In the earlier discussion, it had been narrated that the proxy war was manifested in the form of Shia versus Sunni factions of religion. A similar notion states that the Shia militia came to the fore for fighting against the extremism and sectarianism flared by the Sunni extremists with similar diplomacy. The madrassah system was initiated to propagate their version of the religion got an exponential growth. The increased madrasah system was threaded in the same pocket with the increase of hostility. Iran also funded like the counterpart to their version as the report of PILDAT explicitly reflects the accurate picture. Which says that Iran thus funded them, as did other countries of the Middle East to the Deobandi proponents.²⁴² The mirror reflection of the proxy and back-to-back war has been mentioned in the book, “What is wrong with Pakistan”²⁴³ that Wahhabi pumped the Sunni ideology for the Sunni people. With the gradual passage of time, the exponential growth of the Madrassah system was seen in Pakistan.²⁴⁴ The multiplied number of these religious institutions reached an alarming level of 64 percent, whereas the fifteen percent belonged to the other sect.

4.1.4 Domestic Politics of Pakistan and Leadership Choices

With the inception of Pakistan, Iranian influence was seen through the policy of recognition and diplomatic ties. This showed that the relations were going to be developed on sound footings based upon mutual respect and trust. The recognition of Iran began the era of developing friendly relations with Pakistan and Iran. In the aftermath of the partition, the

²⁴¹Laurent Gayer, “The Various Jihads of Mariam Abou Zahab,” *Herald*, January 6, 2018 <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153953>.

²⁴² “Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan,” *Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency – PILDAT*, May 1, 2011.

²⁴³ Maryam Usman, “What’s wrong with Pakistan?: New Book Lauded for its Journey into Uncharted Waters,” *The Express Tribune*, August 23, 2013, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/593984/whats-wrong-with-pakistan-new-book-lauded-for-its-journey-into-uncharted-waters>.

²⁴⁴ Zulqarnain Khan, “Sectarian Rise in Pakistan: Role of Saudi Arabia and Iran,”³⁹.

Iranian supreme leader was the first head of the State that pay a visit to Pakistan. The Shah of Iran came to Pakistan. These initial periods of bilateral relations were so good that the relations between the two got deeply rooted. One of the heads of the Pakistani State, Iskandar Mirza, belonged to the Shia sect. Therefore, it was so natural that the tilt was more favored and inclined towards the Iranian counterpart. Her wife was from Iran, so the ‘Shia Card’ was used as an instrumental element of soft power for bringing peace and harmony between the two states and their relationship. At that time, the Shia Monarch was heading the Iranian State,²⁴⁵ and no such evident has been found for their intervention and involvement in incidents of sectarian clashes. In this context, the only way of penetration could be observed through the lens of the civilization of Iran. Iranian civilization has a diversified level of identity,²⁴⁶ which could have been propagated, promoted, and protected on Pakistani soil. However, for this notion, no such examples or shreds of evidence support a case in point.

The founding of several Khane Farhang Iran (Houses of Iranian Culture) around Pakistan during that period was a noteworthy development that attempted to showcase Iran's rich cultural history, which included art, literature, and the Persian language. The Shah then expressed repeated worries over Pakistan’s stance towards India during Yahya Khan’s visit in 1969.²⁴⁷ In a fit of zeal after the events of 1971, the Shah made an apparently bold declaration that Iran would think about annexing the Pakistani province of Baluchistan if ethnic disputes in Pakistan caused further internal division. During this time, there was a discernible change in the Shah’s tone of contempt towards his Pakistani peers. Pakistanis were very offended by this attitude, which left a mark that is still very much there in the collective memory of many people in Pakistan.

²⁴⁵ Theda Skocpol, “Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian revolution,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1982): 275-279.

²⁴⁶ Mohammad Akhbari and Alfaghari Hossein Zou, “A Geopolitical Analysis of Ethnicity in Iran, with an Emphasis on Challenges and Opportunities,” (2010): 59-61.

²⁴⁷ Andreas Rieck, “The Yahya Khan and Bhutto Era, 1969–1977,” *The Shias of Pakistan: An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority* (May 19, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190240967.003.0005>,

The level of Saudi interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan could easily be guessed by the statement of the then Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan, which was leaked by WikiLeaks in which the Ambassador had been quoted saying, “We in Saudi Arabia are not observers in Pakistan, we are participants.”²⁴⁸ Saudi and Americans, unlike the Chinese State, have time and again intervened in the internal affairs of Pakistan from behind the scene, helping in brokering deals among different power segments of Pakistan. Sometimes, these interferences in the internal affairs of Pakistan are at the behest of the Pakistani establishment and the ruling elite. Pakistani elite always looked at the Saudis in recessions; Saudis have always provided financial support to almost every segment of society ranging from Pakistani society, religious and charitable groups; and private sector industries; to essential personalities of the political and military establishment. The royal family of the Sauds have a staunch interpretation of theology which they want to endorse and spread around the world; for that purpose, they want to see people who match their interpretation in Islamabad like General Zia and support conservative governments like Nawaz’s government;²⁴⁹ these people are the favorites of the Royal House of Saud. Over time, the Saudi government extended its support to any dictator or regime, making Pakistan a trustworthy and reliable partner as she needed Pakistan’s support in multiple places during internal and external conflicts and international forums. The Saudi government reluctantly and with a heavy heart accepted Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his socialist tendencies as the Prime Minister of Pakistan.²⁵⁰ Apart from being a socialist, his lack of trust was also rooted in his suspected Shia lineage and liberal lifestyle.

Unlike any other political leader, Bhutto had a charismatic personality to develop solid and friendly ties with all the Muslim countries of the world. His nationalisation process aside, he

²⁴⁸ Saba Imtiaz, “External Actors: Saudi Arabia’s covert role in Pakistan,” *The Express Tribune*, December 8, 2010. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/87373/external-actors-saudi-arabias-covert-role-in-pakis>

²⁴⁹ Masood Akhtar Zahid, “Dictatorship in Pakistan: A Study of the Zia Era (1977-88),” *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2011): 18-20.

²⁵⁰ Bidanda M. Chengappa, “Pakistan: impact of Islamic Socialism,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2002): 37-40.

had tried his best to make friendly ties with the Middle Eastern states. His policies could not win the hearts and minds of people owing to some of the internal and external roles of influencers, which resulted in the loss of elections in 1977. The political instability can be observed in the context of Pakistan, as some deep concerns by the KSA rose after the elections of 1977. It was a day when he was sent back home from his office. Martial law administrator Zia took the lead of the nation. As the military regime prolongation started, Gen. Zia pursued his policy of Islamization. His Islamisation process worked as the need of the hour owing to the USSR intervention in Afghanistan. The support of KSA was unparalleled in the wake of this assistance for training and sending the freedom fighters to get rid of the foreign intervention in Afghanistan. Foreign aid, remittance, and economic support worked very well in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the predecessors were not tilted towards KSA.²⁵¹ The controversy emerged with the female Muslim head of the state terms. Nevertheless, the Kingdom preferred not to indulge in the internal political matters of Pakistan. Similarly, Nawaz Sharif had an inclination toward KSA for political and economic gains only. The state patronage favoured the aspect of getting leverage for political and economic assistance in the more special interests of the State. Nevertheless, it was long due when the General Pervez Musharraf, took control over the State. Following the military coup, Nawaz Sharif took political asylum in KSA till 2007. The elections of 2007 came as a challenging one owing to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto²⁵² in a political campaign, and this incident sympathized all the people to vote in favour of the PPP. Asif Ali Zardari made it to the President office. He was skeptical of the Saudi involvement in the internal security concerns of Pakistan. One of his Ministers declared that Saudis had been implicitly helping the madrassas within the length and breadth of Pakistan to serve their interests. Here again, religion was used for attaining political goals and ends. Observing the political instability, history witnesses that the Saudis felt relaxed with the tenure of Nawaz

²⁵¹ Weinbaum, "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia," 221-223.

²⁵² Alec E. Metz, "Assassination of Benazir Bhutto," *The Culture & Conflict Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2008).

Sharif, which was more tilted towards them. At the helm of the affairs, it was Nawaz Sharif, who seemed to be comfortable as the head of the State in the eyes of the Kingdom of KSA.²⁵³ As expressed emphatically by the Saudi Finance prince Alwaleed bin Talal, “Nawaz Sharif is Saudi Arabia’s man in Pakistan.” Nawaz has much more to do with the business-related things than the religion-political alma maters. Being an industrialist, he looks through the prism of material gains and economic opportunities more than anything else. For the same purpose, he and his many companions have a web of connectivity through trade and commerce with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This includes the steel mill that Sharif set up in Jeddah, funded by interest-free loans from the Saudi government.²⁵⁴ With Nawaz Sharif back in the office, the economic opportunities expanded in different dimensions, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which also kicked off in the same tenure of the Nawaz government. His entrepreneurial mindset keeps Pakistan on track with progress through the development of trade, energy, and development structure through investments in mega projects. These developments may serve his interest, but cumulatively, the entire state gets the benefit and fruition of such megaprojects. It has been noticed that the policy formulation by the head of state gave economic opportunities to the people. Similarly, the Ambassador of KSA met Nawaz Sharif in the post-2013 election. Following the same, Sharif was reported to have told King Abdullah during their “private visit” that the relationship between their countries is not based on “political expediency” but is instead “etched in the soul of every Pakistani and Saudi national.” Furthermore, hindered thousand barrels of crude oil and fifteen thousand tonnes of furnace oil per day were promised through deferred payment for three years to fuel the country’s under-fuelled thermal power plants. In addition, the KSA decided to give a fifteen-billion-dollar loan to overcome the energy deficit and fight against Pakistan’s internal security

²⁵³ Pervez Hoodbhoy, “Saudizing Pakistan: How Pakistan is Changing and What this Means for South Asia and the World,” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Pakistan* (London: Routledge, 2017), 466-474.

²⁵⁴ Abdullah Iqbal, Sharifs likely to set up steel mill in Saudi Arabia, *Gulf News*, July 8, 2001. <https://gulfnews.com/uae/sharifs-likely-to-set-up-steel-mill-in-saudi-arabia-1.420631>

issues. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also played a vital role in getting the contractor Raymond Davis scot-free in the aftermath of the incident of 2011.²⁵⁵ The families of the victims were reportedly invited to Saudi Arabia for Umra and were assured that they could trade “blood money” for Davis’s freedom while they were there. The KSA viewed as the real-time need for providing financial assistance in times of dire need. It has been observed historically that the Kingdom tried coming to assist financially whenever Pakistan asked for economic incentives and loans. Finally, the State of Saudi Arabia is so critical and skeptical in witnessing the activities carried out by anti-Saudi rhetoric and anti-Saudi narratives done by the non-state actors, which are rising from both Pakistani and Afghani soil.

It is evident that the civilian leadership has their own personal interest and choices which led them to show tilt toward either state. For instance, Pakistan People Party government considered as pro-Iranian while Pakistan Muslim League (N) title towards Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in order to play a mediatory or balanced role it might be a one of the hurdles.

4.1.5 Security Dilemma

One idea that comes up a lot in the field of international relations is the security problem, and it is especially pertinent when considering the balance of interests approach. States must figure out how to improve security while reducing unforeseen effects that could jeopardise the security of others in order to solve the security conundrum. Despite the friendly relations between Iran and Islamabad, this border area remained volatile, created trouble for both states, and even sometimes affected their relations to lower ebb. Therefore, the neighbouring states’ border regions have primarily been found in the insecurity paradox. On the other hand, in the Baluchistan region of both states, the majority population subscribes to Sunni Islam and is considered underdeveloped and marginalized. The lack of government attention, poor

²⁵⁵ Ghulam Muhammad Nagra, Ghulam Mustafa, and Muhammad Imran, “An Analysis of Pak-US Relations after Pentagon 2011 Attacks,” *Review of Economics and Development Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2019): 567-568.

economic conditions, and unequal resource distribution made the situation vulnerable in the border area of both states. This situation is favourable for the cultivation of non-state outfits. Hence, the border area is vulnerable to terrorist groups and activities that disturb the peace on the border. Historically, the Shah of Iran, as well as Bhutto, made a collaborative effort to end violent and extremist elements in the border region. From both sides of the borders, various segments and extremist agendas are working hard to exploit the territory and locality for their vested interests. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, the number of firing and shelling cases from Iranian territory to Pakistan witnessed an upsurge in the past few years. The situation quickly deteriorated when Jaish al Adal, formerly known as Jundullah, a Sunni Muslim organisation, abducted twelve Iranian guards from Mirjaveh town, an Iranian border area.²⁵⁶ With the help of Pakistan Army efforts few soldiers were recovered, and rest are still not found. Both sides suffered from these terror activities.

Moreover, the separatist elements and the extremist mind-sets are exploited by foreign hands as well. The Indian RAW involvement in destabilizing the Baluchistan province of Pakistan further alarmed Pakistan. The Indian spy Kulbushan Jadhav came to Pakistan through the Iran-Pakistan border to carry the terror activities.²⁵⁷ Hence surveillances and security of the border area bring peace which is ultimately a win-win situation for both Tehran and Islamabad. The large area on both sides of the border cannot be fenced due to its barren region and prolongation of the border region.

4.1.6 Energy Security

The Economy of Pakistan is struggling with the energy crisis, yet the policymakers cannot address the primary issues faced by the energy sector. It is estimated that energy demand

²⁵⁶ Fatima Raza, "Pakistan-Iran Relations in the Evolving International Environment," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2020).

²⁵⁷ Abdul Manan, Tehran probing whether Jadhav crossed border illegally, *Express Tribune*, April 2, 2016. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1077901/tehran-probing-whether-yadav-crossed-border-illegally>

increases 4.5-5 percent annually. Pakistan energy is constituted of mainly 80% gas and oil and 20 percent liquefied petroleum gas, nuclear, hydel, and coal.

Riyadh has been a crucial supplier of oil at critical moments in Islamabad. KSA provided financial assistance through petrodollars during the 1965 and 1971 wars. In 1998 when Pakistan became a nuclear power, despite U.S. sanctions,²⁵⁸ Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan with free oil. The Saudi government extended \$1.5 billion in support in 2014 when the Pakistani government was juggling the circular debt issue in the energy sector.²⁵⁹ Since the 1990s, Pakistan has desired to ink an international agreement on constructing the oil and gas pipeline. Pakistan planned to build three major power pipeline projects with oil and gas-rich Central Asia and the Middle East to overcome the domestic gas shortage dilemma. These projects are the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI), Qatar Pakistan Gas pipeline project, and the Iran-Pakistan-India pipe. So far, no transnational single pipeline project has yet been materialized; therefore, Pakistan relies on gas import mainly from the Gulf States and crude oil from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Therefore, Pakistan depends on the Middle Eastern region to fulfil its domestic energy needs.

It is also speculated that Saudi Arabia is one of the factors of delay in Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline. Dr. Qandil Abbas, Associate Professor shared his analysis upon Pak-Iran gas pipeline project, “The major hurdle in the bay of IP are U.S. sanction against Iran and constrains of Arab friends of Pakistan in this regard. However, political will of Pakistani leadership is required to benefit from energy resources of neighbouring Iran with very cheap prices. Even Pakistan can follow Indian model of waver from sanctions in this regard.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Sana Haroon, “Pakistan Between Saudi Arabia and Iran: Islam in the Politics and Economics of Western Asia” In *Pakistan at the Crossroads: Domestic Dynamics and External Pressures* edited by Christophe Jaffrelot, (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2016) 301-334. <https://doi.org/10.7312/jaff17306-012>

²⁵⁹ Mehreen Zahra-Malik, Saudi Arabia Loans Pakistan \$1.5 Billion to Shore up Economy, Reuters, March 13, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-saudi-idUSBREA2C13G20140313>.

²⁶⁰ Dr. Qandil Abbas, Associate Professor Associate Professor at School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. Interviewed in person on 27th December 2022 at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

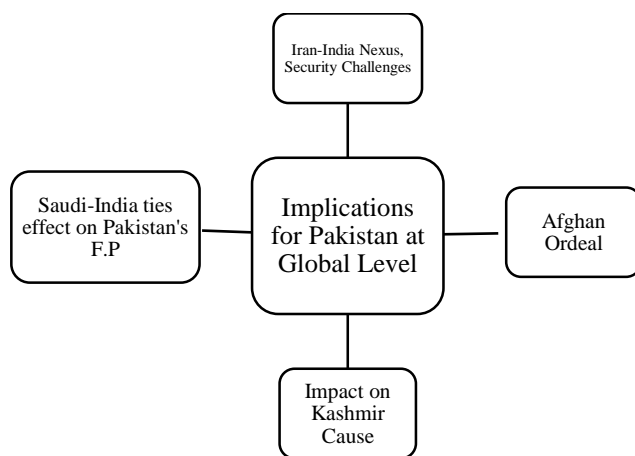
Figure No-5: Implications for Pakistan at Domestic Level



4.2 Implications for Pakistan at the Global Arena

The conflict between Tehran and Riyadh not only influences Pakistan domestically but also has implications for Pakistan on the international front. This creates severe challenges for Pakistan on the Economic, Security, and Political front.

Figure-6: Saudi-Iranian Rivalry: Implications for Pakistan at Global Level



4.2.1 Iran-India Nexus and Security Challenges for Pakistan

The ties between Iran and India are more pragmatic and tangible than between Pakistan and Iran, which are merely accentuated with verbosity and rhetoric. In 2003 Pakistan soured its relations with Iran and stood with the U.S.; on the contrary, India signed a deal New Delhi Declaration with Iran, and a joint statement was released: “It is clear to both parties that a solid economic relationship is essential to supporting their growing strategic convergence. Interests

of India and Iran complement each other in the energy sector, so this is seen as a key area for future cooperation between the two countries. Additionally, India and Iran have agreed to investigate prospects for defence cooperation in agreed upon areas, such as training and the exchange of military officials.”²⁶¹

During the Shah of Iran’s reign, Tehran and Delhi decided to collaborate in Indian Ocean Region, which at last materialized in 2016 as the Chabahar Port development project. This port will not only boost Indian trade but also bypass Pakistan to access Central Asian Republics through Afghanistan. In a broader perspective, this cooperation leads to bridge North-South region. International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) was a brainchild of Russia to connect India and Iran to the Central Asian region and Southeast Asian region. Hence Iran will become the heart of the transit link to access the giant markets and oil-rich countries bypassing Pakistan. Tehran and New Delhi are willing to avail this opportunity, but Islamabad has severe concerns about such projects. The Chabahar port was considered a competitor to the Gwadar port,²⁶² developed by China through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, one of China’s grand Belt and Road Initiatives. In comparison, Chabahar port is considered a joint venture of India and America to counter Chinese influence in the region and somehow to compete with Gwadar.

The close engagements between New Delhi and Tehran not only contain around the port projects, but their nexus in war-torn Afghanistan via the convergence of interest may also give tough time to Pakistan and isolate the role of Pakistan in the peace process and sabotage the interest of Pakistan in Afghanistan. Therefore, Pakistan needs to engage with Iran to counter

²⁶¹ Alan, K. Kronstadt and Kenneth Katzman, “India-Iran Relations and US Interests,” *Library of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service* (2006).

²⁶² Junaid Roshan Tanoli, “Comparative Analysis of Gwadar and Chabahar: The Two Rival Ports,” *Center for Strategic and Contemporary Research*, Vol. 2 (2016),78.

the Indian influence in Iran and Afghanistan. India uses Iranian soil to create instability in Pakistan.

4.2.2 Saudi Arabia-India Ties: Effects on Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Saudi Arabia has always supported Pakistan in matters of economy. Therefore, Islamabad considered Riyadh, a strategic partner. The economic, military, and diplomatic relations were started in the 1960s. Riyadh cooperated Islamabad during the 1965 and 1971 wars against India with free oil. KSA assist Pakistan's position on issue of Kashmir but recently, Riyadh has been cautious about matters related to Pakistan and India. In February 2014, New Delhi and Riyadh inked a defense pact that allows both to exchange information regarding military training, security, logistics, hydrograph, and education.²⁶³

Analysts believe that Saudi's attempt to sign an agreement with India has many reasons. As the U.S. softened the Iranian nuclear program (JCPOA), the U.S. diminished interest in dethroning the Assad regime in Syria, 2015 Pakistan's decision not to deploy troops in KSA for the Yemen war these factors led KSA to diversify its dependence on countries for security partnership.

This nexus of KSA and India was perceived as a menace to Pakistan; they believed that this nexus would decrease the function of Pakistan in the Arab world and their dependence on Pakistan for security perspective. Few analysts predict that U.S. and KSA will use such a situation as an opportunity to force India and Pakistan to establish friendly relations. India sees KSA as a chance to influence anti-India militant groups working in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The former DG ISI Asad Durrani stated that the real external threat to Pakistan is not India but considered Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey a new challenge. In its vision 2030,²⁶⁴ KSA

²⁶³ Shairee Malhotra, "India Opportunities in Pak-Saudi Rift," *The South Asian Voices*. September 23, 2020. <https://southasianvoices.org/indias-opportunities-in-the-pakistan-saudi-rift/>

²⁶⁴ Khalid T. Aboalshamat, "Awareness of, Beliefs about, Practices of, and Barriers to Teledentistry among Dental Students and the Implications for Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 and Coronavirus Pandemic," *Journal of International Society of Preventive & Community Dentistry*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2020): 431.

considered countries as strategic partners, including India, but Pakistan was unable to make it to that list. In October 2019, KSA-India signed an agreement on establishing Strategic Partnership Council. Pakistan perceived the growing KSA-Indo relations as anti-Pakistan. The growing partnership in defence, military, and security was a concern for Pakistan when KSA signed the Joint Commission on Defence Cooperation in 2018. In 2019, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz, also known as MBS, paid a visit to India. PM Modi also visited Saudi Arabia the same year; General Manoj Mukund Naravane was the first Indian Chief of Army Staff to visit Saudi Arabia. In December 2020, India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval went to Saudi Arabia to further strengthen the ties. Both countries pledged to ink an agreement on defence intelligence. Prime Minister Modi, under the initiative of "Made in India," intends to diversify its economy and access large markets. As a soft power tool, Riyadh has released Indian prisoners around four hundred fifty in numbers, along with increasing the Hajj quota for Indian Muslims in 2019. PM Modi was also granted the highest civilian award to show interest in further improving Saudi-India ties.²⁶⁵

India-Saudi trade can be estimated by these statistics that Saudi Arabia is the fourth largest trade partner of India after China, the U.S., and Japan. India fulfils its 18 percent oil requirement through imports from Saudi Arabia. Riyadh also actively contributes to the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves program. 2.7 million Indians live in KSA, which provides human resources to Saudi Arabia. It is evident in terms of economy and technology that India has more to offer Saudi Arabia in terms of market, human resources, technology, and industries than Pakistan. While with Islamabad, Riyadh's interests were merely strategic and security-related rather than economic. It is a bitter truth that Saudi Arabia does not want to deteriorate its tie with India, risking its economic interests to support Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. In view of

²⁶⁵ Isra Sarwar, "India's Relations with Gulf: A Case Study of Indo-Saudi Strategic Relationship," *Journal of Indian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2020): 51-62.

analysts, there is a decrease in the confidence in Saudi Arabia to remain a financial supporter of Pakistan.²⁶⁶

Furthermore, the new Saudi Labour Law reforms and visa policy have affected Pakistani labor and the economy. The expatriate remittances sent from KSA play a crucial function in the economy of Pakistan. A decline in foreign remittances was observed in December 2020, and a significant number of Pakistani labourers were also deported from Saudi Arabia.²⁶⁷ This Saudi move led to misunderstandings. The situation worsened when the United Arab Emirates followed Saudi's footsteps on work and visa policy. Saudi Arabia might not remain the top labour destination for Pakistan as the work permit for Pakistani becomes difficult.

4.2.3 Afghan Ordeal

Despite several commonalities and brotherly ties between Tehran and Islamabad, mistrust still prevails on the Afghanistan issue, and challenging to make any consensus. Pakistan and Iran were among the countries that most suffered due to the Afghanistan issue, the refugee crisis,²⁶⁸ and the security concerns of Tehran and Islamabad badly affected the respective states' economies and internal security. On the societal front, drug smuggling, human trafficking, and suicide attacks increased, negatively affecting the economy and social fabric. The terrorist infiltration through porous borders to tribal regions further deteriorated the security conditions of the country. Even though the security threat rose of the Afghan issue, both states, instead of cooperating and supporting each other started to assist the opposite group in Afghanistan: Iran given aid and training to Northern Alliance, on the contrary, Pakistan supported Taliban group. Both sides tried to dilute the tense relationship caused due to Afghan conundrum. Attempts were made from both sides to alleviate the peace procedure in Afghan land. The incident of

²⁶⁶ "Saudi Arabia Agrees to Revive Financial Support to Pakistan," *The Economic Times*, October 27, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/saudi-arabia-agrees-to-revive-financial-support-to-pakistan/articleshow/87300689.cms>

²⁶⁷ "Pakistan Remittances from Saudi Arabia Fall by 7.5% in Two Months," *Pakistan Revenue*, September 13, 2022, <https://pkrevenue.com/pakistan-remittances-from-saudi-arabia-fall-by-7-5-in-two-months/>

²⁶⁸ Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "South Asia's Emerging Refugee Crisis," *Asian Currents* (2016).

Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 once again deteriorated Pakistan-Iran relations. Under shuttle diplomacy, the Iranian Foreign Minister tried to bridge the gulf between the Northern Alliance and Taliban. Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Abdul Sattar, in November 2001, announced that “the two countries had decided to collaborate in Afghanistan’s stabilization.”²⁶⁹ The American element always remained crucial in determining the nature of Islamabad-Tehran relations. The U.S. impacted Pakistan-Iran relations and cut Iran from being part of any international forums and organisations that impart its role in bringing peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s foreign policy always remains a dilemma: because of its economic dependence on American foreign aid, it is unable to manifest its independent foreign policy. Therefore, the option is only left to obey the dictations of a foreign power. Islamabad once again sacrificed its relationship with Tehran to comply with the orders of the U.S. to fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and on its land. Meanwhile, Iran sensed the situation and found it suitable to join hands with Russia and India due to American animosity and Pakistan’s reluctance to negotiate or talk about the peace process in Afghanistan. With U.S. involvement in a prolonged war in Afghanistan and a considerable amount of American budget spent in Afghanistan, the U.S. came under pressure from the public to exit Afghanistan.²⁷⁰

The U.S. intended to withdraw from the Afghanistan war started by the President Trump regime. The first round of talks started in UAE. It was estimated that despite U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the Taliban had a hold on a significant percentage of the Afghan territory. Trump was interested in involving India to play a prominent role in the peace process in Afghanistan. The anti- Pakistan rhetoric of the U.S. always brought Islamabad and Tehran closer to work with regional stakeholders on the Afghanistan conflict. Pakistan has played a crucial role in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the table of negotiations with the U.S. In December 2018, the

²⁶⁹“We’re Tired of Revolution [in Iran],” *JAFRIEDEL*, September 11, 2013, <https://jafriedel.wordpress.com/2013/09/11/iran-pakistan-relations/>

²⁷⁰ Clayton Thomas, “Afghanistan: background and US Policy,” Congressional research service 10 (2018): 16.

peace negotiations started in UAE, Iran was not invited to play a part in the Afghanistan peace process;²⁷¹ therefore, it has started its negotiation talks with different factions in Afghanistan with the prior consent of Ashraf Ghani's government. Hence one more opportunity was missed to bridge the ties with Iran by including it as a stakeholder in the Afghan peace process, mainly because of U.S. pressure. Hence Afghan peace process once again brought Pakistan and Iran at odds.

4.2.4 Kashmir Cause

KSA and Iran both supported Pakistan's stance over Kashmir. Recently history has witnessed a low ebb in their bilateral relations. The Saudi government was reluctant to convene a Foreign Minister level meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which Pakistan demanded as India, on 5th August 2019, had scarped the Article 370 and 35A, convert the Indian occupied land of Kashmir to as Union territory.²⁷²

Pakistan also did not participate in the Kuala Lumpur Summit. Because of KSA's pressure, Pakistan asked KSA to call a Foreign Ministers level OIC meeting. Shah Mehmood Qureshi,²⁷³ the Foreign Minister (FM), criticized OIC as: it should "stop dilly-dallying." Furthermore, Foreign Minister announced to call for a meeting of Islamic States on the issue of Kashmir; in other words, Pakistan threatened to make another alliance. In response, a diplomatic rift emerged, and Saudi Arabia took punitive economic measures against Pakistan. KSA asked to pay the loans earlier in the period along with the money in foreign reserves granted by KSA. Pakistan could not pay back the money. China, in this situation, came and supported financially to pay back. Analysts viewed the economy as a vital tool of KSA foreign policy to achieve its interests in Pakistan. Pakistan's military was also not pleased by these acts of Riyadh and a

²⁷¹ Thomas Ruttig, and Obaid Ali, "Words, No Deeds: 2017, Another Lost Year for Peace (talks) in Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Analysts Networks* (2018).

²⁷² A. Z. Hilali, "Kashmir Combustible Region: Abrogation of Article 370 & 35-A and its Grave Implications," *Journal of Indian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2021): 257-263.

²⁷³ Siegfried O. Wolf, "Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations in Flux: Is Islamabad Realigning its Foreign Policy?," *SADF-South Asia Democratic Forum* (2021).

growing Saudi-India nexus but did not risk its relations to break with KSA. Despite displeasure, the military regime has leverage over KSA regarding security, staff training, etc. Whenever the relations between Riyadh and the civilian government of Pakistan deteriorated, the military came forward to rescue it.

Following the crucial role of both the states as major stakeholders in the Middle Eastern Region, the interests of Pakistan are quite obvious. Pakistan is driven by the economic incentives and the economic edge of the states. The interests and goals have the potential to influence the domestic political developments of these states. Therefore, domestic involvement in the form of sectarian divide and foreign direct investments become strategic compulsions in the changing political dynamics. These foreign direct investments as well as remittances are causing sectarian activities based upon their cult. The roots of claimants of sectarian violence and other dimensions' result in altering the foreign policy missions. Moreover, the interests and goals of Pakistan viz-a-viz both Iran and Saudi Arabia are inextricably linked with the foreign policy orientation of the state.

With both countries playing such a pivotal role as major stakeholders in the Middle Eastern Region, Pakistan's interests are glaringly obvious. Pakistan is pushed forward by the economic advantages and incentives offered by other states. All of this has the potential to affect the internal politics of these states in some way. Because of this shift in political dynamics, domestic involvement in the form of sectarian divide and FDI has become a strategic necessity. These remittances and foreign direct investments are fuelling cult-based extremism. Alterations to foreign policy objectives are caused by the claims' origins in sectarian violence and other dimensions. Furthermore, Pakistan's foreign policy orientation is inextricably linked to the country's interests and goals with respect to both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In a nutshell, the discussed chapter has two specific aspects; one is linked with the implications for Pakistan in the deepening, rising conflict between the two states. With the additional factor

of domestic, state-level, and regional connotations of the developing political affairs. The driving factor of this implication can be gauged by the domestic compulsion of Pakistan in search of economic gain. The dependency on the economic sector is the baseline to steer through the developing phase. Pakistan, being a developing state, has direly needed economic and financial assistance since its inception. The rise of sectarian fault lines was the obvious consequence because of the Sunni-dominant Saudi Arabia and Shia-dominant Iran. These sectarian divides did not come as a surprise, as the religious inclinations of these two sects result in widening the gap of the majority sect card. With the enhanced level of economic dependency, both states have penetrated the community of Pakistan, which has had an impact on the societal fabric within the state of Pakistan. To say the least, it is not only the contours of the economic front but also the security perception and energy security that have created a thirst in relations with both the states. As far as the changing global dynamics are concerned, the enhancement of relations between Iran and India on one side and the development of ties with India and Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, have made this stance clear that the developing ties can have security repercussions on the state's affairs in Pakistan.

Secondly, following the crucial role of both the states as major stakeholders in the Middle Eastern Region, the interests of Pakistan are quite obvious. Pakistan is driven by the economic incentives and the economic edge of the states. The interests and goals have the potential to influence the domestic political developments of these states. Therefore, domestic involvement in the form of sectarian divide and foreign direct investments become strategic compulsions in the changing political dynamics. These foreign direct investments as well as remittances are causing sectarian activities based upon their cult. The roots of claimants of sectarian violence and other dimensions' result in altering the foreign policy missions. Moreover, the interests and goals of Pakistan viz-a-viz both Iran and Saudi Arabia are inextricably linked with the foreign policy orientation of the state.

With both countries playing such a pivotal role as major stakeholders in the Middle Eastern Region, Pakistan's interests are glaringly obvious. Pakistan is pushed forward by the economic advantages and incentives offered by other states. All of this has the potential to affect the internal politics of these states in some way. Because of this shift in political dynamics, domestic involvement in the form of sectarian divide and FDI has become a strategic necessity. These remittances give a fresh breath to the dying economy of Pakistan, while funding to madarrasas is fuelling cult-based extremism. Furthermore, Pakistan's foreign policy orientation is inextricably linked to the country's interests and goals with respect to both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

PART-III

***ROLE OF PAKISTAN IN
RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT
AND INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE***

CHAPTER FIVE

ROLE OF PAKISTAN IN RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT AND INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

It is essential to clarify the term ‘Resolution of the Conflict’ because sometime this terminology may be taken in connotation of International Law which is denoted as Conflict Resolution. Moore (1996) and Tillet (1998) claim that conflict appears at different awareness levels. Three stages of conflict are distinguished by analysts: latent conflict, which is characterised by underlying tensions that may not be publicly acknowledged; emerging conflict, which is when the dispute is acknowledged and parties are identified but no formal resolution process has been established; and manifest conflict, which is when attempts at resolution have failed and the parties have reached a deadlock. At this point, the problem is apparent, and people might choose to resolve it by court action, negotiation, mediation, or verbal or physical altercation.²⁷⁴

This chapter sheds light on the bi-folded dimensions. The first part discusses the role of Pakistan in the resolution of the Saudi Arabia-Iran conflict by highlighting the geo-strategic positioning of Pakistan and the effective balancing role of Pakistan as a mediator in wriggling out of the crises that emerged between the two states i.e. Saudi-Iran. The second part shed light on the external and internal factors that hinder Pakistan from playing the balancing act or remained neutral, keeping in view the changing political and economic dynamics. External factors comprise extra-regional powers or the International System and their influential role on Pakistan’s foreign policy towards the KSA-IRI conflict. This factor is a main reason Pakistan couldn’t able to play it role in the resolution of the Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry especially influence of U.S. The western sanction laden Iranian economy since the Islamic Revolution in Iran limits Pakistan’s maneuverability. The first part reflects the Balance of Interest

²⁷⁴ Carolyn Manning, *Defining Conflict Resolution*, Deal M for Mediation, 2. <https://www.dialmformediation.com.au/Defining%20Conflict%20Resolution.pdf>

perspective, while the second part reflects the neoclassical perspective that the foreign policy imperatives are influenced and shaped by the role of extra-regional forces (the International System) as well as the regional forces.

The chapter discusses the role of Pakistan during the time period of 2015 to 2020. The contemporary political dynamics have been brought to the fore as a balancer to navigate the peaceful process and settlement of the rivalry. And the regional political dynamics with the leading role of balancing between the two states have been discussed for setting the path to wriggling out of the crises and adversaries.

Since power shifts have posed a danger to the U.S.-led world order, the alliances and foreign policies of states such as Pakistan have assumed critical relevance. Keeping in view Pakistan's geostrategic importance, untapped natural resources, and enormous human capital, it must be exceptionally cautious with its foreign policy. Pakistan is economically dependent on international institutions and is bordered by hostile and unpredictable neighbours.²⁷⁵ The international system mainly influenced by the major Global powers U.S. and China; therefore, it is necessary to discuss the influence of major power on Pakistan's policy towards Saudi Arabia and Iran. Therefore, the U.S. influence as a hindrance has been mentioned specifically to talk about the shaping of Pakistan's policy orientation towards the Middle East region. In this way, various dimensions have been included such as the role of the U.S. in shaping Pakistan-Iran relations as well as the role of the U.S. in determining the relations with Saudi Arabia. In the preceding chapter, the role of China as another reason has also been discussed owing to the shift in policy orientations because of the stakes and interests of China in the Middle Eastern region.

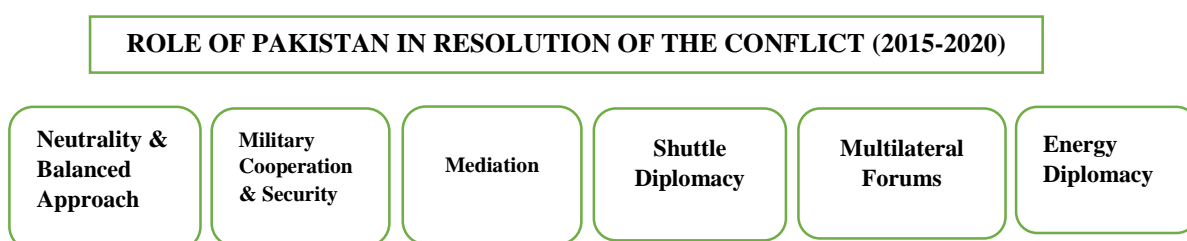
²⁷⁵Shahid Iqbal, "Foreign policy preferences of Pakistan: A comparative analysis (2008-2018)." *Muslim Perspectives* (2018):64.

5.1. Pakistan's Balancing Role from 2015-2020 Under Balance of Interest Theory

Pakistan has worked hard over the last ten years to meet the conflicting needs and interests of its neighbours while putting itself through challenging tests. Using the Balance of Interest Theory to examine Pakistan's involvement in the Saudi-Iranian rivalry provides insights into the intricate dynamics of regional power politics and state strategy planning.

Islamabad's diplomatic skills have been put to the test in three specific incidents: Saudi Arabia's actions against the Houthi rebels in Yemen in 2015, Iran's explosive response to the killing of a Saudi Shia cleric in 2016 and in 2019 the attack on Saudi oil facilities and upsurge of tension. An in-depth examination of the conditions surrounding these regional crises paints a clear picture of Pakistan's intentions and strategies for resolving tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan took a number of steps between 2015 and 2020 to encourage communication and lessen hostilities between Saudi Arabia and Iran, same the practice Pakistan did in past. Among these initiatives are:

Figure-7 : Pakistan Approaches in Resolution of the Saudi-Iranian Conflict



5.1.1. Neutrality and Balancing Approach

According to the balance of interest theory, preserving stability and reducing conflicts between conflicting interests require a neutral stance and a balancing strategy. "neutrality" describes the impartiality or lack of tilt towards rival states. Using a balancing strategy means carefully lining up with different players so neither state can take over the political scene. Within the balance of interest theory framework, these ideas are critical for regulating power relations,

encouraging collaboration, and preventing confrontation. By keeping parties from becoming involved in each other's internal affairs, neutrality acts as a check on the escalation of conflicts. Neutral nations can be facilitators or mediators in talks, encouraging communication and harmony between rival groups by remaining unbiased.

Additionally, by building partnerships and alliances with various entities, a balancing approach enables states to negotiate intricate geopolitical contexts. By using this tactic, states can preserve their sovereignty and autonomy while counteracting the influence of more substantial entities. States can prevent the rise of hegemonic forces and guarantee a fairer power distribution by coordinating with various actors according to their goals and interests.²⁷⁶

Pakistan remained impartial in the conflict between KSA and IRI, refusing to choose a side and promoting amicable relations between the two nations. Pakistan sought to avoid getting sucked into the crisis and to maintain its reputation as a mediator by taking a neutral stance.

In the early phase of Saudi military operation in Yemen, in March 2015, Saudi Arabia made a formal request for Pakistan to support in war against Houthi rebels in Yemen. The Houthi rebels in Yemen, who had taken over the capital city of Sana'a and were moving towards the southern port city of Aden, near Saudi border. Pakistan was enlisted by Saudi Arabia in order to strengthen its coalition and supply more military power. Pakistan originally responded to Saudi Arabia's request with caution and a lack of commitment. Pakistan chose to proceed cautiously despite appreciating its strong ties to Saudi Arabia and the significance of maintaining regional stability for a number of reasons. The defence minister of Pakistan informed the parliament that Saudi Arabia had requested aircraft, warships, and troops from Pakistan to support its attack against the Houthis in Yemen²⁷⁷. The United States and other Persian Gulf nations supported the Saudi government when it began its airpower-heavy

²⁷⁶ Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the security dilemma," *World Politics*, 30(2), 167-214.

²⁷⁷ Salman Masood and Kareem Fahim, Saudis Ask Pakistan to Join the Fight in Yemen, *The New York Times*, April 6, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/07/world/middleeast/saudis-seek-pakistani-troops-for-yemen-campaign-official-says.html>

campaign against the Houthis. However, after almost two weeks of bombardment, the Houthis' advance—including into Aden—has not been halted. The prospect of a ground invasion has been brought up by the Saudis and their allies on several occasions.

Analysts predict that such an invasion would heavily rely on foreign forces, notably those from close allies of the Saudis like Pakistan.²⁷⁸ Pakistan's primary approach to Saudi Arabia's appeal for military assistance during the 2015 Yemen war was to refrain from intervening and remained neutral keeping in view its domestic opposition, Parliamentary Resolution, Strategic consideration and resource constrains. Pakistan's Parliament resolved to abstain from intervening militarily in the Yemen war and to maintain its neutral position. The Persian Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, reacted harshly on Pakistan's neutral stance.

The domestic factors played a crucial role to refrain Pakistan to take side of any states. On some issues, Pakistani Wahhabi organisations also back Saudi Arabia. For instance, in 2015, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, a pro-Saudi group, organised a rally in support of Saudi intervention in Yemen.²⁷⁹ When a well-known Shiite preacher was executed by the Saudi government in 2016, there were protests in Pakistan.²⁸⁰ Similarly, pro-Iran factions in Pakistan staged similar demonstrations following the U.S. drone operation that assassinated General Qasem Soleimani.²⁸¹ The sectarian discord which was brought by Zia's Islamization and the Afghan Jihad²⁸² in Pakistan, Wahhabi organisations and some extreme Sunni factions also turn against the Shi'ite populace. Furthermore, the Shiite population reacts negatively to events occurring

²⁷⁸ Salman, Saudis Ask Pakistan to Join the Fight in Yemen, *New York Times*, April 6, 2015.

²⁷⁹ Umair Jamal, "The Kuala Lumpur Summit 2019 Shows Pakistan's Diplomatic Subservience to Saudi Arabia" *The Diplomat*, December 20, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/the-kuala-lumpur-summit-2019-shows-pakistans-diplomatic-subservience-to-saudi-arabia/>

²⁸⁰ Ankit Panda, *Pakistan's Approach to Navigating the Saudi-Iranian Split*, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Special Report. no. 439. February 2019, pg 16.

²⁸¹ Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan Stress Neutrality, Big Rally Protests Killing of Soleimani", *Voice of America*, <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/voa-news-iran/pakistan-stress-neutrality-big-rally-protests-killing-soleimani>, January 05, 2020.

²⁸² Jamal Shah, Zia-Ul-Haque and the Proliferation of Religion in Pakistan, *International Journal of Business and Social Science*. 3(21). http://www.ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_21_November_2012/33.pdf . 533.

in the Middle East. Thus, Pakistan's neutral stance is essential to preserving domestic stability. On April 9, 2015, Iran's foreign minister Javad Zarif paid a visit to Islamabad, one day prior to the Pakistani parliament's decision. One of Zarif's main goals during his formal discussions was to persuade Pakistan's government to withdraw from the military coalition in Yemen.²⁸³ Through the formal correspondence that followed, Tehran also expressed gratitude for Pakistan's neutrality on this issue.²⁸⁴ It was resolved at a National Security Council meeting that Pakistan will maintain its neutrality in regional disputes.²⁸⁵

On the matter of Syrian issue in 2017, despite the Saudi influence on Pakistan to call off his envoy from Syria. Pakistan did not call out his ambassador from Syria which show its neutral stance in the matter of Middle East. And this positive neutrality of Pakistan was appreciated by Syria. Despite Saudi Arabia's perception of Pakistan as a vital state in times of need, the country has consistently avoided the push from Riyadh to advance its own agenda and remained neutral.

5.1.2 Military Cooperation and Security

According to the balance of interest theory, military security, and collaboration are essential to preserving the balance between rival states on a national and international level. According to this theory of balance of interest, security measures and military cooperation are used to protect national interests and stop any party from controlling the system at the expense of others. First, alliances and partnerships between states with similar security concerns are fostered via military cooperation. States can strengthen their collective security posture and thwart possible threats by cooperating, exchanging intelligence, and organizing joint military drills. By

²⁸³ J. Boone and Dehghan. "Pakistan's Parliament Votes Against Entering Yemen Conflict." The Guardian, April 10 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/10/pakistans-parliament-votes-against-entering-yemenconflict>.

²⁸⁴ Press TV, "Iran lauds Pakistan Stance not to Join Saudi War on Yemen." October 29. <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2015/10/29/435462/Iran-Pakistan-Shamkhani-SNSC-Nawaz-Sharif->.

²⁸⁵ "Pakistan to Stay Neutral in any Regional Conflict." Pakistan Today, May 23. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/05/22/top-civil-military-leadership-reiterates-resolve-for-regional-peace-stability/>.

working together, we can lessen the chance of conflict and advance stability in the international system, which benefits all the parties.

Given the above, Saudi Arabia declared the creation of the “Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism” in December 2015. The coalition, which eventually included 41 countries with a majority of Muslims, promised to defend Muslims from terrorist groups, ostensibly with the Syrian Civil War in mind. This time, Pakistan secretly joined the coalition after opting not to send soldiers to support the Saudi attack on Yemen in April 2015. However, Pakistan has made a significant effort to dispel the notion that the partnership is an anti-Iranian pact. “The goal of the coalition is not military in nature and is instead focused on adopting a joint counter-terrorism narrative, rather than forming an anti-Shia alliance,” said then-Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif in 2016.²⁸⁶ “It would be more fitting to describe our policy towards Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other Muslim countries as balanced rather than neutral,” said Sartaj Aziz, adviser to the prime minister on foreign affairs, in an interview.²⁸⁷ June 2017, Sartaj Aziz reaffirmed at a Senate meeting that they were part of a coalition, not an alliance, because an alliance requires a formal agreement. He made it clear that each member will choose whether or not to participate in coalition-sponsored events on their own.²⁸⁸ However, it should be mentioned that despite Saudi Arabia’s best efforts to convince Pakistan to forego declaring a front against Iran, Saudi Arabia was unable to even convince Pakistan to remove its envoy from Damascus. Pakistan has been very cautious on the Syria issue as well. With the exception of a brief period when it was unsafe to do so, the Sharif government maintained its ambassador in Damascus. This approach, known as “positive neutrality,” was applauded by the Syrian

²⁸⁶ Muhammad Anis, ‘1,180 Pakistan Army personnel present in Saudi Arabia: Kh Asif’, The News, January 20, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/92465-1180-Pakistan-Army-personnel-presentin-Saudi-Arabia-Kh-Asif>

²⁸⁷ Muhammad Anis; also see conciliatory comments by National Security Advisor to the PM, Nasser Khan Janjua, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1377204/raheel-sharif-willnot-hurt-irans-interests-nasser-janjua/> 2016.

²⁸⁸ Irfan Ghauri, ‘Sartaj Aziz fails to satisfy Senate on Saudi alliance’s mandate’, The Express Tribune, June 2, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1425195/sartaj-aziz-fails-satisfy-senate-saudi-alliances-mandate/>

envoy in Islamabad.²⁸⁹ It may still seem quite strange that Pakistan joined the Islamic Alliance and then permitted its highly regarded former chief of staff, Raheel Sharif, to lead the group. However, in order to avoid any misunderstandings, the Pakistani government spoke with Iran before declaring that they did not oppose to General Raheel 'Sharif new position.²⁹⁰ The administration repeatedly stated that Raheel Sharif would never drag any conflict with Iran in his new role.²⁹¹

Iran's ambassador to Pakistan has stated that Iran views Pakistan's authority and believes that any endeavours by Arab governments within Pakistan are an internal matter for Islamabad. The Pakistani army, which has Shia chiefs of army staff in addition to Sunnis and a few Christian commanders, is remarkably the largest nonpartisan army in the Muslim world. Pakistan is therefore in a good position to alleviate the pressures from Saudi Arabia and Iran.²⁹²

Moreover, the incumbent Army Chief Qamar Jawed Bajwa was the first army chief to reach out to Tehran.²⁹³ He gave a statement about Pakistan and Iran ties that both countries enjoyed historic relations and there will be no compromise on their ties.²⁹⁴ On the other hand, army personnel of different ranks around 1180 are stationed in Riyadh for training and security.²⁹⁵

Pakistan military had a great role in the modernization of Saudi military; dozens of cadets pass out from military academy of Pakistan as well as trained by Pakistan, same is the case of Iraqi

²⁸⁹ 'The Future of Syria': A Talk by H.E. Ambassador Radwan Loutfi, Pakistan Horizon, 29 November 2015, <https://pakistanhorizon.wordpress.com/2015/11/29/the-future-of-syria-a-talk-by-h-e-ambassador-radwan-loutfi/>; 'Syria Honors Ambassador of Pakistan', Syrian Arab News Agency, 30 March 2015, <http://sana.sy/en/?p=34062>

²⁹⁰ Iran envoy expresses reservations about fmr Pak army chief 's role in military alliance', IRNA, April 3, 2017, <http://www.irna.ir/en/News/82480185/>

²⁹¹ Govt vows to keep balance in ties with S. Arabia, Iran', Dawn, April 5, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1324932/govt-vows-to-keep-balance-in-ties-with-s-arabia-iran>; 'Pakistan resisted Saudi offer to join military alliance: NSA', The News, April 7, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/197142-Pakistan-resisted-Saudi-offer-to-join-military-alliance-NSA>

²⁹² Khursheed Alam, Asia's quiet superpower: Pakistan army's teetering balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Middle east eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/asias-quiet-superpower-pakistan-armys-teetering-balance-between-saudi-arabia-and-iran>. February 8, 2018.

²⁹³ Kamal Alam, 'Pakistan Army to the GCC: No longer your gun for hire', Middle East Eye, July 5, 2017, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/pakistan-army-gccno-longer-your-gun-hire-1617896546>

²⁹⁴ 'Stronger Pak-Iran defense ties to serve regional peace', Dawn, March 5, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1318523/stronger-pak-iran-defence-ties-to-serve-regional-peace-bajw>

²⁹⁵ Anis, Pakistan Army personnel present, 2016.

cadets.²⁹⁶ It was also evident that Pakistan wish not to utilize its troops in war against any Muslim country.²⁹⁷ The Pakistani Ambassador to America Ms. Maleeha Lodhi was asked about the matter of sending Pakistani soldier in Yemen, she states: *“Pakistan should not do anything in hurry. Yemen is an Islamic country. Muslims should not attack it... It does not suit Pakistan to send its army against an Islamic country. We have to take care of the interests of Iran because Iran is our close neighbor. Pakistan will suffer an irreparable loss in case its relations with Iran deteriorate. Already Pakistan has also to take care of the Afghan front along with India, now a third front with Iran will paralyze Pakistan”*.²⁹⁸

The Islamic Alliance should not be used by Pakistan as a tool for isolating and opposing Iran, according to Khalid Mahmood, a former Pakistani ambassador to Tehran who served there under Hashimi Rafsanjani, “Pakistan would not allow its friendship with other countries in the Persian Gulf region to stand in the way of the development of friendly relations with Iran.”²⁹⁹ Lastly, with reference to the purported shift in Pakistan’s policy away from Iran and towards Saudi Arabia in 2017, it was stated by a Pakistani ambassador that “We have been trying and will continue to try to convince them that relations with Saudi Arabia are not at Iran’s cost. We equally value ties with Iran as a neighbor and a Muslim country. We cannot change our neighbours and so need to have good relations with them.”³⁰⁰

By remaining neutral in the Iranian-Saudi or intra-Arab conflicts, Pakistani officials are demonstrating their ongoing concern over internal sectarian strife. In the military, where it’s

²⁹⁶Kamal Alam, ‘Asia’s quiet superpower: Pakistan army’s teetering balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran’, Middle East Eye, March 2, 2017, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/asias-quiet-superpower-pakistan-army-s-teetering-balance-between-saudi-and-iran-903452261>

²⁹⁷ Umair Jamal, ‘Why Would Pakistan send Combat Troops to Saudi Arabia?’, The Diplomat, March 20, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/why-would-pakistan-send-combat-troops-to-saudi-arabia-now/>

²⁹⁸‘Dr. Maleeha Lodhi Interview’, Interview by Muhammad Owais Razi, <http://www.weeklyazm.com/gs/354-13to19.03.15/DR%20MALEEHA%20%20LODHI%20INTERVIEW.pdf>

²⁹⁹‘Statement by Amb. Khalid Mahmood, Chairman and DG, ISSI, Speech on “Pakistan, Iran & Gulf Countries Relations”, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, ISSI, May 24, 2017, <http://issi.org.pk/statement-pakistan-iran-gulf-countries-relations/>

³⁰⁰‘Statement by Amb. Khalid Mahmood, Chairman and DG, ISSI, Speech on “Pakistan, Iran & Gulf Countries Relations”, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, ISSI, May 24, 2017, <http://issi.org.pk/statement-pakistan-iran-gulf-countries-relations/>

customary to disregard or avoid discussing an officer's sect,³⁰¹ are particularly worried as such internal strife would jeopardise their own unity. For instance, it has been stated that while Saudi Arabia's political leadership and Chief of Staff Sharif indicated they were willing to provide soldiers, Pakistani officers as a whole were against Pakistani forces taking part in the military attack in Yemen.³⁰² The son of former chief of inter-services intelligence, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, Abdullah Gul, asserts that "Yemen was hotly debated within the military. Ultimately, the military feared that there would be a sectarian backlash within the military itself if it got involved in the Saudi-Iranian proxy war in Yemen."³⁰³ This audacious decision to forgo sending forces was made even though it made Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates angry.³⁰⁴

According to reports, General Bajwa—who at the time was the Inspector General for Training and Evaluation at General Headquarters—was mainly against the Saudi request. In order to allay Iran's worries and preserve the precarious equilibrium between Pakistan's ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran, he went above and beyond. The Director-General of Inter-Services Public Relations, Major-General Asif Ghafoor, publicly declared in April 2017 that Pakistan aspires to cultivate good relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. He underlined that Pakistan cherishes its friendships with both nations and expects that they will develop amicable relations as well. He further declared that no action would be taken by the new alliance, which would endanger relations between the two Islamic nations.³⁰⁵ It comes as no surprise that a number of Pakistani

³⁰¹Schofield, *Inside the Pakistan army: a woman's experience on the frontline of the war on terror*, London: Biteback Publishing, 2011, 23.

³⁰² Kamal Alam, for instance, claimed on the contrary that the majority of the military was in favor of participating in the war in Yemen, 2017.

³⁰³James M. Dorsey, 'Pakistani Military Engagement: Walking a fine line between Saudi Arabia and Iran', Huffington Post, April 15, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/pakistani-military-engagement-walking-a-fine-line_us_58c8ecb5e4b01d0d473bcf51

³⁰⁴ Roi Kais, 'Report: Pakistan Rejected Iran Offer to join anti-Saud coalition in Yemen', Ynet.news, April 11, 2015, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4645941,00>.

³⁰⁵ Murtaza Ali Shah, 'Pakistan Wants Good Ties with Saudi Arabia, Iran: DG ISPR', Geo Tv, April 5, 2017, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/136948-Pakistan-wants-good-tieswith-both-Saudi-Iran-says-DG-ISPR>; Talat Masood, 'Navigating a Complex Middle East', The Express Tribune, April 12, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1380970/navigating-complex-middle-east/>

retired generals advise against taking any action that might encourage sectarianism among the armed services. According to former Air Vice Marshall Shahzad Chaudhry, “proxy wars on sectarian lines between Islamic countries must not be allowed to be fought on the soil of Pakistan.”³⁰⁶ Retired Lieutenant-General Talat Masood has also said that Pakistan should not take sides in these types of Middle Eastern feuds.³⁰⁷ Pakistan opposes sanctions and any strike on Iran due to the same worry of growing militancy and sectarian tensions. All of this does not imply that Iran does not cause Pakistani issues. Iran is still operating covertly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, encouraging the Shia people there to join the Syrian conflict, “Residents of Pakistan are recruited to join the fight in Syria through Urdu-language websites... at least hundreds—if not thousands—have left Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight in Syria under Iranian direction.”³⁰⁸

The problem of Baluchistan is still an ongoing concern. Prior to General Raheel Sharif’s retirement, Pakistan accused Iran during President Rouhani’s visit in March 2016 of permitting the Indian intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), to operate in the Baluchistan region from Iranian soil.³⁰⁹ On the contrary Iran complains the activity of anti-Iranian groups for instance Jaysh al-Adl operating in Baluchistan province of Pakistan.³¹⁰

Even with these issues and the sporadic border skirmishes and gun exchanges, Iran still commands a great deal of respect in Pakistan’s diplomatic ties. With 57% of Pakistanis having a favorable opinion of Iran compared to 16% having a negative one, Pakistan has the highest

³⁰⁶Asif Jehangir Raja, Interview with Air Vice Marshall (Retd) Shahzad Aslam Chaudhry, *Hilal: The Pakistan Armed Forces Magazine* Edition 9, Volume 50, (March 2014),32.

³⁰⁷Talat Masood, ‘Pakistan’s Role in Mideast Crisis’, *The Express Tribune*, June 14, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1434745/pakistans-role-mideast-crisis/>

³⁰⁸ Ari Heistein and James West, ‘Syria’s other foreign fighters: Iran’s Afghan and Pakistani Mercenaries’, *The National Interest*, November 20, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/syrias-other-foreign-fighters-irans-afghanpakistani-14400>

³⁰⁹ ‘Rouhani denies discussing ‘RAW’s involvement in Balochistan’ with Pakistani leadership’, *Dawn*, March 26, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1248078>

³¹⁰ ‘Iran warns will hit militant ‘safe havens’ inside Pakistan’, *The Express Tribune*, May 8, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1404372/iran-warns-will-hit-militantsafe-havens-inside-pakistan/>

approval rating among nations with a majority of Muslims in 2015. This relatively high proportion conceals the reality that in 2006, 72% of Pakistanis approved of Iran.³¹¹

Pakistan kept up its military engagement with Saudi Arabia through bilateral agreements and training initiatives while remaining impartial. Pakistan underlined the significance of regional security and stability while restating that its military support was not intended to exacerbate tensions in the area.

5.1.3. Mediation and Diplomacy

Within the balance of interests theory framework, conflict management and preserving equilibrium between rival states primarily depend on diplomacy and mediation. Diplomacy and mediation are tools to balance these conflicting interests and keep problems from worsening.

Pakistan has included the mediator function in its balancing relationship with Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan took up the role of a broker or mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran during the dispute that erupted after Saudi Arabia assassinated Sheikh Nimr-al Nimr in the early months of 2016. Chief of Army General and Prime Minister Sharif traveled to Tehran and Riyadh to defuse the tense situation. Similar to Zia's regime during the Iran-Iraq War, Pakistan has clung to its role as a mediator. Meanwhile, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini's chief military adviser and Supreme National Security Council secretary, Ali Shamkhani, met with the Army General. Pakistani reports state that General Sharif supported direct lines of communication between Saudi Arabia and Iran during that meeting. Following the two Sharifs' visits to Saudi Arabia and Iran, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that Pakistan might be crucial in breaking the deadlock between Riyadh and Tehran two weeks later.³¹²

³¹¹ Hani ZainulBhai and Richard Wike, 'Iran's Global Image Mostly Negative', Pew Research Center, June 18, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/18/irans-globalimage-mostly-negative/>

³¹² Irfan Haider, "Nawaz Can Play Pivotal Role in Solving Saudi-Iran Conflict: Ban Ki-Moon," *Dawn*, February 12, 2016, www.dawn.com/news/1239072

The Yemen crisis reappeared in the middle of September 2019, when Aramco, the biggest oil facilitation company in the United States, was attacked with a number of missiles and drones. Saudi Arabia accused Iran of being behind the attack, a claim Tehran denied. As regional tensions increased, other nations—particularly Pakistan and Iraq—tried to mediate. In October 2019, Imran Khan, who was prime minister at the time, travelled to Tehran and Riyadh. The Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Salman has asked both nations to intercede and defuse the situation, according to a report from the New York Times.

Following attacks on the oil fields of Abqaiq and Khurais in September 2019, Saudi Arabia accused Iran of being behind the attacks and supporting the Yemeni Houthis. Both nations were on the verge of war, but Imran Khan, the prime minister of Pakistan, denounced the attack and travelled to Saudi Arabia and Iran to resolve the situation.³¹³

Pakistan's attempt to mediate disputes between Riyadh and Tehran was successful, dispelling any skepticism expressed by certain quarters over the likelihood of this effort succeeding. In the meantime, Tehran also wanted to set up a meeting between the two countries, and both accepted the offer of mediation and the designation of a focal point by Pakistan; Iran and Saudi Arabia would also be called to facilitate this. All other Muslim states greatly appreciated Pakistan's honest efforts.

Prime Minister Imran Khan said Islamabad will keep moderating the issue, pointing out that Pakistan's involvement as a mediator stopped tensions between Tehran and Riyadh from rising. Furthermore, he acknowledged that although the mediation process is moving slowly, it will not end because we have made every effort to avoid escalation and succeeded.

Dr. Qandil Abbas, Associate Professor, shared his views, "Pakistan is enjoying an amicable relationship with Iran and Arab countries. Both parties are usually welcoming Pakistan's

³¹³ Shariq Khan, Express Tribune, *The Saudi-Iran conflict and Pakistan*, 13 October 2020.

mediatory role in resolving the differences between Iran and Saudi Arabs. During the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan. It was decided that Pakistan would appoint a focal person to look after Pakistan's mediatory role, but that did not happen, and Pakistan lost this opportunity; however, Pakistan still has the potential to play such a mediatory role, which can enhance Pakistan's importance in a regional and international level.³¹⁴

Managing the rivalry between Iran - Saudi Arabia, Pakistan requires diplomacy and mediation. The region can experience less tension and more peace and stability if diplomatic efforts are made to promote communication, avoid escalation.

5.1.4. Shuttle Diplomacy

Shuttle diplomacy is a term used to describe a diplomatic strategy in which a mediator travels between disputing parties to assist in conversations and settle disagreements. It was first used during Henry Kissinger's efforts in the Middle East in the 1970s. This method, distinguished by the partners' back-and-forth movement, enables continuous discussion and contact even when direct participation is difficult. Shuttle diplomacy has been helpful in many diplomatic endeavors, such as the 1978 Camp David Accords, in which Kissinger was a key player in mediating a settlement between Egypt and Israel. Shuttle diplomacy has recently been used to settle disputes in areas like the Persian Gulf and the Korean Peninsula. The approach is an essential tool in contemporary diplomacy because it may establish trust, uphold confidentiality, and offer an impartial forum for discussion.

To reduce tensions and advance understanding, Pakistani diplomats have engaged in shuttle diplomacy between Riyadh and Tehran, delivering messages and opening lines of

³¹⁴ Dr. Qandil Abbas, Associate Professor at School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Interviewed in person on 27th December 2022 at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

communication. For instance, after Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned in November 2017, citing Iran's meddling in Lebanese affairs, tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran escalated. The Lebanese militia funded by Iran, Hezbollah, was allegedly responsible for Hariri's resignation, according to Saudi Arabia, which had backed him. General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, travelled to Tehran and Riyadh to conduct shuttle diplomacy and ease tensions. In addition, the newly appointed Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff, was the first army chief who has visited Iran and reiterated Pakistan's brotherly relations with Iran.³¹⁵

Prime Minister Khan travelled to Riyadh and Tehran in October 2019 in an effort to start a conversation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Although Tehran told Khan that it was willing to speak with Riyadh, Prime Minister Khan's shuttle diplomacy resulted in no clear plan of action but it timely defused the intensity of rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Foreign Minister of Iran in a session in Islamabad delineated Iranian stance,

“We are ready to work with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on every bilateral and multilateral issue. He said that we know that we cannot exclude Saudi Arabia from this region and it's important for them to also understand this. We need to have a reciprocal understanding that excluding one another from the region is not an option. If Saudi Arabia faces any aggression, Iran will be the first to come to their assistance. We believe the security of our neighbours is our security. Stability within our neighbourhood is our stability”.³¹⁶

5.1.5. Engagements on Multilateral Forums

Multilateral forums offer for collaboration, negotiation, and conflict resolution between numerous players with conflicting interests, multilateral forums are crucial to the balance of interests theory. Although Pakistan has always taken a balanced stance towards Saudi Arabia and Iran, on occasion it has voiced concerns and called for communication to reduce tensions

³¹⁵Stronger Pak-Iran defense ties to serve regional peace', Dawn, March 5, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1318523/stronger-pak-iran-defence-ties-to-serve-regional-peace-bajwa>

³¹⁶ Public Talk, 70 Years of Pakistan-Iran Relations and Future Prospects, Islamabad: ISSI, 2018.

between the two nations within the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the United Nations (UN). These events are noteworthy because they represent Pakistan's positions on the Saudi-Iranian rivalry.

Due to Saudi Arabia and Iran's support of opposing forces, the Yemeni conflict has heightened tensions between them; Pakistan has expressed concerns over this. Pakistan emphasised the need for communication and mediation within the UN and OIC venues and demanded a diplomatic resolution to the dispute.³¹⁷ Pakistan advocated for a peaceful end to the unrest during the 2011 Bahraini revolt, which saw protests by the Shiite majority against the Sunni-led government. Reiterating the OIC's views, Pakistan stressed the necessity of communication and peace making between the opposition and the administration.³¹⁸

Remarkably, in a strongly anti-Iranian resolution published on January 21, 2016, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is made up of fifty-seven Muslim states and is acknowledged as the largest international organisation after the United Nations, stated that it was in favour of Saudi Arabia in its diplomatic dispute with Iran. This resolution charged Tehran with supporting terrorism and interfering with other countries' domestic affairs. The OIC did not, however, address Riyadh's execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a well-known Shia cleric, an act that heightened tensions between the two competing regional powers.³¹⁹ Pakistan has backed statements and decisions at OIC summits that stress the value of peacefully settling disputes, such as the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. These proclamations frequently emphasise the necessity of communication, negotiation, and respect for each member state's sovereignty and territorial integrity.³²⁰

³¹⁷ "Pakistan stresses political solution to Yemen crisis," Dawn, April 1, 2015

³¹⁸ "Pakistan urges Bahrain to address demands of people," The Express Tribune, February 22, 2011.

³¹⁹ Hala Guta, "Sectarian transnational identities online: Bahrain and Saudi Arabia," In *Gulf Cooperation Council Culture and Identities in the New Millennium*, pp. 33-52. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2020.

³²⁰ "OIC Summit Declaration," Organization of Islamic Cooperation, May 31, 2019.

Pakistan has played a multifarious role in the UN in resolving the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, including diplomatic measures, advocating for dialogue, and promoting regional stability. Pakistan has made use of its standing in the UN to promote Saudi Arabia and Iran's mediation. It has offered its diplomatic skills to help expedite negotiations and urged both parties to have a positive discourse.³²¹ Within the UN Security Council and other relevant bodies, Pakistan has consistently called for diplomatic solutions to regional conflicts, including the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It has emphasized the importance of dialogue, de-escalation, and respect for sovereignty.³²²

In UN forums, Pakistan has aggressively promoted actions meant to stop the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran from getting worse. It has encouraged all sides to abstain from acts that could worsen the situation and supported initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying causes of conflict.³²³ Pakistan has advocated for the use of multilateral diplomacy within the UN framework to address complicated regional concerns. It has urged the international community to constructively assist in facilitating negotiations and advocated for communication within regional organisations.³²⁴ These instances demonstrate Pakistan's attempts, with a focus on diplomacy, war avoidance, and regional stability, to settle the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran inside the framework of the UN.

5.1.6. Energy Diplomacy

Pakistan aimed to strengthen its energy cooperation with Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan endeavoured to enhance economic relations and promote stability in the region by pursuing pipeline projects and energy deals. Pakistan's involvement in energy diplomacy has also given

³²¹ "Pakistan calls for diplomatic solution to Gulf crisis," *The Express Tribune*, July 20, 2017.

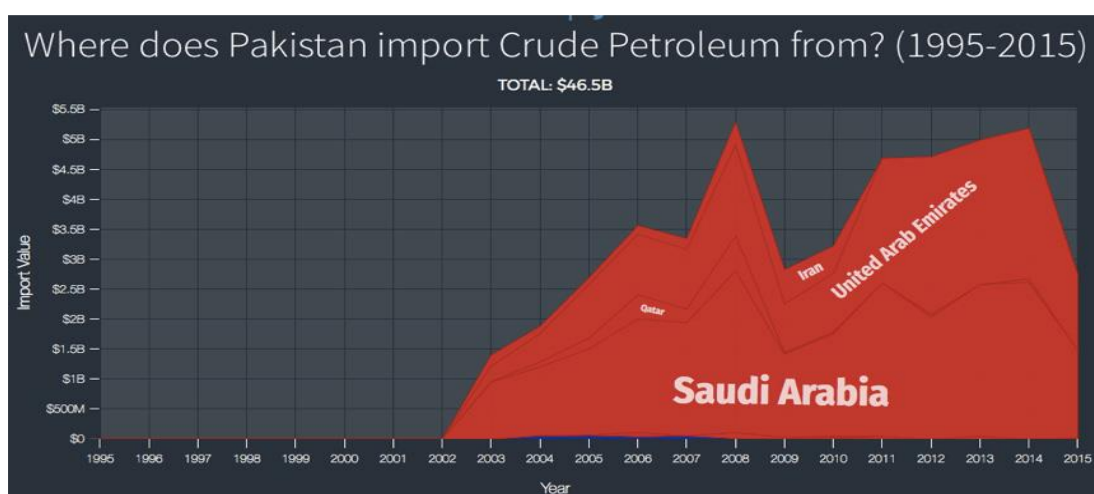
³²² "UN General Assembly: Pakistan underscores the need for peaceful resolution of conflicts," *Associated Press of Pakistan*, September 25, 2021.

³²³ "Pakistan stresses need to address root causes of conflict," *The Nation*, August 13, 2019.

³²⁴ "Pakistan stresses importance of multilateral diplomacy," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan*, October 12, 2022.

Saudi Arabia and Iran a platform for communication and confidence-building. Other factors that compel Pakistan to exercise caution are economic in nature: Maintaining ongoing access to gas and oil presents serious practical challenges for Pakistan. Pakistan imports natural gas and oil from Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to meet its energy demands (a minor amount from other countries). The below figure depicts Pakistan's dependency on Saudi Arabia in terms of crude oil.

Figure 7: Where does Pakistan import Crude Petroleum from? (1995-2015)
(Source: atlas.media 1995.2015)

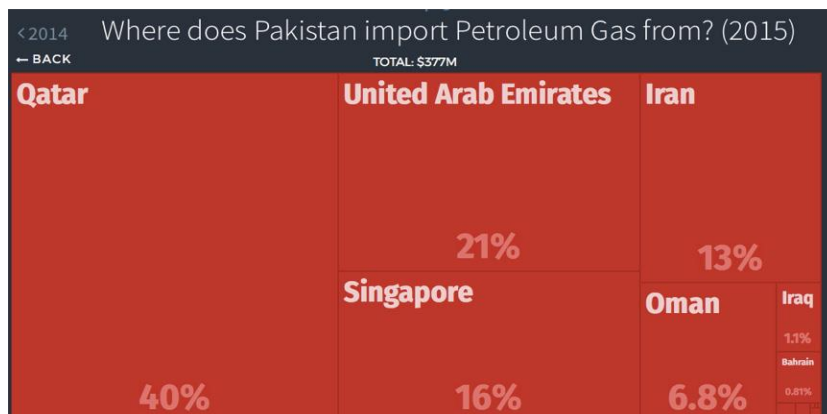


However, Qatar supplies the majority of the natural gas needed, with the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, and Iran following. In 2016, Pakistan and Qatar inked a deal to guarantee the supply of LNG until 2031,³²⁵ and is anticipating to import more from a Iran.³²⁶

³²⁵ 'Pakistan to continue import of LNG from Qatar', Dawn, 8 June 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1338261>

³²⁶ Mehreen Zahra-Malik, 'Iran's Rouhani says can provide Pakistan gas through pipeline within months', Reuters, March 26, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-iran-pipeline-idUSKCN0WSOLA>

Figure 8: Where does Pakistan Import Petroleum Gas from? (2015)
(Source: atlas.media 2015)



These figures give Pakistan the economic justification it needs to actively seek a balance between its ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran. It cannot afford to lose Saudi Arabia as a crude oil supplier, any more than it can afford to agitate Iran and watch as it forges closer ties with its bitterest foe, India. Furthermore, Pakistan stands to benefit greatly from Iran's reopening to the global economy following the nuclear accord. Pakistan and Iran signed a memorandum of agreement for a five-year (2016–2021) Strategic Trade Partnership to increase economic cooperation with the aim of taking advantage of this new opportunity.³²⁷ Pakistan also wishes to avoid isolating Iran to the extent of driving it towards the India-Afghanistan axis from a strategic standpoint. For this reason, "Iran must not be further alienated and its interests in the CPEC [China Pakistan Economic Corridor] should be developed," according to Lt.-Gen. (retired) Nadeem Lodhi.³²⁸

In general, Pakistan's efforts to lessen the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran between 2015 and 2020 were motivated by its dedication to regional stability, diplomacy, and neutrality. Even though the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran remained strong throughout this time,

³²⁷ 'Signing of MoU between Iran and Pakistan on Five Years Strategic Trade Partnership Plan', Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Commerce, <http://www.commerce.gov.pk/?p=5367>

³²⁸ 'Pakistan Defense Experts worried over India-Iran-Afghanistan Alliance', The Economic Times, May 31, 2016, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-defence-experts-worried-over-india-iran-afghanistan-alliance/articleshow/52520007.cms?prtpage=1>; also see Kasuri, p.398

Pakistan's diplomatic efforts helped to foster communication and interaction between the two nations, even though they were not very successful in easing underlying tensions.

According to Luttwak (1990), in the post-cold war political context, there has been a fundamental shift in the international order from geostrategic to geo-economics. This paradigm is based on interdependence, and cooperation and convergence are rewarded while divergence and defection are penalised. As a result, the region's economic benefits are now determined by regional politics. Since the benefits of peace and stability extend throughout the entire region, Pakistan has demonstrated its commitment to peace and stability by facilitating the opening of a dialogue between the two Middle Eastern countries. Regional issues require resolution at the regional level.

Sub Chapter-b : Global Power Influence on Foreign Policy of Pakistan

Pakistan's foreign policy is shaped by a complex interaction of global power dynamics, security imperatives, economic considerations, regional dynamics, and principles of non-alignment, as per the balance of interests theory. The main challenge Pakistan's foreign policy makers facing is striking a balance between global powers influence and interests while defending its sovereignty and national interests. This subchapter shed light how major global powers i.e., U.S. and China influence Pakistan's foreign Policy towards Saudi Arab and Iran.

5.2. Factoring the United States in Pakistan's Foreign Policy Towards Middle East

Along with China and the United States, Saudi Arabia is one of the few nations that has a major impact on Pakistan's decisions on both internal and foreign policy. Pakistan's strategic partnerships with other Middle Eastern countries, particularly Iran, Egypt, and Syria, have not diminished in significance in spite of this. In these nations' diplomatic and strategic goals, Pakistan is essential.

5.2.1 U.S. Influence on Pakistan-Iran Relations Post 9/11

Pakistan's tight strategic alliance with the United States as a frontline ally in the global counterterrorism campaign and the tense ties between the United States and Iran contributed to the lack of beneficial relations between the two countries in the post-9/11 strategic environment. Even if the United States, Pakistan, and Iran got into a "marriage of convenience" after the Taliban were defeated,³²⁹ It didn't last long, but this couple did. The completion of Iran's seven billion dollar arms deals with Russia on October 4 dashed hopes of a breakthrough with the United States after a long period of hostility. Furthermore, Russia promised to ship a nuclear reactor to Iran's Bushehr nuclear power project. Iran had previously purchased a nuclear reactor from Russia. The bargaining of WMD could threaten regional stability and American alliances.³³⁰ The United States' response was to reduce Iran's influence in Afghanistan, further isolating the country. Because of this, tensions between Pakistan and Iran subsided in the 1990s, following a decade of hostility. Massive pressure was applied by U.S. President Bush on Pakistan's foreign policy, forcing Musharraf to side with the U.S. against Iran's strategic ambitions. As a result, Pakistan was unable to improve ties with Iran due to U.S. pressure and instead began consolidating power within Afghanistan's new government.³³¹ Through their interactions, the three states contributed to the growth of a more intricate connection and a sense of miscommunication.

Pakistan's relations with Iran were significantly influenced by the U.S-Iran rivalry and the well-equipped military outposts in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The United States quickly encircled Iran. Iran believed that a pro-American Pakistan would encourage the United States to increase its own regional influence. In turn, this triggered geopolitical instability and froze

³²⁹ Zahid Ali Khan, & Shabir Ahmad, Pakistan and Iran in Afghanistan: From Soviet Intervention to the Fall of Taliban, *Central Asia Journal* 64 (2009), 5.

³³⁰ Daniel Brumberg, *End of Brief Affair? The United States and Iran*, (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002),9.

³³¹ Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, 2010 (California: Praeger),2.

ties between Pakistan and Iran.³³² Nevertheless, Islamabad was not identified as a source of nuclear proliferation by the IAEA Director General for a considerable amount of time despite extensive evidence of ties between Pakistan and Iran.³³³ It makes sense that Pakistan would side with a non-Muslim country against a fellow Muslim country. Pakistan helped the United States destabilise Iran's economy through covert dealings after Iran's dispute with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) over Pakistan's provision of centrifuges for uranium enrichment. There was international pressure on Pakistan, especially from the United States, which was already wary of Iran's nuclear development. So, the U.S. applied lots of pressure on Pakistan to stop those plans. The United States has expressed its displeasure with Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities by imposing sanctions on the country's nuclear program. As a result, it had a profound effect on their bilateral strategic relations, which were only partially restored in the days following September 11.³³⁴

During the Bush administration (2001-2008), Iran was included in the 'Axis of Evil' and was seen as a threat to the international community rather than just the United States. This did not help improve relations between the two countries. It's no secret that former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (in office from 2005-2013) held the United States largely responsible for 9/11. The icy relationship between the two countries did not begin to thaw until after Bush and Ahmadinejad had left office.³³⁵

American foreign policy has long been a major factor in Pakistani and Iranian relations. From the aftermath of 9/11 until President Musharraf's term ended, the U.S. factor was especially high, leading to a deterioration in relations between Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan, under heavy

³³² William Wilson, "A Troubled Triangle: Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan in Strategic Perspective," (Washington: Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series 2005).

³³³ Rajesh Kumar Mishra, "Closure of the Pakistan-Based AQ Khan Network Case: A Hasty Burial?," *Strategic Analysis* 30, no. 2 (2006):

³³⁴ S. Shoaib, *Factors in Pak-Iran Relations: Post Cold War Era*, (Islamabad: International Islamic University 2011)56.

³³⁵ Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, & Naheed S. Goraya, *Geneva Deal: Beginning of a New Era between Iran-US Relations*, *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 29 (1) (2014), 12-17.

American pressure, has maintained its policy of undermining Iran's stability on account of that country's nuclear ambitions and support for terrorism. This campaign of instability persisted even after President Zardari took office in Pakistan in 2008 and remained in office until 2011. The United States' sway in Pakistan was not entirely ignored, but it did not stop its disruptive covert operations aimed at giving Iran enough problems at home. Because of the serious threat that terrorist operations across the border between Iran and Pakistan pose to Iran's security, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hassan Qashqavi said in January 2010 that Pakistan must now take comprehensive steps to eliminate such operations. In his words, "It is expected that the Pakistani government will fulfil its pledge to abolish these barbaric terrorist acts."³³⁶

The regional security situation and the rise of terrorism were discussed at a meeting between Iranian, Pakistani, and Afghan officials on January 16, 2010, and a framework for mutual collaboration in combating this threat was agreed upon. Former Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Quraishi stressed the importance of seeking similar perspectives and consultations on the issues we are all facing to find solutions. The large presence of U.S. military in Afghanistan and Pakistan was becoming a major source of tension in relations between Iran and the United States, according to Iranian officials. Following the terrible events on Iran's eastern border with Pakistan and Afghanistan, an Iranian Foreign Ministry official has also revealed that the United States is engaged in covert measures to destabilise Iran.

Pakistan's positive relations with the United States, which Iran blames for destabilising the region, make addressing the issue of regional security difficult. The United States once again places a high priority on Balochistan due to the ease with which it can access the province, especially in the areas close to the Pakistani and Iranian borders. Iran's government officials blamed this for the deterioration of relations and suggested Pakistan take measures different from the United States to protect sensitive data. Rahman Malik, the Interior Minister of

³³⁶ Farrar, Wellman, & Frasco, R, Pakistan-Iran Foreign Relations, American Enterprise Institute (2010).

Pakistan, has said that our government is committed to creating formidable encirclements against the militant extremist leaders of Jundullah, who have launched bombing attacks with covert international support. He went on to say that the Jundullah leadership had taken refuge in Kabul with U.S. puppet President Kurzai.³³⁷

U.S. influence on Pakistani foreign policy since the Musharraf administration has been substantial, though it has fluctuated at times. President Zardari's Shia religion made him favour warmer ties with Iran over the United States.³³⁸ Pressure from the United States slowed the infiltration program into Iran that President Zardari inherited from his predecessor. Eloquently, President Zardari expressed his country's solidarity with Iran and sent a message of defiance to the United States, promising that it would not allow its soil to be used in a military strike against Iran.³³⁹ Pakistan's relations with the United States were also strained due to the United States' controversial attitude on the previously unbuilt Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. Against the fact that President Zardari and President Ahmadinejad signed this 25-year agreement in 2009 despite U.S. pressure, geopolitical, economic, and technical problems prevented the execution of this project. Islamabad's participation in this project has infuriated the Washington and its allies, who want Islamabad to withdraw. To alleviate Pakistan's energy shortage, this pipeline was deemed the best solution. However, the U.S.'s unjustifiable sanctions on the Iranian nuclear program have caused delays in the pipeline's construction, which has not only exacerbated Pakistan's energy shortage but also negatively impacted. The presidents, Asif Ali Zardari and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, took a courageous position and resisted U.S. pressure by inaugurating the building of the Pakistani segment of the pipeline which drew strong critique from the United States. There was a risk that Pakistan, like Iran, would be subject to sanctions.

³³⁷Janne Bjerre Christensen, *Strained Alliances: Iran's troubled relations to Afghanistan and Pakistan*, No. 2011: 03, DIIS Report, 2011.

³³⁸ Muhammad Salman Khan, The Saudi Factor in Pakistan-Iran Relations, *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, 4 (4), 5 (2014).

³³⁹ Taboola, Pakistan allies with Iran against US, *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 24, Issue-1(2017),299-300.

Due to Pakistan's poor economy, Iran agreed to lend Pakistan five hundred million dollar out of \$1.5 billion to keep the project alive.³⁴⁰ Pakistan was still unable to complete its portion of the pipeline, but the decision to transfer management of the Gwadar port to China was a positive development. According to a Pakistani official at the embassy in Tehran, China has offered an additional five million dollars for the pipeline's completion.³⁴¹ As a result of the Pakistani government's lukewarm response to the IP project, some analysts are of the opinion that the Zardari administration took this bold stance not in the country's national interest, but to garner the support of energy-starved, impoverished Pakistanis in the upcoming 2013 general elections.³⁴²

The most crucial aspect for American strategic interests is Pakistan's geographical proximity to the Persian Gulf. This element connected the two states despite their dubious and uneven relations. Palmer referred to it as a "Tortured Relationship" because of the inconsistency in their interactions.³⁴³ Despite being a frontline ally of the United States in the worldwide fight on terror, mistrust and antagonism fostered ambiguous relations. The ten-year pursuit of the world's most wanted man, Osama bin Laden, by the United States culminated with the assassination of Osama bin Laden and a new turn in international relations. The already tense relationship between the United States and Pakistan entered its most destructive phase, with dire consequences for both countries. Twenty-four Pakistani servicemen were killed in 2011 because of Osama bin Laden's demise, the Raymond Davis incident, NATO helicopter assaults, and ground military attacks on Salala posts. The unilateral action taken by American soldiers without informing Pakistani intelligence services created a schism and deepened the

³⁴⁰ David R. Jalilvand, *Iran's Gas Exports: Can Past Failure Become Future Success*. Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, Working Papers (2013), 3.

³⁴¹ Zafar Bhutta, *Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline: In Snub to US China Offer Dollar 500M Loan*, *The Express Tribune*, March 13, 2013.

³⁴² Micheal Kugelman, "Iran-Pak Pipeline: Still a Pipedream," *The Express Tribune*, March 11, 2013.

³⁴³ Norman Dulbar Palmer, *The United States and Pakistan: A Tortured Relationship* (Arlington: Virginia, 1981), 3-9.

trust gap.³⁴⁴ Although NATO forces engaged in action with militants near the Salala checkpoints, which are located in close proximity to the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, President Obama described the attacks as a tragedy. These people were incorrectly labelled as militants by ISAF soldiers. Pakistan, however, angrily denied these allegations, claiming that the attacks were planned and deliberate. Their once cordial relationship took a major turn for the worst as a result of these episodes, casting a shadow on their strategic alliance.³⁴⁵

The tight strategic ties between Pakistan and the United States in the globally war against terrorism have become more distant as a result of these developments. Furthermore, since September 11, 2001, ties between the two countries have remained tense and unstable, mostly as a result of American dissatisfaction with Pakistan's contributions to the fight against terrorism. Rather, it charged Pakistan for not doing enough to undermine the Taliban. In addition, the U.S. military left Shamsi airfield, which they had leased so they could use drones to assault tribal regions in Pakistan.³⁴⁶

The assaults' aftermath has seriously hampered American efforts to finish the war on terror in Afghanistan peacefully, endangering NATO's departure plan led by the United States in the area. Moreover, without the backing of Islamabad, negotiations on behalf of the United States with the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network would have been extremely difficult. It is now acknowledged that Pakistan is an essential non-NATO ally and negotiator for holding negotiations with the Taliban.

The future of Afghanistan was dealt another blow when Pakistan decided not to participate in the upcoming Bone conference. Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan and continued

³⁴⁴ M. S. Mazhar, & Naheed S. Goraya, Geneva Deal: Beginning of a New Era between Iran-US Relations, *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 29 (1)(2014), 13-16.

³⁴⁵ S. Muhammad, *The Crisis in Pakistan-US Relations*. Islamabad: European Center for Information, Policy and Security (ECIPS), 2012.

³⁴⁶ Khalid Aziz, Implications of NATO Attacks, *Dawn* (December 1, 2011).

involvement in the country's security efforts meant that the United States couldn't win the end game in Afghanistan without it.³⁴⁷

Iran has traditionally viewed the United States as the primary source of discord since it has penetrated the regional security scenario and exported terrorism to other nations while accusing others. Therefore, it opposed the hegemonic intentions of the United States in the region, which cared primarily for her strategic aims while compromising the sovereignty of lesser states, and the United States viewed this position as a possible danger to its strategic objectives. Iran has long questioned Pakistan's tight connections with the U.S., attempting to create a schism between the two countries. Iran, which was actively looking for a strong ally to oppose the United States, asked Pakistan for help in creating an anti-American bloc. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made Iran's goal to damage ties with Pakistan public some months before the Salala assaults. Pakistan was terrified by their statements over U.S. objectives in South Asia.³⁴⁸

Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, conveyed a message to Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, criticising the Salala strikes as a violation of international law and Pakistan's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The world was made aware of what he called the real face of the United States—a nation that takes pride in defending both international peace and human rights—through this move.

As a result, bilateral relations between the two nations improved dramatically during the last two years of Pakistan's People's Party administration, hampering the U.S. strategic goals to isolate Iran. Almost immediately following the Salala attacks, Pakistan-Iran ties improved, and an environment of confidence arose. The arrivals of high officials significantly strengthened the bilateral relations between the two neighbouring countries. In February 2012, Presidents

³⁴⁷ Khalid Aziz, *Implications of NATO Attacks*, Dawn, 2011.

³⁴⁸ Robina, *The Future of US-Pakistan Relations in an Asian Context*, (Washington: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011)76.

Karzai and Ahmadinejad travelled to Islamabad to hold peace talks with Pakistan's military and civil authorities in order to form a regional alliance between the three countries. A wide range of subjects were discussed during the peace talks, such as the development of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and the peace process in Afghanistan.³⁴⁹

The United States was apprehensive about this scenario because it ran against to its fundamental external policy goals. Nonetheless, all three presidents pledged to strengthen mutual collaborations by resisting external pressure.³⁵⁰ Ahmadinejad verbalized unwavering support for the Pakistani government and people. He further demonstrated his support for Pakistan by declaring that Iran will consider Pakistan's enemies to be its own. He criticised the United States for creating such situations that destabilise Pakistan internally. After Pakistan's deterioration of relations with the United States in 2011, a convergence of policy between Pakistan and Iran led to the regional understanding. During the last two years of Pakistan's Peoples Party (PPP) government, President Zardari visited Iran twice and signed a significant pipeline agreement with his counterpart, President Ahmadinejad, despite intense pressure from the United States to abandon the project. Although the U.S. is a powerful foe of Iran and a global powerhouse with the potential to influence any state's foreign policy through several means, the situation has changed radically in recent years.³⁵¹ Additionally, President Zardari replied favourably to the subject of the Iranian nuclear program, which had become a significant matter. This action enhances President Zardari's reputation in Iran, as most Pakistanis hold a favourable stance on this issue.³⁵² Although the United States is a formidable foe of Iran and a worldwide superpower with the ability to influence the foreign policy of any

³⁴⁹ Yousuf Ali, Manzoor Ahmad, Muhammad Sabir, and Sajjad Ali Shah, "Regional development through energy infrastructure: A comparison and optimization of Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) & Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipelines," *Oper. Res. Eng. Sci. Theory Appl* 4 (2021): 99-103.

³⁵⁰ Kamran Yousaf, & Sumera Khan, Iran, Afghan Presidents arrive: Of Peace talks, Pipeline and Regional solutions. *The Express Tribune*, (February 17,2012)

³⁵¹ S. Shoaib, *Factors in Pak-Iran Relations: Post Cold War Era*, (Islamabad: International Islamic University, 2011),87.

³⁵² Meir Javedanfar, *Iran's new Opportunity to Improve Relations with Pakistan*, Herzliya: Al Monitor (2016).

state through a variety of means, the situation has altered dramatically in recent years. The United States is becoming aware of the intimate ties between Pakistan and Iran, which it had not previously seen as a concern. The reason for this is that the United States has no objections to specific aspects of Pakistan and Iran's relations. Pakistan is also cautious in its dealings with Iran due to the acrimonious past between the United States and the Islamic Republic. Considering the Major Powers' renewed interest in the South Asian region, Pakistan's major position in maintaining regional stability is viable and necessitates the maintenance of cordial relations with other regional states, particularly Iran.³⁵³

Sartaj Aziz, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's foreign affairs adviser, lauded the deal as a welcome step toward regional integration, noting that the strategic and economic potential of this historic rapprochement will revitalize Pakistan's battered economy. He stated that the agreement will boost the chances of building the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and other lucrative projects hit by Iran's sanctions.³⁵⁴ Despite multiple agreements between Pakistan and Iran, the IP gas project could not be realized throughout the years due to constraints imposed by the United States and the European Union. National and international banks refused to finance the project, primarily due to U.S. concerns, resulting in a halt in gas supplies by the 2014 deadline, and Pakistan also fell under the line of sanctions against Iran. However, neither Pakistan nor Iran offered the consequences, and neither demanded them. Instead, Iran warned Pakistan unequivocally that it should pursue the project in its own national interest, without seeking or obtaining authorization from other countries, because they had no intention of carrying it out. The July 2015 nuclear agreement between the United States and Iran has smoothed the way for Pakistan to go forward quickly with this project.

³⁵³ Zamir Ahmed Awan, Pak-US Relations: Convergence of Interests, *PUTAJ Humanities and Social Sciences*, 21 (2) (2014).

³⁵⁴ Malik Qasim Mustafa, *Iran Nuclear Deal: Prospects for Pakistan*, Islamabad: ISSI (2015).

The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, believed that the nuclear deal could expand U.S. political, cultural, and economic dominance in Iran and stated that the JCPOA would not result in any improvement in U.S.-Iran ties or the intended adjustment in Iran's regional policies. During his address to the United Nations General Assembly on September 29, 2015, Rouhani discussed the prospects of the JCPOA, stating that the accord will enable Iran to keep forging ties with governments across the world, which was previously impossible. By creating trade and other economic relationships with international and regional governments, it will increase Iran's regional power. President Obama agreed that the agreement will usher in a new era between Iran and the United States by resolving all outstanding issues.³⁵⁵

Pakistan's move in February 2016 to re-establish economic and commercial ties with Iran in trade, investment, technology, banking, finance, and energy will breathe new life into the country's ailing economy. The visit of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Pakistan in March 2016 was warmly received by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and the two leaders laid the groundwork for future relations between the two countries.³⁵⁶ The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline was one of the major focal points of the President's visit. Six memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and a five-year strategic trade cooperation plan were signed by the two heads of state. Thus, it appears that future cooperation between Pakistan and Iran would not only strengthen economic relations between the two countries but will also benefit the entire region.³⁵⁷

5.2.2 U.S. Influence over Pak-Saudi Arabia Ties

Policymakers and scholars have found it challenging to comprehend the United States' Middle East foreign strategy. According to Weidenfeld & Nicolson, U.S. policymaking on the Middle

³⁵⁵ Roger Cohen, "US Embassy, Tehran," *New York Times*, April 8, 2012.

³⁵⁶Manzoor Ahmad, Tahir Ali, and Zahir Shah, "The US Factor in Pakistan-Iran Relations: New Dimensions," *Journal of Political Studies* 24, no. 1 (2017): 295.

³⁵⁷ Najam Rafique, Prospects of Pakistan-Iran Relations: Post Nuclear Deal, *Strategic Studies*, 36 (3) (2016), 34.

East is difficult to assess. Complex and multi-centred, and at times chaotic, it takes place in a society where, despite the partisan clamour, most people know little about the region and care even less about it.³⁵⁸ However, it is not a secret that the United States has a secret purpose in West Asia. Nearly fifty years of U.S. strategy in the Middle East have been devoted to securing oil supplies for American business and building Israel as a Jewish homeland. The United States can encourage demilitarisation; however, “rather than encouraging demilitarisation, the United States has been responsible for the transfer of hundreds of billions of dollars of highly sophisticated armaments into the region over the past two decades, accounting for 80 percent of all U.S. arms exports to the Third World”. Nevertheless, a cursory examination at the Middle East in the present day reveals that many things have changed while others have remained the same. To emphasise a few issues “intra-regional (Arab-Israeli wars and the Iran-Iraq war) and inter-regional conflicts”. Foreign invasions (the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990), civil war in Lebanon and the subsequent stationing of U.S. marine corps there in the early 1980s, Iran’s Islamic revolution, uprisings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, growing Islamic radicalism and associated terrorism, and a U.S. military build-up in Saudi Arabia are all dramatic events that have shaped the region’s political landscape.³⁵⁹

According to Monshipouri, the Middle East is today marked by harsh regimes, an oppressive Israeli occupation, human rights violations, economic disparities, unelected administrations, and corrupt political systems. Arab defeat in Israel’s wars, combined with the failure of parliamentary democracy to hold ruling elites and the military accountable through elections, has resulted in a growing sense of disappointment and crisis in many Muslim cultures, culminating in the late 1970s in the revival of political Islam. This rebirth has come to be seen

³⁵⁸Fred Halliday, “The Study of US Foreign Policy in the Middle East,” *The International History Review* 31, no. 4 (2009): 832-836.

³⁵⁹Geoffrey F. Gresh, “Gulf Security and the US Military,” In *Gulf Security and the US Military*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2015),121.

as a strong reaction to the failure of secular states and ideologies such as liberal nationalism and Arab socialism, as well as secular processes and institutions.³⁶⁰

On the other hand, the U.S. element has played a dual role in the Iran-Saudi alliance. Instead of attempting to reconcile or mediate between the two rivals, the United States has taken advantage of their fractious relationship. According to Fathollah-Nejad, for instance, the presence of Western countries such as the United States in and around the Persian Gulf has not produced a stable security order in the region. In fact, their existence in the past and present has been a source of conflict, aggressiveness, and regional instability. A viable security order cannot be imposed from the outside in the Persian Gulf region, and particularly not by perpetuating an arms competition. It will only emerge organically from within, with the littoral governments and other immediate players establishing a mutually advantageous partnership.³⁶¹

The United States has always had a vested interest in the Saudi-Iran rivalry; nevertheless, its biggest ally, Saudi Arabia, has expressed reservations because U.S. interests frequently overlap with those of Saudi Arabia. The United States and Saudi Arabia frequently work closely together to curb Iranian influence, although Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy opposed to Arab democracy and any democratic reform of existing monarchical institutions. In contrast, Iran considers the United States to be its deadliest enemy. The competition between Riyadh and Tehran has manifested itself in the politics of several regional governments in which these two heavyweights have influence.³⁶² Unlike Riyadh, however, Tehran's prime objective is the endurance of the country in its current form. Tehran perceives the United States as an existential danger and threat. has built a strategy based on both deterrence to counteract this perception.³⁶³

³⁶⁰Vali Nasr, and Maria Fantappie, "How Iran and Saudi Arabia Can Together Bring Peace to the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 3 (2021).

³⁶¹Alexandra Cojocaru, "The Persian Gulf Crisis 2019-2020 and the US-Iran interactions," *Euro-Atlantic Studies* 3 (2020): 34-42.

³⁶²Cinzia Bianco, "The GCC monarchies: Perceptions of the Iranian threat amid shifting geopolitics," *The International Spectator* 55, no. 2 (2020): 97-107.

³⁶³James Shires, "The Simulation of Scandal: Hack-and-Leak Operations, the Gulf States, and US Politics (Fall 2020)." *Texas National Security Review* (2020).

5.3. Factoring China in Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Middle East

In modern history, the Middle East and China are the center of global interest. Even though the Middle East has fought a battle in relation to extremism in the region, the search for energy supplies cannot be ignored. While China's policy framework revolves around non-interference, economic development, and a desire for a multi-polar global system, the United States, which preaches democracy and human rights yet has an interventionist policy, has a significant obstacle. China is attempting to gain economic, political, and military sway in the region without employing military force.³⁶⁴

The growth of China in the Middle East is neither unexpected nor unprecedented. It has longstanding links with Iran, including cooperation, economic interests, and the selling of military technologies. In 2015, after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's Nuclear Program was signed, China's position in P5+1 became notable.³⁶⁵ Aside from that, the founding of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in 2004 highlighted Beijing's ambitions to expand ties and encourage collaboration with Arab countries, primarily considering China's expanding energy significance. China has avoided its political and military engagement in the situation of Syria, while still anticipating its role in the Iranian nuclear negotiations. Since Xi Jinping's ascension to the throne in November 2012, however, China's attitude toward the Middle East has become more positive. The Chinese government published "The Chinese Arab Policy" in January 2016, which outlines the policy framework for China-Middle East Relations, focusing mostly on Arab League members. The book emphasizes the relevance of this region for China and defines the way China must collaborate with Arab

³⁶⁴Gholizadeh, Ali, Seyedashkan Madani, and Saba Saneinia. "A geoeconomic and geopolitical review of Gwadar Port on belt and road initiative." *Maritime Business Review* 5, no. 4 (2020): 337-343.

³⁶⁵Moritz Pieper, "An Iran nuclear deal without the United States? Chinese, European, and Russian interests and options after the US Withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action." In *Contemporary Issues in International Political Economy*, (Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2019), 43-51.

nations, according to the formula “1+2+3”; nevertheless, the new relationships are more likely to be built on energy cooperation.³⁶⁶

There are major differences between Middle Eastern nations in terms of their economic growth and integration with the global economy. Based on exports, GDP, and population, the countries in the Middle East fall into four broad categories: large oil exporters with small and large populations and high incomes, and both types are large oil exporters. While the other two are non-oil exporters with high foreign direct investment and countries with a low GDP but a huge population, the oil exporters have the most foreign direct investment.³⁶⁷

China’s strategic partnerships are based on bilateral relations (e.g., economic, political, cultural, and military) and are mutually agreed upon by both parties.³⁶⁸ It also illustrates Chinese-Arab history in a broad perspective, ranging from the maritime silk lanes two thousand years ago to the present day. China’s relations with the region date back to the Maoist era, when bilateral relations of countries were formulated within the expansive Cold War strategic and conceptual context.³⁶⁹ Although China provided revolutionary parties with aid and logistical support, economic and commercial ties remained restricted.³⁷⁰ China viewed the Middle East as a position from which it could assess the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. Therefore, Beijing allowed individuals, groups, and businesses to offer labour, participate in construction projects, and give consulting services in Middle Eastern markets.

³⁶⁶ Cesar Catella, China’s Evolving Middle East Role. Policy Brief. No. 193 (March 18, 2016), Institute for Security & Development Policy. <http://isdpeu/publication/chinas-evolving-middle-east-role/>

³⁶⁷ David N Balaam, & Dillman, Bradford Introduction to Political Economy, Pearson Education Inc, (2011), 351-352

³⁶⁸ Evan S. Medeiros, China’s International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism and Diversification, RAND: Santa Monica, CA, (2009), 82-89

³⁶⁹ Yitzhak Shichor, Mountains Out of Molehills: Arms Transfers in Sino-Middle Eastern Relations, Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA), Vol. 4 (3), (September 2000), 27-39

³⁷⁰ Zha Daojiang, & Meidan, Michal, China and the Middle East in a New Energy Landscape. Chatham House. The Royal Institute of International Affairs (October 2015). <http://www.iberchina.org/files/ChinaMiddleEastEnergy.pdf>

During the Cold War, China sponsored anti-colonial struggles, and this is indicative of its close relationship with the Middle East. This connection has grown throughout time in order to obtain the region's oil and gas supplies. Despite China's efforts to diversify its energy support sources, the Middle East still accounts for 50% of its oil imports, whereas Saudi Arabia and Iran supply approximately 30% of China's oil imports.³⁷¹ In the early 1980s, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq became China's largest customers for arms. However, in the early 1990s, the United Nations and the United States imposed arms embargoes on Iran and Iraq, resulting in a near-total cessation of China's arms sales to Iran and Iraq by the end of the decade. This occurred somewhat because of U.S. efforts to limit arms proliferation and exert pressure on China, but primarily because of the Middle East's awareness that inexpensive Chinese arms are worthless on the battlefield. Arab nations have been China's principal crude oil supplier and seventh largest trading partner since the mid-1990s.³⁷²

China's Middle Eastern policy may be divided into three primary pillars: a) Securing Energy Supplies; b) Promoting Trade and Transportation; and c) Exploring potential channels for security cooperation, particularly in the fight against terrorism.³⁷³ Despite its pursuit of alternative energy sources, such as those of Russia and Central Asia, China continues to buy oil from the Middle East. During the years 2010-2014, this rate increased to an average of 6.75 percent.

Even if the instability of the Gulf is a huge concern, the Middle East's struggle to strengthen energy collaboration with oil-producing nations is of vital importance. For instance, it supplies China with 51% of its crude oil imports. Middle East is significant to China's Silk Road

³⁷¹ Chietigi Bajpae, "China's Growing Middle East Role and the Potential for US-China Conflict," *The Asia Pacific Journal*, Vol. 4 (3) (March 29, 2006), <http://apjjf.org/-Chietigi-Bajpae/1677/article.html>

³⁷² Zha Daojiang, & Meidan Michal, *China and the Middle East in a New Energy Landscape*. Chatham House. The Royal Institute of International Affairs (October 2015) <http://www.iberchina.org/files/ChinaMiddleEastEnergy.pdf>

³⁷³ Cesar Catella, *China's Evolving Middle East Role*. Policy Brief. No. 193 (March 18, 2016), Institute for Security & Development Policy. <http://isdpeu/publication/chinas-evolving-middle-east-role/>

Economic Belt and twenty-first century Maritime Silk Road program, known collectively as BRI, due to its location between Europe and Asia. China must expand infrastructure and ports throughout Central Asia and the Middle East to promote trade in both directions to complete this project. Iran is a lynchpin in such endeavours, through which China aspires to 'promote common growth and prosperity for all countries. Moreover, China is concerned about the Islamic State in the Middle East and its own extremists, primarily in the western region of Xinjiang. As it desires strict control over border security, intelligence, anti-terror, and antipiracy operations. The trajectory of China's economic and defence strategies for the Middle East suggests that China intends to expand its commercial footprint in the region,³⁷⁴ but has limited interest in assuming a larger security role. President Xi Jinping's vision for the 'Silk Road' of the twenty-first century and the resurrection of the Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt – the Belt and Road policy – includes the expectation trade, a significant agency for financing related infrastructure projects based in Beijing.³⁷⁵

In light of the fact that China places a priority on acquiring natural resources for its economic expansion, its quest for export markets in the Middle East is significant. China sees the region as a tremendous economic potential for its expanding businesses.³⁷⁶ In addition, the Middle East represents a significant export market for China's construction, telecommunications, and finance industries, excluding contract services by construction businesses. China is consequently working profitably and generating a substantial quantity of capital. However, there are still a few problems to be resolved. First, the region is afflicted by several wars that provide a significant obstacle to the implementation of China's Silk Road plan. The second step is for both parties to seek ways to maximise the trade relationship and balance. The current

³⁷⁴Tim Niblock, "China and the Middle East: A global strategy where the Middle East has a significant but limited place," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 14, no. 4 (2020): 492-502.

³⁷⁵ Zhao Minghao, China's New Role As a Middle East Peacemaker, *The Japan Times*, (February 4, 2016) <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/02/04/commentary/worldcommentary/chinas-new-role-middle-east-peacemaker/>

³⁷⁶ Wang Lian, Economic and Trade Relations Between China and Middle Eastern Countries, *International Studies* Vol. 4. (2008), 26.

decline in oil prices, which has resulted in budget deficits, has diminished the purchasing power of consumers, hence China's concern for the economic development of this region, which will benefit all parties involved. Without an emphasis on economic growth, all projected economic advancements would be unsustainable.³⁷⁷

5.3.1 China's Influence over Pakistan-Iran Relations

China plans to utilize its alliance with Pakistan as a "launching pad" to strengthen ties with the Middle East. This new China-Pakistan relationship is likely to strengthen Beijing's influence in Middle Eastern issues and have an impact on Islamabad's foreign policy. China's willingness and ability to influence Pakistan's foreign policy is an intriguing indicator of Beijing's regional objectives, requiring Beijing to balance its longstanding relationship with Pakistan against a rising number of new possibilities, commitments, and hazards. One significant step in this direction was taken when China prevented Pakistan from joining the Saudi-led military alliance fighting Houthi rebels, which would have undoubtedly exacerbated the Yemen conflict.³⁷⁸

Massive Chinese investments in Pakistan's economy could be another strong reason for Islamabad's refusal to intervene in the Yemen conflict. For example, Beijing's generosity in financing and building the IP pipeline, which may be extended inside China, is advantageous for all parties. This plan urges Pakistan to maintain cordial relations with Iran and refrain from adopting a pro-Saudi stance on the Yemen crisis.³⁷⁹ Given its ongoing investments in Islamabad, Beijing has strong incentives to keep the country's economy stable and would desire that Islamabad focus on domestic development rather than being distracted by an

³⁷⁷ Asiya Mahar, China's Economic Engagement in Middle East, Pakistan Observer, (March 3, 2016).

³⁷⁸ Chaziza, M, "China's Middle East foreign policy and the Yemen crisis: Challenges and implications," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 19(2) (2015), 20–25.

³⁷⁹ M. Chunshan, "Revealed: How the Yemen crisis wrecked Xi Jinping's Middle East travel plans," *The Diplomat*, (April 22, 2015). [http:// thediplomat.com/2015/04/revealed-how-the-yemen-crisis-wrecked-xi-jinpings-middleeast-travel-plans/](http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/revealed-how-the-yemen-crisis-wrecked-xi-jinpings-middleeast-travel-plans/)

international issue. Although there are various explanations for Pakistan's hesitation to join the Saudi campaign in Yemen, the most intriguing is the Chinese aspect.³⁸⁰

According to Pakistani officials, Chinese President Xi informed his Pakistani counterpart that if Pakistan's relations with the Arab world deteriorated, Beijing would stand behind Islamabad. Despite tremendous pressure from Riyadh, Islamabad rejected Saudi Arabia's request for military cooperation in its fight against Houthi rebels, citing China's promise of \$46 billion in economic investment and assistance. Rather than engaging in the Saudi-Iranian proxy war in Yemen, Islamabad formed a new special division of the Pakistani Army to protect Chinese workers in Pakistan.³⁸¹

The Pakistani government conduct appears to indicate China's determined desire and ability to influence Pakistan's regional behaviour. China also urged Pakistan to establish friendly relations with Afghanistan and participate to the political resolution process. Beijing's rising security, commercial, and economic interests in the area are putting pressure on Kabul to play a more active role in Afghan reconciliation and persuading Islamabad to create cordial relations with its neighbours.³⁸²

Beijing appears to be playing an ambitious and important role in securing the geo-economic environment for its massive investments. For decades, Pakistan has been an important part of China's South Asian strategy. It serves as a gateway to the Middle East, where China desires access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf region, highlighting the importance of its geostrategic location. The advances between China and Pakistan may strengthen Beijing's regional economic and strategic dominance, so Beijing's clout in the Middle East has shifted from geo-economic to geostrategic. The findings show that China-Pakistan ties may have far-reaching

³⁸⁰ Safdar Sial, Emerging dynamics in Pakistani–Saudi relations, NOREF Report (2015).

³⁸¹ Zahid Gishkori, Economic corridor: 12,000-strong force to guard Chinese workers, The Express Tribune (April 22, 2015) <http://tribune.com.pk/story/861078/economic-corridor-12000-strong-force-to-guard-chinese-workers/>

³⁸² Mustafa, China tells Pakistan CPEC success depends on peaceful Pak-Afghan ties, The News (2015, April 19), <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-37085-China-tells-Pakistan-CPEC-success-depends-on-peacefulPak-Afghan-ties>

geo-economic and geostrategic implications, not just for the Middle East, but also for the greater Asia region, where the U.S. and China are competing for influence.

During visit to Pakistan, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged to assist Pakistan in building the Four hundred and Eighty-five -mile segment of the Iran Pakistan Pipeline (IP).³⁸³ China Petroleum Pipelines Bureau (CPPB) would soon commence construction of the liquefied natural gas terminal in Pakistan and the IP gas pipeline as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project. The two projects would cost around U.S. \$2.5 billion to complete, with China spending 85 percent and Pakistan contributing 15 percent of the stock.³⁸⁴ Once the IP gas pipeline is operational, China can connect it to CPEC. Iranian natural gas will be supplied from the South Pars gas field and delivered at the Pakistan-Iran border, linking with the Pakistani port city of Gwadar and to China's western Xinjiang area more quickly and affordably via a network of highways, railways, and pipelines.³⁸⁵

Crucially, when completed, this pipeline will add to China's New Silk Road strategy, which aims to expand infrastructure links between eastern and western Asia. Furthermore, Beijing may integrate its Karakoram highway corridor with Gwadar, alternative non-sea-based methods of extracting Iranian natural gas, allowing Iranian natural gas to be transferred to China without using dangerous marine lanes.³⁸⁶

China's growing energy consumption and reliance on Middle Eastern oil and gas necessitate the completion of the IP gas pipeline and its connection to Gwadar Port as part of the CPEC project. This would help China increase its trade and energy supply with Iran and Pakistan.

³⁸³ Saeed Shah, "China to build pipeline from Iran to Pakistan", The Wall Street Journal, April 9, 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-to-buildpipeline-from-iran-to-pakistan-1428515277>

³⁸⁴ Zafar Bhutta, LNG pipeline, terminal: Govt to decide on Chinese firm's bid in a month, The Express Tribune. October 1, 2015. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/965384/lng-pipeline-terminal-govt-to-decide-on-chinese-firms-bid-in-a-month/>

³⁸⁵ Ankit Panda, An "all weather" encounter: China's Xi Jinping heads to Pakistan, The Diplomat (April 18, 2015). <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/all-weather-encounter-chinas-xi-jinping-heads-to-pakistan/>

³⁸⁶ Adam Hodge, "Karakoram highway: China's treacherous Pakistan corridor," The Diplomat July 30, 2013), <http://thediplomat.com/2013/07/karakoramhighway-chinas-treacherous-pakistani-corridor/>

The IP pipeline, on the other hand, confronts Beijing with both opportunities and challenges. A withdrawal by India from the pipeline would reduce Iran's capacity to negotiate gas prices aggressively. Second, Chinese cooperation in the construction of the IP pipeline would establish a new overland energy link that would complement Beijing's energy diversification strategy and assist China in achieving energy security.

Nonetheless, the IP pipeline project faces several security and logistical obstacles that might derail Chinese involvement. The pipeline is designed to pass extremely challenging terrain in the Gilgit region of Pakistan, which will raise prices and connection time to Xinjiang. Moreover, the massive investment in the pipeline would be subject to numerous security risks because it lies along a major fault line of instability, either because of large-scale terrorism in the territory traversed by the pipeline or, more generally, because of widespread civil unrest in Pakistan.³⁸⁷ The Iran Pakistan pipeline project would have enormous geopolitical and geo-economic ramifications throughout Asia, demonstrating not just the convergence of the Middle East, Persian Gulf, and South Asia with East Asia, but also China's growing prominence and influence as the continent's hub.

5.3.2 China's Influence over Pak-Saudi Ties

China, on the one hand, desires to strengthen its friendship with Pakistan, while on the other, it views Pakistan as a "launching pad" for greater Middle Eastern connectivity³⁸⁸. Pakistan stands at the crossroads of "Middle East" and "Asia," yet its proximity to Persian Gulf nations, including Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, makes it significant. Currently, the country's diverse interests and requirements indicate that Beijing will be a more suitable best friend, although this is contingent on several variables, including its relations with Kabul, Tehran, and New Delhi. Pakistan does not seek to suspend its critical relationship with Riyadh,

³⁸⁷ Stephen Blank, "Will China join the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline?", *China Brief*, 10(5) 2010, 8-10.

³⁸⁸ Mordechai Chaziza, *China's Middle East Policy: The ISIS Factor*, Middle East Policy Council. Vol. 23 (1), 2016:45.

but it does want Saudi Arabia to understand that the Pakistani military may not participate actively in Middle Eastern politics. Pakistan is caught between the devil and the deep sea in contemporary Middle Eastern events. Since ancient times, Pakistan has attempted to serve as a balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia.³⁸⁹ The current circumstance requires Pakistan to adopt a neutral stance toward global interactions. Pakistan should be called upon to fulfil its responsibility as a peacemaker in the Middle East problem. In this regard, the slaughter of Karachi's Shia minority shortly after the CPEC agreement cannot be ignored. The reluctance of Pakistan in the case of Yemen is a further indication that Pakistan does not wish to act as a proxy in Shia-Sunni conflicts in the area. Pakistan is therefore attempting to strike a balance between its relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia, as both the United States and China have an interest in Iran and the Middle East.³⁹⁰ The ongoing Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project also necessitates a careful foreign policy stance towards the Middle East on the part of Pakistan. Due to this, Pakistan is also attempting to preserve good relations with Turkey, and its stance to the Yemen issue was influenced by its tight partnership with Turkey. With big global upheavals occurring and the Centre of power shifting to Asia, Pakistan is focusing on prospects with China rather than actively engaging in Middle Eastern politics - a stunning shift from its prior status.³⁹¹ Pakistan's tight ties with both Saudi Arabia and China are supported by several important elements. China Saudi Arabia is a longstanding ally, the religious home of Muslims, a major oil provider, and a source of financial favours. China has surpassed Saudi Arabia significantly in terms of Pakistan's economic, strategic, and political interests. Over the years, has provided Pakistan with technical assistance and access to nuclear energy, and it is a close neighbour with whom India has strained relations. Pakistan will not "pivot" away from the

³⁸⁹ Rashid Ahmed Siddiqi, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations with Saudi Arabia: Emerging Dynamics and Challenges." *Policy Perspectives* 16, no. 1 (2019): 61-76.

³⁹⁰ Jeremy Garlick, and Radka Havlová, "The dragon dithers: assessing the cautious implementation of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Iran," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 62, no. 4 (2021): 474-479.

³⁹¹ Murtaza Hussain, "How Obama's Asia's Pivot Nudged China towards Pakistan but Helped Aggravated India," September 1, 2016. <https://theintercept.com/2016/09/01/how-obamas-asia-pivot-nudged-china-towards-pakistan-but-helped-aggravate-india/>

Middle East, either temporarily or permanently, even though China's reorientation is currently more aggressive. As a result of historical, ideological, cultural, and economic compatibilities, the regional nations, including Saudi Arabia, will undoubtedly preserve their cooperation with Pakistan. However, Pakistan's tight bilateral connections with China will prevent it from engaging in any direct military action in the Middle East to attract the Arab States.³⁹²

Numerous geopolitical objectives have united China and Pakistan in a close relationship, with their shared fears of Indian hegemonic ambitions being the most prominent. The status of the (CPEC) as the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative has improved the regional landscape. A few weeks after Pakistan agreed to stay out of the Saudi-Yemen conflict, Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first state visit to Pakistan and unveiled a USD 46 billion CPEC plan. The multi-modal CPEC is speculated to connect, China to Gwadar Port, Pakistan by roads, railroads, and oil pipelines, as well as erecting substructure for energy generation and telecommunications.³⁹³

It is a project with the potential to elevate relations between China's and Pakistan, and there are indications that Pakistan is addressing all concerns raised by China,³⁹⁴ such as the safety of its nationals working on the project in Pakistan. Notably, initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and other investments in the region will not only improve Pakistan's economy and its relations with China, but also facilitate Chinese access to port facilities on the Indian Ocean. On the other side, even though CPEC will have long-lasting effects, it has contributed to the escalation of tensions with India. Throughout history, both China and Pakistan have strained relations with India, shows how China manages this resolve to expand

³⁹²Hamza Shad, Pakistan: Between Asia and the Middle East, The GATE (2015), <http://uchicagogate.com/2015/06/15/pakistan-between-asiaand-the-middle-east/>

³⁹³Wang Lian, Economic and Trade Relations Between China and Middle Eastern Countries. International Studies, Vol. 4 (2008), 26.

³⁹⁴ Christina Lin, The new Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East. Policy Analysis. The Washington Institute. (April 2011). <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-new-silkroad-chinas-energy-strategy-in-the-greater-middle-east>

its influence with Pakistan, and how other powerful countries re-join, will determine whether South and Central Asia embark on a new era of collective prosperity or remain mired in a series of conflicts. Pakistan's security condition is one of the most significant issues involving China. Consequently, the Pakistani government has surely made extremely firm decisions. Numerous enhancements have been made to protect national economic interests. The fact that President Xi assured Pakistan, after Pakistan's refusal to take sides in Yemen, that China would support Pakistan in the matter of untangling its ties with the Arab world is further evidence. Surely, there are constraints to this transformation in ties, as developments have a clear bearing on Pakistan's foreign policy. From a strategic standpoint, CPEC will facilitate China's access to Persian Gulf states. Therefore, this project is not only geopolitical but also geo-economically advantageous for China.³⁹⁵ A change in India's power and behaviour, for example, could impact the Sino-Pakistani relationship India has asserted that CPEC is "undesirable" since it will pass across Pakistani-administered Kashmir, which India considers as its own.³⁹⁶ While China and Pakistan have downplayed this worry, observing India's stance on the matter will be crucial.

The Foreign Minister's statement upon the failure of O.I.C. to call a meeting on Kashmir again deteriorated the relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia asked to return the loan. In this situation, again, China came to rescue Pakistan and help with payment to Saudi Arab and U.A.E. These instances show China supported Pakistan in thick and thin.

In the first phase, the key role of Pakistan cannot be negated in the process of bringing a conflict resolution mechanism to this rivalry or conflict. Pakistan is pivotal in furthering proper solutions to the conflict and confrontation. Not to mention all aspects, the historical phases

³⁹⁵Jai Kumar, Chen Xi, Muhammad Imran, and Joti Kumari, "Cross border project in China-Pakistan economic corridor and its influence on women empowerment perspectives", (*PloS one* 17, no. 6 (2022)).

³⁹⁶Muhammad Bilal, Muhammad Khurram Ali, Usama Qazi, Salman Hussain, Mirza Jahanzaib, and Ahmad Wasim, "A multifaceted evaluation of hybrid energy policies: The case of sustainable alternatives in special Economic Zones of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)", *Sustainable Energy Technologies and Assessments* 52 (2022).

prove that Pakistan has played a leading role in balancing the conflicting developments between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The state of Pakistan played the role of a balancing act in the pre-1979 period, and the state made an all-out effort to bring both states to the negotiation table. In the aftermath of the post-revolution period, the states have become more exclusive; they have kept their pool apart in crises at all levels.

Nevertheless, in all these political dynamics, Pakistan navigates both states. In contemporary dynamics, proceeding further toward settlement and negotiations is inevitable. The role of the balancer is to create balance and stability in all the fields, and this navigation is the need of the hour to bring forth a stable and peaceful Middle Eastern region. Moreover, in this framework, Pakistan can play a crucial role in overcoming the challenges and adversaries.

The second part of this research analyzed the role of international players, who seem indispensable in shaping the political dynamics within the Middle Eastern Region. Inextricably, the role of Pakistan remains crucial in shaping the foreign policy decision-making process owing to the exerted pressure and influence of the global powers. The research depicts that the extra-regional powers, such as the U.S. and China, have their stakes in the politics of this region. For this reason, they are using the state card to develop the nature of politics as per their demand. As an extra-regional power, the U.S. uses hard and soft power to influence Pakistan's relationship with both states. China's use of soft power is in the limelight because of China's peaceful rise through its economic ventures. International organizations and these extra-regional powers also play a crucial role in political and regional affairs.

The United States has dominated Middle Eastern politics and strategy for the last thirty years, influencing its political and strategic environment to suit its interests. However, the Americans are left out of the current détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which China mediated. The long-standing rivalries and alliances that ruled diplomacy are currently in disarray. The U.S. is now merely a spectator in the historical developments in the region due to the deal, which has

temporarily reduced it to a peripheral role. China's long-term plan is shown by its rise to a new power play in the Middle East.

Once thought to be the only domain of American hegemony, the Middle East is currently undergoing a seismic upheaval as China, with its substantial financial resources and strategic influence, becomes a significant force in the political economy of the area. Normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran resulted in a meeting between their representatives in Beijing in March 2023. Following a seven-year break, Iran and Saudi Arabia re-established diplomatic ties as part of the Peace deal. This bilateral agreement aims to maintain regional stability in the Gulf and Middle East. Furthermore, it calls for reciprocal guarantees for efforts to foster confidence that neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia will undermine the interests of other countries' nationals on various security, intelligence, political, and media-related matters.

CONCLUSION

The research study has been divided into three parts. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is thoroughly examined in the first section. It traces its history since the two countries emerged on the world map and analyze the underlying rivalry factors. The following section sheds light on the implications of the rivalry for Pakistan, including security issues, economic considerations, and Pakistan's strategic value to both Middle Eastern states. The final section explores Pakistan's efforts to ease tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Over many years, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been at odds. The two major Middle Eastern countries, Saudi Arabia and Iran, are deeply involved in a protracted proxy war and state of tension. This hostile connection has brought about several difficulties that have repercussions on the internal and external dynamics of the region and beyond. In the pre-Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, this rivalry's primary source was identity conflicts. Nevertheless, in the post-Islamic Revolution, the competition became more of a power battle, with religion being used increasingly to further geo-political objectives.

The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is fuelled by several things, including competition for geo-political hegemony, control over OPEC policies, and geo-culture, which has now taken the place of ideology as the focal point of their competition. Significantly, this rivalry has broad ramifications and affects other countries. The Neo-Classical Realism paradigm emphasizes leadership preferences emerging as critical variables in creating a state's foreign policy and other factors. Through NCR, the genesis of Saudi-Iranian rivalry could be examined. In Saudi Arabia and Iran, the monarch makes all foreign policy decisions. Different institutional systems are present for executing and implementing decisions. The institutional structures of the Iranian governance system are comparatively more robust than those found in Saudi Arabia. However, their application is frequently conditional upon the specific policy under consideration. The

decision-making principles in Iran are framed by revolutionary fervor, Khomeini's philosophy, the idea of Velayat-e Faqih, and opposition to Western and colonial dominance.

The year 2015 saw a dramatic change in Saudi Arabia-Iran foreign policy choices. Iran and the P5+1 inked a comprehensive nuclear agreement on July 14, 2015, which was anticipated mainly to make Iran's reintegration into the international community easier and, later on, the reaction of Iran upon the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia has seen a dramatic change in leadership after King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz passed away on January 23, 2015. The new leadership has brought changes to KSA's foreign policy.

One of the consequences of Iran's early Islamic Republic actions was its alienation from the international frameworks and platforms for political and economic cooperation. However, the Islamic Republic has recently adopted a more practical foreign policy. Iran's pursuit of a nuclear deal with world powers and direct talks with the United States shows a slight shift in its foreign policy decision-making, despite the country's direct involvement in Syria and indirect meddling in Bahrain and Yemen have had disastrous political and economic effects. Iran's leadership was willing to bear the economic costs of its engagement in Syria. However, the socio-political consequences of that involvement have severely undermined its regional and global foreign policy goals.

In Saudi Arabia, decisions on foreign and domestic affairs are frequently intertwined. Furthermore, in Saudi Arabia, making decisions about foreign policy is primarily a family affair. From 1930 to 1960 and from 1962 until 1975, Faisal bin Abdulaziz held the title of King of Saudi Arabia for eleven years and was also the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Saud bin Faisal, his son, held the position of Foreign Minister from 1975 till 2015. Thus, a father-and-son team led Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry for almost 80 years, directly influencing Saudi foreign policy in the monarch's direction.

Because of these particular characteristics, analyzing Saudi Arabia's foreign policy from both a leader-centric (or family-centric) perspective and a reactive one in light of regional developments is necessary. Saudi foreign policy is gradually becoming more assertive and ambitious, moving away from being cautious and calculated. In the Arab world, defacto King Salman's strategy posits the kingdom as the main power defending political interests. Under the leadership of King Salman and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, the formulation of foreign policy has become more assertive and liberal.

Saudi Arabia remained comparatively inconspicuous during the 1980s and 90s when Iran grew its adventurist foreign policy. Saudi Arabia was seen as the defender of regional and global security interests, while Iran was considered a danger to Gulf regional security. These facts, however, are no longer actual today. Iran's foreign policy has not changed much; the only thing that has changed is the amount of diplomatic and economic efforts made to interact with the world community positively. Under the de facto leadership of Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has initiated a bold, forceful, and ambitious drive to transform both its international and internal policy. Their distinct decision-making processes and philosophies have set them apart mainly regarding the factors influencing and determining their foreign policy goals. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is associated with irrationality when Iran is seen as the sensible actor, and this has been the case since 2015 and vice versa. Given recent developments in the region—such as the blockade against Qatar, the U.S.'s shifting approach to confronting Iran, and the negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran through a covert channel—one could argue that Saudi policymakers' reactionary thinking has given way to Iranian influence.

Iranians have steered the foreign policy conflict with Saudi Arabia and other regional actors in their favor, even though they still face existential challenges from U.S. sanctions and populist movements in the Arab world. However, the third state has always had difficulties due to the tense relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Any change in a state's relationship is

viewed with distrust by the other state. As an example, Pakistan is a state that sees the effects of this competition between the two states on several fronts, including issues about social, political, economic, and security.

Pakistan is also a key factor in the Middle East's larger geopolitics, with Saudi Arabia and Iran seeking Pakistan's support or neutrality due to its strategic position. Saudi Arabia has frequently asked Pakistan for support for many ventures. For instance, in 2015, Saudi Arabia asked Pakistan for military assistance during the Yemeni crisis. In addition, Pakistan supported Saudi Arabia in order to keep it as the leader of the Muslim world and hinder the emergence of another Muslim bloc. Pakistan withdrew from the 2019 Kuala Lumpur summit to placate Saudi Arabia. These incidents highlight how significant Pakistan's backing of Saudi Arabia's interests is.

Pakistan faces obstacles due to the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, which requires deft diplomatic maneuvering and aggressive internal policy measures to lessen its negative impacts. According to the theory of the balance of interests, states should adopt policies to balance their and other states' interests, especially when confronted with conflicting forces. Pakistan, which has close links to both Iran and Saudi Arabia, has attempted to balance its interests in this competition.

Pakistan had good connections with Saudi Arabia at first, especially regarding defense cooperation and economic support. However, because of its shared border and oil interests, it has also worked to strengthen ties with Iran. Pakistan is a significant actor in the region with the ability to affect the dynamics between Saudi Arabia and Iran due to its strategic position and status as the only Muslim state having nuclear technology. Pakistan has avoided taking a stance in their rivalry by pursuing a policy of balancing its relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. The goal of this strategy is to safeguard both its security interests and internal social stability. Pakistan has often intervened as a mediator, seeking to defuse diplomatic tensions between Riyadh and Tehran.

Key Findings

The major findings of the research are as below;

- The rivalry between Saudi Arabia-Iran is not based upon only ideological conflict but it has multifaceted factors involved i.e., struggles for regional hegemony, dominance in OPEC, and geo-economic competition. The rivalry of these giants of the Middle East has multiple implications for Pakistan in terms of economy, security and political stability.
- The difficult time for Pakistan's foreign policy started after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Iranian also attempted to influence Pakistan and tried to support the revolution in Pakistan. The Middle Eastern political dynamics have badly affected the social fabric in Pakistan; sectarianism and religious extremism increased in Pakistan. Amid the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan gained enormous significance. Saudi Arabia financially supported Afghan jihad through Pakistan. During the 1980s, Islamabad remained in the sphere of influence of Saudi Arabia but did not confront Iran.
- Military Establishment of Pakistan has cordial relations with the Saudi Kingdom. The provision of security in terms of safeguarding holy places of Saudi Arabia, and the modernization of the Saudi Military enabled the relations of Military establishment between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strengthened further the Retired general Raheel Shareef leading role in Islamic Military Coalition against Terrorism has further augmented this stance. It is evident that Saudi Arabia has influenced Pakistan's politics and it has in many instances mediated between the Civil and Military leadership of Pakistan. Hence, it is inevitable for civil leadership to take any step without the consensus of military leadership in the case of Saudi Arabia.
- The complex dynamics of the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, have added a role of mediator in Pakistan's portfolio. Many civilian governments in Pakistan have attempted

to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The consensus to appoint a focal person to resolve the difference was also suggested by Iran and Saudi Arabia. Such opportunities will definitely show both state's trust in Pakistan and its potential to mediate.

- The major powers have also influenced Pakistan's policies towards Saudi Arabia and Iran. U.S. alliance with KSA and hostility towards Iran have affected Pakistan's policies towards both states. Currently, the emerging role of China in the Middle East is seemingly influencing on the ongoing conflict between Riyadh and Tehran. This factor would obviously be effecting on Pakistan's position too as Pakistan is a major stakeholder of BRI too.

Recommendations

- This has been observed that neutrality strengthens Pakistan's credibility as a mediator and reduces the risk of entanglement in the proxy conflicts of the two nations. Therefore, Pakistan must maintain a neutral position, avoiding any perception of aligning too closely with either Saudi Arabia or Iran.
- Pakistan should strengthen diplomatic relations with both countries (Saudi Arabia and Iran) while ensuring balanced diplomacy. Continue fostering economic, cultural, and political ties with both Iran and Saudi Arabia to reinforce this balanced stance.
- Pakistan can offer to host or facilitate dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran, using its longstanding ties with both nations to encourage de-escalation. Islamabad could collaborate with international organizations like the UN, OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation), or even form a trilateral dialogue mechanism with other neutral countries to mediate.
- Pakistan encourage informal, behind-the-scenes diplomacy, including academic exchanges, conferences, or religious dialogue initiatives that can help ease tensions and build trust between both countries' elites and intellectuals.

- Pakistan should resist pressure from either Saudi Arabia or Iran to participate in their regional proxy wars, such as the Yemen conflict or issues in Syria and Iraq. A policy of military non-alignment in the Middle East will help Pakistan avoid deepening the conflict. Offer support for UN or multilateral peacekeeping missions where Pakistan could contribute without directly engaging in the conflict, further building its image as a peace broker.
- Given the volatility of the Saudi-Iran rivalry, Pakistan should develop contingency plans in case of escalation. This includes ensuring energy security, preparing for potential refugee inflows, and safeguarding Pakistani nationals living and working in the Gulf.
- Pakistan should reduce dependence on any single regional actor, particularly in terms of remittances and energy imports, to mitigate the risks of economic fallout from an escalation of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia-Iran.
- Pakistan as a leading Muslim-majority country committed to peace and stability in the Islamic world. This would bolster its diplomatic profile and increase Pakistan's influence in shaping the future trajectory of the Middle East. The consensus between Saudi Arabia and Iran to appoint a focal person from Pakistan to help reduce their differences presents a valuable opportunity for Pakistan to step into a mediator role in the Saudi-Iran rivalry. Pakistan should actively seize this chance to facilitate dialogue and promote peace between the two nations.
- Pakistan should engage Saudi Arabia-Iran cooperation on broader regional issues like counter-terrorism, climate change, and economic development, where common interests can overshadow their rivalries.

Post Research Scenario

Since the research “Saudi Arabia-Iran Rivalry: Implications for Pakistan and its Role in the Resolution of the Conflict (2015-2020)” is limited to the year 2020, it does not account for the significant events that have occurred after 2020 and reshaped Saudi-Iranian relations. Therefore, this post research scenario aims to provide some key developments that have taken place in Saudi Arabia-Iran relations during 2020-2024

Throughout 2021, both countries Saudi Arabia and Iran continued to support opposing factions in regional conflicts, particularly in Yemen and Syria. Iran’s support for the Houthis in Yemen was met with Saudi airstrikes, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. These proxy wars heighten the security dilemma in the region.³⁹⁷ Furthermore, in March 2021, Iran and China signed a 25-year strategic partnership, which included a significant investment in Iran’s infrastructure and energy sectors. This agreement was seen as a strategic alignment between Iran and China, further complicating Saudi-Iran relations.³⁹⁸ This agreement shows China’s tilt towards Iran which was explicitly disturbing for Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, during 2021 and 2022, Saudi Arabia and Iran engaged in several rounds of dialogue in Baghdad, brokered by Iraq. These discussions focused on de-escalation and improving bilateral relations, particularly regarding Yemen.³⁹⁹ By the end of 2022, reports indicated that Saudi Arabia and Iran had resumed diplomatic talks. This marked a potential thawing in relations, with both sides recognizing the need for dialogue to address regional issues.⁴⁰⁰ In March 2023, China brokered an agreement for Saudi Arabia and Iran to re-establish diplomatic

³⁹⁷ Adil Khan and Hassan Farooq Mashwani, “Saudi Arabia-Iran Conflict in the Middle East: A Struggle for Regional Hegemony,” *Arbor* (2024).

³⁹⁸ Kulsoom Belal, “China-Iran relations: Prospects and complexities,” *Policy Perspectives* 17, no. 2 (2020): 47-66.

³⁹⁹ Niloufar Baghernia, “China’s Marginal Involvement in the 2023 Iran-Saudi Arabia Reconciliation,” *Asian Affairs* 55, no. 1 (2024): 34-51.

⁴⁰⁰ M.Nawaz, A. Amin, and M. F. Ashgar, “Iran-Saudi Arabia Rapprochement: A Perspective of Neoclassical Realism,” *Global International Relations Review*, VI (2023).

ties after seven years. This landmark agreement was a significant diplomatic success for China and indicated a shift in regional dynamics.⁴⁰¹

Post-agreement, Saudi Arabia and Iran have begun exploring avenues for economic cooperation, focusing on trade and investment opportunities. Saudi Arabia has reportedly proposed a combined exercise with Iran in the Red Sea, a rare move that experts regard as a positive outcome and continuation of the resumption of diplomatic relations, which carries a positive significance for the stability of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.⁴⁰² This shift has potential implications for regional stability and economic integration.

In 2021 and 2022, Saudi Arabia continued to strengthen economic ties with China, particularly in the energy sector. China's large-scale investments in Saudi infrastructure and its significant oil imports from the kingdom deepened their bilateral relationship. Saudi Arabia, has been involved in several joint initiatives with China, including the development of NEOM, a futuristic city in Saudi Arabia that is aligned with China's technological ambitions.⁴⁰³

China's most significant diplomatic achievement between 2020 and 2024 came in March 2023, when it brokered an unprecedented agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This agreement resulted in the two countries re-establishing diplomatic ties after a seven-year break. The diplomatic rapprochement, known as the "Beijing Agreement," signalled China's growing influence as a mediator in the region and demonstrated Beijing's ability to maintain neutral relations with both nations.

⁴⁰¹ Muhammad Bilal, Sajida Begum, and Amina Farooq, "Iran-Saudi Arabia Rapprochement and China's Role in Regional Politics," *Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 12, no. 1 (2024): 1-17.

⁴⁰² Potential Saudi-Iranian joint naval exercise to promote stability in Persian Gulf and Red Sea regions, Li Yawei, *Global times*, 23rd October 2024. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202410/1321745>.

⁴⁰³ Benjamin Houghton, "China's balancing strategy between Saudi Arabia and Iran: the view from Riyadh," *Asian Affairs* 53, no. 1 (2022): 128-131.

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