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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Saudi Iranian Rivalry: The Struggle for Power and Influence in the Middle East**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the study is to observe the radical changes in Middle Eastern politics as well as to understand the struggle for economic, political and social influence in the region. Saudi Arabia and Islamic Republic of Iran are the most important states of the Middle East. The research also deals with the analytical approach of US policies towards Iran and Saudi Arabia. The theory Balance of Power has been used to understand the power struggle of the both states, (Iran and Saudi Arabia) in the Middle East. Both of these States have been struggling for power in the region. Saudi Arabia has its economic influence, whereas, Iran is influential owing to its military capacity. The aim of becoming hegemonic power, led them to the conflicts and rivalry. The revolution of 1979 of Iran was great threat to the Saudi Arabia as well as its allies. This threat initiated proxy wars in the region. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia and Iran adopted unfriendly approaches against each other.

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**Introduction**

The bedlam of the Middle East has instigated a burgeoning political milieu and irresistibly managed the power structure of the surroundings and exhibited an overt threshold for further combined venture in the region for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Commencing with an illustration and research of the irrefutable Iranian Saudi correlation leading 1979 through the current time; (Fatima, 2017). this research underscores and inspects the triumphs and challenges of the history that have epitomized the connection between the two dynamic regional powers, underlining three main aspects that have contained the most force on their association. The proof and examination will demonstrate that the Iranian Saudi rapport has improved;

conflicting diversions will lead to a constant enmity between the both states as they seem to make sure collaborations within the Gulf and safe the continuousness of their own governments. Since the one-year tribute of the terrific cast out of former president of Tunisia(Zine El Abidine Ben Ali) has been approved, Iran and Saudi Arabia expected the consequence of verdicts and thriving adequate improvement in (Libya, Tunisia and Egypt)(Cerioli, 2018). Beside this, law based skirmishes carry on in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, whilst other authoritarian innovators have slightly curved the inner powers to alter the bases of government in both Jordan and Morocco. These successions, joint with succeeding domestic conflict in Iraq, which was once a significant contestant in the Middle East, have shown an unlock entrance to a more cohesive ilk of government in the Gulf for Iran and Saudi Arabia. Even though, both of these states regulate their own backers responses to 2011's conversions along with their wishes of regional management in the light of un-objective political complicities, their political relationship looks hot and cold(Cordesman, 2020).

The issues of last decades have molded the relations of the both nations Saudis and Iranian. Whereas, it is the result of their going on conflicts of past.

The last year's incidents have transformed the association between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but the past of this connection is chaotic and intricate. From hot relationships before ousting of the Shah in 1979 to an end of political bonds at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, the inconsistent relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are now indecisive in the perspective of the budding political atmosphere of the Middle East (Doran, 2011). Commencing with an analysis and overview of the past affiliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia before 1979 to the current time, this research underscores and talks about history's successes and challenges that have either helped or hindered to revise the liaison between these two major states of the Middle East. As per this historical analysis, the research elucidates three main aspects that have possessed power on the link between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the degree to which their relationship is affected by these factors. These factors incorporate aspirations for regional power and esteem; sectarian divisions on the basis of Wahhabis and the Shi'ites; and the most important aspect is economic prospects particularly with regard to oil and the "Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)." The evidence and analysis will show that the current association of Iran and Saudi Arabia has been growing; contradictory benefits will have consequences in a constant rivalry between the two states because they search to ensure coalition inside the region and sustain the eternity of their own government.

### **The Iranian Saudi Relations during Shah Era**

In 1928 the Al-Saud line was formulated, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran returns. Official trips of leaders of the countries, however, did not happen till the mid-1960s, the dynamic power for an extended appeasing dialog occurring on account of the 1958's collapse of King Faysal in bordering Iraq(Fürtig,

2006). The leader's toppling by nationalist authorities augmented concerns regarding the probability of additional democrat insurgents who are not in the favor of monarchical administrations in the environment. Consequently, "Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Saudi Kings Sa'ud, and particularly Faysal after his seizing power in 1964, started a modus of regular meetings to organize their territorial approaches," that made more powerful the relations between the two households and their states (Hadžikadunić, 2019). The supportive force between the innovators was unambiguously a consequence of a common eagerness for the protection of their individual governments, also to usual financial concerns and objectives. As HennerFurtig, paints "the regular enthusiasm for battling communist and radical-patriot impacts in the Gulf area, in guaranteeing a steady stream of oil and gas, and in expanding riches through fares, Iran and Saudi Arabia till the end of the 1970s." Moreover, one should behold that age of cordial relationships was proclaimed on the environs of analogous administrative establishment in both nations beside flattering remote policy and limited aims; partisan separations were not underscored, nor were they notable in particular conversations (Fürtig, 2007).

David Long asserts, "preceding the [Iranian] insurgency, the essential political meeting in the Gulf was neither Sunni-Shiite nor Arab-Persian yet traditionalist radical." This observation is specifically outstanding when distinguished against incumbent inspections of partisan enmity and eminent anxieties in the middle of Shi'ites and Sunnis in the Middle East. Additionally, it exposes the degree to which religious, social and etymological disparities were reduced by constricting universal issues and household; the two traditions were coupled together in an agreeable and cordial relation. However, in spite of the initial success of the Saudi-Iranian correlation, agreeable and warm ties between two states were not intended to end as the ejection of the Shah in 1979 produced an outstanding progress in Iranian distant method that harmed al-Saud legitimacy despite the tricky current condition of matters of monarchic instruction in dissimilar states in the area (Heydarian, 2010).

### **Iranian Revolution and Iran-Iraq War**

Sha's collapse in the middle of 1979 led to a reversal between Saudi-Iranian relationships. The achievement of the alteration talked to all that the Shah and the al-Saud family had been joint against. After the 1979 strife the Saudi-Iranian correlation kept collapsing propelling a split in pacifying relationships in 1988 (Gary Sick, 2004). Saudi Arabia pondered Iran a subverting power in the region because of its "rehashed endeavors to fare its upheaval" to other Gulf countries. However, while on the other hand, Iran contemplated Saudi Arabia vulnerable to protect Islam's holy sites, whilst "Iran's Khomeinist philosophy [was] intensely antimonarchical, formalize[d] administrative power in governmental issues and... trumpet[ed] an unequivocally populist line," all features those were directly contrary to Saudi local political structure and arrangement. Although a clash of faith, "Saudi-Iranian ties were further strained after the 1979 Mecca Grand Mosque takeover, despite the fact

that there was no immediate proof that Tehran was included in the incident." The main actual aspect of the revolt on the Saudi-Iranian correlation was an eminent query between the two states that stop their supportive discretionary relationships, made a harsh conflict for impact and force in the region (Swearingen, 1988). In the War of Iran and Iraq that took soon after the initiation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia strengthened Iraq, a display that additionally crumbled Saudi-Iranian relationships. The Saudi preference to strengthen Iraq hinged on the Saudi anticipate that Iran and its focused advertising against the territory itself, made vulnerable the Saudi government and its authority; it is the cause Riyadh aided Iraq monetarily and politically amidst their issues with Iran lending Iraq 40 billion US dollars for strengthening its armed forces (Kevin & Woods, 2009). This option similarly stated to an important movement; Furtig portrays like triangular provincial demand for the Gulf through which the main power unification in the region stimulated from Iran and Saudi Arabia trying to hold within Iraq and Saudi Arabia striving to control Iran. Additional political consequences in the middle of the war included Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981, that was entailed the 6 Gulf States of the (United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia) and the commissions ensuing not in the favor of Iran political inspiration (Nuruzzaman, 2012). The main purposes of GCC are: "to impact coordination, incorporation, and interconnection between Member States in all fields," basically for the reasons of common defense and financial flourishing. In 1982, the GCC Secretary-General (Abdullah Bishara) confirmed that "Iran's mission for amazingness in the Gulf was the essential danger to the strength of the GCC." The peril, which Bishara depicted, was summarized in the causes for fear of Saudi Arabia about Iran's intimidation to its government in development to disturb local question that asserts for instance, (Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE) and have and keep taking on with Iran (Pradhan, 2011 & Muzaffar, et al, 2017).

As the Iran-Iraq skirmishes furthered, financial approach measures were exerted by Saudi Arabia for putting further burden on Iran. As the support, forced by several Western forces on Iran these days, the Saudis "overwhelmed the universal markets with oil [during] 1985-86 taking after an Iranian hostile at the [Iraqi] port of Fao, [causing] oil costs [to] plummet."

The economy of Iran was injured by the measure as the plummet in expenditures became the reason for diminishing profits for the state amidst times of uses of high security initiating from war requirements. Saudi Arabia's capacity to affect in such a sensational way on the costs of world oil would continue to sprain the relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia in future. Saudi-Iranian activities strike a matchless low in the upshot of Mecca episode in 1987. Whilst having an attention in Haj, the travelers of Iran managed confronts which instigated clashes with the strengths of Saudi security. The violent quarrels, that prompted a ludicrous accusation, martyred 275 Iranian travelers and 303 were wounded (Fraihat, 2020).

Saudi Arabia reproached Iran for the shameful event of history,, stating Iran had overlooked the "otherworldly essentialness" of the ritual, whilst further

emphasizing its version by saying that "it would not permit the Haj to be "abused by any state or bunch for political gain." The disaster that has been portrayed by some researchers as "the most noticeably awful episode of its kind since the Islamic Revolution" in the holy place of Mecca; Iran was offended whilst simultaneously, burning Saudi causes for fear of Iranian desires to destabilize and expel the al-Saud government (Terrill, 2011). Iranian consultation prepared these causes for threat as "Tehran scrutinized the al-Saud 'family's qualifications as sheltered managers of Islam's most heavenly places," and needed the damage of the Saudi government. Eventually, appeasing relationships were detached in 1988; subsequently, Haj was barred for Iranian in future years (Mousavian, 2016).

### **Rapprochement Era**

As soon after the Iran-Iraq War was finished in 1989, the sever in Saudi-Iranian unrestricted relationships advanced. At any rate, with the ensuing 1990's assault of Kuwait by Iraqi forces, the trilateral strength IRAN and SAUDI ARABIA relation in the Gulf acted. A cooling of dangers was instigated by The Gulf War amid Saudi Arabia and Iran as the two states were combined against a usual enemy Iraq. The following war provoked a relieve between two states, although appeasing relationships were not reestablished till March 19, 1991 (Frederic Wehrey, 2009).

The incidents of previous years would forge an eternal impression on the Saudi-Iranian relation, with the absence of reliance carrying out a disorder in overhauling particular relationships. However, like the correlation, which Iran and Saudi Arabia had prior to 1979, a consideration on shared financial and political schemes contributed mitigate the animosity between regional pioneers despite 1980's stresses (Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, 2010). Iraqi hostility joint the two states politically because after finishing the Iran-Iraq War, the former lingered resolutely antagonistic to latter; and as Saudi Arabia appeared, Iraq as a striking threat to its security than Iran. Additionally the states began to focus on financial problems, mainly as Iran started seeing relations with Saudi Arabia as essential as far as oil income, which would fuel the nation's reconstruction." After the eight-year war with Iraq, Iran had innumerable financial local issues Including unemployment and high swelling. (Sarmadi H, 2017)." After the war, Revising the relationships of Saudi Arabia and Iran was particularly influential to enhance the financial condition of latter since supply of world oil is allocated by the lions of Saudi Arabia possesses (roughly one-quarter of the world's supply) and its ability to manipulate oil costs as they were done by it in the mid-1980s. Hence, Iran pondered the relationship with Saudi Arabia decisive on account of its influence in the region as well as over OPEC. Collectively, Saudi Arabia also contemplated financial thoughts of the relationship. The haj is the divine journey, the Islam's fifth pillar and deemed religious obligation for the Muslims. Moreover, it is an essential source of income for the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In fact, The Industry of religious tourism shows "the second biggest wellspring of remote salary for the Saudi kingdom," whereby, twenty to forty billion US dollars are saved yearly. Apart from Haj, Iranian also had to give extra payments

for lesser pilgrimage Umrah. Subsequently, these elements compelled Saudi Arabia to restore old relationships with its adversary (Mason, 2016).

In 90s, GCC according to which many Gulf states were attached to Saudi Arabia, imagined the threat of Iran to former amid flagging relations of past between the two nations and also conceived that menace was misused. In 1997, the worse Relationships of Iran and Saudi Arabia were then further deposit at the yearly summit of GCC "the Iranian Government's aim to open another page in its relations with the GCC part states (Ulrichsen, 2010). Whilst local question with some parts states stayed indecisive, the GCC's broad mental state toward Iran found to be less opposing and more unbiased. Generally, the nineties were explained by a pact between Iran and Saudi Arabia which was mulled imaginable through Iran's altering remote approach destinations and also financial, the handling of Saudi Arabian causes for intimidation of Iranian maneuver. The abrupt move in the relationships of Iran and Saudi Arabia further pushed former and latter nearer together, allowing them to mitigate obsolete transgressions and contrasts keeping in view the purpose to ascertain the journey of Iraq for power. Then again, whilst the 1990's progression made it show just as relationship was out and inside augmenting, altering incidents in the area would push Iran' and Saudi Arabia's relationship as distant as feasible(Bahgat, 2000).

### **After Saddam Regime**

The Middle East and the nations of Iraq and Afghanistan were particularly pushed into the worldwide spotlight by the incident of 9-11(Durrani, 2002). The US invaded in the region pertaining to peace, and enhanced the forces to fight against the War on Terror, assaulted both states. Chiefly after Saddam Hussein's collapse, the issues of force legislative of the Gulf area were stirred, defiantly distressing the relationship of Iran and Saudi Arabia. US manipulated the power between the states of the Middle East whilst similarly blazing extremist tendencies that strengthened disparities between the East and the West equally amid Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims (Cardinali, 2013).

The most vital outcome of US movement in Middle East proved the end of "Iraq as a convincing regional support versus Iran," whose influence over its neighboring states rapidly augmented. As Iraq's main interest advanced amidst turmoil and upset, the harmed nation returned from more striking regional governmental quandaries. This forged the collapse of the triangular framework earlier defined, wherein "the three huge Gulf forces of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq adjusted each other, [and its] replace [ment] with a bipolar structure setting Iran and Saudi Arabia straightforwardly against each other." Instead of going towards a mutual interest on curbing Iraqi authority after Saddam's wreck, Finally, Iran and Saudi Arabia met a rushing of sprains due to an obsession of schemes, regardless of the truth that they were integrated on some meticulous issues. These issues, portrayed by Gwenn Okruhlik, "incorporate regular hobbies in oil and Islam notwithstanding a union of national hobbies on three different focuses: regular

residential circumstances, local clashes, and regular dissatisfaction with the United States (Soage, 2017). However, the common traits after Iraqi removal as a main political contestant in the Middle East were inadequate to allow relations of Saudi Arabia and Iran to be maintained cordial as they were in times of late 1990s. After the expulsion of Saddam Hussein from power, the most harmful part for the relation between Tehran and Riyadh was to allow Iranian journey to more notable control and influence in the locale. Furtig emphasized "the US without a doubt did Iran an extraordinary support when it crushed Saddam Hussein while at the same time doing extraordinary harm to its own believability in the area by substantiating itself not able to control and balance out Iraq." The elimination of the continuing unreceptive to Iranian administration in Iraq, door was opened to the former to consolidate a relationship with the young majority governs scheme that possesses a demographic population of Shi'ite that is sixty-five percent (Maloney, 2001). Besides tries to consolidate authority in Iraq, the government of Iran proceeded with a powerful campaign against the tradition of Saudi Arabia. Iran's accusations have included the Labeling Saudi Arabia to be USA's expert in the region, despite "Iran's... test [to] the authenticity of the al-Saud before territorial and household groups of onlookers by upstaging them on skillet Arab issues, for example, Palestine." This discussion has extremely harmed the trust level between the two states and central injured or advanced other Gulf States East to ask Saudi Arabia's hegemony in the region. Certainly, relationships among Iran, Lebanon and Syria have strengthened, with Iran's close ties with non-state prepared organizations including Hamas and Hezbollah (Menashri, 2007). Hence, it has finished obvious that "the basic driver of the relationship [between Iran and Saudi Arabia] is a battle to shape the territorial parity of force," not supporter separations that in reality, are just utilized as a gauge for legalizing Saudi monarchy. According to late RAND report, "the Sunni-Shiite separate surely figures the analytics of the authority and is either energized or made light of as a device in a bigger session of geopolitical moving." In this political link that their relation was additionally experienced at the commencement of the first Arab turmoil in the middle of 2011(Khan, et. al, 2019 & Taşpınar, 2018).

### **Arab Spring**

The collapse settled tyrants in (Libya, Tunisia and Egypt), has compensated the leveling of vigor in the Middle East when US influentially ousted Saddam Hussein from power. On contrary, the 2011's disturbance, unlike to Iraq's autonomy in 2003, was emboldened by household population fed up with stretched meeting for political alteration. These troubles speak of an incredible hazard to the al-Saud household; the fear of political protesters is speeded with the purpose of regime alter to their own territory. The Saudi vision about this menace is justifiable. Michael Doran portrayed in an article of foreign affair, "Today's progressive wave is driven by local requests: for occupations and political representation (Sinkaya, 2015)." Iran and Saudi Arabia are unsafe to these family grumbles and must mull these problems and find out methods for soothing additionally; satisfying their state or risk needs

strife within their own fringe. To Iran, a few trusts the nation will exert the late Arab upheavals as a possibility to fix conspiracies with states whose earlier oppressors had reduced any ilk of relationship with the former. Once again, a few hope that "Tehran's impact has dependably been most prominent in spots with dug in tyranny, where it has misused the wrongness of Arab rulers by highlighting their reliance on the United States and their weakness (or indecision) on skillet Arab issues." The resulting elimination of these leaders does not make sure that vote system of Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, which is newly formed, will immediately descend into the camp of Iran. It is indistinct who has the power of region will fall contemplating the force vacuum, which has formed and the disruption of innumerable states with their inhabited issues. The issue is further twisted by the vagueness in the future of Iran from one point of view, the state may revolve focusing on inner issues, then, the country may discover "a contentious system of subversion past its fringes as Iran's rulers search for preoccupations from household agitation." Pertaining to Saudi Arabia household does not feel any threat of Iranian treason and the possible results of Shiite's developments. This is palpable in Saudi Arabia's response to political confronts in Bahrain. A harsh disguise of Bahraini protestors was strengthened by it, keeping in view the main purpose to aid for the protection of the verdict of Sunni al-Khalifa gang (Ulrichsen, 2013). On the other hand, this point provided additional material to the publicity of Iran, machines that could also heighten the injustice of the activities of Saudi Arabia, the country's absolute carelessness of human life. Saudi movements have produced prolonged partisan divisiveness by implication; the toll of assaulted Shi'ites is equal to those who have seen the mediation in Bahrain. Despite interrupted Iranian consultation which could expressed any other thing, prolonged the pressures of partisan between Iran and Saudi Arabia "would be a thrashing for Iranian remote approach subsequent to 1979, as Iran constantly tried to present itself as rising above both the ethnic and partisan impediments of the state." Instead, "it is longstanding basic strains [that] seem to portray a great part of the relationship between these oil-rich powers, each having yearnings for Islamic administration and contrasting dreams of provincial request. A rivalry has been forged, and that competition could imaginably weaken the region's may. In short, the situation of the rapport between Iran and Saudi Arabia is still needed to be fixed because these two states can feel the repercussion of political instability in the Middle East(Kelkitli, 2016). As testimony has exhibited the dithering approach to the duties of Iran and Saudi Arabia could mean that these two states disregard the previous contrasts for working in participation towards the completion of common purposes. The trust issues of the past for impact and force will eventually propel a culmination of the Saudi-Iranian political affairs. Whilst both states yearn for regional popularity, Saudi Arabia's apprehension of Iranian atomic potential and Iranian dependence on Saudi Arabia for financial reasons may ultimately embolden a structure of power as each meeting indicates a reluctance to rise for other (Keynoush, 2016). Generally, the "current Saudi-Iranian rivalry for the 'Middle Easterner hearts and brains'" will bring break up between the two powers; subsequently, a craze for survival will ensure that their relationships will not deteriorate by enmity. The consequence of their relationship will largely influence the situation of the region despite the fact that Saudi Arabia has an influence in the



world owing to its oil facility. It would be interesting for others to see how "the meeting between two fundamentalist and maybe late types of administration (a progressive Shi'ite Republic and a reactionary Sunni Wahhabist government) and [their] rivalry for local power" will proceed, mainly to 2011's incidents and continue with Iranian menace to halt Hormuz.

A tale of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia consists of approximately eighty adventurous years of political bonds, the former and latter, both saw countless ups and downs. In those times, Iran abided the revolution of (Islamic Shia) (1979) whereby Pahlavi was ousted; and Islamic Democracy was formulated under the shadow of pastorate class (Axworthy, 2013). However, while, on its contrary, Saudi Arabia, being an orthodox Sunni country, was governed by several aristocrats of the Al Saud regal group. Including other elements, their common mutual ties were rigorously manipulated by Shia-Sunni schools of thought. Their flagging relationships had further affected trustiness in the region. In 1980s, the sour relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia had permitted their neighboring country Iraq to put the region into war on the signal of USA to control this oil nation. Soon after, US powers were given a huge opportunity by Gulf war to have their influence in the region. The approach of USA in the region did nothing except furthering the disparity between two Islamic countries. Now-a-days, their cold relationships seem to be worse than ever before. Haplessly, both states are doing their utmost to expand sectarianism and exert the public sentiments against each other just for the sake of their own meager personal interests. The several players of Middle East have been divided by this approach and these two nations, Iran and Saudi Arabia, instead of gathering all Muslim states on a page, not only overlooking the relation of brotherhood, but also trying to attract them on their side (Mabon, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

Whatever the situation of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but it is deemed the relationships between the two opposite forces in the Center Easter region. One can envisage that their hobbies are different too. After World War II, Israel was established and the Safeguard Settlements of war times were ended. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia and Iran adopted unfriendly approaches against each other.

### **Recommendations**

Issues can be resolved through negotiation and dialogues. Peace can bring economic prosperity, political stability and peaceful co-existence. Both nations should maintain religious harmony in the Gulf as well as in the Middle East. The mutual understandings of the both states can strengthen the Muslim world.

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