



New Opportunities in Times of Crisis: Possibilities of Iran-Saudi Arabia's Diplomatic Relations

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to argue that Iran and Saudi Arabia's decisions, whether positive or negative, will shape the future security dynamics and landscape of the Middle East, due to their significant roles in the region. It is impossible to create security in the region without the cooperation of both countries. Therefore, a diplomatic negotiations and strategic plan to meet both sides' demands in the region is crucial to the future of the Middle East.

Successful Negotiations

-Focusing on common grounds between adversaries [creating security/stability in the region, ISIL, OPEC energy policies]

-Private negotiations, without the third party intervener

-Both states' highest representatives should be present during negotiations, including:

President Rouhani, Ali Shamkhani- The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council-, Javad Zarif-Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs
+ King Salman, Ahmad Al-Jubeir- Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs- Muhammad Bin Salman-Deputy crown prince and defense minister

Methodology

Qualitative approach, using secondary sources, such as Academic Journals, history textbooks, news articles and think tanks journals to broaden the research by gaining background information and different historical analyzes to provide valid alternatives

Introduction

-Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalries, as two neighboring Muslim countries with significant regional importance, have led to the rise of sectarian violence and insecurity in the region.
-Since the 1980 Iran-Iraq war, with the involvement of Saudi Arabia, to more recent proxy wars in Yemen and Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia has been opponents to contain each other's influence in the region.
-Nevertheless, their corporation will be considerably productive to create stability and security in the region.

Thesis: This research analyzes the current situation of Iran and Saudi Arabia by taking a historical approach of both countries' relations since 1929, as well as their rivalries in the region. As a result, it offers an alternative solution-diplomatic talks between two countries- toward reducing the tensions in the Middle East, since Iran and Saudi Arabia's cooperation is the key toward rebuilding security and stability in the region.

Iran & Saudi Arabia's Regional Importance

Saudi-Arabia

-Population: 32,535 Million
-Largest economy in the region
-The land is connected to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba from the West, Persian Gulf from the East, positioned between Asia, Africa and Europe
-Mecca and Medina, sacred places for Muslims around the world
-Largest oil reserves and oil producer in the world
-based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam(Wahhabism)/Sunni majority/Leader of the Sunni world
- One of the biggest U.S Allies in the region (allowed U.S military and political intervention in the region)

Iran

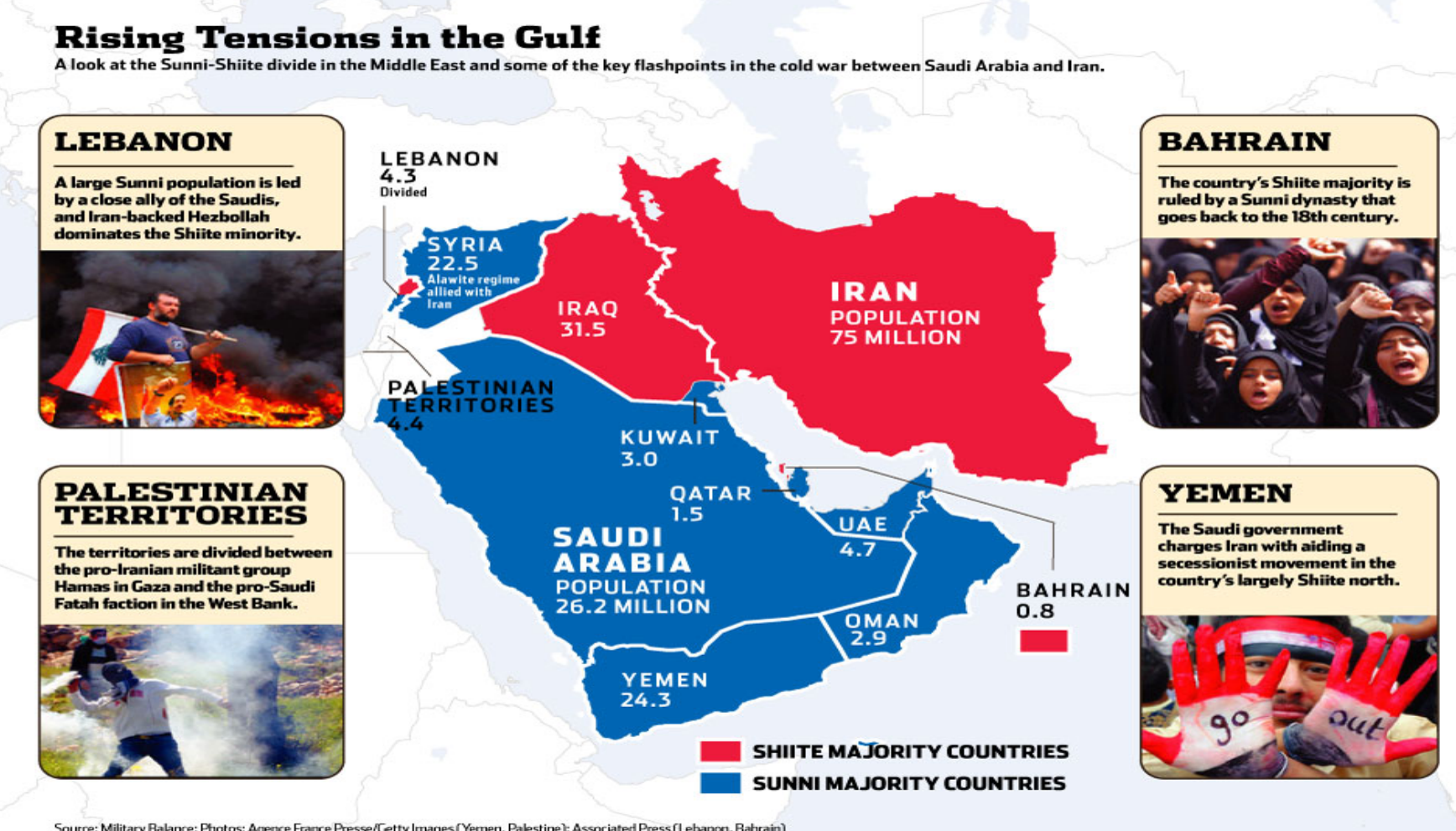
-Population 79.11 Million, Second largest in the region after Egypt
-Second largest economy in the region after Saudi Arabia
-Neighboring Iraq, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan- Connected to Caspian Sea in the North, Persian Gulf(the most strategically significant waterways of the world" and Gulf of Oman in the South
-Ranked 2nd in natural gas reserve in the world
-Ranked 3rd for oil reserves in the world
-Islamic Republic of Iran, after 1979 Islamic revolution (Shia dominating revolution, seen as a threat by Saudi Arabia)
-Constitution based on Quran and Sharia Law (Islamic Law)
-Rise of Sunni-Shia conflicts in the region after 1979 revolution
-Khomeini, leader of Shia Islamic revolution, as anti-monarch (Saudi Arabia) and anti-West (the U.S)
-Iran as the political reference point for most Shia movements/ Leader of the Shia world

Historical Relations

1929: First diplomatic relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, titled as "Saudi-Iranian Friendship Treaty"
1970: Iran and Saudi Arabia as dominant players in the region to promote security and peace (Iran expanded its military and economic dominance and King Faisal increased his influence in the Muslim world)
1979: Islamic revolution and Khomeini's opposition toward Saudi-Arabia, Iran's promotion of aggressive foreign policies toward them and grasping the support of Shia population in the region
1980-1988: Iran-Iraq war, Saudi Arabia financially and militarily supported Iraq during the war- Considers as the first proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia- Change of Iranians' perspective toward Saudi Arabia as a threat and their enemy
1987: Shiite pilgrim clash with Saudi authorities during hajj, more than 200 Iranians killed- Led to Iranian protesters attack Saudi embassy in Tehran
1988-1990:Iran boycotts the annual hajj, Saudi Arabia send aids
1991: Rafsanjani and King Fahd restore diplomatic ties, remains stable during two moderate presidency in Iran, Rafsanjani and Khatami (both believed that the regional stability is dependent on Iran's close ties with Saudi Arabia)
2005: Ahmadi-Nejad became president of Iran, took hostile approach toward Saudi Arabia, announced his support toward Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, and his goal to expand their regional influence
2011: During Arab spring, Shia minority demonstration in Bahrain against the royal family (Saudi-Arabia blamed Iran for provoking Shia population- sent 1,200 troops to suppress demonstrations)
2015: 464 Iranians killed during hajj due to Saudis' mismanagement
2016: execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al Nimr in Saudi Arabia, led to a number of Shitte protestors attacking Saudi embassy in Tehran, End of Iran and Saudi Arabia's diplomatic ties

Iran-Saudi Arabia's Rivalries in the Region

-Syrian Conflict: proxy war with international involvements, such as the U.S and its allies, Saudi Arabia and Turkey on one side[in support of Syrian opposition], Russia and Iran, with the involvement of Hezbollah on the other side[Assad's allies]. Rise of ISIL [both sides' enemy]
-Yemen: victim of Iran and Saudi Arabia's proxy war, Saudi Arabia's military involvement since 2015 in support of Yemeni government, against Shia Houthi rebels [supported by Iran]
-Rise of failed states/governments, Sectarian violence across the region
-Iran continues funding allies[Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamists], Saudi Arabia continues to contain Iran's influence
-Proxy wars between these two significant players is continuing to increase and affecting the whole region



Alternative Solution: Diplomatic Negotiation

-With the high number of poverty, unemployment, marginalization, destroyed infrastructure, internally displaced people, refugees and terrorism in failed and weak states, there is a need for extensive military, security power, serious investments and governance
-Both sides' cooperation will positively effect proxy wars, reduce sectarian conflicts and terrorist activities, such as ISIL[common enemy
-Cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia will include their allies, including GCC countries and Iraq [reduces Shia-Sunni conflicts]
-Common goal is to create stability/security in the region
-Focus on their mutual interest as a positive first step [security issues and combating terrorism]

Conclusion

-Iran and Saudi Arabia as bitter opponents created a cold war in the region
-The history has shown that Iran-Saudi rapprochement is possible with moderate approach, rather than hostility, despite their ideological, ethical, geopolitical and religious differences
-Improving their relationship will be domestically, regionally and internationally beneficial toward creating security and stability



Trish McAlaster/The Globe and Mail, Pew Research Center, Council On Foreign Relation.