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The question of Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflicts in the Middle East



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Introduction

Iran and Saudi Arabia, two powerful countries of the Middle East, have been bitter rivals with no diplomatic relations ever since the Second World War and the end of the colonial rule in the Middle East, namely, the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The main cause of their dispute arises from their different interpretations of the Islamic theology where Saudi Arabia is mostly Sunni Islamic and Iran is mostly Shiite Islamic. Instead of fighting directly against each other, the two countries have been involved in conflicts in other States, resulting in conflicts in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Definition of Key Terms

Proxy war

A war instigated by a major power which does not itself become involved but instead the opposite sides use third parties as substitutes for directly battling each other.

Sunni Islam

Member of one of the two major branches of Islam. Sunnis are frequently described as orthodox Muslims with different traditions within the Sunni branch of Islam. From the time when the death of Muhammad, there has been increasing conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites, i.e. the other major branch of Islam, even though both branches share a belief in the teachings of the Qur'an. A Sunni Muslim believes that the caliph, the chief Muslim ruler,



Abu Bakr was the rightful successor to Muhammad after his death. Saudi Arabia is mostly Sunni.

Shiite Islam

Second largest branch of Islam, the first one being the Sunni branch, also known as Shia Islam. Contrary to the Sunni belief, a Shiite Muslim believes that Mohammed's son in law, Ali, was his legitimate successor as the leader and prophet. Similar to the first branch of Islam, the Shiite branch also have further divisions. Iran is mostly Shiite.

Quran

Holy book of the Islamic religion also spelled as the Qur'an and the Koran.

Shah

Title of a ruler of Iran in the past.

General Overview

History of Iran-Saudi Arabia relations

History plays a big role in the Iran and Saudi Arabia conflict, the biggest proxy war in the Middle East. Early in the 19th century the Ottoman Empire, known as one of the strongest and long-lasting dynasties in world history, stretched across the Middle East covering many different tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. The Ottoman Empire entered the First World War in October of 1914 on the side of the Central Powers i.e., the Austro-Hungarian empire, Germany, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, and shaped the way towards British entry into the Middle East. On the other hand, the division of the defeated Ottoman Empire began among the Allied Powers, i.e., Serbia, Russia, France, United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium and the United States. This caused ample room for the Arabian tribes to then fight amongst themselves to control power in the region and resist any foreign invaders. By 1932, an interior tribe known as Al-Saud (translated as the House of Saud) conquered most of the Arabian Peninsula and on the 23rd of September Saudi Arabia was officially recognized. In 1938, massive oil reserves were discovered in Riyadh, which is the capital of Saudi Arabia. The money made from the oil made the monarchs rich and they were able to finance the



development of the kingdom. This paved the way for the US-Saudi Arabia alliance. During this time, Saudi Arabia was flourishing.

Iran also had oil reserves but due to constant foreign influences, such as being invaded by the Russians, the Soviets and the British was creating problems in the success and prosperity of the nation. Because of the American support to Saudi Arabia, the US could not directly buy oil from Iran. Therefore in 1954, the US furtively staged a coup to remove Mohammed Mosaddegh the (democratically elected) prime minister at the time. In his place, Mohammed Mosaddegh, the Shah of Iran was appointed as the representative king. He was considered to be a “progressive who wanted to westernize and secularize his country” who despised the Soviets (on account of being insulted by Stalin on one occasion). But soon, his progressivism morphed into a form of self-indulgence in which corruption and exploitation became widespread and extensive and the SAVAK, the former Iranian secret police, started to terrorize citizens. However, Iran’s prosperity and wealth remained unaffected during this time.

Hostage Crisis of 1979

During the foreword of a successful revolution by the Islamic fundamentalists against the American Shah of Iran, the US became an object of virulent criticism and the US embassy in Tehran was targeted. On November 4th 1979, a group of Iranian students stormed the embassy and took 66 American hostages ranging from the Chargé d’ Affaires to the most junior members of the staff. The Hostage Crisis of 1979 resulted for the student revolutionaries to break ties with Iran's past and affirm an end to American intrusion in its affairs. The Iranians held the American diplomats hostage for 444 days and set them free on January 21st 1981.

The repercussions from the crisis still reverberate in the current relations between the United States and Iran, adding weight to the belief of moderates which is that the events were as highly detrimental to Iran’s standing not only with the United States but in the wider western world. The hostage crisis continues to affect the United States’ perception of Iran, as according to Anthony Dworkin, an expert on US foreign policy at the European Council on Foreign Relations, “*The embassy and hostage crisis on 1979 lay at the roots of the widespread feeling in the United States that Iran is a hostile and threatening country and that dates back to the time of the Islamic Revolution*”.



As an effect of the Hostage Crisis of 1979, monarchy was ousted from Iran and replaced by a government that the people were fond of, who were Islamic and led by the clergy. This was a problem for Saudi Arabia as the nation claimed to be the leader of the Muslim World.

Gulf Cooperation Council

A predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia started fearing that a predominantly Shiite Iran will try to export their revolution to the Kingdom. According to a 1990 CIA report, their fears were not vulnerable. To stop the progression of the rapidly spreading Iranian beliefs, Saudi Arabia formed the Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC, in 1981. The GCC is an alliance between the US and the gulf monarchies which does not include Iran.

The tensions spike owing to the American interference, specifically with Iraq. When former president of Iraq, Saddam Hussain set out to invade Iran in September 1990 to gain power and in addition, Iranian oil reserves, Saudi Arabia helped Iraq by providing Hussain the money, weapons and logistical support he required. This proxy conflict ended in a stalemate at a human cost of at least 1 million people dead.

After receiving help from Saudi Arabia, Iraq became the buffer state, a usually neutral state lying between two larger rival powers. However this changed in 2003, when the US overthrew Saddam Hussain. By doing so, a power vacuum and a highly unstable country that was driven into rebellion was created. This trend of Civil War continued into 2011 when pro-democracy, anti-monarchy protests broke out in Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain. These protests were referred to as the Arab Springs.

This led to the proxy wars worsening which, eventually resulted in some of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century. Three major wars broke out and four failing states, Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, emerged and anarchical factions like Hezbollah, ISIS and al Qaeda arose.

Regional conflicts

As mentioned previously, the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia has resulted in many regional conflicts and wars, the Syrian civil war is briefly explained below. However, for more in depth explanation for the many other regional conflicts, please refer to Appendix I, J, K, and L to find useful links for further information which explain the topics clearly.



Syrian Civil War

Inspired by the Arab Spring protests, in March 2011, pro-democracy protests erupted in Deraa, a city in the south of Syria, and when the government started to use dangerous and lethal force against the demonstration in order to dissolve any form of dissent, protests demanding for president Bashar Assad to resign erupted nationwide. The social unrest only intensified and the opposition supporters took up weapons at first to defend themselves but later, to rid their areas of security forces. Assad then affirmed to “*crush foreign-backed terrorism*”.

Currently, the conflict has become more than a battle between the people who support and are against Assad and there are many groups and countries around the world that are involved, resulting in the complexity of the issue and causing for the conflict to only prolong.

As a result of the war, not only causing more than approximately 500,000 deaths and missing cases, at least 6.2 million Syrians are displaced around the country and more than 5 million Syrians have fled abroad. By February 2019, around 13 million an estimation of 13 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance however, the parties at war have made the problems more complex by refusing aid agencies access to many of the people in need.

Major Parties Involved

Islamic Republic of Iran

Country that follows a Shiite theocratic regime and is allegedly seeking to increase its influence in the Middle East through instigating multiple proxy wars with Saudi Arabia.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Follows a Sunni theocratic regime, accused of pursuing increasing influence in the Middle East through instigating multiple proxy wars with Iran.

Republic of Iraq

Former aggressor in the Iran-Iraq war and the Kuwait war. The country is subject to significant civil unrest between both of the factions supported by Iran and Saudi Arabia.

While Iraq was opposed to Iran and Saudi Arabia when Saddam Hussien was in power, after the US invasion in 2003, Iran sought alliance with Iraq and is influential in the government of Iraq.



Syrian Arab Republic

Allied with and supports Iran and the country is subject to significant civil unrest. The ongoing civil war since 2011 has been a significant battleground for Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Syria has also played an important role historically for Iran to assert its influence. The civil war threatened this and thus created an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to back rebel militants.

United States of America

Allied and supports Saudi Arabia. Since president Trump of the United States withdrew from the 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action' (JCPOA) in May 2018 and instead implemented a policy of maximum pressure on Iran, the relation between United States and Iran has only worsened.

Not only has the US provided material, logistical, military, and surveillance but it is also openly hostile to Iran which may possibly lead towards a conflict that might involve the US and Iran.

Russian Federation

Allied with and supports Iran and Syria. However, Russia is viewed as meddling with the Middle East conflicts to serve its own purpose and benefits.

Support from Russia to president Assad of Syria as essential to the elimination of extremists operating in Syria, has made the political situation in the Middle East more complicated. To add, Russia, who has maintained ties with Iran for a long time, has pursued closer ties to Saudi Arabia and in September 2016, the nations have conducted informal talks about cooperating on oil production as both have been heavily affected by the collapse of oil prices. President of Russia, Vladimir Putin recommended an exemption from oil production capping for Iran, as Iran's oil output has increased steadily following the lifting of international sanctions in January 2016. Saudi Arabia offered to reduce its oil production if Iran capped its own output by the end of 2016.



Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
October 1914	The Ottoman Empire entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers, paving the way towards British entry into the Middle East.
September 1932	Saudi Arabia is officially recognized.
1938	Oil reserves are discovered in Riyadh.
August 1953	US secretly stages a coup d'état to remove the prime minister, Mohammed Mosaddegh.
February 1979	Iranian Revolution – King Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the Shah or ruler of Iran of the time, overthrown by Shiite Muslim clerics in Riyadh, as determined to export their Islamic Revolution.
September 1980 – August 1988	Iran-Iraq War – Iranians fumed over Saudi Arabian support for Iraq during the war, wherein Baghdad, capital of Iraq, uses chemical weapons.
July 1987	Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran were strained to a near breaking point during this time, during the Mecca clashes when over 400 pilgrims, 275 Iranians, died during clashes in Mecca, also referred to as the Muslim holy city. Protesters then took the streets of Teheran, capital of Iran, occupied the Saudi Arabian embassy and set fire to the embassy of Kuwait. Mousa'ad al-Ghamdi, Saudi Arabian diplomat, died in Teheran of wounds when he fell out of an embassy window. Riyadh accused Teheran of delaying transfers to a hospital in Saudi Arabia.
December 1997	Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia visited Iran for an Islamic Summit , becoming the highest-ranking Saudi to do so since the Islamic Revolution.



- May 1999** Mohammad Khatami, Iranian president, visited Saudi Arabia, the first visit by an Iranian president since the revolution. Iranian Shiite Muslim cleric, Khatami worked for rapprochement with Saudi Arabia after winning his first election in 1997 with a landslide victory.
- April 2001** Saudi Arabia King Fahd congratulated Khatami on his election victory indicating that it was an “endorsement of his reformist policy”. The two countries Iran and Saudi Arabia sealed better relations with a security pact in April 2001.
- March 2003** The invasion of US that toppled Saddam Hussein, former president of Iraq, empowered the country’s Shiite majority and resulted in a shift in its political alignment towards Iran.
- Iran’s nuclear energy programme caused tensions with Saudi Arabia that Teheran, under Khatami’s successor president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was keen on dominating the Gulf region and boosting its Shiite populations.
- 2011** Arab Spring Revolution – Saudi Arabia sent troops to help Bahrain settle mass pro-democracy protests, fearing that mostly Shiite opposition would align with Iran. The two countries later accused Teheran of instigating violence against Bahraini police.
- U.S diplomatic cables released by “WikiLeaks” disclosed to Saudi Arabian leaders, including King Abdullah, pushing Washington to take a strong stance against Iran over its nuclear programme, including the potential use of military force.
- Saudi Arabia accused some Shiite populations in its Eastern Province including Nimr, of cooperating with a foreign state, i.e. Iran, to propagate dissent, after clashes between police and Shiites.
- Washington said it had uncovered an Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States. Riyadh said the evidence was overwhelming and “Teheran would pay a price”.



- 2012** Saudi Arabia becomes the main supporter of rebels fighting to topple Iran's ally, president Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Riyadh accused Assad of genocide and Iran of being an "occupying power". Teheran accused Riyadh of backing 'terrorism'.
- March 2015** Saudi Arabia begins a military campaign in Yemen to stop the Houthis, allied to Iran, from taking power. Riyadh accused Iran of using the military to stage a 'coup d'état'. Teheran alleged Riyadh's airstrikes targeted civilians.
- June 2015** Iran and the world's major powers, i.e., United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, China and Germany, reach a deal over Iran's nuclear program and Saudi Arabian officials publicly endorse the deal despite past reservations.
- September 2015** At least 2000 people are killed during a stampede in Mina, Mecca. Tehran accuses Riyadh of mismanagement and threatens legal action.
- January 2016** Saudi Arabia executes Sheik Nimr al Nimr who was a prominent Shiite leader who supported anti-government demonstrations. This prompted protests from Shiites in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Lebanon and Yemen. Due to this, Iranian protesters burn a part of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran.
- Following the protests and violence at the Saudi Arabian embassy, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Bahrain sever diplomatic ties and the UAE downgrades its relations with Iran. All members of the Arab League, except Lebanon, issue a statement condemning the attacks.
- October 2016** Saudi Arabian-led coalition bomb strikes kill 155 people in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen.
- May 2017** Missiles launched by Iranian supported Houthi rebels from Yemen into Saudi Arabian territory allegedly targeted a missile in Riyadh.



- June 2017** Riyadh and other Sunni allies break off diplomatic relations with Qatar claiming Doha, Qatar's capital, of supporting Iran. These allegations were denied by both Iran and Qatar but still increased tension.
- 4 November 2017** Houthi rebels in Yemen fire rockets at Riyadh. The attack is prevented by Saudi Arabia's missile shield. Prime minister of Lebanon Saad Hariri, supported by Saudi Arabia, announced his resignation during a broadcast from Riyadh and blames Iran's clutch on the country. Iran believes the Hariri was forced to resign and also claims he is being held against his will and Saudi Arabia is using him as a pawn in the conflict.
- 6 November 2017** Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of "a blatant act of military aggression" and alleges that the missiles that were fired at Riyadh by Houthi militias in Yemen originated in Iran. The claims are denied by Tehran. Riyadh tightens the blockade in Yemen.
- Officials of Yemen allege that their president, Abed Rabbo, Mansour Hadi, was barred from leaving Riyadh and it was possibly as part of a feud with the UAE.
- 8 November 2017** The US gives its support to Saudi Arabia and Nikki Haley, ambassador to the UN calls for the Un to "*hold the Iranian regime accountable*" for allegedly providing weapons to the Houthis. The UN warns the tightened blockage on Yemen could cause "*the largest famine the world has seen for many decades with millions of victims*".
- 9 November 2017** President of France, Emmanuel Macron announced that he would travel to Riyadh to meet Saudi Arabian officials. He said he wanted to meet the crown prince, Mohammad bin Salman, to discuss regional stability.
- The Saudi Press Agency reports that Saudi Arabian nationals are being told to leave Lebanon immediately.



- 10 November 2017** President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, told a Saudi Arabian official that Hariri's resignation is not acceptable. Lebanon's leader of Hezbollah said that "Saudi Arabia officials have declared war on Lebanon". The Saudi Arabian led coalition reopens its land border to allow aid into Yemen but the ports remain closed.
- 2 December 2017** Former president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, suggests a willingness to engage in peace talks with Saudi Arabia to end the conflict in a televised speech. This is seen as a move aimed at 'side-lining' Houthi rebels.
- 6 December 2017** Saleh is assassinated by Houthi fighters.
- January 2018** Houthi rebels fire a missile towards an airport at the Saudi Arabian border. The defense forces report that they shot down the missile and not that the attack demonstrates the continued support of Houthis by Iran.
- February 2018** Saudi Arabia join forces with the US, Great Britain and France to support a UN draft resolution which condemns Iran for its inability to stop Houthi rebels from gaining access to ballistics.
- 5 March 2018** Prince Mohammad bin Salman of Saudi Arabia tells CBS that Saudi Arabia will develop nuclear weapons if Iran does.
- 14 April 2018** Independent Islam Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei accuses the US of using money from Saudi Arabia to assist in the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).
- 9 May 2018** Saudi Arabia supports US president Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. Iran takes advantage of the lifted sanctions in order to develop more ballistics and support various other terrorist militias including the Houthis.
- August 2018** US reinstates the sanctions against Iran.



- October 2018** Saudi Arabia kills Saudi Arabian journalist, Jamal Khashoggi and US president Trump reaffirms that the US will stand by Saudi Arabia as an ally against Iran.
- 5 August 2019** Iran seizes foreign oil tanker in the Arabian Gulf and detained the ship's crew. This capture is the third such seizure in one month at the time of high tensions with the US, UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- 17 August 2019** During this month, Saudi Arabian King Salman expressed "extreme irritation" with the UAE which was his closest Arab partner. The comment appears to be evidence of a break in their alliance.
- 15 September 2019** Saudi Arabia charged that Iran weapons were used to attack the kingdom's oil installations and thus dismissing claims of responsibility by Yemen's Houthi rebels.
- 15 September 2019** Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blamed Iran for an attack at a Saudi Arabian oil field. Drone strikes on crucial Saudi Arabian oil facilities disrupt around half of the kingdom's oil capacity, 5% of the daily global oil supply. Yemen's Houthi rebels took responsibility for the attacks but they are often backed by Iran, questioning the reliability.
- 11 October 2019** An oil tanker belonging to the National Iranian Oil Company or NIOC was hit and damaged by two missiles.
- 11 October 2019** US secretary of Defence Mark Esper says he has authorised the deployment of additional forces such as fighter jets and a defense system. It was said that it was in response to the "threats in the region", amid efforts to protect the kingdom from "Iranian aggression", regarding the attack on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities in September.
- 30 October 2019** The Riyadh Agreement, brokered by Saudi Arabia with support from the UAE, expected to be signed in the near future. The agreement expands the political influence of southern secessionists in return



for their forces returning to the ranks of the Saudi-led coalition fighting Houthi rebels in Yemen.

- 31 October 2019** Death toll from the Yemen war has hit 100,00 since 2015. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data or ACLED, said in a new report that this death toll includes more than 12,000 civilians that have been killed in attacks that directly targeted civilians.
- 5 November 2019** Yemen's internationally recognized government and UAE-backed power sharing deal to halt infighting. The agreement will result in a government reshuffle to include the separatists with equal representation and their armed forces will be placed under government control.
- 22 November 2019** The United Nations envoy for Yemen has said the momentum to end the country's devastating 5 year war is building and pointing to a nearly 80% drop in airstrikes nationwide in the last two weeks, a strengthened ceasefire in the key port of Hodeida, and beginning of the kind of relationship needed to restore peace to Yemen.
- 28 November 2019** The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has helped repatriate 128 rebels from Saudi Arabia to Yemen.
- 3 December 2019** Iran acknowledges for the first time that its security forces shot and killed protesters across the country to put down demonstrations last month over the sharply spiking price of gasoline. It is the deadliest unrest to hit Iran since the turmoil of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- United Nations Security Council resolution 552, 1 June 1984, **(S/RES/552(1984))**
- Note by the President of the Security Council, 2 June 2016, **(S/RES/2231)**
- Security Council Press Statement on Terrorist Attack in Ahvaz, Iran **(SC/13523)**



- Security Council Press Statement on Terrorist Attack in Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Iran (**SC/13703**)
- General Assembly Right of Reply First Declaration, 28 September 2018, (**GA/12071**)
- General Assembly Right of Reply Second Declaration, 1 October 2018, (**GA12073**)
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland draft resolution, 26 February 2018, (**S/2018/156**)
- The Situation in Middle East Including the Palestinian Question, 28 October 2019 (**S/PV.8648**)

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, led by the United States, to remove terrorists and their backers backfired and was unsuccessful because the resulting power vacuums were filled by rival domestic factions who seek their own interests and make a grab for power. Training and equipping the military who are fighting extremists has not been a success either.

The Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, IMAFT, was formed by Saudi Arabia in December 2015 in order to combat terrorism however, the coalition only involves Sunni-dominated government States.

The future of US policy in the Middle East has been uncertain ever since the election of Donald Trump in United States in 2016 from both Iran and Saudi Arabia because both were targets of criticism during his campaign. Due to this, Iran feared the return of economic isolation therefore, made efforts to establish international economic participation for US by signing oil deals with Western companies before he took office. The re-election of president Hassan Rouhani in Iran was seen as a popular mandate for liberal reforms in Iran. However, this was followed by Trump declaring a shift in US foreign policy toward favoring Saudi Arabia at Iran's expense.

Possible Solutions

Although the two countries' relations have seen ups and downs following the victory and success of the Islamic Revolution and after the fall of the government of former president



of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, a new proxy war has started between Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, there appears to be possible solutions wherein the tensions between the two countries can be eased, thereby possibly resolving the other regional crises.

The main point for the management of the current conflict is to understand the realities in the Middle East region and not to expect a recurrence of past events. In terms of the issue in Iraq, it should not be expected for the Saudi Arabian government to anticipate for Iraq to alter its governing systems to when Saddam Hussien was governing Iraq, at which point a Sunni minority ruled over a Shiite majority. The viewpoint which expects the Iraqi Shiites to once again accept the conditions that existed after the independence from Great Britain i.e. renewed domination of Sunnis over Iraq is not a realistic viewpoint. To add, the rights of the minority Shiites in Yemen have not been recognized therefore, a resolution of the political crisis in the country is not expected either.

The complications in Yemen can be solved through serious political negotiations as well as resilience and flexibility of the two sides. In the matter of the crisis in Syria, in order to initiate any possible solution(s), it is important for Saudi Arabia to be aware or acknowledge the fact that the country's president, Basha Assad is the only person that can maintain Syria's state institutions to stay united and integrated. Based on this, Riyadh should recognize the consequential chaos and unrest that will occur if Riyadh persists on the fall of Assad and/or provides extensive aid to radical opponents of the Syrain government. The outcomes of such measures, for all regional parties including Saudi Arabia, will result in much suffering. In order to productively resolve the conflicts, Iran will need to be open to develop or encourage its (regional) allies to have close ties with Sunni Muslims as for example after the fall of Saddam Hussein, currently the Sunni population in Iraq perceive to feel boycotted and isolated and deem that they have been excluded or sidelined by the government of the Shiite majority. In order for this idea to progress, other parties should be open to helping the government of Iraq. At the same time, Iran may well inspire Shiite parties in Iraq to resolve the political, infrastructural and economic issues in the regions dominated by Sunni populations by developing a political package. By doing so, the trust between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Iraq could be gained and the gap that exists between them could shorten. To add, as for the developments in Yemen, it is important for the solution to have more broad regional (and transregional) negotiations, keeping in mind that two points should be acknowledged. Firstly, the Yemen crisis does not have a military solution and secondly, the rights of Zaidi Shiites (which are one of the Shiite branches,) cannot be ignored due to their large population.



In terms of the Syrian conflict, Iran can encourage the government in Syria to pave the way for more participation of Sunni political elites, who disapprove of armed and violent operations, in the political structure in Syria. In general, regional crises in the Middle East cannot be solved without cooperation and interaction between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In the meantime, it seems as though the current strategies adopted by Saudi Arabia in the region have not been successful or sustainable.

Appendices and Useful Links

Appendix A

Estimated distribution of Sunni Muslims in the Middle East

5-20% 21-40% 41-60% 61-80% 81%+



Figure 1 Map showcasing the estimated distribution of Sunni Muslims in the Middle East



Appendix B

Estimated distribution of Shia Muslims in the Middle East

0-5% 5-20% 21-40% 41-60% 61-80% 81% +



Figure 2 Map showcasing the estimated distributions of Shiite or Shia Muslims in the Middle East



Appendix C

Who supports whom

■ Saudi side ■ Iran side ■ Split* ■ Non-aligned



Figure 3 Map showcasing the allies and enemies of countries in the Middle East



Appendix D

Military might

	 Iran	 Saudi Arabia
Armed forces 	563,000	251,500
Battle tanks 	1,513	900
Artillery 	6,798	761
Combat air 	336 (Ageing fleet in need of repairs)	338 (Modern fleet inc 64 Typhoon jets)
Patrol boats 	194	11
Submarines 	21	-
Destroyers/ frigates 	-	7

Source: IISS Military Balance 2017



Figure 4 Infographic representing the differences in military between the Iran and Saudi Arabia

Appendix E

United Nations. "At Security Council Meeting on Maintaining International Peace, Speakers Propose Regional Mechanism to Foster Dialogue, Build Trust in Middle East, North Africa | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." *Www.Un.Org*, 2018, www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13392.doc.htm. – Informative article from the UN regarding the issue.

Appendix F

Vox. "The Middle East's Cold War, Explained." *YouTube*, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFCFyOwFI. - Informative video explaining the issue.



Appendix G

Saudi Arabia vs. Iran: The Sunni-Shiite Proxy Wars. "Saudi Arabia vs. Iran: The Sunni-Shiite Proxy Wars." *YouTube*, 7 Apr. 2015, www.youtu.be/l7cdBjYd2Bo. - Informative video explaining the issue.

Appendix H

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Appendix K

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Appendix L

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