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Iran-Saudi Arabia Rapprochement and Its Implications for the Region

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ABSTRACT

Iran-Saudi Arabia's détente is a landmark in the relations between the two nations. Iraq and Lebanon also tried to cool down their animosity. Several rounds of negation were held in Baghdad. Finally, it was brokered with the help of China when the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Iran met in Beijing on 10th March 2023. Both have long rivalries due to their religious, geo-economic, and geo-political differences. Hence, their hostility has been destabilizing the entire region of the Middle East economically and politically. However, the purpose of this research paper is to find out the implications of this rapprochement. It may promote political stability, security, and economic development and end the Yemen and Syrian crises and sectarianism in the whole region. Qualitative research has been used in this study. Secondary sources such as published books, journals, and newspapers are also used.

Key Words: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Rapprochement, Détente, Reconciliation, Implications, Rivalry

Introduction

On 10th March 2023, China brokered a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The representatives of both states gathered on this day in Beijing. This

detente has seemed to reduce, if not end, Iran and Saudi Arabia's long history of mutual animosity. Before the advent of the Islamic revolution in Iran, relations between both nations were cordial. Relations between the two countries worsened after the Islamic Revolution, which occurred in 1979 under the leadership of Imam Khomeini.

“The trilateral agreement occurs during substantial geopolitical developments as the world order shifts towards a multipolar structure. The United States, which dominated the world for most of the post-World War II era, faces increasing challenges from emerging superpowers like China and Russia. In the Middle East, regional countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia compete for influence and dominance, reflecting intense regional power conflicts.” (Rana Eijaz Ahmad, 2023)

As Shia is the majority of the population of Iran, Shiaism became its official ideology of it. On the other side, Saudi Arabia has been dominated by the Wahabism ideology. Since the early dawn of Islamic history, the Shia-Sunni division has been dagger-drawing the Muslim ummah with each other. Similarly, the Islamic revolution in Iran ignited again the sectarian division in the Middle East, particularly among the Muslim nations generally. Each state has been striving to promote its ideology in other Muslim states.

This sectarian motive leads both countries into political and military conflicts. Although they have not fought directly, multiple proxy wars have been fought between them. The recent ongoing wars in Yemen and Syria and uncertainty in Lebanon are instances of this. Owing to their hostility, the whole region has been divided into two camps: the pro-Saudi camp and the pro-Iranian camp. Both are assisting their allies politically, economically, and militarily.

Proxy wars are being fought. It has resulted in regional insecurity, political instability, sectarianism, underdevelopment, and international interference. Their hostility makes their domestic socio-political and economic conditions fragile. However, this détente has seemed the beacon of light and a ray of hope for the whole region. Lodhi (2023) says, "This thaw in Saudi-Iran relations is a potential game changer for the region and pave the way for a more stable and peaceful region." If it materializes, it will enshrine peace, stability, security, and economic development of the whole region.

Moreover, it may confirm the respect for states' sovereignty and the non-interference in their internal affairs. (Hussain Z. , 2023). It may further lessen the sectarianism in the region. Historical context has been taken as a literature review in this article.

Literature Review within the Historical Context

The literature in this study is reviewed in the historical context. So, the historical context of Saudi-Iranian relations is divided into sub-themes, such as

I. History of Transformation in Saudi-Iranian Relations

Before the successful Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, relations between both states were amicable. They worked together and collaborated in many fields and avenues. However, the Islamic revolution in Iran deteriorated relations between the two countries. This revolution brought into the limelight the Shia ideology, which was a contradiction to the Sunni ideology followed in the Saudi Kingdom. Both states endeavored to promote their ideology in the peripheral states.

They even backed their cohorts with diplomatic, political, military, and economic assistance. It resulted in regional conflicts that have jeopardized the entire region's peace, security, and development. Relations between the two states further estranged during the Iran-Iraq war. Saudi Arabia supported Iraq with all political, economic, and military means against Iran. Relations also went at the lowest level when 450 pilgrims, mostly belonging to Iran, were shot down by the Saudi security forces in 1987.

However, a little détente occurred when Iraq attacked Kuwait. Kuwait was close to both countries, so both supported Kuwait against Iraq. During this period, both states restored diplomatic relations. Moreover, the assassination of the former prime minister of Lebanon, Rafik Hariri, in 2005 also worsened relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Mnekhir, 2023). Rafik Hariri was close to Saudi Arabia, and hence, the Saudi Kingdom accused the Iranian government of his murder.

Arab Spring also deteriorated relations between the two countries. The Saudi Kingdom blamed Tehran for instigating agitations in Bahrain against the royal family. (Aljazeera, 2023). In 2015, relations again deteriorated when the Houthi, a rebel group backed by Iran, attacked the Yemeni government backed by the Saudi Kingdom.

In 2016, the execution of Nimr-al-Nimr, a Shia cleric, by Saudi Arabia and, in reaction, the burning of the Saudi embassy by the Iranian mob in Tehran also cut diplomatic relations between the two countries (Aljazeera, 2023). In 2017, relations worsened when Saudi Arabia and its allies, i.e., UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, imposed a blockade on Qatar, which is very near to Iran (Ibid). Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have remained on-off during the regime of Muhammad Bin Salman. Relations improved when he assumed office in 2017 and declared a shift in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. He wanted to develop cordial relations with all the regional states, including Iran, and to diffuse all the outstanding regional conflicts and issues. However, relations again deteriorated, and a confrontation occurred when the Saudi oil facilities were targeted in 2019. Saudi Arabia accused Iran, though the latter denied it (Mnekhir, 2023).

The killing of Qassem Soleimani in Iraq by the US drone attack in 2020 also impacted relations between the both nations. Relations again witnessed improvement when Muhammad Bin Salman showed a willingness to negotiate on the file of the Iranian nuclear program in 2021 (Ibid). Due to Iraq and Oman's mediation, five rounds of negotiation and dialogue started between both countries

and melted the ice. Finally, the rapprochement brokered with the assistance of China on 10th March 2023.

II. Struggle for Regional Influence

Owing to their deep-rooted rivalries, both states have been endeavoring to increase their area of influence in the region. Each one is increasing its clout, mainly in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Both regional powers have been diametrically opposing geopolitical trajectories, cashing through regional proxies (Moini, 2023). Mnekhir (2023) says that the main reason for tense relations between the two states is the Iranian support of the Houthi in Yemen and its interference in Syria and Lebanon.

Each is trying to make alliances with more states, bring them under its umbrella, and use them against their opponents. "Their competition in the regional nations revolves around many political, economic, and religious issues such as oil, gas, land, religious and security motives (Ibid)." Therefore, their struggle for regional power and influence resulted in regional conflict, leading to military conflicts and proxy wars. Moreover, 'the competing regional motives of Iran and Saudi kingdom have compounded devastating wars in Yemen and Syria and continue to fuel instability in Lebanon and Iraq' (Heiko, 2023).

III. Religious and Sectarian Differences

The Middle Eastern region is heterogeneous. Its principal communities are the Sunni and Shia Muslims. Sectarian differences and prejudices have taken deep root in this region. The ignition of sectarian differences between both states further increased cleavages between both sects across the region. Khalil (2023) says that the sectarian approach between both countries resulted in their geopolitical rivalries.

Every state falling in this region has been facing the challenge of religious differences. Both are involved in sectarian conflicts and proxy wars in the region (Ali, 2023). The Shia-Sunni clashes in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, etc., are examples of it.

IV. Interference in the Internal Affairs of Arab Countries and Conflict over Regional Issues

Due to their severe rivalries and maneuvering for regional hegemony, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been meddling in the internal affairs of the regional countries. The principal battleground states are Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, etc. Each state has vital religious, economic, political, and security interests in the region. So, their interferences and politics of alliances have been polarizing the entire region.

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The region has been divided into two blocs, i.e., the Iranian-led bloc and the Saudi-led bloc. It has been leading the whole region into a war-torn region. 'Wars and conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have influenced the relations between the two states which are competing for geo-political and ideological predominance.' (Tabatabai, 2020). Similarly, Liaqat et al. (2023) say that common economic interests, regional influence, and aspirations influence their relations.

Research Methodology and Research Questions

Qualitative research methodology is used in this study. Inductive reasoning, along with interpretive and explanatory approaches, is also used. Primary and secondary sources are used for data collection. The central data collection sources are published books, journals, newspapers, etc. Two research questions have been put to conduct this study. One, what were the factors that forced Iran and Saudi Arabia to be reproached? Second, what are the regional implications of this rapprochement?

Factors Leading towards Rapprochement

Iran-Saudi Arabia détente is significant for the Middle East, generally and beyond the region. Multiple factors contributed to this marriage of convenience, such as:

I. Changing Political Priorities

Iran and Saudi Arabia's political priorities have changed. For many years, they have followed the policy of containment and confronted each other. Now, they have realized that confronting each other wastes resources and destabilizes the whole region. So, they have learned lessons from these skirmishes. They wish to resolve their outstanding issues peacefully and follow the coexistence policy.

They have also realized that their cordial relations will reduce domestic issues and enshrine the region's peace, security, and development. Khaleel (2023) says that resolving regional issues with the regional powers was a positive development that enhanced their relations and reduced Western interference.

II. Impacts of Regional Transformation

Regional changes and incidents also melt the ice in the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. They have realized that uncertainty in the region will affect the whole region. Both have been involved in the proxy wars in Yemen and Syria, spending a lot of energy and resources in these wars.

Both gain nothing except regional instability and domestic fragility. Moreover, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) posed a threat to the whole region, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran. Mnekhir (2023) says, "This new rapprochement indicates that Saudi Arabia and Iran are beginning to understand the extent of the damage caused by ISIS in the region." Thus, the sufferings from

the Syrian and Yemen crises and the existential threats of ISIS have forced both states to cooperate.

Tehsin (2018) says that threats of terrorism have also forced both countries to seek reconciliation. Moreover, in the G.C.C. meeting, it was announced that regional dialogue was vital for regional partnership and economic development (Khalil, 2023).

III. Changes in International Relations

Changes in global politics have also led both states to rapprochement. The cold shoulder attitude of the great global players, particularly the USA, also improved relations between both states. American President Trump came out from the agreement between the P5+ and Iran about the Iranian nuclear profile. Even the Trump administration imposed more sanctions on Iran. It further estranged relations between Iran and the West.

It changed the Iranian foreign policy perspective to a regional approach. Ibrahim Rasai's (late) regime policy of regional outlook for resolving regional issues with the peripheral states, notably the Saudi Kingdom, resulted from it (Khalil, 2023). Moreover, the administration of Trump changed the mindset of the foreign policymakers of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia when Houthi targeted the oil refinery of Saudi Arabia and posed threats to the Strait of Hormuz. Saudi government thought and even requested a strong and coercive reaction from the American government.

However, the Trump administration showed a cold shoulder to the Saudi government. (Khaleel, 2023). The harsh statement of Trump that Saudi Arabia does not stand two weeks without American support further changed the attitude of the Saudi government. A warm welcome was not given to the heads of both states when they visited each other. Biden's statement of making Saudi Arabia a pariah state, Saudi Arabia refusing to increase oil production, and condemning the Russian attack on Ukraine and its joining SCO also pushed it for détente. Mnekhir (2023) says that changes happening at the international level forced both states to modernize foreign policy that serves their national interests.

Khalil (2023) also says that recent regional and international developments have forced both to put aside their differences and work together in coordination and understanding for the betterment of the entire region. This has also forced the Saudi Kingdom to look for regions and solve its regional issues with regional powers.

IV. Domestic Transformation of the Middle Eastern Countries

The socio-political transformations of the Middle Eastern countries also paved the way for détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It may become a "marriage of convenience driven by national interests and shaped by political and economic calculus (Bishra, 2023)." The religious division on the grounds of Shia Sunni,

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either within the region or within the country, rang a threatening bell to both states. They have realized that sectarian division will promote instability and weaken them internally. Both states have realized the need for religious tolerance and harmony.

Domestic political transformation also closed them together. They lack democratic values and a democratic political system. They are authoritarian regimes. There is a lack of public participation and fundamental rights. Mass movements in the various countries posed threats to their regimes. Owing to their animosity, their economies have weakened. They are wasting their resources and money in containing and conflicting with each other. The decline in the economy forced them to cooperate.

Saudi Arabia is feeling fatigued from the Yemen crisis, and Iran is facing economic compulsions that forced them both to reconciliation. (Hafeez, 2024). Muhammad Bin Salman's vision of 2030 of peace and economic development through diversifying its economy, reducing its dependency on oil, and developing the public service sector, focusing on tourism, infrastructure, health, and education also played a role in this détente (Hussain, 2024) (Gardezi, 2023).

They have also realized that their struggle for regional dominance has created internal conflicts, chaos, and disorder in the whole region of the Middle East. Bishra (2023) says, "This deal was conceived out of need and desire. The Saudi-Iranian needs to end a conflict that has proven costly and toxic to both nations and disastrous to the Middle East." They have realized that regional cooperation is more vital for collective betterment than the regional competition.

Regional Implications

After many years of hostility, this détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia under the auspices of China will have crucial impacts on the whole Eurasian region and worldwide (Moini, 2023). If the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia materializes, its implications for the region will be everlasting. Mahmood (2024) says it is developing a new shift beyond its traditional complexities. She further said that it was wholeheartedly welcomed across the region. Following may be the regional impacts:

I. Regional Political Stability

The détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia may develop regional political stability by resolving outstanding disputes and increasing multilateralism. (Gardezi, 2023). Mnekhir (2023) says, "The strategy of rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is an important step towards peace and stability in the region." Khalil (2023) says that the success of Iranian diplomacy is in the interest of stabilizing the Middle East, getting international legitimacy, and breaking its isolation.

The whole region has been burning into the fire of regional political instability. Political upheavals and wars have been witnessed in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, the Gulf Arab States, and Iraq. Even Saudi Arabia and Iran are not aware

of it. So, the Saudi-Iran rapprochement may reduce political uncertainty in Middle Eastern countries. Mnekhir (Ibid) says it will restore political stability in the region, reduce tension and armed conflicts, and promote security and stability. Its regional impacts may be seen in the following regional states.

Gulf Arab States

Gulf Arab States are very close to Saudi Arabia. They are part of the Saudi camp. The majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. They are aligned with Saudi Arabia in their foreign policy. They cut off their relations with other nations and had adverse relations with Saudi Arabia. That is why they cut off their relations with Iran. However, this rapprochement may reduce tensions between the Gulf Arab states and Iran. With the mediation of China, many internal issues in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar will also be solved (Hussain, 2024). Jerri (2023) says, "BBC has indicated that there are indications for better relations between the Iran and Gulf states in the light of this rapprochement."

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, Faisal Bin Farhan, said that the Saudi Kingdom wanted to enhance maritime security in the crucial Gulf region as part of this rapprochement (Dawn, 2023). Moreover, "this détente is crucial for an economically strained Iran and its Gulf neighbors confronting security challenges." (Alsmadi, 2024).

Yemen

Yemen is the neighboring state of Saudi Arabia. Since the Arab Spring, Yemen has been burning into fire. There are two groups. One is the pro-government group, which is Sunni and backed by Saudi Arabia. The second group is the Houthi, the rebel group, and the Shia group, which Iran supports. Both groups have been fighting against each other.

Yemen has become the battleground of proxy wars between Iran and Saudi Arabia. So, détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran will reduce tensions in Yemen, and Yemen may observe internal peace and stability. Marwat (2023) says that a détente between the two countries may greatly benefit the region, which would be the cessation of hostilities in Yemen.

Syria

In Syria, the majority of the population is Sunni, but its ruler, Bashar- al-Assad, belongs to the Shia community. Arab Spring also caused a revolt to topple Assad's government in Syria. Iran, along with Russia, has been supporting the government, whereas Saudi Arabia and the West have been supporting the reactionary forces.

There is a civil war in Syria. If rapprochement occurs, an amicable solution to the Syrian conflict may occur. Nicholas Noe says better relations may end the Syrian crisis (Cafiero, 2023). Moreover, it may facilitate the complete restoration of

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relations between Syria and the Gulf states, further leading to significant economic investment in Syria (Heiko, 2023).

Saudi Arabia has also made gestures to unconditionally normalize its relations with the Syrian government (Ibid). As a result, the Syrian government announced that it would talk with the Egyptian government to resume diplomatic relations with it.

Lebanon*

Lebanon is the most heterogeneous country in the Middle East. The major communities residing there are the Sunni, Shia, and Christians. Sunnis are in the majority. Its political system is divided into three groups. Saudi-Iran rivalries also do not spare it. Iran supports Hezbollah, the Shia, and the militant organization in Lebanon. Hezbollah destabilizes Lebanon. Heiko et al. say, "Lebanon has stumbled into another deep polarization between the two political camps, and Hezbollah leads one." It also involves the assassination of the top political leadership and the ousting of various governments.

This chaotic situation may be overcome by Saudi-Iranian rapprochement. Both states will restrain themselves from indulging in their internal affairs. The Exchange Foundation president, Nicholas Noe, envisaged that Lebanon's political dynamics and atmosphere would probably improve due to this deal (Cafiero, 2023). So, "if the Lebanese political environment could improve due to it, it may bode for a better Lebanese economy (Ibid)."

Iraq

Iraq is also the victim of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It also has both Sunni and Shia communities. Iran has a considerable stake in Iraq due to its large border and religious, economic, and cultural ties. In order to materialize its motives, Iran Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps supports several armed groups in Iraq against Saudi Arabia and the USA (Gardezi, 2023). Similarly, Iraqi Sunni historically holds tribal, trade, and religious ties with the Saudi Kingdom. Therefore, both states use their influence on their respective community.

Their undue interference in the internal matters of Iraq has destabilized it politically. So, the Saudi-Iran détente will reduce their undue interference in Iraq's internal affairs and restore political peace and stability there. Heiko et al. (2023) say that this reconciliation can potentially lessen tension in Iraq as it has been striving to bring its assertive neighbors closer together.

Israel

Israel is the only country in the region that has been disturbed by the Saudi-Iran rapprochement. It has increased its worries. Bishara (2023) says, "This reconciliation may scuttle the American scheme of polarizing the region in favor of a pro-Israel and anti-Iran bloc." Israeli former Prime Minister Maftali called this

détente "a serious and dangerous development for Israel, a political victory for Iran, and a fatal blow to the effort to build a regional coalition against Iran" (Gardezi, 2023).

Israel wants to keep the Middle Eastern nations divided on the grounds of religion, culture, politics, and economics. It knows that its vital interests, particularly security, are to be secured in dividing the regional countries. This rapprochement will reduce the Israeli hegemonic policies in the region.

II. Promote Regional Security

The Middle East has been suffering from the menace of regional conflicts for a long time. This Iran-Saudi rapprochement, if it materializes, may end regional confrontation. The Yemen crisis, the Syrian crisis, and the upheavals in Lebanon and Iraq are the off-shoot of the rivalries between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The security of other Middle Eastern states has become vulnerable. Their internal vulnerability has made them vulnerable to the external actors. So, Rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia may significantly lessen the chances of new regional conflicts and wars shortly (Cafiero, 2023).

Lodhi (2023) says that reducing Saudi-Iran tensions will address security threats. It may end the wars in Syria and Yemen and resolve regional territorial issues. (Dawn, 2023). Jilani (2023) says that it may reinstate peace process and regional unity and stability. Tehsin (2018) says it may set up a security regime in the Middle East. Moreover, it may also reduce Gulf Arab states' security concern. (Heiko, 2023). It may also open the door to security dialogue among the Gulf states, Iran, and Iraq (Heiko et al. ;).

They further say both nations seek compromise in Yemen as a first step towards a regional security arrangement. This arrangement may convert them into collective security mechanisms like the European Union or NATO. Even the Arab League, which has become ineffective due to rivalries, can effectively establish regional security.

III. Economic Development

The détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran will restore peace and stability in the region. Peace is the sine qua non for economic development. Mnekhir (2023) says it will encourage trade and investment and promote the region's economic development. As they are already rich in natural energy resources, particularly petroleum and gas, détente will further boost their economy. Akhtar (2023) says it will enable Saudi Arabia to diversify and modernize its economy through the reforms and transfer of technology and to lessen its reliance on the USA. Saudi Arabia is the largest, and Iran is the second largest country of oil producers in the O.P.E.C. (Bahgat, 2000). Regional connectivity and intra-state trade may also increase their economic condition.

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Gardezi (2023) says this region will become a global energy market. He (Ibid) says they should direct their energy on the economies and geo-economics. "It may push a big regional economic boom for some sort or at least fast growth (Cafiero, 2023)". Ahmad (2024) says that regional development will enable these states to achieve geopolitical objectives.

IV. End Sectarianism

The most burning issue of the Middle Eastern nations is the issue of sectarianism. The entire region has been divided into Sunnis and Shias, backed by Saudi Arabia and Iran, respectively. It is the root cause of the issues confronted by the Middle Eastern nations. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are the major players behind this game. Moini (2023) hopes that this rapprochement between the both will reduce this menace of sectarianism across the region. Mnekhir (2023) says that cooperation in scientific research, education, and culture may also reduce sectarianism in the region. It may also promote Muslimhood as well as brotherhood in the region.

Challenges for Iran-Saudi Rapprochement

The Iran-Saudi rapprochement is a first step towards cordial relations between both countries. There are many obstacles in front of it. The significant challenges are:

I. Internal Environment

The interior environment of the Middle Eastern nations is very complex. There are many types of conflicts among them. They have been confronting the issues of sectarian, border, water, and natural resources. Each state has severe issues with another state. Mistrust between the both, particularly Saudi's mistrust of Iranian sincerity, is also challenging (Gardezi, 2023). That is why "Saudi Arabia gets guaranteed from Iran not to encourage Houthi in Yemen (Cafiero, 2023). Hence, the Middle Eastern region's turbulent internal environment is a big challenge in front of this rapprochement.

II. External Environment

This Iran-Saudi détente does not favor external actors. The USA, the West, and Israel are prominent external actors with vital regional interests. Their motives can only be fulfilled if the region is divided and indulged in intra-regional conflicts. The West, mainly the USA, developed a sense of insecurity emanating from Iran and its cohorts among the minds of Saudi Arabia and its allies.

On this ground, they provide them security and extract resources from there. Nevertheless, if rapprochement materializes, the security issue will be resolved. The USA will have to leave the region. The USA does not want to leave this

region, which has vital security and economic interests. Therefore, it does not accept this *détente* wholeheartedly. Even it may do its best to sabotage it. Similarly, Israel, which has security concerns against Iran, does not want the materialization of it. It knows it may develop a collective security system among the regional Muslim nations. They may check its expansion policy and pose an existential threat to it.

III. Regional Power Equation

The struggle for regional hegemony is also a challenge in the way of this rapprochement. Both states do not look at a win-win game; instead, they consider it a zero-sum game. Each state wants to play a prominent and dominant role in regional affairs. Neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia wants to come back from this approach. Both have equal cards in their pockets for regional hegemony. So, if they do not come out from this quagmire, rapprochement between them ceases to exist.

Conclusion

The rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia brokered due to the mediation of China on March 10, 2023. It has landmark significance in the political history of the Middle Eastern region. It may end the deep-rooted rivalries between both countries. The core conflicting issues between both states are the sectarian struggle for regional hegemony, control of natural resources, and political differences. They have been involved in containing each other for many years. They have wasted colossal time and resources on this politics. They have realized that perpetual enmity is not the solution to any problem. They decided to solve their issues peacefully. Many factors contributed to this marriage of convenience.

The main factors are the changing political priorities of the regional states, the effects of the regional transformation, changes in international affairs, and domestic transformation in the Middle Eastern countries. The impacts of this reconciliation on regional and global politics are nothing short of seismic. (Moini, 2023). It may restore regional political stability by resolving the issues of the Gulf States, ending political uncertainty in Lebanon and Iraq and resolving the amicable solutions of Yemen and Syrian crises. It may further promote regional security.

Regional nations may develop collective security mechanisms to deter any security challenge. It may also boost their economies by fully concentrating on the economic indicators. The outstanding achievement of this *détente* may be the eradication of the menace of sectarianism, which is the mother of all ills confronting the entire region. This reconciliation has to confront specific challenges. The significant challenge is the troublesome internal environment of the regional countries. They are too involved in internal politics and conflicts, which may derail this peace process. Similarly, the unhappiness from the USA, and Israel is also an external threat to this peace process. Both have significant

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political, economic and strategic interests in the Middle East. This peace process may end their vital interests in the Middle East. Moreover, hegemonic struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran also poses threat to this rapprochement.

Findings and Recommendations of the Study

Rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran may restore economic development, security and stability across the region. It may also halt the proliferation of sectarianism in the Middle East. Yet, this peace process has to face many hindrances. Regional rivalries particularly between Saudi Arabia and Iran is the major challenge in the way of this rapprochement. So, it requires sufficient time and sincere efforts to materialize this peace process. It may be materialized if the following recommendations are to be followed:

Sectarian and cultural issues between Saudi Arabia and Iran should be resolved through negotiation, dialogue, and communication. They should open channels for reciprocal cooperation and understanding. Diplomatic relations, sports visits, cultural and scientific visits, and exchanges are also necessary for addressing this issue. Religious and intellectual freedom to educate the masses is vital. Interfaith dialogue is also necessary for ending sectarian issues.

Regional economic integration is necessary for harmonious relations among Middle Eastern nations. For this purpose, trade and natural resource exchanges are to be encouraged. Trade and economic investment should also be encouraged.

For Political stability, they should resolve all regional issues, notably the Yemen and Syrian issues, through dialogue and peace talks.

They should also improve diplomatic relations. For this purpose, they should restore diplomatic relations and reopen their respective states' embassies.

They should also open dialogue about the issues and problems hindering their relations and work to lessen tensions in the Middle East through collaboration in economic, commercial, and cultural fields. They should also enhance regional cooperation through regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League. These regional organizations should be made vibrant.

They should also avoid external meddling via reciprocal trust and regional cooperation in their internal matters. In this way, they may hinder the foreign actors to exploit and aggravate their internal conflicts. Both the population of Saudi Arabia and the Iranians should pressure their leader to focus on their domestic affairs. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran should pursue democratic harmony at home instead of promoting chaos abroad. Last but not least, I recommend that China remain involved in monitoring the progress of this détente.

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