



# Analysis of Iran's Reasons for Normalizing Diplomatic Relations with Saudi Arabia in 2023

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## Abstract

*Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which have been heating up in recent years, have finally come to light. The normalization of relations between the two countries cannot be separated from the assistance of China, which is a third party in the process of improving relations between the two. Both began to improve relations with each other by opening diplomatic relations. This study aims to find out the reasons behind Iran opening its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. The study used a qualitative approach with library research data collection techniques via Google Scholar and Publish and Perish platforms. The author finds that there are several reasons for Iran to reopen its diplomatic relations with Arab countries: (1) international pressure such as the US's economic sanctions, (2) economic interests by opening embassies in both countries, (3) stability following the normalization of the relations, especially on Sunni-Shia issues and establishing the Middle East's hegemony, (4) the role of China, (5) the tendency of Saudi Arabia to China instead of the USA, and (6) the failure of Saudi Arabia in the Yemen war.*

**Keywords:** Iran, Saudi Arabia, Diplomatic Relations.

## INTRODUCTION

Before World War II took place, Iran and Saudi Arabia only had limited policies except for regulations governing the Hajj from the cities of Mecca and Medina, whereas policies in other fields had limitations, especially in the field of trade. Internal national security in both countries began to be considered important, which ultimately gave birth to British residency to create regional

stability. However, this did not last long because at that time England experienced a defeat in the war which made England less powerful. When Britain began to reduce its power in the Middle East, the United States stepped in to provide economic assistance and supply weapons to Iran and Saudi Arabia with the aim of getting help in facing the Cold War, namely to fight the spread of Communism (Keynoush, 2016, 9-19). In 1971 the Twin Pillar policy was developed to accelerate arms sales with the aim of ultimately maintaining "Over The Horizon" to avoid fighting in the Persian Gulf with the Soviets. However, when other countries were preparing to face war with the Soviets, Iran actually moved closer to the Soviets. makes Arabs feel uncomfortable, coupled with Iran's economic and military strength which is much more stable compared to Saudi Arabia, it makes Saudi Arabia nervous.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are two countries that aspire to dominate hegemony in the Middle East (Duad, Othman, Idris. 2018). They continue to compete and expand their influence on other Arab countries with different ideologies, creating a bloc in the Middle East. The two countries also have different positions in the dynamics of the Middle East. During the Arab Spring, Iran tended to support opposing groups, while Saudi Arabia was the party that maintained the status quo. This can be seen from the various conflicts in the Middle East, such as those in Syria, Yemen, and Tunisia. Iran enthusiastically welcomed the change of regime in the country as the new regime would awaken the spread of the Islamic revolutionary and become a momentum of defeat for the United States.

Diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran fell apart when the Government of Riyadh decided to execute the Shia cleric in Saudi Arabia, namely Sheikh Nimr al Nimr in January 2017 who was charged with calling on Saudi society to oppose the Saudi Arabian Monarchy (Keynoush, 2016). The people of Iran, who are predominantly Shiite, could not accept it and carry out an attack on the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran. The attack resulted in the withdrawal of the Saudi Arabian ambassador and diplomats in Iran.

Previously, Saudi Arabia and Iran also disputed in the Syrian War (Mustahyun, 2017). The Syrian conflict began a prolonged conflict for both those

who were pro and those who were contra to the regime. Saudi Arabia became one of the countries that supported the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and continued to accuse Iran of playing an active role in helping Bashar by providing weaponry to the Syrian government and sending aid from Lebanon. It made Saudi Arabia stand against Iran by maximizing its potential. On the other hand, Iran also alleged that many people's actions created demonstrations in Syria which led to resistance movements. Syria and Iran provide anti-Western narratives and explain their positions in responding to the Syrian revolution. Following the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2017, many countries tried to reconcile the countries' relations, such as Indonesia, Switzerland, and China (Fauzi, 2017). However, it was China that managed to intervene. Saudi Arabia and Iran finally agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies within two months. (CNBN Indonesia, 2023).

Several studies have been done to study the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran. First, Arsyad conducts conflict mapping to analyze the situation between the two countries (Arsyad, 2022). The results of the conflict mapping illustrate the influence of the conflict on political and economic conditions in the Middle East. This research also indicates third parties participated in triggering the ongoing conflict, namely the United States and Russia where the countries have the same interests, namely controlling politics and economy of the Middle East countries.

A study by Abdul Halim Daud, Zarina Othman, and Nor Azizan Idris examine Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia, Sunni-Shia understanding and how the geopolitical pattern in the Middle East region (Daud, Othman, Idris. 2018). Daud et al. claim that the Iranian Revolution and Sunni-Shia ideas changed the existing geopolitical relations in the Middle East region. The change that occurred as a result of the Iranian Revolution was a rift in relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran which eventually led to an alliance of countries that were pro-Iran and pro-Saudi Arabia. The shift in Sunni-Shia's understanding has also become a contributing factor to conflicts in the Middle East region as indicated in the Yemen conflict, Saddam Hussein's attack in 1980-1988, and the Syrian conflict.

Another study by M. Nasser Rafsanjani discusses the possibility that Saudi Arabia will resume diplomatic relations with Iran by trying to rationalize it (Rafsanjani, 2022). The research reveals that normalization of Saudi Arabia - Iran relations may occur in the long term. The involvement of third parties is urgently needed to carry out normalization, including the involvement of Switzerland as a representative of Arab interests in Iran, especially in handling consular affairs and reestablishing formal relations, Iraqi mediation for Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the two countries can make statements to agree to cooperate and maintain peace.

Fitroh Mucharom explains Iran's efforts to increase its power modality in the Middle East region by developing a nuclear program and strengthening its military and technology (Mucharom, 2014). With this, Iran can become an independent country by utilizing nuclear power to supply energy in the military field. The development of nuclear power turned out to cause new problems which ultimately forced Iran to face economic sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran.

Umam explains the influence of political developments in these three countries which can affect the stability of the Middle East region (Mustahyun, 2017). In addition, this study also explains the political dynamics that occur between Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel to increase their political influence in countries in the Middle East region. Other actors also participate in the struggle for influence in the Middle East region, causing regional instability.

A study by Ali Mohsenifar, Morteza Dousti, Fateme Zare, and Gábor Géczi investigates the political motivations behind Saudi Arabia's and Iran's respective decisions not to host football matches between their respective national teams (Mohsenifar, 2022). Mohsenifar et al. state that following the Saudi Embassy attack in Tehran and Mashhad (January 2016) and the execution of Sheikh Nimr, a Shiite sheik opposed to the Saudi government, tensions increased between Tehran and Riyadh. To solve the Saudi-Iranian problem, public diplomacy could also solve the crisis caused by their relationship and be the first step in getting the two countries' elites and politicians to talk to each other.

This study focuses on Iran's reasons for normalizing diplomatic relations

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with Saudi Arabia in 2023. By looking at several aspects, namely national, regional, and international, it found that the reason Iran normalized diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia was Iran's economic interest to increase and stabilize the economy within the country. This study also found that there is a potential for stability in the Middle East region with Iran normalizing diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. With pressure caused by the economic sanctions imposed by the United States, Iran must seek strong allies to secure its position and national economic stability.

## **METHOD**

This study mainly aims at describing the discussed problem or phenomenon in detail. For this purpose, the study used a qualitative approach with library research data collection techniques via Google Scholar and Publish and Perish platforms. The data in the research were also obtained from other online platforms, such as journals, theses, and news that were considered relevant to be used as a basis for conducting research.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Foreign policy analysis with the International System and Foreign Policy theory explains that the behavior of a country that issues foreign policy is influenced by the international system (Hudson & Day, 2020). The international system itself is devoid of any real governing body with the capacity to enforce state compliance. However, the state moves based on international phenomena. The international system forms a concept whereby small countries must find ways to protect themselves from large powers by forming alliances or coalitions with other countries. The theory answers the question of how foreign policy is made. Different countries may provide varied responses regarding the international system. However, it can create countries' groupings that share common principles of foreign policy behavior. The approaches are two real-world systems and a hypothetical system which generally shows that system-level variables are excluded in a counterfactual manner.

The real-world two-systems approach deals with the balance of the renegade

system and the bipolar system. The system shows that balance rules show a system that requires several actors to be able to issue policies as follows. First, the country chooses to improve its capabilities and negotiate compared to fighting. Second, it fights rather than fails to improve ability. Third, the country stops fighting rather than losing its important actors. Fourth, the country initiates opposing coalitions and takes positions of dominance in the international system. Fifth, a regulation restricts the state from interacting with supranational organizations. Finally, a regulation allows the defeated key actor to hire the system as an acceptable role or act on the previous actor's carry (Kaplan, 2005).

In this case, the countries will act per national interests and change over time. Tendencies of state behavior are believed to emerge in systems that are perceived to have many advantages. In this case, Iran chose to increase its capabilities by opening diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia because Iran weighs on the fact that Saudi Arabia is an important factor in the Middle East and it will generate economic benefits in the future. In addition, international pressure forces Iran to protect itself by forming a coalition to secure its position.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **International Pressure caused by the United States' economic sanctions**

When Iran carried out nuclear power development program in the 1980s, Western countries were suspecting that Iran would develop it into nuclear weapons (Abdillah, 2019). Hence, the Iranian government responded by claiming that the government's nuclear development program was aimed at civil purposes. However, the Western countries' suspicions were strengthened in 2002 by an official statement that Iran had controlled the circulation of nuclear fuel in the mining, milling, conversion, and enrichment of uranium. Iran also owned 20,000 centrifuges of uranium which could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons.

With these disclosed facts, the United States, Europe, and the United Nations consider Iran a threat to global security. Consequently, Iran got economic sanctions from the three parties through an embargo and restrictions on

individuals, companies, banks, and military institutions. The economic sanctions aimed to put pressure on Iran into negotiations related to its nuclear development and goals (Irawan, 2021).

In 2015, after 15 years of economic sanctions, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), along with Iran and Germany, signed the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2015). The agreement was established during the administration of Barack Obama and Hasan Rouhani. The agreement was to ensure that within 10 years the nuclear development in Iran was carried out with the aim of peace. The agreement also contains five main points, including uranium enrichment levels, uranium capacity, uranium stocks, plutonium stocks, and supervision (Joyner, 2016). In addition, Iran had to reduce its nuclear development activities at a level that was jointly agreed upon. Therefore, the United States agreed to suspend most of its economic sanctions.

However, in only three years, the United States government withdrew from the agreement (Angelia, 2021). Apart from withdrawing from the agreement, the

United States also stopped suspending economic sanctions specified in the JCPOA. The United States' decision to withdraw from the agreement was based on a claim that the JCPOA failed to realize Iran's non-nuclear program due to the temporary nature of the JCPOA. It was believed that the JCPOA is only delaying Iran's ambition to own the world's largest nuclear power. The United States government wants a new, more comprehensive nuclear deal (Krismayanti, 2023).

The withdrawal certainly increased the tensions between the United States and Iran, including the tankers attack on the Gulf of Oman in May-June 2019 to the US drone shooting in Iranian territory (Diasih, 2022). With Iran's repressive actions, the United States continued to tighten its economic sanctions by imposing extraterritorial sanctions by blocking Iran's oil exports. These sanctions are intended to bring maximum pressure on Iran's oil exports. The sanctions succeeded in making Iran's economy drop dramatically in 2018-2019 as a result of the United States threatening customers who traded oil with Iran (CNBC Indonesia, 2019). The culmination was on 3 January 2020, when the United States

launched an airstrike that killed Iran's Supreme Commander, Qassem Soleimani (Abdul & Karam, 2020).

International pressure, especially in the economy, has severely harmed Iran (Rahmadanti, 2021). The economic sanctions imposed by the United States hinder Iran's oil trade in the international markets and affected its currency. Another pressure is the political isolation caused by its nuclear development and support for terrorist groups. These actions made many Western countries criticize Iran. Therefore, Iran needs to strategically partner with other countries, one of them Saudi Arabia, to survive in the current condition. The international pressure has made Iran strategize its image and position. By opening diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran will gain a good image, especially due the fact that Saudi Arabia is also an ally of the United States. In this case, Iran can gain advantages from the alliance. Saudi Arabia may pave the way for Iran to promote oil trade and gain the trust of Western countries.

### **Iran's Economic Interests in Normalizing Diplomatic Relations with Saudi Arabia**

Iran is an agricultural country with abundant natural resources, especially in the oil and natural gas deposits. Additionally, Iran also has abundant uranium material, making it easier to procure nuclear energy on a large scale. However, the economic sanctions imposed by the United States have made it difficult to export oil and natural gas, especially due to Western countries' sentiments regarding Iran's nuclear technology. Although Iran states that nuclear development was carried out to supply its national electricity, the Western countries are still in doubt.

IMF reported in 2019 that Iran's economy declined by 10% compared to 2017. As a result, Iran was on severe inflation and had a critical amount of unemployment. The IMF shows that Iran experienced inflation of 35.7% which dramatically increased consumer goods prices (DW, 2019). The Iranian government is trying to improve its economy by normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia. In terms of petroleum exports, Iran cooperates with Saudi Arabia to

cooperate in exporting oil with reasonable profits. With the existence of several wars and conflicts in the world, the supply of oil decreases and causes oil prices to soar (VOA Indonesia, 2022).

In addition to oil and gas, Iran can benefit from other fields, such as agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing. In agriculture, Iran suffers from the decline of its currency which prevent other countries to import from Iran. For instance, Japan and South Korea declined Iran's proposal on importing agricultural products (DW, 2020). Therefore, Iran needs to improve relations and cooperation with its closest neighbors to achieve its goals. Iran's renowned agricultural products, like wheat and rice, will benefit the Arabs which mainly depend on products of dates and coffee (Ilmu Demografi, 2018).

The normalization of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia means travel restrictions between the countries. In the past, the termination of relations between the two countries causes Saudi Arabian citizens no direct transportation access. It was due to Iran's decision to deactivate land routes. By the time diplomatic relations improve, there will be potential for cooperation, especially on Hajj services, between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Rafsanjani, 2022).

## **Middle East Regional Stability Post Normalization of Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations**

Some of the conflicts that occurred in the Middle East generally involved both Iran and Saudi Arabia. As in the Syrian conflict, Iran is involved in the conflict for both have been in ally since 1982. Additionally, Iran's involvement is an effort to survive the isolation committed by the Arab countries (Tjandra, 2018). The Syrian conflict was caused by an uprising against the government of Bashar al-Assad. People's dissatisfaction led to massive protests and demonstrations as a result of an authoritarian government system. Bashar al-Assad's government has caused social, economic, and political problems as the government acted arbitrarily in cases like corruption and oppression (Nurrochim, 2021). In addition, the conflict is difficult to resolve because it involves two different views of Islam, namely Sunni and Shia. One of the pieces of evidence is the support of Saudi

Arabia to the opposition representing the state of the Sunni school. In contrast, Iran supports the government of Bashar al-Assad with the Hezbollah movement, which is a Shia movement (Fahham & Kataatmaja, 2014).

The conflict quickly turned into a civil war where the Syrian government used weapons and chemical weapons against the protesters. It claimed many victims from both law enforcers and protesters. The violence perpetrated by the Syrian government received criticism from various state leaders and human rights activists who demanded the war stop immediately (Nurrochim, 2021).

The conflict involved two different schools of thought resulting in Saudi Arabia and Iran having different political views. From the Iranian side, its military advisors called the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) which makes the Syrian government's military stronger. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia sent its aid in terms of funding and military logistical assistance aimed at opposition groups (Maulana, 2018). These two countries provided for different sides with similar purposes, to set influence the schools they profess. Saudi Arabia tried to prohibit the Shia-based Iran's power; in contrast, Iran blocked the expansion of Saudi Arabia's Sunni-based power.

Another conflict involving Iran and Saudi Arabia is the Yemen conflict. The conflict was a result of the protest movement's escalation against the policy of removing fuel subsidies by the Yemeni government in 2014 (Kamaliya, 2020). The conflict involves President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his government against the Houthi Shia group. The tension increased when the Houthi Shia group succeeded in occupying the Yemeni capital; it eventually sparked the enthusiasm of the group to occupy other areas, such as Ibb province and the port of Hodeida in October 2014. The Houthi group's attacks continued to expand until they succeeded in occupying the presidential palace.

In the conflict, Iran helped the Houthi group for they shared similar religious beliefs. Iran supplied weapons and other military aid to the Houthis (tempo.co, 2019). It then made Abd-Rabb Mansour Hadi request assistance from Saudi

Arabia, to ease the conflict. Saudi Arabia sees the Houthi as a serious threat to the Yemeni government and its national security. Additionally, it also believed that the Houthi group, with the help of Iran, would overthrow the legitimate Sunni government and replace it with a Shia-based administration. Thus, Saudi Arabia continuedly to support Abd-Rabb Mansour Hadi's government as the legitimate leader in Yemen (Herlianto, 2022).

The involvement of Iran and Saudi Arabia has made both Yemen and Syrian conflict difficult to settle down because both Iran and Saudi Arabia take advantage of the conflicting parties to achieve national interests. The conflicts, which were initially domestic issues, turned into regional problems. The conflicts also ended up creating regional instability which harmed other countries in the Middle East. The normalization of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia may lead to stability among the Middle East countries. It was mainly due to Iran's commitment to stop weaponry assistance to the Houthi Group. (republika.co.id, 2023) Therefore, it is a definite step toward reconciliation of various conflicts involving Iran and Saudi Arabia to achieve peace in the region. Furthermore, peace will likely occur in the Syrian and Lebanese conflicts.

## **The Role Of China**

Saudi Arabia and Iran decided to normalize relations between the two on March 10 2023. With mediation by China, with the hope that the normalization of relations between the two can stabilize the region in the Middle East (CNBC Indonesia, 2023). As is known, Saudi Arabia and Iran had an argument because Saudi Arabia executed an Iranian cleric which caused Iranian citizens to demonstrate at the Saudi Arabian embassy in Iran and followed by the withdrawal of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Iran.

China itself has previously approached these two countries for a long time using a cooperative relationship approach in the economic and political fields. This can be seen from the oil exchange between Iran and China which reached more than USD 16 billion in the same year. 30% of Iran's foreign trade depends on China,

which has pledged to invest USD 400 billion in Iran over 25 years. Apart from that, Saudi Arabia is also China's largest oil supplier, whose trade reached USD 87 billion in 2021. Efforts to restore diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have taken place in several previous rounds, including meetings sponsored by Arab countries such as Iraq and Oman. However, discussions about the processes that have been carried out previously did not have the magnitude of the Ebrahim Raisi-Mohammed bin Salman meeting in Beijing on March 10 2023 (CNBC Indonesia, 2023) .

In this peace mission, China played a constructive role in encouraging the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. With support from China, representatives from Saudi Arabia and Iran held talks in Beijing from March 6 to 10. China, Saudi Arabia and Iran signed a joint statement announcing that Iran and Saudi Arabia had agreed to restore diplomatic relations (CRI Indonesia, 2023). The Beijing Agreement announced that the three parties will uphold the basic norms of international relations and make joint efforts to promote international and regional peace and security.

By looking at China's efforts to mediate relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, China can further promote its interests in the energy sector towards Saudi Arabia. In addition, China can synergize one of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) corridors that passes through Iran with Russia's interests to develop a transit corridor in Iran. The development of this corridor will allow Russia to access global markets without going through the Suez Canal. This route also provides an alternative route for China not to pass through the Strait of Malacca, where the US and its allies are intensively building a strong defense fleet in the area.

### **The Tendency of Saudi Arabia to China instead of The USA**

Relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States have been one of the pillars of diplomatic relations in the Middle East for decades. Security and defense cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the US has been established through arms sales, military training and cooperation on regional security issues. Saudi Arabia has become one of the largest buyers of American arms, and arms sales deals between the two have become an integral part of their relationship. The United

States is a major oil consumer and Saudi Arabia is one of the largest oil producers in the world. Both countries have a strong economic interest in maintaining the stability of the global oil market (Prados, 2007). In addition, there is significant investment from Saudi Arabia in sectors of the United States economy, and vice versa. The two countries have close diplomatic relations, and there are frequent high-level visits between their government officials. This relationship also includes broad political dialogue, discussing global and regional issues.

Although the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States has many positive aspects, it can also involve tensions. Human rights issues, regional foreign policy, and differences in approaches to certain global issues can create friction between the two. Therefore, the dynamics of this relationship continue to change in line with events and developments at regional and global levels. One of the main sources of tension is the issue of human rights (Baxter & Simpson, 2015). Human rights organizations and a number of Western countries, including the United States, have criticized Saudi Arabia for human rights violations, including cases of arrests and treatment of human rights activists, religious freedom, and treatment of minorities. The murder case of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 at the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, created serious tensions in bilateral relations. Khashoggi, a critic of the Saudi government, was killed in controversial circumstances and drew international condemnation, including from the United States government. Tensions in these relations could have an impact on cooperation in various areas, including arms trade, investment and regional security. Nonetheless, this relationship remains complex and fraught with ever-changing geopolitical dynamics. Changes in government or policy on one or both sides could also reshape the dynamics of relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States.

The tense relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States has made relations between Saudi Arabia and China increasingly harmonious. This can be seen from the fact that relations between Saudi Arabia and China have developed over time and involve various fields, including economics, trade, energy and investment (Al-Saudiri, 2013). Saudi Arabia is one of the largest oil producers in the world, and China is the second largest oil consumer after the United States.

China's dependence on oil imports makes economic relations with major oil producers such as Saudi Arabia very important. Saudi Arabia is one of China's main oil suppliers, and the two are involved in a long-term energy trade deal. China has also increased its investment in Saudi Arabia, especially in the infrastructure and energy sectors. The two countries have also signed agreements for joint projects, such as the development of special economic zones, oil refining and other infrastructure projects (Yamada, 2015). This initiative reflects efforts to strengthen the economic and investment partnership between the two. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative initiated by China. This initiative aims to build infrastructure connectivity and increase economic cooperation between China and various countries, including in the Middle East region. Diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and China are growing, and high-level visits between officials from the two countries are frequent. Both have an interest in maintaining regional stability and promoting peace (Wang, 1993).

Seeing the harmonious relationship between Saudi Arabia and China proves that Saudi Arabia is now much closer to China than to the United States. Another piece of evidence is that Saudi Arabia is normalizing relations with Iran, which was initiated by China.

## **The Failure of Saudi Arabia in The Yemen War**

The Yemen War is a large-scale conflict in the Republic of Yemen, a country in the Middle East on the Arabian Peninsula. This conflict involves various local and regional actors, with complex implications and serious humanitarian impacts. The Yemeni war began as a conflict between the internationally recognized Yemeni government led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the Houthi rebel group, known as Ansarullah. The Houthis come from the Zaidiyyah ethnic group, a Shia sect that is a minority in Yemen. The conflict developed into wider fighting with the military intervention of the Saudi Arabian-led coalition in 2015. This coalition aimed to support Hadi's government and counter the Houthi advance. This coalition received support from Gulf Arab countries, including the

United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and others, and received logistical support and weapons support from the United States and other Western countries. The Yemeni conflict has also involved fighting between Hadi's coalition-backed government forces and Houthi forces. In addition, terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS are also active in several areas of Yemen, adding to the complexity of the conflict. The Yemen War has become one of the most critical conflicts in the Middle East and caused mass suffering for the local population. Sustainable peace solutions and greater humanitarian efforts are urgently needed to overcome this crisis (Mustofa & Syarifah, 2021).

Saudi Arabia's interests in the Yemen War involve a number of strategic and security factors that drive its active involvement in the conflict. Yemen shares a southern border with Saudi Arabia, and stability in the region is of primary interest to the Saudi government. The Saudi government is concerned that a conflict or uprising in Yemen could create security threats on their borders, including potential infiltration by armed groups or Iranian influence. The Saudi Arabian government provides active support to Yemen's internationally recognized President, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who has fled Yemen following the outbreak of the conflict. Saudi Arabia sees Hadi as a legitimate leader and reliable friend in the region, and they are trying to restore his power. Apart from that, another advantage is that Saudi Arabia tries to counter Iranian influence and secure access to the Bab El-Manded Strait which is a strategic route for international trade and oil shipments. Saudi Arabia has an interest in ensuring security and stability in this area so that maritime traffic and oil exports can continue without hindrance (Giovanny et al., 2021).

However, the support provided by Saudi Arabia appears to be losing ground due to its limited military capabilities. Saudi Arabia has failed to oust rebels from their strongholds in northern Yemen and is struggling to quell deadly fighting among its allies in southern Yemen. Saudi Arabia is essentially fighting those challenges alone in Yemen after the United Arab Emirates – its main ally – reduced its military presence in Yemen in what some saw as an attempt to limit its losses. Another factor in Saudi Arabia's defeat in the Yemen war was the dispute between the UAE and Hadi (Saudi loyalists) and the incompatibility of the Arab coalition.

The UAE was angry with Hadi who fired Aden Governor Major General Aidarous Zubaidi and Prime Minister Khaled Mahfoud Bahah, both UAE loyalists. Meanwhile, Hadi was annoyed because the UAE pressured him to appoint UAE loyalists to strategic positions in the military and security bodies (FITRI, 2017). The UAE is also at odds with Saudi over the rejection by the UAE of planes carrying Yemeni currency printed in Russia. The two kingdoms had influence in different regions of Yemen. Saudi controls the north and east, while the UAE controls the south and Aden. The Central Bank of Yemen (BSY), which is loyal to Saudi, accused the UAE of blocking the entry of Yemeni currency from Russia to the BSY office in Aden so that Yemen's economy was strangled. This unexpected development, combined with the lack of prospects of victory in the war, the considerable costs of the war at a time when the Saudis are having a hard time for money, and the increasingly waning support of the Yemeni people for Hadi, in mid-August MBS told Martin Indyk (former US ambassador to Israel) and Steven Hadley (former national security advisor during the George W Bush administration) that Saudi intends to end the war in Yemen. It is hoped that this can be done after reconciliation with Iran. King Salman bin Abdul Aziz and MBS have also contacted Baghdad to become intermediaries for improving relations between Riyadh and Tehran.

## **CONCLUSION**

Iran and Saudi Arabia hold formidable influences in the Middle East region. Diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran fell off when the government of Riyadh decided to execute Sheikh Nimr al Nimr, a prominent Shia figure, in Saudi Arabia in January 2017. Al Nimr was charged with provoking Saudi society to oppose the Saudi Arabian monarchy. It made the people of Iran—mostly Shia followers, attacked the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran. The Syrian conflict marked the beginning of a prolonged conflict between the faction that wanted to overthrow the regime and those who were pro to the regime. In this case, Saudi Arabia openly opposed Iran's steps by maximizing its support to the rebel group. After the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2017, several countries tried

to reconcile their relations, for instance, Indonesia, Switzerland, and China. In the end, China managed to mediate between these two countries.

After 15 years of economic sanctions imposed on Iran, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) with Iran and Germany signed the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). The agreement aims to ensure that within 10 years the nuclear development in Iran was carried out with the aim of peace. Apart from withdrawing from the agreement, the United States also refused to revoke its economic sanctions specified in the JCPOA. The United States government wants a new, more comprehensive nuclear deal with Iran. The United States setback intensified the tensions between the United States and Iran, including the tanker's attack in the Gulf of Oman in May-June 2019 to the US's drone shooting by Iranian authorities. With Iran's repressive actions, the United States continues to tighten its economic sanctions by imposing extraterritorial sanctions. The US blocked Iran's oil export which was mainly Iran's largest export commodity.

Iran needs to find a solution to deal with the various economic sanctions imposed on it. Saudi Arabia's economic strength, especially in crude oil products, is the principal reason for Iran to reopen its diplomatic relation with Saudi Arabia. Iran needs a partner to gain economic stability amidst international pressure. Saudi Arabia as the largest oil reserves in the world plays an important role in the Middle East. In addition to the oil and gas reserves, Iran can improve its income from cooperation in agriculture, tourism, and the manufacturing industries. Iran also needs to cooperate in education, in terms of student exchanges that will enhance science and technology, especially in nuclear power development.

Some of the conflicts that occurred in the Middle East generally involved Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran stood behind al-Assad's government; meanwhile, Saudi Arabia provided funding and military assistance to the opposition groups. The Syrian conflict occurred because of an uprising against Bashar al-Assad's government. People's dissatisfaction with Bashar al-Assad's government ended up in large protests and demanded a more democratic administration. The conflict quickly turned into a civil war where the Syrian government utilized its chemical

weapons against protesters. It was heavily criticized by many state leaders and human rights activists.

Another example of both Iran and Saudi Arabia's interventions is the Yemen conflict. The conflict occurred between the government of Yemen led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the Houthi Shia rebels. Iran supplied weapons and military assistance to the Houthi rebels. It then made Abd-Rabb Mansour Hadi requested assistance from its ally, Saudi Arabia, to solve the conflict. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have made the Yemen and Syrian conflicts even more complicated since these countries take advantage of conflicting parties to achieve their interests.

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