

## The Arab Spring and Saudi-Iranian Rivalry:

By

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### Abstract:

*The study is an attempt to explore the Saudi-Iranian relations after the Arab spring 2011. The uprising of 2011 have deep and profound impacts on the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. After the event the relations between the Saudi Kingdom and Iran took a new dimension and their rivalry get intensified. The uprisings engaged many regional states in internal conflict and unending rivalry. The region took the shape of battle ground as many regional states experienced civil war and violence. The study underscores the historical incident of 2011 and its impacts on the political dynamics of the region. The event engaged the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran proxies against each other. The study highlights the historical events of 2011 and analyses the post Arab spring era in Saudi-Iranian relations, and Saudi-Iranian proxies in some regional states. The paper explores how the historical events of 2011 have exacerbated the already tense relation between Saudi and Iran. The study also suggests some points important for normalization of Saudi-Iranian relations. Data for this study is collected using secondary source of data collection.*

**Keywords:** Saudi Arabia, Iran, Middle East, Gulf, Arab Spring, Rivalry.

### Introduction:

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran are two important Muslim states. The huge reservoirs of natural resources enhance their importance in the world. The Iranian Islamic revolution changed the balance of power in the region. The Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 created deep and profound impacts on the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Saudi kingdom feared the Iranian revolution and considered it as a threat to its hegemonic role in the Muslim world. Indeed, the Iranian revolution was threat to status quo in the region. The revolution influences many regional states. It was the dawn of rivalry between Saudi Arabia and

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Iran. The struggle for power and regional dominancy was main objective of Saudi-Iranian foreign policies. In 2011, the events of the Arab spring further intensified the already tense relations between these two Muslim countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia feared the uprisings and deemed it challenging for her monarchy. As the uprisings extended in the region, the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran also escalated (Gause, 2014). The study is an attempt to explore the Saudi-Iranian relations after the Arab spring 2011. The uprising of 2011 have deep and profound impacts on the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. After the event the relations between the Saudi Kingdom and Iran took a new dimension and their rivalry get intensified. The uprisings engaged many regional states in internal conflict and unending rivalry. The region took the shape of battle ground as many regional states experienced civil war and violence. The study underscores the historical incident of 2011 and its impacts on the political dynamics of the region. The event engaged the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran proxies against each other (Beauchamp, 2015). The study highlights the historical events of 2011 and analyses the post Arab spring era in Saudi-Iranian relations, and Saudi-Iranian proxies in some regional states. The paper explores how the historical events of 2011 have exacerbated the already tense relation between Saudi and Iran. The study also suggests some points important for normalization of Saudi-Iranian relations. Data for this study is collected using secondary source of data collection.

#### **Research Methodology:**

Secondary source of data collection has been adopted. Number of books, research articles, official publications, Newspapers and periodicals are available related to this topic. As data related to this study is already available. Therefore, no need is felt to use primary source of data collection.

#### **The Arab Uprisings:**

A series of terrible events shocked the region of the Middle East in 2011. The uprisings which were anti-regimes and pro-democracy triggered the fall of many regimes in the Arab world. Although, there were socio-economic issues in some regional states and the masses were disappointed but the events were shocking for the rulers. Consequently, the uprisings led to the fall of many governments and the changed existed power structure. The Arab uprisings created lasting impacts on political order in the region. The events created deep and profound impacts on the peace and stability of the region. Many regional states are still experiencing civil wars and become weak and fragile. The region has been a battle ground

for the proxies of foreign powers. The Arab spring did not bring peace transitions in regional states rather violence and proxies (Telhami, 2002).

### **The Arab Spring: A New Dynamic:**

The Arab spring introduced a new dynamic which is critical for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. As the uprisings extended in many regional states; both state both state waited for the consequences of the protestations by adopting policy of wait and see. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia wanted status quo to be maintained whereas the state of Iran was in favor of the spread of its revolutionary ideology in the region. The Saudi Kingdom feared falling of governments in some regional states and deemed it as a challenge for the status quo. On the other hand, Iran was in favor of the changing circumstances. Iran wanted the spread to its revolutionary ideology and deemed the political changes disastrous for the United States and freeing Islamic development in the region (Altoraifi, 2012).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the state of Iran made efforts to establish friendly ties with the newly formed regimes. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Iran sought to extend their influences in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran exploited the anarchy in some regional states in order to ensure their dominancy. After the uprisings of 2011, these two Muslim states are not merely engage in proxies against each other, but in some part of the region they are involve in direct military intrusions (Nasr, 2007).

The uprising of 2011 have deep and profound impacts on the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. After the event the relations between the Saudi Kingdom and Iran took a new dimension and their rivalry get intensified. The uprisings engaged many regional states in internal conflict and unending rivalry. The region took the shape of battle ground as many regional states experienced civil war and violence. The event engaged the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran proxies against each other.

### **Saudi Arabia and Iran in Bahrain:**

Bahrain is equally important for the Saudi Kingdom and the state of Iran. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are Sunni Monarchies. The natural resources of Bahrain are derived from the Saudi Kingdom. The Bahrain's economy is dependent on Saudi Arabia to a great extent as these two states share the Abu Safa offshore field. Bahrain regards the Kingdom support vital for its Monarchy. While as Iran also enjoys long-standing ties and religious affiliations with the Monarchy of Bahrain. Historically, Iran have a claim over Bahrain's territory and it even announced to re-unite Bahrain to its territory in 1970s. Furthermore, Bahrain gets major significance for

Iran on account of its Shiite ideology. The regional protests also took shape in Bahrain the opposition movements started to protests for constitutional reforms. In Bahrain 70% of the population is Shiites Muslims, but the Sunni minority enjoys political power (Abdo, 2015). In Bahrain, majority of the people protesting were Shiites. Iran viewed these protestations as an opportunity to gain her foreign policy objectives. Kingdom, on the other hand, feared that the rebellions could create difficulties for the Al-Khalifa regime. The politicization of Shia-Sunni divide led to hate the other. Consequently, the king even stopped Bahrain airlines to Iran, Lebanon and Iraq with aim to distance Shiite population from one another (Mohammed, 2008, pp. 24-25).

### **The Syrian Civil War and Saudi-Iranian Rivalry:**

The Arab uprisings created deep and profound impacts on the peace and stability in Syria. The civil war in Syria have taken thousands of lives of the innocent Syrian people with large number have taken refuge in foreign countries. Foreign involvement in Syrian civil war have exacerbated conflict. After the Arab spring, Syria have been a battle ground for foreign proxies. The two rival states, Saudi Arabia and Iran, have been engaged in proxy conflicts in Syria and even involve in direct military confrontations targeting the other rebellion groups (Vali, 2007, p. 20). The Arab uprising changed the balance of power in many regional states. The Arab uprisings resulted in violent political transformation. Syrian has been a battle ground for foreign proxies. Saudi Arabia and Iran are engaged in proxies against each other. The Saudi Iranian rivalry in Syria have led to their alliance with the World powers.

At the start of the Syrian civil war, Saudi Arabia demanded an end to the war and condemned the killing of Syrian population. Later, Saudi Arabia supported the anti-regime protestors and provided weapons and trained rebellions. After the Arab uprising, Syria have been a battle ground for Saudi-Iranian proxy war and both these states are even involve in direct military clashes (Geneive). Iran has been supporting the pro-government groups and providing the Syrian government military support. Iran views Syrian territory vital in gaining her foreign policy objective in the region. For Iran, the removal of Assad regime is catastrophic. The removal of Assad government would be a threat to its access to Hezbollah, spreading of religious beliefs and its dominancy in the region.

### **Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in Yemen:**

Historically, Gulf has been a noticeable arena of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia holds a high level of political leverage with the monarchies of the Gulf. Iran has been in want to influence the Arab Shiites with aim to pressurize Gulf regimes on issues

significant to Iran. Yemen have been another battle ground for Saudi-Iranian rivalry, especially after the Arab spring 2011. When the uprisings occurred in Yemen, Saleh was unable to control the chaos and eventually political changed was happened. The Saudi forces had defeated the Shiite-affiliated religious group in 2011, but the Arab spring it took the shape of a stronger and organized group and supported the anti-regime revolts (Robert, 2014). Yemen is equally important for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Yemen is immediate neighbor of Saudi Arabia and internal conflicts in Yemen has been viewed as a national security threat by the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For Iran, Yemen holds great importance to achieve its foreign policy objectives of regional supremacy and countering the Kingdom (Mohammed, 2008, p. 25).

**Conclusion:**

To conclude, rivalry between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Iran continues. Both states are engaged in proxy conflicts against each other. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry have divided the region on the basis of religious differences. The uprisings of 2011 created lasting impacts on the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. After the events of 2011, the Saudi Iranian rivalry get intensified. The uprisings engaged many regional states in internal conflict and never-ending enmity. The region took the shape of battle ground as many regional states experienced civil war and violence. The study explored the historical incident of 2011 and its implications for the peace and stability of the region. The event engaged the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran proxies against each other. The study highlighted the historical events of 2011 and examined the post Arab spring era in Saudi-Iranian relations, and Saudi-Iranian proxies in some regional states.

The study reveals that Saudi Arabia and Iran engaged in proxy conflicts against each other in part of the region. The growing rivalry between these two Muslim countries are posing threats to the peace and stability of the region as the region has always been a battle ground for the world proxies. Their rivalry started after the Iranian Islamic revolution, but the last decade witnessed more intensity in their un-ending rivalry. The struggle for power and regional dominancy was main objective of Saudi-Iranian foreign policies. In 2011, the events of the Arab spring further intensified the already tense relations between these two Muslim countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia feared the uprisings and deemed it challenging for her monarchy. As the uprisings extended in the region, the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran also escalated. The uprising of 2011 have deep and profound impacts on the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The rivalry between these two important Muslim states is

disastrous for the peace and stability of the region. Both states are exploiting the violent situation of some regional states. It is high time for these two Muslim countries to play decisive role for the peace, stability and prosperity of the Muslim World.

**Suggestions:**

Findings of the study suggest some important points to consider. Saudi Arabia and Iran are two important Muslim countries. Their rivalry has affected the regional peace, stability, prosperity and economic development. Both states should agree on cooperating in a peace building programs.

- Saudi Arabia and Iran should make efforts to support the peace building process in the region.
- Governments of both these states should formulate policies to bring their citizens close together, which will help in reducing the level of hate between these two states.
- Saudi Arabia and Iran should cooperate on diplomatic level to improve their relations.

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