

THE MIDDLE EAST COLD WAR: IRAN–SAUDI ARABIA RELATIONS AND PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

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The controversy between Saudi Arabia and Iran intensified when Iran proclaimed Shiism as its state religion. The Shiites finally got their own state. These two currents of Islam differ in legal issues. After the death of the prophet Muhammad, who did not reserve a direct male heir, the question arose of the supreme power in the Muslim state.

Most Muslims agreed that the power is transferred by the decision of the community (ummah) to the most respected Quraishite Muslim, to whom the Prophet Muhammad belonged.

A smaller part of the Muslims recognized the family and direct descendants of the prophet (Ahl al-Bayt) as his only legitimate heirs and spiritual successors.. Shiites believe that the head of the ummah is worth the imams - the appointed Allah, elected persons from among the descendants of the prophet, to whom they include Ali ibn Abu Talib and his descendants from the daughter of Muhammad Fatima, and not elected people - the caliphs. Shiites do not recognize the first three righteous caliphs, considering them usurpers.

Until 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran co-existed relatively peacefully. Saudi-Iranian diplomatic relations were established in 1929. The Victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran marked the beginning of the struggle between two projects of Islamic fundamentalism: Sunni and Shiite.

The creators of the Islamic revolution saw it as a victory for Iranian culture and the restoration of Islamic values. Iran's spiritual leader, R. Khomeini called the Islamic revolution liberation from “servile dependence” on the West. Ayatollah Khomeini has made exporting the Islamic revolution and spreading his ideology to other countries with Shiite populations a major foreign policy focus. Iran has begun sponsoring Shiite extremist groups in Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Since 1979, the Pro-Iranian "Organization of the Islamic revolution in the Arabian Peninsula" and "Hezbollah Hijaz" began to conduct revolutionary propaganda in Saudi Arabia, calling on the country's population to rise up against the ruling Saudi Royal family and "American rule". On July 31, 1987, during the Hajj in Mecca, clashes occurred between Iranian pilgrims and the Saudi police, resulting in the death of 402 people and hundreds of injuries. After the incident, the situation escalated and in 1988, Riyadh broke off diplomatic relations with Tehran [1].

Saudi Arabia, concerned about Iran's actions, has tried to strengthen ties with other States in the Persian (Arab) Gulf. In 1981, the cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf was established.

At the same time, there was a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and the United States. After the capture of American hostages in Tehran on April 7, 1980, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Iran. The United States and Saudi Arabia have begun to cooperate in the defense sector. This fact became a challenge to Tehran and a demonstration of Saudi Arabia's strength.

In order to protect itself, Saudi Arabia took a number of measures against Iran, one of which was cooperation with Iraq, another contender for regional leadership at that time.

The Saudis have found a significant ally in the fight against Iran in the face of Iraq. Saddam Hussein, hoping to take over the oil-rich province of Khuzestan, invaded Iran on September 22, 1980 without declaring war. The Iran-Iraq war began which lasted 8 years and was the last major

conflict in the cold war. During the conflict, approximately 700,000 people were killed on both sides.

Saudi Arabia did not benefit from strengthening Iraq as a potential leader of the Arab world, so the Kingdom tried to prolong the war as much as possible so that the parties would suffer maximum losses. The Saudis, together with the Council of Arab countries, provided financial support to Iraq throughout the war [2].

After the end of the war, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait demanded that Iraq pay its debts. Hussein accused Kuwait of producing more oil than specified in the agreements, as well as stealing fuel from Iraqi wells, and demanded compensation from Kuwait, after the failure of the Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait.

This was supposed to improve the economic and geopolitical situation of Iraq, but it was its collapse. Saudi Arabia, like all the Gulf countries, perceived this as a betrayal. The League of Arab States and the UN Security Council demanded the withdrawal of troops from the territory of Kuwait, which Iraq ignored. In early 1991, operation Desert Storm began with the participation of forces from the United States, Egypt, Britain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, during which Kuwait was completely liberated.

This war ended with the success of both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia, having deprived Iraq of the opportunity to claim the role of a regional leader, began to increase its influence and authority among the Arab countries. In turn, Iran, where by that time Ayatollah Khomeini had died and more progressive people came to power, ceased to be the main enemy of the Gulf countries and was able to establish relations with these countries, which made it possible to restore the economy. In 1991, diplomatic relations between the two countries were restored. In 2001, a security Treaty was concluded, which included such important items as the joint fight against terrorism and organized crime and the delimitation of water borders. Iranian foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, during a meeting with Saudi king Fahd, proposed the creation of a military Alliance between Iran and the cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf (GCC). However, this proposal was not implemented in the end [3].

In 1997, Iran hosted the summit of the Organization of Islamic cooperation. Crown Prince Abdullah, who later became king, and foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal visited from the KSA. The following year, for the first time since the overthrow of the Shah, the two heads of state met.

During the presidencies of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran improved again, although they were still generally not friendly. Rather, they reflected the desire of the two regional powers to avoid sharp contradictions.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime led to a significant change in the balance of power in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia opposed the occupation, but the American administration did not pay attention to it. In 2005, parliamentary elections were held in Iraq under American control, which were won by the united bloc of 22 Shiite parties, the United Iraqi Alliance. The Alliance won 48 % of the vote and 140 seats in the 275-seat Parliament. Shiites were elected Prime Minister and Vice-President. Iraq has become a de facto Shiite state and has fallen under the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Arab countries were in a difficult situation. King Abdullah II of Jordan said that "if the new Iraqi government is dominated by Pro-Iranian parties and politicians, we will get a new "Shiite Crescent" from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, which will disrupt the traditional Sunni-Shiite balance and bring new challenges to the US and its allies" [4].

In these circumstances, the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran broke out with new force. All the Kingdom's efforts were aimed at preventing Iran's interference in the internal Affairs of Iraq and limiting Iranian activity in the Middle East region.

In the summer of 2005, conservative forces came to power in Iran, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the country's President, whose main goal was to make Iran a regional leader. Therefore, Iran, on the one hand, developed active activities in the region, joining all sorts of

political organizations (for example, the SCO, SAARC), and on the other — used the American presence, primarily to create new relations with Iraq [5].

The 2010-s were marked by increased tension in Saudi-Iranian relations. In 2011, the Arab spring broke out, causing instability and chaos in some countries, and serious political changes in others.

In Syria, the Arab spring brought with it a civil war that is still going on. Of course, the ubiquitous middle East cold war was not without its consequences. The Saudis, who were traditionally on bad terms with the Assad clan, sought to establish Sunni rule in Syria, so they supported the Syrian opposition and the Islamic State. At the same time, the Islamic Republic fully supported the Alawite Assad clan and provided it with military support in every possible way. With the help of Iran and Russia, President Bashar al-Assad managed to suppress most of the opposition forces and the Islamic State.

The hot spot of the cold war has moved to the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula – to Yemen. As a result of the civil war, power in Yemen passed into the hands of Shiite Houthi rebels. Most Arab countries regarded this as a coup d'etat. Saudi Arabia has begun to build up its military forces on the border with Yemen. The Houthi leader, Mohammad Ali al-Houthi, said that his forces would counterattack the Saudis in response to any aggressive move on their part and would not stop until they captured Riyadh. In March, full-scale military operations began. South Yemen and Saudi Arabia were joined by the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan, Egypt and Pakistan. To date, the fighting has not stopped.

Meanwhile, on June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with another neighboring country. Now a former Saudi ally, Qatar has been accused of financial support for terrorist organizations and friendship with Shiite Iran [6].

In June 2017, the Iranian authorities decided to supply food to Qatar to help the country overcome the consequences of the economic blockade by neighboring countries, and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called on Arab countries to stop putting pressure on Doha. In August 2018, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani held talks with Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad al Thani and confirmed Qatar's unconditional support in the current standoff with Saudi Arabia and its allies.

To sum up, the religious element has a significant role in relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudis claim to be the leader of the Sunni world, while Iran is the largest country where Shiite Islam is officially accepted. The authorities of both states strengthen the long-standing confrontation between these two main branches of Islam to achieve their own political goals.

Intervention of third parties is another important issue. The USA is considered as the main ally of the Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the current stage of relations between America and Iran is characterized by new tensions, which intensified after US missile attack on the airport in Baghdad and the assassination of the Iranian major general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and commander of the Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani. Another powerful state, China is increasing its economic and political influence in the Middle East. Nowadays it is the second largest importer of oil. Hence, for both Iran and Saudi Arabia relations with China are extremely important. China is interested in stable energy supplies, and therefore, Beijing is making efforts to establish strong relations with each of these key states in West Asia, helping to defuse tensions between them [7].

Events in the middle East are developing with rapid speed, so it is practically impossible to predict them. The year 2020 began with the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani by the US air force. At that time, many political scientists predicted the beginning of a new regional or even global conflict. The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic froze all events that took place in the world. At the same time, Saudi Arabia and Iran do not stop to clarify their relations even during the pandemic. Saudi Arabia has accused Iran of spreading a new type of coronavirus across the region. Qatar delivered medical aid to Iran to fight the coronavirus.

The middle East has entered an intermediate phase. We are at a turning point in human history. How will this cold war end and who will emerge victorious? There is no exact answer to this question yet. We can only be sure that the middle East will not be the same as before.

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HEALING OUR PLANET: PLASTIC POLLUTION AND ITS SOLUTION

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Introduction. The accumulation of plastic and products made of plastic in the environment lead to plastic pollution which imposes a hazardous effect on wildlife and human food chain. The plastics have a chemical configuration by which they are resistant to environmental degradation resulting to high incidences of environmental pollution due to slow degradation. Plastic pollution occurs by plastic goods which vary according to its chemical configuration. It depends on the method of its polymerization and the method of natural degradation. Depending on the size, plastic pollutants are categorized into micro-, meso-, or macro debris. Plastic pollution is of particular concern in coastal areas of developing countries that lack appropriate waste management policies, but it also represents a major threat to the world's oceans as a whole because of the slow degradation of plastic litter. The larger items generate so-called micro-plastics (particles smaller than 1-5mm in diameter), which can spread over long distances through ocean surface circulation. These plastic fragments will persist in the aquatic environment for decades or centuries, due to their high resistance to natural degradation processes [1].

Plastics are used so universally that they have become a major part of our everyday lives. Sadly, once used, a large amount of this plastic is not dealt with adequately and mostly people do not pay attention how to recycle it properly. The problem is so acute that it is a priority issue in ensuring better management and protection of our ecosystems. There is still a long way to go to increase public awareness about the adverse effects of plastic pollution on marine life. Achieving this would inculcate a sense of individual responsibility and encourage the setting up of public and private initiatives to reduce plastic pollution all over the world.

Research questions. The article considers the following research questions:

- 1) Are the traces of using plastic becoming more ubiquitous?
- 2) What are the main alternatives to replace plastic?
- 3) Ecosia as the viral instrument to heal the planet.

The majority of answers for research questions have the less awareness among young generation comparing to other selected problems. But nowadays it becomes one of the most highlighted aspects of the news and requires immediate response from the community. Our plastic problems can be addressed with a combination of solutions and all need to be incorporated to bring