

Implications of Saudi-US relations on the security dynamics of Middle East

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Abstract

Saudi Arabia is the second largest weapon purchaser after India in the world and the bulk of the military weapons it purchases come from the US military companies. Besides that, Saudi Arabia is the most trusted and closest ally of USA in the Middle East. This bilateral relationship stretches from economic and cultural exchange to the military and strategic partnership. Their mutual relationship has left deep imprints on the security dynamics of the entire region, especially, on the Saudi-Iranian relations whilst the security of the other Gulf countries like Yemen and Qatar has also been affected. The Saudi-US alliance in Syria has also brought much animosity and hostility toward them. This research which is based on the qualitative mode of the research is aimed at discovering the implications of the given Saudi-US bilateral relationship on the Middle Eastern countries.

Key words: Arms race, Middle East, Imperialists, strategic ties, implications, USA, Saudi Arabia, Security dynamics

Introduction

Although many global and regional powers are deeply involved in Middle East politics but Saudi US romance has far greater impacts on its peace and security. United States of America and Saudi Arabia have been playing a dominant role in different Middle Eastern countries for long being to have created far reaching impacts. However, the peace and security of the region mainly relies upon the alignment of both countries because of the Iranian and Russian growing fluency and their alarming rise of militancy. (al-Rubaye, 2017)

It would not be fair to applause the United States and Saudi Arabia's hypocritical tactics but it is also worthwhile to showcase how their convergence have ensured peace and security in the region. The military cooperation between Saudi Arabia and United States of America has created deep impacts. They have created a united front to contain Iran and combated

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sponsored militancy to establish their dominance in regional politics for attaining their vested interests. On the contrary the Saudi United States alignment has ensured regional peace and maintained security of Middle East. (Palmer, 2007).

To underscore, the bonhomie of both allies, the possibility of war between Israel and the Arab world has been diminishing owing to the backdoor channel diplomacy. They have greatly combated Iranian sponsored militants from overtaking war torn states and stymied the revolutionary movements like what that had taken place in Iran after overthrowing shahs regime and installing the government of Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali Khomeini in 1979, hence the than United states of America and Saudi nexus has a profound impacts on middle east peace and security. (Yergin, 1991)

In reality, the U.S.-Saudi relationship has long been an uncomfortable one. It has been prone to crises, most notably the 1973 oil boycott and the 9/11 terrorist attacks as well as sharp disagreements, like those over the Iraq war and the Iran nuclear agreement. Washington has long been a bit less than normal with Riyadh's role in sponsoring extremism. And until the 2000s, Saudi Arabia was reluctant to be too closely identified with the United States. But the relationship weathered these challenges because despite them, each country saw the other as indispensable to its security strategy. (Antonius, 2015)

The political, economic, and social development of the Gulf in terms of the regional context as well as through the complicated, interconnected prism of the individual polities; Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, Iran, Yemen are the main focus of the article as the Saudi hegemony has been fully endorsed by USA. This article explains the concept of the Gulf Security System, the symbiotic relationship between the Arabian Gulf and the West, which has contributed to stability and modernization in a region plagued by a lack of both. (Reich, 2005)

Saudi-US economic partnership

Saudi Arabia is known worldwide for its oil production as it is the largest oil producer of the world at the moment with the second largest oil reserves after Venezuela. The Saudi US relations from the economic perspective go back to the 1920's. In 1925-26, for the first time a US geologists' team came to Saudi Arabia and began the spadework about finding oil. It took many months of arduous travelling and drilling and inspecting of the deserted and barren plains of the country when finally oil was discovered. (Yergin, 1991).

The discovery of oil changed the fate of the Arabs overnight making it a strategically imperative country from a mere desert. The discovery of oil paved

the way for the foundations of the largest oil company of Saudi Arabia known as ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) in 1944. The relations starting from oil soon ushered into a massive bilateral trade as USA created an exclusive market for its furnished goods in return for the trade of oil from Saudi Arabia. (Bronson, 2006).

There are deeply ties between the United States and the Saudi government officials and businessmen that include both commoners and royals. The ministers from Saudi Arabia mostly have degrees from U.S universities among these ministers there are some finance and petroleum ministers are also involved.

For instance, the famous Prince Talal bin Alwaleed one of the biggest billionaire and investor who also studied from the Syracuse University owns stakes in Twitter and snap. Being a part of 2017 crackdown Bin Talal was detained for three months. There are stakes in U.S tech firms from Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund. (CIA Factbook, 2018)

In addition, the Trump administration is very happy with the tactics of new Saudi leadership and though, there were some points when questions were raised regarding Saudi support by USA regarding Saudi actions in 2018. However, recently on the murder of Saudi journalist in the Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul, the U.S lawmakers and human rights groups pressurized the U.S administration to take immediate action by penalizing the Riyadh.

Actually, seventeen Saudi officials were suspected by the U.S treasury department which levied sanctions against them in November. In spite of reported being involved of ordering the killings by the conclusive report of CIA, President Trump rejected the proposals of cutting the arms sale to Saudi Kingdom. (CIA Factbook, 2018)

Saudi-US strategic partnership

This topic is vastly significant to understand that there is an enormous role of arms whether they are licensed or illegal in the current socioeconomic and political turmoil in the Middle East.

Since the very end of World War Second it has been the top priority of the US to provide security to the oil rich region of the Persian Gulf. In 1970 US oil companies have carried out operation unearthing oil reserves in the region. Saudi Arabia has nationalized many oil industries in that decade. United States of America has remained a strategic partner for the Saudi kingdom during the cold war period from early 1950's to 1991. (Bronson, 2006).

But most importantly United States of America has adopted twin policies to seek the assistance of Iran during the shah regime to stabilize the unstable Middle East countries. It remained an important partner during the cold war period. Iranian revolution of 1979 severely upended the United States regional interest thereby there has witnessed a tilt towards Saudi kingdom of United States. It left Saudi Arabia the sole player to protect United States strategic interests in the region for approximately more than four decades. (Bokhari, 2004).

United States and Saudi nexus peaked during the time of gulf war in 1991 between Iraq and Kuwait. There have been several military exchanges between them to extend military assistance to the Saudi Arabia. According to estimation more than five hundred thousand troops have been flooded into the gulf region. They have been given military base by the Saudi kingdom. The massive presence of US based military troops have drew anger among the part of conservatives and reinforced coercive arguments that it is facilitating the foreign troops which is against the interest of Muslim Ummah. (Waltz, 2012)

Under the US influence Pakistan and Saudi Arabia resisted the soviet occupation from 1979 to 1989. They have flooded cash and military arsenals to wage jihad against the Soviet Union. This policy has attracted thousands of people from south Asian countries and in North Africa to wage holy war against the aggressors. The son of a Saudi largest construction company Osama bin laden joined the holy war campaign against the foreign aggressors in 1980. (Bokhari, 2004).

He returned back to Saudi after two years having strong links to the Saudi based intelligence wing. Moreover his displeasure to the presence of United States troops in Middle East has put him at odds with the ruling family in the kingdom, as they have warmly greeted the US troops that has toppled Saddam's regime against the Kuwait. (Palmer, 1992).

In this critical juncture Osama bin Laden left Saudi kingdom in 1992 and stripped his kingdoms citizenship in 1994. He settled himself in Afghanistan under the umbrella of Taliban's leaderships. He opened a second and hard front against the USA presence in the Middle East and issued a fatwa that United States troops have occupied the Muslim mosques in the region. (Salman, 2015).

After the very inception of 9/11 attacks the US Saudi ties touched the lowest ebb once again. There has emerged a new wave of anti Saudi sentiments in America. Under the leadership of George W. Bush an omission comprising on 28 pages has been fueled severe speculations that Saudi Arabia has veiled the

testimonies of attackers as she is equal contributor for the initiation of a global war.

According to this team Saudi Arabia has been termed as the fair accomplices of this attack. In recent past in 2016 Barrack Hussain Obama's veto power and Saudi threats to the economic upsurge. This has allowed the victims of 9/11 incidents to legally sue the Saudi kingdom for the precious losses of Americans in 11 September 2001. Currently Saudi Arabia is the top purchaser for US military arsenals in the region. (Salman, 2015).

According to CIA fact finding record Saudi has purchased more than 90 billion dollars weapons from US since 1950 to December 2018. President of America has recently encouraged that such treaty create millions of private jobs for jobless Americans. Recently in 2017 trumps administration has signed 350 billion dollars trade over a decade with kingdom. According to a report that US Saudi total arms imports are eighteen times much greater than its volumes in 2018 than they were considered some decades earlier. (CIA Factbook, 2018)

Security implications for Middle Eastern region

There have been established a number of NATO markets where the stolen weapons are sold in open. These weapons include the snipers, daggers, Kalashnikovs, pistols and night vision goggles. They are easily accessible to the anti-state elements to foment chaos.

Meanwhile the conflict of Palestine has Israel has further aggravated the situation in the Middle Eastern countries. It was the only issue that has formed harmony among the all muslin countries despite having ethnic religious differences. On the other hand Riyadh has initiated the Arab peace process during the second Arab intifada. Under the banner ship of Riyadh proposal all the entire Ummah has demanded the withdrawal of the Israelis occupied palatines territories. These have been initiated during the tenure of Barak Hussain Obama and bush administration. (Bronson, 2006).

Now the scenario has completely changed after the US unilateral decision to transfer the capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem under the directions of trumps administrations. Saudi Arabia and many other muslin countries have formally denounced the trumps unilateral decision. The recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has burgeoned numerous problems for the stability of the region. (Bronson, 2006).

It is scare full for the future prospects of the region. Because the Palestine's issue was the mere platform for all the Islamic countries despite their sectarian differences to bring peace and harmony. Now the chances rifting the region

have burgeoned. Iran's relations with Saudi are already aggravated. It brings further aloofness among the Muslim countries. (Bajoria, 2011).

Middle Eastern region is undergoing a very volatile political turmoil and security dilemma has aggravated this political climate. Following are some of the major countries with the greatest effects from this relationship. (Bajoria, 2011).

Saudi-US alliance in Syrian Civil War

There is no denying the fact that Syrian Civil War is the largest Arab conflict in the history of the Middle Eastern region in centuries. The Syrian Civil War which started in 2011 quickly divided the entire region into two blocs. One bloc which consisted of the US backed Western alliances and Arab countries like Saudi Arabia including the entire Gulf region supported the Free Syrian army and other those militant outfits who were fighting to overthrow the Baath regime of Bashr al-Assad. (Barrett, 2014).

On the other hand, Iran and Russia supported the Baath regime of Bashr al-Assad and also used Hezbollah militia to counter the other militant militias. The given divisions and alternate sidings in the civil war led to a bloody confrontation leaving 5 million dead and above 10 million people have been displaced creating an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Middle East. (Barrett, 2014).

Being the largest Arab country, Saudi Arabia should have been more reasonable and more responsible for peace building, but it has chosen the opposite path leading to more blood bath to demonstrate its power and the hegemonic influence. Mere for vested interests, a sanguinary war has been started in Syria which seems unabating still. (Barrett, 2014).

War in Yemen

In 2015, when serving as the defense minister of Saudi Arabia Muhammad Bin Salman intervened in the civil war of Yemen. This act of Muhammad Bin Salman marked a new shift and showed the aggressive posture of Saudi regime. Nevertheless, the Obama administration was not away from assisting Saudi Arabia by providing it with arms, intelligence and aerial refueling to strike against Houthi rebels who were being helped by Iran. (Urwat, 2016)

Consequently, there were some disagreements as well between USA and Saudi Arabia over different policies. As a result, the guided missiles that were to be provided to Saudi were suspended by the Obama administration

due to the higher casualties of civilians. However, under the leadership of President Trump all of these policies have been reversed.

According to some lawmakers from USA, the United States of America should suspend the portion of arms sale and also should not participate in any war. In fact, the congress needs to seek assurance from the secretary of state to continue any military support on the basis of only less amount of harm to the civilians. Hence, the Saudi minister of foreign affairs Adel Al-Jubeir said that the war was imposed on us. As a matter of fact, as the pressure of congress increased the Trump administration put an end to the refueling operations. (Urwat, 2016)

Saudi-Iranian hostilities

The Saudi Iranian hostilities are not something new, as a matter of fact, this enmity runs deep and it all began in the year of 1979. This year marked the ripening of the sectarian hatred that had been remaining dormant for centuries. The Shia Sunni tussle is not something new, rather it has kept the Muslims divided since the period of the Pious Caliphs which grew stronger during the Umayyad, but after that it remained dormant for centuries. (Bajoria, 2011)

This tussle freshened in the wake of the 1979 year. In January of this year, Iran saw its purely Shiite Islamic Revolution which toppled the entire liberalist monarchy which was plagued the structure of the society whilst the same year also saw the rise of the militant Sunni mindset in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan where a Sunni Jihadist movement was launched.

First the Zia government decided to help USA and Western countries to indirectly fighting by proxy war with Soviet forces in Afghanistan. It is clear that war brings disaster for society and also for its neighbors. The proxy war started in Afghanistan, the tribal and Madressahs students trained to fight with USSR forces keeping religious sentiments in their mind. Saudi and Pakistan relations too improved during this war, but it gradually paved the way for the sharpening of the sectarian hatred. (Bajoria, 2011)

The extremist tendencies of both these sects ended their diplomatic relations. Interestingly, the Islamic Revolution of Iran also shut the US-Iran diplomatic ties forever after the hostage crisis of the US embassy in Tehran. On the other hand, the Jihadist movement in Afghanistan brought USA closer to Saudi Arabia making a natural alliance against Iran. The deeper their relations got, the more strained the US-Iran relations became. The Iranian nuclear program strengthened the Saudi-US nexus as Saudi Arabia too considered this nuclear program as a move that could jeopardize its security. (Bajoria, 2011)

Saudi-Iranian arms race

There is no denying the fact that the Iranian nuclear program is aimed at countering the growing influence of Saudi Arabia from the region, especially, from the oil trade of the Persian Gulf and to curtail the KSA's hegemony over the OPEC. The stronger the Saudi-US ties grow, the stronger the will of Iran becomes to attain the nuclear capability. Its missile defense system is also at par with the KSA's missile system. (MIIS, 2011)

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is the second largest purchaser of weapons in the world, interestingly, it's major partner in arms sale in USA. Naturally, Iran thinks that USA is arming KSA to counter it. This arms race can prove disastrous for the region and has already proved much costly for Middle East as both of them have waged proxy wars against each other in Syria and Yemen and this enmity is growing deeper. (Tariq, 2016)

The Qatar crisis

Qatar is the richest country in the Gulf region and used to be the major ally of KSA in the war on terror, however, the expanding Qatar-Iran relations and the differences between Qatar and KSA over dealing with the course of the war on terror and the differences over the future of the role of GCC led to the cutting off of the diplomatic ties between these two countries.

KSA not only ended its diplomatic ties with Qatar, rather, it imposed severe sanctions on it which sparked a wave of political crisis in Qatar as 30 countries saw the severing of their diplomatic missions with Qatar in the wake of these tensions. KSA used its political hegemony over OPEC and led to the withdrawal of Qatar from OPEC. Al-Jazeera, a Qatar based international news channel was banned for creating panic by providing disinformation over the policies of KSA in the Middle East. Trade within the GCC countries was curtailed toward Qatar and its Qatar Airways also saw a financial disturbance due to boycotting of its flights. (Rohan, 2018)

KSA used its influence and strong relations with the other countries to isolate Qatar which also saw a sharp decline in its GDP growth soon after the diplomatic crisis which had led to the sanctions. Qatar was accused of aiding and sponsoring the terrorist networks and Al-Jazeera was accused of engaging in propaganda against KSA and its allies. KSA was backed by USA and it took a harsh attitude toward Qatar as well. The given Qatar-Saudi confrontation reveals how the US-Saudi relations have elevated KSA to a hegemonic stage and how Saudi Arabia is demonstrating its power in Middle East. (Rohan, 2018)

Conclusion

An exhaustive and thorough analysis of the Saudi-US relations from all major perspectives reveals that their bilateral relations have left long lasting implications for the Middle East. Especially their strategic relationship has brought much hue and cry in the neighboring countries like Yemen, Iran and Qatar.

The Trump administration has characterized the U.S.-Saudi partnership as an instrumental one, vital to furthering American aims such as countering Iran. There is a basis for the assertion: While Saudi Arabia is not as capable a partner as Israel or Jordan, the kingdom has proven helpful on matters like intelligence-sharing and Arab outreach to Iraq.

At their worst, their strategic relationship has strained the relations with Iran and their collaborative role in Syrian Civil War has also changed the security dynamics of the region pushing Saudi Arabia to a hegemonic regional superpower in the Middle East which many countries including the mentioned above are resisting. Given the facts, Saudi Arabia has also directed its security relations with the US toward its hostilities with Iran which leaves the region in utter state of security dilemma and arms competition.

Iran perceives the presence of the US influence in its neighborhood as a move against its national security; as a result, Iran has been openly criticizing and opposing Saudi Arabia on every possible platform along with USA. Similar is the case of Qatar and the Baathist regime of Syria and the Houthi rebels of Yemen; all of them perceive Saudi Arabia as a puppet who works at the behest of the US directions and they perceive their mutual relations as attempts to strengthen the Saudi hegemony over the Middle East.

As a direct consequence of the Saudi hegemony, these countries are also struggling to strengthen their defenses against its hegemony and finding new allies. These new alliances, for instance, Iran has aligned with Russia, is making the region more vulnerable and prone to arms race than ever and providing more fertile ground for hostilities. The given Qatar-Saudi confrontation reveals how the US-Saudi relations have elevated KSA to a hegemonic stage and how Saudi Arabia is demonstrating its power in Middle East.

USA should insist that Saudi Arabia designate and empower officials below the king and crown prince with whom American officials can deal. The United States cannot choose who leads Saudi Arabia and should not try. Otherwise, their aligned activities will lead the Middle Eastern region toward a more volatile and politically instable region.

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