Rechtsidee

Table Of Content

RECHTSIDEE

SCAN ME

Rechtsidee

Originality Statement

The author[s] declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the published of any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom author[s] have work, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author[s] declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright Statement

Page 3 of 16

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor in Chief

Rifqi Ridlo Phahlevy , Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Indonesia (Scopus) (ORCID)

Managing Editor

Noor Fatimah Mediawati, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Indonesia (Sinta

Editors

Faizal Kurniawan, Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia (Scopus)

M. Zulfa Aulia, Universitas Jambi, Indonesia (Sinta)

Emy Rosnawati, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Indonesia (Sinta)

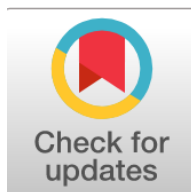Totok Wahyu Abadi, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Indonesia (Scopus)

Complete list of editorial team (link)

Complete list of indexing services for this journal (link)

How to submit to this journal (link)

Rechtsidee

Article information

Check this article update (crossmark)

Check this article impact [(*)]

Save this article to Mendeley

The Conflict and Competition among Regional Powers and its Effect on the Region's Stability

Konflik dan Persaingan Antar Kekuatan Regional dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Stabilitas Kawasan

Saleem F. Aljebori, selim.ferhan@uokerbala.edu.iq, (1)

Faculty of Law, Kerbala University, Iraq

(1) Corresponding author

Abstract

This article explores the longstanding regional animosities and power rivalries among Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, focusing on their impact on regional peace and stability. Despite extensive research on Middle Eastern geopolitics, there is a need for a comprehensive understanding of how these rivalries shape the region's security dynamics. The study aims to analyze the geopolitical goals driving these powers towards regional dominance, including territorial disputes, religious or ethnic tensions, resource distribution issues, and ambitions to alter the regional structure. Using qualitative analysis of historical and contemporary conflicts, the research highlights how sectarian warfare, proxy wars, and transnational violence contribute to regional instability. The findings reveal that the use of proxies by regional powers exacerbates tensions, leading to humanitarian crises and escalating conflicts. This study underscores the necessity for diplomatic interventions and international cooperation to mitigate the adverse effects of these rivalries on the Middle East's stability.

Highlights:

- Dominance Goals: Driven by territorial, religious, and resource issues.
- Proxy Wars: Heighten instability and humanitarian crises.
- Regional Impact: Escalate tensions and threaten peace.

Keywords: Middle East, Proxy Wars, Sectarianism, Geopolitical Interests, Destabilization

Published date: 2024-06-29 00:00:00

Introduction

Because the modern world is interconnected, both regional and global powers impact the dynamics of international relations. As their economic, military, and political dominance grows, regional powers often confront one another. Because these conflicts affect regional alliances, power dynamics, and security, they can have far-reaching effects on regional stability.

Dynamic power struggles and regional rivalries have long defined the Middle East. Prominent states vying for dominance and influence include Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey. This article delves into the animosity and competition among regional powers by examining the effects on regional peace and stability.

The geopolitical goals of regional nations drive their competition for regional domination. Historical, ethnic, or religious tensions, territorial disputes, disputes over resource distribution, or the desire to shape the regional structure to suit their interests are common catalysts for their quest for supremacy.

One tactic regional powers use-regional powers use to further their interests and increase their influence in the region is to support proxies, which can be non-state entities or adjacent countries. These proxy wars can escalate into more significant regional confrontations, heighten tensions, and cause instability. Regional stability might have disastrous consequences if regional powers become involved in proxy wars. Humanitarian crises and escalating tensions between neighbouring nations are expected outcomes of these conflicts. In addition to complicating regional security, proxy wars foster an environment where extreme ideology and terrorism can flourish.

Increased military might and a stockpile of weapons are common outcomes of regional power struggles and rivalries. In order to intimidate potential enemies and demonstrate their dominance, states invest heavily in strengthening their defensive capabilities. Militarization is a process that can destabilize the region, make conflicts worse, and increase the chance of misjudgment. By forming alliances and pursuing partnerships with other governments that share their interests, regional powers are motivated to participate in competition. Potentially leading to the formation of power blocs and a further polarisation of regions, these alliances are established in response to perceived threats or to expand influence. A security environment that is not cohesive and hinders regional cooperation are both possible outcomes of this kind of polarisation.

The Middle East is organized as a multipolar region, regardless of the arguments about whether countries should be regarded as regional powers. Our analysis shows that Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are central regional powers. So, this study looks at how the rivalry and fighting among these three big countries impacted Middle Eastern stability. To accomplish its goal, this paper tackles the following questions.

1. How does the rise of regional powers impact regional stability in the Middle East?

2. How did these factors impact the policymaking and action-taking of regional states in the Middle East about their geopolitical interests?

3. The stability and security of the Middle East have been impacted by sectarian strife.

4. How frequently do regional powers use proxy wars to achieve their goals?

5. Regarding the security and peace in the region, how meaningful were the consequences of regional powers' interventions in neighbouring states?

Methods

We have gathered pertinent secondary data to examine the research questions outlined before. The paper also uses the English School's theoretical framework concerning related research questions.

1. Lecturer Review

Power and rivalry affect regional politics worldwide, especially in the Middle East. However, this ferocious struggle for domination has only recently had overall goals and political/ideological endeavours. Security and geopolitics take primacy during violent power clashes. Geopolitical and security concerns are hindering regional progress and democracy. Additionally, regional authoritarianism may strengthen. Due to Middle East fragmentation, regional decision-makers must balance the US, Russia, and China's competitiveness. This will prevent competition from worsening regional discontent and fragmentation [1].

Middle East has been a platform for Russia, China, and the US to compete [2]. The Middle East is critical for significant giants to seek influence and access. The research focuses on Russia, China, and the US's primary Middle East disputes. It targets functional and geographical elements that may spark proxy wars or short conflicts.

However, Dawood claims that international and regional forces and their alliances have different strategic viewpoints and political and economic goals, which have increased Arab tensions [3] and found that comprehending the roots of the Middle Eastern order is crucial for recognizing its contemporary form. Consider external forces, the dominating patterns of action of entities and institutions that established the regional order, and the dynamics between the numerous parties involved. The power dynamics, ambitions, behaviours, and interactions of regional powers—Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—are the best approaches to understanding stability, unpredictability, and security risks.

After the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and the US's failure to preserve regional peace, numerous neighbouring states have moved to reshape the regional system to their advantage. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Qatar, and the UAE are trying to alter this arrangement. According to [4], these efforts have neglected rival regional bodies and civilizations' security concerns. Civil wars, weapon proliferation, nation collapse, and humanitarian crises induced by outside parties' regional power disputes have increased [4].

Religion and cultural variety have created Middle Eastern bloodshed, claims [5]. Crises and disagreements have sparked regional government conflict and outside intervention. Interference by non-local powers in regional disputes has harmed stability. He noted that the Syrian civil war's instability allowed the US and Russia to help rivals. Regional tensions have sparked a Middle East cold war. First, Sunni disagreement over political Islam, and second, a Saudi-led Sunni alliance using sectarianism against an Iran-led Shia alliance. The Muslim Brotherhood's sympathizers and detractors demonstrate this split [6].

Iraq borders Iran and Turkey, growing regional powers [7]. American military retirees have become more significant in the country and its economic partners. In Iraq, Turkey wants a strong, faction-free political process. It prioritizes a strong Iraq for regional and personal security. Turkey is funding Iraqi oil and gas extraction projects to meet energy needs. Turkey will become Europe's principal Middle East energy carrier. Iran seeks a neighbouring nation with a non-interventionist attitude and an openly sectarian political system that guarantees Shiite-led administrations that are sympathetic to Iran. A powerful Iraq may undermine Iran's regional hegemony and conventional military. Iraq's hydrocarbon output goals could compete with Iran's oil exports, which worries Tehran. Middle East geopolitics is fluid, according to [8]. Many interactions occur between ideological and theological factors and domestic and international institutions. He analyses Saudi Arabia and Iran, two Gulf powers competing for dominance. He examines how Saudi Arabia and Iran handled Yemen and Bahrain's Arab Spring unrest. They compete internationally, he says. His article reveals Tehran and Riyadh's ideologies and how competition restricts regional politics.

A study of Iran-Russia collaboration to balance Middle East strategic stability. The writers methodically examine how Iran and Russia have affected these two notions, focusing on regional and global factors. The authors of the study credit Iran and Russia's coordinated efforts to oppose the US in the Syrian crisis and construct a regional balance system to improve strategic stability. Russia's policies restrain Iran but support its long-term goals [9].

A fragile, possibly unstable Middle Eastern hierarchical order is evolving. The regional scenario is defined by four interconnected tendencies that exacerbate this system's fragility. Globalization has weakened the US in the Middle East. This lets regional giants combat local rivals. Internal and international reputation and influence goals drive regional power rivalry. Israel and Saudi Arabia want to keep the global system, while Iran and Turkey want to overthrow it. Regional intermediate powers, called "pragmatic" ones, use pragmatic foreign policy. However, "allied" middle powers that form alliances based on ideology or identity worsen problems. After the 2011 revolts overthrew the central government, regional forces and certain secondary regional governments deployed local proxies and non-state groups to consolidate power in Arab states. Example: Libya, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen. Due to convergence in regional dynamics, Middle Eastern instability and tensions will likely persist [10].

2. Theoretical Framework

According to [11], the English School of International Relations may be more influential in the UK than in other countries. Noted British thinkers like John Vincent (1986), Hedley Bull (1977), Martin Wight (1977, 191), Timothy Dunne (1998), Nicholas Wheeler (2000), Barry Buzan (2001), and [12] largely shaped the subject of the study. The 1970s were when most people were interested in studying global society (Stanescu, n.d.). Bull's establishment of the distinction between liberal and realist world systems is crucial to his theoretical tenets. According to Bull, when numerous governments have substantial mutual impact and contact, prompting them to take each other's actions into account when making decisions, an international system is developed. When nations with shared ideals and interests see themselves as linked through a common legal framework that permits the exchange of institutions, a liberal conception of international society emerges, according to Bull [13].

Realists argue that states must look out for themselves without a central authority to protect them rather than worrying about non-state actors. From this angle, you can see how the players constantly try to out-plan and out-manoeuvre one another. International politics can be explained by the idea put out by [14]. We are not jeopardizing world peace. Participation in diplomatic debates aiming at reducing the use of force is essential for nations to sustain a global community.

Because of its position as a middle ground between two extreme positions, the English School is seen by

conventional theories of international relations as taking a moderate approach. Regarding global politics, the international society approach (English School) rejects hopeful predictions of international cooperation and perpetual peace, in contrast to the realist tradition that portrays international relations as an ongoing condition of conflict characterized by each state competing against another. People studying international relations must pay close attention to both war and peace since they occur in cycles throughout history. To sidestep the difficult choice between "collaboration among humans and self-interest and conflict among states" that the realism vs. liberalism argument presents, proponents of a global community and rationalists who support the media viewpoint do this [15].

Contrary to realists' gloomy view, the English School does not believe conflict is inherent to human nature. Rather, it contends that nations have the power to establish a global community characterized by amicable diplomatic ties, standardized institutions, and rules. Cosmopolitan intellectuals propose a new international order and universal humanism, although members of the English School are sceptical about this vision. Since the English School acknowledges that states often employ force to accomplish their aims or settle significant disputes, it holds both realism and idealism in high esteem. As a result, many see the English School as a compromise between idealism and realism. By avoiding idealism and realism, which are too simplistic, the English School has been able to claim that their international theory is sound.

According to the English School of Thought, autonomous nations have a major impact on international politics [16]. Despite their seemingly chaotic nature, claims that nations exhibit a great degree of organization and a shallow degree of hostility towards one another. The English School argues that even in a very safe civil society, the loss of sovereign power leads to increased injustice, violence, mistrust, and insecurity. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya are just a few of the Middle Eastern sovereign nations that have recently seen their social and political systems completely collapse. The nations were rocked by instability, insecurity, and general anarchy brought on by a dramatic escalation in violence.

Most scholars from the English School believe that humanity operates within a global society, even though they may have different opinions on issues of justice and order. Militarism, say the school's linked pluralists, is one of the biggest dangers to global peace and stability. As a minority group, the Solidarists advocate for the use of force and demand compensation for human rights violations. According to English School pluralists, the protection of global peace and stability must be prioritized over individual liberties. Because of the wide cultural variety in human rights conceptions, countries have substantial challenges in reaching a consensus on justice objectives. Violence and instability on a global scale will increase if establishing a global civilizational order precedes justice. The concept that nations, with their diverse cultural and normative viewpoints, can establish practical accords without a central regulating body is, according to pluralists, the belief that states should form the basis of the international community. Sovereignty of states is defined as the power of individual states to establish and enforce their laws and governance, which might change between historical periods, regions, and even within the same state. Also noticeable is the expectation of value-based competition. While states may hold differing views on what constitutes justice, they can work together to create internal mechanisms to ensure stability. Everyone agrees that nations should stick to sovereignty and keep their independence in handling their affairs. Pluralists contend that peacekeeping and the protection of state sovereignty should take precedence in the global community. The preservation of state sovereignty is essential for the preservation of order. Regional powers Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey show blatant contempt for the independence of their Middle Eastern neighbours, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. When these powerful nations meddled in these countries' internal affairs, they did it for various reasons that threatened their peace and security. The peace and stability of the entire region were affected by the actions of these states by the regional powers. As a result, issues related to human rights, extremism, sectarianism, and anarchy have intensified. According to this article, regional powers, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, were at odds with one another, which contributed to instability in the Middle East.

Results and Discussion

A. The Nature of Conflict and Competition Among Regional Powers

1. Geopolitical Interests

Iran wants to dominate the Middle East geopolitically. Iran wants to influence the regional order to achieve its strategic goals using its imperial background. The group wants to expand its influence in neighbouring countries, especially those with large Shia populations. Religious, cultural, and strategic elements drive this effort, according to [17].

Iran prioritizes territorial defence and foreign threat defence. The country has long had disputes with neighbouring countries, especially Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Iran uses conventional and unconventional military measures and aids Shia proxies and allies to hide its regional influence and security [18]. Iran has worked to denigrate the US and its regional allies to dominate the region. The Iranian administration achieved its goals by

developing economic ties with China and geopolitical cooperation with Russia, especially in Syria.

Turkey wants to reclaim its regional dominance and global power. Turkey intends to expand its influence outside its borders by using its location between Europe and Asia. It targets Muslim-majority societies in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Caucasus. Its global ambitions are shaped by historical, cultural, economic, and political factors [19].

Before 2000, Turkey was a minor player in the Middle East. Turkey improved EU relations and focused on Arab and Muslim nations during this time. Turkey started a process with Middle Eastern Arab countries based on common cultural values and economic advantages by pursuing this approach. The most crucial step was to improve diplomatic relations with Arab nations, including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, through free commerce, mediation, and visa liberalization. Business relations improved, and more people crossed borders. This makes Turkey's connections and interests the most dynamic. Long-term, Turkey wants more international independence. Due to its involvement in regional crises like Syria and Libya, Turkey has allied and clashed with major global powers like Russia and the US.

Refugee flows, terrorist bombings, and Syrian civil war spillovers—including cross-border shelling and Turkey's downing of a Russian jet near its airspace—have led Turkey to prioritize its security and interests (4). In response to these problems, Turkey and other states formed a complex network of strategic alliances with regional governments and NGOs. Turkey planned to deploy its armed forces to the Syrian and Iraqi borders more often to protect its friends. Turkey has often taken independent action to address its immediate issues while criticizing Iran and the Gulf area. This shows how important regional nations must collaborate to create a new order and strengthen collaboration. Israel, Iran, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are more aggressive, but Turkey is a counterweight. However, these competing Turkish political groupings have not yet embraced this position. They often regard Turkey's aims as a barrier to their goals, such as constructing a regional order that prioritizes their interests over regional compromise.

Territorial disputes, terrorist assaults, and regional instability complicate Turkey's security environment. It seeks to downplay opposing powers like Russia and Iran, maintain regional stability, and resolve Kurdish separatist issues. Turkey uses economic engagement, diplomacy, and military activities to protect national security and regional peace.

Saudi Arabia's geopolitical ambitions are to maintain its religious and political power as the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the Islamic faith's inception. This organization seeks to lead the global Muslim community, understand Sunni Islam, and combat Shia Iran. Saudi Arabia uses diplomacy, religious organizations, and religious doctrine to enhance its geopolitical power [20]. Saudi Arabia prioritizes geopolitical challenges, Gulf security, and border defence. Support for Shia extremist organizations and Iran's regional influence alarm the country. Saudi Arabia is dedicated to defending its energy resources, especially oil reserves, and stabilizing global oil markets. Saudi Arabia is a major oil exporter and producer.

Iran and Saudi Arabia constantly argue about geopolitics, oil prices, the Gulf's nomenclature ("Arab" or "Persian"), and non-state entities. These are some of the parties' many disagreements. Turkey and the Gulf states also have issues because Tehran views Ankara as a rival. Turkey's economy is larger and more developed. It has friendlier relations with the US and EU than Iran. This includes diplomatic relations with Sunni and Shiite nations. Given Iran's economy and growing isolation, officials will certainly want to remain ahead of the competition. Iran's Supreme Leader may decide that nuclear weapons are his best technological edge against Turkey.

The second most significant event that changed the power balance was the creation of a contiguous landmass between Iraq and Syria. Located between two main power centres, neighbouring countries took advantage of Iraq's power vacuum after the 2011 US pullout and uprisings against Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship. The Gulf states supported opposition groups, while Iran wanted governments favouring its interests in both nations. Israel wanted to stop Iran's growth.

Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia's geopolitical goals shape their foreign policies and actions, often causing complex regional power conflicts. Understanding these issues is essential to understanding regional stability, human well-being, and global geopolitics.

2. Sectarian Rivalries

The Middle East's sectarian rivalries have deep roots and have developed through the years due to societal and historical forces. The Sunni-Shia split emerged as a result of the first struggles of the Rashidun Caliphs and the ensuing unrest following the execution of Caliph Uthman. The rise of Sunni and Shia dynasties and the subsequent marginalization of other religious groups are two examples of how political and social progress have contributed to the maintenance of sectarian tensions [21]. The formation of sectarian identities and the act of "othering" are intricately related to sectarian conflicts in the Middle East. Many people's sense of who they are and how they fit into the world is shaped by the sectarian groups to which they belong. Past grievances and social and political circumstances contribute to the process of othering, which in turn deepens sectarian divisions and cultivates mistrust and hostility among various sects [22]. In addition, sectarian strife in the Middle East has been impacted

by cultural and economic factors. At times, linguistic, ethnic, socioeconomic, and sectarian divides occur simultaneously. Conflicts can break out when cultural and economic differences and inequalities in resource distribution serve to fortify sectarian identities.

Disputes between Muslim sects in the Middle East have intensified as a result of regional and global power conflicts. The two major regional powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran, who respectively support Shia and Sunni interests, have been fighting for control of the region. In these power struggles, both nations have exploited sectarian identities to gain an advantage and expand their control areas [23]. The distribution of power in the region was affected by the disintegration of Iraq caused by Saddam Hussein's leadership. The Iraq War intensified divisions in the region. It stoked animosity between two groups: one, the 'moderates,' who were conservative and pro-American and wanted to keep things as they were. This group included anti-Western Iran and other states, and second, the 'radicals,' who were also conservative and pro-American, with Saudi Arabia being one of the most prominent examples.

An additional expression of regional discord typified by the Sunni-Shia difference, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry displays clear sectarian tendencies. The Sunni Arab countries see Iran and its Shiite minority as possible threats because of their religious beliefs. The already mentioned sectarian division is now a prominent aspect of the modern Middle East and could exacerbate regional security instability.

Islamic militant groups were able to form and flourish during the Iraq War, which further divided the region. Many extreme opposition movements in neighbouring countries used the Iraqi rebel groups' blueprint as their model. Thus, notwithstanding the costs to the states concerned, the Iraq War helped bolster these players' positions. These rebel groups' activities have escalated sectarian strife to the point that internally unstable nations are ill-equipped to deal with it. Meanwhile, specific organizations serve as instruments for Saudi Arabia and Iran to solidify their authority, capitalizing on regional instability to destabilize their rivals. The existence of sectarian disputes has made it easier for political groups and extremist organizations with sectarian roots to emerge and sustain themselves. ISIS and other extremist groups have used sectarian tensions and marginalization as opportunities to recruit members and engage in violent acts. Sectarian tensions are rising as a result of the proliferation of extremist groups, which is making peace and stability more elusive [24].

A common justification for Saudi Arabia's regional strategy is the growing regional influence of Iran, which the kingdom views as a threat to the Arab Gulf states. By playing on sectarianism, Saudi Arabia hoped to win over the Arab Sunni masses and strengthen its political allies to reignite regional rivalry with Iran. Unfortunately, they have not been able to use this threat knowledge to their advantage in their regional balance manoeuvres against Iran. Saudi Arabia has consistently rejected any compromises to prevent talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia that could lead to a complete accord and regional stability.

Furthermore, a Saudi coalition was established in foreign policy to combat Turkey's growing influence. Turkey saw the fall of the dictatorships as a chance to put its weight behind the growing Islamic grassroots movement and solidify its position as the region's dominant power. Turkey was able to position itself as the protector of Sunni Islam due to the sectarian nature of the Syrian crisis. Because of this, there was an open conflict with Saudi Arabia, which has always presented itself as the top religious authority in Sunni Islam.

B . The Effects on Regional Stability

1. Proxy Wars and Humanitarian Crisis

The Middle East's divided civilizations and communities, compounded by proxy armies and foreign intervention to advance regional and global powers, led to ongoing wars. For decades, proxy conflicts and regional involvement have fueled sectarianism, instability, and fragmentation in the Middle East. Insurgencies, violence, civil wars, and proxy warfare plague the Middle East, illustrating its fragility. A state cannot always govern its territory or lead. [25] argues that the state's withdrawal has facilitated the rise of militias, traffickers, non-state actors, and quasi-state organizations such as the Islamic State, Rojava, and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq.

Iran, Saudi Arabia, and their allies have fought proxy wars and power struggles in the region for decades, suffering setbacks. Saudi-led counterrevolution supporters have exacerbated regional strife and Riyadh-Tehran hostility. Because of this, the region will become unstable, and wars may intensify. Iran helped create and support Iraqi armed groups. Paramilitary groups include 50 Iraqi Shia militias. Iran uses many of these militias as proxies, with 45,000 to 142,000 fighters in battalions. Iran heavily influences Shia Iraqi forces. Besides military aid, money, weapons, and technology, the Iranian government has helped the militias. Given the parties' rivalry for power in the Iraqi military and government, Iranian influence over Iraq's political and security dynamics is apparent. So, Iran is a key factor in the country right now. Sunni militant groups and terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda in Iraq and ISIS expanded beyond opposing American soldiers to participate in other conflicts, such as the ongoing Syrian civil war. Because Iran supports a Shiite-led government in Baghdad, the IRGC's presence in Iraq has increased. The Iraqi government and many Shiite militias support Iran. (26) reported that Iran supplied the central government with Su-25 fighter jets for US$195 million.

Syria's proxy war and civil war began after the summer of 2011. Iran has helped Bashar al-Assad in previous military interventions with Hezbollah's military and logistical backing. Hezbollah's hard-won post-sectarian legitimacy is at risk (6). Tehran's financial aid to the Assad government is controversial despite its vital role in preserving the regime. Despite accusations that the Syrian government has received lines of credit in the low billions, UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura allegedly claimed that the Islamic Republic supplies up to $35 billion to Syria annually. Estimates of Iran's annual funding of Hezbollah range from $2,032 million to $500 million. Iran and Hezbollah helped build the 50,000-strong paramilitary force Jaish al-Sha'abi, which is thought to assist Assad [26].

Hezbollah, an Iranian Shiite affiliate, is especially powerful in Lebanon. In addition to being Lebanon's most active military force, Hezbollah dominates society and politics. Iran has utilized Hezbollah to terrify the US and Israel for 30 years. Hezbollah has been working hard to maintain the Alawite-run Assad dictatorship in Syria. Due to their vulnerabilities, Assad and Hezbollah depend increasingly on Tehran for safety and funding. This gives Iran greater power and obligations in the Levant than before [26].

Iran's overt and covert backing for the al-Houthi struggle in Yemen, Shia-led demands in Bahrain, and radical movements across the region have driven necessary Arab parties away from Tehran. Turkey, Jordan, and other GCC border states oppose Iran's expanding influence in Iraq. Saudi troops entered Yemen in March 2015. This followed the Houthi seizure of Sanaa, the capital, and President Mansour Hadi's northward retreat. Houthi-allied Hadi took office after Ali Abdullah Saleh's departure. Despite substantial Houthi support, limited military aid from Hezbollah and the Revolutionary Guards, and tiny armament deliveries from Oman, Iran joined Western powers and Saudi Arabia in supporting Hadi in mid-2017. It has been likened to Saudi Arabia's "Vietnam War." Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman wanted a rapid and decisive military campaign. Almost 10,000 Yemenis and 100 Saudis have died, and 3 million Yemenis have been forcibly displaced within their country.

Military activities, proxy warfare, and group backing have escalated Middle Eastern sectarian enmity. Russia, China, Iran, Israel, and the Sunni Arab governments led by Saudi Arabia have fought wars for their purposes. These actions deepened religious and racial tensions and prolonged hostilities. The early involvement has increased group enmity and made political agreements tougher.

Politicians, academics, and regional actors disagree on how proxy wars cause humanitarian crises. Alternative views prioritize de-escalation and diplomatic resolutions, believing that international aid worsens humanitarian problems and prolongs confrontations. Critics say foreign entities backing comparable parties may assist in stabilizing a situation and protecting ethnic or sectarian groups. Countries see proxy wars differently. Some see them as a chance to fight regional enemies, while others worry about regional stability [27].

Proxy wars between community factions have aggravated the refugee crisis and caused more people to flee. Persecution and violence cause people, especially sectarians, to abandon their homes. About three million Iraqis have fled their homes due to the ISIS insurgency since 2014. Anxiety between groups, especially non-Kurds, Sunnis, and Shias, and occasional violence contribute to instability. Thus, bordering countries must provide appropriate resources and humanitarian aid to house a growing number of migrants. Overburdened infrastructure and resources may cause social and economic unrest in the host country. Some fear this relocation would increase sectarian tensions in host communities and extremist ideology.

Refugees struggle to access healthcare, education, food, and services, worsening the humanitarian catastrophe [28], [29]. Proxy warfare substantially hinders humanitarian relief and access. Armed factions influenced by outside interests rule the fractured territories. Fragmentation hampers humanitarian agencies from contacting affected populations and giving aid. Help distribution is further complicated by the security threats aid workers face when working with armed organizations [30].

Sectarian proxy wars complicate humanitarian aid and peacebuilding. Diplomatic conversations and compromises are tough when diasporic players are involved because they have diverse goals. Long-term proxy battles make it harder to establish durable peace, settle sectarian tensions, and meet the humanitarian needs of affected people. An integrated political, social, and economic approach is needed to resolve sectarian tensions, according to [31]. Understanding proxy conflicts and humanitarian disasters requires multiple perspectives and carefully analyzing each conflict's inherent complexity. Crisis management must prioritize civilian safety, allow humanitarian help, and promote inclusive rebuilding that addresses the core causes of sectarian conflicts.

2. Sectarian Division and Polarisation

Societal disintegration, polarization, and animosity can result from hazardous religious, ethnic, or sectarian tensions. These inequities cause political instability, bloodshed, and escalating social, economic, and humanitarian disasters. Sectarianism and polarisation exacerbate social divisions. Resentment, religious intolerance, and cultural norm violations generate an "us"-versus-"them" worldview. Some religious or sectarian groups may be disadvantaged, ostracised, or discriminated against due to this separation. Social fragmentation weakens trust, national identity, and social cohesion [32].

Polarisation and sectarianism promote political instability and violence. Religious groups vying for resources can

cause political impasses, power struggles, and even bloody wars. Sectarian identities used for political benefit can cause violent conflicts worldwide [33]. Increasing sectarian tensions and division could also harm human rights and free speech. Minority communities may face prejudice, religious limitations, and civic and political impediments. Limiting public discourse and deleting competing views hinder progress towards a more accepting and tolerant society, which deepens sectarian tensions [34].

Polarisation and sectarianism may hurt the economy. Social stratification can make economic cooperation and commercial and investment activity difficult. Economic gaps caused by political or religious divisions can exacerbate grievances, limit social mobility, and spark social unrest. War increases the likelihood that economic resources would be distributed unfairly to advance sectarian objectives, which can fuel violent cycles and slow economic growth [35].

Power balancing in the face of threats is linked to regime security. International Middle Eastern officials prioritize it, too. After 2011, these hazards from within are equally as likely as those from outside due to the growing number of governments deploying international proxies to expand their influence abroad. The Syrian regime maintains links with Iran to defend itself from IS and Saudi and Qatari-funded forces. Politicians sometimes confuse internal and external threats. Bahrain has allied with Saudi Arabia because Shiites and Iran threaten the monarchy. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have been close since 2011 because they both perceive Iran as a danger.

Saudi Arabia and Iran's activities caused the Iraqi rift. Iraqis blame these activities for sectarian militias, suicide bombings, and societal unrest after 2003. Iran will maintain regional dominance due to Iraq's depletion and disintegration. Arab-Persian hatred would increase, and internal issues might cause regional instability. A world-renowned state that rejects its security aid is less trusted by Iran than an autonomous body spreading its revolutionary philosophy. Iran's security aid to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen degrades non-citizens. Sub-state actors benefit most from the Iranian revolution in three of four cases. Iran helps Hezbollah, which supports Iranian revolutionary goals against Israel and Saudi Arabia, acquire regional power in Lebanon, damaging the Lebanese government.

Iran backs Iraqi Shia militias Badr, AAH, and KH. Iran's revolutionary philosophy founded and sustained these groups. Iraq's elected government collapses because of these factions. Iranian assistance for Houthi forces in Yemen threatens Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Iran is replacing the internationally recognized Yemeni government with an Iran-backed Houthi administration to weaken it politically and religiously. Iranian security aid to Syria helps the Assad administration but funds ideological armed groups since its intentions are undefined. Iranian aid to Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militias in Syria gives Assad "the tail wagging the dog" directly. Their historic connection helps Iran support Bashar al-Assad. Iranian security help in Syria may differ from its usual preference for specific administrations [36].

Iran has funded Sunni factions Hamas and PIJ in their battle against Israel. The Iranian leadership has supported ideological opponents like the Sunni Taliban in Afghanistan and allowed al-Qaeda to recruit Iranians to fight the US. Tehran has several non-Shiite, non-Muslim allies, like North Korea and Venezuela, which are united in their opposition.

The consensus on sectarian polarisation and division depends on the situation and the people concerned. Many think sectarian divides are inevitable and inherent to particular communities. They emphasize peaceful dispute resolution and power-sharing. [37] suggests that governmental manipulation and outside intervention cause sectarian bloodshed. A comprehensive political, social, and economic approach is needed to combat sectarian polarisation. Supporting inclusive government, educational and social activities that promote tolerance and understanding, and contact between varied religious and sectarian groups helps reduce sectarian divisions. Allowing religious and sectarian groups to participate in decision-making and equally distribute resources can stabilize and unite society.

3. Destabilization of Neighbouring Countries

In sectarian conflict, violence might extend to neighbouring counties. This problem may be spread by the need for more functional borders, international armed groups, and the movement of troops between countries. A minority believes neighbouring nations can increase sectarian tensions by aiding competing factions . Other researchers claim that power rivalries, regional animosity, and geopolitical issues are also contributing to sectarian tensions and violence. suggests that examining issues purely through the prism of sectarianism simplifies the complicated dynamics in the area.

There is debate over how much sectarian polarisation and division could cause instability in other countries. This depends on regional dynamics and interests. These folks believe outside meddling worsens the situation and sows future instability. Some say sectarian disputes, regional rivalries, and power conflicts drive geopolitical agendas. Sectarianism may be a symptom or an outcome of systemic concerns . Sectarian conflicts involve transnational alliances. These networks may enable radicals to recruit new members, discreetly move weapons, and promote ideology, putting neighbouring countries at risk . External influences intensifying regional power struggles and proxy conflicts may increase sectarian tensions. According to the hypothesis, neighbouring nations support rival groups out of sectarianism or religion. According to , such gatherings can aggravate tensions and divide

communities.

The 2003 U.S.-led regime change in Iraq changed Middle Eastern dynamics. Iran has allied with non-state actors in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq to further its regional influence. Iran's expanding prominence worries its enemies, especially in the Arab Gulf. Big nations have opposing interests, so they cannot fight Iran together. They refuse to discuss a "grand bargain" with Iran to resolve regional power conflicts . Iran has developed long-range missiles and supported armed non-state militias in Iraq and Lebanon as part of its advanced defence plan. Iran's regional foes are right to blame these policies for regional turmoil, according to some. They may also be reactions to American efforts to establish a regional order that would deprive Iran of any important role. These actions emphasize ousting the government, which is a significant setback. Iran has taken every measure to reverse regional attempts to isolate it, which it firmly opposes. Iran wants regional domination and to advance its agenda. However, it lacks resources, and its aggressive methods often cause regional fragmentation by frightening its foes .

Saudi Arabia's support for dictator governments has sparked civil turmoil in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, as well as sectarian conflicts. Saudi Arabia has recently funded strong diplomatic and military measures to restore regional stability. Their territory now includes Libya, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq .

Saudi Arabia is trying to constrain Qatar's independent foreign policy towards Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE. The monarchy has partnered with the UAE to counter Iran's influence and attempts to take Yemen after a pause in Syria. Iran and Turkey are establishing control zones around their Syrian territory. Hezbollah helped Iran achieve this in Iraq and Lebanon. After the 2017 Saudi-UAE campaign against Qatar, Turkey and Qatar strengthened their diplomatic relations [38].

Saudi Arabia believes Iran's revisionist posture is unstable and threatens its interests and friends. Iran threatens Saudi interests and aspirations because of its influence in Syria and Iraq and its ties to the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Riyadh and Iran are fighting an all-out war due to their long-standing animosity. Both nations strive to weaken Iran. Iran did the same, according to [39].

As Iran and Saudi Arabia sought to counter each other's influence in Iraq, the civil war became sectarian . Complex alliances and animosities have emerged from the Syrian civil war, causing a Middle Eastern power struggle. Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah initially supported the Assad administration, while Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey supported the insurgents.

Iran tried to capitalize on the 2011 Arab Spring-inspired protests in Bahrain, ruled by the US-allied al-Khalifa dynasty and home to a sizable Shiite Muslim community. In irredentist discourse, Iranian elites have denounced the Sunni al-Khalifa dynasty and Bahrain . Ultimately, Turkey wanted to be a bigger regional political mediator. Arab Spring changes threatened Turkey's regional dominance. Turkey was an important mediator in Iraq, Libya, and Bahrain initially. As Libya, Syria, and Yemen subsided, foreign-led civil wars began [40].

NATO's action in Libya, Russia's support of the Syrian regime, and the US-led anti-ISIS coalition force in Iraq and Syria have opened fresh avenues for foreign participation . Addressing regional destabilization requires a holistic approach that considers local and global factors [41]. We must establish national conflict resolution systems, encourage productive discourse, and strive for an inclusive government. Addressing geopolitical concerns between adjacent nations, encouraging regional cooperation, and engaging in diplomatic endeavours are also part of this.

Conclusion

The rivalry and conflict among regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, significantly affect the stability of the Middle East. Sectarian animosity, geopolitical ambitions, and proxy wars motivate these superpowers. The results show how these factors are interdependent and dynamic, with geopolitical interests playing a role in the rise of regional control disputes and sectarian tensions and divisions becoming more severe. Destabilization of neighbouring nations, proxy wars, humanitarian catastrophes, sectarian tensions, and polarisation are some consequences that impact regional stability. In order to foster stability and peace in the region, it is essential to understand these processes.

The first finding shows that regional powers use geopolitical groups to advance their agendas. This strategy worsens the instability in the region and intensifies conflicts. Consequently, sectarian rivalries are crucial, as they complicate the dynamics of the conflict by involving regional forces that support certain religious or sectarian groups. Conflicts intensify, and tensions rise, both inside and between surrounding countries.

The second finding highlights that competition and conflict among regional groups significantly impact the area's stability. When regional powers use sectarian tensions to further their interests, they often resort to proxy wars, in which they arm and provide support to different groups. Conflicts of this kind exacerbate violence, leave leadership vacuums, and force neighbouring states to shoulder heavy burdens as a result of humanitarian crises and increased violence. The erosion of confidence, intensification of social and political fragmentation, and hindrance of reconciliation efforts caused by regional forces capitalizing on sectarian divides and polarisation threaten regional stability.

These findings have led to recommendations that stress the significance of mediating conflicts, working together regionally, providing humanitarian aid, and addressing socioeconomic disparities. Diplomatic engagement is essential to persuade regional powers to emphasize dialogue and diplomacy rather than sectarian-driven zero-sum competitiveness. If we want to get to the bottom of sectarian tensions and bloodshed, we need to make mediation and conflict resolution activities a top priority. Economic alliances and shared security agreements are examples of regional collaboration initiatives crucial for building confidence, decreasing tensions, and improving stability. In order to help affected populations and make it possible for them to relocate to neighbouring countries, humanitarian aid must be deployed, and refugees must be supported. In order to lessen complaints and encourage development methods that are inclusive of all groups, it is essential to address socioeconomic disparities. In conclusion, extremist ideologies that play on sectarian tensions must be combated through counter-radicalization initiatives. Promoting religious tolerance, education, and social cohesiveness are the goals of these endeavours, which call for cooperation on a global and regional scale.

The geopolitical aims and factional rivalries that characterize the conflict and struggle among regional powers largely determine the extensive long-term ramifications for regional stability. By applying the aforementioned suggestions, a holistic strategy can be employed to lessen the impact of the disturbance and promote peace, reconciliation, and stability in the area. So, to solve the complex problems that come from these connections, the international community, neighbouring nations, and regional powers must work together.

References

1. Farhadi and A. J. Masys, The Great Power Competition Volume 1: Regional Perspectives on Peace and Security. 2021.
2. K. J. Ranaweera, "Great Powers, The Middle East, and The Cold War (Case Study – Islamic Republic of Iran and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)," JETISH: Journal of Education Technology Information Social Sciences and Health, vol. 2, no. 1, 2023.
3. M. Ponížilová, "The Impact of Regional Powers' Competition on the Middle East Regional Order 1945-2010," Central European Journal of International and Security Studies, vol. 10, no. 3, 2016.
4. W. Hazbun, "Regional Powers and the Production of Insecurity in the Middle East," MENARA Working Papers, no. 11, 2018.
5. S. Zulfqar, "Competing Interests of Major Powers in the Middle East: The Case Study of Syria and Its Implications for Regional Stability," Perceptions, vol. 23, no. 1, 2018.
6. R. Hanau Santini, "A New Regional Cold War in the Middle East and North Africa: Regional Security Complex Theory Revisited," International Spectator, vol. 52, no. 4, 2017.
7. S. Kane, "The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition in Iraq," United States Institute of Peace, 2011.
8. L. G. Cerioli, "Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi–Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain's and Yemen's Arab Spring," Contexto Internacional, vol. 40, no. 2, 2018.
9. R. Noori and H. Masoudi, "Re-focusing on Iran-Russia Cooperation in the Syrian Crisis; A 'Broader' Strategic Stability on Agenda," Geopolitics Quarterly, vol. 17, no. 64, 2021.
10. M. Kamrava, "Accessing the Multipolarity and Instability in the Middle East," Orbis, vol. 62, no. 4, 2018.
11. S. Burchill, A. Linklater, and S. Buzar, Theories of International Relations, vol. 52, no. 2, 2015.
12. R. Little, "The English School's Contribution to the Study of International Relations," European Journal of International Relations, vol. 6, no. 3, 2000.
13. M. Morisse-Schilbach, "Hedley Bull, The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics, Basingstoke, London 1977," in Schlüsselwerke der Politikwissenschaft, 2008.
14. H. Bull, "The Concept of Order in World Politics," in The Anarchical Society, 2012.
15. R. Jackson, G. Sorensen, D. Suryadipura, and D. Kamdani, Introduction to International Relations, Fifth Edition, Multi-modality Cardiac Imaging: Processing and Analysis, 2013.
16. S. Hobden, Critical Theory and International Relations, 2023.
17. A. Ansari, Iran: A Very Short Introduction, 2014.
18. D. Newman, "Contemporary Geopolitics of Israel-Palestine: Conflict Resolution and the Construction of Knowledge," Eurasian Geography and Economics, vol. 51, no. 6, 2010.
19. Aras and E. Fuat Keyman, "Turkey, the Arab Spring and Beyond," Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, vol. 17, no. 3, 2015.
20. M. Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia: Second Edition, 2010.
21. J. A. O. C. Brown and B. Gibson, A History of the Arab Peoples, 2017.
22. J. Fox, "The Correlates of Religion and State: An Introduction," Religion, State and Society, vol. 47, 2019.
23. L. Diamond, Democratization and Authoritarianism in the Arab World, 2020.
24. Phillips, The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East, 2020.
25. M. Beck and T. Richter, "Fluctuating Regional (Dis-)Order in the Post-Arab Uprising Middle East," Global Policy, vol. 11, no. 1, 2020.
26. K. Sadjadpour and B. B. Taleblu, "Iran: Leveraging Chaos," in Geopolitics and Democracy in the Middle East, 2015.
27. Wastnidge and S. Mabon, Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Struggle to Shape the Middle East, 2022.
28. N. Hashemi and D. Postel, "Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East," Review of Faith and International Affairs, vol. 15, no. 3, 2017.
29. M. Kamrava, The Great Game in West Asia: Iran, Turkey and the South Caucasus, 2017.

30. H. Slim, "The Ethical Humanitarian Worker," in Humanitarian Ethics: A Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disaster, 2015.
31. S. Makdisi, The Iran-Iraq War and Western Security, 1984-87: Strategic Implications and Policy Options, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
32. G. H. Talhami and D. K. Pearsons, "Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb and the Clash that Shaped the Middle East," Middle East Policy, vol. 25, no. 4, 2018.
33. Haddad, Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity, Oxford University Press, 2011.
34. J. Brownlee, "Mariz Tadros. Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Egypt," Review of Middle East Studies, vol. 48, nos. 1–2, 2014.
35. C. Phillips, "Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria," Third World Quarterly, vol. 36, no. 2, 2015.
36. R. Springborg, "Security Assistance, Securitization, Security Systems, and Insecurity in the Mediterranean Mashriq and Maghreb," Mediterranean Politics, 2023.
37. K. F. Osman, Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation Since 1920, 2014.
38. Y. Güçlü, "The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East, 1914–1920," Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, vol. 35, no. 4, 2015.
39. C. Anzalone, "Beyond Sunni and Shi'a: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East," Digest of Middle East Studies, vol. 27, no. 2, 2018.
40. L. Okar, Structuring Conflict in the Arab World, 2005.
41. M. Kamrava, "Hierarchy and Instability in the Middle East Regional Order," International Studies Journal, vol. 14, 2018.