

## **Iran Foreign Policy toward Saudi Arabia Aftermath of Arab Uprising:**

By

<sup>1</sup>Abdul Rasool, <sup>2</sup>Abdul Qadir

### **Abstract:**

*Iran and Saudi Arab are two aggressive revivals in the region. After Arab spring the blame game between the reaches at peak. Each of both countries made accountable for Arab unrest. In the course of Middle East history both the rival began to find regional proxies and covert alliance and counter alliance turned the region into more insecure zone. Arab uprising marked the region change in the region. But Saudi kings tactically tackled the issue of internal eruption. In various time from 2011 to 2013 Riyadh blamed Iran for interference of Saudi affairs. But Iran foreign office strongly rejected the claim and called such allegation as a 'diplomatic intervention'. Most notably Tehran becomes more vigilant after Arab nominal revolution. She becomes more aggressive and limited her foreign policy toward Shia countries like wise Syria and Lebanon. Iran apparently change its relations toward Sunni dominated countries in the region. On the other side Saudi makes more relations with Sunni government of the region and openly declared 'Limited relations with non-Shia Regime'. Such foreign policy approaches by both responsible countries could lead the region in a religious war. The entire Middle East was at chaos and whether to join Saudi camp or to seek refuge under Iranian umbrella. The rest of the region faced polarization, economic down turning, social unrest, poor economic growth and raising petroleum prices in the region. But Saudi and Iran could not realize the intensity of insecurities and future repercussion. War was inevitable by irresponsible foreign policy making of both and region could obviously left in an eternal war.*

---

<sup>1</sup>MPhilScholar, Department of International Relations, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

**Keywords:** Regional revivals, Blame game, Limited relations, Diplomatic intervention

**Introduction:**

Iran and kingdom of Saudi Arabia historically confronted on the point of tradition and religious rift. They have failed to formulate an environment for mutual harmony. Confrontation is the part of their diplomacy and both countries refuses to step back on the point conflict. In the veracity of that both countries are regional rival and the point of compromise would be considered as violation of sovereignty.

In such a situation the rest of region is facing the repercussions. Regional economy is getting slower and petroleum prices are hiking and even production of LNG is badly affected. Iran foreign policy addresses all regions of the world, but Iran overwhelmingly focuses on the Near East region, including on U.S. operations, allies, and activities in that region. It is the Near East where all the various components of Iran's foreign policy interact. Iran's foreign policy also seems to be directed at influencing the policies and actions of big powers affected. (Elizabeth 2011)

Foreign investment is considerably decreased and international businessmen are not taking interests in regional trade. It is notable that after Arab spring the regional economy is downed with 35% percent on concern of trade and investment. It is obviously due to Saudi and Tehran poor cooperation on economic fronts. Both countries are finding markets in region and beyond region and openly opposing each other. Such approach between two main power of the region left enormous problems for regional stability and peace. (Abi 2012)

The region aftermath of revolution becomes more insecure on line of religion and race. It was divided the region to Shia and Sunni branch of Islam and both claim to be the regional dominated populations. Hence the rift between both nations is fueling the blame game and creating imminent regional war in near future. Currently, both nations are busy to blame on regional conundrum and Saudi allege that Iran at the back of Russia brought the region in the fold of civil war. The same Iran viewed on Saudi that at the back of West and America Riyadh regime is responsible for present condition of region. (Shahram 2012)

**Arab Uprising and Foreign Policy Changes:**

The series of violence initiated from Tunis and immediately spread throughout Gulf countries. Soon the rising got much popularity and public

supports in the whole region. The first aim of uprising was to sash of monarch office to general people through election. Secondly it aims to introduce democracy in the fertile land of Arab countries. The resolution was mainly lead by youth and majority of them were unemployed. They were fed up from the menace of unemployment. (Bessema momani, Ennis Crystal 2013)

Arab resolution resultantly changes internal and external affairs of the countries in the region. The various demonstration, protests, riots, coups and civil war left the region in various problems. The public eruption soon gained access to five Arab countries likewise Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain so on. Regional turmoil badly affected regional economy and business. (Staff 2014)

Obviously the foreign policy of two rival countries were continued to change. Aftermath of revolution Saudi limited her foreign affairs with intraregional countries likewise European countries and America. But Iran being non monarch state of Middle East and had no danger of takeover and promoted regional access and got more sympathy from the rest of region. Saudi lost regional support to tackle the issue of uprising with mutual cooperation with them. Riyadh such withdrawal on regional affairs left her role less on regional scenario. But Iran mutually deals the changing situations of Middle East. (F.Salloukh 2013)

Hence Iran got much regional fame in the region on tackling combined regional issues. While Saudi isolative policies on regional enigma created many grievances on its shoulder. The regional diplomatic persuasion of Iran brought more sympathy for Tehran artistic role for vibrant remedies of regional issues. Thus Iran successfully tackled regional issues without investing single money and scored the active actor on regional issues. Since the Arab Uprisings, the two have become increasingly embroiled in proxy conflicts in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, in addition to hostility in Iraq. The attack in Iran seriously challenges Riyadh's allegation that Tehran is behind all acts of terrorism in the Middle East.

### **Iran and Saudi Conflict on Eve of Arab Revolution:**

The regional polarizations begin with the wave of numerous means violence in many countries. Obviously the division was between Iran and Saudi Arab. Saudi regime was vigilant on Arab spring and danger of buyout was possible to its traditional ruling club. Riyadh regime blames Iran for Arab conundrum and agitates regional countries against Iran. But Iran practical presence on the spot of resolution made her a responsible

regional state. Saudi diplomatic quest badly failed to find regional ally due to it's beyond regional diplomatic march. (F 2014)

Iran covertly tried to change Saudi crown elites ruling to a democratic regime. But Saudi limited regional diplomatic exchanges and could not let such influence on its internal matter. People internally were given limited liberty and poor access to modern communications and most of regional TV channels were banned to broadcast regional news. Saudi on one hand tactically refrain external trespass and Iran obtained regional proximity. The rest of regional countries relied on Tehran diplomatic dealings on their affairs. The Saudis will miscalculate if they take much solace from Trump's support for their regional policies. Regardless of what the United States does, sharply increasing the vitriol towards Iran while at the same time laying siege to fellow GCC member Qatar will likely weaken the Saudi position and what is left of an already compromised Arab political order. Intended to take Iran down a notch, these actions instead will likely strengthen Tehran's hand.

Saudi Arab becomes more violent on Iran successful diplomatic achievements toward other Gulf countries. Arab states rapidly become Iran centric on economic and political concerns. Iran supported those countries which were badly affected by revolution and supported them to crush their demonstrations and protests. While Saudi was busy on protecting its survival and its regime was at sever threat from mass uprising. It was good fate of Sheikdom of Saudi that the revolution could step in their soil. But Saudi lost diplomatic opportunities of the region to quell the uprising and many regimes were abdicated by popular elections. (Monica 2013)

#### **Iran Stance on Arab Conundrum:**

Iran viewpoint on the Arab civil war was neutral apparently. But she performed as an arbitrator between masses and regime of the respective revolutionary torn countries. Iran tactically supported Tunis masses for regime change without widespread bloodshed. Although a long number of death and casualties was caused from Arab spring. But Iran made it limited while the quashing mass violence and restrained civil war among various governments and general public. But Riyadh called 'Iran diplomacy is to control regional countries in order become sole regional power'. (Dr. 2016)

The bloodshed was the immediate consequences of Arab rising but Iran stop it with making agreement among masses and governments of

respective countries. Iran stance was always maintaining of regional peace and internal harmony. But uprising took place suddenly and lost very long. Most importantly, it was spreading throughout the region if Iran could not interfere to tackle the issue on peaceful mean. Iran offered both the protestors and regime of Libya, Syria, Egypt and other countries to adopt peaceful manner for immediate solutions of the problem. Thus the respective regimes become flexible to deal the issue according to wishes of common people. (Rene 2013)

Iran approach on the eve of Arab unrest was quit remedial toward the prevailing issues of civil war. Without Iran intervention on civil war of Arab rising could not be possible to stamp out Arab nationals strife. Iran understood the gravity of problem and made policy plan to deal the issue accordingly. Iran made three fold policies, included immediate measures to address youth issues of Arab region. Secondly Tehran regime recommended the respective government to bring reforms in education sectors and creation of jobs opportunities. Thirdly the system election to be introduce for vibrant democratic norms and principles.

#### **Iran Policy toward Saudi during 2012:**

The flexible foreign policies of Iran tackling regional civil war were poorly supported by Gulf Arab countries. More especially Saudi Arab openly opposed Iran move toward region and called at 'Regional hegemony' of Iran. But Iran policies toward Kingdom were peaceful and tried to make regional bilateral relationships. Saudi poor response could not develop brotherly relationships with each other. Tehran government offered Saudi elites to visits for mutual cooperation and more coordination. At the beginning of 2012 Iran prolong its foreign policy toward Saudi elites. From very beginning they had showed interests on the offer but later they backed out from the promise of goodly relations. (Ghadah 2014)

Some diplomatic exchanges taken from Iran side but Saudi Arab could not response appropriately. The failed diplomatic relations brought immense confusion between Iran and Saudi relationships. Iran quest many ways to formulate goodly relations with kingdom. All the Gulf countries were taken in consent by Iran for lowering regional civil war and other regional issues. Other Gulf countries also tried to soften the relationships between Saudi and Iran. Consequently all the measures were failed to bring both countries closer but they become more aggressive. Thus both countries failed to frame cooperative relations with each other.

Indeed Iran eagerly bashes to get closer with Saudi. It was the glorious year and Iran was so flexible toward Saudi. Iran offered Riyadh government for more economic and political relations. The offer was quit beneficial for both the countries and kingdom refuse to enlarge its relations with Shia dominated state. Such stance of Riyadh was so hurting for Tehran and prompts her to become more limited on its own ideology. Henceforth, in 2012 Iran compromise with its ideology and try to establish goodly relations with regional sole power.

### **Iran and Saudi from 2013 to 2015:**

On the beginning 2013 Saudi regime once again shows some keenness on relationships with Iran. But due to traditional opposition the kingdom could not formulate goodly relations. Some lower diplomatic exchanges taken place by the Saudi side but could not discussed bilateral issues openly. The limited meeting of Saudi envy could not become fruitful for bilateral relationships. Iran welcomed the diplomats wholeheartedly and gives them opportunities to discuss the issues. But both countries could not converse the prevailing issues between them accordingly. Hence the limited visits between them in initial phase of 2013.

Iran maturely sends her diplomats after Saudi envy visits. Same was expected from Saudi Arab and the representatives of Iran came back without achieving single goals. The immediate goal of visits of Iranian side was to formulate economic, political, social and cultural ties. But none of single goal was discussed between them in a result oriented means. The representatives of Iran came back without gaining single objectives. Thus diplomatic centric relations failed from poor response of both countries. "The region's strategic balance is at stake," write experts Hussein Agha and Robert Malley in the *New York Review of Books*. As a sign of alarm over a sectarian shift, Riyadh sent its troops into Bahrain to support the Sunni-minority regime, arguing that protests were orchestrated by Tehran to support the rise of Bahrain's Shia majority.

At the end of 2013 Oman and United Arab Emirate played vital role for closer ties of Iran and Saudi. But Saudi polarized policy against Tehran in regional and international front failed for formulating result oriented relations. Thus they have failed to frame goodly ties after Gulf arbitration. Additionally, Saudi and Iran become more hostile on concern of mutual relationships. The acerbic foreign polices of both nation reach at drought and could not reach at result centric. (Stenslie 2013)

At the early phase of 2014 Iran once again offer Saudi Arab for cordial bonds. But Riyadh regime could not showed keen interests on the offer. Tehran government offered for economic and cultural ties respectively. But poor response of Saudi foreign office openly negates the proposal. It was new beginning and with various hopes for regional peace and stability. The rest of Arab countries supported the move of Iran and criticize Saudi for appropriate reply.

In the mid of 2014 Saud showed some interest on making economic ties with Iran but Tehran was not in position to agree on the offer. Iran reasonably rejected the relations offer due to Saudi covert and deep rooted relations with America. Iran viewed that it may disturb internally with relations sheiks elites in the mid of 2014. The political upheavals once again initiated and hinder regional economic drawbacks. (Bank 2014)

The regional rifts grew very high and with the passage of time. In the last days of 2014 Iran openly defies Saudi and called it 'Diplomatic warfare' and cold war begin at peak. The war of words between them resultantly worsens the ties and brought 'diplomatic blockade'. The regional media called it "new cold War of 21 century" between Iran and Saudi. European media called it Diplomatic vows for the rest of region and American media termed it Iran regional hegemonies for the region. (Helia 2016)

During 2015 the relations become very friendly and offered each other for deep economic and political relationships. Some diplomatic exchange took place for trade and mutual investments. Most notably the point of religious differences between them was the headache. It was the biggest hindrance which could not let both countries for mutual relationships.

### **Saudi Military Alliance and Iran Grievances:**

Saudi military alliance formulated on 15 December 2015 with initial 34 memberships for counter terrorism policies. Iran was not offered for membership and other Muslim countries were joined for the cause of future against Muslim nations. The initial aim of alliance was to counter ISIS and other terrorist networks which were thriving against Muslim countries. But Iran called the alliance is against its security and sovereignty. (Ali 2016)

After joining of Omen in 2016 the total memberships reached to 42 and Iran called the alliance is an open aggression against its sovereignty. But it was only Pakistan that it had softened the harsh relationships between them. Pakistan Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and General

Raheel Sharif visited the both countries for addressing the contradictions and satisfy Iranian authorities that the Alliance is not against Iran and will never aims to ambush Iran. Some Iranian analysts believe that because of the Sunni-Shia divide and the geostrategic goals of Tehran and Riyadh in containing each other's regional power, easing of relations between them will not be an easy task.

But the point of difference widens and Iran cut its diplomatic ties with all countries which are the members of alliance. But Saudi Arab could not compromise on its military alliance and supported by Western countries too. Iran becomes more vigilant and porous borders on Arabian side were deployed with bunch of military forces. Saudi Arab have taken the benefits of time and criticized Iran on such approaches. But Iran was clam on the point of deployment and could not argue on the point of military parades. (Stenphenson 2013)

Iran diplomatic stagnation toward Arab countries left the region into enormous problem. The first and foremost was the regional proxies were given more funds and weapons to threaten Saudi and Iran respectively. Iran supported Shiite forces to destabilize the Sunni dominated countries. And on the side Saudi bolstered Sunni dominated militant organization against Iran. Thus region was entered in a new sort of war to counter each other through proxies and militant organization. (Fatima 2016)

### **Current Analysis:**

Iran and Saudi religious rifts is the main drawback on making cordial relationships. The card of Sunni and Shia conflict left the region in diplomatic stagnations and do not let the region to thrive diplomatically. In the veracity of fact, that both countries have enough resources to become world active player with mutual cooperation's. In the point of religion both country wanted to dominate the region. Saudi overtly protecting the cause and ideology of Sunni sect of Islam and Iran made the Shiite as the state region under its constitution. It is mandatory that the head of state of Iran should be a Shia. (Simon 2017)

Secondly, cold war soon after Iranian revolution of 1979 and continue till the date. Sometime relations become very tensed and reached at the brink of total war. But sometime they adopt the policy of truce and peaceful co-existence. From the brink of cold war between the both nations the entire region is facing enormous regional crises and economy is lowering comparatively. Gulf cold divided the region into two aggressive rival's camp which are polarized on line of culture and region. Hence, the war



inflamed the region and problems are leading more problems on regional prosperity. (Harrison 2017)

Iran nuclear program is the current headache of Saudi plutocracy and rising international objections. On the other side Iran rejected the claims are useless and there is no intension of Iran on nuclear testing. Iran argued on this claim of Saudi Iran boarder aim is energy and civil nuclear vision of Iran would benefit the rest of region. Iran gained much international support on this objection of Saudi; the IAEA, UNO, NPT, Russia, China and to some extent EU countries rejected Saudi bogus allegations. (Conor 2017)

Iran and Saudi presently have very poor relations on line of economy and the poor investment of both side affected both nations economy. It is known fact that economic interdependency is the need of both countries and beyond. But naturally both countries do not accept each other for economic dependency. Although, both countries can gain much benefits on formulating economic ties.

Although the Iran 2 percent population is Arab but majority of Iranian can speak Arabic language due to their cultural affinity and social proximity. But they are aggressively divided on line of culture and language. This division brought more gaps between them. Indeed Arab is the largest group comparatively in the region and following the Persian is the second. Arab biased approach toward Iranian birth is known to everyone and it is adopted a violent mode. (News 2016)

Presently Iran and Saudi Arab are polarized on issue of Yemen and Iran openly called Saudi Intervention is “great intervention of this decade”. Saudi Arab challenges the rift of Houthi rebellion movement and termed it “Saudi security is in question”. Secondly, Saudi Qatar conflict brought more opportunities for Iran to help Doha government regionally. In the rest of region it was only Iran which supported Qatar in the time of Diplomatic row with Gulf countries. Thirdly Saudi alleges that Iran is supporting ISIS and Bashar ul Assad regime in the backdoor. Lastly, Iran point out Saudi covert relations with Israel which is existential threat for Muslim nation in the region. (staff 2017)

### **Recommendations:**

Iran being the main player located the crossroad of Asia's three most important regions of Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia. The peace of the Middle East is directly and substantially depends upon Iran. Tehran government should open its diplomatic doors for the countries of the rest of region. It should enlarge its policies toward Gulf countries especially Saudi Arab. She should Saudi for more diplomatic relations for restraining future war.

The ISIS and other terrorist networks of the region are eternal threats for the both nation security and sovereignty. It is the need of hour for the both countries to draw plans for tackling and stamp outing these threats for the rest of region. Hence, both nations should shows on the point of eradication of terrorism in the region and beyond.

Saudi and Iran should stop to support proxies against each other. In fact, currently both countries are supporting militant groups against each other and so on. Saudi claimed that Iran is overtly supporting Hezbollah and supporting near around 100 shite organizations directly or otherwise. On the other hand Saudi enlarges its support to Jundullah of Malik reki group of Iran claimed to be Sunni dominated factions. Such support and counter support to be strictly stop for future collision.

Saudi and Iran should open diplomatic relations on the point of Yemen issue. Riyadh regime should avoid further military measures against Shia group of Houthi. They should with the consent of Yemeni authorities, Houthi leaders and other regional actors to talk the issue on peaceful settlement.

Both country should draw a collectively plan for regional economy and politics. It is need of time for the each country to respect each other ideology and culture. Thirdly, Iran should avoid further nuclear tests for regional peace. They should develop the concept of peaceful co-existence, respect of mutual regional and international interests and provide equal opportunities of development and prosperity.

**Conclusion:**

Iran porous border with Iraq left it vigilant for internal peace problem. But Tehran tactically brought a Shiite regime in Bagdad. This becomes a question of insecurity for Gulf countries and Saudi elites on Shiite government of Sunni populated country. Iran raised same question of Bahrain which is approximately majority are Shia. So the question becomes balance and Saudi regime could not reason raise this question again. In fact, Iran not used Iraqi regime for its single purpose.

Saudi future quest is to maintain Sunni status quo in part of Arabian region including Iraq. It may create another uncertainty for the rest of region. It is the need of time for maintaining balance of power among each other to not interfere on the affairs of other nations in the region. The policy of non-intervention and safeguard of each other sovereignty is immediate requirement for Iran and Saudi Arab.

Thus, both nations are being the main actor of the region and have stronger economies comparatively to other countries of region. This is responsibility of both nations to formulate closer ties for the sake of regional protection from war within and beyond. Hence, security and regional rift among the nation is in several threats.

**References:**

- Abi, Mohammad Habib. "Saudi seek to formal army to Syria rebels." *The wall street journal* , 2012: 09-.
- Ali, Omidi. "Five reasons why Iran and Saudi conflict exists." *Al Monitor*, 2016: 16.
- Bank, World. *Iran: country at glance* . General, Newyork: The World Bank publisher, 2014.
- Bessema momani, Ennis Crystal. "Shaping the Middle East in the midst of the Arab uprising Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies ." *Third world Quarterly*, 2013: 04.
- Conor, Tom. "Iran threatens to destroy Isreal Tel Aviv but Gulf Arab appear closer to former foe." *Newsweek*, 2017: 33.
- Dr., Dimmt Riaz. *Crises in Iran and Saudi Arabia relations*. Tehran: Tehran university economic policy center, 2016.
- Elizabeth, Iskander. *Arab-Iranian relations:Discourse of conflict and cooperation*. London: London school of economics and political science, 2011.
- F, Gause Gregory. "Beyond sectarianism; the new middle east cold war." *Bookings Doha center analysis* , 2014: 23.
- F.Salloukh, Basse. "The Arab uprising and politics of Middle East." *The international spectator*, 2013: 23.
- Fatima, Raza. "Tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia relations and future prospects." *Institute of strategic studies*, 2016: 12.
- Ghadah, Alghanaim. *Conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran;an examination of factors inhibitating rules in Middle East*. Newyork: Nova Southeastern university, 2014.
- Harrison, Ross. "Saudi Arabia is weakening itself and strengthening Iran ." *EP*, 2017: 15.
- Helia, Ighani. "Managing the Saudi Iran rivalry." *Council of foreign relations*, 2016: 17.

- Monica, Marks. *Reconstructing Libya; stability through national reconciliation* . Doha: Brookings Doha center analysis, 2013.
- News, B.B.C. "Saudi Arabia allies Bahrain, Sudan, and UAE act against Iran." *B.B.C*, 2016.
- Rene, Reiger. *In search of stability Saudi Arabia and the Arab and the Arab spring*. Ankara: Gulf research center, 2013.
- Shahram, Chubin. "Iran and the Arab spring, ascendancy frustrated ." *CRS Gulf paper*, 2012: 11.
- Simon, Mobon. "Iran Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: A tangled web of politics and terror." *CNN*, 2017: 4.
- staff, Egypt today. "Egypt relations with Iran depend on Arab national security." *Egypt today journal* , 2017: 18.
- Staff, Reuter. "Timelines: History of turbulent Saudi Iranian ties." *Reuter* , 2014: 16.
- Stephenson, Fones. *A history of U.S sanctions against Iran*. Washington : U.S foreign policy research center, 2013.
- Stenslie. *Not too strong, not too weak Saudi Arabia policy toward Yemen*. Riyadh: NOREF policy brief, 2013.