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Dynamics of Power of Political Alliances and Proxy Conflicts in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT:- *This research examines political alliances in the Middle East, focusing on internal dynamics, external influences, and non-state actors. It explores how alliances form in response to regional conflicts, economic dependencies, and domestic politics, emphasizing proxy wars and external interventions. Traditional theories highlight external threats, but this study emphasizes the role of internal dynamics and non-state actors. The Arab Spring disrupted regional alliances, while proxy wars in Syria and Yemen illustrate how Iran and Saudi Arabia leverage non-state actors to advance their interests. The normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states reflect shared concerns over Iran, while the Israeli-Hamas conflict shows how intra-regional disputes strain emerging alliances. The research aims to provide insights into how shifting alliances impact regional stability and future cooperation in a fragmented Middle East by analyzing these dynamics.*

Keywords: Middle Eastern Alliances; Proxy Wars; Non-State Actors; Arab Spring; Israel-Hamas Conflict

I. INTRODUCTION

Political alliances are shaped by common interests such as security, economic cooperation, regional identity, and shared values, serving as mechanisms to address complex political challenges (Zhang, 2024). These alliances, operating within specific ideological frameworks, shape policies, operations, and the perceptions and priorities of their members and the wider audience (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Ideological alignment promotes cooperation and solidarity, although navigating ideological differences poses significant challenges. These challenges become more complex when alliances include states or entities with diverse cultural, religious, and historical backgrounds, as ideological disagreements or leadership changes can strain alliance cohesion, requiring robust conflict resolution mechanisms (Gause, 2019). This trend is particularly evident in the Middle East, a region characterized by rapid shifts in alliances driven by both geopolitical and sectarian factors. The rise of non-state actors and the expanding influence of Iran have spurred new rivalries and reshaped existing alliances (Porter, 2017).

The evolving dynamics of international politics have shifted attention toward regional powers, whose influence is distinct from that of traditional global powers. As the global economy transforms, strategic alliances have the potential to guide the world through this transition, fostering sustainable peace and development. However, in the Middle East, external powers such as the United States, Russia, and China play essential roles in shaping the region's geopolitical landscape through military and diplomatic interventions. These external influences have catalyzed cooperation between historically opposed states, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, underscoring how shared security concerns can transform diplomatic relations. However, as Diane and Zorri (2023) explain, the continuance conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran significantly influences the global world order.

This research examines the fluidity of political alliances in the Middle East, particularly in the context of regional instability and evolving power dynamics. It explores how geopolitical shifts, ideological divisions, and external interventions shape the formation and dissolution of regional alliances. The research seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of how regional actors and external powers navigate their interests in the volatile political landscape of the Middle East. The study aims to identify mechanisms for maintaining alliance cohesion and mitigating ideological conflicts, which could provide insights for future peace-building efforts and regional stability.

Theoretical Approach

Political alliances are a central feature of political dynamics, representing coalitions formed among individuals or groups that share common traits, identities, or interests. These alliances are often shaped by political ideologies, socioeconomic status, cultural background, ethnicity, religion, or specific policy objectives (Zajak & Haunss, 2021). Forming alliances allows countries to pool resources and leverage collective influence, increasing their potential to achieve desired political outcomes. This concept is particularly relevant when examining alliances in the Middle East, where political and military coalitions often reflect deep-seated religious or ethnic divisions (Khan & Zhaoying, 2020). These boundaries reinforce a sense of "us versus them" within groups, strengthening internal cohesion and intensifying external conflicts. In the context of proxy wars and political alliances in the Middle East, these exclusive alliances can deepen sectarianism and perpetuate violence. Groups with a common identity, such as religious or ethnic solidarity, may justify their actions based on a perceived need to protect their in-group, further marginalizing or attacking those outside their identity boundaries. However, as Brehony (2020) shows, these groups' cultural and identity-based solidarity creates alliances that continue to shape the region's political landscape and contribute to ongoing conflicts with no end. Shared ideological values influence society by promoting unity, guiding behavior, and shaping institutions. While these values face challenges in an increasingly polarized world, they remain essential for maintaining social cohesion and fostering international cooperation. International relations theory provides insight into how ideological values affect global governance. Liberal internationalism, as espoused by scholars such as Ikenberry (2018) and Reus-Smit (2013), emphasizes the role of shared norms and institutions in promoting peace and cooperation. While critics argue that liberalism has weakened in the face of rising nationalism and populism, others assert that the coordinated response to crises, such as the European Union's support for Ukraine (Nissen & Dreyer, 2024), demonstrates the resilience of shared ideologies in shaping international relations.

In classical international relations theory, alliances are formed to counterbalance a powerful state or respond to external threats. However, in the Middle East, these alliances are complicated by varying domestic political systems - democracies, autocracies, monarchies - and by the role of non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and various militias. These non-state actors often serve as extensions of state power or disrupt the traditional state-centric model of alliances. As Kausch (2017) argues, these proxies create instability and act as tools for regional powers, necessitating future military and diplomatic policies to address state-level actors and these influential non-state entities. He argues that proxies, or non-state actors supported by regional powers, play a significant role in creating instability in the Middle East. These proxies serve as tools for advancing the geopolitical interests of powerful states, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, without directly engaging in military conflicts. This strategy allows state actors to influence outcomes in regional conflicts while minimizing their costs and risks.

This argument is relevant to the research on political alliances and proxy conflicts in the Middle East. Proxy groups, whether militias, political movements, or terrorist organizations, act as extensions of state power, allowing countries like Iran to exert influence in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen through groups like Hezbollah and the Houthis. Ghorbani (2021) explains the broader impact of the indirect conflict executed through proxies, arguing that the involvement of proxies deepens instability and conflicts, prolongs violence, and complicates diplomatic resolutions.

Analyzing the motivations and strategies behind political alliances in the Middle East becomes essential as the region continues to navigate a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. This research explores the multifaceted nature of these alliances, examining how historical contexts, domestic considerations, and external interventions shape the region's political dynamics. By analyzing these developments and their implications for regional stability, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay of forces that define Middle Eastern politics today.

This study explores how shared ideological values influence political, cultural, and social dynamics across various contexts. It covers political alliances, religious movements, and social organizations, providing concrete examples of how ideologies drive cohesion and division. The alliances show how ideological values are translated into practical policy measures, fostering economic integration, security cooperation, and international norms. The study will also explore the complexities of managing alliances with diverse ideological perspectives where member nations have differing stances on global issues. This analysis aims to contribute to the academic understanding of how shared ideologies shape political alliances and broader societal structures, offering insights into ideology's unifying and divisive potential in global and regional contexts. While mainstream approaches focus on factors like the balance of power, external threats, and identity politics, this paper emphasizes the need for a broader perspective.

Shared Ideological Values

Traditional state security concerns, domestic political considerations, economic dependencies, and the rise of influential non-state actors shape alliances in the Middle East. The complex interplay of ideologies, state structures, and regional dynamics influences how states navigate alliances and manage relations with other

powers. Analyzing the Middle East's regional security landscape and global alliances reveals that strategies for managing interstate relations depend on a state's power, governance system, and threat environment.

A longitudinal analysis of political alliances in the Middle East is essential for understanding Historical events, such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which significantly reshaped alliances and set the stage for contemporary political dynamics. The revolution resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which altered the balance of power in the region and led to a realignment of alliances. Divsallar and Azizi (2023) explain that after the 1979 revolution, Iran's approach to security assistance shifted significantly. Initially characterized by fragmented and ideologically motivated support for various Islamic movements, it gradually became a central component of Iran's national security strategy. This evolution reflects a transition from a revolutionary zeal in exporting its ideology to a more structured and strategic use of security assistance to influence regional power dynamics and safeguard Iran's national interests.

Following the revolution, Iran's shift toward a more radical Islamic ideology prompted Sunni-majority countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, to form counter-alliances aimed at containing Iranian influence. The U.S. support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) exemplified how historical events influenced alliances and set the stage for ongoing regional rivalries. Kamrava (2011) argues that the aftermath of the revolution created a "security dilemma" for Gulf states, pushing them toward increased military expenditures and strategic partnerships with Western powers. This rivalry led to proxy conflicts, such as the civil wars in Yemen and Syria, where Iran and Saudi Arabia back opposing sides (Nasr, 2018).

The Gulf War (1990-1991) and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 further complicated alliances in the region. These events fostered a perception of American hegemony that some countries embraced while others resisted, leading to further fragmentation and shifting allegiances. The rise of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS can be traced back to these historical events, as the power vacuum in Iraq and the Syrian civil war created fertile ground for extremism (Prezelj & Zalokar, 2023).

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring revolutions were watershed moments that altered the security landscape of the region. The Gulf monarchies, particularly those in the GCC, have since focused on countering perceived threats from both state and non-state actors, including Iran and groups like ISIS. As Zorri (2023) discusses, the Gulf states have consistently relied on alliances with external superpowers to ensure their security, underscoring the interdependence of regional and global actors in shaping Middle Eastern alliances. However, as Priya (2024) suggests, while the GCC was established initially to foster regional cooperation, its countries have recognized that securing economic interests is paramount. Thus, the foreign policy behavior of the GCC members is changing, as its countries are embracing discussion and diplomacy rather than focusing on contention and opposition (Tsalikis & Pedi, 2024).

The 2011 Arab Spring uprisings further transformed the Middle East's political landscape. While initially promising reforms, they often led to increased instability, civil wars, and authoritarian crackdowns, especially in Syria, Yemen, and Libya. These conflicts attracted regional and global actors, exacerbating sectarian divides and resulting in humanitarian crises and mass displacement (Lynch, 2016). The long-term effects of these uprisings are seen in how new alliances and rivalries have emerged, often based on sectarian and ideological divides.

The region's political ideologies are diverse and influential. Islamism remains a potent force, as seen in the rise of groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia. At the same time, radical movements pursue a more extreme version of political Islam. Conversely, secularism and liberal reformist ideologies, though challenged, continue to shape political debates in countries like Tunisia (Hamid, 2016). Meanwhile, authoritarianism, often justified by narratives of stability and security, remains entrenched in many countries, using repression to maintain power (Brownlee, 2017).

The normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab states, particularly those established through the Abraham Accords in 2020, represent a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape. These agreements have prompted a reevaluation of traditional alliances as countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain seek closer ties with Israel to address mutual concerns regarding Iranian influence and regional instability (Vakil & Quilliam, 2023). For instance, the UAE's normalization with Israel reflects a pragmatic approach to security and economic cooperation, aligning both nations against common threats from Iran and non-state actors. Suhail (2024) explains that moderate Arab countries, to the convenience of their national interests, normalized diplomatic relations with Israel and have facilitated economic collaboration and technology transfer - creating a platform for intelligence-sharing and joint military exercises, thus redefining regional security dynamics.

The reaction of Iran and its proxies to the normalizing of diplomatic links between Israel and its new allies was evident in the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas on Israel. The attack referred to as "Operation Al-Aqsa Storm," and the subsequent war between Israel and Hamas highlight the broader regional tensions and the complexities of international law concerning the use of force. The attack involved a coordinated and multi-pronged assault from the Gaza Strip, causing significant casualties, infrastructure damage, and captives. Israel's

immediate military response was extensive, marking a new phase in the Israel-Palestine conflict. According to Mohammadi et al. (2024), Hamas is designated as a terrorist organization by Israel and Western states, and Israel frames its response as self-defense, a right enshrined in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Following this attack, Israel went to war against Hamas in Gaza, calling it the Iron Swords War, with the intent of collapsing its military power and governing rule, freeing hostages, and controlling the Gaza Strip. After clearing Hamas militants from its territory, the Israeli army conducted an extensive aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip, followed by a large-scale ground attack.

Iran's Expanding Influence

These developments reflect changing dynamics and challenge regional cooperation, revealing the intricate interplay between historical legacies, national interests, and external influences. They challenge longstanding narratives about Arab solidarity and the Palestinian cause, as some Arab states prioritize national interests over traditional support for Palestinian statehood. This has led to criticisms from various regional factions, highlighting how normalization can further complicate existing alliances. Khalidi (2020) argues that such shifts can destabilize established political coalitions and increase tensions among those marginalized by the new alignments. Nevertheless, the Israel-Iran conflict remains one of the Middle East's most significant and complex geopolitical rivalries. Rooted in ideological differences and strategic concerns, particularly over nuclear weapons and regional dominance, this conflict has played out through confrontations, proxy wars, and cyber operations. It has also influenced regional alliances and will likely continue to shape the broader dynamics of the Middle East for years to come. Rezaei (2018) explains that Iran strongly supports its proxies in the broader region with financial and military means.

The war in Yemen has shifted the dynamics of the Iran-Houthi partnership, illustrating how Iran has effectively leveraged the conflict to expand its influence in the region. Since 2015, Iran has offered low-cost but impactful support to the Houthis, primarily to counter Saudi Arabia's influence. This strategy mirrors Iran's broader regional tactics, which involve supporting non-state actors to destabilize its adversaries (Juneau, 2021). However, it is crucial to note that the Houthis are not merely proxies for Iran. While Iran's assistance has strengthened the Houthis, it has also opportunistically benefited from the Houthis' independent successes. This relationship highlights how Iran strategically "bandwagons" on the achievements of aligned groups to bolster its influence without bearing the total costs of engagement (Juneau, 2020).

For Iran, this partnership entangles Saudi Arabia in a protracted and expensive conflict, weakening its regional rival. Iran's backing of the Houthis includes weapons supplies, military training, and financial assistance, which has notably increased in both scale and sophistication over the years. The partnership also reflects broader patterns in Iranian foreign policy. It supports a constellation of revisionist actors across the Middle East to challenge the established order and further its geopolitical goals (Eisenstadt, 2021).

This strategy aligns with Iran's historical role of using indirect, asymmetric warfare to undermine stronger adversaries and influence key geopolitical theaters, as seen in Lebanon with Hezbollah and in Syria. The Iran-Houthi relationship serves as a broader reflection of Iran's approach to engaging in regional conflicts, where it seeks to shift the balance of power at minimal cost to itself while maximizing its strategic gains. Khan and Zhaoying (2020) argue that Iran is interfering in every country in the region, conducting multiple proxy wars. In the case of Yemen, Brehony (2020) argues that it represents an advantageous opportunity for Iran to undermine Saudi interests at minimal cost and risk while creating a broader regional power struggle between the two. The Houthi movement and al-Qaeda gained considerable influence over Yemen's domestic policies (Porter, 2017), creating a complex web of political, historical, and socioeconomic cleavages, collectively leading the nation to collapse (Ghorbani, 2021). In addition to these sociopolitical factors, Yemen's authoritarian political environment played a significant role in fostering the growth of Islamist revolutionary movements (Perkings, 2017).

The partnership's success has had significant consequences, including prolonging the war, increasing regional instability, and complicating peace efforts. It underscores the challenges of countering Iran's influence in the region as it continues to build relationships with non-state actors that serve its long-term strategic interests (Juneau, 2020). Del Sarto et al. (2024) maintain that regional organizations in the Middle East, most notably the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, failed to advance any durable regional cooperation despite an initial period of bold activism.

Davoudpour (2024) demonstrates the Iranian outlook on the nature of the Middle East. He argues that the Middle East's political fragmentation, despite its historical and cultural unity, is mainly due to a combination of sectarian divides, colonial legacies, and modern nationalist movements. This tension between shared cultural identity and political division is central to understanding the region's ongoing instability. As further explained by Elham (2023), the Sunni-Shia divide is one of the most critical fractures in the Middle East, and the split into Sunni and Shia factions has deeply influenced politics, particularly in countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, fueled by competing visions for regional dominance, continues to define much of the region's conflicts and alliances. The fluidity of these alliances, often shaped by historical grievances and strategic interests, reflects Middle Eastern politics' complex and dynamic nature. This divide continues to fuel conflicts and has regional power implications, with countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran supporting opposing sides in proxy wars across the region (Wehrey, 2018). Davoudpour (2024a) argues that the genetic and cultural similarities across the Middle Eastern countries are disrupted by internal, external, and terrorist challenges, as has been evident with an ongoing crisis in Gaza. As Takeyh (2009) explained, Iran has sought to expand its influence through Islamic internationalism, which paradoxically unites and divides the region. The Shia-Sunni divide, which is central to Iran's political strategy, has further deepened the sectarian rift in the region, preventing the emergence of a unified Middle Eastern identity. Additionally, Iran's use of proxy groups in countries like Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq exemplifies how modern political strategies exploit historical sectarian divisions to further national interests (Wehrey, 2018).

Iran is expanding its influence through the cultivation of militant networks in countries like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. As Afshon (2018) explains, Iran's success in maintaining these alliances depends on aligning religious and geopolitical interests, particularly when these interests share Iran's interpretation of Shi'a Islam. As Conners (2024) explains, Iran's ability to leverage these relationships for strategic gains continues to challenge the stability of the GCC and its leadership, particularly Saudi Arabia.

Instability within the Gulf Cooperation Council

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have historically maintained robust economic and political ties with the United States, benefiting from close cooperation on energy, trade, and security matters. However, this relationship has faced significant strain in recent years, driven by growing geopolitical challenges, policy divergences, and a shifting global landscape. The internal dynamics of the Gulf region, including the ongoing conflicts in Yemen and Syria, have further compounded these tensions, allowing other international actors such as Iran, Russia, and China to expand their influence.

The instability within the GCC itself, marked by strained relations between member states, has undermined its ability to present a unified front in addressing regional challenges. Del Sarto and Soler (2024) highlight the failure of regional organizations like the Arab League and the GCC to maintain durable cooperation despite initial efforts towards activism and integration. The entrance of non-Arab entities, such as Iran and non-state actors, has further fragmented the region, making it challenging to sustain collective political and economic objectives.

Economic factors also play a crucial role in shaping alliances. The region's oil and natural gas wealth has made energy resources a central driver of alliance formation. For instance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states rely heavily on oil exports, shaping their alliances with superpowers such as the United States, China, and Russia. The international oil market links Middle Eastern states economically with these superpowers, reinforcing strategic partnerships through trade and investments. Berni (2023) explains that the changing regional security perceptions of the regional actors based on diplomatic maneuvers awakened Saudi Arabia to invest in building soft power apart from the religious leadership in the Muslim world.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 significantly transforms its domestic and foreign policy. It represents an ambitious, transformative economic and social reform initiative to decrease Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil revenue while fostering a dynamic public sector and increasing international investment (Almakaty, 2024). The strategic reforms under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, particularly the Public Investment Fund's (PIF) restructuring, reflect a shift toward broader economic diversification and external investments. The PIF is responsible for overseas investments to build strategic alliances, increase regional influence, and secure economic diversification beyond oil.

As Guzansky (2021) explains, the expanding cooperation between Israel and Gulf states is tied to these countries viewing Iran as a shared threat. Through the normalization with Israel, Saudi Arabia's focus on economic partnerships aligns with its broader goals under Vision 2030, aiming to diversify the economy and reduce reliance on oil exports. According to the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia (2021), one main objective is establishing strategic economic partnerships, which helps Saudi Arabia build international alliances. Regional alliances have shifted with the realignment of Israel and some Arab states, mainly through the Abraham Accords. These accords, which normalized relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, and later Morocco and Sudan, represent a major geopolitical shift in the region. As Berman (2021) notes, these alliances are partly a response to the shared perception of Iran as a regional threat, with Gulf states aligning more closely with Israel to counterbalance Iranian influence. However, this shift weakens Iran's position in the region, as it has long sought to exploit the Arab-Israeli divide. With several Arab countries now normalizing relations with Israel, Iran's traditional rhetoric of "resistance" against Israel has lost some of its potency. Iran responded by doubling down on its proxy relationships and attempting to create a "Shi'a Crescent" of influence across Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, further intensifying the Israel-Iran proxy conflict.

Shifts in regional alliances, such as the Abraham Accords, reflect new opportunities for cooperation between Israel and Arab states like the UAE and Bahrain. These agreements, which signal a pragmatic shift away from old hostilities, are primarily driven by mutual concerns over Iran's growing regional influence and the threat posed by Islamist extremist groups (Lynch, 2022). As a result of these developments, in the last decade, the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has profoundly influenced their bilateral relations and shaped the perceptions of Saudi Arabia within Iran. Alsulami (2024) argues that a discernible trend has emerged within Iran, suggesting a belief that Saudi Arabia has effectively leveraged various international relationships to advance its national interests. This rivalry has manifested in various ways, with Iranian official discourse historically portraying Saudi Arabia negatively. However, recent developments, particularly the significant strides made under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, have shifted this narrative. Saudi Arabia's development model has garnered attention in the region and globally, placing the kingdom in a prominent position both regionally and internationally. This transformation has had notable repercussions within Iran, where many elites and a broader segment of the public have acknowledged the progress made by Saudi Arabia.
The rivalry between these two regional powers, as explained by Vatanka (2021), has consistently shaped public opinion and policy discourse in both countries. Saudi Arabia's reforms, particularly those related to women's rights, such as granting women the right to drive and access public spaces, have resonated with Iranian women and youth. This starkly contrasts Iran's domestic policies, which have often curtailed such freedoms, leading to discontent among the Iranian populace (Wehrey, 2018).

Saudi Arabia's crackdown on extremism and promotion of a more moderate form of religious discourse have also exerted pressure on Iran, particularly among its religious establishment. This shift has required Iranian clerics and institutions to adjust their rhetoric, aligning it more closely with Saudi Arabia's rationalized approach. In turn, this has undermined the traditional narrative within Iran, which has long framed Saudi Arabia as an adversary, particularly on ideological and sectarian grounds (Azizi, 2022). The comparison between the living conditions in the two countries has intensified public debates in Iran. While Saudi Arabia has surged forward with economic diversification, infrastructure development, and social reforms under Vision 2030, Iran has faced worsening economic conditions due to international sanctions, political isolation, and internal mismanagement. This disparity has further fueled dissatisfaction among Iranians, many of whom look to Saudi Arabia's progress as a model for potential reforms within their own country (Katzman, 2023).

The Conflict between Israel and Iran

The October 7 attack has broader implications for Middle Eastern power dynamics. Iran's support for Hamas raises concerns about proxy warfare, with regional actors using non-state groups to exert influence. Gerges (2019) noted the role of regional powers in supporting militant groups to further their geopolitical interests, emphasizing how this fuels conflict in contested areas like Israel and Gaza. He argues that the proxy dynamics involving Iran, Israel, and other regional powers demonstrate how local conflicts can quickly escalate into broader geopolitical confrontations. Hoffman (2006) argues that non-state actors, particularly terrorist organizations, can often punch above their weight regarding their ability to influence policy and provoke large-scale military responses. Khalidi (2020) explored how such flare-ups reflect underlying unresolved issues, such as the status of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Indyk (2021) argued that sudden escalations in violence can destabilize regional cooperation efforts. According to Khalidi (2020), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains at the core of Middle Eastern instability, and each escalation serves as a reminder of the unresolved tensions around issues such as territorial disputes, the right of return, and the blockade of Gaza.
The war between Israel and Hamas that followed the attack has important implications for regional and international relations (Farber, 2024). This conflict carries profound historical, political, and security relevance, prompted by the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The war represents one of the deadliest and most intense escalations in the ongoing conflict. Moreover, non-state actors like Hamas significantly challenge state sovereignty and shape regional security dynamics (Kravetz, 2024). It further demonstrates Hamas' influence not only in Gaza but also in its capacity to disrupt Israeli security and force broader regional responses involving neighboring countries and global powers. Iran's support for Hamas, alongside Hezbollah's increasing involvement from Lebanon, establishes the evolution of Iran's 'Resistance Geopolitics,' suggesting that the conflict is not isolated but intertwined with broader regional rivalries (Saraswat, 2024).

Iran plays a crucial role in the Israel-Hamas war and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East through its support of various proxy groups. By providing financial, military, and logistical support, Iran seeks to maintain influence over non-state actors that challenge Israel directly. Iran's relationship with Hamas and Hezbollah is part of its broader strategy to extend its "axis of resistance," a term used to describe its network of allies and proxies that oppose Israel and the U.S. in the region (Friedman, 2022). Oluwashakin and Aboyade (2024) argue that Iran views support for Hamas and Hezbollah as central to its national security strategy, which includes deterring Israel and projecting power throughout the Middle East. Suhail (2024) explains that Iran's

backing of these groups allows it to engage in asymmetric warfare, exert influence in neighboring countries, and avoid confrontation with Israel while still maintaining a presence in regional conflicts.

According to the Iranian outlook, as Bakr (2024) explained, Operation Al-Aqsa Flood was not a spur-of-the-moment action by Hamas. He argues that it was meticulously planned with strategic support, which marked a significant shift in the conflict between Hamas and Israel. He explains that the attack, unprecedented in its scale and surprise factor, has drastically shifted the dynamics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, creating a new phase in the geopolitical landscape. This event underscored the significant influence Iran wields in the region, mainly through its proxies, and has raised critical discussions about Iran's involvement in backing militant groups like Hamas.

In contrast, as explained by Barnea (2024), the continuing violent conflict results from Iran's support to Hamas and other Palestinian factions, providing both financial aid and military resources. This support has facilitated the development of Hamas' military capabilities, such as their use of rockets and other advanced weaponry. Iran's influence extends beyond Gaza, with its network of proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon (Hezbollah), and Yemen (Houthis). While Iran may not have directly coordinated Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, it sought to capitalize on the aftermath, utilizing the conflict to strengthen its regional positioning.

Bakr (2024) explains that Operation Al-Aqsa Flood shed light on the intricate conflict dynamics involving Iran and its regional proxies. He acknowledges that Iran utilized Operation Al-Aqsa Flood as a platform to amplify its criticisms against nations that normalized ties with Israel, particularly after the Abraham Accords and the normalization with Saudi Arabia. In analyzing the implications of the conflict, Bakr maintains that the dynamics of Iran's influence and its relationship with Hamas are evolving amidst ongoing conflict and geopolitical shifts. While Israel's military strategies, including targeted assassinations and strikes against Hamas and its affiliated factions, aim to neutralize threats, the implications for Iran could be profound. He argues that if Israel succeeds in significantly diminishing Hamas's operational capacity, Iran may lose a critical ally in its broader confrontation with Israel, thus reducing its leverage in the Palestinian arena.

Bakr explains that Iran's connections with factions like Hamas are viewed as vital instruments for asserting influence and pressure against Israel and its allies. As Israel ramps up its efforts to neutralize these factions, Iran's capacity to leverage these relationships may diminish. Following the Gaza operations, Israel is anticipated to expand its military focus to include operations targeting the Syrian regime and Hezbollah, as well as initiating discussions aimed at destabilizing the Syrian government, which has indirect ties to the conflict (Samudzi, 2024). This potential expansion of conflict zones underscores Iran's precarious position, as it must navigate both internal and external pressures on its influence in the region.

Bakr further explains that Iran's strategy of employing proxy forces across the Middle East, while effective, could face challenges if Israel intensifies its military responses. Israeli intelligence reports have highlighted the usage of routes across the Iraqi-Syrian border by Iran for transferring weapons and resources to Hamas. However, Bakr maintains that if Israel decides to undertake operations to disrupt these supply lines, the efficacy of Iran's proxy strategy could be severely compromised, leading to a decreased ability to exert its influence.

Conclusion

The alliance-making policies in the Middle East reflect a complex interplay between state actors, non-state actors, economic interests, and external interventions. The region's geopolitical dynamics cannot be fully understood through traditional models alone. Instead, we must consider the multifaceted political, economic, and ideological interactions that shape alliances in a region where non-state actors and global superpowers play significant roles. The evolving nature of these alliances suggests that future scholarship must continue incorporating these diverse variables in explaining Middle Eastern alliances.

The political alliances in the Middle East are characterized by a complex interplay of historical rivalries, sectarian divisions, and the influence of external powers. The emergence of proxy conflicts has intensified regional tensions, as seen in the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars, where various factions receive backing from regional and global actors. This has led to a fluid geopolitical landscape where alliances constantly evolve in response to emerging threats and opportunities.

The normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states through the Abraham Accords exemplifies a significant shift in regional dynamics, driven by shared concerns over Iran and Islamist extremism. This development underscores the importance of pragmatic diplomacy in addressing shared security challenges, even as underlying hostilities persist. Non-state actors are significant players in shaping alliances and conflicts, complicating the political landscape. Their involvement reflects the ambitions of state sponsors to further sectarian divides, which forces global alliances to play a critical role in shaping the course and response to the conflict.

Iran's influence in the region is a significant driver of political realignment, particularly among Sunni-majority states seeking to counterbalance its power. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is central to

much of the political maneuvering in the region, shaping alliances along sectarian lines, with Sunni-led coalitions opposing Iran's Shia-oriented policies. Iran's expanding influence has dramatically reshaped the region's geopolitical dynamics. By supporting proxies and allies in countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, Iran has established itself as a dominant force through various Shia militias. This network of proxies has allowed Iran to project power and extend its influence beyond its borders, creating strategic buffers and gaining leverage over regional rivals. However, Iran's actions have intensified sectarian tensions, especially with Sunni-majority nations like Saudi Arabia, which see Iran's rise as a direct threat.

The war between Israel and Hamas underscores the enduring and complex nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It reveals the power of non-state actors to destabilize regions, the fragility of peace agreements, and the challenges international diplomacy faces in addressing protracted conflicts. Iran's role in the Israel-Hamas war underscores the centrality of its proxy relationships to its regional strategy. By supporting Hamas and Hezbollah, Iran challenges Israel's security and seeks to enhance its influence throughout the Middle East. This demonstrates that the ongoing conflict in Gaza is not only a localized struggle but part of a multi-faceted geopolitical competition in which Iran's proxies play a critical role.

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