



Implications of the Normalization of Diplomatic Relations Between Saudi Arabia and Iran for the Stability of the Middle East Region in 2023

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Abstract. The Middle East region has a complex security constellation. Saudi Arabia and Iran are countries in the Middle East that have great influence in a region with ideological differences. The differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran have led to hostility that has lasted for decades. Saudi Arabia and Iran experienced a severance of diplomatic relations in 2016 and succeeded in re-approach in 2023. The sectarian and proxy conflicts played by Saudi Arabia and Iran in the region made countries in the region vulnerable to threats, so with the implementation of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two then the prospects for stability in the Middle East Region can be realized. This Research uses the Regional Security Complex Theory to analyze the implications of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the stability of the Middle East Region in 2023. Researchers used qualitative research methods with a descriptive approach. The data collection technique used is a literature study using primary and secondary data sources. Saudi Arabia and Iran have a relationship with a pattern of hostility or enmity. Sectarian and proxy conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran occur in Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon. The Normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran has implications for reducing conflict tensions, restoring and strengthening relations between countries in the region, and realizing a solid regional security dialogue.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Middle East, Regional Security Complex

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is a region of strategic value both geographically, socially, and politically. The rampant conflicts that have occurred over a long period have caused tension between countries in the Middle East Region. One of the causes of the vulnerability of conflict in this region is the opportunistic, pragmatic, and even selfish attitudes of the Middle Eastern people and even their leaders who continue to cause conflict and seem to be allowed to continue [1]. Conflicts with low to high intensity have occurred in the Middle East region throughout time. The dynamics of the Middle East political constellation that is currently occurring are an impact of the process of upheaval from time to time. The legacy of this upheaval can still be found today in various conflicts, both from a movement that is ridden by the interests of a country or group in the region to being ridden by actors outside the region. The element of interest that is the basis of the main conflict in this region is the conflict between ideologies, namely sectarianism between Sunnis and Shias. Ideological conflicts can last a long time because there are actors who defend and fight for them, in this case, Saudi Arabia which represents Sunni, and Iran with Shia. Saudi Arabia and Iran are countries that have great influence both inside and outside the region. By carrying different ideologies, the potential for conflict

arising from both is inevitable and even causes tension in the region at large.

Ideology is an important way for Saudi Arabia and Iran to strengthen their influence which can be achieved through economic, political, cultural, educational, and even war approaches [2]. In general, the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran began after the Islamic Republic of Iran Revolution in 1979. The First Gulf War, namely the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, was the first tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran where in that war Saudi Arabia intervened to protect Iraq from the rise of Shia. Saudi Arabia in this case also invited other Gulf countries to provide support to Iraq. Iran condemned the action until finally, tension arose in the form of retaliatory actions which led to the severance of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Saudi Arabia and Iran continue to experience fluctuations in conflict, the next peak of tension between the two countries occurred in 2016 which ended with the severance of diplomatic relations. The severance of diplomatic relations between the two occurred after Saudi Arabia executed Sheikh Nimr Al-Nimr, a Shia cleric, and was retaliated by attacks by Iranian demonstrators on the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Tehran and its Consulate in Mashhad [3]. The Saudi Arabia-Iran dispute raises concerns for the Middle East region because it could encourage the escalation of conflict in the region. The tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran have forced both of them to engage in proxy wars within the region. The Saudi Arabia-Iran proxy war occurred in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen [4]. The severance of diplomatic relations lasted for seven and a half years, during which time conflicts between the two countries continued to emerge and even had an impact on other countries in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran in this case took further steps in severing commercial relations, calls for a boycott of Iranian products were emphasized by Saudi Arabia and the countries that support it, while Iran announced a ban on imports from Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian group [5]. Then in 2016-2021 during the severance of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, there were 4,103 Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, in Yemen, and on other targets [6]. In early 2022 the Houthis also launched a long-range attack on the United Arab Emirates, which is an ally of Saudi Arabia. The attack used Zulfiqar ballistic missiles and a UAV attack on Abu Dhabi Airport [7]. This attack is part of Iran's show of strength and sophistication of weapons projected to its proxies in the region. The existence of proxy wars has made regional conditions unstable and caused many losses over the years.

On March 10, 2023, diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran were normalized after seven and a half years of tension. Saudi Arabia and Iran announced the normalization of diplomatic relations mediated by China. China's mediation efforts in normalizing diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran were not the only efforts, since the beginning of the severance of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran there have been many normalization efforts by third parties, including Switzerland through good offices in 2016, then rounds of dialogue held in Iraq and Oman as hosts in several rounds during 2021-2022 [3]. However, several efforts by third parties before China did not produce results in the form of normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran. When the conflict that had a significant impact on the region ended, the regional security constellation also changed. The implementation of normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which was previously difficult to implement, became an important achievement for the region, thus the normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran will have an impact on the stability of the Middle East region. Based on the background of the problems that have been described, the theory used in this study is the Regional Security Complex theory. This basis is used to answer the formulation of

the problem, namely how the implications of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran affect the stability of the Middle East region in 2023. The purpose of this study is to identify the implications of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the development of stability in the Middle East region in 2023. Positive developments in mitigating the decrease in the intensity of internal conflicts in the region can occur as a form of implication for the implementation of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, positive developments provide an understanding of the complexity of security in the Middle East region which can be analyzed using the Regional Security Complex Theory.

METHODS

The research method used in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research methods are methods that focus on observation. In addition, qualitative methods are also an in-depth and comprehensive research approach to understanding and explaining phenomena in their natural context [8]. The emphasis in qualitative methods is on interpretation, understanding a context, and subjective meaning. The approach in this qualitative research method is descriptive-analytical. In a descriptive-analytical approach, the reality of social phenomena will be analyzed and explored in more depth so that conclusions can be drawn through a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon [9]. Then the type of data used in this study is library data that can be obtained by sorting primary and secondary data sources. Primary sources are in the form of official reports from government agencies of related countries containing facts and statistics in certain cases, and secondary sources are obtained by reading previous research findings in the form of scientific publications such as books, journals, and scientific articles related to the implications of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the stability of the Middle East region. The Regional Security Complex theory and the concept of normalization are the references in this study to observe security units in the Middle East region to provide an understanding of the complexity of the security problems that occur.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. MIDDLE EAST REGION AS A REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX

The Middle East is a region where autonomous regional security levels have been operating strongly for decades despite continued strong pressure from the global level. Regional Security Complex Theory, hereinafter referred to as RSCT, answers contemporary security challenges with standard forms of RSC, including competition patterns, balance of power, and alliance patterns among major powers in the region. This pattern is then supported by the impact of external power penetration. In the social construction variable, the pattern of friendship (amity) and hostility (enmity) are quite complex which ultimately always leads to the two major powers in the region, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia has an amity pattern with several countries in the region such as the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and Yemen [10]. Meanwhile, Iran has spread its influence in the region through the spread of Shia ideology to several countries such as Lebanon through Hezbollah, Syria through support for its government regime, Iraq through providing support to Shia militias, and Yemen through the Houthi group [11].

This relationship phenomenon creates a pattern of competitive interaction to hostility (enmity) between Saudi Arabia's allies and Iran's allies when Saudi Arabia and Iran themselves have an enmity interaction pattern. The dynamics of conflict in the Middle East region are quite complex because they are related to each other. The pattern of interaction between countries can affect the stability or fragility of security in a region.

The Middle East RSC is classified as a Standard RSC type because the polarity that occurs has been formed by regional powers. In the Standard RSC, the main element of security politics is the relationship between regional powers in the region, this relationship then determines the conditions for small countries around it and for RSC penetration by external countries which are global powers. The Cold War that occurred in the Middle East between Saudi Arabia and Iran in sectarian disputes has formed the region into two camps. Both countries are countries that have strong influence and massive distribution of power in the region. Thus, the polarity that occurs in the Middle East is bipolar where power is concentrated in two countries. The bipolarity review can be proven by the dominance of the two units in various fairly complex conflicts in the region, the struggle for influence still occurs between the two units so that a pattern of competition and even hostility arises. Furthermore, the anarchic structure is one of the variables in the RSC that requires a region to have two or more autonomous units. The role of regional institutions in the Middle East as the Arab League and the GCC is sufficient to encourage collective and targeted action so that it is considered effective, but not at all in dealing with regional security issues. This inability can be seen in the ongoing conflicts such as those in Yemen, Syria, and Libya to the crisis in the GCC in the form of a diplomatic crisis in 2017 [12]. Likewise in the Palestine-Israel conflict, the Arab League functions more as a diplomatic cover than as a catalyst for meaningful change in the region [13]. The social construction in the Middle East is largely shaped by the cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Through this social construction, it can be seen how the dynamics of the balance of power create a security dilemma and mutual distrust, thus encouraging the creation of a pattern of amity and enmity [14]. Saudi Arabia and Iran have a very long track record of hostility even before the two countries were formed. In the past, namely, the Sunni Ottoman Turkey and the Shia Persian Safavid Dynasty were also hostile and produced a legacy for Saudi Arabia and Iran [15]. The competition between the two created a complex tendency in interdependence towards their allies and proxy groups. Until early 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran normalized diplomatic relations. The two main actors greatly influence the changes in patterns that have spread widely in the region, and the formation of amity relations has the potential to form if both establish harmonious relations.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF COMPETITION BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN

Saudi Arabia and Iran are large countries in the Middle East that have a long and complex historical relationship. The two officially established diplomatic relations in 1932, the establishment of full diplomatic relations was marked by the signing of the Treaty of Friendship [16]. The relationship between the two was stable, until several decades later there were various efforts to strengthen bilateral relations through collaboration in various aspects. After Iran experienced the Islamic Revolution in 1979, relations between the two began to deteriorate. Post- revolutionary Iran experienced significant changes both in ideological values and government infrastructure. This became an obstacle for the two countries to establish harmonious relations because the

values held by both were very contradictory and ended in conflict. Saudi Arabia itself is a country whose majority population is Sunni with Wahhabi ideology [17]. While Iran is a country whose majority population is Shia. The existence of Saudi Arabia at the regional level has challenges that come from its rival, Iran, the conflict occurred based on strong differences in religious and political values between the two.

Shia power has re-rooted in Iran until it enters the political infrastructure, causing an increasingly heated sectarian conflict with Saudi Arabia. In addition, there is also a proxy conflict that competes for influence in the region. Thus, sectarian and proxy conflicts are the basis of the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran which affects the regional security constellation. One year after the Iranian Revolution, the sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shias re-emerged and played an important role in the First Gulf War of 1980-1988. In this conflict, Saudi Arabia helped Iraq which was fighting Iran because it was worried about regional stability, Saudi Arabia helped Iran because it considered post-revolutionary Iran as a threat [18]. Because of this, Saudi Arabia and Iran experienced a severance of diplomatic relations in 1988 which lasted until 1991. Within three years after the end of the First Gulf War, Iran normalized its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia along with the change of the Supreme Leader of Iran. In the Second Gulf War between Iraq and Kuwait in 1990-1991, Iran attempted to remain neutral due to the intervention of the United States while simultaneously attempting to take advantage of the war conditions to redefine its interests and integrate itself into Persian Gulf politics, especially with Saudi Arabia. The Gulf states began to worry about Iraq's tendency to engage in expansionism, making it easier for Iran to create divisions between Iraq and its supporters [19]. Iran actively maneuvered at the regional and even global levels and succeeded in thawing relations with neighboring countries, especially Saudi Arabia.

Sectarian conflict entered a new era in the 21st century, the conflict was recorded by the participation of proxy groups driven by the struggle for influence and control of Saudi Arabia and Iran over the region. However, sectarianism remains the basis for both in spreading their regional influence. The existence of proxy groups is full of the interests of the supporting country in this case Iran which spreads its influence specifically in the fields of politics and security. Iran's efforts to spread its influence in the Middle East region include 1) Efforts to increase the monarchy in Bahrain; 2) Broad support for the Houthi rebellion in Yemen; 3) Direct financial and military assistance to the Assad Regime in Syria; and 4) Broad geopolitical support for Shia militias in Iraq [19]. In addition, in Lebanon, there is Hezbollah which is a Shia Muslim militant group and a close ally of Iran. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps provided funds and training to the militia which then succeeded in dominating the political and military fields in Lebanon [20]. Iran is trying to show itself as a much more reliable partner than the United States, so it is actively loading its foreign policy activities and allies on a large scale. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that is at the forefront of countering Iran's influence in the region. The alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran that occurred through a series of conflict proxies has become one of the characteristics of the Middle East region for at least the last decade. At points of conflict that occurred in the Middle East region, there was interference from Saudi Arabia and Iran, this became an arena for competition between the two. In the conflict in Yemen, the Houthis as Iran's proxies disrupted Saudi Arabia's security, causing Saudi Arabia to take action against the Houthis. The Houthis in 2015 began directing their military efforts at Saudi Arabian military targets and walled themselves off using stockpiles of ballistic missiles obtained from Yemeni military stockpiles during the 2014-2015 coup [6]. Since 2014, Iran has increased its aid to the

Houthis as the war in Yemen escalated. In the long-running civil war in Syria, Iran has supported the Syrian government with financial and military aid. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has become the main supplier of aid to the rebel group. Each has conflicting interests in the conflict in Syria, it is noted that Iran built a military base to facilitate the shipment of weapons from Iran to Syria and provided US\$23 million in aid to Syria, Iran also deployed Hezbollah forces in Lebanon to help the Syrian government fight the rebels [21]. In addition, Saudi Arabia also provided US\$124.73 in aid to the opposition group and undertook political diplomacy efforts to support it. Saudi Arabia and Iran continue to experience conflict which ultimately resulted in the severance of diplomatic relations between the two in 2016.

Saudi Arabia and Iran continue to experience conflict fluctuations that ultimately resulted in the severance of diplomatic relations between the two in 2016. The severance of diplomatic relations occurred after the execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a Shia cleric by Saudi Arabia, and a retaliatory attack on the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Tehran, Iran. The severance of diplomatic relations with Iran by Saudi Arabia was also followed by other Gulf countries such as Bahrain, Sudan, and Djibouti. Meanwhile, several other countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Jordan changed the status of their diplomatic representatives to chargé d'affaires with Iran [3]. The dynamics of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran are more dominated by tensions than harmonious relations. The severance of diplomatic relations that occurred hurt regional stability, so efforts are needed to normalize diplomatic relations so that stability in the Middle East region can be realized immediately. Various efforts to normalize diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have been recorded as having been carried out several times but have not yet yielded results. Finally, in early 2023, another third party from outside the region, namely China, emerged to mediate the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. On March 6-10, 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran held talks regarding preparations for normalization between the two in Beijing. In the end, the full implementation of normalization was carried out with mediation by China. The signing of the normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran was carried out on March 10, 2023, when the People's Republic of China hosted and facilitated the talks between the two countries. After that, less than two months after the normalization was implemented, Saudi Arabia and Iran resumed their bilateral trade [22]. The normalization was reinforced by a trilateral statement between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the People's Republic of China on March 10, 2023 in Beijing.

The trilateral statement on the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran contained the following agreements: 1) Resuming diplomatic relations; 2) Reopening embassies and representative offices within no more than two months; 3) Affirmation or respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in state affairs; 4) Meeting of respective foreign ministers to discuss the return of ambassadors and the improvement of bilateral relations; 5) Implementing the Saudi Arabia-Iran Security Cooperation Agreement signed on April 17, 2001 and the General Agreement on Cooperation on May 27, 1998; and 6) Making every effort to enhance regional and international peace and security [23]. The establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran is an important event because both are large countries that are very influential in the region, the dispute between the two has resulted in conflicts in countries in the region. With the implementation of normalization, the regional security constellation that tends to be rooted in the two countries may also change.

3. IMPLICATION OF NORMALIZATION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN IN 2023

Second, civil war also occurred in Syria which has been going on since 2011. Since 2011 Saudi Arabia and Iran have been involved in the civil war in Syria, both sponsoring opposing sides. Saudi Arabia is the main supplier of aid to the rebel group, while Iran supports the Syrian government with financial and military assistance. Since the start of the conflict, regional and international powers have intervened, thus having a significant impact on the tensions that have occurred. Global powers in this case, namely the United States and other Western countries, support the Syrian opposition while Russia and China support the Bashar Al-Assad regime with trade and protection in the UN Security Council, in particular, Russia also acts by sending weapons [30]. In line with RSCT, the presence of global powers in the region will make the conflict conditions even more murky. The regional security constellation can become more complex and vulnerable to prolongation. The implications that occurred after the normalization of Saudi Arabia-Iran for Syria were the improvement of Syria's relations with Saudi Arabia and even with other Arab countries. Following the normalization of Saudi Arabia-Iran, on May 9, 2023, Saudi Arabia also decided to resume its diplomatic mission in Syria [31]. The decision was taken by Saudi Arabia after the Arab League approved Syria's return on May 7, 2023, after being suspended for more than a decade. There is a fact that one year earlier Saudi Arabia rejected Syria's re-entry into the Arab League at the 31st Arab League Summit in Algeria in 2022 [32]. Saudi Arabia refused by saying that Syria needed to distance itself from Iran and Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia's efforts were supported by other Arab countries such as Egypt. However, after Saudi Arabia reduced tensions with Iran through normalization, Syria was accepted for rehabilitation and welcomed by Saudi Arabia and other Arab leaders. Then in 2023, data from the Syrian Network for Human Rights stated that there was a decrease in tensions in Syria which can be seen from the decrease in civilian casualties caused by the conflicting parties. The decline is the lowest point since the start of the conflict in 2011. In addition, the death toll from torture in the last 13 years has also decreased in 2023. The decrease in tension has an impact on reducing the number of fatalities from both conflicting forces and civilians. The normalization of Saudi Arabia and Iran in this case remains a breakthrough that has a major impact on the crisis in Syria. The presence of both in Syria has been going on for a long time, and each has strengthened its influence through the assistance provided. This has implications in the form of a broader geopolitical shift in Syria.

Third, the crisis in Lebanon tends to occur due to competition between internal political units. Broadly speaking, the problems that occur in Lebanon refer to the security dilemma in the Sunni-Shia conflict, which is the main cause of polarization [33]. The political arena in Lebanon, which adheres to a confessionalism system, has become an arena for proxy battles between Iran with its support for Hezbollah, and Saudi Arabia which supports former Prime Minister Saad Hariri and other Sunni politicians. The implications that occur in Lebanon due to the normalization of Saudi Arabia and Iran tend to be in the form of positive progress because there is no open war. Hassan Nasrallah Secretary General of Hezbollah stated that the trilateral agreement in the normalization of Saudi Arabia-Iran is a "good development" that can benefit many countries including Lebanon [34]. This positive development can be in the form of stability due to de-escalation towards civil peace in general. Six months after the implementation of the normalization of Saudi Arabia-Iran, the Foreign Ministers of Iran and Lebanon met in Beirut on September 1, 2023. In the meeting, Iran stated that Iran-Saudi Arabia relations

would have a positive impact on regional issues including Lebanon. He continued by adding that after he met with Saudi officials, there were proposals related to regional affairs including Lebanon, namely supporting the return to normalcy with Saudi Arabia and there were secret and public talks with other countries to restore relations [35]. The efforts made by Saudi Arabia and Iran have made progress towards the stability of Lebanon. Meanwhile, demonstrations over the crisis in Lebanon also decreased in 2023, where there were only 968 events compared to the previous year, which was 1038 events.

The second implication is the restoration and strengthening of relations between countries in the region. Saudi Arabia's severance of diplomatic relations with Iran invites other countries to do the same. Countries that have a friendship pattern (amity) with Saudi Arabia have also severed diplomatic relations with Iran. This happened because of the great influence of Saudi Arabia in the region accompanied by its common interests in hostility towards Iran. Various responses emerged from countries in the region towards Iran, both in the form of threats and severance of diplomatic relations. Relations between countries in the region experienced recovery and strengthening after the normalization of Saudi Arabia-Iran. This recovery tended to be carried out by countries that had previously severed diplomatic relations with Iran together with Saudi Arabia.

The agreement in the normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran brought great hope for the realization of stability in the Middle East region. After the normalization of both, some implications became a moment for strengthening relations between Arab countries through the restoration of diplomatic relations with Iran. According to the Crisis Group report, all Arab Gulf countries except Bahrain have restored or plan to restore full diplomatic relations with Iran. Officials in the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman have hailed the deal as a step toward stability and prosperity that will benefit all parties [36]. Then Bahrain, which is notoriously reluctant to involve Iran, also welcomed the Saudi-Iran normalization, the Bahraini Foreign Ministry expressed appreciation for the People's Republic of China's initiative to host and sponsor the Saudi-Iranian talks, complementing the diplomatic efforts of Iraq and Oman. One by one, Arab countries are re-establishing good relations with Iran, both conditional and unconditional. Iran stated that it would try to negotiate to restore its country's relations with other countries. This statement was made by the Iranian Foreign Minister at a press conference at the Tehran Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon in September 2023 [35]. Iran has the desire and always tries to normalize relations with countries in the region such as Morocco, Egypt, Libya, and Bahrain. Iran expressed this desire after the resumption of its relations with Saudi Arabia and at the same time signaled that the de-escalation of the conflict had occurred.

The third implication is the occurrence of a Solid Security Dialogue of Middle Eastern Countries. The normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran has implications for the dynamics within regional institutions. These implications are realized both in the Arab League and the GCC. In May 2023, the 32nd Arab League Summit was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. At this summit, there was optimism in the form of hope that the results and recommendations from the implementation of the summit could positively help several crises and challenges in the region. The crises and challenges include the Palestinian issue and Syria's re-entry into the Arab League after a 12- year absence. In addition, there are other sensitive issues such as the crises in Yemen and Libya and the vacancy of the presidential position in Lebanon [37]. The 2023 Arab League Summit generally produced the Jeddah Declaration which encouraged joint action by Arab countries. The leaders of the Arab countries emphasized the importance of strengthening joint Arab action [38]. The decision that was the main focus was Syria's return to the

Arab League. Syria's return to the Arab League marks the continued consolidation of what can be described as a new regional security architecture [39]. This architecture is a framework for managing competition that is perhaps the most significant change in regional dynamics in the past two decades.

Effective dialogue also took place at the Joint Summit of the OIC and the Arab League on November 11, 2023, which discussed efforts to resolve the escalating Gaza conflict. The two organizations adopted a resolution at the summit underlining the importance of the Palestinian cause and their full support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to liberate all their occupied territories and the need to end the Israeli aggression against Palestine [40]. Members made various suggestions including Iran, which attended the summit for the first time since the conflict began. The visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Saudi Arabia for the summit was the first visit by the Head of State of the Islamic Republic of Iran in more than a decade [41]. This was made possible after Iran and Saudi Arabia officially ended years of hostilities under a Chinese-brokered deal in March 2023. The 44th GCC Summit on December 5, 2023, also took place with a solid dialogue in which there was a discussion on issues involving Iran. In the Final Statement of the 44th Summit, it was stated that the Supreme Council welcomed the agreement reached between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Beijing, the Council also expressed its hope that this agreement would be a positive step towards resolving disputes and ending all regional conflicts [42]. At the previous summit in 2022, there was a statement of concern over Iran's increasing steps to undermine regional security and stability, the Supreme Council reiterated its rejection of its continued intervention in the internal affairs of the GCC countries and the region, which fueled sectarian conflicts as well as supporting and funding and arming militias, organizations, or groups that fueled the conflict [43]. The comparison of the Final Statements of the 2022 and 2023 Summits is visible, especially on issues related to Iran.

CONCLUSIONS

The de-escalation of Saudi Arabia and Iran has implications in the form of positive changes for countries in the region. The positive changes in question are a decrease in conflict tensions, the restoration and strengthening of diplomatic relations, and the holding of solid dialogue between countries in the region in 2023. The long-standing regional security turbulence in the region is largely driven by the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both countries have great influence and each has almost equal supporters in the region. When the two are in conflict, the countries and their allied groups can also come into conflict with each other. Then when Saudi Arabia and Iran establish harmonious relations, regional stability can also be realized which is followed by the surrounding countries. The polarity that occurs in the Middle East is bipolar, namely the distribution of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both have significant influence and track records of conflict intervention in various countries in the region, making the regional security constellation dependent on the conditions of amity or enmity between the two. The normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran was widely welcomed in the Middle East. As stated in the Trilateral Agreement Saudi Arabia and Iran will make every effort to improve regional and international peace and security, this can be a means to realize the Middle East region as a region that can bring stability to its people. Saudi Arabia and Iran as countries that have great influence in the region can be catalysts in realizing the vision and mission of the Middle East regional institutions.

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