

Changing in Geo-Strategic Dynamics in Middle East: Implications for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This research explores how shifting geostrategic dynamics in the Middle East are shaping Pakistan's foreign policy and the security of its national interests.

Methodology: Utilizing both an interceptive and descriptive methodology alongside a qualitative research design, the study gathered non-numerical data and employed social science techniques like interpretation and discourse analysis. The researchers thoroughly examined the data, interpreted various discourses, and drew conclusions.

Findings: The findings underscored the critical role of Pakistan's leadership in effectively responding to these changing circumstances. The study stressed the necessity for a well-informed foreign policy that aligns with national interests, which demands a deep understanding of the evolving dynamics in the Middle East and careful consideration of their implications for Pakistan's stability and regional influence.

Conclusion: The research offers valuable insights and policy recommendations for Pakistan, highlighting the importance of a proactive and informed strategy to navigate the complexities of the Middle East while safeguarding its interests and promoting regional stability.

Keywords: Middle East Dynamics, Foreign Policy, Regional Stability, National Interests.

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Introduction

The Middle East has been of great significance for centuries, with various powers competing for dominance over the Gulf region. Historical empires, such as the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, and the Ottoman Empire, have all played influential roles in this area. The early twentieth century saw the discovery of substantial oil and gas reserves, which drew the attention of global powers. Nations like Britain, France, and the United States aimed to assert their influence, with the U.S. becoming the leading power after World War II. The U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, along with its backing of Israel, has been central to its Middle Eastern strategy for decades. Oil and natural gas

production is vital to the region's economy, which accounts for 53% of the world's proven oil reserves and 49% of its natural gas reserves. This strategic importance has led to ongoing competition among nations and threats from external forces. Given its vast oil reserves, the Middle East has long been a focal point for international intervention, including influences such as Zionism.

The world's leading nations have engaged in a subtle contest for influence in the Middle East, drawn by its critical significance, religious diversity, and abundance of resources. Over centuries, a varied population and unique states have shaped the region's culture and history. This area has acted as a vital link between the Abrahamic monotheistic religions and the wider world, with Judaism and Christianity originating in the Levant and Islam emerging in the Arab lands, before Asian and American cultures integrated into these faiths. It is reasonable to conclude that whoever dominates the Middle East will also exert considerable influence globally (Gritly, 2018).

The Arab Spring has significantly affected Muslim governments, resulting in internal conflicts and the rise of rival factions seeking power. This domestic unrest, along with instability in neighboring nations, has been a direct outcome of the ongoing upheavals in the region. Challenges such as terrorism and sectarianism—particularly shaped by Saudi-Iranian tensions—have impeded Pakistan's journey toward economic and political success. Additionally, regional organizations like the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have faced difficulties in achieving unity among their member states (Mumtaz, 2015).

Pakistan's reluctance to participate in the Islamic Military Coalition has long-term implications for its foreign policy. Its proximity to Arab nations has led to various complications, despite Pakistan's generally positive role in the region. This research offers a critical analysis of the current situation in the Middle East and the challenges Pakistan may face (Khalil, 2013). In the globalized twenty-first century, Middle Eastern politics have become increasingly complex and tumultuous. Iraq and Syria are embroiled in conflict that spans their shared desert border. In Damascus, Bashar al-Assad retains control, but his authority does not extend throughout the entire country. Although Assad crossed the "red line" set by President Barack Obama regarding the use of chemical weapons against his citizens—prompting potential U.S. involvement—Britain and its allies chose not to intervene directly.

Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia and its authoritarian coalition are determined to oust Assad, providing support to rebel forces fighting against him, while also being wary of the threats posed by ISIS and al-Qaida. Neighboring Gulf states harbor deep-seated animosity toward Shia Iran, backing Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad and offering support to Assad. Western nations, including the UK, are concerned about radicalized individuals returning from conflict zones in the Levant.

The Middle East is a region of global significance, characterized by its vast oil reserves, complex international dynamics, and sacred sites. The internal politics of the region largely revolve around ideological, ethnic, and territorial conflicts among nations. Non-state actors are increasingly gaining influence, complicating the security landscape due to power struggles. External powers often leverage these actors to advance their economic interests. Several factors contribute to the security challenges in the region, including the enduring Palestinian issue, the destabilizing presence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, military interventions by NATO and the U.S., controversies surrounding Iran's nuclear program, the crisis in Yemen, tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the rhetoric of war between Iran and Israel, and the reluctance of Middle Eastern leaders to engage in public discourse and evaluation.

Pakistan's relations with the Middle East are complex, and the region's shifting international dynamics have significant implications for the country. Pakistan has a strong partnership with Saudi Arabia, which has been a vital source of financial and political support. This relationship is built on shared interests in security, energy, and religion. Additionally, Pakistan shares a long border with Iran and has historically maintained cordial relations with it. However, Iran's increasing regional influence and its rivalry with Saudi Arabia create a challenging dynamic for Pakistan, which aims to remain neutral in these conflicts.

The rise of extremist groups like ISIS and the Taliban in the region poses a serious security threat to Pakistan. The country has long struggled with terrorism and radicalism domestically, and the spillover effects of conflicts in the Middle East have further complicated its security situation. Furthermore, Pakistan's relationship with China, which is expanding its economic and political influence in the Middle East, also brings these changing dynamics closer to home. China's Belt and Road Initiative, which includes significant infrastructure projects in Pakistan, could be affected by the evolving geopolitical landscape in the Middle East. Pakistan's connections to the Middle East are deep-rooted, stemming from both cultural and economic ties. Therefore, developments in the Middle East must be viewed holistically, as they will inevitably impact Pakistan, necessitating a thoughtful and calculated response.

Problem Statement

The evolving geo-strategic dynamics in the Middle East present various policy implications and foreign policy challenges for Pakistan. The situation is complex and fluid, presenting significant dilemmas for the country. Key issues include the Abrahamic Accord and the recognition of Israel by major Arab states, as well as ongoing proxy conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which complicate Pakistan's foreign policy options. This scenario tests Pakistan's leadership in how they respond to these developments while considering national interests and foreign policy choices. Consequently, this research aims to analyze these changing dynamics in the Middle East and assess the various policy options available to Pakistan to safeguard its interests.

Research Questions

Evaluating the geo-strategic dynamics in Middle East and the dire implications on Pakistan is a crucial subject matter. Therefore, the researcher had postulated the following research questions listed below:

1. What are the major changing geo-strategic dynamics in Middle East?
2. What are the implications of the changing geo-strategic dynamics in Middle East for Pakistan?

Research Objectives

The following research objectives had been outlined to achieve the goals:

- To analyze the changing geo-strategic dynamics in Middle East.
- To assess various implications for Pakistan under these changing dynamics in the Middle East.

Significance of Study

While a stable and terrorism-free Middle East aligns with the interests of neighboring allies, the complexity of the events destabilizing the region is considerable. Establishing a fundamental security agreement emerges as a vital step toward addressing the intricate strategic security challenges of the Middle East. Given Pakistan's proximity to the region, it cannot afford to remain indifferent. The country's distinct security and economic motivations necessitate proactive national and foreign policies. As a result, it has consistently been challenging for Pakistan to maintain neutrality in the conflicts and internal struggles of Middle Eastern nations.

Literature Review

The geostrategic and geo-economic dynamics of the region, combined with the global competition among regional and extra-regional actors, have turned the Middle East into a battleground for international influences and interests. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, several challenges have emerged. As Iraq developed closer ties with Iran, American strategies faltered. The Arab Spring of 2011, however, brought renewed hope. This movement led to the overthrow of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, while the popular uprising in Syria was suppressed with the assistance of

Assad's allies, Russia and Iran. Additionally, there has been a rise in protests in other Arab countries. With the exception of Bahrain, where violent demonstrations have been reported, these movements have largely remained peaceful, prompting reforms from previously autocratic governments (Khalil, 2018).

The Arab Spring has significantly undermined religious harmony by exacerbating the divide between Shia and Sunni Muslims. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Shia communities in the Middle East have become more prominent, marking the establishment of the first Shiite-led government in Arab history. This shift has led to unrest in countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, where Shia populations are governed by Sunni minorities. The close relationship between the new Iraqi government and Iran has further strained tensions in the region.

The rise of Shia power dynamics has been influenced by developments in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, creating an environment where Iran has successfully expanded its influence. Iran is actively involved in Iraq to counter ISIS, supporting the Assad regime in Syria, and maintaining a presence in Yemen. Additionally, Washington's post-2003 policies in the Middle East have had detrimental effects, leaving some U.S. allies dissatisfied with the outcomes of the Iraq war (Yamin, 2017). The potential instability in Bahrain is likely to exacerbate these issues further.

The Middle East is widely acknowledged as the cradle of human civilization and has gained increased global significance in recent years. Positioned at a vital crossroads of ancient trade routes, it holds political importance as the birthplace of the three major world religions. The doctrinal and military landscape of the region has been profoundly shaped by events following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, including the discovery of oil in the 1930s, the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 and its subsequent territorial expansions, the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict, Arab-Israeli wars, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the Arab Spring of 2011 (Cordesman, 2015).

The post-revolution peace and stability mechanisms have further widened the gap between the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, particularly evident in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. U.S. allies in the Middle East have expressed similar concerns regarding the nuclear agreement with Iran (Cordesman, 2015). The Trump administration's withdrawal from the 5+1 nuclear agreement negotiated during the Obama administration drew widespread condemnation globally, including from America's allies. Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and his unilateral actions have severely undermined the U.S.'s credibility as a mediator in the region, exacerbating tensions. Initially, the United States supported the Egyptian uprising, but after Mohamed Morsi was elected with a significant majority, it adopted a neutral stance following the subsequent military coup (Express Tribune, 2015).

The United States (US) has supported regime change in Syria to oust Bashar al-Assad, but since 2011, Assad has managed to retain power with the backing of Russia and Iran. While Moscow initially supported Gaddafi and later sought a diplomatic resolution to the Syrian crisis, these efforts ultimately failed. In contrast, China has been expanding its influence in the Middle East through the One Belt One Road initiative and is believed to be developing new policies to fill the void left by the U.S.

For over two decades, the Middle East has been a conflict zone, prompting the European Union to focus much of its efforts on humanitarian aid. Key factors that ignited the Arab Spring included a lack of political and civil rights, along with widespread poverty, unemployment, high inflation, and a resulting decline in consumer spending. With the regional power dynamics shifting and sectarian tensions rising, political instability in the region has intensified (Sorenson, 2018).

U.S.-brokered initiatives like the "Deal of the Century" and the "Abraham Accords" have begun to complicate the region's already delicate security landscape. Given Pakistan's close cultural and economic ties to the Middle East, the country faces challenging decisions about its alignment with the region. Domestic pressures and economic factors necessitate that Pakistan closely monitor regional developments and respond appropriately (The News, 2020).

Hostilities in Arab Nation

Barnett (1998) argues that the rise of Arab nationalism has often led to more discord than unity within the region. The Middle East is characterized by strong and diverse inter-Arab and inter-Islamic interests, with disputes primarily focused on the competition for leadership within the Arab world. Traditional rivalries also arise from issues related to territory, ideology, familial ties, and historical imperial ambitions.

Sectarian and ethnic divisions have become more deeply entrenched, leading to increased tension and conflict over time. The dynamics in the region are significantly influenced by two key actors: The United States as the global superpower and Saudi Arabia as the central regional player (Bilgin, 2015, p. 5).

History of the Middle East Regional Security Complex

- The rise of Arab nationalist sentiments has played a significant role in shaping these dynamics.
- Tensions between Palestinians and Jewish settlers were particularly evident in the 1930s.
- Conflicts have also arisen within the region, such as those between Lebanon and larger Syrian territories.
- There exists a longstanding enmity among Arab nations.
- Many of the contemporary conflict dynamics in the region can be traced back to events and developments during the interwar period.

(Yapp, 1991, 49–208; Barnett, 1998; Podeh, 1998)

Middle East in Modern Era

Islamic movements frequently resist state authority in Arab nations, and countries like Iran are often viewed as significant threats by their Arab neighbors (Karawan, 1997). There is notable interaction between Arab and non-Arab entities, as well as among different Arab factions. Overall, the narrative of Arab versus non-Arab tends to dominate over Arab versus Arab conflicts, although there are notable exceptions to this trend.

The current uncertainties in the Middle East largely stem from the U.S.-backed invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was part of the broader American War on Terror that began after the 9/11 attacks with the intervention in Afghanistan (Haqqani, 2015). While each country in the region faces its own complex challenges, the overall situation is shaped by persistent issues related to governance, demographics, economics, religion, and ongoing social changes (Crisis Group, 2015).

Figure 1: *Middle East Security Complexes in Sub Complexes*

<p>Formed (1930-1948)</p> <p>Central Conflict Israel versus other Muslim countries</p> <p>State Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel • Egypt • Syria • Lebanon • Jordan <p>Non-state Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plo • Hamas • Hizbollah • Hamas <p>Military, Financial and Rhetorical Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iraq • Iran • Saudi Arabia • Kuwait • Libya • Tunisia <p>(Tibi, 1993, pp.183-4 ; Barnett, 1998, pp.121-3; Dervis and Shafik, 1998, p. 508)</p>	<p>Formed</p> <p>After Britain's withdrawal from the area in 1971.</p> <p>Central Conflict</p> <p>A triangular rivalry among:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran • Iraq • The Gulf Arabs • Saudi Arabia ▪ Kuwait ▪ Bahrain ▪ Qatar ▪ United Arab Emirates ▪ Oman <p>(Tibi, 1993, p. 171) the 1979 revolution</p> <p>Ideological rivalry between</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saudi Arabia • Iran <p>(Chubin and Tripp, 1996, pp. 15 & 71)</p>	<p>Weaker sub complex</p> <p>A shifting and uneasy set of relationships among:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libya • Tunisia • Algeria • Morocco • Western Sahara <p>Central Conflict</p> <p>The Moroccan annexation of Western Sahara starting in 1975 (McNeill, 1963, pp. 618-28; Hodgson, 1993, pp. 194-5).</p>
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Buzan and Waever 2003

Super Powers' Involvement in Middle East

The increased presence of global superpowers in the Middle East became particularly pronounced after the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Lustick (1997) offers a state-centric perspective on the complex history between the West and the region, arguing that Western powers have consistently sought to prevent the emergence of a dominant Middle Eastern nation. The United States currently plays a crucial military role in combating the Islamic State, employing a strategy that includes providing arms and training to neighboring countries, as well as conducting regular airstrikes against Islamic State forces. Additionally, the U.S. coordinates extensive air campaigns with various allies, which encompass both Arab and European nations (Byman and Moller, 2016, p. 294).

Although superpowers did not directly dictate the alliances and conflicts among Middle Eastern states, their influence manifested in three key ways:

1. **Provision of Arms:** By supplying military support, superpowers significantly affected the distribution of power within the region. This arms trade often aimed to bolster specific allies, thereby exerting control and leveraging influence over regional actors.
2. **Diplomatic Maneuvering:** Superpowers engaged in strategic diplomacy, forming alliances and partnerships that shaped the political landscape. These relationships often reflected broader geopolitical interests rather than the needs or desires of local populations.
3. **Economic Assistance:** Through economic aid and investment, superpowers sought to reinforce their strategic positions. This financial support was frequently tied to political objectives, impacting the stability and governance of recipient states.

Overall, the involvement of global superpowers has had profound implications for the Middle East, influencing power dynamics and regional conflicts while shaping the future trajectory of states within the region.

War against Terrorism

The phrase "The Great War on Terror" often describes the military and political initiatives launched by the United States and its allies in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. A primary aim of this campaign has been to eliminate international terrorism, particularly targeting Islamist extremist groups like al-Qaeda and its affiliates. However, the War on Terror has become one of the most detrimental factors in the Middle East.

Today's approach to the War on Terror is markedly different from that of 2003. Instead of fostering peace in the region, it has resulted in greater suffering, chaos, and instability. The conflict has rapidly expanded, impacting countries such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and has given rise to the more extensive threat posed by the Islamic State (IS), which operates primarily in Syria and Iraq and is known for its unprecedented acts of violence.

The failure of secular governance, coupled with a lack of social and economic security, has driven many individuals in the Arab world toward religious extremism. In response to the rise of IS, an unlikely coalition of foreign military forces has emerged to confront this threat. As a result, the Middle East, North Africa, and much of the Islamic world find themselves entangled in a complex web of escalating crises.

The Arab Spring

In various Middle Eastern nations, many individuals lived under dictatorial rulers who claimed to represent the public. The Arab Spring began in 2010, aiming to spark change in the conflict-ridden Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa. However, its overall impact on significantly improving the lives of Arab citizens was limited (Cockburn, 2015, p. 2). Citizens expressed their discontent with authoritarian regimes through widespread protests, leading to the removal of leaders such as Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Libyan President Mu'ammār al Qadhafi, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (The Economist, 2013). After Mu'ammār al Qadhafi was ousted, NATO forces, alongside local fighters, intervened against him.

The outcomes of the Arab Uprisings were varied. Tunisia, one of the impacted nations, successfully adopted a new Constitution with broad consensus. However, many other countries have struggled to meet their goals and continue to face significant issues related to governance, rule of law, security, and balancing religious and secular values. By 2016, the Middle East remained a central focus of global attention due to ongoing crises in the region. The Arab Spring has evolved into a major security concern both regionally and globally, suggesting it cannot be classified strictly as a success or failure. The long-term effects of these uprisings will require substantial time to evaluate.

The extensive consequences of the Arab Spring, combined with persistent conflicts in Syria and Yemen, have far-reaching global implications. Oman could also become a potential flashpoint, especially given the uncertain succession plans following health concerns regarding the Sultan, who does not have a clear heir. While Oman has managed to navigate the challenges presented by the Arab Spring, there have been ongoing grievances, particularly in the Dhofar region and surrounding areas (Hussain, 2015). The Sultan's legitimacy and financial support from Saudi Arabia post-2011 have helped Oman address these issues. In Bahrain, the Arab Spring triggered a period of significant instability, marked by sectarian tensions between the Shia majority and the Sunni-led government. The uprising was suppressed in 2011 with the intervention of Saudi military forces at the Bahraini government's request (VOX, 2015).

Palestine-Israel Conflict

Additionally, the Israel-Palestine conflict persists without a clear resolution. The ongoing instability and unpredictability in the region have facilitated the spread of extremist propaganda. Currently, the Middle East is more volatile than it was in 2001, marked by frequent and dangerous attacks across Europe and the Muslim world. This environment has contributed to the rise of radical factions on both sides of this conflict-ridden area.

Spreading over of Middle East Situation's in Pakistan

The evolving and uncertain dynamics in the Middle East have created a complex challenge for Pakistan, leading to diverse public opinions. For a nation already facing domestic security issues, this growing polarization presents a significant policy dilemma. Despite its various responsibilities, Pakistan has been cautious about becoming embroiled in the region's political instability. It has avoided military involvement in several conflicts and has instead opted for a neutral stance, seeking to act as a mediator. Pakistan has managed its relationships with Middle Eastern countries carefully.

The situation in the Middle East could significantly affect Islamabad's economic development in two main ways: first, by impacting the flow of remittances from the oil-rich Gulf States to Pakistan, and second, by contributing to a more unstable security environment that could foster radical and sectarian tendencies within Pakistan. Therefore, it is crucial for Pakistan's leadership to focus on developing and implementing strategies to address these challenges (Rizvi, 2014).

Additionally, Pakistan's foreign policy is vital in its efforts to counter radicalization. It is equally important for the country to avoid major policy shifts. In combating terrorism, the military provides support to various sectors and state institutions. The National Action Plan (NAP) serves as a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, employing a multifaceted approach. This includes enforcing sentences for convicted terrorists, reducing hate speech, and dismantling the financial networks of extremist groups, all aimed at eradicating radicalization in Pakistan (National Action Plan, 2014). If effectively executed, the NAP offers a robust framework to tackle the ongoing challenges.

Evolving Geo-Strategic Dynamics and their Features

The geo-strategic landscape of the Middle East has undergone significant transformations, notably influenced by the Arab Spring, which began in 2010. This movement led to major political shifts, resulting in the toppling or weakening of several authoritarian regimes and creating a power vacuum that non-state actors, including terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, quickly filled. The rise of these non-state actors has had serious implications for Pakistan, which has long been targeted by terrorist organizations. The emergence of groups like ISIS has increased instability in the region and has directly impacted Pakistan's security, leading to more cross-border attacks by militant groups operating from Afghanistan.

Another factor contributing to the changing geopolitical dynamics is the shifting power structures within the region. Iran has emerged as a significant regional power, challenging the dominance of traditional Arab states like Saudi Arabia. This rivalry has heightened tensions between Iran and Arab nations,

particularly Saudi Arabia, with implications for Pakistan. Historically, Pakistan has maintained close ties with Saudi Arabia while managing a complex relationship with Iran. The escalating tensions between these two countries have placed Pakistan in a difficult position, pressuring it to take sides (Naz, 2015).

Propositions for Pakistan

Pakistan's foreign policy prioritizes fostering friendly relations with other Muslim nations. During conflicts among these countries, Pakistan has maintained a neutral stance, as emphasized by a statement from the foreign office: "We do not intervene and we do not take a side" (Pakistan Foreign Office, 2014). However, the outbreak of the Yemen crisis, closely linked to the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, presents a significant challenge to this neutrality.

Saudi Arabia has expressed its desire to include Pakistan in an Islamic military coalition to support its campaign in Yemen, prompting Pakistan to confront difficult foreign policy choices. Iran has openly opposed Pakistan's potential involvement, raising concerns that participation could introduce sectarian divisions within the country, which would be detrimental to Pakistan's stability.

Incidents in Quetta during Ashura illustrate how sectarianism can spread in Pakistan, particularly in response to regional crises like those in the Middle East. The influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran in Pakistan is undeniable, and many view Zia's Islamization policies as a root cause of sectarian tensions. Between 1989 and 2014, sectarian violence claimed approximately 4,734 lives, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal.

The ongoing Saudi-Iranian proxy conflict significantly fuels sectarianism, and the crisis in the Middle East could exacerbate tensions within Pakistan. Many scholars believe that regional sectarianism would worsen if Pakistan were to engage in the conflict in Yemen. There is also a concern that religious extremists might be inspired to form their own terrorist groups modeled after ISIS, given the continued instability in the region.

Policymakers face internal divisions regarding Pakistan's stance on the Yemen situation, with Sunni Deobandi and Ahl e Hadis factions generally supporting military action, while the Shia community tends to align with Iran. This evolving dynamic underscores the urgent need to address the sectarian rifts between Shia and Sunni Islam within the country.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study consisted on qualitative research design and descriptive in nature.

Theoretical and Practical Perspective

This research study would be helpful to increase in the literature review regarding Geo-Strategic contents. From practical point of view, this research study may be adopted by the policymakers and stakeholders.

Research Approach

The research employs an inductive reasoning approach, starting with specific observations and then identifying patterns from the diverse responses gathered through both primary and secondary sources. This method enables the researcher to develop a preliminary explanation that can be further analyzed.

Research Strategy

The research strategy for this study incorporates descriptive and interpretive techniques. Grounded theory serves as an approach that helps the researcher investigate specific phenomena and develop new theories based on the collection and analysis of real-world data.

Methodological in Research

The methodological choice for this study is mono-method, as it focuses on qualitative research, placing it within the scope of a single-method approach.

Research Time Horizon

The research time horizon for this study is cross-sectional. One advantage of this study design is that it allows for the examination of multiple variables simultaneously.

Technique and Procedure

Once the researcher collects data on the topic, it will be analyzed using social science techniques, including interpretation and discourse analysis. After a thorough and in-depth examination of the data, the researcher will interpret the findings, derive various meanings, and ultimately reach conclusions and key insights.

Population

Since the research is grounded in a qualitative approach, the population comprises security experts from academic and journalism fields who possess expertise on the topic being studied.

Sample

A maximum of 15 respondents were interviewed, including five from academia, five security experts, and five journalists or Middle East specialists. The researcher was advised to stop recruiting new participants once data saturation was reached. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling methodology.

Data Sources

This research study utilized both secondary and primary sources. The secondary sources comprised books, research articles, journals, newspapers, and preliminary studies on the topic. The primary sources included open-ended interviews with security experts on the Middle East.

Data Collection Tools

Books, academic articles, and journals were utilized as primary sources, while interviews served as secondary sources. References for these materials are listed in the references and bibliography section at the end of the thesis. The interviews were conducted with a population of security experts and journalists in Pakistan. A maximum of 15 respondents were interviewed, consisting of five academics, five security experts, and five journalists or specialists on the Middle East. The researcher was advised to cease recruiting new participants once data saturation was reached.

Data Collection

Initially, primary data was collected from books, academic journals, and articles. The descriptive analysis presented in these sources was examined and further analyzed in the results section. Additionally, secondary data was gathered through interviews with various security experts and journalists on the topic. Their responses were recorded and thoroughly analyzed in the results section.

Data Analysis Technique

After collecting data on the research topic, it was analyzed using social science techniques, specifically interpretation and discourse analysis. Following a careful and in-depth examination, the researcher interpreted the data to derive various meanings and discourses, ultimately leading to conclusions and key findings.

Delimitation

The primary focus of this study was on the changing geostrategic dynamics in the Middle East following the Abrahamic Accords since 2020 and their implications for Pakistan. The researcher will specify the time period upon completion of the research.

Results

The descriptive analysis focused on the evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East was derived from various sources, including research articles and academic journals. The details are presented below, along with the respective references:

The Middle East in Flux

The Muslim world, representing 20% of the global population, consists of 57 nation-states and controls over 70% of the world's resources and half of its natural assets. Given this wealth, the Muslim world should ideally be a significant global power. However, it remains embroiled in conflicts and struggles, often vulnerable to external forces under military protection. "Muslim issues continue to be overlooked over time. Palestine is exhausted and may be on the brink of surrender. Iraq is still aflame. The Islamic world is highly turbulent and vulnerable" (Legrenzi, 2016). While some countries in the region possess abundant natural resources, others face economic challenges. The Middle East experienced significant transformation following the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003, with the U.S. invasion of Iraq fostering a renewed sense of purpose among Muslim nations and exacerbating numerous regional security challenges.

The Arab Spring that swept through the Middle East in 2010 was initially viewed as a hopeful transformation but ultimately led to severe consequences. One significant outcome was the rise of ISIS, which drew millions of fighters from various countries, profoundly affecting Iraq and Syria as they opposed Shia influence. The upheaval dismantled existing regimes, resulting in the establishment of authoritarian governments in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, and created new challenges for these states. The situation in the Middle East is now characterized by ongoing sectarian tensions, increasing partisan divides, and regional conflicts, leading to a state of instability and crisis in the region (Zehra, Fatima, and Khan, 2018; Yamin, 2017).

Iran Arab Conflict

The longstanding animosity between Arabs and Iranians dates back to ancient Islamic history, rooted in their religious differences. Arabs are primarily Sunni, while Iranians follow the Shia branch of Islam. This antagonism can be traced back to the Iran-Iraq War, during which predominantly Sunni Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, supported Iraq's military efforts. The emergence of Shia rule in post-Saddam Iraq heightened concerns among Arab leaders. Sunni-majority states feared that the rise of Iraqi Shia power could embolden their own Shia populations, increasing tensions. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia openly voiced worries about Iranian influence in the Iraqi government, fearing it would strengthen Shia factions and disrupt the fragile balance between the two sects. Arab sentiments were further strained following the U.S. shift in focus in the Middle East due to the Iraq War. Historically a key ally of the Gulf States, U.S. involvement changed significantly after the invasion of Iraq, leading to substantial differences between the two sides (Yamin, 2017).

This situation was complex for Islamabad, given its close relationships with both Iran and Saudi Arabia. Despite their differences, Pakistan maintained generally positive relations with Iran, benefiting from trade and business opportunities following Iran's nuclear deal with the international community. Tehran also helped address Pakistan's energy needs. Similarly, Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia has been strong, with the kingdom consistently providing support, including a significant financial grant in 2014, which created employment opportunities and generated unrecorded remittances (Papanek, 1967).

According to Kasuri (2015), Pakistan has chosen a mediation role in the Saudi-Iranian conflict, encouraging both nations to resolve their disputes peacefully. The country has consistently aimed to ease tensions through diplomatic channels to prevent any hostility on the international stage. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed this sentiment in an interview, stating, "I believe that every conflict has a political solution. I am not an advocate for a military solution." He further emphasized his commitment to promoting peace in the Middle East, highlighting the suffering of Muslims in various regions, including Libya, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. He noted that these conflicts undermine collective strength and that Pakistan is eager to contribute to conflict resolution efforts (Sorenson, 2018).

The central theme of Pakistan's approach has been to prevent the emergence of sectarian divides that could create discord within the Muslim Ummah. This is aligned with the principles outlined in Article 2 of Pakistan's Constitution, which establishes the state's fundamental responsibility to mediate conflicts among Muslim nations, enhance relations, and promote global peace for overall harmony. Additionally, Article 29 imposes a clear obligation on all political offices, government departments, and citizens of Pakistan to adhere to the constitutional principles. This legal framework provides Pakistan with an opportunity to elevate the issue of sectarian division and violence to the international stage and actively seek constructive solutions to a persistent problem. This issue remains a significant challenge for Pakistan, given the substantial loss of life in the region due to sectarian strife, with no parties willing to take responsibility, thereby perpetuating the stalemate (Gasp, 2009).

Conflict of Palestine and Israel

As a nation rooted in its Islamic identity, Pakistan is deeply concerned about global support for the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian issue, especially regarding Jerusalem, holds significant importance for Pakistan, which views Israel as a persistent adversary and threat to its security. Pakistan has consistently advocated for the full realization of the objectives set by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which include the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories, defined by pre-1967 borders, and the establishment of a sustainable, sovereign Palestinian state with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Pakistan has also reaffirmed its commitment to promoting peaceful coexistence with Israel.

During an Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Nations, Maleeha Lodhi, strongly condemned the violence committed by the Israeli military in Gaza. Pakistan criticized the UNSC for its failure to denounce these acts and called for an impartial and independent investigation into the violence. The ongoing aggression by Israel has led to significant casualties, including an incident on the Gaza border that resulted in the deaths of 60 Palestinians and injuries to around 2,700 others due to the use of toxic gas by the military (Arnald, 2019). Pakistan urges major powers to pursue a peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict to establish lasting peace.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the current study reflect insights gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The analysis reveals that the changing geopolitical and geostrategic dynamics in the Middle East since the ratification of the Abraham Accords have garnered significant attention. The Accords, established in 2020, marked a pivotal shift in the region by facilitating diplomatic relations between Israel and countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. These agreements have not only reshaped regional alliances but also influenced power dynamics and security across the area.

From the conducted interviews, it is clear that the Accords have encouraged increased cooperation between Israel and Arab nations, challenging longstanding narratives and alliances. This realignment poses both concerns and opportunities for Pakistan, given its historical connections with Arab countries and its stake in regional stability. The evolving situation has prompted Pakistan to reevaluate its foreign policy, particularly regarding its relationships with Arab states and its traditional position on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Moreover, the changing landscape carries implications for regional security and Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism, promote stability, and pursue economic interests. As these geopolitical dynamics continue to unfold, Pakistan must navigate its diplomatic relations carefully, foster regional cooperation, and adapt its policies to address emerging challenges and opportunities effectively. By leveraging its historical ties, promoting dialogue, and maintaining a balanced approach, Pakistan can play a constructive role in regional stability and safeguard its national interests in this rapidly changing Middle Eastern context.

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