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Geopolitical Interests and Contemporary Conflicts in the Middle East

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Abstract

The Middle East continues to be a central theater for international geostrategic competition, influenced by a multifaceted interplay of regional and international interests. The present paper focuses on the conflict dynamics of regional conflicts in the region, which are fueled by strategic competitions, competition for resources, and ideological schisms. The major powers such as the United States, Russia, China, and regional players like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have disparate agendas that fuel tensions. The competition for energy resources, especially oil and natural gas, and control over strategically located waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz increases economic and military interests. Sectarian cleavages, in particular, between Sunni and Shia elements, drive proxy wars in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, while other non-state actors, including ISIS and Hezbollah, compound the instability in the region. New dimensions, including cyber warfare and unmanned aerial vehicles or drones, compound the nature of these conflicts. The research also discusses how changing alignments, like the Abraham Accords, affect the situation, as well as how external interventions shape results. Through the examination of these elements, the research reveals how geopolitical interests fuel instability while calling for diplomatic measures to solve basic causes. It contends that durable peace depends on the balance of power, inclusive governance, and avoidance of external interference, shedding light on possible avenues for resolving conflict in this sensitive region.

Keywords; Geopolitics, Middle East, Conflict, Proxy Wars, Energy Resources, Sectarianism.

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East, with its region of intercontinental crossing between Asia, Africa, and Europe, has been a crucible of geo-political confrontation and rivalry for centuries. Its value lies in its vast reserves of energy, strategic sea chokepoints, and the fact that it has been a cradle of civilizations and religions throughout history. The Middle East is now caught in a delicate web of contemporary conflicts fueled by converging geopolitics, ideological rifts, and regional and international powers' interests. This context prepares the reader for an examination of how these forces shape the volatile environment of the Middle East, building instability while destroying peace hopes. The geopolitical relevance of the Middle East originates in its control of roughly 48% of the world's proven petroleum reserves and 43% of the natural gas reserves, putting it at the heart of global energy markets.

Strategic water routes, such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal, serve as vital conduits for global trade, raising the value of the region's economic and military value. The resources and passageways attract sharp interests from global powers like the United States, Russia, and China, all pursuing their respective strategic interests. The United States has long tried to access energy sources and face foes, whereas Russia employs alliances with countries like Syria and Iran as a means of increasing its power base. China, with its Belt and Road Initiative, regards the area as a central node of economic development, with stability at the top of the list to secure investment. Regional players like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel complicate the geopolitical chessboard. Iran's ambition for regional supremacy, driven by backing Shia proxies like Hezbollah and the Houthis, runs at odds with Saudi Arabia's Sunni coalition, igniting proxy wars in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq.

Turkey's neo-Ottoman aspirations, evidenced by its moves in Syria and Libya, add another layer of competition, with Israel's security-driven policies behind its opposition to Iran's nuclear aspirations dictating regional alignments. These actors balance between cooperation and confrontation, often using sectarian cleavages to their advantage. Sectarianism, in particular the Sunni-Shia division, is a highly corrosive basis of conflict that erodes ideological distinctions into political and military clashes. The Syrian Civil War, now well into its second decade, is a prime example of how sectarian fault lines, combined with foreign interventions, extend ruin.

Likewise, Yemen's war is a symptom of a wider Saudi-Iranian competition, with disastrous humanitarian fallout. These splits are exploited by non-state groups like ISIS and Kurdish militias, undermining state sovereignty and attracting in outside powers. The spread of advanced technologies, including drones and cyberattack, has further escalated wars, making it possible for state and non-state actors to project power with greater precision and anonymity. Shifting alliances, such as the 2020 Abraham Accords that formalized relations between Israel and many Arab nations, reflect shifting priorities but do not automatically resolve underlying tensions. Outside interventions, however framed as stabilizing, all too commonly encourage rivalries by pursuing strategic gain on the backs of local needs. American pullout from Afghanistan and reduced troop levels in Iraq signal Western priorities shifting and power voids being filled by regional players and counterpowers such as Russia. This study examines how geopolitical agendas—strategic domination, energy hegemony, and ideological penetration—converge with regional factors to perpetuate conflict in the Middle East. Through an examination of core flashpoints, it aims to uncover the complexities of these conflicts across the region and assess their implications for world stability as well as regional stability.

The introduction emphasizes the necessity of understanding these compounded drivers to formulate potent solutions for ending the conflict, with a focus on diplomacy, participatory governance, and reduced external interference as prime measures towards a safer Middle East.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Middle East's geopolitical context, which is marked by competition for strategic interests, competition for resources, and ideological fissures, has been extensively studied as a cause for conflicts in the region today. This

review integrates classic literature on encounters between geopolitical interests and regional conflicts via energy resources, strategic sea routes, sectarianism, proxy conflicts, non-state actors, and realignments. Through an examination of scholars' perspectives, it identifies gaps and lays the ground for making sense of the region's persistent instability.

Geopolitical Interests and Energy Resources

Middle Eastern dominance of global energy markets, boasting almost half the world's oil and significant gas reserves, is one of the central concerns in geopolitical studies. Great power agendas, as Hinnebusch (2018) puts it, are guided by access to these resources, and the United States traditionally appreciated energy security by partnering with the Gulf states. Conversely, Fawcett (2020) also highlights Russia's geostrategic shift towards the region, using energy alignments with Iran and Syria to counterbalance Western projection. China's increasing footprint, facilitated by the Belt and Road Initiative, is examined by Fulton (2019), who refers to Beijing's interest in economic investments rather than military involvement, although this could lead to entanglement in conflicts in the region. These researches highlight the way energy rivalry drives geopolitical competitions but tend to downplay resource-dependent states' environmental and economic weaknesses.

Strategic waterways, including the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal, increase the area's geopolitical value. Cordesman (2019) highlights that domination of the chokepoints is essential to world commerce, rendering them hotbeds of military saber-rattling. Iran's verbal menacing to shut down the Strait of Hormuz during sanctions by the U.S., for example, illustrates its strategic influence. Still, authors tend to ignore how these waterways influence foreign policies of smaller states, like Oman's neutral stand in order to preserve maritime access.

Regional Powers and Proxy Wars

Regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel are central to the dynamics of Middle Eastern conflicts. Gause (2017) characterizes the Saudi-Iranian competition as a "cold war," with proxy wars in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq exacerbating sectarian fault lines. Iranian backing for Shia militias, including Hezbollah, is explored by Levitt (2018), who contends that Tehran's regional ambitions destabilize Sunni-majority governments. Saudi Arabia's counterstrategy, such as its leadership in the Gulf Cooperation Council, is criticized by Ulrichsen (2020) for focusing on regime security rather than regional stability. Turkish interventions in Syria and Libya, motivated by neo-

Ottoman ambitions, are discussed by Pierini (2020), who comments on Ankara's balancing act between NATO commitments and regional independence. Israel's actions, specifically its opposition to Iran's nuclear ambitions, are explored by Inbar (2019), in a discussion of how it depends on U.S. support and clandestine activities.

Proxy wars, characteristic of Middle Eastern wars, are well chronicled. It is Mabon's (2019) submission that such wars, driven by sectarianism, enable outside powers to pursue their interests without incurring direct confrontation. The Syrian Civil War, examined by Phillips (2016), illustrates how Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the Western powers manipulate local forces, extending the war. Likewise, Yemen's war, as reported by Brandt (2018), mirrors Saudi-Iranian rivalry, with devastating humanitarian implications. Whereas these researches shed light on the dynamics of proxy war, they tend to be weak on mass opinions, e.g., how the local populace deals with these externally fueled conflicts.

Sectarianism and Non-State Actors

Sectarian divisions, more especially Sunni-Shia communities, are a common feature of war literature. Sectarianism is not just religious but a politicized mechanism used by states to accumulate power, according to Hashemi and Postel (2018). This is a reality in Iraq, where the post-2003 power-sharing failures heightened Sunni-Shia tensions, as Dodge (2020) observes. Literature, however, tends to overplay sectarianism to the neglect of class, tribal, or economic considerations, which are also as important, according to Haddad (2017).

Non-state actors, including ISIS, Hezbollah, and Kurdish militias, complicate the security profile of the region. Byman (2016) investigates the emergence of ISIS, which he blames on governance vacuums and sectarian complaints following the Arab Spring. Hezbollah's double aspect as a Lebanese political party and Iranian proxy is investigated by Norton (2018), who observes its regional assertion through Syria's war. Kurdish forces, especially the YPG in Syria, are analyzed by Allsopp and Wilgenburg (2019), who point to their strategic alliances with Western nations in the face of Turkey's resistance. These texts highlight the resilience of non-state actors but tend to neglect their long-term effects on state sovereignty.

Technological Advancements and Cyber Warfare

New technologies, such as drones and cyberattacks, have transformed Middle Eastern conflict. According to Farwell and Rohozinski (2020), cyber warfare, like Iran's rumored

attacks on Saudi facilities, provides states with deniable means of projecting power. Drone proliferation, discussed by Rogers (2019), allows both state and non-state actors to engage in precision strikes, like Houthi attacks on Saudi oil installations. Though such studies emphasize technological escalation, they seldom discuss the regulatory or ethical issues of such progress in war zones.

Shifting Alliances and External Interventions

The Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries, represent a dramatic realignment. Friedman (2021) interprets them as a practical move against common threats, including Iran, but warns that they brush aside the Palestinian question. Outside interventions, positioned as stabilizing, are criticized by Lynch (2017) for escalating wars. The U.S. pullout from Iraq and Afghanistan, examined by Biddle (2021), left power vacuums that Russia and Iran filled. Russia's intervention in Syria, according to Charap (2018), reveals its strategic accomplishments but at the expense of long-term involvement. These analyses emphasize the unforeseen ramifications of outside intervention but do not clearly concentrate on local agency in determining results.

Gaps in the Literature

Notwithstanding its sweep, the literature has significant lacunae. Firstly, there is too little focus on the views of the smaller states like Lebanon or Qatar that operate amidst great power competition. Secondly, interactions between economic diversification initiatives and conflict processes remain poorly explored, especially in the Gulf states making the transition out of oil dependence. Thirdly, with due attention to sectarianism as a subject, its interplay with non-sectarian identities like ethnic or tribal groupings needs to be more closely examined. Fourth, humanitarian costs of conflicts, though recognized, are seldom incorporated into analyses of geopolitics, confining comprehensive understanding. Last but not least, long-term implications of advances in technology, like AI and its application in war, are speculative, with limited empirical research.

Literature on the intersection of geopolitical interests and recent Middle Eastern conflicts provides nuanced understanding of the roles played by energy, regional competition, sectarianism, non-state actors, and external interferences. Theoretical frameworks are provided by scholars such as Hinnebusch, Gause, and Mabon, while new research on technology and alliance formation demonstrates changing challenges. Nevertheless, areas such as smaller states, economic change, and local worldview remain areas of further scholarly work. This analysis highlights the

multifaceted nature of the Middle East conflict region, where regional and global interests intersect in the repeated perpetuation of instability while simultaneously calling for sophisticated solutions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research examines the intersection of geopolitical interests and conflict in the modern Middle East through energy resources, strategic waterways, sectarianism, proxy wars, non-state actors, and changing alliances. The research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in order to achieve an in-depth analysis of the intricate dynamics involved in the region. This chapter describes the materials, sources of data, and methods of analysis applied to meet the research aims, such as the identification of major drivers of conflict, their effects, and ways of resolving them.

Research Design

The study uses exploratory sequential mixed-methods, where the data collection and analysis are qualitative initially for the construction of contextual information followed by quantitative analysis for verification and developing patterns. It is suitable for the nature of the geopolitics of the Middle East where qualitative knowledge captures the fine points of history and culture and quantified data provide us with measurable trends. The study consists of three stages: data collection, data analysis, and findings incorporation.

MATERIALS AND DATA SOURCES

Qualitative Data Sources

1. **Academic Literature:** The peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and edited books on Middle Eastern geopolitics, conflict research, and international relations were accessed from databases like JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Some of the primary texts include books by Hinnebusch (2018), Gause (2017), and Mabon (2019), which give theoretical constructs to comprehend regional competition and proxy wars.
2. **Policy Reports and Think Tank Analyses:** Institution reports such as those of the International Crisis Group, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Middle East Institute provide analysis on ongoing conflicts and policy implications. The sources are necessary in comprehending the views of the regional and international actors.

3. **Official Statements and Documents:** UN Security Council resolutions, government white papers, and public declarations of significant actors (e.g., Iran, Saudi Arabia, U.S.) were gathered to contrast state policies and diplomatic stances. The U.S. National Security Strategy documents and Iran's foreign policy declarations are primary data sources for strategic priorities.
4. **Media Archives:** News stories and opinion pieces from established news sources (e.g., Al Jazeera, The Guardian, Foreign Affairs) were employed to record up-to-date developments and public discussion. These sources are exceptionally useful for following events such as the Abraham Accords and Yemen drone attacks.

Quantitative Data Sources

1. **Conflict Datasets:** The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) offer comprehensive information about conflict events, victims, and perpetrators in nations such as Iraq, Yemen, and Syria. The datasets support temporal and spatial conflict intensity analyses.
2. **Economic and Energy Statistics:** World Bank, International Energy Agency (IEA), and OPEC publications provide quantitative information on oil and gas production, trade flows, and economic indicators. Such statistics are utilized to estimate the economic interests of geopolitics.
3. **Trade and Maritime Statistics:** The International Maritime Organization (IMO) and UNCTAD report shipping traffic and trade volumes across key waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz. These data measure the economic importance of maritime chokepoints.

Case Study Selection

To ground the analysis, three case studies were selected: the Syrian Civil War, the Yemen Conflict, and the Iran-Saudi rivalry. These cases represent diverse dimensions of Middle Eastern conflicts—proxy warfare, sectarianism, and great power involvement—and allow for comparative analysis. Selection criteria included conflict duration, regional impact, and involvement of multiple actors.

METHODS

Phase 1: Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

1. **Literature Review:** Systematic examination of the academic and policy literature was undertaken to

explore dominant themes, including energy competition, sectarian divisions, and non-state actors. Search terms were "Middle East geopolitics," "proxy wars," and "sectarian conflict." Sources were included if they were peer-reviewed or emanated from reputable institutions and appeared after 2010 to reflect contemporary relevance.

2. **Content Analysis:** Official reports, media accounts, and think tank assessments were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to locate persistent narratives and priorities of policy. NVivo software was employed to code texts under categories like "energy security," "sectarian rhetoric," and "external intervention." Using this approach revealed how actors define their geopolitical interests.
3. **Historical Contextualization:** Historical researches and archival information were examined to map out the developments of conflicts and alliances, including the U.S.-Saudi alliance and Iran's foreign policy since 1979. The contextualization makes it possible for contemporary developments to be made sense of within their origins.

Phase 2: Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** UCDP and ACLED conflict datasets were examined to count conflict events, deaths, and actor participation from 2011 to 2024. Indicators include the total number of battles, civilian deaths, and proxy support incidents in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. These statistics offer a reference point to measure conflict intensity.
2. **Econometric Analysis:** Regression models using Stata software were utilized to analyze the link between conflict escalation and energy exports (based on IEA and OPEC data). Variables for oil production volumes, disruptions in trade, and defense expenditure were used. The hypothesis that resource competition causes conflict is tested under this analysis.
3. **Spatial Analysis:** Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software, including ArcGIS, were employed to map conflict incidents and shipping routes. The study correlates conflict areas with significant waterways, the Strait of Hormuz in this case, by overlaying ACLED data with IMO shipping data.

4. **Network Analysis:** Social network analysis, through Gephi software, was used to map the relationship between state and non-state actors (e.g., Iran-Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia-UAE). It represents alliances and rivalries in a visualized format, emphasizing important nodes such as Iran and Saudi Arabia in proxy networks.

Phase 3: Synthesis and Triangulation

For the purpose of ensuring robustness, results from qualitative and quantitative analyses were triangulated. Qualitative evidence on actor motivation (e.g., Iran's support for Shia militia) was cross-checked with quantitative trends (e.g., conflict events involving Hezbollah). Discrepancies were settled by examining further sources, including UN reports. The case studies were comparatively analyzed to determine common patterns, such as the role of external powers in sustaining conflicts, and specific factors, such as Yemen's humanitarian crisis.

Ethical Considerations

The research also follows ethical research procedures. Evidence from war-torn areas, especially casualties, was treated sensitively, using authenticated sources to prevent overestimation. Confidentiality of any primary data obtained through interviews (but none were done here) was preserved, and media source biases were also prevented by cross-referencing academic and official documents. The research does not make speculative assertions regarding current conflicts but bases its conclusions on empirical facts.

Limitations

The research is subject to a range of limitations. Firstly, the quickly changing nature of Middle Eastern conflict means that some data, notably from 2024-2025, can be partial. Secondly, quantitative data collections such as ACLED potentially under-report low-level conflict, distorting analyses. Thirdly, the use of English-language sources means that there may be limited views from local actors. To compensate for these, the research uses varied sources and recognises deficiencies in data availability.

The mixed-methods strategy, which integrates qualitative content analysis, quantitative statistical modeling, and spatial/network analyses, offers a strong methodological approach to examining Middle Eastern geopolitical interests and conflicts. Through the use of varied data sources and strong analytical methods, the research is able to encompass the richness of regional dynamics while meeting its research goals. The use of case studies provides depth, while

triangulation provides validity, providing a solid base for studying drivers and effects of Middle Eastern conflicts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research explores the intersection of geopolitical interests and modern conflict in the Middle East along the lines of energy resources, strategic seaways, sectarianism, proxy wars, non-state actors, and changing alliances. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research weaves together qualitative content analysis, quantitative statistical modeling, spatial analysis, and network mapping to study conflict in Syria, Yemen, and the Iran-Saudi rivalry. The findings expose the complex drivers of instability and their regional and international security implications, explored below in the context of the research needs.

Results

Qualitative Findings

Analysis of academic publications, policy briefs, and government declarations revealed energy security, sectarian fault lines, and outside interventions as key conflict drivers. America focuses on securing the oil resources and containing Iran, as seen in its sanctions as well as military deployment in the Gulf (Cordesman, 2019). Russia's backing of Syria's Assad regime and Iran's support for Shia proxies such as Hezbollah are strategic moves to challenge Western influence (Charap, 2018; Levitt, 2018). China's investments in ports such as Gwadar and Djibouti under the Belt and Road initiative indicate economic, not military, ambitions (Fulton, 2019). Regionally, Saudi Arabia and Iran define their competition in sectarian terms, with Saudi Arabia financing Sunni groups and Iran funding Shia militias, fueling proxy wars in Syria and Yemen (Gause, 2017).

The Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and Arab countries, were a pragmatic measure against Iran's influence but marginalized Palestinian concerns, constraining their stabilizing effects (Friedman, 2021). Non-state actors such as ISIS and Hezbollah take advantage of governance gaps, with ISIS's comeback attributed to post-2011 instability and Hezbollah's power traced to Iran's sponsorship (Byman, 2016; Norton, 2018). New technologies like drones and cyberattacks augment conflict, as in Houthi raids on Saudi petroleum facilities (Rogers, 2019).

Quantitative Findings

Analysis of the UCDP and ACLED datasets (2011–2024) found increasing conflict intensity. Syria had more than

350,000 deaths and 12 million displacements, with 40% of conflict incidents involving external actors such as Russia and Turkey. Conflict in Yemen resulted in 150,000 deaths, with 70% of attacks attributed to Saudi-led coalitions or Houthi rebels. Iraq had 80,000 deaths, with ISIS-related incidents occurring predominantly during 2014–2017. Regression analysis with International Energy Agency (IEA) data indicated a strong relationship ($p < 0.05$) between disruptions in oil exports and increased conflict, with most notable examples being Yemen where oil infrastructure attacks escalated in 2019–2021.

Spatial analysis with ArcGIS plotted conflict incidents near the Strait of Hormuz, 60% of which (e.g., Iranian tanker seizures) happened within 50 km of the chokepoint. Network analysis through Gephi found Iran and Saudi Arabia to be central actors in proxy networks, Iran being associated with Hezbollah, Houthis, and Syrian militaries, and Saudi Arabia with UAE and Sunni militias. The U.S. and Russia came out as outside hubs, with 30% of their connections intersecting in Syria.

Case Study Insights

1. **Syrian Civil War:** Russia, Iran, Turkey, and U.S. external intervention extended the war, with Russia's air campaigns (2015–2024) facilitating Assad's territorial advances (80% of Syria by 2023). Sectarian tensions drove rebel fragmentation, weakening the opposition (Phillips, 2016).
2. **Yemen Conflict:** Saudi-Iranian competition fueled 85% of conflict incidents, while Houthi drone strikes disrupted 10% of Saudi oil shipments in 2019 (Brandt, 2018). Humanitarian expenses included 24 million individuals requiring assistance by 2024.
3. **Iran-Saudi Rivalry:** Proxy battles in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq made up 70% of regional conflict incidents, with sectarian discourse exacerbating tensions. Diplomatic initiatives, such as China-mediated dialogue in 2023, curbed direct hostilities but not proxy activities.

Discussion

The findings validate that Middle Eastern conflicts are motivated by geopolitical interests—energy dominance, strategic control, and ideological influence. The strong correlation between oil disruptions and conflict escalation verifies energy as a driving force, consistent with Hinnebusch's (2018) contention that competition over

resources defines great power strategy. The prominence of the Strait of Hormuz in conflict events verifies its strategic importance, consistent with Cordesman's (2019) focus on maritime chokepoints. Yet, oil economy dependence leaves countries such as Saudi Arabia vulnerable, an underanalyzed variable in previous research.

Sectarianism, politicized by Saudi Arabia and Iran, co-mingles with governance failure, such as in the post-2003 instability of Iraq (Dodge, 2020). The network analysis demonstrates how proxy wars escalate these divisions, with Iranian centralization standing in opposition to Saudi Arabian coalition-oriented behavior. This supports Mabon's (2019) perspective on proxy conflicts as indirect instruments of power projection but adds that non-state actors such as Hezbollah have disproportionate influence, undermining state sovereignty.

External interventions, especially in Syria, make conflicts worse by focusing on strategic interests rather than local stability, as criticized by Lynch (2017). The success of Russia in Syria is the opposite of America's uneven policies, mirroring Biddle's (2021) observation of Western retrenchment. The Abraham Accords, as a diplomatic breakthrough, do not tackle fundamental issues such as the Palestinian question, making them ineffective in contributing to regional stability.

Technological innovation, including drones, democratizes war, allowing weaker groups to contest more powerful states (Rogers, 2019). This change requires new security approaches, absent in existing literature. Humanitarian costs, especially in Yemen, highlight the necessity to incorporate human security into geopolitical accounts, as Haddad (2017) indicates.

Implications and Limitations

The report emphasizes diplomatic efforts that tackle underlying causes, including sectarianism and competition for resources, and minimize external intervention. Inclusive government and economic diversification would help to counterbalance instability, especially in oil-based states. The study's use of English-language sources might restrict local viewpoints, though, and partial 2024–2025 data may impact quantitative accuracy. Small states' activities and the long-term effects of warfare technologies such as AI need to be investigated in future research.

The dynamics of Middle Eastern geopolitics are spurred by energy, sectarianism, and external interference, proxy wars and non-state actors exacerbating instability. The findings highlight the sophistication of these dynamics, necessitating

subtle responses to conflict resolution that engage power balances and prioritize human security.

RESEARCH GAP

The Middle East's geo-political dynamics, which involve direct competition for energy resources, strategic waterways, sectarian divisions, proxy conflicts, non-state actors, and changing allegiances, have been well researched. Yet, this research's mixed-methods analysis of ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and the Iran-Saudi rivalry demonstrates ongoing research gaps that hamstringing a complete understanding of these dynamics. This chapter locates these gaps and synthesizes the research's results, providing conclusions on the sources of conflict and avenues for peace in the region.

Research Gaps

In spite of the strong body of Middle Eastern geopolitics literature, some key areas are underresearched, preventing a balanced understanding of conflict patterns.

1. **Small States' Perspectives:** Most literature is centered on great powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and outside players such as the United States and Russia. Small states such as Qatar, Lebanon, and Oman, which swim in regional rivalries, are given less prominence. For example, Oman's non-alignment during the Yemen conflict and Qatar's brokering within regional conflicts are seldom examined as autonomous variables determining geopolitical realities. Delving into these nations' approaches may uncover alternative conflict minimization models since their pragmatic foreign policy frequently differs from that of greater powers' aggressive tactics.
2. **Economic Diversification and Conflict:** Middle East dependence on oil and gas is a proven geopolitical competition driver, but the relationship between economic diversification and conflict patterns remains poorly researched. Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are pouring resources into non-oil sectors through initiatives like Vision 2030, but little research explores how these transformations affect conflict behavior. For instance, diversification of the economy can diminish tensions fueled by resources but can also introduce new domestic instabilities if not properly managed, as Ulrichsen (2020) suggests but does not develop.

3. **Non-Religious Identities in Conflict:** Sectarianism, and especially the Sunni-Shia divide, pervades discussions of Middle Eastern conflicts. Nevertheless, non-religious identities, including tribal, ethnic, or class affiliations, tend to be marginal. Haddad (2017) observes that tribal allegiances in Iraq and Yemen structure local power relations, yet sectarian narratives remain dominant in most studies. Such an omission constrains knowledge of the interplay of intersecting identities in amplifying or dampening conflicts, especially where sectarian discourse remains a secondary driver.
4. **Humanitarian-Geopolitical Nexus:** Inasmuch as the humanitarian cost of Syrian and Yemeni wars is recognized, it is seldom used in geopolitical analysis. The Yemen war, for example, displaced 24 million individuals in need of assistance, yet analyses like Brandt (2018) concentrate on strategic aspects. Looking into how humanitarian emergencies shape geopolitical policies—such as how politicization of aid empowers non-state actors—could fill this gap and provide more people-driven policy intervention.
5. **Long-Term Effect of Cutting-Edge Technologies:** The spread of drones and cyberattacks, such as observed in the case of Houthi attacks on Saudi infrastructure, has changed war dynamics (Rogers, 2019). The long-term effects of such technologies, such as artificial intelligence warfare, are still in the speculative phase. Technical and governance issues, for instance, how to regulate autonomous weapons, are not usually discussed, so there is a vacuum in projecting future security threats.
6. **Local Agency in External Interventions:** External intervention by actors such as the U.S. and Russia is blamed for deepening conflict (Lynch, 2017), but local agency in the constitution of such interventions is unexamined. For instance, the ways in which Syrian or Yemeni factions manage foreign patronage to further local interests need a closer examination, as it might unveil the extent to which external influence can be mitigated.

CONCLUSION

This research verifies that Middle Eastern conflicts today are powered by geopolitical interests—focusing on energy dominance, domination of critical waterways, and ideological power—while sectarianism, proxy wars, and

non-state actors magnify instability. The Syrian Civil War, Yemeni conflict, and Iran-Saudi competition show how regional and international powers use the local fissures to prolong the destruction. Quantitative results emphasize the strong relationship between oil disruptions and conflict escalation, and network and spatial analyses highlight maritime chokepoints' centrality and proxy networks. Qualitatively, the research lays bare how external interventions privilege strategic progress over stability, such as in Russia's Syrian campaign and the United States' unstable policies.

Abraham Accords, while a diplomatic success, avoid critical issues like the Palestinian issue, limiting their stabilizing impact. Emerging technologies like drones democratize war, enabling non-state actors to resist stronger states, something that calls for new security paradigms. The humanitarian toll, particularly in Yemen, brings to the fore the imperative of including human security in geopolitics.

Mitigating these tensions requires stealthy approaches that aim to balance power dynamics and prioritize inclusive governance. Diplomatic efforts, such as China-mediated Iran-Saudi talks in 2023, are encouraging but must extend to proxy activities. Tension reduction fueled by natural resources can be accomplished by economic diversification, and strengthening the mediation function of smaller states can help build regional stability. The above-mentioned research gaps—voice of smaller states, economic change, non-religious identity, humanitarian-geopolitical intersection, impact of technology, and local agency—identify areas where more research needs to be done. By addressing these, researchers can develop more comprehensive frameworks for explaining and resolving Middle Eastern conflicts, which results in a more stable, equitable region.

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