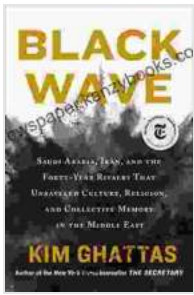


Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Tumultuous 40-Year Rivalry that Fractured Culture and Religion



The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been one of the defining geopolitical conflicts of the Middle East for over four decades. The two countries, with their vast oil wealth, have been vying for regional dominance, exerting their influence through a combination of religious soft power, economic coercion, and military force. This intense competition has had far-reaching consequences, fueling sectarian tensions, shaping the course of regional conflicts, and casting a long shadow over global politics.



Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East by Kim Ghattas

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 4583 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
X-Ray : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 389 pages



Historical Roots: Clash of Ideologies and Geopolitical Ambitions

The seeds of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry were sown during the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The toppling of the Western-backed Shah and the establishment of an Islamic republic led by Ayatollah Khomeini sent shockwaves throughout the region. Khomeini's fiery anti-Western and anti-monarchist rhetoric struck a chord with Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, home to a significant Shia population.

Saudi Arabia, the self-proclaimed guardian of Sunni Islam and custodian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, saw the Iranian Revolution as a direct threat to its regional hegemony. The Saudis feared that Khomeini's revolutionary zeal would galvanize Shia Muslims in other Gulf states, potentially destabilizing their own rule.

Religion as a Weapon: Sunni vs. Shia Divide

Religion has played a central role in fueling the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Saudi Arabia, with its adherence to Wahhabism, a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, has long portrayed Iran as a threat to the purity of the faith. Iran, in turn, has played up its status as the protector of Shia Muslims, condemning Saudi Arabia for its alleged persecution of the Shia minority.

The clash between Sunni and Shia ideologies has contributed to a deep-seated animosity between the two countries. This sectarian divide has been exploited to justify violence and foster mistrust between the two populations.

Regional Proxy Wars: Battlegrounds of Influence

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry has manifested itself in a series of proxy wars across the Middle East. In Lebanon, the two countries have backed opposing factions in the bloody civil war. In Syria, they have supported rival rebel groups in the ongoing conflict. And in Iraq, the rivalry has fueled a sectarian divide, with Saudi Arabia backing Sunni groups and Iran supporting Shia militias.

These proxy wars have not only caused immense suffering and instability in the region but have also allowed Saudi Arabia and Iran to project their power and influence beyond their borders.

Economic Rivalry: Oil and Regional Trade

Oil has been another major factor in the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Both countries are among the world's largest oil producers, and their economic well-being is heavily dependent on the global oil market. The rivalry has sometimes taken the form of economic warfare, with both sides manipulating oil prices and market share to gain an advantage.

Beyond oil, Saudi Arabia and Iran have also been competing for economic dominance in the wider region. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 economic plan aims to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on oil. Iran, meanwhile, has been seeking to expand its trade and investment in the Middle East and Central Asia.

International Implications: Global Security and Energy Markets

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry has had a profound impact on international politics. The conflict has been a source of tension between the United States and its allies in the region, as each side has sought to align itself with one or the other side. The rivalry has also affected global energy markets, as disruptions to oil production and exports from Saudi Arabia and Iran can have significant consequences for the world economy.

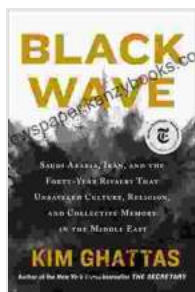
In recent years, the rivalry has intensified, with both countries engaging in covert and overt operations to undermine each other. The assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in 2020 by the United States, which had close ties to Saudi Arabia, further escalated tensions.

: A Continuing Crisis with Far-Reaching Consequences

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry has been a defining characteristic of the Middle East for over four decades. Rooted in religious and ideological differences, fueled by geopolitical ambitions and economic rivalry, the conflict has had devastating consequences for the region. It has caused wars, instability, and sectarian strife, casting a long shadow over the lives of millions.

As the rivalry continues, it remains a major source of uncertainty and volatility in the Middle East. Its resolution will require a concerted effort from

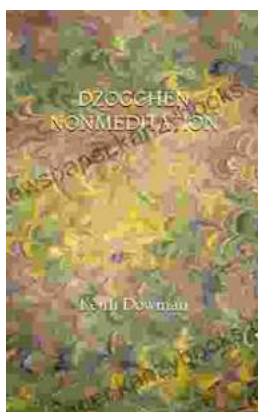
both countries, with support from the international community, to address the underlying causes of tension and build a more cooperative future.



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