



The Different Attitudes of Saudi Arabia and Iran Towards the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A National Interest Analysis

Tia Afrilia¹, Ahmad Sahide¹

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author email: tiaafrilia18@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The re-escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict in 2023 has triggered mixed responses from regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran, two major powers in the Middle East with contrasting political orientations and national interests. This study aims to analyze the geopolitical dynamics influencing the attitudes of the two countries toward the conflict, using Donald E. Nuechterlein's theory of national interest. Through the library research method, this study identifies that Saudi Arabia tends to emphasize regional stability and maintain strategic relations with the West, while Iran uses the conflict to strengthen its anti-Zionist ideological narrative and expand its regional influence through alliances with non-state actors. The findings show that differences in interests in terms of defense, economy, ideology, and global position significantly shape each country's response patterns. This study contributes to the understanding of the shifting balance of power in the Middle East and the relevance of national interests in determining the direction of foreign policy in the region.

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INTRODUCTION

The Palestine-Israel conflict has been a central issue in the dynamics of Middle Eastern politics. Tensions began in the late 19th century with the emergence of the Zionist movement that aimed to establish a Jewish state in the land of Palestine, which was part of the Ottoman Empire, and the majority of its population was Muslim Arabs. After the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire, which had controlled Palestine for more than four centuries, collapsed. In the secret Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916, the Middle East region, including Palestine, was divided into zones of influence between Britain and France. Subsequently, Palestine was placed under a British mandate based on a decision of the League of Nations (Darme et al., 2024). In 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, which expressed support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This policy caused tensions with the Arab

population of Palestine, who feared losing control of their territory, especially since they constituted the majority of the population in the region at the time (Khairani et al., 2024).

In 1947, the United Nations (UN) proposed a plan to divide Palestine into two states, one for Jews and one for Arabs, with Jerusalem as international territory. However, this plan was rejected by Arab countries and the Palestinian population (Badjobah et al., 2021). In 1948, Israel declared its independence based on the partition plan. This move immediately angered Arab countries that rejected Israel's existence. The day after the declaration, forces from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq attacked Israel, starting the 1948 Arab-Israeli War (Sisma & Jatmiko, 2023). Israel won the war, not only retaining the territory allocated by the UN but also taking additional territory that was to become part of the Arab state of Palestine. As a result of the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to flee their homes, creating a refugee crisis that remains at the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to this day (Respati, 2023).

The defeat of Arab countries in the 1948 war did not end the conflict. In 1967, another major war broke out, known as the Six-Day War, in which Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. In that war, Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula. After the war, Israel expanded settlements in the occupied territories, adding to the dissatisfaction among Palestinians. This situation sparked the First Intifada, which began in December 1987, attracting international attention and paving the way for peace agreements (Sisma & Jatmiko, 2023). Peace efforts began with the Oslo Accords in 1993, which recognized the existence of Israel and the PLO, but the process was hampered by Israel's occupation and the construction of illegal settlements (Aljazeera, 2023).

Tensions rose again when the Second Intifada erupted in 2000 after Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, sparking violence that lasted until 2005 (Sari, 2022). Although Israel withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, the conflict did not subside. Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections deepened the rift with Fatah, and in 2007 Hamas took control of Gaza, creating a de facto separation between Gaza and the West Bank. Armed conflict continued, as seen in Operation Cast Lead in 2008 and the 2014 Gaza War, which caused significant casualties and destruction (Britannica, 2024)(BBC News, 2023) (BBC News, 2023). Tensions escalated again in May 2021, when the eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and clashes at the Al-Aqsa Mosque led to a series of Israeli airstrikes and rocket attacks from Gaza (Tim Redaksi ITS Online, 2021). Although a ceasefire was reached in May 2021, tensions between Israel and armed groups in Gaza remain high.

In 2023, the Palestine-Israel conflict experienced another major escalation, marked by the outbreak of open war between Hamas and Israel on October 7 (Ferris & Lyons, 2023). The surprise attack launched by Hamas from the Gaza Strip, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, managed to penetrate the Israeli defense system and resulted in hundreds of casualties, including civilians. This attack was seen by Hamas as a response to Israel's violations against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank, and the blockade that continues to worsen the humanitarian situation in Gaza (Era.id, 2023). In response, Israel launched Operation Iron Sword with a massive scale of military attacks, including bombing civilian infrastructure, medical facilities, and places of worship. By the end of 2023, more than 25,000 Palestinians had been killed and hundreds of thousands more displaced. The UN has called this crisis one of the worst humanitarian disasters in Gaza's modern history (CNN Indonesia, 2023). Arab countries once again responded differently to the 2023 attack.

The response of Arab countries to the Palestine-Israel conflict has shifted significantly in recent decades. Sarah et al note that the Arab League collectively supports Palestinian independence and condemns Israeli aggression. However, weak coordination among member states and the strong influence of the United States' veto in the UN make their diplomatic efforts less effective (Sarah et al., 2024). The responses of countries in the region to the conflict also vary widely. Khalid and Mat show that after the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, Saudi Arabia chose to suspend the normalization process with Israel, Qatar actively acted as a mediator, and Oman maintained a neutral position (Khalid & Mat, 2024).

The process of normalizing relations between Arab countries and Israel is one of the important factors influencing the dynamics of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Xuameng Hu highlighted that the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, was an important turning point that hampered the normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Israel (Hu, 2024). Minhajuddin and Umam emphasize that countries such as the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan are beginning to view relations with Israel as a strategic interest to counter the common threat from Iran (Minhajuddin & Umam, 2023). Wardoyo and Valentino even mentioned that solidarity with Palestine began to be seen as a symbolic burden that hindered modernization and domestic security (Wardoyo & Valentino, 2022). On the other hand, Arafat noted that this normalization led to a decrease in attention to the Palestinian issue and strengthened Israel's position on the international stage (Arafat, 2023). Furthermore, Baqai and Mehreen warned that the Abraham Accords had changed the dynamics of the conflict in the Middle East and shifted the narrative of the conflict from Arab-Israeli to Palestine-Israel alone, so that the Palestinian struggle was increasingly marginalized (Baqai & Mehreen, 2021)

In this context, two countries that have remained consistent in their positions towards Israel are Saudi Arabia and Iran, albeit with very different and often opposing motives. The rivalry between the two has colored various conflicts in the region, from Syria, Yemen, and Iraq (Umam, 2022)(Azzahra, 2020). Maulana pointed out that the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran was driven by regional hegemonic competition, Sunni-Shiia ideological differences, and global strategic alliances, Saudi with the US, and Iran with Russia and China (Maulana, 2019). Cerioli explains that each country forms a national identity and an international role that are at odds with each other. Saudi Arabia positions itself as the guardian of stability and the conservative leader of the Sunni world, while Iran appears as the protector of the oppressed and a symbol of resistance to the West and Israel (Cerioli, 2018).

However, this dynamic began to change in 2023 when Saudi Arabia and Iran normalized relations mediated by the People's Republic of China. Aprillia and Prasodjo revealed that this normalization occurred for various reasons from Iran, such as economic sanctions pressure from the United States, the need for domestic and regional stability, and strategic economic interests, especially the energy sector and cross-regional trade. The normalization was also triggered by Saudi Arabia's failure in the Yemen war and the increasing economic dependence of both countries on China. China itself has a great interest in maintaining the stability of the Middle East for the smooth running of the Belt and Road Initiative (Aprillia & Haryo Prasodjo, 2023). Petyur and Aliyev said that the success of this mediation was part of China's peaceful diplomacy strategy to strengthen its influence in the Middle East, while accommodating the energy and economic interests of both countries (R.K & Hamidulla, n.d.). Zahra and Burhanuddin added that China's negotiation strategy reflects a pragmatic approach, where regional stability is prioritized over ideological rivalry (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). Meanwhile, Aulia and Zaman

showed that Saudi Arabia has a strong national interest in maintaining stability for the continuation of the Vision 2030 development program (Aulia & Zaman, 2024).

Following the Saudi-Iranian reconciliation, a new question arises: will this normalization of relations truly reduce rivalry, or will it merely be a temporary pause before tensions escalate again? This becomes even more relevant when the major conflict between Palestine and Israel erupts again in late 2023, which puts new pressure on each country's position. Iran has consistently supported the Palestinian resistance group, while Saudi Arabia, which had begun to open up to Israel before normalization with Iran, suddenly postponed the process. This condition opens up a new space for analysis: will they again take opposing positions in the Palestine-Israel conflict?

This study offers novelty by comparing Saudi Arabia and Iran's attitudes towards the Palestine-Israel conflict in the post-normalization context. Although many previous studies have discussed their proxy conflicts in Syria or Yemen, there are still very few studies that specifically look at how the two countries respond to the Palestine-Israel conflict in the framework of national interests post-reconciliation. This study aims to answer whether the normalization of relations has changed the pattern of their rivalry or instead shows a new, more complex dynamic in the struggle for influence in the region.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with library research methods to analyze the differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran's positions in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the framework of national interests. As an analytical tool, the concept of national interests developed by Donald E. Nuechterlein (1976) is used, which divides national interests into four dimensions: (1) defense, (2) economy, (3) world order, and (4) ideology. Additionally, this concept also categorizes the urgency of interests into vital, important, secondary, and marginal (Nuechterlein, 1976). This framework was chosen because it provides a systematic conceptual category for assessing how a country formulates and prioritizes its interests in the context of foreign policy.

The concept of national interests in this study is also reinforced by the perspective of international relations theory, particularly classical realism (Hans J. Morgenthau) and structural neorealism (Kenneth Waltz), which emphasize the importance of power, security, and the survival of the state in an anarchic international system (Metea, 2020)(Navari, 2016). On the other hand, the constructivist approach (Scott Burchill) adds dimension by viewing national interests as the result of social construction that can change in line with domestic and global political dynamics (Burchill, 2005).

The data in this study comes from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained from official statements by the Saudi Arabian and Iranian governments published in credible media outlets such as Al Jazeera, BBC, and Arab News. Meanwhile, secondary data was collected from books, scientific journals, theses, and proceedings, with priority given to academic sources based on Scopus and SAGE Publications over the last ten years. Data collection was conducted through access to digital libraries, international news portals, and the foreign policy archives of both countries.

Furthermore, the data was analyzed by matching the foreign policies, statements, and actions of Saudi Arabia and Iran with each dimension and intensity of national interest according to Nuechterlein's framework. This analysis aims to identify patterns of strategy and rationality in

the foreign policies of both countries, as well as to evaluate the extent to which their differing positions can be explained through the logic of national interests, from the perspectives of defense, economics, world order, and ideology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Saudi Arabia and Iran Relations Post-Normalization 2023

After years of tension, Saudi Arabia and Iran normalized diplomatic relations in March 2023 (Jash, 2023). The Saudi-Iran normalization in March 2023 marked a new phase in regional dynamics, with both countries showing mutual restraint. However, this agreement is more of a strategic maneuver than an attempt at deep reconciliation, as ideological differences, regional alliances, and external influences (especially the US and Israel) remain major obstacles to truly harmonious relations (Maher, 2023).

For Saudi Arabia, restoring relations with Iran is part of a regional de-escalation strategy to maintain the stability needed for the continuation of national development projects (Harsono & Ceria, 2024). For Iran, this recovery is an instrument to strengthen its position amidst global isolation and reduce pressure from the Gulf region. With this recovery, there is an assumption that the rivalry between the two will subside, including in sensitive regional issues such as Yemen, Syria, and Iraq (Jalal et al., 2023). However, post-normalization geopolitical developments show that the two are not yet fully aligned, especially in responding to the escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

The major conflict that broke out in October 2023 became an early test of this reconciliation. Iran quickly took a vocal position in support of the Palestinian resistance, not only symbolically but also with harsh rhetoric against Israel and its supporting countries (Awwad, 2024). Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has shown a much more cautious attitude: delaying the normalization process with Israel without completely cutting off communication lines (Esber, 2023). This situation shows that even though Saudi-Iranian relations have improved formally, both countries still take different positions on the Palestine-Israel conflict, according to their respective calculations and national interests.

In other words, the 2023 reconciliation does not automatically eliminate the potential for competition between the two. In fact, in the re-heating Palestine-Israel issue, the differences in the foreign policy orientations of Saudi Arabia and Iran are again visible. Iran emphasizes its ideological position as a supporter of the Palestinian struggle, while Saudi Arabia chooses a more measured diplomatic approach. This confirms that the old rivalry has the potential to emerge in a new form, where the two are no longer directly at odds, but continue to compete for political and moral influence in the Islamic world, especially regarding the Palestine issue.

B. Saudi Arabia and Iran's Attitudes to the Palestine-Israel Conflict 2023

In response to the escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict in 2023, Saudi Arabia issued several official statements affirming its support for the Palestinian people (Cook, 2023). The Saudi Foreign Ministry called for an immediate cessation of violence and aggression against the Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip, and demanded respect for international law and UN resolutions related to Palestine. Saudi Arabia stressed the importance of realizing a two-state solution as the basis for a just and comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict (Syarifudin, 2025). Although the statement indicated Saudi Arabia's traditional solidarity with the Palestinian cause, the diplomatic tone used was relatively moderate and avoided confrontation with Israel.

This reflects Saudi Arabia's careful position in maintaining a balance between historical solidarity with Palestine and its long-term geopolitical strategy.

Saudi Arabia also adopted an active diplomatic approach in international forums to exert pressure on Israel, without taking radical steps such as severing diplomatic ties with countries that support Israel. Saudi Arabia rallied support in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League to condemn Israeli aggression and call for an investigation into human rights violations in Palestine (Aljazeera, 2023). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is increasing its role in providing humanitarian aid. Through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief), Saudi Arabia is distributing medical aid, food, and emergency shelter to victims of the conflict in Gaza (Arab News, 2025).

Iran's response to the Palestine-Israel conflict in 2023 shows the continuity of the country's ideological and geopolitical position as a staunch opponent of Israel's existence. When Hamas launched a major attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Iran welcomed it as a "legitimate response to Israel's crimes." (Kirichenko, 2023). Official statements from the Iranian government imply moral and political support for the Palestinian resistance movement, although Tehran denies direct involvement. This response is not only rhetorical, but also strengthens Iran's legitimacy in the eyes of resistance groups in the region, such as Hezbollah and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria (Altawee, 2024).

Diplomatically, Iran has also used the conflict to strengthen its anti-normalization narrative against Arab countries that have established relations with Israel. In this context, Iran has strongly criticized the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states that have maintained cooperation with Israel amid the aggression on Gaza (Yetim & Kaşikci, 2025). This rhetoric aims to isolate Israel regionally, while also portraying Iran as the main protector of the rights of the Palestinian people. In fact, in international forums, such as the UN General Assembly, Iran has called for the establishment of an international legal mechanism to prosecute Israeli actions as war crimes (Taskhiri, 2024).

C. National interests that influence the attitudes of Saudi Arabia and Iran

To understand the differences in Saudi Arabia and Iran's attitudes towards the Palestine-Israel conflict after October 7, 2023 in more depth, an analysis based on international relations theory is needed that can reveal the motives behind the foreign policies of both countries. In this discussion, these differences are examined through four categories of national interests according to Donald E. Nuechterlein's theoretical framework, namely defense, economy, position in the international world order, and ideology. Through this framework, the attitudes of each state actor can be systematically reviewed to see the extent to which the actions taken are in line with broader national interests.

D. Defense Interests

One of the main factors driving Saudi Arabia's pragmatic attitude in responding to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is national defense and security interests (Abadi, 2019). Based on Donald E. Nuechterlein's theory, defense interests refer to a state's efforts to protect sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security from external and internal threats. Open confrontation with Israel, for example, by supporting resistance groups such as Hamas, risks triggering additional tensions that can be exploited by non-state actors or Iranian proxies to weaken Saudi Arabia's position. Therefore, Saudi Arabia tries to maintain a balance between support for Palestine and the need to maintain stability in the region. Saudi Arabia realizes that too strong

support for Palestine without considering regional security factors can threaten its domestic stability (Oluwashakin & Aleyomi, 2023).

Saudi Arabia's defense interests are also closely linked to its strategic alliance with the United States and Western countries. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries with the highest level of dependence on the United States in the defense sector. Based on data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in the period 2019–2023, Saudi Arabia was recorded as the second largest arms importer in the world, contributing 8.4% of total global arms imports. Of that figure, around 75% came from the United States, making Washington a major partner in meeting Saudi Arabia's military needs (SIPRI, 2024). The defense cooperation has been going on for a long time, but reached its peak under President Donald Trump, who in May 2017 approved a package of arms sales worth \$110 billion outright and potentially \$350 billion over a decade, including F-15 fighter jets, Patriot and THAAD missile defense systems, as well as various armored vehicles and other military equipment (Forum on the Arms Trade, 2024).

Saudi-US security cooperation has long been a key pillar of the kingdom's defense, whether through arms sales, military training, or the presence of US troops at strategic bases. Taking too hard a stance on Israel, a key US ally, risks straining the defense relationship that underpins Saudi national security. A more diplomatic approach to the Palestinian issue, therefore, allows Saudi Arabia to balance domestic demands for support for the Palestinians with its strategic alliance commitments with the US (Quamar, 2022).

Meanwhile, for Iran, national defense has become a major foundation of Iran's security strategy, especially after the 1979 Islamic Revolution that put the country on a path of prolonged conflict with major world powers. One of the important turning points that shaped Iran's defense doctrine was the traumatic experience of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), which killed hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed the country's infrastructure (Saikal & Vestenskov, 2020). From this experience, Iran realized the importance of building a defense system that not only relies on conventional forces but is also capable of defending and attacking asymmetrically. This approach became the basis of Iran's foreign policy, including supporting Palestinian resistance groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad as part of the "depth of deterrence" strategy, namely keeping threats to enemies as far away as possible from Iran's territorial borders (Rezeg, 2020).

Through funding, military training, and the transfer of missile technology to resistance groups in Gaza and Lebanon, Iran can create direct security pressure on Israel (Kaunert & Wertman, 2022). In Iran's defense logic, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a profitable strategic battleground: Iran can pressure its enemies from afar without having to openly involve its armed forces (Aji, 2022). In addition, by strengthening resistance groups, Iran is expanding its influence in the Levant and Sham regions, while creating a regional "security network" loyal to its strategic interests (ALAGÖZ & TOPRAK, 2022).

Iran's defense policy is also closely tied to regional geopolitical dynamics. By maintaining confrontation with Israel, Iran wants to present itself as the last bastion of resistance in the Islamic world that has long been "abandoned" by Arab countries that have begun to normalize with Israel (Ahmadian, 2021). In this context, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a field to differentiate itself from its rivals, such as Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Iran wants to show that it is not just a symbolic defender, but also an active actor in providing real military assistance to the Palestinian side. This gives Iran a strategic position in the political map of the region, allowing them to establish close relations with the Assad regime in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Shiite groups in Iraq and Yemen (Taha, 2022). In other words, Palestine becomes part of Iran's

defense architecture in building an “axis of resistance” against the hegemony of the West and its allies.

E. Economic Interests

In Donald E. Nuechterlein's national interest framework, economic interests reflect a state's drive to enhance national well-being and development through stable and economically beneficial international relations. Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing a critical phase in its economic history. After decades of relying on oil exports as the main source of state revenue, the kingdom has begun to realize that the oil-based economic model is no longer sufficient to ensure sustainability. To that end, Saudi Vision 2030, an ambitious blueprint for economic transformation, was launched. This vision includes economic diversification through the development of tourism, foreign investment, renewable energy, and the creative industries (Altalhi, 2023). However, to carry out this grand agenda, Saudi Arabia needs a stable regional environment. Tensions such as the prolonged Palestinian-Israeli conflict not only risk triggering regional instability but could also shake the confidence of international investors that Saudi Arabia desperately needs in this transition period (Nawaz, 2022).

In an increasingly interconnected world, Saudi Arabia can no longer afford to be purely ideological in its foreign policy decisions, including on the Palestinian issue. Instead, the kingdom is increasingly considering long-term pragmatic interests. Good relations with major trading partners such as the United States and European countries are becoming increasingly important (Huang, 2023). Saudi Arabia is aware that aggressive rhetoric against Israel or explicit support for Palestinian resistance groups can create distance with Western partners, which not only serve as export markets but also as sources of technology, education, and investment in strategic sectors. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has chosen to propose a peaceful solution, as a middle way that does not sacrifice solidarity with Palestine but still maintains access to the global economic network (Mnekhir, 2023).

In the context of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, economic dependence on the United States is one of the driving factors behind the kingdom's pragmatic stance on regional geopolitical issues, including the Palestine-Israel conflict (Jassim, 2022). Saudi Arabia tends to avoid open confrontation that could damage strategic relations with Washington, and instead prefers a diplomatic approach by promoting peaceful solutions as an official position. Therefore, Saudi foreign policy is not only driven by ideological considerations but also by national economic interests that are closely related to regional stability and global trade relations (Willner, 2023).

Meanwhile, Iran's economic interests in the Palestine-Israel conflict cannot be separated from the country's geopolitical strategy to maintain its influence in the Middle East and protect and strengthen its economic stability amid global pressure. Iran views this conflict not merely as an ideological issue or religious solidarity, but also as a strategic tool to strengthen its regional position (Bijan & Soroush, 2024). Support for Palestinian resistance groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad has become an important instrument in Iran's foreign policy to oppose the dominance of the United States and its allies, including Israel and Saudi Arabia (Roomi, 2023). Through this approach, Iran is not only showing its political position, but also trying to create regional conditions that can be beneficial from an economic perspective, especially regarding trade, energy, and market influence (Mahmudlu & Shin, 2022).

The energy sector is one of the main pillars of Iran's economy. The conflict in Palestine and tensions with Israel can have a direct impact on global oil and gas prices. When conflicts escalate, global markets tend to react by raising energy commodity prices due to concerns about supply

disruptions in the region (Rusanti et al., 2025). Iran, as one of the world's largest oil and gas producers, has the potential to gain economic benefits from the price spike. Despite international sanctions that limit its energy exports, the country still has a network of illegal sales and unofficial channels that allow revenues to continue flowing in. In this context, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict could be used as a tactical tool to influence global energy markets to Iran's advantage (Chuvakhina et al., 2023).

In addition, support for Palestine also opens up other economic opportunities for Iran through strengthening relations with countries or groups that have similar positions in the conflict. Iran has established economic and military cooperation with countries such as Syria, Lebanon (through Hezbollah), and Iraq, and has expanded its trade network to Central and South Asia (Awwad, 2024). In many cases, support for Palestine has become part of the narrative of "resistance to imperialism and Zionism," which Iran uses to cement strategic alliances and open up alternative trade routes that are less dependent on the Western-controlled global financial system. This is important for Iran, which has for years faced economic sanctions that have limited its access to the international banking system and global markets (Utkarsh & Ganguly, 2025).

F. The world order interests

As an absolute monarchy undergoing a major internal transformation, Saudi Arabia places the stability of the state order as a top priority in its foreign policy (Mohammadzadeh, 2019). In Donald E. Nuechterlein's theory, the interests of world order refer to a country's efforts to create or maintain an international system that allows for a stable political and economic environment that is beneficial to the survival of the country. The Palestine-Israel conflict is a highly emotional issue in the Arab and Muslim world, and could trigger domestic tensions if not managed carefully. Saudi Arabia is aware that escalating rhetoric or direct involvement in this conflict could provoke a strong reaction from the public, including conservative and opposition groups, who still uphold the traditional narrative of the Palestinian struggle. Therefore, an overly extreme stance could endanger the internal stability that is being built. By taking a position as a promoter of peace, Saudi Arabia seeks to maintain a balance between meeting public expectations of solidarity with Palestine and preventing potential disruption to the ongoing internal reform project (Faheema, 2023). Moreover, the pragmatic attitude towards this conflict also reflects Saudi Arabia's desire to strengthen its international image as a modern and responsible country. As part of its efforts to form an adaptive and integrated state order with the global world, the kingdom wants to be known not as a disruptive state or a supporter of extremism, but as a constructive partner in maintaining regional peace and stability. This aligns with Saudi Arabia's aspirations to play a role as a respected diplomatic power in the international arena, based not only on its oil wealth but also on balanced and rational political contributions (Athanasoulia, 2020).

This approach is also a long-term effort by Saudi Arabia to build international trust, especially with Western countries that are strategic partners in security and development. By supporting a peaceful solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict, Saudi Arabia not only maintains its relations with the United States and the European Union but also avoids involvement in a prolonged conflict that could disrupt regional stability and internal modernization projects. This attitude also helps Saudi Arabia reduce international criticism over human rights issues and its involvement in the Yemeni war by presenting itself as a proactive party in the peaceful resolution of other major conflicts (Heistinger, 2024). Likewise with Iran. Iran's stance on the Palestine-

Israel conflict cannot be separated from the country's long-term strategy in forming and maintaining an alternative world order that challenges the dominance of the West, especially the United States and its allies (Posch, 2017). For Iran, the stability of the world order in the Western version, supported by the military power and political influence of the United States and the presence of Israel in the Middle East, is seen as a direct threat to its national sovereignty and regional aspirations. Therefore, Iran sees the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as part of an arena to challenge this order, not merely for reasons of religious or humanitarian solidarity, but also as part of a larger project to form a more multipolar world system free from Western hegemony (M.zorri, 2023).

Through its support for Palestinian resistance groups such as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Iran not only aims to strengthen the position of the Palestinian people in facing Israel, but also uses this conflict as a tool to destabilize the international power structure that it considers unjust. Iran uses the Palestine-Israel conflict to build solidarity among countries and groups that feel marginalized by the Western-controlled global system, including by expanding cooperation with countries such as Russia, Syria, and China. Iran actively builds a narrative that resistance against Israel is part of the resistance against the corrupt and non-neutral international order. This strategy aims to strengthen Iran's diplomatic position in various international forums while also building an alternative power bloc that is not subject to the existing domination structure (Wastnidge, 2024).

Moreover, Iran also uses the Palestine-Israel conflict as a means to maintain its internal and regional legitimacy. By positioning itself as the main defender of Palestine and the opponent of Israel, Iran strengthens the revolutionary narrative that has been the foundation of its domestic politics since 1979. This narrative is not only important to maintain the loyalty of the Iranian people to the Islamist political system, but also to show the Islamic world that Iran, despite being a Shiite state, is committed to the main issues of Muslims (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2016). In this context, support for Palestine becomes a symbol that Iran is an independent force that dares to challenge global domination, and thus deserves to be a center of alternative leadership in the Islamic world. This is directly related to the interests of the world order, where Iran is trying to form new norms and alliances that are more in line with its vision of international justice (Pinar, 2024).

G. Ideological Interests

As the birthplace and development of Islam, Saudi Arabia has a huge symbolic and spiritual responsibility in the Muslim world. Its position as the guardian of the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, makes Saudi Arabia not only seen as a political actor, but also as a moral and religious authority (Saudi Press, 2025). In this context, every step of its foreign policy, especially those related to the Palestinian issue, cannot be separated from the burden and demands of this ideological identity. Palestine has long been a symbol of the struggle of Muslims, and Saudi Arabia is required to show its support for the Palestinian people as part of its historical and religious commitment. However, in today's more complex geopolitical reality, Saudi Arabia's ideological position has undergone a significant transformation, especially in the form of a more moderate and diplomatic approach (Esber, 2023).

This ideological transformation has become increasingly apparent since the emergence of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who initiated a major social and religious reform program through Vision 2030 (Esber, 2023). This vision is not only about economics or infrastructure modernization, but also about reshaping Saudi Arabia's national identity as an

open, tolerant, and progressive Islamic state. Within that framework, the approach to the Palestinian issue is no longer placed in the framework of ideological confrontation alone, but rather in a more realistic and solution-oriented diplomatic framework. Instead of using harsh rhetoric such as "total resistance", Saudi Arabia chooses to promote a two-state solution and peace negotiations as a middle way that allows them to maintain the solidarity of Muslims, but also not sacrifice strategic relations with Western countries, especially the United States (KOÇ, 2020).

Furthermore, this stance is also a strategic response to the ideological rivalry with Iran. Iran, which carries the narrative of "resistance" against Israel through support for groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, uses the Palestinian issue as a tool to mobilize political support in the region. Saudi Arabia, to differentiate itself, does not want to fall into the same militaristic logic (Abdul & Siddeqi, 2021). Instead, they chose the path of diplomacy to show that the leadership of the Islamic world should not be demonstrated through weapons, but through rationality, mediation, and peaceful solutions. In this logic, defending Palestine does not mean having to be hostile to Israel, but rather encouraging a just settlement that benefits all parties, including the Palestinian people themselves. This is a new narrative that Saudi wants to build amidst the regional ideological struggle (Schuetze, 2024).

Meanwhile, Iran builds its attitude and policy towards the Palestine-Israel conflict based on the ideological foundation of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This revolution not only replaced the monarchy with theocracy, but also introduced a new paradigm in Iran's foreign policy: resistance to Western hegemony and solidarity with the oppressed, especially Muslims. Palestine became the main symbol of this struggle (Mousavian & Chitsazian, 2020). Article 154 of the Iranian Constitution states that the Islamic Republic supports "the oppressed people of the world," which implicitly refers to the Palestinian people. Thus, support for the Palestinian struggle against Israel is not merely an expression of foreign policy, but rather a constitutional mandate and a direct reflection of the state ideology (*Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, n.d.).

This anti-Israeli stance is further strengthened by Iran's perception that the Jewish state is an extension of the United States and a major symbol of Western imperialism in the Middle East. In Iran's official narrative, the Palestine-Israel conflict does not stand alone, but is part of a global dynamic between the oppressed (mustadh'afin) and the oppressors (mustakbirin). Israel is positioned as an illegitimate colonial entity that must be wiped off the map, as Iran's supreme spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has often stated. This rhetoric is not mere propaganda, but rather a tool of ideological mobilization to strengthen Iran's identity as the last bastion of Islamic resistance against Western powers (Sadjadpour, 2020). In the regional realm, Iran's ideological commitment to Palestine also serves as a differentiator of identity compared to other Arab countries, especially after the signing of the Abraham Accords by the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco. While some Arab countries chose the path of diplomacy and economic relations with Israel, Iran has hardened its stance and accused these countries of betraying the Islamic struggle. Thus, ideology becomes a tool to build moral credibility in the eyes of Arab and Muslim societies and strengthen Iran's position as the leader of the "axis of resistance", along with Syria, Hezbollah, and Palestinian resistance groups. This shows that Iran's ideology is not static, but adaptive to regional geopolitical dynamics (Awwad, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the differences in Saudi Arabia and Iran's attitudes toward the 2023 Palestinian-Israeli conflict are not only influenced by sectarian or ideological factors, but also reflect differences in priorities in defining national interests. Saudi Arabia has adopted a pragmatic and moderate approach, focusing on regional stability, economic development, and social transformation through its Vision 2030 agenda. Meanwhile, Iran has chosen a more ideological and confrontational path, positioning its support for Palestine as part of its revolutionary identity and an indirect defense strategy against the dominance of the United States and Israel. Based on Donald E. Nuechterlein's framework, these differences are evident in four main dimensions: on the defense side, Iran exploits the conflict as a strategic arena, while Saudi Arabia seeks to maintain regional security; in the economic sphere, Saudi Arabia promotes normalization for the sake of development and diversification, while Iran remains consistent in its ideological stance despite sanctions; in the context of the world order, Iran opposes Western domination through Palestinian symbolism, while Saudi Arabia takes a diplomatic stance to maintain global strategic relations; and in terms of values and ideology, Iran uses the Palestinian issue to strengthen revolutionary legitimacy and claims to Islamic leadership, while Saudi Arabia balances Islamic solidarity with broader strategic interests. Thus, Iran's response is ideological and confrontational, while Saudi Arabia prioritizes a more pragmatic and calculative approach. These findings open up space for further study on how the Palestinian issue is utilized as a strategic diplomatic tool by other regional countries.

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