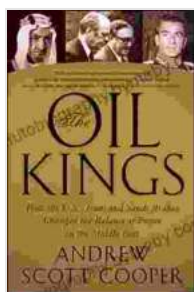


How the Iran-Saudi Rivalry Reshaped the Middle East

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been a defining feature of Middle Eastern geopolitics for decades. The two countries, representing the Shia and Sunni branches of Islam, have long competed for regional dominance, their competition spilling over into proxy wars, economic sanctions, and diplomatic crises.



The Oil Kings: How the U.S., Iran, and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East

by Andrew Scott Cooper

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In recent years, the rivalry has intensified, fueled by a number of factors, including the Arab Spring, the Syrian civil war, and the rise of ISIS. The two countries have clashed over everything from nuclear proliferation to the control of Yemen, and their rivalry has had a profound impact on the region's stability and security.

In this article, we will explore the history of the Iran-Saudi rivalry, its causes, and its consequences. We will also examine the implications of the rivalry for the future of the Middle East.

The History of the Iran-Saudi Rivalry

The roots of the Iran-Saudi rivalry can be traced back to the 16th century, when the Safavid dynasty of Iran and the Ottoman Empire of Turkey competed for control of the Persian Gulf region. The rivalry intensified in the 19th century, when the British and Russian empires began to compete for influence in the Middle East.

In the 20th century, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia took on a new dimension with the discovery of oil in the region. Both countries became major oil exporters, and their wealth fueled their competition for regional dominance.

The rivalry reached a new peak in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which overthrew the pro-Western Shah of Iran and replaced him with an Islamic republic. The new Iranian regime was hostile to Saudi Arabia, which it saw as a puppet of the West. The two countries fought a bloody eight-year war in the 1980s, and the rivalry has continued ever since.

The Causes of the Iran-Saudi Rivalry

The Iran-Saudi rivalry is rooted in a number of factors, including:

- **Religious differences:** Iran is a Shia-majority country, while Saudi Arabia is a Sunni-majority country. The two sects of Islam have a long history of conflict, and the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is often seen as a proxy for the wider Sunni-Shia divide.

- **Political differences:** Iran is a revolutionary state, while Saudi Arabia is a conservative monarchy. The two countries have very different political systems, and they often disagree on regional issues.
- **Economic competition:** Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are major oil exporters, and they compete for market share. The rivalry between the two countries has led to price wars and other economic tensions.
- **Regional ambitions:** Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have ambitions to be the dominant power in the Middle East. The two countries compete for influence in countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

The Consequences of the Iran-Saudi Rivalry

The Iran-Saudi rivalry has had a profound impact on the Middle East, including:

- **Instability and conflict:** The rivalry has fueled instability and conflict in the Middle East. The two countries have fought proxy wars in countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. The rivalry has also contributed to the rise of ISIS and other extremist groups.
- **Economic damage:** The rivalry has damaged the economies of both Iran and Saudi Arabia. The two countries have spent billions of dollars on arms and military spending. The rivalry has also led to economic sanctions and other economic disruptions.
- **Social division:** The rivalry has deepened social divisions in the Middle East. The two countries have used sectarian rhetoric to mobilize their supporters and demonize their opponents. The rivalry has also led to discrimination against Shia and Sunni minorities in both countries.

The Implications of the Iran-Saudi Rivalry for the Future of the Middle East

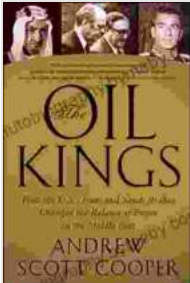
The Iran-Saudi rivalry is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The two countries have deep-seated differences that are not easily resolved. The rivalry is also fueled by regional and global powers that have their own interests in the Middle East.

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a major threat to the stability and security of the Middle East. The two countries could easily stumble into a wider war that would have devastating consequences for the region and the world.

There is no easy solution to the Iran-Saudi rivalry. However, there are a number of steps that could be taken to reduce tensions between the two countries, including:

- **Dialogue and diplomacy:** The two countries need to engage in dialogue and diplomacy to resolve their differences. They need to find ways to coexist peacefully and to cooperate on issues of mutual interest.
- **Confidence-building measures:** The two countries could take a number of confidence-building measures to reduce tensions, such as reducing military spending, withdrawing from proxy wars, and exchanging prisoners.
- **External mediation:** A third party, such as the United States or the United Nations, could help to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia. A mediator could help the two countries to find common ground and to negotiate a settlement to their differences.

The Iran-Saudi rivalry is a complex and challenging issue. However, it is essential to find a way to resolve the rivalry if we want to build a more stable and secure Middle East.



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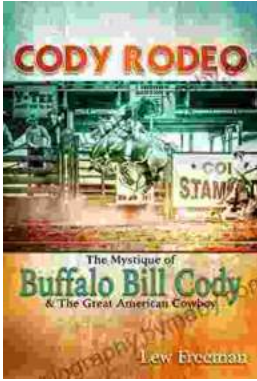
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