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INTRODUCTION

The rapprochement between Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran, mediated by China, is believed to be significant for United States of America's (USA) 'great game' in the Middle East (M. East). This development has got attention due to its potential impact on the USA's influence in the region. China's involvement in mediating the normalization is driven by its economic interests and aversion to secure energy resources of Central Asia (CA), Iran, KSA, and Gulf countries. It provides an opportunity to China to influence and challenge USA's might in the M. East. The improved relations between KSA and Iran could contribute to the stability in the region and also cooperation. However, this turn may strain US-led alliances like Gulf states and may force the US to look into its commitments to human rights. In this way, the implications of the China's mediated rapprochement between KSA and Iran may extend beyond regional geopolitics and raise important questions for the USA's tactical interest in the M. East.

(2) IMPLICATIONS OF RAPPROACHMENT ON USA

Recent normalization of ties between KSA and Iran has tremendous impacts on USA and its great game in the region. Following examples give a thorough outlook of these impacts:

(i) CHALLENGES TO THE MARKETS CONTROLLED BY USA:

China, being the world's largest import of oil and it relies on countries of Middle East heavily for its imports. The normalization of ties between KSA and Iran may secure imports of China without any obstruction, and it may expand greater influence over regional energy markets. As per the theory of Realism, China is driven by its self-interests and pursuit of influence and that is why it is challenging the USA's influence on the oil markets of this region.

(ii) IMPACTS ON USA-LED ALLIANCES:

The rapprochement could strain the USA-led alliances, especially GCC countries. Historically, the USA has maintained close ties with the GCC, including the KSA. If KSA turns towards Iran for the normal ties even further in the future then it may divide the alliances and

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pose challenge to USA's efforts to maintain cohesion and influence among its member states.

(iii) REDISTRIBUTION OF GLOBAL POWER:

Global power redistribution is the shifting distribution of influence among countries on a global scale. This results from the rise of emerging or revisionist countries, changing economic dynamics, and geopolitical shifts. Status quo power seems to lose its power, while emerging powers are gaining power. Normalization of ties between KSA and Iran may just do it. This may lead to new opportunities for other states, along with China, to realign themselves to a potential and cooperative alliance.

(iv) USA MILITARY PRESENCE IN MIDDLE EAST:

With the reduced tensions and improved ties between KSA and Iran, the need for USA's security presence in the region could diminish. This may then lead to a change in the scope of USA's military forces, and adjustment of the presence of its military somewhere else. However, the withdrawal would mostly depend on other factors as well, like further relations, changing regional dynamics, and priorities of the foreign policy's objective of USA.

(v) FROM UNIPOLAR TO MULTIPOLAR WORLD ~ THE ART OF NEO-REALISM

The lens of Neo-Realism on the rapprochement of between KSA and Iran, could lead to a potential transitioning from unipolarity of USA to multipolarity. As per Neo-Realism, the distribution of power among states shapes international politics. The normalization poses a greater challenge to the unipolar order of USA, and may alter global balance of cooperation and competition of various actors. Dynamic nature of power in international relations and transition from unipolar to multipolar order aligns with the assumptions of Neo-Realism.

(vi) POWER SHIFT IN THE MIDDLE EAST:

The normalization of ties between KSA and Iran brings enormous changes in the regional dynamics. The rapprochement potentially will lead to the redistribution of power, and challenging the status quo powers in the region. Both KSA and Iran may garner increased leverage and influence, altering the balance of power in the Middle East. This shift may also affect the influence of external actors such as the USA. The normal relations between KSA and Iran will shape the regional security environments and

(vii) THE QUESTION OF NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION:

In the lens of liberalism, the international cooperation and norms, as a result of normalization of ties between KSA and Iran, would potentially undermine the USA-led efforts to circumvent Iran in nuclear proliferation in the region. The closer ties between KSA and Iran may create an environment where nuclear cooperation becomes more plausible. This challenges the influence of USA and its control over non-proliferation efforts in the Middle East. As KSA has expressed interest in developing a civilian nuclear program, and normalization may further the implementation of it.

(viii) PROXIES CONFLICTS ~ DAMPENING REGIONAL TENSIONS:

Neo-realism emphasizes power dynamics and competition among states. But improved relations will reduce the incentives for KSA and Iran to support proxies dampening regional tensions. As the USA has been involved in managing and exploiting such conflicts, a decline in conflicts diminishes its ability to shape events and exert influence. This blow stems from the loss of a strategic tool, undermining USA interests in the region and potentially leading to a diminished role for the USA in shaping the Middle East's power dynamics.

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(ix) COUNTERBALANCING THE INFLUENCE OF USA:

China's meddling in the Middle East, including its mediation effort resulting into rapprochement between KSA and Iran, allows it to mitigate the influence USA has in this region. By creating closer ties between the two erstwhile archrivals, China can expand its economic, diplomatic, and strategic presence, challenging the USA hegemony and diminishing the effectiveness of USA decisions and alliances in the Middle East.

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CONCLUSION

China's mediation resulted into normalization of ties between two arch-rivals which has tremendous impacts on USA's 'great game' in the Middle East. It becomes evident that normalization challenges the cohesion of these alliance of GCC, threatening USA dominance and influence in the region which in turn strengthens the presence and influence of China, there in the region.