

(Q.2)

Ans:-

* INTRODUCTION:-

Saudi-Arabia and Iran are two major powers in Middle East. Iran is a Shia Majority country while Saudi-Arabia has more Sunni Population. Both fought for the dominance of each other in the region. They fought through proxies in different Middle East countries including Syria, Lebanon, Yemen. The conflict was surprisingly converted into a rapprochement in March 2022 by the mediation of China. This rapprochement will definitely improve the situation of the region and will have implications for Pakistan. It will provide an opportunity to Pakistan to enhance bi-lateral relationships with Iran. While building relationships with Iran and Saudi-Arabia, Pakistan should have to balance relations with other powers. Overall, this rapprochement is a ray of hope for the region in dark times.

* BACKGROUND OF CONFLICT:-

Saudi-Arabia and Iran have enjoyed strong relationships before 1979 Iranian Revolution. Raza Pahelvi, the king of Iran, was close to US like Saudi-Arabia. Due to similar interest, both Saudi-Arabia and Iran shared good relationships. 1979 revolution in Iran brought Ayotullah Khomeini in power who was against US. Moreover, the revolution was on the

lines of Shiaism. This created a sectarian divide between regional powers. In order to dominate the region, both fought proxy wars in different Middle Eastern countries.

The relationships between two reached a new low in 2016 when Saudi-Arabia executed a Shia Cleric, named Nimr al-Nimr. This event led to the breakage of relationships. Both countries call back their ambassadors and cut diplomatic ties. Moreover, they also pull back from their security and defense agreements of 1998 and 2001.

* RAPPROCHMENT:-

On March 10, 2023, China surprised the world by saying that Saudi-Arabia and Iran are ready to end long-lasting conflict and to restore diplomatic ties. This news shocked some parts of the world while it is encouraging for other regions. Under the agreement:-

- (i) Both countries open embassies within 2 months.
- (ii) They do not interfere within their internal matters.
- (iii) Both countries should restore 1998 and 2001 agreements.

* IMPLICATIONS FOR MIDDLE EAST:-

(a) END OF PROXY WARS:-

Middle East is the hub of proxy wars for decades. Both Saudi-Arabia and Iran and other

powers including US and Russia fought to achieve their respective objectives. Saudi-Iran deal is a relief of sigh for the region. It will end the proxy wars being fought in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon.

(b) STABILITY IN THE REGION:-

The deal will bring peace and stability in the region. It will enhance cooperation and collaboration among the countries of the region.

(c) IMPROVED SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF PEOPLE:-

People of the Middle East Region have witnessed the havocs of war after the Arab Spring in 2011. They saw destruction of their properties and loss of lives. The peace deal will improve the lives of citizens and the standard of their living.

(d) MORE INVESTMENT:-

Economic revival and investment is linked to the stability of the region. The deal will be crucial for the economic development of war-torn countries. China is ready to invest in the region in pursuit of its BRI project.

(e) IMPROVED RELATIONS AMONG COUNTRIES:-

The countries of Middle East will improve their relationships after the deal which will be better for overall region. This fact is evident after Syria's re-admission in Arab League after its removal in 2011. Moreover, release of Houthis rebels by Saudi-Arabia is also a positive sign.

(f) LESSEN INFLUENCE OF WESTERN POWERS:-

The influence of western powers like USA and Israel will also decline. As it is evident by the statement of former Prime Minister of Israel who said that the peace deal is a slap on Israel's diplomatic efforts.

* IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN:-

(a) TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH IRAN:-

The deal will open the opportunity for Pakistan to establish relations with Iran. Due to conflict between Saudi-Arabia and Iran, Pakistan has limited diplomatic choices. Pakistan had not establish relationship with Iran to full potential due to its tussle with Saudi-Arabia. Pakistan remained close to Saudi-Arabia during the period of war.

Now, this deal is a blessing for Pakistan. Recently, Pakistan and Iran opened market at Mand-Pishin Border which will boost the bilateral trade. Moreover, Polan-Gabd Electricity Transmission line is another manifestation of developing ties between Pakistan and Iran. The project will provide 100MW of electricity to remote areas of Pakistan.

(b) RELIGIOUS HARMONY:-

The deal will promote religious harmony among the countries. It will remove sectarian divide in Pakistan. Moreover, it will lessen the

religious extremism in Pakistan which is purely on Sectarian lines.

(c) KASHMIR AND PALESTINE ISSUE:-

The deal will provide Pakistan an opportunity to effectively raise the issue of Kashmir and Palestine at the forum of OIC. The deal will strengthen cooperation and harmony among OIC members and ultimately will be beneficial for OIC.

Iran was previously under the influence of India and never supported Pakistan's stance on the issue of Kashmir.

(d) Regional Quad:-

The rapprochement between Saudi-Arabia and Iran will open the way for a new quad consisting of Pakistan, Iran, Saudi-Arabia and China. It will counter already existing quads of Indo-Pacific and I2U2 of West Asian region, the purpose of both is to contain China.

Moreover, all these countries will use the platform to further their interests and raise voice to resolve their disputes.

(e) EXPANSION OF CPEC:-

CPEC is a flagship project of China's BRI. It remains under lot of controversies from its opponents especially US and India. Now, the deal will pave the way for the expansion of CPEC into Iran as Iran is getting closer to Pakistan and is coming out of the influence of India on the

development of Chahbahar Port.

(f) INDIAN HEGEMONY:-

Pakistan was waiting for this rapprochement to end Indian hegemony in the region. The affiliation of Iran with Pakistan helps to end Indian nefarious designs of using Iranian soil for terrorist activities against Pakistan.

* MEASURES FOR ISLAMABAD:-

Islamabad should have to capitalize on such a great opportunity. It should take steps to complete CPEC as soon as possible. Moreover, Pakistan should have to convince Iran and Saudi-Arabia to join CPEC. Along with this, Pakistan should strive to start halted TAPI project.

In international relations, today's friends might be tomorrow's enemy and vice versa. So, Pakistan should have to balance its relationship with other Western and European powers including USA and European Union.

* CONCLUSION:-

No matter how the deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran will impact the region in coming future. But, one thing is obvious that it will be beneficial for peace and stability of entire region. Besides, the deal will be an opportunity for regional countries to cooperate

with each other and work for the betterment
of the people.