

## Joint Crisis: Iran-Saudi Arabia Conflict



Joint-Crisis: Iran-Saudi Arabia Conflict  
President's Letter  
Oakland University Model United Nations  
March 27-28, 2020

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Joint Crisis committee on the Iran-Saudi Arabia conflict at the fifth annual OUMUN Conference!

In these committees, we will be discussing the current, multi-faceted conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We are very excited to listen to the knowledgeable and engaging debate you are sure to have at our conference. We believe MUN should be looked at as more of a learning experience, not a competition to win. We hope that all delegates will be respectful of each other and treat everyone's views and ideas respectfully. Being disrespectful to other delegates and the dais, including use of body language as well, will be looked upon unfavorably.

We have a couple of expectations for incoming delegates. First, please research your assigned role. Please be aware that in this committee, some of you will be representing specific individuals and some will be representing delegations from other countries and organizations. You should be knowledgeable about the topics, even ones you wish not to discuss, in case it is set as the agenda. Various UN and other scholarly websites include excellent information on our topics, please learn how to utilize these resources and use them to your advantage.

Second, please familiarize yourself and be comfortable with the Rules of Procedure. As mentioned before, this will be a learning experience for all, so mistakes are inevitable. If mistakes are made in using the rules or procedures, the chair will respectfully explain why and lead you towards the correct way to use them. If at any time you are confused by a ruling during debate, please raise your placard or pass a note to the chair.

Our last expectation is that everyone participates. One good piece of advice to follow as a MUN delegate: always be on the speakers list, there is always something to say. The debate will be run by you all, the delegates, while the chair is simply there to moderate.

Model United Nations is all about learning about the world and various international issues that are at hand. This conference is your chance to practice your public speaking, debate, and compromise skills. We hope you use this conference as an educational experience. We look forward to seeing you all in March! The following guide should help you in gaining background knowledge on the topic, as well as prepare you for the mechanics of our committee and prepare you for debate. More information about each committee, rules of procedure, and policies for the conference can be found at the [conference website](#).

## **Joint-Crisis Committee Mechanics:**

A joint-crisis committee works a little differently than a General Assembly or a Security Council committee. The following sections will outline the rules and mechanics for our joint-crisis committee. Please refer to these, as well as our Conference's rules and procedures, in order to best understand how this committee will function. Please note, we also plan to have a brief, separate joint-crisis training session before the opening ceremonies of the conference. We highly suggest attending, as it will prepare you better for the conference. If you have any questions about the rules of the committee, as well as any clarifying questions about any of the material presented in this guide, please feel free to email [oaklanduniversitymun@gmail.com](mailto:oaklanduniversitymun@gmail.com), and include "JCC" in the subject heading, and we will reach out as soon as we can.

### **Rules and Procedures:**

Speech in third person is not required. Delegates may address each other by title or last name; for example, "the representative from Hezbollah."

Assassination of a committee member in either the Iran or Saudi Arabia sub-committee is **NOT** allowed. You may be able to assassinate a non-committee actor or have military action if it is approved by the crisis director.

At the advent of a new crisis, the committee may vote to move into a moderated caucus to discuss the crisis, which will supersede all remaining motions of the floor.

If you would like to pass a directive you must write what type of directive it is at the top, following these three categories:

**Personal directive:** A directive passed by you alone.

**Joint directive:** A directive passed by you and at least one other delegate, in which you can combine resources.

**Group directive:** These take the place of resolutions, and are actions that are passed by the body. The provisions listed will be enacted.

If your personal or joint directive is approved by the director, it is up to your discretion to share the information with the rest of the committee.

At the beginning of the committee, you will receive information regarding the resources you possess, including money and military, and can use in your directives.

Below are examples of directives you could pass. Please note, these are just examples of *content* you can include, not the categories of directives:

*Military Directives:* Directives regarding armed forces, including a launch of a military operation, or deployment of an aircraft or ship from a base. These should include an explanation of how the operation will be carried out and the operation's intended objectives.

*Intelligence Directives:* Directives used to send in intelligence operatives to covertly obtain information about another actor, this information may or may not be given per the director's discretion, sabotage, to take deliberate action to weaken another country through subversion or disruption, the intended objective must be clearly defined, or surveillance of the behavior, activities, or other changing information of actors.

*Enforcement Directives:* Directives to issue administrative measures in a country or region that have the force of law, may include censorship of media or emergency legal measures.

A good crisis note should answer the following questions:

1. Who is taking part in it?
2. What do you want to accomplish?
3. When do you want it accomplished?
4. Why do you want to do this?
5. Where do you want it to happen (if applicable)?
6. How do you intend to accomplish it?

Make sure that your request follows your character's typical powers. For example, the Minister of Finance would not likely have a large intelligence service available to him alone, but he would have access to funds to hire someone.

Approval of directives is not guaranteed, and is fully up to the discretion of the director.

Delegates can communicate through note passing with other delegates in the room as well as the other sub-committee. Joint directives can be passed with delegates in either joint crisis committee. If you want an in-person meeting with a delegate from the other room, it will be requested in the form of a personal objective sent to the JCC director.

If you are a major player in the room, it is possible you will not have as many resources. We encourage you to use other delegates in the room as your resources and mobilize them to obtain your objectives.

#### Position Paper Guidelines:

Please refer to the OUMUN website in regard to the due date and length of your position paper. Please make sure that your position paper includes both your individual or organization's general stance and *directives* that you could potentially take part in. Please be aware that you are ineligible of winning an award at the conference if you fail to turn in a position paper.

## **Introduction to the Committee**

Welcome to the joint-crisis committee focusing on the modern Iran-Saudi Arabia conflict. Because of the nature of this joint-crisis committee, there is no set topic of discussion or plan of action. Nonetheless, this background guide will provide you with the information needed to learn more about your individual roles and their respective thoughts and policies about this ongoing conflict.

Listed below are the actors that will be represented in the Iran and Saudi Arabia sub-committees:

<b>Iran</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>
Iranian President	Minister of Defense
Iranian Foreign Minister	Minister of Oil
Iranian Defense Minister	Minister of For Affairs
Iranian Oil Minister	Minister of National Guard
Head of Revolutionary Guards	Head of Religious Affairs
Speaker of the Iranian Majles (Parliament)	Head of Saudi Secret Service
Hezbollah	US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia
Houthi Rebels (Yemen)	Israeli Mossad
Russian Ambassador to Iran	Yemeni Governmentt Representative
Iranian Secret Service	UAE Emir
Qatar	US National Security Adviser

The Supreme Iranian Leader (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) and Saudi Leader (Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, MBS) will not be represented by student-delegates. Your committees will be writing directives and making recommendations to these leaders. These leaders, however, will be communicating with individuals on each committee as well as with the committee as a whole.

This joint-crisis committee will be set in the present time but knowing the history between Iran and Saudi Arabia will be critical to understanding the current conflict. Thus, the remainder of this guide will provide a brief summary of the applicable history, what is currently happening, and future actions. As stated before, some of you will be representing specific individuals and some will be representing delegations from other countries and organizations. You will find it useful to research your role in-depth, and make use of speeches or news articles by your individual.

We are at an interesting moment in time to study the Middle East. Regional instability has been brought on by many different actors, but one of the most consistent conflicts occurring is between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In order to best understand this, you must first realize the stark

differences between these two countries and how that has played a role in shaping this conflict. Iran is a Shiite-led Islamic republic, while Saudi Arabia is a Sunni-led Islamic monarchy. Differences in ideology are not the only factor behind this conflict; these two countries have had a long history of quarrels, as you will read below.

## **Historical Background**

Before the Islamic Republic of Iran was formed in 1979, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were based off bilateral understanding of their importance on US foreign policy in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran formed formal diplomatic relations in 1929, following the signing of a friendship treaty.<sup>1</sup> Relations between the two countries were not strong during this time, as both were working on building their country's infrastructure. A shift in the relationship occurred after the Iranian revolution of 1979, which established the Islamic Republic and replaced the Shah. The new Republic adopted a Shiite Islamic way of ruling, opposing Saudi Arabia's Sunni-Wahhabi ideology. It is important to note that Iran is a Shiite-majority, ethnically Persian country. Saudi Arabia is a Sunni-majority, ethnically Arab country. While there is no question that their ideological differences have exacerbated the conflict, that is not the catalyst of the conflict itself.

A major incident occurred in 1987 in Mecca, in which Iranian pilgrims clashed with Saudi forces, which resulted in more than a hundred casualties. During this time, the Ayatollah Khomeini went on to state the following regarding the ruling family of Saudi Arabia: "these vile and ungodly Wahhabis, are like daggers which have always pierced the heart of the Muslims from the back," and announced that Mecca was in the hands of "a band of heretics."<sup>2</sup> Following this rhetoric, in 1988, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia suspended all diplomatic relations with Iran until 1991.<sup>3</sup>

The 1990s saw an increase in mutual understanding and friendlier relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Then President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, visited Saudi Arabia in 1999<sup>4</sup>. Khatami was the first president to visit Saudi Arabia since the 1979 revolution. Following his visit, the two countries signed a security pact in 2001. Unfortunately, these friendly relations would not last long. As the US and coalition forces invaded Iraq and toppled the Sunni-led Iraqi government ruled by Saddam Hussein, Iran began to shift its political alignments in the region. Iran's development of nuclear capabilities through the 2000s began to worry Saudi Arabia. A more concise timeline of Iran's nuclear capabilities can be found [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f7c6/b618f1b5c0ff1deede47975633c986b66949.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief\\_2\\_Saudi\\_Arabia\\_Iran\\_01.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_2_Saudi_Arabia_Iran_01.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-turbulent-history-of-iran-saudi-relations/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-turbulent-history-of-iran-saudi-relations/>

It wasn't until the Arab Spring of 2011 that tensions were aggravated between the two countries. The Kingdom of Bahrain, a longtime ally of Saudi Arabia, experienced a violent string of protests that they believe were incited by Iranian authorities.<sup>5</sup> A sort of "cold-war" has been ongoing between the Gulf Sunni monarchies versus Iran. Since 2011, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been providing support to various faction groups in the region that have exacerbated violence in countries like Yemen and Syria. Qatar, which is represented in the Iran sub-committee, has also played an interesting role in the rivalry. Stemming from the Qatari diplomatic crisis in 2017, the country, which has been a long member of the GCC and a friend to Saudi Arabia and the United States, has found a new friend in Iran. Qatar is therefore playing an "in-between" role within the conflict, as it is still supported by the United States. From the Arab Spring to the recent diplomatic crisis with Qatar, the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been becoming increasingly strained and has reached a new level of conflict. The following section will analyze the current relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and what each side is supporting in the regional conflicts.

### **Current Conflict**

In 2016, Saudi Arabian authorities executed a prominent Shiite cleric, Nimr al-Nimir.<sup>6</sup> This execution infuriated the Iranians, leading to protests in Tehran which resulted in attacks against the Saudi embassy in Tehran. In response, the Saudi government announced the end of diplomatic relations with Iran; Saudi Arabia withdrew all of its diplomatic representatives from Iran and expelled all Iranian diplomats from Saudi Arabia.<sup>7</sup> Since then, relations have deteriorated. In 2019, Iran was accused of a drone strike on a Saudi oil facility. The Saudis are also concerned about Iranian military activity in the Persian Gulf, and both Saudi Arabia and the UAE (among others) have actively sought American military support. Another aspect of this conflict is the fate of the Iranian nuclear deal, with the possibility of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon remaining real. Iranian support for various Shiite groups in the region, including in Iraq and Lebanon, has also stoked Iranian-Saudi tensions.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have begun fighting a proxy war in the region. A proxy war is an armed conflict between two states in which neither party is directly involved in the fighting but do so through other means. In this case, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been fighting two proxy wars, one in Yemen and the other in Syria.

### **Yemen:**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/21/bahrain.protests/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35213244>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-executions-shia-and-sunni-tensions-on-the-rise-as-protests-erupt-across-the-middle-east-a6795021.html>



The civil war in Yemen began as a result of the Arab Spring in 2011, which saw protests topple the president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled the country for 22 years.<sup>8</sup> The Houthi rebels, which are supported by Iran, began to revolt against the Yemeni government forces as instability wreaked havoc over the country. The Houthis are a Shia militant group, fighting against the Sunni dominated government. Iran, having the largest Shia population in the Middle East, began supporting the Houthi rebels in their fight against the government. In response to Iran's support of the rebel forces, Saudi Arabia, as well as other Sunni governments in the region, began to support the governmental forces. This has led to a proxy war between the two countries, as they both support an opposing side within the conflict.

### Syria:

The civil war in Syria also began as a result of the Arab Spring of 2011, as Syrians took the streets to protest against abuses by the Assad government. In this case, the Assad government is supported by the Iranians, and the rebel forces are supported by Saudi Arabia. The civil war in Syria has been the battle ground for another proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia does not support Assad and his regime, and has been providing funding to rebel groups in order to topple the regime.<sup>9</sup> Iran wants to maintain a close relationship with Syria and the Assad regime, as it gives Iran a better chance in achieving power in that region of the Middle East. Iran having a vested interest in the Syrian conflict can also be understood through the lens that by maintaining power in the Levant, it could keep their rival, Israel, on edge.

### **Who Supports Whom?**

There are many complex parts and key players in this conflict. In order to best understand who supports whom, we have provided figures and tables below so that you could begin to understand who's on what side, as well as the military capabilities of both state actors. Please note, these are just *some* of the main actors in the ongoing conflict. The actors listed below may not all be represented in the sub-committees by delegates, but they might be able to be brought in through directives.

<b>Iranian Supporters and Proxies</b>	<b>Saudi Supporters and Proxies</b>
Hezbollah	Gulf Cooperation Council
Syrian Government	People's Mujahedin of Iran
Russia	Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran
Popular Mobilization Forces	Jaish ul-Adl
Houthi Rebels	Israel
North Korea	United States
Shia Separatists Movements in Saudi Arabia	Syrian Opposition

<sup>8</sup> <https://globalsecurityreview.com/yemen-iran-proxy-war/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://time.com/5229691/syria-trump-putin-saudi-arabia/>



In this Joint Crisis, delegates should be prepared for, among other topics, military tensions and buildup in the Persian Gulf, actions by proxy forces throughout the region, the continued crises in Yemen and Syria, and interference by outside actors. Although some delegations may have a more hawkish position, few envision an all-out regional war as a successful outcome.

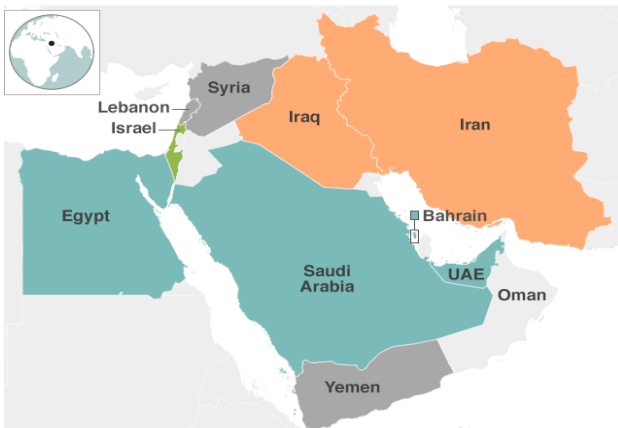
In your position papers, clearly state what the goals of your particular actor are. The overarching goal of your committee should be to advance your common interests, which in some cases may include cooperative overtures and in some cases may include actions to weaken or discredit the opposing committee. As noted above, your committee may decide to take military, economic, and political or diplomatic actions. These need to be “realistic” in terms of your capabilities. Our crisis team will resolve various directives you devise. You will also be supplied with “intelligence” and updates throughout the meeting.

### **Things to Consider:**

- What could your individual/organization propose in terms of coming to a resolution with Saudi Arabia or Iran?
- How could Iran or Saudi Arabia increase their power and influence in the region?
- What are some other issues that the Iranian or Saudi Arabian government and their supporters would want to discuss?
- Could Iran and Saudi Arabia come to a peace agreement?
- What are some possible solutions to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen?










#### **Who supports whom**

■ Saudi side ■ Iran side ■ Split\* ■ Non-aligned



\*Syria: Govt pro-Iran, opposition pro-Saudi. Lebanon: Hezbollah pro-Iran, main Sunni bloc pro-Saudi. Yemen: Govt-in-exile pro-Saudi, Houthi rebels pro-Iran

#### **Military might**

	 Iran	 Saudi Arabia
Armed forces 	563,000	251,500
Battle tanks 	1,513	900
Artillery 	6,798	761
Combat air 	336 (Ageing fleet in need of repairs)	338 (Modern fleet inc 64 Typhoon jets)
Patrol boats 	194	11
Submarines 	21	-
Destroyers/ frigates 	-	7

### **Useful Resources for Further Research:**

The information provided to you in this background guide is solely for you to being to understand the conflict and some of the history behind it. In order to best prepared for this committee, I highly encourage to you do some more research on the conflict, especially how your individual role plays a part within it, and what they could do in this committee. Below, I have listed some great resources to get you started on your research.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/> -- Iran's state-run newspaper which provides news in English

<http://saudigazette.com.sa/> -- A Saudi-government run news site which provides news in English

[From Rivalry to Nowhere: A Story of Iran-Saudi Ties](#) – Provides an in-depth, historical account of Iran-Saudi relations

[Timeline of Iran-Saudi Relations](#) – This is a great source to see a chronological account of Iran-Saudi relations from the past to the present

[United Nation's documents](#) – Familiarize yourself with important UN resolutions/documents that you determine are necessary in understanding this conflict

We also suggest news sources such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Foreign Policy*, amongst many others, as reputable sources of information on the conflict. Additionally, thinktanks such as the Brookings Institution, Middle East Institute, and the Washington Institute for Near-East Policy are great places to consider when looking at policy analysis of Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia.