

BITTER RIVALS

Iran and Saudi Arabia

3 x 60 HD



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From the devastating war in Syria, to the crisis in Yemen, to continuing turmoil in Iraq, much of today's widespread violence across the Middle East has been portrayed as part of an ancient battle between the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam.

But as FRONTLINE explores in this three-part documentary, the real story is far more complex and contemporary—rooted in a 40-year rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia that has fueled sectarian extremism for political gain, with virtually every step the U.S. has taken along the way only ratcheting up the conflict.

In *Bitter Rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia*, FRONTLINE tells the epic, inside story of how this dangerous feud has plunged the Middle East into unprecedented levels of violence—with exclusive, on-the-ground reporting from inside both countries as well as Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Bitter Rivals illuminates the essential history—and profound ripple effect—of Iran and Saudi Arabia's power struggle. It draws on scores of interviews with political, religious and military leaders, militia commanders, diplomats, and policy experts, painting American television's most comprehensive picture of a feud that has reshaped the Middle East.

The series also traces how historical interventions by the U.S. have helped to amplify sectarian antagonism between majority-Shia Iran and majority-Sunni Saudi Arabia across the decades. It delves into that history, unspooling the political animosity between Iran and Saudi Arabia that has been steadily building since the Iranian revolution of 1979. The series charts the rise and ambitions of Iran in the region, as its government has seized power vacuums in Iraq and Syria and used proxy forces on the ground to control capitols from Tehran to Baghdad, from Damascus to Beirut.

And on the other side, *Bitter Rivals* traces how the Saudi government has jockeyed with Iran to try to claim regional powerhouse status, assembling a coalition of Sunni countries prepared to fight Shia Iran, and directly initiating a war in Yemen to draw a line. It's an escalating struggle for control that has had devastating consequences, with civilians perpetually caught in the middle—including in Yemen, where the film team became the only outside journalists allowed into the Houthi-controlled north of the country in all of 2017, and captured stunning scenes of devastation wrought by the U.S.-backed Saudi coalition.

Bitter Rivals also examines each country's role in exporting extremism across the region and the world. In heated interviews with Smith, leading politicians from each country each hold the other responsible.

As violence continues to reverberate across the Middle East, *Bitter Rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia* is a gripping, must-watch television event that will help viewers understand the forces that are shaping the region today.

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CREDITS

Producers: David Fanning, Linda Hirsch and Martin Smith

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Image: FRONTLINE



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