KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY: REGIONAL SECURITY PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS IRAN

HAZAL MUSLU EL BERNİ

SUPERVISOR: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AHMET SALİH BIÇAKCI

PH. D THESIS

ISTANBUL, JULY, 2021

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ABSTRACT

MUSLU EL BERNİ, HAZAL. *DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY: REGIONAL SECURITY PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS IRAN, Ph.D. THESIS, Istanbul, 2021.*

Saudi foreign policy-making is a complicated process which forces the researchers to adopt an integrative analysis considering the multi-factorial characteristics of domestic context, multi referential objects of the process, and various factions of the royal family actors. This thesis aims to interpret the Saudi foreign policy decision-making process towards Iran from the critical constructivism theory perspective, in order to reach an understanding emanating from social, historical and political (re)construction of the events, wars and crises. In order to avoid contextless generalizations and a timeless approach, it asks how possible questions investigating which actors succeed in bringing their perceptions into the process. It argues that the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War was a turning point that revealed the peak level of Iranian foreign policy at the neighbors' domestic contexts, raised the Saudi regional security concerns, and put an incredible strain on the foreign policy-making process of the kingdom. As it conceives the security as a powerful political word, it tries to bring an analysis of the decision-making process operating inside the kingdom based on the mutual reconstruction of the domestic context and regional security perceptions of Saudi Arabia towards Iran.

Key words: Saudi foreign policy, critical constructivism, decision-making process, King Abdullah period, foreign policy analysis, regional security, Iran, 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, King Salman period, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

ÖZET

MUSLU EL BERNİ, HAZAL. *SUUDİ ARABİSTAN DIŞ POLİTİKASINDA KARAR VERME SÜRECİ: IRAN'A KARŞI BÖLGESEL GÜVENLİK ALGILAMALARI, DOKTORA TEZİ, İstanbul, 2021.*

Suudi dış politika yapım sürecinin karmaşık yapısı, araştırmacıları, Suudi Arabistan'ın iç yapısının çok faktörlü karakterini, karar verme sürecinin çok yönlü nesnelerini ve kraliyet ailesinin çok fraksiyonlu yapısını dikkate alarak, bütünleştirici bir analiz yapmaya yöneltmektedir. Bu çalışma, İran'a karşı Suudi dış politika yapım sürecini eleştirel teori perspektifinden yorumlamayarak, olayların savaşların ve krizlerin sosyal tarihsel ve siyasal yeniden yapılanmasını anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Bağlamdan uzak genelleştirmelerden ve zaman faktörünü dikkate almayan bir bakış açısından kaçınmak ve hangi aktörlerin karar verme sürecine kendi bakış açılarını dahil etmekte başarılı olabildiklerini anlamak için, süreçte gözlemlenen gelişmelerin ne kadar mümkün olabileceğine dair sorular sormaktadır. 2006 İsrail-Lübnan savaşı sonrası, Suudi Arabistan'ın İran'ın komşu ülkelerin iç siyasetinde olan etkisinin Suudi Arabistan'ın bölgesel güvenlik kaygılarını zirveye ulaştırdığını ve dış politika yapım sürecinde inanılmaz bir gerginlik teması inşa ettiğini savunmaktadır. Çalışma, güvenlik kavramını güçlü bir siyasi kavram olarak algıladığı için, iç yapı ve bölgesel güvenlik algılarının süreç boyunca birbirlerini karşılıklı yeniden yapılandırmalarını da dikkate alarak, kraliyet içinde yürütülen karar verme sürecini anlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Suudi Arabistan dış politikası, eleştirel teori, karar verme süreci, dış politika analizi, Kral Abdullah dönemi, bölgesel güvenlik, İran, 2006 İsrail-Lübnan savaşı, Kral Salman dönemi, Prens Muhammed bin Salman.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACPRA:	Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association
Aramco:	First Arabian-American Oil Company, then Saudi Oil Company
AWACS:	Airborne Early Warning and Control System
CIA:	Central Intelligence Agency
Daesh:	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ECO:	Economic Cooperation Organization
EU:	European Union
FBI:	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FPA:	Foreign Policy Analysis
GCC:	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GWoT:	Global War on Terrorism
IAEA:	International Atomic Energy Agency
IANA:	Islamic Association of North America
IR:	International Relations
IRGC:	Iranian Revolutionary Guard
ISCI:	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
JCPOA:	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KACND:	King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue
MENA:	Middle East and North Africa
MGI:	McKinsey Global Institute
MOFA:	Minister of Foreign Affairs
MOI:	Minister of Interior
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT:	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
OAPEC:	Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
OECD:	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIC:	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OPEC:	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSLR:	Organization for Hajj and Pilgrimage
PDRY:	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PIJ:	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
PLO:	Palestine Liberation Organization
PSP:	Progressive Socialist Party
RSCs:	Regional Security Complex
SANG:	Saudi Arabian National Guard
SCTA:	Supreme Commission for Tourism and Antiquities
YAR:	Yemen Arab Republic
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UAR:	United Arab Republic
UK:	United Kingdom
UN:	United Nations
US:	United States
USSR:	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD:	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WMDFZ:	Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Ahl al-Hall wal-Aqd:	People who are eligible to elect the caliph or a ruler in Islamic thought
Ahrar Al-Sham:	Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant
Ajam of Bahrain:	ethnic Iranians living in Bahrain
Al-Dawa Party:	Message or Call party
Al-Khulafah Al-Rashidun:	Muslim Caliphates
Al-Mabahith al- 'Amma:	General Security Service
Al-marja 'al-a'zam:	The highest marja in the world
Al-Mashriq:	The Levant
Al-Masjid al-Haram:	Grand Mosque
Al-nizam:	System
Al-nukhba al-fikriyya:	Intellectual elite
Al-shiraziyyin:	Partisans of al-Shirazi
Al-Tayyar al-Sadri:	Sadrist Movement
Amir al-Mu'minin:	The leader of believers
Amr malikî:	Royal order
Asabiyya:	A group feeling of social cohesion and solidarity
Bara'at az moshrekeen:	Liberation from infidels
Basij-e Sazandegi Sepah-e Pasdaran:	Development Basij of the Revolutionary Guards
Bay'ah:	Oath to a particular leader
Bayan dawah lil-islah:	Call for reform
Bedouins:	Nomadic tribes or desert inhabitants
Bid'ah:	Bringing new beliefs
Bidari-ye Eslami:	Islamic awakening
Coup d'État:	Military coup
Dar al-Harb:	Territory of war
Dar al-Islam:	Territory of Islam
Dawah:	Religious call
Fatwas:	Legal opinions in Islamic law
Fiqh:	Islamic jurisprudence
Fitna:	Chaos or conflict
Hadar:	City-dwellers
Hadith:	Sayings and teachings of Prophet Mohammed
Harakat al-muqawamah al-Islamiyyah:	Islamic resistance movement
Hashid Sha'abi:	Iraq's Popular Mobilization
Hawza:	Shiite madrassah
Husayniyyas:	Community centers where the Shiites hold mourning sessions
Hezb-e Islami:	Islamic Party
Hijra:	Migration
Hisba:	Commanding right and forbidding wrong
Hizballah:	Party of Allah/God
Hizb al-Dawa:	Islamic Dawa Party
Hokumat-e eslami:	An Islamic government

Ikhwan army:	First Saudi army formed by the Bedouin
Imamah:	Leadership
Intifadah:	Uprising
Intifadat al-Istiqlal:	Cedar Revolution
Ijma':	Consensus
Jabhat al-Nusra:	Al-Nusra Front
Jaish Al-Fatah:	The Army of Conquest
Jaysh al-Islam:	Islamic Front
Jihad:	Striving in the path of Allah
Jonbesh e Sabz:	Green Movement
Khadim al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharifayn:	Servant of Two Holy Mosques
Khitab Salman al- 'Awda yumaththilni:	Salman al-'Awda's letter represents me
Kuffar:	Heretics
Lulu al-Qatif:	Pearl of Qatif
Madrassas:	Schools on Islamic teaching
Mahdi:	Guided one
Malik al-hazm:	King of steadfastness
Majlis Al-Wukala:	Council of Deputies
Majlis Ash-Shura:	Consultative Council
Marja'iyat al-taqlid al-tamm:	Highest level Shiite authority that is a source to imitate by the followers
Marsûm malikî:	Royal decree
Matalib al-shabab al-saoudi:	Demands of the Saudi youth
Mostazafin:	Oppressed masses
Mostakberin:	Oppressors
Mufti:	A legal authority who gives opinion on a matter in Islamic law
Muhassasa ta'ifia system:	Sectarian apportionment
Muhtasibun:	He who practices hisba
Mujahideen:	Jihadists
Mushrikun:	Idolaters
Mutawa:	Religious police
Nahwa dawlat al-huquq wa al-muasasat:	Towards a state of rights and institutions
Nasiha:	Advice to the ruler
Rabitat al-A'lam al-Islami:	Muslim World League
Rafida:	Rejectionists
Rajul al-howar wa rajul al-islah:	Man of dialogue and reform
Rawafid:	Rejectionist
Sahwa:	Awakening
Sharaf:	Honor
Shariah:	Islamic law
Shuraka fi l-Watan:	Partners in the homeland
Sudur-i inqilab:	Exportation of revolution
Tablighat:	Spreading the message by word, and doing propaganda

Taghutti:	Tyrannical
Tamarod:	Rebel
Tanzim-e Dahwat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan:	The Islamic Dawah Organization of Afghanistan
Taqarub principle:	Rapprochement between Muslims and non-Muslims
Ta'ziyeh:	Expression of grief
Tawhid:	Divine unity
Ulama:	A group of educated Muslim scholars in theology and law
Umara:	Statesmen
Ummah:	Community
Velayet-e faqih:	Guardianship of a jurist
Wasta:	Nepotism
Wilayat al-umma:	Governance of people
Zakat:	A religious tax on Muslims to aid poor people within the Muslim community
مجتمع المقاومة:	Resistance society

"ريال لأفضل ٥ تغريدات وطنية ٥٠٠٠": 5000 riyals for best 5 patriotic tweets

1. INTRODUCTION

The Saudi decision-making process has been a difficult one from which to glean first-hand information, due to the close working circle of the decision-making system to outsiders. It constitutes a challenge for the researches in drawing certain conclusions about the informal construction of the Saudi foreign policy. At this point, it is inevitable to state that any research on Saudi foreign policy can only aim to understand the process, and to offer insights without reaching exact causes and effects behind the construction of Saudi foreign policy and its imprints on Saudi domestic context. The fragmented structure of the Saudi decision-making process compels the researchers to bring a multi-factorial, multilevel, multi-interdisciplinary, and integrative analysis rather than adapting contextless generalizations and a timeless approach to the perceptions of the decision-makers, and abstractions about Saudi Arabia.

Despite the methodology of the research was initially built upon conducting interviews with the Saudi decision-making actors, and Saudi officials working at the decision-making institutions, the conjunctural changes at the regional politics, particularly the decline of the Saudi-Turkey relations after the 2017 Qatar crisis, posed obstacles to the data collection process. The unexpected shift in the regional dynamics made the contacts, who had been asked before the 2017 Qatar crisis, to decline the interview requests. Hence, I preferred to focus on the discourse constructions of the Saudi decision-makers in Saudi newspapers in addition to conducting interviews with retired ambassadors, journalists, and academics working on the Saudi foreign policy making.

The complexity to understand the process reveals the necessity to analyze the agent-oriented features without underestimating structural context. In tandem, the images, perceptions, and ideologies in discussing the Saudi foreign policy making are social constructions, rather than a personal act of specific individuals. Through adapting critical constructivism with the foreign policy analysis (FPA), this research aims to investigate the reconstruction process of the regional security perceptions of Saudi decision-making actors towards Iran after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, during the King Abdullah period (2005-2015). In order to avoid a straightforward interpretation of the process, it asks how possible questions and examines which actors succeed in bringing their perceptions into the process, and how those decisions are taken among the distinctive representatives of royal family members and policy making institutions.

Saudi foreign policy-making is not a process solely shaped by the individual choices of the King. This fact enforces the researchers on Saudi foreign policy to reach an understanding emanating from social, historical and political (re)construction of the events, wars and crises from the perception of the multi referential objects and decision-making actors. Rather than explaining the responsibilities and roles of decision-making institutions, this research aims to bring an analysis based on the social, economic, and security environment of the backgrounds of the regional developments, to conceive the reconstruction of threat perception in Saudi foreign policy towards Iran. Saudi Arabia historically construes Iran as a threat to the self, but which is changing in accordance with the impact of the regional dynamics on the domestic understandings of the kingdom. At this juncture, the process tracing method helped the research to comprehend the process working behind the reconstruction of Iran in Saudi foreign policy making, by analyzing the relation between the independent variables and the shifts and continuities of Saudi foreign policy. Critical constructivism integrated with the FPA in understanding the active role for domestic construction of foreign policy and social institutions directed this research to comprehend the interplay between rules, discourses and constructions of decision-making institutions.

Understanding the mutual construction of domestic and regional politics in the Saudi decision-making process requires an analysis without prioritizing individual choice and psychology of leaders, or structural forces. Moreover, it requires an understanding of where the preferences originate from, whose decisions are prioritized, whose are marginalized and at whose expense, by asking how possible questions. Critical constructivism helped the research to have a critique of society-power relations and to comprehend how actors become inter-subjective in the construction of foreign policy making. FPA, integrated with the critical constructivism, minimized the mechanical looking at the decision-making process and Saudi regional security perception towards Iran, as it requires adopting a dynamic aspect of a social, political and historical position to the analysis. By asking how possible questions rather than examining which factors caused the change of Saudi regional security perception after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, this research focuses on workings of the influence of the regional dynamics on the domestic mechanisms that claimed to contribute to the reconceptualization of the

decision-making process and, in turn, the Saudi regional security perception towards Iran after 2006.

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon War was a turning point in the perception of Saudi decision-making actors towards Iran which revealed the peak level of Iranian foreign policy at the neighbors' domestic contexts. By conceiving the security as a powerful political word referring to Booth, this research aims to link the Saudi domestic context and the perceptions of the decision-makers with the regional security dynamics which are prone to change. After perceptual shift and tensions from multiple quarters following the 2006 war, Saudi decision-makers suffered incredible stress in restructuring the kingdom's regional security policy. As the 2006 war multiplied its concerns over the domestic stability, it constituted a turning point for Saudi Arabia in understanding the consolidation of Iran's potential in encouraging unrests at the neighbors and directing their domestic crisis, and effecting the foreign policy. Following the Arab uprisings which began in 2010, Saudi Arabia found itself reestablishing its decision-making process, and royal elites had to reconstruct their perception in dealing with altered regional security dynamics at the end of the war. All of these factors contributed to this research to discuss which actors have been designated to be feared, controlled or objectified in the Saudi foreign policy-making process, which actors' security perceptions influence the Saudi foreign policy decision-making process in post-2006 war on the reconstruction of regional security politics of Saudi Arabia, and in what ways or how possible those actors/institutions come to redefine the regional security perceptions of Saudi Arabia towards Iran.

The second chapter builds the theoretical framework, and outlines how to integrate the critical constructivism and FPA in understanding the Saudi decision-making process. It elucidates the motives of choosing the critical constructivism to understand the role of power relations in the decision-making process among the royal family. The integration of critical constructivism with the FPA directed the research to adopt a multi-factorial, multilevel, multi-interdisciplinary, integrative, and agent-oriented analysis. It reconceptualizes the Saudi decision-making process through mediating the rational, cognitive and bureaucratic schools to understand where the preferences of the decision-makers come from, and whose decisions are taken into consideration at whose expense. By asking how possible policy-makers come to adopt a particular decision for a foreign

policy issue, it emphasizes the pillars of Saudi foreign policy which course is not an individualistic process solely determined by the King; rather it is a social, historical and political construction through its multi referential objects and various actors. It refers to the 9/11 period which drastically changed the international security dynamics, and domestic and external security interpretations of the Saudi foreign policy. The regional security dynamics turned in favor of Iran after the 2003 Iraqi invasion due to Iran's rising influence in Iraqi politics. Hence, Iran began to foster its ties with the Shiite led post-war Iraqi government, and Iraqi Shiite militant groups on the ground, as well as its cultural, religious, political and economic influence in Iraq society. The penetration of Iran in the domestic dynamics of the neighbors was understood in regard to Saudi regional threat perceptions with a particular focus on the production of regional crises and domestic political structures which mutually constitute each other.

The third chapter deals with the historical establishment of the succession process and the decision-making process from the reign of King Saud (1953-1964) to that of King Abdullah (2005-2015). By focusing on the periods of King Saud, King Faisal (1964-1975), King Khalid (1975-1982), and King Fahd (1982-2005), it analyzes the continuities and shifts of the domestic establishments and their imprints on the regional security understandings towards Iran. The chapter outlines how the Al-Saud family consolidated its authority among the other families through the wars, political rivalries, campaigns and crises, and how it established authority over the Saudi society that is persuaded or voluntarily assimilated to accept the system of beliefs of the Al-Saud. It emphasizes that the King of Saudi Arabia has been one of the leading actors of the process within the extended family of Al-Saud, thus the Saudi decision-making process is dominated by the struggle between multiple state, society, and royal actors. The Al-Saud family is defined as the ruling family of the kingdom, relying on hegemony with a consensual control of the Saudi society, rather than a royal family that takes its authority thanks to coercive or economic power to rule.

The fourth chapter focuses on the succession crisis and the regional security perceptions of Saudi Arabia towards Iran during the first years of King Abdullah until the 2010 Arab uprisings. The chapter underlines the impact of the representations of domestic crisis, rivalries or developments in regional security perceptions of the Saudi decision-makers. It views the royal family as an institution that has been shaped around the royal

reputations and rivalries over time. It emphasizes the succession crisis among the senior princes due to the death of the senior princes, like Prince Sultan and Prince Nayef, during this time. The King Abdullah period was the last when the seniority principle was applied to the succession process as the traditional selection criteria. However, King Abdullah established the Allegiance Council in 2004 to select the future king and crown prince in order to avoid the monopoly of the princes of the Al-Sudayri family by giving right to the members of the Council. Despite the King still having the right to reject the candidates who were chosen by the Council and to offer his own candidate instead, the Allegiance Council constituted the royal split among the Al-Saud princes for the succession. King Abdullah's period mainly dealt with the domestic issues and succession issue due to the post 9/11 period which brought an international media attack on the state, thereby pushing the kingdom to cooperate with different societal groups of the Saudi society. This period demonstrated that the timing of any regional crisis, war or an international event triggered a major domestic issue or a succession affair inside the kingdom. At this juncture, it becomes decisive to understand how the domestic structure and regional security politics of Saudi Arabia reconstructed each other throughout the succession crisis in addition to the regional wars and events like the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, Ahmadinejad's military nationalism, the 2009 Green Revolution, rise of nuclear agreement discussions with Iran and the West, and the Arab uprisings in 2010. All these events revealed the connectedness of the domestic and regional at the perception of the decision-makers, and the importance of the relation between power and discourse in the decision-making process. The chapter italicized that the political issues within Saudi foreign policy-making have no meaning outside the discourse of the decision-makers.

The fifth chapter analyses the implications of the Arab uprisings on the domestic structure and the regional security perceptions of the Saudi decision-makers. It looks at the domestic context after the 2011-2014 Saudi protests to examine the responses of the domestic dissidents, including the Islamists and liberals of the Saudi society. It underlines that succession process, domestic context and regional dynamics continuously reconstruct each other in accordance with the interaction of the Saudi state with Iran's regional security understandings and policies. The period of Saudi protests revealed the fact that the implications of the regional events can target any state at any time depending on the penetration capacity of the events, crises and wars into the domestic structures of

states. Furthermore, Iranian attempts to adopt the themes and slogans of the Arab uprisings like justice, equality, dignity and anti-corruption through defining them as part of the Islamic awakening, constituted counter narratives of the kingdom. Through diversifying its foreign policy discourse from the religious claims based on transnational religious ties with the Muslim world to more diversified ones, Saudi Arabia aimed at reconstructing the Saudi state image as a trustworthy and respectful regime to the Saudi society's demands, as well as the domestic affairs of the other states. Towards the reign of King Salman (2015-), the regional security dynamics in favor of Iran pressured the Saudi decision-makers to find regional rhetorical deficiencies in Iran and rasp them in accordance with the newly projected international image of the kingdom.

The sixth chapter focuses on the first years of the post-King Abdullah period, when King Abdullah was succeeded by his half-brother King Salman in January 2015. It asks questions to comprehend the process of the sharp discursive shift from the King Abdullah period's domestic-focused and escalation-averse regional security policy, to King Salman's internationalization of the Saudi regional security understandings. King Salman's reign initiated domestic reform processes such as the 2030 Saudi vision, and the reconstruction of the Saudi state credentials such as nationalism, oil wealth, and Wahhabism as part of the domestic political and economic reforms. Thus, it brought the Salman government lead by himself and his son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, under criticism domestically, regionally, and internationally. At this juncture, the chapter focuses on the shifts of the institutional and discursive power relations that privilege particular royal and non-royal actors, and how the new discourse of the state under the authority of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman came openly to designate Iran as an existential threat to the regional stability.

2.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research intends to apply foreign policy analysis in understanding the Saudi foreign policy decision-making process from the critical constructivism theory perspective. Through remaining agnostic about the reality behind the events, wars, and crises, critical constructivism does not question the authenticity of the social reality. As it doesn't make any analytical difference, the whole point for the critical constructivism theorists is to observe whether the agents regard it as real or not, and to draw social/political implications from this.[1] Hence, one of the aims of this research is to adopt an approach that questions "habitual way of thinking and acting"[2] in international relations (IR). It intends to provide alternative explanations for the field by calling the historically determined constructions into question, negotiating their ambiguities and paradoxes within the Saudi decision-making process. As the agents continually essentialize reality with the theorists' observations on the reifications through agents' practices, the following rationale that Charles Taylor stated designs the main tenets of the research: "we can only continue to offer interpretation, we are in an interpretative circle."[3]

2.1. RE-THINKING CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Critical constructivism is a variant of constructivism originating from critical social theory that has an anti-essentialist ontology.[4] It teaches an alternative way of thinking about the meaning of our experiences and interpretations concerning the issues of international affairs.[5] According to critical constructivism, ideas and beliefs, as well as

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[1] Vincent Pouliot, "The essence of constructivism," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 7, no. 3 (2004): 322.

[2] James Der Derian, "The Boundaries of Knowledge and Power in International Relations," in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics,* ed. James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (New York: Lexington Books, 1989), 3-10.

[3] Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences, Philosophical Papers Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 53.

[4] Anti-essentialism draws upon the argument that there is no given essence to our experiences and ideas. One does not need to define something by expressing its essence in words. Meaning is prone to change, inconstantly, through time and space, hence exposes various orientations through different historical, social, political contexts. See: Robert Stalnaker, "Anti-Essentialism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (1979): 343-355.

[5] Critical constructivism has various branches which entails different orientations for us to integrate the critical constructivism with other disciplines as it is aimed to be applied in this research. One of the branches of critical constructivism focus on social theory and historical sociology illustrated in the work of Adler's epistemic communities, and Barnett's and Adler's reinvigoration of Deutsch's security community theory. (See: Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, *Security Communities* (Cambridge University Press, 1998): 6). Other branch is more critical of liberal assumptions, illustrated in Oren's work that criticizes how leaders change the definitions of democratic peace by disregarding how the

shared understandings, inform actors in interpreting the international scene, while mainstream theories of international relations like realism draw its approach upon state-centric policies and concepts that take the state at the center of their explanations.[6] As a result, one can state that critical constructivism adds the public agency in the construction of the foreign policy process, including the role of power and alienation, which are underrated in realism, liberalism, and other mainstream theories. To underpin the role of power, alienation and domination, critical constructivists ask why particular values are embodied in foreign policy discourse while others are marginalized, what are the institutional and discursive power relations that privilege particular actors while marginalizing others, who are the dominant representatives and to whom is legitimacy denied, which institutions are defined as principal actors for foreign policy-making, on what societal and organizational power relations these representations rely and at whose expense. [7] Hence, critical constructivism stresses construction, reproduction, and transformation of interests, ideas, identities, and foreign policy-making which emerge out of representations that define the situations and events the actors are facing throughout the process.

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meaning of democracy altered throughout the US history. (See: Ido Oren, "The Subjectivity of the 'Democratic' Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany", *International Security* 20, no. 2 (1995): 263-301.) Another branch of critical constructivism is closer to the poststructuralism with its linguistic and discursive stress on identity, security and foreign policy. This branch views foreign and security policies of states as legitimate practices through constructions, rather than arising from objective national interests. To illustrate, Fierke worked on how the Western responses to the Bosnian War situated the war inside a particular language game. (See: Karin M. Fierke, "Multiple Identities, Interfacing Games: The Social Construction of Western Action in Bosnia," *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no .4 (1996): 467-497). Weldes portrayed how official US discourse showed different reactions towards the Soviet Union during the Cuba Missile Crisis because of the SU's representation in the US foreign policy. (See: Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press:1999), 227). And Mutimer analyzed how practices and narratives of nuclear proliferation shape the transition from nuclear proliferation to chemical, biological and chemical weapons after the end of the Cold War. (See: David Mutimer, "Reimagining Security: The Metaphors of Proliferation," in *Critical Security Studies,* ed. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 192).
[6] Richard K. Ashley, "Poverty of Neorealism," *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (1984): 225-286; Richard K. Ashley, "Political Realism and Human Interests," *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1981): 204-236; Karen Devine, "Stretching the IR Theoretical Spectrum on Irish Neutrality: A Critical Social Constructivist Framework," *International Political Science Review* 29, no. 4 (2008): 463.
[7] Karen Devine, "Stretching the IR," 466. See also: Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50, no. 2 (1998): 324-348; Checkel, "Constructivism and EU Politics," in *Handbook of European Union Politics*, ed. Knud Erik Jorgensen, Mark A. Pollack and Ben Rosamond (London: Sage Publications, 2006): 58-59; Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 248.

Before rethinking the main tenets of critical constructivism, it is critical to mention the background of critical IR theory that begins with Robert W. Cox's article *Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations*[8] and Richard K. Ashley's *Political Realism and Human Interest*[9]. Their contributions paved the way for critical thinking on international affairs, by building their arguments upon the Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas. This period was followed by Andrew Linklater's contribution to the critical IR theory with his *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations in* 1982.[10] Critical theorists aimed to refrain from viewing the world in terms of generalized, universalized, and irreducible patterns of human behavior, in understanding the anarchical power struggle among states. For instance, realists relate states' actions with their capability of power, while constructivists believe that states do what they think most appropriate. In doing so, constructivists are guided by norms that define the identities and interests of actors.[11] In contrast to the established IR theories which reduce complex historical and political structures to ahistorical moves and thoughts based on the power politics and balance of power, critical theorists attempt to engage with the practical implications of the historical and political process of meanings as practice, and theory as an everyday political practice in defining the threats and complexities of the world.[12] Hence, one can deduce that critical constructivism tries to advance beyond the rudimentary ritualized representation of traditional theories.

In being aware of the paucity of value-free social science, critical theorists attempt to analyze the historical particularities of a situation, along with the researcher's interpretation of it, what are the possibilities of change, and how actors came to a particular interpretation since they define the existing structure of the social world as a

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[8] Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations," *Millennium: Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 2 (1981): 126-155.

[9] Richard K. Ashley, "Political Realism and Human Interest," *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1981): 204-236.

[10] Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982).

[11] Theo Farrell 'Constructivist Security Studies: Portrait of a Research Program," *International Studies Review* 4, no.1 (2002): 56.

[12] Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 1-41.

non-immutable one.[13] Hence, one can construe this endeavor of critical theory as a strive for a dialogue with other theories through a social arrangement to escape "unjustified exclusion"[14], through examining and then questioning the issues raised in established theories such as realism or liberalism.[15] For instance, for the examination of state, critical constructivists do not take the state as the object of their analysis, rather they contextualize the state concerning the social, political, and historical environment of events. They empirically explore how institutions, practices, and identities are taken as natural and are products of human agency of social construction. Critical constructivism believes in emancipation and the researcher's role in creating it. Critical constructivism also aims to surface identities and interests through understanding how people come to believe in it without articulating their effects and causes.[16] Especially in the writings of David Campbell, Roxanne Lynn Doty, Simon Dalby, and Michael J. Shapiro, one can observe their call for limits of possibility of the social construction of reality in contrary to the positivist attitude towards the existence of ideas, interests, and identities which are taken for granted, without referring to the impact of time and space throughout different historical, social and political contexts.[17]

Critical constructivism also has similarities with post-structuralism[18] in terms of its disparate method of adding the researcher's own interpretation in the reproduction of

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[13] Andrew Linklater, "The Achievements of Critical Theory," in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, Marysia Zalewski (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 279.

[14] Ibid, 280.

[15] Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane and Stephen D. Krasner, "International Organisation and the Study of World Politics," *International Organisation* 52, no. 4 (1998): 645.

[16] Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 184, 185.

[17] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (1993); Simon Dalby, "Contesting an Essential Concept: Reading the Dilemmas in Contemporary Security Discourse," in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Michael C. Williams and Keith Krause (London: UCL Press, 1997), 3-32; Michael J. Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations*, 5, no.2 (1999); Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedau, *Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing: A Brief Guide to Argument* (US: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013).

[18] Post-structuralism begins with the works of Ashley, Derrida, Shapiro and Walker in the 1980s as a meta-theoretical (that is above and beyond theory, is a critical exploration of the theory itself) critique of realism, neorealism and other dominant interpretations of the world. For those scholars, realism marginalized the emerging transnational actors, issues and voices of excluded people around the world. Campbell defines the post-structuralism as an attitude instead of a theory, which sees the theory as practice. That is because it asks meta-theoretical questions such as what counts as knowing, who can

politics, identities, interests and the world she/he is living and studying in. On the other hand, critical constructivism defines the states as actors, but not as discursively constituted subjects, and identity is something that a state has and decides to protect. For post-structuralists, identity is discursively constructed and mobilized by states in legitimating foreign policies; thus, they don't define the identity as an entity that can be fully controlled. Critical constructivists often associate identities on the basis of explicit words or concepts found in the texts examined, while post-structuralists usually trace how such terms are linked to more deep-seated identities in the historical and social process of the states, such as Western/Oriental, democratic/despotic and rational/irrational.[19] Critical constructivism builds its philosophical backgrounds on critical and post-structural theorists like Wittgenstein[20], Habermas[21], Bourdieu[22] and Derrida[23], but have an intensive focus on power, domination and alienation inherent in language and discourse. For instance, Derrida clearly paints the significance of

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claim to know something, and how particular ways of knowing occur. (see: David Campbell, "Post-Structuralism," in International Relations Theory: Discipline and Diversity, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 225.) Post-structuralism does not count on taken for granted categories rather it builds its arguments on abstractions, representations and interpretations of the world. For instance, when one speaks about the human rights, politics of identity or end of the Cold War, it provides targets of opportunity of engaging in representations as we are all involved in interpretations of the world. It does not mean to have personal opinions as legitimate knowledge but mapping the world based on representations, interpretations, power and knowledge.

[19] Barry Buzan and Lene Hassen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 197-200; Lene Hassen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

[20] Ludwig Wittgenstein, as a philosopher of mind, logic and language, questioned how the humans sort out to communicate ideas to one another. Wittgenstein advocated that words enable us to make pictures of facts, and the meaning of the words can be understood in relation to their usage in that language. See: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London, Routledge: 1994).

[21] Jurgen Habermas, a sociologist associated with the Frankfurt school, explored the structural transformation of the public sphere from a historical perspective and argued the establishment of the public sphere and vast civil society ascending over the solidarity between the equal human beings and the classes. See: Jurgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies,* ed. Chandra Mukerji, and Michael Schudson (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 398-404.

[22] Pierre Bourdieu questioned what glues the society together, and how can behavior be regulated without being concerned about obeying to the rules. Bourdieu coined the term of habitus which organizes the acts of human beings and regulates the ways that human beings act in certain ways is related to their expectation of other's responses. See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

[23] Jacques Derrida as a philosopher who coined the concept of deconstruction which was defined as excessively disassembling human's loyalty to any idea and investigating the aspects of truth that can be understood in its opposite such as reason over passion, masculinity over femininity or profit over generosity. See: Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

dichotomy such as time and space, self and other, inclusion and exclusion that today's chronology is elevated over geography.[24]

In terms of the role of actors and bureaucracies, process of decision-making, effect of international system/society on conducting foreign policy, critical constructivists focus on the impact of cognitive process on foreign policy and on agency, as they perceive the state as a base for foreign policy elites and non-state norm entrepreneurs. Zehfuss highlights the misunderstanding of constructivists in taking identities and materiality for granted and, referring to Alexander Wendt[25], he pays greater emphasis on the possibility of change instead of the causality of things.[26] Critical constructivism tends to observe that material limits do not directly impact the social world but through its meanings and representations, without stressing material limits of speech and essentialization of the materiality.[27]

Critical constructivism claims that policy-making is embedded within power relations long before agendas are set. Struggle for power among the Saudi royal family members exemplifies the informal construction of the decision-making process before the political agendas are publicized. All representational practices of the Saudi foreign policy making process entail, enact and reify power relations and discourses to constitute worlds, which puts struggle over representations at the center of policy-making. In everyday life, people make sense of their own life through their experiences of particular events, hence representational practices are the everyday practice of state leaders or decision-makers to construct meaning, usually through security practices inherited from linguistics or institutional factors. Representational practices determine who counts as an expert on a particular policy, and whose inputs will be marginalized. This is in accordance with Foucault's point of view on power and knowledge which implies that power/knowledge practices privilege some, while marginalizing others.[28] The case of Saudi foreign policy-making illustrates the discourses of the privileged groups, such as the business political elites and *ulama* (a group of educated Muslim scholars in theology and law), will be

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[24] See: Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[25] Wendt views materialism is associated with self-interest and coercion ruling international politics.

[26] Maja Zehfus, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 12-15.

[27] Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smit, "Dangerous Liaisons?: Critical International Theory and Constructivism." *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 3 (1998): 260.

[28] Michael Foucault, *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977,* ed. Colin Gordin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 86.

deemed more powerful because they are articulated to institutionalize power through the superiority of their practices or imaginaries, in turn reproducing that power. Moreover, representations of the privileged actors in the decision-making process are subject to change due to the possible challenges to the status of the privileged communities which forces dominant representations to be actively reproduced in response to anticipated challenges. A process of constitution is at the heart of discussions of foreign policy-making, not given interest or policy-makers' interests. Once close relations have been constituted as having this practical meaning, interests of a state emerge.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

Studying Saudi decision-making process presented certain limitations to this research as the process required outsider researchers to have in-person interviews and to acquire information about the functioning of the decision-making institutions. The process-tracing method that explores the causal process between the independent variables and the outcome of dependent variable by analyzing the workings of a causal mechanism[29], indicates the ways to understand how the Saudi domestic context was altered by the regional security dynamics of the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon war period. It helps to construct a way to comprehend the preferences, goals and motivations of the Saudi decision-making actors functioning in the process in order to give an in-depth analysis of the shifts and continuities in the Saudi regional security politics.[30] Through an in-depth analysis of the process, the process tracing method will help the research to bring an examination within-case inferences about the existence or absence of a causal mechanism working between the independent variables, and the shifts and continuities of Saudi foreign policy towards Iran after the 2006 war. In this sense, this research follows a particular methodology from single case studies which draws inferences about causal relationships between the variables of an affair. To understand the factors that contributed to the evolution of the Saudi regional security perception towards Iran's regional activities after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war requires an investigation of the

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[29] Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (US: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 4.
[30] Ibid, 13.

workings of the causal mechanisms at the regional level, that claimed to advance to the reconceptualization of the decision-making process.

The theory-testing process tracing method tests whether the theory deduced at the beginning of the research, and which illustrates the hypothesized causal mechanism, is present in a given case and if it functioned as expected. Beach and Pedersen outlined several steps in applying the theory-testing process tracing method in case studies.[31] Firstly, the researcher deals with conceptualizing a causal link between the independent variables and the dependent variable based on the existing theorization. Secondly, the hypothesized causal mechanism needs to be operationalized by introducing the theoretical perceptions into case specific and observable predictions, to evaluate if the mechanism is present or absent in the case. After the conceptualization and operationalization steps, the researcher collects empirical evidence to make within-case inferences, to ensure the existence of the hypothesized mechanism, and whether it functioned as expected in the beginning, or if some parts of it were absent. Lastly, the researcher begins assessing the evidence collected throughout the process.

In analyzing the independent variables contributing to the shifts on the Saudi domestic context and the perceptions of the decision-makers, this research aims to go beyond a causal link between both. Rather, it aims to make an in-depth analysis investigating the main tenets of the causality, if it exists, that functions and contributed to the perceptual shift after the 2006 war. How actors become inter-subjective and then shaped the foreign policy making process can be comprehended through a critique of society-power, a normative approach that contrasts with subjectivism, and adds a system of repression and exploitation as a referent.[32] In accordance with the critical constructivism that rejects pre-given concepts, the research asks how possible questions instead of examining which factors caused and what aspects of a state's identity and interests should change.

The Saudi decision-making process has mostly been closed to outsiders seeking first-hand information or a legislature to demand information about the process.[33] At the initial process of the research, the interviews were planned to conduct with the people in decision-making institutions such as Ministry of Interior, and *Majlis Al-Shura*. However,

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[31]Ibid, 14-15.

[32] Ronen Palan, "A World of Their Making: An Evaluation of the Constructivist Critique in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 4 (2000): 585-586.

[33] Thomas Lippman (journalist and author), in online-written interview with the author, October 2018.

the conjunctural changes at the regional dynamics shifted the focus group of the interview process. Saudi Arabia's threat perception due to the 2017 Qatar crisis towards the regional actors like Turkey, prevented my field trip to the country to conduct direct interviews with the decision-makers in order to acquire first-hand information and a more nuanced interpretation of the process, as planned in the earlier phases of the dissertation. As a matter of fact, people working in Saudi governmental institutions, who had been contacted before 2017 crisis, declined the interview requests. That is why this research conducted twenty interviews, in person, online and written, with the scholars, journalists, and retired ambassadors around the world who had spent time or worked in Saudi Arabia, or had extensively written on Saudi foreign policy-making. I spent a remarkable amount of time in Doha in order to get the opportunity to meet scholars and journalists who are writing on various dimensions of the Saudi foreign policy. These interviews provided significant outlooks to associate the royal family dynamics and Saudi foreign policy-making mechanisms from the critical constructivism perspective. In addition to the books and academic journals, the Saudi newspapers in Arabic and English were consulted to directly analyze the discourses of the decision-makers, as well as to make sense of the domestic affairs that were not covered in the international newspapers.

2.3. INTERPRETING SAUDI DECISION-MAKERS

Adopting the process tracing method enabled this thesis to interpret the changing perceptions of the decision-makers towards Iran in accordance with the shifts and continuities of the regional security dynamics. FPA and IR theories have been portrayed as intellectually dislocated and sometimes contrary to each other by many scholars. Houghton illustrates the fact that FPA has not been taken seriously by the IR theories. As such, "FPA is a theory 'without a home'; while it is in another sense 'its own home.'"[34] During the 1960s-1980s, FPA obtained a systematic framework focusing on comparative foreign policy, and thus it was criticized of neglecting to focus on inside the government agency and complexity of the domestic level of states. In the late 1980s,

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[34] David Patrick Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3 (2007): 25.

scholars like Llyod Jensen[35], Michael Clarke and Brian White[36] and Margot Light[37] attempted to build a middle range theory of the FPA with a special focus on case studies and domestic sources of foreign policy. Likewise, the Saudi decision-making process will be analyzed by referring to the social, historical and political interaction of the domestic actors, regional dynamics and international factors as major ingredients of the process.

New concepts, methods and developments in the FPA literature since the 1990s have been illustrated in the works of Philip Tetlock, George Breslaver, Donald Sylvan, Charles F. Hermann, G. R. Boynton, Amy Carnes, Steven B. Redd, Nehemia Geva, Karl DeRouen, Helen E. Purkitt, and Alex Mintz. For instance, Purkitt mentioned verbalizations by human agents and introduced 'think aloud protocol' before the decisions are taken in governments. [38] Mintz and DeRouen viewed the essence of decision-making as a decision-making process taken in an interactive setting and a sequence of decisions.[39] Likewise, Mintz, Geva, Redd and Carnes adapted poliheuristic models which integrate cognitive and rational models of decision-making.[40] Poliheuristic theory integrates rational and cognitive models, and focuses on dimension-based process of different policy options, use of non-compensatory decision rules and primacy of domestic political calculation. [41] Key pillars of the poliheuristic theory is domestic politics. Policy-makers are political actors making sequential and interactive decisions; as such, their survival is paramount and enables them to be sensitive to loss aversion. On the other hand, Bonham, Sergeev, Parshin underlined change and social learning,

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[35] Lloyd Jensen, *Explaining Foreign Policy* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982).

[36] Michael Clarke and Brian White (ed.), *Understanding Foreign Policy: The Foreign Policy Systems Approach* (UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 1989).

[37] Margot Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988).

[38] Helen E. Purkitt, "Problem Representations and Political Expertise: Evidence from "Think Aloud" Protocols of South African Elite," in *Problem Representation in Foreign Policy Decision Making*, ed. Donald A. Sylvan and James F. Voss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 147-186.

[39] Alex Mintz and Karl DeRouen, *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

[40] Alex Mintz, "How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective," *Journal of Conflict Resolution 48*, no. 1 (2001): 3-13; Steven B. Redd, "The Poliheuristic Theory of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Experimental Evidence," in *Integrating Cognitive and Rational Theories of Foreign Policy Decision Making: A Poliheuristic Perspective*, ed. Alez Mintz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 101-126; Alex Mintz, Geva Nehemia, Steven Redd and Amy Carnes, "The Effect of Dynamic and Static Choice Sets on Political Decision Making: An Analysis Using the Decision Board Platform," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 3(1997): 553-566.

[41] Mintz and DeRouen, *Understanding Foreign Policy*, 80. See also: Gary Goertz, "Constraints, Compromises and Decision-Making," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 1(2004): 15.

especially in the emergence of new structures with the minds of leaders in the example of John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev during Partial Test Ban Treaty, which was claimed to bring mutual understanding and reflectivity to the US-USSR relations during the Cold War period.[42] Janis, Hart, Stern, and Sundekius developed their theories on analyzing how groupthink mediate individual cognition, social working, group intervention and persuasion,[43] while Drezner, Van Belle, Rioux, Potter have appeared to be new representers of agent-oriented perspective.[44] Likewise, Bender and Hammend argued that there is room for human agency and bargaining in bureaucracy. In relation to the bureaucracy, Brummer integrated the poliheuristic and bureaucratic model, impact of bureaucracy and role played by human agency and their perceptions on foreign policy, how internal process within bureaucracy resulted in certain foreign policy actions that others rejected.[45]

Traditional model or rational school of decision-making differs itself from cognitive model through the analysis of optimal outcome of the decisions. The rational school portrays the states as unitary actors and single decision-makers seeking maximum gains, wealth and self-interest beside enhancing their security. Rational school assumes security matters are paramount compared to domestic issues, hence it is useful to understand the Cold War conditions and the nuclear deterrence. As a part of rational school, rational choice theory defines the foreign policy decisions based on the cost-benefit analysis; first it identifies goals and prioritizes them, then selects from means available to the prioritized goals in accordance with the costs and benefits. Thomas Schelling's game

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[42] G. Matthew Bonham; Victor M. Sergeev; Pavel B. Parshin, "The Limited Test-Ban Agreement: Emergence of New Knowledge Structures in International Negotiation," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1997): 215-240.

[43] Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); Paul 't Hart, Eric K. Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, *Beyond Groupthink: Political Group Dynamics and Foreign Policy Making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Philip E. Tetlock, "Identifying Victims of Groupthink from Public Statements of Decision Makers," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (1979): 1314–1324.

[44] Douglas Van Belle, Jean-Sébastien Rioux and David M. Potter, *Media, Bureaucracies, and Foreign Aid: A Comparative Analysis of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, and Japan* (York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004).

[45] Brummer uses the stand-sit position, actors' positions determine what an actor can or must do. See: Klaus Brummer, "The Bureaucratic Politics of Security Institution Reform," *German Politics* 18, no. 4 (2009): 503. See also: Klaus Brummer, and Valerie M. Hudson, "The Boundedness of Foreign Policy Analysis Theory?" Global Society 31, no. 2 (2017): 157-166.

theory[46], Robert Putnam's trade policy negotiations and two-level game theory[47], and Levy and Razin's work on democratic peace theory[48] can be stated as well-known examples. However, traditional foreign policy paradigm has various paradoxes, such as producing contextless generalizations and grand theory, timeless approach to the events, and abstractions about states. One can argue that these ideals had method preferences such as game theory, rational choice theory, and econometrics that cannot be applied to the actor-specific theories. These require contextual, concrete and complex interpretation using the methods of content analysis, in-depth case studies, and process tracing. At this point, one needs to analyze the relationship between the FPA and IR within the context of the emergence of the cognitive school against the rational school.

Even though there is a lack of serious point of view towards the FPA regarding why states undertake a certain foreign policy and the status quo in domestic politics, some argue that the FPA can work interdisciplinary and do not need an IR theory.[49] On the other hand, there are scholars seeking to reconcile the FPA with IR theories. To illustrate this, Viotti and Kauppi engaged liberalism and interdependence theory with the FPA while Holsti, Kegley and Wittkopt engaged realism and neo-realism with the FPA.[50] Those attempts have been criticized for incompatibility between liberalism and realism with the FPA. Both work on systemic level of analysis, taking states as primary actors on the basis of rational calculation of self-interest, while the FPA builds its analysis based on its interpretation of situations by using a problem-solving mechanism, taking humans as agents.[51] For instance, White emphasizes that there is no necessary connection between realism and the FPA, which is logically unconnected to the IR. Similarly, Ripley

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[46] Thomas C. Schelling, "What is Game Theory?" in *Contemporary Political Analysis*, ed. J.C. Charlesworth (New York: Free Press, 1967).

[47] Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42 (1988): 427-460.

[48] Gilat Levy and Ronny Razin, "It Takes Two: An Explanation for The Democratic Peace," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2, no. 1 (2004): 1-29.

[49] Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study," 26.

[50] Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism and Globalism* (UK: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987, 1990, 1998, 2011); K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall. Charles, 1995); Charles Jr. Kegley and Eugene H. Witkopf, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation* (Belmont: Thompson and WardsWorth, 2004).

[51] Houghton indicates that Viotti and Kuppi don't say more than anti-realism and pluralism. In Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study," 25. See also: Brian White, "Foreign Policy Analysis and New Europe," in *Contemporary European Foreign Policy* ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Helene Sjursen, Brian White (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 25.

believes that realism treats states as primary and makes rational calculations, while the FPA defines political elites based on their definition of situation, and non-state actors as primary actors in foreign policy acting on the behalf of states.[52] On the other hand, Duffy argues that one should give structure its due as it shapes actions, actors, preferences and concepts of self-understandings.[53] However, humans have critical capacity to reformulate our preferences in light of their reconceptualization. At this juncture, critical constructivism finds a ground with the FPA to analyze the perceptions and personalized understandings of the regional crises and wars by the leaders. In tandem, this research attempts to analyze the preferences of the Saudi decision-makers in respect of structural context within which the decision-makers as the agents produced the records of meanings of the foreign policy decisions. It prefers not to overstate the influence of the psychology and perceptions of the Saudi kings and power holders as the major determinants of their decisions. Rather, it endorses the influence of the domestic and regional environment on the decision-making process without passivating the individual choices of the decision-makers.

Historical events and circumstances, both external and internal to the discipline, increase and decrease the appeal of bureaucratic, physiological or rational insights to the foreign policy analysis.[54] The fact that FPA lacks a permanent home also allows it to run from fashions that sweep the IR from time to time. With the emergence of constructivism in the post-Cold war, scholars argued that ideational factors can alter the policy makers' perception of power, interest and systemic structure, while remaining the main drivers along with the focus on the concepts of power, systemic structure and ideas in their analysis.[55] Snyder, Bruck and Sapin's study "Foreign Policy Decision Making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics" written in 1954 and revised in 2002, is accepted as a welcome of constructivism to the FPA. In their analysis, they look at how policy makers interpret their operational environment, what values and norms are applicable to certain kinds of issues, how particular situations and meanings are constructed, and how past experiences impact the responses of policy makers to a

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[52] Brian Ripley, "Physiology, Foreign Policy, and International Relations Theory," *Political Psychology* 14, no. 3 (1993): 406.

[53] Gavan Duffy, "Give Structure Its Due: Political Agency and the Vietnam Commitment Decisions," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 2 (2001): 162.

[54] Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study," 25.

[55] Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 73-79.

particular situation.[56] They portray policy makers as major agents, but they also underline the need of other actors for specific foreign policy decisions, which makes it difficult to relate concrete and uniform units in the decision-making process. In other words, foreign policy is most fruitfully understood and analyzed in an organizational context.[57] On the contrary, James N. Rosenau's study "Pre-Theories and Theory of Foreign Policy" also needs to be stated as one of the first contributions of cognitive decision-making theories. He uses philosophy of integration by choosing genotypic variables such as size, wealth and political system as clusters of variables including individual level variables, role variables, governmental variables, societal variables, and systemic variables.[58]

The efforts made by those scholars paved the way for ideational, personal and cultural factors affecting decision-making process and subjective situation of decision-making in a scientific way, which are minimized by the mainstream IR theories. FPA scholars argued that the international system cannot fully explain the determinants of foreign policy, rather it acts as a constraint.[59] To tackle the division between traditional and cognitive decision-making theories, Herbert Simon uses the concept of bounded rationalism that adds the need for human rationality to understand human reasoning and foreign policy behavior.[60] Simon argues that rationalism has various limitations to conceptualize the agents' actions and preferences, such as lack of cognitive dimension, highly objective description of the external and internal environment, working through laboratory experiments and computer stimulations. Likewise, Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout count on the role of psychological and environmental factors on the individuals and leaders shaped by their interpretation of the psychological and operational environment surrounding them, in contrast to realism which views the

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[56] Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck and Burton Sapin, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 88.
[57] Ibid.
[58] James N. Rosenau, "Pre-Theories and Theory of Foreign Policy," in *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, ed. R. Barry Farrell (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966): 27-92; Hudson argues that Rosenau generalizes such as role variables are good for developed states while individual variables can be applied to underdeveloped. See: Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1 (2005): 9.
[59] Arthur A. Stein, "Constraints and Determinants: Structure, Purpose, and Process in the Analysis of Foreign Policy," in *Approaches, Levels, and Methods of Analysis in International Politics*, ed. Harvey Starr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 190.
[60] Herbert A. Simon, *Reason in Human Affairs* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 19-23.

decision-makers as the major actors conceiving their environment in the right way.[61] Alexander George's research "Presidential Decision-Making in Foreign Policy" portrays the leaders and political elites as creatures of habits, with set beliefs which provide them with a coherent way of organizing and making sense of signals.[62] Similarly, Jerel A. Rosati argues that countries do not act; people act on behalf of them, as states are made up of individuals.[63] All of these studies direct us to contemplate about state, policy-making and cognitive process in ways that go beyond the concept of rationalism, and which is too ambitious to explain the foreign policy making process of states.

Brecher and Jonathan's work need to be cited as a contribution to the studies on crisis behavior and FPA integration with a philosophical approach.[64] Brecher's research "The Foreign Policy System of Israel" analyzes the operational environment and physiological environment of the decision-making process. He emphasizes that information about operational environment is conveyed to decision-making elite through a variety of means such as media reports and first-hand knowledge. Then, this information is filtered through the physiological environment of decision-makers and shapes the foreign policy decisions.[65] Wilkenfeld's work "Foreign Policy Behaviour: The Interstate Behavior Analytical Model" indicates the independent variables such as physiological, political, societal, interstate and global component; intervening variables such as classification of state types, state capabilities, governmental structure; and dependent variables such as, spatial, temporal, relational, situational, substantial, behavioral classification, which are substantial components for understanding foreign policy behavior.[66] In contrast, Jervis believes that it is not operational environment but perceptions, personalized

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[61] Harold Hance Sprout, Margaret Sprout, *Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics* (US: Princeton University, 1956), 33.

[62] Alexander George built on the work of Nathan Leites's study on operational code to understand the impact of international actors on cognitive actors. See: Alexander George, *Presidential Decision-Making in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (UK: Routledge, 1980).

[63] Jerel A. Rosati, "The Power of Human Cognition in the Study of World Politics," International Studies Review 2, no. 3 (2000): 47.

[64] See; Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (US: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

[65] See; Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Settings, Images, Process* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[66] See; Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *Foreign Policy Behavior: The Interstate Behavior Analysis Model and The Political Economy of Foreign Policy Behavior* (Sage Publications, 1980).

understandings of history by leaders, and misperception that are paramount;[67] while Boulding identifies the foreign policy as a process of producing images that are produced out of individual leaders' interpretation, stereotypes and biases. Policy-makers rely on common perpetual patterns for making sense, as the mind tells them to categorize and stereotype, and simplifies causal inferences through historical analogies.[68] In Jervis's words, knowledge, expertise, individual occupancies, situation and expectations, first-hand experience, early personal career, generational effects and major events have a substantial impact on policy makers. He illustrates this argument by referring to US foreign policy during the Cold War where there was lack of international knowledge experience, and thereby a vulnerability to dominating historical analogies.[69]

Lastly, the social performative approach and discursive practices approach can be stated as other branches for studying FPA. The social performative approach argues that policy-makers are performing in accordance with a social framework as a part of a wider social order, hence this approach defines the policy-makers as involved in reproduction of the social order. FPA is a practice deriving a social order as language, words, and images that are signifiers for statement making calls. On the other hand, the discursive practices approach draws on representations in the form of discourse in dealing with social structure and actors. It defines the discursive space as metaphors, concepts and analogies which construct meanings and dissolve social constructs. Through the use of metaphors as part of discursive activity, it helps the reader to comprehend and visualize how the socially constructed meanings can change and how the agents come to take a specific decision. Foucault, Habermas and Bauman are accepted as intellectual representatives of this approach, which analyzes hegemonic and suppressed discourse. For instance, Bauman says "talk and text in context" is discourse, and language is the representation of world as construction of reality emerge out of human minds.[70] Reconceptualizing the Saudi decision-making process requires an approach that mediates the rational, cognitive and bureaucratic schools to the extent that they allow the research to ask how possible

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[67] See; Robert Jervis, *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Relations* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1976).

[68] Rosati, *The Power of Human*, 59-64. Also, see; Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956).

[69] Robert Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 187.

[70] Reiner Baumann, "The Transformation of German Multilateralism," *German Politics and Society* 20, no. 4 (2002): 6.

questions for understanding where the preferences of the decision-makers come from, and whose decisions are taken into consideration at whose expense. Through the use of interpretive epistemology, the discursive practices approach makes analyses on discourse constructing realities and asks how possible policy-makers come to adopt a particular decision on a foreign policy issue.

The Saudi decision-making process can be understood by giving credits to the limitations of both cognitive approach and rational school. Applying cognitive approach to the Saudi decision-making process would make this thesis overstate the personal views of the Saudi kings and other decision-making actors, while rational school would cause the study to treat the decision-makers as fully rational in their decisions. Interpreting the relation between the domestic and regional dynamics in Saudi foreign policy towards Iran requires an analysis that does not prioritize either the power politics or psychology of the leaders. As the Saudi decision-making process is a social construction rather than the result of personal acts of the kings, this thesis draws upon the social, political and historical contexts of the regional security dynamics in which Saudi foreign policy operates.

2.4. COMBINING CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM WITH THE FPA

This research intends to integrate critical constructivism with the FPA to understand the influence of the regional crises, wars and events on the evolution of Saudi decision-making process and the shifts of its regional security perceptions towards Iran. As Stephen Walker clearly stated: "foreign policy and international relations events are products of very complex, agent-level subsystems of thoughts and actions interacting as a larger social system of varying complexity."[71] As critical constructivism and foreign policy incorporate to deal with the complexities of the world, foreign policy decision-making is a multi-referential process in which construction of representations, arbitrary distinctions between inside and outside such as peace/order, and danger/violence are reproduced. Moreover, foreign policy is a process of constructing the other as a threat to the self which is understood as the negation to other. It forces states to ensure the unity of self with regard to the attributions of domestic societal groups, and might result in use

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[71] Stephen Walker, Akan Malici and Mark Schafer, *Rethinking Foreign Policy Analysis: States, Leaders, and the Microfoundations of Behavioral International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2010), 271.

of force if possible to repress dissident groups in order to adjust their attitude to secure themselves. While doing this, as Weldes mentions, repeated articulations of events and actions which can be represented differently in accordance with the nature of discourse, are taken as not fixed and expose to change.[72] Foreign policy analysis with its multi-factorial, multilevel, multi-interdisciplinary, integrative, and agent-oriented features is exposed to a variety of information from other fields. In a similar vein with Hudson, who argues that there is a natural bridge from IR to other fields such as public policy, and the FPA,[73] this research intends to demonstrate that FPA is able to build upon domestic political constraints and contexts to provide a bridge between itself, security analyses and critical constructivism by understating Saudi foreign policy.

Decision-makers cannot be fully rational in applying maximization of utility to foreign policy decisions. While giving credit to that fact, one needs to take the limits of cognitive approach into account and focus on the social, political and historical context in which the Saudi foreign policy operates. In doing so, images, perceptions and ideologies are not the product of individuals, but of social constructions. To illustrate this, Steve Smith emphasizes that Iran's hostage crisis was not a personal act but was shaped by the events background in social, economic and security environment as well as the fractioned decision-making groups.[74] However, the decision-makers' beliefs can change over time; the more central the beliefs that constitute the foundational principles of a state, the more resistance to change as beliefs vary along a central-peripheral dimension.[75] At this point, one needs to re-emphasize that social constructivism shares much with the cognitive approach of FPA. For instance, Finnemore and Sikkink indicate that the cognitive approach can examine the origins of norms and thinking of what they term norm entrepreneur in accordance with constructivism.[76] Norms emerge through a persuasion process of the critical actors to welcome a new norm, by the norm entrepreneurs who create logical cohesions and "legitimate social purposes"[77] for the change of social norms

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[72] Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press:1999), 98-99.
[73] Valerie M Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (UK: Rowman & Little field, 2014), 10.
[74] Steve Smith, "Groupthink and Hostage Rescue Mission," *British Journal of Political Science* 15, no. 1 (1985): 117-123.
[75] Milton Rokeach, "On the Unity of Thought and Belief," *Journal of Personality* 25, no. 2 (1956): 231.
[76] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 904.
[77] Ibid, 887.

in a society, such as constructing justifications for humanitarian interventions, conflict resolution processes or humanitarian aid during and after the wars.

The integration of critical constructivism with the FPA allows scholars to assess the interrelationship among factors at different level analysis, in which variables at different levels of abstraction are interacting and paving the way for new concepts; hence improving the theory.[78] Stephen Walker emphasizes the importance of binary role theory for integration of FPA with the IR.[79] For Walker, the binary role defines the nature of world politics as interplay of power between agents in a social system, and an agent centered approach emphasizes the exercise of behavior as social power and rationality, as cognitive power to reduce uncertainty and manage complexity. Foreign policy is proceeding on the basis of social facts which influence our behavior and which are exposed to change in the course of time. Thus, foreign policy is not a natural phenomenon but rather a part of context of human institutions and social facts.[80] Institutions as social phenomena are a collectively accepted system of rules and procedures that enable people to create institutional facts within the context of human society borders. In addition to that, foreign policy process is not limited to actual decision making or temporary events, it also includes several politicians, civil servants and bureaucrats, who are involved in writing memoranda and intellectual reports so it is far beyond governmental institutions.[81]

FPA starts from a state-as-actor perspective and then looks inside the black box, while constructivism begins from the assumption that actors make their own worlds, which also lies behind most of the FPA.[82] While Smith claims that constructivism and FPA are made for each other, in a similar vein, Katzenstein, Risse-Kappen, and Krasner argue the constitutional structures, state, domestic institutions and interest groups operate, and devising coalition building strategies demonstrates the effectiveness of domestic influence on foreign policy.[83] On the other hand, many constructivists are known to be

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[78] Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 10.
[79] Stephen Walker, Akan Malici and Mark Schafer, *Rethinking Foreign Policy Analysis: States, Leaders, and the Microfoundations of Behavioral International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2010), 266.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Marijke Breuning, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative Introduction*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 120.
[82] Steve Smith, "Foreign Policy is What States Make of It," in *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* ed. Vendulka Kubalkova (US: Routledge, 2015), 38.
[83] Kubalkova, *Foreign Policy in,* 3, 40, 44, 250, 257.

closer to rationalism than reflectivism [84]. For instance, Wendt seeks a form of constructivism that involves causation of analysis. Even though Wendt's version closes the gap between rationalism and constructivism, drawing our analysis on Wendt, who believes that ideas are important as material factors, will likely cause us to have narrow discussions. As Wendt does not see the world as reflectivists do, the fact that he is rationalist in studying the IR doesn't provide an answer for the question how we know the world we study in.[85]

Onuf's approach is considered as closer for integration of constructivism with the FPA compared to that of Wendt, since he doesn't regard the states a pre-given. He also pays attention to the active role for domestic construction of foreign policy and social institutions in maintaining an international system and normatively constitutive practices.[86] Onuf believes that people act in a goal directed manner which is defined by the rules of language, and creation of institutions that represent those expectations. In his definition of the world, actors interpret rules and decide whether to follow them or not, as they are influenced by domestic factors. Agents follow rules because they live in a world that is socially constructed by these rules. This way of understanding agents fits with the FPA since it looks both at social structure and calculating actors, bureaucratic

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[84] In contrast to rationalism which embraces positivism, observable rules, rational-choice accounts, and calculated behavior of the actors in analyses, reflectivism distinct itself from rationalism by arguing the rules are socially constructed, cannot be treated as given facts. For reflectivist theorists, objectivity does not exist in conducting a social science due to the fact that researcher and their study topic cannot be separated from each other. Keohane emphasizes that human subjectivity and human reflection constitute the nature of international politics and institutions. He believes the major weakness of the reflectivist theories is being lack of a clear research program for the IR students. See: Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1988): 379-396.

[85] Wendt says that he is epistemologically positivist and ontologically post-positivist. See: Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90.

[86] Onuf believes that saying is doing, people use speech acts, repetition of speeches and then reach an agreement if they want to keep doing. Rules tell people what to do and gives them obedience or disobedience choices. Social communities create rules, not states, based on the acts so structure and agent are tied through rules. Wendt says that people do not consist of ideas only but material things even though structure and agent are constructed through social practices and interrelations. Agents are states whose identities are socially constructed, IR is a product of interaction between states. Wendt do not look at the internal dynamics of states and brackets them. States are real, they are human too as they can have beliefs, interests and intentions. He doesn't look at the identity construction but interaction among states. Wendt has a holistic approach based on Gidden's structuration theory which indicates agents and structure mutually constituted but structure has priority. While Wendt argues that state constructs the meanings and giving meaning is an individual and cognitive act, Onuf says that states are social constructions, so they cannot construct meanings, but societies do. For further details, see; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Role in Social Theory and International Relations* (US: Routledge, 2012).

politics, interface between agents, institutions, and rules with the aim of pointing out how these factors have led to foreign policy choices made by agents. When it comes to stating the problem of Onuf, one can observe that he leaves us with social institutions as the main forces of history defining the rules and the ruled, though they cannot determine human conduct.[87]

In reconciling agent and structure for understanding the foreign policy process, the first attempt was taken by Peter Gourevitch who emphasizes the international system is also a cause of domestic politics and structure, not only consequence.[88] Agents of the international system are highly influenced by the domestic political environment like lobbies, people's demands or government agencies which display distinct means and structures in each state. Hence, one can argue that domestic environment has a large capacity to determine the scope of the decision-maker's policy options and decisions. Hopf is another prominent scholar accepted as one of the most influential theorists for engagement, who is influenced by cognitive psychology, and defines society as a social construction that consists of a social cognitive structure.[89] One can state the contribution of Hopf as his description of intersubjective ideas that are the product of the social interaction among the agents or communities in a particular state, and are more important than the individual ones, which is also useful and valid for FPA.[90] By contrast, Hollis and Smith differentiates the FPA from constructivism through underlining that FPA explains while constructivism understands, thus there is a practical impossibility to combine due to their epistemological differences.[91] Despite their differences, one can find a common ground between the two approaches by reconciling their take on the social construction, interpretation, and cognitive process. In order to cope with the epistemological differences and artificial division between the IR and FPA which misrepresents the relation between structure and agent, constructivism might make efforts to work more on co-constitution and, in turn, FPA might make efforts to look at

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[87]Ronen Kaplan, "A World of Their Making: An Evaluation of the Constructivist Critique in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 4 (2000): 576.

[88] Jean Frederic Morin and Jonathan Paquin, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 330-333.

[89] Hopf, "The Promise of," 182.

[90] Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study," 38.

[91] Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, "Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision Making," *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 3 (1986): 269.

social rules and norms.[92] Another difference of both was exemplified by Carlsnaes who argued cognitive foreign policy has an objectivist position while constructivism is interpretivist.[93] Cognitive foreign policy understands decisions from the standpoints of decision-makers by reconstructing their reasons. However, the cognitive school overstates the function of psychological motivations and personality of leaders in the decision-making process, and thereby fails to understand whose decisions are prioritized and whose are marginalized throughout the process.

Lastly, one must underline the need for the FPA to move from theoretical photos to motion pictures, by focusing on how perceptions change and evolve over the course of decision-making processes, and across multiple levels of analysis.[94] This is possible through the inclusion of the social, historical and political interaction of the domestic actors, regional dynamics and international factors in influencing the decision-making process. Some scholars have an agent-centered view and rely on psychology of leaders, perceptions, and individual choice for making foreign policy decisions. Others prefer to passivate actors and focus on structural forces. However, understanding the influence of the domestic and regional environment of Saudi Arabia on the decision-making process requires an interpretation without prioritizing either the power politics or characteristics of the leaders. In this research, one needs to focus on how we explain the decisions taken, and the interplay of domestic and international factors. Both the rational and bureaucratic approach allow no place for personality, while the cognitive approach exaggerates the role of psychology and personality of leaders in their analysis. To mediate them, it can be emphasized that rational, cognitive and bureaucratic approaches need to know from where the preferences come, whose decisions are prioritized, whose are marginalized and at whose expense by asking how possible questions. In tandem, this research analyzes the Saudi decision-making process by asking which decision-making actors' ideas were taken into consideration and which actors were sidelined throughout the process in constructing the Saudi regional security politics towards Iran. Hollis and Smith underline that rationalism needs to switch from nation states to individual states when needed, and

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[92] Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study," 40.

[93] Walter Carlsnaes, ''Foreign Policy,'' in *Handbook of International Relations,* ed. W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse, and B. Simmons (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002), 336-339.

[94] Valerie M. Hudson and Christopher S. Vore, "Foreign Policy Analysis Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, *Mershon International Studies Review* 39, no. 2 (1995): 229.

the bureaucratic model needs to grant that bureaucrats look for their interests as well as the accomplishment of their duties in the service of their bureaucracies.[95] Foreign policy analysis integrated with the critical constructivist approach will minimize the mechanical consideration of the decision-making processes, as it requires a dynamic aspect of a social, political and historical position, and activates them in actors' relations with others to understand the foreign policy making process.

2.5. PILLARS OF THE SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY MAKING

Saudi foreign policy making process is a multi-referential one rather than a straightforward process determined by the King. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the decision-making actors, decision-making process and their influence on the foreign policy decisions, whose decisions are given priority and how the decisions are taken among the distinctive representatives of royal family members and policy making institutions. One also tries to take the regional dynamics into consideration as they have a crucial role in manipulating the leaders' decisions. The fragmented structure of the Saudi decision-making process requires the analysis to reconsider the process as multi-factorial, multilevel, multi-interdisciplinary, and integrative. It also reveals the necessity to analyze the agent-oriented features without underestimating structural context. Neither rational school nor cognitive school clearly signifies the influence of the agencies and structural context on Saudi foreign policy making. Cognitive foreign policy understands decisions from standpoints of Saudi decision-makers by reconstructing their reasons, while rational school relies on maximizing the benefits of the process for the state. Therefore, it is inevitable to accentuate the social, political and historical context that foreign policy operates in a decisive role, and give an account of foreign policy making agents, institutions, societal groups and royal family fractions in its analysis.

Saudi foreign policy course is not an individualistic process solely determined by the King, but a social, historical and political construction through its multireferential objects and various actors. Hence, intersubjective ideas are more important than individual ones, which is also convenient and valid for the FPA. Saudi foreign policy institutions will be attributed as collectively accepted system of rules, and not limited to actual decision-

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[95] Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, "Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision Making," *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 3 (1986): 273.

making or temporary events. Accordingly, explaining the decision-making institutions, their responsibilities and individual characteristics of leaders, or viewing the crises or wars as personal acts of leaders will be avoided. Rather, the social, economic and security environment of Saudi Arabia beside the perceptions of the factionalized decision-making elites towards Iran constitute the major focus of the research.

The oil wealth and religious claims of Saudi Arabia has influenced its foreign policy making process in terms of domestic, regional and even global levels, and even placed the kingdom at the center of regional transformation in many historical cases. On a global level, Saudi Arabia faces a critical future due to the limitations of an oil income-based economy, the political consequences of the US withdrawal from Iraq, and conflicts over the nuclear enrichment of Iran. At state level, Saudi Arabia has political, economic and social challenges that have been historically subdued by the ruling family's stake of using oil wealth which also helped to solidify the role of government institutions. [96] Furthermore, as Saudi Arabia has historically been subjected to geographical, sectarian, socio-economic and tribal divisions, the domestic crises have often been intensified by the external actors such as Nasser's Pan-Arabism in the 1950s and 1960s, the changing regime of Iran in the 1980s, and Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s and 1990s. As the ruling family functions according to the consensus and conflict, Saudi policy-making and governance need to be defined as pluralistic. [97] While the ruling elites' families are historically one of the key actors in maintaining the unity of the fractured Saudi society and a decisive part of the decision-making process, the decision-making process is not a straightforward one. Rather, it is a dynamic one evolving the social, political and historical structures, as well as the intersubjectivity among the foreign policy actors.

2.6. REGENERATION OF THE REGIONAL SECURITY CONCEPT IN THE POST-9/11 PERIOD

The end of the Cold War and the 9/11 period drastically changed the international security dynamics, as well as the domestic and external security interpretations of the states. IR theories on the concept of regional security have shown a dynamic

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[96] Giulio Gallarotti and Isam Yahia Al-Filali, "Saudi Arabia's Soft Power," *International Studies* 49, no. 3-4 (2012): 234.

[97] Yousif Makki, "Not What It Seems: The Role of the Tribe in State–Society Relations in Saudi Arabia," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2011): 447.

characteristic in accordance with the international conjuncture that these two periods reshaped and redefined. During the Cold war period, security studies were dominated by the conventional security scholars[98] who narrowed their focus on state centrality, the military sector such as arms race and politics of deterrence. For traditional scholars, military conflict was the defining key to security, therefore they supported the widening discourse of the security concept if it were in accordance with their concerns about the use of force and threat.[99] On the other hand, critical security scholars have had a more questioning and inspecting attitude of the security conceptualization of security at the end of the Cold War, and post-9/11. In fact, a wider agenda for security studies emerged along with the decline of military-political aspects for security, which came into prominence in the last years of the cold war. Given the fact that the war and rivalry between leading states were disappearing, realist approaches on military security were questioned in accordance with the tendency of current priorities of the international conjuncture. The image of the emerging new world that aimed to challenge the view of the traditional school's assumptions on non-military issues such as international economy and environment -which were conceived as low security issues - began to alter the security agenda of states.[100] For instance, the rise of economic and environmental issues in the 1970s-80s, in addition to the rise in identity issues and transnational crime in the 1990s, was paving the way for widening security studies on the newly emerging sectors in security perceptions of states.

With the end of the Cold war, there was a need to redefine the challenges brought on by the emergence of a post-Cold War security field. However, IR scholars were unable to reach a consensus on what a more broadly constructed approach of security should look like. On the one hand, Ullman[101], Mathews[102], Roberts[103], and Crawford[104] aimed at

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[98]Colin S. Gray, "New Directions for Strategic Studies: How Can Theory Help Practice?" *Security Studies* 1, no. 4 (1992): 610-635; Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 211-239; Robert H. Dorff, "A Commentary on Security Studies for the 1990s as a Model Curriculum Core," *International Studies Notes* 91, no. 3 (1994): 23-31.

[99] Barry Buzan, "Rethinking Security After the Cold War," *Cooperation and Conflict* 32, no. 5 (1997): 10.

[100] Ibid, 8.

[101] Richard Ullman, "Redefining Security," *International Security* 8, no. 1 (1983): 129-153.

[102] Jessica Mathews, "Redefining Security," *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 2 (1989): 163-177.

[103] Brad Roberts, "Human Rights and International Security," *The Washington Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1990): 65-75.

[104] Beverly Crawford, *Economic Vulnerability in International Relations: The Case of East-West Trade, Investment and Finance* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1993).

broadening the neorealist approaches to the security to include a wider range of non-military threats, such as environmental issues, human rights and international migration. On the other hand, Buzan[105], Tickner[106], and Waever[107] challenged the traditional discourse by moving the discussions to the level of individual security or international security, by keeping regional and societal security as intermediate aspects. Others such as Kupchan[108], Carter[109], Steinbruner[110], and Dewitt[111] attempted to adopt a state-centric approach, but advocated different multilateral forms of interstate security cooperation that could improve the traditional approach to the conception of security dilemma. Despite their discussion, the common viewpoint of those scholars was the fact that the neorealist focus on protecting the core values and redlines of a state from externally defined military threats could no longer explain what is to be secured, from what threats, and by what means.[112] At this point, critical security studies have claimed to provide a less evidence-based understanding of what lies behind the events, exhibits elitist suppositions in existing knowledge and includes the excluded knowledge in the theorizing process. Hence, they attempt to explore the new ways of thinking and alternative discourses in the conception of security.

2.6.1. The 9/11 Transforms Regional Security Perceptions

The September 11 attacks have served as a 'temporal benchmark'[113] for the evolution of security studies and constrained the Saudi decision-making actors to polishing their endeavors to fight against terrorism at their foreign policy discourse. The significance of

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[105] Barry Buzan, *Peoples, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Book, 1983); Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colombia: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

[106] Ann J. Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1992).

[107] Ole Waever, "Securitization-Desecuritization," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie Lipschutz (New York: Colombia University Press, 1995), 46-86.

[108] Charles A. Kupchan, "After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration and the Sources of Stable Multipolarity," *International Security* 23, no. 2 (1998): 40–79.

[109] Ashton B. Carter, "The Architecture of Government in the Face of Terrorism," *International Security* 26, no. 3 (2001-2002): 5–23.

[110] John D. Steinbruner, "Beyond Rational Deterrence," *World Politics 28,* no. 2 (1976): 223–45.

[111] See: David Dewitt (ed.) *Nuclear Non-proliferation and Global Security* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); David Dewitt, "Common, Comprehensive and Cooperative Security," *Pacific Review* 7, no. 1 (1994): 1–15.

[112] Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, "Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods," *Mershon International Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (1996): 229-254.

[113] Barry Buzan and Lene Hassen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 226.

the two periods is that the scholars forgot the IR was written by people with a view from somewhere for some purpose. Hence evidence-based explanations and rational choice consensus were popular among the scholars during the Cold War, as well as before and after 9/11.[114] The 9/11 attacks attracted the gaze of scholars on specific notions of violence and inequality, while they defined the referent object of security as state, and viewed the difference and identity as sameness for the purpose of claiming a legitimate social science.[115] Some scholars criticized this orthodox rationality in IR and underlined the necessity of intellectual pluralism. For instance, Smith argued that the key issue is interpretation rather than representation, without specifying which interpretation is correct.[116] In the post-9/11 period, the critical security studies were jeopardized by the concept of globalization as old rules of statecraft, warfare and diplomacy re-entered the center of the discipline. On the contrary, 9/11 urged the critical security scholars to interrogate and challenge the authorized truths and artificial actions of existing analyses. In addition to that, critical security scholars needed to position 9/11 in a historical context and thickly describe the ahistorical attitude of the official response to it. This positioned the good against the evil, and italicized the difference through binary oppositions of actors. By internalizing the significance of the role of binary oppositions of agents, there are various routes to understanding. Hence, one doesn't need to define his/her studies as either empiricism or value-neutrality by taking the agenda of the powerful, rather it takes the meanings and interpretations of individuals and their subjectivities into account.[117]

One of the decisive outcomes of 9/11 was the discourse of the Global War on Terrorism (GWoT) which has been argued to reshape the agenda of security studies.[118] 9/11 and the responses to it elevated the existing literature on security through producing challenges from the critical security scholars. For instance, Derian emphasized that the US defined the way in terms of military conditions which in turn paved the way for ad virtuous war discourse. This discourse was played out by the military, industrial and media network as a neo-medieval rhetoric of holy war on the Internet and TV, hence the

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[114] Steve Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2004): 514.
[115] Ibid, 514.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Smith, "Singing Our World," 514.
[118] Buzan and Hassen, *The Evolution of,* 2009.

US maintained hegemony and claimed to bring an order to the Middle East.[119] Derian also underlined the strategic and negative binaries in George W. Bush's speeches, such as "we are friend of Afghan people", and "every nation has to make a choice in this conflict, no neutral grounds" that italicize who we are and who they are as a battle of representation along a friendship, enemy, indifference and tolerance.[120] In turn, one can argue that this discourse resulted either in appropriation or rejection, and consequently diminished the human subjectivity in shaping the events.

The 9/11 process was also an historical change which is in accordance with the traditionalist approaches on world politics. For instance, the terror attacks on the US in 9/11, and the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) further clouded the complex realities of security and carried the military language into prominence. At this point, in order to challenge the views in terms of the traditional security understandings, critical security theories had to deal with reconceptualizing the concept of security differently to its statist versions which describe the security of some against others. As Booth argues, critical security theory had to view the challenges to the discipline from a historical perspective in order to be realistic and emancipatory.[121] In the Saudi case, the leader of al-Qaeda during the 9/11 period, Osama bin Laden, who was originally from an eminent Saudi family and whose father owned a prominent construction company called bin Laden group close to the Al-Saud family, illustrated the complex relationship of the Saudi domestic actors with the royal actors in terms of posing security challenges to the Saudi domestic structure and its international status.

Poststructuralists, Critical Constructivists, Feminists and the Copenhagen School have argued in favor of conceiving security as a discourse through which identities and threats are constituted, rather than as an objective or granted facts. The debates and different standpoints of the security schools in the post 9/11 period draw on the fact that security is a contested concept. As Dalby defines it: "security is a contested term, one with multiple meanings, some of which are not at all necessarily logically linked to conventional understandings." [122] Likewise, Baldwin, in contrast to Buzan, avoids

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[119] Derian, "In Terrorem," 267.
[120] Ibid, 271.
[121] Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30.
[122] Simon Dalby, "Contesting an Essential Concept: Reading the Dilemmas in Contemporary Security Discourse," in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (UK: UCL Press, 1997), 6.

defining the security as a neglected or essentially contested concept.[123] He emphasizes that one cannot appoint the concept of security as an essentially contested concept, just as a pretext of not conceptualizing one's own conception of security as precisely as possible. Therefore, for Baldwin security is more appropriately defined as "a confused or inadequately explicated concept than as an essentially contested one."[124]

Along the same line as critical constructivism, the states, individuals, non-state groups, and threats are constructed social facts that have influence on the security concerns. While avoiding an understanding of an objectively given concept of threat and security, it attempts to analyze the process of interaction between the states and reproduction of social structures that shape the actors' interests. As Booth and Peter emphasize, the task of the critical security approach is to play a part in redescribing the historical and contemporary facts of regional security for reforming the conception of regional security.[125] In accordance with that, the Saudi foreign policy making process, and its regional threat perceptions with a particular focus on Iran, requires an analysis of the production of regional crises and domestic political structures which mutually constitute each other.

2.6.2. The "Shiite Crescent" Claims and Changing Balances of Regional Security

After the second Gulf war in 2003, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt in particular became concerned about Iran's rising influence in Iraqi politics, as Iran began to foster its ties with the Shiite led post-war Iraqi government, Iraqi Shiite militant groups on the ground, as well as its cultural, religious, political and economic influence in Iraq society. In addition to the Iraqi case, one needs to underline the fact that Iran had natural connections

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[123] "Buzan presents plausible arguments for the empirical proposition that security at the individual level is related to security at the level of the state and the international system. His insistence that 'security cannot be isolated for treatment at any single level', however, gives the impression that this is conceptually impossible rather than simply an unwise research strategy. His justification for mixing conceptual and empirical analysis is that 'the search for a referent object of security goes hand-in-hand with that for its necessary conditions'. This approach, however, risks conflating conceptual analysis with empirical observation. Understanding the concept of security is a fundamentally different kind of intellectual exercise from specifying the conditions under which security may be attained. Indeed, conceptual clarification logically precedes the search for the necessary conditions of security, because the identification of such conditions presupposes a concept of security." See: David Baldwin, "The Concept of Security," *Review of International Studies* 23 (1997): 7-8.

[124] Baldwin, *The Concept of Security*, 12.

[125] Ken Booth and Peter Vale, "Critical Security Studies and Regional Insecurity: The Case of Southern Africa," in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (UK: UCL Press, 1997), 354.

with the Shiite communities in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Gulf states.[126] Although there is no accurate or certain data on the Shiite population in Iraq, in 2021, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) stated the number of Shiite as 64-69% and the number of Sunnis as 29-34% of the total population in Iraq,[127] while the World Population Review announced the percentage of Shiite as 65%, and Sunni as 35% of the total population in Iraq.[128] According to the international religious freedom report by the US Department of State, Saudi Arabia has 10-12% Shiite dominantly settled in the Eastern province of the kingdom.[129]

The term 'Shiite crescent' was coined by King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2004 from Syria to Iran passing through Iraq to identify the Iranian rising influence in the region.[130] Iran was also a supporter of President Bashar Al-Assad in Syria, who had helped Iran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) gaining a unique place in Iran's historical memory. The activities and linkages of Iran in Arab neighboring countries, such as initiating the establishment of Hizballah (Party of Allah/God) and supporting its activities in Lebanon, acted to challenge Saudi Arabia, the US, and Israel's dominance in the region and force them to reshape their understanding of the regional dynamics. The threat perception of the Saudi decision-makers from Iran which gained momentum after the siege of Mecca in 1979[131], directed them to motivate the segments of Pakistan society for the Sunni sect, and to back the jihadi groups in Afghanistan.

Iran's presence in the region was consolidated by its natural connections with the Shiite communities, in response to security threats caused after the arrival of US troops in the region. For Barzegar, therefore, Iran's activities in engaging the Shiite governments was

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[126] According to the CIA's factbook in 2019, Shiites, including Alawites and Ismailis, constitute %13 of the Muslim population in Syria while Shiites constitute %28,4 of the Muslim Population in Lebanon and %35 of the Muslim population in Yemen. See: "Number of Shiites in Syria and Yemen," *Central Intelligence Agency*, accessed November 3, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/.

[127] "Iraq," *Central Intelligence Agency*, accessed May 2021, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#people-and-society.

[128] "Iraq's Population," *World Population Review*, accessed November 2018, http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/iraq-population/.

[129] "Saudi Arabia 2020 International Religious Freedom Report," *US Department of State*, accessed May 2021, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/240282-SAUDI-ARABIA-2020-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf.

[130] Robin Wright and Peter Paker, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election from Iran: Leaders Warn Against Forming Religious State," *Washington Post*, December 9, 2004, accessed November 24, 2019.

[131] Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising in Islam's Holiest Shrine and the Birth of Al-Qaeda* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

defensive, not expansionist.[132] Likewise, in February 2004, Iran's Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, mentioned an emerging new regional order in which he positioned Iran as an alternative to the US in the Gulf to hinder the European countries in the region.[133] When one adds the dimension of Iran's historical bonds with Iraq through their Shiite populations - for instance, thousands of Iranians make pilgrimages to the holiest Shiite cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, and Iraq's most prominent Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani is an Iranian-born speaking Arabic with a Persian accent - it clearly illustrates the capacity of Iran's potential influence in Iraqi politics and society.[134] In addition to that, Iran and Iraq share a historical memory of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war which caused significant casualties in both countries.

The concerns of Saudi Arabia can be stated as the Sunni elites' perception of their own diminished power in the post-2003 war era, growing political demands of the Shiite populations, and Iran's thriving role in "Arab" affairs.[135] The seizure of Arab issues by Iran and Iran's rhetoric of presenting itself as a phoenix of virtue, especially on Israel-Palestinian issues, opposition to the West in the region and presenting itself as an alternative to the US in the region, have all been somewhat alarming for Saudi Arabia due to the possibility of Iran drawing support from the Arab peoples.[136] Following the war, Iran was accused of aiding and donating candidates and political parties that were sympathetic to itself. For instance, King Abdullah of Jordan claimed that during the Iraqi elections, over 1 million Iranians crossed the 910-mile border to Iraq for the purpose of voting which was to build pro-Iranian public sentiment in Iraq. King Abdullah was concerned about the possibility of transformation of Iraq into an Islamic Republic in the line of Iran, which would serve to cause chaos in Iraq, the rise of Iran as a regional power, and evoke fear of new and catastrophic consequences, especially in the possibility of an

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[132] Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran and The Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 15, no. 1 (2008): 87.

[133] Ilan Berman, *Tehran Rising: Iran's Challenge to the United States* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 70.

[134] Wright and Baker, "Iraq, Jordan See."

[135] Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran and The Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 15, no. 1 (2008): 88.

[136] Frederic Wehrey, Theodore W. Karasik, Alizera Nader, Jeremy Ghez, Lydia Hansell, Robert A. Guffey, "Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam, *RAND National Security Research Division* (2009): 23, 24.

armed confrontation with Iran.[137] Similarly, President of Iraq, Ghazi Yawar, emphasized that a sectarian or religious government in Iraq would not be successful: "Unfortunately, time is proving, and the situation is proving, beyond any doubt that Iran has very obvious interference in our business - a lot of money, a lot of intelligence activities and almost daily interfering in business and many [provincial] governorates, especially in the southeast side of Iraq."[138] President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, underlined the ties of Shiites in Arab countries with Iran in an interview with Al-Arabiya television: "Definitely Iran has influence on Shiites. Shiites are 65% of the Iraqis... Most of the Shiites are loyal to Iran, and not to the countries they are living in."[139] Regional reactions seemed to favor urging the regional states to feel alarmed by the threat of the Shiite crescent, which would eventually force Saudi Arabia to reconstruct its perception of the regional dynamics and its political stance, as well as form an ideological rhetoric against Iran.

2.6.3. The 2006 Israel-Lebanon War: "Security as a Powerful Political Word"?

Following the US incursion on Iraq in 2003, identification of the Shiite crescent as a regional threat, Hamas's success in the second Palestinian Legislative Council in January 2006, and the introduction of 'new' Middle East by Condoleezza Rice[140], National Security Adviser to the US President G.W. Bush, came into prominence to redefine the regional dynamics. The liberation of Iraq was attributed as a unique opportunity to strengthen security in the region and in the world around a positive agenda for the Middle East by the US.[141]

As the legacy of 9/11 remained in the historical memory of the US, President Bush quitted the US foreign policy of containment and shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East in the post-2003 war period.[142] Referring to the US perception of resentment that was manifested on 9/11, the Bush administration called for coalition to challenge Iran in the

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[137] Lan Black, "Fear of a Shia Full Moon," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2007, accessed August 13, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jan/26/worlddispatch.ianblack.
[138] Wright and Baker*, Iraq, Jordan See*.
[139] "Mubarak's Shia Remarks Stir Anger," *Aljazeera*, April 10, 2006, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/4/10/mubaraks-shia-remarks-stir-anger.
[140] Condoleezza Rice, Transforming the Middle East, *The Washington Post*, August 7, 2003.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Toby Harnden, "Death and Despair Amid US Pursuit of 'New Middle East'," *The Telegraph*, July 30, 2006, accessed July 14, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1525200/Death-and-despair-amid-US-pursuit-of-new-Middle-East.html**.**

region. Political justification provided by Iran's financial and military aid to Hizballah, and ideological justification needed to be completed by the politically religious framework to contain the expansion of Shiite crescent. This impelled Saudi Arabia into a religious competition when it had aimed to avoid such a sectarian rivalry.[143] On the other hand, Iran was already drawn into the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war after being accused of providing arms to Hizballah, and ended up being a threat to the whole region. The war was a turning point in Saudi Arabia's attitude towards Israel, since from the outset of the 2006 war, Saudi Arabia and Egypt had accused Hizballah. This was the first time that an Arab state had not accused Israel in a regional crisis or war. Furthermore, Ali Larijani, the secretary of Iran's National Security Council, alleged Saudi Arabia for its security engagement with Israel.[144]

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, that has since been named the July War or Second Lebanon War, lasted 34 days. It was a turning point in that it placed incredible stress on the regional security perception of Saudi Arabia, posing tensions from multiple quarters on regional security perceptions of it. During the war, Hizballah allied with the Amal Movement[145], the Lebanese Communist Party, and the Popular front of Liberation of Palestine, aided also by Iran and Syria. Despite the statements of President Bush to the effect that Hizballah had lost the war and a 'new' power was about to emerge in Lebanon, Hizballah claimed victory. Moreover, the image of Hassan Nasrallah, Hizballah's leader, among the Arab countries ascended towards that of a folk hero. Sunni conversions to Shiism mainly in Syria, Egypt and Sudan were also an alarm for Saudi Arabia; these conversions were not interpreted as part of sectarian affinity, but a signal of political solidarity with the Shiism that was conceived as the 'winning sect' of that time.[146] The success of Hizballah in the war revealed that it could expose criticism to Arab regimes at home. Moreover, Iran emerged from the war with the upper hand in terms of public

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[143] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Competing Powerbrokers of the Middle East: Iran and Saudi Arabia* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2008), 40.

[144] "Iran: Saudis Gave Israel 'Strategic' Intel in 2006 Lebanon War," *The Times of Israel*, June 7, 2016, accessed May 24, 2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-saudis-gave-israel-strategic-intel-in-2006-lebanon-war/.

[145] Amal Movement is a Lebanese political party and a resistance movement for the rights of the Lebanese Shiite, founded by Musa al-Sadr in 1975. It was one of the prominent resistant entities on the ground during Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990. See; Richard Norton Augustus, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (London: University of Texas Press, 1987).

[146] Wehrey, Karasik, Nader, Ghez, Hansell, and Guffey, "Saudi-Iranian Relations," 26.

opinion.[147] As Hizballah became an important part of the decision-making process, the regional vision of its supporters Iran and Syria grew stronger, which also urged Saudi Arabia to take preventive action in the Eastern province where the Shiite populations dominantly resided. In the post-2006 war era, Saudi Shiites faced pressure both from the state and the Salafi clerics from Najd, who regarded them as fifth column.[148] As a response to Iran's regime versus public rift, and to cool the public sentiment, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia stressed that regional efforts at Shiite should rise and Iran's support for it would eventually fail.[149]

In order to calm the public sentiment, Abdullah bin Jabreen, one of Saudi Arabia's leading Wahhabi clerics, issued a fatwa by referring to verse 51 of Surat al-Ma'idah in the Quran: "and whoever is an ally to them among you—then indeed, he is [one] of them"[150] and declared it illegal for Muslims to join, support or even pray for Hizballah.[151] King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia raised his concerns on a regional war, and gave $1.5 billion to support the Lebanese currency.[152] Most ironically, the second leader of the Al-Qaeda Ayman Al-Zawahiri who had labelled Shiite as infidels, adopted a similar language of Hizballah and Shiite Muslims in general towards Israel.[153] The 2006 war redefined the interlocked nature of the conflictual perspectives of the regional states on regional security. From the Saudi side, the relative success of Hizballah was a trigger for taking action against the expanding linkages of Iran with the Arab public and Arab Shiite populations, despite the entanglement and vagueness in deciding the nature of the action. From December 2006, Saudi Arabia adopted a more proactive stance to enhance the nuclear capacity of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a response to the Iran nuclear enrichment program, which began to take an international interest in 2002. In February

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[147] According to a poll in 2006 conducted by Zogby International, University of Maryland, only 11 percent of the participants identified Iran as the greatest threat to their security, 85 percent identified Israel, and 72 per cent listed the US. In Wehrey, Karasik, Nader, Ghez, Hansell, and Guffey, "Saudi-Iranian Relations," 25.

[148] Ibid, 25.

[149] Ibid, 26.

[150] "Al-Ma'idah" *Verse 51*, accessed November 21, 2020, https://quran.com/5/51?translations=20,84,17,85,101,18,95,19,22.

[151] Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Arab Leaders, Unlike Much of Public, Uneasy About Hizballah," *The Washington Post*, July 24, 2006, accessed April 2, 2018.

[152] Roger Hardy, "Arab Leaders Fear Rise of Hizballah," *BBC News*, July 28, 2006, accessed February 18, 2019, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5224650.stm.

[153] Neil MacFarquhar, "Tide of Arab Opinion Turns to Support for Hizballah," *The New York Times*, July 28, 2006, accessed April 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/28/world/middleeast/28arabs.html.

2007, Abdul Rahman al-Attiya, the Secretary-General of the GCC, announced that the GCC could start using nuclear power for peaceful purposes. Eventually, by 2011, Saudi Arabia had established an independent counter terrorism body under UN supervision.

In addition to the incriminating situation which resulted from the terrorist attacks whereby Saudi Arabia had to clarify itself in the eyes of the world and the US post 9/11, the 2006 war multiplied its concerns over domestic stability, the future of the Kingdom, Iran's potential of encouraging unrest among the Arab Shiite populations, Iran's nuclear enrichment and "opportunism" in involvement in "Arab" affairs. In this way, Saudi Arabia found itself reestablishing its decision-making process, and royal elites had to reconstruct their perception in dealing with altered regional security dynamics at the end of the war. Thereof, it becomes inevitable to discuss which actors have been designated to be feared, controlled or objectified in Saudi foreign policy making process, which actors' security perceptions influence the Saudi foreign policy decision-making process in the post-2006 war period on the reconstruction of regional security politics of Saudi Arabia, and in what ways or how possible those actors/institutions come to redefine the regional security perceptions of Saudi Arabia towards Iran.

2.7. A CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEW ON THE REGIONAL SECURITY PERCEPTION OF THE SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY

The second Gulf war in 2003 changed the security dynamics of the region by repositioning the regional states in the Gulf political crossword, as well as paving the way for emergence of new state and non-state actors as regional actors. Previous wars - the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the US's intervention in 1990-1991 - had also contributed to the robust conditions of the Gulf security dynamics. At the end of Kuwait's invasion, the US entered the region militarily, and built its military base in Saudi Arabia. However, in the post-2003 war period, the US shifted its airbase from Saudi Arabia to Qatar mainly due to the involvement of Saudi citizens as hijackers in the 9/11 attack.

The fact that the majority of the hijackers were Saudi citizens, posed tensions over the Saudi-US relations and forced Saudi Arabia to defend itself as not sponsoring terrorist activities. Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Saud Al-Faisal, was faced with a difficult balancing act in reconstituting Saudi Arabia's international image without inciting

conservative Muslim populations in the region. In one of his public speeches, Al-Faisal emphasized that Islam should not be seen as the enemy: "You just cannot dismiss a 1,400-year-old culture and civilization by stigmatizing it as merely a hatchery for terrorism."[154] Furthermore, he accused the US for the post-2003 regional structure which enabled Iran as an influential actor in Iraq, as well as an intervening actor in "Arab" affairs as he was worried about the ethnic and sectarian tensions possibly spilling over from Iraq to the region.

Moreover, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 paved the way for a perceptual shift in the nature of rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran compared to the period before 2003 when Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq were part of a tri-polar balance of power in the region. In contrast, new actors such as Al-Qaeda and the US began to play out in the region as regional actors, and ironically Iran was empowered by the overthrowing of the Saddam regime with the 2003 War. It contributed to the emergence of new sectoral threats such as questioning the social contract between state and society, or constitutional reform calls for diminishing the authority of states which activated domestic pressures for the legitimacy of the governments. In addition to that, the emergence of new non-state actors inside the Arab neighbors pushed the GCC states into a regional arms race, as well as raising the sectarian conflict discourse which was relatively decreased in the 1990s. All of this urges us, the researchers, to build a critical evaluation of the logic of security away from the neorealist and neoliberal approaches in the Gulf, in order comprehend the regional security perceptions of Saudi Arabia and how its security logic emerges within the context of foreign policy decision-making institutions.

Without underestimating the role of the 2003 war in reshaping the security dynamics of the region, the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war claimed to be a turning point in Saudi Arabia's perceptions towards the regional security and its foreign policy towards Iran. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in recent years have often been characterized by religious-ideological antagonism, competing political and geo-strategic interests, as well as an ongoing competition for regional hegemony. While avoiding to map the Saudi foreign policy from a regional security complex perspective, which has already been applied to

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[154] "Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Saudi Foreign Minister – Obituary," *Telegraph,* July 10, 2015, accessed October 26, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/11731855/Prince-Saud-al-Faisal-Saudi-foreign-minister-obituary.html.

the region by some scholars[155], this research attempts to mark a departure from siding between ideological and stategical aspects of the rivalry. Rather, it aims to understand which actors have been designated to be feared, controlled or objictified, which actors' security perceptions are prioritized in shaping the Saudi foreign policy decision-making process and why, and the role of beliefs, values, fears and practices on the construction of regional security politics by integrating critical constructivism with the cognitive side of the foreign policy analysis. Thus, the purpose of the research is not solely to explain the Saudi foreign policy within the context of determinate, transhistorical, and generalizable causal claims, but to comprehend it through a contextual understanding, as critical constructivists describe the theory as practice and the power of practice in producing knowledge.

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon war was a turning point for Saudi Arabia's threat perception and decision-making process, given the provided fertile ground for reconstructing the security concerns of Saudi Arabia and Iran. The war recalled the cycle where regional conflicts intensified the animosity and mistrust between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which in turn intensified the regional conflicts.[156] The 2006 war demonstrated the maximum potential of Iran in spurring the insurgent groups in the region against their government and consequently also against the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy. This in in turn constituted an existential threat to the stability of Saudi Arabia. When one adds Iran's pursuit of nuclear capability in shaping the security agenda of regional states, it becomes an additional threat for Saudi Arabia.[157] In order to understand the Saudi decision-making process, one needs to emphasize the overlap and interplay of the domestic and elite power struggles within the regional structure as well as the possibility of proxy wars. States view each other differently based on the meanings that they give each other; therefore, security cannot be defined as a constant situation, rather, its meaning changes

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[155] See; Gregory Gause, "Saudi Arabia's Regional Security Strategy," *in The International Politics of the Persian Gulf, e*d. Mehran Kamrava, 169-183, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Fatemeh Shayan, *Security in the Persian Gulf Region* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[156] Karen E. Young, "Foreign Policy Trends in the GCC States," *Oxford Gulf & Arabian Peninsula Studies Forum* (Autumn 2017), accessed June 5, 2020, https://www.oxgaps.org/gulf-affairs/bulletins/new-item-276/publications/foreign-policy-trends-in-the-gcc-states..

[157] Karim Sadjadpour and Behnam ben Taleblu, "Iran in the Middle East: Leveraging Chaos," *FRIDE Policy Brief,* no. 202 (May 2015), accessed March 25, 2019, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/191161/Iran%20in%20the%20Middle%20East_%20leveraging%20chao.pdf.

continuously for states.[158] In a political environment where the status of others is uncertain, new threats can emerge and disappear, new enemies can be created, and old enemies can become members of the same party. At this juncture, one can observe that there is no objective or fixed reality, and the researcher can only mirror how she/he sees and conceives the security as self-reflexive historical practices. Accordingly, mirroring the political power relations in building the foreign policy-making and constructing the regional security politics of Saudi Arabia, constitutes one of the major goals of the research. For instance, Saudi Arabia's threat perception towards Iran was not the same as other regional actors such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or Bahrain, both of which resumed relations based on amity with the kingdom. Therefore, state interactions may cause enmity or friendship based on the shared meaning of sovereignty, interest and threats. More significantly, these relations of enmity, rivalry or friendship may change in accordance with the changes within the regional security dynamics. Both actors and structures can be redefined as the relations are not constant, fixed and permanent. It means improbability in specifying the real causes, as in the example of the US foreign policy when the US interpreted the threat from Iraq and then secured boundaries of the US identity in whose name it functioned. On the other hand, insecurities emerging out of statist discourses in which leaders describe the world to themselves and others as policy-making, is highly related to the power relations in the political structure of a particular society. All representations of practices already reify the power relations even long before the foreign policy decisions are set. Hence, they are always for someone and for some purpose, and are linked to the political structure of that state.

Saudi foreign policy has evolved around the patterns of amity and enmity among the actors in the region, which makes foreign policy dependent on the actions and interpretations of actors. This aspect, in line with Buzan's argument, is relevant to the research because it does not impose a mechanical reflection of the power relations, but includes the fears and aspirations of the states which in turn emerge from domestic features and fractures and have an important role in shaping their threat perceptions. It also accepts the fact that any domestic or regional issue can be defined as politicized or securitized, in accordance with the contemporary circumstances, since the construction of threat has an intersubjective meaning. On the other hand, the Copenhagen school's

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[158] Hopf, "The Promise of," 188.

claim on the referent object of security, which is identified as the state and reveals the state-centric approach, is not compatible with understanding the multireferential Saudi decision-making process even though it advocated the broadening of the security agenda towards non-military sectors.[159] Buzan, who coined the theory of regional security complex (RSCs), defines a security complex as: "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another."[160] Even though it is inevitable to argue that states' security politics cannot be understood without reference to the interaction among them, this research prefers to avoid technical or mechanical descriptions as well as descriptive threat and security verbalism. On the other hand, it tends to conceive the securitization discourse, agreeing with Booth, as part of the political sphere and security as a political practice.[161] Rather than focusing on the securitization and desecuritization processes[162] in the international system, which it is argued manifest themselves in regional clusters in Buzan's writings,[163] this research understands the development of Saudi foreign policy towards Iran in relation to the concept of security as a political practice.

In the same line as Booth, security cannot be for its own sake; it is always for someone and for some purpose. Security can be understood as part of the researcher's commitment to emancipatory practices as reflectivity at the decisive position of the theorist's role, shaping the practice and directing critical approaches to renew themselves. The critiques of the traditional understanding of security and the referent object brings an epistemological shift in the way security is to be reviewed and studied.[164] The role of ideas, norms, and values in the construction of that which is to be secured, and the historical context within which this process takes place, need to be given credit at this

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[159] Booth, "Theory of World," 98.
[160] Barry Buzan, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 44.
[161] Booth, "Theory of World," 165-166.
[162] "Thus, the exact *definition* and *criteria* of securitization is constituted by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with u saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects. Securitization can be studied directly; it does not need indicators." In Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Publisher, 1998): 25.
[163] Buzan, *Regions and Powers*, 40-44.
[164] Michael C. Williams and Keith Krause, "Preface: Toward Critical Security Studies," in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (UK: UCL Press, 1997), 49.

juncture. Hence, epistemologically, it moves away from the rationalist approach of neorealism and neoliberalism and moves towards interpretive modes of critical analysis. At this point, it is inevitable to move beyond a demonstration of the constructed nature of threat discourses to illustrate how these constructions could have been different, given the concrete historical circumstances in which political choices were made.[165] Reflectivist methods that examine actors' practical understandings of the organization of their social world are prominent for conducting this research.

Reconceptualizing the regional security issues in Saudi foreign-policy making requires an interpretation through a historical contextualization, and conceiving it as a powerful political word in line with Booth's approach. Thus, the concept of security emerges as a particular set of historical discourses and practices that rest upon institutionally shared understandings. Additionally, the concept of state security cannot be portrayed as *démodé* at Saudi foreign policy making, but as an important historical remedy to the problems of its domestic politics. When people speak about security, or carry out practices in the name of security, their words and actions are embedded in their conceptions of the state and world politics. Security cannot be understood, reconceptualized, or reconstructed without paying attention to the constitutive account of the political events. Existential threats which require urgent action and acceptance by the audience can only be understood in relation to a particular sector and referent object, as people cannot compromise on a universal standard based on the existential threats.[166] Thus, transforming the politics into practices of security and remedying the narrow view of security of problem-solving theories, constitutes a significant part of the analysis of the Saudi foreign policy making process. If we are to understand the realities as the realm of subjective practices, one needs to take them more seriously than the abstractions of neorealism allow.[167] One must take the construction of security issues as grounded in

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[165] R. B. J. Walker, "The Subject of Security," in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (UK: UCL Press, 1997), 66-67.

[166] In military sector referent object is state; in political sector existential threats are defined in terms of constituting principle of the state such as sovereignty, ideology of state; in economic sector referent objects and threats are difficult to recognize, firms and national economies have distinct. In societal sector, large-scale collective identities that can function independently of the state, nations. In environmental sector, it is wide range from survival of species, habitat or maintenance of climate. In Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Publisher, 1998): 21-22.

[167] Paul Rogers, "Peace Studies," in *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins (UK, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75-77.

concrete historical conditions and practices, rather than in abstract definitions and claims of rational actors and scientific methods.[168]

One can apply the concept of regional security as a political word in the Saudi context, which in turn ties it to the domestic events and crises as well as the floating relations of Saudi Arabia with the regional states. As states give meanings to each other's actions based on their political context, either a past hostility or a current threat, Saudi regional security perception towards Iran has often displayed a floating characteristic in accordance with the changing regional dynamics and domestic crises of both states. In the Saudi context, events and regional crises have been politicized and securitized through constructing narratives in respect of the security concerns of the Saudi public over the shared understandings between the state and society. Hence, the Saudi case reveals that the regional security policies have historically served the political aims of the decision-making actors. Regional security perceptions of the state have never been independent from the political practices in the domestic context, thus the Saudi regional threat perception of Iran has evolved differently to its perception of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The Saudi case discloses the regional crisis as the cause of the domestic politics and structure, not only the outcome of the structural changes in the domestic context. Regional events, crises and wars often interact with domestic institutional changes and eventually influence the foreign policy rhetoric of Saudi Arabia towards the region and Iran. Regional crises have often revealed whose ideas are marginalized or privileged in Saudi decision-making, since the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is a social construction made by decision-makers. From the 1960s to Iraq's invasion in 2003, Saudi foreign policy was based on a trend of avoiding entry into irreparable crises with the neighbors, and tended to apply appeasement for the regional actors as Saudi Arabia had not been a military power during those years. The major foreign policy trend observed in Saudi decision-making was the preference of the decision-makers to wait for the events to evolve and then give calculated reactions. Haence the Saudi foreign policy was based on a defensive as well as a reactive mood. While the 1960s were the years of stability without assigning ideological definitions to the other, the end of the Pax-Britannica at the start of the 1970s revealed a foreign policy trend of politicizing the oil wealth. This

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[168] Walker, "The Subject of Security," 50.

was particularly observed during the 1967 and 1973 oil embargoes towards the US. The embargo of the kingdom contravened US support for Israel in Palestine conflict which in turn tied the Israel-Palestinian issue to the oil politics. It also constructed an awareness among the Saudi decision-makers and society to utilize the oil revenues of the kingdom for political purposes and regional ambitions.

The Saudi decision-makers' perception of Iran has represented varied trends throughout the years, which in turn prevents us from analyzing the bilateral relations or threat perception of both states in terms of the structural theories. One might state the prominent and continuous rhetoric followed by the Saudi decision-makers towards Iran was the trend of publicly ignoring Iran as a regional and domestic threat at the domestic context both before and after 1979. Prior to 1979 when Iran and Saudi Arabia had been competing in ingratiating the US, Saudi regional security perception towards Iran was far from ideological concerns. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Saudi decision-makers were still careful not to define the Iranian revolution as something that might have triggered a Sunni-Shiite conflict, which in turn would pave the way for constructing a binary position in representing the Muslims around the world. Rather, Saudi decision-makers polished their role and prestige around the Muslim states as the Saudi kings were identified as the servant and custodian of the two holy mosques, Mecca and Madinah. After 1979, Saudi decision-makers avoided making aggressive or contrary speeches to the Iranian revolution, instead preferred to keep silent and wait for the events to evolve as part of its traditional policy since the 1960s.

Saudi Arabia often preferred to remain in a defensive position of replying and repositioning its foreign policy behavior in accordance with the Iranian decision-makers' regional activities and speeches towards the kingdom. Before 1979, Iran had been neither an enemy nor friend of the Saudi perception. However, after Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological rhetoric and criticism of the monarchies, such as labelling the Wahhabism as responsible for all regional problems, Saudi decision-makers wished to protect their right to speak on behalf of the Muslims for representation of the *ummah* (community). Saudi foreign policy rhetoric was not ideological in the public sphere, to avoid a construction of the two headed images of the representation of the *ummah*. It was obvious to the decision-makers that Iran would eventually inspire the Saudi Shiites, but this fact required the construction of the Saudi regional security policy not to develop aggressive

state policies towards the Saudi Shiites. Despite the Shiite rhetoric appearing to be domestic and regional threat, at decision-making level it seemed to be more agreeable for Saudi Arabia to ignore it and refrain from labelling it clearly as an Iranian, Persian or Shiite threat. At the public level, they tended to claim their respect for Iran which showed the circumspect policy of the state. Instead, Saudi Arabia financed Islamic conferences around the Muslim world, spoke for Al-Quds and uniting the Muslims, and supporting Iraq against Iran in 1980-1988 war. On the other hand, some royal actors, like Prince Nayef, were not desisting from calling Iran the terrorist of the region.

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's term in Iran led off a rapprochement period when the Iranian foreign policy was formalized around revitalizing the collapsed economy, owing to the eight-year war with Iraq. Mohammed Khatami's term (1997-2005) was a period of solid relations and continuity of rapprochement with Saudi Arabia which, due to the illness of King Fahd, was ruled by Crown Prince Abdullah, in the fields of economy, diplomacy and culture. While King Abdullah and Khatami had a foreign policy, approach based on vivifying the economy, and avoiding diplomatic crises by applying a non-ideological perspective to the region, Ayatollah Khamenei's rhetoric was still in accordance with Khomeini's criticism against the Wahhabism and the monarchies for their luxury lifestyles and allowing US troops to station in Saudi Arabia after Kuwait's invasion in 1990-1991. At this point, King Abdullah's approach was far from defining Khamenei's rhetoric as a problem or crisis by not underestimating or exaggerating it with the aim of persuading the Saudi public about the kingdom's uniting and peace role in the Muslim world.

9/11 brought with domestic problems beside regional ones to the kingdom and caused political distance from the US, given the terrorism accusations of the US towards Saudi Arabia which damaged the international image of Saudi Arabia. This period directed the decision-makers to demonstrate their commitment to combat terrorism, directed by Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. Its impact was observed in the domestic structure by increasing the voice of modernists, and raising the number of non-royal actors, especially in the Council of Ministers. While 9/11 introverted Saudi Arabia to its own domestic and international image problems, to claim its commitment to the counter terrorism policies, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 awakened the Saudi decision-makers to understanding Iran's domestic influence on local actors, the Shiite communities of Iraq, and thereby its

active role in state establishment of Iraq. This was an alert for Saudi Arabia about the possibility that the regional power narrative could tremendously be revitalized in favor of Iranian regional ambitions. On the other hand, it pointed to the end of the rapprochement period on the Saudi side. At the domestic level, Iraq's invasion paved the way for a reform process, such as the 2003 National Dialogue which was initiated by King Abdullah to claim Saudi Arabia's respect for domestic religious plurality. This was also a part of King Abdullah's domestic oriented mindset and strategy to avoid securitizing Iran in the eyes of the Saudi public, or exaggerating Iraq's instability to spill over the kingdom's Shiite communities. At this juncture, King Abdullah was defining the Iran's rise in Iraqi domestic politics as a matter of concern[169], not a regional threat to the kingdom.

What brought a discursive shift in Saudi foreign policy was the 2006 war, given the realization of the Saudi decision-makers to challenge Iran inside and become involved in regional affairs behind the scenes as part of an active but still partially reactive foreign policy. Saudi decision-makers understood that specialness rhetoric, given its protection of the two holy mosques, was no longer enough to deal with Iran's varied narratives from culture, history, and religion. This was a discursive shift in terms of Saudi understanding of Iran that could effectively work with the local actors and help them to win a war by spreading and legitimizing Iranian regional narratives among the Shiite societies of the neighboring states. What was new in the Saudi regional security perception was the threat of the emergence of resistance and peace slogans which were actually initiated by Hizballah and Syria in the region, and constituted an existential threat to the kingdom. What remained the same after the 2006 war was the foreign entities discourse of Saudi decision-makers and avoiding to name Iran as the regional threat. Likewise, Saudi decision-makers avoided using the term Shiite crescent, but kept its domestic impact on Saudi Shiites in mind, especially the danger of the Saudi Shiites acting as a political institution of the Iranian narratives inside the kingdom. Saudi prefers to discuss within the family.

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[169] Frederic Wehrey et al., "Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy," *Rand: National Security Research Division* (2009), 7.

In addition to the resistance and peace slogans, another existential threat to Saudi Arabia was Iran's Green Revolution application of the *intifadah* (uprising)[170] term which had become popular with the Palestine issue.[171] Prior to this, it would be worthy to note that Khomeini had often referred to the Palestine issue as part of Iran's Islamic Revolution. To represent the Palestine issue as part of the Islamic Revolution, and citing the lack of Arab efforts to bring concrete solutions to it was an embarrassment strategy on the part of Iran towards Saudi Arabia's capacity to represent the *ummah*. The impact of Iran's close narratives to the concepts of the Palestine issue was reflected in Saudi foreign policy of polishing its Islamic role, working inside the neighboring countries by, for example, helping *Salafis* or the al-Shalal family in Lebanon, or using its financial wealth to gain supporters and legitimize its regional narratives by, for example, sending money to Beirut Central Bank, financing the education of the Lebanese students and promoting the Siniora government as Iran did for Hizballah and South Lebanon. Until 2015, Saudi Arabia followed a behind the scenes strategy that avoided a sectarian or anti-Shiism rhetoric, and continued to persuade the Saudi public through repetition and imitation discourse. In order to maintain its strategy to prevent any claims of the disunity of the royal family, Saudi Arabia continued to calm the divergences of regional threat perceptions within the royal family following the Yemen war in 2015. The Saudi decision-makers understood that sharing the neighborhood with Iran required a regional security policy actively involved in regional crises, events, and wars. More significantly, it required designation of the domestic and regional threats publicly to the international audience.

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[170] Intifadah refers to the Palestinian uprising which started in Gazze in 1987 against Israel. It continued until the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority with the Oslo Agreement in 1993. Second intifadah (Al-Aqsa intifadah) began in 2000 until 2005 and ended with the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit in Sinai.

[171] Hamid Dabashi, *The Birth of A Nation: Iran* (US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) ,7.

3.   SETTING THE SCENE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The evolution of the Saudi regional security perceptions towards the region and Iran went hand in hand with the changes in Saudi domestic structure, reform processes and succession issues. This chapter aims to overview the historical background of the succession, the decision-making process and institutions in Saudi foreign policy, and the background of its regional security perceptions and foreign policy towards Iran, from King Saud's reign in 1953 until the Israel-Lebanon War in 2006.

3.1. ROYAL FAMILY AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The King of Saudi Arabia is one of the leading actors throughout the process within the extended family of Al-Saud, which had established its authority among the other families through the wars, political rivalries and campaigns. The Saudi decision-making process is not a top down political process, rather it has been dominated by the struggle between multiple state-society actors. The Al-Saud royal family relied on hegemony with a consensual control represented in the society that is persuaded or voluntarily assimilated to accept the system of beliefs of the Al-Saud, hence it did not rely on only coercive or economic power to rule.[172] The King is the Imam of the Saudi Wahhabi community, and he is, since 1986, referred to as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.[173] The Al-Saud family's hegemony was also a part of the meeting between the sheikh and the emir to promote the *dawah* (religious call) of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab and divine unity (*tawhid*), in turn preserving the recognition of the Al-Saud family's political leadership as well as the succession of the sons and grandsons in the future.[174] In this ambiance, succession issue becomes problematic among the royal family as it is determined by the *Shariah* (Islamic) law which accepts that all sons are same and legitimate, even those from illegitimate marriages.[175] As King Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal ibn Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad Al-Saud (Ibn Saud) understood that lineal challenges were destructive for the survival of Al-Saud, he introduced the concept *bay'ah* (oath to

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[172] Mark C. Thompson, *Saudi Arabia and the Path to Political Change: National Dialogue and Civil Society* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014): 23-24.

[173] Stig Stenslie, *Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of Succession* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012): 85.

[174] Yousif Makki, "Not What It Seems: The Role of The Tribe in State–Society Relations in Saudi Arabia," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2011): 447.

[175] Joseph A. Kechichian, *Succession in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Palgrave, 2001): 10.

a particular leader) to support his own successor to the throne, and an Islamic concept *Ahl al-Hall wal-Aqd* (people who are eligible to elect the caliph or a ruler in Islamic thought) to ensure stability in the Kingdom.[176] The people who were included within the concept of *Ahl al-Hall wal-Aqd*, have the wisdom to act on behalf of Muslim communities. It was later accommodated by King Abdullah in Allegiance Council to form a group of Saudi royal family members to elect or depose the crown prince and the king.
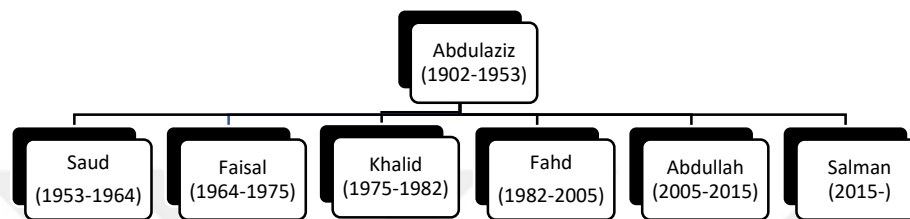
Figure 3.1: Saudi Kings since 1932

Ibn Saud's sons (figure 3.1) did not accomplish forming a unified body of governance, rather they have been in rivalry to rule the kingdom since his death in 1953. Even though it is difficult to indicate the exact size and genealogies of the families in Arabia which were shaped through the political intermarriages of Ibn Saud with the other families, one can emphasize some recognized branches of the Al-Saud family; Al-Saud Al-Kabir,[177] Al-Faisal, Al-Jiluwi[178], Al-Turki,[179] Al-Thunayan,[180] and Al-Farhan. In addition to that,

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[176] Ibid, 18.

[177] "The genealogically senior branch of the family, the Saud Al-Kabir basing their claim to rule on their seniority within the family in 1900s. Ibn Saud married one of his sisters, Nura, to the leading contender from the senior family line, Saud bin Abdul Aziz bin Saud Al-Kabir. By acting in this manner, Abdul Aziz coopted the Saud Al-Kabir and gave them a continuing stake in the rule of his branch of the family." In Kechichian, *Succession in Saudi*, 88.

[178] The Al-Jiluwi is a politically prominent clan of the Al-Saud family. The Al-Jiluwi family has hold positions governorships, for instance the son of Ibn Saud, Abdullah, was appointed the first governor of the Eastern Province in 1913. In ibid, 34.

[179] The Al-Turki is the descendants of Faisal bin Turki who was one of the brothers of Ibn Saud's grandfather. This branch did not largely marry the Ibn Saud's descendants; therefore, their political importance is limited in the decision-making. Abdul Aziz Al-Turki as the Deputy Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, and Mansur Al-Turki as the Deputy Minister of Finance can be named as the well-known representatives of this branch. In ibid, 33-34.

[180] The Al-Thunayan has not been politically active or seen as a threat to the royal family. Abdul Aziz Al-Thuyanan married King Faisal's daughter, and King Faisal married Iffat bint Ahmad Al-Thunayan, and established an important connection between the Al-Thunayan and the ruling line. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Thunayan served in the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Prince Saud bin Abdallah Al-Thunayan was appointed as the Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs. In ibid, 4.

the Al-Shaykh and Al-Sudayri tribes are considered as aristocratic; the Al-Shaykh tribe members are descendants of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab who was the founder of the Wahhabism, traditionally provided the members for *ulama* (a group of educated Muslim scholars in theology and law) for the Kingdom, and religious officials who are influential in law and education. On the other hand, the Al-Sudayri members are known to be influential in the administrative, governance and ministerial positions. While seniority is a significant characteristic of succession, one can argue that it does not guarantee political prominence alone. This was proven throughout the history of the kingdom given the complex and ambiguous relationship among the princely circles. Beside the seniority factor, maternal lineage, and being full brothers, the social standing of mothers and their tribal connections need to be emphasized as determinant factors in a prince coming to the throne. For instance, mothers from prominent families, such as the Al-Jiluwi, Al-Sheikh, or Al-Sudayri, can potentially be vigorous political references to their sons in addition to the political and social alliances that each prince needs to achieve on their way to the throne (table 3.1).

Kings	Mothers
Ibn Saud	Sara bint Ahmed Al-Sudayri
Saud	Wadhah bint Hussein Al-Orair
Faisal	Tarfa bint Abdullah bin Abdullatif Al-Sheikh
Fahd	Hussa bint Ahmed Al-Sudayri
Khalid	Al Jawhara bint Musaed bin Jiluwi Al-Saud
Abdullah	Fahda bint Asi Al-Shuraim Al-Shammari
Salman	Hussa bint Ahmed Al-Sudayri

Table 3.1: Kings and Mothers' Lineage

Despite political monopolization and hegemony of the Al-Saud family over the other families, these characteristics of the family do not guarantee the cooperation among the Al-Saud members, as behind the scenes politics ruled over the kingdom's political and succession history. The Saudi royal family is not a unified and harmonious family that are not exposed to the internal conflicts like in many dynasties. While respecting the seniority is a norm in Saudi society, the seniors do not command obedience from the junior princes in all conditions. However, *bay'ah* and respecting the king's decisions are traditional practices; how the king reaches these decisions and in consultation with whom, has often been kept a secret. The family tends to conceal the internal conflicts

among the princes as much as they can, and prevent the conflicts from gaining public visibility in the event of the disunity and collapse of the family. If a conflict among the princes popularizes, then the family utilizes a legitimizing tool, either religious or material, such as increasing salaries, building housing, or financing domestic religious organizations to convince the society. This has also been a traditional method of the royal family. Clouding the inner circle to the outsiders while avoiding an obvious competition for power at public level, helps the dynasty to hide how the princely circles compromise on conflicts. A similar case was observed between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal, King Abdullah and Crown Prince/Minister of Interior (MOI) Nayef, and none of these conflicts were presented as an open challenge to undermine the king's authority in front of the Saudi public. Besides the challenges, the kings are able to withdraw the crown prince either by forcing or convincing them to resign, such as in the case of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef in June 2017. Prince Mohammed's case was discussed and finalized inside the family and announced as a decision of the withdrawal of Prince Mohammed from his position in a peaceful manner. Another decisive factor that opens the way for the throne can be emphasized by surrounding himself with the royal family members, by staying next to the father and controlling the royal backstage rather than studying abroad. In the case of Mohammed bin Salman, he stayed with his father, Prince Salman, in Riyadh while Prince Salman was the governor of the city from 1963. He studied law at King Saud University and became a potential candidate, while enjoying internal support from his mother Fahda bint Falah bin Sultan Al-Hithalayn who promoted him to Prince Salman for the throne. In contrast, his half-brother Prince Faisal was awarded a PhD in Political Science from Oxford University, but was not considered as one of the potential candidates by his father or his mother Sultana, bint Turki. All of this recalls the construction of the face to face politics built upon the *Bedouin* and tribal political practices and informal networks of the princes, which presents the obscure and complex politics behind the political succession in the royal family.

While the top-down process determines the path of the future king, vertical decision-making defines the political process in the kingdom. According to Article 5 of the Saudi Basic Law, Saudi Arabia is a monarchy that transfers the power to the sons of Abdulaziz and the sons of his sons with the declaration of the royal order. The law is not clear about the details of selecting the future king, rather it emphasizes that the power needs to be

transferred by a royal order to the most suitable one on the basis of Quran and Sunnah.[181] At this point, one needs to underline that being a senior prince is not enough to become king, given the fact that not all tribes and sub-families of the Al-Saud have equal opportunity when it comes to succession politics. If the princes lack support from the royal family or a member of a respected family, they need support from other institutions. This is demonstrated in the case of king Abdullah of the Al-Shuraim tribe who gained the support of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) which had been governed by him, and eventually became his power base from the 1960s. Moreover, the SANG members were recruited from the *Bedouins* like King Abdullah himself and added another source of support to Abdullah for the throne. Hence, it would not be unjust to state that the princes have control over different institutions and shape their political future based on these power bases. Governing Riyadh, a center of royal family members, and governed by Prince Salman between 1963 and 2011, is a strategic source to prepare the princes or their sons to the throne. Governing Riyadh gave Prince Salman the power to gain respect among the junior princes alongside all the royal family members based in the city beside their other accommodations in other cities. On the other hand, coming from a small family like Al-Sudayri is an important factor in keeping the unity between the members and support for one another. To illustrate, the Al-Sudayri became a powerful alliance within the royal family following King Fahd's rise to power in 1982, which in turn helped the family treasure up enormous wealth owing to their rise in the royal family. The Al-Sudayri princes were in power within different institutions including the Ministry of Defence and Aviation, Riyadh Province since 1962, and the Ministry of Interior since 1975, during the periods of King Fahd and King Abdullah; for

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[181] "(a) The Regime in Saudi Arabia is Monarchy.
(b) The dynasty right shall be confined to the sons of the founder, King Abdul Aziz bin Abdurrahman Al Faisal Al Saud and the sons of sons. The most eligible among them shall be recognized as king, to rule in accordance with the Holy Qur'an and the prophet's Sunnah.
(c) The king appoints the crown prince and may relieve him of his duties by royal decree.
(d) The crown prince shall devote full time to his job and to any other duties assigned to him by the king.
(e) The powers of the king shall be assumed by the crown prince on the king's death
(f) The crown prince shall assume the powers of the king on the king's death until the Bai'ah "Allegiance" is set." See; "Saudi Basic Law," accessed June 5, 2020, http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/aboutKingDom/SaudiGovernment/Pages/BasicSystemOfGovernance35297.aspx.

instance, king Abdullah worked with and assigned many Al-Sudayri princes namely Sultan, Salman, Ahmed, and Nayef in accordance with the seniority principle.

In addition to controlling significant institutions such as the Ministry of Interior, centers and provinces, the royal lineage of a prince is highly deciding for his political future, including the tribe and social status of his mother. Despite Saudi royal women lacking any direct political power over the issue of succession, they act behind the scenes to ensure the dynastic stability as well as the political future of their sons. As the Saudi women were considered to be the *sharaf* (honor) of the royal family, they were assigned responsibilities by their male counterparts, such as full obedience to the system, and getting married within the royal circle.[182] Saudi King Abdullah al-Saud's wives Hassa bint Trad Al-Shalan, Aida Fustuq and his favourite daughter Adila served as his unofficial advisers[183] and were highly respected royal figures as part of their intelligence and compatible behaviours to the Saudi traditions. By remaining within the realm of high politics, royal women are visible in the society including the health, family, culture, and business fields. For instance, in 2003, Princess Sita, the sister of King Abdullah, created the Princesses' Council consisting of one royal princess from each sub-branch gathering together and discussing the issues regarding the family culture. The Council and other dinner gatherings organized by Saudi princesses are important for bringing the extended family together and maintaining social links with the royal family women. In some cases, Saudi women also played a mediator role in the family crisis; when Prince Talal left the kingdom after the formation of the Free Princess movement[184], his mother Munayer ensured King Fahd that they were aware of the Talal's counter behaviour and called Talal to give up his irrational attitude, hence his assets remained unfrozen and were safely returned to the kingdom in 1963.[185] Beside their mediator role, royal women also have an educating role over the junior princes and princesses like King Abdulaziz's elder sister Nora, or King Faisal's wife Princess Iffat, who played a major role in promoting girls'

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[182] Stig Stenslie, "Power Behind the Veils: Princesses of the House of Saud," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 73.

[183] Mohammed Al-Ahmari (academic and human rights activist), in discussion with the author, January 2019.

[184] Free Princes Movement is a political movement founded by Talal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud in 1958 and supported by Saudi liberal princes calling for political reforms, a constitution and a national council. the movement was affiliated with the ideals of Jamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabism. The members were excelled by King Faisal and spent their years in Beirut and Cairo until 1964. See: Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (Saqi Books, 1997).

[185] Stenslie, 77.

education in the Kingdom. [186] Thanks to Princess Iffat's efforts, many of Faisal's daughters, like Princess Lolwah, were well-educated faces of the family. Mothers also pave the way for their sons to the throne by working behind the scenes. An example of this is King Abdulaziz's wife Hussa bint Ahmad Al-Sudayri who promoted her sons Al-Sudayri Seven- Fahd, Sultan, Abdulrahman, Turki, Nayef, Salman, and Ahmad- to high positions within the state and ministerial institutions (table 3.2).

Crown Princes	Mothers
Abdullah (1982-2005)	Fahda bint Asi Al-Shuraim Al-Shammari
Sultan (2005-2011) (died)	Hussa bint Ahmed Al-Sudayri
Nayef (2011-2012) (died)	Hussa bint Ahmed Al-Sudayri
Salman (2012-2015)	Hussa bint Ahmed Al-Sudayri
Muqrin (2015-2015) (resigned)	Baraka Al-Yamaniyah
Mohammed bin Nayef (2015-2017)	Jawhara bint Abdulaziz bin Musaed Al-Jiluwi
Mohammed bin Salman (2017-)	Fahdah bint Falah bin Sultan

Table 3.2: Crown Princes and Mothers' Lineage

The Al-Saud family, under the leadership of King ibn Saud, declared the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia an official state in 1932. However, the Al-Saud family as the governing royal family with a political leadership, and the Al-Shaykh family with its religious and spiritual guidance, reached an agreement to work together to build a state in the Arabian Peninsula in 1744.[187] The establishment of the state was gradually achieved through the wars and rivalries among the distinctive tribes of the Arabia. After the long years of wars, Ibn Saud unified different tribes and families from Hijaz, Asir, Al-Hasa and Najd in the Arabia Peninsula. Ibn Saud invaded Al-Hasa province in 1913, Taif in 1924, and Jeddah in 1925. He ended up the Hashemite dynasty ruled by Hussein ibn Ali Al-Hashimi in Mecca, Medina and Hijaz in 1925, and the Rashidi dynasty of Shammar tribe first ruled by Abdulaziz ibn Mutaib Al-Rashid and then Muhammed ibn Talal ibn Naif in Hail in 1921.[188] Previously, the first Saudi state was established by Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud

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[186] Yasar Yakış (former ambassador, former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs), in online discussion with the author, March 2019.

[187] Bruce Riedel, *King and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States Since FDR* (Brookings Institution Press, 2017), 12-13.

[188] Further details on the wars of Ibn Saud with the tribes of Arabia, see: Michael Darlow and Barbara Bray, *Ibn Saud: The Desert Warrior and His Legacy* (London: Quartet Books Limited, 2010). Mohammed Almana, *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud* (London: Hutchinson Benham, 1982). Haifa Alangari, *The Struggle for Power in Arabia: Ibn Saud, Hussein and Great Britain, 1914-1924* (UK: Ithaca Press, 1998). Askar H. Al-Enazy, *The Creation of Saudi Arabia: Ibn Saud and British Imperial Policy, 1914-1927* (New York: Routledge, 2010). Harold Courtenay Armstrong, *The Lord of*

in 1744 but was removed by the Ottoman Empire in 1818. Imam Turki ibn Abdullah established the second Saudi state in 1824 which collapsed in 1891; and finally, the third Saudi state was formed in 1902 by Ibn Saud after capturing Riyadh from the Rashidi family. Ibn Saud formed the royal family through marriages of the Al-Saud family with the leading families of tribes, the business community, and urban centers, thus created relatives with the intermarried elite of prominent families.[189] This paved the way for a subdivision of the royal family into kinship parties representing certain tribal groups in Saudi society.

Throughout his military and political campaign, the major threat for Ibn Saud's authority was the Hashemites as they were holding a territory, sources of income, and tribal loyalties.[190] In addition to the Hashemites, the Ujman, Shammar tribes, some parts of the Harb, and the Utayba tribes opposed the Ibn Saud's rule; on the other hand, the Qahtan, Subay, Mutayr tribes, and some parts of the Anaza, Harb, and Utayba accepted Ibn Saud's supremacy over them.[191] As Britain had already dominated the Gulf region in the early 1900s, Ibn Saud attempted to cooperate with Britain to gain tribal support from the Najd region which was economically, strategically and religiously important to Arabia. The growing relationship between the Al-Saud family and Najd prevented tribes in the other regions like Hijaz, Al-Hasa and Asir from proclaiming their interests against the Al-Saud authority.[192] The Najd *ulama* helped to consolidate and extend Ibn Saud's authority at his disposition as well as the *Ikhwan* army (first Saudi army formed by the *Bedouin*), *umara* (statesmen), *mutawa* (religious police)[193] that Islamized the society in consolidating the Ibn Saud's authority, and worked for the expansion of his authority over the others. While the Najd *ulama* played a prominent role in the settling down of

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Arabia (Routledge, 1998). Ameen Fares Rihani, *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia* (London: Kegan Paul, 1928). Anita L. P. Burdett, *King Abdulaziz: Diplomacy and Statecraft, 1902-1953* (Slough: Archive Editions, 1998). Elizabeth Monroe, *Philby of Arabia* (UK: Ithaca Press, 1998).

[189] Joseph Kostiner and Joshua Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," in *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, ed. Joseph Kostiner (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2000), 131.

[190] Robert McNamara, *The Hashemites: The Dream of Arabia* (London: Hus Publishing, 2009). Asher Susser and Aryeh Shmuelevitz, *The Hashemites in the Modern Arab World* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005).

[191] Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916-1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.

[192] Ibid, 11.

[193] It is officially called the Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. For more; Vassiliev, *The History of*.

the *Bedouins* (nomadic tribes or desert inhabitants) and the creation of the *Ikhwan* army, the *Ikhwan* challenged the ideological authority and centrality of the cooperation during the rebellion in 1927-30.[194] It jeopardized Ibn Saud's rule because the *Ikhwan* attempted to challenge Ibn Saud's centralist regime, reestablishing traditional independence, and its leaders were supported by some prominent *ulama* and *mutawa* who were seen as the defenders of Wahhabism.[195] After his victory over the *Ikhwan*, Ibn Saud claimed his authority over the tribal sheikhs, thereby undermining the power of *umara* after 1930.[196]

Map 3.1: The Map of Saudi Arabia

Source : https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/saudi-arabia-map.htm.

In literature, the rise of Ibn Saud was attributed to his commitment to the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam which is a lineage of the Hanbali school of Islam, and had emerged in a community called *Hadar* (city-dwellers) in Najd by Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab.[197] The royal family presents itself as the guarantor and sponsor of Islam, and affirms its commitments to the Islamic law, the Qur'an, and Wahhabi teaching even though it has been challenged by the discordance between the twentieth century

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[194] Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (Yale University Press, 2014), 260. "Like the country's other institutions, the Committee of Grand Ulama is monopolized by the Najdi element (more than 70 percent of members of the Saudi elite are from Najd)." See: Ibid, 262-263.

[195] Mordechai Abir, *Saudi in the Oil Era: Regime and Elites; Conflict and Collaboration* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1988), 20-21.

[196] Ibid, 6.

[197] For the birth of Wahhabism in Arabia and its relationship with the establishment of Saudi state:
H. St. J. Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1977). In Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban, *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Boulder Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009).

diplomacy and conservative religious environment inside the Kingdom. The Supreme Council of Religious Scholars, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Imam Muhammad bin Saud University, and various Islamic Charities are the main institutions of Saudi religious establishment and contribute to its domestic influence over the public.[198] However, the consolidation of Ibn Saud's rule cannot be argued to depend on a single explanation but a combination of various factors. For instance, Kostiner argues that Wahhabism had not transformed the political landscape of Arabia, rather, the uneven development of the Saudi state and Ibn Saud's conduct of its external relations especially with Britain, contributed to the political, social and economic transformation of the Kingdom.[199] On the other hand, Al-Rasheed emphasizes the fact that Ibn Saud gained his victory over the other tribes of Arabia owing to Britain's financial and logistical help, but that is not to underestimate the role of internal dynamics nor to exaggerate the personal characteristic of Ibn Saud as a leader.[200] The factors contributed to the Ibn Saud's rise operated within a historical context and were influenced by the societal actors. Nevertheless, Ibn Saud couldn't produce a nationalistic rhetoric like Hussain ibn Ali al-Hashimi had achieved in Hijaz during the 1916 Arab Revolts; vocabulary of state formation was not based on a historical memory of unity or national heritage rhetoric, but upon ancestral claims of Ibn Saud such as his exile in Kuwait and return in 1902 to Arabia, as well as his reference to the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance in 1744-1888.[201] Until 1912, the tribes of Arabia were major contributors to the state formation of Ibn Saud but gradually they were identified as contrary to the Islamic moral order. However, state became mediator between the settled community of conservative Najd and more cosmopolitan Hijaz and al-Hasa, as it is not a specific tribe but a royal lineage that determines the ruler of the kingdom.[202]

Consolidation of Saudi state was through informal social-cultural mechanisms rather than institutional and bureaucratic lines.[203] Kostiner recapitulates the state formation of Saudi Arabia as a "renewed version of traditional chieftaincy". [204] Thus, modern

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[198] Stenslie, *Regime Stability*, 45, 47.

[199] Kostiner, *The Making of,* 6.

[200] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.

[201] Ibid, 4.

[202] Ibid, 6.

[203] Ibid, 9.

[204] Joseph Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (California: The University of California Press, 1990), 228.

bureaucracy is a relatively recent phenomenon in Saudi Arabia, which emerged in the early 1950s in the aftermath of the raise of oil income. However, Kostiner argues that Ibn Saud had achieved some bureaucratic structure based on his practical calculations, rather than urban classes or a class struggle, with special offices for health and education in the mid-1920s.[205] Due to the economic growth following the discovery of oil in the early 1930s and the oil crises of the 1970s, Saudi Arabia has evolved into a wealthy state with economic infrastructures besides its rural and tribal-based social structure. Nonetheless, tribal solidarity has remained a strong force in gaining the loyalty of the military and security institutions as well as the society, while tribal chiefdoms of the *Bedouin* have less power to command the influence compared to the Ibn Saud's reign.[206] Saudi state formation based on monopolization of power was facilitated by the cultural foundation of a tribal system and Islam as its religious value system. Political monopolization was important for internal and external conditions for the state survival, but it didn't result in a stable political corporation among the fractions of tribes.[207] State security and foreign policy were monopolized by Saudi monarchy to consolidate Saudi domination over other tribes or other social forces and maintain Saudi autonomy, which in turn illustrates the Saudi hegemony over other potential forces. The Saudi state also constructed its political sphere for separating the Al-Saud rule from others through social economic policies, the religious legitimization process of power reproduction, which produced a relation of interdependence between the state institutions, religious establishment and socio-economic forces. Thus, families and princes do not hold equal power in shaping the politics, there are divisions of labor and power struggles within each family that impose a hierarchy of power in joining the decision-making process.[208] Nonetheless, princes without formal positions in government can still be considered as robust in some policy-making areas that do not follow a bureaucratic structure. For instance, Stenslie argues that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been indirectly controlled by the king and crown prince since its establishment in 1975.[209]

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[205] Ibid, 233.
[206] Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities," 248.
[207] Adham Saouli, *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 80.
[208] Ibid, 80.
[209] Stenslie, *Regime Stability,* 31, 34, 35.

Saudi Arabia, as an institutionalized state with its domestic and foreign policy bodies, suits the model of dynastic monarchy in which the royal family chooses the qualified candidate as the king, and in turn the king must consult with the other members of the royal family in achieving a consensus, though the king must be respected under all circumstances.[210] It has a vertical decision-making process in which the decisions are made on a top-down basis. In this structure, the royal family forms ruling institutions and as a royal family rule, the most crucial issue is the question of succession to throne.[211] Article 5 of the Saudi Basic Law, which was established by King Fahd along with the *Majlis Al-Shura* (Consultative Council) by early 1992, indicates that "the system of government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is that of a monarchy and rule passes to the sons of the founding king, Abd Al-Aziz Bin Abd Al-Rahman Al-Faisal Al-Saud, and to their children's children."[212] It also acknowledges a division of powers such as executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The king is the president of the Council of Ministers, and appoints his deputies, ministers and high-ranking officers by royal decree; moreover, he is the commander-in-chief of all armed forces, and has authority to declare emergencies and war.[213] He may delegate some of his authority to the Crown Prince who is elected by the Allegiance Council. On the other hand, the King cannot discharge his relatives, but cannot be removed or replaced once he is elected, as long as he ensures the state survival, respects the values of the kingdom, and manages the state resources effectively.[214] For instance, King Saud bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud (1953-1964) was removed from power due to the significant increase of Saudi debt in 1958, mismanagement of state resources and his political negligence in confronting the Nasserism that was spreading around the Arab world and Saudi Arabia.

Even though it is difficult to assess the borders between the princes, policy of Ministries, businessmen, technocrats,[215] the positions of royal family members in the decision-

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[210] Fahad M. Alsultan, "The Saudi King: Power and Limitation in the Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy Making," *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 3, no. 5 (2013): 457-460.

[211] Ibid, 458.

[212] "Saudi Basic Law," http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/aboutKingDom/SaudiGovernment/Pages/BasicSystemOfGovernance35297.aspx.

[213] Alsultan, "The Saudi King," 458.

[214] Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in Middle Eastern Monarchies* (State University of New York Press, 1999), 238.

[215] Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29.

making process and governmental jobs, are largely related to their standing within the family. The senior members of the royal family, the inner part of the royal family, the senior princes - even though there were differences during the reigns of different kings-junior princes, religious scholars, tribal notables, merchants and technocrats have been separated from each other. The *ulama*, tribal chiefs, business community, and heads of the state bureaucracy are considered to be the non-royal elites that have institutional power bases and function in parallel to the formal actors and institutions. This situation enables the Al-Saud family to control the non-royal elites through a "policy of segmented clientelism".[216] Therefore, one can clearly state that foreign policy making in Saudi Arabia is a consensual issue, along with the hierarchical power structure within the Al-Saud family. Even though the king is the ultimate ruler and holder of all branches of government, as stated in the Saudi Basic Law which gives extensive powers to the King, he also has some limitations which means that Saudi Arabia is far from being an absolute monarchy. The King consults various bodies such as the Crown Prince, the Council of Ministers, the Alliance Institution,[217] the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Security Council, the Saudi Intelligence and *Majlis Al-Shura* (Consultative Council)[218], all of which play a significant role in providing the King and his deputies with the necessary advice for decision-making. Of course, one also needs to add the intellectual elite (*al-nukhba al-fikriyya*), including *ulama* and judges, intellectuals, professionals as well as private consultants such as religious scholars, economists, politicians and militaries as part of the decision-making process.[219]

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[216] Stenslie, *Regime Stability,* 42.

[217] In 2006, in a royal decree, King Abdullah announced the establishment of the Allegiance Council that includes fifty-three members of the royal family who are eligible to be the future king and accepted as *Ahl al-Aqd wal-Hall.* It is chaired by the oldest son of Ibn Saud and its members can nominate any of them as the Crown Prince. Depending on the valid reasons-if he has health problems or engaged in activities against the Kingdom's interests- the Institution has authority to replace the King and the Crown Prince. See: "Allegiance Institution Law," accessed on March 2019, http://susris.com/resources/documents/2006-docs/the-allegiance-institution-law/.

[218] There is no parliamentary in the country rather *Majlis Al-Shura* is the consultative council includes businessmen, technocrats, journalists, Islamic scholars, professional militaries. This consultative council has ability to evaluate the domestic and foreign politics. It has 150 members; 120 males and 30 females. See; "The Statesman's Yearbook 2017: The Politics, Cultures and Economies of the World," (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1037.

[219] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 16.

After the death of Ibn Saud, King Saud (1953-1964)'s reign was overshadowed by his struggle for power with Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, particularly following the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Syria and Egypt in 1958.[220] His reign was threatened potentially by the pan-Arab nationalists in Hijaz, socialist oriented northern Najd, Asir and al-Hasa as well as the success of Nasser's pan-Arabism in Egypt and its waves in other neighboring countries.[221] After becoming the Prime Minister in 1962, Faisal sought to win the sympathy of society and nationalists, because of the regional conjuncture shaped by the Arab nationalism on those years, for his political future. In fact, nationalism had little support in Saudi Arabia due to the lack of Saudi national feeling as they were more alleged to their tribes. Nationalists were the people from the urban middle class whom *Bedouin* disliked, and the socialists were the ones excluded from society due to being atheists or because they identified with the Shiites.[222] Nonetheless, nationalism had some support, partly from peripheral Najd intelligentsia, Aramco's Shiite workers, Arab expatriates and non-aristocratic armed forces.[223] However, after Faisal established his authority against the King Saud, he persecuted radical nationalists who were dissatisfied with his reforms or refused to join his camp.[224]

While King Saud was portrayed as extravagant in spending the kingdom's resources as well as taking large loans from the National Commercial Bank, King Faisal (1964-1975) was a religious and hardworking royal figure in the eyes of the public.[225] King Saud mismanaged his governance by concentrating on empowering himself and his sons at the expense of other families, and eroding the political and economic standing of family members. On the contrary, Crown Prince Faisal aimed to ensure the royal family's monopoly of power and in decision-making, which would later serve for the political legitimacy of his authority during his reign. However, it needs to be noted that the legitimacy of the king is also based on his success in maintaining the royal family's political and economic interests. Keeping the half-brothers or cousins politically and

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[220] For more; Ibrahim Al-Rashid, *The Struggle between the Two Princes: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Final Days of ibn Saud* (USA: Documentary Publications, 1985).
[221] Abir, *Saudi Arabia in*, 98.
[222] Ibid, 98.
[223] Ibid, 98-99-100.
[224] Ibid, 100.
[225] Karen Elliott House, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines and Future* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 268.

economically satisfied with the monarchy helps the consolidation of the king's authority over the royal family structure. In 1962, the majority of the royal family and *ulama* were supporting Faisal to King Saud who tried to impose additional authority while Faisal aimed to take the family's backing for his political future.[226] King Saud did not seek to dismiss Faisal, and in turn Faisal did not aim directly to depose King Saud. Rather, a delegation of royal princes asked King Faisal to take over the governance from King Saud and form a new government of national reform.[227] Moreover, it was the support of the *ulama* for Faisal against King Saud for his ascension to the throne. The *ulama* also gives *fatwa* in support of a controversial or sensitive issue either in domestic or foreign policy, in this way the king and his deputies gain further support from the society.

During the reign of King Faisal, who was assassinated by his nephew Faisal bin Musaid bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud in 1975, Saudi Arabia's ability to deal with the outside world grew stronger but threat perceptions expanded too. King Faisal was portrayed as the founder of modern Saudi Arabia; he transformed an almost impoverished kingdom into a modern state with global stance.[228] He channeled oil revenues towards investments to stimulate growth and make the kingdom's future less dependent on the foreign workforce. He achieved development of human capital through compulsory and free education for girls and boys, which increased the number of university students despite the moral concerns of families. Moreover, he spent time transforming the society to adopt modernizing methods without secularization despite criticism from *ulama*.[229] King Faisal's modernization projects entailed over centralization of the state with limited domestic reforms, which was a response to his ideal of promoting the kingdom as an alternative to the Arab world following Nasser's defeat and his loss of popularity after the 1967 war. Religious significance and oil wealth of the Saudi state helped King Faisal to enforce the modernization projects. Moreover, the oil embargo of King Faisal intensified his popularity in the Arab world, even in the Muslim world, replacing

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[226] Sarah Yizraeli, *The Remaking of Saudi Arabia* (Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997), 75-76.

[227] House, *On Saudi Arabia,* 268.

[228] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, 29.

[229] Joseph A. Kechichian, *Faysal: Saudi Arabia's King for All Seasons* (USA: University Press of Florida, 2008), 3. For more on Faisal and modernization; Gerald De Gaury, *Faisal: King of Saudi Arabia* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2007); Willard A. Beling, *King Faisal and the Modernization of Saudi Arabia* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Alexei Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times* (Lebanon: Saqi Books, 2012).

Nasser's popularity among the pan-Arabism supporters. King Faisal based his policies and beliefs on modernization and developments in Sharia in terms of the Arab and Muslim solidarity. It was during his reign that Saudi Arabia began to export its version of Islamic values funded by oil revenues around the world through building schools, mosques and hospitals. For instance, Saudi Arabia aimed at orienting and financing the Islamic teachings and practices in Pakistan *madrassas* (schools on Islamic teaching) in favor of Sunni Islam against Iran's domination over the religious interpretations of Pakistani society.[230] He established the Muslim World League for the purpose of propagation of Islam, and it then became a non-governmental organization for the propagation of Wahhabism.[231] Furthermore, Faisal formed the Popular Committee for Aiding Martyrs, Families, and Mujahedin in Palestine, which has been governed by Prince Salman until today.[232] He was identified with his pro-Western, anti-communist and anti-Zionist stance as he advocated the Palestinian issue, reaching a final border agreement with Jordan in 1965. During King Faisal's reign, Saudi Arabia adopted the Saudi maritime boundary with Iran through the Continental Shelf Agreement in 1968.[233] The agreement ended the ownership of the long time disputed Khark island and the overlapping oil fields. Despite the Shah's unaccommodating attitude over full ownership of the Khark island, King Faisal settled a proposal accepting the half effect of the island.[234] He strengthened the hold of the ruling family, safeguarding the Al-Saud from internal and external threats. At the same time, he supported his brothers and appointed his brother Khalid as the Crown Prince, and his brother Abdullah as the head of the SANG for internal security and protection of the royal family. He also implemented rules for all the ruling family benefiting from the kingdom's treasury to rescue the kingdom's finances.[235]

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[230] For more; Madiha Afzal, "Saudi Arabia's Hold on Pakistan," *The Brookings Foreign Policy Brief*, May 2019, accessed April 28, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/FP_20190510_saudi_pakistan_afzal.pdf.

[231] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, 45.

[232] Ibid, 46.

[233] See; "No.24 Continental Shelf Boundary Iran-Saudi Arabia," *US Department of State: Bureau of Intelligence and Research*, accessed April 13, 2019, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LIS-24.pdf.

[234] See; Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh and Bahador Zarei, "Maritime Boundary Delimitations in the Persian Gulf," *International Studies Journal* 14, no.2 (2017): 57-58

[235] Ibid, 7.

During this period, King Saud wanted to keep the existing order. His half-brother, Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, who was known for his liberal stance and as the leader of the Free Princes Movement, favored a constitutional monarchy while King Faisal wanted a reformed, technologically developed but conservative order.[236] In March 1958, eleven senior princes and Prince Fahd demanded King Saud to render power to Prince Faisal, and Faisal gained an executive power to restore government spending following this. In December 1960, King Saud revoked his executive powers from Faisal through collaboration with the Free Princes Movement. However, due to health issues, King Saud had to travel to the US. In November 1961 Faisal became acting prime minister.[237] King Faisal created a new balance between the society and tradition; a balance within the royal family between the Sudayri branch and other branches of the Al-Saud family. He encouraged the monarchy with twenty government ministries in the areas of petroleum, education, planning, justice and commerce to extend the influence of the royal family into public life. His Five-Year Plan was called "maintaining economic and social stability within the existing religious and social framework"[238]. He established the Ministry of Justice in 1970 to define the *ulama* within an official position, and a part of state bureaucracy. During his reign, the civil service grew from 62,000 to 336,000 between 1960-80, and the Al-Saud family became an unquestioned ruler of the kingdom as he restructured the royal family as the political center, main economic entrepreneur, and welfare provider for the society.[239] Moreover, he divided the control of the main military force; the regular army was ruled by Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud who was King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud's full brother and the Minister of Defence and Aviation (1963-2011); and the SANG was responsible for internal security under his half-brother, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

After the assassination of King Faisal by his nephew Faisal bin Musaid, King Khalid (1975-1982) came to the throne. Due to his ill health, he delegated much of his authority to the Crown Prince Fahd who had almost complete authority, and subsequently became King between 1982-2005. It has been emphasized that Prince Fahd used the Council of Ministers to strengthen his authority over King Khalid, and he also established the

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[236] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and," 135.
[237] Riedel, *King and Presidents,* 35.
[238] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and," 136-137.
[239] Ibid, 135-136.

Consultative Council composed of appointed representatives of tribal leaders, professionals, technocrats, businessmen of middle class and *ulama*, in order to win the general support of the new middle class when he came to the throne. This period relied on technocrats, through assimilating the Najdi technocrats such as Ghazi al-Gosaybi as Minister of Industry and Electricity, Sulayman Sulaym as the Minister of Commerce, and aimed to eradicate the Hijazi predominance to pave the way for the reestablishment of the Najd hegemony, which historically constitutes the major power base of the Al-Saud family, in government, service and military.[240] He modernized the Najd business elites by combining them with the younger generation of western educated technocrats. Hence, he aimed to transfer the economic power from the Hijazis to the Najdis as the new classes emerged from the Najdi constituency. The Najdi bureaucratic elite regarded themselves to be at the top of the business community through *wasta* (nepotism), which has still been practiced by people favoring their tribes and clans in Saudi society.[241]

Owing to the oil crisis in 1979[242] when the decline of oil production caused oil prices to rise, it became too costly to build the kingdom's infrastructure and forced the country into economic diversification. *Ulama* was frustrated with the impact of modernization since due to the large number of foreigners, western experts were perceived as a threat to the Wahhabi lifestyle and habits. This perception of the *ulama* affected the rivalry among the royal family, particularly with regard to who would replace King Khalid, as his health was getting worse. To illustrate, for the purpose of consolidating the Al-Sudayri family's influence in the decision-making process, Crown Prince Fahd and his brothers, who also came from the Al-Sudayri family,[243] thought about replacing Prince Abdullah, who was in charge of the SANG, as the second Deputy Prime Minister. This meant being second in the line of succession with Prince Sultan who was the Minister of Defence. On the other hand, conservatives who were dissatisfied with the modernization process insisted that Prince Abdullah resist Al-Sudayri family's demands to control them,

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[240] Abir, *Saudi Arabia in*, 137-138.

[241] Thompson, *Saudi Arabia and the,* 51.

[242] See: Al A. Attiga, *The Arabs and the Oil Crisis 1973-1986* (Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), Kuwait: 1987).

[243] Al-Sudayri family come from the descend of Ahmad bin Muhammad Al-Sudayri (1869–1936). Al-Sudayri members are dominantly present in the provincial governments, bureaucracy. They have provided more women for the royal lineage than other families of the Al-Saud. For instance, Ibn Saud's mother was a Sudayri, and he married three Sudayri women; Hassa who was the mother of six full brothers called as the Sudayri Seven, others were Jauhara bint Saad and Haya bint Saad. In Keichican, *Succession in Saudi*, 35.

as control of the SANG was essential to protect their interests.[244] The royal family is extensively divided between Fahd, who had a liberal stance, and a more conservative Abdullah who was the brother of Khalid and Fahd, and third in line to the throne.[245] As King Fahd's government (1982-2005) had economic-social difficulties during these years, he was willing to provide positions for intelligentsia in the decision-making process to strengthen his political future, and to spread the oil wealth among the new elites[246]. This was interpreted by some as undermining the Al-Saud rule.

The other political issue that shocked the Saudi ruling class and the political future of Crown Prince Fahd, was the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, prior to Camp David in March 1979. This caused King Fahd's modernization projects that were in line with the US to fail, and he was blamed by the *ulama* and conservative parts of the society. There was a growing Arab radicalism which enabled a rapprochement between Syria and Iraq in 1978-79, while simultaneously, the kingdom was observing a rising Shiite militant fundamentalism in Iran. During that period, *Majlis Al-Shura* was presided over by Prince Abdullah who was known to be friendly to Syria with his anti-western agenda, and Crown Prince Fahd's brother Prince Sultan, who did not support Fahd's close relations with the US as well as with Anwar Sadat, and had to support the neighboring Arab regimes, such as rejecting a boycott against Egypt, establishment of the 1978 Camp David Accords, and active US foreign policy in the region.

Due to these regional developments, there was a belief among the new elites that the Saudi regime was collapsing, while conservatives were aiming to undermine the Al-Sudayri family's authority over the monarchy. The 1979 Mecca Rebellion, and the Shiite riots in Eastern provinces came into prominence in that period and paved the way for re-establishment of solidarity in the kingdom within the ruling class.[247] The Shiite riots in al-Hasa had been protesting since the 1950s and claiming state discrimination towards them. The Shiite populations, who were 10% of the population in the 1980s, and living in al-Hasa while working in Aramco, were considered to be dangerous for the stability of the monarchy. It was believed that the Shiite populations were encouraged by the

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[244] Abir, *Saudi Arabia in,* 141-142.
[245] Riedel, *King and Presidents,* 58.
[246] The Tender Law was passed into law for this purpose in 1977.
[247] Abir, *Saudi Arabia in,* 146-147.

Islamic Revolution and gained new pride in being part of Shiite tradition.[248] On the other hand, the Mecca Rebellion, which damaged the Saudi image as protectors of holy places, also diminished the authority of Prince Abdullah as the National Guard as well as Prince Fawaz bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud as the Governor of Mecca province (who was accused of serving alcoholic beverages), in turn diminishing the authority of the *ulama*, and leading to the estrangement of the Hijazi technocrats. During King Fahd's reign, the newly urbanized and rural population were disliked by traditional institutions and intelligentsia who saw the new elite as corrupted by wealth and prestige, and hence did not deserve special consideration or priority by the government. More importantly, King Fahd improved the image of the Sudayri family as the guardians of the kingdom's Wahhabi character as a response to the rising fundamentalism in Iran and broader Muslim world. He had to raise the authority and responsibilities of *umara* and *mutawa* who were placed in charge of directing the development projects of different ministries of the kingdom.[249] This was a result of the third-year development plan of Saudi Arabia[250] which aimed to diversify the economy's oil resources, industrialize the kingdom, increase investments in agricultural projects and curb the migration of the rural populations to the cities. Within the third-year development plan, the Saudi Shiites gained substantial aids which accelerated the development of the Eastern provinces.

Another important feature of King Fahd's reign was the appointment of the young royal members to significant positions in civil service, military, administration, and political liberalization. There was also the introduction of democratic institutions during the 1990s as King Fahd had to deal with the new emerging realities and contemporary historical events following the collapse of communism, and the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. Thus, King Fahd introduced a reform program, including the Saudi constitutional reform in late 1993, which paved the way for the introduction of *Majlis Al-Shura* in 1992 in transforming Saudi law and politics. The 1990s were the years during which Saudi Arabia showed its inadequacy in preparing for the threats from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, relying on foreign forces and suffering from economic recession[251]. All of this damaged

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[248] Ibid.

[249] Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and Gulf Crisis* (UK: Routledge, 1993), 97.

[250] "Development Plans," Ministry of Economy and Planning, accessed on March 14, 2021, https://www.mep.gov.sa/en/development-plans.

[251] "Per capita income dropped from 17,000$ in 1981 to 6,975$ in 1993, fast growing population and shrinking national income." Ibid, 140.

the sustainability of Al-Saud's rule by the new middle-class, which comprised academics, technocrats and middle-ranking businessmen who believed that they did not have a secure future in government and the public sector. This acted as the failure of Faisal's order, and he was criticized for his personal favoritism of the Al-Sudayri family.[252]

King Fahd gave importance to legitimization by *ulama* to balance the ongoing Islamism threat spreading from the Islamic Revolution and oppositions from the *ulama* after the Gulf War in 1990-91. By appointing Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz (1993-1999), from the Al-Sheikh family, as general *mufti* (a legal authority who gives opinion on a matter in Islamic law) and the president of the Senior Ulama Council and Administration of Islamic Studies and Rulings, the royal family gained support from the Senior *ulama*, and controlled the appointments as well as speeches of lower level religious officials.[253] For instance, Bin Baz, mostly in *Al-Majalla* magazine, was writing about the importance of obeying the rulers, underpinning the unity and respect for authority.[254] In addition to this, Saleh bin Abdul Aziz Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al-Shaykh was appointed as the Minister of Islamic Endowments, Dawa and Guidance Affairs; Abdallah bin Muhammad Al-Shaykh as the Minister of Justice; and Muhammad bin Abdul Aziz Al Shaykh as a Minister of State as an indicator of the Al Shaykh family's authority in the religious field. Under the circumstances of royal polarization, King Fahd, as the senior member of the Al-Saud and the senior male member of the Al-Sudayri family, further deepened the impact of the Sudayri Seven[255] of the Al-Saud family by appointing their relatives in provincial governments to consolidate the Al-Sudayri hegemony over the other clans. For instance, Prince Salman was the Governor of Riyad to balance the influence of King Khalid and Prince Abdullah on the rural population; Prince Nayef became the Minister of Interior and was directly responsible for the governors and improving relations with *umara*; Muhammad bin Turki was the governor of Baha Province; Turki Al-Sudayri controlled the Asir province and Fahd bin Khalid Al-Sudayri governed the Najran province.[256] By the early 1980s, the Al-Sudayri family and its allies, both royal and non-

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[252] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, "State-Formation and," 140.
[253] Ibid, 145.
[254] Ibid, 146.
[255] Sudayri Seven within the Al-Saud family refers to the sons of Ibn Saud from his wife Hussa bint Ahmad Al-Sudayri.
[256] Abir, *Saudi Arabia in,* 184-187.

royal as governors, senior administrators and armed forces were appointed in many provinces. Hence, the Al-Sudayri family expanded their influence on the rural, urbanized lower middle class. They expanded their group among the *Bedouin,* and *umara* who were traditionally the powerbase of Prince Abdullah on his route to the throne.

3.2. HISTORICIZING AND CONTEXTUALIZING THE REGIONAL SECURITY POLITICS OF SAUDI ARABIA TOWARDS IRAN

3.2.1. Competing Agendas but 'Brothers in Faith'

Wealth and security arrived in the Kingdom as part of its economic, political and strategic ties and close relations with the US.[257] Until the announcement of its withdrawal from the Gulf in January 1968[258], Britain played a security provider role mainly in Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf while the US was already present in Turkey, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Iran. In the 1950s, Saudi Arabia was on the edge of financial wellbeing, and its oil revenues, which enabled the kingdom to dominate weak neighbors and consolidate the Saudi ruling family, began to rise.[259] At the regional level, the emergence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a security partner of Egypt, the Arab-Israel tensions, strengthening of pan-Arab nationalism, formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR), strengthening of Ba'ath Party in Iraq and Syria and civil wars in Lebanon and Yemen, all put Saudi Arabia on alert for the future of its monarchy and ruling family. Yet, Zionism and communism were defined as twin evils for Saudi Arabia in addition to the Nasserism[260] threat, despite the division between the royal family over relations with

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[257] Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in,* 4.

[258] See: William Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British retreat in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). James Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection* (Doha: Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2009).

[259] Aramco headquarter moves from the US to Saudi Arabia that signals the central importance of Saudi Arabia for Aramco. Oil production peaks 1 million bpd for the first time in 1954.
In "History," Saudi ARAMCO, accessed November 2019,
http://www.saudiaramco.com/en/home/about/history/1950s.html.

[260] Nasserism was defined in Arab nationalist and socialist political ideas of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second President of Egypt. He claimed to liberate the Arabs colonized by the West. His ideas were influential in shaping the Middle East politics and security dynamics during the 1950s-60s. For more; Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler, *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt* (Gainseville: University Press of Florida, 2004). Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and The Clash That Shaped the Middle East* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018). Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to the Muslim Brotherhood* (New Haven: Yale

Egypt. Even though King Saud supported Nasserism in the beginning of his reign, he withdrew his support in 1956 when Jordan and Iraq began to have close relations with Egypt, as both were considered enemies to the Kingdom in those years. The fact that, in 1955, a group of army officers who tried to overthrow the Kingdom were Nasser's sympathizers, and the rise of labor unrests in the Eastern Provinces of Saudi Arabia - where Aramco (first Arabian-American Oil Company, then Saudi Oil Company) was located in Dhahran and Shiite population was concentrated - in 1953 and 1959, urged Saudi Arabia to take the regional events, crises and wars seriously in consolidating the political structure of the Kingdom and the unity of the royal family.

Under these circumstances, the 1958 Iraqi *coup d'État* (military coup) or the 14th July Revolution, organized against the Iraqi King Faisal II by Abd al-Karim Qasim and Muhammad Najib ar-Ruba'i, was a mixed grace for Saudi Arabia because it ended with the withdrawal of Iraq from the Baghdad Pact in March 1959, while simultaneously promoting close ties between Iraq and the UAR. After the *coup*, Qasim came into power as the Prime Minister of Iraq, while ar-Ruba'i became the first President of Iraq. In February 1963, a pro-Nasser Ba'athist coup occurred in Iraq, and establishment of the Syrian Ba'ath party followed the coup in 1966, both of which undermined the consolidation of the Saudi royal family and isolated the Kingdom. After the rise of the Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq that weakened Iran's position in the Arab world[261], Iran preferred to cut its ties with Syria because of its claims on Iranian providence Khuzestan as an Arab land. In addition, Saudi Arabia expelled Syrian workers with leftist ideas and tightened its grip on Shiite populations of the al-Hassa region. Hundreds of Saudi Shiites were arrested for protesting in favor of Nasser as well as against the working policies of the Aramco where the Saudi Shiites were dominantly recruited.

Saudi Arabia had to deal with the domestic impacts of regional rivalries, interplay of regional politics, and fluid alliances throughout the 1950s-60s. During King Saud's reign, the security concerns of Saudi Arabia was intense and multidimensional, while King Saud was under pressure from senior princes and *ulama* due to his incompetent

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University Press, 2013). Said K. Aburish, *The Last Arab: A Biography* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004).

[261] Banafsheh Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends or Foes?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 77.

leadership.[262] In addition to the confrontation with Nasserism and the North Yemen civil war (1962-1970), threats of Hashemites' irredentism, tribal secessionism inside the Kingdom, the Free Princes movement led by Prince Talal bin Abd al-Aziz Al-Saud, and pan-Arabism tested the stability and reliability of the Saudi security policy as well as King Saud's leadership, which was defined between hesitancy of appeasement and fighting against the Nasserism. In fact, the supporters of Nasser had a substantial impact inside Saudi Arabia, within the army and even in the royal family, directly pressuring King Saud to take a resolute stance against him.[263] For instance, King Saud fired the Minister of Defence, Mishal ibn Abdulaziz, due to his alleged support for Nasserism alongside accusations of corruption in 1956, and assigned his own son, Fahd ibn Saud, as the new minister.[264] Yet, divisions on security policies within the royal family was evident as a result of tribal rules of succession, unequal share of power and, most importantly, arbitrariness with which competing factions and approaches were other fundamental threats to the survival of the Kingdom.[265] To ensure the unity of the Kingdom, King Saud utilized the material wealth of Saudi Arabia by increasing oil revenues to achieve domestic developments such as the establishment of the Council of Ministers, Health, Education, and Commerce, establishment of religious institutions to teach Islam, more efficient arming, establishment of King Saud University and King Abdulaziz Military Academy, and the abolishment of slavery in 1962. His successor, Crown Prince Faisal, adopted a ten point program to overcome the challenges of Nasserism's pan-Arabism for encouraging the Saudi society to achieve an alternative anti-monarchial system. Moreover, after he came to power, King Faisal called for Islamic unity among the Muslim countries in 1965, and Shah Reza of Iran visited Saudi Arabia in November 1968 to respond to King Faisal's call, though he avoided accepting King Faisal as the leader of an Islamic movement.

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[262] He was accused of using the oil revenues to his personal usage and having a luxury lifestyle.
See: Islam Yassin Qasem, *Oil and Security Policies: Saudi Arabia, 1950-2012* (Brill: Lam Edition, 2015), 48-53.
[263] Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 110.
[264] Ibid, 105.
[265] Ibid, 110.

The Bagdad Pact[266] was another decisive regional event which ended in isolating Saudi Arabia whilst, on the other hand, arming Iran. Crown Prince Faisal believed that the Pact could place Iran, Iraq and Pakistan in a position to end hostilities toward Egypt and bring peace to the region. King Saud advocated Nasser's positive neutralism similar to Mossadegh's negative equilibrium[267] which urged balanced relations by regional states and western blocks, kept Iraq contained and prevented the isolation of Egypt. The fact that Iran became part of the Pact caused King Saud to perceive the pact as strengthening Israel's regional position and changing the regional balance in Iran's favor. When Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal[268] in 1956, Saudi Arabia supported the nationalization due to its rivalry with the Hashemites who had been the ruling family of Jordan since 1921, and were the previous rulers of Syria (1920), Iraq (1921-1958) and Hijaz (1916-1925).[269] The US President D. D. Eisenhower's view of leftist regional groupings as acts of communism doubled Iran and Saudi to engage with socialist Arab states, and fueled a regional arms race.[270] In contrast, during the J. F. Kennedy administration, the US believed that Nasser could bring reforms to Egypt, which worried both Saudi Arabia and Iran, but changed the regional balance mostly against Iran.

Saudi Arabia faced reform pressures from the US, particularly for abolishing slavery which was later achieved during King Saud's reign in 1962. In order to orient the Kingdom towards the reform process, Crown Prince Faisal renewed *Majlis Al-Wukala* (Council of Deputies)[271], divided the council's administrative power from the monarch's and introduced ten points of reform, including the creation of a constitution called Basic

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[266] It was formed as a mutual security organization by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the UK in 1955, aimed at promoting shared political, military and economic goals as well as protecting the Middle East from the SU's influence.

[267] Mohammad Mossadegh was the Prime Minister of Iran between July 1952 and August 1953. Through his negative equilibrium, Mossadegh took neutral positions and avoided supporting one to another in the region.

[268] See: Charles W. Hallberg, *The Suez Canal, Its History and Diplomatic* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974).
Also, in Scott W. Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US, and the Suez crisis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).

[269] Elie Podeh, "The Struggle Over Arab hegemony after the Suez Crisis," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1 (1993): 91.

[270] See: Cole Christian Kingseed, *Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis of 1956* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University press, 1995).

[271] It was established in December 1931, and renamed as the *Majlis Al-Wuzara* (Council of Ministers) in 1953. For more; Fouad Al-Farsy, Fouad Farsy and Farsy Fouad Al, *Modernity and Tradition: Saudi Equation* (London & New York: Kegan Paul International, 1990), 42-47.

Law, Consultative Council, and independent judiciary[272] in 1961. These reforms were followed by a five point program in 1969. Regardless of who was king, the Saudi dynasty reflected a distinct diplomatic style rooted in tribal culture, vagueness, discretion, ambiguity, use of proxies, attempts to buy allies, avoidance of confrontation, and appeasement of powerful opponents.[273] It also showed the capacity of government to make sharp diplomatic turns, and reverse sources to protect the perceived security interests. To illustrate, King Saud had tried to act pro-Egyptian and anti-Hashemite in the first years of Nasser's government, but he then adopted a policy for the appeasement of Nasser and collaborated with him.[274] King Faisal made similar swings in relation to Nasser and Britain, but in their relations with the US, both lowered and raised the temperature, and was careful to avoid rupture.[275] Nevertheless, King Faisal's reign was relatively more stable owing to the changed understanding of Saudi leadership in that domestic developments could be seriously affected by crisis in the region, hence they were careful with shifts of regional power as well as opinion among the ruling elites.[276] During King Faisal's reign, the main challenge for the issue of succession was to defend and reform in accordance with changes across the Arab world and the interests of the US. Instead of imposing rapid modernization, King Faisal aimed to achieve the reforms and unification of the royal family through instilling the need in the face of instability. King Faisal paid importance to conceiving what modernization meant for Saudi society rather than following the US prescriptions.[277] He did not expand the military but increased internal security; he increased Saudi intelligence by assigning his brother-in-law, Kamal Adham, as the head of Saudi Intelligence. He removed the national guard from King Saud's appointees, and promoted his closer half-brothers like Prince Fahd and Prince Abdullah, and Prince Sultan. In 1963, he appointed Prince Salman as the governor of

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[272] The ten-points program of King Faisal included issuing a new basic law, issuing a province law, judiciary system administered by the Supreme Council of Justice, establishing a committee for issuing fatwa, the duty of disseminating Islamic knowledge and values, establishing a Committee for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, social reforms, structuring the economic, commercial and social growth, reforms for economic prosperity and financial stability, and abandonment of slavery. In "King Faisal bin Abdulaziz," King Faisal Foundation, accessed March 2021, https://www.kff.com/en/King-Faisal.html. For more details on ten points program; Peter W. Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm* (Routledge, 1994): 52-54.
[273] Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 111-112.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in,* 8.
[277] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran*, 83.

Riyadh, and he administered the Free Princes by accepting them as a voice of change with the condition that they sever ties with Nasser. He appointed his half-brother Prince Khalid as the Deputy Prime Minister and Crown Prince, and Prince Fahd as the second Prime Minister, as part of his plans to solve the succession issue.

King Faisal had also commited to Islam as a unifying force in Saudi domestic and foreign relations, as well as in the fight against communism through Saudi initiatives across the Muslim world. He made conferences in Makkah in May 1962 and April 1965 on Islamic unity, initiatives which led to the establishment of the Muslim World League and the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation). At the same time, Reza Shah was also promoting Islamic values compatible with modern times because he believed that his policies would make Iran the most stable country of the region. Iran was actively involved in the conferences, even became a founding member of the Muslim World League *(Rabitat al-A'lam al-Islami)* and helped the establishment of the OIC.[278] Reza Shah had been known to have a pro-Israel stance[279] while King Faisal was publicly asserting Islamic leadership, and at the same time, both were challenged by Nasser of Egypt. Under these circumstances, and despite the partnership appearing to be suspicious, both Saudi Arabia and Iran were trying to remove each other's security concerns. For instance, Reza Shah stated that Shiites Islam shouldn't undermine the Iran-Saudi relations or overshadow Saudi Arabia's role in the Muslim world. He even said he wished to delegate King Faisal the responsibility to mobilize the Muslims, and portrayed King Faisal as *Amir al-Mu'minin* (the leader of believers) a role which was given to Ali, one of the four Muslim Caliphates (Al-Khulafah Al-Rashidun).[280]

In 1963, the center of gravity of the security dynamics shifted to the Gulf from the Middle East; Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Yemen directly competed for influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and Iran had competing agendas through the 1960s but were aware of the fact that they needed to work closely. In that sense, the US President R. M. Nixon's twin pillars doctrine was critical in describing Iran and Saudi Arabia as two prominent and pro-US stabilizer actors in the aftermath of Britain's military withdrawal

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[278] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran*, 85.

[279] As part of its periphery doctrine, David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, endeavored to develop relations with the non-Arab Muslim states including Iran, Turkey, India, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, to counter the Arab states. See: Noa Schonmann, *Israel's Phantom Pact: Foreign Policy on the Periphery of the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2020).

[280] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran*, 86.

from the Middle East. While defining them in the same line as the US interest in the region, the Nixon Doctrine also created a structural power rivalry between the two and geopolitical competition in the 1980s and subsequently. In addition, inter-Arab politics continued to dominate Iran and Saudi Arabia's regional relations while both were far from creating a clear influence for themselves due to the unstable and changing nature of the region, and often competed in the hydrocarbon market and gaining more influence in the OPEC[281] (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries).[282] In the case of the OPEC, Iran aimed to build its own output, develop its own portfolio by acquiring bigger allocation with high prices, while Saudi Arabia favored stabilizing the oil market for the sake of international economic stability through its own output adjustments.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli war (Al-Naksa) was a turning point in decreasing the regional influence of Nasser, and starting an oil embargo as an act of retaliation against the states supporting Israel.[283] The war also put King Faisal in a vulnerable position since Saudi public opinion was sympathetic towards Nasser, and protests of the Aramco workers were increasing at the same time. In terms of the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, despite Reza Shah refusing to join the embargo by Arab oil to the west, he criticized Israel's occupation of Gaza. In turn, King Faisal gave a talk in the Iranian parliament, emphasizing that both states shared the same interests as brothers in faith.[284]

With Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf in January 1968, Saudi Arabia and Iran faced the following key question: what new regional order would look like; either Arab states would contain Iran, or Iran would fill the power vacuum in the Gulf. Britain wanted to leave the region quickly but with a viable order, and wanted a regional structure based on the strengths of each state. Hence, a multipolar order emerged consisting of Iran, Iraq,

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[281] The second half of the 1950s when nationalization wave was sweeping across the Middle East countries, oil-producing states founded the OPEC as a permanent intergovernmental organization in 1960, in Baghdad. See: Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa'ud, and the Making of U.S.-Saudi Relations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

[282] Prime Minister of Iran, Ali Amini, defined Saudi Arabia as the only reliable partner, as a response to the reception organized for Amini in Islamic conference in Saudi Arabia. Ibid.

[283] The oil embargo was signed by Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Qatar, Abu Dhabi. See: M. S. Daoudi and M. S. Dajani, "The 1967 Oil Embargo Revisited," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 2 (1984): 65-90.

[284] After King Faisal was assassinated in March 1975, Iran declared a week of mourning despite the battle over the oil prices remained. Both states helped the US to conclude a peace treaty, Camp David signed in September 1978, between Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel under the support of the Carter administration of the US. For more on Camp David Accords; William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peace Making and Politics* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1986), 291-320.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait working with the Trucial states that formed the UAE in December 1971.[285] More importantly, Saudi Arabia proposed a collective Arab Gulf security network despite the political rivalries and border tensions between itself and Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. King Faisal settled the boundary dispute over Buraimi in favor of Abu Dhabi, and concluded an agreement with Kuwait on the division of the neutral zone, and territory between Kuwait and Iraq. He also supported Bahrain in joining the UAE, but Iran did not want Bahrain or trucial states to merge into an Arab federation as this would alter the regional dynamics against Iran. Rather, Reza Shah strived for the bilateral Gulf security pacts to avoid a collective regional structure in favor of Arab states to match Iran. However, he often cited the openness of Iran to multilateral cooperation with the regional states.

3.2.2. The First Saudi Steps for Tightening Grip on Iran

In the post-Nasser period, regional dominancy of oil rich states began to prevail over the other states with a nationalist ideology. This meant the transition of regional influence of Egypt to the oil rich monarchies like Saudi Arabia. The fact that the OAPEC (Organization of Arab petroleum exporting countries)[286] boycotted the West through the oil embargo in the aftermath of the 1967 and 1973 war showed an Arab solidarity to some extent. On the other hand, it signaled the oil rich monarchies' arrival to the regional and international scene. The second half of the 1970s illustrated the shift of political and military center of gravity towards the Gulf where turmoil and transition grew together under the regional dominancy of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran.[287]

Three events of turmoil can be emphasized to shape the regional dynamics of the 1970s; Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. After the collapse of Nasser's government and the recession of Egypt from the regional scene, the Arab states' solidarity which was observed during the

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[285] Trucial states were Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Kalba, Ras Al-Khaimah, Sharjah, Umm Al-Quwain. See: Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates: A Political and Social History of* the Trucial States (London: Routledge, 2016). Donald Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970). Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (UK: Ithaca Press, 2002).

[286] Members of the OAPEC are Bahrain, Algeria, UAE, Egypt, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Qatar, and Syria.

[287] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Competing Powerbrokers of the Middle East: Iran and Saudi Arabia* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2008), 4.

Arab-Israel crises, was weakened. The Islamic Revolution in Iran paved the way for an anti-Western and anti-status quo political elite to dominate Iranian politics, and as a result of its vocal anti-monarchical sentiments, Iran posed a direct challenge to the monarchies like Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was an indirect challenge to Saudi Arabia since Afghanistan was not an area of competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran; however, it decisively helped to reshape the MENA's (Middle East and North Africa) geopolitical map.

King Faisal's reign encountered severe dangers directed towards the Kingdom's strategic regional security environment. Proxy armed conflicts with Egypt in Yemen, the end of Pax-Britannica in south Arabia and the Persian Gulf, the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israel wars, the oil embargo, and the first opposition with the US are examples of the security concerns during King Faisal's era. Nevertheless, King Faisal was successful in dealing with the regional dynamics, mostly owing to his interpretation of the Saudi state apparatus in the fields of security and defense which was based on his reliance both on conventional means and non-military means such as education, culture and knowledge. [288] For instance, during the 1973 oil embargo, he used conventional diplomacy focusing on the fields of economy and politics as well as traditional methods reflecting the tribal structure, such as keeping the decision-making system between the king and the princes. In addition, King Faisal attempted to build up military capability despite his efforts falling short because of the fluctuating financial and diplomatic constraints, suspicion of the military forces, sectionalism, lack of effective manpower and slow development of the Kingdom's infrastructure.[289] Even after King Faisal was assassinated in 1975, his attempts to build an effective military power as a serious instrument of national security remained undeveloped.

Due to the lack of military capability, King Faisal had to depend on the Kingdom's security on defensive foreign policy style. He preferred to use appeasement against the neighbors, and avoided irreparable confrontation, especially in relations with Nasser. He implied a reduction on the price of Tehran oil in December 1973 in order to avoid an immediate confrontation with Iran.[290] It was a typical feature of King Faisal's diplomatic

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[288] Safran, *Saudi Arabia,* 212.
[289] Ibid.
[290] For more; Andrew Scott Cooper, "Showdown at Doha: The Secret Oil Deal That Helped Sink the Shah of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 4 (2008): 567-591.

style of 'wait and see' before reacting to the regional events; such as his response to Britain's announcement of withdrawal which was an indicator of his tacit political-strategic mind.[291] He viewed Saudi defense policy in terms of combination of relations with the US and three interrelated issues of conflict: south Arabia, the Gulf, and Arab-Israel . In the case of South Arabia, hostility of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) regime, instability of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), and conflict on Yemen unity were the major problems for regional stability and regional threat for Saudi security.[292] In the Gulf, the security issue was two-tiered; at one level, threat of Iraq's hostility to the regimes of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and their oil facilities; at other level, the threat of the rising regional influence of Iran. Therefore, Saudi Arabia needed to rely on Iran to control Iraq's regional aims, and the US to monitor Iran's rising influence.[293] For the Arab-Israel issue, King Faisal supported the Palestinian Arab's claims at any occasion.[294] King Faisal expected the US to take a more balanced approach, since the US policies fell short of this expectation, and Saudi Arabia supported Egypt in the 1973 Yom Kippur war against Israel. After the war and the global oil crisis, Saudi Arabia used its oil wealth leverage to establish a settlement.[295] Overall, King Faisal gave priority to dealing with the immediate issues rather than conducting long term strategies. In contrast to King Faisal's reign, King Khalid's reign experienced the lack of collective leadership, the rise of military building spending in the face of inadequate military power, flow of foreign labor as well as geographic and demographic constraints, which all together eroded the cohesiveness of King Khalid's foreign policy.[296] During this period, there were fundamental limitations on Saudi Arabia's strategic position. It was a prisoner of the oil wealth since Saudi Arabia was "too rich to be ignored by others, and too weak and cautious to be able to ignore them".[297] In the eight-year period of King Khalid's reign, regional strategic environment, and regional critical developments defined the Saudi security perception. While Egypt's peace treaty with Israel polarized the Arab

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[291] Safran, *Saudi Arabia,* 213.
[292] The fact that South Yemen was resting on Bab Al-Mandeb was a potential threat to oil route, and Soviet position in the horn of Africa. In Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 213.
[293] Ibid, 214
[294] Abdulaziz H. Al Sowayyegh, "Saudi Oil Policy During King Faisal's Era," In *King Faisal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, ed. Willard A. Beling (US: Westview Press, 1980): 203.
[295] Rene Rieger, "Saudi Arabia's relations with Israel and Palestine," In *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation*, ed. Neil Partrick, (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016): 153.
[296] Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 452.
[297] Ibid, 449.

states, it forced Saudi Arabia to side between the bandwagoning and the domestic sentiments. At the same time, the USSR was threatening to expand its power through its proxies of the PDRY, in the horn of Africa, and to gain influence in the Gulf. Later on, the Iran-Iraq war in 1980-88 caught Saudi Arabia and Gulf monarchies between Iran and Iraq, and exposed their oil facilities and transit route to danger, which again caught Saudi Arabia between the US and the hostility of other regional actors to Saudi relations with the US.

The 1967 oil embargo created an awareness among the Arab states, and accordingly King Faisal began to succumb to the idea of using oil as a political power, despite his previous belief in not combining oil and politics in interpreting the regional issues. In the 1973 war, Saudi Arabia started a diplomatic mission under the management of the Saudi Oil Minister, Ahmed Zaki Yamani, and the Deputy Minister, Saud bin Faisal, to Washington, and exposed the link between oil and Israel. Yamani argued that Saudi Arabia was not thinking about expanding the production rate until the US changed its policy towards Israel, which was later ignored by the US President Nixon.[298] Despite Iran wanting to show its contentment for the rise of oil prices, it avoided being part of any oil cut or embargo as Iran was Israel's chief oil supplier, and an ally of the US. Hence, as Yamani emphasized, it appeared to be an Arab initiated oil embargo.[299]

The other impact of the Arab states' perception on using oil wealth as a political weapon was the change of the paradigms in Nixon's twin pillar policy. After the oil embargo by the OAPEC countries in October 17, 1973, Iran temporarily gained control over its oil pricing.[300] While Saudi Arabia linked the oil policies to the resolution of the Arab Israel conflict, Reza Shah raised oil prices up to USD 17.4 in December 1973, and took advantage of the oil shortage after the embargo.[301] While higher oil revenues enabled Saudi Arabia to make defense, development, technological and investment plans, Iran was still more central to the US foreign policy in operating a vast national oil infrastructure.[302] After the 1973-74 crisis, Saudi Arabia began to have closer relations with the US, and gradually took over Iran's preferred position due to its larger oil

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[298] Al Sowayyegh, "Saudi Oil Policy, 208.
[299] Vassiliev, *King Faisal of,* 386.
[300] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and,* 101.
[301] Ibid., 102.
[302] Ibid.

reserves, small domestic energy consumption, and less regional ambitions. By 1978, Saudi Arabia was more favorable for the US due to its positive attitude towards the global oil market. While the US was pressuring Iran to reduce the process, Saudi Arabia was already meeting development goals with lower prices and increased its production by 10 percent each year; Iran could only increase its production by 2.5 percent.[303] In December 1976, public split of the OPEC in theDoha Meeting emerged and revealed Saudi Arabia and the UAE's support for the US, as well as Iran and Iraq's targets of pushing for high oil prices.[304]

The relative success of the 1973-1978 period was mostly related to establishing good relations with the US, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Sanaa and Aden, as well as recognition of the limitations degraded by the Islamic revolution in 1979. Even though Saudi Arabia continued to remain a close ally of the US, it avoided identification with the US initiatives such as being a part of strategic consensus, or the US policy in the Iran-Iraq war. Instead, Saudi Arabia tried to make its own resolutions.[305] In the case of the implications of the Islamic revolution, Saudi Arabia never aimed to make Iran a weak or isolated state, rather it wanted to cope both with the US and Iran until Iran strived to implement inharmonious policies, and contentious oil policy under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini (Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini) in the post-revolution era.[306] Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states did not view Iran as an ally or enemy despite their resistance to Iran's demands for a Gulf security cooperation. [307] Moreover, Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan portrayed the upheavals and internal crisis in Iran as 'international communism' as well as the USSR's influence in Afghanistan and its possible influence on Iran in the case of

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[303] Ibid., 104.

[304] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39. The 1975 Algiers agreement needs to be mentioned in redefining the security dynamics of the Iran-Iraq tension. Iraq recognized the Iranian claims over the half of the Shatt Al-Arab or Arvand Rud which is a river between the Tigris and Euphrates, and Iran gave the disputed territory to Iraq and ended its support for the Iraqi Kurdish groups. Nevertheless, Saddam Hussein abandoned the agreement after the Islamic Revolution, and ended with the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. See: "The Algiers Agreement," UN Treaty Series, accessed on September 2018, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=080000028010131f. For more on the history of Shatt Al-Arab conflict; Burcu Kut, *Ortadogu'da Bir Istikrarsizlik Unsuru: Sattu'l Arab Sorunu*, Master diss., (Marmara University, 2006); Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick, *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 11-18; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 204, 223-225, 243.

[305] Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 453.

[306] Ibid, 105.

[307] Gause III, *The International Relations,* 5.

the fall of Shah. All of this made Prince Sultan politically call the Muslims to support the Shah. Furthermore, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal declared the uprisings against the Shah's rule as contrary to the interests of Islam, the entire Muslim world and the stability of the Middle East. The calls of the Saudi decision-makers for the continuity of the Shah's term claiming to serve the stability of the region and the interests of the Muslims, demonstrated Saudi Arabia's fear of the penetration of the instability of Iran into the Saudi domestic context.

The Iranian revolution gradually altered the regional security perception of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. The Islamic revolution comprised uncoordinated acts of open defiance against the state which was unprepared to act against it, and then emerged a revolution.[308] In the beginning, Saudi Arabia remained ambivalent about the revolution's ideals, and had no intention to contest or confront Khomeini's ideals. One can argue that the factor which raised Saudi Arabia's security concerns was Iran's representative claims for all Gulf Shiites and then the whole Muslim world. Ayatollah Khomeini focused on a narrative on the concept of Shiite victimhood, not Ali himself, and not on religious rights of Shiite minorities in Sunni countries, but raised their awareness of a better quality of life and citizenship rights.[309] As the Gulf states had geographical proximity to Iran and a sizable Shiite population, it was the first place where Iran could test its ideological influence. As Saudi Arabia had continuing prestige in Muslim world, it was difficult for Iran to export the revolution across the Gulf. The relative failure of Iran in exporting the revolution among the Gulf Shiites was partly the intimidation by the Gulf rulers of their Shiite communities to rally against the monarchial system. Nevertheless, Iran tried shuffling the domestic contexts of the Gulf states, for instance; Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani claimed Bahrain was an Iranian province in June 1979, and denounced the March 1970 agreement.[310] In January 1969, Reza Shah had stated that Bahrainis made their own decisions regarding their political future; the UN Security Council had announced the Bahraini people's demand for independence, and Iran had ratified its renunciation of sovereignty over Bahrain.[311]

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[308] Kamrava, *Inside the Arab,* 39.
[309] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and*, 109.
[310] Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy* (UK: Routledge, 2003), 27.
[311] Gause III, *The International Relations,* 22.

Khomeini defined the Islamic Republic as an antithesis to the monarchical countries. His provocative rhetoric on the Gulf monarchies that were interpreted as spread of the American imperialism was an existential threat to the survival of the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia.[312] Khomeini often accused the Gulf monarchs of wasting the oil revenues in an un-Islamic way and sustaining luxury lifestyles.[313] In addition to its challenge to the monarchical nature of the Kingdom, Khomeini's rhetoric was also a religious challenge to the Kingdom's claims, as he called Muslims around the world to unite as one *ummah*, and to administer Makkah and Medina which was ruled by Saudi Arabia. Khomeini humiliated the kingdom by defining it as the "government of the Hijaz", "traitors" of these two holy cities and "anti-quranic", which further broadened the gap between both states.[314] In the case of Iraq, Iraqi Shiites clerics rejected Iran's efforts to politicize Islam and export the revolution among Iraqi society, and challenged Khomeini's propagation of the principle of *vilayat-i faqih* (guardianship of a jurist), which was designed to grant the Khomeini's political authority in the Shiite world.[315] Khomeini asked his followers not to be afraid of this concept as the jurist would not aim to deal with people by force, rather, using force would make that jurist lack mandate.[316] To avoid criticism by the Iraqi clerics in Najaf and Karbala, which are two holy sites for Shiites, Khomeini ignored Iraqi activists such as *al-shiraziyyin* (partisans of al-Shirazi)[317] who was led by Ayatollah Mohammed al-Shirazi criticizing *vilayat-i faqih,* and also called the overthrowing of Saddam's government, targeting the Iranian government through an eight year long war in 1980-88.[318]

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[312] Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy: From Idealism and Confrontation to Pragmatism and Moderation," In *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability*, ed. Jamal S. Al-Suwaidi (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies, 1996): 86.

[313] Charles A. McLean, "End of the Islamic Cold War: the Saudi-Iranian Detente and Its Implications," Master diss., (Virginia Military Institute, 2001): 17.

[314] Ibid, 18.

[315] For the concept of *vilayat-i faqih*: Imam Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist* (The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, International Affairs Division, 1970), 7-18. Ali Rahmena, "Ayatollah Khomeini's Rule of the Guardian jurist: From Theory to Practice," In *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini,* ed. Aashin Adib-Moghadda (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 88-115.

[316] Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26-27.

[317] Shiite Islamic movements in the Gulf were already existing before the Iranian revolution. Al-Shiraziyyin was one of the Iraqi Shiite movement led by the Al-Shirazi clerical family in Karbala, under the leadership of Ayatollah Mohammed Al-Shirazi.

[318] Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 111.

Khomeini defined the foreign policy of Iran as Islamic, neither east or west-focused. He underlined the importance of independence and freedom in order to establish an Islamic government (*hokumat-e eslami*).[319] Khomeini was not interested in establishing laws which were not needed in an Islamic Republic guided by Islamic law.[320] Referring to Britain's and Russia's control over the Iranian oil resources during the 1970s, Khomeini's rhetoric went against the Pahlavi period, which was secular and authoritarian, as well as against the opposition movements such as the National Front, and Marxist and Islamist groups. A decisive point emphasized by Khomeini in his speeches was in calling the oppressed masses (*mostazafin*) to rise against social injustice and against the oppressors (*mostakberin*).[321] He used a universalist approach, and called Islamic governments to free themselves from superpower hegemony. On the other hand, he rejected jihad, only permitting it during war times for self-defense.[322] Since the exportation of the revolution (*sudur-i inqilab*) was an indispensable part of Khomeini's ideals, spreading the message by word, and encouraging propaganda (*tablighat*) for this purpose were an important part of Khomeini's way of implementing his ideals.[323] He permitted military attempts to some extent for the purpose of spreading the revolution, but his method of spreading the revolution was by words. The Ministry of Revolutionary Guards supported the military means of exporting the revolution, but the Foreign Ministry of Iran always took a stance against aggressive acts of spreading the revolution. For instance, Kamal Kharrazi, who was Iran's UN Ambassador, stated that Iranian government was not in favor of military acts as Iran was against interfering in the domestic affairs of other states; something that was also part of Khomeini's foreign policy ideals.[324]

The hostage crisis, which was prepared by a group of students of Khomeini and lasted 444 days from November 1979 to January 1980, was a turning point in declaring the triumph of radical clerics supported by the ulama, traditional middle class and lower

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[319] Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 29-78.
[320] Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26.
[321] Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf*, 26.
[322] Ibid, 27.
[323] Ibid, 28.
[324] Ibid, 31.

classes, and the demise of provisional government.[325] The hostage crisis was led by the radical clerics against the provisional government, in the hands of Khomeini who did not arrest students but gave them a public endorsement, and ended with shifting the power center to revolutionary government.[326] To illustrate, Mehdi Bazargan, the first prime minister of Iran after the revolution (February 1979-November 1979), was a nationalist who beieved that Iran's economic interests and territorial integrity should be prioritized in relations with others, which was not much different than Shah. He was not aiming to cut relations with the US but called for congenial relations with the US and neighbors based on mutual respect, reciprocity and non-interference.[327] For the radical establishment of the revolution, this behavior towards the US was not in accordance with the revolutionary principles of Khomeini, as illustrated in the hostage crisis.

The Islamic revolution inspired the Shiite populations of the Gulf to demand better living conditions and they made demonstrations for more rights as equal citizens. Khomeini was perceived as an exact threat to the kingdom because of his divine claims on Muslims.[328] Khomeini's words were mostly effective among Shiites in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia where they were economically more disadvantaged compared to Shiites in Qatar, UAE, and Oman. Also, many Kuwaiti Shiite had links with Iran due to geographical proximity.[329] In Iraq, violent oppositions and demonstrations were observed in Najaf and Karbala, which led to the arrest of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in 1979, and the attack of the Iraqi Hizb al-Dawa (Islamic Dawa Party), major Shiite Iraqi opposition, and to regime symbols.[330] For the case of Saudi Arabia, since the 1930s, Saudi Shiites has been practising in private, living under poor conditions, mostly in Qatif and Hasa, where Shiites constituted 40-60% of the workforce in oil industry[331]. They were given the lowest ranks within the army and bureaucracy, faced difficulties in

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[325] Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy," 85. For more on hostage crisis; David Patrick Houghton, *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[326] Robert Mason, *Foreign Policy in Iran and Saudi Arabia: Economics and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 17-18.

[327] Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy," 85.

[328] Joseph A. Kechichian, "Trends in Saudi National Security," *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 2 (1999): 235.

[329] Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf,* 40.

[330] For more; Talib M. Aziz, "The Role of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr in Shi'i Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 2 (1993): 207-222.

[331] Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf*, 41.

entering the universities and, politically, were denied cabinet positions. Moreover, according to the Wahhabi interpretation, the Shiite was *mushrikun* (idolaters) and *kuffar* (heretics).[332] They referred to the Shiite as *rafida* (rejectionists), and accused them of bringing new beliefs (*bid'ah)* to Islam that did not exit during the Prophet's time.[333] In accordance with the living conditions of its Shiite, Saudi Arabia encountered unrests in Qatif on the first anniversary of Khomeini's return to Iran in February 1980.[334] In November 1980, King Khalid paid a visit to al-Hasa to listen to the complaints of Shiite clerics. After King Khalid's son Muhammed bin Fahd became governor of the Eastern province (1985-2013), he worked on improving their life conditions, released many Shiite prisoners, provided them with jobs, and allowed exiles to return.[335]

The Islamic revolution was also viewed as a contest to Saudi Arabia's right to speak in the name of Islam as well as to represent the Muslim world. As Saudi Arabia was aware that Wahhabism was important in keeping the kingdom intact, it could not contemplate challenging the Wahhabi establishment in favor of the Shiites. At the same time, Saudi officials were concerned about the empowerment of the Shiite populations in the Eastern province by the Khomeini's narratives. Therefore, Saudi Arabia established policies, such as involvement in proxy wars and financing factions opposing Iran, to challenge the Iranian ideals of exporting the revolution to the Muslim world. In the domestic context, Saudi Arabia restricted the Shiite communities to practising their religious activities freely by enhancing the state control over the Eastern province.[336]

When considering the idea of Sunni-Shiite rivalry in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution, Turki Al-Faisal, who was the head of the Saudi Intelligence, interpreted the idea of Sunni-Shiite rivalry as a myth. He preferred to pursue realpolitik responses in keeping Saudi national interests dealing with Iran. For instance, in July 1979, a Saudi delegate led by the Secretary General of Muslim World League, visited Tehran and tried to impress Iran by arguing that Iran was disappointed by Reza Shah's secular ideals.[337] King Khalid even stated that the revolution marked the start of closer ties between the

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[332] Ibid.
[333] Mohamed Bin Huwaidin, "The Security Dilemma in Saudi-Iranian Relations," *Review of History and Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2015): 72.
[334] Gause III, *The International Relations,* 47.
[335] Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf,* 41.
[336] Huwaidin, "The Security Dilemma," 72.
[337] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and*, 110.

two countries, while Prince Fahd claimed great respect for Iran's new leader and government. Another sign of the attempt to improve bilateral relations, in the aftermath of the hostage crisis, was Saudi Arabia's rejection of the US of stationing a military aircraft in Saudi Arabia to avoid provoking Iran.[338] Prince Fahd also rejected US President Carter's proposal of entering the US military forces into Saudi Arabia to counter Iran.

In November 1979, the Grand Mosque (al-Masjid al-Haram) in Mecca was seized by Juhayman Al-Utaybi, a former soldier in the Saudi National Guard, who claimed the illegitimacy of the al-Saud family's rule and heralded the coming of the *Mahdi* (guided one), and Muhammed Abdullah Qahtani, Juhayman's brother-in-law.[339] Since the *Ikhwan* rebellions in 1928-29, the seizure of Mecca was the most serious challenge that made the al-Saud family uncertain about the future. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran were further strained by the seizure of Mecca despite the lack of any direct evidence that Iran was behind the incident. According to other interpretations, the seizure was either backed by the US and Israel, or it was an attempt by Prince Fahd's men to overthrow King Khalid.[340] However, Saudi Arabia insisted on the involvement of some Iranian clerics in the incident in provoking the pilgrims, and arrested or deported those Iranian pilgrims from the kingdom.[341] Moreover, Shiite uprisings in the Eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain urged King Khalid and Crown Prince Fahd to take a critical stance and direct the army to stop the revolts. Khomeini viewed the hajj as a political-religious event, and called on pilgrims to organize anti-American and anti-imperialist demonstrations in the name of *bara'at az moshrekeen* (liberation from infidels).[342] In turn, Saudi Arabia imposed more limitations on Iranian pilgrims, resulting in the hajj confrontation of July 1987, and the death of 450 Iranian pilgrims.[343] Throughout the 1980s, however, Saudi Arabia continued to be cautious against any

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[338] Ibid, 111.

[339] Abdullah bin Baz who was one of the top clerics of Saudi Arabia was protector of the Juhayman's group. He was not aware of Juhayman's intentions to seize the grand mosque but believed that Juhayman's men were true believers and negotiated for their release from the prison with Prince Nayef who was the MOI. In 1992, he became the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia. In Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, 68.

[340] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, 67.

[341] Kechichian, "Trends in Saudi," 235

[342] Hooshang Amirahmadi, "Iranian-Saudi Arabian Relations since the Revolution," In *Iran and the World*, ed. Hooshand Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar (London: Macmillan press, 1993), 148.

[343] Ibid.

spontaneous uprisings, while Iran strived to inspire the Shiites for demonstrations in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait. In return, Saudi Arabia decided to challenge Iran using similar methods, by supporting groups opposed to Khomeini as well as backing a coup attempt in the first years of the 1980s.[344]

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in December 1979, advanced regional consensus between the US and Saudi Arabia who financed the US foreign policy in Afghanistan, and supported the *mujahideen* (jihadists) as well as Afghan personalities like Abd al-Rasaoul Sayyaf, and Moulana Mohammad Nabi Mohammedi, against the USSR's influence over the central government.[345] Since the invasion happened at a time when the hostage crisis was occurring in Iran, and the Carter administration could not respond swiftly, it was interpreted as the reason for Carter's failure to be re-elected.[346] Prior to the Islamic revolution, Saudi Arabia and Iran were already worried about the similar regional concerns, like the expansion of the USSR in the region despite their efforts to prevent Soviet spread.[347] By way of summary, the events, wars and tensions shaped the 1970s, paving the way for a circumspect and mindful Saudi foreign policy towards Iran.

3.2.3. Building Saudi Self-Confidence in the Face of Mistrust towards Iran

The 1980s were the years that reshaped the security understandings of Saudi Arabia over inter-Arab politics, the Iran-Iraq war, the Arab-Israel conflict, regional implications of the US-USSR rivalry, politics of oil production and prices, fears of losing control over oil reserves, and fears regarding military inability to defend the Kingdom. As phrased by Quandt, "geography blessed Saudi Arabia with oil but history has been less kind"[348]. Saudi Arabia had economic power due to its oil revenues but its neighbors were often in turmoil, which in turn forced the kingdom to become involved in regional crises and to function as destabilizers. Moreover, during the 1980s, the Arab world was divided due to the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, Iran's new posture on the regional

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[344] McLean, "End of The Islamic," 20-21.

[345] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and*, 112-113.

[346] For more; David W. Lesch, *1979: The Year That Shaped the Middle East* (Westview Press, 2001), 45-56, 94-109.

[347] For instance, in 1974, both countries joined France, Egypt and Morocco to fight against communism through multinational cooperation of their security services, and Safari Club which was an anti-communist inter security service group motivated by the French Intelligence agency directed by Comte Alexandre De Marenches. In Saeed M. Badeeb, *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982* (London: Centre for Arab and Iranian Studies, 1993), 130-131.

[348] Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in*, 3.

issues during the post-revolutionary era and its new political elites, Afghanistan's invasion by the USSR, and the regional states' perception of the US as an uncertain ally, despite their close relations.

At regional level, Saudi Arabia was surrounded by crises, tensions and threats of war in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and North Yemen. Palestinians were frustrated with the Camp David Accords, Syria was in dangerous conflict with Israel at Lebanon's expense, Iraq was seeking leadership in the Arab world while being at odds with Iran, and North Yemen was shaky while South Yemen allied with the USSR. In terms of Egypt's Camp David accords with Israel, Saudi Arabia believed that it was signed in order to make Egypt and Israel play a leading role in the US military strategy in the region, which would undermine Saudi Arabia's central role in the eyes of the US. Therefore, Saudi Arabia did not support Anwar Sadat's decision to sign the Camp David agreement despite still being a potential force for the regional stability and moderation in the eyes of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Sadat's assassination opened an era with new uncertainties in Egypt, the largest Arab country of that time. On the other hand, the Soviet invasion on Afghanistan was encircling the Gulf as the USSR's remarkable presence in South Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria and Libya threatened the Saudi regional security policies. During this period, Saudi Arabia believed that regional stability could only be solved if the Palestinian question was resolved in accordance with the kingdom's interests. Saudi Arabia was uncertain about the future and harbored deep ambivalence towards the US. This enabled it to view the solution as not solely based on isolation or exclusive dependency on US, but to keep the population from destabilizing influences spreading from the region.

Crown Prince Fahd believed the regional dynamics were prone to change in time. Crown Prince Fahd avoided continuing to practice the long-term policies of the kingdom at times of short-term conflicts and threats. For instance, in 1979, Saudi Arabia reduced oil production to avoid Iran's anger despite it being against Saudi Arabia's long term established oil policy. Fahd preferred caution and discretion over maximization of potential gains, as well as showing readiness to make sharp tactical reversals.[349] After the Iranian revolution, Saudi decision-makers brightened the Islamic dimension of Saudi foreign policy and promoted its Islamic leadership claim by organizing an Islamic conference in Islamabad and Taif in the early 1980s, condemning the USSR invasion to

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[349] Safran, *Saudi Arabia,* 456.

Afghanistan, and stating that Western and Latin American countries should close their embassies from Jerusalem, regarded as the eternal capital of Israel.[350] The Jerusalem issue seemed to be uniting the Muslims at least at the discourse level but, apart from this, it can be argued that Muslim countries were unsteady and divided in reconciling the regional crises.

Before the Iranian revolution, Saudi-Iranian relations were already competitive, but the nature of the relations were cordial and improving. After 1975, there was a sense of gradual rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iraq whose foreign policy became more pragmatic and pan-Arabist under Saddam. By 1978, Saudi and Iranian officials continued to make routine visits to each other and even concluded a security agreement to establish joint operations for combating terrorism, subversion, and crime.[351] Saudi Arabia was confident and optimistic about the Shah's rule after the revolution started, and it was perceived as anger of the masses against the communists and leftists. The perceived threat to the legitimacy and domestic stability of Saudi Arabia, as well as regional stability, can be argued to have risen after 1979 with the Iranian revolution which contrasted with Saudi Arabia's legitimization of religion and state institutions.[352] Despite their opposing views on oil prices and regional hegemony claims from time to time, both states could not be viewed as furious with each other.

During the rule of Reza Shah, Saudi-Iran relations were based on distrust, uncertainty and sharp disagreements, but they were cooperating cautiously on regional issues. In the mid -1970s, Shah and Crown Prince Fahd even tried to engage in intelligence and security services and exchanged information, especially on the South Yemen issue[353]and perceived USSR threats towards the region. Despite their sharp disagreements on several issues, such as oil production and pricing, and Iran's claim on three small islands belonging to the Gulf states during the last year of Shah, both states followed parallel

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[350] Ibid.

[351] McLean, "End of Islamic," 16.

[352] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War: Cooperation and Confusion," In *the Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives,* ed. Nigel Ashton and Bryan Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2013): 113.

[353] South Yemen or People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (1967-1990) was a socialist one-party state aligned with the USSR, East Germany and Cuba. In 1972, South and North Yemen had a short-term border conflict. In 1986, South Yemen had a civil war with the Al-Toghmah fraction, part of Yemeni Socialist Party, led by Abdul Fattah Ismail, and Al-Zomrah fraction lead by Ali Nasir Muhammed which paved the way for a weakened government, and then unified with the North Yemen after the collapse of the USSR. See; Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

politics in various areas. After the fall of Shah's regime, Iran's new spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, emphasized the contradiction between Islam and hereditary claims which directly intended to criticize the monarchial system of Saudi Arabia. As a result of Khomeini's rhetoric directed towards the Shiite populations, but also towards all Muslims, Saudi Arabia encountered a few demonstrations against the kingdom in Qatif in November 1979 and February 1980. Khomeini's rhetoric was worsening gradually through Iran's broadcasting propaganda, referring to the Quranic verses against Saudi Arabia. He was calling the Muslims for a rebellion, if not a revolution, in the Arabian Peninsula by citing the 24th verse of the al-Naml surah in Quran: "Kings despoil a country when they enter it and make the noblest of its people its meanest".[354] In turn, Saudi Arabia often found itself responding to the claims of Iran's new leader by underlining that Saudi Arabia as a kingdom was built on Islamic principles. However, Iran's new position on th ePalestinian issue and accusations against the Arab states of not supporting Palestinians, put further pressure on the kingdom while protecting its interests and relation with the US.

The 1980s can be portrayed as the constructive years for Iran's present-day foreign policy perceptions and policies.[355] It was also the year of constructing the regional security understandings of Iran and Saudi Arabia towards each other which has influenced the regional dynamics and bilateral relations to the present. The most influential event of the 1980s was the Iran-Iraq war which lasted eight years and caused casualties on both sides, but which ended with almost the same conditions of the pre-war period. During the war, Saudi Arabia emerged as a supporter of Iraq's war attempts as it discreetly allied with Iraq but stayed out of the direct conflict, and continuously called for peace. The war claims began with Saddam Hussein's claims on Khomeini's rejection of the 1975 Algiers agreement related to the territorial dispute over Shatt al-Arab. In Saddam's view, this was humiliating for Iraq and would unite Arabs to fight against Iran in restoring the river's Arab Iraqi identity.[356] Furthermore, Saddam argued that Iran had to quit the province of Khuzestan, the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. Despite President Hassan al-Bakr seeking to maintain intimate ties with Iran, Saddam was against peaceful

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[354] Quandt, *Saudi Arabia,* 39.
[355] Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (US: A Saban Center at the Brooking Institution Book, 2004): 181.
[356] Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: 1980-1988* (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 22.

relations with the country. He even ordered the deportation of Iraqis with Iranian origin and members of the Shiite Da'wa party, forced Iraqi men to divorce their Iranian wives, and led a campaign to silence Iraqi clerics. This was led by Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who was the ideological founder of Da'wa Party and was later executed in 1980.[357] Moreover, Saddam abandoned the Algiers agreement and ordered the invasion of Iran which was known as an imposed war in Iranian history. Despite Saddam's self-construction as the leader of the Arab world and his uncordial relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, Khomeini's discriminated rhetoric toward the monarchies and Saudi Arabia were interpreted as more existential, which in turn directed Saudi Arabia to support Iraq against Iran.[358]

Prior to the war, and with the experience of hostage crisis, the Reagan Administration had increased its support for the regional actors like Saddam who was critical to Iran and claimed a stake in the post-revolution era.[359] Saddam was successful in convincing the West that Iran was a source of Islamic extremism and, in turn, gained support from the US and USSR, while Libya, Syria and North Korea supported Iran believing that they were left outside of the international world.[360] The US was concerned about penetration of the USSR in the region through the war, as well as polarization of Sunni-Shiite instability, and the possibility of an oil crisis. The impact of war on oil exports was the concern but it had no significant effect at the beginning of the war because oil prices started to fall mid-1985. A sudden rise in the oil price would affect the world economy too and, in turn, the US and the western states would aim to keep the oil prices stable.[361] Under these circumstances, the Gulf emerged as a center of gravity for the US to ensure the oil flow to the international markets. Due to the fact that both Iran and Iraq had the ability to threaten oil installations of the Gulf states, the US was seen as the only external actor that could ensure this in the perception of the Gulf states.[362]

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[357] Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle,* 114.
[358] Muhammad Rizwan, Muhammad Arshid, Muhammad Waqar, Saira Iram, "From Rivalry to Nowhere: A Story of Iran-Saudi Ties," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 19, no. 9 (2014): 96.
[359] Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle,* 181.
[360] Rob Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq war* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 179.
[361] Ibid, 183.
[362] Iraq under Saddam leadership was the only Arab oil state with the military capability necessary to threaten the security perceptions of other states in the region as well as to threaten the world's access to Gulf oil. Additionally, Saddam was disturbed by Gulf states' incomes: Saudi Arabia had $10,595, Qatar $23,956, Kuwait $12,731, Iraq $3,172. If Saddam succeeded in Iran-Iraq war, Iraq would get 11 million

Saudi Arabian foreign policy, under the King Khalid and Crown Prince Fahd, aimed to prevent Iran invading or defeating Iraq without targeting the defeat of Iran.[363] At the beginning of the war, Gulf states wanted a quick Iraq victory as their oil facilities were vulnerable and, militarily, they could not afford an Iran attack. Saudi Arabia avoided making a public statement in the beginning despite its initial response being in favor of Iraq. In Iraqi news, it was announced that King Khalid had called Saddam to give his support against the enemies of the Arab people, pointing out Iran.[364] Likewise, despite it not being proven news, Saddam visited Saudi Arabia on August 5, 1980[365] to state his intention of invading Iran and to ask for the King's approval. The Saudi Press agency emphasized that King Khalid had only stated his interest and good brotherly wishes to Saddam, and had avoided mentioning direct support. However, intelligence reports revealed the permission of Saudi Arabia for Iraqi warplanes to land in Saudi airspace despite Prince Turki al-Faisal, the director of Saudi intelligence, announcing that Saudi Arabia did not give any material support to Iraq during the first two years of the war.[366] While adopting these policies towards the war, Saudi Arabia was claiming its policy was not ideological towards Iran, as it was careful not to ignite a Sunni-Shiite rivalry. This was despite Saudi intellectuals, religious and dissident clerics continuing to hold stereotypical views on Iran.[367] Similarly, Iran did not view the war as a Sunni-Shiite rivalry with the aim of ending hostilities with its Arab neighbors. Yet, Khomeini used the Iraqi threat paradigm during the war, for instance by calling the masses to fight until Karbala was liberated. This in turn sparked fears in the Gulf states of a hidden Iranian agenda by provoking their Shiite populations.[368]

There were two issues that distressed and concerned the regional states during the war. First was the transfer of oil to the global markets through the Gulf, and policies over the oil production and pricing. During the war, Iraq attacked the Kharg island of the northern Gulf, and other oil installations of Iran in 1984, while Iran attacked or mined the ships in

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bpd of oil production which was around 20 percent of global consumption in 1980. In Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 114.

[363] Saeed M. Badeeb, *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982* (London: Centre for Arab and Iranian Studies, 1993),132.

[364] Gerd Nonneman, *Iraq, The Gulf States & The War* (London: Ithaca Press, 1986), 32.

[365] Ulrichsen, *The Gulf States*, 113.

[366] Nonneman, *Iraq, The Gulf,* 32.

[367] Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy," 115.

[368] Ibid, 117.

the straits of Hormuz. During these tanker wars, Iran aimed to stop the oil exports of states if others attacked its oil installations. When Iran blocked Iraq's maritime exports, Saudi Arabia helped Iraq to export its oil through overland pipelines on Saudi territory. Saudi Arabia helped Iraq to internationalize the war in 1987 by inviting Western navies to neutralize Iran's maritime advantage.[369] In turn, Iran mined the waters of the Gulf to damage their oil export. For the oil pricing, Saudi Arabia peaked its oil production during the shortfalls at the beginning of the war, then preferred to cut back in order to maintain those prices in the face of an oil surplus. In accordance with this policy, Saudi oil production fell to 2mb/d in 1985 from 10 million barrels.[370] Owing to the pressure from the royal family, King Fahd increased the production in 1986 in the hope that this policy would discipline other OPEC countries. This was seen as an agency of Saudi Arabia by Iran to cut back the production. On the contrary, it harmed all oil producers and caused a collapse in oil prices; in 1986-87 Iran's oil revenues fell to $6.8 billion from $21.2 billion in 1983-84.[371]

During the war, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were the first GCC states to grant financial aid and generous loans to Iraq; Saudi Arabia granted $25 billion, Kuwait $13.2 billion, in addition to grants from Qatar and Abu Dhabi, and in turn they were exposed to Iranian violent acts against Kuwait oil installations and against Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Sabah in 1985.[372] The fact that Kuwait City was 150 km far from the war zone meant that Kuwait shipping was directly influenced by the course of the war. Together with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia provided 330,000 barrels of oil per day from their shared neutral zone, Khafiji, to compensate Syria's closure of the pipeline running through Syria to Iraq in 1982.[373] Furthermore, Saudi Arabia established the Fahd line which was a navigation channel connecting the kingdom to the Strait of Hormuz, and hence protected Saudi oil installations, and send a message to Iran in case of any possible attempt to cross this line.[374]

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[369] Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order: Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Balance of Power in the Gulf* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid, 14.
[372] Ulrichsen, *The Gulf States,* 115.
[373] Ibid, 116.
[374] Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2015), 307.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states were highly influenced by the US which convinced them about Iran's threat to the Gulf navigation. Nevertheless, they tended to avoid any public statement in support of Iraq at the beginning of the war. From the outset of the war, Saudi Arabia helped Iraq to sell its oil, and opened Saudi ports as a transit route for Iraqi imports. Zaki Yamani, the oil Minister of Saudi Arabia, even announced that Iraq and Saudi Arabia compromised to build a crude oil pipeline across the kingdom to the Red Sea.[375] In 1981, Saudi Arabia was exposed to clashes between Iran pilgrims shouting "Revolution. Khomeini is the leader" and the Saudi security forces.[376] After this incident, Saudi Arabia decided to reduce the number of Iranian pilgrims, took a pro-Iraqi stance, and became more critical of Iran.[377] Moreover, Saudi financial aid to Iraq reached at least 6 $billion in 1981.[378] Prince Nayef, the MOI of Saudi Arabia, emphasized that Saudi Arabia would be better off supporting its Arab neighbor who was a member of the Arab league and signatory of the joint defense charter, and declared Iran as the "terrorist of the Gulf".[379] Prince Nayef perceived Iraq's war efforts as a defensive act against Iran who was attacking the whole Arab nation by entering a war with Iraq.[380]

Saudi Arabia had a massive military buildup and presented itself as dominant among the GCC states and in the Gulf due to its material superiority against Iran, raising Saudi self-confidence in the region.[381] Throughout the war, both states were involved in meetings beside the tensions and attacks. To illustrate the imbalanced relations, Saudi Arabia with F15 aircrafts guided by AWACS (airborne early warning and control system) shot down an Iranian F4 fighter near a Saudi island in June 1984 as a response to an Iranian retaliatory attack on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. A year later, in May 1985, Iran shifted to a friendly attitude, by inviting Prince Saud al-Faisal to Tehran. Saudi did not reject any invitation from Iran to reduce the tension, despite the opposing views in many areas. Iran's main demand was punishment of Iraq's war aggression, but Saudi Arabia was in favor of ending the war, hence it continued its war relief crude oil policy for the benefit

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[375] Nonneman, *Iraq, The Gulf*, 39.
[376] Ibid, 48.
[377] Mackenzie Tyler and Anthony M. Boone, *Rivalry in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and Iran* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2012), 7-8.
[378] Nonneman, *Iraq, The Gulf,* 39.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid, 50.
[381] Nonneman, *Iraq, The Gulf,* 71.

of Iraq, and completion of the pipeline from Iraq to the Red Sea through Saudi Arabia.[382] Later on, in accordance with the broadcasting in Iraqi media which announced Saudi support for Iraq in February 1986, Iran continued its attacks, both physical and verbal, on Saudi Arabia. Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri stated that Wahhabism was founded by mercenaries affiliated to foreigners in order to create division between Muslims, and they were responsible for any anti-Shiite propaganda spreading in the region.[383] In February 1986, Iran attacked Iraq while Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, a former Chairman of Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council, and Ahmad Qasim Taqi, a former Iraqi Oil Minister, held a meeting in Riyadh, which was interpreted as an act against peace and stability by King Fahd.[384]

Like the Medina incident in September 1981, Saudi security forces and Iranian pilgrims clashed again during the hajj, resulting in the death of 400 pilgrims on July 31, 1987.[385] Iran's Speaker of Parliament, Hojatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, viewed this incident as part of the export of the Islamic Revolution, and a legitimate Muslim pilgrimage mission.[386] Moreover, Khomeini tended to describe the hajj as highly related to politics while Saudi Arabia held the opposite view, which conceived the pilgrimage as not a political event open to countries' frustrations.[387] Following the clashes, Iran interrogated the Saudi management of the hajj and royal family's credentials for keeping the holy places safe. Furthermore, Khomeini described the Saudi royal family as heretics and announced that "these vile and ungodly Wahhabis, are like daggers which have always pierced the heart of the Muslims from the back".[388] In turn, Saudi Arabia responded to the aggressive rhetoric of Iran by calling Iranians to "throw the Ayatollahs out" and by 1988, the diplomatic relations were at its worst stage.[389] As the relations were severed, Saudi Arabia reserved a hajj quota of 45,000 for Iranians. In turn, Khomeini boycotted the hajj and called for an international body to manage the hajj, but this did

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[382] Ibid, 72.
[383] Ibid, 73.
[384] Ibid, 87.
[385] Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy," 122.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Muhammad Rizwan, Muhammad Arshid, Muhammad Waqar, Saira Iram, "From Rivalry to Nowhere: A Story of Iran-Saudi Ties," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 19, no. 9 (2014): 96.
[389] Kechichian, "Trends in Saudi," 236.

not gain momentum. [390] Throughout 1988, both countries argued that two Muslim countries should not behave like this despite their differences, hence relations improved and 1 million Iranian pilgrims made a visit to Mecca.[391] In order to show its goodwill to Saudi Arabia, Iran cut its ties with *al-shiraziyyun* of Iraq that was strongly in favor of spreading the revolution and coordinating armed operations against the neighbors, such as allocating Bahrain for its material and ideological support.[392]

The Iran-Iraq war was the beginning of conflicts in the Gulf which continued with Kuwait's invasion and the 2003 war. It influenced the formation of the GCC and internationalization of the Gulf region by propelling the Gulf states into responses. Under these fluctuating politics and threat perceptions, the GCC was formed during the Iran-Iraq war on May 25, 1981, with the proposition of Kuwait. The GCC's aim was to cooperate with the spirit of Arab unity as they shared similar economies, society and political systems.[393] Its main concern was announced by Abdullah Bisharah, Secretary General of the GCC, as Iran's strive for supremacy in Gulf security, which functioned against the stability of GCC states. For Iran, GCC was a cooperation serving the US interests in the region, however GCC's position was based on the idea of preventing either Iran or Iraq emerging as victors or disturbing the flow of oil through the Gulf. During the war, Gulf states were still working on their state consolidation, institution-building, and socio-economic transformation. Hence, their main concern was the spillover effect of the war into the Gulf despite their different threat perceptions and positions towards Iran. However, they all supported Iraq due to the lack of an alternative way to deal with Iran. As the threats were transnational, intercultural, and functioning at interstate levels, they posed a direct threat to their domestic stability beside their regional impacts. Due to the intermixed nature of Sunni and Shiites, especially in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the war posed both a material and ideological threat with its internal and external aspects of security.[394]

Owing to the new realities of the war period, Saudi Arabia slowly began to build its military superiority. It bought F-15, 72 tornado fighter bombers from the United

[390] Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy," 122.
[391] Ibid, 123.
[392] Ulrichsen, *The Gulf States,* 115.
[393] Ibid, 38.
[394] Ulrichsen, *The Gulf States,* 114.

Kingdom (UK), 4 US air force AWACS sentry aircraft in 1980 and deployed the first in 1986. The AWACS with the F-15 gave Saudi a deterrent capability.[395] The first example of Saudi military force against Iran was shutting down an Iranian F-4 fighter over Saudi waters in June 1984.[396] In 1982, the GCC agreed to build a joint command and established the first joint exercise Peninsula Shield in October 1983 in the UAE, though it never developed integrated operations. Abdullah Bisharah stated that the GCC reached a level of defending any attack to the Straits of Hurmuz in 1983.[397] The war shaped the perception of the Gulf states towards developing military structures and, after the war, in 1988, the GCC's military strength amounted to 160,950 men, and 382 modern aircraft.[398] After 1986, internationalization of the Gulf came into prominence with the involvement of France, USSR, Italy, UK, US warships to conduct convoy operations for reflagged or charted ships. By 1988, it reached a total of 82 western ships, including 33 combat ships, in addition to 23 ships and minesweepers from the USSR.[399]

Overall, the Iran-Iraq war introduced the GCC into a triangular balance of power including Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran, as well as new intra-GCC tensions into the regional security equation. After the war, Iran was ideologically and strategically isolated, which paved the way for self-criticism to repair damaged relations with its Arab neighbors. Despite its description of the US, Iraq and Saudi Arabia as *taghutti* (tyrannical)[400] and corrupted, Rafsanjani, who became the president of Iran in 1989, attempted to show goodwill from of Iran towards its neighbors in improving regional cooperation and political, economic, and cultural ties with them. This shift reflected the understanding of Iranian decision-making and the significance of active and peaceful participation of Iran in the Gulf after the war to ensure its own security at home. However, Iran still maintained that regional security could not be achieved with the participation of external actors.[401] The Saudi side was skeptical of Iran's new posture as Iran's unstable behavior during the war left the kingdom confused about Iran's regional intentions. Saudi Arabia,

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[395] Joseph A. Kechichian, "The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Gulf War," In *The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for strategy, Law, and Diplomacy*, ed. Christopher C. Joyner (US: Greenwood Press, 1990): 108.
[396] Ulrichsen, *The Gulf States*, 115.
[397] Kechichian, *The Gulf Cooperation,* 108.
[398] Ibid, 107.
[399] Ulrichsen, *The Gulf States,* 117.
[400] Rob Johnson, "Mustazafin and Taghutti: Iran and the War 1980-1988," In *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives,* ed. Nigel Ashton and Bryan Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2013): 57.
[401] Chubin and Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia,* 18.

as well as the other GCC states, were far more in favor of US protection in the aftermath of the war.[402]

While the Iran-Iraq war consolidated the revolution, undermined the power of moderates, caused a rise in radicalism, and unified the country under Khomeini,[403] it heightened the sense of distrust and hostility in both states. For the Saudi side, there was no sign that Iran was considering a shift in its distinctive interpretation of Islam. Moreover, Iran was perceiving itself as the victim of Iraqi aggression, as well as Saudi aggression, given the Saudi financial help to Iraq. In terms of the relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran was adversarial because of the Saudi support for Iraq, economic warfare, and growing ties to the United States. Iran continued its support for the dissidents of Saudi Arabia and Khomeini's rhetoric against the monarchical systems. The war gave Iran a chance to redefine its interests and integrate itself in Gulf politics, but also taught lessons like competence in military professionalism and the importance of developing modern weapon systems. Moreover, the war was important in demonstrating that regional disputes with neighbors had a high possibility of becoming Arabicized and internationalized, and of isolating Iran from the neighbors and the West.[404] For the Iranian side, it was understood that the country had to develop new tactics and foreign policy agendas without imposing their interests, interpretations, and understandings on the neighbors.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Saudi Arabia began to feel more confident about protecting their regional interests, despite the remaining threat of spill-over of the Iranian revolution. Although Saudi Arabia improved its ties with Iran during the Rafsanjani and Khatami periods, and had less contentious foreign policy agendas, perceived deep ideological differences and mistrust were still present to serve as a potential conflict in the future of Gulf security. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, Gulf monarchies shared common interests with Iran despite opposing views on oil price policy. The 1980s were the years of redefining the interests, reperceiving the neighbors and repositioning regional as well as external actors. Hence all shaped the security perception of Saudi Arabia in the 1990s and the 2000s.

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[402] Ibid, 19.
[403] Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy," 86.
[404] Ibid.

3.2.4. Crown Prince Abdullah's Rising Influence in Decision-Making Process: Iran is "Neither Permanent Enemy nor Friend"

When the Iran–Iraq War ended, both Iran and Iraq were suffering from war debts and damaged oil installations because of the tanker wars and Iran's blockade of export trade through the Strait of Hormuz. Poor economic conditions of the post-war period forced Iran to reshape its regional threat perception towards the region and the Gulf states. The fastening rearmament program of Iraq increased the security concerns of the Gulf states, and gradually replaced, if not eliminated, their perceived regional threat towards Iran with Saddam Hussein's Iraq.[405] Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran declined in the 1980s when Iran's foreign policy was controlled mostly by the religious and revolutionary ideals of Khomeini, such as that of exporting the Islamic revolution. The fact that Saudi Arabia economically, politically and militarily supported Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war paved the way for an indirect war between Iran and Saudi Arabia.[406] Contrary to the regional dynamics of the 1980s, the 1990s can be described as the years of rapprochement in bilateral relations, to some extent due to the fluctuation in oil prices, mutual threat perception of both states towards Iraq, reactions towards the Arab-Israel peace process, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the worsening economic situation of Iran and its striving for economic reconstruction, the impact of the disintegration of the USSR on the international system, and the defeat of Iraq in Kuwait by a largely Western coalition force. Despite these factors, some still believed that most of the 1990s experienced no major change or breakthrough in Iranian-Saudi relations.[407] Overall, it is inevitable to underestimate at least preferable relations between both sides during the 1990s as a result of the change of regional dynamics, occurrence of new wars, and common regional security understanding.[408]

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[405] Khadduri and Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf,* 80-81.

[406] Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, "Security Cooperation of Iran and Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2, no. 16 (2011): 251.

[407] Gawdat Bahdat, "Iranian-Saudi Rapprochement: Prospects and Implications," *World Affairs* 162, no. 3 (2000): 108-109.

[408] In March and June 1998, Saudi and Iran signed to various agreements on technical, industrial, transportation, environmental investment, news, broadcasting services, transportation, exchange expertise, sports. Iran exported saffron, carpets, food and cement while it imported oil, chemical products, gasoline coolers. *Majlis Al-Shura* voted for a bilateral cooperation agreement between Saudi and Iran and approved in November 12, 1998. Their trade volume increased to USD 133 million in 2000 compared to USD 95 in 1999. Iran's trade with the GCC increased to USD 8.71 billion dollar in 2007, and USD 1.71 billion in 2000. See: Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and*, 149.

The rapprochement period emerged as a result of rhetorical change in the leadership level of both countries. After the Iran-Iraq war, revolutionary ideals and slogans of the Iranian side were not intensive in shaping the Iran foreign policy. With the election of Muhammad Khatami as the President of Iran in 1997 and Crown Prince Abdullah's rise to power in 1995 due to King Fahd's stroke, the process of rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran was further accelerated but in an attentive way. The rapprochement was also due to the compulsory mindset change of the Iranian decision-makers towards peaceful and progressive relations with the Gulf states and neighboring Arab countries.[409] Especially after the invasion of Kuwait, Iran was perceived as an actor that could efficiently counter Iraq in the eyes of the Saudi decision-makers. For Iranian decision-makers, the invasion of Kuwait was an opportunity to remind the Saudi side about their support for Iraq in the past and Iran's rightfulness about Saddam's regional aggressive intentions.[410] However, this process was not a quiet, peaceful process, as Saudi Arabia remained suspicious of Iranian intentions given the existence of pro-Iranian organizations in Saudi Arabia, such as Hezbollah Al-Hejaz, which were believed to be responsible for attacks on the Khobar Towers in June 1996.[411]

The fact that Iran sided with the international community and the US led coalition against Saddam during the Kuwait invasion, directed the GCC states to restructure their diplomatic relations with Iran. In the post-Cold war period, Iran foreign policy followed a regionalization trend towards both North and South; for instance, Iran developed the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), peaceful relations with Caspian Sea countries, built alliances with Syria, and deepened its ties with China, North Korea, Russia, India, Greece and Georgia as part of this policy. Iran's endeavor to take membership in regional organizations as an indicator of its progressive intentions increased its contacts with the GCC states. For example, during the OIC Summit in Dakar in December 1991, Crown Prince Abdullah and Rafsanjani decided to collaborate in the OPEC given the influence of war debts on Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as the cut in

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[409] Mahjoob Zweiri, "Arab-Iranian Relations: New Realities?" in *Iran's foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, ed. Anoushiravam Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri (UK: Ithaca Press, 2008): 115.

[410] Both Saudi and Iran economy was based on oil revenues in the 1990s which made them vulnerable to the oil price fluctuation. In addition, per capita annual income and living standards of both states were declining; while per capita annual income of Saudi Arabia was $6,790 in 1997 and $16,000 in 1982, it was $1,780 in 1997 and $2,160 in 1978 in Iran. See: Bahdat, *Iranian-Saudi Rapprochement*, 108-109.

[411] Yoel Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East: Between Iran and the 'Arab Spring'* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2015), 43.

Iraqi production resulting from sanctions.[412] In 1992, King Fahd announced that a joint economic commission should be built to remove the effects of the 1988 Saudi bans on Iranian products. Furthermore, Crown Prince Abdullah had meetings with Hizballah leaders, which showed the Saudi intentions on repositioning the Kingdom against the new regional challenges, particularly to counter the instability of neighboring countries like Iraq and Lebanon. In 1992, Saudi Arabia invited Sheikh Baqir al-Hakim, the head of Iraq's Iran-based Hizb al-Dawa (Islamic Dawa Party), to exchange opinions regarding the future of Saddam's regime. These were the signs of the Iranian and Saudi leadership's realization of their need for reconciliation of their adverse regional security interpretations.

Despite these peaceful shifts in bilateral relations, Saudi-Iran relations remained weak, troubled and divided. While the new spiritual leader of Iran, Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei, called for a holy war against the US forces in Saudi Arabia after the invasion of Kuwait, liberal political figures like Mohammad Ali Hadi, prospective Iran ambassador to Riyadh, was defining both sides as the wings of the Muslim world.[413] On the Saudi side, Sheikh Salman Al-Quda[414] urged Saudi decision-makers to the protect Saudi and Arabian peninsula from Iranian interventions while a reformer politician, Sheikh Ghazi Abdulrahman Al-Qussaibi, warned religious figures to soften their opposition of US forces in Saudi Arabia and of Iranian threat.[415] For Saudi decision-makers, the change of perception towards Iran was a calculated political step to safeguard their privilege in protecting the holy sites for Muslims on a more permanent basis while both Iran and Iraq were relatively weak.[416] However, the subsequent invasion of Kuwait by Iraq paved the way for both sides to reconstruct their threat assessments towards the region, neighbors, and each other in a more nuanced and peaceful way.

The invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 was a decisive event for the evolution of the perception of Saudi Arabia and Iran towards each other. After Saddam occupied Kuwait

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[412] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and,* 131.

[413] Ibid, 127.

[414] He was imprisoned in September 7, 2017 because of his critiques against the blockade of Qatar in July 2017. Saudi authorities are thought to seek death penalty for him. See: "Saudi 'Seeks Death Penalty' for Muslim Scholar Salman Al-Awdah," *Aljazeera*, September 5, 2018, accessed October 14, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/9/5/saudi-seeks-death-penalty-for-muslim-scholar-salman-al-awdah.

[415] Ibid.

[416] Kechichian, "Trends in Saudi," 238.

with its 150,000 troops and 2000 tanks, and announced Kuwait as Iraq's nineteenth province[417], Kuwait's invasion paved the way for the appearance of Saddam's Iraq as a regional threat for both sides. For Iran, the war was an opportunity to convince the world about Saddam's threat to the region and remind the GCC states of their support for Saddam during the Iran-Iraq war. It was the first conflict that allowed the major US forces to intervene in the region[418]; the Iran-Iraq war was almost a test for Saddam on his future actions which were proved to end with his miscalculations about the support that he believed he had from the US. In the end, the Kuwait invasion did not help Iraq's financial problems, rather Kuwait's invasion was the catalyst for international society to take a proactive stance against Iraq. Moreover, after the war, Saddam was declared as an aggressor and exposed to pay reparation payments.[419] Hence, the invasion was emphasized as a turning point of the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Saddam's miscalculated policy introduced Iraq as an aggressor and Iran as a responsible country in the region, in the eyes of the Saudis.[420] Related to the regional states' change of perception towards Iran, President Rafsanjani defined Iran's regional policy as: "Iran does not accept geographical changes. Iran just intends to solve regional problems. So, regional countries should not be worry."[421] As a response, the declaration of King Fahd about Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian financial assistance to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war had not been aimed at invading Iran but to contributing to Iraq's defense, illustrating both sides' endeavors to improve their relations.

One needs to underline the different attitude of Saudi Arabia to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in comparison to how it had reacted during the Iran-Iraq war. According to the SSI Special report for the Desert Shield and Desert Storm Operations launched in January 16, 1991, Saudi Arabia provided 56,000 soldiers of National Guard, 38,000 soldiers of Prince Khalid bin Sultan, 550 tanks, 180 combat aircraft and 8 frigates for supporting Kuwait against Iraq's war aims.[422] For the US side, President George H. W. Bush

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[417] Saddam changed the name of Kuwait as "Kadima" which was the name from the Ottoman era.

[418] Fred Halliday, "The Gulf War and Its Aftermath: First Reflections," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 67, no. 2 (1991): 224.

[419] Hossein Askari, "Kuwait Faces Invasion," *The National Interest*, April 20, 2011, accessed January 24, 2019, https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/kuwait-faces-invasion-5199.

[420] Reza Ekhtiari Amiri and Fakhreddin Soltani, "Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait as Turning Point in Iran-Saudi Relations," *Journal of Politics and Law* 4, no. 1 (2011): 192.

[421] Ibid.

[422] Joseph P. Englehardt, "Desert Shield and Desert Storm: A Chronology and Troop List for the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf Crisis," *Strategic Studies Institute: US Army War College* (March 25, 1991): 10. With

publicly announced his position as "America will stand by her friends"[423], and the US led coalition deployed more than 900,000 troops in the region, most of them stationed on the Saudi-Iraq border.[424] At the end of the war, the US emerged from the war as a military power in the region. As a result of King Fahd's invitation of 70,000 US led troops to Saudi Arabia as part of the Operation Desert Storm, critics of Bin Laden began to be heard against the Saudi governance and ruling family, which later became a part of Saudi vulnerability to internal violence in the coming years.[425] However, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was important in restricting Iraq's economic and military development through the UN Security Council resolution 687, which forced Iraq to disclose all NBC and ballistic missiles facilities, and weapons stockpiles.[426]

Prior to the invasion, Iraq and the Gulf states' relations were not at their best, as Saddam was critical of the US and Britain's military presence in the Gulf. At the same time, Saddam's relations with the US were at their best, which can be argued to have encouraged Saddam to invade Kuwai and to bolster the way for leadership of the Arabs, especially after the Arab League and Arab Cooperation Council meetings in February 23-24, 1990.[427] For some, Saddam was driven by his chronic political insecurity for his survival rather than a megalomaniac regional hegemony, impetuosity or pan-Arab solidarity.[428] The fact that Iraq emerged stronger than Iran from the Iran-Iraq war due to its well-equipped military force and US support for Iraq can be argued as an important

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the advent of the war, around 5,000 Kuwaitis crossed the Saudi-Iraq border as announced by Saudi officials. In James Lemoyne, "Confrontation In the Gulf; Border Opened, Kuwaitis Flee to Country," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1990, accessed January 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/17/world/confrontation-in-the-gulf-border-opened-kuwaitis-flee-their-country.html.

[423] Adam Kelliher, "American Forces Arrive in Saudi Arabia," *United Press International*, August 8, 1990, accessed October 26, 2019, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1990/08/08/American-forces-arrive-in-Saudi-Arabia/1745650088000/.

[424] Alan Taylor, "Operation Desert Storm: 25 Years Since the First Gulf War," *The Atlantic*, January 14, 2016, accessed July 15, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2016/01/operation-desert-storm-25-years-since-the-first-gulf-war/424191/.

[425] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and The Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2011), 28.

[426] Gabriel Ben-Dor, "The Arab World: Ten Years after the Gulf War," In *the Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, ed. Andrew J. Bacevich and Efraim Inbar (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003): 53.

[427] Jerry M. Long, *Saddam's War of Words: Politics, Religion, and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait* (US, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 16.

[428] Efraim Karsh, "The Middle East and the Gulf War: A Decade Later," In *the Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, ed. Andrew J. Bacevich and Efraim Inbar (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003): 169.

factor in motivating Saddam to attack Kuwait in 1990.[429] Moreover, in his Revolutionary Day speech, in July 17, 1990[430], Saddam accused the Gulf states of being the agents of the West by keeping oil prices low. Prior to the war, Iraq had tried to persuade the oil producer states to agree on a higher pricing by reducing overproduction because the Gulf countries were overproducing, causing a fall in world oil prices. The fact that Kuwait's financial standing in the world market was unaffected due to its high financial reserve can be emphasized as another reason that angered and reminded Saddam about his historical claims on Kuwait.[431] In addition to that, according to Saddam, Kuwait was violating OPEC quotas and overusing the shared oil field.[432] After the Arab Summit in May 28, 1990 in Baghdad, Iraqi officials knew for certain that Kuwait would not stop overproducing and would continue to disregard Iraq's financial disabilities affected by the Iran-Iraq war.[433]

Saudi Arabia was cautious of avoiding any public statements favoring one side at the beginning of the conflict between Kuwait and Iraq. It was cautious regarding the crisis and did not consider it as serious danger pertaining to its territorial integrity and sovereignty, but feared the possibility of penetration of the conflict into the Saudi oil province of al-Hasa. Before taking a side, Saudi Arabia attempted to reconcile both sides in Jeddah with the aim of preserving stability and protecting the Saudi national interest.[434] Despite the absence of any evidence that Saddam was planning to invade Saudi Arabia or others, the idea of Prince Bandar ibn Sultan, Washington ambassador of Saudi Arabia, for Saddam's regional ambitions revealed the fear of Saudi officials from Saddam's unpublicized aims: "He who eats Kuwait for breakfast, is likely to ask for something else for lunch".[435] King Fahd was favoring Kuwait and announcing the kingdom's future side:

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[429] Michael Klare, "Arms Transfers to Iran and Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88 and the Origins of the Gulf War," In *the Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, ed. Andrew J. Bacevich and Efraim Inbar (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003): 4-5.

[430] Jerry M. Long, *Saddam's War of Words: Politics, Religion, and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait* (US, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 20.

[431] During the Iran-Iraq war, oil production of both dropped suddenly and other Gulf countries had opportunity to raise the prices, asking for eighteen per barrel. During this period, oil prices dropped to eight dollars per barrel, whereas before the war it was twenty-five dollars per barrel. See: In Majid Khadduri and Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf,* 86.

[432] Caryle Murphy, "Iraqi Invasion Force Seizes Control of Kuwait," *The Washington Post*, August 3, 1990, accessed May 15, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/08/03/iraqi-invasion-force-seizes-control-of-kuwait/19a5d276-5147-4ef0-85a5-eca64d7abf5e/.

[433] Khadduri and Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf,* 88.

[434] Ibid, 83.

[435] Karsh, "The Middle East," 169.

"Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are one. We live together and we die together."[436] Saudi Arabia hosted Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Jabir Ahmed Al-Sabah while his brother Fahd was killed in defending the Al-Shaab palace of the royal family.[437] On the other hand, some Arab countries, especially Yemen which was ruled by Ali Abdullah Saleh, supported Saddam, which ended with severing ties of Saudi Arabia with Yemen.

Despite the continuity of the mutual threat perception after the invasion of Kuwait, regional threat perceptions of Saudi Arabia and Iran were still evident in bilateral relations for several reasons. In addition to Iran's criticisms towards the US relations with the GCC, Iran's intervention in eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia where Saudi Shiite minorities resided, would shape the Saudi domestic politics in favor of Iran. For Iran's perception, a possible Saudi intervention in Sistan and Baluchistan would be a decisive act against a rapprochement period and be felt in Iran's domestic politics. For the Saudi decision-makers, Iran's historical claims on Bahrain despite Bahraini Shiite clerics' affiliation and compromising for Sunni al-Khalifa ruling family originated from Najd ascent were still threatening for the regime. However, Bahraini Shiite clerics were known to be educated in Iran with Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Fazel Lankarani, who was a grand Shiite Marja and follower of Khomeini's teachings and had criticized the policies and treatment of the Gulf monarchies for their Shiite populations.[438]

The dual containment policy of the Clinton administration developed by the National Security Adviser Tony Lake, in May 1993 came in a period when both states endeavored to improve relations was in its initial phase. It was as an attempt by the US to ensure the primacy of its power in the Gulf issues by containing Iran and Iraq in the wake of the 1993 Oslo accords which was objected to by both states.[439] However, the Middle East Peace Accords was actually meant as support for Israel's position and alleged US support of Israel for many Arab states and for Saudi Arabia. Iranian FM Kharrazi argued the US foreign policy's disappointment in the eyes of the regional societies: "Iranian arguments are getting more support. The way the Americans have dealt with the peace process has

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[436] Siraj Wahab, "Analysts recall Saudi Arabia's Sacrifices for Kuwait, And Explain the Current Rise in Anti-Saudi and Anti-US Sentiment," *Arab News*, August 2, 2018, accessed January 13, 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1349691/%7B%7B.
[437] Murphy, "Iraqi Invasion Force."
[438] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and,* 133.
[439] Ibid, 134.

made people dissatisfied."[440] The dual containment policy can be argued to have moved Iran foreign policy towards an offensive mood, given the Iranian perception on US policy which aimed to exclude Iran and Iraq from regional arrangements between the US and the Gulf states. Given the continuing reliance of the GCC states on US security agreements, in addition to the dual containment that contained and isolated Iran and Iraq, the path was opened for unbalanced regional threat perceptions as well as the rise of bin Laden's followers and other jihadist claims.[441] The oppositions, reform calls, and internal and external critiques for security that were spread via television channels and radios, paved the way for a carefully controlled liberalization of state-society relations.[442] For instance, Saudi Arabia expanded the number of members of *Majlis Al-Shura* and agreed to have municipal elections from 2005. In Qatar, municipal elections were held in 1999, a new constitution was established in Bahrain in 2002, and limited elections were held for the Federal National Council of the UAE in 2006.[443]

The rise of Crown Prince Abdullah in Saudi politics since 1995-96 was a decisive factor in paving the way for a shift in regional understanding of the kingdom towards Iran, as well as meeting the domestic reform calls. Crown Prince Abdullah believed in a foreign policy based on "neither permanent enemy nor friend" with his awareness of Iran's capabilities and Iraq's importance as one corner of regional stability.[444] Crown Prince Abdullah underlined that Saudi Arabia had to change the point of view that it had adopted throughout the 1980s on Iran. His outlook of the region helped to shift the Saudi understanding of relations with Iran and paved the way for the continuous diplomatic meetings between Crown Prince Abdullah and President Rafsanjani. This in turn helped Iran to understand that Saudi Arabia had a different and progressive vision for the region. On the other hand, Crown Prince Abdullah was keen on reducing dependency on the US security assurances and opposing the presence of foreign forces in the region, both of which were in accordance with Iran's priorities and critics for the region. To illustrate, in OIC meeting in Islamabad in December 1995, Crown Prince Abdullah mentioned to

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[440] McLean, "End of the Islamic," 41.
[441] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and The Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2011), 29, 30.
[442] Ibid, 31.
[443] Ibid, 32.
[444] Reza Ekhtiari Amiri and Ku Hasnita Ku Samsu, "Role of Political Elites in Iran-Saudi Economic Cooperation," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 12 (2011): 114.

Rafsanjani the danger of the US forces, the Saudi public's critics against the presence of the US military forces and the possibility of moving it to Qatar.[445] During this period, one can argue the relations moved to a moderate mood but were still far from removing the mutual mistrust between the Saudi and Iranian officials, as it was clear for the Iranian side that Saudi Arabia preferred to continue to develop its military infrastructure over the US guarantees.

Crown Prince Abdullah was considered as a popular and nationalistic leader preserving traditional Al-Saudi tribal/Islamic values, alongside his modern views on amending the failing economy, especially due to the fall of oil prices in 1998-99.[446] He was not seen as more pro-American than the previous kings as he openly made his criticisms of US policies in the region without underestimating the strategic partnership with the United States. Crown Prince Abdullah's criticisms were mostly directed to the US support for Israel, and the military attacks on Iraq as he openly supported the Palestinians in the peace process. He was also aware of the fact that Saudi Arabia could not support oil rents anymore and the royal family needed to tighten their expenses as the golden days of oil had passed. Moreover, due to Crown Prince Abdullah's efforts, Saudi Arabia reached a national dialogue initiative with Shiite leaders in eastern province as he invited some Shiite clerics from Iran and Syria such as Hassan al-Saffar, Tawfiq al-Seif, Jafar al-Shayib, Sadiq al-Jubran.[447] In July 1997, membership of *Majlis Al-Shura* expanded to 90, including two Shiite representatives, and in May 2001, the of number members increased to 120 with double the number of Shiite representatives. In accordance with President Mohammad Khatami's call for dialogue among civilizations, Crown Prince Abdullah developed an interfaith dialogue initiative and he appointed a Saudi Shiite ambassador to Iran for the first time in Saudi diplomatic history; Jamil Al-Gieshi served

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[445] The US air base from Sultan Air Base of Saudi Arabia was moved to Qatar's Al-Udeid Air Base, which was built in 1996, after the 2003 war. See: Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "Aftereffects: Bases; U.S. Will Move Air Operations to Qatar Base," *The New York Times*, April 28, 2003, accessed March 26, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/28/world/aftereffects-bases-us-will-move-air-operations-to-qatar-base.html.

[446] In 1998, crude oil prices were at the lowest level, $12.28 a barrel after the period of 1986 when it was $13.53 a barrel. See: "Average Annual OPEC Crude Oil Price from 1960-2018," The Statistics Portal, accessed November 2019, accessed October 4, 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/262858/change-in-opec-crude-oil-prices-since-1960/.

[447] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and*, 137.

between 1999-2003. [448] Saudi Shiite scholars promoted the idea of civil society for collective action by Saudi citizens, as civic institutions grew rapidly both in Saudi Arabia and Iran in response to the dissatisfaction of their societies on the issues of human rights, women's rights and the implementation of the Islamic law.

The last of the tensions of the late 1990s that shaped the threat perception of Saudi Arabia and Iran was the 1996 Khobar attacks in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Given the death of 19 US officers in the bombing of the Khobar towers, the US blamed Iran as responsible of the attacks, while Saudi Arabia avoided directly accusing Iran of the bombing. U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lamberth emphasized the involvement of Iran in the attacks: "The totality of the evidence at trial…firmly establishes that the Khobar Towers bombing was planned, funded, and sponsored by senior leadership in the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran."[449] However, in 2004, the 9/11 Commission Report revealed the unproved role of the Al-Qaeda despite strong evidence of Iranian involvement.[450] Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Mughassil, who was thought to be the mastermind of the attacks and leader of the military branch of Saudi Hezbollah, was captured in Beirut and transferred to Saudi Arabia in August 26, 2015.[451] The reluctant attitude of Saudi Arabia to blame Iran for the attacks can be interpreted as part of rapprochement and avoiding a sabotaging stance without any investigation.[452] The rapprochement period was further observed when the GCC leaders met in Kuwait for the GCC annual summit in December 1997; it was noted as such: "the Iranian Government's intention to open a new page in its relations with the GCC member states."[453] The late 1990s demonstrated the reconciliation in bilateral relations and further facilitated this due to Saudi Arabia's policy of distancing itself from the US in early 2000s.

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[448] Tobby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10.

[449] Carol D. Leonnig, "Iran Held Liable in Khobar Attack," *The Washington Post*, December 23, 2006, accessed June 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2006/12/23/iran-held-liable-in-khobar-attack-span-classbankheadjudge-orders-254-million-paymentspan/6a93eae4-7e03-4167-9cf8-c3b11f42d160/.

[450] "9/11 Commission Report," The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, July 22, 2004, accessed November 5, 2019, https://9-11commission.gov/report/index.htm.

[451] "Saudi Arabia Said to Arrest Suspect in 1996 Khobar Tower Bombings," *The New York Times*, August 26, 2015, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/27/world/middleeast/saudia-arabia-arrests-suspect-khobar-towers-bombing.html.

[452] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and,* 141.

[453] Kechichian, "Trends in Saudi," 237.

Prior to 9/11, Saudi understanding of Iranian regional security policies revolved around avoiding officially to define Iran as an enemy, and a non-existential threat to the kingdom. The beginning of the 1990s, owing to the Khatami and Abdullah's peaceful resolutions, demonstrated the willingness of both parties to reconcile to some extent despite being faced with obstacles, in order to strengthen the bilateral relations apart from diplomatic visits and softened foreign policy rhetoric. This period revealed Iran's intention to redefine itself as a non-interventionist regional state in the eyes of the neighbors by stating its unwillingness to build territorial changes, meaning an attack on another regional state. The major reason for reconciliation initiatives of both sides was Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, which illustrated Iraq's ability to invade and unhesitatingly to attack the GCC states. The mutual threat perception of Saudi and Iranian decision-makers over Saddam's confrontation towards the regional states brought both states closer. However, it was limited to the time of conceiving Iraq a common enemy, which did not propel them to economically, politically and militarily cooperate but to avoid a hostile foreign policy rhetoric on the eve of the 9/11 period, when Saudi Arabia began intervening in a process of international criticism.

3.2.5. The 9/11 and Saudi Foreign Policy: Prince Mohammed bin Nayef's Combat Against Terrorism

The 9/11 attacks, being the most decisive event of the beginning of the 2000s, shifted the regional security perception and threat assessments of Saudi Arabia towards the region and Iran. Despite their differing perspectives on various regional issues, both Saudi Arabia and Iran shared mutual security concerns and common arguments for peace resolutions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, hence they agreed to take responsibility for the region's peace and stability. Both condemned Israel's policies toward Palestine and Lebanon, believing the importance of applying international principles in the post-Iraq war situation, and supporting the preservation of Iraq's territorial integrity and self-determination principle.[454] Following the 9/11 attacks, Saudi Arabia was a supporter of terrorism in the perception of the US officials while Iran gradually took its place in the

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[454] Zweiri, "Arab-Iranian Relations," 150.

Bush administration's "axis of evil"[455] despite its efforts to change the direction of the bilateral relations towards peaceful terms by supporting Hamid Karzai's presidency in the post-Afghanistan war.

Due to the Saudi citizens' involvement in the attacks, the US was suspicious about the Saudi state, individuals and institutions' financial support for terrorist activities around the world. In the initial days of the attacks, Saudi Arabia was hesitant to define who was in charge of the attacks, as illustrated in the speech of the Ministry of Interior, Prince Nayef bin Abdelaziz: "We're not saying that bin Laden is innocent, but still it would have happened."[456] Prince Nayef was known for his attitude during the 1979 Mecca seizure when he had again not believed that Al-Qaeda was inside the state, especially inside the MOI.[457] However, because of the significant events of 1979, the Saudi royal family preferred to be close to the Wahhabis, to raise objections against reforms, support *mujahideen* in Afghanistan, and send soldiers for Bosnian issue and Palestine.[458] During these years, Prince Nayef declared his opposition against reforms in an ironic way as such: "I don't want to be Queen Elizabeth".[459] Prince Nayef, was also known as black prince, tactically preferred to be close to the clergy and applied tough policies against Saudi Shiite minority. In contrary to the 1980s, the Saudi state gradually had to investigate and accept the informal establishment of Al-Qaeda inside the state, and Saudi individuals' financial aids to it after the 9/11 attacks.

Following the attacks, the US announced reports of Saudi involvement in financing Al-Qaeda, and claimed that Saudi Arabia "was a place where Al-Qaeda raised money directly from individuals and through charities."[460] However, the US later reported that they could not find any evidence supporting the involvement of the Saudi state or Saudi state officials in terrorist activities.[461] At the same time, Saudi officials were trying to

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[455] The term was first used by the US President Bush in January 2002, for the states that support terrorism and produce nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

[456] Douglas Jehl, "A Nation Challenged: The Networks; Saudi Minister Asserts That bin Laden Is a 'Tool of Al Qaeda, Not Its Mastermind," *The New York Times*, December 10, 2001, accessed November 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/10/world/nation-challenged-network-saudi-minister-asserts-that-bin-laden-tool-al-qaeda.html.

[457] Riedel, *King and Presidents,* 11.

[458] Ibid, 10.

[459] Ibid.

[460] Christopher M. Blanchard and Alfred B. Prados, "Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Financing Issues," *CRS Report for Congress*, September 14, 2007, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=479177.

[461] Ibid.

convince the world of their innocence and publicly emphasizing the threat of Al-Qaeda against the Saudi state itself even more than against the US. The bombings in Riyadh in May 2003 on the compound where Foreign ministry exerts resided, and which caused 35 deaths, served as an opportunity for the Saudi state to illustrate the emergency of the Al-Qaeda threat.[462] The bombings, labelled Saudi's Pearl Harbor, were viewed as the most serious internal challenge for Saudi Arabia since 1902. Following this attack, it was believed that Saudi individuals and charities drastically reduced their funding for Al-Qaeda.[463] According to the State Department's 2003 Patterns of Global Terrorism, the Riyadh attack fostered an unprecedented level of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the US. Moreover, US officials began to portray Saudi Arabia as "an excellent example of a nation increasingly focusing its political will to fight terrorism."[464] In 2003, bin Laden released a video called "Among a Band of Knights" in which he accused Saudi Arabia of betraying Palestinians, giving the kingdom to American crusaders, and working for the establishment of Great Israel.[465] In addition, he described the Gulf states as "traitors" and "quislings" that were solely dependent upon the US security umbrella.[466] Following the release of this video, during 2003-2006, Saudi Arabia was exposed to various attacks as well as to violent unrest within the kingdom.

In contrast to its report on Saudi Arabia, the 9/11 Commission charged Iran of being inactive in combating terrorism in 2004.[467] The US further argued that Iran supported bin Laden's son, Saad bin Laden, and Sulaiman Abu Ghaith, his son-in law, and accused Iran of approaching Al-Qaeda after the bombing of the USS Cole off the shores of Yemen in October 2000[468] to launch attacks against the US.[469] The Report was also critical of Saudi Arabia in terms of private funding by individuals for Al-Qaeda before 9/11, which in turn

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[462] "Bombings and Arrests in Saudi Arabia," *CNN World*, November 9, 2003, accessed March 24, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/11/08/saudi.chronology.reut/index.html.
[463] Blanchard and Prados, "Saudi Arabia," 3.
[464] Raphael Perl, "The Department of State's Patterns of Global Terrorism Report: Trends, State Sponsors, and Related Issues," *CRS Report for Congress* (June 1, 2004), accessed April 18, 2019, https://fas.org/irp/crs/RL32417.pdf..
[465] Osama Bin laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (Verso, 2005), 186-206.
[466] Ibid.
[467] "9/11 Commission Report."
[468] "U.S.S. Cole (DDG-67) Senate Resolution Concerning Terrorist Attack in Aden, Yemen, on 12 October 2000," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, October 18, 2000, accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/manuscripts/c/u-s-s-cole-ddg-67-senate-resolution-concerning-terrorist-attack-in-aden-yemen-on-12-october-2000.html.
[469] "9/11 Commission Report."

directed Saudi Arabia to compress local extremists. This was followed by the establishment of an independent counter-terrorism body in Saudi Arabia under UN supervision in 2011. This body helped in providing jobs and rehabilitation services for the extremists, and their assimilation into Saudi society. The Saudi state sought to convince people to leave Al-Qaeda and to differentiate itself from Al-Qaeda's vision of Islam by describing it as a deviation from Islam.[470] However, it was later reported that some of these people returned to Yemen and Iraq for Al-Qaeda.

The accusations against the Saudi state's involvement in international terrorist activities alarmed Saudi decision-makers into demonstrating the Saudi state's intentions to combat terrorism. Given the rise of attacks and violent domestic unrests between 2003-2006, Saudi Arabia strived to show its commitment to solving the global terrorism threat. Adel Al-Jubeir, who became foreign policy adviser to CP Abdullah and then Saudi ambassador to Washington, defined the accusations of the US as "politically motivated, ill-informed, and factually incorrect."[471] Prince Mohammed bin Nayef[472], the son of Prince Nayef, appeared to be the face of the Saudi combat against terrorism during these years as part of the Saudi response to the terrorism accusation. Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was a respected figure for the counter terror campaign and the closest actor to work with for theUS, particularly between 2003-2006. He was the face of the Saudi war against Al-Qaeda, appearing on TV and encouraging the listing of the wanted persons by the MOI. Consequently, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was exposed to assassination attempts several times. The process of combating terrorism led to reforms, including administrative and institutional reforms in Saudi Arabia. In terms of combating terrorism, Saudi Arabia established new regulations, such as the Saudi Nongovernmental National Commission for Relief and Charity Work Abroad, to control the flow of financial aid by Saudi-based charities.[473]

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[470] Thomas W. Lippman, "Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, A Wily King Who Embraced Limited Reform, Dies," *The Washington Post,* January 22, 2015, accessed July 17, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/abdullah-of-saudi-arabia-a-wily-king-who-embraced-limited-reform-dies/2015/01/22/2ed987f0-a28d-11e4-9f89-561284a573f8_story.html.

[471] Blanchard and Prados, "Saudi Arabia," 4-5.

[472] Prince Mohammed bin Nayef studied in Lewis & Clark College in Oregon, had training in FBI in late 1980s, and studied at Scotland Yard's antiterrorism institution in 1992-1994. He was the assistant Interior Minister for Security in 1999, he became number two in MOI after his father in 2004, and in 2012 he became the Minister of Interior.

[473] Blanchard and Prados, "Saudi Arabia," 11.

Given the domestic, regional and international turmoil, Crown Prince Abdullah had to launch a domestic reform process inside the Saudi state beside the process of combating terrorism. Despite Crown Prince Abdullah being considered more of a rival for King Fahd, he was an important figure in countering the Al-Sudayri family's further penetration, according to Weston, within the royal family and clergy.[474] Crown Prince Abdullah was known as a man of integrity, a king who brought stability to the region, worked for the improvement of infrastructure and education of the kingdom, and had no association with corruption himself.[475] He was portrayed as a Bedouin with a gentle character, having no full brother from the same mother, who was a taken in battle, and thereby often felt alone inside the inner circle of the royal family.[476] To avoid the further strengthening of the Al-Sudayri members inside the royal family after his death, King Abdullah established the Allegiance Council in 2006. Ironically, it has been argued that if the Allegiance Council had formed prior to his reign, he may not have become king, given the lack of harmony among the powerful circle of the princes who were known as the "Sudayri Seven".[477] However, like other kings, King Abdullah also favored his sons and appointed Prince Turki bin Abdullah as governor of the Riyadh Province, Prince Mishaal bin Abdullah as the governor of Mecca Province, and senior son Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah as head of the Saudi Arabian National Guard, and who was considered as the potential king after King Abdullah.[478]

As a response to the domestic pressures, in 2002, Crown Prince Abdullah initiated a Peace Initiative aimed at resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, something that was seen as an historic move.[479] Prior to the initiative, Crown Prince Abdullah had sent a letter to

Related with the cooperation with the US, in March 2005, Saudi MOI reported that US-Saudi Joint Task Force on Terrorist Financing operations had investigated 1,098 Saudi bank accounts for financing terrorism. In Ibid., 23.

[474] Cited in Lippman, "Abdullah of Saudi."

[475] Mamoun Fandy, Edward S. Walker, Jr., Ofer Grosbard, Michael C. Hudson, and Chas. W., "The Abdullah Peace Plan: Offer or Ultimatum," *Middle East Policy Council* 9, no. 3 (2002): 3.

[476] John Bulloch, "King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia: The King Who Initiated Mild Reforms at Home While Tightening Saudi Arabia's Grip on the Middle East," *Independent*, January 23, 2015, accessed April 12, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/king-abdullah-saudi-arabia-king-who-initiated-mild-reforms-home-while-tightening-saudi-arabia-s-grip-middle-east-9999554.html.

[477] Ibid.

[478] "Saudi Arabia: King Bolsters His Branch of Dynasty," *The New York Times*, May 14, 2014, accessed February 21, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/15/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-king-bolsters-his-branch-of-dynasty.html.

[479] For full text: "Text of Arab Peace Initiative Adopted at Beirut Summit," *European Parliament*, accessed on October 2018,

President Bush complaining of the American stand on the Arab-Israeli issue in August 2001 and mentioning the different perspectives between the two countries: "from now on, you have your interests and the Kingdom has its interests, and you have your road and we have our road."[480] The main goal of the initiative was to ensure full Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in the 1967 war, Syrian Golan Heights and occupied Lebanese territory in the south of Lebanon. Prior to King Abdullah's Peace Initiative in 1989, Saudi Arabia asserted its remarkable role in the conflict resolutions by initiating the Taif agreement[481] which was signed to end the Lebanese civil war which lasted from 1975 to 1990. In addition to the expectations of the public on the Palestinian-Israeli issue, especially after May 2003, Crown Prince Abdullah received petitions calling for reform in countering terrorism outside and inside kingdom, education, infrastructure, women's rights, and extremism. He launched a campaign to educate citizens against extremism through media, and built the King Abdullah Economic City for the improvement of infrastructure, economy and education.[482] Moreover, Prince Abdullah showed his commitment to the acceptance of diversity in Saudi society and accepted the first National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue on June 30, 2003. King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) was formed to cultural dialogue, and to close the gap between state and society despite it being in contrast with the royal family's vertical and patrimonial structure.[483] Overall, in the post-2003 war period, Saudi decision-makers felt pushed into a process of compulsory domestic reform and a fight against terrorism to erase the international suspicions over the Saudi state, Saudi individuals and Saudi institutions' contribution to international terrorism.

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http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/empa/dv/1_arab-initiative-beirut_/1_arab-initiative-beirut_en.pdf..

[480] F. Gregory Gause, III, "The Approaching Turning Point: The Future of U.S. Relations with the Gulf States," *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World Analysis Paper Number Two* (May 2003): 9.

[481] "The Taif Agreement," United Nations, accessed on March 6, 2021, https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_taif_agreement_english_version_.pdf.

[482] Catherine E. Shoichet and Nic Robertson, "Amid Turmoil, Saudi King Abdullah Brought Stability, Pushed Reforms," *CNN*, January 23, 2015, accessed March 15, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/22/middleeast/saudi-arabia-king-abdullah-obit/index.html.

[483] Thompson, *Saudi Arabia and,* 221-222.

3.2.6. From 9/11 to the 2006 War: Saudi Arabia's Security Preferences over Rapprochement with Iran

The post-9/11 period demonstrated the Saudi state's preference to politically distance itself from the US, given the accusations against it and the rise of anti-Americanism inside the kingdom.[484] Common perceptions with Iran were seen in their stance on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars when they made it clear that both were seeking to reach a rebalanced relationship and security preferences. At decision-making level, this intention was clear in MOI Prince Nayef's speech: "Iran's security was akin to Saudi Arabia's security and vice versa."[485] In the case of the second Gulf war in 2003, both states acknowledged the significance of Iraq's sovereignty and integrity for the stability of the region. Regarding Iraq, Hassan Rouhani, the secretary of the Supreme National Council, argued Iran's choice of restoration of stability and security in Iraq while Prince Nayef agreed with Rouhani in denouncing the aggressive actions of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon against the Palestinians, and the actions of the Bush Administration, that "despite the accords already made, has stood by Israel."[486] In the 2001 Afghanistan war, both sides agreed on peace building, objecting to the use of force, and backing Hamid Karzai for the post-war presidency.

The security cooperation agreement, which was signed between Iran's Interior Minister, Hojjatoleslam Abdolvahed Mousavi Lari and Prince Nayef on April 18, 2001, needs to be emphasized as an indicator of the common security concerns of Saudi Arabia and Iran. It was a turning point in that it was a sign of respect for security and stability, as well as hope for a new beginning of peaceful relations.[487] The fact that the nature of the security agreement included "measures to combat organized crime, forgery of state documents, economic crimes, smuggling of goods, arms, and cultural heritage, as well as exchange of information on security issues and police cooperation"[488] illustrates both sides' intention to reshape the structure in the pre-9/11 period when they had concerns about the same issues in the Kuwait war, and the military presence of the US and UK in the

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[484] F. Gregory Gause, III, "The Approaching Turning Point: The Future of U.S. Relations with the Gulf States," *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World Analysis Paper Number Two* (May 2003): 12.

[485] Khaled Al-Maeena, "Kingdom, Iran Sign Historic Agreement," Ara*b News*, April 18, 2001, accessed September 14, 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/211187.

[486] Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, "Saudi Arabia, Iran Sign Security Accord," *EIR* 28, no. 17 (2001):42-43.

[487] Amiri, "Security Cooperation of," 246.

[488] Mirak-Weissbach, "Saudi Arabia, Iran," 42.

Gulf. In addition to Prince Nayef's speeches on the military strategic implications of the agreement, it is important to note the impact of the presence of Crown Prince Abdullah in foreign policy from 1995 to 19996 was another factor in paving the way for security cooperation. Crown Prince Abdullah underlined the need for a foreign policy shift changing the Saudi security perception towards Iran and developing a new regional security lens different to that of the 1980s. On the other hand, Iran needed Saudi Arabia's assistance for regional integration, given that Saudi Arabia was the largest Arab country in the Gulf and leader of the Arab states. For Saudi Arabia, the security agreement functioned as an opportunity for it to be released from its fear of Iranian threat. In other words, both states were aware of their common security concerns and needs, hence they preferred to move towards further cooperation which could benefit Iran and Saudi Arabia, albeit in different ways.[489]

Prior to the 2003 Iraq war, the US invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 occurred as another regional challenge to the Saudi threat assessments of the region. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran perceived the Taliban as a mobile and regional threat, therefore both allowed the US to access their command facilities as well as granted humanitarian and financial aid for the rebuilding of Afghanistan under the presidency of Karzai. Saudi Arabia had financially supported key figures of the Taliban, like *Tanzim-e Dahwat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan* (The Islamic Dawah Organization of Afghanistan)[490] or *Hezb-e Islami* (Islamic Party)[491], however, once the Taliban betrayed the kingdom and stopped serving Saudi regional policy,[492] Saudi Arabia preferred to support Karzai's presidency from early 2002. Following the 9/11 attacks, Saudi Arabia cut its ties with Afghanistan and defined the attacks as highly dangerous, and stating that they would "defame Islam and Muslims".[493] Likewise, Iran supported the US in backing Karzai's presidency in the

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[489] Amiri, "Security Cooperation," 247.

[490] It is an Islamist political party in Afghanistan founded by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf in early 1980s. It became a political party in 2005.

[491] An Islamist political party in Afghanistan founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in 1975. It operated both as a party and a militia until 2016.

[492] Guido Steinberg and Nils Woermer, "Exploring Iran and Saudi Arabia's Interests in Afghanistan & Pakistan: Stakeholders or Spoilers-A Zero Sum Game," *CIDOP Research Project* (April 2013), accessed January 25, 2020, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/fachpublikationen/Steinberg_Woermer_SaudiArabia_Interest_April2013.pdf..

[493] "Saudi Arabia Severs Ties with Afghanistan," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2001, accessed July 25, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/25/afghanistan.terrorism7.

hope of rebuilding relations with the US and redefining Iran-US interests. Despite Iran not having any role in the 9/11 attacks, and supporting the US operation against Taliban, the US continued to perceive Iran as an unreliable regional actor. In January 2002, the Bush administration listed Iran with Iraq, North Korea, Syria, Libya and Cuba as the states which made up the "axis of evil", which in turn served to shift the US public's threat perception from Saudi Arabia to Iran.

One can underline two fundamental regional changes that occurred following the 2003 war; the changing perception of the regional states of Salafi Jihadi school as a threat to the security of the Gulf, and the rising regional image of Shiite populations in the Middle East.[494] While in the 1980s the Shiite populations were perceived by the US as a threat to the security of the Middle East and the Gulf, after the 2003 war the Shiites of post-was Iraq began to be seen as an ally of the US. In contrast, for the neighboring states ,the Shiite-dominated government in Iraq emerged as a new security threat due to Iran's historical relations with the Shiite elites, clerics and society. However, the 2003 war reconstructed the Saudi and Iranian perception of regional security concerns and each other's standing in other regional affairs. In addition to Saudi Arabia's threat perception from Iran, some argued that the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt was a greater threat to Iran than the existence of the Al-Saud family.[495] Iran was concerned about the presence of US forces in the region while the GCC states were perceived Iran's nuclear capability as disastrous for the stability of the region. However, Iran was satisfied with the US strategy in post-war Iraq which enabled the Shiites to come to power, therefore, Iran supported the election process of Iraq, even helping the Iraqi government with $100 million.[496] Moreover, Iran already had strong ties with the Iraqi Shiite elite, scholars, Ayatollahs, and Shiite religious groups such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Iraqi National Congress. This in turn allowed Iran to become more involved in post-war Iraqi politics. By contrast, given their concerns regarding Iraq's insecurity and instability, the GCC states insisted that Iraq needed to preserve its

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[494] Zweiri, "Arab-Iranian relations," 119.

[495] Frederic Wehrey, "What's Behind: Saudi Arabia's Clear Anxiety?" *Sciences Po CERI Strategy Papers*, no. 15 (December 2012), accessed March 15, 2019, https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/fr/content/what-s-behind-saudi-arabia-s-nuclear-anxiety.html. .

[496] Zweiri, "Arab-Iranian relations," 118.

Arab and Islamic identity.[497] Despite Iraq Prime Minister Nouri Kamil Mohammed Hasan Al-Maliki's endeavor to rebuild relations with Arab neighbors, from the perspective of new political figures of post-war Iraq, such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Muqtada Al-Sadr, it was significant to gain some distance from Arab regimes which had supported Saddam previously, and which had anti-Shiite and anti-Kurdish policies. Overall, a Shiite dominated Iraqi government with an Iraqi Kurdish Prime Minister, could be argued to have posed a threat to the Saudi royal family who considered the kingdom as the natural defender of Iraq's Sunnis.

Crown Prince Abdullah was motivated to counter the Iranian threat in several areas; in the post-war rebuilding of Iraq, Iran's nuclear enrichment program, and President Ahmadinejad's conservative rhetoric and politics. It is important to note that President Ahmadinejad and Crown Prince Abdullah came to power in the same year; Ahmadinejad was elected as the president of Iran in June 2005, and King Abdullah came to the throne in 2005. Ahmadinejad's conservative reputation and nuclear policy created a new wave of security concern in the Arab world, especially among Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the GCC countries, as well as the European Union and the US. At diplomatic level, Saudi-Iran relations could not be described as degrading since President Ahmadinejad visited Riyadh in March 2007 with the aim of ending Iran's isolation and benefiting both sides. This was considered to be a rare visit, as both leaders discussed the growing violence and political crises in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq, and tried to establish a beneficial peace resolution for both sides. As Saudi FM Prince Saud bin-Faisal stated: "The two parties have agreed to stop any attempt aimed at spreading sectarian strife in the region."[498] However, Ahmadinejad was careful in underlining the possibility that in the case of any attack on Iran by the US or Israel, the Gulf region would also be affected by the turmoil. As a response, Saudi Arabia insisted that they supported the UN Security Council resolutions and were ready to defend themselves in the event of any regional confrontation.

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[497] "The Closing Statement of the Twenty Sixth Session," *GCC Supreme Council*, December 18-19, 2005, accessed January 25, 2020, https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Statements/SupremeCouncil/Pages/TwentySixthSession.aspx.

[498] Hassan M. Fattah, "Saudi King Meets with Iran's President," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2007, accessed July 28, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/04/world/africa/04iht-saudi.4787296.html.

The nuclear issue was another regional issue of contention that had directed the regional states' security perception since 2002. Saudi foreign policy with regard to the nuclear issue was based on avoiding any daring policy decisions. Instead, it conducted discreet diplomacy on the issue of oil behind the scenes, forming multiple and sometimes contradictory policy options as a form of insurance.[499] The Minister of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Saudi Arabia announced that the Iranian nuclear program was not a threat to the kingdom, but at the same time, he asked Iran to pay more attention to the demands of the international community.[500] King Abdullah urged Iran to restrain its nuclear ambitions and called on the West to approach it with greater caution: "Iran has announced its nuclear program is intended for peaceful use. If this is the case, then we don't see any justification for escalation, confrontation and challenge, which only makes issues more complicated.[501] Overall, Saudi officials tended to make peaceful statements that highlighted the peaceful intention of the nuclear program. On the question of acquisition of nuclear weapons, Saudi officials continuously underlined that this was not their aim.[502] However, according to a report released by the Guardian in September 2003, Saudi Arabia launched a strategic security review that included the development of nuclear weapons; with the aim of using nuclear capability as a deterrent, launching a nuclear-free Middle East, and forming an alliance with an existing nuclear power that would offer protection.[503] This report was not proved, but one can argue that Saudi Arabia perceived Iran as an actor attempting to test the future of its regional leadership, through its suspicious nuclear activities and involvement in the affairs of the neighboring Arab states.[504] However, in February 2007, Abdul Rahman Al-Attiya, Secretary-General of the GCC, announced his plan to travel to Vienna to discuss the development of nuclear power for peaceful purposes in GCC countries.[505]

The possibility of escalation as a result of a US military intervention, or an Israeli strike to counter Iran nuclear capability and its impact on the kingdom, can be emphasized as

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[499] Wehrey, "What's Behind," 7.

[500] Zweiri, "Arab-Iranian relations," 125.

[501] Tariq Khaitous, "Egypt and Saudi Arabia's Policies towards Iran's Nuclear Program," *NTI*, December 1, 2007, accessed April 13, 2019. https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/egypt-and-saudi-policies-toward-iran/.

[502] Ibid.

[503] Ewen MacAskill and Ian Traynor, "Saudi Considers Nuclear Bomb," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2003, accessed May 19, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/18/nuclear.saudiarabia.

[504] Khaitous, "Egypt and Saudi."

[505] Zweiri, "Arab-Iranian relations," 126.

the principal matter of concern for Saudi Arabia. For Saudi decision-makers, it would inevitably worsen the domestic political environment of the kingdom, and foreign policies of the regional states.[506] If one adds the endeavor of Iran and Saudi Arabia to build a regional structure in favor of their interests, the possibility of a war between Iran and the US or Israel would pave the way for a conflict of interests of the neighboring states and non-state actors regarding future realignments in the region. While Saudi Arabia dismissed the approach of the US towards Iran, which was argued to use its nuclear program to threaten its Arab neighbors, it also questioned why the US ignored Israel's nuclear empowerment and nuclear arms proliferation of others.[507] For the Iranian side, Iran prioritized strengthening its position in OPEC given the advantage of the absence of Iraq as a powerful hydrocarbon producer and exporter. However, the oil boom of the 2000s affected Iran's economy and technology, which was already structurally weak, while increasing the prosperity level of the GCC.[508] Therefore, the return of Iraq to the OPEC table would be challenging both for Iran and the oil producing Gulf states. In addition to Iraq, the rhetorical shift in Iranian politics, with the presidency of Ahmadinejad on a conservative discourse and his critique of the political standing of the GCC states, led to the questioning of the legitimacy of GCC elites in Gulf monarchies. It also partially influenced the domestic reform process. As part of the political rise of Shiite populations in Iraq and Lebanon, Iran's support for the Shiite of the Gulf states worried Saudi officials and raised Saudi's threat perception inside and outside of the kingdom. For instance, the Bahraini government, since 2003, was exposed to demonstrations and riots by its Shiite population. In addition, the Al-Wefaq National

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[506] Ibid, 125.

[507] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and*, 171.

[508] "High oil price levels between 2002 and the autumn of 2008 strengthened the key macroeconomic indicators in the six GCC countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, SA, and the UAE. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth reached an average of 8 percent a year over the 2002–2007 period, with foreign reserves, investments, and budgets showing equally solid performance. As a result, average GDP per capita across the six countries grew about 32 percent in the 2002–2007 period. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates, average per capita income measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) increased from U.S. $12,000 in 2002 to above $20,000 in 2007. However, average per capita income concealed wide variations among countries, ranging from a per capita income of $16,000 in SA, the Gulf's most populous state, to $36,000 in Qatar." See: Ibrahim Saif, "The Oil Boom in the GCC Countries, 2002–2008: Old Challenges, Changing Dynamics," *Carnegie Endowment*, no. 15 (March 2009), accessed November 29, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec15_saif_final.pdf.

Islamic Society's electoral success in the 2006 legislative elections, with 17 seats out of 40 seats, was a worrying situation for both Bahraini and Saudi officials.[509]

Removal of Saddam from Iraqi politics alongside the degradation of Iraq as a major regional power, motivated Saudi Arabia and Iran to impose their political and economic superiority over each other in ensuring regional stability. Saudi Arabia aimed to lead the regional agenda; it had a mediating role in Palestine since the Hamas dominated the government, with the 74 seats out of 132 in the 2006 legislative elections, and worked towards a lasting deal between Hamas and Fatah.[510] It also hosted the Arab League in March 2007, which provided a platform for Saudi decision-makers to enforce their arguments on Arab affairs and a Saudi peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Other GCC actors tried to influence the regional agenda in their favor, such as Qatar who invited Ahmadinejad to the 2007 GCC Summit in Doha. With respect to post-war politics in Iraq, Saudi Arabia was not in fact averse to a Shiite controlled government in Iraq if it were independent from Iranian political and ideological influence. However, this was not possible due to Iran's rising political influence in Iraqi society, elites and scholars in Iraq. Moreover, Saudi officials were concerned about the US's involvement in handing Iraq to Iran, illustrated by the former MOFA Prince Saud Al-Faisal who stated: "to keep Iran out of Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait," but "now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason".[511]

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[509] Ehteshami, *Competing Powerbrokers of,* 38.
[510] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and*, 221.
[511] "Timeline: Arab-Iranian Relations," *Aljazeera*, April 13, 2009, accessed June 23, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2009/4/13/timeline-arab-iranian-relations.

4. REGIONAL SECURITY PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS IRAN DURING THE KING ABDULLAH PERIOD (2006-2010)

The first years of the King Abdullah period encountered the destructive regional and domestic implications of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war on the Saudi foreign policy discourse. This chapter analyzes the reconstruction of Saudi regional security policies towards the continuity of the rising influence of Iran in the domestic structure of the neighbors of the kingdom, and overall in the region, prior to the Arab uprisings.

4.1. RECONSTRUCTING DOMESTIC ROLES OF SAUDI ROYAL ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS

4.1.1. King Abdullah and Senior Princes: Politics of Obscure Process, Unclear Roles and Successors

The Al-Saud family was a hegemonic class designed in vertical dependency, persuading other families and Saudi society to serve the interest of the Al-Saud state.[512] It can be described as a family corporation that was formed by Ibn Saud, uniting the vast territory of the Arabian Peninsula through alienating, dividing, and controlling his cousins, brothers and other tribes in order to establish an undisputed line of succession through his own sons.[513] The Al-Saud family was also an acephalous tribal faction with various princes representing different circles of power, competing for leadership among themselves but cooperating to perpetuate the Al-Saud rule.[514] The family prioritized the protection of the particularity and distinctiveness of the kingdom owing to its custodianship of Islam's holy places, as illustrated in a speech by a former Minister of Interior, Nayef bin Abdulaziz: "What we took by the sword we will hold by the sword."[515] Prince Nayef's statement on protection of the kingdom by the sword demonstrates Saudi Arabia's determination to ensure the unity of gained territories, particularly the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, which enabled the maintenance of the distinctiveness and

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[512] Thompson, *Saudi Arabia and,* 24.

[513] Mai Yamani, "New Line of Succession to the Saudi Throne: Riyadh's Old Regime Grows Older," *Qantara,* November 2, 2011, accessed June 4, 2020, https://en.qantara.de/content/new-line-of-succession-to-the-saudi-throne-riyadhs-old-regime-grows-older.

[514] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Circles of Power: Royals and Society in Saudi Arabia," In *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs,* ed. Paul Aarts, Gerd Nonneman (UK: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2005):189.

[515] Yamani, "New Line of."

leadership of the kingdom in the Muslim world. The hegemonic structure of the family was built upon Islamic teaching, bureaucracy, convention, unwritten rules, consultation, technocrats, kinship ties, *asabiyya* (a group feeling of social cohesion and solidarity)[516], *ulama* and *umara*. These concepts continue to be major elements of the decision-making process in persuading citizens on the legitimacy of the Al-Saud rule. The decision-making process inside the Al-Saud family, which is driven by different factions and sub-families, is a complex process which cannot be viewed as schematic but conducted through informal networks. Despite the historical power of the Al-Saud family, one cannot argue the unity or centrality of the family to control the periphery, hence the decision-making process is not a simple top-down process in the Saudi context.[517] Rather, the domestic dynamics are shaped by the struggle between multiple centers, senior and junior princes, religious, political and business elites, and state-society actors defined within the informal socio-political networks.

Following the death of Ibn Saud, his sons were able to maintain the conformity of the succession system which was determined according to their age and seniority. Ibn Saud's sons were never entirely united aside from their gradual aging, but they cooperated to avoid a public emanation of the quarrels among them.[518] Patron-client relations, penetration of external powers into the domestic sphere, social consensus and pragmatism have always been present as defining features of the system, along with the favoritism around an absolute ruler, but always reconstructed by the cyclical socio-political, economic and cultural environment.[519] Hence, repercussions of these defined features on the domestic structure and foreign policy decisions had always followed varied trends and priorities during the reign of each ruler. Overall, the decision-making process has historically been a family affair but there have been government technocrats

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[516] For Ibn Khaldoun, societies can be transformed into states if they have the feeling of *asabiyya*, if not, they are prone to collapse eventually. However, after the formation of a state, the *asabiyya* inevitably terminates and nothing can prevent it from this end. The kinship is insufficient after the formation of states, which forces the societies to have loyalty to a dynasty. For more; Ibn Khaldoun, *Muqaddima: An Introduction to History* (Princeton University Press; Abridged Edition, 2015). Ernest Gellner, "Cohesion and Identity: The Maghreb from Ibn Khaldun to Emile Durkheim," *Government and Opposition* 10, no. 2 (1975): 203-218.
[517] Thompson, *Saudi Arabia*, 24.
[518] Yamani, "New Line of."
[519] Thompson, *Saudi Arabia*, 24.

within the system, namely the sons of main dignitaries or families and others who are well connected with the leading families.[520]

Prior to King Abdullah's reign, the core circle of the decision-making process consisted of the most influential and senior members of the royal family. As table 4.1. illustrates, the second circle still comprised royal elites, including some professionals, religious elites as well as academics, bureaucrats and technocrats, and the third circle were the other influential actors, who emerged according to the cyclical domestic structures, and who advised the core and second circle rather than ruling.[521] The third circle was heterogenous and filled with people who could lose their political influence depending on the socio-economic-political dynamics of each term. They could move to the second circle by forming alliances, or competing with each other.[522] While business people, professionals, intellectuals and religious elite had similar political influence in the process, the core circle was the major circle where one could observe the change of elitism, given the generational change through horizontal succession in the kingdom.[523]

Core Circle	Second Circle	Third Circle
Senior members of the royal family	Professionals Religious elites Academics Bureaucrats Technocrats	Other Influential actors, advisers to the core circle

Table 4.1: Glosemeyer's Categorization of the Saudi Decision-Makers

Until the reign of King Abdullah, several first-generation princes from the core elite, who had traditional Islamic and history education, survived and their sons, who had received higher education usually in the UK or US and trained for the second circle positions, were excluded from the core elite for a considerable time.[524] The policy trends in the core circle have traditionally been influenced by cyclical socioeconomic developments and outsiders who direct the agendas of the politically relevant elite. However, the core circle remains at the core of decision-making, even though it is often manipulated by different

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[520] Uzi Rabi (academic), in online-written interview with the author, May 2019.
[521] Iris Glosemeyer, "Saudi Arabia: Dynamism Uncovered," in *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*, ed. Volker Perthes (Lynne Rienner Pub, 2004): 141.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Ibid, 150.
[524] Ibid, 151.

segments of politically relevant elite.[525] Despite the common wisdom to view the royal and elite changes as part of the impact of external actors, the core circle has been influenced by a fragile coalition of intellectuals and elite segments as part of their internal balance of power and influence.

Until the 1950s, the politically influential actors were the Al-Saud family members, religious and tribal elites. After the oil advent in the 1950s, the Al-Saud aimed to develop the infrastructure of the country and respond to the financial demands of the populations. The second generation of the kingdom grew up in a rentier state structure while the third generation, who were born in the 1970s-80s, grew up in a period when oil income was declining. In the 2000s, material wealth, personal networks and integral cohesion were still the defining features of royal politics; however, a small number of the royal family stayed within the core and influential ministries, given the aging nature of the core elite circle. Following 9/11, the core elite, including the senior members of the royal family, moved towards a transparency favoring tolerance and pluralism in the society. To a limited extent this was a response to the international critics of the responsiveness of the Saudi state to the involvement of Saudi citizens in the 9/11 attacks.[526] Hence, the 9/11 period, when King Abdullah was acting as Crown Prince but *de facto* ruler, paved the way for the core elite to become more responsive to the demands of the third circle and society for reforms in the political system.

Decision-Making Actors and Institutions
King / Prime Minister / Commander in Chief of All Armed Forces
Crown Prince / Minister of Defense (1943)
Deputy Crown Prince
Senior Members of Royal Family
Majlis Al-Shura (1926)
Allegiance Council (2006)
Council of Ministers (1953)
Minister of Interior (1951)
Minister of Foreign Affairs (1930)
Royal Saudi Arabian Armed Forces (1902)
Saudi Arabian National Guard (1917)
General Intelligence Presidency (1955)

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[525] Ibid, 150.
[526] Ibid, 164.

| National Security Council (from 2005 to 2015) |
| Council of Political and Security Affairs (since 2015) |
| Presidency of State Security (2017) |

Table 4.2: Decision-Making Actors and Institutions of Saudi Arabia

The King and Crown Prince have been the key decision makers of Saudi foreign policy making (table 4.4). The Defense Minister, who also acts as Crown Prince, and the National Guard commander, who is responsible for the protection of the House of Saud from a *coup or* domestic threats, advise the king on foreign policy and domestic policy issues. While the Foreign Minister has been only a spokesperson and not a decision maker, the Interior Minister has often been consulted if there is a domestic aspect to the question.[527] The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, and while consultations occur on a regular basis with numerous officials at different levels, the ultimate decision-maker is the King.[528] To illustrate, opinions of the elites who support the royal family have always been considered as a political tool to persuade the society on foreign policy decisions of the core circle, despite the elites not being particularly appreciated and liked[529] by the royal family. Religious elites can be depicted as the most influential public persuaders who have traditionally been recruited mostly from the Al-Sheikh family throughout Saudi history. The *ulama* gives religious endorsement to decisions made by the Saudi decision-makers; for instance the *ulama* endorsed King Fahd's decision of stationing of the US troops in Saudi Arabia during the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.[530] However, along with business elites and professionals, the religious elites are often viewed in the media as the spoilers of decision-making, and being dependent on their personal access to the core elite.[531] The religious elites, who are in the second or third circle but willing to move to the core, do not have a direct influence on the decision-making, rather they provide traditional legitimacy to the royal family in some affairs. In order to integrate the religious elite in the state institutions, the Council of Senior Ulama, whose members were chosen from the Najd region and chaired by *grand mufti*, almost

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[527] Bruce Riedel (former CIA analysts), in online-written interview with the author, December 2018.
[528] Kechichian, in online-written interview.
[529] Al-Ahmari, in discussion with.
[530] M. Ehsan Ahrari, "Political Succession in Saudi Arabia: Systemic Stability and Security Implications," *Comparative Strategy* 18, no. 1 (1999): 22.
[531] Ibid, 144.

have legislative effect.[532] In 1991, the Awakening or *Sahwa* Movement[533] as young religious scholars, but not as the religious elites, demanded political reforms which illustrated the fragmentation and heterogenous nature of the *ulama*.[534] Hamud al Uqla Al-Shuaibi, a religious scholar supporting the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, criticized the core elite as infidels for supporting the US in the 2001 Afghanistan war, and America as "an enemy of the Muslim nations and at war with them".[535] Nasir Al-Fahd, Sulaiman bin Nasser Al-Alwan, and Ali bin Khidr Al-Khudayr were part of a network that heavily influenced Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s as well as the transnational jihadi movement. They wrote extensively on Saudi Arabia's inconstancy in working with the US in its regional interventions, especially during the first Gulf War.[536] Sheikh Abullah bin Jibreen and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ghunayman accused the US of a crusade against Islam and urged support for the Taliban from the Saudi religious establishment.[537] Another incident that illustrates the fragmentation of the religious scholars was the 1995 Buraidah[538] Uprising which was predominantly composed of Islamists protesting against government corruption, the unequal distribution of wealth, immorality of the state and US dominance in the royal family's decision-making. In fact, it emerged as a response to the jailing of its prominent leaders, Sheikh Safar Al-Hawaii and Sheikh Salman Al-Awdah, as well as some of their followers in September 1994, bolstered by the fatwa of Abdulaziz bin Baz as the grand mufti in 1993-1999, and head of the Council of Ulama since 1962. At this juncture, being a religious elite cannot be defined as a permanent or

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[532] Ibid, 144.

[533] The Al-Sahwa Al-Islamiyya, which constitutes a concoction of Muslim Brotherhood ideology and Wahhabism, has been seen a challenging actor for the hegemony of the Al-Saud family since the 1960s. Despite the fact the Sahwa figures had not always been oppositional with the state particularly until the First Gulf War, the movement became politicized and raised its popularity inside the kingdom and the region. Since the 1990s, the state repression against the Sahwa figures like Salman Al-Awdah, Awad Al-Qarni, and Ali Al-Omari has been prominent given the critiques of these members towards the Al-Saud family's domestic and regional policies.

[534] Safar Al-Hawali and Salman Al-Ouda were the leading figures of the movement, and Al-Ouda was imprisoned between from 1994-99, and Al-Hawali was imprisoned in 2011 because of his book criticizing bin Salman with betrayal. In September 2018, Al-Hawali was sentenced to death penalty because of spreading incitement against the King. In "Saudi 'Seeks Death."

[535] David Pallister, "Mystery Sheikh Fuels Saudi Jitters," *The Guardian*, December 15, 2001, accessed October 13, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/dec/15/afghanistan.september111.

[536] Hassan Hassan, "The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context," *Carnegie Endowment for International peace,* June 13, 2016, accessed March 24, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/13/sectarianism-of-islamic-state-ideological-roots-and-political-context-pub-63746.

[537] Ibid.

[538] A city in Qasim.

sustained approval of the core elite's decisions but a highly fractioned segment whose political tendencies cannot be basically defined as a unified body.

While the al-Saud family, religious elites and business elites saved their place in decision-making, the tribal elite whose identity has historically been a challenge to the royal family appeared as an underdog of the process, but clients of the core elite within the rentier state system.[539] Tribal elites were influential in the SANG, whose officers were recruited from certain tribes of Najd and later became the support base for Crown Prince Abdullah, who was also the commander of the SANG from 1962-2010. In contrast to the tribal elites, the business elites utilized their sources of wealth to raise their socio-economic status and political credit during the years. Businessmen have often had informal access to the core elite, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the Supreme Economic of Council where the institutions could influence the decision-making process with additional opportunities to access the core elite.[540] For instance, Al-Waleed bin Talal, son of Talal bin Abdulaziz, who was also the leader of the Free Princes Movement, was one of the most affluent businessmen. He built 10,000 homes and donated Ramadan gifts to impoverished Saudis in 2002 and, in turn, his demands for the system were listened to by the Crown Prince Abdullah.[541]

Saudi domestic politics have been all about face to face politics along with a paternalistic and patron-client relationship.[542] Beside the internal competitions of the royal family, the princes facilitated their personal control over money, prestige, networks, the military and secret service. By 2003, first generation princes of the core elite continued to secure their offices, money, prestige and military capacities which they had accumulated throughout the 1960s-70s.[543] King Abdullah, Prince Talal, Salman and Sultan were principal core elites and prominent figures of the Senior Members of the Royal Family Council that was established in 2000, with 18 members representing the main branches of the royal family.[544] Another clique of the core elite was the family known as the "Sudayri Seven"

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[539] Glosemeyer, "Saudi Arabia," 142.

[540] Ibid, 143.

[541] Ibid, 157.

[542] Mordechai Abir, "The Consolidation of the Ruling Class and the New Elites in Saudi Arabia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (2006): 164.

[543] Royal Saudi armed forces was seen as a potential threat to the regime and received a pay increase in Arab uprisings of 2011 from King Abdullah to counter the critics and anti-regime protests. See: David S. Sorenson, "Why the Saudi Arabian DefenceDefense Binge?" *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 1 (2014): 116–37.

[544] Ibid, 151.

including Prince Sultan, Prince Nayef, and Prince Salman who had taken their places in major aspects of the military and security apparatus. Beside King Fahd, who was from the Al-Sudayri branch, Prince Sultan was the Minister of Defense and Aviation from 1962, Second Deputy Minister from 1982, and next in succession after Crown Prince Abdullah. Prince Nayef was the Minister of Interior from 1975, and Prince Salman was the Governor of Riyadh from 1962. On the other hand, Crown Prince Abdullah, as the head of SANG which was dominated by Najd people, gained support from some of King Faisal's sons on the distribution of power within the family. Moreover, Crown Prince Abdullah rewarded high rank positions to first generation princes for siding with him.[545] Compared to the Al-Sudayri clan portrayed as pro-American, Crown Prince Abdullah was much more pan-Arabist, a critical figure towards the US, a pro- Palestinian, and founder of the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002, all of which led many people to support him as a national figurehead.[546] However, Crown Prince Abdullah had a weaker position than the Al-Sudayri branch inside the royal family, hence he needed support from outside or religious elite. He was favored by the members of the opposition in-exile who were criticizing the political attitudes of the Al-Sudayri princes.[547] Abdullah also rewarded princes close to him, like Prince Nawaf bin Abdulaziz, who was one of the first-generation princes among the Free Princes, and was appointed as the head of Saudi General Intelligence in place of Prince Turki bin Faisal in 2001.[548] Moreover, Abdullah, like previous kings, favored his sons for the political future of his circle. For instance, Prince Khalid was the Deputy Commander of SANG until 1992, Prince Mutaib was the former Commander of SANG, Prince Mishaal was the governor of Mecca during 2013-2015, Prince Abdulaziz was an adviser to the king for Syria, and the Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister since 2011, Prince Faisal was the head of Saudi Arabia Red Crescent Society in 2006-2016, and Prince Turki was a pilot in the Saudi Royal Air Force and governor of Riyadh in 2014-2015.[549] In addition, his daughter, Princess Adila, was known to be influential in her father's decisions, and even acted as his adviser in the

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[545] Ibid, 149.
[546] Ibid, 149.
[547] Ibid, 150.
[548] Later, Abdullah discharged Prince Nawaf, and replaced him with Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz in 2005. Prince Muqrin was appointed as the Crown Prince from January to April in 2015.
[549] Prince Turki was arrested of corruption in Riyadh metro construction by King Salman in 2017.

background.[550] All of this illustrates the personalization of the decision-making system among the king, his sons and other princes close to the king. This in fact constitutes a traditional characteristic of Saudi politics and a common attitude of the Saudi kings in constructing the future of the succession process.

King Abdullah's period was significant in the sense of creating new links between the state and society. King Abdullah tolerated the petitions from different segments of society, and was more open to the demands of reforms to the extent of disobedience.[551] The king was not a reformist but a king with a relatively tolerant attitude within the controlled socio-political discourse of the state structure. He initiated the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) in 2003 where 'selected' professionals, religious scholars and intellectuals met to discuss the domestic affairs and reform demands. The National Dialogue meetings underpinned the legitimacy of the state, and functioned as a mechanism that connected political and civil society. Thus, they created a moral, cultural and intellectual system whose function it was to maintain the hegemonic persuasion and consent of the society as well as the persistence of the socio-political system.[552] In 2003, the Strategic Vision Statement, which was signed by 104 people and drafted by Abdullah Al Hammed from Riyadh, Mohammed Said Tayyeb from Jeddah, and Jafar al-Shayeb from Qatif, was sent to Crown Prince Abdullah; it included domestic challenges, external threats and reforms. Over 40 signatories of 104 people were invited to dialogue with Abdullah, which demonstrated Abdullah's concerns over the reform demanding society.[553] Likewise, during the second Palestinian intifada, Saudi youth's demonstration including women and Islamists demonstrated by stating that "You must take on board what we feel", "We are the nation and are not consulted."[554] Crown Prince Abdullah attempted to appease the demonstrations by exercising a firm attitude towards the US and promising to give financial help to the Palestinians in his speech during the Arab

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[550] Princess Adila, Princess Maryam and Princess Sahab were the other daughters of King Abdullah who made marriages with the wish of their father. However, according to the news in 2014, Princess Sahar, Maha, Jawaher, and Hala were under house arrest. In Stacy Brown, "'We are Hostages': A Saudi Princess Reveals Her Life of Hell," *New York Post,* April 19, 2014, accessed January 16, 2019, https://nypost.com/2014/04/19/a-saudi-arabian-princess-reveals-her-life-of-hell/.

[551] Iris Glosemeyer, "Checks, Balances and transformation in the Saudi political system," In *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*, ed. Paul Aarts, Gerd Nonneman (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2005): 228.

[552] Thompson, *Saudi Arabia,* 22.

[553] Ibid, 55.

[554] Mai Yamani, "Awakening," *The World Today* 56, no. 12 (2000): 22.

meeting in Cairo in 2000. The endeavors of Abdullah provided an internal outlet for social discontent, marginalized people, and liberals[555] into the state municipal elections, women's access to elections for voting and being elected, tolerating petitions, and expanding the members of *Majlis al-Shura*. However, Abdullah failed to intervene imprisoned liberals like Abdullah al-Hamid, Ali al-Dumaini, and Matruk al-Faleh for criticizing the political establishment in 2004 and were pardoned by King Abdullah once he came to the throne in August 2005.[556] Fawzia al-Oyouni and Jamila al-Oqla, the wives of Ali al-Dumaini, and Matruk al-Faleh, were influential figures during that time, appearing in campaigns and writing petitions.

The policies of King Abdullah were highly related to the regional and domestic environment of the post 9/11 period which brought a media attack on the Saudi state, thereby pressing the state to cooperate with different groups of the society. Glosemeyer argues that this process contributed to an establishment of nascent Saudi national identity rather than Najfis, Hijazis, Shiites, or Hanbalis.[557] The 2003 Riyadh bombings after 9/11 accelerated this process, and both leadership and society cooperated by threat of external interference, terrorist attacks and invasion of Iraq.[558] Following the 2004 Riyadh terror attacks, state security services began to act arbitrarily, free from constitutional restraint, while citizens preferred to maintain the status quo. During this time, Prince Nayef controlled the MOI, and Prince Salman, as Governor of Riyadh, controlled the religious police, unofficially tightening controls on society.

King Abdullah was a more forward-leaning figure than other princes, who rallied for the throne, and a more pious and less corrupt prince at home who involved himself in local and regional affairs.[559] Throughout the 1980s and 90s, corruption was a rallying point against King Fahd; for instance, Osama bin Laden's criticism of the state corruption resonated deep within the Kingdom. Hence, King Abdullah paid more attention to domestic affairs through certain aspects of social and political reforms, despite the

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[555] In post 9/11 two trends of liberals: social liberals believe in social and cultural reform; political liberals believe on social cultural reform must go with political one. In Thompson, *Saudi Arabia,* 55.

[556] "New Saudi King Pardons Jailed Reformists," *The Irish News*, August 9, 2005, accessed October 24, 2019, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/new-saudi-king-pardons-jailed-reformists-1.1181103.

[557] Glosemeyer, "Checks, Balances and," 223.

[558] Ibid, 224.

[559] "Bronson: King Abdullah's Ascension Seen as Important 'Plus' by Washington," Interview with Rachel Brunson by Bernard Gwertzman, *Council on Foreign Relations,* August 3, 2015, accessed February 12, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/interview/bronson-king-abdullahs-ascension-seen-important-plus-washington.

constraints within the royal family. This was in part due to the regional and domestic threat assessments of their own periods of ruling. To illustrate, King Fahd was more interested in global politics during his rule; Saudi Arabia was heavily involved in trying to hedge Soviet, and often Libyan, expansion in Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan as well as sending aid to Africa and Central Asia. Abdullah, both as Crown Prince and King (though, taking the title of king gained him more respect and power within the family) was often focused more on the region and the domestic politics: The Arab Peace Initiative in February 2002, first municipal elections in 2015, increasing the number of seats to 150 members in *Majlis al-Shura*[560], women's right for running in municipal elections[561] and the appointment of 30 women to the *Majlis al-Shura* can be given as examples of the Crown Prince and later King Abdullah's initiatives for the increased concerns of Saudi society to domestic affairs and reform demands.[562] However, King Abdullah's period was mostly challenged by the middle classes as businessmen, civil servants and academics, many of whom were educated in the West, appeared as the main advocates of liberal reforms inside the kingdom.[563]

The relations between King Abdullah and the senior princes revealed the fact that no one except the king and the core elite had direct influence on the decision-making process. While the seniority principle helped the succession system to maintain its traditional selection criteria during the King Abdullah period he, like previous kings, appointed the princes closest to him, his sons to higher positions, and unofficially his daughter as an adviser to him. However, the King Abdullah period did not experience a process of favoring the sons for the throne by appointing them as the crown princes. In this sense, his period was the last one where the traditional method of succession based on the seniority principle continued to be respected for the throne. On the other hand, by establishing the Allegiance Council in 2004, King Abdullah showed his intention to

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[560] King Fahd increased the number of seats from 60 to 120 members in the period 1997–2001, and 120 members in the period of 2001–2005.

[561] In December 2015, "a total of 978 women have registered as candidates, alongside 5,938 men. Only 130,000 women registered to vote, compared with 1.36 million men." In "Saudi Arabia's Women Vote in Election for First Time," *BBC*, December 12, 2015, accessed December 23, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35075702.

[562] King Abdullah first announced that he was planning to name women to the Shura Council in 2011, when he also said they would be allowed to vote and stand as candidates in the 2015 municipal elections." In "Saudi Arabia's King Appoints Women to Shura Council," *BBC*, January 11, 2013, accessed May 25, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20986428.

[563] "Saudi Arabia's Political Dilemmas," *Strategic Comments* 7, no. 10 (2001): 1–2.

counter the Al-Sudayri family's monopoly over the succession in the future. However, the Council could not go far from selecting the crown prince in accordance with the king's recommendations, as illustrated by the selection of the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2017. Due to the sources of change in the regional security environment, such as Iraq's invasion in 2003, and the 2006 Lebanon-Israel war, the first years of the King Abdullah period followed a trend of strengthening the penetration of the state with the people not thought to be represented in the Saudi political system or marginalized because of their religious identities. Overall, Saudi foreign policy under King Abdullah revealed the mutual reconstruction of the regional security dynamics and domestic politics at the times of crisis, wars and conflicts in the neighbors.

4.1.2. Royal Family as an Institution: Princely Circles and Royal Narratives

Royal reputations and rivalries are constructed and prone to change over time in accordance with the domestic advocators of a particular prince within the royal family. King Fahd's reign experienced a firm rivalry between Crown Prince Abdullah and Minister of Interior, Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz, to succeed in gaining the throne, and ended with Crown Prince Abdullah's success. This trend was normal in the history of succession of Saudi Arabia as, since the death of Ibn Saud in 1953, the caliphate system has been organized by the rapid installation of a new king after death, disability, isolation or the assassination of the predecessor king, albeit internal rivalries were sometimes there to cause fractures in the leadership. The ruling family grappled with complicated regional politics while also handling issues such as domestic, political, economic and social reform in the beginning of king Abdullah's rule. However, the last years of King Abdullah's reign displayed a different trend, in which royal actors no longer had a clear indication of what would happen in the future.

Historically, senior members of the ruling family were entrusted with particular portfolios as part of a formal institutionalized process, although this practice gradually began to lose its validity.[564] The kings and senior princes tended to circulate their previous positions to their sons throughout Saudi royal history. Following the death of King Abdullah, the head of the National Guard title was transferred to his son Mutaib bin Abdullah, Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz's son, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, served

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[564] Kechichian, in online-written interview.

as the minister of interior after his father, and Prince Khalid bin Sultan became the deputy minister of defense while his father Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz served as minister of defense for nearly half a century. However, since the death of King Fahd in 2005, the succession issue has become less predictable, more ambiguous and complicated. As the King Abdullah period experienced a different dynamic than the former reigns due to the aged senior princes and the question of who would shape the future of the Kingdom, questions and worries about the new successor were prevalent in the royal family. In particular, following the death of Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, Prince Nayef became the Crown Prince at the age of 78, and the rivalry grew fierce between Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, as the Director General of the Saudi Intelligence Service, Prince Salman as the governor of Riyadh, and Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz as the deputy Minister of Interior. The death of Prince Sultan was a turning point which allowed the ruling family to consider the potential candidates for the title of crown prince. The rivalry was in fact between the senior princes for the title, and in preparing their sons as potential candidates for the throne. With the flow of information through the internet and social media, rivalries, ambitions and double-dealings among the senior princes could not be prevented from appearing in the public domain.

During King Abdullah's reign, neither Crown Prince Sultan nor Prince Nayef were against the king publicly, and their differences were swept under the carpet. Crown Prince Sultan was known to be siding with King Abdullah in royal disputes and warned the other senior princes to avoid agitating the stability and internal security by stating: "If we challenge Abdullah where will it end?"[565] King Abdullah worked respectively with Prince Sultan, Prince Nayef, Prince Ahmed, Prince Muqrin and Prince Salman as the crown princes, who were all members of the Al-Sudayri branch of the Al-Saud family (table 4.3, table 4.4.). An exception was Prince Muqrin who served as the adviser of King Abdullah in 2012. While Crown Prince Abdullah was portrayed as a 'reformer' and even projected as *rajul al-howar wa rajul al-islah* (man of dialogue and reform)[566], Prince Nayef and Prince Sultan were portrayed as princes in favor of conservativism who were

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[565] "Crown Prince Sultan Backs the King in Family Disputes," February 12, 2007, accessed February 13, 2019, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07RIYADH296_a.html#.

[566] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Circles of Power: Royals and Society in Saudi Arabia," In *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs,* ed. Paul Aarts, Gerd Nonneman (UK: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2005): 210.

less reform minded in domestic and regional politics. While King Abdullah was in favor of more openness, tolerance, and engagement with the outside world, Prince Nayef was the opposite. For instance, Prince Nayef disapproved of women driving in the 1990s, punished human-rights activists, and stated his unwillingness to openly give seats to women in the Council, while King Abdullah introduced the first municipal elections in 2005 (then in 2011 and 2015).[567] It may not be correct to portray King Abdullah as a reformer, however, in Saudi context he seemed to be more open, did not totally agree with the Wahhabi religious discourse on Saudi society, and was tolerant to the petitions and reform demands of the people.

Crown Princes		
Name	Family background	In Duty
Abdullah bin Abdulaziz	Al-Shuraim	1982-2005
Sultan bin Abdulaziz	Al-Sudayri	2005-2011 (died during duty)
Nayef bin Abdulaziz	Al-Sudayri	2011-2012 (died during duty)
Salman bin Abdulaziz	Al-Sudayri	2012-2015
Muqrin bin Abdulaziz	Baraka Al-Yamaniyah	January 2015 - April 2015 (resigned)
Mohammed bin Nayef	Al-Sudayri	2015-2017 (was removed)
Mohammed bin Salman	Al-Sudayri	2017-present

Table 4.3: Family Background and Duty Periods of Crown Princes

Deputy Crown Princes	In Duty
Sultan bin Abdulaziz	1982-2005
Nayef bin Abdulaziz	2009-2011
Mohammed bin Nayef	January 2015 - April 2015
Mohammed bin Salman	2015-2017

Table 4.4: Duty Periods of Deputy Crown Princes

King Abdullah brought limitations to the privileges of the royal family actors and their families after telling his brothers that he was over 80 years old and did not want to reach his judgment day with "the burden of corruption on my shoulder". In accordance with this, he curtailed toll free mobile phone services for royal family members, and his government paid for their suites in Jeddah hotels, and unlimited tickets for them on

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[567] "Bronson: King Abdullah's."

Saudia Airline.[568] This arrangement was argued to be the reason for King Abdullah's great popularity among the people of Saudi Arabia, despite his decision being openly challenged by Prince Nayef and Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz.

King Abdullah displayed the portrait of an ordinary person as illustrated in the statement of his son-in-law, Prince Faisal bin Abdullah: "He is the closest route between two points - a straight line… The way he perceives things is very straightforward."[569] After the death of King Fahd, Abdullah was expected to take constructive steps towards the reforms, but was often questioned regarding how far he could take them. He was seen as the reformer who permitted courteous criticism of himself and his family, and allowed citizens to submit their grievances on the internet and on Facebook. On the international scene, King Abdullah enjoyed a "genuine and warm friendship" with Barack Obama and, after his death, Obama referred to Abdullah stating: "as a leader, he was always candid and had the courage of his convictions… One of those convictions was his steadfast and passionate belief in the importance of the US-Saudi relationship as a force for stability and security in the Middle East and beyond."[570] This does not mean King Abdullah was less religious than his half-brothers, on the contrary he took his responsibilities seriously in Mecca and Medina.[571] On the other hand, Princes Sultan and Nayef capitalized more on the security issues, and were more in favor of satisfying or appeasing the religious establishment, though they sacrificed reforms, especially in women's rights.[572]

Being a full brother or half-brother of the King, the background of the mother and personal characteristics are equally important in being considered as a potential King. King Abdullah studied traditional Islamic education in the Saudi royal court, was portrayed as a simple person who rejected being addressed as 'your majesty' but welcomed the title of 'Guardian of the Two Holy Shrines'[573], capitalized in tribal

[568] "Crown Prince Sultan."

[569] Brian Whitake, "Straightforward Is the Word Most Often Used to Describe Him, But It Is Not Always Meant As a Compliment," *The Guardian,* March 24, 2006, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/24/saudiarabia.brianwhitaker.

[570] Jim Kuhnhenn, "King Abdullah Dead: President Obama Hails Saudi Ruler's 'Bold Steps' In Advancing Arab Peace Initiative," *The Independent*, January 23, 2015, accessed November 14, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/king-abdullah-dead-president-obama-hails-saudi-ruler-s-bold-steps-advancing-arab-peace-initiative-9997081.html.

[571] Whitake, "Straightforward is."

[572] Roger Hardy, "Why Saudi Rulers Feel Under Siege," *BBC News*, October 4, 2011, accessed November 28, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15149351.

[573] Whitake, "Straightforward is."

Bedouin heritage and sought to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. According to his daughter, Princess Adelah, "He is very straightforward, very honest, and hates injustice" and "He had a tough childhood… He took on a lot of responsibility from the time he was very young."[574] He was not a favorite son and did not have support from the royal family for several reasons. He was a son of Fahda bint Asi al-Shuraim, who was the wife of Saud bin Abdulaziz Al-Rashid of the Rashidi Dynasty which had various battles with the Al-Saud and collapsed in 1921.[575] Since his mother was from the Shammar tribe of the Rashidi Dynasty, this was a barrier to his reign. As his mother died when he was only six years old, he did not have motherly support like other princes. He married 30 wives from daughters of the Shaalan of Aniza, al-Fayz of Bani Sakhr, and al-Jarba of the Shammar tribe. However, Abdullah as the head of SANG which was dominated by the Najd people, gained support from religious scholars and some sons of King Faisal on the distribution of power within the family, in addition to the impact of age-based seniority criteria to the throne. On his way to the throne, in 1962, he became commander of SANG, second deputy prime minister in 1975, first deputy prime minister and Crown Prince in 1982 under the rule of Fahd, de facto ruler in 1995 due to King Fahd illness, and finally became the king in August 2005.

Princess Adelah described Abdullah's reign by stating: "Change is always confronted by resistance and obstacles. Therefore, preparing to face obstacles and planning for gradual phases of change will make the management and integration of change easier. My father does not make hasty decisions or resolutions; they are all carefully studied by concerned bodies and are well planned."[576] During the 9/11 period, Abdullah was the Crown Prince but de facto leader of the kingdom, and felt embarrassed because of the involvement of some Saudi citizens in the attacks. His favorite daughter, his public face and his supposed adviser Princess Adelah, quoted from his statements at the night of 9/11: "I am sure our good people did not do these things."[577] However, he later defined the attackers as "the

[574] Christopher Dickey, "Saudi King Abdullah's Sudden Push for Reforms," *Newsweek*, March 20, 2009, accessed July 17, 2019, https://www.newsweek.com/id/190350.

[575] She had two sons from Saud bin Abdulaziz Al-Rashid; Abdulaziz and Mishal. She had three sons from King Abdulaziz; Abdullah, Nuf and Seeta.

[576] Rahilla Zafar, "Reflections on the Late King Abdullah From His Daughter Princess Adela," *Huffington Post*, March 25, 2015, accessed January 5, 2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/reflections-on-the-late-k_b_6531794.

[577] Dickey, "Saudi King Abdullah's."

deviant group" and took a more critical stance towards the claims of the relations of Saudi citizens in the attacks.

The King Abdullah period experienced the critical attitude of liberal and religious orientations towards the Saudi legitimacy. This was the case many times during the rule of other kings but they were quickly welcomed, if not tolerated, by King Abdullah. Many Saudis from different segments of society had urged Abdullah to initiate change on social, educational, youth and economic issues when he was crown prince, and the insufficiency of reforms in these fields was considered as a consequence of the limited opportunities for political participation. Due to the prevalence of the internet and social media, people through internet discussion boards began to ask for freedom, social justice, economic reform, and political participation. To illustrate, Radio al-Islah, which was an arm of the London based Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, Radio al-Tajdeed of the Party for Islamic Renewal, Tuwaa.com, Daralnadwa.com, Yaislah.org, Wasatiyah.com, Islamtoday.net were some of the web platforms on which people were raising their voices.[578]

The King Abdullah period was a period of establishment for the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, beside the wave of human rights petitions and constitutional monarchy calls. Establishment of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (active from 2005 - 2020) which invested over \$2 billion annually as an international scholarship program funded by the Saudi government, provided quality higher education for qualified Saudis especially in US. [579] Young Saudis who benefited from these scholarships became potential reformers and were given the opportunity to understand the insufficiency of state responses on social, educational, youth and economic matters. Many observers viewed a wave of human rights in 2003-2005 as the Riyadh spring that would lead to Saudi Arabia becoming a state of institutions rather than of a monarchy. This process was shattered, however, when Prince Nayef arrested many signatories in 2004. Once Abdullah came to the throne a few months later, he released the detainees but under the shadow of a war on terror campaign managed by Prince Nayef, and he failed to stop the flux of oppression in the kingdom.

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[578] Al-Rasheed, "Circles of Power," 191.
[579] Tamara Yakaboski, Karla Perez-Velez, Yousef Almutairi, "Collectivists' Decision-Making: Saudi Arabian Graduate Students' Study Abroad Choices," *Journal of International Students* 7, no. 1 (2017): 95-96.

The five circles of Ibn Saud's sons - Faisal, Fahd, Abdullah, Sultan, and Salman- produced eligible sons for the throne, but not all of them were awarded the title of king or crown prince. Many princes were eliminated long before their commenced their route to the throne; however, some still held high ranking positions such as commander, deputy minister of defense, deputy minister of culture and information, head of SANG or the governor of some regions. In Abdullah's circle, Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah was a prominent figure as the commander of the SANG from May 2013 to November 2017, and was once thought to be next in line for the throne. He studied in Sandhurst Royal Military Academy and was regarded as a pragmatic, ambitious, and well-liked prince by tribal leaders. Prior to his career as the head of the SANG, he was effective command of the force as his father had become the country's de facto leader in 1996. In 1983, he was promoted to the rank of Colonel by King Fahd and was commander of King Khalid Military City.[580] He was also the last member of Abdullah's Shammar branch to take a key position at the top of the Saudi power structure. His full brothers, Mishaal bin Abdullah, the governor of Mecca from 2013-15, and Turki bin Abdullah, a pilot in the Saudi Royal Air Force as well as the governor of Riyadh from 2014-15 were relieved of their positions in 2015.[581] Prince Mutaib was relieved of his post as the head of the SANG in November 2017, and was succeeded by Prince Khalid bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf Al Muqrin whose father, Prince Abdulaziz bin Mohammed, was one of the founders of the SANG and had worked with King Abdullah in the early 1960s to transform the force.[582] In 2017, Mutaib was imprisoned following accusations of embezzlement, giving allowances to his own firms, and a $10bn deal for walkie talkies and bulletproof military attire.[583] In addition to Prince Mutaib, King Abdullah's other sons, Prince Turki, Prince Faisal and Prince Mishaal, were also arrested in the same period and released later.

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[580] "Mutaib bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz," House of Saud: Saudi Royal Family, accessed February 2019, *https://houseofsaud.com/saudi-royal-family-profiles/mutaib-bin-abdullah-bin-abdulaziz-al-saud/*..

[581] Katie Paul, "Saudi Prince, Relieved From National Guard, Once Seen As Throne Contender," *Reuters*, November 5, 2017, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-government-defence defense-newsmaker-idUSKBN1D40VG.

[582] "FaceOf: Prince Khalid bin Abdul Aziz bin Ayyaf Al-Muqrin, Minister of the Saudi National Guard," *Arab News,* November 4, 2018, accessed October 26, 2019, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1399116/saudi-arabia.

[583] "Saudi Prince Miteb bin Abdullah Pays $1bn in Corruption Settlement," *Reuters*, November 29, 2017, accessed November 26, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/29/saudi-prince-miteb-bin-abdullah-pays-1bn-in-corruption-settlement.

In the Sultan circle, Bandar bin Sultan was the prominent prince and ambassador to the US between 1983-2005. As the head of general intelligence from 2012-2014, he shaped the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and relations with the US in the post-9/11 period. Khalid bin Sultan, Fahd bin Sultan, Faisal bin Sultan, and Turki bin Sultan were the prominent second-generation princes from the same mother, Munira bint Abdulaziz bin Musaed bin Jalawi. Prince Khalid, as the eldest son and deputy minister of defense, attained military training from the Sandhurst Royal Military Academy in 1968, pursued military studies at the US Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, and graduated from the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. He was the commander during Iraq's invasion in 2003 and Kuwait's invasion in 1990 and, given his experiences and memoirs during the first Gulf War, he authored "Desert Warrior".[584] After earning his master's degree in the US, Fahd bin Sultan became a long-time governor of Tabuk in July 1987. He built a university named Fahad bin Sultan University in Tabuk, and became deputy chairman of the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud Foundation.[585] Turki bin Sultan Al-Saud was deputy minister of culture and information, and Salman bin Sultan was the assistant secretary general of the Saudi Arabian National Security Council for intelligence and security affairs, as well as the former deputy defense minister. Badr bin Sultan was deputy Governor of Makkah, and was later appointed as emir of Al-Jouf by King Salman in February 2018.

In the Fahd circle, Prince Abdulaziz bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz was the favorite son of King Fahd, known with his critical views towards the UAE. He portrayed Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed as a deceiver to all Muslims, stating: "Don't put your photo next to Salman's… Bin Zayed has a "satanic black face."[586] Interestingly, it was rumored that Prince Abdulaziz died in 2017, yet he appeared in a photograph with Mohammed bin Salman in February 2019.[587] Prince Abdulaziz had followers who believed that he deserved to be appointed as the crown prince: "We want you be like Prince Nayef, may

[584] "Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al Saud," House of Saud: Saudi Royal Family, accessed January 2019, https://houseofsaud.com/saudi-royal-family-profiles/prince-khalid-bin-sultan-al-saud/..
[585] "FaceOf: Prince."
[586] "Son of Late King Fahd Criticizes UAE's Mohammed Bin Zayed," Middle East Monitor, July 26, 2017, accessed November 23, 2019, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170726-son-of-late-king-fahd-criticises-uaes-mohammed-bin-zayed/.
[587] "Picture of MBS with Prince Abdulaziz bin Fahad Goes Viral," Arab News, February 17, 2019, accessed October 23, 2019, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1453311/saudi-arabia.

God have mercy on him, as a lion and a thorn in the throat of the enemies."[588] He was also a partner of Saad Hariri in the Saudi Oger construction business which dated back to their fathers King Fahd and Rafiki Hariri. This demonstrates the level of connectedness in domestic personal relations between the Saudi princes and Lebanese political actors like Saad Hariri, hence the influence of Saudi Arabia over the Sunni front in Lebanon. Turki bin Mohammed bin Fahd, the eldest son of Prince Mohamed bin Fahd bin Saud, was appointed by royal decree of King Salman, a minister of state, and a member of Cabinet in December 2018.[589] Prior to his appointment, Prince Turki fled Saudi Arabia prior to the arrests of the Saudi princes in the corruption crackdown of 2017, and the death of Prince Mansour bin Muqrin in a helicopter crash.[590] While the deaths of the sons of King Fahd and Crown Prince Muqrin raised Prince Turki's concerns about his life in the kingdom, it was claimed by Simon Aran, the Israel Radio's political correspondent on Arab affairs, that Prince Turki was offered political asylum by Iran.[591] Prince Turki's arrival in Iran as a political asylum seeker illustrated the political tact of Iran towards the Saudi decision-making system and succession crises by protecting the dissident Saudi princes. At this time, Sultan bin Fahd was the former president of youth welfare, Faisal bin Fahd was the president of Youth Welfare in Saudi Arabia from 1975 to 1999, Saud bin Fahd was a Saudi Arabian businessman and the vice president of general intelligence, and Mohammed bin Fahd was the former governor of the eastern provinces until 2013 and succeeded by Saud bin Nayef.

In the Faisal circle, Khalid bin Faisal was a prominent prince as the governor of Makkah Province from 2015, as the Minister of Education from 2013 to 2015, and also the Governor of Asir Province from 1971 to 2007. Mohammed bin Faisal was a Saudi businessman and a member of the House of Saud, and he was also one of the guides in the establishment of Islamic banking in the kingdom. Prince Mohammed was a member

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[588] "الأمير عبد العزيز بن فهد يطلق على نفسه لقب "خادم السنة" عبر التويتر," *Akhbaar 24 News,* June 19, 2012, accessed December 9, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/104091.

[589] "Saudi Prince Turki bin Mohammed bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz Thanks King Salman," *Al Arabiya*, December 28, 2018, accessed March 15, 2020, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2018/12/28/Saudi-Prince-Turki-bin-Mohammed-bin-Fahd-bin-Abdulaziz-Thanks-King-Salman.

[590] "With Saudi Princes Dead, Arrested, King Fahd's Grandson Flees Kingdom to... Iran," *India Today*, November 7, 2017, accessed May 7, 2020, https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/saudi-arabia-prince-turki-bin-mohamed-bin-fahd-flees-to-iran-1081165-2017-11-07.

[591] Abhishek G Bhaya, "Riyadh Rejects Prince's Death 'Rumors' Even As Another Royalty Flees to Iran," *CGTN*, November 8, 2017, accessed September 16, 2019, https://news.cgtn.com/news/77557a4e34597a6333566d54/share_p.html.

of the Board of Dar-Al-Maal Al-Islami Trust, Faisal Islami Bank (Sudan), Faisal Islami Bank (Egypt), and Ithmaar Bank (Bahrain). From Salman's circle, Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the second son, was a former Royal Saudi Air Force pilot and the first member of a royal family to become an astronaut. He was also the first Arab and Muslim to fly into space. Sultan bin Salman became the Secretary-General of the Supreme Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) in 2000, contributing significantly to the improvement of Saudi Arabia's tourism strategy.[592] Faisal bin Salman was the governor of Madinah province from 2013, studied political science at the King Saud University, and was awarded a PhD on "Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: Power Politics in Transition 1968-1971" from Oxford University in 1999.[593] Prince Ahmed bin Salman, as chairman of Asharq Al-Awsat, Prince Fahd bin Salman, the eldest son of Riyadh Governor, was deputy governor of the Eastern Province and an adviser at the Ministry of Interior[594]. Abdulaziz bin Salman, as the deputy oil minister of Saudi Arabia between 2005 and 2017[595], appeared to be the prominent figure of the Salman circle which began to strengthen among the royal circles after King Salman's rule in 2015.

4.1.3. The Royal Quandary between King Abdullah and Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz

Prince Nayef and King Abdullah were portrayed as opposing figures in interpreting the politics, royal claims, society, reforms and regional crises. Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz, a member of Sudayri Seven of the al-Saud family, was a prominent security figure of Saudi Arabia as a long-term head of the Ministry of Interior from 1975. Saudi society tended to refer to him as the lion of sunnah, defense of noble sunnah, watchful eye, prince of wisdom, deputy goodwill, and commander of intellectual security.[596] He was a well-informed prince on internal and external security affairs of the kingdom, and had a strong

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[592] "Sultan bin Salman Al Saud," House of Saud: Saudi Royal Family, accessed June 2019 *https://houseofsaud.com/saudi-royal-family-profiles/sultan-bin-salman-al-saud/*.

[593] "Faisal bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud," House of Saud: Saudi Royal Family, accessed March 4, 2019, https://houseofsaud.com/saudi-royal-family-profiles/faisal-bin-salman-bin-abdulaziz-al-saud/.

[594] Saud Al-Tuwaim, Maher Abbas and Badr Al-Nayyef, "Prince Fahd Ibn Salman Dies at 46," *Arab News,* July 26, 2001, accessed March 14, 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/214109.

[595] "Profile: Prince Abdulaziz Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz," *Asharq Al-Awsat,* February 1, 2015, accessed March 30, 2019, https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/theaawsat/business/profile-prince-abdulaziz-bin-salman-bin-abdulaziz.

[596] "نايــف بن عبدالعزيـــز قامــة شامخــــة ومسيـــــرة حافلــــة," *Al-Watan*, June 17, 2012, accessed April 18, 2019, https://alwatannews.net/article/128952/نايف-بن-عبدالعزيز-قامة-شامخة-ومسيرة-حافلة.

personality and notorious character for speaking his mind.[597] Like other princes, Prince Nayef was educated at the Princes' School by the leading scholars and sheikhs, and then studied diplomacy and security affairs. Prince Nayef began his career as the deputy governor of the Riyadh region at the age of 18, and then became governor of Riyadh in 1953. Later, in 1975, Prince Nayef began working as the Minister of Interior, which he did for almost 37 years. King Abdullah appointed him as the second deputy prime minister in 2009, whereby he gained more responsibility among the other princes in the power sharing of the kingdom, and particularly when King Abdullah suffered a herniated disc in his back in October 2010.[598]

Prince Nayef had a reputation as a hard-liner and a conservative figure inside the kingdom. He was known to oppose reform demands for Saudi women, Shiite populations, and freedom of expression in the society. Prince Nayef did not hide his views of the reforms, declaring: "I don't want to be Queen Elizabeth."[599] Compared to his brothers, he was believed to be more affiliated to the Wahhabi religious establishment, and had an authority over the religious police *mutawa*, both of which were a major tool for Prince Nayef in maintaining stability in the kingdom and preventing the spread of violent jihadi movements. To illustrate his conservatism, one might emphasize the shutdown of the 2006-2008 Jeddah Film Festival, entitled Jeddah Visual Show Festival, to avoid any provocation.[600] In June 2009, the 4th Jeddah Film Festival was cancelled by the Minister of Interior by a *fatwa* of grand mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh on the basis of disastrous societal impacts of the movies for Saudi society.[601] Another Saudi cleric, Sheikh Dr. Yousuf Al-Ahmad, supported banning the film festivals and described the cinemas as "an effort by hypocrites to implement the program of Westernization, to corrupt society, and to distance it from Allah's laws."[602] Likewise, chief of the religious police, Ibrahim Al-Ghaith, objected to a screening of the comedy film Menahi, produced by the Rotana company owned by Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, by

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[597] "Obituary: Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud," *BBC News*, June 16, 2012, accessed February 24, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15500679.
[598] Ibid.
[599] Bruce Riedel, "The Prince of Counter Terrorism," *The Brookings Essay,* September 29, 2015.
[600] Andrew Hammond, *Pop Culture in North Africa and the Middle East: Entertainment and Society around the World* (ABC-CLIO, 2017): 116.
[601] Y. Admon, "Revival of Cinema Sparks Debate in Saudi Arabia," *MEMRI*, March 11, 2010, accessed January 21, 2019, https://www.memri.org/reports/revival-cinema-sparks-debate-saudi-arabia.
[602] Ibid.

defining the cinema as "evil and corrupting".[603] These policies of the Ministry of Interior under the control of Prince Nayef alerted the liberal segments of society, especially after he was appointed as the crown prince by King Abdullah. They were worried that if he became the future king, he would abolish the reforms that had been achieved during the King Abdullah period.

Prince Nayef has also been described as a difficult and uneasy person with in-depth analytical talents and critical thinking. He controlled Saudi internal security apparatus for a long time, and made critical foreign policy suggestions against the US and Israel; for instance, he accused Mossad for being behind the 9/11 attacks, and he even proposed that US citizens entering the kingdom should do so through fingerprinting. According to the US Embassy assessments in 2009, he was "a firm authoritarian at heart".[604] On the other hand, Prince Nayef maintained solid relations with most of the Arab countries; for example, in the case of ousted Tunisian President Zayn al- Abidine bin Ali in 2011, Prince Nayef was influential in hosting him in Saudi Arabia, and he initiated the sending of troops to Bahrain following the protests during the Arab uprisings.[605] The fall of the long-term allies of Saudi Arabia demonstrated the fluidity of the leaderships and instability of alliances in the region, alarmed the Saudi domestic security apparatus into preventing a spill-over effect of the uprisings into the kingdom, and hardened the state discourse towards the domestic dissidents and the dissidents within neighbors like Bahrain.

Another controversial issue during his term as the Minister of Interior was the relationship between Al-Qaeda and the Saudi royal family. It has in fact been a highly complex issue that has followed an unstable trend throughout the history. During his service as the Minister of Interior, Prince Nayef faced the challenges of Al-Qaeda's strong presence inside Saudi Arabia, which was observed in the attacks between 2003 and 2006; in particular, in the US consulate in Jeddah, in Riyadh residential compounds and in the world's largest oil processing facility in Abqaiq. Prior to the 9/11 period, Prince Nayef had tended to ignore the vigorous establishment of the Al-Qaeda inside the Ministry of

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[603] Ibid.

[604] "Saudi Crown Prince Nayef, Next in Line to Throne, Dies," *The National*, June 16, 2012, accessed March 14, 2020, https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/saudi-crown-prince-nayef-next-in-line-to-throne-dies-1.465580.

[605] "الأمير نايف بن عبد العزي," *Aljazeera Arabic*, November 11, 2011, accessed July 5, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/10/27/الأمير-نايف-بن-عبد-العزيز.

Interior.[606] From 2001, the Ministry of Interior increased its security measures via the army, police, emergency forces and intelligence in the kingdom, and expanded its budget for the general security service (*al-Mabahith al-'Amma*) which had been the directing the domestic intelligence services reporting directly to the Ministry of Interior.[607] In tandem, Prince Nayef claimed that Al-Qaeda could not possibly have organized an attack such as 9/11.[608] Following the 2003 attack in Riyadh, he began to shift his perception towards Al-Qaeda's involvement in 9/11, and pursued an iron fist policy against Al-Qaeda.[609] On the other hand, Saudi cleric Ali bin al-Khudayr, a close insider of Al-Qaeda, issued a fatwa advising his followers to indicate the US as one of the greatest enemies that Islam has ever faced. Khudayr was not arrested until the 2003 Riyadh suicide bombings which italicized the direct threat to the political status quo.[610] The Riyadh bombings also led the leaders and elements of Al-Qaeda into Yemen and joined the Al-Qaeda branch of the Arabian Peninsula. Prince Nayef's son, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, Deputy Minister of Interior, was a trusted figure in deradicalizing violent "extremists" and, under the rehabilitation program, the Ministry of Interior assigned imams with teaching "correct" Islam in order to suspend the "extremists" from a violent interpretation of Islam.[611] By 2008, the decision-makers believed that Al-Qaeda was largely removed from the kingdom; however it proved the opposite when in August 2009, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the face of counterterrorism operations in Saudi Arabia, was subjected to a failed assassination attempt by Al-Qaeda of Yemen.[612]

Despite his differences with King Abdullah who had controlled the SANG since the 1960s, Prince Nayef was able to consolidate his authority on civil servants and internal security force. Loyalty and patronage were two defining pillars of state institutions like security forces, intelligence services, and the Minister of Interior. Prince Nayef was in

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[606] Riedel, "The Prince of Counter."

[607] "Mapping the Saudi State, Chapter 2: The Ministry of Interior (Part 1)," *Report, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain,* accessed on April 7, 2021, https://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015.04.24_MSSCh.2_The-MOI-Pt.-1.pdf.

[608] Ibid.

[609] "فضائية آسيوية شددت على "الكاريزما" التي جعلت السعوديين يجمعون على تقديره. صحف العالم ترثي الأمير نايف: دمر "القاعدة" وصان "الأمن الوطني" لبلاده," *Al-Hayat*, September 17, 2012, accessed June 13, 2019, https://www.sauress.com/alhayat/31829051.

[610] Michael Scott Doran, "The Saudi Paradox," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 1 (2004): 40,41,42.

[611] "شخصيات وطنية: الفقيد جمع خصـــال الزعامـــة وعُـــرف بمآثـــره الإنسانيـــة," *Al-Watan*, June 17, 2012, accessed January 12, 2020, https://alwatannews.net/article/128957/-شخصيات-وطنية-جمع-الفقيد-خصال-الزعامة-وعرف-بمآثره-الإنسانية.

[612] Ibid.

favor of recruiting loyal Qasimis and southern Najdis for top positions within the security forces. On the other hand, however, low-ranking policemen and intelligence personnel were recruited from historically impoverished and peripheral tribal groups in Hijaz, Asir and Najd.[613] Likewise, SANG personnel was historically recruited from the tribes of Utaybah, Mutayr, Shammar (King Abdullah being a member of the tribe), Sebay, Ajman and Qahtan, while top leaders were allocated from Qassim and southern Najd tribes.[614] In order to establish durable authority in the religious field, King Abdullah surrounded himself with advisers, consultants, and high ranking civil personnel from Qassim and south Najd, and the cities of Unayzah and Buraydah who had strong networking with Islamic scholars, as well as the Al-Tuwayjiris of al-Majma'ah who supported his bureaucratized power.[615]

In his article *The Saudi Paradox,* Michael Scott Doran described the rivalry between King Abdullah and Prince Nayef as a tense and dual monarchy. Rivalry on the question of succession was evident since the King Fahd period, but neither prince had enough reinforcement to capture the throne. Doran argues that the two sides opposed each other on whether the state should reduce the power of the religious establishment. Prince Nayef allied with the clerics depicting the Christians, Jews, Shiites, and even pious Sunni Muslims as idolaters.[616] Since Prince Nayef was responsible for the *mutawa* in the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, he directly controlled the internal dynamics and security affairs. Doran portrays Prince Nayef as: "Not known personally as a pious man, Nayef zealously defends Wahhabi puritanism because he knows on which side his bread is buttered - as do others with a stake in the repressive status quo."[617] In contrast, King Abdullah allied himself with the *taqarub* principle (rapprochement between Muslims and non-Muslims) against the clerics associated with the hard-liner princes. He advocated relaxing restrictions on public debate, promoted democratic reform, initiated "national dialogue" with prominent Saudi liberals, increased the public role of women, endorsed elections, the establishment of an independent judiciary, and reduced the power of the clerics.[618]

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[613] Al-Rasheed, "Circles of Power," 202.
[614] Ibid, 204-205.
[615] Ibid, 206.
[616] Doran, "The Saudi Paradox," 36.
[617] Ibid, 37.
[618] Ibid, 38.

Despite opposing views on various issues, King Abdullah assigned Prince Nayef as the crown prince through the Allegiance Institution in. 2011. For some, appointment of Nayef was an attempt to send a message about the Al-Saud family uniting around the solidarity principle. For others, it was an attempt to absorb the anger among the Al-Sudayri family against the decision-making actors, or it was organized to resolve rivalry between Prince Nayef and his brother Prince Salman, who were both Al-Sudayri members motivated for the throne. On the other hand, appointment of an aged senior prince was also a kind of frustration among the second generation of princes of the royal family. Those younger princes, like Prince Turki Al-Faisal, Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal Al-Saud, Prince Khalid bin Sultan, Prince Bandar bin Sultan and Prince Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah were looking for a greater role in the decision-making process of the kingdom. For the liberals, Nayef's appointment was also frustrating because of his radical ideas about governance, society and woman rights. In one of his statements, Prince Nayef emphasized that his country "does not need representation for women in parliament and does not need elections", and for the participation of women in the council, Nayef argued: "I think there is no need."[619] Moreover, he responded to demands for the election of Shura Council members rather than them being appointed by King Nayef, stating: "The appointment is always best, even if it was an election."[620]

When Prince Nayef died in June 2012, he was the Minister of Interior, crown prince and deputy prime minister. King Abdullah held a prayer in all mosques of the cities in Saudi Arabia.[621] Gulf and Arab leaders portrayed Prince Nayef as a security specialist that saved the lives of many innocent people from terrorism and violence. They concluded that Prince Nayef had a very popular social personality inside the kingdom and the entire Arab world. For instance, the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the Kingdom of Bahrain, Taha Mohammed Abdul Qadir, stated: "We cannot but declare our solidarity brotherly with the sincere brotherly Saudi people in this painful patient and say only what pleases God (we are God and we refer to him) and no power but God.[622] The Vice-Sheikh

[619] "تعيين الامير نايف نائبا ثانيا لرئيس الوزراء يخلط الاوراق في الاسرة السعودية الحاكمة" *Palestine Today*, March 28, 2009, accessed May 22, 2019, https://paltoday.ps/ar/post/41216/-تعيين-الامير-نايف-نائبا-ثانيا-لرئيس-الوزراء خبر-تعيين-الامير-نايف-نائبا-ثانيا-لرئيس-الوزراء-يخلط-الاوراق-في-الاسرة-السعودية-الحاكمة.

[620] Ibid.

[621] "خادم الحرمين الشريفين يوجه بإقامة صلاة الغائب على الأمير نايف" *Saudi Press Agency*, July 17, 2012, accessed November 5, 2019, https://www.spa.gov.sa/1008290?lang=ar&newsid=1008290.

[622] "خليجيون وعرب: رحيل الأمير نايف خسارة كبيرة للسعودية والأمة العربية," *Al-Watan,* June 17, 2012, accessed June 21, 2019.

of the Al-Dawasir tribe in Dammam and the Kingdom of Bahrain, Shaikh Isa bin Ali bin Isa Al-Dosari: "Prince Nayef had the power of a whole nation with great achievements and heroic positions that would remain in everyone's memory… Prince Nayef's security school would remain and follow in his footsteps."[623] The US President, Barack Obama, underlined the significance of Nayef's security focused perspective on the region: "Crown Prince Nayef has been interior minister for decades and devoted himself to the security of Saudi Arabia and of the whole region."[624] British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said: "Prince Nayef has served Saudi Arabia for years with sincerity and dedication, and his contribution to the wellbeing and security of the kingdom will be remembered for a long time."[625] His departure seemed to receive similar reactions and condescension from all around the world, which shows the world's depiction of Nayef's image as a security figure of the kingdom.

Following the death of Prince Nayef, competition for influence among the princes of the second generation of the Saudi family was highly intensified. Minister of Interior, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef (Nayef's son), National Guard Minister Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah (Abdullah's son), and the head of the Royal Court Khalid Altwaijri (replaced Abdelaziz bin Fahd in 2011) a non-royal prince removed by King Salman in 2015, together appeared as an axis against the rest of the princes.[626] Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz was one of the princes who was allowed to serve as the Minister of Interior for only six months, from June to November 2012. In succession terms, the main question revolved around who would likely be the new crown prince. Mohammed bin Nayef, who was later appointed as the Minister of interior, was seen as a strong candidate for the crown prince title due to his experience on security affairs. However, his senior cousins, like Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Sultan (63), Minister of State and National Guard commander Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah (60), and Governor of the Eastern Province Prince Muhammad bin Fahd (62) were also expected to be considered as the new crown prince.[627] In this process, King Abdullah resolved the crisis of

[623] عيسى الدوسري," مواقـــف الأميــر نايـــف البطوليـــــة جعلتــــه بحجـــــم أمـــة," *Al-Watan,* June 17, 2012, accessed July 24, 2019.

[624] الأمير نايف كرّس نفسه لأمن السعودية وكل المنطقة," *Al-Watan,* June 17, 2012, accessed June 5, 2019.

[625] "فضائية آسيوية شددت." *Al-Hayat,* September 17, 2012, https://www.sauress.com/alhayat/31829051.

[626] Simon Henderson, "Saudi Resignation Prompts Fresh Succession Debate," *The Washington Institute*, November 5, 2012, accessed December 20, 2019, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/saudi-resignation-prompts-fresh-succession-debate.

[627] Ibid.

succession very quickly by appointing Prince Salman as the new crown prince through the Allegiance Institution, and Prince Ahmed, who had previously worked closely with Prince Nayef, as the new Minister of Interior. Following his appointment, Prince Salman praised King Abdullah and emphasized the unity among the Al-Saud brothers: "History has shown that this family is full of unity, cooperation and love. At the end of the reign of King Ibn Saud, there were those who said what will happen to this country and this family? They said the same after King Saud, after King Faisal, after King Khalid and then after King Fahd. Praise be to God that anyone who monitors our situation and knows it well will find that your brothers will always rally round you, along with all your family and your people, praise be to God."[628]

Growing influence of the axis, including Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the Minister of National Guard Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah and the President of the Royal Court Prince Khalid Altwaijri, paved the way for the removal of many princes and non-princes from their positions. For example, Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz was removed from the head of the Ministry of Interior and was succeeded by Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, secondly Prince Khalid bin Sultan from the Deputy Minister of Defense and, thirdly, the head of the royal ceremony, Mohammed Al-Tabishi.[629] At this juncture, beside Prince Mohammed bin Nayef's position, Prince Mutaib bin Abduulah's role was increased within the House of Saud after his appointment as the head of SANG, and Prince Bandar bin Sultan's role as the head of Saudi intelligence with the help of his brother Prince Salman bin Sultan.

Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, the youngest son of King Abdulaziz, served in various positions, providing him with experience on national security issues as well as regional and international conflicts. He was portrayed as an affable and courteous figure with a good grasp of foreign affairs and political experience on security, beside his good relations with the US.[630] He served in the Saudi military as a pilot in the beginning of his career, later serving as the Emir of Hail and Madinah, the director of Saudi Intelligence from 2005 to 2012, deputy crown prince from January to April 2015, and special adviser

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[628] Tariq Al-Homayed, "The ruling House of Saud," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, June 19, 2012, accessed July 13, 2019, https://www.arabnews.com/ruling-house-saud.
[629] Ibid.
[630] "Proud of Trust Reposed in Me by King: Muqrin," *Saudi Gazette*, February 1, 2013, accessed April 18, 2019, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/30759.

to King Abdullah.[631] However, Prince Muqrin's rise to the throne was undermined because of the Yemeni background of his mother, who was not a Saudi princess with an impure lineage.[632] In 2015, Prince Muqrin resigned from his crown prince position, and succeeded by Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. Despite the questions raised as to whether it was prince's decision, his resignation was officially assumed as Prince Muqrin's personal decision to help the royal transfer of power to the younger princes.[633] King Salman decreed the resignation of Prince Muqrin as he did for the resignation of some other princes like Bandar bin Sultan as the head of intelligence: "We have received your resignation request in which feelings of loyalty and true brotherhood are evident."[634]

4.1.4. Allegiance Council and Royal Actors: Putting the Succession Process in Place

Representations of domestic crises, rivalries and developments have had their implications in regional security perceptions of the Saudi decision-makers. How the domestic structure and regional security politics of Saudi Arabia reconstructed each other throughout the crises and wars of the region, reveals the connectedness of the domestic and regional in the perception of the decision-makers. The timing of any regional crisis, war or an international event triggered a major domestic issue or a succession affair inside the kingdom.[635] Prior to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, the political history of Saudi Arabia revealed various examples of this. To illustrate, one can underline that the impact of Kuwait's invasion by Iraq was followed by a process of institutionalizing the consultative process in *Majlis Al-Shura* in 1993, as a royal coalition in accordance with the US demands from the Saudi governance. The 9/11 period forced Saudi Arabia to pressure the conservative elements within the decision-making system, such as

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[631] Abdullah Al-Qtaibi, "Opinion: Deputy Crown Prince Muqrin and Saudi State Stability," *Asharq Al-Awsat,* March 29, 2014, accessed April 12, 2020, https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/abdullah-al-otaibi/opinion/opinion-deputy-crown-prince-muqrin-and-saudi-state-stability.

[632] Johnlee Varghese, "'Political Earthquake' in Saudi Arabia: Prince Muqrin's Yemeni Lineage Cost Him the Crown?" *International Business Time,* April 29, 2015, accessed March 14, 2020, http://www.ibtimes.co.in/political-earthquake-saudi-arabia-prince-muqrins-yemeni-lineage-cost-him-crown-630774.

[633] Ali Al-Ghamdi, **"**Dawn of a New Era in the Kingdom," *Saudi Gazette,* May 5, 2015, accessed November 4, 2020, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/121900.

[634] "King Salman Thanks Former Crown Prince Muqrin For Tenure," *Saudi Gazette,* May 1, 2015, accessed June 18, 2019, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2015/05/01/King-Salman-thanks-former-Crown-Prince-Muqrin-for-tenure-.

[635] Alexander Bligh, "Changes in the Domestic-Foreign Policies Relationship in the Saudi Context in the Wake of the Change of the Guard," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 9, no. 1 (2018): 93–116.

increasing the seats for non-royal members like moderate intelligentsia and technocrats in the Council of Ministers.[636] Through limiting the conservative voices, Saudi Arabia aimed at alleviating the international pressure on the foreign policy of the kingdom. The 9/11 and 2003 terror attacks in Riyadh both forced the kingdom to broaden domestic reforms for foreign nationals and foreign investment, as well as being involved in the resolution of regional crisis such as the establishment of the Saudi Peace Initiative.[637] One can define the post-2003 war period as a period of broadening reforms, such as expanding the structure of the *Majlis Al-Shura* from an advisory council to a legislative body, holding local elections for the first time in 2005, allowing women to obtain commercial licenses in their own names without their male guardians' permission in 2003, and permitting women to participate in municipal elections for the first time in 2004. [638] Moreover, the decision-making actors acknowledged the importance of developing diplomatic relations with the US as well as Saudi intelligence; hence the assignment of Prince Turki bin Faisal as the successor of Prince Bandar bin Sultan as the US ambassador in 2005, Prince Bandar as the Secretary-General in Saudi National Security Council, and Prince Muqrin as the President of Saudi General Intelligence. Following this, in 2005, the first Saudi-US Strategic Dialogue was held in Jeddah with the co-chairing of Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud and the US Secretary of State Rice.

After the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, the kingdom went through a reform process to counter the rise of Iranian influence among the neighbors, especially in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria as well as the Shiite populations inside the kingdom. King Abdullah began changing some governmental positions like that of the head of religious police, Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ghaith, and senior judge Sheikh Salih Ibn Al-Luhaydan, as well as moderating the grand *ulama* commission by assigning more moderate clerics who were believed to bring reformist ideas to this process. He also appointed the kingdom's first woman minister, Nora bint Abdullah Al-Fayez, as the deputy education minister

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[636] Nawaf E. Obaid, In Al-Saud We Trust, *Foreign Policy*, no. 128 (Jan. - Feb., 2002): 7.

[637] Michael Herb, "Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 3 (2004): 382-383.

[638] Andrzej Kapiszewski, "Saudi Arabia: Steps Toward Democratization or Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?" *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 5/6 (2006): 472.

following the dismissal of Sheikh Saleh Al-Lihedan.[639] However, it would be an oversimplification to describe King Abdullah as a reformist king against the conservative nature of the societal, religious and political institutions, as the core coalition within the royal family required an alliance with key social actors, the Islamic values and business elites.[640]

Establishment of the Allegiance Council in October 2006 was a significant move in formalizing the royal succession which was first codified in the Basic Law of Governance issued by King Fahd in March 1992. Prior to this step, the Al-Saud Family Council had functioned as a similar mechanism for removing the ailing King Fahd from the throne. The fact that the Allegiance Council was established by a royal order *(amr malikî)* rather than a royal decree *(marsûm malikî)* strengthened its status and differentiated it from the Al-Saud Family Council, as it reflected the direct will of the king.[641] The Allegiance Council was a radical break from the previous understanding of the succession which had been defined by Ibn Saud based on choosing the most appropriate candidate among the princes in accordance with the principles of Quran and the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad. In his speeches, King Abdullah often underlined the compatibility of the Council with Ibn Saud's teachings and advised: "King Abdulaziz had urged us to become God fearing people and to enhance the pillars of justice, and to close our ranks, and to settle any difference through discussion and dialogue in a transparent manner, and not to allow anyone to interfere in our special affairs… I am confident that you are aware of this and will follow it."[642]

The Allegiance Council was established to organize the succession process under an institutionalized body where the decisions were taken in close meetings. James Smith, the former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (2009-2013), described the system of the Council as a result of the necessity of an extensive consultation with the family's senior members, stating: "This leadership, probably the world's only system of government by

[639] Julian Borger, "Saudi Arabia Appoints First Female Minister," *The Guardian*, February 16, 2009, accessed June 15, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/16/saudi-cabinet-woman-minister.
[640] Torgeir E. Fjærtoft, "The Saudi Arabian Revolution: How Can It Succeed?" *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 3 (2018): 140.
[641] Ibid.
[642] "King Abdullah Names Members of the Allegiance Commission," Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington DC, June 1, 2012, accessed January 27, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20120601061618/http://saudiembassy.net/latest_news/news12100801.aspx.

half-brothers, is consensus-based and by nature cautious, conservative, and reactive."[643] In the Council, 35 senior princes, including 16 sons and 19 grandsons of Ibn Saud, were the members of the council to choose the crown prince by a secret vote in 2006.[644] However, by 2019, the Council had 34 members including 4 surviving sons of Ibn Saud, his 29 grandsons and one great grandson. While the sons of Ibn Saud were lifetime members of the Council, a son of the King and a son of the Crown Prince with the capacity of being king could also be a member. The sons of their deceased brothers, like King Faisal's kin, and the third-generation grandsons could only be named for four-year periods. According to the Council regulations, the King chooses his crown prince candidate but consults with the members of the Council for the nomination of the candidate. The council can also decide to appoint a new king if the king is believed to be deprived of strength. Likewise, a WikiLeaks cable of a statement of a US embassy in 1995 revealed the US perception on the Saudi succession process by stating: "The inner circle of the Al-Saud (family) can and do exclude from succession those found lacking in lineage, leadership and personal character."[645] However, the King has the right to refuse these alternatives or candidates and designate his own candidate as the most appropriate.[646] If the King does not agree to the nomination of the Council, the Council casts a vote between its candidate and the King's nominee in thirty days from the date of the selection of the King.[647] Overall, the allegiance system was established to ensure the

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[643] "Saudi Succession: Can the Allegiance Commission Work?" October 28, 2009, accessed July 28, 2020, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RIYADH1434_a.html.

[644] The 35 members of the Allegiance Commission were: Prince Mishaal bin Abdulaziz; Prince Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz; Prince Miteb bin Abdulaziz; Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz; Prince Badr bin Abdulaziz; Prince Turki bin Abdulaziz; Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz; Prince Fawaz bin Abdulaziz; Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz; Prince Mamdouh bin Abdulaziz; Prince Abdul-Illah bin Abdulaziz; Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz; Prince Ahmad bin Abdulaziz; Prince Mash'hoor bin Abdulaziz; Prince Hazloul bin Adulaziz; Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz; Prince Mohammed bin Saud; Prince Khalid bin Al-Faisal; Prince Mohammed bin Saad; Prince Turki bin Faisal bin Turki (I); Prince Mohammed bin Nasser; Prince Faisal bin Bandar; Prince Saud bin Abdulmohsin; Prince Mohammed bin Fahd; Prince Khalid bin Sultan; Prince Talal bin Mansour; Prince Khalid bin Abdullah; Prince Mohammed bin Mishari; Prince Faisal bin Khalid; Prince Badr bin Mohammed; Prince Faisal bin Thamir; Prince Mishaal bin Majed; Prince Abdullah bin Musaed; Prince Faisal bin Abdulmajeed; and Prince Abdulaziz bin Nawaf.
See: F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East," Council Special Report no. 63 (New York, December 2011), accessed November 27, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2011/12/Saudi_Arabia_CSR63.pdf.

[645] "How Saudi Arabia Picks Its Kings," *Reuters*, June 17, 2012, accessed May 24, 2019, https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/how-saudi-arabia-picks-its-kings-1.1036659.

[646] Nabil Mouline, "Power and Generational Transition in Saudi Arabia," *Sciences Po: Critique Internationale,* no. 46 (2010), accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr.ceri/files/critique_add/ci46_nm.pdf.

[647] "تعيين الامير نايف."

safety of the succession transfer by eliminating any possible conflict within the royal family.

Despite the Council being criticized as being "an ambiguous and mysterious family body that resembled the Vatican's College of Cardinals" organized around the family bloodlines criteria beside seniority[648], it was "an institutional basis of governance and a clear mechanism for a smooth transition of power" during King Abdullah's period.[649] As stated by US Ambassador James Smith, the selection process was an independent process from any external influence, despite the fact that whoever became king would likely be disposed towards the US.[650] The most significant regulation of the Council was that it would not apply to King Abdullah and Crown Prince Sultan, but the future cases. This meant that Prince Sultan had the right to the throne automatically after King Abdullah, but it was not certain whether second deputy crown Prince Nayef would be required to be appointed as the next Crown Prince despite being the most senior after Prince Sultan.[651] On the other hand, it was unofficially believed that King Abdullah designed this system to counter the domination of the Al-Sudayri branch in the royal family and to protect the system of multi domination.[652] During Abdullah's reign, the Al-Sudayri branch was already controlling the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, the Eastern province of Al-Ahsa, Tabuk, and the Riyadh provinces. Interestingly, all the senior princes anticipated the throne; Princes Sultan, Nayef, and Salman were the members of the Al-Sudayri branch, hence King Abdullah's appointment of Nayef as the crown prince after the death of Prince Sultan was long speculated as being the result of royal pressure on king Abdullah by the Al-Sudayri princes.[653]

While King Abdullah was described as a "wise and kind" person, Crown Prince Sultan was portrayed as a "smart and shrewd" one.[654] Prince Sultan was appointed as the crown prince at the age of 70 in 2005 when he had already been ill with cancer, suffering from memory loss, and having examinations in New York, followed by rehabilitation in

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[648] Mai Yamani, "New Line."

[649] "تعيين الامير."

[650] "Saudi Succession: Can."

[651] Simon Henderson, "Desert Schism: Prince Nayef Bids for Saudi Throne," *The Washington Institute*, March 31, 2009, accessed July 12, 2019, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/desert-schism-prince-nayef-bids-saudi-throne.

[652] Ibid.

[653] Ibid.

[654] "Crown Prince Sultan Backs the King in Family Disputes," February 12, 2007, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07RIYADH296_a.html#.

Agadir. During Sultan's period of treatment, when he was unable to carry out his duties, king Abdullah was ill at the same time. Therefore, second deputy crown prince, Prince Nayef, who also suffered from leukemia, found his way to the throne. However, Prince Sultan died in 2011, and the crown prince title was taken by Prince Nayef, who also subsequently died in 2012. Since a crown prince was required to be appointed within 30 days of a new king ascending to the throne, it was an urgent issue for the royal family to compromise on a crown prince candidate for the next in succession, according to the law of the Allegiance Council, before Abdullah died. Formally, Prince Nayef was the candidate with the highest chance of occupying the position of the crown prince. On the other hand, there were a number of younger princes, like Al-Waleed bin Talal and Bandar bin Sultan, with the expectation of power. Consequently, the death of Prince Sultan, and the illness of King Abdullah and deputy crown Prince Nayef left the kingdom with an uncertain future and the challenge of creating a new generation of government. King Abdullah declared his decision to appoint Prince Nayef as the crown prince to the Allegiance Council members. He was subsequently appointed to the post by royal decree in October 2011. However, Prince Nayef's appointment came within the system of the Council, as did Prince Muqrin's appointment as the Deputy Crown Prince in 2015. This was as a result of King Abdullah and Crown Prince Salman's call for the Allegiance Council in March 2014, where he was chosen by more than a three-quarter majority.

One also needs to emphasize the opposition voices against the appointment of Prince Nayef as the crown prince of the kingdom. A liberal leaning royal actor, Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz, who was also the father of billionaire businessman Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, issued a statement questioning Nayef's political standing against reforms. Prince Talal, as a close ally of King Abdullah, expressed his concerns, stating: "I call on the royal court to clarify what is meant by this nomination and that it does not mean that he (Prince Nayef) will become crown prince."[655] Another controversial royal figure was the youngest son of the Sudayri Seven, Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz[656], who served as Deputy Minister of Interior from 1975 to 2012, and Minister of Interior for six months

[655] Henderson, "Desert Schism."
[656] Prince Ahmed went to Redlands College in the United States in 1962, and received his BA degree in management in 1968. He was appointed as the Deputy Governor of Makkah in June 1971 by King Faisal, also served as the operational head of the Special Security Force. In "Salman named Crown Prince, Ahmed Minister of Interior," *Saudi Gazette*, June 19, 2012, accessed May 23, 2019, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/6648.

(2012 June-November), but overlooked as a potential successor.[657] Prince Ahmed was removed from duty as the Minister of Interior by his full brother, Crown Prince Salman, and his power was diminished. The exempt of Prince Ahmed, who was believed not to have the capacity for leadership, was criticized by some Saudis as criminal, though this was responded to by Prince Ahmed who stated: "Why are you saying this about Al-Saud?... What does the whole of the Al-Saud family have to do with this? There are certain individuals who are responsible. Don't involve anyone else."[658] The attitude of Prince Ahmed was a differentiation of the Al-Saud family from King Salman's rule, and the first time a prince in the rank of succession had broken the historical silence on the family ciphers.[659] Prince Ahmed's dissatisfaction with the power was later illustrated in his opposition at the Allegiance Council (he was one of the three members who objected) for Mohammed bin Salman's appointment as crown prince in 2017. He then declined to attend official receptions given by King Salman.[660] More interestingly, in 2018, Prince Ahmed, as the only living full brother of King Salman, was backed to replace Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as the next in line; however, he was regarded as too unmotivated to be the next king, and attempted to act as a stopgap until a qualified candidate was chosen for the throne.[661]

4.1.5. The Domestic and Regional Practices of Prominent Royal Figures in 2006 Israel-Lebanon War

Prince Bandar was one of the controversial princes within the royal family, given his special posts inside and outside the kingdom. He performed his first and major position as the Saudi ambassador to the US from 1983 to 2005, then headed the Saudi intelligence from 2012 to April 2014. At the same time, he was the secretary-general of the National

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[657] Simeon Kerr, "Return of Senior Saudi Prince Sparks Speculation Over Role of MBS," *Financial Times*, October 31, 2018, Accessed November 16, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/19367f6c-dd20-11e8-8f50-cbae5495d92b.

[658] Ibid.

[659] Ibid.

[660] David Hearst, "Exclusive: Saudi King's Brother Is Considering Self-Exile," *Middle East Eye*, September 7, 2018, accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/exclusive-saudi-kings-brother-considering-self-exile-841116473.

[661] Bel Trew, "King Salman's Brother Lands in Saudi Arabia for Alleged 'Crisis Talks' After Khashoggi's Murder Rocks Kingdom," *The Independent*, October 31, 2018, accessed February 6, 2020, https://www.inkl.com/news/king-salman-s-brother-lands-in-saudi-arabia-for-alleged-crisis-talks-after-khashoggi-s-murder-rocks-kingdom.

Security Council with the rank of minister from 2005 to 2015. In early 2010, Prince Bandar attempted to overthrow King Abdullah to place his father Prince Sultan on the throne. However, Prince Sultan passed away before King Abdullah in October 2011, his death paving the way for Prince Bandar's de facto leadership in the Al-Sudayri branch.[662] Bandar bin Sultan was a graduate of the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell in 1968, and held a master's degree in International Public Policy from Johns Hopkins University.[663] Despite his education and skills, the origin of his mother, Khizaran Al-Saud as a southern Saudi and concubine of Prince Sultan, was a barrier to him accessing the throne and the driving force for him to legitimize himself in the eyes of his father.[664] Prince Bandar was considered to be one of the most influential diplomats in the US and, according to Riedel, he was "probably the most effective ambassador in Washington ever… He was highly regarded by every president."[665] Furthermore, Prince Bandar, as an ambassador to the US and a close friend of President Bush, was an influential actor in the Saudi claims of being a moderate partner to the US.[666]

Despite the allegations, accusations and proven documents[667], Prince Bandar was a respected senior prince within the royal family who had taken key roles inside and outside of the kingdom. On many occasions, he stated his belief in the gradual development of Saudi society, state, politics and the decision-making process: "From the time of King Abdulaziz until today, Saudi Arabia is the only country where the state

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[662] "Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan Visits Royal Court Media, Research Center," *Al Arabiya,* February 27, 2018, accessed February 15, 2020, https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2018/02/27/Saudi-Prince-Bandar-bin-Sultan-visits-Royal-Court-media-research-center.

[663] "Bandar bin Sultan: Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Architect Power Broker Ambassador," House of Saud: Saudi Royal Family, accessed November 2019, https://houseofsaud.com/saudi-royal-family-profiles/bandar-bin-sultan/.

[664] Craig Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud: The Secret Relationship Between the World's Two Most Powerful Dynasties* (Scribner, 2004), 59.

[665] Jennifer Rizzo, "Prince and the '28 pages': Indirect 9/11 link to Saudi royal revealed," *CNN Politics*, August 5, 2016, accessed November 24, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/05/politics/28-pages-saudi-prince-bandar-9-11/index.html.

[666] Ian Bremmer, "The Saudi Paradox," *World Policy Journal* 21, no. 3 (2004): 23–30.

[667] Prince Bandar was exposed to several allegations during his duty as an ambassador and the head of Saudi intelligence. The 28 paged US congressional report in 2002, which was part of the investigations for the 9/11 attacks and kept private by the US President Bush later released by his successor Barack Obama, revealed an 'indirect link' between a Colorado company associated with Prince Bandar and an al-Qaeda member. In Jess Staufenberg, "9/11 report: Secret 28 pages reveal 'indirect link' to Saudi prince," *The Independent*, August 6, 2016. Also, following this, another possible link was revealed between Prince Bandar, his wife Princess Haifa al-Faisal and the 9/11 attacks; which was the Bandar's relationship with a Saudi national and US resident named Osama Bassnan. As Riedel implies, Bandar was known to give "a lot of money to charity" and "he gave some of the best parties Washington probably has ever had". In Rizzo, "Prince and."

wants to progress."[668] Prince Bandar was a very close figure to the former US President George Bush and his family, as Riedel asserts: "Bandar was in the White House I would say every other day and in some periods every day. It was a very, very close relationship… And I think President Bush and Bandar genuinely liked each other."[669] During Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the mobilization of Saddam Hussein's troops on the Saudi border, Prince Bandar bin Sultan asked President George HW Bush: "How far can you go?" Bush's response was: "If you ask for help from the United States, we will go with you to the end."[670]

Prince Bandar was a prominent actor in the resolution of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war and the Saudi-Israel engagements following the war. During his Saudi national security adviser position, Prince Bandar allegedly advocated a military response against Iran and was known for his distrust of Iran, stating: "We all know that Saddam Hussein is a criminal and a murderer, but Khomeini declared in a speech that he would liberate Iraq first and then go to liberate the Gulf states by force..."[671] After he resigned from his post in Saudi intelligence in June 2014, Prince Bandar was appointed as a special adviser to King Abdullah, and his son Prince Khalid bin Bandar became the head of Saudi intelligence in 2014-15.[672] Prince Khalid was a graduate of Sandhurst Royal Military College, respectively promoted to the rank of ground forces commander, the deputy minister of defense, the governor of Riyadh, ambassador to Germany in June 2017, and then ambassador to the UK. Like his son, Prince Bandar's daughter, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, was assigned as the first Saudi female ambassador to the US in 2019. Both Prince Bandar's son and his daughter were promoted to the ranks of intelligence and ambassador, possibly due to appreciation of the royal family for Prince Bandar's substantial role in Saudi diplomatic history.

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[668] *The Independent* "بندر بن سلطان: دعمنا صدام في حربه مع إيران بعد تهديدات الخميني ضد دول الخليج (الحلقة 1- 5)," *Arabiya,* January 29, 2019, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.independentarabia.com/node/5576/سياسة/بندر-بن-سلطان-دعمنا-صدام-في-حربه-مع-إيران-بعد-تهديدات-الخميني-ضد-دول-الخليج-الحلقة-1.

[669] Rizzo, "Prince and."

[670] Abdulrahman Al-Turayri, "قبلات كلينتون وأحضان أوباما" *Al-Hayat*, October 28, 2013, accessed January 16, 2020, https://aaltrairi.com/archives/1475#.YJOqxS1h3Up.

[671] "بندر بن سلطانز."

[672] *Al-Hurra,* July 1, 2014, "بندر بن سلطان مستشاراً ومبعوثاً خاصاً لخادم الحرمين... وخالد بن بندر رئيساً للاستخبارات" accessed July 16, 2019, https://www.alhurra.com/saudi-arabia/2014/07/01/السعودية-تعيين-بندر-بن-سلطان-مبعوثا-للملك-وخالد-بن-بندر-رئيسا-للاستخبارات.

The Al-Faisal circle was a potent circle among the decision-making actors with an image as a bastion of education and modernity. Prince Turki and Prince Saud, the sons of Iffat bint Mohammed Al-Thunayan who was the most prominent wife of King Faisal from Adapazari of Turkey[673], were two active actors who influenced the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia from the 1970s. Iffat bint Mohammed Al-Thuyanan was a major personality advising King Faisal in Saudi governance, the education system and health policy of the kingdom. As she paid great importance to modernizing the health and education system of the kingdom, she was believed to be prominent in encouraging King Faisal's sons to be qualified princes and diplomats serving the royal family.

Fandy emphasizes the significant role of the Al-Faisal circle and specifically Prince Saud and King Faisal in the history of the kingdom, stating: "The history of Saudi foreign policy is Al-Faisal, both him and his father… It's how the world knew Saudi Arabia, through Al-Faisal."[674] Despite his ill health, mainly from Parkinson's Disease, and his request for retirement in order to rest, Prince Saud was a favorable minister for King Abdullah who refused Prince Saud's retirement request, saying: "So I should be the only one to die in office?"[675] Another narration that illustrates his personal attachment to his duty and to the kingdom was from Prince Turki. When one of the nurses approached him during a nap in the hospital room and asked him to confirm his awareness of what would happen to him, asking: "Do you know who the president of the United States is?" Prince Saud replied: "You tell me who is the king of Saudi Arabia?"[676] Though Prince Saud was relieved of his position on his own personal request for health reasons, he was believed to influence many future diplomats of the kingdom with his experience and knowledge. His successor, Adel Al-Jubeir, stressed that he had learned patience from him, and how to read and prepare in advance, and stated that he was "a model of dedication at every

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[673] Yasar Yakış (former ambassador, former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs), in online discussion with the author, March 2019.

[674] "History of Saudi Foreign Policy is Al Faisal," *Gulf News,* July 10, 2015, accessed January 24, 2020, https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/history-of-saudi-foreign-policy-is-al-faisal-1.1548109.

[675] Abdullah Al-Shihri and Lee Keath, "Prince Saud al-Faisal: Politician Who Spent 40 Years Guiding Saudi Arabia Through Crises and Tensions Throughout the Middle East," *The Independent,* July 12, 2015, accessed October 18, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/prince-saud-al-faisal-politician-who-spent-40-years-guiding-saudi-arabia-through-crises-and-tensions-throughout-middle-east-10383651.html.

[676] *Akhbaar24 News,* "بالفيديو.. تركي الفيصل يروي موقفاً طريفاً لأخيه سعود مع ممرضة سألته عن اسم الرئيس الأمريكي," June 19, 2018, accessed March 15, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/341903.

moment of his life."[677] Upon his death, the US Secretary of State John Kerry emphasized that Prince Saud was one of the wisest diplomats in the world,[678] while Nabil Al-Arabi, former Secretary General of Arab League, described Prince Saud as a noble diplomat with courage and valor.[679] In addition to the favorable words of the Western and Arab diplomats that illustrate the impact of Prince Saud's reign in the history of Saudi foreign policy, his death was the death of an era of elder royals.

Prince Saud was one of the proponents of political and social reforms designed by the local actors rather than imposed by external actors. Given his studies at the Hun school of Princeton, and his economy degree from Princeton, Prince Saud distinguished himself from the other princes and proved his careful diplomacy in challenging foreign relations of the kingdom. As the world's longest serving Foreign Minister (from 1975 to 2015), he played key roles in Saudi Arabia's dealings and positions in various affairs, crises and wars of the Middle East. These included the Taif Agreement in the Lebanese war (1975-1990), the Israel-Palestinian affairs, the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi invasion in 2003, chronic tensions between the Gulf states and Iran, the Arab uprisings, Syrian war, Yemeni war, and the establishment of Islamic State in 2014. Prince Saud was a highly respected figure among Saudi decision-makers and a soft diplomatic face, as illustrated by the former Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa who remarked: "he is a school of rational diplomacy, he was strong when the situation needs strength, and he was human when the situation needs a humane respond, he was diplomat when the situation needs a diplomatic answer, and expert when an expert's opinion is needed."[680]

Prince Saud was a gentle, diplomatic figure of Saudi Arabia with a grandiose vision of the Arab world.[681] Despite his close relations with the US presidents, from Gerald Ford to Barack Obama, he criticized the 2003 US invasion of Iraq as a mistake that had increased Iran's sphere of influence and almost dismissed Saudi Arabia from Iraqi

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[677] "الجبير: هذا ما تعلمته من الأمير الراحل سعود الفيصل," *Akhbaar24 News,* January 19, 2019, accessed May 26, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/425846.

[678] "Former Saudi FM Prince Saud Al-Faisal Passes Away," *The Sundaily,* July 10, 2015, accessed October 15, 2019, https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/1486042-JSARCH319012.

[679] "History of Saudi Foreign."

[680] "الأمير سعود الفيصل يرحل في أعقد مرحلة تمر بها المنطقة العربية," *Al-Arab UK,* July 11, 2015, accessed July 5, 2019, https://alarab.co.uk/الأمير-سعود-الفيصل-يرحل-في-أعقد-مرحلة-تمر-بها-المنطقة-العربية/.

[681] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Prince Saud Al-Faisal Obituary," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2015, accessed July 16, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/10/prince-saud-al-faisal.

politics. To illustrate his Arab nationalist tendencies, one can emphasize his support for King Abdullah's Arab peace initiative in 2002 with the aim of Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and a settlement of the refugee problem.[682] Another incident to illustrate Prince Saud's belief in Arab solidarity was narrated by his companion Hassan Al-Yassin; when Saddam Hussein fired a rocket near the Foreign Ministry in Riyadh, Prince Saud was deeply influenced, remarking: "Arab missile strikes an Arab country?"[683] He tended to believe that the main source of crisis in the Middle East was not Muslims but "deprivation and injustice" in the region.[684] Prince Saud often insisted that Islam and Muslims were not the enemy of the world, by stressing their share of a 1,400-year-old culture and civilization.[685] During his duty, Prince Saud did not hesitate to publicly criticize the Bush administration's policy in the region, especially the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. He underlined the importance of finding a local solution to counter the possible chaotic impact of the invasion that would destabilize the region: "If the change comes with the destruction of Iraq, you are solving a problem and creating five other problems". [686] Following the 28page congressional report of the US Congressional Inquiry Committee on the 9/11 attacks, he expressed his anger at accusations towards the kingdom. He stressed that the kingdom had nothing to hide with regard to the 9/11 attacks, and the congressional report would help the Kingdom to respond to allegations in a clear and credible manner.[687] However, it would be a mistake to portray Prince Saud as an opponent of the US since he described the Saudi-US relationship as an "Islamic marriage" in which the kingdom could retain as many wives as it wished if it could modify them according to the particular case in hand.[688]

In 2011, Prince Saud played a key role in mobilizing support for the Saudi military intervention against the opposition in Bahrain. He called the GCC to arm the Syrian

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[682] Ibid.

[683] "قصة بكاء سعود الفيصل حينما سقط صاروخ أطلقه صدام حسين بالقرب من وزارة الخارجية," *Akhbaar24,* June 13, 2017, accessed February 5, 2020, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/341026.

[684] "في ذكرى رحيل سعود الفيصل.. محطات تاريخية سطرها التاريخ في 4 عقود," *Akhbaar24,* June 18, 2017, accessed May 17, 2020, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/341720.

[685] "Saud al Faisal Dies at 75; Saudi Prince Was A Force in Mideast Diplomacy," *Los Angeles Times,* July 9, 2015, accessed January 16, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-saud-al-faisal-20150710-story.html.

[686] Ibid.

[687] "بالفيديو.. تصريح نادر لسعود الفيصل يطالب فيه بنشر الـ 28 صفحة السرية الخاصة بهجمات 11 سبتمبر," *Akhbaar24 News,* July 18, 2016, accessed April 18, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/292381.

[688] "الأمير سعود الفيصل."

opposition in 2012 against Syrian President Bashar Hafez Al-Assad. Prince Saud emphasized the growing influence of Iran in Iraq, and the possible consequences of Iranian control in Iraq and Syria, claiming: "Any Iranian boat entering the territorial waters will not return to Iran."[689] Moreover, he was in favor of applying tough sanctions against Iran, such as travel bans, restrictions on lending and other economic sanctions.[690] For the case of Saudi Arabia's military campaign against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, Prince Saud underlined the kingdom's intention to avoid war inside Yemen, stating: "We are not advocating the war, but if we hit their drums, we are ready for them."[691] For the case of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, he called on the international coalition to carry out air strikes and accused Iran of imposing control over Iraq and Syria by arming the militant groups.[692]

Turki Al-Faisal, the youngest son of King Faisal as well as King Abdullah's nephew, began his career as an adviser to the Saudi royal court until 1977, then headed up Saudi Intelligence from 1979 to 2001, however he stepped down only ten days before the 9/11 attacks.[693] Turki Al-Faisal was a controversial figure who knew the leaders of Al-Qaeda better than any Saudi decision-maker as it was not a secret that he had several meetings with bin Laden personally and Mullah Muhammad Omar of the Taliban.[694] In 2002, he was assigned as the Saudi ambassador to the UK, and pressed the British government to be less tolerant of the Islamic preachers of violence.[695] From 2005 to 2007, Prince Turki was the ambassador to the US, and this was portrayed as an indication of Saudi's voluntariness to work with the US in the post 9/11 period.

Turki Al-Faisal was exposed to several allegations of negotiating and transferring funds to the Taliban.[696] He was suspected of personally and financially supporting Al-Qaeda

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[689] Ibid.

[690] "نبذة عن سعود الفيصل," *BBC Arabic News*, July 9, 2015, accessed January 14, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2015/07/120919_saud_al_faisal.

[691] Ibid.

[692] "في ذكرى رحيلز."

[693] Edward Luce, "Lunch with the FT: Prince Turki Al-Faisal," *Financial Times*, March 14, 2014, accessed January 21, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/9eb2ba0c-a9e0-11e3-adab-00144feab7de.

[694] Ibid.

[695] "Prince Turki's Resume," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2005, accessed May 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/31/opinion/prince-turkis-resume.html.

[696] Peter Foster, "Saudi Princes 'Supported Al-Qaeda before 9/11' Claims Twentieth Hijacker," *The Telegraph,* February 4, 2015, accessed February 25, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/saudiarabia/11390705/Saudi-princes-supported-al-Qaeda-before-911-claims-twentieth-hijacker.html.

but insisted that he had no contact with bin Laden since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. In 2002, together with Prince Turki, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, and Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal were suspected of funding the Al-Qaeda members involved in the 9/11 attacks along with the other Saudi princes, banks, and charities.[697] According to a confidential document released by an Algerian newspaper, Al-Nahar, Prince Turki held several meetings with Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar at the Saudi embassy in Pakistan which had already been confirmed by Prince Turki without specifying the exact number of meetings. [698] He supervised coordination with the US and Pakistani intelligence services to confront the Soviet forces by aiding the mujahedeen in Afghanistan in 1980. According to the report, Saudi Arabia and its intelligence continued to aid the *mujahedeen* indirectly under the cover of charitable and humanitarian work after 1989.[699] With the realization of Al-Qaeda's increasing danger to the Saudi state survival, in June 1998, King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah issued an order to send Prince Turki to Afghanistan in order to meet the Taliban leader Mullah Omar in order to deport bin Laden to Saudi Arabia for trial.[700] However, Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador from Afghanistan and cut off diplomatic relations with the Taliban government in September 1998. All of these allegations have been recorded in Prince Turki's resume as ambiguous incidents for a diplomat and representative of the Al-Faisal branch.

4.1.6. Rise of Saudi Arabian Counterterrorism Efforts and Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef

Mohammed bin Nayef, known as "the prince of counterterrorism", was a prominent royal actor in the fight against terrorism and Al-Qaeda inside and in the borders of Saudi Arabia after 9/11.[701] Prince Mohammed, representative of Al-Sudayri branch and son of Jawhara bint Abdulaziz bin Jiluwi, has publicly and internationally been the face of Saudi counter-terrorism initiatives, especially since 2003 Riyadh attacks of the Al-Qaeda. He was

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[697] Ibid.

[698] Ismail Falah, "نعم التقيت بن لادن والملأ" عمر عدّة مرات", *Al-Nahar*, January 25, 2011, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.ennaharonline.com/عمر-عدّةAC%80%E2%-AE%80%E2%نعم-التقيت-بن-لادن-والملأ/.

[699] Ibid.

[700] Ibid.

[701] "ناسف" الإرهاب ... و"أمير" الحرب على الخوارج," *Al-Hayat,* September 5, 2009, accessed May 16, 2019, https://elaph.com/Web/NewsPapers/2009/9/479519.html.

trained for years under the guidance of his experienced security chief father Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz. Prince Mohammed studied at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon (though he did not graduate), he trained at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the late 1980s, and also at Scotland Yard's antiterrorism institution in 1992-1994. He served as the Deputy Governor of Makkah during the reign of King Faisal, was assigned as the Deputy Minister of Interior by King Khalid in 1975, became a member of the Supreme Economic Council in 2009, became the Minister of Interior in 2012-2017 following the death of his father, and then acted as crown prince in 2015-2017.[702] He was regarded by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as the major royal actor to defeat Al-Qaeda, and later in 2017 Prince Mohammed was awarded a medal by the CIA owing to his contributions to global efforts in counterterrorism.[703]

Prince Muhammad was seen as a respected, wise, kind and patient statesman who always paid importance to visiting and sending gifts to the Saudi families of martyrizes every Eid.[704] However, according to Riedel, Prince Mohammed promoted a Pax-Saudi repression for dissidents who were treated as being linked to terrorism and, like his father, he has been defined as the public face of repression inside the kingdom.[705] Adam Coogle, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, describes the Prince as worse than his father when it comes to security affairs, stating he: "is the chief No. 1 hardliner, and he is persecuting moderate, independent voices for reform."[706] Beside the critics of his policy towards the dissidents, he was known for his seriousness, and pragmatic attitude along with his pro-American security approach. An anonymous US ambassador to Saudi Arabia portrayed him as "America's favorite Saudi official", who ensured solid relations and cooperation between US decision-makers and the Saudi Ministry of Interior.[707] In accordance with US security interests, Prince Mohammed adopted a "soft" security

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[702] "Muhammad Bin Naif Named Interior Minister," *Saudi Gazette,* November 6, 2012, accessed September 12, 2019, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/121237.

[703] "Profile: Former Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef," *Aljazeera*, June 21, 2017, accessed February 21, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/3/7/profile-former-saudi-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-nayef

[704] "Muhammad Bin Naif: Statesman with a Kind Heart," *Saudi Gazette*, November 7, 2012, accessed November 14, 2019, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/21206/Muhammad-Bin-Naif-Statesman-with-a-kind-heart.

[705] Riedel, "The Prince of Counter."

[706] Kevin Sullivan, "Meet the Saudi Royal Family's Rising Star," *The Washington Post*, January 23, 2015, accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.stuff.co.nz/world/middle-east/65381263/meet-the-saudi-royal-familys-rising-star.

[707] Ibid.

policy to combat extremism and terrorism. This was recognized by President Obama who in one of his statements said: "I can say that, on a personal level, my work and the US government's work with Crown Prince bin Nayef, on counterterrorism issues has been absolutely critical not only to maintaining stability in the region but also protecting the American people".[708] In contrast, his close views on US security interests were exposed to serious critique. According to Daniel Byman, the kingdom's counterterrorism cooperation with the US was a paradox: "Saudi government is a close partner of the United States on counterterrorism. On the other hand, Saudi support for an array of preachers and nongovernment organizations contributes to an overall climate of radicalization, making it far harder to counter violent extremism."[709] Even before the 9/11 attacks, Prince Mohammed, who was the deputy minister of interior in 2001, had already developed solid relations with the US decision-makers regarding the war on terrorism. Following the 2003 Riyadh attacks, the Minister of Interior emphasized the intensification of the kingdom's counterterrorism campaign under the guidance of Prince Nayef, Prince Mohammed and Prince Ahmed, and accordingly, the Minister of Interior sought to gain an upper hand in the fight against terrorism and Al-Qaeda by 2007.

During his duty as the Minister of Interior, Prince Mohammed was exposed to several assassination attempts and survived all. In June 2003, Abdul Rahman Al-Ghamdi, an Al-Qaeda member, surrendered to the Prince in person, and was later arrested.[710] In 2009, Prince Mohammed survived in an assassination attempt which was described as a "miracle" by the Saudi government[711] in a Ramadan gathering in Jeddah by Abdullah Hassan Al-Asiri. Later, it was understood that Al-Asiri, a 23 years old Saudi member of Al-Qaeda whose name was on a list of 85 most wanted suspects, called Prince

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[708] "Remarks by President Obama and Crown Prince bin Nayef of Saudi Arabia," *The White House Office of the Press Secretary*, May 13, 2015, accessed October 5, 2020, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/2015/05/13/remarks-president-obama-and-crown-prince-bin-nayef-saudi-arabia.

[709] Kathy Gilsinan, "Why the U.S. Can't Quit Saudi Arabia," *The Atlantic,* October 16, 2018, accessed June 14, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/10/jamal-khashoggi-american-saudi-counterterrorism-relationship/573148/.

[710] "Al-Qaeda Suspect Blows Himself up in Saudi," *The Irish Times,* July 3, 2003, accessed October 25, 2021, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/al-qaeda-suspect-blows-himself-up-in-saudi-1.485817.

[711] Peter Bergen, "Saudi Investigation: Would-be Assassin Hid Bomb in uUnderwear," *CNN*, September 30, 2009, accessed June 14, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/09/30/saudi.arabia.attack/.

Mohammed to meet him during a Ramadan reception at his home in Jeddah.[712] The attempt of Al-Asiri to assassinate Prince Mohammed in 2009 was obviously a threatening message to the Saudi government and society, and was even described as an earthquake to the society which aimed to destabilize the security and stability of the kingdom.[713] The assassination attempt was also significant for being the first operation of the Al-Qaeda outside Yemen after merging Saudi Al-Qaeda and Yemeni Al-Qaeda as "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula". The case was taken seriously by Yemen, and it was revealed by Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi, Yemeni minister of foreign affairs, that Al-Asiri entered the kingdom from Marib of Sanaa.[714]

Before the assassination attempt, Al-Asiri had been imprisoned due to his attempt to join Islamist insurgents in Iraq, and he later accused the Saudi government of committing inequity to the society and Islam: "They put me in prison and I began to see the depths of [the Saudi] servitude to the Crusaders and their hatred for the true worshippers of God, from the way they interrogated me".[715] The major actor in the suicide attacks inside Saudi Arabia was his sibling Ibrahim Al-Asiri, who was listed as "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" in 2011, prepared the underwear bomb plot in the 2009 incident, and made devices found on cargo planes in 2010. However, he died in a US drone strike in Yemen in 2017.[716] Former CIA deputy chief, Michael Morell, portrayed him as "probably the most sophisticated terrorist bomb maker on the planet. Incredibly creative, incredibly innovative".[717] The assassination attempt on Prince Mohammed had regional responses from Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the United Arab Emirates, Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah, Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and Kuwait's ambassador to the Kingdom, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, who all condemned

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[712] Mohammed Jamjoom, "Saudis Reveal Details of Attempted Assassination of Minister," *CNN*, September 2, 2009, accessed May 17, 2019, http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/09/02/saudi.royal.assassination.bid/index.html.

[713] Jamil Aldhiyabi, "دلالات استهداف محمد بن نايف," *Al-Hayat*, August 28, 2009, accessed June 4, 2019.

[714] "القاعدة" تكشف هوية منفذ محاولة اغتيال محمد بن نايف: المطلوب 40 من قائمة الـ85. الأمير نايف: الإعتداء الإرهابي الفاشل لن "يغلق الباب أمام عودة التائبين" *Al-Hayat*, August 31, 2009, accessed June 4, 2019.

[715] "Profile: Al-Qaeda 'Bomb Maker' Ibrahim Al-Asiri," *BBC News*, July 4, 2014, accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11662143.

[716] "Chief Al-Qaeda Bomb Maker 'Killed in Yemen Strike' - US Reports," *BBC News*, August 21, 2018, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45257631.

[717] Samer al-Atrush, "Al-Qaeda Master Bomb Maker Ibrahim Al-Asiri 'Killed in Yemen Strike'," *The Telegraph*, August 21, 2018, accessed May 18, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/authors/samer-al-atrush/.

the attack while praising the efforts of Prince Mohammed and his brothers to combat terrorism.[718]

Saudi Arabia was long criticized for its slow response to condemning terrorism after 9/11. The assassination attempt, which was interpreted as an "action of treachery and treason"[719] by the Saudi government, was in fact an opportunity for Prince Mohammed to claim his counterterrorism program and cooperation with the US. Accordingly, he announced three steps of his program as; putting the militants of the Al-Qaeda in prison, arresting and detaining individual supporters, and organizing a "naming and shaming" campaign against the identified militants.[720] Between 2003 and 2007, around 9,000 militants and individuals, and in 2008, 56 individuals, were suspected of being related to terrorist activities or funding terrorists, and were imprisoned.[721] Prior to Prince Mohammed's efforts, in 2004 King Fahd issued an open-door policy towards the militants, stating: "Everyone knows that we are not saying this out of weakness but to show those with deviant thoughts that the government and the people gave them a chance to return to the righteous path. If they refuse to come back to their senses, we will fight them with our strength".[722] Likewise, Prince Mohammed announced an open-door policy towards the militants wishing to be adapted to the Saudi society, saying they would: "not change their approach to anything, but will continue to open the door to repentant to return and say what they have to officials."[723] Hence, Prince Mohammed founded a "soft" rehabilitation program known as the Counseling and Care Center, that was built with various facilities including a gym, a pool, a banquet hall and furnished apartments reserved for visits, to return the extremists home to the "true Islam".[724] Director of the center, Yahya Abu Maghayed, asserted the motivations and targets of the center, that also accommodated those from Guantanamo Bay, stating: "Our focus is on correcting their thoughts, their misconceptions, their deviation from Islam…We make the

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[718] "محاولة اغتيال محمد بن نايف... أبرزت تلاحم القيادة والشعب," *Al-Hayat,* September 3, 2009, accessed March 23, 2019.

[719] Mohammed Jamjoom, "Saudis Reveal Details of Attempted Assassination of Minister," September 2, 2009, http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/09/02/saudi.royal.assassination.bid/index.html.

[720] Rob Wagner, **"**Rehabilitation and Deradicalization: Saudi Arabia's Counterterrorism Successes and Failures," *Special Report, Peace & Conflict Monitor*, August 1, 2010.

[721] Ibid**.**

[722] Ahmad Abdullah, "Winning the War on Terror," *Saudi Gazette,* August 23, 2012, accessed June 4, 2019, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/16436

[723] "عودة التائبين القاعدة."

[724] Wagner, **"**Rehabilitation and Deradicalization."

'beneficiaries' feel they are normal people and still have a chance — a chance to return to society."[725] However, the success rate of the center was 80%, with 20% returning to violence [726], and indicated the success, for the Saudi state, of the counterterrorism initiatives of the deputy Minister of Interior, Prince Mohammed at state level. In addition, following the 2003 Riyadh attacks, the Ministry of Interior founded the first anti-terrorist department among the Arab countries, exclusively to combat terrorism as well as terrorism financers. It set up an anti-money laundering unit within the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency as well as in local banks, to fight the unmilitary dimension of the terrorism, as well as allocating rewards ranging from SR1 million to SR7 million for anyone who reported a wanted subject.[727]

Prior to this period, the Kingdom had been exposed to attacks since the siege of Mecca in 1979 by Juhaiman Bin Saif Al-Otaibi and his followers, which illustrated the responsibility of the decision-making system. [728] Other attacks included; hijacking incidents of Saudi airplanes in 1984[729], the riots during the Haj season of 1987 when 400 people were killed[730], three explosions that took place in Makkah in which 16 people were killed in 1989[731], the 1996 Khobar attacks[732], five terrorist attacks and 80 terrorist operations in Riyadh, Eastern Province, Makkah, Madinah, Northern Frontier and the southern provinces between September 2001 and 2006 (table 4.5), and 101 operations were registered between 2007 and 2009.[733] The May 2004 attack in the oil installations

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[725] Anuj Chopra, "Jihadists Go to Rehab at '5-Star' Saudi Center," *The Times of Israel,* November 29, 2017, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.timesofisrael.com/jihadists-go-to-rehab-at-5-star-saudi-center/.

[726] Frank Gardner, "Inside Saudi Arabia's Rehab Center for Jihadists," *BBC News,* May 26, 2017, accessed September 15, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40061550.

[727] Abdullah, "Winning the War."

[728] " لي محمد بن نايف: ماذا سنكتب عام 2039؟" *Al-Akhbar*, September 9, 2009, accessed June 24, 2019, https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_Articles/127026.

[729] "Around the World; A Saudi Jet is Hijacked to Iran with 127 Board," *New York Times*, November 6, 1984, accessed March 4, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/06/world/around-the-world-a-saudi-jet-is-hijacked-to-iran-with-127-aboard.html.

[730] "400 Die As Iranian Marchers Battle Saudi Police in Mecca ; Embassies Smashed in Tehran," *New York Times*, August 2, 1987, accessed November 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/02/world/400-die-iranian-marchers-battle-saudi-police-mecca-embassies-smashed-teheran.html.

[731] "Explosions in Mecca Kill 1 and Wound 16 Near Grand Mosque," *New York Times*, July 11, 1989, accessed June 23, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/11/world/explosions-in-mecca-kill-1-and-wound-16-near-grand-mosque.html.

[732] Perry D. Jamieson, Khobar Towers: Tragedy and Response (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, United States Air Force, 2008).

[733] Abdullah, "Winning the war."

of Khobar city which killed 22 people[734] and the December 2004 attack on the US consulate in Jeddah which killed four security guards and five staff[735], showed that Al-Qaeda comprehended the propaganda value of targeting high-value targets in the Arabian peninsula, such as oil installations and US diplomatic representatives.[736] These two attacks, both of which were organized by Fayez ibn Awwad Al-Jeheni (a former member of *mutawwa*), Eid ibn Dakhilallah Al-Jeheni and Hassan ibn Hamed Al-Hazmi[737] who were not in the most-wanted terrorist list of Saudi Arabia, were claimed to punish the kingdom for its oil agreements with the US and to oust "crusaders" from the holy lands. In response, Nail Ahmed Al-Jubeir, a spokesman for the Saudi Embassy in Washington, underlined that the real intention of these attacks was to convince foreigners about the unsafe environment in Saudi Arabia, and to persuade them to reconsider their dealings with the kingdom.[738]

DATE	COUNTRY	CITY	PERPETRATOR GROUP	FATALITIES	INJURED	TARGET TYPE
10/3/11	Saudi Arabia	Awamiyya	Unknown	0	14	Military
6/7/11	Saudi Arabia		Unknown	3	1	Police
11/3/09	Saudi Arabia	Jizan	Houthi extremists (Ansar Allah) (suspected)	1	11	Military
10/14/09	Saudi Arabia	Jizan	Unknown	3	1	Police
8/27/09	Saudi Arabia	Jeddah	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	1	1	Government (General)

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[734] Jason Burke, "Militants Give Blow-By-Blow Account of Saudi Massacre," *The Guardian*, June 6, 2004, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jun/06/saudiarabia.jasonburke.

[735] James Sturcke, "Nine Killed as US Consulate in Jeddah Attacked," *The Guardian*, December 6, 2004, accessed March 26, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/dec/06/saudiarabia.usa.

[736] Michael Knights, "Jeddah Attack Underscores Fall in Capabilities of Saudi Militants," *The Washington Institute*, January 2005, accessed July 16, 2019, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/jtic-briefing-jeddah-attack-underscores-fall-capabilities-saudi-militants.

[737] Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf E. Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses and Challenges* (Praeger, 2005), 281.

[738] Donna Abu-Nasr, "Shooting Rampage, Hostage Crisis in Saudi Arabia Leaves 22 Dead," *The Journal Times*, May 31, 2004, accessed March 8, 2018. https://journaltimes.com/news/world/shooting-rampage-hostage-crisis-in-saudi-arabia-leaves-dead/article_46213945-4a97-5d82-9802-0c655f2b232a.html

2/26/07	Saudi Arabia	Medina	Unknown	3	1	Tourists
5/27/06	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	0	0	Government (General)
5/12/06	Saudi Arabia	Jeddah	Unknown	0	0	Government (Diplomatic)
2/24/06	Saudi Arabia	Abqaiq	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	4	8	Utilities
10/30/05	Saudi Arabia	Mecca	Unknown	1	0	Police
12/29/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (suspected)	8	90	Government (General),Military
12/6/04	Saudi Arabia	Jeddah	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	9	5	Government (Diplomatic)
10/3/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property
9/15/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	1	0	Private Citizens & Property
9/11/04	Saudi Arabia	Jeddah	Unknown	1	0	Business
9/5/04	Saudi Arabia	Buraydah	Unknown	3	0	Police
8/3/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	1	0	Business
6/18/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	1	0	Military
6/13/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	1	0	Private Citizens & Property
6/6/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	1	1	Journalists & Media

Date	Country	City	Group	Killed	Wounded	Target
6/2/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property
5/29/04	Saudi Arabia	Khobar	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	22	26	Business
5/22/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Muslim extremists	1	0	Private Citizens & Property
5/1/04	Saudi Arabia	Yanbu	Unknown	0	1	Educational Institution
5/1/04	Saudi Arabia	Yanbu	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia	10	25	Business
4/23/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Haramayn Brigades	5	145	Police
4/19/04	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	0	0	Unknown
12/29/03	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Haramayn Brigades	0	0	Police
12/4/03	Saudi Arabia	Unknown	Al-Haramayn Brigades	0	2	Police
11/8/03	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia	17	122	Private Citizens & Property
9/23/03	Saudi Arabia	Jizan	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (suspected)	4	4	Business
5/12/03	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (suspected)	0	0	Business
5/12/03	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (suspected)	11	Unknown	Business
5/12/03	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (suspected)	11	Unknown	Private Citizens & Property
5/12/03	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (suspected)	12	Unknown	Private Citizens & Property

11/20/02	Saudi Arabia	Kharj	Unknown	0	0	Business
6/20/02	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	1	0	Business
10/6/01	Saudi Arabia	Khobar	Unknown	2	4	Business
5/2/01	Saudi Arabia	Khobar	Unknown	0	1	Private Citizens & Property
3/15/01	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	0	2	Business, Private Citizens & Property
12/16/00	Saudi Arabia	Khobar	Unknown	0	1	Business
11/23/00	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	0	3	Business
11/17/00	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Unknown	1	1	Private Citizens & Property

Table 4.5: Terror Attacks on Saudi Arabia (2001-2011)

Source: Global Terror Database

The appointment of Prince Mohammed as the crown prince came at a time when Saudi Arabia and the region were entering one of the most sensitive periods in the Yemen War, and continuing impacts of the Syrian war on the Saudi state and Gulf neighbors in 2015. Moreover, it was a period when the internal differences and conflicts inside the royal family were designated as a serious source of threat.[739] The controversies among the royal family were claimed by a Saudi singer named Mujtahid in his twitter account; he related to the rise of Prince Mohammed within the royal family line owing to his success in winning the consent of many of his uncles, and his efforts in preparing the alliance against anyone who competed against him, and repression of all the opponents as well as the dissidents.[740] Mujtahid also mentioned Saad Al-Jabri, known as the right-hand man of the Prince, and being ousted by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (2017). This functioned as a weakening of the influence of Prince Mohammed on his path to the

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[739] "آل سعود والاضطراب الداخلية للعائلة الحاكمة," *Al-Tasnim,* October 27, 2015, accessed November 7, 2019, https://www.tasnimnews.com/ar/news/2015/10/27/899526/آل-سعود-والاضطراب-الداخلية-للعائلة-الحاكمة.
[740] "محمد بن نايف «يتفوّق على الجميع» ويتولّى وزارة الداخلية," *Al-Akhbar*, November 6, 2012, accessed January 25, 2020, https://al-akhbar.com/Arab/78365.

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throne.[741] Accordingly, Prince Mohammed was assigned as the crown prince by his uncle, King Salman, in 2015 and again ousted by King Salman who appointed his son Mohammed bin Salman to succeed Prince Mohammed in 2017.

4.2. POWER AND CONSTRUCTION DISCOURSES IN SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY

Top-down construction of the discourses in Saudi foreign policy-making constitutes a significant case for understanding the relation between power and discourse in the decision-making process. Political practices of the Saudi decision-makers create meaning and influence over the Saudi foreign policy by attaching discursive aspects to it. Discourses of the decision-makers make and define the regional security agenda of Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the political issues within Saudi foreign policy-making have no meaning outside the discourse of the decision-makers. Discourse is not only a statement of the decision-makers, but it also emerges as a way of talking and thinking. This can occur across the different forms of acts within different institutions of a state. Power and discourse reconstruct each other in the representations of the privileged actors in the decision-making process, which evolves by the challenges to the status and power of the privileged groups to influence the foreign policy-making. However, the Saudi decision-makers actively have reproduced their discourse and act in response to anticipated challenges throughout history.

4.2.1. Israel-Lebanon War: Discursive Shift in Saudi Regional Security Perception

Given the involvement of factors and actors at multiple levels, the Saudi regional security perception towards Iran has been shaped by more complex issues rather than being a part of proxy war or ancient hostilities. The construction discourse of the decision-makers towards Iranian regional politics displayed constraints at Saudi domestic politics over the discussions of ideological rivalry, oil, nuclear issue and hajj affairs. The construction process of narratives in Saudi foreign policy requires an analysis of the imposition of top-down narratives over the manipulated events in favor of Saudi regional security

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[741] "Secrets Keeper of ibn Nayef Distracts ibn Salman," *Yemen Press*, September 2, 2017, accessed January 24, 2020, https://www.yemenpress.org/category/ticker/page/1217/.

perception.[742] Furthermore, the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war was also a crucial turning point since Iran and Hizballah emerged as the defenders of the Muslims against Israel and America, which in turn provided Iran with a crucial ideological advantage and signaled the Houthis' association with Hizballah in the wake of war.[743] At this juncture, the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war needed to be stated as a clear turning point in the regional security narratives of the Saudi decision-makers who were totally disappointed with the results of the conflict as an Iranian victory in Lebanon. While the war itself formed the Iranian power projection in the domestic affairs of the Arab neighbors, the consequences of the war made the Saudi decision-makers conclude that the Hizballah was the most dangerous threat in the region. Therefore, Saudi Arabia specifically shaped its foreign policy towards Syria and Yemen by that conclusion.[744] Furthermore, Asharq Al-Awsat, owned by Saudi Research and Marketing Group, portrayed the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war as "Beirut Under the Second Occupation" by referring to the occupation of Beirut in 1982.[745] This perception of war as an occupation spurred Saudi Arabian decision-makers to take a more direct and active role in the region, raise its allies in Lebanon and Palestine, take a guarded attitude towards Syria, and urge the US to take serious efforts to stabilize Iraq as well as deter Iran from its nuclear activities.[746] The behavior of Saudi Arabia reflected the need of providing a counterbalance to Iranian influence on Shiite populations inside the kingdom and in the region owing to Iranian influence in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine. As a non-Arab political entity, Iran was a peripheral power that forced the country to consider its militias to make inroads into the Arabian neighbors.[747] Domestically, Saudi decision-making tended to view the Iranian threat as equated with the Shiite crescent concept while at regional level. Meanwhile, it was mostly the cause of political instability for other Sunni Arab states. Internationally, Saudi Arabia was putting more efforts to keep the US decision-makers in their favor in order

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[742] Simon Mabon, "Muting the Trumpets of Sabotage: Saudi Arabia, the US and the Quest to Securitize Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2018): 758, 759.

[743] Bruce Riedel, (former CIA analysts), in online-written interview with the author, December 2018.

[744] Lippman, in online-written interview.

[745] Mohamad Bazzi, "Lebanon and the Start of Iran and Saudi Arabia's Proxy War," *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/lebanon-and-the-start-of-iran-and-saudi-arabias-proxy-war/

[746] Paul Salem, "The Aftereffects of the Israeli-Hizbollah War," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2006, accessed April 28, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/paulsalemchapter.pdf.

[747] Kechichian, in online-written interview.

to prevent any diplomatic rapprochement between Iran, the international community and the US.[748]

The post-Iraq's invasion dynamics in 2003 seemingly had revealed that the scale of power narratives might be shifted in favor of Iran, leading to a major change in Saudi regional behavior, security calculus and narratives. Beside the subsequent sectarian fragmentation of Iraqi society, the degradation of both the Taliban and the Baathist regime seemed to have paved the way for the rise of Iran as a regional actor.[749] Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal's argument illustrated the changing regional perceptions and narratives of the decision-makers in the Arab world: "All Arab countries assisted Iraq not to be occupied by Iran (in the Iran-Iraq war), but now, we are handing the whole country of Iraq over to Iran without reason."[750] According to Saudi decision-makers, Iran was no longer contained but was allowed to enter Iraq's political and social structure and this helped to expand its influence in Iraq. This, in turn, would enable Iran to have access to its friendly non-state actors and supporters in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, and thus deepened the Saudi's fear of a resurgent Iran and the 'Shiite crescent' phenomena.[751] Prior to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, Saudi regime's narratives were shaped by the emerging regional dynamics of the 2003 Iraq's invasion, which ousted Saddam's Baathist regime and created a power vacuum in Iraq that might be filled with Iranians, Iran's nuclear program activities, Iran's support for Hizballah and Hamas, and its alliance with President of Syria Bashar Al-Assad.

Saudi decision-makers built their narratives to ensure that there was unity among Lebanese society as well as peace and stability in the region. Inverse perceptions of the Saudi and Iranian decision-makers towards Hizballah created a great obstacle for rapprochement between the two countries.[752] Prince Turki highlighted the efforts of Saudi Arabia to reach an end and peace in the crisis through collaboration with the US

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[748] Mabon, "Muting the Trumpets."

[749] Jaafar Alloul, "The 'Shi'a Crescent' Theory Sectarian Identity or Geopolitics of Religion?" Master diss., (Universiteit Gent, 2011): 10-12.

[750] Prince Saud Al-Faisal, "The Fight against Extremism and the Search for Peace" (Council on Foreign Relations, September 7, 2005), accessed September 13, 2019, http://www.cfr.org/publication/8908/fight_against_extremism_and_the_search_for_peace_rush_transcript_federal_news_service_inc.html.

[751] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power," *The International Spectator* 53, no. 4 (2018): 75–94.

[752] Torgeir E. Fjærtoft (senior adviser to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), in online-written interview with the author, November 2018.

and the UN.[753] Similarly, Prince Saud, the Saudi foreign minister, underlined the importance of the unity of Lebanon, making the country a "model of peaceful coexistence between religious, ethnicities and different groups" and the danger of a division of Lebanon that might be "a loss for the Arab nation".[754] This narrative was related to Saudi Arabia's motivation to keep the unity of Lebanon and act as a peace initiator since the Lebanese civil war. However, the Iranian penetration into the Lebanese domestic context through financing the Hizballah alarmed Saudi Arabia to invest in the reconstruction of Lebanon after signing the Taif agreement in 1989. From King Faisal period to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, Saudi foreign policy followed a reactive, cautious and risk-averse trend towards the region. Saudi Arabia tended to apply a "behind the scene" approach and also acted as a mediator in the disputes such as the 1981 Fahd plan and King Abdullah's Arab Peace initiative in 2002. On the one hand, the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon war period not only forced King Abdullah's "behind the scene" approach to take a bold position against Iran's growing influence but also learned how to live with a resurgent Iran factor.[755] On the other hand, the Israel-Lebanon war shifted the Saudi decision-makers' perception and regional security discourse within the dominant political rhetoric and forced the kingdom to diversify its rhetoric from claiming uniqueness and disparateness to a moderate regional actor taking a direct and active role in regional affairs. In the domestic context, Saudi Arabia was in a process of structural reforms including moderating the religious discourse due to its claim of being a moderate Arab state and eluding the accusations of being a suspicious ally after the 9/11.[756] To create conventional wisdom within the Saudi regional narrative, Saudi decision-makers had to persuade the insider and outsider audience by constantly repeating the danger of the Iranian initiatives inside the neighbors against the Saudi domestic and regional

[753] "Saudi Arabia Announces Massive Aid Package to Lebanon, Palestine to Help Relief Efforts | The Embassy of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Saudi Embassy in Washington DC, July 26, 2006, accessed January 25, 2020, https://www.saudiembassy.net/press-release/saudi-arabia-announces-massive-aid-package-lebanon-palestine-help-relief-efforts.

[754] Ben Birnbaum, "Saudis Walk Away from Effort to End Lebanon's Political Crisis," *The Washington Times*, January 19, 2011, accessed April 3, 2018https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jan/19/saudis-walk-away-from-effort-to-end-political-cris/.

[755] Paul Aarts, "Saudi Arabia Walks the Tightrope," *The International Spectator* 42, no. 4 (2007): 545.

[756] Rosemary Hollis, "Getting out of the Iraq Trap," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 79, no. 1 (2003): 23–35.

security.[757] At this point, Saudi Foreign Policy elites are scrutinizing the Iranian issue to seek the attention of the public domain and create a counter regional security narrative against Iran's regional plots.

Lebanon was a long-standing neighbor of Saudi Arabia since the periods of Pierre Gemayyel and Kamil Sham'un in the 1950s to 1960s against Nasser's pan-Arab context, and took decisive roles in brokering the 1989 Taif Accords as well as ending the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). However, what strengthened the Saudi Arabia's interference in Lebanon's affairs was mostly the royal family's ties with the wealthy Hariri family of Lebanon. Saudi influence within Lebanon increased after a Lebanese billionaire Rafik Hariri (known as a longtime Saudi ally) became Prime Minister in 1992.[758] Saudi Arabia strengthened its hand in Lebanese politics by funding the Hariri's clientelism, Hariri Foundation's schools and health centers as well as donating a Lebanon's Central Bank. After Hariri's assassination by a massive car bomb exploded on Beirut's Rue Minet el Hosn in 2005, Lebanese politics observed political fragmentation and chaos following the protest of 20,000 people of Lebanese, Muslims and Christians in Beirut's Martyrs' Square.[759] These people blamed the Syrian government for Hariri's assassination, calling for a withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and for the resignation of the pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karami (October 2004 to April 2005), and President Emile Lahoud (1998 to 2007). Following the protests, the election was held in May 2005. It was declared as "fair and credible" by the UN Security Council, and ended with the victory of an anti-Syrian coalition between Saad Hariri's Future Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), which was a piece of favorable news for the Saudi decision-makers.[760]

During the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, the domestic political climate in Lebanon has already polarized, which in turn made the consensus-oriented politics difficult to be

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[757] Patrick Conge and Gwenn Okruhlik, "The Power of Narrative: Saudi Arabia, the United States and the Search for Security," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 359.

[758] Rafiq Hariri accumulated his wealth through his construction activities in Saudi Arabia since the late 1960s, and later owned the Saudi Oger company which later have become the major construction company of the Saudi royal family. For more; "Profile: Former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri," *BBC News*, January 16, 2014, accessed August 12, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13978635.

[759] Rory McCarthy, "Lebanon's Cedar Revolution Withers," *The Guardian*, October 21, 2005, accessed April 19, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/22/syria.lebanon.

[760] Rupert Rupert Sutton, "Lebanon's Arab Spring: The Cedar Revolution Nine Years On," in *A New Paradigm: Perspectives on the Changing Mediterranean* (Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2015), 97–111.

achieved.[761] The statement of Saudi Ambassador Abdul Aziz bin Mohieddin Khoja to Lebanon (2004–2009) reveals the impact of the war on Saudi regional perception: "You Lebanese have made me sick. You made me confused. I do not know what to do to help you out of this troubling situation. But we accept the disease for you."[762] The political climate was seemingly divided into the pro-Saudi and pro-Iranian factions as illustrated in March 8 alliance—Hizballah, Amal, Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement—supported by Iran and Syria, and March 14 alliance—pro-Hariri coalition—supported by Saudi Arabia. While Hariri's assassination made both countries reassess each other's motivations in the domestic political context of Lebanon, both were motivated to engage themselves with local actors and parties without directly intervening in the domestic rivalry.[763] At this juncture, it could be emphasized that the Hariri's assassination, the Cedar Revolution (Intifadat Al-Istiqlal) in 2005 and the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war are major events that resulted in the involvement of Saudi Arabia and Iran to the Lebanese politics as well as reconstruction of the regional security narratives beside threat assessments towards each other. Following the assassination, damaging economic impact, political polarization and security concerns, the July 2006 Israel-Lebanon war began as a result of a deadly attack on Israeli troops and abduction of two IDF soldiers, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. Furthermore, this lasted 34 days with the death ranging between 1,035 and 1,191 Lebanese civilians and combatants, 119 Israeli soldiers and 39 civilians.[764] Saudi Arabia utilized their wealth to control Lebanon, while Iran was financially supported by Hizballah. During the war, Saudi Arabia and Iran financially supported the different sides. For instance, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait deposited $1.5 billion to support the Beirut Central Bank's currency reserve[765], Saudi Arabia alone

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[761] Amry Hamzawy, "2006 Lebanon War: Regional Conflicts as Moments of Truth," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 18, 2008, accessed June 25, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/20753.

[762] "خوجة لـ«الأخبار»: لقاء الملك عبد الله مع وفد «حزب الله» خير دليل على حياديتي," *Al Akhbar*, January 6, 2007, accessed December 15, 2019, https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_Local_News/199542/-الملك-لقاء-الأخبار-لـ-خوجة عبد-الله-مع-وفد-حزب-الله-خير-دليل-على-حياديت.

[763] Matteo Legrenzi and Fred H. Lawson, "Saudi Arabia Calls out Hizballah: Why Now?" *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 2 (2016): 31–43.

[764] "Lebanon War Report Could Pressure Olmert," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, January 30, 2008, accessed January 17, 2019, https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/theaawsat/news-middle-east/lebanon-war-report-could-pressure-olmert.

[765] Hannes Baumann, "The Different Risks of Saudi and Iranian Aid to Lebanon," in *Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Struggle to Shape the Middle East* (UK: The Foreign Policy Center, 2018), https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Saudi-Arabia-and-Iran-The-Struggle-to-Shape-the-Middle-East-Report.pd.

provided up to $1 billion assistance directly to the Lebanese Central Bank in the post-war period, the Saudi Development Fund also funded the post-war infrastructure and paid for one year's education for all Lebanese students. Furthermore, Saudi financial aid was estimated to reach $120 billion including schools, bridges, health centers in Shiite populated areas of Beirut.[766] On the other hand, Iran funded Hizballah through military training, logistics, cash and charities. It was reported that Iran funded the Hizballah dominated areas of Beirut with $60 million in post-war reconstruction in 2007.[767] According to former Iranian president Abolhassan Bani Sadr, Iran spent around $1 billion for the reconstruction of southern Lebanon from 2006 to 2010.[768]

King Abdullah felt the need to conduct the Saudi foreign policy towards putting more effort behind the regional security policy that used the method of financing friendly regimes and paying off enemies. At this point, it was critical to support the Siniora government during and after the war, when Hizballah apparently aimed at toppling it. Prince Turki's statement on the engagement of Saudi Arabia with the local actors in Lebanon reveals the alert mood of the decision-making system towards the Shiite populations inside the kingdom and in the region: "Engaging with the people of Lebanon in general. I think will help and maintain somehow the linkage of Lebanon to the rest of the Arab world. I think even within the Shiite community in Lebanon, there is an opportunity to engage because Hizballah does not represent all of the Shiites in Lebanon."[769] Another incident that reflects the anxiety of Saudi Arabia about the results of the war and the growing influence of Iran in the society was Prince Saud's offer to establish an Arab force from the Arab "periphery" states excluding Gulf countries' troops, despite his plan not being applied. As part of its concerns in the post-war reconstruction period,[770] Iran and Saudi Arabia both engaged with the local actors,

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[766] Frederic Wehrey et al., S*audi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy* (*RAND Corporation*, March 2009), 82.

[767] Kitty Logan, "Iran Rebuilds Lebanon to Boost Hizbollah," *The Telegraph*, July 29, 2007, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1558948/Iran-rebuilds-Lebanon-to-boost-Hizbollah.html.

[768] "Iranian Money Amplifies Influence in Lebanon," *Voice of America*, October 13, 2010, accessed March 16, 2019, https://www.voanews.com/world-news/middle-east-dont-use/iranian-money-amplifies-influence-lebanon.

[769] "Turki Al-Faisal: 'Hizballah Cows Opposition Due to Their Well-Armed Position,'" *Al-Arabiya*, February 16, 2019, accessed June 5, 2020, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/02/16/Turki-al-Faisal-Hizballah-cows-opposition-due-to-their-well-armed-position.html.

[770] "The draft solution agreed by Bandar and Larijani, 1) Formation of a government of national unity comprising 19 ministers for the majority and 11 ministers for the opposition (two ministers for President Emile Lahoud, five ministers for the Amal movement and four ministers for General Michel Aoun bloc).

political movements, and paramilitary groups. At this period, supporting the Sunni actors in Lebanon (including Iraq, Iran and the Palestinian territories) was more effective for Saudi decision-making, to weaken Hizballah concerning the approval of the US government.[771] Following this analysis, Saudi Arabia aimed at constructing means for countering Iran by increasing its funds to the Salafi actors inside Lebanon such as Al-Shahal family,[772] of which there had been quiet actors in Lebanon and in the Palestinian camps prior to Iraq's invasion in 2003.[773] On the other hand, Iran aimed at legitimizing its influence in Lebanon by promoting Iranian culture among the society (particularly the Shi'ite community), exalting the anti-US sentiments, and enhancing the image of Hizballah.[774] Given the weakness of Lebanon's state institutions, Iran already had a soft power in Lebanon through a variety of cultural, educational, religious, and reconstruction projects as well as through the IRGC's secretive Quds Force operatives in Lebanon and Syria, the Iranian Institute for Martyrs, Imam Khomeini Relief Committee in Lebanon, the Quds Force and the Basij-e Sazandegi Sepah-e Pasdaran Development Basij of the Revolutionary Guards, and the Cultural Center of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Beirut. Prior to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, Saudi and Iran decision-makers—especially Secretary General of the Saudi National Council, Prince Bandar, and Secretary of Iran Supreme Council for National Security, Ali Larjani—were motivated to move towards peaceful security arrangements with each other as illustrated in the 2001 security agreement. Meanwhile, this was described by Prince Nayef to be a non-political and non-

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2. Formation of a joint Saudi-Iranian committee with a Lebanese expert to amend the draft of the International Court to ensure its criminal character, and to limit it to the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the subsequent assassinations without discrimination and not to include crimes and events with retroactive effect in 1982. And France to include the bombing of French marines and paratroopers in 1983. 3. Adoption of a new law for the parliamentary elections. 4. Accordance with the election of a new president between the March 14 and March 8 teams. 5. Conducting early parliamentary elections in April 2008." In "نجاد ــ عبدالله في قمة تتويجها وعرقلت واشنطن تدخَّلت التي التسوية," الأخبار, *Al-Akhbar*, March 5, 2007, accessed October 7, 2019, https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_Local_News/197058.

[771] Aarts, "Saudi Arabia Walks," 546.

[772] Salem al-Shahal introduced Salafism in Lebanon in the 1940s and increased his audience after the Arab-Israel wars in 1948 and 1967. Also, al-Haraka al-Islamiyah al-Mujahida (the Islamic Jihad Movement) is an example of Salafi jihadism occurred in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh and increased its power during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. This movement even formed an Islamic Salafi emirate in 1982-1985. Prior to the 2006 war, Salafists strengthened their hand and many Salafi actors including Ain al-Hilweh moved to Iraq to rally against the US. In Robert Rabil, "Salafism in Lebanon," *The Washington Institute*, February 20, 2015, accessed January 14, 2019, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/salafism-in-lebanon.

[773] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 83.

[774] Ahmad K. Majidyar, "Is Secterian TensIon Plunging Lebanon Into A New Civil War?" in *The Shi'ites of the Middle East: An Iranian Fifth Column?* (American Enterprise Institute, 2017), 21–45.

military agreement to establish an independent regional security arrangement including fighting money laundering, crime, and smuggling.[775] Moreover, the agreement itself was aimed at strengthening the trust between the Gulf countries and Iran as Prince Nayef made it clear that the kingdom was keen on establishing good relations with the regional actors and states. Prince Nayef's message reflected a clear but also an unambiguous tone: "Iran's security was akin to Saudi Arabia's security and vice versa. . . The Iranians' intentions toward the Gulf Cooperation Council are good. . ." In 2007, the visit of Iranian President Ahmadinejad to Saudi Arabia was a significant move in relations as both countries were portrayed as "brotherly nations". However, in January 2007, both states found themselves engaged in the power struggle and to counter the violent activities of the local actors given the growth of Hizballah's bargaining power and its move in West Beirut in 2008.[776]

After the war, Syria's Bashar Assad emerged as an opposing figure that was against the Siniora government in the perception of Saudi decision-makers. Furthermore, after Bashar Assad announced the Arab leaders who did not ally with Hizballah as half men in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan in 2006, tensions deepened between Saudi Arabia and Syria.[777] Saudi decision-makers from the beginning rejected the idea of discussing with Syria over the reconstruction of the war as illustrated in the speech by Prince Saud: "What would be the use?".[778] Likewise, in an interview, Prince Bandar—who was a prominent actor during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war—underlined the anger of King Abdullah from Bashar Al-Assad and narrated King Abdullah's dialogue with Assad in one of his visits to Riyadh: "I know your uncle before your father, then I knew your father, and you cannot say anything about him except that he (Hafez) is honest, he never lies. But you are a liar."[779] Likewise, Prince Bandar agreed with King Abdullah about Assad and compared the differences between Hafez Al-Assad and Bashar Al-Assad to that of heaven and

[775] Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, "Saudi Arabia, Iran Sign Security Accord," *EIR* 28, no. 17 (April 27, 2001): 42–43.

[776] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 77–92.

[777] "Syrian President Tries Mending Fences After Insulting Arab Leaders," *Haaretz*, August 21, 2006, https://www.haaretz.com/1.4862550.

[778] Mohamad Bazzi, "Lebanon and the Start of Iran and Saudi Arabia's Proxy War," *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2015, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/lebanon-and-the-start-of-iran-and-saudi-arabias-proxy-war.

[779] *Akhbaar24,* "بندر بن سلطان يروي تفاصيل حول اغتيال الحريري.. ولماذا وصف الملك عبد الله بشار بـ"الكاذب" ثلاث مرات," February 6, 2019, accessed May 23, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/428304.

earth.[780] However, as a royal diplomat with close relations with the US and in favor of developing relations with Israel, Prince Bandar was criticized by Iranian decision-makers as being motivated "to create problems between the Iranians and Syria. Bandar's approach is very unlikely to succeed."[781]

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon war was also critical for construction of the Saudi's perception on common interests with Israel. However, the beginning of the development of bilateral relations was thought to start with the Iraq's invasion in 2003 war after a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and Mossad Chief, Meir Dagan, on the relations with the Gulf states. Barak Ravid, a correspondent of Israeli Channel 13, described this as "the beginning of a broad secret diplomatic operation by the Mossad towards the Gulf states, particularly with Saudi Arabia."[782] During the war, Prince Bandar, the Saudi national security advisor, played a key role in developing relations, and indirect and direct talk with Israel.[783] Furthermore, it was even claimed that Saudi Arabia cooperated with Israel to give "strategic" intelligence from the Iranian side.[784] For example, in Al-Mayadeen TV channel, a pro-Hizballah Lebanese satellite, Ali Larijani, the Secretary of Supreme National Security Council (2005–2007), claimed the "definite information" about Saudi Arabia's contacts and intelligence cooperation with Israel. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia were critical against Obama administration's behavior towards Iran and the region, and hence decision-makers from both sides labeled Iran to be the greatest danger for the region. For instance, in August 2014, Foreign Minister Prince Saud criticized the common attitude among the Arab states of the region towards Israel: "We must reject planting hatred toward Israel and we should normalize relations with the Jewish State."[785] On another occasion, Prince Turki, the head of Saudi intelligence, underlined the possibility of "the integration of Israel into the Arab geographical entity" if Israel agreed to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and signed a comprehensive peace agreement.[786] Similarly, Saudi decision-making actors developed their narratives of the war over

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[780] "بندر بن سلطان."

[781] Seymour M. Hersh, "The Redirection," *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2007, accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/03/05/the-redirection.

[782] "Iran: Saudis Gave."

[783] Aarts, "Saudi Arabia Walks the Tightrope," 548.

[784] "Iran: Saudis Gave."

[785] Jacob Abadi, "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel: The National Security Imperatives," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3 (2019): 433–49.446.

[786] Paul Taylor, "Senior Saudi Prince Offers Israel Peace Vision," *Reuters*, January 20, 2008, accessed January 23, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-31493720080120.

revealing the ties between Iran and Hizballah. In 2008, Saudi decision-makers, particularly Prince Bandar, claimed a secret fibre-optic communications network of Hizballah financed by the Iranian Fund for the Reconstruction of Lebanon.[787]

The rhetoric of Hizballah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, was a disturbing factor for the Saudi regional narratives and marked a new chapter in Saudi-Iranian antagonism, as he called the results of the war a "divine, historic and strategic victory".[788] In addition, Iran underlined the historical pain in the hands of Arab rulers as part of its emotional interpretation of Saudi foreign policy actions. Meanwhile, it was an important tool for Iran to spread the emotional spirit around the Shiite communities, and this gave way to a feeling of sympathy towards the Saudi Shiite populations and others.[789] In his speeches, Nasrallah announced the Hizballah as a "heroic" opponent of Israel and the US accused the Bush Administration of instigating *fitnah* (insurrection and fragmentation within Islam) by working closely with Israel, and claimed the goal for the redrawing of the map of the Middle East, and asking for the partition of Iraq.[790] In response, Saudi Arabia criticized Hizballah for its "irresponsible adventurism"[791] given the continuous expansion of Hizballah in Lebanon and its establishment of a militia against the national army.[792] However, this was supposed to deepen Iran's regional security position in the Levant. Moreover, Hizballah's declaration of building a "resistance society" (مجتمع المقاومة) within the Lebanese society was a "further alerting" motto for the Saudi decision-makers as it had already penetrated the society by constructing religious institutions, schools, youth associations, health clinics and woman associations.

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon war paved the way for the deepening of the Shiite (Sunni) tensions owing to the strengthening of Iran's influence inside the neighboring states

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[787] Ian Black and Middle East editor, "Lebanon Told Allies of Hizballah's Secret Network, WikiLeaks Shows," *The Guardian*, December 5, 2010, accessed March 29, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/05/lebanon-warned-allies-Hizballah-telecoms.

[788] Michael Slackman and John O'Neil, "Hizballah Chief Leads Huge Rally," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2006, accessed March 16, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/22/world/middleeast/23lebanoncnd.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=896AC5D9BED8C0992D7AF755B703F38B&gwt=pay&assetType=REGIWALL.

[789] Mohammad Soltaninejad, "Iran and Saudi Arabia: Emotionally Constructed Identities and the Question of Persistent Tensions," *Asian Politics & Policy* 11, no. 1 (2019): 119-120.

[790] Hersh, "The Redirection."

[791] Kim Murphy, "A Divide Deepens in Arab World," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 2006, accessed March 16, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-jul-17-fg-arabs17-story.html.

[792] Abbas William Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship," *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 1 (2008): 32.

through its demography, geographical size, industrial capacity and military means.[793] According to Yamani, it was consolidated with the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war among the Shiite populations as "the idea of the Shi'a as a non-Arab people".[794] It was a warning of sectarian clashes and conflict about to prevail in the region and in the discourse of policy-making. Furthermore, the statement by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt underlined the danger of the Iranian influence in the domestic context of the regional states: "Definitely, Iran has influence on Shiites. Shiites are [forming] 65% of the Iraqis. . . Most of the Shiites are loyal to Iran, and not to the countries they are living in."[795] In the perception of Iranian decision-makers, Saudi Arabia was an American proxy actively damaging Iranian economy by motivating the US to maintain economic sanctions to Iran, and funding anti-Iranian actors and groups that are motivated to rally against the government such as the Balochis in southeastern Iran.[796] During this period, it was revealed that Prince Muqrin asked for the implementation of the sanctions on Iran without UN approval, while Prince Saud reminded the US decision-makers about the military pressure option against Iran.[797] At the perception of the Iranian side, the military presence of the US in the Gulf was a direct challenge to the consolidation of the Iranian hegemony in the region. In tandem, according to the WikiLeaks diplomatic cables in 2008, Prince Muqrin and Prince Nayef agreed to cooperate with the US against Iran, and King Abdullah even insisted that the US should take the Iranian nuclear case seriously and "cut off the head of the snake" (punish and saction Iran).[798]

Saudi and Iranian decision-makers' perceptions towards each other can be identified as an example of instrumentalization of ideology within the political rhetoric at the discourse level. Saudi Arabia's rhetoric of anti-Shiite in the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon period emerged as a calculated political action instead of a sectarian schism between Iran and Saudi Arabia, with the realization of the Saudi decision-makers over the pressure of the Shiite ideology on their domestic contexts.[799] Moreover, Iran's sphere of influence

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[793] Alloul, "The 'Shi'a Crescent'," 30.
[794] Mai Yamani, "Arcs and Crescents," *The World Today* 62, no. 12 (December 2006): 7–8.
[795] "Mubarak's Shia Remarks."
[796] Richard J. Schmierer, James F. Jeffrey, Alireza Nader, and Fahad Nazer "The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and The Obama Doctrine," *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 2 (2016): 17-19.
[797] "Saudi King Abdullah and Senior Princes on Saudi Policy toward Iraq," April 20, 2008, accessed March 24, 2020, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08RIYADH649_a.html.
[798] Ibid.
[799] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 26-29.

moved towards Arab capitals such as Baghdad and Beirut. After the Yemen and Syrian civil wars, Iran's rising domestic influence on Arab neighbors constituted the major concern of Saudi regional security policy.[800] At this point, it is needed to underline the endeavors of king Abdullah since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq on tolerating and respecting the Shiite communities of Saudi Arabia in the socio-political sphere. Prior to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, King Abdullah began to organize a series of well-publicized National Dialogue forums to bridge the gap between the state and Shiite populations as well as constructing dialogue among the different sects within Saudi Arabia including Sufis, Salafis, and Shi'as. This tolerant outlook of King Abdullah was a big step from Saudi Arabia that attempted to adopt a rhetoric of domestic religious plurality. However, the election of Iranian President Ahmadinejad in 2005 accelerated the political influence of Iran among the Shiite communities through "Arab street" strategy and hyper activist regional policy on pan-Arab issues, especially Palestinian issue. In addition, it also created a resistant political attitude against the US intervention in the region.[801]

4.2.2. President Barack Obama and Saudi Decision-Making: The Threat of "Sharing the Neighborhood"

Obama's presidency constituted a clear rejection of the Bush doctrine that assumed the US knew what was best for the people of the Middle East. However, it was based on the motto that less involvement of the US would be better for the region. Obama prioritized giving more responsibility to the Arab countries in shaping the regional dynamics and relations with each other.[802] Furthermore, it has brought sudden shifts to the regional security perceptions of the Saudi decision-makers towards the US regional motivations in the Middle East. As the Obama administration was against the grand involvement of the US in the wars, domestic and regional crisis of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia along with other GCC states began to have fear of further expansion of Iran in the region in the

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[800] Danny Postel and Nader Hashemi, "Playing with Fire: Trump, the Saudi- Iranian Rivalry, and the Geopolitics of Sectarianization in the Middle East," *IEMED/Mediterranean Yearbook*, 2018, 58–63.

[801] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations,"* 19-21.

[802] Shadi Hamid, "Obama's Good Intentions in the Middle East Meant Nothing," *Brookings*, January 23, 2017, accessed June 23, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/01/23/obamas-good-intentions-in-the-middle-east-meant-nothing/.

post-2006 period.[803] As Obama's first official visit was made to Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, it was appreciated by Saudi decision-makers; however, his Cairo speech that outlined his approach to the region was a dismay for the Saudi decision-makers. Obama's speech at the University of Cairo was a critical stage in the sense that it was a speech directly for the Arabs and Muslim world. It can be argued that he intended to show his respect and sensitivity to the history of Islam and Muslims by starting his speech with the Islamic greeting and quotations of the well-known verses from the Quran.[804] The major point he made in his speech can be underlined as his intention to seek a new beginning between the US and the Muslim world based on principles of mutual interest, mutual respect, justice, progress, tolerance and dignity. Moreover, he argued to get over the "cycle of suspicion and discord" in the relation between the West and Islam, which were defined in his speech as inclusive as well as a part of America's story.[805] On the other hand, one of the most significant parts of Obama's speech for the Saudi decision-makers was his request from the Saudi and Iranian decision-makers to learn how to "share the neighborhood" as part of preventing wars, crisis, instability and a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.[806] At this juncture, the possibility of a rapprochement between Iran and the US served as an alert for the Saudi decision-makers. Furthermore, after the 2015 nuclear deal, the new US administration was almost seen as a betrayal.[807] Obama's Cairo speech was criticized by several writers in terms of being weak and failing to represent the characteristics of a superpower in the world. Some even described it as a deception due to the possibility of adopting Iran's regional narratives, thus undermining Saudi Arabia's role in the region.[808]

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[803] Richard J. Schmierer et al., "The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and The Obama Doctrine," *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 2 (2016): 5.
[804] Ian Black and Mark Tran, "Barack Obama's Cairo Speech Pledges New Beginning between US and Muslims," *The Guardian*, June 4, 2009, accessed November 12, 2019https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/04/barack-obama-speech-cairo-israel.
[805] "Remarks by the President at Cairo University," *The White House*, June 4, 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09.
[806] Ibid.
[807] James Reinl, "Obama Aide: How We Got It Wrong in Yemen," Obama Aide: How We Got It Wrong in Yemen, *Trt World*, February 14, 2019, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/obama-aide-how-we-got-it-wrong-in-yemen-24162.
[808] Elhanan Miller, "Saudi Official: We Won't Cooperate with Israel as Long as 'Palestine Is Occupied,'" *The Times of Israel*, September 20, 2015, accessed May 23, 2019, http://www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-official-we-wont-cooperate-with-israel-as-long-as-palestine-is-occupied/.Miller.

Saudi decision-makers throughout history tended to depend on the US security umbrella during troubling periods to guarantee their external security. The Obama administration functioned as a kind of process for them to assess the geopolitical, ethnic, sectarian and ideological reasons for viewing Saudi Arabia and Iran, in order to share the neighborhood without claiming religious or historical dominancy. By 2012, King Abdullah announced the views of President Obama as a threat to the domestic security of the kingdom. This occurred at the time when the Obama administration became more problematic for Saudi decision-makers following the toppling of President Hosni Mubarak who had been a close ally of Saudi Arabia. It became a domestic security issue for Saudi Arabia as a monarchy that could be the next in line to be toppled down.[809] One of the most crucial incidents of the Obama administration to the crisis of the region after the Arab uprisings was his refusal to launch airstrikes in Syria in 2013, leading to a clear awareness to the Saudi decision-makers on the fundamental shift in the way that the US considers its role in the region. As one includes the Saudi concerns about the Shiite minority in eastern provinces in the case of a more deepened involvement of Iran in the region, it can be seen that Saudi Arabia was constrained to work for itself in Syria for overthrowing Syrian President Bashar Assad as Iran's closest ally, or arming opposition groups at least in the early phases of the war.[810] All of these thrilled Saudi Arabia's self-perception of being the dominant actor in the region and imposed a fundamental shift in the perception of the decision-makers to adopt a more assertive foreign policy, including military operations. Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement to view the deterioration of the US-Saudi relations during the Obama administration. As Saudi Arabia has been the world's largest oil producer with a qualified excess production capacity, the US preferred to hold sound relations with Saudi Arabia in order to moderate and control the rise and falls of the oil prices.[811] Moreover, since Obama took office in January 2009, Saudi Arabia had been the recipient of air-to-ground missiles, small arms and ammunition to tanks, attack helicopters, and missile defense ships beside receiving US military training for the Saudi

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[809] Patrick Cockburn, "How Barack Obama Turned His Back on Saudi Arabia and Its Sunni Allies," *The Independent*, March 12, 2016, accessed December 18, 2019, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/barack-obama-saudi-arabia-us-foreign-policy-syria-jihadism-isis-a6927646.html.

[810] Ilan Goldenberg, "Here's How Both Obama and Trump Stoked the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry," *Foreign Policy*, December 7, 2017, accessed March 23, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/07/heres-how-both-obama-and-trump-stoked-the-saudi-iranian-rivalry/.

[811] Ibid.

army.[812] However, Obama administration's prioritization of a nuclear agreement with Iran, which would in turn enable Iran as a nuclear threat, and raise a nuclear escalation process between Saudi Arabia and Iran with the possible establishment of the first nuclear development. It can be argued that the impact of the nuclear talks on the distrust of the Saudi decision-makers towards the US administration and deep suspicion towards the US views in favor of Iran's regional role and pushing the kingdom to share the neighborhood with Iran. As a result, Saudi Arabia felt itself to act on their own, such as calming revolts in Bahrain by sending troops, arming groups in Syria and launching a Saudi-led group for the intervention of Yemen.

4.2.3. Ahmadinejad's Era: Messianic Fervors versus Military Nationalism

Ahmadinejad era was a controversial one that was criticized for being ultra-conservative and reshaped the Saudi narratives towards the region and Iran in the aftermath of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war. Ahmadinejad, an old member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard who fought in the Iran-Iraq war, and a former mayor of Tehran, came to power in 2005 as the most favored candidate of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and Basij[813]. During his first period, more than two-thirds of all ministers, governors, and the majority of the Iranian parliament members were the past commanders of the IRGC.[814] As an award to its cooperation, during his first three years of his presidency, the Basij received more than three thousand contracts from the government and in road constructions.[815] In 2005, for the first time since Khomeini's death, the conservatives controlled the majority of the government organs, supreme leader title and coercive state instruments. However, the Assembly of Experts and the Expediency Council remained out of their full control. From early 2008 to 2009 elections, various reformist leaders such as Rafsanjani, Hussein Ali Montazeri and Mir Hussein Mousavi publicly began to

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[812] Yara Bayoumy, "Obama Administration Arms Sales Offers to Saudi Top $115 Billion: Report," *Reuters*, September 7, 2016, accessed February 12, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-security-idUSKCN11D2JQ.

[813] The Basij is a paramilitary and voluntary organization functioning under the IRGC. It might recruit paid members but heavily recruits its members from clerical segment and trustful citizens. It relies on the cooperation of local and regional mosques.

[814] Abbas Milani, "Obama's Existential Challenge to Ahmadinejad," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2009): 65.

[815] Ibid, 69-70.

criticize Ahmadinejad's domestic and foreign policy decisions, most especially over the economic inflation, and unemployment of the Iranian people and youth.[816]

In terms of his political rhetoric, Ahmadinejad presented himself as the representative of the *mosta'zafin* (downtrodden), the true follower of Khomeini, and adopted the motto of "justice-nurturing government".[817] As a student of various conservative clerics such as Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi (also a colleague of Mojtaba Samareh Hashemi) and a senior advisor to the Ahmedinejad's government (2005–2009), and Saeed Jalili, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (2007–2013), Ahmadinejad built his political rhetoric on pillars of a pious political behavior with a belief in the apocalypse and messianism that were not actually new in the history of religions.[818] The Mahdi belief was a focal point of his political rhetoric and a useful political tool to gather Muslims around the regional claims of the regime. For instance, Ahmadinejad sponsored the first annual International Conference of Mahdism Doctrine in 2005, and defined Mahdism as an ideology conforming with the peace and unity across religions around the world: "Islamic Republic and the system of *velayet-i faqih* have no other mission but to prepare for the establishment of a world government. . . as the Imam (Mahdi) runs and manages the universe".[819] In his speeches, Ahmadinejad continuously underlined the symbol of divine hand that would come soon to clean up the tyranny in the world (i.e., the US troops in the region).[820] Likewise, Supreme Leader Khamenei supported the political rhetoric of Ahmadinejad by claiming his presidency as the fulfillment of the "prayers of the Lord of the Age", and Ayatollah Ali Meshkini, as the start of the last action to clean up Iran internally in order to cope with the Islamic revolution's international roles.[821] Therefore, Ahmadinejad's messianic rhetoric can be argued to find a response and support at the

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[816] Amin Saikal, "The Roots of Iran's Election Crisis," *Survival* 51, no. 5 (2009): 96-99.

[817] Mohebat Ahdiyyih, "Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi," *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1, 2008, accessed April 17, 2019, https://www.meforum.org/1985/ahmadinejad-and-the-mahdi.

[818] In addition to the Jewish and Christian messianic traditions, Twelver Shiite believes the messiah Muhammad al-Mahdi - the Twelfth Imam - who went disappeared in 874 CE and will return before the Day of Judgment.

[819] Ahdiyyih, "Ahmadinejad and the."

[820] John Daniszewski, "Messianic Fervor Grows Among Iran's Shiites," Los Angeles Times, April 15, 2006, accessed June 14, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-apr-15-fg-twelvers15-story.html.

[821] Abbas Djavadi, "The Apocalypse, Messianism, And Ahmadinejad," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, December 9, 2009, accessed June 16, 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/The_Apocalypse_Messianism_Define_Ahmadinejads_Policies/1899060.html.

religious leadership level beside the IRGC and Basij part. As a result, this shaped his foreign policy discourse towards the West and the neighbors in the region.

Under the leadership of Ahmadinejad, the conservatives took control of the parliament, and this paved the way for Iran to revive the exportation of the revolution ideal along with a confrontational approach toward the West. This was reflected in his interpretation of the economy, and it is in contrast to Rafsanjani's Structural Adjustment Program or Khatami's Economic Rehabilitation Plan, Ahmadinejad rejected capitalism, socialism and communism as the non-Islamic economy models, which could constitute internal contradictions within the Iranian domestic structure.[822] In one of his speeches, he highlighted his intention to stay away from economic discussions or adopt a distinctive economic plan similar to his counterparts: "I pray to God that I will never know about economics."[823]

Despite that his era increased the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as with the other Gulf countries, Ahmadinejad worked to develop sound relations with the regional states, undermine the emerging concerns regarding its nuclear activities, and take a serious stance against allegations based on Iranian intentions to gain hegemony over the regional states, particularly through forming a Shiite Crescent.[824] At this point, the "enemy abroad" phenomena was a crucial tool for reshaping domestic politics to readdress the Ahmadinejad government's foreign policy decisions. The US and Israel were two actors as the "enemies abroad" served for reshaping domestic and regional politics that were portrayed as two states determined to destroy the Islamic regime of Iran. To contain the supposed intentions of the two, Ahmadinejad focused on building Iran's military power, developing nuclear program, and strengthening its ties with the Shiite societies of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. On many occasions such as at a conference in 2007 at Columbia University, Ahmadinejad questioned the Holocaust and criticized the propaganda by the West against the Islamic credentials of the Iranian regime.[825] Moreover, in October 2005, in a conference entitled "A World Without

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[822] Jahangir Amuzegar, "Ahmadinejad's Legacy," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 4 (2013): 124–32.

[823] Jahangir Amuzegar, "The Ahmadinejad Era: Preparing For The Apocalypse," *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (2007): 36-37.

[824] Debbie Abuelghanam and Naser Tahboub, "Mixed Messages: Iran versus Saudi Arabia and GCC," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 5, no. 4 (2018): 365–386.

[825] Ali M. Ansari, "Chapter Three: The Ahmadinejad Presidency: Image and Foreign Policy," *The Adelphi Papers* 47, no. 393 (2007): 43-45.

Zionism" in Tehran, he argued that "the Jerusalem-occupying regime must be erased from the page of time".[826] Beside all of the negative discourse against the US and Israel, he rejected the US's superpower status in the international system and criticized the international institutions as part of the Western domination over the desires of the Islamic republic: "Our nation is continuing in the path of progress and this path has no significant need for United Nations."[827] After all, eliminating Israel or countering the US influence in the region were the antagonizing rhetoric mixed with the messianic fervors of the Ahmadinejad's era beside strengthening the domestic situations of the Shiite communities in the neighbors.

Meanwhile, the 2009 elections in Iran were the turning point for his political future in politics, which turned some former supporters of Ahmadinejad against him. Khamenei's strong support in the 2005 elections was not the same in his second term, especially after he rejected the Ahmadinejad's suggestion of the dismissal of the Minister of Intelligence, Heidar Moslehi. The results and conspiracies of the 2009 elections shifted Ahmadinejad's rhetoric from apocalypticism to nationalistic themes, which illustrated the deepening split within the conservative fraction. This change was argued to serve the demand of the Iranian people who were not associating themselves either with the Islamic republican values or the reformist movement.[828] Under these circumstances, Ahmadinejad found himself to be supported only by the most hardline figures from the Rayehe-ye Khosh-e Khedmat (Pleasant Scent of Servitude)[829], students of Mesbah-Yazdi, and several IRG figures.[830] On the other side, Mir Hossein Mousavi, his opponent in the 2009 election, found support from the reformist leaders like Rafsanjani, Grand Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri and Former President Khatami by spreading the slogan of "We Can", with the aim of reforming the Islamic regime to situate Iran in a more

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[826] Joshua Teitelbaum, "What Iranian Leaders Really Say About Doing Away with Israel: A Refutation of the Campaign to Excuse Ahmadinejad's Incitement to Genocide," (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2008), accessed July 21, 2020, https://jcpa.org/article/what-iranian-leaders-really-say-about-doing-away-with-israel/.

[827] Ray Takeyh, "A Profile in Defiance: Being Mahmoud Ahmadinejad," *The National Interest*, no. 83 (2006): 19.

[828] Robert Tait, "Iranian President's New 'Religious-Nationalism' Alienates Hard-Line Constituency," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, August 18, 2010, accessed December 28, 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/Iranian_Presidents_New_ReligiousNationalism_Alienates_HardLine_Constituency/2131415.html.

[829] It is a conservative political coalition founded in 2006 and supported the Ahmadinejad's government.

[830] Ahdiyyih, "Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi."

pleasing place in the world.[831] However, the 2009 elections changed the Iranian domestic dynamics and revealed the capacity of a non-Islamic movement such as the Green Movement, which in turn served as an alert for the regional states, especially for Saudi decision-makers concerned about the regime survival of the kingdom.

4.2.4. The 2009 Green Movement (Jonbesh e Sabz) of Iran and Saudi Threat Perception

The victory of Ahmadinejad in the 2009 elections of Iran created a suspicion of fraud and corruption of his government. According to the Ahmadinejad's government, he received 62.6 percent of the votes, while the opposition candidate and former Prime Minister and candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, received 33.75 percent of the votes. According to the Ministry of Interior, Ahmadinejad's votes rose by 113% compared to 2005.[832] Despite the suspicions over the results, the 2009 elections became the highest vote turnout in Iranian history with 85 percent.[833] From June 23, 2009 until February 14, 2010, a mass demonstration began in Iran with the slogan of shouting "where is my vote?". This was later called the Green Movement,[834] which created an opportunity as a powerful social force for the people critical against the regime's domestic and foreign policies. The movement ended with a death toll of around 110 people.[835] It also included imprisonment and house arrest of many people and politicians such as the major oppositon candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi [836] and his wife Zahra Rahnavard. Other opposition candidates such as Mehdi Karroubi, as well as various human rights activists,

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[831] Amin Saikal, "The Roots of Iran's Election Crisis," *Survival* 51, no. 5 (2009): 96-99.

[832] Daniel Berman and Thomas Rintoul, "Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election" (Chatham House, June 2009), accessed July 15, 2019, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/iranelection0609.pdf.

[833] Ulrich von Schwerin, *The Dissident Mullah: Ayatollah Montazeri and the Struggle for Reform in Revolutionary Iran* (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 217-218.

[834] "The Green movement took its name from a green sash given to Mir Hossein Mousavi by Mohammad Khatami." In Abbas Milani, "The Green Movement," *United States Institute of Peace*, October 6, 2010, accessed April 25, 2019, https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/green-movement.

[835] Akbar Ganji and ContributorDissident Iranian journalist; Intl Press Association World Press Freedom Hero, "Iran's Green Movement Five Years Later -- 'Defeated' But Ultimately Victorious," *HuffPost*, August 6, 2014, accessed June 17, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/iran-green-movement-five-years_b_5470078.

[836] Mousavi served as the Prime Minister of Iran from 1981-1989. He identified himself as a principalist-reformist leader of Iranian politics. In addition to his leadership of the Green Movement, together with his wife, he was one of the leading figures for the victory of the 1979 Iranian revolution. In his campaign of the 2009 elections, he criticized the discrimination against women and proposed the exterminate the polygamy. For more; Seyed Amir Niakooee, "Explaining the Crisis of the Green Movement in Iran (2009-2017)," *Democracy and Security* (2020): 1-31.

lawyers, writers and artists (such as Nasrin Sotoudeh, Jafar Panahi, and Shirin Ebadi), left Iran to live in exile.

Despite their critical stance against Ahmadinejad's government, Mousavi and Karroubi were also the products of the Islamic Republic and the followers of Khomeini. As a result, the Green movement was not against the regime of the Islamic republic, but rather the domestic policies and foreign policy decisions of the Ahmadinejad's government that was accused of being corrupted in the 2009 elections. For instance, Mousavi was a former prime minister selected by Khomeini and his personal representative during the Iran-Iraq war, while Karroubi was a Shiite cleric and a reformist politician who served as the speaker of the parliament in 2000–2004. Both candidates endeavored to represent the interests, political and social freedom of the middle classes in cities as well as claimed to end the political and economic corruption and unemployment in the country.[837] Mousavi, Karroubi, and the demonstrators of the Green movement cannot be defined as local actors against the Islamic republic but against the regime's foreign policy decisions and domestic activities. For instance, they viewed the Ahmadinejad regime's behavior towards the UN sanctions as "adventurism" due to his nuclear development activities. Nevertheless, if Iran can be transferred into a democratic country, it would not seek to develop a nuclear bomb.[838] However, during Ahmadinejad's second term, Mousavi claimed the "ineffectiveness of the government in foreign policy" were said to be conducted without the knowledge of the government given the affairs of Afghanistan and Lebanon and overseas operations.[839] Meanwhile, he resigned by a written letter to Khamenei.

The motivations for the movement can be traced back to the 2005 elections when Ahmadinejad and conservative elites began to rise in Iranian politics. Therefore, it can be concluded that the power structure of the Iranian political system constructs its own opposition.[840] Despite the movement having no hierarchical structure, it reached out to

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[837] Robert F. Worth and Nazila Fathi, "Protests Flare in Tehran as Opposition Disputes Vote," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2009, accessed March 5, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html.

[838] Milani, "The Green Movement."

[839] Selim Celal, "Iran Threat Over Saudi Arabia Growing," *Anadolu Agency*, November 11, 2017, accessed April 17, 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis-news/opinion-iran-threat-over-saudi-arabia-growing/962100.

[840] Ross Colvin, "'Cut off Head of Snake' Saudis Told U.S. on Iran," *Reuters*, November 29, 2010, accessed September 15, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-wikileaks-iran-saudis-idUSTRE6AS02B20101129.

the world as a civil right movement instead of a revolution. Since 3,000 Iran-related videos were uploaded to YouTube within 24 hours on June 17, 2009[841], the Green movement had emerged as a kind of social media or a Twitter revolution.[842] At this point, it was different from the demonstrations that begun against the Shah regime in 1979, which had been shaped around an organized leadership with well-defined goals. The Green Movement lacked an organized structure to express certain goals and strategic visions. However, neither Mousavi nor Karroubi were interested in overthrowing the regime or changing the religious regime of the country. It was the outcome of the tension and anger of the society against the existing regime owing to the suspicious turnouts of the 2009 election and this added pressure on the Supreme Leader to restructure the governance system.[843]

The demonstrators of the Green Movement borrowed the *intifadah* term to identify their movement by referring to the Palestinian cause, which added a deep concern for Saudi Arabia. From the Saudi decision-makers' perspective, it was an encouraging movement by the Middle Eastern people rebelling for liberties and socio-political freedom. By using the Arabic terms to define the Green Movement, Iran aimed at attracting attention to the interaction between Arabs and Iranians as far from sectarian tensions and geopolitical goals. As the movement was understood to be a challenging one towards the pillars of the Islamic revolution by the regime, it seemed like serving for the end of the Islamic leadership claims of Iran. However, since it was actually a non-violent civil rights movement, Saudi Arabia viewed it as a motivating engagement for the Saudis and Arab people against the monarchial structure of the kingdom and other monarchies in the region.

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[841] Sara Beth Elson, Douglas Yeung, Parisa Roshan, S. R. Bohandy, and Alireza Nader, "Background on Social Media Use in Iran and Events Surrounding the 2009 Election," in *Using Social Media to Gauge Iranian Public Opinion and Mood After the 2009 Election* (RAND Corporation, 2012), https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR1161.html.

[842] Jared Keller, "Evaluating Iran's Twitter Revolution," *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2010, acessed December 25, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/06/evaluating-irans-twitter-revolution/58337/.

[843] Victor Sundquist, "Iranian Democratization Part II: The Green Movement - Revolution or Civil Rights Movement?" *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 1 (March 2013): 45.

4.2.5. Rise of Nuclear Discussions in Saudi Regional Security Perception

The nuclear enrichment of Iran was perceived as a perilous move by the Saudis, especially following the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon war period that shifted the regional dynamics in favor of Iran. International perception towards Iran's nuclear activities had actually been triggered since the establishment of a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy-water reactor at Arak, without being declared to the IAEA in August 2002.[844] According to the Iranian decision-makers, Tehran's aim was not to develop a nuclear bomb for military activities but to have a nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. At this juncture, *fatwas* given by the Supreme Leader of Iran regarding the ban of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Islam was decisive to legitimize Iran's rhetoric towards the critics.[845] Previous Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini's statement during the Iran-Iraq War on the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons in Islam was a supportive emphasis to convince the international public about the nuclear power generation of Iran. More significantly, as an answer to the international critics for the Natanz centrifuge enrichment plant, Ayatollah Khamenei announced a famous nuclear fatwa, and thus stressing the indiscriminate nature of the WMD and banning the development and stockpiling due to their incompetency with the Islamic tradition in 2003.[846] However, following the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran adapted its perception of the nuclear policy to the national defense and security purposes as illustrated in the former Prime Minister Rafsanjani's statement in 1988: "Chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bomb and can easily be produced. We should at least consider them for our defense. . . We should fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons. . ."[847] As the fatwas are responses to the changing conditions of the world, the modified arguments of the Iranian decision-makers might be a nuclear issue in the future. According to the deception and

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[844] Michael Clarke, "Iran as a 'Pariah' Nuclear Aspirant," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 67, no. 4 (2013): 494.

[845] Iran ratifies NPT in February 1970. Shah Reza Pahlavi establishes the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) in 1974. Iranian nuclear projects are halted in 1979. For the fatwa of Khamenei on nuclear enrichment, see: "Supreme Leader's Message to International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament," April 17, 2010, accessed April 28, 2020, https://farsi.khamenei.ir/treatise-content?id=228#2790.

[846] Michael Eisenstadt and Mehdi Khalaji, "Nuclear Fatwa: Religion and Politics in Iran's Proliferation Strategy," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, no. 115 (2011), https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/3344?disposition=inline.

[847] Shah Alam, "Nuclear and Foreign Policy Calculations of Iran," *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 64, no. 2 (2008): 112-113.

dissimulation factor claiming to serve the interests of the *ummah* in Shiite tradition, Iran's responses and fatwas perceiving the nuclear development for non-military purposes might become suspicious for the regional actors and international community.[848]

Iranian side often expressed little confidence in the international community, and the unfair practice of the negotiations against the Iranian interests. Mohammad Javad Zarif, the ambassador of Iran to the UN, related Iran's national security doctrine to the past war experiences of Iran and its strategic geopolitical stance.[849] For instance, Iranian officials always stated their disappointment towards the silence of the regional and international actors during Iraq's attack on Iran by chemical weapons and missiles in the 1980–1988 war. This experience of Iran was underlined to be the major reason for Iranian's distrust against the foreign actors and reshaped the perception of Iranian decision-makers of developing its own military defense, and conventional and non-conventional capabilities.[850] For the Ahmadinejad's government, nuclear development activities of Iran was a legitimate right of the Iranian people (the right of the Iranian regime), and the critics viewing Iran's rights as illegitimate would be eventually defeated by the will of the Iranian people.[851] His government was particularly critical about the Khatami government's nuclear negotiating efforts and the soft tone of the nuclear negotiators such as Hassan Rouhani, who were accused of ignoring Iran's interests for Western favor.[852]

Nuclear-armed Iran was a great concern for the Saudi decision-makers in the post-2006 period when Iran had already strengthened its hand in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. The Saudi decision-makers' concerns can be observed in King Abdullah's message through Adel Al-Jubeir, to urge the US to "cut off the head of the snake" and "put an end to (Iran's) nuclear program".[853] This was a direct request from King Abdullah to the Obama administration to launch military strikes against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure. At the same time, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, highlighted the rationale of the kingdom towards the nuclear empowerment activities of the regional

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[848] Eisenstadt and Khalaji, "Nuclear Fatwa: Religion".

[849] James Dobbins, Sarah Harting, and Dalia Dassa Kaye, *Coping with Iran: Confrontation, Containment, or Engagement? A Conference Report* (RAND Corporation, 2007), https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF237.html.

[850] Gawdat Bahgat, "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 307–27., 312.

[851] "سياسي / احمدي نجاد / القضية النووية وكالة الأنباء السعودية," November 21, 2007, accessed February 21, 2019, https://www.spa.gov.sa/501916?lang=ar&newsid=501916.

[852] Ansari, "Chapter Three: The," 62-65.

[853] Colvin, "'Cut off Head."

states and Saudi regional security perception as such: "Gulf states are not known for seeking hegemony or threatening power".[854] Similarly, Prince Turki often underlined Saudi Arabia's preference of building a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East. A nuclear-empowered Iran was defined as a destabilizing factor for the security of the world as stated by President Obama in 2009: "Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile activity poses a real threat, not just to the United States but to Iran's neighbors and our allies".[855] After the 2009 elections, it was even a serious discussion among the right-wing US decision-makers to launch direct military action against Iran's nuclear facilities.[856] It also posed a security threat to other Gulf countries and served as a deterrent to the common security perception of the Gulf states as it might possibly threaten the world oil supply in the case of the blockade of the Straits of Hormuz.[857] The Gulf states' view of the Iranian nuclear program differed from one to another due to the distrust of the Gulf states about Iran's purpose in the use of nuclear power. For instance, while Kuwait and Bahrain believed it is Iran's right to launch its own nuclear power for peaceful purposes, the foreign minister of the UAE, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, called Iran a "huge problem that goes far beyond nuclear capabilities" (i.e, the military support of Iran for "terrorist" groups active in the Gulf, Afghanistan and Yemen).[858]

Owing to the disbelief of the kingdom towards the regional intentions of the Iranian side and Saudi Arabia, a signature country of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1988 attempted to acquire nuclear weapons as a deterrent to Iran despite it had already benefitted from transfers of advanced weapon systems from the West.[859] It was argued that Iran's nuclear program directed the Saudi decision-makers to discuss the ways to develop its own nuclear program. In addition, this program was believed to decrease the security dependency on the US, and calm the royal family's worry of losing their political

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[854] Sammy Salama and Heidi Weber, "Arab Nuclear Envy," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, no. September/October (2007): 48.
[855] "Remarks By President Barack Obama In Prague As Delivered," *The White House: Office of the Press Secretary,* April 5, 2009, accessed September 7, 2020, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered.
[856] Michael Clarke, "Iran as a 'Pariah' Nuclear Aspirant," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 67, no. 4 (2013): 493.
[857] Mark Fitzpatrick, "Assessing Iran's Nuclear Programme," *Survival* 48, no. 3 (2006): 5–26., 22.
[858] Ganji and Hero, "Iran's Green Movement."
[859] Robert Tait, "WikiLeaks Cables Suggest Arab Fears Over Iran Mirror Israel's," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, November 29, 2010, accessed May 23, 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/wikileaks_cables_us_leak_iran_arab_israel/2234156.html. Accessed on

legitimacy in the face of the critics given the over-dependency on the US forces.[860] Although in 2008, the kingdom established a department responsible for the nuclear energy development[861] and in 2010, it announced the kingdom's plans to set up sixteen nuclear reactors until 2040.[862] It might be argued that there was no evidence that illustrated the kingdom's determination to build a nuclear capacity of its own. However, at the discourse level, Saudi decision-makers such as Turki Al-Faisal, the head of the Saudi intelligence and then the ambassador to Washington, emphasized the possibility of the developing nuclear empowerment activities of the Arab states in case Iran's nuclear development could not be deterred by the IAEA. At this juncture, it was even argued that Prince Turki had unofficial talks with Britain and the US to discuss the economic, diplomatic, and security resources in order to counter the Iranian nuclear activities and regional ambitions following the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.[863] Nevertheless, Saudi decision-makers tended to underline their cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), claiming that they did not possess nuclear reactors or materials. As a result, this gave a peaceful and opposite regional vision compared to Iran's verbal reactions to the critics from the international community.

4.2.6. Ideological Sensitiveness versus Political Struggles of the Palestine Conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran

Iran has often tended to define and legitimize its regional rhetoric and narratives over the intra-Arab rivalries. The Palestine conflict has been one of the decisive moments that incrementally raised the Saudi regional threat perception against Iran as Saudi Arabia imposed itself as the leading regional actor on the resolution of the issue throughout history. Most especially after the Camp David agreement that signaled Egypt's retreat from regional politics, Saudi decision-makers' concerns increased over Iran's role among

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[860] R. Russell, "A Saudi Nuclear Option?" *Survival* 43, no. 2 (2011): 70-72.

[861] Dan Drollette Jr, "View from the inside: Prince Turki al-Faisal on Saudi Arabia, Nuclear Energy and Weapons, and Middle East Politics," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 72, no. 1 (2016): 19.

[862] Lauren Sukin, "Beyond Iran: Containing Nuclear Development in the Middle East," *The Nonproliferation Review* 22, no. 3–4 (2015): 383.

[863] Dan Drollette Jr, "View from the inside: Prince Turki al-Faisal on Saudi Arabia, Nuclear Energy and Weapons, and Middle East Politics," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 72, no. 1 (2016): 17-18.

Palestinians and the ties with Hamas[864]. Furthermore, Iran shaped its regional interests in accordance with Hamas (such as the elimination of Israel and the establishment of the Palestinian state), hence financially and politically support Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). This strengthened it as a major regional player in the crisis such as the 2008–2009 Gaza War. Rhetorically, Iranian officials presented themselves as the representatives of virtue on the Palestinian conflict, which intended to attain the Iranian regional narrative over the Saudi Arabia's. To illustrate, Khamenei was not hesitating to portray Palestine as "a limb of our body"[865] during the Palestinian *intifadah* in 2000. Moreover, Yasser Arafat—the chairman of Palestine Liberation Organization—until his death in 2004, revealed Ayatollah Khomeini's equation of the Palestine cause with the Iran's revolution, which would be completed with the victory of the Palestinians.[866] The Palestinian cause was a propitious source of rivalry between Saudi and Iranian regional narratives that were being reshaped in favor of the latter in the post-2006 period.

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon War and the victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian elections that came out simultaneously, put the Israeli-Palestinian cause into the top of the regional agenda of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan as well as pushed a dialogue between the Arab states, Israel and the US. In the aftermath of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, with its perceived defeat in the eyes of the Arab states against Hizballah, Israel attempted to restrain the influence of Iran in Lebanon and Palestine by defining and exalting Saudi Arabia as a "moderate" state in the Middle East.[867] Besides being highlighted as a moderate state in comparison to Iran, Saudi decision-makers aimed at demonstrating their intention to take the lead in mitigating intra-Arab tensions such as by organizing the 2007 Arab League Summit in Riyadh. Secondly, to contain Iran's embracement of Hamas politically and financially, King Abdullah supported the reconciliation and brokered the 2007 Mecca Agreement that initiated a unity government between the Palestinian National Authority and Hamas.[868] However, the interim agreement

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[864] Hamas is an abbreviation of "Harakat al-muqawamah al-Islamiyyah" (Islamic resistance movement) in Arabic and emerged as a local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood following the first Palestinian intifada in 1987.

[865] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 23.

[866] John K. Cooley, "Iran, the Palestinians, and the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs, Council on Foreign Relations* 57, no. 5 (1979): 1017.

[867] Rachel Brandenburg, "Iran and the Palestinians," *United States Institute of Peace: The Iran Primer*, January 2016, accessed March 14, 2019, https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-palestinians.

[868] Julia Pettengill and Houriya Ahmed, "Regional Actors and the Fatah-Hamas Unity Deal: Shifting Dynamics in the Middle East?" (Henry Jackson Society, 2011), accessed January 15, 2020,

constituted a failure for Saudi decision-makers, which further raised the kingdom's threat perception towards Iran's assist in the conflict.

The alignment of Iran with the Palestinian conflict was interpreted by the Saudi decision-makers as part of Iran's regional ambitions, and had to be solved between the Arab states as it was actually an Arab issue.[869] For Saudi Arabia, it was critical to underline the fact that Iranian decision-makers were impotent to offer a sound solution both for the Palestine conflict and the regional crises in the Levant due to their ideological conception of Israel. As Iran declared itself as an actor clearly committed to Israel's elimination since 1979, Hamas and Hizballah became two local actors and tools for fighting militarily and politically against Israel. At this juncture, it might be argued that the statement of Hamas Leader, Khaled Mashaal, for Iran acted as a "partner in victory"[870] after the Gaza War in 2008–2009 within the context of Iran's penetration in the political structure of Gaza. Iran's regional desires were more evident during Ahmadinejad's period as illustrated in one of his speeches: "I am telling you that a greater and new Middle East will be established, but it will be a Middle East without the presence of America and without the existence of the evil Zionist regime."[871] Another dimension that worried the Saudi decision-makers was the possibility of the stimulation of the Palestinians and the Shiite minorities of the Gulf states given Iran's embrace of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[872] At this juncture, Khamenei's reference to the killing of the Palestinians in Gaza as martyrs demonstrates the Iranian intention to embrace both the emotional and ideological side of the conflict regardless of the religious divergence.[873] Therefore, Iran's relationship with Hamas could be understood as shared interests ideologically serving as the Iranian narrative in the eyes of the Palestinian diaspora and the Arabs in the region.

After the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, the Gaza War emerged to exacerbate Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan's concerns over Iran, Syria, and Hizballah. It also revealed divisions

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https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-il/dv/regionalactorsandfathhamasunitydeal/regionalactorsandfathhamasunitydealen.pdf.

[869] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations,* 23-24.

[870] Brandenburg, "Iran and the Palestinians."

[871] Pettengill and Ahmed, "Regional Actors and," 21.

[872] John K. Cooley, "Iran, the Palestinians, and the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs, Council on Foreign Relations* 57, no. 5 (1979): 1021.

[873] Michael Slackman, Iran Gives Hamas Enthusiastic Support, but Discreetly, Just in Case," *The New York Times,* January 12, 2009, accessed April 29, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/13/world/middleeast/13iran.html.

of the Saudi Arabia's multilateral Arab approach; for instance, while Egypt coordinated with the kingdom of Gaza, Qatar and Syria opposed the Saudi views.[874] Following the end of the Gaza War, Saudi Arabia was motivated to build intra-Palestinian and intra-Arab unity with the purpose of limiting Iran's influence in Arab affairs. In accordance with this move, King Abdullah referred that the political disputes among Arabs "have led us to division and dispersion of our will. These disputes have helped and are still helping our treacherous Israeli enemy and whoever seeks to sow division of the Arab ranks and take full advantage of promoting his regional goals at the expense of our unity, dignity and aspirations."[875] King Abdullah was in favor of keeping the unity among the Arab states, deflating the Iranian influence over the Palestinian cause, and urging the unity of the Palestinians to establish an independent state with the Jerusalem capital beside reaching an agreement between the US, Israel and Hamas.[876] From the Iranian side, Saudi decision-makers implemented the interests of the US and Israel rather than helping the Gaza people according to the Iranian newspaper Kayhan: "King Abdullah, the puppet king of Saudi Arabia, is not expected to ignore the demands of his American and Zionist masters and frown at what is going on in Gaza".[877] Besides, both sides accused each other of taking advantage of the Palestine conflict in their favor of narratives; they both pledged financial aid for the reconstruction of Gaza. Iran announced to build houses, schools, shops, and hospitals, while Saudi Arabia paid $1 billion to the Palestinian government of the West Bank.[878] While gaining political leverage among the Arabs was a priority for Iran, Saudi decision-makers were struggling to counter Iran's penetration within the political structure of Gaza and with Hamas.

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[874] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 88.

[875] Jim Zanotti, Carol Migdalovitz, Jeremy M. Sharp, Casey L. Addis, Christopher M. Blanchard and Rhoda Margesson, "Israel and Hamas: Conflict in Gaza (2008-2009)," *Congressional Research Service*, February 19, 2009, accessed February 3, 2020, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40101.pdf.

[876] Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran*, 223-224.

[877] Slackman, "Iran Gives Hamas."

[878] Damien McElroy, "Iran Vows to Pay for Gaza Aid as Children Return to UN schools," *The Telegraph*, January 24, 2009, accessed October 15, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/4330561/Iran-vows-to-pay-for-Gaza-aid-as-children-return-to-UN-schools.html.

4.2.7. Fifth Column Concerns of the Saudi Foreign Policy-Making

Shiite communities in Saudi Arabia living in the Eastern provinces such as Qatif and Al-Hasa (Twelver Shiites)[879], Nakhawila community (Twelver Shiites) in Medina and Najran (Ismaili Shiites)[880] at the Yemen border appeared to be considered a political threat to the Saudi governance due to the expanding influence and attachment of Iran within the Shiite communities of the region in the post-2006 period. One of the factors constituting the threat perception of the kingdom can be emphasized as Saudi Shiite's rejection of the official narrative of the kingdom that was built upon the idea of the unification of the Arabian Peninsula by the capture of Al-Hasa in 1913. Saudi Shiites believed that Al-Hasa, the homeland of Saudi Shiites, was occupied by Ibn Saud, and since then, they had been exposed to restrictions and persecutions under the governance of Al-Hasa, and subject to "Islamization of Shiite" idea by Ibn Jiluwi.[881] Saudi Shiites had actually been allowed to build their mosques, *hawzas* (Shiite *madrassah*) and *husayniyyas* (community centers where the Shiites hold mourning sessions)[882] until the mid-1940s, and were able to produce Shiite scholars including Ibrahim Al-Qatifi, Ahmad Zayn Al-Din Al-Ahsai, and Ali Al-Khunayzi. Following the closing of the *hawzas* in Saudi Arabia, many religious Shiite scholars and students moved to Iraq where they could integrate themselves into the most active *hawzas* and *husayniyyas* among the region in addition to Iranian ones.

Despite that Saudi Shiite communities (constitute 10–15 percent of the Saudi population)[883] did not have a direct linage with the tribes or clans of Iran or Iraq (in

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[879] Twelver Shiites are the biggest branch of the Shiite Islam living in Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon. After the death of Prophet Mohammed in 632 CE, they believe that the *imamate* had to be replaced by Ali, who was the son-in law and cousin of the prophet. Twelver Imam begins with Ali, and continues with the lineage of his sons Hasan and Hussein. The Twelver Shiites believe that the *Mahdi (rightly guided one) or* Hidden Imam, who lives in occultation will return one day and commence the process of the Day of Judgement. For more; Heinz Halm, *Shi'ism* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004).

[880] Ismaili Shiites differ from the Twelvers over the succession and leadership of the *Imamate*. The name Ismaili comes from Imam Isma'il ibn Jafar who succeeded Ja'far al-Sadiq after his death. They accept Mohammed ibn Isma'il ash-Shakir (the son of Ismail ibn Ja'far ibn Sadiq) as the seventh Imam instead of the Musa al-Kadhim. For more; Halm, *Shi'ism*.

[881] Madawi Al-Rasheed and Loulouwa Al-Rasheed, "The Politics of Encapsulation: Saudi Policy towards Tribal and Religious Opposition," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1 (1996): 110.

[882] For more on *husayniyyas*; Géraldine Chatelard, "'Ashura Rituals in Najaf: The Renewal of Expressive Modes in a Changing Urban and Social Landscape," in *Najaf: Portrait of a Holy City,* ed. Sabrina Mervin, Robert Gleave and Géraldine Chatelard (Reading, Ithaca Press, and UNESCO Paris, 2017).

[883] Joshua Teitelbaum, "The Shiites of Saudi Arabia: Riyadh's Ultimate Other," in *Saudi Arabia, Gulf, and the New Regional Landscape* (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2017), 37–42.

contrast to Kuwaiti Shiites), except the Banu Tamim tribe, Saudi Shiite constituted a domestic political entity that could easily be abused by Iran against the domestic security of Saudi Arabia. Beside their claim of loyalty to the king, Saudi Shiites underlined the fact that they were the original segment of the kingdom needed to be integrated into the Saudi society as equal members such as their Sunni counterparts. The Shiites in Saudi Arabia were not a direct threat to the survival of the royal family; however, given the rising influence of Iran and the Shiites in Iraq, they were conceived as a community that needed to be controlled against the disruption by the political rhetoric of the Iranian decision-makers. In the domestic context, Saudi Shiites were opposed by the Wahhabi ulama and the Salafi discourse influenced by Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Ibn Taymiyya, Abd al-Aziz Bin Baz, and portrayed as associationists and even *mushrikin* (polytheists). Moreover, the fact that the Supreme Leader of Iran was defined as "the great leader of the universal Islamic Revolution" in article 107 of the Iranian constitution,[884] in addition to his claims of being the leader of all Muslims around the world, constituted an existential threat to the religious narrative of the kingdom. Here, the king of Saudi Arabia was defined as the Servant of Two Holy Mosques *(Khadim Al-Ḥaramayn Al-Sharifayn)*. Despite Saudi Shiites as the followers of the Twelver Shiite (Iranian Shiite) were believed to being a potential follower of the Iranian Supreme leader, Saudi Shiite leaders claimed their loyalty to the kingdom with their religious allegiance to *marja'iyat al-taqlid al-tamm* (highest level Shiite authority that is a source to be imitated by the followers). However, this does not represent the loyalty to foreign governments, but it means accepting a certain *marja* as the authority in religious terms. The followers choose their *marja,* and not necessarily the *al-marja 'al-a'zam* (the highest *marja* in the world) to imitate; however, a strong *marja* can be a powerful unifying force.[885] In accordance with this, Saudi Shiites believed their historical ties with the *marja'iyyas* in Iran and Iraq, and as part of their religious duties, they visit the shrines in Najaf, Karbala and Qum every year. In 1993, Shiite oppositional figures such as Ghazi Al-Qusaybi returned to Saudi Arabia and reached a deal with King Fahd to achieve

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[884] "Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989," Accessed April 28, 2020, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en.

[885] Linda S. Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 4.

political reforms for the exchange of their peaceful activism.[886] As part of the 1993 reform process, Saudi Shiites could be able to open a new *hawza* (unrecognized by the government) and later expanded it to a library and a *majlis* in Qatif following the teachings of Muhammad Al-Shirazi and Sadiq Al-Shirazi.[887]

It can be mentioned that the first significant event that raised Saudi Shiites' belief in enhancing their situation inside the kingdom was the downfall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. After this period, Saudi Shiites believed that Najaf was liberated and this could pave the way for the Shiites to carry out their rituals on religious days such as the Ashura day. Saudi Shiite actors also interpreted this process as an opportunity to empower the Saudi Shiites' domestic situation. At the same time, they avoided using a separatist rhetoric and claimed their loyalty to the king and the Saudi nation as illustrated in the statement of a prominent Saudi Shiite scholar Shaykh Hasan Al-Saffar: "Saudi Shiites were determined to claim some of their rights while defending the nation's unity."[888] The second significant event for the Saudi Shiite was King Abdullah's arrival to power in 2005, which motivated the Shiites about the reform process and religious tolerance. To state their *bay'ah* to King Abdullah, Shiite leaders and scholars traveled to Riyadh from the Eastern Province, and published a memorandum titled "Partners in the Homeland" *(Shuraka fi l-Watan),* in which they asked for equality among the Saudi citizens, underlined their loyalty to the state, and urged for a dialogue between the religious scholars and clerics of all sects in the kingdom.[889] Prior to the memorandum, the 2003 National Dialogue initiated by King Abdullah had been the first time when Wahhabi ulama, oppositionists and clerics from Shiite and Sunni communities and liberals came together to discuss the tolerance and plurality process. Furthermore, Saudi Shiite was allowed to participate in the 2005 municipal elections, and the Al-*Shirazzyin* won five seats in Qatif and three seats in Al-Hasa, which can be viewed as a continuation of the

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[886] Frederic Wehrey, "The Forgotten Uprising in Eastern Saudi Arabia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* June 14, 2013, accessed April 18, 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/06/14/forgotten-uprising-in-eastern-saudi-arabia-pub-52093.

[887] Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 167.

[888] Teitelbaum, *Saudi Arabia and*, 31.

[889] Roel Meijer and Joas Wagemakers, "The Struggle for Citizenship of the Shiites of Saudi Arabia," in *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relations: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and The Media,* ed. Brigitte Marechal and Sami Zemni (London: Hurst, 2014), 124.

plurality and tolerance claim of King Abdullah's reign.[890] Despite the reform process, Saudi Shiites were still not allowed to hold key posts within the National Guard, the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Interior, or being a cabinet member, an ambassador, or establishing Shiite courts in the Shiite dominated cities, and were not allowed to build mosques and organize *husayniyyas* in cities where Sunni- Shiite communities lived together.[891] King Abdullah's reign presented a tolerant environment with a series of dialogue between the ulama of Sunni and Shiite communities but did not actually bring any grave change in their domestic situation. Overall, as illustrated in the statement of a liberal Saudi policy analyst Turki Al-Hamad, Saudi Shiite communities remained the distrusted part of the society: "I would say 90 percent of the people in Saudi Arabia don't trust the Shiites".[892]

Anti-Shiite politics of the government, as well as anti-Shiite fatwas, became prevalent among the Saudi scholars and decision-makers in the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon War. Given the destabilization of the pro-Saudi government in Lebanon, the rise of the Hizballah in Lebanese politics and pro-Hizballah demonstrations in Iraq, Egypt and Yemen rally behind Nasrallah's anti-Israel discourse. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia noted its opposition against Hizballah and Iran at the domestic and regional level. Moreover, the post-war conditions brought the Shiite identification with Hizballah within the kingdom, which consequently paved the way for a discourse based on the idea of viewing Iran as a manipulative actor of the post-Saddam Iraq, the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon War in Lebanon, Yemen, and eventually that of the Saudi Shiite communities.[893] For instance, related to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, it can be referred that the IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassim Soleimani's statement on Shiites around the world "has transformed into a single base and has found a single leader" inciting the Iranian Supreme leader.[894] On the Iranian side, it had a grave significance to strengthen the ethnic or religious

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[890] Ahmad K. Majidyar, "Saudi Arabia's Forgotten Shi'ite Spring," in *The Shi'ites of the Middle East: An Iranian Fifth Column?,* ed. Michael Rubin and Ahmad K. Majidyar (American Enterprise Institute, 2017), 5.

[891] Omaima Al Najjar, "The Saudi Shia: Between an Iranian Rock and a Saudi Hard Place," *Aljazeera*, May 8, 2019, accessed December 23, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/saudi-shia-iranian-rock-saudi-hard-place-190507153257184.html.

[892] Teitelbaum, *Saudi Arabia and*, 31.

[893] John Gordon Gordon et al., "Iran's Near Abroad," in *Domestic Trends in the United States, China, and Iran* (RAND Corporation, 2008), accessed November 23, 2019, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG729.sum.pdf.

[894] Majidyar, "Saudi Arabia's Forgotten," 5.

attachment with the Shiite communities of the region, especially in the Gulf and the Levant. At this point, it can be argued that the Iranian threat to Saudi Arabia is far from conventional arms but highly related to the ideological, rhetorical and symbolic factors.[895] In order to contain the ideological side—during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War—Saudi scholars such as Shaykh Abdallah bin Jibrin, who was a member of the Senior Ulama Council, issued fatwas calling Sunnis to negate Hizballah as *rawafid* (rejectionist). Meanwhile, this further alerted the anti- Shiite discourse in the kingdom.[896] In another fatwa in January 2007, Bin Jibrin distinguished the Sunnis as the "true Muslims" and explained the reasons why Shiites are needed to be identified as *mushrikin* (polytheists). [897] Another Sunni scholar, Shaykh Salman Al-Awda, called for the consciousness of the Saudi government in the rise of the Sunni converts to Shiism and related it to the rise of Shiites' domestic situation in the neighboring states. However, leaders such as Ja'afar Al-Shayib, Muhammad Mahfuz and Hasan Al-Saffar tended to implement or expect the continuity of engagement with the government, while other Shiite clerics such as Nimr Al-Nimr favored a more offensive stance against the regime.[898] In sum, despite that King Abdullah's term offered more opportunities for the Saudi Shiite in their integration into the society, it remained far from ameliorating their domestic situation given the regional crisis and wars such as the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War and the rise of the Hizballah and Nasrallah's regional narrative among the Arab peoples beside the Shiite communities.

4.2.8. Constructing the Hajj as a Political Affair in Saudi Foreign Policy towards Iran

The hajj pilgrimage has been conceived as an area that could be politically abused by Iran at the perception of the Saudi decision-makers. Iranian pilgrims and decision-makers' rhetoric have often been defined within Iran's revolutionary context by Saudi Arabia and the hajj issue, which appeared to be closely connected with the foreign policy decisions of both states. Meanwhile, both sides used the regional crisis, wars and events

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[895] Frederic M. Wehrey and Dalia Dassa Kaye, "Fifth Columns in the Gulf?" *Foreign Policy*, May 24, 2010, accessed May 16, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/24/fifth-columns-in-the-gulf/.
[896] Joshua Teitelbaum, "The Shiites of Saudi Arabia," *Hudson Institute,* August 21, 2010, accessed October 28, 2019, https://www.hudson.org/research/9895-the-shiites-of-saudi-arabia.
[897] Teitelbaum, *Saudi Arabia and*, 35.
[898] Ibid.

as an occasion to proclaim their dominant status in regional politics. Since 1979, the hajj affair produced a sensitive and symbolic arena that was shaped by conflicts as well as accusations of Saudi Arabia and Iran against each other. For instance, clashes between Saudi police and the Iranian pilgrims in the 1987 hajj term caused a death toll of 400 people, and paved the way for both sides. However, there were peaceful times of hajj periods such as Khatami's presidency, when both sides announced détente, cooperation, and reduced the hostile rhetoric against each other. Following Ahmadinejad's reign, Saudi decision-makers' threat perception and its impact on the hajj affair stepped up in response to the change of Iranian foreign policy discourse from rapprochement and dialogue to messianic fervor rhetoric towards the regional states.

Iran views the hajj as a political issue promoting the Iranian version of Islam, and consolidates its religious networks associated with hajj and social and financial status among the Muslims. While the hajj was a political and religious obligation[899] for Iran, Supreme Leader Khamenei, underlined in many occasions that Mecca and Medina not only belong to the Saudi Muslims but also belong to the Muslims around the world.[900] By highlighting the universality of the two holy sites Mecca and Medina (instead of being two cities of Saudi Arabia), Khamenei aims at preventing the spread of Wahhabism to dominate the minds of the Muslims around the world. While Iranian decision-makers tended to point out the lack of equality and justice in Saudi management of hajj, Saudi perception towards Iran's critiques evolved around Iran's utilization of the pilgrimage as a political instrument for expanding its Shiite religious networks and spreading the Iranian revolution ideal to all Muslims. For instance, The organization for Hajj and Pilgrimage (OSLR) that functioned as part of Iran's institutional network based in Tehran and affiliated with the Ministry of Intelligence, the judiciary, or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps appeared to spread Iran's revolutionary rhetoric abroad, including for the hajj rituals.[901] As a response to any demonstration or a violent act during the hajj season, Saudi decision-makers such as Minister of Interior Prince Nayef stated the Saudi intention to stop any attempt for the implementation of the sanctity of the hajj

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[899] "Hajj is a Political Religious Obligation," *Mehr News Agency*, July 4, 2019, accessed December 21, 2020, https://en.mehrnews.com/news/147165/Hajj-is-a-political-religious-obligation-Leader.

[900] Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Ideological Exploitation of the Hajj," *The Washington Institute*, September 12, 2016, accessed November 18, 2019, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/irans-ideological-exploitation-hajj.

[901] Ibid.

by force.[902] The statements of the Saudi decision-makers reflected the Saudi threat perception towards Iran's ideal of promoting its Islamic vision among the Muslims in the region as well as empowering its societal ties with the Muslim world.

Based on the regional dynamics in the post-2006 period, Saudi Arabia tightened the process of hajj application and limited the hajj capacity for Iranian pilgrims. In June 2007, a Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, opposed the Saudi decision of limiting the number of Iranian pilgrims as such: "going on minor Hajj in such conditions undermines Shiite Muslims' dignity and if the Saudi Hajj officials do not change their attitude toward Iranian pilgrims, the Shiite leadership will boycott the minor Hajj."[903] Despite the tensions between the two states on regulations of the hajj season, it was an unexpected move from King Abdullah to invite Ahmadinejad to the kingdom. This became the first official visit of Ahmadinejad to perform hajj in December 2007. Even though it was later argued that he was not invited by King Abdullah, but rather an Iranian initiative.[904] The hajj visit of Ahmadinejad raised the possibility of reaching a deal to reduce the tensions in regional policies, especially in Iraq and Lebanon. Moreover, during his visit, Ahmadinejad urged King Abdullah to be aware of the attempts to divide the Muslims and underpin the sectarian tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.[905] The tolerance in bilateral relations was further observed during Rafsanjani's visit to the kingdom in June 2008, when Iranian female pilgrims were allowed for the first time to visit a Shiite graveyard in Medina.[906]

By 2009, there exist the tensest period of the Saudi-Iranian ties in hajj affairs since the unfortunate bloodshed of 1987 given the opposing views of Saudi and Iranian decision-makers on the conflict in northern Yemen.[907] In accordance with this, Saudi Arabia limited hajj visas for Iranian people and refused to take fingerprints from Iranian women,

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[902] "Saudis in Show of Force for Hajj," *BBC News*, January 28. 2004, accessed February 15, 2020, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3436083.stm.

[903] "Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi Threatens to Boycott Minor Hajj," *Iqna News*, June 27, 2007, accessed June 13, 2019, https://ikna.ir/en/news/1557726/grand-ayatollah-makarem-shirazi-threatens-to-boycott-minor-hajj-.

[904] "الرئيس الإيراني يزور السعوديةو," *BBC Arabic*, March 2, 2007, accessed November 24, 2019, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_6409000/6409889.stm.

[905] "نجاد يدعو العاهل السعودي إلى توخي الحذر من," *Alittihad*, September 16, 2007, accessed February 25, 2019, https://www.alittihad.ae/article/137978/2007/.

[906] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 41-42.

[907] Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, Ku Hasnita Binti Ku Samsu, and Hassan Gholipour Fereidouni, "The Hajj and Iran's Foreign Policy towards Saudi Arabia," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 46, no. 6 (2011): 685-687.

which in turn made the Iranian side to claim discrimination of the Saudi authorities against them. Ahmadinejad responded to this claim by declaring a "veiled threat" to Saudi Arabia, and thus stating the intention of the Iranian government to apply "appropriate decisions" in the case of any attempt to treat the Iranian pilgrims in an improper way.[908] The Saudi Hajj Minister, Fouad Al-Farsi's response to the Iranian side was based on Saudi claims of the Iranian side's aim to promote their political purposes and taking advantage of the situation in favor of their regional agenda.[909] Furthermore, Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei tended to bring another dimension to the hajj affair by claiming the attitude of the Saudi authorities and Saudi media towards the Iranian pilgrims serving only for the US interests, ascending the hostility between the Shiites and Sunnis, and in turn reflecting a factious rhetoric against the Muslim unity.[910] Until the Arab uprisings in 2010, Saudi threat perception towards Iran over the hajj affair can be argued to maintain and sometimes accelerated within the distrust manner and shaped around the political provocations of the hajj rituals continuously by the Iranian side.

4.2.9. Rivalries in Iraq

Iraq has been a conflictual zone and a source of political struggles at the time of the regional crisis given the religious and ethnic heterogeneity of its people and society. To illustrate, it can be referred that the Tabnak's report revealed the conflictual nature of the Iraqi politics between Saudi Arabia and Iran. According to the report, in a meeting comprising Iraq's neighbors in 2008, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud asked Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki about the level of interference of Iran in Basra, and Manouchehr replied as such: "Not as much as your interference".[911] Compared to Saudi Arabia's narratives over Iraqi politics and society, Iran's societal ties with the Iraqi political, social and religious structure was much ahead than the Saudi side as Iraq is known to be a special place in Shiite communities' religious belief. Meanwhile, the holy shrines of Imam Ali and Imam Huseyn at Najaf and Karbala are located in this country. In the times of Saddam's period, Iran's regional narrative benefited from the argument

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[908] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 39.
[909] "Saudi Clerics Hit Back at Iranian Hajj Allegations," *Dawn,* October 31, 2009, accessed December 12, 2020, https://www.dawn.com/news/499812/saudi-clerics-hit-back-at-iranian-hajj-allegations.
[910] Rachelle Kliger, "Saudis and Iran in Pre-Hajj Tensions," *The Jerusalem Post,* October 28, 2009, accessed June 24, 2019, https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Saudis-and-Iran-in-pre-Hajj-tensions.
[911] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 64-67.

of the repression of Najaf and Karbala by the government. This narration of the Iranian regime strengthened Iran's ties with the Iraqi Shiite society, legitimized Khomeini's ideology and later consolidated Khamenei's authority in Iran. The changing political structure within Iraq after the US invasion in 2003 revealed that the Shiite and Kurdish elite's role was shaped around *muhassasa* (quota system defined over sectarian identity), which restructured the domestic politics in Iraq. The *muhassasa ta'ifia system* (sectarian apportionment) helped the political parties of Iraq to institutionalize their place according to their vision and division over their sectarian identities after 2003.[912] Given Iran's shared past of the new elites of Iraq, who had spent years in exile in Iran due to Saddam's government opposition, it can be argued that Iran's involvement in Iraq was much more in accordance with the consent of the new government. At this point, much emphasis is laid on the irony of the previous political attitude of the Iraqi Shiite troops who had fought against Iran in the Iran-Iraq War.[913] The second irony that remained from the Iran-Iraq War period when Saudi Arabia preferred to support Iran against Iraq was underlined by Foreign Minister Prince Saud whose remark was "we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason", by referring to the post-2003 situation.[914]

At the level of the decision-making, it can be argued that Saudi decision-makers were much more concerned about the impact of Iranian growing influence and power rather than a sectarian spelling of the Shiite rhetoric. For instance, Salafi Sheik Musa bin Abdulaziz argued that "Iran has become more dangerous than Israel itself", Prince Bandar was much more in favor of the US narratives, and Prince Turki advocated more diplomatic endeavors such as negotiating with the Iranian regime.[915] However, Saudi regional security practices in the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon War was argued to reveal that Saudi Arabia did not know much about Iraqi society and politics.[916] To illustrate, in the 2010 parliamentary election of Iraq, Saudi Arabia supported and financed Ayad Allawi's Al-Iraqiya Party (Iraqi National Movement), which comprise both Shiite and Sunni

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[912] Toby Dodge, "Muhasasa Ta'ifiya and its Others: Domination and Contestation in Iraq's Political Field," POMEPS Studies 35, in *Religion, Violence, and the State in Iraq* (October 2019): 40.

[913] Renad Mansour, "Saudi Arabia's New Approach in Iraq," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, November 2018, accessed March 13, 2019, https://www.csis.org/analysis/saudi-arabias-new-approach-iraq.

[914] Prince Saud Al-Faisal, "The Fight against."

[915] Hassan M. Fattah, "Bickering Saudis Struggle for an Answer to Iran's Rising Influence in the Middle East," *The New York Times*, December 22, 2006, accessed November 21, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/22/world/middleeast/22saudi.html. Accessed on

[916] Mansour, "Saudi Arabia's New."

groups against Al-Maliki's party. However, it still could not resist Iran's activities that functioned through the Shiite parties with the Kurdish community's endorsement, to shadow the victory of Allawi's party. The major security perception of the Saudi royal family was the sentiment of losing Iraq due to the rising influence and the strengthened allies of Iran after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War. One of the most significant causes of the dominancy of Iranian narratives in Iraq can be named as the anti- Shiite discourse within Wahhabi doctrine inside the kingdom, which views the Shiite as infidels. Among the Iraqi political actors such as Nouri Al-Maliki, Saudi Arabia was often described as an actor supporting and heavily financing jihadist-Salafist groups in the region. Given the Saudi nationals' contributions to these groups and Saudi religious scholars' fatwas against the political stability in Iraq. For the Saudi side, the great concern could be emphasized as the destabilizing effect of the political insurgency of Iraq against the Sunni communities of the region, which would be directly contrary to Saudi Arabia's regional security understanding of the country.[917]

The political situation in Iraq cannot be defined as solely in favor of Iran, since the Shiite political bloc was highly fragmented and was liable to a growing protest movement against the elites in Iraq. The Shiite community of Iraq that claimed to be the victims of the Saddam's rule, argued to reach their freedom to practice Shiite scholarship following Iraq's invasion in 2003. This discourse benefited the Iranian narrative, which was also based on the injustice against the Shiite communities in the region by the local governments. It needed to underline that Iraq's invasion provided Najaf-based Grand Ayatollahs such as Ali Sistani, who was known as a figure not appreciating Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih,* to be able to have communication with Iraqi followers and Iranian pilgrims on the religious issues.[918] Despite Sistani did not appreciate the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih,* Iraqi Shiite Islamist movements were greatly influenced by the Islamic revolution of Iran, which put them in the target of Saddam's government. Therefore, the resurrection was the major theme after Iraq's invasion in the 2003 war when many from Shiite clerical families emerged as major political actors and then established parties.

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[917] Joseph McMillian, "Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion, and an Enduring Rivalry," *The United States Institute of Peace*, no. Special Report 157 (January 2006), accessed March 28, 2019, https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/01/saudi-arabia-and-iraq-oil-religion-and-enduring-rivalry.
[918] Michael Rubin, "Has Iran Overplayed Its Hand in Iraq?" in *The Shi'ites of the Middle East: An Iranian Fifth Column?,* ed. Michael Rubin and Ahmad K. Majidyar (American Enterprise Institute, 2017): 15-16.

Islamic Dawa Party, founded by Mohammed Baqir Al-Sadr in 1957, drew upon the principle of *wilayat al-umma* (governance of people) based on Shiite Islamism but also was influenced by Sunni ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb, Hassan al-Banna, and Abu al-Aala Al-Mawdudi, and supported Khomeini's leadership. Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, Nouri Al-Maliki, and Haider Al-Abadi can be named as the prime ministers of Dawa party at different times between 2005 and 2018. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was an opportunity for the Dawa members to come back to Iraq and strengthen their affinity with the society by italicizing the Shiite sense of victimhood. However, Dawa party did not only ally with Shiite political groups such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Sadrist Movement *(Al-Tayyar Al-Sadri)*[919], and Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress but also with Kurdish parties.[920]

Saudi Arabia perceived Iraqi politics through the lens of its own domestic environment, viewing the potential threats as being political beside their military effect. As kingdom's longest international border is 814 km with Iraq, it was a great concern for the kingdom that Iraq political insurgency would have a spillover effect on Shiite Arabs in the Gulf. Saudi foreign policy agenda on Iraq was focused on the extension of Iraqi insurgency spirit to the kingdom since the political situation of Iraq was defined as "a magnet for terrorists" by Adel Al-Jubeir, the foreign affairs adviser to King Abdullah.[921] In addition, Minister of Interior Prince Nayef emphasized the perceived danger from Iraq, implying that the jihadists had fought in Afghanistan and later moved to Iraq from Saudi Arabia as such: "We expect the worst from those who went to Iraq".[922] Rhetorically, the Saudi government tended to exacerbate the influence of Saddam government's policies and ambitions on the bilateral relations; for instance, they did not resume diplomatic relations since the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 when Saudi Arabia cut off ties and allowed the US military base in the kingdom. Following the demise of Saddam Hussein and the establishment of the Shiite-led government in Iraq, Saudi Arabia became concerned

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[919] Sadrist Movement founded by Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammad Sadeq Al-Sadr in 2003, was much in favor of Iranian side especially during the US invasion of Iraq and benefited from Iranian resources.

[920] Harith Hasan, "From Radical to Rentier Islamism: The Case of Iraq's Dawa Party," Carnegie Middle East Center, April 16, 2019, accessed April 18, 2020, https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/04/16/from-radical-to-rentier-islamism-case-of-iraq-s-dawa-party-pub-78887.

[921] McMillian, "Saudi Arabia and Iraq."

[922] John R. Bradley, "Al Qaeda and the House of Saud: Eternal Enemies or Secret Bedfellows," in *The Epicenter of Crisis: The New Middle East*, ed. Alexander T. J. Lennon (Washington Quarterly Readers, 2008): 34.

about Saudi Shiite population in the eastern province. In addition, it aimed to build ties and establish reforms for the Shiite community to counter the Iranian narratives over the Shiite peoples of the region. In order to counter the Iranian influence, Saudi Arabia aimed to spend money on some Sunni tribes such as Shammar, which has members both in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Beside the economic endeavors (such as investing in the market of southern Iraq and Basra) that served as an opportunity of change for anti-Iran sentiments, Saudi Arabia and Iran competed over the question of Shiism or Arab nationalism to unify the fragmented society of Iraq.[923] However, it became obvious that the Saudi narratives built upon by Arab were not efficient enough to unify the fragmented Sunni society of Iraq.

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon War brought sectarianism discussions into the Saudi public opinion, which brought about the rising ties of the Iranian regime inside the neighbors' social structure. At this point, it was inevitable for the Saudi government to consolidate its ties inside the kingdom with its own Shiite through the "National Dialogue" initiative, with the attendance of Saudi Shiite Leader Hassan al- Safar, municipal council elections in 2005 and the participation of the Saudi Shiite to elect representatives for the Shiite dominated cities, and allowing the Ashura day mourning. All of these initiatives gave an image of reversing its tentative policies towards the Saudi Shiite community and reverse the image of the kingdom supporting a sectarian language in its regional political narratives.[924] On the other hand, in contrast to King Abdullah's initiatives, some Saudi religious scholars mostly from the Islamic universities called for a rally against the US and Iran. At the same time, they defined Shiite as *rafida* (rejectionists) by adopting a tense discourse, and urged for the support of the embattled Sunni communities in Iraq. This might be considered as a response to the training of the Iraqi militias, most especially Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi and ISCI's Badr Arms Corps (Badr Organization) by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. However, King Abdullah had a more accommodating discourse towards the issue, and avoided using a sectarian discourse by

[923] Kevin Newton, "An Awkward Triangle: Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Institute*, May 23, 2019, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.mei.edu/publications/awkward-triangle-iraq-iran-and-saudi-arabia.

[924] F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia: Iraq, Iran, the Regional Power Balance, and the Sectarian Question; Strategic Insights, v. 6, Issue 2 (March 2007)," *Strategic Insights* 6, no. 2 (2007), accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=471343.

describing the Sunni-Shiite discussions as "a matter of concern, not a matter of danger"[925] during his reign.

4.2.10. Second Screen: Syria Case

Saudi Arabia's regional security perception towards Syria historically evolved through an ambiguous trend that cannot be defined by direct confrontation but periodically followed either containment or rapprochement policy. Saudi Arabian and Syrian decision-makers tended to be on the opposing sides in the political and military rifts of the Middle East region; while the Saudi side illustrated a regional trend of being an ally of the US, Jordan and Egypt, Syria supported Hamas, Hizballah and Iran in the regional crisis. Two events that can be named to further damage the relations is as follows. After the 2003 Iraq's invasion war, there was an assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 and the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War that both revealed a clear anti-Syrian stance in Saudi regional security perceptions. Saudi decision-makers largely aimed at containing, blaming and even isolating the Syrian President Bashar Assad as being observed in the cases of the assassination of Hariri and occupying Lebanon. As a result of the accusations towards the Syrian regime's involvement in the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, Syria had to remove its army from Lebanon in 2005.[926] In the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, both were on the opposing sides and even criticized each other roughly; for instance, President Assad portrayed the countries against Hizballah in the war as "half men",[927] which included Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, US, and Israel. Despite this period ended with Hizballah's invasion of West Beirut and the 2008 Doha Agreement[928] that was initiated by the Emir of Qatar to end the political crisis in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia continued its containment policy of Syria's regional security designs and withdrew its ambassador in August 2008 beside protesting, in order to attend the 2008 Arab League's summit in Damascus.

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[925] Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, 7.

[926] "الخلاف السعودي - السوري:المعاني والمآلات," *Al-Hayat*, August 21, 2007, accessed March 12, 2019, http://www.alhayat.com/article/1348825.

[927] "Syrian President Tries Mending Fences After Insulting Arab Leaders," *Haaretz*, August 21, 2006, https://www.haaretz.com/1.4862550.

[928] "UN Security Council Report," June 10, 2008, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S2008392.pdf.

Despite their regional priorities were interfering with each other, King Abdullah was aware of the significance of the regional role of Syria and its growing role in countering Iran's rise in Lebanese politics and the Levant. At this juncture, a rapprochement process with Syria appeared to be an urgent action for Saudi Arabia in order to weaken the ties between the regime, Hizballah and Iran. The visit of King Abdullah to Damascus in October 2009 was made in accordance with changing the containment policy to a rapprochement to some extent. On the other hand, it was welcomed by President Assad who later visited Saudi Arabia three times by January 2010. Moreover, Saudi Arabia was a significant financial supporter for the Syrian decision-makers to mend the weak Syrian regional industry, transportation system and economic development in general. In order to abide by this, Syria accepted the electoral victory of Saad Hariri's Future Movement and began to restrict the move of foreign fighters from Syria to Iraq.[929] The period of rapprochement was damaged by the anti-Assad protests in Syria and the the Syria Civil War in 2011 when King Abdullah publicly called for "stop the killing machine" (President Assad).[930]

Until the Arab uprisings, the political, security and Sunnism credentials of the Saudi stance towards Syria's regional security policies are known. Saudi Arabia was concerned about the regional stance of Syria close to Iran, Hizballah and Hamas beside the incompetency of Saudi governance with Syria's Ba'athist ideology and ideological incompetency of the kingdom with the Alawite-ruled regime.[931] Iran's regional foreign policy was not designed around a potential Saudi security threat, but around establishing societal ties with the people and governments inside the neighboring states with weak systems in the region.[932] Iran established its regional legitimacy from the inside of the neighbors, while Saudi Arabia tended to utilize the kingdom's oil wealth on gaining legitimacy and loyalty owing to the lack of a historical record of relations with Syria. For the Saudi side, weakening and containing Syria was much related to the decline of Iranian

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[929] Andrew Lee Butters, "A Rapprochement Between Syria and Saudi Arabia?," *Time*, October 8, 2009, accessed April 18, 2019, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1929072,00.html.

[930] Benedetta Berti and Yoel Guzansky, "The Syrian Crisis and the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, October 2012, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/161960/Berti_Guzansky_-_Syrian_Crisis_and_Saudi-Iranian_Rivalry.pdf.

[931] Ibid.

[932] Dina Esfandiary and Ariane Tabatabai, "Saudi Arabia Cares More About Iran Than Iran Does About Saudi Arabia," *The National Interest*, October 18, 2016, accessed September 12, 2019, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/saudi-arabia-cares-more-about-iran-iran-does-about-saudi-18091.

rise in regional politics. In contrast, for the Iranian side, the Syria issue was mostly understood in terms of the geopolitics, geo-cultural affairs, the Shiite Crescent ideal and countering the regional hegemony as well as being the leader of the Muslim claims of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East. Hence, the regional crisis related to Syria not only meant much more than a regional security issue for Iran but also as a domestic affair.

Iran's alliance with Syria was not a new phenomenon that could be traced back to the Shah's period when the first strategic relations between former Syrian President Hafez el-Assad and Khomeini, who had been in exile, was set. Syria was even declared as the "35th state" of Iran [933] by Hussein Talip, the deputy Commander of the Iran Revolutionary Guards, and even a more important ally than Khuzestan city that is located in an oil-rich area of Iran.[934] Despite the theological differences between the Alawites and Shiism, Syria's alliance was still decisive in the sense of constructing a common ground and establishing societal ties with the Shiite people under the Sunni governments, which in turn served for completing the Shiite crescent ideal with Lebanon and Iraq. To illustrate, one can refer to the statement of an Iranian cleric Moujtaba al-Husseni, who emphasized the attempts of Iran to construct an ideological affiliation with the Muslims in neighboring states: "Let the good relations between Iran and Syria serve as an example for all Muslims to do the same".[935] Therefore, it can be argued that the Syria case served for Iranian decision-makers to utilize it in the Palestine issue by forming a link with Hamas over Syria, initiating resistance against Israel and the US, and creating an embarrassing environment for Saudi Arabia claiming for the protection of all Muslims around the world.

At the decision-making level, King Abdullah was described as a royal figure paying attention to close the gap between the Arab states allied with the US, Iran and Syria as well as the supporters of Hamas.[936] At this juncture, King Abdullah often avoided confrontational rhetoric against Syria and its judgements of allies. He underlined the fact that Saudi Arabia did not expect Syria to cut its ties completely with Iran; however, the

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[933] Rajih Khouri, "Opinion: What Did Riyadh Tell Kerry?" *Asharq Al-Awsat*, June 29, 2013, accessed February 26, 2019, https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/r-khouri/opinion/opinion-what-did-riyadh-tell-kerry.
[934] Mohsen Milani, "Why Tehran Won't Abandon Assad(ism)," *The Washington Quarterly* 36, 4 (2013): 84.
[935] Butters, "A Rapprochement Between."
[936] Ibid.

kingdom's expectation is for Syria to give more priority to Arab issues.[937] He paid visits to Damascus many times after confrontational times of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, and showed the kingdom's commitment to calming down the tensions between both regarding Lebanon as well as overcoming opposed views on the peace talks between Palestinian Israeli sides.[938] However, for the Syrian side, the picture was much more blurred because the further the country moved closer to Iran,[939] the more it was viewed to leave the Arab neighbors alone and moving away from the West. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia played a significant role in the Syrian economy such as providing foreign investment, developing infrastructure and purchasing state companies.

Beside the economic side, the Syrian government interpreted the Saudi Arabia's opposition to Hizballah and Syrian regional security politics after 2006 as a strategy of encirclement of the Syrian regime. Hizballah's importance to the Syrian regime was defined as more decisive to Syria than Hizballah according to El-Hokayem: "Syria is more pro-Hizballah than Hizballah is pro-Syria".[940] The alliance with Syria was decisive for Hizballah to create resistance at the Syria border against Israel; however, Hizballah consolidated its significance in Syria regional security by allowing Syria to maintain its patronage in Lebanon after the withdrawal of Syrian from Lebanon in 2005. Although it was interpreted as contradictory to the state identity of Syria to ally with a Shiite militia (which believed in the pan-Arabism beside secularism), Syria had played a direct role with Iran in the establishment of Hizballah at the beginning of the 1980s. President Assad often highlighted the concepts of resistance and peace that were not contradictory or mutually exclusive but employed by the decision-makers of both sides as part of "repeated convergence of interests"[941]. While Syria's alliance with Hizballah in the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War was much more a strategic decision to counter Syria's regional

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[937] "Saudi-Syrian Relations Thaw as Assad Calls on the King," *The National,* January 14, 2010, accessed May 13, 2020, https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/saudi-syrian-relations-thaw-as-assad-calls-on-the-king-1.605825.

[938] Ian Black, "Syrian and Saudi Leaders Arrive in Beirut for 'Historic' Talks," *The Guardian*, July 30, 2010, accessed December 14, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/30/assad-abdullah-arrive-lebanon-beirut.

[939] Daniel L. Byman, "Syria and Iran: What's Behind the Enduring Alliance?" *Brookings*, July 19, 2006, accessed April 21, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/syria-and-iran-whats-behind-the-enduring-alliance/.

[940] Cited in May Darwich, "Ideational and Material Forces in Threat Perception Saudi and Syrian Choices in Middle East Wars," PhD diss., (The University of Edinburgh, 2015): 148.

[941] Ibid, 151.

isolation after 2005, and was not basically driven by Iranian alliance commitments, Saudi decision-makers tended to view it as a commitment to the Iranian side in terms of strategy, security, politics and societal affinities.

4.3. RECONCILING SAUDI REGIONAL SECURITY INTERPRETATION WITH DOMESTIC STRUGGLES

Despite that King Abdullah favored the closest figures to him and appointed his sons to the ministerial and strategic positions, his period was the continuation of the foundational succession principles that were later questioned and reversed in King Salman's reign. Saudi foreign policy discourse had followed a reactive, cautious and risk-averse trend towards the regional crisis and wars under King Fahd's reign when King Abdullah had been the *de facto* ruler due to the ailing health of King Fahd. Following King Abdullah's arrival to the throne, Saudi regional security narratives were produced through a "behind-the-scene" approach under the influence of the emerging regional dynamics of the Iraq's invasion in 2003, which necessitated the kingdom to take a rigid position against Iran's growing influence in the neighboring states. The rise of the Iranian influence among the Iraqi society and the strengthening of its political power in the Iraqi parliamentary after 2003 alarmed the Saudi decision-makers and taught the kingdom to revise its strategies to live with a resurgent regional actor.

Regional dynamics after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War demonstrated the peak of the Iranian power projection to the neighbors of Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, this forced the decision-makers to diversify the kingdom's regional and foreign policy rhetoric from claiming specialness and disparateness to a moderate regional actor while taking a direct and active role in the regional affairs, wars and crisis. The unity, peace and stability rhetoric inside the kingdom was utilized to counter the penetration of Iranian influence in Saudi society. King Abdullah tried to bridge the gap between the state, Sufis, Salafists, Shiites, and other sects practiced within Saudi society, through the National Dialogue project. However, anti-Shiite politics bolstered by the anti-Shiite fatwas remained prevalent among the Saudi scholars and the society, and thus raised Iran's hand to criticize the domestic policies of Saudi Arabia towards the Saudi Shiites.

The regional shifts reconstructed the credentials of the Saudi domestic structure, and directed King Abdullah to adopt a relatively tolerant attitude towards the society and to

focus on the critiques regarding the internal problems of the kingdom in the socio-political sphere, particularly the Shiite communities of Saudi Arabia. In this context, Saudi decision-makers had to persuade the audience both inside and outside the kingdom by influencing the Saudi public perception. In tandem, King Abdullah's reign presented a relatively tolerant environment such as accepting and evaluating the petitions of the dissatisfied groups of the Saudi society. However, his efforts did not actually bring any serious change at the transformation of the domestic into a moderate and tolerant structure.

The growth of Hizballah's bargaining power and Nasrallah's popularity appeared to be the major threat to the Saudi regional security vision after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War and Hizballah's move in West Beirut in 2008. For instance, Nasrallah declared the end of the war against Israel as a "divine, historic and strategic victory" and at the same time claimed "strategic" intelligence cooperation of Saudi Arabia with Israel. The emergence of Hizballah and Nasrallah as the resistance face of the dissatisfied groups in the region marked a new chapter in Saudi-Iranian antagonism, and forced the kingdom to take a counterbalance regional security policy towards Iran at the non-military sectors. The construction of the Hizballah's victory in Nasrallah's words challenged Saudi Arabia's construction of its self as the dominant actor of the region and directed the perception of the decision-makers towards a more assertive foreign policy. It was time for Saudi decision-makers to work with the local actors, political movements, and paramilitary groups inside the neighbors. In accordance with it, Saudi Arabia aimed at constructing means for countering Iran by supporting the Sunni actors in Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and the Palestinian territories and by increasing its funds to the Salafi actors inside Lebanon such as al-Shahal family. However, in many cases, Saudi Arabia could not counterbalance the Iran's societal influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, which were observed particularly in the fields of cultural, educational, religious, and reconstruction projects. In response to the Iranian activities, Saudi Arabia utilized a discourse of portraying Iran as a regional actor against the territorial and societal unity as well as regime stability of the neighbors. Therefore, it could not be considered as an actor to offer peaceful resolutions in the regional crisis, particularly in the Palestine conflict and the regional crisis of the Levant. Iraq constituted one of the most decisive cases where Saudi decision-makers were concerned to counter the impact of Iranian growing influence at the political, military

and societal level of the country. Iraq was also a regional actor that could help Saudi Arabia to contain the rising influence of Iran in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia avoided a sectarian spelling of Shiite rhetoric in state narratives, which portrayed Iran as a regional actor dramatizing the sectarian divisions among the societies of the Middle East. Furthermore, King Abdullah's government interpreted the Iraqi politics within the Saudi domestic political environment and its capacity to spread the Iranian narratives through the country's societal ties over the Shiite peoples of the region. The Wahhabi discourse that historically defined the Shiite as *al-rafida* (rejecters) has always worked against Saudi Arabia's regional vision and helped the spread of the Iranian soft power among the Shiite populations of Iraq as well as other neighboring states. Therefore, King Abdullah government constructed a more accommodating discourse towards the different sects in the kingdom by avoiding a sectarian discourse and describing their influence inside the kingdom. In addition to the discourse level, spending money on the Sunni tribes such as the *Shammar* tribe,[942] which has members both in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, continued to be the major political tools of Saudi Arabia to shape the regional dynamics in favor of the kingdom. Overall, the post-2006 Israel-Lebanon War period italicized the language of sectarianism and sectarian themes in defining the relations between the regional states, and shifted the political agenda and regional security discourse of the Saudi decision-makers towards a more harmonious stance, at least at the public discourse, and thus targeting the domestic and external audience.

Saudi Arabia's regional security perception towards Syria that historically evolved through an ambiguous trend established another case, where the Saudi regional anxieties towards Iran were observed either as a containment or rapprochement policy of the kingdom. At most of the political and military rifts, Saudi Arabian and Syrian decision-makers tended to be on the opposing sides, such as in the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, and even harshly criticized each other; for instance, President Assad described the states against Hizballah in the Israel-Lebanon War as "half men". For the Iranian side, the Syria case was officially conceived in relation to its impact on the geopolitics of the region, its geo-cultural efficacy, and its potential to counter the regional hegemony and the

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[942] See; Madawi Al-Rasheed, "The Process of Chiefdom-Formation as a Function of Namadic/Sedentary Interaction the Case of the Shammar Nomads of North Arabia," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 3 (1987): 32-40.

specialness narratives of Saudi Arabia in the Muslim societies of the Middle East. On the other hand, the regional crisis and alliances that occurred during the Syria war in 2011 were implied to be a domestic affair to the Iranian officials rather than a regional security issue. Saudi decision-makers tended to interpret the Syria's commitments to the Iranian side in terms of security, politics and societal affinities among their societies. As King Abdullah was aware of the significance of the growing role of Syria in countering Iran's rise in Lebanese politics and Levant beside its organic ties with Hizballah, the regional outcomes of the Syria war were officially interpreted within the regional security concepts in relation to its domestic constraints for Saudi Arabia.

Prior to the Arab uprisings, the regional security understandings of the kingdom evolved around countering the Iran's peak level of power projection at the neighbors' domestic structures, particularly in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. King Abdullah's foreign policy rhetoric revealed the Saudi intention to redefine the kingdom out of sectarian language while leaving Iran alone as a regional actor intervening in the neighbors' domestic affairs and abusing their weaknesses along sectarian policies. Describing Iran's regional security initiatives as a concern instead of a danger for the kingdom's security and the security of Saudi narratives demonstrated Saudi Arabia's policy of underpinning its potent image inside and outside. While establishing a relatively tolerant domestic political agenda, King Abdullah promoted a national dialogue among the different sects and political leanings of Saudi society to the extent of their respect for the kingdom's foundational principles and the authority of the king. This policy appeared as a calculated response to Iran's claims of intolerant policies of Saudi Arabia towards the other sects in the kingdom. In addition, it also helped Saudi Arabia to stay out of the sectarian definitions, and ascribe the logic of sectarianism to Iran's foreign policy style. Although the kingdom did not experience a serious challenge through the Arab uprisings (except for the demonstrations in its Eastern province and violent response of the security forces), the demonstrations in the neighbors constituted a matter of domestic threat to the Saudi decision-makers needs to be countered discursively. This is before Iran owns the struggle of people of the region for liberties and corruption of their governments to utilize against the Saudi regional narratives.

5. THE ARAB UPRISINGS AND SAUDI DECISION-MAKERS' REGIONAL SECURITY PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS IRAN (2010–2015)

The Arab uprisings that shifted the socio-political environment of the Arab states revealed distinct perceptions of the Saudi domestic actors from each other. Meanwhile, it enforced the decision-makers to reconcile their discourse over the domestic protests with several crisis and wars occurring in the regional context. This chapter deals with the interfering discourses of Saudi foreign policy to understand the imprints of the regional security issues on the development of the Saudi decision-makers' discourse at the domestic level.

5.1. SAUDI DOMESTIC CONTEXT AND ROYAL ACTORS

5.1.1. The Effects of the 2011–2014 Saudi Protests

The Arab uprisings socially transformed the public sphere and undermined the political legitimacies of regimes, elites and leaders in the Arab world. The upheavals that displayed a unique character in each Arab country shifted the Arab peoples' perception towards the governments. While Saudi Arabia directly intervened in the anti-government demonstrations in Bahrain in 2011, it became a military part of the Syria and Libya cases and applied containment policy for Yemen, Egypt and Tunisia. Given the degraded economic standards of the Tunisian people, the uprisings that started in Tunisia and spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain alarmed the regimes about the future of their political legitimacy in the eyes of their own people. The impact of the uprisings constituted a political and security challenge in these countries. Meanwhile, it would be an exaggeration to portray it as a direct regime challenge in the Saudi case. The Saudi uprisings were much associated with the dissatisfaction of domestic actors including liberals, Shiites, and religious scholars with the government's attitude towards the release of the prisoners, reform process, elected national assembly, and the establishment of constitutional monarchy. The uprisings had a relatively little visible impact on Saudi Arabia compared to the Tunisia, Syria or Egypt cases, except in the Eastern provinces, where large Shiite protests were replied with violent repression. The wave of protests was balanced by the Saudi government's utilization of wealth as financial aid for the

Saudi people, which also aimed to construct an external enemy narrative implying Iran to counter the flow of the uprisings across the kingdom.

Despite the uprisings in the Saudi context were conceived as a failure of the protesters, it would be an oversimplification to limit the impact of the uprisings to the Shiite protests. The reason is that it also had a serious impact on the responses of different segments of the Saudi society such as the Islamists and liberals who were not satisfied with the royal family's governance. The Saudi protests questioned and confused the traditional, political and social structures and institutions, hence raised a popular awareness among the domestic actors.[943] On the other hand, the Saudi regime found a firm domestic support from leading religious actors in their way to construct an official narrative based on obedience to the rulers and being a religious leader of the Muslim world, and awarded their efforts in turn.

While the concepts of dignity, justice, equality and corruption were the prominent themes of the demonstrators across the Arab peoples, the protesters joined the uprising with various motivations in the Saudi case. The Saudi protesters are composed of different segments of class, sectarian, ideological leanings, demanded constitutional monarchy, *al-nizam* (system), independent judiciary, freedom of thought and expression, release of the political prisoners, while criticizing corruption, rise of unemployment, and human rights violations. Although some protests in the Eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia (especially in Qatif and al-Awamiyah) used the slogans of "death to Al-Saud" that directly target the demise of the kingdom and the royal family, the protesters underlined that they were not demanding the collapse of the kingdom or the royal family. Instead, they were concerned about the release of the prisoners (Shiites) having equal rights with the Sunni citizens as well as the succession process, the aged kings and princes to shape the future of the kingdom. The protesters belonging to a wide range of political stances such as Islamists, nationalists, leftists, and liberals criticized the opaqueness of the political process, and were still loyal to the government. To elaborate, it might be underlined that the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) established by

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[943] Bader Ibrahim, "الربيع السعودي في 2011" *Almqaal*, October 31, 2011, accessed September 21, 2019, https://www.almqaal.com/?p=823.

Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih Al-Qahtani[944], Mohammed Saleh Al-Bejadi[945] and Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali Al-Hamid in 2009, [946] was a prominent institution demanding the transparency and opening of the political process without the demise of the royal family. It was closed down in 2013 by the Saudi government as it was accused of impelling the society for rebellion, and giving false information about the human rights violations inside the kingdom.[947] Another prominent figure and one of the symbols of the protests was a teacher Khalid Al-Johani, who underlined the lack of dignity, justice and democracy in the kingdom rather than the overthrow of the royal family.[948]

The demonstrations forced the kingdom to recalculate the strengthens and weaknesses of the royal family structure and the domestic actors' demands from the government. In the Saudi case, the uprisings urged the government to realize that they could not avoid the reform demands of the Saudi people. King Abdullah was aware of the fact that the royal family cannot underestimate people's claim for freedom, and the right to participate in the decision-making institutions and the government. [949] Most especially, the young Saudis suffering from the rise of unemployment[950], religious and social taboos, (such as shaking a woman's hand for men, or women playing sports in public, and exclusion from the state welfare system) were highly decisive to motivate their protests against the government. In addition to the aspirations of the young generation and public services (including health, education, or water and electricity services), infrastructure and succession issues were under tension all over the kingdom, and were not limited to the Eastern Provinces. This was the first time Saudi Arabia encountered the largest street

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[944] Al-Qahtani was the co-founder of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, one of the critical figures of the Saudi government, a Saudi human rights activist, and an academic in economy. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison on March 2013.

[945] Al-Bejadi was the co-founder of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, and a Saudi human rights activist. He was being under arrest since March 2011, and was sentenced to 10 years on March 2015.

[946] Al-Hamid was the co-founder of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, and a Saudi human rights activist, and a professor in Arabic. He was sentenced to 11 years on March 2013.

[947] Angus McDowall, "Saudi Arabia Jails Two Prominent Rights Activists for 10 Years," *Reuters*, March 9, 2013, accessed May 27, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-activists-prison/saudi-arabia-jails-two-prominent-rights-activists-for-10-years-idUSBRE9280BK20130309

[948] Then, he was being captured at Ulaysha Prison.

[949] Abdulkhaleq Abdulla and Paul Salem, "The Arab Spring: A View from the Gulf," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 28, 2011, accessed June 7, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/2011/07/28/arab-spring-view-from-gulf-event-3343.

[950] Around 70% of the population was below age 30, and unemployment under the age 25 was at 40%. See; Rania Abouzeid, "Saudi Arabia's 'Day of Rage' Passes Quietly," *Time*, March 11, 2011, accessed January 3, 2019, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2058486,00.html.

protests and online campaigns by its own people, which alarmed the royal family for the survival of the monarchy and risked the royal family's unity narratives among the Saudi society. The protestors pushed the decision-makers to consider the inclusive political process without jeopardizing the religious establishment of the kingdom. The protests have also been observed in Riyadh, which constitutes a base for the royal family settlement, and in Buraidah, which is a historical hub of the Wahhabis, and a city with a high percentage of political prisoners from the dissidents. While the protests in Riyadh concerned the Saudi government for the stability of the regime, the most striking aspect of the protests in Buraidah for the government was the women protestors along with men in the organization of the protests.[951]

Shiite communities in the Eastern Province have often encountered economic, social and political marginalization at the local level beside being accused of having an emotional and sectarian attachment to Iran. At the domestic level, the Shiite communities have been excluded from the high governmental institutions and ministries such as the Ministry of Interior, the National Guard, the Ministry of Defense, and the *Majlis Al-Shura*. Despite that the Saudi Shiites' situation is governed by the Ministry of Interior (also controlled by the royal family), they are represented in municipal councils, and they could get positions in traffic and police departments in the Eastern Province.[952] The exclusion of the Shiites from the major governmental institutions gradually created a sense of estrangement between the Shiite communities and the Saudi government. The main dilemma that the Saudi Shiites often face is that they reside in the areas of the oil reserves; however, they are not getting equal benefit from the income of the reserves. Moreover, they have to live in poorer conditions than their Sunni counterparts. One of the Saudi Shiites emphasized this situation as such: "As you see, we live on top of the oil. I see how it is being taken out of our soil every day. But you also see that our areas are poor, and we do not get a fair share of the oil income. Much of it is wasted through corruption

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[951] For instance, 161 people -women and men- in Buraidah organizing a protest were arrested in March 2013. See; Mohammed Jamjoom, "161 arrested in Saudi Arabia protest over detentions," *CNN*, March 2, 2013, accessed May 17, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/01/world/meast/saudi-arabia-protest/index.html.
[952] Frederic Wehrey, "The Forgotten Uprising in Eastern Saudi Arabia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 14, 2013, https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/06/14/forgotten-uprising-in-eastern-saudi-arabia-pub-52093.

in the ruling family."[953] This circumstance continuously reconstructs the distrust and social rupture between the Shiite communities, especially among the younger Shiite generation and the royal family. However, during the protests in the eastern provinces, the Shiites italicized their peaceful stance towards the government and their loyalty only to God, and then to the government, not Iran.

Map 5.1: The 2011 protests in Saudi Cities

Though the Saudi protests were often affiliated with the Shiite communities, the Saudi protests actually were triggered by a man's suicide in Jizan province, and then the flow of the protests spread in the cities of Qatif, Jeddah, Riyadh, Ta'if, Tabuk, Hofuf, Buraidah, Dammam, and Al-Awamiyah town (map 5.1). Once it reached Buraidah and also Riyadh in the hub of the Saudi state establishment and royal family settlement, the Saudi regime had to take serious incentives to prevent the spread of the protests to larger areas. Prior to the March protests, Al-Awamiyah was the place where the Shiite protesters took the streets for a silent demonstration in February 2011. Furthermore, protests in Qatif and Safwa took place in the same month for the release of the prisoners accused of being a member of the Hizballah Al-Hijaz and being involved in the Khobar attacks.[954] In March 2011 when the protests reached Bahrain and the Eastern cities, it was an alarm for the Saudi government to utilize the religious narrative based on the protection of the two Holy mosques, obedience to rulers and the Wahhabi doctrine against the Saudi Shiite

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[953] Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring That Wasn't,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 76.
[954]   Toby Matthiesen, "A 'Saudi Spring?': The Shi'a Protest Movement in the Eastern Province 2011—2012," *Middle East Journal* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 2012): 631.

communities. The protests were supported by the social media campaign called "11 March Revolution of Longing"[955] as a new phenomenon for the government due to its online organization with the political demands from the royal family.

The most worrying part for the Saudi regime was the mixed Sunni-Shiite slogans of the protests. Regardless of the historical tendencies of hostility, the Sunni-Shiite activists' common demands and desires were observed in Najd and Hijaz in the protest campaigns in March 2011.[956] The March protests were also called the Day of Rage (later called Hunayn revolution), which was constituted as a religious reference to the Hunayn War between the followers of Prophet Mohammed and Bedouin tribes of Ta'if in 630 CE.[957] The reference to the Hunayn War was ironic as it was one of the first wars in the history of Islam mentioned in the Quran and initiated by the Hawazin and Thaqif tribes to counter the rapid move of the Muslims 17 days after the conquest of Mecca by the Muslims in 630 CE. The religious and historical references of the protesters forced the government to influence the public by consulting religious scholars such as Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Sheikh, who described the Egyptian protesters as enemies of Islam creating chaos, and the reason for bloodsheds.[958] On the other hand, Shiite protesters and clerics such as Hasan Al-Saffar emphasized the official narrative of the government in encouraging rumors and false information over the protests as such: "It is not right to unleash the chaos of rumors and news that destroy bridges of trust between people and cause sedition and problems among people".[959] Moreover, the mixed nature of the protests directed the government to activate an iron fist policy and sectarian narratives by exaggerating the Sunni fears from the fifth column claims for the Shiites.[960] While the Saudi regime found widespread support from religious scholars, some Saudi journalists such as Khashoggi were critical against the official narrative of the regime

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[955] "Protests continue across the Arab world," *Toronto Star*, February 23, 2011, accessed January 12, 2019, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2011/02/23/protests_continue_across_the_arab_world.html.

[956] Frederic Wehrey, "Shia Days of Rage," *Foreign Affairs*, December 11, 2012, accessed March 14, 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/saudi-arabia/2012-12-11/shia-days-rage

[957] Wehrey, "The Forgotten Uprising."

[958] "Saudi Top Cleric Blasts Arab, Egypt Protests-Paper," *Reuters*, February 5, 2011, accessed March 18, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-saudi-idAFLDE71403F20110205.

[959] "الشيخ الصفار يحذر من فوضى استخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي," September 2, 2012, accessed December 25, 2019, http://saffar.org/?act=artc&id=3042.

[960] John R. Bradley, "Saudi Arabia's Invisible Hand in the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs*, October 13, 2011, accessed October 16, 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2011-10-13/saudi-arabias-invisible-hand-arab-spring..

and argued that the Saudi Shiites' efforts were actually appreciated but not directly supported by Iran.[961] Hence, The Iran factor was often instrumental for the government to exaggerate the feelings of the Sunni Saudis towards the political, social and religious affiliation of their Shiite counterparts with Iran.

At the institutional level, the MOI was one of the most active ministries in constructing counter-narratives against the protests through official announcements endorsed by the Council of Senior Religious Scholar. On March 5, 2011, the MOI prohibited public protests and marches with an excuse of their contradiction with the Sharia law as well as traditions and values of the society.[962] From the beginning, the MOI intended to present these protests as the provocation of other countries in the Kingdom. Prince Nayef, the Minister of Interior, tended to ignore the domestic accounts of the protests spreading from Jizan province to Qatif. Instead, he linked the formation of the protests motivated by the externally linked non-loyal Saudis. The protests were identified against the values of the Saudi society and the principle of obeying the rulers in Islam. Without clearly mentioning any state, Prince Nayef's description of the protests as 'evil',[963] which were appeased by the Saudis and security forces loyal to the state identified the protesters as non-loyal actors and dissidents motivated by the external states. In addition to the religious dimension, the MOI tended to utilize the foreign entities narrative, which was also the government's official political logic for explaining the motivations of the Saudi protests, in order to counter the flow of the protests across the kingdom. The official government position implied Iran of using the term of Safavid or employment of Iran beside describing the protests even as a "new terrorism" against the Sharia law.[964] The MOI's stance was supported by the official Saudi Press Agency, which pointed out that the demonstrations were affiliated with a foreign entity's involvement. [965] The government's official narrative on Shiites' engagement with Iran was undermined by a

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[961] "رويترز: احتجاجات «القطيف» شرقي السعودية تكشف عن جيل شيعي أكثر تشددا," *AlMasralyoum,* July 24, 2012, accessed January 23, 2020, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/148035.

[962] "Saudi Arabia: Renewed Protests Defy Ban," *Human Rights Watch*, December 30, 2011, accessed July 14, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/30/saudi-arabia-renewed-protests-defy-ban.

[963] "Saudi Prince Says Loyal Saudis Foil 'Evil' Protests," *Reuters*, March 13, 2011, accessed June 25, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE72C11O20110313?mod=related&channelName=worldNews.

[964] "محكمة سعودية تقضي بإعدام رجل الدين الشيعي «نمر النمر» تعزيرا," *The New Khalij News,* October 15, 2014, accessed April 18, 2019, https://thenewkhalij.news/index.php/article/4031/محكمة-سعودية-تقضي-بإعدام-رجل-الدين-الشيعي-نمر-النمر-تعزيرا.

[965] Bradley, "Saudi Arabia's Invisible."

critical Shiite cleric Al-Nimr who argued that even before the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Saudi Shiites had been already protesting in Al-Awamiya in December 1978 and attacked by the police if they gathered together to perform *ta'ziyeh* (expression of grief) for Imam Hussein. Another Shiite scholar from Qatif, Tawfiq Al-Saif, can be mentioned as a critical figure against the Saudi government's treatment of the Saudi Shiites, which were portrayed as the agents of Iran and something that is not even worth discussing at the regional level. However, it was a domestic problem of the kingdom.[966] Hence, treating the Shiites as externally backed agents were actually not new and can be traced back to the Iranian revolution era. The government tended to define the uprisings over the Shiite question that has been often tied to the external enemy narrative in Saudi politics. Although the Shiites received a marginal recognition[967] and the networks were allowed to become more public in 1993, one cannot really mention the reparation of the Shiites' rights throughout the Saudi political history.[968] This fact can be related with the official political narrative of the government, which was declared by an official at the MOI as such: "But we can't give the Shia special rights just because of their sectarian affiliation, or we would have to do this for other groups as well."[969] Despite that Saudi Shiites often faced persecution and prohibitions for their religious rituals, mosques, and political critiques, the 2003 National Dialogue period that was initiated by King Abdullah can be emphasized as a critical step that gathered various segments of the society (including the Shiites, Islamists, and liberals) to discuss the reform demands in various fields including religious plurality.

The MOI Prince Nayef was the prominent royal figure at the center of the demonstrations and was described as a criminal by the protesters. After he died in June 2012, a Shiite cleric from Qatif, Nimr Al-Nimr, identified him as the major actor behind the Shiite murders and intimidation, hence the Shiite community could not feel sorry for his death.[970] Moreover, the death of Prince Nayef was celebrated by the Shiite communities in the Eastern villages by setting fire to his pictures, and thus opened the way for the

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[966] Marwan Sadiq, "هل تتكرر أزمة البحرين في قطيف السعودية؟" *Al-Hurra*, November 9, 2012, accessed August 17, 2019, https://www.alhurra.com/a/will-qatif-be-the-next-bahrain-in-saudi-arabia/214851.html/.

[967] Matthiesen, "A 'Saudi Spring?'" 631.

[968] For more; Matthiesen, The Other Saudis.

[969] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf,* 83.

[970] "Saudi Cleric Nimr Al Nimr - Speech on the Angel of Death and Prince Nayef," July 11, 2012, video, 2:31, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GLBACJNNg8.

Shiite communities to clearly express their dissatisfaction against the government regulations. Al-Nimr extended the anger of the Saudi Shiites to the Al-Saud, Al-Khalifa and Al-Assad families for the ailing domestic situation and marginalization of the Shiites in the Gulf.[971] The protesters were particularly chanting against the Al-Saud rule as such: "this country is ruled by the sons of Abdul Aziz until God inherits the land and those on it."[972] This kind of slogan was highly clear and threatening to the government's unity and stability image to the outside and to the Saudi public. As a result, it ended with the identification of Al-Nimr as a seditionist who disobeyed the rulers and took up arms against the security forces and then was sentenced to death of Al-Nimr in 2014.[973]

Utilizing the power of wealth, fatwas, repression, and sectarian elements were the major narrative tools of the government, which in turn led to the far more alienation of the Shiite communities from the state. At this point, one might remember the famous slogan of Prince Nayef "What we took by the sword, we will hold by the sword"; however, the protests revealed the limitations of the power of the traditional sword to meet the social, political and economic challenges that the kingdom encountered after the uprisings.[974] In the public sphere, Saudi officials through the media often shaped the discussions over the real intentions of the Saudi Shiites by defining them as disloyal actors to the government and even as the agents of Khomeini.[975] The official discourse of being the guardian of Islam and two holy sites were functional in the eyes of the Saudi regime to have authority to call the protests un-Islamic. At this juncture, mobilizing the Saudi religious leaders to give fatwas in favor of the official discourse was significant to legitimize the protests as un-Islamic for the majority of the Saudi people. For instance, Sheikh Abdel Aziz Alasheikh was one of the prominent religious scholars who raised the issue of disobedience to the ruler over the protests as such: "Islam strictly prohibits protests in the kingdom because the ruler here rules by God's will".[976] As much as the government tended to portray the protests over the Islamic principles and obedience to

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[971] Ibid.

[972] "بالصور والفيديو.. «القطيف».. «لغمٌ يهدد حكم «آل سعود»," *Al-Masry Al-Youm,* July 9, 2012, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/197629.

[973] "محكمة سعودية تقضي."

[974] Mai Yamani, "Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Fortress," *The World Today* 67, no. 4 (April 2011).

[975] "الرافضة في السعودية يعلنون تأسيس حركة " خلاص " في الجزيرة العربية," March 3, 2012, accessed March 14, 2019, http://www.dd-sunnah.net/news/view/action/view/id/825.

[976] Ian Black, "Saudi Arabian Security Forces Quell 'Day of Rage' Protests," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2011, accessed October 15, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/11/saudi-arabia-police-quell-protests.

the king, it failed to address the root of the Shiite issue and made Shiites feel more unequal with their Sunni counterparts. The discourse of the Shiite communities seemed to reveal no intention of cooperating with foreign entities or overthrowing the ruler; instead, they were motivated to ask political and religious demands from the government without using bullets as illustrated in an angry Friday sermon of Al-Nimr who underlined that the Shiites were loyal only to the God and not to any country or a royal family.[977] Using religious narratives have been a classical tool of the Saudi government to legitimize the decisions in the eyes of the Saudi people, and thus was used to counter the protesters' arguments. However, the Day of Rage, the Bahraini and the Libyan protests pushed the government into an environment of countering the protesters' narratives by using wealth. For instance, King Abdullah announced a package of $93 billion and a package of about US$37 billion for easing the social tensions beside extra two-month salaries to public sector employees, construction of 500,000 housing units and promotions for all military personnel.[978] On the other hand, the Shiite communities were in expectation of valid responses for their own benefits that were initiated by Mohammed bin Fahd, the governor of the Eastern Province through government spending programs, employment, and housing helps for Qatif. The government's changing attitude was welcomed by the Shiites and Mohammed Al-Jirani, the judge of Qatif. This opened the way for the Shiites to hope for a bilateral working environment with the government.[979] Following this environment, Al-Jirani condemned the attacks against the Saudi security forces, and criticized the Saudi Shiites who were sending *zakat* (a religious tax on Muslims to aid poor people within the Muslim community) to Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq, instead of giving it in their hometown. Al-Jirani's statements seemed to favor the Saudi government's arguments in dealing with the political, social and economic problems of the Saudi Shiites; he was kidnapped in 2016, and killed by some Shiite militants as

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[977] "Saudi Ayatollah Nimr Al-Nimr Dares Saudi Regime to Attack Iran and Declares: We Are Loyal to Allah, Not to Saudi Arabia or its Royal Family," *Memri TV*, October 6, 2011, accessed June 25, 2020, https://www.memri.org/tv/saudi-ayatollah-nimr-al-nimr-dares-saudi-regime-attack-iran-and-declares-we-are-loyal-allah-not.

[978] Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 50.

[979] Later on, his car and parts of his house were set on fire by radical Shiite authorities in the Eastern Province.

announced by the Saudi government. His murder was considered a terror case and directly condemned by the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars.[980]

The positive ambiance was disturbed by the release of the allocations of the large financial aids to institutions where the Shiites are largely banned, such as religious institutions and the MOI. This shadowed the sincerity of the government initiatives in the eyes of the Shiites who continued to view the government policies to keep the Sunni community together by intimidating the Shiite protesters in order to prevent a united Sunni and Shiite opposition. Despite the violent side of the counter-protest policies of the government, one needs to mention the efforts of King Abdullah's period when he was listening to the Saudi people's call for political reforms including liberals, Islamists and the Shiite communities of the society. Petitions and open letters demanding reforms and rights were popular during King Abdullah's period. Nevertheless, these petitions were welcomed as they were not intended to overthrow the regime. King Abdullah was a tolerant figure towards these calls and foreseen the necessity of overthrowing old political mindsets of closed-door politics and exclusion of people from governance. However, what was new with the 2011 protests was the online campaigns, street demonstrations and silent sitting protests in front of government institutions such as the MOI and even in front of the prisons—all of which had not been part of Saudi political culture until that time. In 2012, there were even instances of protests on several university campuses such as King Khalid University, which did not carry a broader political message but replied with physical violence.[981] These new methods of protesting and demanding appeared as new political challenges to the royal family and decision-makers in the post-uprisings era, to deal with it through a well-calculated attitude and a peaceful narrative inclusive of the different segment of the Saudi society.

Petitions during the Saudi protests reflected the disappointments of the different segments of the Saudi society towards the government that was criticized for avoiding to implement serious political reform and economic demands. Four petitions of the 2011 protests period can be noted with similar motivations and the political demands of the

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[980] Mohammed Al-Sulami, "3 held in Qatif Judge Kidnap Case," *Arab News*, January 2, 2017, accessed April 3, 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1032496/saudi-arabia.

[981] David B. Ottaway, "Saudi Arabia's Race Against Time," *Wilson Center Middle East Program* (Summer 2012), accessed May 27, 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/saudi_arabias_race_against_time.pdf. .

earlier petitions in 2004. The first petition in 2011 was called "The Declaration of National Reform", [982] which was signed by 119 people intellectuals and religious scholars. It demanded the transformation of the regime to the constitutional monarchy (a written constitution as part of judicial reform), elected local governments, releasing political prisoners, and enabling freedom of expression across the kingdom. The second petition was called *Nahwa dawlat al-huquq wa al-muasasat* (towards a state of rights and institutions)[983], initiated by scholars such as Sheikh Salman Al-Awdah, Judge Suleiman Al-Rushoudi, Muhammad Al-Ahmari, and Abdullah Al-Maliki and asked similar demands such as the first petition (freedom of speech, an elected national assembly, independent associations, and release of all political prisoners). The third petition in 2011 was called *Matalib al-shabab al-saoudi* (Demands of the Saudi youth)[984], signed by around 10,000 people demanding better housing conditions and a decrease in inflation, and promoting the private sector. The last petition was called *Bayan dawah lil-islah* (Call for reform),[985] which was much more a traditional *nasiha* (advice to the ruler) and signed by 65 religious scholars such as Sheikh Nasir Al-Omar. The fourth petition was more different than the first three in terms of its religious focus on the major transformation of the Saudi state into a constitutional monarchy and even going back to the first Saudi state period by reminding the royal family about the agreement between Ibn Saud and the Wahhabiyya.

Meanwhile, it was not in Saudi political culture to organize large scale protests by the Shiite or Sunni communities until the 2011 protests. What made the Saudi government more alerted about the escalation of the protests was the Bahraini protests at the Pearl Roundabout in Manama, which disrupted the Manama's road network and banking sectors. The escalation of the Bahraini protests was highly respected in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, as many Saudi Shiite families such as the Al-Jishi, Al-Saif, and Al-Dossari have members out of intermarriages with the Bahraini families. Since it appeared as an emotional attachment between the Shiite communities of Bahrain and

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[982] "Saudi Reform Documents 2011," translated by Ahmed Al-Omran, accessed April 5, 2021, https://al-bab.com/albab-orig/albab/arab/docs/saudi/saudi_reform_documents_2011.htm.

[983] Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists: The Struggle over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 36.

[984] "Demands of Saudi Youth For the Future of the Nation," *Jadaliyya Reports*, accessed April 2021, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23767/Demands-of-Saudi-Youth-For-the-Future-of-the-Nation.

[985] Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists,* 37.

Saudi Arabia, Shiite communities in the eastern province showed solidarity with the Bahraini Shiites by chanting "Free Bahrain". There was peaceful coexistence of the dissidents, and they accused the government of invading Bahrain with the support of the Desert Shield Force of the GCC.[986] At the decision-making level, the Bahraini protest was a direct domestic challenge to the sovereignty and stability of the government as illustrated in Prince Nayef's speech as such: "any harm to any of our countries is a harm to all of us".[987] Moreover, Saudi Shiite, with the leadership of Al-Nimr, called the demonstrations in Saudi Arabia as the *Lulu Al-Qatif* (Pearl of Qatif), as part of the Saudi government's injustice treatment towards its Shiite citizens, which illustrated the organic linkage between the Bahraini and the Saudi's.[988] However, Bahraini protest differed from the Saudi's in the domestic context such as their constitution, level of freedom or the stability of parliamentary, which was more developed in the Bahraini context.

In addition to the escalation of the protests in the Gulf neighbor, another matter of danger for the Saudi government was the change of leadership in Egypt to Mohammed Morsi's presidency through elections from June 2012 until July 2013. The electoral change of the leadership of Egypt intimidated the Saudi decision-makers' perception of the domestic context that was already stimulated by the 2011 protests in the kingdom. Morsi's arrival to power was a threat to the Saudi government due to the possibility of encouraging the Saudi public, most especially to the Sahwa figures that embrace the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology. The possible success of the uprisings as part of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Egypt was a great concern for the royal family as it would encourage the dissatisfied communities of the kingdom towards democracy and Islamism. Moreover, the great sympathy towards Morsi by the Arab followers on social media illustrated the potential of the new governance of Egypt as a domestic danger to the regional and religious narratives of the kingdom. Prince Bandar, the director of the Saudi Intelligence Agency, was an influential figure to direct the Saudi public's information about the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. At this juncture, using

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[986] It needs to be noted that Desert Shield was formed to protect the royal families of the GCC states rather than defending them against an external threat.

[987] "تؤكد وقوفها الى جانب البحرين والامارات," *AlWatan*, May 28, 2012, accessed June 24, 2019, https://alwatannews.net/article/20276/السعودية-تؤكد-وقوفها-الى-جانب-البحرين-والامارات.

[988] For Nimr al-Nimr's Speech on Saudi government; "Saudi Ayatollah Sheikh Nimr Al-Nimr Dares Saudi Regime," July 12, 2012, video, 8:33, accessed November 21, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bRh_-CkBgE.

the money for political purposes' theme came into prominence, and Saudi Arabia together with the UAE and Kuwait supported the armed forces led by Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi against the Morsi's government. While the withdrawal of Morsi through a military coup in July 2013 was a relieving news for the government, it had a broad repercussion among the major sheikhs of the kingdom such as Saudi sheikh Salman Al-Awda and Kuwaiti sheikh Tariq Al-Suwaidan who denounced the coup as a violation of the will of the people. Al-Awda further tweeted an open letter to the government by saying: "When one becomes hopeless, you can expect anything from them", and his tweet was followed by the Saudi Shiites with the hashtag *Khitab Salman al-'Awda yumaththilni* (Salman Al-'Awda's letter represents me) and also was criticized by the pro-government segments as *Khitab Salman al-'Awda la yumaththilni* (Salman Al-'Awda's letter does not represent me).[989] It also started a process of the deterioration of the GCC stability, especially as part of the different point of views of Qatar with the UAE and Saudi Arabia on the withdrawal of Morsi. Following the coup, Saudi Arabia together with the UAE pledged $8 billion to the new Egypt administration to heal the ailing economy.[990] On the other hand, Qatar had pledged to inject around $6 billion into the Egyptian economy and Morsi's government since the beginning of the uprisings.[991] Therefore, the uprisings in Egypt paved the way for the regional tensions and crisis between the GCC states beside alerting the Saudi government to manage and create counter-arguments on social media in order to sustain the domestic structure and the Shiite communities as well as the Sunni counterparts under control.

The Shiite protests combined with the Bahraini protests put a serious challenge to the regime, which directed the royal family to mobilize all the resources at its disposal, and orchestrate a campaign of Iranophobia. The regime prepared the Saudi public to believe that any protest demanding political reform was an Iranian– Shiite cooperation to undermine the Saudi legitimacy and Sunni Islam. This, in turn, directed the Saudi

[989] Stephane Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," *LSE Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*, no. 36 (May 2014), accessed October 16, 2019, https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56725/1/Lacroix_Saudi-Islamists-and-theArab-Spring_2014.pdf. .

[990] Michael Peel and Camilla Hall, "Saudi Arabia and UAE Prop up Egypt Regime With Offer of $8bn," *Financial Times*, July 10, 2013, accessed June 24, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/7e066bdc-e8a2-11e2-8e9e-00144feabdc0.

[991] Elizabeth Dickinson, "UAE, Saudi Arabia Express Support for Egyptian Military's Removal of Morsi," *The National*, July 4, 2013, accessed July 16, 2019, https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/uae-saudi-arabia-express-support-for-egyptian-military-s-removal-of-morsi-1.289085.

government to announce a royal decree on the imprisonment of the supporters, the sympathizers of the extremists and the terrorists linked to religious groups at the local, regional or international level from three years to twenty years in February 2014.[992] Moreover, encouraging the members of the official religious establishment to take public positions in support of the monarchy was also instrumental for the regime. Mufti Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Sheikh appeared on official state TV as a prominent pro-government Sheikh to alert the Saudi people against the dissidents, with the aim of creating divisions in the society and the need for *ijma'* (consensus) with the ruling family. Through the Council of Senior Ulama fatwas, the government strengthened its religious discourse by accusing the protesters as *fitna* (chaos or conflict) and division creators that are clearly forbidden in Islam.[993] In exchange for their support, religious institutions and scholars received about $1.2 billion, while the religious police were rewarded with higher positions.[994] Moreover, the pro-governmental religious scholars gained new centers and financial sources to spread the Wahhabi message, Hanbali jurisprudence[995], Quran memorization, and missionary work inside and outside Saudi Arabia.

5.1.2. From Saudi Liberals to Islamist Contrasting Interpretations on Saudi Protests

The Arab uprisings constructed a trend of wide-range protests among the Saudi society by raising popular awareness among the different segments of the society including the liberals, constitutional reformists and Islamists. The protests gathered the liberals and Islamists with similar motivations against the government policies and even reached a rapprochement period to some extent regardless of their differences on various topics, especially the role of religion in governance and social sphere. However, it would be mistaken to view the liberals and Islamists as homogenous entities; instead, they had a variety of different approaches towards the reform period of Saudi Arabia. Prior to the Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia had already experienced several women campaigns such

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[992] Stéphane Lacroix, "Saudi Arabia's Muslim Brotherhood Predicament," *POMEPS*, March 9, 2014, accessed April 8, 2019, https://pomeps.org/saudi-arabias-muslim-brotherhood-predicament.

[993] Dilip Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy* (UK: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2018), 244.

[994] Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists," 15.

[995] Hanbali jurisprudence is one of the branches of the Sunni Islam influenced by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, beside the other three schools of Sunni Islam Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi'i. See; Abdul Hakim Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (Routledge, 2006).

as "Teach me how to drive, so I can protect myself" and "Women2Drive" campaigns led by two prominent Saudi women rights activities, Manal Al-Sharif and Samar Badawi, in 2011. The uprisings brought a wide range of protesters together and combined their demands in the form of petitions, thus calling for the release of the imprisoned foreign workers, holding regular elections for the *Majlis Al-Shura* and the rising of the representation of Saudi women in the *Majlis*.

Saudi liberals consisted of the branches demanding constitutive monarchy, democracy, openness, reform, pluralism, and freedom, which appeared to be a decisive part of the protests in the kingdom. Despite criticizing the government policies, the liberals were in favor of preserving the traditions and customs. As argued by a prominent Saudi liberal, Turki Al-Hamad, there is no umbrella under which all non-Islamist currents can be gathered together with the same characteristics. Moreover, liberalism is a modern term in the Saudi arena that was not adopted before the 1990s. However, it began to emerge during the post-World War II when Marxist, leftist, Nasserist, and Arab nationalist discourses became popular in the Saudi context. The emergence of alternative discourses was the result of the social mobility of Saudi students who traveled to study in Egypt, Lebanon, or Iraq. It also involved the arrival of a large number of workers from the Arab countries to Saudi Arabia. What was the threatening matter for the government was the emergence of the *Sahwa* movement that claimed to represent universal values, and their compatibility with Islam. The liberals also saw the momentum of the *Sahwa* movement as a greater threat to their existence than the liberals since the Saudi liberals are yet to have a convincing discourse on Islam for the Saudi public in the 1990s. Even though the *Sahwa* sheikhs had polished their authority among the population and the young in the early 2000s, the rise of jihadist terrorist movements and the 9/11 attacks gave the Saudi liberals a stronger boost in the face of the Saudi Islamists. Therefore, the 9/11 period opened the way for them to be presented as an alternative to the Islam oriented movements and discourses in the kingdom. Following the 2011 protests, liberals and constitutional reformists noticed the new dynamics that the kingdom was pushed into on the way to begin a social reform process. They believed the majority of the Saudi society was actually eager to gain them; however, the government was very spectacle towards the possible impacts of the further reform processes, which might open the way for a democratic structure and withdrawal of the royal monarchy. At this point, one might refer

to one of the liberal figures of the kingdom such as the co-founder of ACPRA, Mohammad Fahad Muflih Al-Qahtani, who argued about the demand of the Saudi society to develop into a social and civil change from a religious society. However, he believed that "Yet. . . the regime is resisting any change."[996]

The Saudi Islamists including the *ulama*, religious intellectuals and scholars have often been in a process of reinterpreting the Islamic texts to engage them with the modern-day realities and reply to the society's demands for political representation, democracy and an elected national assembly.[997] Although they do not enjoy extensive and protected freedom to contribute to the public debate about the politics of Saudi Arabia, they have always been asked by their opinion to influence and convince the Saudi audience. In the domestic context, the Saudi Islamists including the liberals and constitutional reformists were exposed to serious restrictions by the political and religious officers, which were seen by their intellectual productions and activism as a threat to the system.[998] Compared to the liberals, Saudi Islamists showed a diversity of political views regarding issues such as the Arab uprisings, the emergence of new Islamist actors, democracy and Islam compatibility, the implementation of sharia, and the use of violence by the government. For instance, pro-democracy Islamist intellectuals such as Salman Al-Ouda [999], Muhammad Al-Ahmari[1000] and Muhammad al-Abd al-Karim[1001] comprehended the need of revitalizing the *Sahwa* discourse with the theories of democracy and the *Majlis Al-Shura* elections after 2011. They even argued that sharia needs to be applied gradually after a revolutionary situation but through democratic ways.[1002] At this juncture, the

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[996] Caryle Murphy, "Saudi Islamists Consider Democracy, Confront Royal Dogma," *Public Radio International (PRI),* September 6, 2011, accessed March 16, 2019, https://www.pri.org/stories/2011-09-06/saudi-islamists-consider-democracy-confront-royal-dogma.

[997] Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists,* 1.

[998] Ibid, 158.

[999] Al-Ouda is a well-known representative of the Sahwa movement who has been detained since September 2017 following his refusal of supporting the statements of the Saudi government during the 2017 Qatar crisis. He has been sentenced to death in September 2018.

[1000] Al-Ahmari is a well-known Saudi Islamist advocating democracy for the kingdom. After spending years in the US, he is a resident in Qatar due to the threat of the Saudi authorities to his life. He was the president of the Islamic Association of North America (IANA) in the 1990s.

[1001] Al-Karim was a professor of Islamic studies at Imam Muhammad University in Saudi Arabia. He was arrested in 2010 due to his comments on the policies of the royal family, and then put in incommunicado.

[1002] Toby Matthiesen, "The Domestic Sources of Saudi Foreign Policy: Islamists and the State in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings," *Brookings Institution: Project on US Relations with the Islamic World*, August 2015, accessed March 16, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Saudi-Arabia_Matthiesen-FINAL.pdf.

concept of *hisba* (commanding right and forbidding wrong) [1003] was utilized as a functional principle in the rhetoric of the Islamists. This is by acting independently from the established religious community for the development of a vivid civil society embracing Sharia governance with democratic means. A possible rapprochement between the constitutional reformists and the *muhtasibun* (he who practices *hisba*) was extremely worrying for the royal family, in contrast to the liberal movements given the discursive power of the Saudi Islamists on the Saudi audience. A rapprochement possibility between the Saudi reformists advocating for a constitutional system and the *muhtasibun* alerted the royal family as it might demonstrate the convenience of the application of the constitutional reforms within the Islamic principles. The appreciation of such a dialogue by the Saudi people would further mean the dissolution of the control of the official narrative over the question of who is eligible to cooperate and state their recommendation for the political and religious affairs of the kingdom.

A compromise might not be reached on the liberal trend to cooperate with the Islamists who were already divided among themselves like the liberals. Most of the liberals and the Islamists agreed about the urgency of the reformist change in Saudi Arabia, although they could not reach a consensus on the nature and the dimension of the change, especially in social issues. The constitutional reformists viewed the calls for a reform period after the Saudi protests as a historic opportunity to rotate the public stance in favor of change. Prior to the 2011 protests, constitutional reformists such as Sulayman Al-Rashudi[1004], Musa Al-Qarni[1005], and Saud Mukhtar Al-Hashimi[1006] encountered a series of strong blows from the regime. They were the ones who studied in the West, and adopted Western values but in favor of reintegrating the Islamic values with democratic means such as free elections and equal representation of women and men in *Majlis*.[1007] They agreed on the issue of political reform and the fate of political prisoners with the Islamists and non-Islamists. While one group indicated the major problem of the kingdom was the lack of neglect for the social reforms, another group believed that any

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[1003] Ibn Taymiyya defines *hisba* as an institution in Islam that constitutes a means of public to intervene the market. See; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Public Duties in Islam: The Institution of the Hisba* (Islamic Foundation, 2007).

[1004] Al-Rashudi is a prominent Saudi human rights activist, a lawyer and a former judge arrested in 2007.

[1005] Al-Qarni is a Saudi mufti, and a professor in Islamic jurisprudence arrested in 2007.

[1006] Al-Hashemi is a medical doctor and a Saudi human rights activist arrested in 2007.

[1007] Murphy, "Saudi Islamists Consider."

reform process needs to bring constitutional reforms, and even parliamentary elections. On the other hand, while some liberals were optimistic about the impact of the Arab uprisings on Saudi peoples and ready to cooperate with the Islamists, anti-Islamic segments of the liberal branch gave more priority to social reforms by defining the uprisings and cooperating with the Islamists to create chaos and empowerment of radical Islamist movements. As an example for the first group of the liberals, one might refer to the speech of Ibrahim Al-Buleihi, a Saudi intellectual and a member of the *Majlis Al-Shura*, which interpreted the effects of the uprisings on the future political environment of the Arab states as such: "it seems that the Arabs are now preparing for a positive and effective entry into history".[1008] Al-Buleihi's statement reflected the high expectations of some Saudi liberals from the reformative implications of the uprisings in the overall region, with the hope to find definite reflections in Saudi decision-makers' domestic reform agenda. Turki Al-Hamad was another liberal figure who blessed the uprisings but critical towards the questioning of the principles and slogans of the Islamist movements. Al-Hamad was suspicious of the sincerity of the Islamists for initiating a cooperation with the liberals owing to the Islamists' distance with the democratic political process.[1009] There were other liberal voices to illustrate the efforts in the liberal side in order to gather the democratic values with the Sharia such as Muhammad Al-Ahmari, and Abdallah Al-Maliki, a liberal Saudi activist and academic, who gave priority to the implementation of sharia for the protection of civil and political liberties in addition to the implementation of political and social reforms. On the other hand, Muhammad al-Abd al- Karim, a *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) professor at Imam Muhammad bin Saud University, underlined the incompatibility between the *Tawhid* and the authoritarian states.[1010]

For the royal family, Saudi Islamists have been the major group threatening the monarchial system in terms of their religious views on the social reform process and thus offering an alternative religious voice to the Saudi audience. Compared to the liberals, Islamists approached the state's political legitimacy from religious perspectives, hence they were exposed to serious surveillance from the security forces. What was more

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[1008] *Gulf Centre for Development Policies,* "الليبراليون السعوديون بعد الربيع العربي وصعود الإسلاميين - عبدالله الرشيد," December 2012, accessed May 24, 2019, http://gulfpolicies.org/gcc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1343%3A2013-04-20-06-18-12&catid=147%3A2011-04-09-07-47-31&Itemid=384.

[1009] Ibid.

[1010] Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists," 8.

worrying for the royal family was that the protesters were asking for social and political reforms without rejecting the Islamic values. According to the Saudi decision-makers, this would possibly create a repeat in the similar trend such as the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the weakening of the monarchy, royal family and Saudi Arabia's Islamic credentials in the Muslim world. To ease the impact of the discussions on the unity and stability of the monarchy, the pro-government sheikhs, such as Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh, were consulted again to protect the royal family's Islamic position and defeat the alternative Islamic voices of the Saudi protests. Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh, a prominent mufti of the kingdom, described the protesters in Tunisia and Egypt as the enemies of the *ummah*. As the protests in the Arab neighbors attempted to destroy the religion and Islamic values according to the Saudi government, the government aimed at influencing the Saudi public about the theological incapability of these movements as an alternative to the Saudi monarchial system. The Saudi decision-makers, especially the attempts of Prince Bandar and Prince Saud, reached a contended level to protect the official narratives in depriving the alternative religious and democratic claims of the Islamists and liberals. Therefore, the Saudi government was relatively able to claim the unsuccessful consequences of the uprisings such as causing *fitna* among the people, and ailing the economy of the Arab neighbors. In addition, it also included keeping the spill-over danger of the uprisings at the border of intellectual discussions between the liberals, constitutional reformists and Islamists inside the kingdom.

5.1.3. Succession Crisis under the Shade of Reform Process

Saudi royal family, as part of its vertical decision-making system, has often encountered succession crises—all of which were traditionally appeased inside the family. The prominent theme of the 2011–2015 period was the complicated process of the selection of a new crown prince as all senior princes were old aged (figure 5.1). The death of Crown Prince Sultan in 2011 and Crown Prince Nayef in 2012 have put the succession issue in crisis and ended with the appointment of Prince Salman by King Abdullah with the Allegiance Council. Compared to Prince Nayef and Prince Sultan, Prince Salman (a prominent royal member from Al-Sudayri family) helped the consolidation of the Al-Sudayri family's power in the succession process among the others in the Al-Saud family. Faisal, Sultan and Nayef branches of the Al-Sudayri family were the successful

branches that could assign their sons to the ministerial positions despite their discordance with King Abdullah who had never been appreciated by the Al-Sudayri members. However, as the founder of the Allegiance Council, King Abdullah respected the Council's decisions, and assigned Prince Salman as the Crown Prince and the Minister of Defense after the death of Prince Nayef in 2012. As this period of succession crisis encountered grave regional security issues such as the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (Daesh) on the border with Iraq, Syria and Yemen wars in 2014, the security issues were among the top agenda of Crown Prince Nayef, then later Crown Prince Salman, and King Abdullah. Crown Prince Nayef had already been known with his policy of giving priority to security affairs such as his son Mohammed bin Nayef, who was responsible for the counter-terrorism campaign of the kingdom since the 9/11 attacks beside being an assistant MOI since 1999 under his father's governance. To illustrate the security-oriented mentality of the father and son—when Prince Nayef was appointed as the crown prince in 2012 to succeed another Al-Sudayri member Prince Ahmed—it was clear for many that "the next king will give the task of security top priority".[1011] However, the death of Prince Nayef caused a crown prince crisis and paved the way for the third generations and domination of the Al-Sudayri members for the throne with the support of the Allegiance Council. This period increased the political visibility of the Al-Sudayri princes in state institutions as Prince Salman got the crown prince title. After a while, he appointed his son Mohammed bin Salman as the deputy crown prince, with 31 votes out of 34 in the Allegiance Council, thus replacing Prince Mohammed bin Nayef who had been re-appointed by Prince Salman to replace Prince Muqrin. Beside the Al-Sudayri princes, other eminent figures of this period such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud bin Faisal, the head of General Intelligence until 2012, Prince Muqrin (later replaced by Prince Bandar until 2014, and finally Khalid bin Bandar until 2015), shaped the regional security and foreign policy of Saudi Arabia under King Abdullah, who was the only Saudi king that worked with all Al-Sudayri senior princes during his reign.

[1011] "محمد بن نايف... الحفيد الملك," *Al-Akhbar,* January 24, 2015, accessed March 16, 2019, https://al-akhbar.com/Arab/14548.
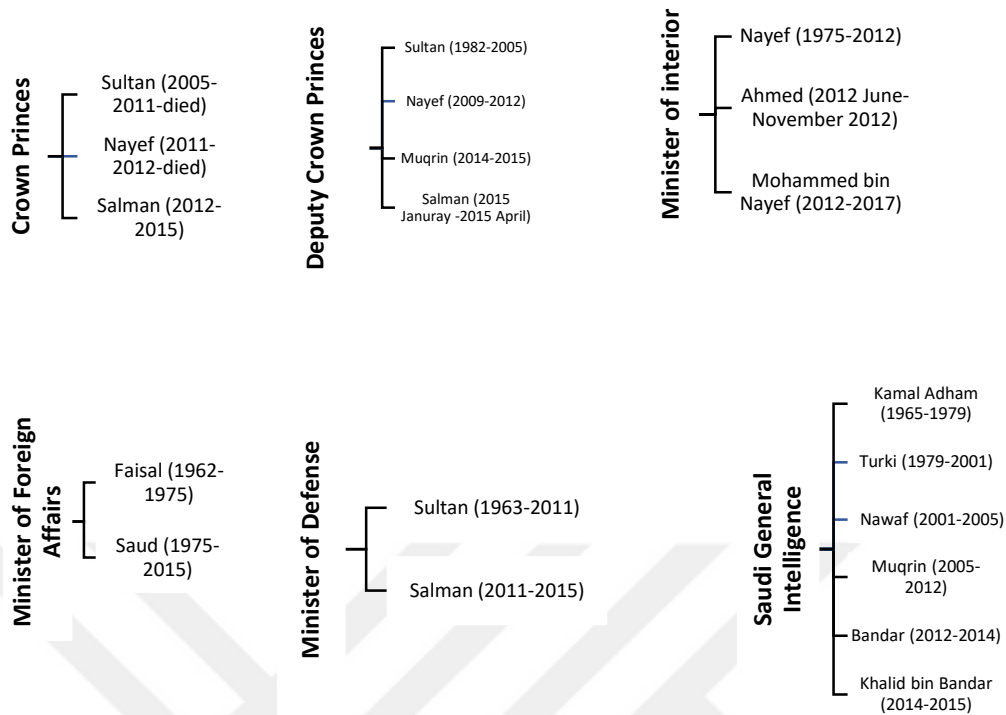
Figure 5.1: The Changes on Duties of Princes until 2015

During the reign of King Abdullah, Saudi people witnessed development projects such as King Abdullah Economic City, formation of new universities, road networks, and industrial cities. This period was unlike the previous periods given his focus on seeking a new legitimacy for the unity of the kingdom, to survive the wave of change that shivered up the kingdom after the Arab uprisings. He was highly focused on the domestic context and changed the kingdom's policies to serve the people rather than simply practicing Sharia law. However, King Abdullah's period was still far from forming a political reform agenda as Saudi Arabia sentenced many reformers, activists and human right supporters to imprisonment during his reign. For instance, he even imprisoned his daughters at house arrest, including his divorced wife Alanoud Al-Fayez, who is the mother of the daughters, for their disobedience to the royal rules.[1012] Although King Abdullah was tolerant to receive petitions for reform demands from the Saudi peoples, he still practiced the restrictions of the obedience principle to the ruler like his other half-brother kings.

[1012] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia Obituary," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2015, accessed April 5, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/22/king-abdullah-of-saudi-arabia.

The 2011–2014 protests brought quick domestic changes in the social and political sphere, to keep the critiques of the domestic actor and dissidents in control. King Abdullah's awareness towards the caustic impacts of the protests on the survival of the monarchy and the unified image of the royal family paved the way for a social and political reform process. In September 2011, women were officially allowed to vote for the municipal elections. In the municipal elections in December 2015, Saudi women were allowed to run for elections; 130,000 Saudi women registered to vote, while there were 1.35 million registrations by the Saudi men.[1013] The low numbers of women eligible to vote demonstrated the influence of male guardianship over the Saudi women's political participation. Finally, the result of the elections was not promising, but it started with the women's visibility in decision-making institutions; 20 women won the elections, which was only 1% of the 2,106 seats.[1014] Even though the results were insignificant numbers, it was a bold step from the government towards the Saudi women regardless of the intentions behind it within the context of the Saudi political history. The election was also criticized for its logistical and bureaucratic problems during the voting and election campaign period. For instance, women were asked to present their national identity card; however, Saudi women were allowed to only carry their family identity cards as means of identification. Previously, in 2012, women had been issued national identity cards as optional, which gave rights to the fathers and spouses to give permission to the Saudi women for getting their cards. Therefore, during elections, those who did not present their identity cards faced problems.[1015] Secondly, women were asked for proof of residence, a copy of family card and residence documents, even though it has been acknowledged that the majority of Saudi women live with their families.[1016] Thirdly,

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[1013] More than 1,000 Saudi women were running for elections comparing to 6,000 Saudi men. In "Saudi Women Go To Polls In Landmark Election," *The Guardian*, December 12, 2015, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/12/saudi-women-go-to-polls-in-landmark-election; "Saudi Arabia Elects Its First Female Politicians," *Aljazeera*, December 14, 2015, accessed May 16, 2019, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/women-win-seats-landmark-saudi-arabia-elections-151213054750832.html.

[1014] David Andrew Weinberg, "Women Voted In Saudi Arabia This Week — But They Only Won 1% of Available Seats And Still Face Systematic Discrimination," *Business Insider*, December 15, 2015, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.businessinsider.com/women-voted-in-saudi-arabia-this-week-but-they-only-won-1-of-available-seats-and-still-face-systematic-distrimination-2015-12.

[1015] Rajkhan, "Women in Saudi," 22.

[1016] Hala Aldosari, "Analysis: The Value of Women Voting in Saudi Arabia," *Aljazeera*, December 13, 2015, accessed April 13, 2019, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/analysis-women-voting-saudi-arabia-151213055435453.html.

even though they have their identity card, women were asked to have a copy of papers from their male guardian to provide their residence.[1017] Fourthly, time restrictions were another asset for women who cannot drive but had to cast their votes in one day.[1018] Another obstacle for women candidates was the outcome of gender segregation, which prevented women to reach the majority of male voters during their campaign. They also could not display their pictures as candidates had to assign men as representatives for them to interact with male voters.[1019] On the other hand, some women candidates with financial inabilities to fund their campaign had to arrange their election campaign at their own house, with the help of their male and female colleagues to spread their campaign slogans.[1020] These problems related to the guardianship system of the kingdom were not considered seriously by the government that did not show any sign of intention about overcoming those problems in the forthcoming municipal elections. Overall, all these obstacles for women's political participation made society question the sincerity of the reforms on the women issue.

Looking at the political achievements of the women, King Abdullah decreed the law that allows the appointment of 30 women to the *Majlis Al-Shura*, and permitted women to vote and run for the municipal elections in 2011. This decree was followed by a 20% quota for women to take seats in the *Majlis Al-Shura* in 2013.[1021] These developments were presumably a response to the regional instability that emerged in the post-2011, which required the Kingdom to implement social, political and economic reforms. King Abdullah was also concerned about the Saudi image abroad, but feminist and cultural efforts with sharp critics to the government were likely to affect his decisions.[1022] On the

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[1017] Ibid.

[1018] Ibid.

[1019] Rajkhan, "Women in Saudi," 45.

[1020] Cynthia Gorney, "The Changing Face of Saudi Women," *National Geographic Magazine*, February 2016, accessed February 21, 2019, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/02/saudi-arabia-women/.

[1021] Elizabeth Dickinson, "Saudi King Appoints 30 Women to Shura," *The National*, January 12, 2013, accessed July 16, 2019, https://www.thenational.ae/uae/saudi-king-appoints-30-women-to-shura-1.261128; Hend T. Al-Sudairy, *Modern Woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Modern Woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Rights, Challenges and Achievements* (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 117; "Women in Public Life: Gender, Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa," (OECD Publishing, 2014), accessed March 7, 2020, https://www.oecd.org/publications/women-in-public-life-9789264224636-en.htm.

[1022] Abdullah Al-Heis, "Women Participation in Saudi Arabia's Political Arena," *Aljazeera Center for Studies*, (October 27, 2011), accessed October 16, 2020, https://studies.aljazeera.net/sites/default/files/articles/reports/documents/20111127125151908734Women%20Participation%20in%20Saudi%20Arabias%20Political%20Arena.pdf. .

other hand, King Abdullah's decisions for Saudi women's empowerment faced critics from the religious scholars such as Sheikh Saleh Al-Luhaida[1023], who was a member of the Council of Senior Ulama at that time, and any consultation with the council or approval from the council in appointing women to the *Majlis Al-Shura*.[1024] After women began to take seats in the *Majlis Al-Shura*, and improvements in the laws regarding the lives of women were being observed. Meanwhile, several laws have been passed such as "Criminalize Domestic Abuse Against Women", which was activated in March 2014, and "Granting a lawyer license to the females" law passed in January 2014. As a result of these laws, if men are found guilty of causing domestic abuse, they will be in prison for up to 1 year and will pay up to 50,000 riyals.[1025] Furthermore, Bayan Alzahra became the first lawyer to open her law firm in Jeddah.[1026] In addition to that, "Accepting driving petition for discussion" was asked in February 2014 but rejected four times until 2017 when it was announced that the driving ban for women will be lifted.[1027] The *Majlis Al-Shura* proposed to allow women to obtain their passports and to request state services without the approval of a male guardian and with the legal basis in accordance with the Sharia law in 2017.[1028] Moreover, the law that allows female muftis to issue fatwas was approved in the *Majlis Al-Shura* in September 2017.[1029]

These laws might seem to provide very basic rights that the women in the West have already obtained. However, for Saudi women, it took a long time to be able to ask and practice them. The efforts of the government between the 2011–2015 period actually

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[1023] She was arguing driving might cause injuries in women's ovaries. See; "Saudi Cleric Says Women Who Drive Risk Damaging Their Ovaries," *Reuters*, September 29, 2013, accessed March 21, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-driving/saudi-cleric-says-women-who-drive-risk-damaging-their-ovaries-idINBRE98S04B20130929.

[1024] Al-Hatlani, "Will Saudi Women."

[1025] Safaa Fouad Rajkhan, "Women in Saudi Arabia: Status, Rights and Limitations," Master diss., (University of Washington Bothell, 2014): 17; "Saudi Arabia: New Law to Criminalize Domestic Abuse," *Human Rights Watch*, September 3, 2013, accessed June 15, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/03/saudi-arabia-new-law-criminalize-domestic-abuse.

[1026] Fouzia Khan, "First Female Law Firm Opened in Jeddah," *Arab News*, January 3, 2014, accessed January 18, 2019, http://www.arabnews.com/news/502791.

[1027] Rajkhan, "Women in Saudi," 17.

[1028] Habib Tourni, "Independent Passports For Saudi Women Approved," *Gulf News*, February 1, 1017, http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/independent-passports-for-saudi-women-proposal-approved-1.1971394;"Saudi Women to Get State Services Without Male Guardian's Permission," *Reuters*, May 5, 2017, accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.rt.com/news/387225-saudi-women-service-guardian/.

[1029] "For the First Time In Saudi Arabia, Women Authorized to Issue Fatwas," *Arab News*, September 29, 2017, accessed January 18, 2019, http://www.arabnews.com/node/1169376/saudi-arabia; "Saudi Women Can Now Issue Fatwas: Report," *Khaleej Times*, September 30, 2017, accessed March 25, 2020, https://www.khaleejtimes.com/region/saudi-arabia/saudi-women-can-now-issue-fatwas-report.

operated for ameliorating the Saudi Arabia's image of a country restricting women's life. It also aimed to convince the world and the dissidents about the kingdom's willingness to improve women's rights. In addition, it aimed at easing the critiques towards the government regarding the implications of the male guardianship system on the rights and lives of Saudi women. Despite that the process was under the king's initiative, the domestic impacts of the Arab uprisings inside the kingdom enforced the Saudi government to take further and quick steps to prevent protests by women rights and human rights activists, in the kingdom and outside. As Saudi Arabia already went through the appeasement process of the protests, particularly in the Eastern provinces, the decision-makers aimed at avoiding an opening of a new front and struggle to overcome both domestic security and succession crisis.

Despite the Saudi women, the political logic of the state towards the Shiites cannot be argued to improve or even attempted to be ameliorated. The government's efforts on women rights were actually helping the decision-makers to cover their unwillingness and amend the Shiite communities' needs and demands in the political, social and religious sphere. The 2011–2014 protests proved the kingdom is about the quick nascence of a Saudi Shiite movement in the case of the rise of the Shiite protests in neighboring countries such as Bahrain. While the kingdom was avoiding to adopt a sectarian vocabulary in expressing its regional narratives, the rise of sectarian rhetoric in the overall region helped the Saudi state to securitize the Shiite issue after the 2014 protests. Therefore, this was a kind of break from King Abdullah's tolerant attitude towards the domestic critiques. Saudi Arabia closed the period of the Arab uprisings successfully in terms of protecting the kingdom's stability and royal family's unified image by adopting a relatively peaceful strategy with a limited tolerance, except for various violent attacks on the Shiite protesters and the military intervention in the Bahraini protests. The 2011–2014 uprisings revealed that the royal family could not disregard anymore the people's demands for social and political rights if they were asked in respectful ways, such as filing petitions without ignoring the principle of loyalty and obedience to the ruler. However, it also revealed the capacity of the Saudi dissidents to put political pressure on the government in order to force the kingdom's limitations in terms of social and political rights, especially if they were combined with regional insurgencies and the emotional support of the neighboring countries.

5.2. RECALIBRATION OF SAUDI REGIONAL SECURITY PERCEPTIONS AFTER THE ARAB UPRISINGS

5.2.1. Regional Security Practices of Saudi Arabia under the Period of Domestic Turbulence

The Arab uprisings radiated the demands of freedom, justice, dignity and economic parity that promptly countered the regional security interpretations of Saudi Arabia. They posed political, economic and social challenges to the Saudi domestic structure. More importantly, the post-uprisings period revealed the need for reconstructing the perception of outsiders by building confidence over the Saudi regional security priorities. The high level of tension within Saudi Arabia's regional and domestic environment had already been evident before the uprisings. At this juncture, the impacts of the uprisings verified the Saudi decision-makers' regional security concerns towards Iran, which had been reconstructed in the post-2006 war period. The 2006 war directed the Saudi decision-makers to understand that Iran's regional penetration over the domestic structures of the neighboring countries was at its peak, and thus required a sudden discursive shift in the Saudi regional security interpretations. While the uprisings did not transform the lack of transparency and conflictual decision-making process behind the scenes into a more transparent one, the protests inside Saudi Arabia forced the decision-makers to take more substantial domestic incentives in favor of the Saudi public and a more tolerant attitude towards the Shiite communities (at least at the official discourse). Regardless of standing on the consultation principle for the governance, the royal family traditionally reminds the public about the fact that the representatives of the Saudi people in *Majlis Al-Shura* are far from being rivals for power.[1030] Therefore, the efforts of the government in the post-uprisings period were to keep an eye on the domestic dissidents while keeping the non-dissidents satisfied by utilizing the country's wealth to counter the domestic challenges and a spill-over impact of the uprisings.

As part of its domestic concerns towards the rise of the protests in other cities compared to the Eastern provinces that make up the majority of the Saudi Shiites, the Saudi government establish punishments for many non-violent activists including scholars and

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[1030] Talha H Fadaak and Ken Roberts, *Youth in Saudi Arabia* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 6.

lawyers calling for the draft of a constitution, holding of free elections, and release of political prisoners who had been arrested with long-term prison sentences.[1031] Through this practice, the Saudi government presented their perception over the status of the Saudi public, who did not hold substantial political power in the system. In addition to the violent acts against the 2011–2014 protests, Saudi Arabia started the period of mass executions such as the case in January 2016 when 47 people were accused of supporting terrorism or being pro-Assad government or pro-Iranian. For example, the execution of a prominent Shiite cleric critical against the government, Al-Nimr, together with many Sunni critical voices. The fact that the majority of the executed people were the Sunnis who were labelled as Sunni extremists or jihadists revealed the unsectarian nature of the executions and illustrated the fear of the government from the Sunni dissidents' critiques as well as their potential influence on the Saudi peoples. Throughout the process, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Sheikh Abdulaziz ash-Sheikh, who was consulted for the legitimization of the executions defined the government policy as a "mercy to the prisoners" and thus preventing the extremists to commit more crimes in the future.[1032] The mass executions of the Saudi religious scholars strengthened Iran's hand to divert the regional security dynamics in accordance with the Iranian narratives. A military Iranian threat or proxy war concepts was not enough to describe the Saudi regional security perception towards Iran; instead, it was shaped by the priority of preventing the domestic influence of the external political or religious pro-Iranian actors on the Saudi public, especially on the young Saudis, which would enable them to appear as domestic threats to the authority of Saudi royal family.

Saudi royal family was not concerned about the danger of foreign military intervention but to reconstruct the regional image of the kingdom for the outsiders by continuously checking the domestic dissidents to ensure and prove the unity of the kingdom and the Al-Saud family. For the Saudi decision-makers, Iran was a regional actor with the threat of initiating a psychological war with its asymmetrical warfare capability that could provoke mass movements in the country. Moreover, Iran's historical narratives based on injustice and inequality of the regional and international actors' politics towards itself

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[1031] Paul Aarts and Carolien Roelants, "The Perils of the Transfer of Power in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2016): 601-602.

[1032] "Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr: Saudi Arabia Executes the Top Cleric," *BBC News*, January 2, 2016, accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35213244.

has traditionally constituted a decisive part of the Iranian foreign policy-making. Iran was interpreted as highly capable of influencing the neighboring societies by exaggerating and supporting their critiques against their governments. Given the uncertain and critical political future in terms of the insufficiency of the oil economy, the withdrawal of the US from Iraq or the Obama administration's nuclear agreement with Iran, it was understood that confrontation needed to be considered as a key feature of the Saudi regional security understandings towards Iran's regional objectives. In accordance with this trend, the Saudi decision-makers utilized the hard power concepts such as deploying armed forces to the neighbors like Bahrain in 2011, creating or joining military coalitions like the US-led coalition against Daesh or applying isolationist policy towards the supposed pro-Iranian partners like Nouri Al-Maliki of Iraq. This period reflected an assertive foreign policy era based on the priority of ensuring the regional stability in favor of Saudi Arabia which in turn directed the Saudi foreign policy to intervene in the domestic structure of the neighbors. Moreover, it can also be interpreted as an attempt of the decision-makers to annihilate the increasing suspicion towards the Saudi involvement in sponsoring the jihadi groups, particularly in Syria.[1033]

The transformation of Saudi foreign policy towards an offensive tone towards Iran was not directly linked to the proxy war discussions rather it was caused by the rise of the unidentified or politically and militarily mobile non-state actors which were able to change sides depending on the regional environment. The offensive tone of Saudi foreign policy was also influenced by the decision-makers' dissatisfaction with the Obama administration which was believed to elevate the regional security dynamics in favor of Iran and created an insecure period for the Saudi domestic structure. Moreover, Iranian officials' Islamization of the motivations of the protesters was much more a domestic challenge beside its regional impacts in converting the regional dynamics against the kingdom. Having these ambiguities in mind, Saudi decision-makers had to redefine the concept of the enemy against the regional and domestic stability, and also reconstruct the ways and mechanisms to convert the external audience's interpretations in favor the kingdom's narratives. For instance, the government began financing the downfall of the Muslim Brotherhood and Assad government which were considered to increase the pro-Iranian political structures in the region. The Saudi decision-makers' problem with the

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[1033] Al-Rasheed, "King Abdullah of."

rise of Muslim Brotherhood figures in neighboring countries was partly because of Iran's exploitation of the concepts of democracy and Islam, beside criticizing the Saudi political system of having a lack of an elected president and resuming an outdated governance system. Hence, it was an obligatory step to label the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization in February 2014 to undermine a possible political influence of the organization on Saudi people particularly the young Saudis.[1034] Nevertheless, labelling an elected government as a terrorist organization reflected the Saudi dilemma which was inconsistent whether to support people's demands for freedom, equality and dignity, or back the autocratic regimes. While criticizing the political rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region and acted against the legitimacy of its electoral victory, Saudi decision-makers were in favor of removing the Assad government from the power through supporting the Syrian rebel groups. The two different foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia in mass protests against the governments demonstrated the ambivalent and unsteady foreign policymaking in interpreting the rise of the new state and non-state actors over the domestic and regional security. It was part of Saudi pragmatic foreign policy to ensure the regional stability in favor of Saudi regional priorities while blocking the Iranian narratives pragmatically rebuilt upon the rise of political Islam and democracy.

The uprisings also brought a politicization of sectarian vocabularies in the regional security politics of the states. It enforced Saudi Arabia to find responses and reconstruct the state narratives to be able to shape the discussions on the Sunni-Shiite tension in favor of Saudi interests which was based on the spread of the religious transnational ties by the kingdom. After the uprisings, Saudi decision-makers like Prince Saud Al-Faisal labeled the sectarian fighting as a "horrible thing".[1035] For some others', this tactic of Saudi Arabia was part of its sponsorship of religious revivalism as a protection racket against ontological insecurity.[1036] The rise of the sectarian language forced the Saudi decision-makers to diversify and reconstruct the official narratives from Sunni solidarity to a more diversified and comprehensive dialogue with the alienated actors. Following this, Prince

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[1034] "Saudi Arabia Declares Muslim Brotherhood as a 'Terrorist Group'," *BBC News*, March 7, 2014, accessed December 25, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26487092.
[1035] Ibid.
[1036] Ben Rich and Ben MacQueen, "The Saudi State as an Identity Racketeer," *Middle East Critique* 26, no. 2 (2017): 117-118.

Saud Al-Faisal underlined the Saudi official narrative evolving around keeping equal distance from the neighboring countries like Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon without taking a side as the protector of the Sunnis.[1037] At this juncture, Saudi decision-makers avoided adopting sectarian concepts in their political discourse towards the regional actors. Prince Turki Al-Faisal were clear from the beginning about preventing any attempt from the Iranian decision-makers to misemploy the protests of the Arab peoples as support of Iranian narratives, hence a mixture of financial aid and hard power initiatives were combined to counter the protests in the neighboring countries like the 2011 Bahrain case.[1038] Despite the aggressive discourse of some Saudi royal actors like Crown Prince Nayef who clearly dismissed any possibility of compromise with Iran, Saudi official discourse was actually avoiding a hostile political discourse towards Iran. For instance, they preferred to show their appreciation over Iran's commitment to the 2015 nuclear agreement without hiding their dissatisfaction with the Obama administration.[1039] The self-reconstruction of Saudi Arabia as a peaceful regional actor, and as the other of Iran, was built upon utilizing non-sectarian vocabulary. In tandem, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, italicized the Saudi rhetoric of keeping distance from the different sects living in the Sunni countries: "If you are protecting Shiites in Iraq, you must remember that there are more Shiites as minorities in Sunni countries than the majority in Muslim countries."[1040] The overall political rhetoric of the Saudi decision-makers revealed the Saudi Arabia's regional security policy of avoiding an antagonized discourse against the Iranian decision-makers which aimed at reconstructing the Saudi regional image in the eyes of the external audience as a respectful actor to the peaceful resolutions and a compromiser regional actor without an inherent hostility to Iran.

[1037] "Transcript: Charlie Rose Interviews Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni of Israel," *New York Times,* September 27, 2007, accessed January 3, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/world/africa/27iht-27charlie.7662846.html.

[1038] Turki bin Faisal Al-Saud, "هل تغيرت إيران؟" *Aljazeera Arabic,* December 18, 2013, accessed September 28, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2013/12/18/هل-تغيرت-إيران.

[1039] "Transcript: Charlie Rose."

[1040] Ibid.

5.2.2. Iran's Islamization of the Arab Uprisings

The Arab uprisings caught Iran in a period of domestic power struggle between President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader Khamenei. The uprisings revealed the Iranian dilemma owing to the mixed political messages of the decision-makers in the cases of Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain. At the regional level, Iran's foreign policy actions varied depending on the regional security priorities and perceptions of the decision-makers. In Yemen and Libya, Iran's priorities directed the country to involve only indirectly at least at the beginning of the crisis while in Syria and Bahrain, Iran preferred to intervene in the domestic affairs of both. In the domestic context, Ahmadinejad's second term of presidency experienced a grave power rivalry between the president and the Supreme Leader, and more importantly within the conservatives, which resulted in the disassociation of the conservative line before the 2013 presidential elections. The protests around the Arab world increased the Iran's regional security perception to the level that the regional events could go against the country if it did not examine how to respond to the negative impacts of the protests in the Arab neighbors. Hence, it revitalized the Iranian political rhetoric towards the region by interpreting the uprisings in the Arab neighbors as an offset of the Islamic revolution as an Islamic awakening. Iranian officials avoided to make links with the Green Movement and the protests which could revitalize the Iranian people with the emergence of an Arab model of political Islam. For instance, Iran described the Green Movement as sedition or as the fifth column initiations of the external forces.[1041] At this juncture, it was important for Iran to continue practicing the resistance strategy to counter the polarization of the region along the sectarian lines while emphasizing the nature of the uprisings within the Islamist trend not secular or liberal line.

The uprisings elevated Iran's capacity to influence the domestic structures and struggles of the neighboring states. Iran was not contesting in terms of military means instead tended to penetrate the societal, political and religious layers of the neighboring states especially in building networks with the non-state actors of the weaker or failed states. Saudi and Iranian media were effectively using their soft power on influencing the public through discrediting each other in the eyes of the external audience and the people of the

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[1041] Ali Parchami, "The 'Arab Spring': The View from Tehran," *Contemporary Politics* 18, no. 1 (2012): 44.

region.[1042] While Iranian media was supportive of the Bahraini protests and accused of giving moral support to the protesters both in Manama and in the Eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia, Iranian media was much more controlled about the news on the rise of the protests against the Assad government. For Saudi Arabian writers, Iran was a hostile neighbor to the Arab countries, chronically aimed at expanding its revolution by mobilizing the protests in its favor. On the other hand, Iran was interpreting the process as a message of the Islamic awakening movement to the monarchies like Saudi Arabia which would bring the end of their oppression over their citizens.

Iranian decision-makers were vigilant to calculate the link between domestic variables and regional impacts of the protests against any destabilizing impact on the Iranian political system. While they preferred to interpret the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia as a liberation wave from the corrupted systems, the Libya and Syria crises were not even seriously mentioned in the Iranian media. [1043] At the same time, Iran conceived the demise of Mubarak and the fall of Bin-Ali as an indicator of the decline of the US and Israel throughout the region. In the case of Libya, Iran criticized the hypocrisy of the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s military involvement in the country in terms of oil interests despite they condemn Qaddafi of committing death crimes against the Libyan people. Ahmadinejad, in an attempt to undermine Iran's value-based interpretation of the protests, argued that Qaddafi had to stand by the Libyan people's demands instead of bombing them. On the other hand, Syria constituted a much more political and commercial road for Iran as it had a crucial role in connecting Iran strategically to the Levant particularly to Hizballah in Lebanon as well as being a base for Hamas leaders. [1044] For Bahrain, it was a remarkable opportunity for the Iranian decision-makers to criticize the Saudi military intervention in the country and deprived the accusations against Iran to support a regime change in the country. In accordance

[1042] Jane Kinninmont, "Why Has the Saudi King Invited Ahmadinejad to the Syria Summit?" *The Guardian*, August 7, 2012, accessed July 13, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/aug/07/saudi-king-ahmadinejad-syria-summit.

[1043] Bernard Gwertzman, "Managing Arab Spring's Fallout in Iran," Interview with Farideh Farhi, *Council on Foreign Relations,* April 7, 2011, accessed January 25, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran?topics=All&regions=All&type=4&sort_by=field_display_date_value&sort_order=DESC&page=3.

[1044] Simon Tisdall, "Iran Has Been Isolated by the Arab Spring," *The Guardian*, May 17, 2011, accessed June 13, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/17/iran-arab-spring.

with this, Khamenei viewed Saudi Arabia as an oppressor state in Bahrain that aimed at dominating and controlling the political-security structure of the kingdom.[1045]

The 2006 war between Hizballah and Israel demonstrated the size of Iranian influence at its peak. The Arab uprisings forced the Iranian decision-makers to turn the protesters' demands from economic issues to political rights into the Islamist tone serving for the resistance strategy of Iran. Iran welcomed the fall of Mubarak in the early days of 2011 as a chance to contest the US and Israeli influence in the region thanks to its collaboration with the Ikhwan. On the other hand, Iran interpreted the Syrian protests against Iran's resistance strategy and resistance network from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Moreover, Iran encountered a political separation with Hamas in 2011 which paved the way for disagreement over the political and regional narratives with Hizballah and Assad. Hereby, it left the resistance strategy militarily and politically vulnerable. However, Iran tried to convert this situation during the Gaza Strip in July by restating its support for Hamas, which would be calculated to build more pro-Iranian groups in the West Bank and overall enabling the superiority of Iranian regional narratives among the Palestinian public.[1046]

Iran's official narrative during the uprisings was based on replenishing the Islamic links of the protesters and putting an Islamic stamp on the nature of the uprisings through referring to the Islamic Awakening (Bidari-ye Eslami), divine blessing, and resistance to the West as key motivational factors of the protesters. Iranian media viewed the protests as a democratic and revolutionary movement with an Islamic nature to topple down the corrupted and non-Islamic regimes like Ben Ali and Mubarak governments.[1047] Iran's democracy stress was a direct result of its claim of representing its own version of democracy through the internalization of the Islamic values within the Iranian cultural values rather than a superficial copy from the West. At this juncture, Iran placed the protests against the monarchies ruled by the "puppet" rulers of the US that eventually

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[1045] Naysan Rafati, "After the Arab Spring: Power Shift in the Middle East?: Iran and the Arab Spring," *Report LSE Research,* 2012, accessed February 23, 2019, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/43466/1/After%20the%20Arab%20Spring_Iran%20and%20the%20Arab%20Spring(lsero).pdf.

[1046] J. Matthew McInnis, *ISIS, Israel, and Nukes: Iran Faces Crises*, *American Enterprise Institute* (2014), 5-8.

[1047] Rusi Jaspal, "Representing the Arab Spring in the Iranian Press: Islamic Awakening or Foreign-Sponsored Terror?" *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 2, no.3 (2014): 437.

would lose against the Islamic awakening of the people of the region.[1048] Since Iran was underlining the Islamic nature of the protests and Iran's compliance with it, it was an alarm for Saudi Arabia to remind its representational role in the Muslim world. For instance, King Abdullah proposed establishing a center for inter-faith dialogue during the OIC in May 2011 in order to give a compromising image of Saudi Arabia to bridge the gap between Sunni and Shiite communities. In response to this, Iran publicized the protests as the indicator of resistance strategy against the US and West domination over the dignity of the people of the Middle East.[1049] Iran was attentive to avoid the Khomeinist discourse like the exportation of the Islamic revolution to the whole Muslim world in order to convince the outsiders about Iran's foreign policy peacefully conducted with the neighboring Arab countries at the time of crisis like the Arab uprisings. Iranian officials often underlined their appreciation on the rise of the Islamist governments in the region against the secular as well as the monarchial states.

In the domestic sector, Iran encountered the power struggle between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei over overwhelming each other's effectiveness among the Iranian conservatives. It constituted the major theme of Ahmadinejad's second term which was the break of a taboo of openly challenging the authority of the Supreme leader. He directly challenged the position of the Supreme leader on many occasions which in turn created a political fragmentation within the conservative branch. In order to shadow the Khamenei's authority, Ahmadinejad declared Khomeini as the guide of the Islamic Republic, and aimed to give the impression that the Iranian Revolution had returned to its foundations.[1050] Furthermore, in order to question the sanctity of the supreme leader, Ahmadinejad had speeches like "the leader's hands are tied without public support".[1051] By advocating the nationalism combined with populist religious fervors, Ahmadinejad aimed at constructing a network of loyalists who could be able to marginalize the clerical class from politics. Despite he had critiques from his guides like Ayatollah Mesbah

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[1048] Ibid, 438.

[1049] Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Ahmadinejad's New Pet Phrase 'Spring' Infuriates Iranian Establishment," *The Guardian*, March 13, 2013, accessed December 26, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/13/ahmadinejad-spring-infuriates-iranian-establishment.

[1050] Nazanine Metghalchi, "Is Iran Immune from the Arab Spring?" in *Europe in the Reshaped Middle East*, ed. Kristina Lausch and Richard Youngs no. 9 (October 2011): 4.

[1051] Massoumeh Torfeh, "Ahmadinejad Has Fuelled Iran's Power Struggle," The Guardian, May 21, 2011, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/21/mahmoud-ahmadinejad-iran-power-struggle.

Yazdi, Ahmadinejad continued to challenge the Khamanei's authority through using the term "Viva Spring" giving reference to the return of the concept of "Hidden Imam" and undermine the religious and political authority of the Supreme leader. To show his political authority gained by the elections and people's will, Ahmadinejad removed the minister of intelligence and the foreign minister who were close figures to Khamenei, then appointed himself as the oil minister without consultation with the Supreme leader or voting in the parliamentary.[1052] Moreover, his main adviser Esfandiar Mashaei, who was called a "misguided gang" by the conservatives, was promoted by Ahmadinejad to rise the spread of Iranian nationalism which was the major pillar of the Ahmadinejad second term referring to the pre-Islamic period of Iranian history. For instance, Ahmadinejad organized the Nowruz festival in 2011 with the invitation of the heads of state to Persepolis, which was criticized and disapproved by Khamenei later on.

Beside the power struggle issue, Ahmadinejad's last term revealed the economic challenges given the economic sanctions on the country by the UN, European Union (EU) and the US including the oil embargo, banking sector, financial transactions. All of them had grave impacts on the vulnerable Iranian economy which had already been exposed to power shortages, high unemployment of the young Iranians, two-digit inflation in addition to Ahmadinejad's ideological foreign policy. [1053] Due to the appointment of many IRGC officials to the high governmental positions like minister of oil, defense, and energy, Iran's economy was militarized with the active involvement of the IRGC in the business sector which created a dissatisfaction among the private sector. [1054] The period of power struggle ended with the further contestation within conservative lines which were observed during the parliamentary elections between the United Front of Principlists and the Front of Islamic Revolution Stability in March 2012. The election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 from the Moderation and Development Party, was welcomed by King Abdullah along with hesitancy in mind about Rouhani's trustworthy presidency. Saudi Arabia viewed the new president seemed

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[1052] Abbas Milani, "Is Ahmadinejad Islamic Enough for Iran?" *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2011, accessed September 26, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/04/29/is-ahmadinejad-islamic-enough-for-iran-2/

[1053] Suzanne Maloney, "Sanctioning Iran: If Only It Were So Simple," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no.1 (2010): 136.

[1054] Nader Habibi, "The Ahmadinejad Presidency and the Future of Iran's Economy," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs,* January 28, 2016, accessed February 26, 2019, https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/the-ahmadinejad-presidency-and-the-future-of-irans-economy.

to be a more tolerant figure in its relations with the neighbors and the West; however, the 2015 nuclear deal emerged as another area of regional tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. On the other hand, friction and mistrust among the Iranian political actors particularly within the conservative branch enhanced Saudi Arabia's regional security understanding to a self-confident tone but the difficulty that the Saudi decision-makers had to figure out was how to elevate the Iranian domestic struggles in favor of Saudi regional priorities. For some scholars like F. Gregory Gause III, this was a new Middle East Cold War lead by two actors; however, it was rather a process of escalating the deficiencies of each other in the third countries while avoiding a direct confrontation. It is an underestimation to describe the conflict as a proxy war which avoids the articulation of the historical practices at the perception of each parties' memory. Despite avoiding a direct confrontation with each other sounds similar to the Cold war themes, the instability of the capacity of both actors to challenge each other's weaknesses and deficiencies depending on their capability to infiltrate the societal and political actors of the neighboring states.

5.2.3. The Rise of Muslim Brotherhood Issue and Saudi Regional Security Practices

Mohammed Morsi's election victory in Egypt after a popular uprising in February 2011 was welcomed by the Iranian decision-makers because of the emergence of a possible regional partner committed to political Islam after long years of limited bilateral relations during Mubarak's reign. Despite Morsi's preference to visit Saudi Arabia as part of his visits to the foreign countries at first, he appeared to be the first Egyptian president to visit Iran since the 1979 Camp David agreement during the Anwar Sadat's presidency. The visit was followed by Egypt's transfer of the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement to Iran in August 2012, then replied with a package of Iranian promotion including oil shipments, and trade agreements. The summit of the Non-Aligned Movement demonstrated the mutual security perceptions of Egypt and Iran in the Syria war and Palestinian issue beside their political distance from Mubarak's foreign policy, the US, and Israel. For Iran, it was critical to portray Egypt as a civil and democratic country with an Islamist tone against the Saudi political system despite their non-identical definitions of the Muslim Brotherhood and Iranian religious structure particularly on the role of Islam in politics and society. In addition to this, referring to

the Syrian case, both actors underlined their compliance to the equality, justice and avoidance of sectarian divisions among the peoples.[1055] The Yemen case might be considered as the most apparent example of cooperation to back the insurgency of the Houthis against the Mansour Hadi government even before Saudi Arabia formed a military coalition against the Houthi rebels in 2015.[1056] However, Morsi paid his first foreign visit to Saudi Arabia as part of his intention to balance his relations with Iran, avoid alienation in the Sunni world, and direct the Saudi private sector companies to invest in Egypt.

While Iran utilized Islam-centric gatherings such as the Islamic Unity Forum to maintain ties with the Muslim Brotherhood figures, it was practical for the Muslim Brotherhood members to retain their dialogue with Iran as political leverage to other regional actors in the Middle East. In contrast to Mubarak's reign when Iran's and Muslim Brotherhood's social, religious and political reliability deteriorated[1057], Morsi's period was not solely based on gaining Iran as the strategic partner or a political ally against the monarchies of the region rather he was in favor of diversifying his political contacts without jeopardizing the political, economic and religious ties with Saudi Arabia. Morsi's period was criticized for his government's efforts to monopolize power, rejecting checks on his power, and being inefficient to implement reform calls particularly by liberal and secular-leaning groups, particularly the young segments of the society.[1058] These critiques were followed by wide protests and campaigns like the *Tamarod* (rebel) campaign which was conducted against Morsi's policies in favor of a military and transitional government in April 2013.[1059] The campaign called for early elections and closing the gap between the people and the government, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

[1055] Geneive Abdo and Reza H. Akbari, "Morsi's Just Not That into Iran," *Foreign Policy*, August 30, 2012, accessed August 5, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/30/morsis-just-not-that-into-iran/.
[1056] Seth Frantzman, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Dirty Dealings with Iran Revealed," *The Jerusalem Post,* November 18, 2019, accessed June 17, 2020, https://www.meforum.org/59938/muslim-brotherhood-and-iran-dirty-dealings.
[1057] At this point, Mubarak's speech in 2005 on the Shiite communities' political connections with Iran which was the "most Shiites are faithful to Iran, not to their own government"[1057] need to be underlined as the indication of the distrust towards the Shiites of the region beside Egypt's preference of Saudi Arabia as a regional partner. In Mehdi Khalaji, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Iran," *The Washington Institute*, February 12, 2009, accessed October 15, 2019, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/egypts-muslim-brotherhood-and-iran.
[1058] Eric Trager, *Arab Fall: How the Muslim Brotherhood Won and Lost Egypt in 891 Days* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 22-26.
[1059] "Tamarod," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 19, 2013, accessed July 26, 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/08/19/tamarod-pub-54917.

However, Morsi was not removed from power through early elections but a military coup lead by Abdelfettah Al-Sisi in 2013 with many conspiracies such as being supported by the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The purge of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology from Egyptian politics was not something that prevented Iran to reach out to the potential allies in the absence of a political partner of Iran in Egypt. Moreover, a secret deal was revealed by the Intercept which claimed various public meetings conducted between the Iranian officials and Muslim Brotherhood members like Ibrahim Munir Mustafa, Mahmoud El-Abiary, and Youssef Moustafa Nada during and after Morsi's presidency to discuss the ways to fight against Saudi Arabia, US and Israel.[1060] Likewise, the Brotherhood members continued their informal contacts with Iran as part of their pragmatism but often constrained by the regional image of Iran in the eyes of their Sunni Arab followers and domestic electoral allies like the Salafi leaning Nour Party as an obstacle to deepening the relations. Historically, the relations between the Brotherhood and Iran followed a continuous and constructive trend but the organization has often underlined their religious distance with Iran. For instance, in January 1982, the head of the Brotherhood, Umar Telmesani's speech illustrates this leaning of the Brotherhood: "We supported him [Khomeini] politically because an oppressed people had managed to get rid of an oppressive ruler and to regain their freedom, but from the doctrinal point of view, Sunnism is one thing and Shiism is another."[1061] Despite opposition to Iran in Sunni Islamist circles, the Brotherhood's continuous contacts with Iran have often served as an important safety net for the political future of the group especially in a period of growing regional and global uncertainty.[1062]

For Saudi Arabia, the Brotherhood was a movement constituting a political threat to the kingdom's survival and regional security priorities. Saudi decision-makers' threat perception from the organization was diverging from some GCC members like the state of Qatar which perceived the Brotherhood as a useful political ally in the face of other domestic and external threats such as the rise of extremist groups, which in turn

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[1060] James Risen, "A Secret Summit," *The Intercept*, November 18, 2019, accessed December 26, 2019, https://theintercept.com/2019/11/18/iran-muslim-brotherhood-quds-force/.
[1061] Khalaji, "Egypt's Muslim."
[1062] Tamer Badawi and Osama Al-Sayyad, "Mismatched Expectations: Iran and Muslim Brotherhood After the Arab Uprisings," *Carneige Middle East Center*, March 19, 2019, accessed February 21, 2020, https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/03/19/mismatched-expectations-iran-and-muslim-brotherhood-after-arab-uprisings-pub-78621.

constituted the emergence of its regional disagreements particularly with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Given the Brotherhood's modernist practice of Islamist principles, its lack of attention to the Gulf cultural, political and social structure as well as the monarchial structure, the Brotherhood was also a rhetorical, theological and structural threat to the establishment of the kingdom. Moreover, its stress on the concept of *bay'ah* related to the movement's transnational ties among the region was critically important regarding the Saudi narratives in terms of regional instability and the GCC's collective security. The establishment of the Brotherhood-affiliated governments around the Arab world constituted a serious obstacle for the monopoly of the religious authority of the Al-Saud family. While the Muslim Brotherhood constituted a direct political threat to the Saudi regime, the real perceived threat of the Brotherhood by the Saudi royal family was its potential for domestic mobilization among the Saudi people through their transnational historical ties with the peoples of the region. On the other hand, both Saudi Arabia and the Brotherhood had a common point of views such as being proponents of the Islamic law and Islamic education which in turn paved the way for the convergence of their interests due to the perceived influence of the Brotherhood ideology to the societal level for the countries through its relatively more tolerant and modernist application of the Islamic principles. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood had serious followers inside the kingdom as its members served in the kingdom's judiciary and educational bureaucracy since the 1950s.

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region, which ended the rules of Mu'ammar Al-Qadhdhafi, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, revealed the convergence of interests with Saudi Arabia, and its common regional security perceptions with Iran particularly in Syria and Yemen closed the ways for possible political rapprochement with the Morsi's government. The statement of the Minister of the Interior Prince Nayef, who labeled the Brotherhood the "source of all evils in the Kingdom"[1063], demonstrated the domestic threat perception of the Saudi decision-makers to the stability of the authority of the Al-Saud family. On the other hand, there were some royal members of the Saudi decision-making process like the Foreign Minister Prince Saud who underlined that Saudi Arabia did not have an inherent hostility to the Brotherhood but had a problem

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[1063] Lacroix, "Saudi Arabia's Muslim."

with only a "small segment affiliated with the group."[1064] Despite the contradictory statements of the decision-makers, Morsi's electoral victory was interpreted as an alarm because of its ability to undermine the existing Egyptian-Saudi regional alliance in favor of Iranian regional narratives and priorities.[1065] In contrast to King Abdullah who viewed the Muslim Brotherhood as a domestic threat to the kingdom's own religious legitimacy, in relation to the *Sahwa* movement inside the kingdom, Crown Prince Salman was believing to approach the Islamist movements in the kingdom to unite the Sunni Muslims against the rise of Iran's narratives of expanding its ties with the Shiite communities of the region.[1066] Moreover, Prince Salman tended to relate the establishment of the regional stability with Egypt's own domestic stability which was believed to affect the whole Arab and Muslim states' domestic affairs and regional security practices. At this juncture, Saudi Arabia indirectly was defining the regional stability and domestic stability of the neighboring states beside the kingdom to Egyptian decision-makers' future political alignments with the regional actors, and potentially a safety net to counter the influence of the Iranian regional practices and narratives over the Muslim and Arab world.

Morsi government's policy of keeping political and religious distance from the Iranian narratives directly targeted to calm the threat perception of the Saudi decision-makers from the domestic intervention of the Muslim Brotherhood inside the kingdom, and motivate the *Sahwa* movement to revolt against the Saudi government. This policy of Morsi was partly because of his government's economic needs from the Saudi Arabian wealth and funds as they already began to receive almost $2 billion financial and economic assistance from Saudi Arabia after the withdrawal of Mubarak. Saudi Arabia's utilization of its wealth as a political leverage in the regional affairs against Iranian regional priorities was an efficient political tool that forced the Morsi government to balance the Egypt's relations with Iran without jeopardizing the continuity of the economic assistance of Saudi Arabia in return for emphasizing their political and

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[1064] Matthew Hedges and Giorgio Cafiero, "The GCC and the Muslim Brotherhood: What Does the Future Hold?" *Middle East Policy Council* 24, no. 1 (2017), https://mepc.org/journal/gcc-and-muslim-brotherhood-what-does-future-hold.

[1065] Cherly K. Chumley, "Saudi Arabia Accused of Giving Egypt $1B to Oust Morsi," *The Washington Times,* July 30, 2013, accessed September 13, 2019, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jul/30/saudi-arabia-accused-giving-egypt-1b-oust-morsi/.

[1066] Toby Matthiesen, "The Domestic Sources of Saudi Foreign Policy: Islamists and the State in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings," *Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at Brookings Institution*, August 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Saudi-Arabia_Matthiesen-FINAL.pdf.

religious distance from Iran. Morsi was constantly underlining his government's willingness to cooperate with Saudi Arabia in regional affairs by referring to the history: "We in Egypt cannot forget that Saudi Arabia has always stood by the Arabs".[1067] He underlined the Gulf security as a red line of Egypt which in turn would mean the regional security perceptions of the Gulf states to be shared by the government. Nevertheless, Morsi was not far from establishing a diplomatic dialogue with the Iranian decision-makers, even his government's relations were considered as a constructive relationship with Iran which in turn constituted a distrust and ambiguity in the perception of Saudi decision-makers.

Owing to the distrusted ambiance of Morsi's government, Saudi Arabia together with the UAE actively redefined the Muslim Brotherhood as an existential threat to the Gulf security. They even offered to establish a "Muslim Brotherhood-free security environment"[1068] in the Gulf. Saudi decision-makers' major fear was the spread of the Brotherhood ideology to Islamic principles and values in Saudi society as a challenge to the official interpretation of the Wahhabism and royal family's religious legitimacy. For instance, Saudi Arabia dismissed the Brotherhood-affiliated religious and political scholars besides cutting the investments to Egypt in order to maintain the kingdom's superiority to control the Islamic discourse in the Muslim world.[1069] Furthermore, in 2014, the UAE and Saudi Arabia with the initiation of the US designated the Brotherhood a "terrorist organization" which in turn encouraged the Iranian decision-makers to criticize the Saudi dilemma in portraying an elected government within a terrorist line.

After the removal of Morsi's government, Saudi Arabia continued to utilize its financial wealth to foster its strategic alliance with the Sisi's government which was designated delegitimate government against the people's political will by the Iranian decision-makers. At the same time, an economic stagnation affected the Gulf states due to the sudden decrease in the oil prices and high costs of the Yemen war to the Saudi led military coalition. Despite the higher costs of donating financial aid to the neighboring countries, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE contributed $5 billion, $4 billion and $3

[1067] Nathaniel Kern, Matthew M. Reed, "Mursi Visits Saudi Arabia in First Trip Abroad," *Middle East Policy Council*, July 12, 2012, accessed May 27, 2019, https://mepc.org/commentary/mursi-visits-saudi-arabia-first-trip-abroad
[1068] Hedges and Cafiero, "The GCC and."
[1069] Ibid.

billion financial assistance for the Sisi's government which demonstrated the decision-makers' perception of Egypt case as an emergency move to maintain the regional stability in favor of Saudi Arabia and the allies. While Saudi Arabia and Egypt had followed similar foreign policies for the conflicts in Syria and Yemen during the Sisi's government, the major threat for the Saudi regional security architecture was the possibility of an Egyptian-Iranian cooperation in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, cooperation of both actors to financially or logistically support Hizballah and Hamas would marginalize the Saudi interests towards any proposed regional arrangements.[1070] In Yemen, both Saudi Arabia and Egypt were in favor of restoring the official government of President Hadi in Sanaa, cooperating with the Al-Islah Party of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood, and forming a military coalition of the Arab and Muslim countries against the rise of the Iranian backed Houthi groups which constituted a security threat in the Saudi border to be controlled emergently. As the new government in Egypt was considered a strategic ally to serve the Saudi regional projections, Sisi's government's efforts to maintain the regional dynamics in favor of the Saudi security perceptions were rewarded with an aid package of 8 million dollars of investment plans during the King Abdullah period. [1071] Following King Abdullah's death, the Saudi financial aids to keep the government far from the Iranian objectives were resumed by King Salman who consolidated the delivery of 700,000 tons of crude oil a month[1072] and 20,000 million dollars aid in the form of investment plans beside various construction plans like a bridge over the Red Sea between both countries, and most controversially the transfer of the control of uninhabited Tiran and Sanafir islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia. As the Sisi's term constituted a less distrust ambiance in Saudi-Egypt relations due to the financial aspects, it was a regional loss for Iran which directed the country to consolidate its dialogue with the Brotherhood members and crystalize the rhetorical deficiencies of the Saudi decision-making.

[1070] "New Era of Relations Between Egypt and Saudi Arabia," Interview with David Ottaway, *Wilson Center*, accessed March 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/new-era-relations-between-egypt-and-saudi-arabia.

[1071] Bruce Riedel, "Saudi Arabia Cheers the Coup in Egypt," *The Brookings*, July 7, 2013, accessed November 28, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/saudi-arabia-cheers-the-coup-in-egypt/.

[1072] Bárbara Azaola Piazza, "The foreign policy of post-Mubarak Egypt and the strengthening of relations with Saudi Arabia: balancing between economic vulnerability and regional and regime security," *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 3 (2019): 416-419.

5.2.4. Reconciling the Interfering Discourses of Saudi Regional Security Politics

Daesh which was alternatively known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, rose dramatically in the early days of 2014 especially after capturing Mosul city of Iraq. Following the taking over of Mosul, Daesh could be able to erase the internationally recognized borders between Iraq and Syria by taking advantage of its prior take over in Raqqa city of Syria since 2013. The regional instability in Iraq after the withdrawal of the US in 2011, marginalizing policies of Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki towards the Sunni tribal forces of Iraq, and civil war in Syria paved the way for the penetration of Daesh into the societies and expand its territorial gains beyond Iraqi borders. The establishment of Iraq's political structure over the *muhasasat ta'ifia system* since 1992 enormously deteriorated the Iraqi state and resulted in the widespread political and personal corruption particularly in elections which, in turn, catalyzed the societal and religious penetration of the Daesh's narratives among its followers. Moreover, the Islamic State announced the caliphate of its leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi which constituted the major difference of the organization from the other jihadist groups and constructed existential, rhetorical and theological threat directly to Iran but more to Saudi Arabia in this sense.[1073]

The Al-Mashriq (The Levant) region, especially Damascus city as the capital of the caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty, were central to the claims of the Daesh for the restoration of the concept of the Islamic caliphate. It was a process of calling for *jihad* (striving in the path of Allah) and *hijra* (migration) to take over Damascus like a final battle between infidels and the Muslims.[1074] Through its official magazine *Dabiq*, Daesh developed a discourse based on the martyr, *jihad*, concept of *imamah* (leadership), *hijra*, the binary concepts of *Dar al-Harb* (territory of war) and *Dar al-Islam* (territory of Islam), which were descriptive caliphate icons and symbols for mobilization and promoting the religious legitimacy to the caliphate.[1075] The emergence of an Islamic organization around the caliphate concept was directly challenging the legitimacy of the religious authority of Saudi Arabia. In turn, the muftis and sheikhs of the region had to

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[1073] The Islamic State also encountered opposition groups like the Jabhat al-Nusra and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham after 2016.

[1074] Ben Fishman, "Defining ISIS," *Survival* 58, no. 1 (2016): 186.

[1075] Erkan Toguslu, "Caliphate, Hijrah and Martyrdom as Performative Narrative in ISIS Dabiq Magazine," Politics, *Religion & Ideology* 20, no. 1 (2019): 108-119.

change their public's perception by giving speeches against the rise of the IS's narratives and territorial gains; like the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia who branded the Daesh and Al- Qaeda enemies of Islam, and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi who announced the declaration of Al-Baghdadi's caliphate as invalid according to the Sharia law.

Prior to the emergence of Daesh, the US military involvement in Iraq that has long been discussed as aggravating the sectarian divisions and effectively handing Iraq to Iran was announced to come to the end in August 2010.[1076] Obama administration declared the time for the Iraqi decision-makers to develop their self-reliance in the governance of the fragmented Iraqi society. Saudi Arabia tended to interpret the US withdrawal as abandoning the Iraqi territory and politics or leaving the political scene open to Iran. Moreover, Saudi decision-makers were aware of the fact that the Iranian militias would extend to the areas emptied by the US forces and began arming the local actors.[1077] At this point, one might argue that the withdrawal raised Iran's self-confidence to consolidate its religious and societal penetration into the Iraqi society beside increasing its military activity within the Iraqi territory. Iran historically considered Iraq as its natural influence zone as well as a political, economic and religious platform to increase its regional influence. The new setting of Iraq in the post-US period was highly decisive to be effectively taken part in. While Iran was interested in being a political partner of establishing a moderate Shiite state with democratic features, Saudi Arabia was not much eager to take part in the future character of the state because of the disappointment or presumptions of the decision-makers to view the new Iraqi political entity completely identified with Iran.[1078] Moreover, one might argue that the Saudi decision-makers came to the understanding of the kingdom's previous political pressure on the new and fragile Iraqi polity went against Saudi Arabia, in turn, created a sense of solidarity between the new Iraqi political elite and Iran by gathering them around a common security and political challenge like Saudi Arabia. In spite of its diverse characteristic, the new political structure in Iraq was actually serving some of the Saudi regional interests of

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[1076] "Barack Obama Announces Total Withdrawal of US Troops from Iraq," *The Guardian,* October 21, 2011, Accessed March 12, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/21/obama-us-troops-withdrawal-iraq.

[1077] "الأمير سعود الفيصل."

[1078] Yoel Guzansky, "The Day after the US Withdrawal from Iraq," *Institute for National Security Studies*, no. 288 (2011): 1-3.

avoiding the emergence of a new state with a hegemonic and expansionist foreign policy agenda.

The rise of the Daesh that came into existence in sectarianized and fragmented societal structure of Iraq changed the states' perception of the religious geopolitical situation in the Middle East. Despite there were different interpretations about the existence of the Daesh such as it was an external phenomenon and had not really focused on Islamic principles, or it was initiated by Iran to marginalize the Sunni Islam, the Daesh did not associate its claims with any regional actor. As the Daesh had universal claims by establishing a Sunni (caliphate) political entity and claiming the sole political, religious, and military authority over the Muslim world, it was a direct existential challenge both to the political establishment of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Despite the Daesh attacks in the region was considered as serving for the Saudi regional security priorities such as limiting the Iranian influence particularly in Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut,[1079] it seemed to be a greater ideological threat to Saudi Arabia because of its commitment to the Salafi tradition with its doctrinaire focus on the rule of the caliph which in turn restricted the kingdom to criticize the religious and doctrinal arguments of the organization. Moreover, the IS had claims over the Saudi territory like its major port Arar and the holy lands Mecca and Medina beside targeting the Shiite mosques and shrines, Saudi security forces, and religious institutions inside the kingdom since May 2015. These attacks[1080] were part of the Daesh target of deteriorating the domestic security structure in Saudi Arabia especially around the Shiite mosques and *huseyniyya*. The attacks inside the kingdom were a grave alarm for the domestic security of Saudi Arabia owing to the strengthened influence of Daesh in the north and south borders of the kingdom. Beside its threat to Saudi domestic security, the growing movement of the Daesh at the Saudi borders along with its penetration to the societies of neighboring states alerted the Saudi decision-maker's concerns about the territorial integrity of the kingdom.

As the Arab uprisings revealed the vulnerability of the old political orders to domestic political pressures, the rise of the Daesh in the region came as a consequence of the personalized governance in the regional states. The Daesh fact forced the governments

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[1079] Vicken Cheterian, "ISIS and the Killing Fields of the Middle East," *Survival* 57, no. 2 (2015): 114.
[1080] The first attack was against the al-Imam Ali mosque in al-Qaeda of Saudi Arabia on 22 May 2015, then against al-Imam al-Sadiq of Kuwait on June, and later on a Sunni mosque in Abha of Saudi Arabia in August.

to focus on the new local, militias, or social actors of the region. The Daesh was a regional security threat to Iran as well as part of the organization's interference in the Iran's sphere of influence and land route towards Iraq, Syria, Hizballah in Lebanon, Yemen, and the edge of the Golan Heights. For the Iranian security agenda, the security in Syria, Yemen and Iraq was a matter that deserved a dramatically different response to counter the rise of Daesh.[1081] While Iran chose to allocate much of its asymmetric forces in Yemen for the Houthi rebels, Iran appeared to interpret the Syria war as vital for regional stability and its own power struggle with Saudi Arabia. In contrast, Saudi Arabia designated the Daesh, Jabhat Al-Nusra (Al-Nusra Front), and some other groups as a terrorist in March 2014 and form an Islamic Coalition to fight terrorism in February 2016 which delegitimized and controlled the religious narrative of Daesh that portrayed the royal family as an infidel.[1082]

In the presence of Daesh in Iraq, Iran found it necessary to publicize its presence in Syria and Iraq while publicly announcing its major intention to keep the territorial integrity of Iraq rather than using the narrative of exporting the revolution abroad. Iran was cautious at underlining its involvement in Iraqi political structure was related to its political, economic, and security interests instead of revolutionary objectives. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia kept its political distance from Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki (2006–14) who was portrayed as a pro-Iranian actor found responsible for multiple physical and ideological threats to the Saudi polity by centralizing the political power with the perceived rise of the sectarianism in the Iraqi political process. Iran had already been inside the Iraqi political structure by supporting non-Shiite parties and political figures like Masoud Barzani who once argued that "Iran was the first country to come to the aid of Kurdistan by providing weapons and equipment"[1083] paved the way for Saudi Arabia's disappointment about the kingdom's political weight in the future of the Iraqi politics. During Maliki's presidency, King Abdullah even refused to send an ambassador to Iraq and often underlined the kingdom's preference for replacing Maliki with the former interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi who was also a Shiite and secular which would be

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[1081] Curtis Ryan, "Regional Responses to the Rise of ISIS," *Middle East Report*, no. 276 (2015): 20.
[1082] Eman Ragab, "The Gulf Cooperation Council countries and countering ISIS: threats, policies and challenges," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2016): 590.
[1083] Sayed Hossein Mousavian, "The Iran-Saudi Conflict: The Iranian Perspective," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, February 18, 2016, accessed March 15, 2019, https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/iran-saudi-conflict-iranian-perspective.

ex-communication for the Iran government and religious elites who backed the Shiite polities in Iraq.[1084] Another tendency the Saudi foreign policy towards Iraq was rhetoric of the decision-makers such as Prince Turki Al-Fasial to underline their equal political distance from all Iraqi factions, and their willingness to work with the Iraqi society with all means to promote Iraq's emergence as a stable and independent member of the Arab world.[1085] In tandem, Saudi decision-makers avoided portraying the Iraqi society as a passive actor which would be an underestimation and degrade the problem to the power struggle of the kingdom with Iran.

Both in the post-US and the Daesh period, Iran largely relied on its historically established ties with the Iraqi social, political and economic structure through activating its military and financial support for the pro-Iranian political parties and militia groups. Meanwhile, Iran used to sustain its ties with the post-US Iraq through repeating religious narratives, establishing economic ties, and backing political parties and groups like the Dawa Party, the Badr organization and the Sadrist Movement. In terms of the military involvement, Iran utilized the IRGC lead by General Qassem Suleimani as well as stationed the Quds Force [1086] to support Shiite military groups inside the Popular Mobilization Forces and pro-Assad military groups in Syria. The Quds Force was attributed religious aspects to help for the defeat of the Daesh as illustrated by Khamenei as such: "If they had not fought terrorism and Takfirism in Syria, we would have been fighting them right here in Tehran."[1087]   The major legitimization of the Iranian decision-makers for stationing the Quds Force in Iraq and Syria was declared at both government's request fighting against instability and insecurity as well as providing economic and military advice for the Iraqi and Syrian army. This in turn weakened the Saudi regional security narratives in both countries because of the official governments' calls and collaborations with Iran and their objections against the states who financially and militarily back the groups and parties fighting against the established governments.

Syria's geopolitical position was strategically decisive for the Iranian regional priorities as it borders Israel, Lebanon, two Sunni Iraqi provinces, Al-Mousel and Al- Anbar

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[1084] Ulrichsen, "Insecure Gulf."

[1085] Al-Saud, "هل تغيرت إيران؟"

[1086] It is a special operational force of the IRGC founded in 1988 and particularly used in military intelligence.

[1087] Zeynab Malakoutikhah, "Iran: Sponsoring or Combating Terrorism?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* (2018): 15.

despite the Syrian religious composition were not serving Iran, unlike Iraq. Saudi regional policy towards Syria was based on exaggerating the domestic problems of the regime to prevent it from conducting effective regional policies in accordance with the Iranian perspective. Syrian Civil war broke out in a deteriorated phase of the Saudi-Syrian relations which had been already weakened by the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, 2009 Gaza war and rise of the Iranian influence in Iraq. Hence, it was a challenging period for the Saudi government to penetrate the political and regional security arrangements of the Al-Mashriq. Saudi Arabia was not particularly preferring to overthrow the regime but expressing its strong opposition to the Assad government's preferences towards the region which were satisfying the Iranian objectives. Prior to the tensions in the relations, Saudi decision-makers aimed at demonstrating their commitment to the regional stability by utilizing their wealth to resolve the crisis and wars as illustrated by Prince Bandar as such: "King Abdullah sent him $200 million in urgent aid to calm the situation and deal with things politically and economically. But Bashar and his wonderful intelligence did not help the suffering of the people."[1088] The development of the Syria war which revealed the unstable regional alliances gradually directed the Saudi discourse towards a more hostile mood towards the Assad government as emphasized by the Washington Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Adel Al-Jubeir "Bashar Al-Assad will leave – I have no doubt about it. He will either leave by a political process or he will be removed by force. The Syrian people will not accept him being in power."[1089] The Saudi dilemma here was the fact that the Saudi state had never been in favor of supporting revolutionary movements or rebellions against the states because their presumption on the emergence of regional instability would risk the authority of the Al-Saud family. After the consolidation of the Iranian influence in Iraqi politics, Saudi Arabia aimed at limiting the Iranian influence in Syria which would further weaken the Saudi Arabia's authority of orienting the regional security dynamics. Therefore, Saudi Arabia preferred to recognize and arm the opposition forces against the Assad government and forces which were accused of being the major obstacle for the regional stability, and paving the way for

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[1088] Jamal Khashoggi, "لا حل ولا سلام في تقسيم سورية," *Al-Hayat,* August 3, 2013, accessed July 19, 2019, http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/لا-حل-ولا-سلام-ي-تقسيم-سورية/ad-id!3847.ks#.YJU0Yy1h2qA.

[1089] "Saudi Foreign Minister: Al-Assad Will leave, No Doubt," (Washington D.C: Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), February 12, 2016, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.saudiembassy.net/press-release/saudi-foreign-minister-al-assad-will-leave-no-doubt.

reconstruction of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the future political structure of the country.[1090]

The most prominent regional discourse of Saudi Arabia and Iran was their adherence to the unity of the Syrian and Iraqi people instead of the sectarian alienation of the societies. As neither of them was eager to share this narrative with each other, they accused the other of utilizing sectarian language and identity politics as a tool of influence; however, both have contributed to the growth of violence along sectarian lines. It is not to argue that the Syrian conflict was solely driven by states' struggle for sectarianism rather it was mostly shaped by both sides' pragmatic policies based on the political, economic and international variables. While Saudi Arabia sent arms and money to the Sunni groups or fighters, Iran allocated its wealth to the Shiite militias in Syria to support the Assad regime. For instance, Saudi Arabia provided weapons like US-made TOW anti-tank missiles as well as funding a coalition of Salafi jihadist militias called Jaysh Al-Islam (Islamic Front).[1091]

Following the disappointment of the Saudi side of the Obama administration's hesitancies to take active steps on the ground in Syria, the decision of having nuclear deal talks with Iran began a period of deterioration of the Saudi-US relations. The possibility of getting in diplomatic dialogue with the Iranian decision-makers made the kingdom feel the danger of the rapprochement of the US and Iran. King Abdullah was critical against the Obama administration's policies in Syria and Iran, and strongly emphasizing the loss of US credibility at the sense of Saudi peoples. Prior to that, Saudi Arabia had already been disappointed with the US hesitancy of supporting the Saudi intervention during the Bahrain uprisings.[1092] All of this contributed to the rise of Saudi unconformity of the regional security architecture despite the US was in favor of satisfying the Saudi concerns at the diplomatic level through the Secretary of State John Kerry's meetings with the Saudi officials. John Kerry aimed at calling the Saudi concerns by saying that he would resign if President Obama did not implement his promise regarding the red lines. Given the feeling of the Saudi side about the failure of the

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[1090] Berti and Guzansky, "The Syrian Crisis."

[1091] Danielle Ellison, "FPI Bulletin: Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Civil War," *Foreign Policy Initiative* (April 15, 2016): 2.

[1092] "مصدر: تحول كبير في موقف الرياض من امريكا بسبب سوريا وايران," *Akhbaar 24,* October 22, 2013, accessed June 29, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/152159.

Obama's promises, Prince Saud Al-Faisal once ridiculed John Kerry during a phone call by asking "Do you speak to me now as a citizen or a foreign minister?" in reference to that he was supposed to have resigned.[1093]

The perceived failure of the Saudi efforts in Syria caused changes in the positions of the Saudi decision-makers who were accused of being the reasons for the losses of the kingdom. For instance, Prince Bandar who had been responsible for the Syrian case from the beginning, was found guilty in the exploitation of armed groups to topple down the Assad government, then replaced by the Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef who was actually concerned more about the impact of the Syrian conflict in domestic politics than the regional dimensions. Despite being dismissed from his position, Prince Bandar had been a prominent royal figure together with a non-royal Washington Ambassador Al-Jubair directed all private and diplomatic meetings with the US to convince the Obama administration to take an active role in the Syria war, especially a military action against the Assad government's aggression towards the Syrian civilians in rural Damascus. Prince Bandar was also highly efficient in conducting regular shuttle diplomacy around the intelligence agencies, the Élysée Palace, the Kremlin, the US and other capitals in order to accomplish the Saudi regional security needs to weaken the Iranian influence over the local military and political actors of the region.[1094] On the other hand, the Saudi regional strategy was also based on portraying the kingdom as not inherently hostile to Iran and ready to open channels of diplomacy, which was illustrated by Prince Saud Al-Faisal's invitation the Foreign Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif to Saudi Arabia "anytime he sees fit."[1095] On another occasion, Al-Jubair's speech was endorsing the same strategy as such: "We have no ill will towards Iran. We have committed no aggression towards Iran. We have been on the receiving end of it."[1096] The official Saudi perspective towards the regional conflicts was the principal of underlining the good neighborliness narrative which was constructed to claim the

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[1093] *Akhbaar24,* "بندر بن سلطان: أرسلنا لبشار 200 مليون دولار لإجراء إصلاحات لكنه أخذها وزاد في القمع والتنكيل," February 13, 2019, accessed March 17, 2019, https://kharjhome1.com/885027820.html.

[1094] *Akhbaar24,* August 27, 2013, "وول ستريت جورنال": بندر بن سلطان يقود المجهود السياسي السعودي للإطاحة بالأسد," accessed January 15, 2020, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/146304.

[1095] Benedetta Berti and Yoel Guzansky, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy on Iran and the Proxy War in Syria: Toward a New Chapter?" *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 8, no. 3 (2014): 30.

[1096] "Saudi Foreign Minister."

compromising strategy of the Saudi foreign policy but also endorse the non-interference principle in the domestic affairs of the neighbors.

5.2.5. Saudi Regional Security Perception and Iran's Involvement in the GCC

Iran's bilateral relations with the Gulf states and societies did not evolve hand in hand with the rise and fall of its regional tensions with Saudi Arabia. Iran often utilized its relatively solid relations with some Gulf states like Qatar as a political leverage and part of its resistance narrative against the Saudi regional security practices. Despite Bahrain and Iran did not resume diplomatic relations after the 2011-2012 protests, its historical and religious ties with the Bahraini society dominated by the Shiites has always been there to serve for raising the Saudi security perceptions towards Iran. As Iran maintained its ties with the Bahraini Shiite throughout history and even considered Bahrain as one of its province, the 2011 political and constitutional crisis of Bahrain strengthened the spread of Iran's regional narratives against Saudi Arabia and the ruling Al-Khalifa family of Bahrain.[1097] Moreover, Bahraini Shiite was considering themselves as the original inhabitants of the Bahrain territory[1098] which adds another security obstacle to the Al-Khalifa family's historical narratives on consolidating the legitimacy of its political authority and in turn tied the evolution of Bahrain politics and foreign policy decisions to the external neighbors like Saudi Arabia. For the Saudi perception, the demands of the Bahraini Shiites were, if not encouraged, supported directly by the Iranian officials to weaken the Saudi authority in Bahrain's political structure as well the authority of Al-Khalifa family in the eyes of the citizens, which would open the way for a reintegration of the Bahraini society with Iran according to the Iran decision-makers.

The Bahraini uprisings were call of the society particularly Shiite citizens for recognition of the constitutional reforms and amelioration of their political, social and economic rights. Despite Bahrain adopted constitutional monarchy in February 2002, the state encountered with political and structural crises with the Bahraini Shiites who constituted the majority of the citizens but lack of political power and only benefiting a fair share of

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[1097] "The Al-Khalifa came to power in the eighteenth century, arriving from Qatar and, with the help of tribal allies from the peninsula, overthrowing the Persian rulers." In Simon Mabon, "The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 2 (2012): 85.

[1098] Simon Henderson, "Saudi Arabia's Fears of Bahrain," *The Washington Institute: Policy Analysis,* February 17, 2011, accessed June 16, 2019, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/saudi-arabias-fears-bahrain.

the state wealth. On the other hand, the Bahraini decision-makers tended to emphasize the opposite such as the Crown Prince Salman, the liberal-leaning son of King Hamad Al-Khalifa, was underlining the state of Bahrain's commitment to the coexistence within the Bahraini society and the rule of law for the all citizen.[1099] As the protests escalated, the Bahrain government had to take rigid steps against the protesters; in addition to allowing the Saudi-led military intervention to protect the authority of the Al-Khalifa family, the Bahraini decision-makers punished some Shiite leaders like Sheikh Isa Qassim who was the spiritual leader of the main opposition party Al-Wefaq, and lost his Bahraini nationality in 2016. Iranian officials argued that the decision of revoking the citizenship of Qassim would definitely trigger the protests and ease the end of the regime as underlined by the IRG Commander Qassem Suleimani as such: "Al-Khalifa [the rulers of Bahrain] will definitely pay the price for that and their bloodthirsty regime will be toppled."[1100] A similar narrative was repeated by the Hizballah through defining the Bahraini government as a "corrupted dictatorial regime".[1101] The discourses of Hizballah and Iranian officials were actually reflecting and endorsing their common regional narrative of resistance towards the "corrupted" and unfair regimes surviving under the US and the West domination targeting the Gulf monarchies and the allies of Saudi Arabia.

In contrary to the Iranian decision-makers, Saudi Arabia held the upper hand in the Bahrain case due to its close relations and political alignment with the government. The Al-Saud and the Al-Khalifa families were linked by the marriage of King Abdullah's daughter to one of the sons of King Hamad. Bahrain has also been politically close to Kuwait given the historical ties between the Al-Khalifa and Al-Sabah royal families who were both from the Anizah tribe.[1102] In addition to its Gulf neighbors, Bahrain had close links within the security sector of the US and the UK as it hosts the fifth fleet of the US navy, and the UK security companies both of which claimed to provide training, assistance to the Bahraini military sector and intelligence. Despite having a lack of

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[1099] Mabon, "The Battle for," 86.

[1100] Ian Black, "Iran Says Bahrain Has Crossed Line By Stripping Shia Cleric of Citizenship," *The Guardian*, June 20, 2016, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/20/bahrain-strips-influential-shia-cleric-isa-qassim-citizenship.

[1101] Ibid.

[1102] Kenneth Katzman, "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," *CRS Report* (September 29, 2017): 25.

political proximity with the Bahraini government, Iran's evolving regional narrative in relation to Bahrain's domestic affairs was perceived as the major factor threatening the Saudi regional security. In addition to underlining historical and societal links with the *Ajam* of Bahrain (ethnic Iranians living in Bahrain), Iranian official narrative mostly benefited from the domestic issues like political, economic and social rights of the Bahraini Shiites, weak constitutional arrangements of the government, and lack of the equal political representation of the Shiites in the government. Iran's emphasis on these issues was not only targeting to highlight the lack of rule of law for the Bahraini Shiites but to portray the Saudi government against the people's political, economic and social demands, hence revealing the discursive dilemma of the Saudi regional security policy particularly in Syria, Yemen, Egypt and Bahrain.

Saudi decision-makers interpreted the development of Iranian discourse for the 2011 protests in Bahrain as the driving force of the unrest and the overall regional instability. In accordance with this strategy, Iran's involvement in Bahrain's domestic affairs was interpreted as a suspicious move that needed to be treated through a cautious policy in order to protect the legitimacy of the Al-Saud authority in the eyes of the Saudi public and the external audience. In this context, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud who was a prominent actor during the Bahraini protests working hard for the support of the Al-Khalifa family, thus gained the respect of the Bahrain government as expressed by King Hamad: "Faisal was communicating with me sometimes in the middle of the night or at the time of dawn to talk about a certain point, I was wondering when this man sleeps".[1103] Saudi security concerns over increasing Iranian involvement among the Bahraini Shiites' political, social and economic problems can be traced back to the Shah Reza's period which ended with the development of the King Fahd Causeway plan in the 1960s. Bahrain's strategic importance to the Saudi regional architecture also stemmed from its concerns about Iran's territorial claims in the country, Iran's perceived ethnic affinity with the Bahraini Shiite as well as with the Saudi Shiite communities. Thus, for the Al-Saud family, tolerating the protestors and the Shiite citizens' demands from the Bahrain government would lead to an empowerment of the Shiite community in the Eastern Province of the kingdom. At this juncture, Saudi decision-makers aimed at maintaining

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[1103] "بالفيديو.. وزير خارجية البحرين: هكذا كان سعود الفيصل يُشعر مخالفيه بأنهم أقزام أمامه," *Akhbaar24*, June 13, 2017, accessed March 15, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/341086.

the financial dependency of the Al-Khalifa government of Bahrain to the Saudi aids which would distance the Bahraini society from the Iranian regional influence. This eventually linked the regime survival of the Bahraini government to the regime stability of the Al-Saud family in the perception of the Bahrain government.

In contrary to the Bahrain case, Iran could be able to establish relations within the Qatari decision-makers which alerted Saudi Arabia again to view one of the GCC members having a diplomatic and economic dialogue with Iran. The threat perception of Saudi Arabia raised towards the Qatar foreign policy after the Arab uprisings when Qatar began to represent the initial indicators of the transformation of its mediation diplomacy into a more assertive diplomacy of influence which reconstructed the Qatar foreign policy over its effective political and military involvement in regional crises. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani's arrival to power in June 2013 can be argued to create a perception change in Saudi regional security understandings. The perception change of the Saudi side was related to Sheikh Tamim's understandings different than his father Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani on the regional security. While Sheikh Hamad was paying more attention to the international image of Qatar, mediation policy in regional conflicts and regional engagement with the neighboring states, Sheikh Tamim declared his intention to be neutral in regional conflicts, and to focus more on the domestic affairs.[1104] Sheikh Tamim's foreign policy strategy was combining the economic and soft power of Qatar, and has also understood impossibility of developing friendly policies with all polarized actors of the region including Hamas and Israel, Iran and the GCC states, the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.[1105] Qatar's regional priorities highly related to its Gulf neighbors' domestic and economic stability as it provided $10 billion financial support over 10 years to Bahrain and Oman to help the recovery and the confrontation of their domestic crisis.[1106] During the Arab uprisings, Qatar was accused of adopting a double standard towards the protests around the Arab countries like

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[1104] Fatiha Dazi-Heni, "Qatar's Regional Ambitions and the New Emir," *MEI Policy Analysis*, May 9, 2014, accessed September 23, 2019, https://www.mei.edu/publications/qatars-regional-ambitions-and-new-emir.

[1105] Francesca Blasi, "Qatar's Foreign Policy, The Challenges in The MENA Region," *Mediterranean Affairs*, December 22, 2019, accessed February 16, 2020, https://www.mediterraneanaffairs.com/qatar-s-foreign-policy-the-challenges-in-the-mena-region/.

[1106] Faisal Mukhyat Abbu Sulaib, "Understanding Qatar's Foreign Policy, 1995-2017," *Middle East Policy Council* 24, no. 4 (2017), https://mepc.org/journal/understanding-qatars-foreign-policy-1995-2017.

supporting the Libya protests against the Qaddafi regime but turning a blind eye to the uprisings in Bahrain. This was a similar dilemma of other regional actors like Saudi Arabia and Iran both of which sided with the protesters or the government depending on their priorities in each case. The Arab uprisings revealed the poorly defined and double-minded regional security policies of the regional states even at the times when they allied themselves beside the demands of the peoples of the region from the governments.

Once Sheikh Tamim came into power, he was cautious of maintaining the ties with the regional and the non-regional states by emphasizing Qatar's new foreign policy position as "not part of any regional trends against any other."[1107] In accordance with this policy, Qatar decision-makers maintained close ties with the US, Russia and the Arab neighbors but also resumed economic relations with Iran mostly because of the requirement of a solid dialogue to keep the gas resources in the North Dame (South Pars) field in a coordinated manner. Qatar was also interpreting the continuity of the relations with Iran as part of the Qatari decision-makers' perception of Iran's strategic importance in ensuring the Gulf stability. At the decision-making level, Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah, the State Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2012, was in favor of ending the sanctions on Iran, establishing serious diplomatic contacts and solid relations in the areas of economy, politics and culture that.[1108] Moreover, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the father of Sheikh Tamim, was one of the first to congratulate the controversial victory of Ahmadinejad in the 2009 elections which ended with the spread of the Green Movement around the country. Sheikh Hamad even criticized the long-serving leaders of the Arab countries by arguing "Iran has had four presidents since its revolution, while some Arab countries have not changed their leaders at al."[1109] As Qatar is a monarchy itself, it was Qatar's dilemma to promote the Arab people's calls for democracy and he falls of authoritarian leaders in Egypt and Syria. While this fact made the Qatar's foreign policy ambiguous, Qatar continued providing financial, logistic support and arms to the rebellious groups and non-local actors such as Jaish Al-Fatah (The Army of Conquest)[1110], Jabhat Al-Nusra and Ahrar Al-Sham (Islamic Movement of the Free Men

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[1107] Marc Pierini, "Qatar's Foreign Policy Under the New Emir," *Carnegie Europe*, June 28, 2013, accessed September 24, 2019, https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/52236.

[1108] Kristian Coaches Ulrichsen, *Qatar and Arab Spring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 73.

[1109] Ibid, 73.

[1110] It is an alliance of Syrian Sunni rebellion groups founded against the Syria government in 2015.

of the Levant)[1111] which were defined as radical Islamist groups for some in the region especially by the official governments of these states.

The Qatari and Saudi regional security perception are disparate particularly after Qatar's economic and political support for the Morsi's government and later alleged support of Houthi rebels in Yemen. Welcoming the Muslim Brotherhood ideology through hosting its spiritual leader Yusuf Al-Qaradawi as well as the exiled leader of Hamas, Khaled Mashal in Doha. Qaradawi appeared a critical figure towards the Gulf states especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia for their support of the Al-Sisi government. Despite Qatar has restricted the influence of any religious scholars or sheikhs at the institutional level unlike Saudi Arabia,[1112] Al-Qaradawi entertained a certain level of authority at the domestic structure of Qatar due to support from Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. During his host in Qatar, Al-Qaradawi often appeared in Qatar TV channels expressing his critiques towards the region particularly towards the UAE foreign policy as a country adopting regional principles and practices contrary to the Islamic rule. On the other hand, Al-Qaradawi was critical against Iran and Hizballah even put them on the list of enemies of the Arab countries as illustrated in his speech: "Iran is also our enemy, the enemy of the Arabs. Those killed in Syria have been killed by the Iranians, the Chinese, the Russians, and the Syrian army. The Iranians stand against the Arabs in order to establish a Persian Empire… The same applies to Hizballah, which sends its men to fight in Syria, and come back in boxes".[1113]

While the regional acts of Qatar were threatening for the Saudi decision-makers in terms of showing the parting the ways with Qatar, Qatar's political and perceptional separation on the interpretation of the regional crisis was an opportunity for Iran to exploit it against Saudi Arabia. While Qatar had to deal with the accusations of its support for the extremist groups and the IS, the divergent regional security perceptions of Saudi Arabia and Qatar were observed in the 2012 GCC summit. During the summit, the GCC states came together to discuss the Syria war and Iran's involvement without inviting Qatar to the meeting and furthermore portrayed Qatar as an unreliable member when it comes to

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[1111] It is an alliance of Islamist and Salafist factions of Syria founded against the Syria government in 2011.

[1112] David B. Roberts, "Qatar and the Brotherhood," *Survival* 56, no.4 (2014): 24-25.

[1113] Andrew McGregor, "Muslim Brothers' Spiritual Leader Yusuf al-Qaradawi Condemns Hezbollah," *Jamestown Foundation: Terrorism Monitor* 11, no. 12, (2013), accessed March 13, 2019, https://www.refworld.org/docid/51bef5f74.html.

Iran.[1114] Thus, the exclusion of Qatar from the GCC meetings was announced publicly by declaring its support for the Brotherhood and, continuous and suspicious relations with Iran as targeting the unity of the GCC members' regional security practices. In turn, it represented the authority of Saudi Arabia in the GCC organization and the possibility of the exclusion of a member in case it contradicted with the Saudi regional security priorities and understandings.

The 2014 diplomatic crisis in the GCC which ended with the withdrawal of the ambassadors of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain from Qatar paved the way for the escalation of Qatar's regional rift particularly with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It has also brought a period of portraying Qatar strategically closer to the Iranian regional priorities than to the GCC members' regional security practices. The decision of the GCC members was announced as part of their priority of ensuring the security and stability in the Gulf, hence defined Qatar as a betraying member against the Gulf neighbors. The crisis actually came after the refusal of Qatar to sign an agreement on non-interference issue in the internal affairs of the GCC states as well as ending its support to the extremist groups of the region in the 2013 GCC summit in Kuwait. However, Qatar later signed a similar agreement called the 2014 Riyadh agreement which was never announced to the public in details.[1115] In the Saudi newspapers like Okaz and Al-Riyadh, Qatar's regional policies were interpreted as contrary to the Riyadh agreement which enforced Qatar to stop incitement in Qatari media, prohibit the religious scholars to give speeches in Qatari institutions against other GCC members, ending support for the Muslim Brotherhood figures as well as Hamas leaders, Iran and extremist groups in the region. Despite Qatar's relations with Iran had much more economic basis such as establishing free trade zones in the Bushehr port and Doha and Al-Ruwais ports in 2014,[1116] Saudi media evaluated the 2014 crisis as a strategic opportunity to accuse Qatar of damaging the Gulf unity by maintaining relations with Iran.[1117] By defining the Qatar-Iran relations as a "long-

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[1114] Roberts, "Qatar and the," 27-29.

[1115] Hussein Ibish, "Unfulfilled 2014 Riyadh Agreement Defines Current GCC Rift," *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, June 6, 2017, accessed May 24, 2019, https://agsiw.org/unfulfilled-2014-riyadh-agreement-defines-current-gcc-rift/.

[1116] Sanam Vakil, "Iran and the GCC Hedging, Pragmatism and Opportunism," *Chatham House: Middle East and North Africa Programme,* September 2018, 11, accessed July 26, 2019, https://chathamhouse.soutron.net/Portal/Default/en-GB/RecordView/Index/179426.

[1117] Ibish, "Unfulfilled 2014 Riyadh."

standing, historical and well-established",[1118] Saudi decision-makers were targeting the Gulf audience beside the external one to undermine the Qatar's foreign policy decisions towards the regional crisis.

5.2.6. Towards Reconstructing the Saudi Domestic Parameters and Regional Security Paradigm

After the Arab uprisings were quieted down, Saudi decision-makers encountered the exigence of solving the dilemmas of their conflicting regional security policies towards each Arab country that experienced the uprisings. The Saudi dilemma of supporting the protesters' demands or the established regimes brought the requirement for the Saudi state to balance its regional security priorities with its own possible domestic crisis, Saudi protesters' demands and eventually the state's regional narratives. The regional outcomes of the uprisings indicated that regional events can go against any state at any time depending on the penetration capacity of the events, crisis and wars into the domestic structures of states. This fact propelled the Saudi decision-makers to reconstruct the regional security understanding of the kingdom, re-evaluate its regional narratives towards Iran, redefine the targeted external audience, and most significantly directed the state towards reconstructing the regional image of the state based on the confidence-building abroad, not in the region anymore.

This period taught the decision-makers that regional affairs, crisis and wars cannot be treated as externally produced realities, rather they are the products of the interconnected concerns or conflicting security perceptions of the regional states which at the end force them to redefine their security priorities in accordance with their domestic structures. Following this, Riyadh came to understand that the necessity of transforming the regional narratives from the religious claims to more diversified ones like reconstructing the Saudi state image as a trustworthy and respectful regime to its own society's demands and the other states domestic affairs and their regional priorities to the extent that they did not threaten the Saudi regional security policies. This was part of the realization of the Saudi state of its religious discourse based on transnational religious ties with the Muslim world

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[1118] "Qatar Failed to Uphold GCC Commitments, Saudi Daily Says," *Gulf News*, May 29, 2017, accessed March 12, 2019, https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/qatar-failed-to-uphold-gcc-commitments-saudi-daily-says-1.2034878.

cannot anymore serve for the Saudi regional superiority alone despite they were still utilized for the domestic legitimization of state authority over the society. However, Saudi Arabia resumed its policy of consolidating influence within the Sunni world in the first instance, and guiding Arab society whenever possible to protect the vital security interests of the kingdom.[1119] On the other hand, the end of Pax-Americana in the region, in addition to the feeling of losing in Syria and Iraq directed the decision-makers to reconsider the critical future of the kingdom in order to have claims to legitimize their take over in the absence of an external protector at the field and policy level. Saudi Arabia also encountered new changes in the local parameters of the Gulf security due to their conflicting foreign policies during the uprisings and afterwards, which directed the Gulf states to question the Gulf unity and stability.

The themes constructed over the Sunni- Shiite tensions were not a practical narrative anymore for serving the Saudi government's regional politics to counter the Iranian practices anymore towards the end of the King Abdullah era. The sectarianism theme surely has been creeping in both sides like bringing in Shiite militias from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq into Syria during the war; however, sectarian issues rarely have been the main driver of the foreign policy.[1120] Despite keeping an eye on the Saudi Shiite in the Eastern provinces, Riyadh had to change its domestic discourse to some extent towards the Shiites such as avoiding to portray them as the agents of Iran at least in the public sphere. The end of the uprisings elevated the Saudi regional and domestic politics from searching for solution for the Sunni- Shiite tensions to defining the sectarian vocabularies out of the Saudi state narratives and affiliating the sectarian and extremist discourses with the Iranian officials' statements. Towards 2015, the Saudi decision-makers began to sprinkle the Iranian discursive deficiencies in regional affairs as the Iranian's peak level of power and discourse projection of the 2006 war period decreased. This was due to the rise of the belief in Iran as a sectarian regional actor exploiting the dissatisfactions of the neighbors' local actors about the governments. Moreover, the regional impacts of the war remained a footnote in the Saudi perception comparing to the wider regional and domestic influence of the uprisings like the Syria war, Yemen war,

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[1119] Kechichian, in online-written.
[1120] Paul Aarts (academic), in online-written interview with the author, April 2019.

Gulf crisis and even the global oil market.[1121] The domestic power struggle among the Iranian officials like Ahmadinejad and Khamenei further lend political assistance to the Saudi decision-makers. Iranian attempts to adopt the themes and slogans of the Arab uprisings like justice, equality, dignity and anti-corruption through defining them as part of the Islamic awakening in the region finally did not find a serious reaction at the audience inside as well as in the region and abroad. On the other hand, the Daesh's rhetorical, theological and existential threat to the foundation of the kingdom attained the Saudi government to question the utilization of the religious narratives at the regional level. At this juncture, Saudi decision-makers preferred to rasp them in accordance with the newly projected international image of Saudi Arabia, towards the King Salman era, instead of being in rivalry with the Daesh's organizational and caliphate claims.

Despite the feeling of distrust continued towards Iran and perceived pro-Iranian allies, Saudi decision-makers, at many occasions, underlined that Saudi Arabia did not have an inherent hostility towards Iran but the country's chronic behavior of intervening in the domestic affairs of the other states in order to dominate the regional dynamics could not be tolerated at any case. Through this discourse, Saudi decision-makers aimed to find the regional rhetorical deficiencies of Iran by avoiding to share the same regional narratives with the country like religious claims or revolutionary ideals. The post-Arab uprisings period enabled Saudi Arabia to elude the regional disappointment and presumptions about the foreign policies of the neighbors. Saudi Arabia thought that portraying Iran within the Khomeini's revolutionary ideals were an old narrative to be employed against the recent Iranian foreign policy practices towards the region as well as the non-local actors of the neighbors. Rather, it seemed to be a more accommodating step to describe Iran as an entrepreneur and belligerent actor of the sectarian language exploiting the neighbors' domestic problems and profit over them as political leverages against the opposing states. While employing these discourses, Saudi Arabia directly indicated Iran in contrast to the previous times when Saudi decision-makers had been preferring to define the regional threats without clearly naming Iran as the subject and entrepreneur of the regional crises.

Towards the King Salman period, Saudi Arabia began to define the new regional and domestic parameters for the kingdom. The new definitions of Saudi decision-makers can

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[1121] Lippman, in online-written interview.

be interpreted as an attempt to indirectly counter the Iran's resistance strategy towards the US and the US allies of the Middle East. Most importantly, the Salman era changed the discourse of the kingdom towards the domestic and regional threat of the Iranian revolution narrative. The chronic threat interpretation of the Iranian revolution was emphasized as a regional phobia that is needed to be gotten over, and replaced with the new self-construction of the kingdom's regional priorities and domestic values. On the other hand, King Salman era was not considering any chance to develop a solid dialogue with an "extremist" country like Iran anymore as illustrated in the speech of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman: "How do you have a dialogue with a regime built on an extremist ideology ... that they must control the land of Muslims and spread their Twelver Ja'fari sect in the Muslim world."[1122] While portraying Iran as an extremist country aimed to dominate the Muslim world with their interpretation of Shiism, Saudi Arabia targeted to destroy the presumptions about the kingdom and its perceived links with the extremist religious groups around the Muslim world by highlighting that it was actually the policy of the Iranian decision-makers.

As Saudi Arabia tackled the critiques abroad of being an intolerant religious regime towards its people, Saudi decision-makers had to shift the self-definitions of the state by modernizing the state's religious perception, practices and values at the domestic then publicize it at the international level. It was the beginning of a period of internationalization of the Saudi state definitions by reconstructing its targeted audience abroad not in the region anymore. King Salman's reign encountered a period of looking for regional alliances for sustaining its regional security position. With the end of the King Abdullah period which was, or conjecturally had to be, more concerned with the domestic affairs influenced by the regional crises and vice versa, the King Salman period found it more compromising to reconstruct the state image abroad by centralizing the royal power and gaining compliance of the royal actors as well as pressuring the domestic and international dissidents' discourses about the kingdom's reconstructed regional and domestic parameters.

[1122] Sami Aboudi, and Omar Fahmy, "Powerful Saudi Prince Sees No Chance for Dialogue with Iran," *Reuters*, May 2, 2017, accessed February 2, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-prince-iran-idUSKBN17Y1FK.

6. AFTER KING ABDULLAH: REDEFINING THE "REGIONAL" AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE REGIONAL SECURITY NARRATIVES

King Salman period initiated a process of reconstruction of the interplay between the Saudi domestic context and regional security understandings of the decision-makers by centralizing the royal power and redefining the Saudi narratives over the traditional politics of the kingdom. This chapter analyzes the redefinitions of the Salman government's regional security perceptions towards Iran and the internationalization of its security discourse.

6.1. LONG LIVE NEW KING: THE DOCTRINE OF KING SALMAN

In contrast to the King Abdullah period's focus on the domestic structure influenced by the regional crises and vice versa, King Salman started a process of reconstructing the Saudi state image and discourse at the international level by further verticalizing the royal power from top to down, and keeping the unity among the royal actors by enforcing them to comply with the new government. According to the regional perception of the Salman government, religious narratives based on transnational religious ties with the Muslim world, such as Pakistan, Yemen and Iraq, or themes constructed over the sectarian tensions were not anymore working for the Saudi regional interests despite they could be still utilized for the domestic legitimization of the state authority over the society. At this juncture, the new government had to find new points of reference for the regional security narratives and domestic crisis, which redefined the Saudi nationalism without excluding the religion and conservative values but curbing their obstructing impact on the society's practices following an open society model. The Salman government applied a combination of the Saudi first policy with a nationalist tone, and reconstruct the Saudi regional preferences out of the monopoly of the Wahhabi definitions.

The theme of the fourth Saudi state was employed to redefine the national narrative with the Ibn Saud period who established the third state without the wealth of the oil revenues. King Salman's son, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, initiated a new state model whose income was not solely based on oil wealth only but a model contributed as a whole nation through the domestic investments to diversify the Saudi economy and put an imprint on the economy, energy and foreign policy of the history of the kingdom. The process of

encouraging the Saudi people, businessman, wealthy elites, and royal members to support the new Saudi government's state model required a redefinition of Saudi nationalism which was enforced by the state over the Saudi society without initiating a debate. The new understanding of Saudi nationalism which was different from the religious nationalism or an Islamic transnational identity claims aimed at creating a new social contract through imposing a consensus to obtain the loyalty of the people for the Salman government. At this point, the new government stated the intention of cutting the enforcement of Wahhabi religious norms, especially on education and the social sphere. By initiating a reform process in accordance with the Islamic values of the Saudi society, the new government targeted to decrease the influence of the *Sahwa* movement and Muslim Brotherhood ideology on society. For this reason, the new government began recruiting relatively young, selected and trusted religious scholars to endorse the Salman doctrine. The updated *fatwas* and reinterpreted *hadiths* (sayings and teachings of Prophet Mohammed) by the selected religious scholars would also help the Saudi government to reconstruct itself in the eyes of the international audience which was thought to be biased against the kingdom for being a supporter of radical groups, and would allow the Saudi decision-makers to redefine themselves as one of the biggest victims of the global and regional terrorism.

The Salman doctrine re-established the concept of external adversary, in contrast to former rulers, by clarifying the enemies of the new government, and equated the foreign policy discourse with the domestic reform process more decisively than before. The regional activities of the new government, particularly in Syria and Yemen, seemed to approach the regional crisis from a military perspective, which was also contrary to the former government of King Abdullah's defensive foreign policy. For the first time, Saudi decision-makers publicly defined Iran as the main responsible actor of all the crisis and conflicts in the region, and an actor working for disintegration of its neighbors. Through its anti-Iran foreign policy discourse, Saudi Arabia desired to presented as an actor protecting the region from Iranian domination, influence and regional desires. In order not to undermine the kingdom's image of being a leader of the Muslim world, the official discourse avoided to approve the Iranian threat to the Saudi domestic structure and regional security priorities. Rather, Iran was viewed as an existential threat to the whole region working for the disintegration of the political leaders and systems of its neighbors.

The Salman doctrine portrayed Iran as a sectarian and ideological actor supporting the radical groups inside the neighbors. By openly designating Iran as a sectarian actor in contrast to the former periods, Saudi Arabia aimed at depriving the accusations of the Iranian decision-makers and definitions by the external audience at the region and abroad on the Saudi support for the rise of regional sectarian vocabularies. This process appeared to be a redefinition of the Saudi political discourse far from the concepts of radicalism, terrorism and sectarianism, instead of polishing Iran as the essential danger to the region even to the world. Prior to the Salman period, Iran had been designated as a matter of concern instead of a matter of danger at the official discourse of Saudi Arabia. Despite being aware of Iran's political exploitation of the neighbors' sectarian differences such as in Yemen and Iraq, Saudi officials had been avoiding to openly use sectarian vocabularies to define the Iranian penetration into the regional stability until the Salman era. Otherwise, the possibility of approval of the Iranian explanations and legitimizations by the external audience would mean the reintegration of Iran into the world and even returning to the former status quo of the Cold war when Iran and Saudi had been both regional partners of the US as part of Nixon's twin pillar policy.

At the domestic level, all of these perceptions and understandings towards the region required the centralization of the political power in the hands of the trusted royal figures in order to keep the unity of the royal family image in the eyes of the citizens and outsiders. To achieve the compliance of the royal actors, the Salman government put pressure on the domestic and foreign dissents who are not supporters of the reform process of the new government. The foreign dissidents who left the kingdom of being threatened, were labelled as the political infidels of the Salman government to maintain the nationalist norms of forming a united front against the critiques towards the kingdom's domestic and regional policies abroad. On the other hand, it would not be accurate to define the rule of King Salman as centralization of the political power within the hands of the Al-Sudayri family as the Salman government seems to be very selective in including their sub-family members in the decision-making process. The members of the Al-Sudayri family had already managed to get in high positions in the ministerial and governmental sectors throughout the political history of the kingdom. However, one cannot argue the unity among the Al-Sudayri members as many of the Al-Sudayri members of the royal family like Prince Mohammed bin Nayef or Prince Ahmed bin

Abdulaziz were dismissed from the decision-making process at different times for different reasons. The Salman government included the trusted Al-Sudayri members beside non-royal loyal figures to the decision-making process which restructured the consultation principle and seniority criteria for the succession history of the kingdom.

6.1.1. Reconstructing the Domestic Establishments of the Saudi State

King Salman period made a sharp turn from the regional and domestic policies/practices of the former kings in many directions. On the contrary to the defensive foreign policy of King Abdullah's term, King Salman processed the Saudi regional security policies into a direct confrontation policy which enabled the kingdom to actively and militarily lead the regional crises such as the Yemen case or the Saudi symbolic support for the US airstrikes against Daesh. Salman government found it compulsory to reconstruct the characteristics, traditional interpretations of the domestic practices, and the credentials of the Saudi state at the international level beyond the regional one. Furthermore, the process of reconstruction of the state narratives was linked up with a redesigned nationalist tone without ignoring the role of the religious values on the Saudi public, but it aimed to curb the Wahhabi influence on the formation of the domestic structures and society. Through the set-up of the 2030 Saudi Vision, King Salman, and his son, Prince Mohammed bin Salman aimed at distinguishing the domestic innovations of the Salman government as the establishment of a new Saudi Arabia.

King Salman era redefined the Saudi regional security perception and domestic politics under the supervision of Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He was appointed as the Minister of Defense in April 2015 which allowed him to be in the first line of the Saudi military intervention in the Yemen war, then he initiated the Saudi 2030 Vision in April 2016 as the head of a super-committee of government officials consist of the ministries directing the Salman government's economic policy, and finally replaced his cousin Prince Mohammed bin Nayef as the crown prince with the approval of the Allegiance Council in June 2017. During the Prince Mohammed's domination of the Saudi politics, Saudi Arabia experienced the construction of a period of breaking ties from the former rulers in the domestic field, in the region, most importantly at the international level. The major distinguishing point was defining the external enemy, Iran, plainly without exaggerating its domestic threat inside Saudi Arabia but over exaggerating its danger to

the region and regional states' security agendas. Iran was portrayed as the defender of radicalism and terrorism in the region as well as an actor working for the disintegration of the neighbors in favor of the Iranian regional priorities. However, designating Iran and its activities inside the neighboring countries' domestic structures as a major threat to the domestic and regional desires of Saudi Arabia would be an underestimation of the Saudi state capacity and its penetration with the Saudi society. Therefore, Iran was officially reconstructed as a threat to the regional security, not specifically to the kingdom, which needed to be countered as a whole region.

Another major contrast of the Saudi domestic outlook was the Prince Mohammed's description of the Saudi people and youth as the primary contributors to the kingdom's future. To achieve this goal, Prince Mohammed promised a new transparent, intolerant to the corruption and respecting government and stated that "We are living in a society where it is difficult not to be transparent, and it is difficult to hide a secret from the society in the modern age." [1123] Moreover, the new administration began underlining the application of fairness criteria in governance and bureaucracy, and even cutting the Saudi ministers' salaries depending on their work activities. [1124] In accordance with this approach, Saudi domestic politics were built around the understanding of encouraging the Saudi people to actively participate in the diversification of the Saudi economy while granting their loyalty and obedience to this new social contract with the royal rule.

The fact that Prince Mohammed was a Deputy Crown Prince and the Minister of Defense when he announced the 2030 Saudi Vision constituted a clear indication of his political future in Saudi politics. Despite Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was the Crown Prince until June 2017, Prince Mohammed bin Salman was appearing to give speeches about the updated domestic establishments and regional dynamics of the Saudi politics. According to Prince Mohammed, the Saudi government and himself personally were in a struggle to achieve domestic reforms, national economic improvement, creating a diversified growing economy and a vibrant society. Furthermore, Prince Mohammad was arguing that the New Europe will be the Middle East in the next five years from 2018 with the

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[1123] "Full Transcript of Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Al-Arabiya interview," *Al-Arabiya,* April 25, 2016, accessed July 24, 2019, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/04/28/Transcript-Saudi-Crown-Prince-Mohammed-bin-Salman-s-full-interview-on-Vision-2030-.
[1124] Karen E. Young, "For Saudi Economic Reforms, Timing is Everything," *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, September 28, 2016, accessed January 3, 2020, https://agsiw.org/timing-is-everything/.

contribution of the other Middle East countries. Despite his speeches gave an image of regional solidarity with the neighbors, the Saudi government was actually maintaining the Saudi first policy like the former periods but with the inclusion of some different domestic ingredients. To illustrate, Prince Mohammed designated three characteristics of the kingdom which were maintaining Saudi Arabia at the center of the Arab and Islamic world, diversifying the state revenues while constructing Saudi Arabia as a global investment hub, and lastly re-establishing the kingdom as a global center for trade and the gateway to the world.[1125] These goals of the 2030 Saudi Vision were designed to reconstruct the reaction and interaction between state, society, and business channels such as transforming Aramco into an international investment company or recreating the Saudi Public Investment Fund as the largest sovereign investment source of the world.[1126] The project was actually putting the Public Investment Fund at the center of the investments which would be decisive, through voting inside, to decide whose half of funds[1127] will be invested to empower Saudi Arabia, and the other half will be invested abroad to claim the Saudi involvement in the global emerging sectors.[1128]

The strategies in the 2030 vision were actually advised by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) to the Saudi government along with some technical warnings about the future of the kingdom's economic situation in December 2015. MGI's report highlighted that Saudi Arabia can no longer rely on oil revenues and public spending for growth. Rather, the kingdom needed around $4 trillion investment inside the country to transform its economy from a statist economic to a pro-market economic model which was thought to increase its GDP and provide new jobs for around six million people by 2030.[1129] Hence, the Saudi vision was designed to diversify the incomes towards a lower reliance on oil

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[1125] "Message from HRH Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud," *Vision 2030*, accessed July 16, 2020, https://vision2030.gov.sa/en/vision/crown-message.

[1126] Ibid.

[1127] "Two years ago, the size of public investment fund was $150 billion US. Today it's $300 billion US. At the end of 2018 it will be around $400 billion US. In 2020, it will be something between $600-700 billion US, and in 2030 it will be above $2 trillion." In "Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Talks to TIME About the Middle East, Saudi Arabia's Plans and President Trump," *Time*, April 5, 2018, accessed December 15, 2020, https://time.com/5228006/mohammed-bin-salman-interview-transcript-full/.

[1128] "Crown Prince Mohammed."

[1129] "Saudi Arabia Beyond Oil: The Investment and Productivity Transformation," *Executive Summary, McKinsey Global Institute,* December 2015, accessed November 19, 2019, https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Employment%20and%20Growth/Moving%20Saudi%20Arabias%20economy%20beyond%20oil/MGI%20Saudi%20Arabia_Executive%20summary_December%202015.pdf.

and government spending, with a greater role for the private sector and encourage the Saudi citizens to invest inside the kingdom. This has changed the status of oil revenues which had been the major income of the state, and moved it from the center to the side as illustrated by Prince Mohammed's speech: "Oil should be treated as an investment, nothing more, nothing less. It is an investment..."[1130] It was not a process of ignoring the impact of the oil revenues on the Saudi economy but redefining the oil incomes in the state budget and utilize the state incomes as investments in global sectors. Prince Mohammed was also positive about the future of the oil and often promoted that the oil was still a wealth source of the kingdom but still as an investment. For instance, he asserted the Saudi Arabia's decisive position in the oil market by foreseeing the oil demand would continue to increase until 2040, and would reach around 100 million barrels per day: "we will produce much, much, much — a lot of barrels in the future. So, we are helping the whole world to produce energy, continuous energy cheaper than they ever have. And we are taking the risk to push all of our demand in that area."[1131]

The calls for the economic diversification were not something new encountered during the King Salman period but it was the first time when the idea of economic diversification has ever been promoted as a major part of state nationalism. Prior to this period, one might refer to the oil boom of 2003-14 which made it politically possible for domestic transformation inside the kingdom due to its unexpected wealth estimated at $450 billion in public capital investment, and continued despite the decline in oil prices since late 2014.[1132] At this juncture, Aramco was in the center of the Saudi Vision as Prince Mohammed announced the plan to sell about 5 percent of the company in 2016 to the local and international customers, with a board of directors at home and abroad, and expected to produce around a $2 trillion value. Despite the plan was delayed in August 2018, it was an indicator of the Saudi government's economic diversification plans and opening the bids of a state company to the global markets. However, the delay of the sale of Aramco came as a result of the understanding of the Saudi institutions or businessmen

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[1130] "Full Transcript of Prince."
[1131] "Crown Prince Mohammed."
[1132] Karen E. Young, "Understanding Vision 2030: Anticipating Economic Change in Saudi Arabia," *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, April 28, 2016, accessed May 4, 2020, https://agsiw.org/understanding-vision-2030-anticipating-economic-change-in-saudi-arabia/.

were not that interested in investing higher than $1.2 trillion into the company.[1133] Due to the doubts of Saudi companies and businessmen on the new market conditions and international investors' obstruction over its valuation, the Saudi government announced the selling the bids of Aramco was not annulled but delayed. In any case, the government focused on other development plans to help the diversification of the Saudi revenues such as the $500 billion NEOM city project in the Tabuk province appeared in October 2017 as another ambiguous project of the Salman era and again lead by Prince Mohammed who described the project's investors as "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund, local as well as international investors".[1134] All of these ambiguous plans contributed to the domestic pressure on the newly constructed state characteristics, thus directed the Salman government to apply a forced investment strategy from the Saudi elites, wealthy people, businessmen, senior and junior princes. This process led to the detainment of the ones who were considered as the potential but hesitant clients of the emerging projects of the Salman period in June 2017. In tandem, the government legitimized the detainment of over one hundred Saudi princes within an anti-corruption purge illustrated as such in the royal decree announced by the king: "the homeland will not exist unless corruption is uprooted and the corrupt are held accountable."[1135] By detaining the princes with the corruption accusations, it was claimed that the government pressured the princes to invest in the projects that they have been asked for; to illustrate, Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal was forced to sign for the whole ownership of Kingdom Holding Company which had been refused by him before. Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah, the former leader of the SANG, agreed to settle with the government's demands by paying $1 billion.[1136] The releases of the princes were conducted in silence as they avoided speaking about the release conditions like Prince

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[1133] Anjli Raval and Arash Massaoudi, "Saudi Aramco Delays Planned Launch of Long-Awaited IPO," *Financial Times*, October 17, 2019, accessed October 25, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/b34d35c8-f106-11e9-ad1e-4367d8281195.

[1134] "HRH the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Announces: NEOM – The Destination for the Future," *Public Investment Fund*, October 23, 2017, accessed October 15, 2019, https://www.pif.gov.sa/en/MediaCenter/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=31.

[1135] Stephen Kalin and Katie Paul, "Future Saudi King Tightens Grip on Power with Arrests Including Prince Alwaleed," *Reuters*, November 5, 2017, accessed September 23, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-arrests-idUSKBN1D506P.

[1136] "Billionaire Alwaleed bin Talal Released From Detention in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Eye*, January 27, 2018, accessed March 3, 2019, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/billionaire-alwaleed-bin-talal-released-detention-saudi-arabia.

Al-Waleed who rejected to express the details because of the confidentiality between the government and himself.[1137]

The 2017 arrests diminished the international investors' confidence in the kingdom. The concept of Saudi first policy was publicized with a nationalist tone very similar to the America first policy of the Trump administration. The fact that Prince Mohammed was often underlining the appreciation of the many members of the US Congress, as well as many people of the US for the 2030 Vision, signaled the new government's need for the support of the US audience by giving an impression of having close relations with Trump administration. For instance, as part of marketing the 2030 vision to the international audience and challenge the critiques towards the Saudi politics, the Saudi government assigned the Saudi Arabia's Riyadh Development Authority to initiate a five-day event called "A Day in Riyad" at the New York branch of the UN.[1138] Through the marketing of Saudi vision abroad, the government aimed at preventing any external interferences and barriers in the implementation of the vision.

The new government was aware of the critiques from the West regarding the human rights violations inside the kingdom. The promotion of the Saudi vision in the West would support the claims of the kingdom on calming down the critiques which were continuously countered by the Saudi decision-makers. To illustrate, the Saudi foreign minister of the time, Adel Al-Jubeir, declared that Saudi Arabia was an independent sovereign state, not a "banana republic" in response to Canada's calls for the release of the Saudi women activists.[1139] It resulted in calling the Saudi students back to the kingdom from Canadian universities, canceling flights, and freezing bilateral trade with the country. Another example of the Saudi endeavors to counter the global critiques of its domestic affairs can be given from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Sigmar Gabriel, who described Saudi Arabia's regional policies as "adventurism" then resulted with the freezing the German companies' operation in the kingdom.[1140] All of these

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[1137] "Billionaire Saudi Prince Reveals Secret Agreement with Government," *Bloomberg Markets and Finance*, accessed May 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zNOY7EcsMg.

[1138] Fahad Nazer, "Saudi Vision 2030 and "A Day in Riyadh," *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington,* October 25, 2016, accessed April 19, 2019, https://agsiw.org/saudi-vision-2030-day-riyadh.

[1139] John Irish, "We're Not 'a Banana Republic' Saudi Says, Demands Canada Apologize," *Reuters*, September 27, 2018, accessed March 29, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-canada-idUSKCN1M71XV.

[1140] Eman Alhussein, "Saudi First: How Hyper-Nationalism is Transforming Saudi Arabia," *European Council on Foreign Relations,* Policy Brief June 2019, accessed October 22, 2020, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/saudi_first_how_hyper_nationalism_is_transforming_saudi_arabia.pdf.

attempts illustrate the dilemma of the Saudi government both in promoting its reconstruction of tolerant and less oppressive state image to the international audience, and adopting aggressive responses towards the critiques of its domestic affairs. All of which made the external audience notice that compliance of the royal actors not happening only among the royal family but also was imposed abroad by utilizing the wealth of the kingdom for the projects of the Salman government.

6.1.2. Centralizing Royal Power Through Imposing Compliance

King Salman's period brought rapid domestic shifts as a response to the consequences of the regional crisis, the emergence of various non-state actors and wars with multiple sides. King Salman who was portrayed as the *malik al-hazm*[1141] advocated the change from the top through centralizing the royal power in the hands of the trusted actors of the royal family beside non-royal political actors. Imposing a rapid reform process was the disregard of the seniority principle of the decision-making process which was traditionally applied during the succession history of the kingdom but it was also neglecting the consultation with the royal members or religious scholars. This constituted a process of inclusion of the trusted royals for the implementation of the Salman government's promotion of the domestic reform process and bolstering Saudi regional interests at neighbors' security concerns. On the other hand, the Salman period claimed the construction of a new governance under the leadership of Prince Mohammed, hence the reform process was not tied to the international community's critiques but the Saudi decision-makers' analysis of the domestic conditions along with the regional and international structures.

King Salman period's major domestic shift was the centralization of the political power within the hands of the trusted young princes and supporters of the Salman doctrine and Prince Mohammed's perception over the governance, social, economic and religious fields. Khashoggi defined the Prince Mohammed's construction of the new era as such: "I believe Mohammed bin Salman is a nationalist who loves his country and wants it to be the strongest but his problem is that he wants to rule alone".[1142] The fact that King

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[1141] Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Domestic Uncertainties."

[1142] Samia Nakhoul, Angus McDowall and Stephen Kalin, "A House Divided: How Saudi Crown Prince Purged Royal Family Rivals," *Reuters*, November 10, 2017, accessed January 13, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-arrests-crownprince-insight-idUSKBN1DA23M.

Salman suffered from dementia positioned Prince Mohammed, especially after June 2017, as the de facto ruler of the kingdom which was actually not unique to the Salman period as it had been traditionally applied by the former rulers due to the aged kings in the Saudi history such as King Fahd and King Khalid. By excluding many senior princes from the decision-making process, the Salman period challenged the seniority criteria for the throne and consultation principle with the royal family members. It constructed its own domestic supporters among the royal family, the non-royals as well as the international partners despite the lack of a political alliance establishment to make us understand the selection process of the trusted figure of the new government. While domestic supporters ensure their position at the decision-making system, international partners appeared to be a more reluctant side among the supporters of the 2030 Saudi vision, partially, because of the unpredictability of the success of the new government's political, economic and social reform process. To illustrate the dismissal of many senior and junior princes, one might emphasize the cases of Abdulaziz bin Fahd[1143], Al-Waleed bin Talal, Mutaib bin Abdulaziz, Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, Mohammed bin Nayef, and Mansour bin Muqrin[1144] who were dismissed with different reasons or without any public given reasons. While the royal circle was narrowed with selected trustees including the non-royal actors[1145] like the Foreign Minister, Adel Al-Jubeir, it revealed the political split in the royal house. Herewith, historical claims on the unity of the royal family needed renewed credentials to be utilized as the source of domestic stability in the eyes of the Saudi domestic and external audience.

The Salman period did not constitute a period of the rise of the Al-Sudayri members but the rise of the trusted supporters of the new Saudi vision and Prince Mohammed's political future. For instance, the sons of King Abdullah and former Crown Prince Muqrin were excluded from the decision-making institutions. King Abdullah was known for his distance from his brothers from the Al-Sudayri members, and even tried to obscure the promotion of Prince Mohammed bin Salman after the assignment of Prince Salman

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[1143] Abdulaziz bin Fahd is one of the surviving sons of King Fahd and a member of the Saudi royal house. He is one of the stakeholders of the MBC media group of Saudi Arabia. He was arrested during the corruption purge in 2017. The government announced that he was released and well in 2018.
[1144] Mansour bin Muqrin was one of the sons of Prince Muqrin, a former Crown Prince resigned in 2015, and an advisor of his father at the Court of Crown Prince. He died at a helicopter crash in 2017 after a few hours of the 2017 corruption purge of the government.
[1145] Lippman, in online-written interview.

as the crown prince and minister of defense. King Abdullah was thinking that Prince Mohammed's ambitions were more than his experiences to rise in the short time just because his father became the crown prince. However, with the Prince Salman's request, King Abdullah allowed Prince Mohammed to work as the head of the court of the crown prince.[1146] The case of the son of former MOI Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz, Mohammed bin Nayef, who had been ousted from the process as the Crown Prince in June 2017 also illustrates the change of succession system during the Salman period. The dismissal of Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was announced as his personal decision to pledge alliance to Prince Mohammed bin Salman which was an act of legitimizing the peaceful power transition on TV for the Saudi and international public. The visual representation of the dialogue between Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Prince Mohammed bin Salman illustrated the solidarity among the royal family and respect to the senior's criteria as Prince Mohammed bin Salman kneeled in front of his cousin and said: "We are always in need of your direction and guidance."[1147] Despite Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was stating his contention with the new power transition, it was argued that he was actually forbidden from traveling out of the kingdom especially to the US where he had high-level contacts to influence the decision-making process behind the scenes.[1148]

Prince Mohammed's rise inside the royal family appeared as a planned step that benefited from King Salman's governance of Riyadh (1963–2011) as a major conservative city in the Najd region (also the power base and residence place of the royal family members). King Salman has been known as the modernizer of the city since the 1960s while maintaining contact with the Al ash-Sheikh scholars who dominate the religious establishment of the kingdom as the descendants of the Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Due to his long-term governance of Riyadh, King Salman could build his authority over the junior princes and appear as a respected royal figure who was called as a referee in royal family disputes and the most alike son of founder King Abdulaziz. Thus, he and his sons (Prince Mohammed) adapted themselves into the power struggle of the complex

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[1146] Ben Hubbard, *MBS: The Rise to Power of Mohammed Bin Salman* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2020), 47.

[1147] "Former Saudi Crown Prince Pledges Allegiance to Mohammed bin Salman," *Al-Arabiya English*, video, 0:25, June 21, 2017, accessed September 14, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEaq0coZVF8.

[1148] "Addiction and Intrigue: Inside the Saudi Palace Coup," *Reuters*, July 19, 2017, accessed June 13, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-palace-coup-idUSKBN1A41IS.

network of contending actors to control the high ministerial positions as well as governorships. The fact that Prince Mohammed was a young prince with limited governance and foreign policy experience, comparing to his elder uncles, constituted a political obstacle for him to rise in accordance with the traditional succession criteria like seniority and experience. In tandem, it was expected that his rise to the throne would be countered inside the royal family. This directed Prince Mohammed to legitimize his assignment as the crown prince in June 2017 within the voting system of the Allegiance Council as such: "So, I get the highest vote in the history of Saudi Arabia, more than anyone before me. I got 31 out of 34 votes from the Allegiance Council. So, this is the highest. The second highest is 22 in Saudi Arabia. So historically I made a record in approval votes among the royal family."[1149] His rise in the Saudi decision-making system was a carefully constructed process throughout his early ages. For instance, he studied in Riyadh[1150], stayed beside his father in contrast to many of his half-brothers while King Salman was the governorate of Riyadh. This was one of the incidents that proved his father over his attachment to the kingdom, which, in turn, gave Prince Mohammed an opportunity to grow up surrounded by royal politics and to closely know the royal family members and ingratiate himself with his father at many occasions. One might emphasize his mother Fahda bint Falah bin Sultan Al-Hithalayn (table 3.1) who married King Salman in 1984 was favoring Prince Mohammed among her other sons and constantly advocated him to his father. Having a chance to grow up in an environment surrounded by the junior and senior princes respecting his father in Riyadh provided Prince Mohammed with an opportunity of estimating the potential of his political rise among the others. Following the death of Crown Prince Nayef in June 2012, Crown Prince Salman appointed Prince Mohammed as his chief of court, which allowed him to work closely with King Abdullah who later ordered Prince to organize the ministry of defense.[1151]

The major departure of the King Salman era was abandoning the historical application of the appointment of some of the brothers, sons or nephews of the kings as the advisors to the kings or in high governance positions. Rather, King Salman preferred to appoint

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[1149] "Crown Prince Mohammed."

[1150] In contrast to many Saudi princes, he did not study at Western universities, he gained his undergraduate degree in law in 2007 from King Saud University in Riyadh.

[1151] Hiro, "Cold War in," 278.

and consult with a team of non-royal Saudi advisers trained in the US or Britain as advisers and ministers.[1152] Junior royal princes were also included in the decision-making process as Prince Mohammed argued that 13 princes close to his age were already assigned in governmental positions. This was a strategy of promoting a generational change by securing the ambition and the loyalty of the young princes with the Salman government.[1153] On the other hand, the new process did not include any sons or grandsons of former King Abdullah and any direct relatives of Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz from Al-Sudayri family, who was suspected to vote against Prince Mohammed in the Allegiance Council for his candidacy as the crown prince. Thus, the selection method of the princes to be included in the decision-making process was based on trust, confidence, past records of their relations, present political preferences, and unpublicized dealings with them which limits our understanding of this mysterious process.

Despite these announced reforms and reconstructed dynamics of the royal family, it would be inaccurate to understand the Saudi decision-making process as a coherent long-term strategic planning process.[1154] The rapid plans and reforms enabled Prince Mohammed to appear as the major actor with long term plans for the transformation of institutions and practices across ruling structures, economy, and society to mark the difference of the Salman period as the fourth state of Saudi Arabia by 2030. Utilization of wealth to achieve the consolidation was not enough at all stages during this time; instead, it was a consolidation of Prince Mohammed's crown prince duty required a process of imposing compliance on the royal actors and construction of related concepts

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[1152] For instance, non-royal actors like Adel Al-Jubeir, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in 2015-2018 December and Ibrahim Al-Assaf 2018-2019, and then Faisal bin Farhan 2019. Musaed Al-Aiban as national security adviser, Khalid bin Ali Al-Humaidan as the director of General Intelligence Presidency in 2015, and Saud Al-Qahtani as Mohammed bin Salman's media relations advisor and very close person to him.

[1153] Abdulaziz bin Saud as the governor of the Eastern Province in June 2017, Abdulaziz bin Turki as the deputy chairman of the General Sport Authority, appointed June 2017, Ahmed bin Fahd as the deputy governor of the Eastern Province like his father in April 2017, Bandar bin Khalid, son of governor of Mecca Province, advisor to the royal court in June 2017, Khalid bin Bandar son of Prince Bandar bin Sultan was appointed ambassador to Germany in June 2017, Khalid bin Salman as the Saudi ambassador to Washington, Turki bin Muhammad a son of the late King Fahd as the advisor to the royal court in June 2017, Badr Ben Abdallah Ben Mohammed Ben Farhan Al Saud as the Minister of Culture in 2018, Khalid bin Abdulaziz bin Eyaf al-Muqrin as the National Guard in 2017-2018, and Turki Al Sheikh as the Advisor to the King since 2015. In Simon Henderson, "Meet the Next Generation of Saudi Rulers," *Foreign Policy,* November 10, 2017, accessed March 7, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/10/meet-the-next-generation-of-saudi-rulers/.

[1154] Lippman, in online-written interview.

to describe the royal and non-royal opponents such as the traitors, threats to domestic security, agents of the foreign countries or Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers. At this juncture, the religious authorities especially the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars were consulted to support these themes in their speeches within the Sharia principles to fight corruption and terrorism.[1155] After a royal decree on the creation of an anti-corruption committee led by Prince Mohammed, the June 2017 arrests of the senior and junior princes, wealthy elites and 159 members of the royal family illustrated the need of visualizing the new government's fight against corruption in favor of transparency[1156] in the kingdom. The arrests were portrayed as the achievement of the Salman government to show that royal family members were no longer above the law by arresting the sons of late senior princes and kings like Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah, Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, and Prince Turki bin Abdullah.[1157] The arrests did not only target the royal members or wealthy elites also the opponent religious figures and women rights activists, who were acting against the reform process on social media, or speaking to the international media outlets. The Salman period, indeed, maintained the traditional method of Saudi governance to restricting the voice of the Saudi opposing figures who can speak to the world about the domestic affairs. The departure of the new era from the former leadership of King Abdullah was abandoning the appeasement at the time of crisis, involving direct military interferences at the wars and crisis, and disregarding competing demands of the royal family members.

6.1.3. Reconstruction of Saudi Nationalism: Shifts and Continuities within the Traditional Political System

The Salman government brought the idea of reconstruction of Saudi nationalism as a result of the shifting domestic structures, which were continuously redefined by the shifting regional security dynamics. The new characteristics of the Saudi nationalism constructed a sense of solidarity seeking nation-state building process which claimed to

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[1155] Alhussein, "Saudi First: How."

[1156] Saudi ranked 49 points out of 100 in Transparency International data index of 2018, and 53 points in 2019. In "Corruption Perception Index 2018," *Transparency International*, accessed May 2020, https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018 and "Corruption Perception Index 2019," *Transparency International*, accessed May 2020, https://www.transparency.org/cpi2019.

[1157] "هيئة كبار العلماء السعودية تعلّق على توقيف أمراء ووزراء بتهم فساد," *Aljazeera Mubasher*, November 7, 2017, accessed May 13, 2019, https://mubasher.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2017/11/5/-هيئة-كبار-العلماء-السعودية-تعلّق-على-90%D9%

be compulsory for the kingdom's political and economic future. However, the government had to legitimize the new measures in the public sphere in order to ensure the society's forced approval and obtain the international audience's appreciation. The reconstruction of nationalism was combined with rapid domestic change plans of Prince Mohammed, who appeared as the royal architect of the 2030 Saudi Vision, in the fields of economy, social, religious and political sphere. The new notion of nationalism was branded as the opening of a new era with the promotion of a local national identity which would be different from religious nationalism of the 1930s, or the establishment of pan-Islamic transnational identity in the 1960s.[1158] Thus, the national identity construction of the new government seemed to base on a national consensus over a supra identity. From the Saudi government perspective, the major departure of the new nationalist tone was defining the state in the center around a sense of continuity with the history rather than of religion or Wahhabi tradition.[1159] This was not a process of excluding the Islamic identity of the state but restricting its societal, political and religious influence on the formation of the domestic reforms and decision-makers' responses to the regional crises. One of the sharpest shifts in the transformation of the domestic sphere was the kingdom's new investment strategy built over the redefinition of the official policy for the oil revenues and defining the income as one of the investment tools of the government among others. At this juncture, utilizing the wealth for achieving the targets helped the kingdom to some extent, what needed more was to convince the international society and impose a forced approval on the Saudi society as well as the regional allies while encouraging them to invest inside the kingdom and include themselves in the process. According to the Salman government, this process would bring the fourth Saudi state by 2030 with clear economic, social, religious departures from the previous periods of the kingdom. On the other hand, Prince Mohammed was drawing a major difference from the first years of Ibn Saud, who founded the third state without the income of oil revenues, from the other Saudi kings by emphasizing the similarities of Ibn Saud period

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[1158] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "The New Populist Nationalism in Saudi Arabia: Imagined Utopia by Royal Decree," *LSE Workshop on 'Heritage and National Identity Construction in the Gulf'*, May 5, 2020, accessed November 26, 2020, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2020/05/05/the-new-populist-nationalism-in-saudi-arabia-imagined-utopia-by-royal-decree/.

[1159] Fatiha Dazi-Héni, "How MBS is Rethinking Saudi Nationalism?" *ISPI Commentary*, May 16, 2019, accessed September 23, 2019, https://www.mei.edu/publications/qatars-regional-ambitions-and-new-emir.

with the 2030 Saudi vision. Despite being similar to the foundation of the third Saudi state, what was imposed during the Salman era was the inevitability of applying a generational change to the domestic structure. In the new government, the seniority issue was disregarded to rise in the high governmental and ministerial positions, rather the young princes, the grandsons of Ibn Saud, who were agreeing with the Salman government's vision were welcomed in the process. Unlike the older generations, young Saudi citizens were assigned a duty of active contribution to the country in a patriotic understanding but with their attachment to the social or religious values of the kingdom. At this juncture, the government employed supporters in social media by promoting tweets such as "٥٠٠٠ ريال لأفضل ٥ تغريدات وطنية" (5000 riyals for best 5 patriotic tweets)[1160] to appease the critiques at the domestic sphere.

The "Saudi first or Saudization policy" which was initiated by Prince Mohammed as part of state nationalism's regional and international imprints allowed the transformation of the discourse of Saudi decision-makers to act alone in the region and abroad if it had to. In spite of favoring the Saudi citizens in the market had been prevalent since the days of founder King Abdulaziz[1161], the reconstructed version of the idea was highlighted and clearly promoted by the Salman government at the public sphere which transformed it from an idea to the policy level. Furthermore, the Saudi first policy was planned to help in the positioning of the Saudi Arabia as the leading regional actor with its modernized version of the state and society relations.[1162] This process was actually an extension of the narration initiated by King Fahd and King Abdullah who had introduced secular norms within the local Saudi identity without ignoring the link between the Najdi credentials and national ones in order to strengthen the domestic legitimacy of the royal rule.[1163] To crystalize the collective national identity around the long history of the nationalist narratives of the Arabian peninsula, Prince Mohammed found it useful to

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[1160] Ty Joplin, "How Saudi's Emergent Hyper-Nationalism is Making the Kingdom more Militant," *Albawaba*, June 26, 2019, accessed December 25, 2019, https://www.albawaba.com/author/ty-joplin-1288847?page=5.

[1161] Stasa Salacanin, "New Nationalism on the Rise in Saudi Arabia," *The New Arab*, August 20, 2019, accessed April 23, 2020, https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/8/20/new-nationalism-on-the-rise%E2%80%8B-in-saudi-arabia

[1162] Jamal Khashoggi, "The Salman Doctrine," *Al-Arabiya*, April 1, 2015, accessed May 24, 2019, https://english.alarabiya.net/views/news/middle-east/2015/04/01/Saudi-King-Salman-s-doctrine.

[1163] Dazi-Héni, "How MBS is."

rehabilitate the pre-Islamic sites like Al-'Ulâ with Madâ'in Sâlih and ancient millenary sites in Hâ'il.[1164]

Prince Mohammed's vision for the Saudi governance and society was based on controlling and monopolizing the royal circle and society through his inner circle with the trusted royal and non-royal candidates for the decision-making process. At this point, rebranded version of Saudi nationalism served for diversifying the state's legitimization tools from tribal, religious or financial leanings to the local national identity which in turn expected to contribute to the Saudi reshape of the regional dynamics. By avoiding to define the nationalism as a domestic threat to the royal family, Prince Mohammed preferred to limit the role of religion on domestic and regional affairs to the extent of respecting them publicly. This was also the limitation of the discursive power of the conservative religious scholars to object the Salman government's social reforms like allowing women to drive, and encouraging the art and entertainment sector.[1165] The new government did not build their strategy upon ignoring the religion as a major component of the Saudi identity but drawing a distance at the discourse level with the monopolistic control of the Wahhabi discourse on society. The tendency of relating the rise and fall of the Wahhabi discourse on society with the Iranian politics in the post-1979 period illustrated the Saudi government's preference of keeping Iran responsible for all the regional instabilities and domestic crisis of the regional states. In one of his interviews, Prince Mohammed distinguished between the practice of Islam and social life in Saudi society in pre-1979 from the post-1979 when the extremists in the domestic context dominated the education system and manipulated the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam on society to counter the rise of the religious rhetoric of another Islamic state, Iran, in the region. Furthermore, Prince Mohammed's discourse against the concepts of Wahhabism and its advocates illustrated the Salman government's exclusionary discourse of the issue as such: "What is Wahhabist? You have got to explain what is Wahhabist. Because there is nothing called Wahhabist. And this is one of the ideas of the extremists after 1979 to put the Wahhabist things, to let the Saudis be part of something that they are not part of

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[1164] Ibid.

[1165] "Why Saudi Arabia Is Embracing a New Nationalism," *RealClear World*, January 7, 2019, accessed December 25, 2019, https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2019/01/07/why_saudi_arabia_is_embracing_a_new_nationalism_112943.html.

it."[1166] In addition to the rise of extremism inside the kingdom after 1979, he portrayed the Iranian decision-makers to disintegrate Saudi Arabia from the Islamic world by claiming the promotion of a different sect like Wahhabism to the regional societies.[1167] In contrary to Iranian perception of Wahhabism, according to Prince Mohammed, the Saudi government avoided othering the Saudi Shiites by enforcing the fact that Saudi Basic Law was far from favoring any sect or school over another.[1168]

By the Wahhabism exclusion rhetoric from the public discourse, the Salman government aimed to dispose of the Western claims towards the Saudi state image as the patron of the extremist ideologies in the region. Rather, the state image was constructed over being the victim of the radical ideologies which were spread to the region and to the domestic spheres of the regional states by Iran. Prince Mohammed's other method of utilization of the Saudi nationalism far from the religious discourses was crystallizing the hostility towards the Muslim Brotherhood which was defined as a terrorist organization by the kingdom in 2014: "So if you see Osama bin Laden, he used to be in the Muslim Brotherhood… If you see Baghdadi the leader of ISIS (Daesh), he used to be from the Muslim Brotherhood. Actually, if you see any terrorist, you will find that he used to be from the Muslim Brotherhood."[1169] The Muslim Brotherhood ideology and the Sahwa movement including conservative and critical intellectuals provided a useful scapegoat for all the domestic crisis of the kingdom since the rules of former kings and constituted a political pretext to silence any type of dissent by relating them with the domestic security concerns.

Despite putting a rhetorical distance with the Wahhabi tradition, the fatwas and statements of the religious scholars remained as the traditional consultants of the domestic legitimization of any economic, political and social projects of the government. However, Prince Mohammed relied on a selected number of official religious scholars to support his agenda like denouncing terrorism, calling for religious tolerance, or defending the social reforms initiated by himself. Respected religious scholars like Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh—the grand mufti of the kingdom since 1999—provided legitimization to the new government by arguing that obeying the ruler without question

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[1166] "Crown Prince Mohammed."
[1167] Ibid.
[1168] Ibid.
[1169] Ibid.

was the duty of Saudi citizens. The new understanding of the Saudi government was also backed by the announcements of the Shura Council, selected religious scholars and later creation of King Salman Complex which reinterpreted the actuality of *hadiths* used by extremists.[1170] In order to endorse the restrictions on the religious discourses to the society, Prince Mohammed visited a conservative Sheikh Salih Al-Fawzan, also promoted relatively younger religious figures like Muhammad Al-'Issa who served as a Minister of Justice during the last years of King Abdullah's period.[1171] Other religious scholars who did not overtly support the new preferences of the Salman government like Abdullah Almalki and Salman Alodah who depicted the Yemen air campaign of the kingdom as a "courageous and timely move"[1172], or Hasan Al-Maliki were all arrested in June 2017 detentions in the kingdom. Hence, the attitude of the Salman government towards the religious scholars was differentiated from the former periods owing to its selective and critical attitude of the religious establishment's willingness and sincerity to support the re-established religious, social and economic discourses of the government.

6.1.4. Accentuating the External Enemy: Redefining the Iranian Threat

On contrary to King Abdullah's relatively accommodating and escalation-averse foreign policy style, King Salman period initiated a process of ousting the former rules of diplomacy and foreign policy credentials. Launching an air campaign coalition with the regional allies against the Houthi rebels in Yemen or plainly displaying an aggressive rhetoric towards Iran can be interpreted as a clear indication of the active foreign policy style of the Salman government. The major departure in the foreign policy of the King Salman era was the clear definition of the external enemy as Iran, which was labelled as the reason for all crisis and wars in the region. Hence, Iran was defined as an all-predominant threat that steers all other policies.[1173] The Salman government was describing Iran as an existential danger to a whole region not specifically to Saudi Arabia, in order to deprive the understanding of Iran's potential to design the kingdom's domestic

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[1170] Stéphane Lacroix, "Saudi Arabia and the Limits of Religious Reform," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (2019): 97-101.

[1171] Ibid.

[1172] Marina García Reina, "Is a Shift to a More Moderate Form of Islam Possible for Saudi Arabia?" *Global Affairs Strategic Studies*, January 13, 2020, accessed March 17, 2020, https://www.unav.edu/en/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/is-possible-a-shift-towards-a-moderate-conception-of-islam-in-saudi-arabia.

[1173] Fjærtoft, in online-written interview.

structure. The new era aimed at preventing further penetration of Iran in the domestic politics of the regional states as well as keeping the Iranian threat theme active in the perception of the regional states as stated in Prince Mohammed's speech: "it's not between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It's between Iran and Saudi Arabia and UAE and Egypt and Kuwait and Bahrain and Yemen, a lot of countries around the world. So, what we want to be sure of is that whatever they want to do, they do it within their borders."[1174] Saudi decision-makers perceived Iran as a threatening actor for the region that did not only desire the diminution of the Saudi royal rule but also looking for the disintegration of the kingdom as a whole.

Prince Mohammed's understood Iran as the major threat actor that is responsible for any regional crisis. Adopting this mission provided him necessary credentials to portray Saudi Arabia as the savior of the region like saving the region from Persianisation.[1175] The nationalist tones were also evident in the regional security discourse of the Salman government such as naming the military campaign for Yemen as "Decisive Storm" which was a reference to one of the quotes by King Abdulaziz.[1176] Regional allies' supportive speeches were indispensable for the government to constantly portray Iran as the major regional threat such as the former Prime Minister of Lebanon Saad Hariri emphasized for Iran: "has a desire to destroy the Arab world and has boasted of its control of the decisions in all the Arab capitals…"[1177] Prince Mohammed's regional strategy appeared to target Iran as an existential; however, he was careful of avoiding to exaggerate the Iran's domestic threat to ruin the Saudi economic projects or state-society relations. At this juncture, one might refer to one of the speeches of Prince Mohammed that highlight a similar point: "Iranians, they're the cause of problems in the Middle East, but they are not a big threat to Saudi Arabia. But if you don't watch it, it could turn into a threat. They are the main cause of problems, but they are not a threat to Saudi Arabia."[1178] Another significant dimension of the Salman government's regional security policy towards Iran

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[1174] "Crown Prince Mohammed."

[1175] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "The view from Riyadh," In Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Struggle to Shape the Middle East, Report, *The Foreign Policy Centre* (2018): 6-9.

[1176] Alhussein, "Saudi First," 14.

[1177] Martin Chuluv, "Lebanon's PM Quits Over Iran Tensions and Concern for His Safety," *The Guardian*, November 4, 2017, accessed October 24, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/04/lebanon-prime-minister-resigns-life-in-danger-saad-hariri.

[1178] "Crown Prince Mohammed."

was related to Saudi Arabia's avoidance of going back to the *status quo* of the Cold war when both states had been the Nixon's twin pillar policy. Thus, Saudi Arabia aimed at preventing the reintegration of Iran in the international community and any rapprochement between Iran and the US which would jeopardize their regional ally status in the perception of the US decision-makers. For this aim, the Trump administration provided the appropriate conditions for the kingdom's regional priorities especially when one takes the personalized diplomacy of Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner which had been absent during the Obama presidency.

In addition to avoiding to describe Iran as an existential threat to the region, Prince Mohammed portrayed Iran as the major responsible for radicalization, global and regional terrorism such as the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or marginalizing the Sunni communities in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. He exemplified his point by giving examples of the Bahrain, Jordan and Sudan cases as stable countries because Iran couldn't find a way to engage in their domestic affairs.[1179] This was part of the Salman government's strategy of influencing the external audience particularly the Western or American audience about the menacing activities and initiations of Iran at the regional and global level. For instance, Prince Mohammed was emphasizing the fact that Iran was hosting the Al-Qaeda figures and relatives of Osama bin Laden for a long time.[1180] The Saudi government's adoption of the terms like new Hitler referring to Supreme leader Khamenei highlighted that the Iranian governance was not suitable for today's world and change was inevitable for the Iranian decision-making system. Prince Mohammed emphasized this point in one of his interviews by referring to the pre-Islamic revolution period when both countries had maintained the bilateral relations to some extent: "We hope that the Iranian people and Iran as a nation have a better future without those leaders. And if that changes, of course, Iran will be close to us as it used to be before '79. But if that doesn't change, they can enjoy themselves for a very long time 'til they change."[1181] On the other side, Iran's response to the Saudi decision-makers' regional discourse was mostly built upon viewing the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam as responsible for all the regional instabilities and domestic crisis of the regional states.

[1179] "Crown Prince Mohammed."
[1180] Al-Rasheed, "The View From," 6-9.
[1181] "Crown Prince Mohammed."

Furthermore, the Saudi government claimed to abduct and force Saad Hariri, the Prime Minister of Lebanon, to resign in November 2017 after he travelled to Riyadh. The fact that Hariri announced his intention to resign from his duty during his visit to Riyadh raised the claims over the Saudi enforcement of the resign.[1182] It provided a useful incident for the Iranian officials to portray Saudi Arabia directly intervening in the domestic affairs of the neighbors. It plainly enhanced the threat perception of Iran towards the Saudi initiatives in Lebanon against the Hezbollah's political future in the country.

Salman era experienced a deteriorated term of the bilateral relations as well as both actors' blaming strategy towards each other of causing "an act of war" in any intervention of the other. One might mention several occasions when both sides used the rhetoric of imposing each other on the regional, domestic and international audience as the sole cause of the regional crises and wars. For the Iranian side, the execution of Saudi Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir Al-Nimr in early 2016 was a provocation of the Saudi government towards the Shia community's critiques of the Saudi government. This incident was followed by the attacks on Saudi diplomatic premises in Tehran and Mashhad in 2016, and a missile attack targeting the Abha airport of Riyadh in 2018. In addition to these incidents, cyber and physical attacks on Aramco in 2016 and 2019 were taken seriously by the Saudi decision-makers and even directed Prince Mohammed to describe Iran as a fool: "Only a fool would attack 5.5. per cent global energy supplies."[1183] The attack at Aramco oil fields in Abqaiq and Khurais in the eastern province in September 2019 decreased the oil production by 50%, causing a direct threat to the Saudi territory, oil revenues and the global oil supplies. Despite President Rouhani insisted that the attack had been conducted by Houthi rebels in Yemen and the Houthis held their claim of responsibility, Iran was convicted to be responsible by the Saudi and US decision-makers like Saudi Colonel Turki Al-Maliki and the Secretary of State of the

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[1182] Lisa Barrington and Angus McDowall, "Lebanon Accuses Saudi Arabia of Holding its PM Hostage," *Reuters*, November 15, 2017, accessed September 24, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics-idUSKBN1DF18A.

[1183] "Interview with Mohammed bin Salman by Norah O'Donnell," *CBS 60 Minutes,* video, 1:41, September 30, 2019, accessed May 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luzSgHRVZv8.

US Mike Pompeo emphasized the existence of the solid proof about Iran's involvement in the attack.[1184]

Saudi Arabia historically had minimal impact on influencing the domestic politics of Iran which created an unequal situation in the rivalry of penetrating the society by communicating with the local actors of each side. This situation often directed the Saudi decision-makers to hope for domestic unrest in Iran without Saudi involvement.[1185] The Salman government's attitude evolved around disregarding Iran economically and militarily behind the other regional actors like Turkey, UAE, and Egypt in the eyes of the Saudi citizens and the external audience. Prince Mohammed's regional security policy towards Iran shifted the previous policies of the kingdom as he argued to start working inside the Iranian domestic structure such as reaching out to the Arab and Baluchi dissidents, and Iranian opposition groups like Mujahedin-e-Khalq (People's Mujahedin Organization).[1186] This policy of the Salman government demonstrated how Saudi Arabia reconstructed its alliances with some regional actors like Israel on a common enemy rhetoric.

The December 2017 protests in Tehran and Mashhad against the Iranian government policies for high prices, unemployment and economic inequality served as another incident to be utilized by Saudi decision-makers against the Iranian regional initiatives. Furthermore, the protesters were calling the government to spend money for the Iranians instead of the crisis and wars in Syria, the Gaza Strip, Iraq and Yemen which was illustrating the crisis between state and Iranian society, also the Saudi government's definitions of the Iranian decision-makers as the existential threat to the region as a whole and not capable actor of managing the Iranian society's demands. While the Saudi decision-makers preferred to keep their silence and observe the flow of the process in the early days, the Saudi newspapers like Okaz and Al-Watan published news, cartoons, and headlines such as "the Republic of the Ayatollahs is toppling", or picturing "the turban

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[1184] Patrick Wintour and Julian Borger, "Saudi Offers 'Proof' of Iran's Role in Oil attack and Urges US Response," *The Guardian,* September 18, 2019, accessed June 4, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/18/saudi-oil-attack-rouhani-dismisses-us-claims-of-iran-role-as-slander.

[1185] Bruce Riedel, "Saudis watch Iran Protests Intently," *Al-Monitor,* January 8, 2018, accessed March 25, 2019, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/01/saudi-arabia-watching-iran-protests-yemen.html.

[1186] "Leaked Audio Shows Saudi-MKO Collusion over Tanker Attacks," *Tehran Times,* June 22, 2019, accessed November 17, 2019, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/437297/Leaked-Audio-Shows-Saudi-MKO-Collusion-over-Tanker-Attacks.

of Iran's ayatollahs has become a noose" to influence and convince the perception of the Saudi people over the dangers of Iran's regional activities.[1187]

6.2. THE RISE AND FALL OF IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL IN SAUDI REGIONAL SECURITY PERCEPTION

The Iran nuclear deal or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed on July 14, 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 in Vienna, constituted a clear incident to observe the rise and fall of the regional security concerns of the Saudi decision-makers towards Iran as well as its distrust towards the regional partners such as the United States. For the Iranian side, the most significant part of the deal was the implementation of the justice and equality principle of the negotiations instead of being imposed to imply the decisions taken by the P5+1 on Iran. As the deal intended to end the long years of economic sanctions by unfreezing the Iranian assets in the global market, it would mean the reintegration of the Iranian companies into the international economic system and into global partnerships, particularly the international oil and gas market. In turn, Iran accepted the international supervision under the IAEA and annulled 98% of its enriched uranium and two-thirds of its centrifuges.[1188] At its initial discussions, the deal had received critiques among the conservatives and Supreme Leader Khamenei because of the mistrust issue towards the West and the US. The debacle of the nuclear negotiations presented challenges to the Iranian government in favor of Saudi Arabia which also underlined a political disagreement between President Rouhani and Khamenei. Khamenei's critiques against a nuclear deal about the US decision-makers had been well-known; however, Khamenei defined the negotiations period of the nuclear agreement as a mistake crossing the red lines of Iranian politics.[1189]

Due to the domestic economic crisis and sanctions that affected the country over the years, both Khamenei and President Rouhani interpreted the deal as the benefit of the

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[1187] "Gulf Press Expresses Optimism, Delight at Popular Uprising in Iran," *MEMRI*, Special Dispatch no. 7261(January 3, 2018), accessed June 24, 2019, https://www.memri.org/reports/reactions-in-gulf-to-iran-uprising.

[1188] Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "What Is the Iran Deal and Why Does Trump Want to Scrap It?" *The Guardian*, May 9, 2018, accessed April 14, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/08/iran-nuclear-deal-what-is-it-why-does-trump-want-to-scrap-it.

[1189] "خامنئي يناقض نفسه ويتباكى ويعلن ندمه ويقر بخطئه" إيران تغلي.. اعتقالات.. ومنع من السفر," *Okaz,* August 14, 2018, accessed July 25, 2019, https://www.okaz.com.sa/politics/na/1663899.

deteriorated economy and international status of Iran. After the Trump administration's withdrawal from the deal in May 2018, Khamenei called the deal a mistake but the former Obama administration's determination to implement the deal without backing off demands for zero enrichment had encouraged the Iranian decision-makers for negotiating a deal to limit the nuclear enrichment projects of Iran. For the P5+1, the deal was a successful attempt to reduce Iran's capability to produce enriched uranium which would prevent the country to make nuclear weapons in the future.[1190] However, the regional reactions to the deal particularly from the Saudi side were highly skeptical towards Iran's commitments to it, and the US's credits to Iran's engagement with the deal beside the Saudi decision-makers' disagreements with the Obama administration's foreign policy in Syria and Iraq.

The rise of the Saudi regional security perception towards Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons was related to the Saudi decision-makers' ingrained official argument on Iran's interference in the domestic and regional affairs of the neighbors. One might refer to the speeches of the former Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Saud who italicized the most perilous part of the deal in supporting the Iranian ambitions and narratives in the region, raising its self-confidence to widen its regional axis, and enhancing its capacity to influence the international audience which would create a narrative challenge for the kingdom's regional rhetoric in keeping Iran responsible for regional stability and the domestic crisis of the neighbors. In another speech, in 2006, Prince Saud was underlining the kingdom's non-confidence in Iran's commitments on developing nuclear weapons for peaceful reasons as such: "Where is Iran going to use these weapons?... If their intention is to bomb Israel, they will kill Palestinians, Syrians, Jordanians, and Saudis as well."[1191] The official strategy of Saudi Arabia can be argued to evolve around viewing the deal as a regional security concern to all states not only to Saudi Arabia which would construct the image of King Salman government domestically and regionally as vulnerable to Iran's regional actions. According to this, the decision-makers were underlining the imperative of having a guarantee of preventing Iran to have concessions or acting as the security guarantor of the region at the expense of the other countries in

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[1190] J. Matthew McInnis, "ISIS, Israel, and Nukes: Iran Faces Crises," *American Enterprise Institute* (2014): 13-14.
[1191] Salama and Weber, "Arab Nuclear Envy," 46.

the region. It was a decisive part of the Saudi regional narrative to portray the Iran's aids to the radical groups such as Iraq's Popular Mobilization (Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi), or supporting the Houthi movement against the official government in Yemen war as contradictory for a country producing nuclear weapons for peaceful purposes.[1192] At this juncture, King Salman government was underlining that Saudi Arabia would be confident with an agreement that prevents Iran from developing nuclear weapons[1193] but Iranian regional activities should be followed through a cautious foreign policy.

Ensuring the regional security and stability was the common rhetoric of Saudi Arabia and the GCC states utilized in interpreting the Iran nuclear deal's political, economic and military impacts on the region. To illustrate, Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad and former Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid Al-Attiya viewed the deal as the best option for strengthening regional security and stability while Bahraini King Hamad bin 'Issa Al-Khalifa's perception was closer to the Saudi arguments in addressing Bahrain's concerns about Iran's interference in the domestic affairs of the other regional states. Saudi decision-makers' discourse towards developing nuclear weapons can be argued to have a reactive tone towards the Iranian attempts in the nuclear deal issue. Saudi Arabia continuously redefined Iran's state identity as the major actor responsible for the instability of the region through publishing cartoons like Iran directs "'nuclear agreement' dollars to 'terrorism'" in Al-Watan, or "'Iran' and 'US at the Friendship Club'" in Al-Iqtisadiyya.[1194] The articles and cartoons were not only critical against Iran but also the Obama administration's foreign policy in the region. Since the King Abdullah period, the reactive tone of Saudi Arabia about getting nuclear weapons was observed particularly in Saudi relations with the Obama administration that had been warned by the Saudi decision-makers on many occasions.[1195] King Salman period revealed a similar attitude of the former government as illustrated many times in Crown Prince Mohammed's speeches for not considering to get nuclear weapons until Iran

[1192] Salman Al-Dossary, "Opinion: Iran Nuclear Deal Opens the Gates of Evil in the Middle East," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, July 15, 2015, accessed October 14, 2019, http://eliasbejjaninews.com/archives/25885/salman-aldosary-iran-nuclear-deal-opens-the-gates-of-evil-in-the-middle-east-ali-ibrahim-terror-apologists-encourage-extremism/.
[1193] Yoel Guzansky, "Saudi Arabia and the Nuclear Agreement with Iran," *INSS*, July 22, 2015, accessed January 23, 2019, https://www.inss.org.il/publication/saudi-arabia-and-the-nuclear-agreement-with-iran/.
[1194] "Gulf Press, Fear and."
[1195] John Hannah, "Saudi Arabia Strikes Back," *Foreign Policy*, August 16, 2016, accessed January 24, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/16/saudi-arabia-strikes-back-3/

announces the existence of the nuclear weapons.[1196] Another major actor of the period of the deal was Prince Bandar who stated the unreliable nature of the Iranian politics and even defined the Iranian deal worse than the nuclear deal with North Korea because of its estimated benefits to the Iranian economy in the long term.[1197] Despite he had been one of the closest figures to the US foreign policy-making, especially during the Bush administration, Prince Bandar insisted to recall the Saudi mistrust with the Obama administration's foreign policy after the deal negotiations through an old saying of Henry Kissinger: "I am convinced more than any other time that my good friend, the magnificent old fox Henry Kissinger, was correct when he said 'America's enemies should fear America, but America's friends should fear America more'".[1198]

Despite all the critiques and concerns against the nuclear deal, Saudi Arabia viewed the enrichment of nuclear programs as the right of all regional states and nations in case they were transparent in their production and committed to the supervision of the IAEA.[1199] Like other GCC countries and Iran, Saudi Arabia is a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) thus committed to construct peaceful nuclear programs as well as sharing nuclear know-how. During the deal negotiations, Saudi Arabia was not a country that developed nuclear power or reactors; however, there were some official announcements by the decision-makers of producing 16 nuclear power reactors by 2030 at a cost of an estimated $100 billion as part of the diversification process of the Saudi economy under the King Salman government.[1200] On the other hand, the idea of establishing a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons was continuously promoted by Prince Turki Al-Faisal. According to the idea of WMDFZ, Prince Turki underlined that the regional states should punish the others by imposing economic, military and political sanctions if they choose to remain outside of the zone, and attempt to produce weapons of mass

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[1196] Time.

[1197] "Saudi Prince: Iran Deal Worse Than One with N. Korea," *Al-Arabiya News*, July 16, 2015, accessed December 23, 2019, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2015/07/16/Saudi-Prince-Bandar-Iran-deal-worse-than-North-Korean-deal-.

[1198] Ibid.

[1199] Turki al-Faisal, "A Political Plan for a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East," *Harvard Kennedy School: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs* (July 2013), accessed October 15, 2020, https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/political-plan-weapons-mass-destruction-free-zone-wmdfz-middle-east.

[1200] James M. Dorsey, "US-Saudi Nuclear Talks: A Middle East Barometer?" *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, no. 712 (2018), https://besacenter.org/us-saudi-nuclear-talks/.

destruction.[1201] Through its inclusive discourse, Saudi Arabia reconstructed its state image of paying greater importance to the regional peace and stability, and indirectly illustrated its mistrust towards the Iranian claims of peaceful production of nuclear weapons.

The major tenet of Saudi regional policy was constantly repeating the fact that Iran cannot be a serious threat to the Saudi domestic structure or stability but it is threatening the regional stability by sowing seeds of separation among the societies of the regional states. It was inevitable for the Saudi state to emphasize the urgency of stopping the Iranian separation and sectarian activities at the neighbors. Related to this, the strategy of polishing the well-equipped army of the kingdom that has the best quality compared to the other countries in the region were utilized by the Saudi decision-makers.

For the Saudi side, the worst results of the deal would be the extension of the Iranian penetration to aid the militant groups at the neighbors across the region to destabilize the domestic structures of the other states. Thus, Saudi decision-makers' discourse was built upon ensuring the stability of the region by taking preventive measures towards the Iran's regional activities. This policy directed Saudi Arabia to accept the nuclear deal which claimed to restrict the nuclear weapons development of Iran, hence contribute to regional security and stability in the Middle East. However, Saudi decision-makers aimed at keeping the mistrust issue always at the center of the international audience to avoid the development of a perception to reconstruct Iran as a new peaceful actor and regional stabilizer. At this juncture, Saudi media promoted the idea of inevitable mistrust towards Iran. For instance, a Saudi columnist Salman Al-Dosary emphasized that Saudi Arabia and the GCC states appreciated the contributions of the deal for the regional security, but the Iranian regime's commitments need to be watched seriously since it might use the deal as a political card to destabilize the region and domestic politics of the neighbors.[1202] Other insecurity concerns of the Saudi decision-makers appeared to be towards the Obama administration's foreign policy in the region particularly after the Iraq and Syria disagreements, which made the King Salman government question the US foreign policy towards the kingdom and the region. At this point, one might refer to Prince Bandar's emphasis on the issue as such: "I say that President Obama's policy on the Middle East

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[1201] Al-Saud, "هل تغيرت إيران؟"
[1202] Al-Dossary, "Opinion: Iran Nuclear."

in general, and Syria, Iraq and Yemen in particular, is a surprise policy to enlighten them, and can be discussed at another time."[1203] Moreover, as a close figure to the US foreign-policy making Prince Bandar raised his personal suspicions towards the US administration of talking about curbing Iran's role in the region while secretly negotiating with it: "I did not expect to live this age to see the president of the United States lie to me".[1204] Despite the US foreign policy was initiating the nuclear deal with Iran, the decision-makers were far from jeopardizing the relations with the GCC states. To illustrate, former Secretary of State John Kerry insisted to convince the GCC states to separate the nuclear deal from the other regional issues. Kerry was careful of viewing the US partnership with the GCC states "as indispensable for the security of the region"[1205] and implementing the political and military support that they need such as the announced $1bn arms agreement to provide military assistance for the Saudi military to fight against the Islamic State and the Houthi rebels in Yemen.[1206] Through these policies, the Obama administration was implying the US foreign policy was not establishing close relations with Iran or raising Iran's regional status as the stabilizer of the region but to contribute to the regional stability by limiting the Iranian nuclear empowerment through the diplomatic ways without putting political, economic and military sanctions on the country.

Trump administration's withdrawal from the deal came into prominence in 2018 as part of his America first policy on the basis of which he also withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement and initiated trade wars with China and Mexico drastically shifted the Saudi regional security perception towards a more self-confident tone. The rhetorical shift in the US foreign policy towards an anti-Iranian discourse and even defining the Iranian government as part of a murderous state that cannot possess a peaceful nuclear program were promoted by the Saudi government for the legitimacy of the Saudi regional threat assessments of Iran. The King Salman government's anti-Iranian rhetoric by defining the

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[1203] Akhbaar24, "بندر بن سلطان في أول موقف له منذ تركه منصبه رئيساً للاستخبارات يقيّم الاتفاق النووي.. ويؤكد: "ثقوا بي," July 16, 2015, accessed June 5, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/225580/-بندر-بن-سلطان-في-أول-موقف-له-منذ-تركه-منصبه-رئيساً-للاستخبارات-يقيّم-الاتفاق-النووي-ويؤكد-ثقوا-بي

[1204] "بندر بن سلطان يكشف عن آخر ما قاله الملك عبد الله للرئيس الأمريكي أوباما," *Akhbaar 24*, January 25, 2019, accessed March 26, 2019, https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/426645.

[1205] "Gulf Allies 'Back Iran Nuclear Deal' After US Security Guarantees," *BBC News*, August 3, 2015, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33758939.

[1206] "Saudi King Meets Obama Amid Concerns Over Iran Deal," *BBC News,* September 5, 2015, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34153624

regime as responsible for all the regional instabilities developed hand in hand with the reconstructed US foreign policy discourse of the Trump administration. President Trump even portrayed the deal as a giant fiction and a disastrous deal claiming the hidden nuclear program of Iran which has not been proven by the authorities.[1207] Despite the P5+1 parties of the deal were in favor of keeping the deal with Iran, the Trump administration reclaimed that Iran maintained its uranium enrichment and even doubled its military budget in a short period of time due to the barriers lifted by the modest nuclear agreement. [1208] The Trump administration's foreign policy was interpreted as a physiological war towards Iran, by President Rouhani, who underlined the continuing commitment of Iran to the nuclear deal with the remaining five partners. By using a Persian saying "…I'm happy that the pesky being has left the Barjam"[1209], Iranian decision-makers found an opportunity to restate the Iranian political narratives against the US that did not historically abide by its commitments and constantly displayed an aggressive behavior toward Iran and its people.

Despite Saudi Arabia appreciated President Rouhani's moderate foreign and regional policy incentives, Iran was still portrayed as an actor aiming to destabilize neighboring countries through establishing sectarian and expansionist policies behind the scenes, thus needed to be treated cautiously. Abdullah Ibrahim al-Askar, a member of the Saudi Consultative Council, described Iran as an unreliable actor that can only represent an artificial peaceful change towards the regional security concerns of the neighboring states. Al-Askar relates the reason of the impossibility of a real change of the official Iranian foreign policy with Iran's philosophy of making its own citizens feel the alleged danger which would avoid them to re-evaluate the deteriorated domestic situation and criticize the massive financial supports of the government to the external groups instead of raising the wealth of its own citizens.[1210] For the Saudi decision-makers, the collapse of the deal at the US side ameliorated the regional mistrust of the kingdom towards the

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[1207] Amanda Holpuch, "Donald Trump Says US Will No Longer Abide by Iran Deal – As It Happened," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2018, accessed May 12, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2018/may/08/iran-nuclear-deal-donald-trump-latest-live-updates.

[1208] Osama Abu Irshaid, "الانسحاب الأميركي من الاتفاق النووي مع إيران: الخلفيات، والذرائع، والتداعيا," *Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies,* May 27, 2018, accessed May 23, 2019.

[1209] Holpuch, "Donald Trump Says."

[1210] Abdullah Ibrahim Al-Askar, "إيران لن تتغيّر," *Al-Riyadh*, May 18, 2016, accessed March 19, 2019, https://www.alriyadh.com/1503857.

US foreign policy under the Trump administration but also represented the fragility and uncertainty of the regional dynamics. Overall, Saudi regional security perceptions evolved around its concerns for external actors' initiation of starting a process integrating Iran to the global economy and political system as a peaceful and stabilizer actor of the Middle East.

6.3. YEMEN WAR AND MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN'S RISE IN SAUDI REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

The divided characteristic of the Yemeni society along the different political leanings over the unity of Yemen exposed the country to the intervention of external actors throughout the political history of the country. The fragility of the social cohesion of Yemen and fluxional distribution of political power constituted a regional instability factor at the southern borders of Saudi Arabia since the 1960s. Conflicts on the Yemen unity including hostility between the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) regime (1967-1990) and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) produced the civil wars and border conflicts in Yemen. The unification of Yemen in 1990 positioned Ali Abdullah Saleh as the president of the unified Yemen until 2012. After the abolishment of the unification agreement by the southern Yemen, the country encountered another civil war in 1994 between the northern and southern parts of Yemen, which resulted in the victory of the northern Yemen over the socialist-leaning southern. Despite Yemen was reunified after the war, the conflicts and civil wars did not end which in turn presented everlasting border security problems for Saudi Arabia.

Yemen conflict began as a civil war between local domestic actors and government, and entrapped the country into a political struggle continuously reshaped by the interference of the international and regional outsiders in 2015. Following his appointment as the Minister of Defense in January 2015, Prince Mohammed appeared as the major actor of the regional security policies of Saudi Arabia with the claim of bringing resolution and reconciliation to the crisis. He was even described as the architecture of the war guiding the Saudi regional security perception concerning Iran. Saudi decision-makers were assuming the war to end with the victory of the Saudi coalition on Houthi rebels in a short period of time and bringing President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi back in power who was forced to resign and replaced with the Houthi initiated presidential council lead by

Mohammed Ali Houthi in February 2015. To illustrate, Saudi Minister of Culture and Information Adel Al-Toraifi were stating the delusion about a quick victory at the Saudi side as such: "We hoped at the beginning it would be a quick thing, and that the Houthis would come to their senses that attacking Saudi Arabia has no purposes for Yemenis."[1211] Therefore, the Yemen war became a sphere of surveillance for the success of the King Salman government's regional security understandings particularly towards Iran. As the war was conceived as the major security challenge for the reconstruction of the Saudi security architecture, it was decisive for the King Salman government to preserve the Yemeni domestic political structure around the authority of President Hadi in favor of the Saudi regional security priorities. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia initiated an aerial campaign called Operation Decisive Storm in March-April 2015, and Operation Restoring Hope since April 2015 both of which illustrated the Saudi government's seriousness to fill the political vacuum in Yemen and claim the precision of the Salman government's regional security perception against Iran. Despite the military operation was portrayed as a Saudi led coalition, the ground troops were extensively from the UAE beside the contribution of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan and Sudan.[1212] However, the length of the operations and resistance of the Houthi movement indicated unexpected obstacles to the Saudi decision-makers and its strategic partners in the war. It also illustrated the limits of the confrontation capacity of Saudi Arabia against the Houthi rebels and Iranian regional narratives which in turn paved the way for the rise of the domestic, regional and international critiques against the Salman government's war strategies, and overall designed the limits of the political future of Prince Mohammed in the kingdom's royal power circles.

The Yemen war has often been explained with sectarian polarization of the domestic actors owing to the country's weak state authority, poor implementation of rule of war and its networks of patronage. Despite the unification attempts by former President Ali Abdallah Saleh and President of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South

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[1211] Mark Mazzeti and Eric Schmitt, "Quiet Support for Saudis Entangles U.S. in Yemen," *New York Times,* March 13, 2016, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/14/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-us.html.

[1212] F. Gregory Gause III, "King Salman and the Future of Saudi Arabia," In *Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and the New Regional Landscape*, ed. Joshua Teitelbaum (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2017): 28-29.

Yemen) Ali Salim Al-Baydh in 1969-1990, Yemeni society has long been exposed to the lack of social cohesion due to its history of hosting different sects, and regional marginalization of its certain local actors. The alienation and exclusion of certain Yemeni local actors from the government and power particularly in post-1990 revealed the lack of a consensual political settlement and fragmentation of societal cohesion in the Yemen political context. Despite there were some attempts such as the National Reform Agenda proposed by the Ministry of Planning and National Coordination in October 2006, the political situation has often been far from closing the societal and political gap among the society.[1213] Yemen war gathered the fragmented domestic actors around regionally and internationally constructed sectarian narratives in the form of regional meta-narratives from the past experiences of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Moreover, Saudi Shias in Jizan and Najran had a tribal affinity with the Zaydi communities of Yemen that added another societal threat to the Saudi regional security perception. Thus, the articulation of the sectarian narratives into the weak political, religious and social context constructed the Yemen conflict, which is prone to the explosion of the regional actors with the interference and critiques of the international actors.

The Houthis, from September 2014, were able to alter the domestic dynamics of the Yemeni political sphere and take over the Red Sea port at Hodeida by gaining de facto control of the capital Sana'a. In the domestic context, the capture of Sana'a decreased the power of the tribal Ahmar clan and the Islah Party founded by Abdullah Al-Ahmar. In the Saudi context, the annexation of Sanaa by Houthis was a 'disruption of normalcy'[1214] and would eventually evolve against the regional stability in favor of the Saudi security perceptions. The major security concern of the King Salman government was the division of Yemen between the Houthis in the north, and the Al-Qaeda in the south of Yemen. Considering the rise of the Houthi rebellions at the Saudi border as the emergence of new Hezbollah supported by Iranian official regional discourse as well as the perceived military assistance constituted a direct challenge to the Saudi regional and domestic security.[1215] Saudi decision-makers legitimized their intervention in the Yemen

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[1213] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152.

[1214] Kjetil Selvik, "War in Yemen: The View from Iran," *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*, Expert Analysis, November 2015, accessed December 25, 2019, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194322/3aa838bcc38767deb0af8f2125e20f36.pdf

[1215] "Crown Prince Mohammed."

conflict upon the request of President Hadi to prevent the collapse of the state authority in Yemen also to avoid the critiques towards the kingdom for intervening in the domestic affairs of the neighbors like Iran. The Houthis were supported by the former President Saleh, until December 2017, who had been a former ally of Saudi Arabia and then agreed with the Houthis to take revenge on those who had turned against him in 2011. The support of the former President for the Houthi rebellions with parts of the Yemeni armed forces remained loyal to him meant crossing a red line according to the Saudi perception.[1216] The lack of the US military and discursive support for the Saudi led coalition alerted the Saudi decision-makers to end the war with the least damage on the authority of the royal family, the king, the crown prince and the legitimacy of the decision-making institutions.

Saudi officials often argued that the Yemen crisis was a direct security challenge to Saudi Arabia but it was also a multifaceted danger to the regional states' internal and external security as well as to the human insecurity of the region. The political vacuum that would be produced as a natural outcome of the Yemeni failed state would be disastrous for the regional security and needed to be consolidated a strong and an efficient central government in Yemen with the contributions of the regional allies. For the Saudi perception, the deteriorating domestic security structure was both the cause and the consequence of the collapse of Yemen's state credibility.[1217] The danger of further strengthening of the terrorist groups like the Saudi branch of Al-Qaeda in Yemen directed the Saudi regional security strategy to move towards heightening and internationally publicizing the existing security threats beside the ones being motivated by Iran against the regional stability in the Middle East.

Yemen government frequently accused Iran of involving in suspicious alliances with the Houthis. Saudi Arabia reconstructed the Yemen conflict as the extension of its regional security narratives against Iran. Despite the Iranian government and media had supportive statements for the Houthis particularly relating their actions with the repression factor, Iran officially ignored its direct military, financial support or transfer

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[1216] May Darwich, "The Yemen War: A Proxy Sectarian War?" *Sectarianism, Proxies & De-Sectarianization (SEPAD)*, accessed November 16, 2020, https://www.sepad.org.uk/report/the-yemen-war-a-proxy-sectarian-war.

[1217] Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf*, 59.

of Iranian weapons for the movement.[1218] On the Saudi side, it was compulsory to convince the domestic, regional and international public for the legitimization of the Saudi led intervention; thus the religious authorities like Grand Mufti Al-Sheikh was consulted who publicized the Yemen conflict as the security endeavor of Saudi Arabia to stop a 'Safavid March.'[1219] King Salman's government interpretation of the war on defining the Yemen conflict as an Iran initiated one constituted an obstacle for the decision-makers to conceptualize the conflict and made it difficult to disclaim the inherent hostility of the kingdom to Iran which has been long time ignored by the official rhetoric. On the other hand, Iranian officials' statements declared the domestic rebellion inside the country as part of the natural consequence of the Yemeni government's repression of the Yemeni society and local actors. For the Saudi perception, Iran aimed at exploiting the domestic weakness of the countries and expand its sphere of influence as well as its leverage where it can by increasing its military and financial support under the name of advising the local groups friendly to the Iranian regional policies.[1220] Some statements of the Iranian officials like Ali Reza Zakani from the Iranian parliament helped the Saudi claims to find an audience in the region as Zakani indicated that Sana'a became the fourth Arab capital that joined the Iranian revolution in addition to Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut. Moreover, Zakani viewed the Yemen conflict as a revolution that will eventually spread to the Saudi territories.[1221] Thus, the Yemen war provided a useful opportunity for the Saudi decision-makers to reconstruct Iran's role in increasing the regional instability against the security priorities of the whole regional states.

The Houthi movement that takes its name from Hussein Badreddin Al-Houthi who was executed in 2004 by the former Yemeni President Saleh has not publicly developed close relations with Iran despite its stated sympathy towards the country. The execution of Badreddin Al-Houthi was the turning point for the rise of the confrontation of the Houthis

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[1218] Christopher Boucek, "War in Saada: From Local Insurrection to National Challenge," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, no. 110 (April 2010), accessed March 15, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/war_in_saada.pdf.

[1219] Ben Rich and Ben MacQueen, "The Saudi State as an Identity Racketeer," *Middle East Critique* 26, no. 2 (2017): 117-118.

[1220] Nussaibah Younis, "The Saudi-Iran Powerplay behind the Yemen Conflict," *The Guardian*, March 29, 2015, accessed March 5, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/29/iran-saudi-arabia-yemen-conflict.

[1221] "Sanaa Is the Fourth Arab Capital to Join the Iranian Revolution," *Middle East Monitor*, September 27, 2014, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140927-sanaa-is-the-fourth-arab-capital-to-join-the-iranian-revolution/.

against the government in the form of an armed militia with an ideological perspective. [1222] For instance, they waged six wars against President Saleh's army between 2004 and 2010. The Houthis preferred to define themselves as a movement motivated primarily by a domestic agenda, rather than a regional one or being dominated by the other states' regional security priorities. They claimed to protect the rights of the Yemen's Zaidi community and stated their opposition to the penetration of the Salafi perspectives into Zaydi communities.[1223] In contrary to the Iranian claims to give only military advice to the Houthis rather than any large-scale direct supply of arms, Saudi Arabia claimed the rise of the further military attachment of the Houthis to Iran at the end of 2014 without sufficient evidence.[1224] The evidence of Saudi Arabia were mostly presented over the attacks on Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport in early November 2017[1225], a failed ballistic missile attempt to the official residence of the Saudi king in Riyadh[1226], a failed missile strike in Najran in January 2018[1227], and the Abqaiq-Khurais oil facilities in 2019[1228]. Moreover, the start of the direct flights between Sanaa and Tehran which was initiated by the Revolutionary Committee founded by the Houthis as well as the agreement of an oil deal with the National Iranian Oil Company were more than enough for the Saudi decision-makers to repeat their claims of the Iranian support for the attacks launched by the Houthis on the kingdom.

The unanticipated length of the war and the continuous resistance of the Houthi movement put pressure on the Saudi decision-making to question the surveillance of the military operations launched by the Saudi-led coalition. Having intervened in a long civil war without a certain victory of the Saudi led coalition inevitably forced Prince

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[1222] Luíza Gimenez Cerioli, "Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi–Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain's and Yemen's Arab Spring," *Contexto Internacional* 40, no. 2 (August 2018): 306.

[1223] Hilterman and Alley, "The Houthis."

[1224] Ibid.

[1225] Faisal Edroos, "Yemen's Houthis Fire a Balistic Missile at Riyadh," *Aljazeera*, November 5, 2017, accessed October 17, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/5/yemens-houthis-fire-ballistic-missile-at-riyadh.

[1226] Patrick Wintour and Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Saudi Arabia Shoots Down Houthi Missile Aimed at Riyadh Palace," *The Guardian*, December 19, 2017, accessed June 4, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/19/saudis-shoot-down-houthi-missile-close-to-capital-riyadh.

[1227] "Timeline: Houthis' Drone and Missile Attacks on Saudi Targets," *Aljazeera*, September 14, 2019, accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/14/timeline-houthis-drone-and-missile-attacks-on-saudi-targets.

[1228] David Reid, "Saudi Aramco Reveals Attack Damage at Oil Production Plants," *CNBC*, September 20, 2019, accessed September 26, 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/20/oil-drone-attack-damage-revealed-at-saudi-aramco-facility.html.

Mohammed to find an exit plan from the war. The reluctance of the Obama administration to support the military operations also gradually discouraged the Saudi decision-makers from the war. Despite the Secretary of State John Kerry emphasized direct security threat to Saudi territories from the Houthis, the US was reluctant to support all of the Saudi military initiatives, which might be interpreted as being part of a proxy war against Iran and the others.[1229] At this juncture, one might refer to the statement of US General Carl E. Mundy, the deputy commander of Marines in the Middle East, who emphasized the official regional outlook of the US administration to the Saudi-led coalition's military operation as such: "We offer them coaching but ultimately, it's their operation."[1230] The responsiveness of the US officials made the Saudi decision-makers question their historical strategic partnership with the US for ensuring the Saudi security. It was the first time when Saudi Arabia felt alone to cope with their regional security concerns and find a way to exit the war without being prone to be labeled alone as the initiator of a humanitarian crisis. For the humanitarian side, the report by the Yemen Data Project revealed that 3,577 Saudi-led air attacks targeted military sites and 3,158 attacks on the schools, hospitals, markets, farms and mosques.[1231] All of these factors and critiques directed Prince Mohammed to keep himself out of the war rhetoric and ending the war in Yemen as the prospective king. For this aim, he visited the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan to discuss ending the war, then he rejected the claims of targeting non-military sites in Yemen but accepted that the war conditions might cause unintended mistakes, and still the kingdom would continue of being the biggest supporter of the people, health care, and education of Yemeni people.[1232] Likewise, another prominent actor of the Yemen war, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Al-Jubeir countered the accusations towards Saudi Arabia by arguing virulence of the Houthis' attacks on schools, hospitals and mosques in Saudi territories.

Prince Mohammed's perceived deteriorated image in relation to the Yemen war encouraged some domestic dissidents to raise their critiques against his governance. Some anonymous royal actors gave statements against the new government such as calling Prince Talal, Prince Turki and Prince Ahmed to unite against the new government

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[1229] Mazzeti and Schmitt, "Quiet Support."
[1230] Ibid.
[1231] Hiro, "Cold War," 307.
[1232] "Crown Prince Mohammed."

and even asked to organize a palace coup: "So four or possibly five of my uncles will meet soon to discuss the letters. They are planning with a lot of nephews and that will open the door. A lot of the second generation is very anxious."[1233] The Yemen crisis was no wonder the only reason for these anonymous actors to announce such a statement, but it was a long-expected opportunity to rise against Prince Mohammed whose war politics in Yemen were considered to fail. The rise of the opposing voices among the royal family illustrated the lack of unity of the Saudi royal family and the tradition of taking decisions by consultation with the other royal members as it has always been claimed to be there. Despite Prince Mohammed often emphasized his Defense Minister role who can only implement the decisions approved by King Salman as he did in the Yemen war, it was clear to the Saudi public and other royal actors that he personally was the major decision-makers instead of his father. Pointing the other decision-makers and institutions like the Council of Ministers and the Council of Security and Political Affairs to share the political burden of the war implemented to protect the domestic and foreign image of Prince; however, there were some incidents that showed the opposite such as the case of Prince Mutaib, the commander National Guard, who was not consulted for the Yemen operation and moreover, the operation was organized while he was out of the kingdom.[1234] Another political strategy of the King Salman government was to embolden the role of Prince Mohammed's full brother Prince Khalid bin Salman as the Deputy Minister of Defense since 2019 in negotiating the end of the war with the coalition members, particularly with the UAE. As Prince Khalid was a graduate of aviation sciences from King Faisal Air Academy, trained as a fighter pilot in the US and a former Saudi ambassador to the US, he appeared as a well-suited royal actor to discuss Riyadh's Yemen policy at the regional and international level. According to Gerald Feierstein, a former US ambassador to Yemen, Prince Khalid was a "reasonably intelligent and personable, clearly, he is very close to his brother, and that I think is his real raison d'être—and the fact that he speaks for both his father and his brother."[1235] Despite Prince

[1233] Hug Miles, "Saudi Royal Calls For Regime Change in Riyadh," *The Guardian*, September 28, 2015, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/28/saudi-royal-calls-regime-change-letters-leadership-king-salman

[1234] Hiro, "Cold War," 285.

[1235] Colum Lynch, Lara Seligman and Robbie Gramer, "Can a Young Saudi Prince End the War in Yemen?" *Foreign Policy,* November 20, 2019, accessed February 24, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/20/can-khalid-bin-salman-young-saudi-prince-end-yemen-war-mohammed-mbs/

Mohammed had some favorable and confidant royal figures like Prince Khalid to assist him in the new government's regional security perceptions and to reconstruct the consultation principle in the decision-making process, the growing regional and international critiques particularly given the humanitarian insecurity threat of the war constituted structural obstacles to the recognition of the Prince Mohammed's security policies at the domestic, regional and international level.

6.4. REDEFINING THE "REGIONAL" AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE SAUDI REGIONAL SECURITY NARRATIVES

King Salman's period not only imposed a sharp discursive shift from the King Abdullah period's domestic-focused and escalation-averse regional security policy, but it also gave more weight to the internationalization of the regional security understandings of the new government led by himself and his son Crown Prince Mohammed. The Salman government illustrated the shifts in the institutional and discursive power relations that honor particular royal and non-royal actors while marginalizing others. In addition, it also shows that actors are capable of implementing the dominant representations. The Salman government's political structure was shaped around the redefined version of Saudi state nationalism and Saudi first policy by putting distance with the Wahhabi religious discourse and its conservative religious scholars, diversifying the economy from oil revenues, and promoting the younger generation for the 2030 vision targets. At the regional level, it appeared as a useful foreign policy tool in the discourse of Crown Prince Mohammed to encourage the regional states for their own economic development by arguing that the new Europe will be the Middle East in the following years. It was part of the Salman government's strategy of portraying itself as a leading actor of the region by bringing new political dimensions for the regional solidarity among the neighbors. As the policy-making is embedded with power relations long before the regional security and foreign policy decisions are set, King Salman's period appeared to be very selective about the inclusion of the royal actors in the decision-making system, which required the abandonment of some foundational principles of the kingdom such as consultation and seniority. The selective features of the new government illustrated that the discourses of the privileged actors of the decision-making system

institutionalized royal power through the superiority of their practices or imaginaries for the regional security politics of the kingdom, and then reproduced that power again.

While promoting fairness and anti-corruption measures along with the changes in the social life of the Saudi peoples, King Salman centralized the royal authority in the hands of the confidant royal actors selected from the sub-families of the Al-Saud family, including the sons of the ousted royals. The new period queried some foundational features of the Saudi foreign policy-making, which was not an individualistic process solely determined by the King; instead, it was a social, historical and political construction through its multi referential objects and various actors. The new foundations of the Saudi decision-making process aimed at ensuring unity among individuals, pressurizing the royal actors serving the government's policies. Due to its lack of confidence towards the royal actors, the Salman government preferred to be advised by non-royal actors trained in Britain or the US, and this constituted another difference from the previous periods. The trust issue was not exclusively regarded at the selection of the advisors as it was the image construction for the authority of Crown Prince Mohammed who did not have enough experience in the West, particularly in the US foreign policy-making. The new government activated the process of reconstructing the Saudi state image at the international level, combining the new domestic parameters with the regional security perceptions of the King Salman government. As the regional crisis and wars forced the Saudi state to take hard policy measures, King Salman government's image through a rapid reconstruction of the economy, society and regional security perceptions found harsh critiques abroad. The fragility of the public opinion owing to the exposition to social media paved the way for the non-transparency of the domestic views over the Salman government's policies. All of these tested the Saudi decision-makers' claimed tolerance capacity of the international audience as well as its international dissidents.

King Salman period re-defined the regional security as a whole and solely linked it to the consensus of the regional states over the security perceptions and policies. This was part of King Salman government's endeavor to lead the regional crisis from front in accordance with its regional security priorities, and avoid the emergence of opposing voices or regional visions from Saudi Arabia. For instance, according to the Saudi decision-makers, any state in the region cannot agree on the rationality of the Iran nuclear

deal and criticize the Iran's other activities against the regional stability at the same time. The rationality of the Saudi politics can be interpreted as a message to the other regional states and external actors that their level of political, economic and social attachment with Iran would not be considered as separate from their bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia. This imposed the non-separation of the regional crisis from the bilateral relations of the actors, especially in defining Iran as the common regional security threat to the regional stability and peace as a whole. Moreover, Saudi Arabia constituted the approval of its regional security priorities in the neighboring states as a political conditionality for the continuity of their solid relations with the kingdom. This policy was maintained through the giving of financial aids to the neighbors, particularly the ones who were constantly in economic crises or at the reconstruction period after a war. At this juncture, Saudi Arabia utilized its wealth to establish a new regional security narrative for itself and demanded the neighbors to endorse it. Saudi decision-makers reconstructed the Saudi state image by openly defining Iran as an extremist regional actor working for the disintegration of the neighbors and motivating the local actors against their governments. Hence, Saudi Arabia aimed at reconstructing its state image internationally as an actor working for the regional stability and domestic wellbeing of its own citizens, who would be working for the implementation of the kingdom's 2030 vision.

The Salman period was the construction, reproduction and transformation of interests, ideas, identities and foreign policy-making of the kingdom. It signaled the end of the "behind-the-scene" approach of the King Abdullah period's foreign policy style due to the strategic changes at the regional level. The Salman period re-established the Saudi foreign policy by challenging the ones that were not coming into terms with the Saudi regional security perceptions and priorities. The end of the escalation-averse foreign policy style brought critiques to the kingdom and to the policies of Crown Prince Mohammed, particularly the Yemen war. However, Saudi Arabia rationalized its regional security policy with its increasing security concern on its borders towards the Houthis, Hezbollah and Iran. The rise of the Houthis was conceived as the emergence of a new Hezbollah with the military and financial contribution of Iran, even though there was no official proof of it found. While King Abdullah's government was defining the Iran's regional rise in the domestic politics of the neighbors as a matter of concern[1236],

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[1236] Wehrey et al., "Saudi-Iranian," 7.

King Salman's period defined Iran as a direct challenge to the region itself. In tandem, Iran could not threaten Saudi regional security priorities directly but its regional activities were detrimental to the regional peace and stability.

Since the security perceptions of the regional states have never been independent of the political practices in the domestic context, Saudi perception towards the Iranian regional activities highly influenced the domestic shifts in the Saudi political context. According to the Saudi decision-makers, Iran should not emerge as the regional stabilizer in the eyes of the international audience (i.e., the reintegration of Iran into the international system, and amelioration of its international image). Furthermore, the nuclear deal had threatened the Saudi regional priorities in this sense, but the Trump administration's withdrawal from the deal relaxed the Saudi decision-makers about turning back to the Cold War structure of being twin pillars of the US foreign policy. However, Saudi decision-makers' rhetoric towards Iran was constructed upon identifying the country responsible for all the problems in the region. The rhetoric of Salman's government acted carefully by avoiding to approach the issue from an ideological perspective within inherent historical hostility towards the country. Iran was viewed as a dangerous actor for the whole region owing to its current acts and foreign policy tools. Iran motivated the sub-identities of the local actors and non-governmental groups of the neighbors, which were publicized abroad as a totally different regional vision compared to the kingdom. Saudi Arabia reconstructed Iran as the opposite version of itself while defining the kingdom's regional security perspective in line with regional solidarity and stability with the neighbors in favor of the central government and authorities.

Regional crises and wars often interact with domestic calls for reforms and institutional changes. King Salman government portrayed Saudi Arabia as a sovereign state making rational decisions and responding to society's demands. The reform process of the King Salman's period came into prominence as a result of the understanding of the fact that regional dynamics cannot be ruled anymore and thus referring to the religious references such as the promotion of Wahhabi school around the region and the Muslim world. It did not mean the end of the influence of the religious principles on the society; instead, it was an attempt to curb the Wahhabi school's influence on the society and education system, and eliminate the international critiques towards the kingdom. This is by following a radical school of thought that damages the international image of the

kingdom and sometimes tracking the country at the rank of the states promoting radical actors. At the same time, giving an image by setting a distance between the religious and foundational credentials of the kingdom in defining the societal field, educational field and economic activities. This is to allow Saudi Arabia to portray the international image of Iran as its opposite version, which for a long time ignored the reform demands of the Iranian society and spent its financial and military resources for funding the non-governmental actors related with the extremist groups inside the neighboring states.

7. CONCLUSION

The primary motivation of this research was to look at the decision-making process and the structure of foreign policy making of Saudi Arabia as an insider. Throughout the process, I assume that my extended stay in the Gulf and linguistic capacities would be enough to achieve this goal. However, the swiftly changing regional context pushed me to reformulate the design of the research. While seeking to find names from the kingdom, interviewee candidates were not motivated to respond to relatively neutral and explanatory questions (see the appendix about the questions). Then I had to seek outside experts who understand the decision-making process of Saudi Arabia through their first-hand experiences. According to the interviews I conducted with various academics, journalists, and retired ambassadors, I concluded that the Saudi decision-making process is not a straightforward one solely determined by the king and the royal family but relatively a complex process with the participation of several local and regional actors. Instead, it is hardly built concord, whose coalition is often fragile, and it involved the incumbent government's exigence in consulting with the other circles.

These circles included the senior members of the royal family in the core circle, professionals, religious elites or bureaucrats in the second circle, or the other influential actors whose statuses are fluid depending on the changing dynamics within the domestic structures. Therefore, the Saudi decision-making process is a dynamic one evolving around the social, political and historical structures and shaped by the intersubjectivity among the decision-making actors that succeeded in taking part in the foreign policy-making. Even though the inner circle was limited for the outsiders to understand the royal competition for power, it was (with the help of the interviews done throughout the research) concluded that the Saudi decision-making process is based on the changing security perceptions of the decision-making actors. The regional security perceptions of the actors are highly influenced by the interplay between the domestic constraints of the decision-making process and the regional security dynamics. Furthermore, the interaction between the domestic and the regional context continuously redefines each other in the threat appreciation of the decision-makers from the Iranian regional security narratives, and their approval at the neighbors' domestic politics.

While the Al-Saud royal family is an institution itself, whose hegemony is based on economic, coercive power and persuasive acceptance of the Saudi society, Saudi

decision-making institutions are collectively accepted system of rules that activates the decision-making actors to reconstruct institutional facts within the regional security perception of the kingdom. In line with Charles Taylor's statement "we can only continue to offer interpretation, we are in an interpretative circle",[1237] one can only bring an interpretation of how possible regional security dynamics after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War altered the Saudi domestic structures, and reconstructed the threat perception of Saudi decision-making actors towards Iran. In this way, foreign policy analysis integrated with the critical constructivist perspective minimized the mechanic looking at the decision-making processes. At this juncture, intersubjective ideas that are products of the social interaction among the agents of states constituted an indissoluble part of the analysis of the operation of Saudi foreign policy. In other words, Saudi regional threat perception is continuously constructed through the interaction among the decision-making actors instead of being an individual choice of the King.

The combination of the foreign policy analysis with critical constructivism helped this research interpret the influence of the agency and structural context on Saudi foreign policy-making and the Saudi domestic political constraints influenced by the regional security dynamics after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War. Since the Saudi foreign policy towards Iran has not been an individual act of the king but shaped by the unstable regional security dynamics, it was inevitable for this research to build an understanding of the evolution of the threat perceptions of the Saudi decision-makers upon the social, political and historical contexts shaped by the regional security dynamics. In tandem, critical constructivism's stress on the relation between power and politics enabled the research to comprehend why particular norms are appreciated in Saudi foreign policy discourse, why some actors are privileged to take part in the process, and which societal and organizational power relations, and at whose expense do the representations of the foreign policy-making rely on.

The end of King Fahd's reign in 2005 transformed the succession issue into an unpredictable, ambiguous and complicated matter due to the aged senior princes to be considered for the throne. Moreover, during King Abdullah's reign, the death of these aged princes, such as Prince Nayef and Prince Sultan, dragged the royal family along an unclear sign of the succession process and criteria to select a new king. While King

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[1237]Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human*, 53.

Abdullah tried to institutionalize the succession process such as establishing the Allegiance Council, King Salman's period underestimated the roles of the institutions for the selection procedure of the kings. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was elected by voting in the Allegiance Council; however, the Council did not constitute an institutional power since the king always had a right to dismiss the candidate and offer his one. Therefore, King Salman's period changed the succession issue by putting aside the seniority, consultation, and consensus principles and overshadowing the clarity of the ways within the royal family structure to reach the throne. As the foreign policy-making is embedded with power relations long before the regional security and foreign policy decisions are set, King Salman's period preferred to be very selective about the royal actors that will take part within the decision-making system. King Salman's reign illustrated the power of the discourse of privileged actors to institutionalize the royal family's authority under the political monopolization of the Salman government over the other senior and junior members of the Al-Saud family. The privileged group of royal and non-royal actors serving the newly constructed state credentials included in the decision-making system gained superiority to implement their practices or imaginaries for the regional security politics of the kingdom, which continuously reproduce their power.

Saudi foreign policy-making is operationalized through the mutual reconstruction of the regional security dynamics and domestic politics at the time of crisis, wars and conflicts in the region. Accordingly, the regional security perception of the kingdom changed towards Iran due to the challenges to the status of the privileged actors whose capability is to dominate the Saudi political spectrum in response to anticipated challenges. At this point, the rise of Hizballah and Nasrallah's authority in Lebanon constituted a serious regional security challenge to Saudi Arabia's construction of the self as the dominant actor of the region. The regional dynamics after the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War demonstrated the peak of the Iranian power projection to the neighbors of Saudi Arabia, which in turn directed the threat perception of the decision-makers towards a more assertive foreign policy. Following the sources of change in the regional security environment after the 2006 Lebanon-Israel War, King Abdullah's period activated a process of involvement of the Saudi state into the domestic contexts of the neighbors by working with the local actors, political movements, and paramilitary groups. However,

this strategy was strengthened, and constituted an obvious foreign policy means of the kingdom with King Salman's arrival to power. For the Salman government, it became inevitable to counter the further extension of the Iranian penetration to the local actors, including the militant groups in neighborhoods designed to destabilize their domestic structures and the regional security. At this juncture, Saudi Arabia reconstructed the state image as the other of Iran who motivates the local actors against their governments and works to disintegration of the neighbors. Accordingly, the Saudi state under the Salman government italicized its regional attitude against the radical movements in solidarity with the security of its neighbors in favor of the central governments and authorities.

Iran motivated the sub-identities of the local actors and non-governmental groups of the neighbors, which were publicized abroad as a different regional vision than the kingdom. Saudi Arabia reconstructed Iran as the opposite of itself while defining the kingdom's regional security perspective in line with regional solidarity and stability, with the neighbors in favor of the central government and authorities.

According to Weldes, repeated articulations of events and actions that can be represented differently by the nature of discourse are exposed to change. Before the Arab uprisings, King Abdullah's foreign policy rhetoric revealed the first steps of the redefinition of the kingdom's regional security politics out of the sectarian language. This strategy was planned to portray Iran as a regional actor abusing its neighbors' economic, social and political weaknesses and motivate them towards adopting sectarian policies within their domestic contexts. The consequences of the Arab uprisings propelled the Saudi decision-makers to redefine the targeted external audience, and reconstruct the regional image of the Saudi state based on the confidence-building abroad (not in the region anymore). This is a clear sign that Iran's regional security initiatives are dangerous and not a matter of concern anymore.

Regional crises and wars interact with domestic constraints, domestic calls for reforms and institutional changes in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi protests in 2011–2014 forced the kingdom to recalculate the strengths and weaknesses of the royal family structure and reform calls of the Saudi people from the government. In tandem, the Salman government transformed the Saudi political structure around the redefined version of Saudi state nationalism, Saudization policy, and a diversified economic policy from oil revenues while putting distance with the Wahhabi religious discourse. With the awareness of the

critiques abroad about being an intolerant regime towards the Saudi society, the Salman government shifted the self-definitions of the state by modernizing the state's religious practices and publicizing it to the international audience. This research found out that King Salman's reign opened the way for the internationalization of the Saudi state's definitions by reconstructing its targeted audience abroad, and not in the region anymore. Since the security perceptions of the regional states are never independent of the political practices in the domestic context, Saudi perception towards the Iranian regional activities has highly influenced the domestic shifts in the Saudi political context. Saudi decision-makers aimed to find the regional rhetorical deficiencies of Iran by describing the country as a belligerent actor of sectarianism profiting over the neighbors' domestic crises as political leverages. Accordingly, Saudi foreign policy appears to be constructing the other as a threat to itself and clearly states that Iran is a direct challenge to the region itself and to the subject and entrepreneur of the regional crises. This constituted one of the major divergences from King Abdullah's government, who understood Iran's regional rise in the domestic politics of the neighbors to be a matter of concern.

Regional affairs, crises and wars are the products of the interconnected threat perceptions from regional states that pressurize Saudi decision-makers to continuously redefine their security priorities per the changes and tensions in the domestic structure. Following this, King Salman's period changed the discourse of the kingdom over chronic threat interpretation of the Iranian revolution and described the country as an ultimate security threat to the whole region whose regional activities need to be countered as a whole. While utilizing its wealth to establish a new regional security narrative for itself and demanding endorsement from the neighbors, King Salman's government came to understand the need for redefining the regional security as a whole and solely linked it to the agreement of the regional states and internationalizing the consensus over the Saudi regional security understandings against Iranian regional security narratives.

Besides the changes in regional security perceptions of the King Salman era, the kingdom went through structural changes in the domestic context. The transformative policies of Crown Prince Mohammed, such as curbing the influence of the Wahhabi understandings over the education and society, or portraying the country as a tourism hub of the region, reconstructed the kingdom's regional security perceptions towards building new alliances. While it demonstrated the constructive bonds between the domestic and

regional contexts, the most notable partnership that came as an unexpected development was Israel. The historical standoff between Saudi Arabia and Israel, mainly shaped by Saudi Arabia's self-identity definitions over protecting its status of being the leader of the Muslim world, created obstacles to establish diplomatic channels between two states. In contrast to the traditional approach of the previous kings for fostering an ideological antipathy towards Israel and favoring a leading discourse of the Arab Peace Initiative, Crown Prince Mohammed envisions a different approach that does not necessarily disturb the regional security understandings of Israel. In addition, Crown Prince's threat perception towards Iranian regional activities, particularly in Yemen, brought Saudi and Israeli decision-makers closer to establish unofficial contacts after 2015. Building diplomatic relations with Israel necessitates convincing the Saudi public opinion, which has sympathy towards the Palestinians and sensitivity toward resolving the Palestinian-Israel conflict in favor of the Arab Peace Initiative. At this juncture, the King Salman government's regional security narrative portraying Iran as the primary cause for all regional conflicts and downsides encourages a process of official dialogue between both sides to calm Israel decision-makers' chronic threat perception from Iran. On the other side, Saudi Arabia likely benefits from the understandings of the Israeli decision-makers to favor the kingdom's stability to overcome its struggle with Iran. However, the development of bilateral relations is prone to change with the unstable regional security understandings of both sides regarding their capacity to shape public opinion in their domestic structures.

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APPENDICIES

A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1- How would you describe the Saudi foreign policy making actors and institutions? Beside the King, can you specify the role of decision-making actors in Saudi foreign policy?

.1 كيف تصفون المؤسسات والفاعلين في اتخاذ القرار في السياسة الخارجية السعودية؟ خلاف الملك، هل يمكنكم تحديد دور أصحاب القرار في السياسة الخارجية السعودية؟

2- Who are the major decision-making actors in conducting regional security agenda of Saudi Arabia during King Abdullah period? How did you get to know about the role of these actors? Can you specify the sources of your information?

.2 من هم صانعو القرار الرئيسيين في إدارة السياسة الأمنية الإقليمية في المملكة العربية السعودية؟ وكيف تعرفتم على دور صناع القرار الرئيسيين؟ هل يمكنكم تحديد مصدر معلوماتكم؟

3- How and in what ways do the prominent figures and royal elites influence the foreign policy decisions during King Abdullah period? Can you specify the prominent lineages in making Saudi foreign policy?

.3 كيف تؤثر الشخصيات البارزة والنخب الملكية في القرارات التي تهم السياسة الخارجية؟ هل يمكنكم تحديد صلات النسب البارزة في صناعة القرار في السياسة الخارجية للمملكة العربية السعودية؟

4- How would you describe the regional security perceptions of Saudi Arabia?

.4 كيف يمكنكم وصف النظرة الأمنية الإقليمية للمملكة العربية السعودية وتوجهها في ذلك؟

5- How would you describe the regional security perception of Saudi Arabia in post-2006 Israel-Lebanon War? Which actors/states were designated as a threat in regional security understanding of Saudi Arabia after the war? Which foreign policy adjustments did Saudi Arabia apply in dealing with these actors and states?

.5 كيف تصفون توجه السياسة الأمنية الإقليمية للمملكة العربية السعودية بعد الحرب الإسرائيلية- اللبنانية سنة 2006؟ ما هي الدول أو الفاعلين الذين تعتبرهم السعودية مصدرا يهدد أمنها الإقليمي بعد الحرب؟ وما هي التعديلات في السياسة الخارجية السعودية التي اتخذتها هذه الأخيرة للتعامل مع هؤلاء الفاعلين والدول؟

6- What is the role, weight and place of Iran in Saudi foreign policy?

6

. ما هو دور وثقل وموقع إيران في السياسة الخارجية للمملكة العربية السعودية؟

7- In what ways does Iran alter the Saudi regional security understanding in post-2006 Israel-Lebanon War? Up to Saudi Arabia's security perceptions, is Iran's security agenda clear or hidden? Why? Can you elaborate milestones of the relations with Iran?

7. كيف غيرت إيران التوجه الأمني الإقليمي للسعودية بعد الحرب الإسرائيلية-اللبنانية سنة 2006؟ حسب التوجه والنظرة الأمنية للعربية السعودية، هل تعتبر السياسة الأمنية لإيران ظاهرة أو مخفية؟ لماذا؟ هل يمكنكم توضيح معالم العلاقة الإيرانية السعودية؟

8- Do you see any areas of competing interest between Saudi Arabia and Iran in regional security? How would you specify the obstacles for Saudi-Iran rapprochement in post-2006 Israel-Lebanon War?

8. ما هي أوجه المصالح المتنافسة بين العربية السعودية وإيران حول الامن الإقليمي؟ كيف يمكن تحديد العراقيل للتقارب السعودي-الإيراني بعد الحرب الإسرائيلية-اللبنانية سنة 2006؟

9- How does Saudi foreign policy perceive the Arab uprisings in the Middle East?

9. كيف تنظر السياسة الخارجية السعودية للانتفاضات العربية في الشرق الأوسط؟

10- How would you characterize the implications of the Arab uprisings on the Saudi-Iran relations?

10. كيف تصفون تأثير الانتفاضات العربية على العلاقات السعودية-الإيرانية؟

11- To what extent is sectarian issue a key element for the rise of rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran?

11. إلى أي مدى تعتبر القضايا الطائفية عنصراً أساسياً في ظهور التنافس بين المملكة العربية السعودية وإيران؟

12- How is your expectation about the future of Saudi Arabia-Iran relations?

12. كيف ترون مستقبل العلاقات بين المملكة العربية السعودية وإيران؟

13- Is there something else you would like to add?

13. هل لديكم أية إضافات؟

Thank you again for your participation.

شكرا لكم مجددا على قبول الإجابة على الاستبيان

B. ROYAL AND NON-ROYAL DECISION-MAKING ACTORS FROM KING ABDULLAH TO KING SALMAN PERIOD[1238]

Turki bin Faisal: Director General of Saudi Intelligence (1979-2001). Ambassador to Washington (2005-2007).	**Saud bin Faisal:** Minister of Foreign Affairs (1975-2015).	**Faisal bin Khalid:** Governor of Asir region (2007-2018). He was an advisor of Crown Prince Nayef at Crown Prince's Court.	**Saud bin Fahd: Vice** President of General Intelligence Directorate (1985-October 2005).	**Mohammed bin Fahd:** Governor of Eastern Province (1985-2013).	**Khaled bin Faisal:** Governor of Makkah region (2007-2013), then (2015-). Minister of Education (2013-2015). Governor of Asir region (1971-2007). He was an adviser to King Salman.	**Mutaib bin Abdullah:** Minister of National Guard (May 2013-November 2017). Chief of National Guard (November 2010-May 2013).	**Abdulaziz bin Abdullah:** Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (July 2011-April 2015).
Turki bin Abdullah: Governor of Riyadh (May 2014-January 2015).	**Faisal bin Abdullah:** Head of Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society (November 2006-July 2016).	**Badr bin Abdullah:** Governor of the Royal Commission for Al-'Ula (June 2017-). Minister of Culture (June 2018-). He is in charge of various key positions for Saudi 2030 Vision.	**Mishaal bin Abdullah:** Governor of Mecca (December 2013-January 2015). Governor of Najran (April 2009-December 2013). He was an adviser at the Saudi royal court.	**Nayef bin Abdulaziz:** Crown Prince-First Deputy Prime Minister (October 2011-June 2012). Minister of Interior (October 1975-June 2012).	**Sultan bin Abdulaziz:** Crown Prince-First Deputy Prime Minister (August 2005-October 2011). Minister of Defense and Aviation (October 1963-October 2011). Governor of Riyadh (February 1947-December 1953).	**Muqrin bin Abdulaziz:** Governor of Hail (1980-1999). Governor of Madinah (1999-2005). Director of Saudi General Intelligence (October 2005-July 2012). Crown Prince-First Deputy Prime Minister (January 2015-April 2015).	**Ahmed bin Abdulaziz:** Deputy Minister of Interior (1975-2012). Deputy Governor of Mecca (1971-1975). Deputy Minister of Interior (1975-June 2012). Minister of Interior (June 2012-November 2012).
Fawwaz bin Abdulaziz: Governor of Riyad (1960-1961). Governor of Mecca (1971-1980).	**Nawwaf bin Abdulaziz:** Director General of Saudi Intelligence (September 2001-January 2005).	**Turki bin Talal:** Governor of Asir (December 2018-).	**Bandar bin Sultan**: Ambassador to Washington (October 1983-September 2005). Director General of Saudi Intelligence (July 2012-April 2014). Secretary General of National Security Council (October 2005-January 2015). He was among King Abdullah's special envoy (July 2014- January 2015).	**Mohammed bin Nayef:** Crown Prince-First Deputy Prime Minister (April 2015-June 2017). Minister of Interior (November 2012-June 2017). Chairman of Council of Political and Security Affairs (April 2015-June 2017).	**Saud bin Nayef**: Ambassador to Spain (September 2003-July 2011). Head of Crown Prince Court (November 2011-January 2013). Governor of Eastern province (January 2013-).	**Nayef bin Ahmed**: Head of Land Forces Intelligence and Security Commission (--- March 2020).	**Salman bin Sultan:** Deputy Defense Minister (August 2013-May 2014). Assistant Secretary General of the Saudi Arabian National Security Council for Intelligence and Security Affairs (-August 2013).
Abdulaziz bin Salman: Assistant Oil Minister (2005-April 2017). State Minister for Energy Affairs (April 2017-September 2019). Minister of Energy (September 2019-).	**Faisal bin Salman:** Governor of Madinah (January 2013-).	**Mohammed bin Salman:** Deputy Crown Prince (January 2015-June 2017). Minister of Defense (January 2015-). Crown Prince (June 2017-).	**Khalid bin Salman:** Ambassador to Washington (April 2017-February 2019). Deputy Defense Minister (February 2019-).	**Mansour bin Muqrin**: Advisor at Crown Prince Court (April 2015-November 2017). Deputy governor of Asir region (2013-November 2017).	**Sattam bin Abdulaziz:** Deputy Governor of Riyadh (1979-November 2011). Governor of Riyad (November 2011-February 2013).	**Abdulaziz bin Sattam**: Advisor to King Salman, also a professor at Imam Mohamed bin Saud university.	**Mohammed bin Nawaf**: Ambassador to UK (January 2005-December 2018). Ambassador to Italy and Malta (July 1995-December 2004).
Fahd bin Turki: Military officer who served as the commander of the Saudi-led coalition joint forces operating in Yemen (February 2018-August 2020). Served in Royal Saudi Land Forces (1983-2020).	**Prince Faisal bin Sattam:** Ambassador to Italy (May 2017-).	**Prince Khalid bin Bandar:** Ambassador to Germany (June 2017-March 2019). Ambassador to UK (March 2019-).	**Ahmed bin Mohammad Al-Salem:** Deputy Minister of Interior (June 2017-).	**Abdulaziz bin Saud Al-Saud:** Minister of Interior (June 2017-).	**Abdulrahman bin Ali Al-Rubaiaan: Consultant** in the Royal Court (June 2017-).	**Prince Bandar bin Faisal bin Bandar:** Governor of Al-Qassim (May 1992-January 2015). Governor of Riyadh (January 2015-). Close figure to King Abdullah.	**Faisal bin Abdulaziz**: Consultant in the Royal Court (June 2017-).
	Prince Abdullah bin Khalid: Consultant in the Royal Court (June 2017-).	**Prince Turki bin Mohammad**: Consultant in the Royal Court (June 2017-).	**Prince Bandar bin Khalid:** Consultant in the Royal Court (June 2017-).	**Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud:** Ambassador to Germany (March 2019-). Minister of Foreign Affairs (October 2019-).	**Adel al-Jubeir:** Ambassador to Washington (January 2007-April 2015). Minister of Foreign Affairs (April 2015-December 2018). Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (December 2018-).	**Khalid bin Ali Al-Humaidan:** Deputy Head of the Criminal Investigation Division (2011-2015). Director General of Saudi Intelligence (2015-).	**Khalid bin Bandar Al-Saud:** Governor of Riyadh (February 2013-May 2014). Deputy Defense Minister (May 2014-June 2014). General Director of Saudi Intelligence (June 2014-January 2015).

[1238] The royal and non-royal actors who were considered to take part in decision-making system from King Abdullah to King Salman period.

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EDUCATION

2015 – 2021   PhD in International Relations (English)

Kadir Has University, Istanbul, TURKEY

- GPA: 4.00/4.00
- Thesis Title: Decision-Making Process in Saudi Foreign Policy: Regional Security Policies towards Iran
- Thesis Adviser: Associate Professor Dr. Ahmet Salih Bicakci

2013 - 2015   MA in Gulf Studies (English)

Qatar University, QATAR

- GPA: 3.68/4.00
- Thesis Title: Migrants' Identity: A Study on Second Generation of Middle Class Migrants in Qatar
- Thesis Adviser: Associate Professor Dr. Baqer Al Najjar

2009 - 2011   MA in International Relations (English)

Marmara University, Istanbul-TURKEY

- GPA: 3.50/4.00
- Thesis Title: "Changing Representation of Islamist Women in the Islamic Novels after 1980s"
- Thesis Adviser: Associate Professor Dr. Yüksel Taşkın

2005 - 2009   BA in Political Science and International Relations

                     Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul-TURKEY

- GPA: 3.19/4.00
- Thesis Title: "Assimilation Policies of Bulgarian Government towards the Bulgarian Turks during the Zhivkov Period"
- Thesis Adviser: Associate Professor Dr. Çiğdem Nas

WORK EXPERIENCE

Oxford Gulf and Arab Peninsula Studies Forum (Ox GAPS) & International
Cooperation Platform (ICP) - Turkey-GCC Trade Investment Report
Research Assistant (Apr. 2016 - Feb. 2017)

The Center for International and European Studies (CIES)
Kadir Has University, Turkey
Research Assistant (Apr. 2016 - Feb. 2017)

Gulf Studies Program, Qatar University
Teaching & Research Assistant (Oct. 2013 - Jun. 2015)
Courses: Gender and Law
                  Public Policy

Marmara University Research Center for International Relations (MURCIR)
Student Assistant (Oct. 2010 - Feb. 2011)

CONFERENCES PAPERS

"An Assesment of Turkey's Overseas Military and Political Initiatives in the Gulf:
Kuwait and Qatar" In Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, December 2019
Gulf Forum

"Labor Migration in Qatar: A Study on Second-Generation Migrants' Identity"
In Yeditepe University, 2017 October, 2nd International Migration in 21st Century Conference

"Understanding the Nature of Labor Migration in Qatar", *In* Cambridge University, 2014 August, The Gulf Research Meeting 2014

"Role of the State on the Care of Low-Income Migrant Workers in Qatar"
In Kyoto University, 2014 December, 7th Next Generation Global Workshop: Theme - Care and Gender

REFEREED JOURNAL ARTICLES

The Perceptual Shock of Qatar Foreign Policy in 2017 Crisis: Systemic Factors, Regional Struggles Versus Domestic Variables, *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2021): 1-24.

Iran's Security Dilemma in the Middle East: A Neorealist Approach to Iran's Foreign Policy in Syria, *Iran Çalışmaları Dergisi (The Journal of Iranian Studies),* vol. 1, no. 2(2017): 115-139.

Labor Migration in Qatar: A Study on the Identity of Second Generation Migrants, *Border Crossing*, vol. 8, no. 2 Special Issue (2018): 479-497.

BOOK REVIEWS

Trita Parsi, Losing An Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy, *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, vol. 5, no. 2 (April 2018), pp. 175-178.
Ilan Pappé, Ten Myths About Israel, *Filistin Arastirmalari Dergisi (Bulletin of Palestine Studies)*, vol.1, no. 3 (May 2018), pp. 96-99.
Fatemeh Shayan, Security in the Persian Gulf, *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2(2018), pp. 191-194.
Dennis C. Jett (2018). The Iran Nuclear Deal: Bombs, Bureaucrats and Billionaires. *Global Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2019), pp. 102-104.

Mehran Kamrava, Inside The Arab State, *Contemporary Review of the Middle East,* vol. 6, no. 2 (2018), pp. 209-211.

Madawi Al-Rasheed (2018), *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemma of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, Ortadoğu Etütleri 13 (2021), pp. 151-152.

OP-ED ARTICLES

"The 'Aeropolitics' of The Qatar Blockade Present New Challenges," *Middle East Monitor*, March 25, 2019.

"Back to Staretgic Hedging and Mediation in Qatar Foreign Policy after the Gulf Reconciliation," *Modern Diplomacy*, February 28, 2021.

"Qatar's Dilemma for Normalization with Israel: Opportunities and Constraints," *Modern Diplomacy*, May 1, 2021.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

2012-2013   Qatar University

                   Arabic Language Scholarship

VOLUNTARY WORKS

Mar. 2010 - Jun. 2010 Helsinki Citizenship Assembly

                   Refugee Advocacy and Support Program

Feb. 2009 - Jun. 2009 Bahcelievler Child Protection Agency

Oct. 2008 - Jan. 2009 Bakirkoy Psychiatric and Neurological Diseases Hospital

PROFESSIONAL TRAININGS

March 2018-June 2018   Persian Language

                   Iran Cultural Center

                   Doha/Qatar

Sep. 2012 - Jun. 2013	Arabic Language Certificate
	Arabic Program for Non-Native Speakers
	Qatar University
Nov. 2012 - May 2013	Arabic Calligraphy Certificate
	Islamic Museum of Arts in Qatar
Oct. 2010 – Jun. 2011	Arabic Language Course,
	ISMEK/Istanbul
Jun. 2008 - Sep. 2008	Russian Education Program,
	Academia Lingua/Istanbul
Feb. 2008 - Apr. 2008	European Union Certification Program,
	Galatasaray University/Istanbul

LANGUAGES

Turkish (Native)
English (Fluent)
Arabic (Intermediate)
French (Intermediate)
Persian (Elementary)