

Dialectics of Agent-Structure in the Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The present study, by means of structure-agent approach, seeks to explore the roots of shaping Saudi Arabia's aggressive foreign policy against Iran in the interval of 2011-2013 and the concerned signals and proofs of the Saudi behavior as a question. The outcome of the present study suggests that the developments at the macro-structural level such as the international anarchy, the change of US strategy as a superpower, change in the order and balance between and among the regional powers after the Arabian uprisings of 2011 along with change at Saudi agent level, i.e. the rise of Mohammad bin Salman's team as the offensive elites, led to the shaping of Saudi Arabia's aggressive foreign policy against Iran in 2011-2018. Admittedly, these developments at the macro-structural level along with the domestic ones in Saudi Arabia resulted in shaping Saudi's aggressive behavior against Iran in a bilateral dialectical equation. In the same vein, the proofs of this behavior against Iran at the two levels of structure and agent include the creation of military-security coalition, establishment of amicable relations with Israel, exertion of institutional pressures, economic war, media-propaganda war and endeavor to exacerbate Iran's home unrests.

Keywords: *Iran, Saudi Arabia, dialectics of agent-structure, aggressive foreign policy*

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Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia are two significant actors in the Middle East, which due to geopolitical, geostrategic and geocultural reasons, play key parts in the regional-international equations. Iran, covering an area of 1.648.195 square meters and having a population of 80 million people, is a major country in the region. Besides access to oil and gas resources and then playing a key role in the Middle East due to the Strait of Hormuz, Iran wields the 2nd substantiated gas reserves and also the 4th oil reserves in the world. Geographically speaking, Iran lies on a plot of land surrounded by the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. In terms of political stance, Iran is considered the leader of “resistance and uncompromising” in the region. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia with an area of 2.150.000 square meters and a population of 28 million people, is also a major country in the Middle East. After Venezuela, this country enjoys the 2nd substantiated oil reserves in the world, which encompasses 18 percent of the world’s oil. As the population of Saudi Arabia is 1/3 of that of Iran, its domestic oil consumption stands at a lower level and is deemed the 1st exporter of oil in the world (OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin, 2015: 8-28). In political stance, Saudi Arabia is considered the leader of “compromising and resistance” pivot against Iran.

These two major actors, featuring the said descriptions, continuously rival with each other to invigorate their part and expand their influence in the Middle East. The rivalry between the two countries in the region is simultaneously affected by their domestic developments as well as the macro regional-international

factors and developments in such a way that any transition in the Saudi-Iranian relations must be deemed to be rooted in the developments at the two levels. Accordingly, without considering the domestic factors of the two countries, the regional security order and the macro trends and developments of the international system, it fails to understand the nature of Iran-Saudi relations. The security order of the Middle East, specially after the Arabian uprisings in 2011 and susceptibility to macro changes in the US strategy, has been exposed to transition. The transition in the regional order of the Middle East has shifted the regional balance in the interest of Iran and in the disadvantage of Saudi Arabia. This circumstance along with the domestic developments in Saudi Arabia and also the rise of new agents, has led the Saudis to the approach Iran, if not hindered, will take the lead of regional order in the future (Kinninmont, 2015). The analysis of Saudi leaders of Iran's threat in the security complex of the region is based on the following two views: the first view is concerned to Iran's aggressive foreign policy. From this point of view, Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies hold that Iran's aid to Hezbollah and Palestinian groups along with support of Syria and its relation to Shiite groups in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain are in line with Iran's longterm purpose to disturb the regional balance powers particularly that in the Arab world. The second point of view concerns the rise of Iran's defense and nuclear power from which Saudi Arabia estimates as sign of Iran's aggressive intentions. In this field, it is maintained that Iran seeks to access nuclear weapons and invigorate its missile power in such a way that it is likely to equip the hostile rivals and groups against Saudi Arabia, including the Hezbollah of Lebanon, Ansarollah in Yemen and other Shiite groups.

Hence, with such a perspective at the level of agents and ruling elites in Saudi Arabia towards Iran and inception of some security changes in the countries allying with Saudi Arabia during the Arab the 2011 uprising which was synchronized with the change of the US strategic approach to the Middle East, the Saudi

regime reached the conclusion to put step into the balance, control and moderation of its major regional rival, Iran, with adopting an aggressive active approach in the region. In the same vein, the present study, through applying the dialectics of agent-structure theory, seeks to clarify the dialectical role and interconnected structural elements (regional-international developments) and agent factors (home developments in Saudi Arabia) in shaping Saudi's aggressive behavior against Iran. Besides, the signals and proofs of the Saudi aggressive approach against Iran will be analysed at the two levels of structure and agent.

I. Structure

Structural elements in shaping the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia could be categorized into international and regional systems. The international system means the existing of anarchy, division of power and the act of superpowers. The regional system means the dynamism of regional powers and developments in the balance of regional powers. Both of the two factors as the variable of macro level, have been playing a leading role in shaping Saudi Arabia's aggressive behavior against Iran since the onset of the third millennium.

International system developments: The international system includes structure, major actors and anarchy or the lack of central power at the international level. The anarchy status in the international system, as the overriding feature, encourages countries to forge alliance and coalition with superpowers in order to establish security. Saudi Arabia as a regional affiliated power, due to susceptibility to the international anarchy as well as the considerations surrounding her royal system, sustainably seeks security through forging strategic coalition with superpowers. In such a frame, Saudi Arabia, since the rise of Malik Abd-al-Aziz (the founder of Saudi regime), first, with accepting the British hegemony on the Persian Gulf and cooperation with this country, deemed alliance with Britain the main pivot in its foreign policy and later it put the strategic corporation with America on the

agenda in the format of “exchange of oil with security”. Presently, the US-Saudi strategic corporation is a consequential factor in creating the domestic legitimacy of the House of Saud (Al-e-Saud) and in formulating its foreign policy (Gause, 2014). In such a condition, any alteration in the US strategy severely affects the Saudi foreign policy strategy in various fields, including those concerned with Iran. The doctrine of Obama was a milestone in the US strategy and in shaping the Saudi aggressive behavior in the early third millennium. This doctrine which was defined as “pivot to the East Asia” was a realistic turn in the US foreign policy for sequencing the US concerns and countering major challenges. The purpose of this doctrine was to reduce the US military array in Europe, stir allies to accept more liability, reduce the US presence in the West Asia and increase the focus on the East Asia to counter the growing power and influence of China in the region and in the world as the main rival of US in the coming decades (Kay, 2013: 1-3).

The requirements to lessen the US role in the West Asia as a key principle in the doctrine, to decrease the number of military forces in the region, to avoid serious engagement in the regional crises, to reinforce the military power in reliance with domestic strength or intra-regional alliance and peaceful resolution of problems with Iran, particularly that of nuclear problem, all perniciously affected the Washington-Riyadh relations during the office of Obama because the consequence of the doctrine was to abandon Saudi Arabia in the midst of regional crises and in the rivalry with Iran. Riyadh expected the United States to directly enter crises like that of Syria, but it refused to do so (Assadi, 2016: 14). The much more substantial issue to be reviewed in the doctrine is Obama’s view towards Iran and her nuclear problem. To minimize the US engagement in the West Asia, Barack Obama flexibly formulated the US Middle East foreign policy upon the resolution of conflicts or the least dispute with Iran. The outcome of such a policy was the resolution of Iran’s nuclear problem and recognition of Iran as a regional power. As Gary Sick states,

“Obama endeavored to turn the policy of Iran’s containment into limited partnership with the country”. From Sick’s point of view, nearly all regional states, specially Saudi Arabia and Israel, were opposed to the policy (Sick, 2015).

From the Saudi’s approach, the nuclear deal, politically, economically and militarily, donated further elbow room to Iran on the Middle East chess board. From their view, regional conflicts such as Syrian crisis, Iraq, Yemen, support of Hezbollah and opposite Bahraini groups should be considered in the deal (Kalout, 2015: 26). The Saudi officials also considered the agreement with Iran as a sign of the US government’s less determination to guarantee the regional security. Accordingly, they determined to counter Iran and its allies with taking a more autonomous part by their own or counterbalance with some Arab governments. However, with the rise of Donald Trump as the US president in January 2016, the Saudi regime found an opportunity, by means of dollar diplomacy and Trump’s business-oriented approach, to enjoy US government’s capacities to counter Iran. With the rise of Trump, the US adopted a new strategy in foreign policy towards the Middle East problems which emphasizes the outsourcing of authorities to allies and the US strategic partnership renewal with them. This strategy was retrieved from the Trump’s neo-isolationism (the first America’s motto) and the new US government’s realism approach (make America great again) which emphasizes the reduction of US costs while maintenance of its dominant position in the international system. According to the new strategy in foreign policy, Trump’s administration, while trying to preserve the dominant position of the US in the international system, is not ready to implement the tasks of a hegemonic state, and it is unwilling to pay the costs of international security in the Middle East (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2018). Such an approach leads to the further partnership of Saudi Arabia in providing the regional-international security, creating the vacuum of power and expansion of rivalry in the region, new blockings, disorder and security-military conflicts in

the West Asia where Iran is at odds with Saudi Arabia as a regional rival.

The renewal of the US strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia by Trump administration, particularly in economic and military sphere, led to the exacerbation of Saudi confrontation with Iran. Only in terms of arms trade, in the first round of Trump's visit to Riyadh which was customarily in contrast to those of the former US presidents, a 110 billion dollar deal was signed with Saudi Arabia in the field of military weaponry purchase; in accordance with the deal, equipment like the THAAD missile system, multipurpose warships, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, M109 tanks, laser guided bombs, modern frigates, patrol boats, Black Hawk helicopters, Abrams tanks and mine resistant vehicles were delivered to Saudi Arabia (David, 2017). While, formerly the Saudis had purchased weaponry from the US, this volume is unprecedented in the Saudi military-political history (Holland, 2017: 2).

Saudi Arabia pursues the following purposes with taking the armament: 1. Boosting the development of military power to counter Iran and its allies like Hezbollah, Ansarollah, Hamas, Iraqi al-Hashd ash-Sha'abi, etc, 2. Offering required economic guarantee to Trump considering his economic-business characteristics in line with realizing the policies of Republicans and consequently drawing the support of the US against Iran and its influence in the Middle East, 3. Guaranteeing the stability and security of Israel in case of the break of war and required cooperation with the regime in regard with Iran's incremental influence in the region, 4. Establishing inflexible hegemony in the Arab peninsula and contact with any anti-hegemony actor through drawing hardware-software encouragements; a recent example of this was Saudi's brutal conflict with Yemen and Qatar. However, from Saudi's perspective, the major anti-hegemony actor in the region is Iran, 5. The final and most tangible goal is to forge joint military coalition and establish Arab army to counter Iran's military power (Malsin, 2017: 2-1).

The second substantial sphere in the American strategic partnership renewal with Saudi Arabia in the Trump administration, which played a key part in exacerbating the aggressive behavior of the regime against Iran, is cooperation in the field of energy, particularly the export of oil. In this field, Trump, after exit from the JCPOA (8 May 2018) and oil resanctions against Iran, immediately called Saudi Arabia to compensate for Iran's share of oil export. This regime, as America's strategic collaborator, pledged to increase its oil production up to two million barrels per day in order to redress the oil vacuum of Iran and hinder the oil price fluctuations in the global market. Hence, the idea to decrease the oil price in order to hurt Iran's economy¹ was conducted in tandem with Saudi and American officials (Tauleigne, 2018) in a way that this was one of the utmost consequential counteractive strategies against Iran.

By the same token, it is observed that the structural considerations at the international level include anarchy escalation and change in the US strategic approach which have led to Saudi Arabia's aggressive behavior against Iran; as stated by Kenneth Waltz, the theorist of Constructivist Realism, the systemic pressures (at the international level) could reshape the behavior of agent (Saudi Arabia's government) in foreign policy.

International developments: the reasons of Saudi's aggressive foreign policy at macro structural level, along with the international system developments which were formerly noted, the regional system transitions are also of a high significance. The regional system is somehow a subsystem of the main international system structure. While affected by the policy of superpowers and

1. The idea to decrease the oil price for hurting Iran's economy was first put forward in 2006 by "Navaf Abed" the security advisor to the Saudi regime. This plan was aimed to deactivate Iran's support of Hezbollah and resistance forces in Iraq which was formerly applied in Obama's administration in 2012 and recently in Trump's in 2018 to counter the regional influence of Iran (Cunningham, 5 June 2018).

international system dynamics, the regional system features its own characteristics. Meanwhile, the Middle East regional system, with respect to elements such as the presence and influence of pivotal regional powers as well as serious intimidation in cases such as ethnic, religious, home legitimacy crises and conflicts and the breakout of revolutionary developments, is considered a challenged and sensitive environment for Saudi Arabia which affects her foreign policy. In the same vein, the Middle East developments, particularly those in post Arab revolutions in 2011 are reckoned substantial transitions which have led to change in Saudi foreign policy (Seifi & Pourhassan, 2016: 87). Saudi Arabia traditionally pursues a cautious foreign policy to avoid outright confrontation with Iran and calls for coexistence. However, the crisis and instability coming out of the Arab uprisings of 2011, moved the regime out of security corner and led to escalation of aggressive actions in foreign policy, the transition which mostly emanates from Saudi Arabia's concerns and her sense of vulnerability (Echagüe, 2014). Security developments in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and Iraq since 2011 up to now are still current and these are the most substantial variables and dynamics in the region which lead to extroversion and securitization of Saudi foreign policy in the Middle East particularly against Iran. Each one of the countries exposed to such transitions enjoys specific geopolitical, ideological and geostrategic codes for Saudi Arabia which are mostly at odds with Iran's interests.

For instance, Saudi Arabia, due to vicinity to Yemen (geopolitical interests), Shiite residence in north Yemen and being contiguous to the south provinces of Saudi Arabia (ideological interests), and the critical location of Yemen in regard with Bab el Mandeb Strait and the port of al-Hudaydah (geostrategic interests), pursues the security developments of Yemen after the fall of Ali Abdollah Saleh; in the same vein, this country exercised some of her aggressive actions against the major actor of Yemen, i.e. Ansarollah and Iran, as the main sponsor of Yemen. According to Peter Salisbury, a researcher at Chatham

House, the ideological rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the utmost paramount element in shaping the model for aggressive counteraction behavior of Saudi Arabia against Yemen, as Saudis believe the Shiite Iran to be the main factor which stirs the Zaidi Houthi religionists. Saudi Arabia thinks that the Houthis as the proxy of Iran seek to dominate the political structure of Yemen unilaterally; hence, since March 2015, it announced military intervention in Yemen as a reason to counter the power of Ansarollah and hinder the influence of Iran (Salisbury, 2015: 12).

Besides Yemen, some other regional developments particularly those in Syria and Bahrain affected Saudi's aggressive behavior against Iran. The developments and protests in Yemen since February 2011, which finally led to Saudi military intervention in Manama, from Saudi officials' view, is the outcome of Iran's influence on the Shiites against Al-e-Khalifa's rule. Saudi Arabia has been continuously defining Bahrain as its backyard and sphere of influence and accordingly, it persists on maintaining the rule of Al-e-Khalifa in the country and it rejects any political reform (Henderson, 2009: 77-79). Another point in Saudi sensitivity towards the security developments in Bahrain is the demography of the country, out of which 70% are Shiite and the historical influence of Iran could be dangerous to the Persian Gulf littoral states. This point is substantial in that there exists the Shiite crowd, correlated to the Shiite of Bahrain, in Saudi Arabia and they may be affected by the Bahraini developments. By the same token, Saudi Arabia has, during the crisis of Bahrain, continuously sought to brag the calls of Bahraini opposites as sectarianism and accuse Iran of meddling in the affairs of Bahrain and in other Persian Gulf states (Mekhennet and Warrick, 2018: 32-34).

The Iran-Saudi confrontation in Syria after the security developments in 2011 lies at two levels of geopolitics and ideology. Ideologically speaking, Saudis have always threatened Syria for supporting of resistance groups for endengenering the status quo, expanding resistance (revisionism) in the region, and a

threat to the interests and future of conservative monarchies. Geopolitically speaking, the effect of the Syria crisis can be analysed from two perspectives: regional balance of power with Iran, and intervention in Syria in the spheres of Saudi Arabia in Lebanon and Palestine (Kaviani Rad et al., 2013: 13); geopolitically, one of the reasons behind Saudi intervention in Syria and invigoration of the front against Assad, is the model of substitution of order in the region based on Salafism, an affair which signifies the ideological confrontation and the rule of Alawite minority against Sunni majority. In effect, Saudi Arabia, through its proxies, seeks, harassing internal opposition to prevent solidarity amongst them, to manifest the Sunni-Shiite confrontation and support the Sunni majority; this issue allows Saudi Arabia to show religious validity to its domestic opposites, i.e. the Wahhabis who call for Jihad in the media and satellite TVs (Madawi, 2012: 20). By and large, in case of Assad's fall, and the rise of a Sunni system, Saudi Arabia will find a more desirable situation and the region will be submerged into the front of Arab conservative policies more than ever, however, in case of Syrian system's survival, the policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia will be confronted with each other more than ever, and Saudi Arabia will look for more international pressures on Iran (Nuruzzaman, 2016).

These issues signify that the structural developments in the region in conjunction with those at the level of international system are considered the most substantial variables which play a key part in shaping the Saudi aggressive foreign policy against Iran (the dependent variable). Indeed, the impact of these structural variables (at regional and international level), fail to be determinant alone; rather, these variables, in a dialectical relation with agency element (governments and states), will shape the foreign policy behavior of countries (Saudi Arabia). The following will deal with the Saudi agency in shaping its aggressive foreign policy against Iran.

II. Agent

In the frame of agent-structure dialectics and their bilateral interaction, it is implausible to overlook Saudi Arabia as an agent and its perception of trends and developments in the regional-international system. The Saudi agency includes the institutional monarchy, some figures and other actors like princes and Wahhabi Ulema who play a significant part in the foreign policy. Nevertheless, the overriding element of agency in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy¹, with respect to the power structure and polity, is the institutional monarchy and the royal family. Although some point to the struggle of the royal family to build solidarity in foreign policy, it is varied in different terms and it is contingent upon the power of kings and their intellectual galaxy (Nonneman, 2005: 355-356). Hence, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy decisions in each term, the condition and royal considerations will place in priority. Meanwhile, in some conditions, the king may consider solidarity in the Saudi family and even in the experts and in the institutions concerned with foreign policy, but some kings tend to autocracy and monopolization in foreign policy decision making (Chuckman, 2017).

In such a framework, the changes concerned to the utmost internal stratum of power in the Saudi royal family, since 2015, has led to a tendency toward the traditional conservative in the foreign policy. These changes could have roots in the developments after Malik Abdullah and the rise of Malik Salman and his perfidy in crown princess of his son Muhammad bin Salman. This change in the leadership of the Saudi polity has resulted in widespread alterations in the configuration of political

1. The polity of Saudi Arabia, as classified by Max Weber, is called neopatrimonial which features autocracy, lack of democratic political institutions, inefficient individualist bureaucracy, political monopoly, reliance on the intelligence service and armed forces, instrumental use of religion and tribal relations rather than formal and legal arrangements(refer to Weber, 1996: 394-396).

elites and different approaches in the foreign policy. While the political elites and decision takers in foreign policy in the realm of Malik Abdullah were mostly of the second generation of Abdulaziz's offsprings who regarded caution, conservatism and forbearance in the foreign policy, the emerging third generation particularly Muhammad bin Salman believes in the risky and aggressive policies. Admittedly, the emerging Saudi elites hold that the former approaches are implausible to meet the interests and security of Al-e-Saud in the existing conditions and the country wields no way except to pursue the aggressive approaches contingent upon the employment of all power elements in the region (Assadi, 2016: 11).

Accordingly, the shaping of aggressive approach in Saudi foreign policy is embedded in Salman's doctrine. The bedrock of this doctrine is to hinder the increase of Iran's regional power. In effect, the Salman's Doctrine deems Iran the main cause of many politico-security problems in the West Asia. The principles of this doctrine (in accordance with the theory of structure-agent) is the outcome of Saudi's strategic need in conjunction with the emerging regional and international situations. The goals of this doctrine also include the omission of Bashar Assad from Syria, Iran's nuclear issue resolution, Iran's growing regional power preclusion, the Shiite militia weakness in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and introducing them as terrorist groups, constituting the independent Palestinian country and finally seeking to invigorate the US-Riyadh relations (Nooralivand, 2017: 25). Salman's Doctrine, in effect, adopts an aggressive security approach towards the regional conflicts and it pursues an active intrusive function in this field; the Saudi's entrance to the war in Yemen is the primary executive instance of the doctrine, and the conflict with Qatar and continuation of proxy war with Iran's allies is included in this doctrine as well.

The goals and intentions of Salman's doctrine are frequently seen in Muhammad bin Salman and other Saudi officials' interviews. In an interview with the Atlantic journal in the early

2018, the Saudi crown prince called Iran a part of “evil triangle” in the region which pursues rule over the whole region. In another interview with the Saudi MBC network in the mid 2017, bin Salman claimed, “The main purpose of Iran is to reach the Qibla of Muslims. We do not wait for Saudi’s enter into the war, and we seek to draw the war into Iran.” He also claimed, “Iran’s extremism hinders talk to Tehran and therefore, we lack any commonalty to negotiate with Iran” (Haaretz, 2017).

Adel al Jubeir, the Saudi foreign minister as an agent in Saudi foreign policy, accuses Iran of disturbing the regional stability and claims, “Iran-Saudi relations are strained and this is nothing but the outcome of the hostile aggressive policies of Iran. We could not allow ourselves to be sentenced to death and then be expected to overlook” (Middleeast eye, 2018). By the same token, it is observed that features, thoughts and the discourse current in the agent system of Saudi Arabia and in the related officials, besides macro structural variables (regional-international) which were noted earlier, finally led to Saudi’s aggressive foreign policy against Iran. This kind of foreign policy features signals and indices in structure and agency, out of which the most substantial ones are dealt with in the rest.

III. Case of Iran

The most substantial measures and procedures adopted by Saudi Arabia against Iran at the regional-international level are:

1. Forging Security-Military Coalitions: This policy in the Saudi foreign policy has been continuous since the very early days of the Islamic Revolution and as one of the major reasons behind the foundation of the GCC, to confront Iran. Nevertheless, the Saudi coalition-building policy was invigorated in recent years after the Arab uprisings of 2011. Saudi Arabia, during the summit of Arab leaders in Sharm El Sheikh in March 2015, put forward the establishment of the “United Arab Army” or “Arab NATO”.

1. Along with Qatar and Turkey

This country tried to operate the Arab NATO with arranging Trump's trip to Saudi Arabia and inviting the leaders of 17 Arab countries to travel to Riyadh and visit the US president. The US president, in the Riyadh summit 2017, fomented this idea of Saudi Arabia with Iran-phobia speeches. In the summit, held on 21 and 22 January 2017, Trump said: "Iran is responsible for the regional instability. Iran trains terrorists and it has fomented sectarian war for decades. Iran calls for destruction of Israel. We witness Iran's adventures in Syria. We all should endeavor to isolate Iran in the region. We aim to forge a coalition to counter Iran and extremism in the region" (Whitehouse.gov 2017).

Besides, the "military Islamic coalition to counter terrorism" with 34 Arab Islamic countries and the support of 10 foreign countries of the coalition in December 2015, is another Saudi's foreign policy indices. The center of this coalition which is separate from that of "Arab Coalition", active in Yemen, is located in Riyadh. Although Saudi Arabia has announced the purpose of this coalition as struggle with terrorism, many experts deem the main purpose of this endeavor to play role and to have more tangible presence in Syria, Libya and Iraq and more importantly, the foundation of Sunni coalition in the face of the Shiite one led by Iran (Salavatian & other, 2015: 146).

2. Institutional Pressures Against Iran: the other aggressive measure of Saudi Arabia against Iran at macro structural level is institutional pressure on Iran using the capacity of the international organizations and institutions. Saudi Arabia as a member of the regional and international institutions like the GCC, Arab Union, OIC, UNSC, seeks to exploit the institutional capacity of these bodies and the existing structural power of international system in the recent years, particularly in the realm of Malik Salman, to ramp up pressures against Iran. In the same vein, after execution of Sheikh Nimr and strike on Riyadh Consulate in Mashhad and its Embassy in Tehran in 2015, Saudi Arabia encouraged some Arab, Islamic and non-Arab governments, including African countries to sever or cut down

their relations with Iran; this issue was put on the agenda of Saudi Arabia in the final statement of the Islamic Cooperation Summit in January 2015. But the furthest Saudi's exploitation of the regional institutions to counter Iran was the GCC. One evidence of this was Malik Salman's endeavor on the 37th summit of the GCC in December 2016 to forge the "Persian Gulf Confederation/Union" for a more effective serious confrontation with Iran. In this summit, the Saudi king invited Theresa May, the British premier to forge a united strong block out of the regional and ultra-regional countries (Abdul Latif bin Rashid, 2016).

Likewise, Saudi Arabia utilized the capacity of international organizations to exert pressure on Iran. The Saudi membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council, which occurred in the 33th meeting in 2016, was one of Riyadh's means to put pressure on Iran in the field of human rights. In addition, Saudi Arabia exploits the UNSC to exert pressure on Iran. Instantly, one of the most recent measures taken by Saudi Arabia is complaint against Iran in the Security Council for the pretext of transferring ballistic missiles to Yemen and the violation of resolution 2216. The Saudi report on the violation of the UNSC resolution on Sept. 14, 2016 was delivered to the UN by her permanent representative to the UN Yahya Al-Moalem (Arab News, 2017). These are just a part of Saudi endeavors at macro structural level to exploit the capacity of the regional-international organizations against the IR of Iran.

3. Ties with Israel: Of the Saudi's aggressive measures and procedures against Iran at macro structural level is to have close ties and restore relations with the main enemy of Iran, Israel. The developments occur while the Riyadh government was on the forefront of struggle against Tel Aviv in pre-Islamic revolution, and the main reason behind the formation of the Islamic Conference organization by Riyadh was the Israelite acts in blazing Masjid al-Aqsa. But in the recent years, in order to play an influential role in the region, Saudi Arabia is establishing close

relations and interrelations with Israel¹. “At the present, Saudi Arabia, due to multiple commonalities, looks to Tel Aviv as an ally not an enemy”, Says Netanyahu. In the following, he adds, “In Arabs’ policies particularly in that adopted by Saudi Arabia towards the issue of Palestine, a dramatic change is happening”. Fareed Zakaria, in this field and on the sidelines of Davus Economic Forum, says, “Rather than an enemy, Saudi Arabia deems Israel an ally because they both face two significant threats: Iran and ISIS” (Press TV, 2016). For instance, Iran-Hezbollah threat and the necessity to forge Hebrew-Arab coalition were the most substantial issues of the 17th annual summit of Hertzelia in Tel Aviv 2017. One of the most significant issues which was discussed in the meeting was that an isolated Israel without the assistance from the Arab coalition, along with the United States, is unable to confront the threats posed by the axis of resistance. In this line, Yisrael Katz the Zionist transportation minister called Arab countries to take more decisive steps for negotiation with Israel. He also called Salman bin Abdolaziz the Saudi king to lead the littoral states of Persian Gulf for taking a decisive step to negotiate with Israel. Katz said, “We need to advise security cooperation to Saudi Arabia and to the Persian Gulf littoral states (Dorell, 2017: 2).”

1. On Saudi’s closeness and interaction with Israel, it has to be said, although both actors deem the IR of Iran the main threat for themselves and for the region in a common approach, due to the sensitivity of Wahhabi groups to the Zionist regime in Saudi Arabia and the low legitimacy of this regime in the common thoughts of Middle East, they fail to consider Israel a clear ally for Saudi Arabia (McKernan, 2017). Therefore, these actors mostly take steps in line with the Track-two Diplomacy to approximate their views on Iran. The Track-two Diplomacy is referred to as political dialogues which are held between former officials, academic figures and think-tank experts. However, governments do not tackle with it, the outcome of these visits are mostly used in the formal diplomacy. This kind of diplomacy is established between and among countries which lack formal diplomatic relations.

IV. Agency level

The most substantial measures taken by the Saudi against Iran at agent level are the following:

1. Economic Pressure Through Energy: Saudi Arabia wields 1/4 of the world's oil and it is considered the 1st oil exporter with 10 million barrels a day. Beside politically exploiting the holy shrines, it has turned oil into another political tool against Iran. Saudi's exploitation of oil has been running since the outbreak of the imposed war against Iran by Iraq, but in the recent years, it has become the most tangible anti-Iran policy of Al-e-Saud. In Iran's nuclear issue, while the Iranian oil export had reached less than one million barrels per day and the international financial limitations had hindered the receipt of the dollars from the oil revenue to international sanctions, Saudi Arabia severely increased oil export and decreased the oil price. These policies have hurt the economy of Saudi Arabia and led to the severe cut of oil price in the recent years. After the JCPOA, Saudi Arabia tried to pursue the increment of oil production and impose abundant limitations on the Persian financial resources. In this field, Muhammad bin Salman the Saudi crown prince, on the eve of OPEC ministerial summit in April 2016, told that his country could drop its oil production at 11.5 million barrels in short term, and in 6 to 9 months to 12.5 barrels; even in case of investment, it could drop the production at 20 million barrels (per day) (Kemp, 2016). Having adopted this approach, Saudi Arabia opposed to oil production decrease in the late 2016 and the oil price faced a drastic decline again to the extent that the then Saudi oil minister stated, even if the oil price hits less than 20 dollars, they will not reduce their production (Ellyatt, 2016). The Saudi officials, in the current conditions in which the American government has exited the JCPOA and tries to return the oil sanctions against Iran, seek to fill the gap of Iran's oil share in the global markets with oil production increase. Hence, exploitation of oil as a means, is one of the most substantial counteractive procedures at the level of agency against Iran and it is mostly conducted in line with the

goals of major actors in the international system, particularly those of US.

2. Supporting Iran's Domestic Unrests :One of the Arabia's aggressive measures against Iran at the agency level, is attempting to foment domestic unrests in Iran. The Saudi Government, particularly after the rise of Malik Salman in 2015, has taken serious measures to disturb Iran's security. In this field, Muhammad bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince and minister of defense, in an interview, clearly declared that he will draw the war into Iran (Al-Alam network). As a result, Iran deems ISIS attacks on the parliament and the holy shrine of Imam Khomeini (ra.) as acts committed by Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, while maintaining silence on the unrests in January 2017, Iran the most stirring hashtags and invitations to unrests in Iran in its affiliated the social media. The Saudi officials have expressed many supports for the groups opposite to Iran's government in the recent years (Arab news, 2017). In this field, Turki Faisal, as the head of the Saudi intelligence services for years, participated in the annual summit of Mujahedin (MEK) in Paris in 2017-2018. His presence and direct speech against Iran are interpreted as the blatant evidence for disturbing Iran's security. The Saudi papers and news agencies like Asharq Al-Awsat, Arab News, Al-Arabiah and Saudi Gazette simultaneously and widely covered the summit in Paris and delivered analysis on the gathering. These media acted in such a harmony that they seemed to publish similar content. For instance, all the media selected this headline, "100 thousand people call for regime change in Iran in the greatest forum of Iran's opposites". Saudi Gazette: Turki Faisal was one of the lecturers whose comments were fused with emotions and slogans. He stated, "People are the first and foremost victims of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of Islamic Revolution. They want to provide for the advent of the 12th Imam with export of revolution." Like Israelite officials, he continued, "Arabs accord a special respect to Persians" (Saudi Gazette, 2016). Some days, after Turki Faisal's participation in MEK summit and chanting the

Arabic slogan, النظام اسقاط يريد الشعب, in unison with them, the Saudi Gazette, in more meddling comments, reiterated the very statements of Saddam on the eve of the imposed war. The headline of this Saudi paper, having pointed to the Iranian interests and reserves in Khuzestan province and applying the fake name of Arabia for this region, called for specifying a seat to the settlers in the Arab Union (Saudi Gazette, 2016).

3. Propaganda and Media War: As Saudi Arabia wields a pre-modern polity, its security and stability in the age of media is severely challenged. Consequently, the Saudi government has done abundant investments on this sphere. After the rise of bin Salman in 2015, Saudi Arabia tried to divert the focus from her domestic legitimacy issues to Iran and introduce it a threat. In the past years, the Saudis have established the Al-Arabiah Network, the main orientation of which is to introduce Iran a regional threat (Arab news 2017). Arab-language papers like Asharq Al-Awsat and Arab News, during the recent three years, have constructed a narrative of Iran as the regional “other” through publishing the articles written by anti-Iran and opposition writers. Revealed to be the accomplice of Israel, Al-Arabiah was substituted by Al-Mayadeen. Saudi Arabia, with a wide financial support and having made a division of media figures, invites them to varied networks and since 2015-2018, it has exacerbated its propaganda war against Iran (Alkhalij online). In addition to directing the public thoughts in the region, Saudi Arabia, having established a Farsi-language network and embedding the Farsi version of Saudi’s formal news agency, VAS, seeks to induce the directed information and affect the behavior, culture, and performance of the Iranian people and officials in order to hamper the current or routine affairs (Pourhassan, 2017: 42).

Conclusion

The current study, attempted to explore that the structure development at the regional-international level along with domestic or agent ones in Saudi Arabia, which have led to Saudi’s

aggressive foreign policy against Iran of Iran in 2011-2018. In this period, substantial developments occurred at both structure-agent levels, each one of which in the dialectical relation to the other, has played a key part in shaping Arabia's aggressive behavior against Iran. At the structural level and in the international system, besides fostering instability and dominance of anarchy in the international security relations, we witness change in the US strategic approach towards the Middle East which on the one hand emphasizes the reduction of US engagement in the region and on the other hand, it deals with assigning an autonomous part to the regional allies of Washington, particularly Saudi Arabia. Such an approach has led to the further engagement of Saudi Arabia as a traditional US ally in securing the costs of regional security, creating power vacuum and most substantially, the expansion of Saudi rivalry against the main anti-hegemony actor in the region (from the view of the West and Saudi Arabia), i.e. the Islamic Republic of Iran. Likewise, at the structural level, major security developments have occurred in the region in post-Arab revolutions in 2011 which have created instability and unrest for many traditional allies of Saudi Arabia including Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and Tunisia.

These security developments in the structure of regional environment have also been drawn into the domestic spheres of Saudi Arabia and have disturbed its security. Saudi Arabia deems the root of all these movements in the regional influence of Iran and hence, she tries to hinder it through an active aggressive approach. Beside structural elements effective in shaping the Saudi aggressive behavior against Iran, in the frame of Structure-Agent Theory, the role of the emerging Saudi agents should not be taken for granted. The emerging agents of Saudi Arabia particularly Muhammad bin Salman sustains that a way for their country to get out of security pressures in the region specially in their influence sphere, which are exerted from Iran, is to abandon the former conservative approach and adopt an active, intrusive and aggressive approach against the anti-hegemony actor in the

region. By the same token, a set of factors and developments at the macro structural level (regional-international) and at the agent level in Saudi Arabia, in an interconnected dialectical relation caused the Saudi aggressive behavior against the IR of Iran. The proofs of this behavior against Iran in reliance with structure-agent theory include the building of military-security coalitions, establishment of close relations with Israel, exertion of institutional pressures and intensifying economic war, media-propaganda war and endeavor to foment Iran's home unrests. The last point is that in regard with the impact of the two sets of structure-agent elements and factors on shaping the Saudi aggressive foreign policy against Iran, any kind of measure and endeavor must be put on the agenda to lessen the animosity between the two countries at the two structure-agent levels.

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