

Iran and Saudi Arabia: Analysis of Divergence

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Abstract

Subsequent to Mena incident in 2015 and the victimization of several thousand citizens of Muslim countries with nearly half of Iranian nationals, diplomatic and political relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia deteriorated. Although the relations between the two countries at both previous eras and prior to the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 is not a new phenomenon, a historical review is indicative of the fact that this divergence was exacerbated in the aftermath of the September 11, and reached its climax with the emergence of some issues such as the US invasion of Iraq and the Arab revolutions in South West Asia and North Africa in 2010. The current article seeks to explain the real nature and underlying causes of the divergence of the relations between the two countries of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the post-September 11. The paper hypothetically considers the substantial ideological difference as the main explanation for all of the soft and hard conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: *Iran; Saudi Arabia; September 11; Ideology; Democracy.*

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Received: 09/05/2020

Accepted: 08/07/2020

Introduction

Since the early twentieth century until today and following the formation of Saudi Royal Family, numerous disputes have been emerged between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While prior to the Iranian revolution in 1979 and since the beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty, differences were insignificant due to the cautious progression of both countries within the framework of the interests of the United States, ups and downs had never been diminished (Alvandi, 2012, pp. 369-370). In the second Pahlavi era which initiated with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia underwent conflicts in some intervals. At the time, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud was able to conquer the Hashemite Kingdom to seize the Kingdom of *Hejaz* and *Nejd*, and to establish the Kingdom of Al-Saudi Al-Arabiya. During this period, several cases led to the debate and conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. One of the most important collisions between the two countries was Saudi Wahhabis' harsh treatment of Iranians and pilgrims (Hajis), which due to insulting behavior of the rulers of Saudi Arabia toward Iranian pilgrims the political and economic relations came to a standstill within a period of four years (Ekhtiari and Others, 2011, p. 33). (Ekhtiari, Hasnita, Samsu, & Gholipour Fereidouni, 2013, p33). Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution led by Imam Khomeini, political and diplomatic process between Iran and Saudi Arabia was greatly transformed. Iranian Islamic Revolution that according to US analyst Robin Wright, should be called Great Revolution (Wright, 2000: 2) was emerged as a political earthquake in the global arena. In the meantime, the slogans of revolutionaries and their

positions all were in an attempt to establish a global Islamic state, renounce hegemony, arrogance, aggression, protect the oppressed, liberation movements, and promote Shiite Islam, and expansion and dominancy of Iran in the Islamic world. All of the above factors significantly influenced the people of the region and even the people who were not interested in the Islamic Revolution. In this regard, the Saudi government hostility towards Iran after the revolution was not highly irrational, and this is an issue that its proof is Saudi Arabia's formal and informal backing of Saddam Hussein's government. The path did change to some extent after the war and with the advent of Hashemi Rafsanjani administration. In this period, political relations between the two countries were improved. Then, with the arrival of Mohammad Khatami's government, positive trend of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia was continued. However, with the September 11 attacks and US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia followed divergent rails.

Using an analytical method, the current research seeks to find an answer to the question on the factors that led to the divergence of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia following September 11. In addition, by studying the five major challenges namely Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Iran's nuclear program, the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is analyzed from a strategic perspective, and the main hypothesis underlying the current research (i.e. substantive ideological differences as the major causes of this divergence) is investigated in the research.

Theoretical Framework

For an accurate understanding of nature of the divergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia after September 11, the paper adopts a profound theoretical perspective. Accordingly, it would be necessary to examine the relations between the two countries using constructivism as theory. Constructivism is a school that attempts to present a more genuine picture of the behavioral patterns of international politics. John Ragy regards the

main feature of constructivism as the realm of ontology (Ruggie, 1998: 33). In fact, the function of the school is to develop intellectual factors (Risse, 2000: 5). In other words, constructivists change the issue of international relations from the epistemology into the ontology (Wind, 1997: 225). Discussing the function of identity maker and immaterial factors, this school presents a recent analysis in the area of international relations, focuses on the concept of identity and considers it as a set of meanings. In this context, the identity is a set of beliefs about ourselves, others, and the relationship among them (Fearon, Wendt, 2005: 64). Actors find an identity in a collective sense and this identity as a feature of international actors creates their own behavioral tendencies (Wendt, 1999: 229). From the perspective of constructivists, understanding the identity of states in international politics and domestic arena is highly essential and can guarantee a minimum level of predictability and order. In other words, a world without global identity is chaotic and full of uncertainty, which is far more dangerous than anarchy (Hopf, 1998: 183). From another perspective, to understand identities and norms, a review of applicable significations is of significance (Zehfuss, 2001:4). In fact, using an interstitial moderate position, constructivists discuss the possibility and impossibility of knowing the truth and phenomena, and underline the material and immaterial aspects of social life (Baylis, 2011).

Now, based on constructivism, the current article finds possibility to explicate the status and impact of value-based and religious values that govern the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, and also to analyze the material factors that cause divergence between the countries after September 11. In addition, the article seeks to prove the hypothesis that the nature of discordance and conflict between the two countries revolves around identity and ideological issues.

I. Significance of the Relations

Over the past half century, the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have had a prominent position. This was an issue that subsequent to the post-revolutionary period and due to the rise of Shi'ite non-secular and democratic state led to the disturbance of the equations between the two countries. In the meantime, the Saudi political system has been structured based on the royalty from the beginning, and according to some scholars such as Niblock little change has been made in the structure and origin of this sovereignty (Niblock, 2006: 21). We should not forget that, the Saudi government has long been distrustful of Shi'ite Iran. This deep-rooted suspicion is most importantly the consequence of ethnic and religious differences. For example, the Iranian territory was occupied by the Arabs in old times, and Iranians gladly accepted all the principles and beliefs of Islam but they did not integrate into the Arab empire, and preserved their Persian cultural, linguistic and religious characteristics. On the other hand, the idea of Arab Shi'ite for Iranians was unacceptable to some extent. Thus, some Arabs considered the Shi'ite movement as opposed to the essence of Islam, and as Islam was first descended upon Arabs they attached a special importance for it (Enayat, 1982: 33). Both Saudi Arabia and Iran take privilege of a distinguished geopolitical and geo-strategic position. Both countries have massive oil and gas resources. In this regard, benefiting from its own prepared infrastructures, Saudi Arabia is more capable of oil extraction, and can play more prominent roles in oil pricing, investment, production, distribution and consumption. The country nowadays takes advantage of more than 200 billion oil reserves (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, 2018), which is a highly considerable figure. Another important issue with regard to the relations between the two countries is the leadership of the Muslim world which existed even before the Islamic Revolution.

Since the revolution, Islamic Republic of Iran introduced its national doctrine to the world with several intentions such as the

protection of the poor and liberation movements, rejection of hegemonic domination, trying to prevent the infiltration of western and eastern countries in the region, the propagation of Islam and invitation to Shiism. In contrast, Saudi government has mainly sought to preserve the status quo, and passionately endeavored to propagate and develop Salafi ideology to combat the Shia and to promote cooperation with the United States with the intention of advancing its international goals. However, it should be noted that the September 11 attacks and the presence of foreign actors in the region was a good opportunity for cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In addition, the neo-conservatives in the Bush administration accused Saudis of terrorism, proposed the Greater Middle East Initiative and democratization policy in Arab countries, and all of the actions led Saudi leaders to be partly distrustful of the United States. In contrast, United States has been always fearful of the establishment of the security in the region, hence passionately seeks to create conflicts and possible permanent war in the region to have a decisive and effective presence in the Middle East (Chomsky, 2005). This is an issue that was completely revealed after the September 11 and with occurrence of various events in the region. Therefore, for a better understanding of this issue, five major challenges between Iran and Saudi Arabia after September 11 are analyzed as below.

II. Major Challenges

Iraq crisis: Following the US invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003 and the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Shiites achieved more influence in Iraq's political and security field. Saudi Arabia as a constant rival to Iran was fearful of the current situation. On the other hand, Iran and Iraq have over 1,600 km common border (World Atlas: 2018), while the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia is only 850 kilometers. The common borders have led Iran and Saudi to be always influenced by the situation underlying Iraq, and naturally, the events occurred in Iraq directly influence

the two countries. As a result, at the beginning of the happenings occurred in Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia adopted different stances. (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2016). However, Saudi Arabia took control of three military bases and practically took part in this military operation in collaboration with US (Meriji, 2009; 35-36). Terrified of the spread of sectarian conflicts in Iraq into its country, Saudi Arabia was very concerned about the situation, but undoubtedly, the most serious concern of Saudi Arabia has long been the establishment of good ties between Iran and Iraq, and its impact on the competition between itself and Iran (Hameed: 2017). The process of forming a new government in Iraq was formed after 2005. In this year, transitional government election was held, and Shiite and Kurdish groups achieved the highest votes, and Sunni groups that had boycotted the elections attained some positions (Katzman, 2014: 2-3). Iran legitimized the elections, and Nouri al-Maliki as a member of the Shiite front took the office since mid-2006 to August 2014.

Saudi Arabia as the leader of Arab countries was upset by the rise of the Shia by democracy. In other words, the rise of Shia majority was in contrast to Salafi ideologies held by the Saudis, and as the Saudis always sought to preserve the status quo in all of the regions were concerned about the fact that lest Saudi Shiites follow the same way of Iraq Shiites and rebel against the government of Saudi (Byman, 2013). For this reason, to neutralize the Shiite influence in Iraq, Saudi Arabia prepared a vast area of Iraqi territory for terrorist activities provided by the Salafists since 2004 (Obaid and Cordesman, 2005: 4). In addition to terrorist operations, Saudi Arabia sought to influence the country's Sunni tribes and to control the border tribes and then influence the Iraqi political equations. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia made all-out efforts to create chaos and put pressure on the Iraqi Shia government to nullify and hinder Iran's influence (Hegghammr, 2008: 10). Other reports prove that, before US's invasion of Iraq, many Saudi nationals travelled Iraq to join al-Qaeda, and although the exact figure of these men is not specified at mid-2005, a Saudi

official, whose name was not released, said the figure was almost 2 to 3 thousands (Hegghammer, 2007: 10-15). This trend continued to the period after the Arab revolutions and the presence of ISIL in Iraq, and it may be the result of decade-long efforts made by Saudi Arabia to undermine Iran's position in Iraq and to have more influence in this country. ISIL's roots emanate from the events occurred in Iraq in 2004 and the establishment of Al-Qaeda network in this country. The group originally entered the war with the Iraqi government and US forces stationed in Iraq, and then took advantage of some existing deficiencies such as Sunni discontent and a sense of marginalization after decades of ruling. In addition, Saudi Arabia provided ISIL with limitless support to the extent that such group was able to capture Mosul as Iraq's second largest city. The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its official policy of seeking peace and fighting terrorism, waged war with the terrorist group from the scratch, and continued its support the Iraqi government to weaken the Islamic State. This support is strictly met with resistance from Saudi Arabia. Generally, the events of Iraq in the aftermath of September 11 have been always the center of the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and after the arrival of ISIL in Iraq's political scene, these differences were deepened, and the main reason is rooted in the different nature of the two countries.

Iran's Nuclear Case: Iranian nuclear case is another issue after the September 11 that has played an effective role on the divergence of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The approximate coincidence of US-led invasion of Iraq and allegations made by The *People's Mojahedin* of Iran (led by Massoud Rajavi) regarding the covert activity of Iran's nuclear facilities promoted the Saudi government to focus on the position of the Islamic Republic in the region. In this regard, the interference of a major power namely the United States should not be ignored. In fact, US has defined its security basis in the Middle East built upon the alliance with Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, after September 11, through inflating the danger of a nuclear Iran to

Arab countries, US hindered Iran's positive interactions with the Arab countries (Ostovar, 2018).

Fearful of disturbing the balance of power in the region that was coincident with the Iranian influence in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, Saudi leaders presented some environmental pretexts to prevent the Islamic Republic of Iran from continuing its peaceful nuclear activities (Shaheen, 2018). This was considered a form of political pretext. It should be noted that Saudi stance towards Iran's nuclear program was mainly influenced by the policy of the United States, and Saudi Arabia has made several attempts to adopt a vehement stance against Iran's nuclear program within the framework of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (Shaheen, 2018). In this regard, the final declaration of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (IOC) in December 2006 or in February 2006 are instances in which Iran's nuclear program is blamed (Vakil, 2018).

To overcome any concern, Iranian government has repeatedly and officially underlined the objectives of its nuclear program based on peace and non-military use, and insisted that its nuclear programs is used for energy production and utilization in the areas such as medical equipment, industry and agriculture in accordance with the needs of the country. In addition to transparency and rejecting the claims in connection with the nuclear case, the Islamic Republic of Iran sought to make security arrangements in the Persian Gulf region without the interference of foreign powers in building trust with the Arab countries and particularly Saudi Arabia. Typically, the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2007 expressed its interest to sign defense contracts to replace the foreign forces stationed in the region, which Saudi Defense Minister regarded direct military cooperation with Iran to protect Persian Gulf as unenforceable (Vakil, 2018: 204).

Interestingly, since the mid-1990s, Saudi Arabia has made widespread efforts to achieve nuclear weapons, and although no official document has yet been attained to prove Saudi Arabia's attempts to produce the atomic bomb, one possible excuse for Saudi Arabia to seek nuclear technology and even atomic bomb is

Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. Due to Saudi Arabia's oil-rich income and its relations with Pakistan and China (both states with nuclear weapons), this issue is not too far from logic. In this regard, al-Vatan newspaper published in Saudi Arabia, quoting from Abdullah Al-Hussein as Saudi Arabia's Minister of Water Resources and Energy informed that Saudi Arabia seeks to build the first nuclear power plant for peaceful purposes backed by the US (Zeraatpishe, 2005).

The nuclear dispute between Iran and Saudi Arabia continued until the Arab revolutions. During this period, in addition to increase in Iranian influence in the region compared to 2001, sensitivity to Iranian influence in neighboring countries and its influence in the region was doubled by Iranian nuclear issue. The best stance adopted by Saudi Arabia was to convince Iran to retreat from its position under pressures imposed by the USAs as the Saudi's ally. Saudi Arabia seeks to win the maximum on the nuclear issue by the lowest cost. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia's politicians allied with US are trying to implement their goals, and it is an issue that emanate from the ideological similarities between the two countries. under the light of the final agreement between Iran and the P5 + 1, although Iran's nuclear program is not absolutely eradicated, Saudi Arabia finds the opportunity to prepare itself for a new political order. Success in preventing Iran's progress is the goal that Arabic countries and America seriously seek to attain.

Syria: Perhaps the most severe confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia following the occurrence of Arab revolutions is the civil war occurred in 2011 in Syria. After the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Syria was the first Arab state that recognized the Islamic Republic of Iran on 12 February 1979. On the other hand, Syria is the only Arabic country that plays an independent role in regional and international equations. Undoubtedly, the conflict and serious disagreements between Israel and Syria is the most pivotal strategic importance of Syria in the region. The adjacency of Syria and Iran has caused Syria to act as a proxy for

Iran. In fact, Syria is considered to be Iran's strategic depth, and can act as a link with Hezbollah and is the main channel for strengthening the resistance front (Samii, 2008: 29). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has long been fearful of the close relations between Iran and Syria and has always waited for an opportunity to subvert Syria's regime. This issue was initiated since 11 September, and reached the peak in 2011.

From the perspective of many political elites, US policies in the Middle East after September 11 and the widespread presence of military forces in the region especially Iraq in 2003 has been instrumental in expanding ties between Syria and Iran (Goodarzi, 2006). In that period, to avoid the wrath of the US government and for condemning the event, the Syrian government cooperated with the US and provided this country with some information on Al-Qaeda. However, the United States has never been satisfied with the aid of Syria and believes Assad is not severed its cooperation with terrorist groups (Leverett, 2005: 16). The US government's increasing threats against Syria provoked this country to introduce US as a threat to its interests, and deepened its strategic and security relations with Iran. Iran and Syria believed that United States seeks a *Greater Middle East* and is looking for a new alliance with Israel, Turkey, Iraq and Afghanistan. Accordingly, Syria and Iran were fearful of a possible isolation that made them vulnerable to Israel and US's attacks. Thus, from that year onwards contracts of cooperation between the two countries deepened, Syrian troops were trained by Iranian forces, bilateral cooperation in the fields of economy, politics, intelligence and energy did occur (Sun, 2009: 9).

This trend continued among the friends and enemies of Syria for nearly a decade. However, since 2011 and the beginning of the unrest in Syria, the trend was shifted in another direction. The protests in Syria after three months turned into a civil war, and the opponents and proponents turned to bloody clashes for domination over different areas. The first signs of Assad's opponents' utilization of armed weapons became apparent to the

public opinion in the early June 2011. In this period, the rebels in northern Idlib killed a number of the government's security forces and implemented first armed conflict against the government, and in all these riots the footsteps of other foreign countries could be traced. In this regard, a report provided by Reuters showed that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have increased their financial aid to the Syrian rebels more than the past, and CNN on 20 August 2012 revealed that Saudi Arabia has contributed \$ 150 million to the rebels in Syria (Spetalnick, Mason and Edwards, 2014).

following the events in Syria and limitless support of Western and Arab states to overthrow Bashar al-Assad, the Islamic Republic of Iran considered the rebels in Syria different from what happened during the Islamic awakening movements in other Arab countries. Thus, Iran's strategy in Syria became the survival of Assad, because Iran via Syria, is linked with non-governmental partners such as Lebanon and Palestine. On the other side of the coin, Saudi Arabia due to regional extensive competition with Iran, more than any country, is determined to subvert the government of Bashar al-Assad and to reduce Iran's regional power. This is because Iran after the revolution has strengthened its influence in terms of regional policy in the Arab world and this is not pleasant for Saudi Arabia (El-Hokayem: 2007, 44).

As a result, King Abdullah in August 7, 2012 presented a statement and urged Syria to terminate the slaughter of the Syrian people and take more rational decisions. In this statement, Saudi Arabia openly blamed and criticized Assad's government (Rydell, 2017). Saudi Arabia did not limit itself to issuing the statement and tried to exert pressure on the Syrian government by appealing to the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. For example, in one of its statements the Council expressed anger and regret for the killing of Syrian children, women and elderly by Assad's regime, and announced its aim to track accurately the events occurred in this country. After this stage, Saudi Arabia made further attempts to increase political and diplomatic support for the opponents of Bashar al-Assad (Hampton, 2014: 11). Another policy followed

by Saudi Arabia's decision-makers is to strengthen the opponents of Bashar al-Assad, who are mostly Salafi. In another sense, the Saudi government is seeking to implement the idea of Salafis in the region which demonstrates the ideological confrontation between Shia and Sunni.

In sharp contrast to Saudi Arabia, Iran believes that the opposition's victory and the removal of Bashar al-Assad causes Iran to be deprived of one of the most important allies in the region, and in case of such strategic blow, the resistance front against Israel will be weakened. Iran also considers Salafism as opposed to principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, Hezbollah as the main ally of Iran since 2011 began to assist Assad in terms of political and advisory issues. However, in the fall 2011, according to the media reports, Hezbollah forces in Homs and Damascus entered an armed battle (Ian and Roberts, 2014). This support was increased in early 2013 by Hezbollah, and Hezbollah Secretary General in August 2013 announced that seeks to double its fighters in Syria. In another step, the Islamic Republic of Iran in connection with the Shiites in Iraq started the formation and mobilization of a group as defenders of the shrine to defend Damascus Zeinabieh. The group's main goal to defend the religious places, especially Zeinabieh in Damascus where the most senior officials of the Syrian Ba'ath party live in that area (Hauslohner, 2013). In general, the events unfolding in Syria can be considered an ideological confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which in this war, Saudi Arabia have found an opportunity to spread its influence in the Middle East and in this way can increase its achievements against Iran. Thus, the fall of the Syrian political system is a weakening of Iran, an issue which has not yet happened and Saudi Arabia is seeking to accomplish it at any rate.

Yemen: Another issue that has contributed to further divergence between Iran and Saudi Arabia is Yemen. Yemen is considered a fertile area in the Arabian Peninsula, and due to its location in the northern part of Strait of Bab el Mandeb and linking the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean is considered the nearest

waterway between East and West (Blasina, 2017). Yemen is among the relatively expansive and important countries in Arab world. The country has an area of 528 square kilometers and is more expansive than a total of five Arabic countries Qatar, UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait. The country's population, according to the statistics presented in 2012, is 24 million which 55% are Sunni, 42% Shia, and Hinduism, Christianity and Jewish accounts for 3 percent of the country's population (World Population Review, 2019).

Yemen is among the countries that following the events of September 11 became one of America's regional allies in the anti-terrorist campaign. At that time, America's military and intelligence forces attended Yemen, and Israel's various bodies secretly traveled to Sana'a (Byman, 2018). This issue created many protests in Yemen and led to the start of fighting between Northern Yemeni Shi'ite and central government. In addition to the conflicts in 2004, five other clashes were ensued between the Houthis and the Yemeni government in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009, and the most important of these conflicts is the war in 2009 with the intervention of the US, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (Reuters, 2018). This trend continued until 2011 and the fall of Abdullah Saleh. In the meantime, as Saudi Arabia and Yemen have 1458 square kilometers of common border in the North and West parts, Saudi Arabia was concerned about the movements. It should be noted that Al Saud throughout its history have always preferred a weak and chaotic Yemen. Since the era of Abdul-Aziz, one proverb was popularized among Saudi Arabia officials: "your comfort is in the weakness of Yemen and your happiness is in its suffering" (Sadeghi & Ahmadian; 2011: 270). On the other hand, cognizant of such negative stances and due to deep-rooted border disputes with Saudi Arabia, Yemenis do not have positive attitude toward Saudi Arabia, and especially Saudis took some intruding actions in the course of the unity of Yemen. In fact, Saudis are fearful of the collapse of the tribal system in Yemen and they cannot tolerate an independent and unified country, and even fear

that lest the wave freedom and democracy finds its way inside the Saudi borders in the future. During the Arab revolutions and protests in Yemen against Saleh, Saudi Arabia greatly assisted him to suppress the opponents. For example, Saudis provided Saleh with the large amount of weapons and armored vehicles. However, finally, not able either to tolerate the Yemeni people's demands, Riyadh elected the deputy of Saleh Mansour at the head of the affair in the form of a plan proposed by Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and through nominal and dictated elections. Mansour Hadi during its sovereignty was not able to convince the revolutionaries, and since 2014, anti-government protests against the interim government were began and led to his escape and Saudi Arabia's military attacks o Yemen.

Saudi Arabia whose interests were threatened, in 26 March and after Ansarollah's forces conquer of Aden attacked Yemen along with an alliance of the Arabic countries such as Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan and the United Arabic Emirates. The dominance of Shiites who are opposed to the Saudi's policies is very heavy and unbearable for Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia knows that Yemen has four geopolitical positions: Yemen's overlooking the Gulf of Aden, complete overlooking the Bab el-Mandeb, complete overlooking the Red Sea, and Yemen's domination of Maran strategic mountains that extend from Aden coasts to Taif in the southwestern part of Saudi. For this reason, it can be said that the range of any evolution in Yemen could be extended to the surrounding areas and Horn of Africa (Bazzi, 2018).

In this regard, Saudi Arabia is trying to prevent Ansarollah from gaining power in Yaman's body. In fact, the involvement of Ansarollah as a Shia-based group in the power that can undoubtedly strengthen the sphere of influence of Saudi Arabia in the region and may weaken the position of Saudi Arabia in the region.

In the face of attempts to undermine Yemen, Iran in its official meetings with the Yemeni authorities and other countries

have underlined Yemeni's territorial integrity and stated that the optimal strategy to resolve Yemen's crisis is decision making by all political groups and parties for Yemen's future. However, an identity relations exist between Yemen and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and figures like Hossain Badreddin Houthi should be named that was strongly influenced by the views of Imam Khomeini, yet he was killed in 2004 War in Yemen. In most of his speeches, Badr refers to Imam Khomeini and the Iranian revolution, and because of his interest in Hezbollah and Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah, he used to raise Hezbollah across the Saada region. He was among the protesters in connection with the nature and causes of America military presence in Yemen, and believed that the prayer that is recited without saying "down with Israeli" is not accepted by God. For example, after the Houthis seized Sanaa they created the possibility of direct access to Iran to fight facilitated Iran's access to the port of Hodeidah, and signed lucrative oil treaties with Iran. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in which a number of Western and Arabic countries have closed their embassies in Sanaa (Website Asr-e Iran, 2014).

Cognizant of the Houthis's devotion to Iranian revolution, and seeing Yemen always as its own backyard, Saudi Arabia sees Iran's influence in Yemen as a form of threat to its interests. In this regard, Fareed Zakaria as one of the most famous political analysts believes that Yemeni's Houthis are supported by Iranians, yet it is not specified how much they have influence on the Houthis, and the problem is that Saudi Arabia considers Shia government in Yemen as a big problem (Zakaria, 2018). Beyond all existing analyzes, Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the unrest in Yemen did not retreat from its allegations about the involvement of Iran to justify its military intervention in Yemen. According to the mentioned points on Yemen and Iran's essential support of Houthis due to historical background and cultural and religious links, significant divergence between the two Shia and Sunni countries has occurred.

Bahrain: Among the important countries of the Persian Gulf

region that suffers from an improper political, economic and social situation is the Kingdom of Bahrain. Bahrain's ruling is now under the control of Al Khalifa which its roots must be sought in 1783. In this year, a Saudi group located in Najd region invaded Bahrain to seize the country and the group was able to capture the whole Shia Island (Peterson, 1991: 10), and so much effort was made to change the island's Shiite fabric.

After the separation of Bahrain from Iran in 1971, which found a legal recognition based on Security Council Resolution 278, many ups and downs occurred in the relations between Iran and Saudi. In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, the people of Bahrain with mass protests in the country supported Iran's Islamic revolution and called for greater solidarity with Iran's nascent revolution. The solidarity of the Muslim people of Bahrain and revolutionary Iranians was so much that the Islamic Front for the *Liberation of Bahrain* had associations with Iran's revolutionary leaders before the overthrow of the Mohammad Reza Shah. It was an issue that Al Khalifa did not confirm at any rate. Notably, cognizant of Bahrain's historical relations with Iran, their shared religion, and also the good relations between the countries, Saudi Arabia is concerned about any tension in Bahrain. On the other hand, in case of the fall of Al Khalifa, not only the alliance between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain would be removed, the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council will be shattered, and Saudi Arabia will fail to compete with Iran in this course, which can even lead to provocation of 15% Shiite population in Saudi Arabia and imposition of more pressure on the Saudi government (Bronson, 2011: 1).

After September 11 and the conversion of Bahrain into the deployment center of American forces, the issue led to Iran's dissatisfaction, and Saudi Arabia that had always regarded Bahrain as a part of its national security area shaped closer relations with Bahrain due to the alignment of its interests with those of US. Divergence between Iran and Saudi Arabia after the events of the September was doubled with the start of the Arab

revolutions including Bahrain people's riots.

The revolutionaries of Bahrain had five major slogans to announce their demands: limiting the power of Al Khalifa through the constitution, increase in the power of the Council of Representatives, resolving unemployment and increasing economic opportunity, replacing sensitive positions that were under the control of members of the Al Khalifa, and amending the electoral law and greater electoral freedom (Katzman, 2012: 6). In Bahrain, political and economic powers are in the hands of minority and in the area of appropriate and fair distribution of wealth, a clear abuse of Shia rights has been occurred, and this group despite enjoying from minority has been constantly at risk of discrimination (Choi, 2003: 41). In the meantime, Saudi Arabia and Iran that looked for maintaining status quo and changing the prevailing situation expressed their own different political positions. During the protests against the regime of Al-Khalifa, Saudi government repeatedly accused Iran of interfering in Bahrain's internal affairs, and the allegation was repeatedly negated by Iran. Notably, unlike other Arabic countries, the protests in Bahrain due to the confrontation between predominantly Sunni Bahrain rulers and largely Shia protesters found a different situation, and some Saudi authorities considered it to be the initiation of a new cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the Safavid, Iranian and Shia conspiracy to control Arab world (Mandawi, 2011). In this regard, King Abdullah said: "Security of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia is indivisible, it is two bodies with one soul" (Teitelbaum, 2011: 2). Given Saudi government's sensitivity and public support from al-Khalifa, concurrent with the rise of unrests and protests and Bahrain government's inability to suppress such actions, Saudi government dispatched about 1,000 troops along with 500 EUA troops under the "The Peninsula *Shield* Force (or Peninsula *Shield*)" related to Persian Gulf Cooperation Council to assist the Bahraini government. Through such action, Saudi Arabia sought to stabilize the status quo and to preserve its interests in Bahrain.

Accordingly, the two countries repeatedly raised the threat of Iranian meddling in the affairs of Bahrain to introduce the unrest occurred in the country as sectarian and religious conflicts to be able to shift Bahrain's population balance toward Sunnis and Wahhabis.

The Islamic Republic of Iran considers a special status in Bahrain for itself in terms of material interests in political and security arenas. The first reason is that Bahrain is geographically important for the Islamic Republic of Iran, and precisely due to this reason, Saudi and American forces attended this country with an intention to dominate and control political and security currents in the country. Secondly, Bahraini people are mainly Shi'ite, and they have also share race and origin with native Iranians residing Persian Gulf islands. The Islamic Republic of Iran that endeavors to support all the Muslims in the world cannot be indifferent to the rights of the fellows in the region. However, resorting to Shia-Sunni rivalries, Saudi Arabia seeks to extend its influence in Bahrain, and in case of not controlling such ambition, the situation becomes more complicated. On the other hand, Iran has always defended all liberation movements that are consistent with the Islamic awakening, and sought to prevent security threats against the Islamic movements, something that in itself increases the security coefficient of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and paves the way for accomplishing regional and global objectives. This is an issue criticized by Saudi Arabia due to ideological and strategic differences.

Conclusion

Discussing relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, it could be said that there is a considerable number of strategic conflicts between the two countries. What is clear and explicit is that the impact of the Saudi-Iranian ties revolves around identity and cultural factors. In fact, all the conflicts and tensions between the two countries are built upon abstract and ideological foundations. On this basis, the two countries have never had strategic partnerships, and have long adopted a hostile approach toward one

another, and all transactions taken place between the two countries have been purely tactical. It could be argued that all frictions between Riyadh and Tehran over the five topics discussed in the paper are just excuses, and all of them is related to identity conflicts. In other words, the disturbance of the balance of power in the region is a spark for the emergence of differences between the Sunni and Shiite thought, and the roots must be sought in the early Islam. Meanwhile, if we want to recognize the main cause of this divergence, or, in other words, the spark that caused the revelation of the truth regarding the dark relations between the two countries, the September 11 should be further analyzed. The incident prompted the United States to establish a new order for global management, and in such order, Iran and Saudi Arabia were in opposition. In this regard, the September 11 attacks can be an effective factor in revealing the deep chasm between the two countries. Accordingly, the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is considered to be a material reductionist collision, because material factors in the Middle East have never been the main cause to the opposition of the two countries, and such matters have merely acted as a mere excuse for the two countries. Based on this analysis, although many pilgrims from other countries lost their lives, it was Iran that showed most serious reactions to Mena incident, which caused the two countries to oppose each other seriously once again. Notably, the divergence between Iran and Saudi Arabia after September 11 can be a secondary factor in developing the conflicts between the two countries, and the main reason must be sought in different worldviews adopted by Saudi Arabia and Iran.

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