

Iran and Saudi Arabia: The Regional Competition of Soft Power

Meysam Ghafarinezhad

(PhD student in International Relations, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran)
mghafari70@yahoo.com

Hamed Kazemi

(PHD in Political Science, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran)
hkazemi1368@yahoo.com

Hojjat Yavari

(Master of International Relations, Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran) yavari.hojjat@yahoo.com

Abstract

Soft power is one of the main concepts in international politics. Decision-makers and policymakers in this field seek to be able to achieve their foreign policy goals. Therefore, gaining international prestige and influence in public opinion are among the important and at the same time unspecified goals of countries' diplomacy in the field of international politics. Since the 1950s, the issue of soft power has entered the political literature of Saudi Arabia. This issue, which has long been the focus of Saudi officials, has originated from a variety of sources. An attempt is made, on the one hand, to describe the potential resources that have made it possible for the foreign policy apparatus of this country to be used, and on the other hand, to show the position of soft power in the country's foreign policy in the Middle East and the Islamic world. Also, what effect will this Saudi action have on the foreign policy of the countries in the region, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran. The question is, what are the

main sources of Saudi soft power? And what are the consequences for the regional position of the Islamic Republic of Iran? The main sources of Saudi Arabia's soft power production include Cultural, economic, and international resources. In case of successful use of these resources by Saudi Arabia, it will have consequences for Iran such as reducing Iran's influence in the region, promoting anti-Shiism in the region, and weakening Iran's leadership position in the region.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, soft power, productive resources, foreign policy, Islamic Republic of Iran.

Received: 2022-06-26 Review: 2022-07-30 Accepted: 2021-11-04 Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs, Vol. 12, No. 2, Summer and Autumn 2021, pp. 353-375

Introduction

Along with the rapid and astonishing evolution of information and communication and the evolution of the nature of power, some thinkers, including Joseph Nye, have named other forms of power in the post-industrial age. In his division of power, Nye first coined the term "soft power" as opposed to "hard power" and, referring to the information revolution, argued that the conditions for soft power had changed dramatically in recent years. The information revolution and globalization have fundamentally changed the world, (Izadi, 2008:10). The information revolution and virtual networks have transcended national borders, making transnational cooperation and non-governmental actors more important, (Nye, 2005:10).

The growing importance of soft power lies in the combination of power sources, and any country that can have a suitable level of these dimensions can optimally withstand currents and threats of soft material, and in addition to reproduction, especially from soft material. Soft power has been used as a term in political science and especially in the field of human conflicts since ancient times. With the presence of religions, especially Islam and its rapid spread in the world, the role of soft power was highlighted and became a decisive factor. Islam spread not on hard power but on soft power. From the sixteenth century and the formation of the nation-state system and the domination of materialist ideas in the West, soft power was gradually forgotten or overshadowed by hard power (Suri Qarlivand and Rashid, 2011: 8)

In today's world, culture, public opinion, democracy, human rights and other social values and technology; They are the most important elements and sources of soft power; Because by using it, the desired goals can be achieved and the decisions and policies of others can be changed by providing appropriate and useful public results resulting from the use of these resources and elements of power (Poor Ahmadi 2010:37). Soft power is very important, especially in the Middle East. In the age of modern global media, with the help of new communication and

information technologies, gaining soft power is much easier than gaining and maintaining hard power, and governments can redefine new security concepts if they can. In that case, they do not have to strengthen their huge military divisions. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is trying to increase its influence in the Middle East region by using its soft power and using it correctly, and it will still be able to maintain its influence in this strategic region. The question is, what are the main sources of Saudi soft power? And what are the consequences for the regional position of the Islamic Republic of Iran? The main sources of Saudi Arabia's soft power production include: Cultural resources, economic resources, international resources. If Saudi Arabia successfully uses these resources, it will have consequences for Iran such as reducing Iran's influence in the region, Shiism in the region, and weakening Iran's leadership position in the region.

Conceptual Framework:

However, scientists such as Max Weber by definition of charismatic power, Edward H. Work through the power of domination of thoughts and Hans. G. Morgenthau referred to areas of soft power by defining characteristics and spirits, but the term was first used by Joseph Nye in 1990. He divided power into hard and soft groups. In terms of tools, the tools that governments use to exercise soft power are intertwined with intangible resources, such as culture. For Nye, soft power is valued by those abilities that help countries absorb what they want. These capabilities reduce the cost to countries of achieving the goals and uses of coercion, (Nye,2004:11-15).

Based on the model of soft power, countries try to force other actors to align themselves with their own interests. In this sense, soft power is not limited to the capacity to influence or even change the public opinion of the target country, but is a broad concept consisting of short-term and long-term cooperation based on the pursuit of mutual interests. In a sense, soft power persuades others instead of using coercion. Persuasion to what will be achieved by the obvious advantage of the parties. Soft power is also used through appropriate actions and decisions to increase a country's credibility.

Of course, it should be noted that the space of influence of soft power and its sphere of influence is completely different from the space of mere advertising and the expansion of advertising and effects based on emotions caused by advertising influence, although today advertising is one of the tools or methods of soft power. In other words, soft power should not be equated with populism. Soft power means specializing, rationalizing and scientificizing the sphere of influence of power in all areas. Joseph Nye argues that the appeal of issues such as soft power comes from three separate sources;

- The need for a proper understanding of the concept of culture;
- The values and what must be addressed within or outside the scope of the duties of governments; And
- Foreign policy as a legitimate and morally desirable policy.

According to Nye, some of the factors that produce or strengthen soft power are: the promotion of language and literature, the promotion of transcendent ideals and values, appropriate and extensive diplomatic relations, cultural relations and exchanges, and the presentation of a desirable image of oneself. , Designing and implementing acceptable strategies and policies, eliminating negative historical mentalities, gaining advanced scientific position, high economic capability, power to shape and control public opinion, power to influence beliefs and attitudes, power of production and publication Diverse media products to countries and influence in international media.

Unlike hard power, soft power can change the behavior of countries without coercion and by offering economic benefits. In a sense, soft power motivates others to crave whatever they want. This will be achieved through the power of attraction. Of course, in the view of Joseph Nye, hard power can sometimes be a consolidator of soft power and has a special function of attractiveness as the axis of soft power for the audience (Ibid, 2004: 7).

Developments in recent decades in the field of international relations also indicate the importance of soft power in achieving goals and improving relations between governments.

Therefore, gaining international prestige and influence in public opinion are among the important and at the same time unspecified goals of countries' diplomacy in the field of international politics, which is important in terms of position, position, facilities, opportunities and The cultural capacities of each country are done in different ways. For this reason, governments seek to consolidate the epistemological foundations of their culture and to extend the values, knowledge, and attitudes produced beyond their geographical boundaries. By using the method of cultural persuasion instead of using force, governments intend to align the minds and public opinion of the world with their goals. A set of internal and external sources constitute Saudi soft power; While some of them are material and tangible resources, some of them are intangible, but at the same time they have strong and effective effects. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia's soft power resources can be divided into three categories: 1- Domestic resources 2- International resources 3- Material resources

I-Cultural Resources of Saudi Arabia's Soft Power

The Religion of Islam: The most important source of Saudi Arabia's soft power is Islam. This country is the cradle of the rise of Islam, where the holy places of all Muslims in the world, especially Mecca and Medina, are located, and millions of pilgrims visit it every year. Every Muslim prays five times a day to the Qibla in this country. This religious significance has enriched the soft power of this country and has always increased its ability to face regional opponents (in the Islamic world and the Middle East). The Hajj Organization itself has incorporated the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into an important and practical network of relations with other Muslim countries. As a reflection of the central role of Islam in formulating the internal legitimacy of the Saudi regime, Riyadh considers itself a progressive political role among Islamic states (Hineh Bush and Ehteshami, 2011: 368-369). In addition, the representation of Sunni Islam, which has the largest number of Muslims belonging to this religion, has made Saudi Arabia symbolic and influential among them. Thus, these unique historical

conditions are the basis of the most important moral source of soft power that has supported Saudi Arabia in expanding its influence in the region.

Saudi Monarchy Traditions: The monarchy of Saudi Arabia has a special kind of social homogeneity and harmony. The main reason is the existence of an Arab rule, the religion of Islam and the Arabic language. Similarly, the Saudi people hold a series of common cultures and values that have not only led to the common coexistence of the people, but have also created a special sense of nationalism and loyalty to the country. While compared to most heterogeneous societies present in the Middle East it has a certain cohesion. Unlike other societies that suffer from differences in values between individuals in their society, a homogeneous society is a positive feature and one of the main sources of Saudi soft power. Therefore, Saudi soft power has local and international supporters. Is for the role of countering the threat posed by Iran (Alanaze, 2015: 35). This tool is mostly used for sabotage in the Sunni areas of Iran and with the financial support of this country, it tries to fulfill its goals due to the heterogeneity of the population in Iran.

But some scholars have criticized the absolutist approach to this social homogeneity and cohesion, arguing that Saudi Arabia is religiously pluralistic and that there is a Shiite minority in the country. It is estimated that Shiite Muslims in the country are predominantly Sunni, a minority group that comprises 10 to 15 percent of the country's population. This community is concentrated in the eastern province. After 1980, the conflict between the two communities shifted from a military confrontation to the Saudi Shiite movement for equal rights and recognition of their cultural rights. But Saudi Shiites who work for the rights of their community within the Sunni community, their religious expression or their political participation and civil rights are limited and deprived of economic progress (Constantin, 2016: <http://www.alterinter.org>). The existence of the Shiite minority is an Achilles' heel and a challenge to this aspect of Saudi Arabia's soft power, which has somewhat shaken Saudi demographic cohesion. However, the Arabic-speaking and

Muslim population is still a prominent component of Saudi soft power sources.

The system of values: Values are considered as the accepted standard for action and behavior in a group, organization and community. Thus, values provide the basis for what is good or bad in a sociological environment. Values can be classified into moral, political, economic, social, cultural, and religious categories. Saudi Arabia's values are generally derived from Islam. Given the influence of religion on people's lives and the importance of Saudi Arabia as a place where the Holy Land is located, Islamic values play an important role in attracting more people to support government decisions at the domestic and international levels. Thus, the support of the people for the Saudi government is undoubtedly a source of power for the country in the Middle East, including in relations with Iran (Shoult and Salman, 1999: 16).

The ideology of Wahhabism: In addition to the cultural appeal of Saudi Arabia, which is the product of the flourishing religion of Islam in different parts of the world, Wahhabism's ideology is another source of Saudi soft power. It is in Saudi Arabia, the strong presence of this sect, which is claimed by Al-Sheikh, a descendant of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, in the Saudi political structure, has been able to give some religious legitimacy to the Saudi rulers. Create other Islamic countries. In addition, Saudi rulers have sought to strengthen their position in the region by establishing formal and informal international institutions among Islamic countries, with religious schools established by Saudi scholars throughout the Islamic world as an informal institution of Saudi religious leadership, especially among Sunnis Salafi Muslims emphasize (rasad, 1394). On the other hand, the creation of the "World League of Muslims" by Saudi Arabia in 1962 in response to the cultural activities of Gamal Abdel Nasser, added another source of Saudi soft power; Headquartered in Mecca, the organization communicates with the Muslim masses through religious, cultural and educational activities in Islamic countries.

II-Material Resources of Saudi soft Power

Income from Mecca and Medina: Places Mecca and Medina are places to which millions of people from all over the world flock every year to perform the Hajj. According to recent estimates, more than two million pilgrims traveled to Saudi Arabia during the Hajj (CNN Library, 2017). In recent decades, Saudi Arabia has expanded the possibility of making religious ceremonies easy. These pilgrims usually have a positive image of the trip as well as the services provided by the Saudi government in the holy places and cities of Mecca and Medina when they return to their countries and tell it to their compatriots. In addition to the Hajj pilgrimage, the Umrah pilgrimage is performed throughout the year and a separate visa is issued for the pilgrims. In 2016, more than six million people or more than 80% of pilgrims went to Saudi Arabia for Umrah. Seven years ago, the number of Umrah pilgrims was about four million, and Saudi officials expect the number of Umrah pilgrims to reach about 12 million in four years. In 2016, the Saudi government's direct revenue from pilgrims was about \$ 12 billion. A total of 8,330,000 pilgrims spent about \$ 23 billion, (ISNA News Agency, 2016).

Oil Revenues: Financial and economic power is another material source for Saudi Arabia's soft power. Estimates of the Saudi economy have shown growth in recent years, and this has been due to high oil prices, expanding private sector activity, and so on. The Saudi economy plays an important role in the global oil market and its stability. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranks first in the world in terms of oil exports and reserves, and fifth in terms of natural gas reserves. In addition, the kingdom is considered one of the most important members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC. Given that the largest oil producer, its policies affect the price of this international strategic commodity and support the country's soft power at all regional and international levels (Butter, 2014: The Market Oracle).

Saudi Arabia's participation in the G20 summit as a member of the summit, due to Saudi Arabia's position as an important player in the energy market, as well as the large volume of international trade and higher financial resources that affect the

global financial system (Behrendt, 2009: Carnegie East Center Middle). The expansion of Saudi Arabia's economic role has contributed to its inclusion in the ranks of major emerging economies in the world such as China, India and Turkey. This positive outlook has played an important role in highlighting the economic position of Saudi Arabia and a major player in the Middle East, the Islamic world and the Arab world.

Investment: Another aspect of its financial power is measures such as lending to poor countries to advance their own development programs. One of the most important organizations in this field is the Saudi Fund for Development, which contributes to lending, funds and its activities are not limited geographically. The organization, called Al-Tanmiya Saudi Fund, also has an active website (<https://www.sfd.gov.sa>). The most important goal of this organization or fund is to allocate funds and give loans to developing and various countries to advance development programs and projects, and it deals with the governments of developing countries in this regard. A prime example of this is the Marwi Dam project in the Republic of Sudan (North Sudan), in which Saudi Arabia has played a significant role; A project that was considered as a model for Arab economic cooperation. This project was completed in 2010.

III- International Sources of Saudi Soft Power

Saudi Arabia has been an internationally influential country politically, culturally (Islamic-Arab) and economically, and has claimed regional leadership in the Arab-Islamic world and the Middle East in recent decades. Although Saudi Arabia has a small population (33 million people, 16 million of whom are nationals or citizens), it has a land area (2.149 million square kilometers) and the longest coastline in the region. It is the largest oil producer not only in the Middle East but all over the world. The country's crude oil exporters account for about one-fifth of the world's proven oil reserves. It also has the sixth largest natural gas reserves in the world. The ancient history and geographical location of this country complements its economic importance. The ancient heritage of Arab culture in

this region and Islam has brought its importance in the Islamic and Arab world as well as its international respect.

Energy: Despite all these considerations, it can be said that Saudi Arabia is one of the most important and influential centers in the Middle East, the Arab world, the Islamic world, and internationally, the energy world. Considering the political and economic importance of these four worlds or the network and position of Saudi Arabia in them, the importance of this country emerges. Although hard power, especially Saudi Arabia's material and economic resources, has played an important role in expanding its influence and diplomatic maneuver, after the second half of the twentieth century, the Saudis have always sought to harness their soft power to achieve goals and maximize their influence. There have been different areas. Their multilateralist policies, at the regional and international levels, have increased the country's communication power and diplomatic maneuver, and are considered a source of their soft power. Globally, Saudi Arabia joined the United Nations in 1945, shortly after its founding. An important member of the International Monetary Fund is the World Bank and most recently the World Trade Organization. In terms of regions, he has been a founding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Arab League, the Union of the Islamic World (Islamic World Relations), the Organization of the Islamic Conference known as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. He also expressed his support for the formation of the Arab Customs Union in 2015. (Gallarotti and Al-Filali, 2012: 24)

In recent years, cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the countries of the Persian Gulf has continued in various dimensions, from understanding in the field of political and security issues to cultural relations, adding to the soft power of this country in the international dimension. The common historical, geographical, religious, and cultural ties have facilitated these relations, and Saudi Arabia's soft power, along with its material resources, has greatly enhanced its influence. Since 2008, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC)

countries have taken steps to form a union by creating a common market to remove all trade barriers to goods and services. In 2012, six countries announced that they would move towards a more formal economic and security confederation (Gallarotti and Al-Filali, 2012: 241).

Leadership Power and Mediating Role: Saudi Arabia has been very successful in imposing its dominant role among the kingdoms of the peninsula. Institutionally, this dominance is crystallized in the GCC - established in 1981. In the face of the security threats of the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war over smaller kingdoms, these countries accepted what many of them had resisted for years - the formal acceptance of Riyadh's leadership role. During periods of peace and stability in the Persian Gulf, small kingdoms have always tried to assert their independence, but with their general status, Saudi Arabia's orbit has not been called into question. Cooperation in recent years has continued in various dimensions between Saudi Arabia and these countries, from understanding in the field of political and security issues to cultural exchanges. The common historical, geographical, religious and cultural ties have facilitated these relations. Saudi Arabia's soft power, along with its material resources, has facilitated its influence on these countries. Since 2008, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) countries have taken steps to form a union by creating a common market to remove all trade barriers to goods and services. In 2012, six countries announced that they would move towards a more formal economic and security confederation (Gallarotti and Al-Filali, 2012: 241.).

The Saudi leadership factor, and in particular the energy issue, has played a major role in this. They have provided military and economic support to the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) and, for example, 70 percent of Bahrain's oil and gas resources come from Saudi Arabia's Abu Shafa oil field. But Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf region and the continuation of its hegemony, relying on its soft and hard power, has always faced challenges, which we will mention two examples below, Yemen and Qatar.

The mediating role of Saudi Arabia and its leadership in resolving disputes between Arab countries and holding international conferences is another part of Saudi soft and international power. One of the examples of Saudi Arabia's use of soft power to achieve its foreign policy goals due to its important role in the Organization of the Islamic Conference or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, its fourth extraordinary meeting dates back to August 2012. The meeting, which was attended by 40 countries from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, was a live expression of the cultural and religious importance of Saudi Arabia, and meetings were held in Mecca and Medina, two of the holy cities of the Islamic world. King Fahd also aimed to isolate the Syrian government after the crisis intensified.

Financial Assistances: Financial aid is another part of Saudi Arabia's soft power. Not only has Saudi Arabia provided financial assistance to various countries in the Islamic world during the crisis, but it has also been a leader in carrying out some projects, such as building airports and roads in countries such as Senegal, Yemen and others. But in addition to the above assistance, by building schools and mosques, the spread of Sunni Pan-Islamism in these countries has also been among its foreign policy priorities. The spread of this Pan-Islamism, which is associated with a Salafi view or interpretation of Islam, has not only helped to spread alliances at the state level, but has also attracted some Sunni Islamist groups. From relations with Islamist opposition groups from the Muslim Brotherhood to jihadist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iraq to Syria, etc., Saudi Arabia as a way to put pressure on other Arab states and expand its influence throughout the Islamic world. Benefits and wins. By connecting with these groups, Riyadh has not only sought to increase its political influence, but has also always sought to influence the concept of Islam in political life in the current conflict in the Islamic world. (Heine Bush and Ehteshami, 2011: 360).

Internationally, the Saudis have aimed more at achieving opportunities within the global system for internal security and progress than at forming close alliances such as those in the

Persian Gulf or the Muslim and Arab world. They have been following it. But in this network, too, Saudi Arabia has always sought to influence regional and international developments through extensive cooperation with active international actors and multilateral relations.

IV-Saudi Soft Power and its Consequences for Iran

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has become a leading country in the Arab and Islamic world due to its spiritual motivation and progressive intellect (Simon, 2013a). Growing economic power has enabled the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to develop itself locally, while at the same time expanding its Islamic and political values and infiltrating internationally. However, the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which was formed in 1979 on the basis of a Shiite-centered attitude in Iran, upset the balance of power in the Islamic world and the Middle East. Islamic Iran, with its components of soft power and power Hardware challenged the existing order and leadership of Saudi Arabia in the Arab and Islamic world by expanding its power as a force opposed to the existing order (Simon.2013 b). The epiphany of Islamic Iran and its role in the Western world and Islam based on a new approach to soft power led the Saudi leaders to be able to use all the tools of their soft power, regional position and Iranian leadership in the region based on a kind of Iran phobia and Shiite phobia. Thus, the majority of countries in the Middle East were either through the spread of Wahhabi and Sunni Islamic ideology or through financial aid to Saudi Arabia to keep them away from Iran.

Saudi Arabia's first tactic to challenge Iran in the Islamic world was to confront the role of the Iranian leadership and also to propagate the issue of Shiism by raising issues such as the Shiite Crescent. The destruction of Iran's spiritual image and the excommunication of the Shiites in order to weaken Iran's position and accept that Saudi Arabia is the leader and Umm al-Qura of the Islamic world has taken on a prominent color in recent years and in the geography of the Islamic world by the Saudis. For example, by providing financial assistance to many countries in the region, especially the countries of Central Asia,

where Iran has a special position and position due to linguistic and civilizational commonalities with some of these countries, to counter Iran's power. Has started with cultural tools and soft power and seeks to increase the costs of these actors in the direction of inclination and proximity to Iran (Davand, 2017).

Saudi Arabia's full knowledge of the intellectual and spiritual poverty of some Central Asian countries has helped Saudi Arabia to contribute to the expansion of its desired Wahhabi Islam by establishing schools and financial aid, and by believing in these countries. To form a new intellectual front against Iran's Shiite Islam in the region and increase the costs of Iran's presence and role in these areas, which can be seen in the Saudi jihadist schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia's financial influence on the leaders and people of Central Asia is a strategy that the Saudis, with their mastery of the spiritual and historical ties of these people with Iran, will use to counter the Shiite discourse to redress the divergence of the people of Central Asia with Iran. One of the target countries of Saudi Arabia in Central Asia is the Persian-speaking country of Tajikistan, which has a common historical and linguistic background with Iran, and Iran has a lot of influence in this country. Therefore, by targeting Tajikistan for soft goals, Saudi Arabia is trying to strengthen its position of power in this country and weaken the foundations of Iran's power with Tajikistan. The increase in bilateral cooperation and the holding of cultural days between Saudi Arabia and Tajikistan in 2019 well confirms Saudi Arabia's new vision and attitude to strengthen cooperation and soft influence in Tajikistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2019).

Spending a million rubles to establish an Islamic center in Kyrgyzstan and sending Wahhabi imams to promote its religious support is also the beginning of Saudi efforts to expand its sphere of influence in Kyrgyzstan (Khairi, 2001: 173). One of the main tools for the expansion of Saudi Arabia's soft power in the Islamic world in recent years has been the Islamic Development Bank, which has provided various loans or investments to many Middle Eastern countries, some of

which depend on these countries. Provided by Saudi Arabia. The \$ 1.2 billion investment of the Islamic Development Bank in Kazakhstan is one of the things that Saudi Arabia has done through this bank to expand its presence and influence through software (Biard, 2019: 8).

Iraq is another country that in the years after the fall of Saddam and with the rise of Shiites became one of the main areas of power and influence in Iran and became part of the axis of resistance, which is a new way with Saudi interests and goals in the region. It was a contradiction. However, in the years following the fall of Saddam, Saudi Arabia's relations with Iraq deteriorated, leading to the severance of diplomatic relations. But during the defeat of ISIS in Iraq, the Saudis, knowing the presence and spiritual influence of Iran in Iraq, tried to increase their influence in Iraq by establishing diplomatic relations and reconnection through their economic power, and paved the way for many divergences from the Iraqi internal forces with Iran.

Due to its soft presence in Iraq, Saudi Arabia resumed its flights to Iraq after 27 years since the last bilateral flights between the two countries, and the volume of these flights reached 140 flights per month. In 2018, then-Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir announced that Saudi Arabia would provide \$ 1 billion in loans and \$ 500 million in aid to Iraq's reconstruction. Another part of the influence and expansion of Saudi soft power in Iraq is the presence of Saudi investors in the Iraqi petrochemical industry to reduce Iraq's reliance on Iran in this regard (Nishat, 2018).

Lebanon is another country that has been the target of Saudi attacks in recent years due to the Shiite population and the presence of Hezbollah forces to expel it from Iran, and from political anecdotes to financial and economic aid, this goal is being pursued. Such policies intensified during the reign of Prince Mohammad bin Salman to undermine regional power and leadership in Iran. Saudi financial and economic support for the Lebanese Central Bank in recent years reflects the Saudi initiative to increase Lebanese power in Lebanon, which in 2006, in the midst of the Lebanese-Israeli war, provided \$ 1.5 billion in aid to the Lebanese Central Bank. In 2008, Saudi

Arabia again provided \$ 1 billion to the Lebanese Central Bank. Even Saudi Arabia paid \$ 3 billion in aid to the Lebanese army to distance itself from Iran (Perry, 2016).

In another move, Saudi Arabia returned the \$ 1 billion line of credit it had previously pledged to Lebanon at the Donors' Conference in Paris in April 2018 (Irish, 2018). Of course, Saudi Arabia later withdrew this amount because the target was not met. However, Lebanon's financial dependence on Saudi aid and loans has increased so much that Saudi Arabia could easily disrupt Lebanon's financial stability.

In addition to Saudi Arabia's hardware actions in Yemen, the combined use of soft power is another part of the Saudis' strategy to expand their influence in Yemen to limit Iran's sphere of influence in the country. Riyadh hopes to use the collapse of Yemen's infrastructure to increase its share of these imports and keep Yemen dependent on its support. In October 201, Riyadh agreed to provide \$ 60 million worth of oil derivatives to Yemen per month, and the first installment was delivered in November 2018 to the eastern and central provinces of Hadramaut, Shabwa, Al-Jawf, Marb and Muharra. The initiative is a humanitarian aid to Yemen. In December 2018, he announced the implementation of more projects to develop the education system in Mahara and Gheiza by presenting thousands of textbooks, backpacks, desks and school buses, which is probably Saudi Arabia's attempt to attract local people.

Such efforts to gain economic influence in Yemen coincide with the monarchy's strategy of controlling key Yemeni logistics centers, through which it selects aid. Bypassing the Houthi-controlled ports of Hodeidah and Salif not only reduces aid to Houthi areas: the huge amount of aid flowing through coalition-controlled ports such as Mokha, Mukla and Aden also creates incentives for local and international companies. Increase the capacity and efficiency of these ports (Harvey, 2019).

Palestine is another country that has soft power resources in Tere, and it has tried to consolidate and expand its power and influence in Palestine with financial and moral support from the

Palestinian forces. Saudi Arabia has made great efforts to help the Palestinians and to use its financial resources and political influence for their benefit. Riyadh maintains normal political relations with both the main Palestinian political parties, Fatah and Hamas. In this regard, the Saudi government has transferred funds directly to various Palestinian organizations over a significant period of time. A significant amount of this money has gone to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, which is controlled by Fatah and supported by the United States. However, the relationship between Riyadh and its types of aid to Hamas has been fraught with ambiguity and complexity, and many previous aid to Hamas has been severed. International pressure and Saudi resentment over Hamas's closeness to Iran have been a factor in the Saudis' divergence from Hamas. Thus, by providing financial assistance to the Fatah movement, the Saudis continue to seek to expand and reduce Iran's influence and influence in Palestine (Terrill, 2011: 33-34).

Afghanistan is another country that is at the center of Saudi Arabia's focus on increasing power and influence. Saudi financial aid to jihadist forces, scholarships for religious scholars, and spending on Afghanistan's religious infrastructure, such as the construction of mosques and religious schools, are examples of Saudi Arabian actions and strategies in Afghanistan. Give. Saudi Arabia's strategic location and proximity to Central Asia, Pakistan, and China, as well as Afghanistan's proximity to Iran, have made it a stronghold of Saudi extremists due to the presence of Sunni Muslims. Saudi mediation between the government and Taliban forces in recent years and the holding of an Islamic conference focusing on the situation in Afghanistan in 2016 have been another part of Riyadh's strategies to influence and expand its influence in Afghanistan to extend its power to Iran's borders. (Jeffrey Valdani and Jahanbakhsh, 2016).

Saudi Arabia, which has a number of components of soft power, and in particular an Islamic appearance, seeks to expand its influence among Islamic countries in order to take the lead in the Islamic world. The Islamic Republic of Iran emerged with a Shiite-Iranian identity as a serious and longtime rival of Saudi

Arabia in the Middle East. The identity differences between these two rival actors caused that in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, neither of these actors had a positive perception of each other. The expansion of Iran's geopolitical and spiritual power in the Islamic world has aroused fear among Saudi leaders to use all its material and spiritual means to counter Iran's power and influence in the region, and this bilateral competition at the regional and international level has occupied several areas.

Conclusion

Soft power today is used as an important tool by various countries to export values and gain regional and global credibility and achieve a leadership position. The successful advancement of any government's power policy requires, to some extent, its reliance on soft power tools. These tools have become especially important in the new global context. While the components of hard power are similar in almost all countries, the foundations of soft power in different drawers have a certain variety. Hence, different forms of soft power governments are conceivable. Saudi Arabia, as a country that has always claimed leadership in the Middle East and the Islamic world, has mobilized all its resources to achieve this defined goal and is trying to export soft power resources and the correct use of executive tools. It can provide the conditions for its regional leadership and, on the other hand, it can confront the Islamic Republic of Iran as its regional rival and prevent Iran's regional and global influence.

This study sought to answer the main question: what are the main sources of Saudi soft power production? And what are the consequences for the regional position of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The results of the study show that Saudi Arabia has a regional power in various cultural, economic and international aspects that has been able to achieve significant influence in the Islamic world and among Islamic countries. The title of Umm al-Qura Islam is accepted by these countries, and in the field of foreign policy of this country, by taking advantage of its economic and political capacities, it also plays a prominent role

in the regional processes. The region also demonstrates Saudi Arabia's ability to align views in the Islamic world.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, by defining itself as the leader of the Islamic world, has started avoiding regional rivalries and conflicts with Iran as its biggest regional rival. In addition to hard tools, soft and spiritual power is the second component and capacity that this country seeks to exploit in order to weaken the position of the regions of Iran and encourage the phenomenon of Shiism. The simultaneous use of soft power-producing components among Islamic countries (Iraq, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, Central Asia, and the Caucasus) argues for the stability and deepening of Iran's restrictive policies with the soft capabilities of power. Success in such goals can challenge the sphere of influence, power and position of the leadership and the regions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Islamic world.

References

- Abuza, Z. (2003). *Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah*. Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Studies.
- Awadpour, Mehdi (2013), *Salafism; Saudi ideological tools in Egypt* are available at <http://tabyincenter.ir>
- Behrendt, Sven (2009), "The G20 and Saudi Arabia's Changing Foreign Policy Agenda," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, September 21, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2009/09/21/g20-and-saudi-arabia-changingforeign-policy-agenda>.
- Biard, Aurélie (2019), "'We Pray for Our President': Saudi-Inspired Loyalist Salafism and the Business Sector in Kazakhstan", *Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs*, Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FP_201901_Biard-paper-on-

Salayism-in-Kazakhstan.pdf, (Accessed on: 4/6/2019)

- Butter, Andrew (2014), "U.S. Shale Oil is the New Swing-Producer: Output Forecast to 2020 Will Make Saudi Arabia Very Happy," The Market Oracle, December 1, 2014, <http://www.marketoracle.co.uk/Article48439.html>.
- CNN Library (2017), Hajj Pilgrimage Fast Facts, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/21/world/hajj-fast-facts>.
- Constantin, samia (2016), Shia in Saudi Arabia: A History of Discrimination, Oppression, Monday 1 August, available at: <http://www.alterinter.org/spip.php?article4502>
- Davand, Mohammad (2017), "Aims and Tools of Saudi Arabia's Cultural Diplomacy in the Islamic World", Available at: <http://alwaght.com/fa/News/106553>, (Accessed on: 16/6//2019) [in Persia]
- Egyptian Salafi fatwa: Cooperation with Saudi Arabia in the war against the Shiites is "Ali al-Barr and Al-Taqwa Cooperation", June 4, 2015, available at: <http://shafaqna.com>
- Gallarotti, Giulio and Isam Yahia Al-Filali (2012), Saudi Arabia's Soft Power
- -Harvey, Jonathan Fenton (2019) .Saudi Arabia's Soft Power Strategy in Yemen, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78749>.
- Heineh Bush, Raymond and Anoushirvan Ehteshami (2011), Foreign Policy of the Middle East, Tehran, First Edition, Imam Sadeh University Press.
- [Http://www.sfd](http://www.sfd).
- International Crisis Group. (2012, October 12). Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition.
- Irish John (2018), Marine Penne tier, Lebanon wins pledges exceeding \$11 billion in Paris, Reuters, April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-france/lebanon-wins-pledges-exceeding-11-billion-in-paris-idUSKCN1HD0UU>
- ISNA News Agency (2016). Saudi \$ 20 billion revenues from Hajj Umrah, news code 95030502883 <https://www.isna.ir/news/95030502883/>
- Izadi, Hojjatullah (2008). Principles of Soft Power in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Basij Strategic Studies Quarterly, Year 11, No. 4.
- Jafari Valdani, Asghar and Jahanbakhsh, Mohammad Taghi (2015). Saudi Arabia's Competitive Approach to Afghanistan, Foreign Relations Quarterly, Year 9, Issue 3.
- Khairi, Abuzar (2001), "Central Asia and West Asia: a Comparative Study Central Asia's Relations with Saudi Arabia

and Turkey since 1991”, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, Available at: https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/15466/10/10_chapter%205.pdf, (Accessed on: 4/8/2019).

- Mabon, Simon (2013). “The Middle Eastern Great Game.” The Foreign Policy Center, June 2013. <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1555.pdf>.
- Mabon, Simon (2013) *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East*. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2013).
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan (2019), “Tajik Ambassador’s Meeting with Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia”, Available at: <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/4050/tajik-ambassadors-meeting-with-deputy-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-saudi-arabia>
- Molajanov, Parviz (2017), "Salafism in Central Asia and the" Soft Power of the Saudis ", Eastern Iran, Tuesday, August 31, available at : <http://easterniran.com/fa/doc/analysis/644/>
- Nye, Joseph S. (2004), *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*,
- Perry, Tom(2016) Laila Bassam, Hezbollah signals no end to Saudi crisis; central bank reassures on currency, Reuters, 26 February 2016, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-saudi-lebanon/hezbollah-signals-no-end-to-saudi-crisis-central-bank-reassures-on-currency-idUKKCN0VZ1KO>
- Peters, G. (2012, July). Haqqani Network Financing: The evolution of an industry. Last accessed February 12, 2013, on Combating Terrorism Center: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wpcontent/>.
- Poor Ahmadi Hossein (2010). *Soft power and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Qom Book Park.
- *Public Affairs*, First Edition, New York.
- Shoult, Anthony and Sami T. Salman (1999), *Doing Business with Saudi Arabia*, London: Kogan Page.
- Suri Qarlivand, Hossein Rashidi (2015). Theoretical study of the concept of soft power and its sources in Iran, *Journal of Political Research*, No. 13, pp. 179-158.
- Terrill, W. Andrew (2011). *The Saudi-Iranian rivalry and the future of Middle East security*. Department of the Army, 2011.
- The Dawn. (2011, May 22).: Extremist recruitment on the rise in southern Punjab (13 November 2008). Last accessed February 7, 2013, on The Dawn:<http://dawn.com/>

- Wolf, A. (2013, February 14). Tunisia: Signs of Domestic Radicalization Post-Revolution. Recuperate on CTC: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/tunisia-signs-of-domestic-radicalisation-post-revolution>.
- Worth, R. (2012, October 6). Citing U.S. Fears, Arab Allies Limit Syrian Rebel Aid. Last accessed Syrian Rebel Aid. Last accessed February 10, 2013, on <http://www.nytimes.com>