


# Analyzing the Implications of the Iran-Saudi Arabia Agreement through the Lens of Defensive Realism

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## Abstract

There is no doubt that with the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia after a long period of tension, one of the key results of this agreement is its impact on the security relations between Iran and the Arab world. At the center of it, Iran and the Persian Gulf are of particular importance. Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq have always been the scenes of indirect confrontation between these two regional powers. But the question is, what is the reason for these tensions? What effect has the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia had on the continuation of this cold war, and more importantly, what effect will this informal understanding have on the economic, political, and security-military dimensions of Iran and other Persian Gulf countries? Some believe that the tensions between the two countries are caused by the endangerment of the oil-economic interests of these countries; others believe that this fear is caused by the possible increase of Iran's influence in the region; and in the opinion of others, the Arabs are worried about America's tendency towards Iran and perhaps less attention from the United States to them. But perhaps these reactions can be explained in the form of defensive realism, and according to "Taliaferro," one of its four main assumptions, i.e., the "security Dilemma," uses every action of a government to increase its security. The competitor is considered a hostile action. The following article tries to answer this question by assuming that the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, was a factor that caused the security dilemma in the relations between the Arab world and Iran, both before and after it was achieved. What will be the situation of the security dilemma in the Persian Gulf after the agreement between the two countries? Using the descriptive-analytical research method, the article investigates the different dimensions of the security dilemma in the relations between Iran and other Persian Gulf countries and analyzes the position of the agreement between Tehran and Riyadh and the consequences of this historical agreement in the region.

**Keywords:** Iran, Saudi Arabia, Agreement, Security Dilemma, Persian Gulf.

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## **Introduction**

The peace agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia was finally reached on Friday, March 10, 2022, in China. After years of tension, the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reached an agreement to normalize relations between the two countries with the mediation of the People's Republic of China. The Iranian delegation, headed by Admiral Ali Shamkhani, former Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, met and discussed with the Saudi Arabian delegation headed by Mosaed bin Mohammad Al-Aiban, Minister of Interior and National Security Advisor. After five days of negotiations, the two sides reached several agreements. Relations between Tehran and Riyadh, as two important and influential countries in the process of regional equations, have been interrupted for seven years. Therefore, the restoration of relations between the two countries is very important; In such a way that only a few hours after the announcement of the agreement, the important regional and extra-regional countries and many groups and parties in the regional countries took a stand, and this shows that the issue and agreement are very important.

No official document has been released regarding the terms of their contract. In a joint statement, they only announced that the two countries want to resolve various disputes through dialogue and diplomacy in the atmosphere of brotherhood. They also recognize the principles and objectives of the United Nations Charter, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and various international conventions and norms. (Keynoush, 2023) Their agreement included the re-establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of embassies in both countries. This agreement also emphasizes respect for sovereignty, and there will be no interference in each other's internal affairs. Iran and Saudi Arabia will also implement the security cooperation agreement signed in 2001 and the general agreement in 1998 to strengthen cooperation in economic, technical, scientific, cultural, sports, and youth fields.

The establishment of relations between the two countries happened when Iran sought de-escalation with its neighbors and Saudi Arabia changed its foreign policy direction in favor of diplomacy instead of confrontation. In recent years, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have moved to reduce tensions with most of their regional rivals by focusing on economic development.

The most important issue in the region is the revival of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Although one of the effects of

restoring relations with Saudi Arabia could be that other Arab countries also take steps toward restoring relations with Iran, this agreement can have many effects on the region. For example, in Lebanon, it can have a positive effect on solving the internal problems in Lebanon, the Syrian issues, the return of this country to the Arab world, and a kind of normalization between the Arabs. But what this research will deal with is the investigation of the mystery of security in the region after the Tehran-Riyadh agreement.

Assuming that the Tehran-Riyadh agreement will have wide-ranging regional effects, this research seeks to answer the question: What is the reason for the Arabs' concerns about Iran? And what will their possible reactions be to this agreement? These questions will be addressed through an examination of the "security dilemma" approach, which is one of the four main assumptions of defensive realism.

### **1. Theoretical Framework: Defensive Realism**

Before delving into the security dilemma, it is essential to discuss two categories: offensive and defensive realism. From the point of view of offensive realism, in which "Fareed Zakaria" and "Mearsheimer" are the most important representatives, the principle is that countries have an aggressive nature and any increase in military power can cause threats to others. Mearsheimer not only acknowledges the enigma surrounding security but also contends that it embodies the fundamental principles of defensive realism. He argues that offensive realism advocates for bolstering military might to potentially invade other nations in safeguarding their own country's interests (Mearsheimer, 2006: 71).

Therefore, in this type of realism, the act of aggression is carried out, the balance of threat is no longer formed, and the threat perception, balance of threat, and mystery of security are presented in defensive realism. Defensive realists argue that governments do not have an inherent tendency toward aggression. This point of view allows the use of military power only for the defense of the land. The mystery of security has been proposed by defense realists. From Taliaferro's point of view, defensive realism is based on four assumptions, which include the delicate structure of power, the field of domestic politics, the mental perceptions of leaders, and finally the mystery of security (Brown & Coté, 2004: 79). In his view, the mystery of security arises when a government's actions to enhance its own security inadvertently diminish the security of others. Defense realists argue that simply increasing military capabilities

does not guarantee security. The problem is that absolute security is not possible except by becoming a global hegemon, and because the probability of reaching such a position is small and the establishment of a world government will mean the end of international politics, governments always seek security. and they will face the security problem (Moshirzadeh, 2011: 133). Perhaps the biggest difference between offensive and defensive realism is the same concept, the mystery of security (Tang, 2008: 458).

The idea of the security dilemma was proposed by John Hertz in the 1950s. From Herz's point of view, in this case, countries try to strengthen their security, and this action is considered a defensive action, while other countries consider it threatening (Herz, 1950: 161). According to "Wheeler" and "Booth, " the security crisis arises when the military procurement of one country creates insoluble uncertainty in the mind of another country as to whether this procurement is only for defensive purposes or offensive purposes. What emerges from this situation is that one country's efforts for security are often a source of insecurity for another country. Governments find it very difficult to trust each other and often look at the goals of others in a negative light. Therefore, the military procurement of a country causes the competition of neighboring countries. It is interesting that, in the end, even though governments take measures to increase their security, they do not feel more secure (Bailis and Smith, 2018: 348).

The lack of trust and uncertainty among countries in the international arena is hampered by the lack of a central government in the international system. The basis of the security problem or mystery is the hostility of the countries toward each other and their lack of awareness of each other's intentions. This concern and pessimism exist even between friendly countries and the United States because today's friends may turn into tomorrow's enemies due to the change of minds and people. Therefore, in the international system, the principle is based on suspicion and mistrust, unless it is proven otherwise, and this is where credibility becomes objective and necessary. Achieving complete trust in the field of international relations may not always be feasible. However, suspicion and pessimism between countries can be mitigated through the adoption of strategies and security measures. This matter becomes even more important and necessary, especially for countries that, rightly or wrongly, are recognized as unreliable and unrecognizable (Dehghani, 2011: 473). The center of traditional concern is related to the military threat. Many believe that the

military threat is still the main threat to a government (Reiter & Gärtne, 2001: 147).

a military threat is the most understandable and tangible threat to a society (Rabiei, 2013: 140) because it is directly related to the material existence of a land, and wars of aggression make the importance of military security more obvious. Military security is considered an influential topic for both the government and the nation. Irrespective of which country the threat is from, even if the threatening country is perceived as a weak country, the fear of insecurity has always focused on military security. Military actions often pose a threat to governmental institutions. Moreover, military measures not only impact the government's protective functions but also influence diverse social and individual interests, which may be more resilient than governmental structures. Therefore, usually, military threats have the highest priority in the national security plan (Buzan, 2000: 141-142).

From Buzan's point of view, military security is related to the two-level mutual effect of countries' offensive and defensive capabilities and their perceptions of each other's intentions. In this regard, it can be mentioned that it is difficult to distinguish between offensive power and defensive power, and due to the subjective nature of security, even an effort to expand defensive power can cause insecurity and pessimism in a country that has strong power. A fundamental similarity among all security theories is their focus on the concept of "threat." From the point of view of "Luther Brock," what ultimately defines security is an "existential threat." From Buzan's point of view, the threat should be evaluated objectively. An objective threat assessment is not simple unless the existing threat is clear, such as border threats (ibid). On the other hand, the perception of the threat by the countries is based on personal evaluations and the definition of specific borders for the threat. From Buzan's point of view, security threats are the instigator of anxiety policies, where the norms and standard procedures to ensure the security and survival of a government are ignored by other governments (Harris, 2008: 46-47).

During the formation of the security dilemma, two types of countries exhibit contrasting actions of two types of countries: small countries that have less military and confrontational power, and larger countries that have higher power. Based on this distribution of capabilities, small countries try to stand against the threat in the form of various agreements or cooperation based on a common goal, and larger countries try to avoid a preventive war against themselves.

## **2. The Islamic Revolution's Impact on Arab Perceptions of Iran**

A revolution, occurring at the national level, also has deep transnational implications. In *The Anatomy of Revolution*, Crane Brinton argues that all revolutions throughout history sought to spread their message and bring it to other people in the world (Brinton, 2012: 208). The occurrence of revolutions often intensifies the perception of threat between the revolutionary government and its neighbors, potentially heightening the likelihood of short-term conflict (Walt: 1996: 144). The security of the Persian Gulf has been influenced by foreign powers for over 500 years. Today's situation mirrors historical patterns, characterized by the emergence of imperialist hegemony led by the United States. This hegemony seeks to maintain naval superiority, ensure stability, and forge alliances with key regional countries (Potter, 2009: 7). The region is also politically and militarily unstable. Four important wars have taken place in the last 30 years, namely the wars of Iraq with Iran (1980), Iraq with Kuwait (1990), and the international coalition with Iraq (1991 and 2003), which is evidence of the instability of the security situation in this region. It is important and strategic (Czulda, 2006: 1).

Historically, Iran's relations with its southern Arab neighbors have not been very good. What has caused temporary exceptions is the understanding of the needs of the neighborhood by some governments, such as Oman (Jaafari Valdani, 2011: 35). When the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council was formed on May 28, 1981, with apparently economic goals, it was obvious to the analysts that the formation of this council was a reaction to the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. A revolution that, with the idea of issuing a revolution and with anti-Western and pro-independence slogans, sounded a big alarm for the conservative and dependent countries of the Persian Gulf. Many experts consider the most important reason for the emergence and formation of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council to be the feeling of threat and insecurity of the Arabs protecting the work of the Persian Gulf from the events of the Islamic Revolution and the policies of the Islamic Republic to export and expand it in the region (Walt 1998: 292-Biglin, 2005: 126). It can be said that this issue was a reaction to increase one's security in the situation of a sense of security vacuum, which deepened with the start of Iraq's imposed war against Iran and gained more serious dimensions with the financial aid of these countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to Saddam Hussein. Of course, with the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the strategic composition

in the region changed, because one side of the political triangle, which was very effective in regional affairs, suddenly disappeared. Traditionally, Iraq was considered a counterweight between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and it was considered an obstacle to the expansion of the influence and dominance of these two countries in the region (Toensing, 2007: 14). Arab countries, since their inception and throughout their relatively short histories, have consistently harbored doubts, or more accurately, security concerns, towards Iran. When the government under the full support of the West, the Pahlavi government, was at work in Iran as the "police of the region, " and with significant military purchases, it was practically considered the undisputed power of the region, and when the Islamic revolution was victorious in Iran, and its repercussions (including the occupation of Masjid al-Haram by Shiites) terrified the Arab countries of the region. In this regard, Professor Abdullah Al Shiji from Kuwait University considers the Iranian plan to be a combination of "threat, cooperation, and domination of the Persian Gulf" and "the member countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council are the only witnesses of the conflict between Iran and the United States over the domination of the Persian Gulf..." (Al Shayji, 2009). Of course, in the meantime, we should not neglect the role of historical, religious, and ethnic factors in these concerns and the doubtful and competitive view of Arabs towards Iran. Factors such as Arab-foreign or Shia-Sunni views. Given the close proximity of governments in this region, as highlighted by Buzan and Waiver (2003: 190), coupled with the Persian Gulf governments' heavy reliance on oil revenues, there exists a significant dependence on security measures in the area (Bellamy, 2008: 244). Patterns of friendship and enmity in the Persian Gulf are also affected by ethnic and religious factors. "Shirin Hunter" considers these two factors to be the most important factors of tension in Iran-Arab relations from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until today (Hunter, 2010: 186).

### **3. JCPOA and Reaction of Persian Gulf Arab States**

Before the start of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the West, the country's nuclear program was always a source of concern for countries in the region, especially Saudi Arabia and the Zionist regime. The heads of these countries explicitly called nuclear Iran a threat to the region by accusing Iran of trying to obtain nuclear weapons, threatening the security of the Middle East, and pushing this region towards an arms race. However, the nuclear agreement between Iran and the 5+1 group, which is referred to as the JCPOA,

made important international players more flexible in their approach to Iran's nuclear program and concluded that an agreement can be reached through effective negotiations. Hossein Kalout, one of the researchers at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center in the Iran Project, summarizes the reaction of the Arab world in three distinct groups, and we will continue to examine these three groups and their views on the JCPOA.

- Pro-Saudi Bloc: This group includes Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Jordan, and Morocco. From the point of view of this group, this agreement returns Iran to the international community and allows it to freely pursue its regional policies through its affiliated groups in the region.
- Pro-Iran Bloc: This group includes Syria, and Iraq, Hezbollah—an important part of the political mainstream of Lebanon, and a part of the political mainstream of Yemen. The group accepted the agreement with open arms. These countries thought that this agreement would have a positive effect on their hopes and capabilities in the region. In addition, they believe that the West had no choice but to negotiate, and the reason for this is Iran's power.
- The Neutral: This group includes North African countries such as Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Sudan. The group views this agreement with a mixture of satisfaction and concern (Perkovich, 2014).

These three groups were formed based on the views of the Middle East countries on the West's nuclear agreement with Iran. Each country looks at this agreement based on its geopolitical and economic power, as well as its regional interactions. The reactions of these three groups of Middle Eastern countries are shown separately in the following map:



For example, Egypt is not militarily dependent on Saudi Arabia, and therefore, in response to the JCPOA, it can take a different path than Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Sissi, the current president of Egypt, is trying to strengthen relations with the Saudis to strengthen the domestic economy of Egypt (Mohseni, 2015: 22). In the atmosphere of the Arab uprisings in the Middle East, a kind of cold war, the relations between Iran and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council were formed. This tense atmosphere in the midst of achieving the nuclear agreement became more intense with the reactions of the leaders of the Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to the possible agreement (Lynch, 2011: 55). For example, we can point to the reaction of "Walid bin Talal," the son of Talal bin Abdulaziz and grandson of Abdulaziz Al Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia, in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, who claims: "Washington shot itself in the foot in the agreement with Iran." Also, a few days later, Saudi Arabia's ambassador in London, Prince Mohammed bin Loaf bin Abdulaziz, called the talks with Iran "pacifying" [to reduce Iran's anger] and indirectly threatened that Saudi Arabia would use weapons if necessary. (Gause, 2013). Also, "Adel al-Jubeir" in an interview with Al-Arabiya clearly states that "the release of billions of dollars from Iran's blocked wealth should be of concern to everyone" (Atroushi, 2015: 221) conveys a clear message, and that message is nothing but the feeling of fear of the Saudis about the end of Iran's twelve-year nuclear crisis. The visit of the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Qatar to Europe and America amid negotiations and consultations with their

European allies is a good expression of these concerns. Of course, it should be noted that after the nuclear agreement on August 3, 2015, "Khalid Al-Attiyah," the then-foreign minister of Qatar, called the JCPOA the best option among the available options at the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council meeting (Einhorn & Nephew, 2015: 44). Arabs were worried that the nuclear agreement had been made at the cost of their long-standing and friendly relations with the U.S. Many experts believe that the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia will increase in the region, at least in the short term (Mohseni, 2015: 32). For example, the event that led to an increase in tension and finally the termination of relations between the parties after the events of Hajj in 2015 and an Embassy tension between two is an example of this. This increase in tension exists for two reasons. First, as Iran's main regional rivals, Saudi Arabia and Israel were only able to express their concerns about Iran's nuclear capabilities during the nuclear negotiations. It is undesirable (Katz, 2014). To some extent, it can be expected that the future of the region depends on how the United States manages the common interests of Iran and the Arab countries (Mohseni, 2015: 27).

Views on regional security after the Iran nuclear deal are contradictory (Washington Post, 2015). Some regional experts believe that Iran is trying to disarm the Middle East and is trying to draw the attention of world powers to Israel's nuclear power within the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Others believed that Iran could use nuclear weapons. This view could have devastating consequences for the region as a result of a cold war between Iran and its Sunni rivals in the region. In addition, an arms race between Iran and Saudi Arabia, caused by a kind of pessimism and a mysterious security dilemma, was very likely to show power and dominance in the region.

#### **4. Iran-Saudi Arabia Agreement: Consequences and Challenges**

Since King Salman came to power in 2015, Riyadh has backed away from the hostile foreign policy adopted by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. This country reconciled with Turkey, reconnected with Syria, and supported the ceasefire in Yemen, but left the most difficult and perhaps most important issue for last. Saudi Arabia surprised the world by announcing an agreement to normalize relations with Iran. The Cold War between Iran and Saudi Arabia has affected almost every conflict in the region. Therefore, the end of this Cold War could have strong consequences for the region.

Since 2015, Saudi Arabia has faced a large number of missile and drone attacks by Ansarullah, which has been raised as a major national security challenge for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia hopes to protect its borders and critical infrastructure from the Ansarullah attacks by signing an agreement with Iran to restore normalcy. Also, long-term peace with Iran is necessary to achieve the goals set by Saudi Arabia based on the 2030 vision. The long-term military conflict in Yemen is an obstacle to achieving such goals. Therefore, the agreement with Iran is a practical action by Saudi Arabia in terms of national security and economic development.

On the other hand, by restoring diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran expects to receive support from the countries in the region regarding its nuclear issue. The agreement with Saudi Arabia will help strengthen Iran's relations with other members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, especially Bahrain and the UAE. This agreement is also an immediate relief for Iran's economy.

If this agreement is fully implemented, it has the potential to significantly improve the situation in Yemen. The end of Saudi military operations in Yemen and restraint by the Houthis can significantly reduce armed violence in this country. It can also significantly improve the human condition and help rebuild the country's economy. Immediately after the announcement of this agreement, the government of Yemen and the Houthis started negotiations on the exchange of prisoners in Geneva. But at the same time, local factors independent of Iran and Saudi Arabia may continue to create tension in this country. In their vicinity, the maritime security environment in the waters around the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea can be improved as a result of increased cooperation between the two countries.

The situation in countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq may not improve soon. Iran has the upper hand in these countries and has created its sphere of influence during decades of political and economic interaction. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia does not have the privileges that Iran has in these countries.

#### **4-1. Yemen**

Yemen has been one of the countries that suffered the most from the differences between Riyadh and Tehran. In 2014, the two countries supported opposing factions in Yemen's civil war. Subsequently, in 2015, a Saudi-led coalition intervened to combat Ansarullah, also known as the Iran-backed Houthis, who had seized control of

Yemen.

Faras Maksad, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C., and a professor at George Washington University, emphasized the significance of the Yemeni conflict for both countries. Hossein Ibish, a senior resident researcher at the Persian Gulf Institute in Washington, DC, suggested that Iran might leverage its influence over Ansarullah to seek a resolution to the war. He stated, "There is a high possibility that Tehran has pledged to exert pressure on its allies in Yemen to end the conflict, but the underlying agreements remain undisclosed." (CNN, 2016)

#### **4-2. Lebanon**

Lebanon is currently suffering from a crippling financial crisis. Saudi Arabia, once the country's closest ally, has largely separated its path from Lebanon due to dissatisfaction with the influence of Iran-backed Hezbollah in the country. Both Hezbollah and Lebanon's interim prime minister, Najib Miqati, praised the Saudi-Iran deal, with Miqati calling it "an opportunity for the region to breathe and look to the future." However, analysts argue that the Iran-Saudi deal does not guarantee that Lebanon's relations with Riyadh will automatically improve its situation. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said that Lebanon needs the "friendship of the Lebanese people" to improve Lebanon's situation, not "the rapprochement of Iran and Saudi Arabia." Firas Maksad said: "Lebanon is not the priority of policymakers in Riyadh at the moment (Meena, 2018: 14).

#### **4-3. Iraq**

Iraq, which hosted several rounds of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, quickly welcomed this reconciliation. Analysts say that reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia is in Baghdad's favor because, since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, this country has become the arena of competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Ehsan al-Shammari, professor of politics at Baghdad University and head of the Iraqi Political Thought Center, added: "Iran has used Iraq to increase pressure on Saudi Arabia in all fields, including political, economic, and especially security." He claimed that due to the great influence of Iran in Iraq, Baghdad has lost the opportunity to improve relations with Saudi Arabia and potentially make large investments in this country. Al-Shammari said that Saudi Arabia will ask Iran to control some of its allies in Iraq, especially militia groups that Riyadh sees as a security threat.

However, he claimed that this interpretation could be just a dream because Iran sees Iraq as a puppet state and Tehran's allies in the Iraqi parliament want to maintain their interests with Tehran (Neuman, 2019)

The agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran will also have consequences for US-Saudi relations. Although the United States and Saudi Arabia are strategic partners, and Saudi Arabia is an important regional ally of the United States in West Asia, normalizing relations with Iran at a time when nuclear negotiations have failed suggests a difficult path ahead for bilateral relations.

While the United States has traditionally practiced a policy of divide and rule, pitting one country against another, China has successfully brought Saudi Arabia and Iran together through mediation. With this, China intends to shape the perception of the international community about its image and role as a neutral and benevolent actor in the turbulent Persian Gulf region.

The closeness of Saudi Arabia and Iran will affect relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Although Saudi Arabia and Israel do not have formal diplomatic relations, they have had indirect talks in recent times. After the Ibrahim agreement, which led to the normalization of relations between the UAE and Bahrain with Israel, there is much speculation about Saudi Arabia joining the Ibrahim agreement. Israel wants Saudi Arabia to join the Ibrahim Pact.

However, the restoration of the Saudi Kingdom's relations with Iran has dealt a severe blow to Israel's ambitions. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has attributed the success of the agreement to the failure of President Joe Biden's regional policy and the policies of the previous administrations of Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett. Israel's relationship with the Persian Gulf Arabs remains challenging as the region's geopolitics continues to expand faster than expected.

China's mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran shows a significant change in the current situation in regional geopolitics in West Asia. China has been acceptable as a mediator for Saudi Arabia and Iran, as both countries have strong relations with it. China has supported Iran on many issues, including the nuclear issue. In 2021, they signed a comprehensive 25-year long-term agreement under which China committed to invest about \$400 billion in various sectors in Iran. China has also ignored US sanctions and continued to buy oil from Iran, and there have been regular meetings between the two countries at the highest levels.

Saudi Arabia has also established strong economic ties with China. Saudi Arabia is the largest exporter of oil to China. There is a convergence of interests between the two over China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, where both have pledged to work together. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Riyadh in December 2022 and held talks with the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the leaders of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. In 2022, China exported billion to Saudi Arabia. During the last 26 years, the exports of China to Saudi Arabia have increased at an annualized rate of 14.3%, from \$904 million in 1995 to \$29 billion in 2022. In 2022, Saudi Arabia exported \$48.7 billion to China. During the last 26 years, the exports of Saudi Arabia to China have increased at an annualized rate of 20.4%, from \$392 million in 1995 to \$48.7 billion in 2021 (OEC.world, 2022).

In addition, the agreement brings China to the Persian Gulf region as an interested actor in regional security and as a geopolitical challenge to the United States. Making Saudi Arabia's foreign policy decisions regarding Iran mediated by China is a ploy for the United States. Although China has traditionally maintained its relations with the countries of the Persian Gulf mainly on trade and energy issues, it has recently made statements on regional security issues in the Persian Gulf. At the first meeting of the heads of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and China for cooperation and development in Riyadh in December 2022, President Xi expressed his interest in contributing to the regional security of the Persian Gulf by supporting and cooperating with the countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. China's successful mediation seems to be the beginning of a new era of Chinese influence in the Persian Gulf. If it can maintain its presence in the US-dominated Gulf, it will be a real litmus test for China.

This proximity controls the growing gap between the two regional powers. Despite Iran and Saudi Arabia's optimism, there are still several challenges facing them. First of all, to what extent Iran can address Saudi sensitivities and concerns about the peaceful nature of its nuclear program is a big question. Second, much also depends on the success of the agreement to create a protective shield for Saudi Arabia against the Ansarullah attacks. Third, Iran is concerned about the extent to which the deal will help end its isolation, facilitate nuclear negotiations, and lift sanctions imposed on it. If the key concerns of both countries are not addressed after the implementation of the agreement, there is a possibility that the situation will go back to the way it was before.

## 5. The Impact of the Tehran-Riyadh Agreement on the Security Dilemma in the Persian Gulf

Nevertheless, a significant outcome of the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia will be the alleviation of security uncertainties in the Persian Gulf region. According to Jervais's definition, "the security dilemma refers to a situation in which a state's actions to increase its security, including military security or establishing political or military alliances with other states, can lead to similar actions by other states as the answer should lead" (Jervis, 1978: 221). An answer can be political, economic, or security-related.

But as stated, it seems that the executive political reflection of the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is more colorful than its other aspects, and this understanding will lead to the reduction of the "security mystery" in the Persian Gulf. There is no doubt that the Tehran-Riyadh agreement reduced regional threats, made the possibility of war weaker, and generally increased the security of West Asia, and now, according to Jarvis's definition of the security dilemma, we should witness the reduction of the security dilemma in the region.

The actions of governments in the shadow of the intensification of the security dilemma can include the creation of military alliances and coalitions (like what we saw in the Yemen war), conducting more military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf, increasing military budgets, and perhaps giving more help to Sunni and anti-Shiite militias in the region. It would be like Al-Qaeda, Al-Nusra, and ISIS. These measures will be largely removed from the policies of regional governments in order to reduce tensions.

After the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran (and even before that), the Persian Gulf countries saw themselves trapped in a vacuum of security suspicion towards Iran. Meanwhile, Iran has repeatedly stated that it has never interfered in the internal affairs of the Persian Gulf countries. Even before the election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997, Tehran carried out the most confidence-building measures in the Persian Gulf (Potter, 1996). Former President Rafsanjani and then Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati tirelessly promoted this idea. In the "Dialogue of Civilizations" policy under Khatami's policy, there were unprecedented measures of regional cooperation, such as mutual visits and mutual contacts. This confidence-building period remained silent in Ahmadinejad's government and caused the strengthening of pessimism in the Persian Gulf countries and, as a result, their defensive position towards Iran (Parsi & Rydqvist, 2011: 26). Saudi Arabia has always

had a "security doubt" in comparison with Iran. A doubt is called "falling into a trap" or "being ignored" in international relations (Weitsman, 2014: 62). One day they will try to fill this void by forming the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, and one day they will support radical anti-Shiite groups. The comprehensive Western sanctions against Iran due to what was called an attempt to achieve nuclear peace, and Iran's staying away from the international arenas may have created a good opportunity for the Arabs to spend some time in a higher security position than Iran, but with the implementation of JCPOA, the fear of Iran's power became visible to them again. It is at this time that we witness the publication of a letter by 130 Arab thinkers regarding what Iran's "Safawi plan" is, with the aim of "capturing the Middle East." Thinkers who accuse Iran of arrogance (Gulf News 2015).

In this regard, "Gori Gaus" from the "Saban" Center for Middle East Studies uses the concept of the "Strategic Dilemma" of Riyadh (Gaus, 2013) and states that Washington's efforts of the past decade in the region have only strengthened its power and influence. Iran is leading in the Middle East, and the closer relations Washington and Tehran have, the more worried Riyadh will feel and the more vital it will feel to maintain its alliance with America. In his recently published book "Security Conundrum in Political Coalitions" by Cambridge University, Glenn Snyder examines the concept of "security conundrum" as a destructive aspect of monarchical regimes. He defines it as follows: "Even if a country does not intend to attack another country, one side cannot be sure that the other side's intentions are entirely peaceful or will forever remain peaceful." Snyder then points to the reactions of the other party in the direction of accumulating power in three cases: firstly, the creation of arsenals; secondly, territorial expansion, and third, the formation of coalitions. It is not a secret that today, the oil-rich countries along the Persian Gulf have a large arsenal of Western weapons, and they are trying to magnify their power through their media and blackmailing the Western media. Countries, especially Saudi Arabia, are America's main political and military partners in the region (Snyder, 2014: 495). It can be predicted that another reaction that the Saudis will take in the face of the "security dilemma" in the region is the all-round support and strengthening of the takfiri groups, and maybe by using them, they can balance the weight of the developments in the region that have shifted towards Iran in the past years. He can change for his benefit.

## Conclusion

According to what was said, the existence of a kind of "security mystery" in the region and among the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran, has a long history. The mystery of security is one of the most important concepts used in the approach of realism, especially defensive realism, which means the military actions of a country with any purpose and threatening perception by other actors, which subconsciously creates competition between countries; usually, the neighbor becomes a border. What is considered a competition between regional powers in the Middle East originates from the uncertainty of the players in this region towards each other and each other's actions. At the top of this uncertainty from the point of view of the member countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, especially Saudi Arabia, is the increasing influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region, which forces this country to react. The findings of the present research show that with the study of the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the security uncertainty between the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf and Iran, the support of the Persian Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia at the head of Takfiri-terrorist groups with anti-Shia ideology, guiding them in the direction of their policies, including their entry into the countries of the axis of resistance, including Lebanon and Syria, which is supported by the Islamic Republic, as well as the introduction of groups such as Al-Qaeda to Yemen, to counter the rise of Shiites, the attack of ISIS on the soil, Iraq and the occupation of a large part of that country's territory will be reduced to weaken the Iraqi Shia government, which was all defined in the form of a "security dilemma." It seems that the diplomatic apparatus of the Islamic Republic of Iran should take measures to win the trust of this country by building trust among the Persian Gulf countries and by repairing its relations with countries such as Saudi Arabia. The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a positive move to break the deadlock in relations between the two countries, but many things depend on maintaining the momentum gained as a result of the negotiations. In addition, difference between them are numerous and complex. It is relatively easy to continue cooperation on non-controversial issues such as bilateral trade, investment, culture, etc., but establishing cooperation on security issues takes time and requires more negotiations and trust between the parties.

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