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IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA RIVALRY

AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION OF IRAN

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'Taha, I wish you could have been here with me. I hope I have made you proud! "

Acknowledgement

To my mother, who has supported me endlessly! Thank you for having faith in me. I am sure, that at this moment, you are the happiest person in the whole world! I am so happy to have you mom!
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Miad Nakhavali

Abstract

The subject of the proposed topic of the doctoral dissertation "Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia after the Islamic revolution of Iran" is one of the most challenging topics in today's world politics. The focus of our research is based on both domestic and international factors that have been misplaced in the previous researches. The anarchic system of the international system, and its self-help structure, affect the relationship between the two countries, whether it is the period of the Persian monarchy under the secular regime of the last Iranian Shah, or the period of the Islamic Republic based on Sharia law and Islamic principles.

In this research we will focus on the fact that there are various fundamental factors and obstacles in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, such as religious, ideological and ethnic differences, the participation of Saudis in the weakening and isolation of Iran, the Iranian-Saudi rivalry after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the political leadership of the Islamic world after the Arab Spring, Iranian support for Hezbollah and Hamas, etc. The aim of this research is to understand the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, both internationally and domestically. In order to understand the relationship between these two neighbouring countries, in addition to the structure of the international arena, we must consider all internal layers of the politics, including ideology, culture, history, etc.

Although Iran and Saudi Arabia had a tense history before the Islamic Revolution and had several challenges on geopolitical issues, as well as on the price of oil, with the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, an ideological aspect was added to this conflict. Since then, this conflict has steadily increased, although this relationship has improved or worsened under different presidents depending on the presidential policy.

Key words: Iran, Saudi Arabia, relations, Islamic revolution, neoclassical realism

Apstrakt

Predmet predložene teme doktorske disertacije, Odnosi Irana i Saudijske Arabije nakon islamske revolucije u Iranu" jedna je od najizazovnijih tema u današnjoj svetskoj politici. Fokus našeg istraživanja zasnovan je na domaćim i međunarodnim faktorima koji su do sada pogrešno postavljani u prethodnim istraživanjima. Anarhični sistem međunarodnog sistema i njegova struktura samopomoći utiču na odnos dve države, bilo da je reč o periodu Persijske monarhije pod sekularnim režimom poslednjeg iranskog šaha, ili o periodu Islamske Republike koja je zasnovana na šerijatskom pravu i islamskim principima.

U ovom istraživanju fokusiraćemo se na činjenicu da u odnosima Irana i Saudijske Arabije postoje različiti faktori i prepreke, poput verskih, ideoloških i etničkih razlika, učešće Saudijaca u slabljenju i izolaciji Irana, Saudijsko rivalstvo nakon pada Sadama Huseina, političko vođstvo islamskog sveta nakon Arapskog proleća, iranska podrška Hezbolahu i Hamasu itd. Cilj ovog istraživanja je razumevanje odnosa Irana i Saudijske Arabije, kako na međunarodnom, tako i na domaćem planu. Da bismo razumeli odnos između ove dve susedne države, pored strukture međunarodne arene, moramo uzeti u obzir i sve unutrašnje slojeve politike, uključujući ideologiju, kulturu, istoriju itd.

Iako su Iran i Saudijska Arabija pre islamske revolucije imali napetu istoriju i imali su nekoliko izazova u geopolitičkim pitanjima, kao i u pogledu cene nafte, trijumfom islamske revolucije 1979. godine, ovom sukobu dodan je i ideološki aspekt. Od tada se ovaj sukob neprestano povećavao, iako se ovaj odnos poboljšavao ili pogoršavao pod različitim predsednicima u zavisnosti od predsedničke politike.

Ključne reči: Iran, Saudijska Arabija, odnosi, Islamska revolucija, neoklasični realizam

Scientific field: International politics

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UN	*United Nations Organization*
GCC	*Gulf Cooperation Council*
LNG	*Liquefied natural gas*
JCPOA	*The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*
GDP	*Gross domestic product*
IRGC	*Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps*
IRGC-QF	*Quds Force*
SCUD B	*Scud missile*
MRBM	*Medium-range ballistic missile*
IAEA	*International Atomic Energy Agency*
SAM	*Surface-to-Air Missiles*
ICBMS	*Intercontinental ballistic missile*
IRIN	*Islamic Republic of Iran Navy*
EFP	*Explosively Formed Projectiles*
SANG	*Saudi Arabia National Guard*
MODA	*Ministry of Defence and Aviation*
RSLFs	*Royal Saudi Land Forces*
RSAF	*Royal Saudi Air Force*
RSN	*Royal Saudi Navy*
RSADF	*Royal Saudi Air Defence Force*
	Saudi Arabian Armed Forces
	Royal Saudi Strategic Missile Force

SAAF

RSSMF

DF   *Dong Feng*

TEL   *Transporter Erector Launcher*

Fe   *Iron*

Cu   *Copper*

Cr   *Chromite*

N-11   *Next Eleven countries*

OPEC   *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*

SABIC   *Saudi Basic Industries Corporation*

UAE   *United Arab Emirates*

U.S.   *United States*

CIA   *Central Intelligence Agency*

BBC   *British Broadcasting Corporation*

ICO   *Initial Coin Offering*

CISADA   *The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act*

EU   *European Union*

UNESCO   *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*

NATO   *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*

U.K.   *United Kingdom*

CFR   *Council on Foreign Relations*

1. Introduction[1]

1.1. Subject and the purpose of the dissertation

Formulation of the problem

There is a variety of fundamental factors and obstacles in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, such as religious, ideological, and racial differences, Saudi's participation in weakening and isolating Iran, Iran-Saudi rivalry after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Political leadership of Islamic world, Arab Spring's aftermath, Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas, etc.

However, our research's focus is based on both domestic and international factors combined, which is more neglected in past studies. The anarchic system of the global network and its self-help structure influences the relations between these two countries regardless of the Persian monarchy period under the secular regime of the last Iranian Shah. After that, the Islamic Republic based on the Sharia law under the Islamic principles. However, we cannot neglect the different relationship levels between these two neighbours due to different presidential periods. Hence, in our belief, domestic and international factors influence the relations between these two countries. Therefore, domestic factors such as religion, sects, identity, and ideology are influential in preventing a friendly relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Again, the most crucial subjects are power policy and security issues in an anarchical international system. Suppose we observe the relations of these two powers before and after the Islamic revolution of Iran. In that case, we can see that these two powers had fewer disputes and tensed diplomatic relations during the monarchical period in Iran. However, the geopolitical, economic, and rivalry over oil production had continuously been an obstacle for a friendly relation. Even after the Islamic revolution of Iran and under four different presidential administrations, the relations had many ups and downs. For instance, during Rafsanjani and Khatami's presidency, the diplomatic relation level has significantly developed. Still, during Ahmadinejad's presidency and his new direction in the Iranian political realm, these two countries' relation became cold again.

Hence, in our research, we attempted to indicate that the main factors influencing the relation between these two great regional powers. These factors are divided into two main categories:

International obstacles include an anarchic system of the international system in which survival is the most crucial issue for every state, self-help structure, and security issues. Based on the experiences of wars, riots, and collapsing autocratic regimes in the Middle East, both leaders of

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[1] This chapter is documented in Doktorski seminar on the 25th of June 2019 at Belgrade's Faculty of Political Sciences.

these two great regional powers are aware that their regimes' survival is a primary and most important goal.

Domestic obstacles include religious, ideological, ethnic, cultural, and historical factors. Based on these backgrounds, which shape the mindset and perception of political leaders and elites, the process of decision-making is influenced.

1.2. The main changes after the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979

Iran and Saudi Arabia have always faced disagreements and rivalries for geopolitical reasons and oil issues, regardless of government structure. However, with the Islamic Revolution's victory in 1979, the ideology element also fueled these differences, and the confrontation between these two countries increased. As Grumet notes: "A theological and ideological rivalry complicates the Saudi-Iranian conflict, with structural tensions indicating two competing aspirations for Islamic leadership that intersect with the strategic and geopolitical rivalry."[2]

According to Muhammad Rizwan, there are fundamental changes in the Iranian government's structure after the Islamic revolution in 1979. These changes are as follow:

"1. Iran's status had altered; the Islamic Republic of Iran had been declared by its revolutionary government, and the Imperial State of Iran had been abolished.
2. Anti-Western policies have been confirmed to exist. The revolutionary government opposed the Shah's pro-western policies.
3. The spiritual leader, Khomeini, advocated for an anti-monarchy agenda. He believes that there is no concept of monarchy in Islam. In doing so, he called into doubt the legitimacy of the monarchy that ruled most Arab countries.
4. Shiite (Shia) beliefs have been taken over by the revolution regime. Iran is one of the region's few Shia-majority countries. The Pahlavi dynasty's Muhammad Raza Shah had a secularist approach, concentrating on Iran's growth and Western moderates."[3]

The geopolitical battle on one side and the changes in Iran's internal system from secular to theocratic Shiite on the other side led to an intense rivalry between these two neighboring countries to further influence the region. Grumet notes: "Saudi Arabia and Iran are gripped in as zero-sum game, contesting for land, resources, weapons and most specifically, influence. While Saudi Arabia and Iran were indeed rivals from the inception of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, tensions escalated to an unprecedented degree after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, where Shi'ite Muslims successfully overthrew the pro-Western Shah's constituted political authority."[4]

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[2] Tali Rachel Grumet, "New Middle East Cold War: Saudi Arabia and Iran's Rivalry" (master's thesis, University of Denver, 2015), 2.

[3] Muhammad Rizwan, Muhammad Arshid, Muhammad Waqar and Saira Iram, "From Rivalry to Nowhere: A Story of Iran-Saudi Ties", *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 19, No. 9 (2014): 96.

[4] Tali Rachel Grumet, "New Middle East Cold War: Saudi Arabia and Iran's Rivalry", 62.

1.3.   Iran-Iraq war

The war between Iran and Iraq, which lasted about eight years, is one of the main reasons for the two countries' hostility. In 1980, and in the wake of the war, Saudi Arabia made various financial, military, and media sponsorship of Saddam Hussein in fear of forming a powerful country with Shiite sovereignty in its neighborhood. At that time, while Saudi ties were not warm with Iraq, she saw it necessary to help Iraq defuse Iran's influence.

Acording to the article *From Rivalry to Nowhere*: "Saudi Arabia gave US $25 billions of aid to Iraq in Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). She also launched a Media War against the Iran to demoralize the Iran on regional and international levels. Not only this, she convinced the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf to put their strength on the side of Iraq against Iran. Syria was the only supporting country in the Middle East region. With such isolator situation, Iran never gave up in the longest conventional war in the 20th century. This war ended in 1988 after 7 years, 10 months, 4 weeks and 1 day with the effort of the UNO."[5]

1.4.   Iran and Saudi Arabia Foreign policy

Ideological or pragmatic?

Iran

According to Alsultan: "Iranian foreign policy oscillated between two opposing views, leaning toward an ideological revolutionary state at one moment, then a pragmatic state pursuing a foreign policy based upon its 'national interest' the next."[6]

In general, the crucial decisions of foreign relations in Iran are carried out by the Islamic Republic leader and not by the president. Therefore, to understand whether Iran's foreign policy is pragmatic or ideological, we should consider the behavior of the Islamic Republic leaders. Of course, the president's role as the government's second person and its significant influence on the leader cannot be denied. Kamal Kharrazi, the Iranian foreign minister between 1997 until 2005, about the Iranian foreign decision-making notes: "the government of Iran executes foreign policy decisions made by Iran's Supreme Leader. He stressed that trying to 'circumvent the Supreme Leader and talk to other people in the government' is pointless (Newsweek, 8

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[5] Muhammad Rizwan, Muhammad Arshid, Muhammad Waqar and Saira Iram, "From Rivalry to Nowhere: A Story of Iran-Saudi Ties", 96.
[6] Fahad Mohammad Alsultan and Pedram Saeid, *The Development of Saudi-Iranian Relations since the 1990s: Between conflict and accommodation* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 30.

November 2007). Ayatollah Khamenei, however, asserts his influence through 'negative power'; he does not necessarily formulate policy, but blocks policies that he opposes."[7]

It may be argued that Iranian foreign policy has been a combination of pragmatism and ideology, at least after the Islamic Republic's victory. Meanwhile, the leader of the Islamic Republic has always played a more significant role in emphasizing ideological issues and religious solidarity. In contrast, the president usually plays a more pragmatic role but runs along the lines of leadership. For this reason, countries often experience "contradictions" in Iranian foreign policy. Since the leader may behave or speak in a manner that contradicts the behavior of the president. One of the Saudis official claims: "We are extremely astonished at the contradiction there is in the way the Iranian leaders are talking to us. While Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, continues to send his letters and his messengers to us with a view to improving relations and bringing closer viewpoints between the two countries, the spiritual leader, Ali Khamene'i, surprises us with improper and irresponsible statements, followed by a frenzied media campaign. Which of the two teams should we rely on and which of the two men should we deal with?"[8]

Alsultan in *The Development of Saudi-Iranian Relations* notes: "Pragmatism is explained by advocates of realism to analyse the foreign policies of Iran and other Middle Eastern countries (Bayman et al., 2001; Ehteshami, 2002; Ramazani, 2004). Ehteshami (2002), for example, asserts that revolutionary Iran has always been a 'rational actor' in the classic sense. Iran's logical action, he notes, fits its position in a changing regional and international context. He did not, however, define whether rationalism has standards or whether Iran's activities are 'logical'. Some academics say that Iran's slow moves toward rationality have demonstrated maturing and reassertion of national int. Some academics suggest that Iran's foreign policy oddities may be explained by the country's progressive shifts toward rationality, which have demonstrated maturing and reassertion of national interest and pragmatism."[9]

Hence, it seems that revolutionary Iran is becoming more rational over time. Even when choosing between the ideology and the regime's benefits, the regime has always preferred its interest to the doctrine. Saraiva exolains that "the combination of religious nationalism and revolutionary populist propaganda, as well as a strategy of opportunism, anti-Americanism, and anti-Zionism, has cast a cloud over Iranian foreign policy."[10]

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, a kingdom controlled by the Islamic principles of the Sharia, has always had good relations with the West in order to maintain its security and survival inside and outside of Saudi Arabia. It seems that the kings of Saudi Arabia have always tried to prevent Iran from penetrating the region, especially in different places such as the occupation of Iraq by the United

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[7] Ibid, 34.
[8] Fahad Mohammad Alsultan and Pedram Saeid, *The Development of Saudi-Iranian Relations since the 1990s: Between conflict and accommodation*, 48.
[9] Ibid, 49.
[10] Rui Saraiva, "The Post 1979 Iranian Foreign Policy: The Emergence of Theocratic Pragmatism?", *International Public Policy Studies* vol. 17, no. 1 (2012): 155.

States, the Arab Spring, the Syrian civil wars, and the Yemeni conflict. Umer Karim notes: "To ensure stability and security both internally and externally, Saudi officials have always exercised prudence in regional overtures, adopted pragmatism, and reinforced connections with friendly governments, particularly the United States."[11] The military intervention in Yemen, which many scholars call the Cold War of Iran and Saudi Arabia, portrayed the peak of Saudis ambitions along with pragmatism. Karim notes: "The GCC's participation in Yemen in 2015 was the first large-scale military campaign, with Jordan and Morocco providing air forces. This supports the idea that Saudi foreign policy is progressively shifting from cautious and calculating to aggressive and ambitious, positioning the Kingdom as the primary power protecting Sunni Arab political interests."[12]

In the political system of Saudi Arabia, the king has absolute power and is considered the head of state. The king must also approve all decisions on foreign policy. However, the influence of the ring around the king, most of which belongs to the royal family, is significant in the king's important decisions. As Karim says: "The Saudi royal family is at the center of foreign policy decisions in this regard. The Saudi king stands at the head of the decision-making structure, with other princes assisting him in governing the country. For different Saudi kings, the form of this hierarchy and power connection amongst members of the innermost core of Saudi monarchy has varied, but this decision-making mechanism has prevailed over time. Nonetheless, institutions with a primarily bureaucratic structure, such as the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, exist and play a vital role in coordinating and interacting with foreign audiences."[13]

1.5. Leaders' perceptions

Khomeini and Khamenei

With the Islamic Revolution's victory under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, Iran entered a new foreign policy field. Khomeini, with the slogan Neither East nor West, Islamic Republic, came to power. In his view, the West, especially the United States (Great Satan), was responsible for Muslim countries' oppression. He sought to correlate the Muslim world with the export of the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran's borders. After the death of Khomeini in 1989, Ayatollah Khamenei, who was known by politicians and intellectuals of the time, came into power. Alsultan stated that: "Outsiders have struggled to understand Ayatollah Khamenei's personality. Those who knew him prior to his appointment as Supreme Leader describe him as a 'closet moderate' (Rubin, 2009). They claim that he is at ease in Iranian intellectual circles and that he likes poetry, both of which are uncommon among Shia clergy. Others who have known him after his election say he is a highly devout, anti-American, and ideologically zealous cleric. This is in line with Levy's (1994) theory that the leader's personality may be changed via observation and interpretation of experience."[14]

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[11] Umer Karim, "The Evolution of Saudi Foreign Policy and the Role of Decision-making Processes and Actors", *Journal of the International Spectator* vol. 52, no. 2 (2017): 72.

[12] Umer Karim, "The Evolution of Saudi Foreign Policy and the Role of Decision-making Processes and Actors",73.

[13] Ibid, 74.

[14] Fahad Mohammad Alsultan and Pedram Saeid, *The Development of Saudi-Iranian Relations since the 1990s: Between conflict and accommodation*, 30.

Saudi Kings

The kings of Al Saud have always tried to have a close relationship with the western countries, especially with the United States. In the perception of Saudi Arabia's kings, even if their tradition, religion, and culture are in contradiction with Western countries, especially with the United States, they need their support to repatriate possible threats and risks from Iran. From the beginning of the formation to the present day, the kings of Saudi Arabia have been trying to establish conservative sovereignty with proximity to the West. Alsultan stated that: "Unlike King Abdullah, who matured into a moderate and pro-Western figure over time, Ayatollah Khamenei's personality leaned toward religious conservatism after he became Supreme Leader."[15]

1.6.   The regimes in Iran and Saudi Arabia

Iran

In the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, it is possible to combine divine laws with customary laws. Of course, the role and influence of the founder of the Islamic Republic in determining the Constitution cannot be ignored. Peter Jones notes: "The Constitution establishes a theocratic republic. On one side are the religious institutions and objectives, which embody the Islamic Republic's theocratic mission. On the other are republican institutions and procedures, based on the French Constitution of 1958. The whole thing is, in theory, given credibility by the regular participation of the people in elections – under the watchful eye of the theocrats."[16]

The Islamic Republic is a political system based on Islamic law, of course, with the separation of powers (legislature, executive, and judiciary), in which the leader has absolute power. This is some kind of contradictory in the political system of Islamic Republic after the Islamic revolution. As, on the one hand, there are democratic symbols and elements, and on the other hand, the despotic religious government has its peremptory norms. Alsulatan notes: "Iran's political system is neither fully authoritarian nor democratic, but a unique system with many overlapping authorities, which gives rise to conflict among actors, each of whom claims authority."[17]

Saudi Arabia

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[15] Fahad Mohammad Alsultan and Pedram Saeid, *The Development of Saudi-Iranian Relations since the 1990s: Between conflict and accommodation*, 30.

[16] Peter Jones, *Iran's Political System and Its Implications for US Policy* (Partnership for a secure America, 2011), 1.

[17] Fahad Mohammad Alsultan and Pedram Saeid, *The Development of Saudi-Iranian Relations since the 1990s: Between conflict and accommodation*, 30.

Saudi Arabia is an absolute totalitarian monarchy based on Islamic principles in which the king is the head of state and has absolute authority. According to the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington: "The Basic System of Government establishes the essence of the state, its objectives and obligations, as well as the ruler-citizen relationship. It describes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as an Arab and Islamic sovereign state, with Islam as its religion and the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah as its constitution."[18]

Unlike Iran, whose Constitution is a combination of conventional and theocratic laws, the Constitution of Saudi Arabia is all based on direct Quran's commands. In this way, it can be said that Saudi Arabia has no constitution, and it is the royal family that implements the Quranic laws "directly".

1.7.   The events of 2003 and the American-led Invasion in Iraq

The occupation of Iraq in 2003 changed the shape of the Middle East forever. Iraq, once considered hostile to both Iran, and Saudi Arabia, has now become an opportunity. The Middle East turned from three-polar to bipolar, and the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia has intensified. Iran was trying to leverage pressure on the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia by gaining more influence in Iraq and strengthening Shi'a groups, while Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries were trying to repel Iran's influence by supporting Sunni groups. Grumet states: "The events of 2003, particularly the American-led invasion of Iraq, shifted the power balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran dramatically. The fall of Saddam Hussein and the civil war in Iraq have altered the regional security landscape, pitting Saudi Arabia and Iran against one other in a power struggle. Iraq, which was previously viewed as a hostile adversary by both Saudi Arabia and Iran, is now a major source of concern."[19]

1.8.   Purposes of research

This study's scientific goals are to understand better and recognize the barriers and problems of normalizing relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The classification and explanation of these two countries' relations help us understand the roots and causes of the problems. We try to describe more detailed perspectives and viewpoints on this problem by scrutinizing domestic politics and foreign barriers. There viewpoints are as follows:

- A domestic policy that includes culture, religion, identity, etc.;
- External barriers include an anarchical international environment and its self-help system, in which the primary goal of governments is to stay in the game.

More accurate knowledge of the problems helps us with a more open view to removing obstacles. In addition to the confrontation, the two countries have also worked together, which

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[18] https://www.saudiembassy.net/basic-system-government-0 (26.04.2019)
[19] Tali Rachel Grumet, "New Middle East Cold War: Saudi Arabia and Iran's Rivalry", 76.

means what we see today is the result of an international anarchical system combined with the perception of the two countries' leaders from each other. Changes in either of these domains can lead to a change in relationships.

The importance of the social part of the research is that it emphasizes the role of individuals in society, culture, history, and their identity in shaping the political environment. Undoubtedly, leaders' decisions are not made outside of this environment. Therefore, the set of decisions of the leaders is based on the set of social issues of those countries.

1.9.   General hypotheses

- Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia during the monarchy of the Iranian Shah and under the secular regime and after 1979 under the Islamic Republic based on Sharia law have been affected by the Middle East's chaotic environment, which has led to tension and rivalry between these two countries.

- The security dilemma between the two countries and the struggle for survival has significantly affected the relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Also, the battle for primacy in the Islamic world led to hostile relations between the two countries.

- The Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 has worsened the relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia and lead to the proxy wars in the region. Also, the Iran-US relation has significantly affected the relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

- The perceptions of Iranian revolutionary leaders Ayatollah Khomeini and after him, Ayatollah Khamenei and conservative Saudi kings harm the relations between the two countries.

1.10. Special hypotheses

- The international system's anarchy has played a deterrent role in improving relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The self-help system has created an endless rivalry between the two countries.

- Relationships are based on two factors of domestic politics and the international system, and changes on each side make changes in relationships. Perceptions of the leaders of the two countries will be a decisive factor in the improvement or deterioration of relations.

- The circle around the two countries' leaders, including the president, the political elite, the interest groups, and the leader's families, plays an essential role in shaping political leaders' decision-making process and their perception.

- If Iran continues to support Shia militias in the region and Saudi Arabia also back up Sunni groups, both countries would be blocked in this "hostile circle".

- If Iran achieves a nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia will attempt to do the same, and this will lead to more hostile relationships between the two and destabilize the Middle East.

1.11. The empirical part of the research

In this part of our research, the attempt will be to analyze our data through exploring different types of sources such as publications, notes, documentaries, interviews, etc.

Our aim is not going to be establishing statistical methods. Still, it is necessary to have a compression approach toward different statistical data (provided by other economic, political, and informational institutions, websites, and associations). We attempt to discover the process behind the hostile relationship between these two powers by analyzing various types of sources, which will be based on:

- "Observation methods,
- Document review."[20]
- Record keeping.[21]

As we indicate below, this research enables us to realize the different approaches of western publications with Iranian ones and at the same time giving us a clearer picture of what acutely is going on in the region. Both sorts of primary and secondary sources will be examined with the comparison approach.

Primary source: Speeches/conferences/communications/documentaries.

The attempt will be on analysing the different speeches, conferences, or statements from officials of Saudi Arabia and Iran within this period of time (also the statement of Gulf States and western countries regarding the relationship between these two countries. It will also be useful to uncover some first-hand text or reliable records. There are some officials of Iran and Saudi Arabia who broke off the relations with their government and are now living in third countries. As these persons are not anymore dependent on their government, their opinion could be more reliable for our research. We will attempt to contact them through different types of communication. There are some sorts of documentaries about the history of the relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia within this period of time, which could provide us a better background of the research.

Secondary source: books/articles/magazines/newspapers/TV broadcast and monographs.

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[20]

https://people.uwec.edu/piercech/ResearchMethods/Data%20collection%20methods/DATA%20COLLECTION%20METHODS.htm (06.01.2016)

[21] https://www.questionpro.com/blog/qualitative-research-methods/ (06.01.2016)

The attempt will be on analyzing most published books over this topic and within this period of time, as well as different types of articles, which are published recently in Iran, Saudi Arabia and western publications. Besides, we will be analyzing the interpretation of various magazines, newspapers, and Iranian/western TV broadcast toward Iran and Saudi Arabia's governments' events, meetings, and speeches. Knowledge of the Persian language will help us find first-hand articles or books published in different ministries (such as the publication of the Ministry of foreign affairs of Islamic Republic), institutions (such as the center of strategic studies of Islamic republic), etc. Monographs - in order to have a better understanding of the topic of research, we will attempt to examine different types of monographs and dissertations, which were published in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Western Countries.

Our qualitative study employs two methods:

- direct observation;
- record keeping.

Direct observation:

The research will be impartial and have no bias while examining the statement. "The researcher is watching rather than taking a part. The researcher is observing certain sampled situations or people rather than trying to become immersed in the entire context."[22]

Record keeping:

As a data source, this strategy uses previously existing reputable documents and comparable sources of information. This information can be utilized in future studies. It's like to going to the library. There, one may go through books and other reference materials to gather information that will be useful in the research.[23]

1.12. The expected result of research and contribution

Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalries over oil issues, hajj, and interference in each other's affairs, have entered a new field. This field has been transformed into a battlefield between the two neighboring countries since the invasion of Iraq by US troops. Meanwhile, Iran tried to support the Shiite groups as much as possible. Saudi Arabia attempted to block the way for more Iranian influence in the region by supporting Sunni groups. After the uprising in the Arab countries, in the famous Arab Spring, which spread across the Middle East in 2010, the battleground between Iran and Saudi Arabia entered a different shape. Both countries went into the proxy wars in Syria and Yemen to confront each other. These rivalries have been a waste of the abundant economic resources of the two countries and destroyed the countries involved in the war since late 2010. The effects of these contests, according to Rizwan, "distort regional peace, damage regional

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[22] http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualmeth.php (06.01.2016)
[23] https://www.questionpro.com/blog/qualitative-research-methods/ (06.01.2016)

integrity, encourage US participation, sectarianism, damage regional economy, and complicate the Palestine-Israel conflict."[24]

Considering the different dimensions of domestic politics and foreign barriers, the road to a better understanding of the problems opens up. As we have already mentioned, the obstacles to bilateral relations are based on the anarchical system and the perception of the leaders and people of the two countries from each other. Therefore, the change at each level may result in recovery or worsening of relationships. The elite forms an essential part of the mindset of leaders in decision-making, so they are also responsible for rethinking relationships between two countries.

Given the unique position of the Middle East in today's world, studying the strategic indices of bringing relative peace and security in this region is of much importance. The rivalry and hostility between these two neighboring countries have had many negative influences on the regional and transregional arena. Changing the approach from rivalry to collaboration will benefit both countries, as well as Persian Gulf countries, in fostering better relations and avoiding future conflict or proxy war. Furthermore, finding a thorough solution to the problem might prevent regional hostilities, which have resulted in several humanitarian tragedies.

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[24] Muhammad Rizwan, Muhammad Arshid, Muhammad Waqar and Saira Iram, "From Rivalry to Nowhere: A Story of Iran-Saudi Ties", 99.

2. The theoretical framework of the research[25]

2.1. Neoclassical Realism

This chapter tries to explain whether neoclassical realism as a theoretical framework can justify the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. To put it in another way, can neoclassical realism explain the motives, goals, and behaviors of these two countries in interaction with each other?

Most political science researchers use the theoretical framework of classical realism and neo-realism to analyze Iran-SaudiArabia relations. However, these two theories are ineffective in explaining foreign policy due to their reductionist nature. Classical realism reduces foreign policy to unit-level variables and ignores the principles of the international system, while neorealism focuses only on the international system and does not consider the national characteristics of the countries. Neoclassical realism aims to solve the shortcomings of classical realism and neorealism by explaining the relative influence of the governments in the international system, based on the leader's perception, the structure of government, estimation of the decision-makers about their relative power, and ultimately its impact on foreign policy behavior.

Hence, a transitional belt is formed between the countries' motives, stimuli, systematic constraints, and foreign policy. So, that systematic variables, international anarchy, relative power distribution and uncertainty, create requirements for countries to ensure their security. As Lobell points out that when it comes to formulating its macro security policy, anarchy gives governments a great deal of discretion. Only the distribution of power determines the causes and variables that define this macro strategy, while the calculations and perceptions of decision-makers determine the required reaction to developments and power.[26]

Wohlforth says: "The fundamental objective of neoclassical realism is to explain and clarify the aspects of realism that have remained concealed from this theory's perspective and have received insufficient attention."[27] Two general assumptions underpin neoclassical realism. First, because paradigmatic realism includes many dependent theories, including a new theory is not prohibited and does not necessarily negate previous theories; and second, because realism has a "hard core" and a "transmission belt", neoclassical realism can enrich the realist paradigm by strengthening

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[25] This chapter is documented in Doktorski seminar on the 25th of June 2019 at Belgrade's Faculty of Political Sciences.

[26] Steven E. Lobell et al., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5-6.

[27] William C. Wohlforth, "No One Loves a Realist Explanation", *International Politics* vol. 48, no. 4/5 (2011): 445.

the transmission belt as a new theory. In other words, the neoclassical realism theory is non-biased in explaining foreign policy and employs both classical and neorealism theories to describe the behavior of political actors in the international arena. In order to provide a more accurate and full account of countries' foreign relations, this theory strives to pay attention to both domestic politics and international structure at the same time.

Neoclassical realism looks at not just "why", but also "how", and "explaining the dimensions of international relations" meaning neoclassical realism is a theory that is regarded to be tied to reality, not simply ideas. Unlike neorealism, which focuses on the distribution of power as the fundamental component of international relations, neoclassical realism is more of a foreign policy theory. While international political theory aims to explain relationships on a global scale, foreign policy theory analyzes why and how they occur on a national and international scale.

However, the central realistic assumption is that international consequences will be consistent with the relative distribution of material resources at the system level. According to Aaron Friedberg: "Structural considerations provide a useful point from which to begin analysis of international politics rather than a place at which to end it. Even if one acknowledges that structures exist and are important, there is still the question of how statesmen grasp their contours from the inside, so to speak, of whether, and if so how, they are able to determine where they stand in terms of relative national power at any given point in history."[28] To this end, neoclassical realism breaks the holistic view of systemic theories and is looking for the units' internal mechanisms and why certain behaviors and events occur. What is important here is first, the difference between the units and, secondly, the difference in a single unit's decision in different time and space periods.

Furthermore, neoclassical realism attempts to systematize the many different perspectives on realism. This theory recognizes the global complexity of international relations and considers developments as the result of various variables.[29] It incorporates this diversity into theoretical research and, based on it, identifies the necessary modifications for other realistic theories. Thus, several general goals can be defined for neoclassical realism:

"1. obtaining more precise explanations and forecasts;
2. refining and exposing the study program's theoretical principles;
3. extending the study agenda to include new topics."[30]

Because of the mentioned reasons, neoclassical realism does not accept adherence to a limited and strict formula of realism.

In summary, the neoclassical realism research program can be summarized in the definition of Gideon Rose. He explains: "This theory updates and systemizes the basic ideas emerging from the notion of classical realism, considering both external and internal factors. Its proponents say

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[28] Randall L. Schweller, Peter D. Feaver, Gunther Hellman, Jeffery W. Taliaferro, William C. Wohlforth, Jeffery W. Lergo and Andrew Moravcsik, "Correspondence; Brother Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?)", *International Security* vol. 25, no. 1 (2000): 181.
[29] Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation", *Review of international studies* vol. 36, no. 1 (2010): 118.
[30] Randal L. Shweller, "New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining not Refuting, Waltz's Balancing Proposition", *American Political Science Review* vol. 91 no. 4 (1997): 927.

that a country's foreign policy scope and purpose are determined first and foremost by its position in the international system, particularly its material power capabilities. They are realists because of this. They go even farther, considering the influence of power capabilities on foreign policy to be indirect and complicated. The factors involved at the unit level must be converted into systemic pressures. That is why they are classified as neoclassical."[31]

According to Schweller, "the systemic pressures are mediated by domestic variables to produce foreign policy behaviors. Internal political processes, in particular, serve as transmission belts for policy outputs, channeling, mediating, and redirecting policy outputs in response to external forces (primarily changes in relative power). As a result, states react to similar systemic pressures and opportunities in different ways, and their actions may be influenced more by domestic factors than by systemic forces."[32] As a result, Neoclassical realism theory is a combination of neorealism and classical realism, which derives its realistic interpretation of facts by studying internal, international, and interactive mechanisms.

The question is how to identify neoclassical realism from the two main streams of realist theory, classical realism and neorealism. As a result, we must first point out the smallest distinctions before progressing to larger ones. The difference between the three realistic branches above begins with their views on the theory's explanatory position: Rather than giving a theory, classical realism serves as a political philosophy and the foundation for other widely understood realist ideas. Neo-realism compares its concept of theory with that of model, distinguishing theory from a model, which does not always correlate to reality or describe external occurrences. As a result, Waltz believes that the theory would be obsolete if a direct comprehension of the world were possible. As a result, theoretical issues must be invented rather than uncovered.[33] Because the theory does not mirror reality but rather explains it. As a result, a model, not a theory, is a complete reflection of reality.[34]

Neoclassical realism rejects far-fetched conception of theory in favor of a case-by-case analysis of the issues. Many opponents, however, believe that neoclassical realism's theory is based on a variety of fragmented and incomplete case studies. Nevertheless, neoclassical realists believe that by employing a case study and theoretical observation, they can test realist hypotheses based on realism's essential principles, according to Randall Shweller. It's possible that realist theories overlooked principles that were ignored in practice. They present a vision with the greatest descriptive power and outline a thorough causal link by revealing the actual weaknesses in other conservative realism theories in order to elucidate a wide range of foreign policy issues.[35]

Classical realists claim that they adhere to more realistic principles than any other realist theory, and that they do not sacrifice operational accuracy for theoretical precision. The question is why may neoclassical realism explain things better than neorealism? The answer is that "intentions" cannot be described by other realist theories. The structural theory is concerned with the effects

[31] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics* vol. 51, no. 1 (1998): 151-152.

[32] Randall L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Under balancing", *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2004): 164.

[33] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), 5.

[34] Ibid, 7.

[35] Randall L. Shweller and William C. Wohlforth, "Power Test: Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War", *Security Studies* vol. 9 no. 3 (2000): 63.

of certain states' foreign policy behavior at a given time, not with specific actions, intentions, or aims. It only discusses the projected outcomes of government activities.

Each country takes "logical" decisions depending on its position and capabilities in the international system, according to neorealist theory. However, due to a variety of causes, some of these countries do not respond "properly" to the system. Intentions, purposes, and perceptions are some of the aspects that neoclassical realists explain. As a result, according to Shweller, governments that do not act in accordance with neorealist expectations and do not respond in accordance with the international system should not be labelled "irrational". In terms of domestic politics, behaviors that appear unreasonable in terms of systemic pressures may be quite rational.[36]

Thus, neorealism and neoclassical realism are distinguished from each other based on the phenomenon they seek to explain. In this sense, neoclassical realism and neorealism are complementary; Each considers the explanation of a phenomenon that is not considered by the other. Neorealism seeks to explain outcomes - that is, phenomena that result from the interaction of two or more actors in the international system. Gilpin believes that the system is composed of actors, or to put it in another way, the elements that make up the system are its actors, but from a structural point of view, he believes that this system has a limiting effect on the actors.[37]

He assumes that the system is stable and balanced when the actors (governments) of that system do not cause much change in their interests and relative power, or the change in power relations is such that the distribution of relative power does not change.[38] As Brian Rathbun explains: "Neorealism provides in many cases a baseline understanding of the behavior best suited to a state's systemic circumstances if the guidelines of the system are followed, but we only expect this to occur if states come together as unitary actors that perceive their situation objectively and accurately."[39]

The current international system is based on anarchy and decentralization, not hierarchy. In other words, although neorealists believe that the international system is anarchic, it does not mean the lack of order, rather the lack of central authority in the international system. The distribution of power between the units of a system is unequal and is affected by the pressures of the system and structure. In this regard, Waltz believes that power should be defined in terms of the distribution of abilities (among actors); one cannot deduce the extent of one's power from the results one may or may not achieve.[40]

Why, despite international structures and the allocation of relative power among countries, do political actors not always act in the same way? And do they occasionally make "irrational" decisions? Neoclassical realism theory responds by broadening its research scope to incorporate several levels of analysis. This theory was proposed to avoid the neorealism theory's extreme

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[36] Randall L. Shweller, "Missed Opportunities and Unanswered Threats: Domestic Constraints on the Balance of Power" Paper Presented at the annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Massachusetts (2002): 11-12.
[37] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 11.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Brian Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism", *Security Studies* vol. 17 (2008): 309.
[40] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 15.

reductionism. According to Waltz, Neorealism is an international political theory that ignores the impact of social and human elements on countries' foreign policy behavior and has left that analysis to the theory of foreign policy.[41]

In this respect, Neoclassical realism does not reject neorealist assumptions, but seeks to correct and compelete them in order to explain the foreign policy of individual countries. This theory, emphasizing the international system and the dynamics of different countries in it, tries to explain the macro strategies of individual countries in advance of repetitive international patterns. Neoclassical realism combines elements and assumptions of classical realism and neorealism. It combines both systematic and unit-level variables to analyze the foreign policy of each countries.

On the one hand, along the lines of neorealism, it acknowledges the impact and importance of anarchy on the behavior of the countries, and begins with the assumption that the anarchic international system limits foreign policy options. That is, causal priority and precedence in foreign policy determinants is with the systematic independent variables. In such a way that the goals and provisions of foreign policy derive more than anything from their relative material power. However, on the other hand, like classical realism, it considers and analyzes the characteristics of the countries and single-level variables. Thus, the impact of power on foreign policy is complex and indirect because systematic pressures and constraints affect the foreign system through single-level variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and government structure.

Colin Dueck notes: "The sole knowledge of the system's function in regulating interactions between states is insufficient to comprehend the difficulties of international relations, which is why neoclassical realists are attempting to examine both the domestic and international levels. While the international system exerts some generalizable forces on all nations, neoclassical realists argue that foreign policy conduct can only be described by layering in unit-specific factors, bridging the gap between the second and third pictures."[42]

Therefore, according to Rose, understanding the link between relative power distribution and foreign policy requires an examination of both the domestic and international contexts in which foreign policy is created and implemented. It is vital to investigate how the international system's power distribution, as well as countries' internal motives and views, influence foreign policy behavior.[43] Neoclassical realism, thus, examines the central role of the governments and seeks to explain how and under what circumstances the internal characteristics of the countries are placed between their decision-makers' assessments, international threats, opportunities and their foreign policy.

The aim, then, is to refine the theory of neorealism by adding internal mediating variables between systematic motivations and foreign policy decisions. Because the structure of the international system, that is, how power is distributed and the level of foreign threats, alone cannot explain foreign policy behavior. Rather, the combination of international constraints and

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[41] Ibid, 16.

[42] Colin Dueck, "Neoclassical realism and the national interest: Presidents, domestic politics, and major military interventions", *World Politics* vol. 51, no. 1 (1998): 141.

[43] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", 144-145.

opportunities, the extent of external threats, domestic opportunities and constraints, all together, can explain the foreign policy behavior.

The important premise of this theory is that in a complex world, no meaningful theory can be correct at all times, and no policy can be right for all situations. To that end, the experts' essential task is to determine in which conditions, which theories reveal relations between countries, to provide a basis for recommending policies that will be effective. According to Steven Lobell: "Neoclassical realism aims to explain differences in a state's foreign policy over time or between states under comparable external constraints. It makes no pretense of describing systemic or recurrent results in broad terms. As a result, a neoclassical realism theory can explain the expected diplomatic, economic, and military reactions of specific countries to the systemic imperatives, but not the systemic implications of those responses."[44]

The theory of neoclassical realism is the most appropriate theory to utilize in the analysis of Iran-Saudi Arabia relations since it can be used to analyze all aspects of this complicated topic. As previously stated, the analysis of states' relative strength in the international system serves as the foundation for this theory. However, due to systematic pressures and relative power, countries do not always behave in accordance with this framework. In certain situations, countries engage in catastrophic conflicts as a result of a particular ideology, revolutionary thought, or the pursuit of a specific group interest. Iran and Saudi Arabia are both considered regional powers in the Middle East, and religion, identity, and pressure groups play a significant influence in influencing their foreign policies. These countries play a significant political, military, and economic role in the Middle East, as well as a significant part in international affairs.

These two hostile neighbors utilize all available tools, including diplomatic, military, civilian, cultural, and religious ones, to ensure their survival in the existing international system. For example, they have been aiding Shiite and Sunni factions in the region, equipping like-minded groups and employing propaganda against one other, demonstrating both countries' efforts to keep their regimes in place. The Islamic Republic followed anti-Western, anti-imperialist, anti-monarchist, and revolutionary policies after the Islamic Revolution, whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has maintained cordial relations with the West, particularly the United States, since its creation. As a result of the revolution, the Islamic Republic's behavior shifted from secular pro-Western to revolutionary and anti-Western.

According to Lobell, neoclassical realism suggests a causal chain with three steps as follows: "the independent variable (the state's relative power), the intervening variable (the domestic-level 'transmission belt', through which systemic pressures are filtered), and the dependent variable, or foreign policy."[45] To illustrate the first step, due to their oil wealth, these two countries have long held a unique position in the international system. This oil wealth has resulted in the establishment of key relationships in recent decades, particularly in the Middle East, demonstrating the relative influence of the two countries on the global stage. Both countries wield tremendous political and military influence in the Middle East, yet Saudi Arabia appears to have adapted better to the existing international order, whilst the Islamic Republic has pursued a different path since the revolution.

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[44] Steven E. Lobell et al., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, 21.
[45] Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 9.

In terms of the intervening variable, as previously stated, the "filter" of the domestic levels processes the international system's systemic pressures, threats, and power balance. These filters in Saudi-Iranian relations include the views of the Islamic Republic's leader and Saudi Arabia's King, as well as the importance of religion, identity, and society. As a result, international pressures move through the "transmission belt" and show up in foreign policy behavior. Although the Islamic Republic's foreign policy after the revolution shifted to a revolutionary and anti-monarchy stance, Iranians had diverse attitudes toward the Saudis at different times during the presidency. This demonstrates the disparity in Iranian presidents' views on relations with Saudi Arabia. In spite of the fact that the Islamic Republic's leader establishes the overall strategy for relations with other countries, presidents play a significant role in defining these strategies.

Neoclassical realists have the main assumption that states are the most important actors, by which systemic forces are indirectly interpreted into actions. Some neclassical realists categorize the systematic effects on the foreign policy behavior into different timeframes. As Thomas Juneau, in *Squendered Opustunity*, quotes Schweller: "In the long run, behavior tends to converge with structural factor predictions. Short-term divergences, on the other hand, are widespread and may be explained by domestic causes. One of the key contributions of neoclassical realism is the use of intervening factors to channel, mediate, and (re)direct systemic influences. Neoclassical realists believe that the outcomes are more accurate - albeit more limited in scope and less parsimonious - explanations of state behavior."[46] In the following chapter, we will explain how a diffrent time frame shapes the foreign behaviour between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Also, we acknowledge the role of the Islamic Revolution in changing the leaders' perception and understanding from each other.

2.2.   Independent variable

2.2.1. Political system

Neoclassical realism, along the lines of neorealism, considers governments as the most important actors in the international arena and describes the distribution of power, as one of the most important propositions in explaining foreign behavior. On this basis, international constraints and opportunities are the starting point of the neoclassical realism research. Waltz notes: "Once in place, an international political system uses the reinforcing dynamics of socialization and competition to limit and shape the conduct of the units (or nations). States learn' through time when they witness the suffering of those who refuse to follow the system's demands."[47]

Moreover, along the lines of other modern realist theories, neoclassical realism emphasises the rivalry over power and influence between states in the international system and considers this challenge as an important feature that defines international politics. As Ripsman states that: "Neoclassical realism, like classical and structural realism, sees international politics as a never-

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[46] Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*, 19.
[47] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 105.

ending battle for power and influence among nations in a world of finite resources and ambiguity about each other's intents and capabilities."[48]

2.2.2. Anarchy

The main feature of the system is its anarchy. Anarchy means the absence of a universal government. Such a feature requires that members in a self-help system and limited resources seek to secure their own survival. Therefore, due to the inherent nature of the system, international politics is meant to imply the use of threat and force. However, international politics cannot be limited only to the use of force and threat, since civilian and non-military tools are also useful in securing the national interest.

Unoki notes: "The international political system is anarchic, meaning that it is decentralized and horizontal, with no central authority. This, according to Waltz, is in sharp contrast to national politics, which has a hierarchical structure with a centralized ruling body and a set of laws."[49]

2.2.3. Self-help system

Neo-classical realism, along the lines of neo-realism, considers that the countries are seeking power because of the fact that their motivation and sense of need for security in the anarchy of the international system and self-help structure. Hence, power is an instrument for ensuring safety, not the goal itself. Waltz notes that: "In a self-help system each of the units spends a portion of its effort, not in forwarding its own good, but in providing the means of protecting itself against others. In any self-help system, units worry about their survival, and the worry conditions their behavior."[50]

Wirtz in *Balance of Power* notes*:* "The international political system is a self-help system in which states must rely only on their own resources to ensure their security and enforce existing agreements." He continues that the security dilemma arises from nations' individual efforts to guarantee their own survival: in anarchy, even if self-defense is the motivation for building up armed forces, a state's upgrading of its capabilities may be viewed as a danger to others' security."[51]

However, the reason that most of the states are not acting according to the international community's interest is that it would be so costly. As it was stated by Mearsheimer: "States operating in a self-help world almost always act according to their own self-interest and do not

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[48] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

[49] Ko Unoki, *International Relations and the Origins of the Pacific War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 11.

[50] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 128.

[51] T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, Michel Fortmann, *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 104.

subordinate their interests to the interests of other states, or to the interests of the so-called international community. The reason is simple: it pays to be selfish in a self-help world."[52]

2.2.4. Capabilities and power

According to Thomas Juneau: "In International Relations, realists are known as the theorists of power politics. The three key elements of power, "according to Thucydides, are military, economic, and territorial."[53] In neoclassical realism, power refers to the resources and capacities of governments that may be employed to achieve their objectives. Every battle, according to neoclassical realism, as well as all other realistic theories, has targeted some sort of power.[54] However, power is not the only goal or the only tool, but both the tool and the goal.[55] Power also has two dimensions of hardware and software, material and perceptual. In other realist theories, however, the software and perceptual dimensions of power are less analytical.

John Mearsheimer, who belongs to the neorealist school, divides power into two categories; latent and hard power. He believes that these two categories are not synonymies, but they are closely related. In the *Tragedy of the Great Powers*, he asserts that states possess two kind of power: latent and armed. Since they are drawn from various types of assets, these two forms of power are closely connected but not synonymous. Latent power refers to the socioeconomic factors that influence military power; it is mostly determined by a country's wealth and population size.[56]

In order to fight, Great powers need money, advanced technology, and people. These will be raw materials for a powerful army. He believes that ultimate power is military power. In the material dimension of power, the territorial, military and economic dimensions can be included. In the land, the population is considered along with the territory and geography. Military power includes the power of war, naval and mercantilist capabilities, and military spending. The economic dimension is measured by the per capita production of goods and the amount of capital.[57] Economy is more about the software aspect of material power. Moreover, today, of course, one should not forget the growing role of technology in enhancing the international position of governments and expanding their software power.

Technology has fundamentally changed international politics and changed the nature of power, the ability to exercise power, and the goals of power itself, and that is why neoclassical realism acknowledges that people will continue to define their identity more with the land, and that nationalism will continue to prevail over cosmopolitanism. However, as Shweller notes: "geography and policies rooted in geopolitics, which used to be government power's main

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[52] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 33.

[53] Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*, 22.

[54] Randall L. Shweller and William C. Wohlforth, "Power Test: Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War",71.

[55] Randall L. Schweller, Peter D. Feaver, Gunther Hellman, Jeffery W. Taliaferro, William C. Wohlforth, Jeffery W. Lergo and Andrew Moravcsik, "Correspondence; Brother Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?)", 174.

[56] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 55.

[57] Randal L. Shweller, *Deadly Imbalances; Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 187.

requirements as raw materials and land, will be less influential in shaping strategy and policies."[58]

He explains: "Although international politics remains essentially competitive over power and influence over others and the environment, and countries aim to maximize money, influence, security, prestige, political autonomy, and freedom of choice, the world has changed significantly."[59] And therefore, despite the importance of military power superiority, the need to address the technological and economic variables of power is given more attention.

In addition to economics and technology, other software concepts of power, such as internal stability, political adequacy, national will, cohesion, personality, and government quality, have been considered. However, although other realistic theories have spoken of their importance, they have rarely used them. It can be said that these variables have never been used to exercise government power. As Shweller notes: "Even the standard version of the balance of power theory has made predictions based solely on national power's hardware elements, often relying only on military capabilities to exclude economic and political capabilities."[60] Whereas, power includes an immaterial dimension that is related to ideas and legitimacy. These ideas are distinct from material power but are inextricably linked to it. This is where the perceptual importance of power comes into play.

Neoclassical realism considers the perceptual dimension of power or the decision-makers' perception of a unit's power along with other material and immaterial dimensions of power. Accordingly, if power is to influence international relations, it must be through government representatives' perceptions. Randall Shweller explains: "In neoclassical realism, the perceptual variable is not independent of other material factors. It is, however, an endogenous variable that arises from material power. As a result, there is no distinction between power and power perception. Changes in power perceptions, rather than changes in power relations, can occasionally lead to fast changes in behavior."[61]

That is why it is not enough to rely solely on material variables. William Woohlforth notes: "standard measures of the distribution of capabilities are inaccurate indicators of both national assessments and our best estimate of the real power balance." [62] However, this point of view is criticized for its inability to explain the transition of concealed power into real power. All states have different processes for converting hidden power into actual power, and not all states have the potential to employ and change hidden power into real power. Thomas Juneau states that: "Zakaria (1998), Schweller (2006), and Taliaferro (2006) argue that a country's state apparatus cannot be assumed to have automatic access to all the nation's capabilities."

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[58] Randall L. Schweller, "Rational Theory for a Bygone Era", *Security Studies* vol. 20 (2011): 462-463.
[59] Ibid, 467.
[60] Randall L. Shweller, "Missed Opportunities and Unanswered Threats: Domestic Constraints on the Balance of Power", 11.
[61] Randall L. Shweller *The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism*, in: Collin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, ed., *Progress in International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2003): 363.
[62] William C. Wohlforth, Randall L. Schweller, Peter D. Feaver, Gunther Hellman, Jeffery W. Taliaferro, Jeffery W. Lergo and Andrew Moravcsik, "Brother Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?)", 184.

According to Thomas Juneau, "the amount of force that may be used to pursue foreign policy is a function of the state's ability to take total resources from society, or national power."[63]

2.3.   Elements of power

2.3.1. Geography, location, and size

From past until now, the geography, area, and location of a country have always been useful in its political destiny. For example, if a country is surrounded by mountains or a vast desert, it will harder to be occupied than a country with lower natural barriers. Thomas Juneau notes: "the absence of physical barriers can weaken a state by increasing its vulnerability."[64] The geographical location of Iran and Saudi Arabia has made these two countries unique and has given them a significant advantage in the region and the world. In the following, this influential factor will be explained in detail.

2.3.2. Population and wealth

The population has a vital role in the formation of military might. No large, wealthy country will become a superpower without a large population. To that end, the most important component of building a large and powerful army is to have a huge population. Wealth is also a very important component in shaping a powerful army. No country will be able to build a large and powerful army without a stable and forward-looking economy. However, a high population does not automatically imply a great amount of wealth. India and China, for example, had a higher population than other nations during the Cold War, yet none became a superpower. Meanwhile, it is impossible to have enormous wealth without a huge population, implying that money and population are inextricably linked.

However, one should bear in mind that countries with a large wealth do not necessarily end up building a large and powerful army. Instead, it should be seen how much do states spend on their defense. Mearsheimer notes: "Mobilizable wealth' refers to the economic resources a state has at its disposal to build military forces. It is more important than overall wealth because what matters is not simply how wealthy a state might be, but how much of that wealth is available to spend on defense."[65]

2.3.3.   Technology and industry

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[63] Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*, 24.
[64] Ibid, 37.
[65] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 62.

Technology and industry also have a massive impact on building a powerful military. The advent of technology, wartime tools, modern equipment, and nuclear technologies also had a significant influence on both wealth and population and ultimately on military might. According to Thomas Juneau: "A huge army might be powerful merely because of its size, but it also needs equipment. Quality, quantity, firepower, mobility and ability to project (the capacity to transfer soldiers and equipment away from mobilization hubs, notably strategic and tactical lift), readiness, communication and control, logistics, and infrastructure are all considered while evaluating equipment."[66]

2.4. Rationality and Clarity

The prominent realism theorists, Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, reject the idea that governments must behave consciously to attain their objectives. Neorealism isn't a rational theory of government behavior, either. Because of the fact that the structure impacts the state's behavior through processes of competition and socialization, Waltz makes it apparent that his theory does not require any rationality assumptions. He also emphasizes that we cannot expect political leaders to make decisions solely on the word rationality's proposition.[67] Therefore, actors' decision based on the power relationship is not necessarily consistent with cost-benefit calculations, and rationality in this sense does not always lead to the "right" decisions.

The clarity in this theory means the signs and information provided by the international system to the countries. The clarity in this theory means the signs and information provided by the international system to the countries. According to the book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International* Politics There are three aspects to clarity:

-   the extent to which threats and opportunities are readily apparent;
-   if the system provides time boundaries for threats and opportunities;
-   if the best policy options stand out.[68]

Countries facing such information and signs usually choose different reactions. The set of domestic policies of countries and the balance of power in the international arena cause different reactions to these signs. Also, the intensity or weakness of each of these information or signs will lead to the different behaviors in different countries.

2.4.1. Clear opportunities

A clear opportunity occurs when a country accelerates its economic, technical, and military advancement in such a way that it is capable of shifting the system's power balance. Clear opportunities, according to Ripsman, include three elements: "(1) evidence that the state in

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[66] Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*, 38.
[67] Jacek Więcławski1, "Considering Rationality of Realist International Relations Theories", *Chinese Political Science Review* vol. 5 (2020): 125.
[68] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 46.

question has superior relative capabilities; (2) proof that other important parties lack the political will to oppose the government's actions in the theater in issue; and (3) proof that a favorable balance of capabilities and resolve will not last permanently, necessitating immediate action."[69]

2.4.2. Time horizon

Time horizon is the second mechanism of clarity, which is more complicated because of the need for a precise understanding of the enemy's abilities and intentions. It may be confusing for the country's leaders whether it is time for a quick reaction and war or tolerance and compromise. For example, In the Iran-Iraq war, for example, Saddam Hussein was almost certain that, considering the internal challenges of Islamic Republic after the revolution, and the support of US and Saudi Arabia, he would easily defeat Iran in the first few months of the war. However, his estimation about the Iranian capabilities both politically and militarily was wrong, as the war prolonged to 8 years without the defeat on any side.

2.4.3. Policy option

Policy option is about implementing policies and decisions of countries in response to the signs and information provided by the global system. In general, if threats and opportunities faced by countries are clear and the reaction time is precise, then one can expect a rational political decision from the leaders. According to Norrin Ripsman: "The less clarity there is, the greater room there is for particular leaders, parties, and states to pursue unique solutions based on their preferences, parochial interests, or strategic cultures."[70]

Foreign policy actions fall into one of three categories: maintaining current tactics, emulating the successful methods of the system's major powers, or taking the lead and developing a new foreign policy. The combination of systemic and internal variables influences the choice of each of these actions. Governments, particularly major powers, are enticed by the international system to follow similar policies or reduce risk as separate entities.

Neoclassical realism determines the power of the state in the sense of the state's relative ability to extract or mobilize social resources, which is mediated by state institutions as well as nationalism and ideology.

Jeffrey W. Taliaferro explains four categories of governments as follow:

1. "Governments that have more extracting capability and are more vulnerable to external threats seek to imitate.

2. Governments with a poor capacity for extraction and mobilization, as well as a high level of external vulnerability, have a harder time replicating.

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[69] Ibid, 47.
[70] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 50.

3. Long-term security efforts are pursued by governments with high extraction and mobilization capability and minimal external vulnerability.

4. Governments with limited extraction and mobilization capacity and low international vulnerabilities are less likely to copy or initiate new tactics and are more likely to stick to old ones."[71]

Internal changes such as a country's lack of nationalist sensitivity and the presence of an anti-government ideology would hinder states' ability to mimic or initiate, among other factors. Vulnerable states insist on their own tactics in this scenario. "Unlike conventional neo-realism, which introduces the balancing behavior of units in the international context as the dependent variable, the dependent variable in neoclassical realism is not 'balance', but coalition difficulties that complicate the balancing process."[72]

2.5. Permissive/Restrictive strategic environment

In general, countries will have a particular strategic atmosphere due to their imminent threats. This strategic atmosphere, depending on the type of threat, can be very intense and challenging or easy. Ripsman notes that: "The strategic environment is concerned with the substance of the information provided by the system, whereas clarity and uncertainty are concerned with the breadth of information provided by the system. The difference between liberal and restrictive strategic settings has to do with the urgency and scale of dangers and possibilities that governments are confronted with."[73]

2.6. The Intervening Variable

Kenneth Waltz explains that structure shapes and exerts pressure, but does not determine behavior nor outcome.[74] According to Taliaferro: "The question for policy makers and for scholars becomes one of discerning the relative strength of those structural shoves and pushes on any given state over time and the establishing menu of possible state responses to those external stimuli."[75] The logic of neorealism is dogmatic in that it considers the international system as a less vulnerable body with an independent explanatory status.

However, it defines it as ontologically dependent on the units and the distribution of their capabilities. This means that units are not given the role of selectivity between the various

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[71] Steven E. Lobell et al., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, 197.

[72] Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Progressive Research on Degenerate Alliances", *American political Science Review* vol. 91, no. 4 (1997): 920.

[73] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 52.

[74] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 117.

[75] Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Strategy of Innocence or Calculated Provocation? Neoclassical Realism and the Roosevelt Administration's Road to World War II", *American Political Science Association* (2009): 9.

leading options and possibly their transgression of systemic requirements. However, the decision-making structure also has explanatory value, even if it rarely has a significant effect on systematic outcomes. The intermediary and decision-making variable in the field of foreign policy is in accordance with the usual principles of government, which is still the most prominent and realistic. The external realities of the environment, which are usually the most significant actors and its internal mechanisms and characteristics, both material (government institutions) and immaterial (ideology and perception of elites) can affect the least intensity and weakness, and in general, the style of behavior of units. According to Taliaferro: "Neoclassical realism distinguishes the state from society, but like classical realism, it accepts the relationship between the state and society in such a way that social forces cannot be separated from the process of decision-making by leaders and the formulation of foreign policy."[76]

The state's definition in neoclassical realism is consistent with Morgenthau's definition, according to which the nation pursues foreign policy within the framework of a legal organization called the state, and its agents act as the nation's representatives in international affairs. They speak on behalf of the government, negotiate on behalf of the government, and try to maintain, enhance and consolidate the power of the government. Taliaferro notes: "Neoclassical realism, like classical realism, analyzes the complex interaction between state and society while being committed to the core concept of the idea of balance of power. The state's authority fluctuates according to the state in various historical times, just as it does in classical realism. The international environment, which is the stage of state interaction, is the primary element influencing states' interests and conduct, much as it is in neo-realism. That is, both neoclassical realism and neo-realism have an environment-based ontology."[77] Thus, the state is not an independent entity; independent of external and internal influences.

Internal resource extraction hypotheses in neoclassical realism are based on a top-down government conception. To put it in another way, systemic factors influence internal state processes and may restrict states' ability to respond to systemic inputs. It indicates that unit-level variables are those that are influenced by systemic factors. As a result, a favorable external environment permits the government to consolidate its internal institutions, whereas an unfavorable external environment might hinder a country's internal forces from growing. However, as Taliaferro says: "this is not the only determining factor in shaping the internal strategies of governments, because of the fact that the state is the arena of bargaining between rulers and its social actors."[78]

Hence, in neoclassical realism, firstly, there is a two-way relationship between the system and the state, and secondly, within the state, interacting forces also bargain with each other and influence foreign policy processes. The analysis of neoclassical realism is typically a multi-level analysis, in which it simultaneously analyzes the system and the units of government. As a result, it has different analyses for different governments. Therefore, governments face important causal factors that are not necessarily the product of the international system.

These factors are interventionist variables (foreign policy) that fall between the independent variable (systemic/structural) and the dependent variable. Thus, countries may face with a wide

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[76] Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell and Norrin M. Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 13.
[77] Ibid, 210.
[78] Ibid, 211.

range of foreign policy options determined by systemic factors. Still, the option chosen by leaders, in particular, may be the product of internal factors, or intervening variables. As it was stated by Juneau: "Intervening variables act as filters or transmission belts between the international distribution of power and the foreign policy outcome, explaining the conversion from the possible—the range of feasible outcomes—to the actual, the foreign policy choice."[79] They are national political procedures defining how practical power is interpreted to foreign policy, or in what way the opportunities and constrictions formed by power are interpreted into real choices.

As a result, the capabilities and distribution of power are the most influential phenomena, but they are not enough to explain behavior. As Thomas Juneau notes: "Power provides the context but not the how, why, and when of choices. Relative power, in other words, is a permissive cause: it explains the opportunities and constraints states face. Domestic factors are then needed as proximate causes; they specify choices within this range of feasible choice."[80]

In *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* intervening variables are devided into four categories:

- "Leaders' image;
- Strategic culture;
- State-Society Relations;
- Domestic Institutions."[81]

2.6.1. Leader Images

Human leaders and influential internal ideas are included in the government, in addition to decision-making structures and formal processes. As a result, neoclassical realism argues that the foreign policy executive is a unified central decision-maker dedicated to improving the country's security and strength. At the same time, it rejects the notion that leaders have automatic access to all national resources and are not required to bargain with social groups in order to put their plans into effect.[82] Leaders are also assumed to be erroneous beings with limitations in assessing environmental conditions and in contact with other human beings. However, in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, where the political system has historically been king-centered or leader-centered, hierarchy becomes less important and the role of the individual in decision-making becomes very significant.

Foreign policy choices are made by the leaders of governments, and the nature of their assessment of the threat is important. Understanding and perception of the state's leaders and political elites about their country, the international environment, and security have a massive impact on their political decision-making process. This understanding and perception depend on

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[79] Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*, 24.
[80] Ibid, 25.
[81] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 13.
[82] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, 289.

a set of psychological issues, political space, culture, language, history, and other issues. Jervis notes: "The broadest justification for looking at how leaders perceive, judge, and choose is that international politics depends on national actions, even if the international results are not the simple sum of how each country behaves."[83]

Political psychology analyzes the behavior of politicians in finding an answer to their reactions to the constraints and opportunities of the international system. Ripsman notes: "Psychological models identify a wide range of cognitive constraints on how decision makers process information in crisis situations when information tends to be incomplete, overwhelming, and/or contradictory. These models emphasize cognitive explanations such as operational codes, the fundamental attribution error, lessons from history, the role of personality, group dynamics and group think, and the beliefs and images of leaders."[84]

In general, it can be said that all the opportunities and constraints of the international system pass through the filter of perception of the elites and political leaders, and their image of threats, risks, or opportunities will play an important role in their future political behavior. Ripsman notes: "All incoming information about the outside world passes through these cognitive filters, which personalize and bias the leader's perception of the external stimuli."[85]

Over-all, four non-institutional or human variables affect the unit level of government capacity to extract and mobilize resources, as well as foreign policy behavior. According to Schweller these four variables are:

- "Elite consensus,
- elite cohesion,
- regime internal vulnerability,
- social cohesion."[86]

The government's will to balance or extend its presence is profoundly affected by elite consensus and cohesiveness, as Shweller explains, while the regime's internal vulnerability and community cohesion impact the government's capacity to extract resources for its goals. These characteristics substantially explain why various governments' responses to (similar) external challenges and opportunities differ.[87]

The sum of the non-institutional components of government shapes its perception of the environment and information processing. Thus, as Wohlfort says: "government capability is defined not only in terms of available material resources but also in terms of how it perceives internal and environmental threats and opportunities, which varies according to location and

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[83] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 18.

[84] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 62.

[85] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 62.

[86] Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 261.

[87] Randall L. Shweller, "Missed Opportunities and Unanswered Threats: Domestic Constraints on the Balance of Power", 11.

time. The causes of changes in perceptions are unclear and difficult to understand."[88] Actors' perceptions provide an answer to the reasons for the emergence of certain behaviors in the international arena, especially the occurrence or cessation of wars.

Offensive realists, who insist on rational choice assumptions, for example, believe that national leaders choose aggressive foreign policies for a time and place where costs and risks of action are low. Elites generally make decisions based on rationality-related norms. In this way, as political leaders weigh the costs and benefits of retreating or continuing the war, they update their preferences in response to new information and pay attention to the consequences. However, historical evidence shows that great powers sometimes insist on wars that ultimately lead to defeat. The roots of such behavior are less related to the objective distribution of power or standard profit and loss calculations, and more to the mental way in which leaders process information about their international environment and relative position compared to other governments.

The elite's processing of information serves as a mediating variable in this case. Elites prescribe a certain sort of foreign policy based on their knowledge of the environment and the particular method they choose to process it, which may or may not be consistent with systemic demands. That is why great powers occasionally engage in battles that are not only bound to fail, but also in areas that are not strategically important. To put it in another way, while the actors' actions must comply to systematic criteria, this conformity is not always attained, and psychological elements such as the actors' desire to observe facts from a specific analytical perspective must be taken into account.[89]

This means that we see a complex and enigmatic relationship between the two levels of systematic and national analysis, contrary to the neo-realist assumption that there is a simple relationship between the systemic stimulus and the state response. Just as actors' behavior is not necessarily compatible with systematic and structural rationality, especially in times of danger. It should be noted that beliefs do not have an independent effect on the foreign policies of governments. As Taliaferro notes: "In fact, elite perceptions are the channel through which structural variables are translated into foreign policy. Every foreign policy theory must identify the mechanisms by which explanatory variables are translated into a policy. This often includes a close look at how leaders perceive the distribution of power and its trends."[90]

The question is whether it is possible to act under the influence of internal variables and against systematic demands without suffering the unpleasant consequences of such behaviour, and the answer is no. Lobell notes that "neoclassical realism emphasizes that in the long run, regimes or leaders who consistently fail to respond to systemic stimuli will jeopardize the survival of their regime."[91]

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[88] William C. Wohlforth, *Witness to the End of the Cold War* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 197.

[89] Dean Keith Simonton "The Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders: Quantitative Multiple-Case Assessments" In goethals G.R., Allison S.T., Kramer R.M. and Messick D.M. (eds) *Conceptions of Leadership: Enduring ideas and emerging insights* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 53.

[90] Jeffery W. Taliaferro, Randall L. Schweller, Peter D. Feaver, Gunther Hellman, William C. Wohlforth, Jeffery W. Lergo and Andrew Moravcsik, "Correspondence; Brother Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?)", 181.

[91] Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.

2.6.2. Strategic Culture

Generally, a set of beliefs and values build the thinking of elites and political leaders that play a significant role in their political decision-making. The neoclassical realists divide the category of strategic culture into two parts of bureaucratic organizational culture, such as military and its more social meaning in the sense of beliefs, values, and worldview.

According to Ripsman: "Scholars such as Jeffrey Legro and Elizabeth Kier, who treat the military as a bureaucratic organization, study the effect of military culture on the formation of national security policy. According to Legro, the military's organizational culture and the attitudes of military professionals explain why the restriction on the use of chemical weapons was not breached on the battlefield during World War II."[92]

The strategic culture, which includes the norms, beliefs, and rules of society, is institutionalized and consolidated, which restricts the freedom of political actors and greatly affects their ideas and thoughts. Robert Keohane notes: "Ideas can be categorized as world views, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs. They can have impacts on policy by acting as road maps, helping to cope with the absence of unique equilibrium solutions, and becoming embedded in durable institutions. Policy changes can be influenced by ideas both because new ideas emerge and as a result of changes in underlying conditions affecting the impact of existing ideas. Ideas matter, as a result of a system of interacting multiple causes of which they are a part."[93]

Looking at Iran-Saudi relations, we see how the role of military groups, pressure groups, religion and the laws that govern the country has been able to create a culture of freedom or restriction (in rare cases) for the leaders of these countries. For example, Islam with two different interpretations has led to the formation of two different Islamic cultures in the two countries. In such a cultural atmosphere, the leaders of the two countries are able to make decision within that specific cultural framework.

2.6.3. State-Society Relations

In a society, the more coordination between state institutions and society, the more power the government has in mobilizing national power and more ability to translate it into their foreign policy. If the government, in the mobilization of the people, the public opinion and disputes between the state and the society acts in a way that directs the society towards their own policies, will then have more support from the community in its foreign policy. According to Ripsman, important questions include the degree of harmony between the state and society, the degree to which society defers to state leaders on foreign policy matters in the event of disagreements,

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[92] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 66.

[93] Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (London: Cornell University, 1993), 29.

distributional competition among societal coalitions to capture the state and its associated spoils, political and social cohesion within the state, and public support for general foreign policy.[94]

These aspects can impact whether the leaders have the authority to extract and use the nation's power. In this case, if the state and society are in a regular harmony, then the open-handed government will have to deal with international opportunities and constraints. But it should be kept in mind that most states within parties and coalitions are faced with many challenges and disagreements. Moreover, public opinion is not always in the direction of government policy.

According to Ripsman: "If good relations between the FPE[95] and key societal interests or the public at large are indicative of high levels of societal respect for and trust of the state, then that should serve to reinforce policy making consistently with the structural realist model, since the state will have a relatively free hand to enact policy as it sees fit."[96] He further notes that if broad consultation and engagement of societal players are required during the policy-making process, the harmony may result in policy that favors local interests rather than simply international ones (or even at the expense of international ones).[97]

Ripsman highlights the role of coalitions and interest groups and divides them into two categories of inward-oriented and outward-oriented. He explains that the state may not be able to adopt policies that are in opposition to the wishes of a certain socioeconomic interest group, sector, or coalition of interests to the extent that such group, sector, or coalition of interests controls. This can happen because of the fact that the leaders are chosen from that political coalition and thus see overseas events through the lens of their own interests, or because they recognize that meeting the demands of their voters is the only way to preserve their power. Researchers who look at the state from a political economy viewpoint predict that countries captured by inward-looking nationalist coalitions will pursue protectionism and military rivalry. Those whose ruling coalition is dominated by outward-looking internationalists, on the other hand, will embrace lots of promises for freer trade and international cooperation.[98]

2.6.4. Domestic Institutions

These institutions determine the mechanisms of mobilization and resource extraction. Institutional arrangements are the material and organizational structures within which the formulation of mobilization and resource extraction strategies occur. The more coherent the mechanism and the more independent capabilities, the more useful the strategies will be. There are two strategies for resource mobilization:

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[94] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 71.
[95] Foreign policy environment
[96] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 71.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 72.

1. "In the first type, the government directly controls economic activity, reallocates resources through a centralized plan, and nationalization of key industries or factories;
2. In the second strategy, the government indirectly intervenes in the economy to facilitate the accumulation of social wealth and thus the acquisition of tax revenues for the government."[99]

Neither of these two strategies is possible without cost, and to this end requires specific government political and economic investments. These investments are made in two ways: first, on a large scale, which is done for direct mobilization; And second, in the form of government subsidies and retreats in favor of non-state actors to expand production, resulting in indirect mobilization. However, in order to extract resources, the government, by direct intervention, turns social wealth into military power, and does so through taxes, recruitment, and trade. There is a two-way relationship between mobilization and resource extraction. Thus, as Taliaferro notes the government is more likely to redouble its mobilization efforts by boosting extraction, but this may diminish mobilization efficacy, because of the fact that increasing the exploitation of existing resources reduces the overall wealth available for investment and weakens incentives to produce greater riches in the future.

The form and type of internal institutions, given their function and mechanism, their democratic and non-democratic character, the structure and type of government, the distribution of the power between institutions, the rules and regulations of the ruling of the country have a significant influence on the political decision-making process of the elites and political leaders. Ripsman notes: "Formal institutions, organizational routines and processes, and bureaucratic oversight, often established by constitutional provisions with clearly specified rules and regulations set the broad parameters within which domestic competition over policy occurs."[100] As a result, they define who can participate to policy development, at what stage of the policy process, and who can act as veto players, preventing policy changes. In this regard, different institutional forms of governments can have a substantial impact on their ability to respond to systemic factors. [101]

Besides, the form of government, including the presidency or the parliamentary, determines the legislative, implementing mechanism, and independence limits. According to George Tsebelis: "Analysis of presidentialism and parliamentarism points out that the most important difference between these regimes is the interaction between legislative and executive in parliamentary systems and their independence in presidential ones. There are differences between presidential and parliamentary systems in terms of who controls the agenda governments in parliamentary systems, parliaments in presidential ones."[102]

Institutions, according to their form and structure, facilitate or impede the decision-making process for their leaders. According to Ripsman: "division of powers, checks and balances, and public support serve to constrain democratic leaders and make it difficult for them to go to war.

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[99] https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-economics/chapter/government-intervention-and-disequilibrium/ (31.07.2021)

[100] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 75.

[101] Ibid.

[102] George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 90.

Nonetheless, democracies vary in the degree to which their institutions provide checks and balances on their FPEs; therefore, it is useful to examine their institutional difference."[103]

Therefore, the formation and functioning of parties, organizations, legislative and executive bodies, power distribution, legislation, and law enforcement will have a significant impact on the mobilization of the country's internal forces. Ripsman states: "Important institutional variables affecting the foreign policy of democracies include the degree to which power is concentrated in the executive's hands, executive-legislative relations, party systems and whether it is a two-party or multiparty system, voting rules and whether the electoral system is based on plurality voting or proportional representation, and the quality of the government and its administrative competence."[104]

2.7.   The Dependent variable

According to Waltz, neoclassical realism is a theory of foreign policy, not international politics. However, assume this theory is divided into three parts: short, short to medium, and long term. In that scenario, there's a lot more to say about how this theory helps us comprehend the international system.

2.7.1. Short-term

In the short term, this theory explains the policies and decisions of governments in relation to the opportunities and constraints of the international arena; therefore, in this period, it becomes more of a theory of foreign policy than the theory of international politics. However, in the short to medium term, this theory explains the grand strategies of governments toward international arena and the distributions of power. In the long run, this theory paves the way for a better understanding of the impact and interplay between the state's internal politics, its external strategy, and its combination with the role of international structures.

Ripsman notes: "In the shorter term, neoclassical realism can help explain the short- term policy choices that states make to respond to the particular challenges and opportunities that the international system and other states present to them."[105] Neoclassical realism can shed light on the policy planning and grand strategic adjustment processes that governments employ to deal with not just current crises, but also expected power shifts, future problems, and opportunities in the short to medium term.[106]

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[103] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 76.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 81.
[106] Ibid.
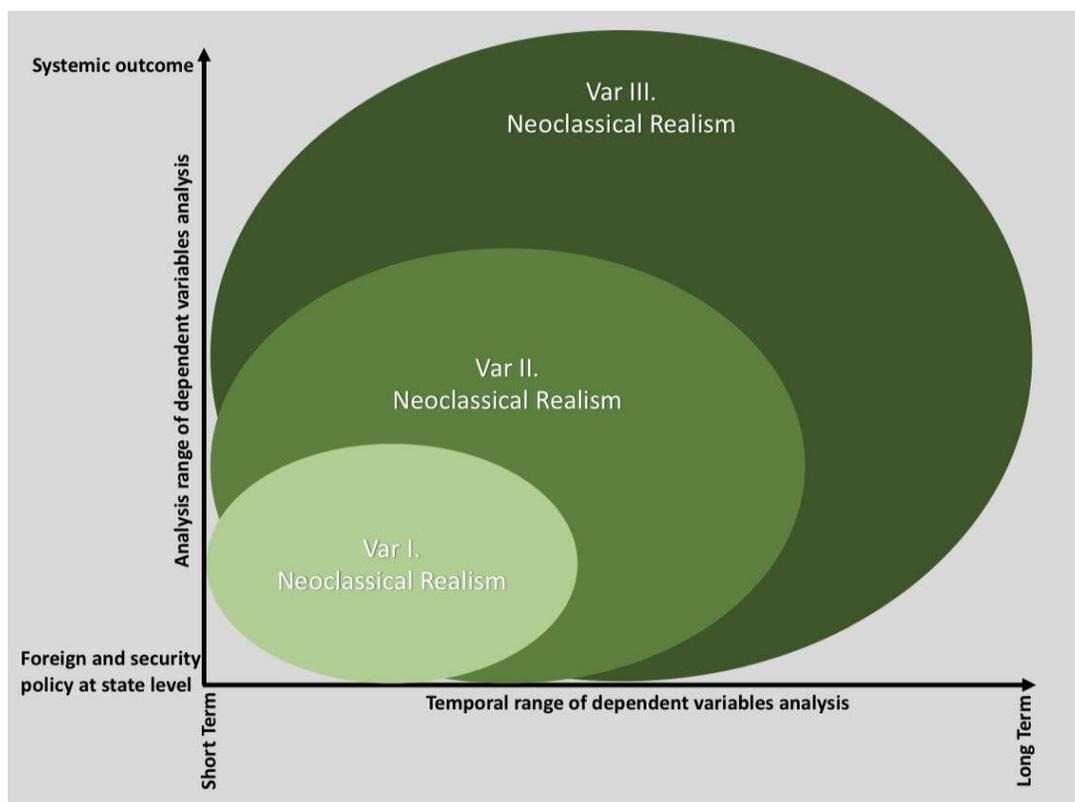
Figure 1 - Explanatory Range of Three Types of Neoclassical Realism[107]

Hence, dependent variables are different depending on the time intervals, and the systemic changes of the international structure can also be explained considering these periods. In the long run, the internal policies of governments are translated into their foreign policies, and ultimately, the interaction of these policies with the international outcomes and relative power will influence or reshape the structure of the international system, or both. When we argue that governments are more likely to seek political navigating in a short period, we mean within a few days, weeks, or months. However, in the short to medium term, it refers to months and years rather than decades. Governments strove to create infrastructure during this time period with an eye toward future grand strategy and the balance of power in the international system in mind.

Now, if we examine the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the short term after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, we will see that the behaviour of the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini has significantly changed toward the Saudi Kingdom. With the changes in the regional and international policies of the Islamic Republic, Saudi Arabia accordingly reacted to navigate its political behaviour to control Iran. As a result, it can be said that in the short term, countries are more reactive and try to direct their political behaviors in proportion to the changes in power. While after the Islamic Revolution, Iran had changed from a monarchical and secular state to a country supporting revolutionary-Islamic movements, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was trying to find a way to respond appropriately and decisively to prevent Iran's goals.

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[107] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 82.

When we look at the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia from the perspective of short to medium period, we find that after about a year from the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the two countries were showing relatively clearer positions at the regional and international levels. This means that the policies of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini were clear to King Khalid and King Fahd, and they knew that Khomeini was seeking to change the order in the Middle East and was ready to face the West and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to achieve his goals. This is a time when the two countries are drawing up a longer-term or grand strategy for confronting each other with a view to the future. According to the book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics,* "the organizing principle or conceptual blueprint that animates all of a state's dealings with the outside world is presented in the Grand strategy. It is a forward-thinking operation that considers external risks and possibilities, as well as the state's specific material, political, and ideological goals."[108]

Only a few years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Iran began to form an alliance with the region's Shiites and revolutionary groups around the world. At the same time, Saudi Arabia was moving closer to the United States, equipping the Gulf countries and Sunni groups opposed to Iran.

2.7.2. Long-term

In the long run, governments seek to increase their power and gain a more significant share of power in the international system. They are trying to make the most of their military power by researching the technology. Meanwhile, the role of economic growth of countries and their industrial progress is highlighted.

According to Norrin Ripsman: "The longer time frame means they can not only draw upon existing resources available to the state but also make plans to expand upon them over time by promoting economic growth, providing more extensive training to the armed forces, or engaging in research and development of new weapons systems."[109] They also have more time to create larger alliances with other countries, such as full-scale alliances with coordinated planning and efforts to improve interoperability across armed forces.[110] The set of grand strategies of superpowers and their effects and interactions with each other will ultimately and in the long-term lead to a change in the balance of power. According to Ripsman: "Extending the time frame further to the medium- to- longer term, defined in term of years and decades, allows the strategic choices of the different great powers to interact and to have an impact on international systemic outcomes."[111] "Systemic outcomes", according to Ripsman, are observable political events that result from the interaction and coaction of two or more players' tactics in the international arena. As a result, the distribution of power in the international system, as well as

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[108] Steven E. Lobell, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Norrin M. Ripsman *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15.
[109] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 84.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid, 85.

strategic decisions made by a number of governments, will determine whether there will be great power conflict or peace.[112]

However, one should keep in mind that the relationship between government strategies and the changes in the structure of the international system is not completely direct and depends on several factors. Ripsman argues that structural change is rooted in the great powers' particular investment decisions, their decisions on whether to adopt a grand policy of restraint or one of aggressive expansion, and their domestic restrictions and opportunities.[113]

Although Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic are not considered superpowers, they are two important powers in the region whose relations affect the rest of the Middle East and even the world. Decades after the Islamic Revolution of Iran, both countries came to a clearer understanding of each other's foreign policy and both perceived each other as a serious threat. In the long run, the two countries have formulated long-term political, military and economic strategies to prevent each other in becoming a regional hegemon. Saudis and Iranians, are both regionally and globally, trying to increase their military and political power. On the global level, Saudi Arbia is trying to get closer to the US, and Iran is making an alliance with Russia and China. On the regional level, Saudis are attempting to recruit Sunni groups and support the GCC in opposing Iran, while Iran is backing up the Shia and revolutionary groups in the Middle East.

2.8.   The weakness of this theory

Dogma based on materialist underpinnings continues to plague neoclassical realism. Although scholars such as Schweller and Taliaferro, like the new generation of neo-realist theorists, have attempted to pay attention to the semantic structures, culture, ideology, and mental perceptions of political elites in order to deepen their own analyses, these phenomena are ultimately considered superstructures. Material structure and material instruments are, in their opinion, the fundamental power of the international system and the state's particular activities. They are deprived of an in-depth grasp of the links between Intersubjective phenomena and the formation of semantic systems due to the mechanical implications of the materialist viewpoint.[114]

In the causal study of international phenomena, Neoclassical realism's attempt to reconcile a systematic view with an agent-based approach leads to some confusion. It is vital to define the basis and main analytical level in order to comprehend international phenomena and behaviors. A precise foundation is required in fundamentalist theories since analysis will become general statements that, despite their apparent attractiveness, will be less useful. After analyzing the above-mentioned theory, it becomes evident that the international system is the central tenet of neoclassical realism. However, the extent to which internal elements influence a unit's foreign policy is debatable. For the final answer, it's important to understand that within neoclassical realism, multiple tendencies may be identified, each of which places varying degrees of significance on internal variables that explain foreign policy.

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[112] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 85.
[113] Ibid, 87.
[114] Gustav Meibauer, "Interests, Ideas, and the Study of State Behaviour in Neoclassical Realism", *Review of International Studies* vol. 46, no. 1 (2020): 22.

This theory has been criticized for two other reasons. According to Juneau: "First, there have been few efforts to develop its internal logic, as the literature is dominated by case studies. Second, despite its professed emphasis on richness, neoclassical realism has focused on sweeping historical cases, often covering decades, leading it to neglect important day-to-day aspects of state behavior."[115] Another critique of this theory is its inattention to non-great powers and other powers around the globe. Juneau also notes that: "Neoclassical realism has focused on broad historical cases studying the behavior of Western and great powers. It has not sought to explain what 'state X did last Tuesday', has not focused on non-Western, non–great powers, and has mostly emphasized broad aspects of foreign policy, especially war."[116]

2.9.   Conclusion

Three major schools of neoclassical realism are separated from each other. The first school, which is a right-wing school of neoclassical realism, is, as a matter of fact, a modified model of Waltz's neo-realist theory. Accordingly, structural variables are sufficient to explain foreign policy behavior, and systemic pressures can explain governments' foreign policy behaviors. But where governments engage in different behaviors despite the systemic pressures, one must consider the impact of single-level variables or the role of leaders' misperceptions or internal barriers that prevent leaders from paying attention to the systemic variables. Therefore, the effect of non-systemic variables on foreign policy is temporary.

In the second school, both structural and non-structural variables are essential in understanding the regulation and style of foreign policy. Thus, unit-level variables play a significant and pivotal role in foreign policy behavior when governments provide themselves the desired level of security in the system. Conversely, in the absence or lack of security, the impact of unstructured and unsystematic factors on foreign policy is a tactical one. The third school of neoclassical realism is a revivalist school in which governments' goals are not exclusively the result of the distribution of power and capabilities at the systemic level (i.e., the idea of neo-realism), but also stem from internal variables. Still, domestic variables can rarely be decisive in determining foreign policy principles and shaping the direction of the governments' macro-strategy.

Therefore, the domestic variables cannot be denied in terms of their effects on the spread or prohibition of foreign policy behaviors. However, what shapes the macro-strategy of governments is the framework of strategic interactions between governments.[117] It is only in the study of various examples of units' foreign policy behavior in different spatial and temporal situations that make it possible to test each of these schools' claims' integrity. As a result, the degree of importance of internal variables may vary depending on the study. In other words, it is always possible that the effect of unit-level variables in one case is powerful and extensive, and in another case, ineffective and superficial. The task of neoclassical realism is to achieve a case-

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[115] Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*, 4.
[116] Ibid, 29.
[117] Tudor Onea, "Putting the 'Classical' in Neoclassical Realism: Neoclassical Realist Theories and US Expansion in the Post-Cold War", *International Relations* vol. 26, no. 2 (2012): 146.

by-case conclusion on the importance of each systematic and international factor that can be generalized to similar case studies.

In explaining the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two Islamic countries whose ideological values have a significant impact on their foreign policy, the theory of neoclassical realism is one of the best options. After the Islamic Revolution of Iran, this country has tried to navigate its political strategy against monarchical and imperialist countries. Soon after, Saudi Kingdom has reacted to these policies and tried to balance the regional power by supporting Sunni groups in opposing the Iranian regime. At the same time, Iran has attempted to ally with the revolutionary and Shia groups to deter the Saudis. As it is already mentioned, the starting point for analyzing the foreign policy in this theory is the power distribution and the position of each country in the international self-help system. Iran and Saudi Arabia both enjoy regional power; they are powerful countries in the region that greatly impact the global situation due to their oil richness and have an influential position in the international arena. However, the disputes between the two and the issue of power are rooted in the perceptions of leaders, the role of religion, identity, and nationalism. This means that power relations pass through the filters of domestic politics and manifest themselves in the form of foreign policy.

3.   Capabilities of Iran and Saudi Arabia

3.1.   Geography, Population, and Wealth

Iran

Geography

According to the official website of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Iran is located in the southwest of Asia that benefits from diverse natural resources, mountains and deserts. Moreover, the eastern Iran is dominated by a high plateau, with large salt flats and vast sand deserts. These plateaus are surrounded by the high mountain ridges of Zagros in the west and the Elburz in the north part of Iran. Hence, these geographical properties impact the connection routes to its neighbouring countries and the possible defence line against any threat."[118] These neighbours are Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia on the north, Afghanistan, Pakistan on the east, and

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[118] https://en.mfa.ir/portal/viewpage/3996 (15.07.2021)

Turkey and Iraq on the west (Fig. 2). Tehran is the capital, the country's largest city, and the political, cultural, commercial, and industrial centre of the nation.[119]

Figure 2 - Iran international boundaries, provinces and connection routes[120]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

However, the Persian Gulf zone and strait of Hormuz are counted as the most significant geographical properties of Iran that could play a remarkable role in the oil industry. The strait of Hormuz is the slim water path which connects the Persian Gulf to the Oman and Arabian sea.[121]

The most suitable area for the naval activities, including the oil tankers, falls within territory of Iran and Oman waters (Fig. 3). It is estimated that about 40% of the world's oil trade is processed through this connection path, ergo reveals its importance.[122]

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[119] https://irimc.org/en/About-IRAN/IRAN (29.12.2021)

[120] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (31.07.2021)

[121] United States Congressional Research Service, Iran's Threat to the Strait of Hormuz, R42335, published on 23. January 2012: 2 (13.04.2021)

[122] Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iran, Oil, and the Strait of Hormuz", *Europe* vol. 1, no. 202 (2007): 2.
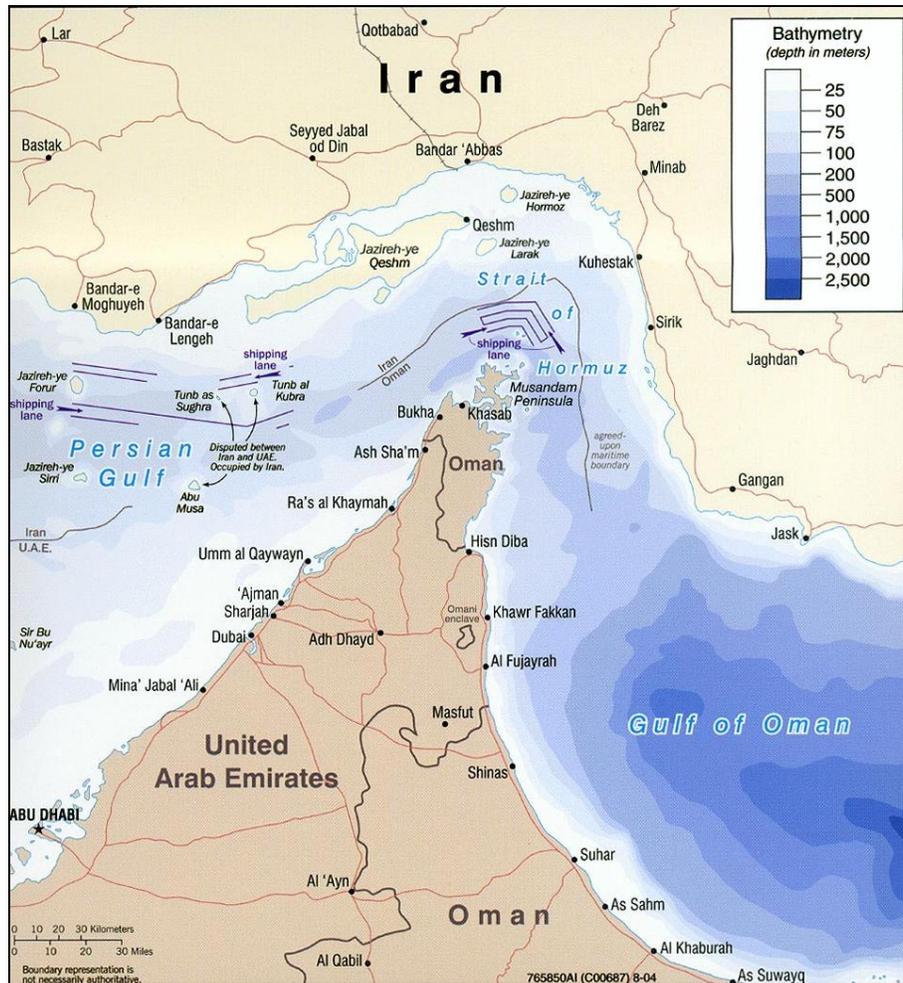
Figure 3 - Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman[123]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

Persian Gulf countries' foreign policy is influenced by the domestic and international environment, where strategy, orientation, and political decisions are shaped. The international environment made these countries increase their power in order to raise the chance of survival by creating an anarchic atmosphere. The rise of power over time translates into influence so that more powerful countries can survive their war on interests.

Nevertheless, throughout the history the response of Iran to the regional and international threats or sanctions is focused on the strait of Hormuz and the possibility of its closure or heavier control over this vital are.[124] These reactions from Iran have a significant reflection on the oil prices at the both short and long terms consequently.[125] According to *Reuters*: "Most of the crude exported from Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Iraq passes through the

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[123] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (31.07.2021)

[124] United States Congressional Research Service, Iran's Threat to the Strait of Hormuz, R42335, published on 23. January 2012: 14.
 available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4f391be42.html (13.04.2021)

[125] Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iran, Oil, and the Strait of Hormuz", *Europe* vol. 1, no. 202 (2007): 6.

strait of Hormuz. It is also the route for nearly all the liquefied natural gas (LNG) from lead exporter Qatar."[126]

Iran has recently tried to get the upper hand in political equations by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz. Zabih Notes: "Iran's policy in the Persian Gulf is determined by factors and conditions that are applicable to her general international posture. Opportunities and constraints that characterize her international posture are at work in its regional stance. For obvious reasons, over the last few years, the Gulf has literally become the lifeline of Iran, and to a lesser extent, of other littoral states."[127]

Before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this country was the United States' most important ally in the Middle East. Paul Iddon notes that the U.S. referred to Iran as the region's gendarme.[128] Iran played a crucial role in regulating Western relations with the Middle East and safeguarding American interests in the Persian Gulf. However, after the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 and with the emergence of a regime based on Shiite ideology led by Ayatollah Khomeini, these relations have immensely changed. The ideas of anti-imperialism, anti-monarchy, and anti-domination with the slogan of freedom and independence soon influenced the international and Middle East scene.

Iran's and Saudi's ideological, political, and economic conflicts on the one hand, and Iran-US and Israeli hostility on the other, have led Iran to seek more significant influence in the region through proxy and non-symmetrical wars. Geranmayeh notes: "Iran has embraced asymmetric tactics using allies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and militias in Syria and Iraq to solidify its regional role, as well as by establishing a direct presence on Israeli borders that could deter Israeli military strikes inside Iran."[129]

The Iranian regime has been subject to sanctions since the U.S. embassy hostage crisis, and these sanctions have been increased over time. Sanctions are damaging Iran's oil-dependent economy, and the Iranian regime has always had trouble transferring its oil money. However, with the nuclear deal, known as JCPOA, signed in 2015, Iran was on the path to normalizing its relations with the U.S. and Western countries, but with the coming of the Trump administration and the pressures of the Saudi and Israeli lobbies, the United States has unilaterally withdrawn from the deal. The confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia from one side and the US-Iranian dispute from the other side has turned the Persian Gulf into a gunpowder barrel that could explode at any moment.

Population

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[126] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-oil-factbox/strait-of-hormuz-the-worlds-most-important-oil-artery-idUSKBN1JV24O (22.08.2019)

[127] Sepher Zabih, "Iran's Policy toward the Persian Gulf", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* vol. 7, no. 3, (1976): 358.

[128] https://www.offiziere.ch/?p=31093 (15.06.2020)

[129] Ellie Geranmayeh, "Regional Geopolitical Rivalries in the Middle East: Implications for Europe", *Istituto Affari Internazionali* vol 18, no. 18 (2018): 4.

According to the website *Statistical Center of Iran*, Iran has an area of 1,648.195 square kilometres with a population of 79,926.270 in 2016.[130] The population of Iran has grown rapidly since the Islamic Revolution.[131] Due to the massacre of a large number of Iranian men in the Iran-Iraq war, as well as the strengthening of Islamic ideologies in families for the sake of having more children, the government has propagated a lot to increase the population. However, the rapid pace of growth in Iran's population gradually declined. "In the immediate aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, fertility rates skyrocketed, running well over six children per woman of childbearing age. Population growth rates accelerated, pushing population growth from 2.9 percent per year in the early 1970s to over 4.4 percent in 1981, one of the most rapid rates of population growth in the world at that time."[132]

Here, we report the changes in the population through four Iran presidential periods: Rafsanjani (1989-1997), Khatami (1997-2005), Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and Rouhani (2013-ongoing). Therefore, studying the population dynamics within these periods should give a clear picture of the different president's strategies and its feedback on the population changes.

As mentioned above, following the crisis that Iran faced after revolution, the population growth significantly increased. This trend also continued in the first year of Rafsanji's presidential period showing a 3.29% annual change in 1989 (Fig. 4).
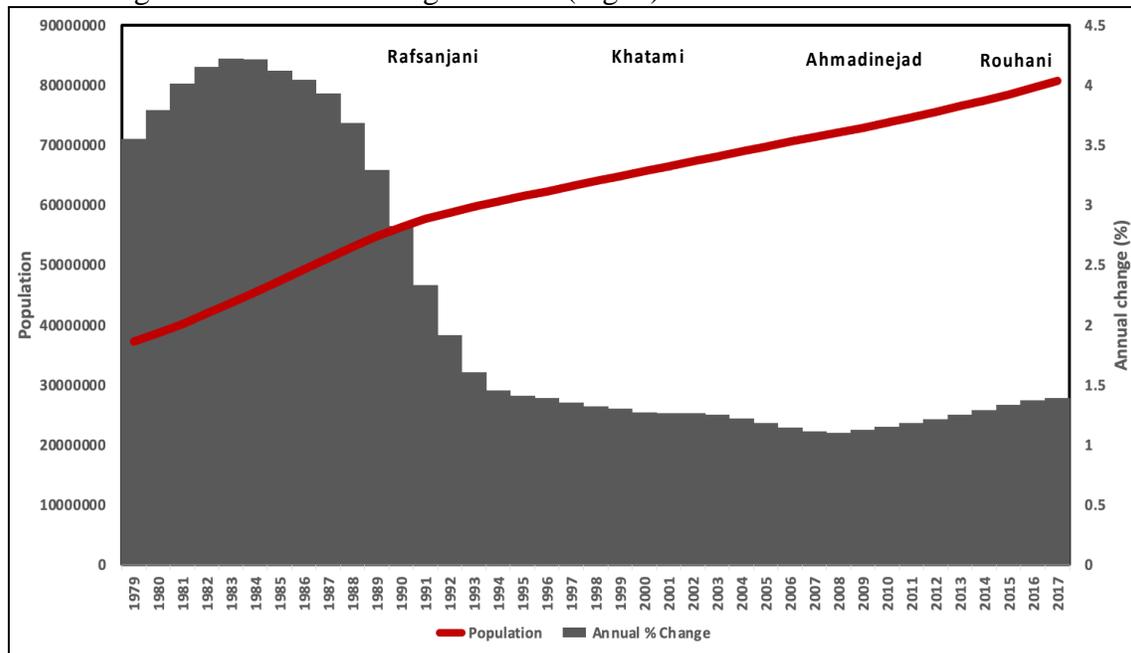

Figure 4 - Iran population and annual change (%) from 1979 to 2017[133]
(data source: World Bank)

Nevertheless, according to the data retrieved from the website *World Bank* this growth rate significantly decelerated and dropped to 1.35% of annual change at the end of Rafsanjani's

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[130] https://www.amar.org.ir/english/ (13.05.2019)
[131] https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/12/18/iran-in-transition-implications-of-islamic-republic-s-changing-demographics-pub-75042 (13.05.2020)
[132] Keith Crane, Rollie Lal and Jeffrey Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008), 59.
[133] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.

presidential period in 1997 with total population of ~63 million (Fig. 4). Within the Khatami's period, this deceleration of population growth continued but at lower rate, e.g., from 1.35% in 1997 to 1.18% in 2005 with total population of ~70 million.

Moreover, based on my research while the first 4th of Ahamadinejad's presidential period (2005-2009) also show slight deceleration of the population growth (1.18% to 1.12%), the second period (2009-2013) shows an increase in the average annual population growth rate (1.25% at the end of 2013) with total population of 76~ million.

Lastly, through Rouhani's period, the slight acceleration of population growth, that started in second period of Ahamadinejad, has continued and it reached 1.39% at the end of 2017 with ~81 millions in total (Fig. 4).

However, the geographical distribution of Iran's population per square kilometre is uneven and the concertation is mainly around the big cities that have an access to the resources and they provide more chance in employment with better life quality. Hence, based on the statistics retrived from the website *World Bank* the largest most populated cities in Iran are: Tehran (with ~6.8 million), Mashhad (with ~1.9 million), Esfahan (with ~1.3 million) and Tabriz (with ~1.2 million).
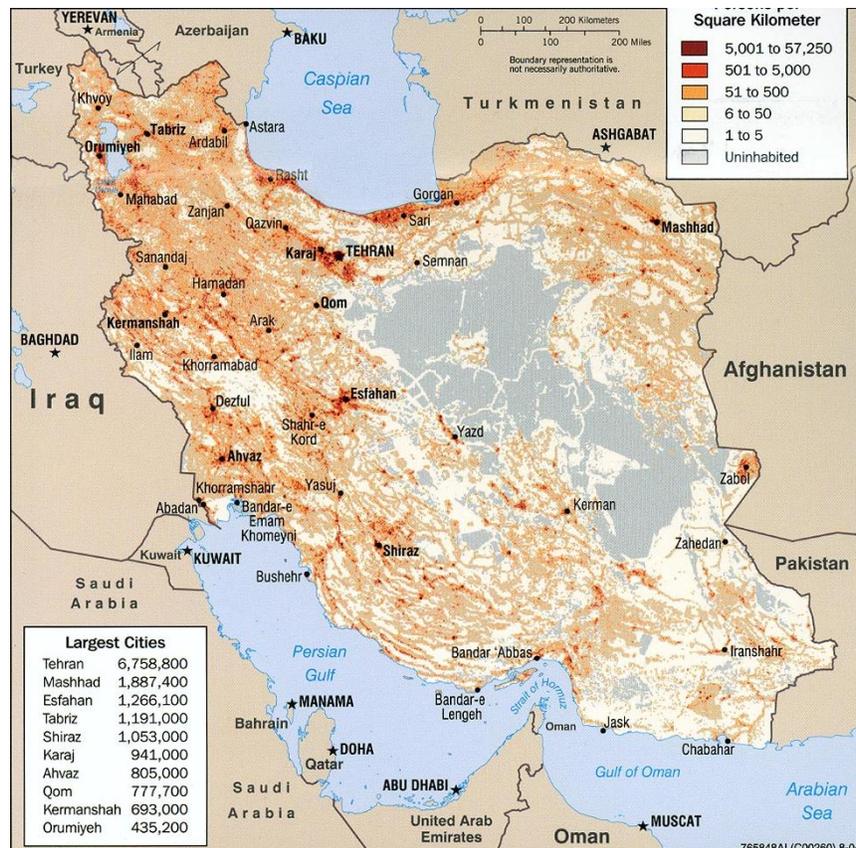

Figure 5 - Iran population per square kilometres[134]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

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[134] https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (31.07.2021)

The dynamics of the population distribution throughout Iran is closely related to the underlaying developments in each city. Nevertheless, the urbanization after revolution has significantly increase (46.7% in 1976 to 66% in 2001) which indicates the mismanagement over the rural areas and the threats to their survival.[135]

Furthermore, we also studied the changes in the population based on the life expectancy, birth and death rates per 1000 people and their annual changes (%) within four presidential period of Rafsanjani, Khatami, Ahmadinejad and Rouhani (Table 1).

By comparing the lifer expectancy within each period individually and all-to-gather, it is clear that every year the life expectancy is increasing. This is due to the constant improvement of parameters such as: health care, clean water, financial and economic conditions. The improvement of these factors has a direct impact on the death rate which shows a constant decrease, ergo an increase in the life expectancy.

Table 1. Iran life expectancy, birth and death rates and annual changes. Colour categories indicates different presidential period (Rafsanjani, Khatami, Ahmadinejad and Rouhani)[136]

Date	Life Expectancy from Birth (Years)	Annual % Change	Births per 1000 People	Annual % Change	Deaths per 1000 People	Annual % Change
1989	61.35	2.31	35.65	-6.21	8.39	-6.82
1990	62.74	2.26	33.29	-6.62	7.77	-7.32
1991	64.13	2.21	30.93	-7.08	7.16	-7.9
1992	65.52	2.16	28.58	-7.62	6.54	-8.57
1993	66.91	2.12	26.22	-8.25	5.93	-9.38
1994	67.34	0.65	24.79	-5.43	5.79	-2.29
1995	67.78	0.65	23.37	-5.74	5.66	-2.35
1996	68.21	0.64	21.95	-6.09	5.52	-2.38
1997	68.65	0.64	20.52	-6.48	5.39	-2.46
1998	69.09	0.64	19.10	-6.93	5.25	-2.52
1999	69.50	0.6	18.76	-1.79	5.20	-0.89
2000	69.91	0.59	18.42	-1.83	5.16	-0.9
2001	70.32	0.59	18.07	-1.86	5.11	-0.91
2002	70.73	0.59	17.73	-1.9	5.06	-0.92
2003	71.15	0.58	17.39	-1.93	5.02	-0.93
2004	71.46	0.44	17.47	0.48	5.02	0.14

[135] Zohreh Fanni, "Cities and Urbanization in Iran after the Islamic Revolution", *Cities* vol. 23, no. 6 (2006): 408.

[136] The table was created manually using data extracted from World bank.

Year						
2005	71.77	0.44	17.56	0.48	5.03	0.16
2006	72.09	0.44	17.64	0.48	5.04	0.14
2007	72.40	0.44	17.73	0.48	5.05	0.16
2008	72.72	0.43	17.81	0.47	5.05	0.14
2009	73.18	0.64	17.95	0.78	4.99	-1.17
2010	73.64	0.63	18.09	0.78	4.94	-1.16
2011	74.11	0.63	18.23	0.77	4.88	-1.19
2012	74.57	0.63	18.37	0.77	4.82	-1.19
2013	75.04	0.62	18.51	0.76	4.76	-1.22
2014	75.30	0.35	18.62	0.63	4.78	0.48
2015	75.56	0.35	18.74	0.63	4.81	0.48
2016	75.82	0.35	18.86	0.63	4.83	0.46
2017	76.08	0.35	18.98	0.62	4.85	0.48

The diverse combination of different ethnical and religious stratum (Fig. 6), puts Iran in a unique position at the region. In general, the main religious group in Iran is Muslim – Shit with a scattered group of the Muslim – Sunni on the north east, east and west parts of country. The major ethical groups, on the other hand, are Persian (distributed mostly in the centre of Iran and in the major cities), Azari (at the north west), Kurd (at the west), Lur (at the south west), Baloch (at the east), Arab (at the south) and other smaller racial groups. Although, the studies suggest that throughout the history there have been a discrimination against these races, more specifically after the Islamic revolution[137], these ethnic groups are functioning together and recognise themselves as Iranian.

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[137] Abbas Gheissari, "Iran", *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism* (2015): 2.

Figure 6 - Religious and ethical groups in Iran[138]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

Given Iran's population nearly twice as high as Saudi Arabia and several times higher than other countries in the Middle East, Iran's neighbours are always worried about the demographic balance of power in the region. However, it seems that since 1980, Iran has had a smaller population growth than other countries in the Middle East. As shown in the figure below, Iran has the lowest growth rate compared to its neighbors in the region. After the revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian leaders, who adopted the population growth strategy, took a new policy in the late '80s.
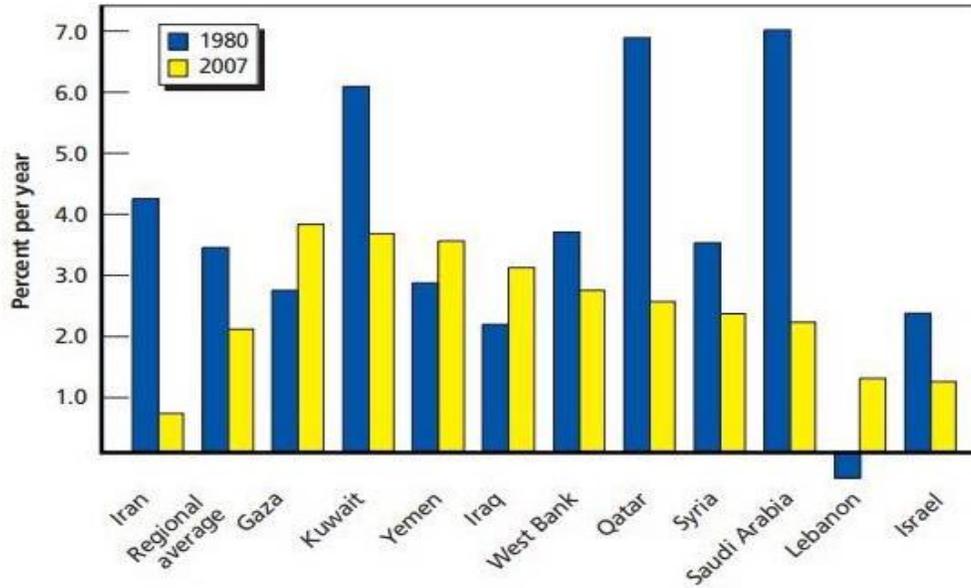
Figure 7 - Population growth rate in Middle East (1980 vs. 2007)[139]
(source: US census Bureau, International database 2007)

However, we can explore the migration fluctuation and its percentage of total population within different presidential period (Fig. 8) to better understand the success of strategies defined by different presidents and their cabinets. Hence, we imported Iran's migration statistical data from World Bank and classified them for period of Rafsanjani, Khatami, Ahmadinejad and Rouhani.
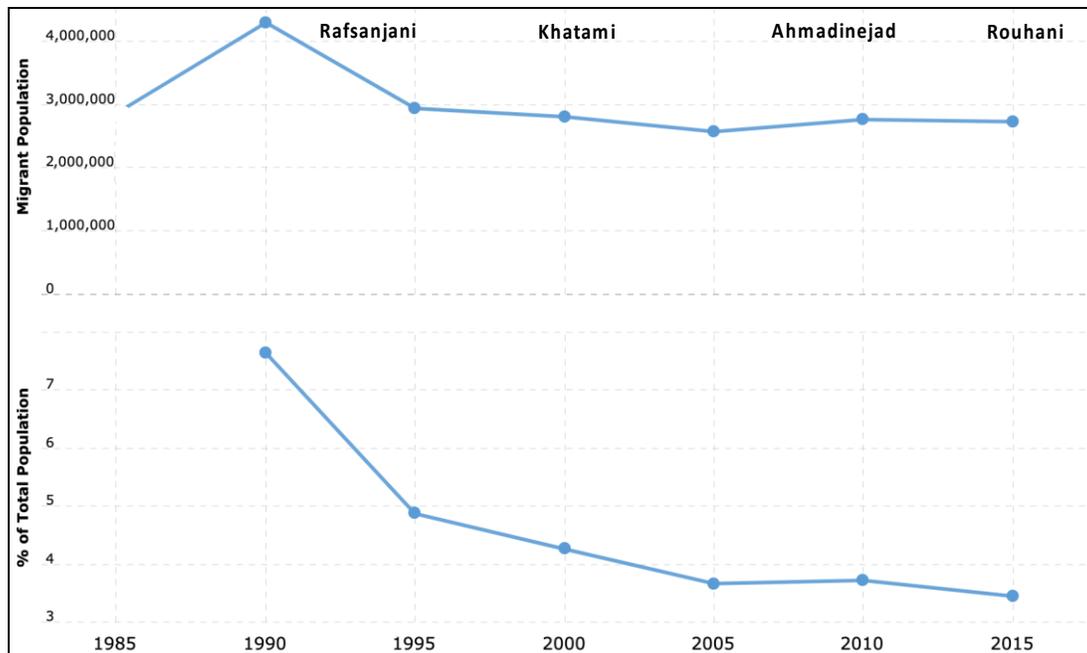
Figure 8 - Migrant population and percentage of total migrated population within different presidential periods[140]
(data source: World Bank)

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[139] Keith Crane, Rollie Lal and Jeffrey Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities*, 60.
[140] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.

According to the statistics retrived from the website *World Bank* the highest rate of immigration belongs to the Rafsanjani's period which is a consequence of the Iran-Iraq war with a 2.8 million in 1985 and 4.3 million as of 1990 which was 7.7% of total population. Nevertheless, at the end of Rafsanjani's presidential period and beginning of the Khatami's period the immigration rate showed a significant decline which reaches 2.5 million people at the end of Khatami's period which was 3.6% of total population.

However, based on my research, during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's presidential periods, the immigration rate shows a slight increase with 2.7 million people as of 2015 which is 3.3% of total population. This is related to the overall dissatisfaction due to the socio-economic hardships. Hence, following we discuss in detail the Iran's economic performance within different presidential periods.

Economy

According to the *WorldBank*, "the petroleum industry, agriculture, and services sectors, as well as notable state involvement in manufacturing and financial services, define Iran's economy. Iran has the world's second-largest natural gas reserves and fourth-largest known crude oil reserves. Oil revenues continue to be a significant source of economic activity and government funding and hence remain volatile."[141]

Hence, the economic indicators such as inflation rate and GDP growth (Fig. 9), are closely related to the oil price fluctuations (Fig. 14). Overall, as mentioned above, due to the structure of Iran's economy by heavily focused on the oil production and export, a significant sensitivity to the oil market is reflected on the economic performance at every presidential period.

[141] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview (30.09.2019)
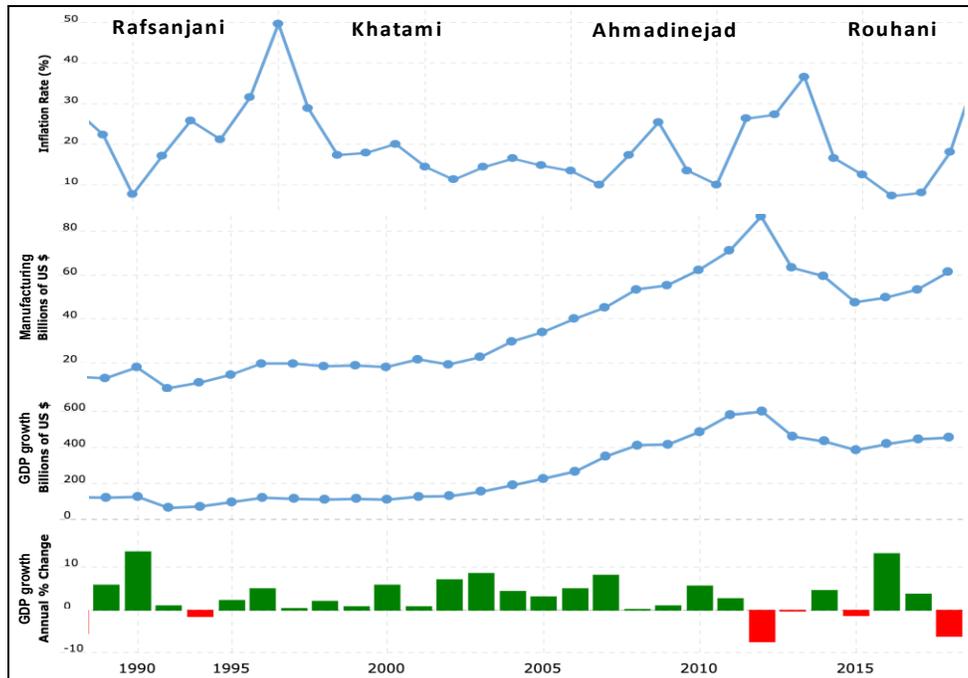
Figure 9 - Inflation rate (%), Manufacturing (billion U.S. $), GDP growth (billion U.S. $) and GDP growth annual change (%) within different presidential periods[142]
(data source: World Bank)

Despite the relatively lower price during Rafsanjani and Khatami's periods compared to the Ahmadinejad (Fig. 9), the inflation rates were more susceptible to the oil price fluctuations (Fig. 9). Nevertheless, the significant increase of GDP growth and manufactures during Ahmadinejad's period is closely related to the notable increase of oil prices, reaching to historical peak of 160$ per barrel. Nevertheless, due to U.S. and international sanctions over Iran because of the fact that its nuclear program, the overall trading volume decreased during Ahmadinejad's period (Fig. 10).

However, according to the data retrieved from the website *WorldBank*, during the Rouhani's presidential period, due to the agreement with the U.S and European states on the nuclear program, we can observe an increase in the total trade that reaches a 60% of total GDP.

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[142] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
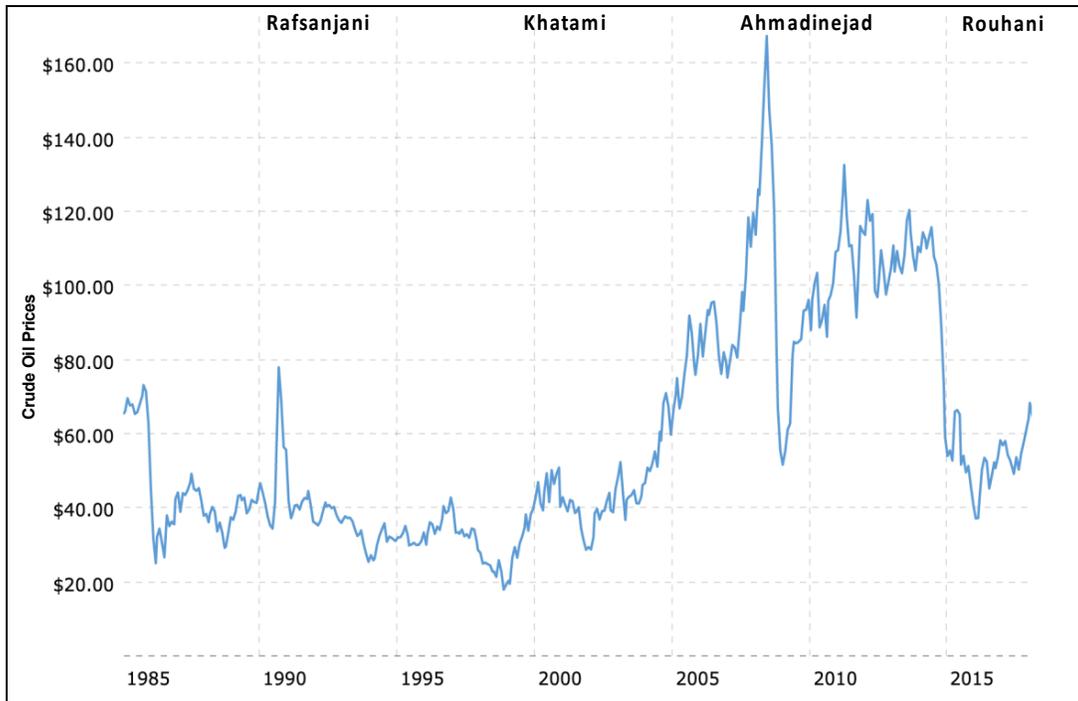
Figure 10 - Crude oil prices ($) within different presidential periods[143]
(data source: World Bank)

Despite this increase in the GDP, yet the inflation rate has increase and manufactures have not improvement notably. Arguably, this shows the significance of the oil price (which decreased remarkably during Rouhani's period) on the economic condition and growth in Iran.

Lastly, the unemployment rate which is reflective of the economic situation is volatile during different presidential period and it represents the level of economic strategical approaches (Fig. 11). For instance, based on my research of the *WorldData*'s information, during Ahmadinejad's period, despite the blooming oil market which was mentioned above, yet the resources were not invested in the sectors which could improve the employability. This mismanagement caused a significant increase of historical unemployment rate at 15% in 2010. Nevertheless, during Rouhani's period, following the nuclear program agreement, the unemployment shows a slight decrease which reaches to 10% by 2017.

Therefore, all these economic factors are affecting the changes in the population growth, overall satisfaction and consequently the level of immigration. Respectively, the Iranian's government plans are focused on improving these sectors to raise the public satisfaction and increase the population growth consequently.

[143] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
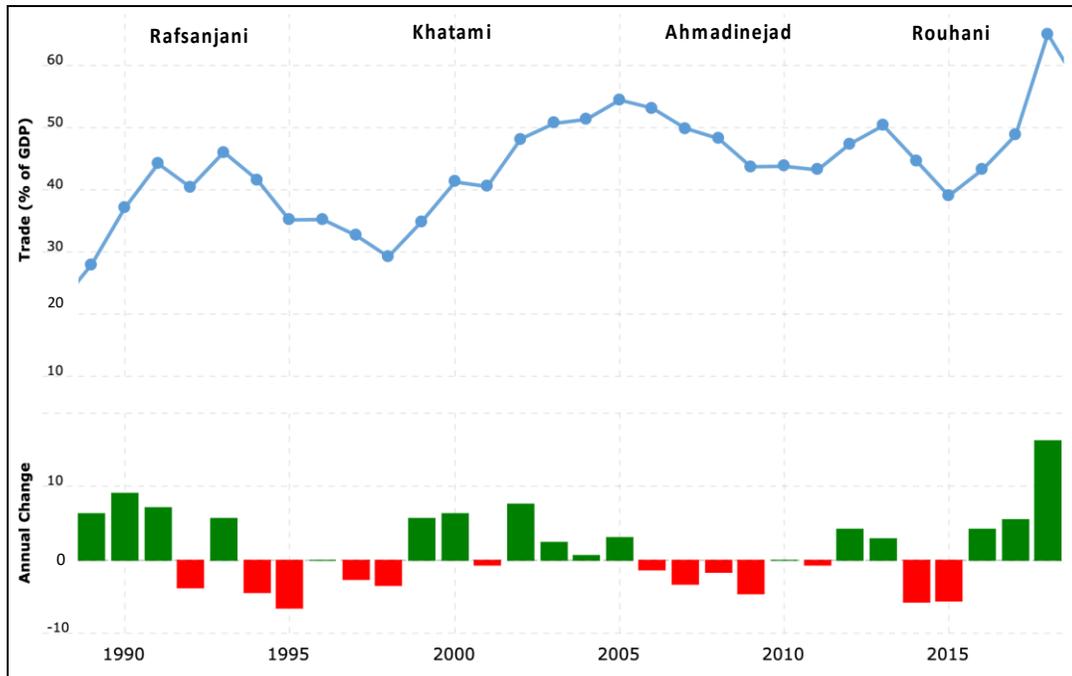
Figure 11 - Total trade (% of GDP) and its annual changes (%) within different presidential periods[144]
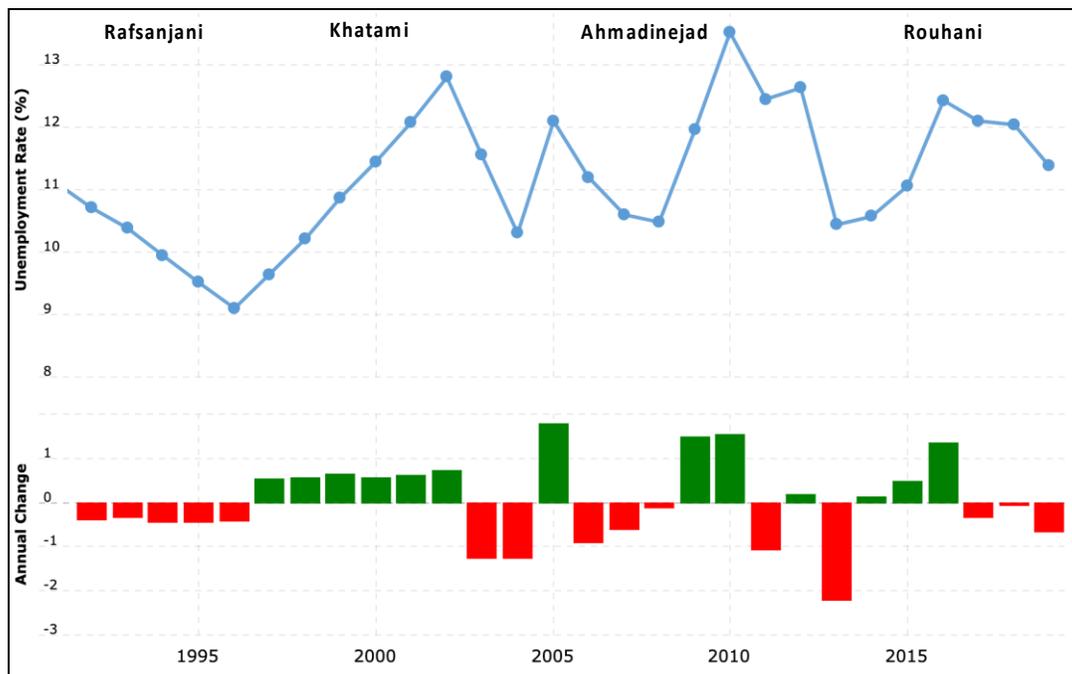
Figure 12 - Unemployment rate (%) and its annual changes (%) within different presidential periods[145]

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[144] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[145] Ibid.

Saudi Arabia

Geography

According to the website *GlobalEDGE*, Saudi Arabia is a country in the Middle East bordering the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Extensive coastlines provide leverage on shipping, especially crude oil, through the Persian Gulf and Suez Canal. Saudi Arabia's neighboring countries include Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The geography of Saudi Arabia is primarily desert, with rugged mountains in the southwest. The government system is a monarchy; the chief of state and head of government is the king and prime minister. Saudi Arabia is a member of the League of Arab States (Arab League) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).[146]

According to Robert Mason, the internal environment of Saudi Arabia in 1980 have had an impact on changing this country from a passive to a more confident. He notes: "The domestic environment and political economy of Saudi Arabia has played a small but important role in the development of Saudi foreign policy, notably in moving it from a passive stance during an extended period of public deficit in the 1980s and 1990s to a more assertive stance after it had paid off most of the deficits and reined in public expenditures in 2000."[147]

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[146] https://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/saudi-arabia (13.05.2019)

[147] Robert Mason, "Economic Factors in Middle East Foreign Policies: The Case of Oil and Gas Exporters with Special Reference to Saudi Arabia and Iran" (PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2012), 52.

Figure 13 - Saudi Arabia international boundaries, provinces and connection routes[148]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

However, Saudi Arabia similar to other Arab countries surrounding the Persian Gulf and Red Sea zones, experienced several conflicts with the neighbouring countries and the defined borders, mainly due to the prepotency over the natural resources.[149] Some examples of these border disputes are as follows (Fig. 14):

- "With Egypt (1967-2017): Tiran and Sanafir Islands; Ruled by Egypt and claimed by Saudi Arabia;
- With Iraq (1922-1991): Iraq and Saudi Arabia neutral zone;
- With Kuwait (1922-1970): Kuwait and Saudi Arabia neutral zone;
- With UAE (1974-ongoing): 25 km of corridor between Qatar and UAE, that is giving Saudi Arabia an access to Persian Gulf;
- With UAE (1974-ongoing): Shayba oil field claimed by Saudi Arabia;
- With Yemen (2003-2008): 75 km barrier on the north side of Saada."[150]
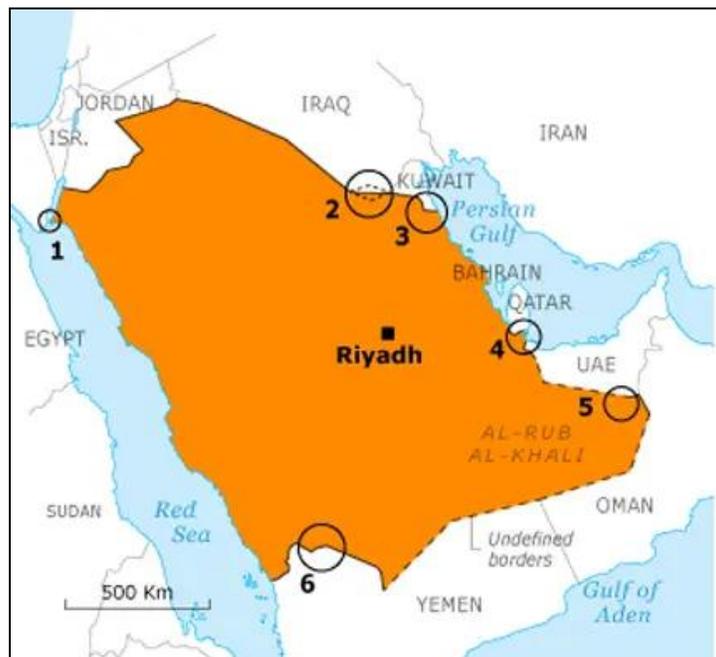
Figure 14 - Saudi Arabia border conflicts[151]
(source: Fanack Online Media Organization: https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography/)

Hence, Saudi Arabia has attempted to take a big portion of peninsula with an access to the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Aqaba and Red Sea. These land borders are in total 4431 kilometres and, as mentioned above, most of the disputes over these boarders are either partially resolved or still ongoing as no acceptable deal has been made so far.[152]

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[148] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (15.04.2021)
[149] Krista E. Wiegand, "Resolution of Border Disputes in the Arabian Gulf", *The Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* vol. 1, no. 1 (2014): 34.
[150] https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography-of-saudi-arabia/ (15.04.2021)
[151] https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography/ (15.04.2021)
[152] https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography-of-saudi-arabia/ (17.06.2021)

Lastly, the Tiran and Sanafir Islands were long-time ongoing conflict between Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israelian governments. The history of this conflict backs to 1967 when King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud rendered these islands to Egyptian government and raised Israelian government concerns and a consequent six-day war at this region.[153] Nevertheless, Israelian government withdraw from these islands in 1982 and they were handed back to Egyptian government. Finally, in June 2017, the Egypt elected president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi signed an agreement to fully return the control of these islands to the Saudi Arabia and end the conflict in the region.

As mentioned before, the Persian Gulf is a vital water path for transporting the oil products from the countries surrounding this area. Saudi Arabia has an access to both Red Sea and Persian Gulf and uses these two paths to transport its oil production which is its main financial source (more discuss below). Saudi Arabia established three main terminals at the Persian Gulf and Red sea as follows:

- "Ras Tanura: the main transport port of Saudi Arabia's oil on Persian Gulf with capacity of 3.4 Million-Barrels-Per-Day (MMBD);
- Ras al-Ju'aymah: the largest terminal for the big oil tankers on Persian Gulf and capacity of 3 MMBD;
- Yanbu: the secondary terminal for exporting the productions that are not exported via above mentioned terminals on Red Sea with a capacity of 1.3 MMBD."[154]
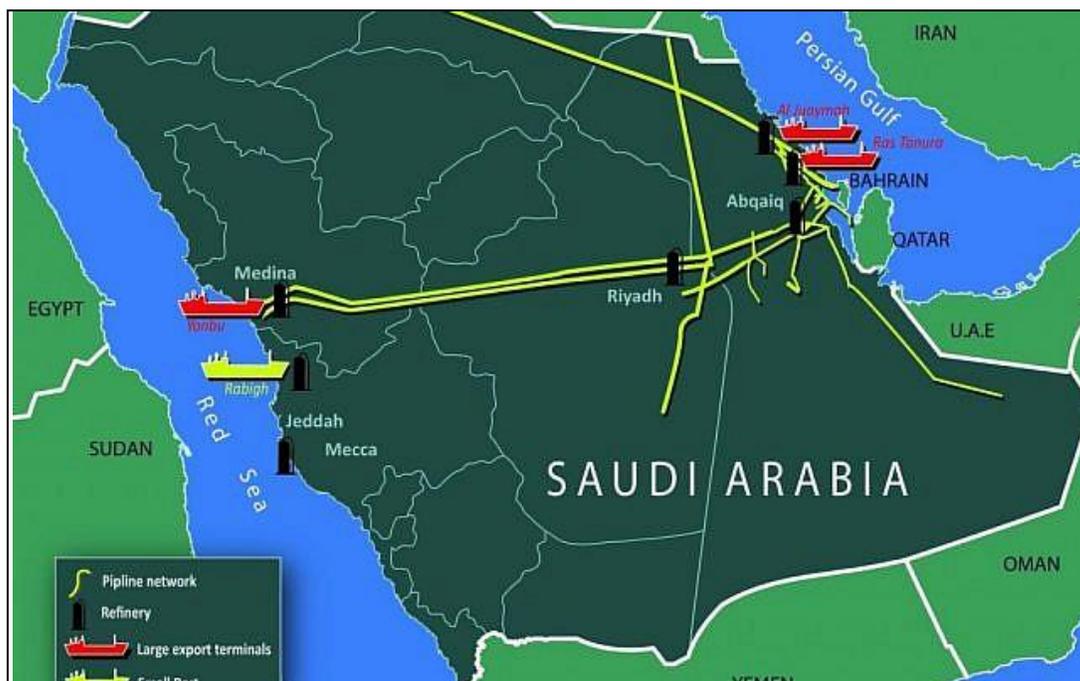
Figure 15 - Saudi Arabia export terminals and ports[155]

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[153] Robert Priewasser *Tiran Island and Straits of Tiran Unexplained Sovereignty over an Island in the Context of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Saarbrücken: AV Akademikerverlag, 2013), 10.

[154] https://www.constructionboxscore.com/project-news/saudi-aramco-to-boost-oil-loading-capacity-with-reopened-terminal.aspx (13.05.2021)

[155] https://www.constructionboxscore.com/project-news/saudi-aramco-to-boost-oil-loading-capacity-with-reopened-terminal.aspx (13.05.2021)

Therefore, the significance level of Saudi Arabia's impact on global oil market is defined by the both production capability and volume as well as the transport of the products to its partners. Ergo, the hydrocarbon outputs shall be profoundly transported both in time and quality manner which is only achievable by running the above-mentioned terminals at their best capacity. This indicates the importance of the Persian Gulf as a main transport path for Saudi Arabian government and any possible conflict impact on their performance.

Population

According to the official statistical report of General authority for statistics of Saudi Arabia the total population amount 33.1 million with annual change of 2%.[156] However, in order to keep the comparability of the Saudi Arabia's population changes with Iran's, which was reported in the previous section, here we also discuss the changes for the period 1979 to 2017.

Throughout the above-mentioned period there have been several kings assigned as the leader of Saudi Arabia. The reign periods are as follows:

- King Khaled: 1975 - 1982;
- King Fahd: 1982 - 2005;
- King Abdullah: 2005 - 2015;
- King Salman: 2015 - incumbent. [157]

The population changes varied during different king's period. For instance, according to the data retrived from the website *WorldBank*, the average population change for King Khaled is 5.7% with the total population of 11 million at the end of his period, which was indeed the most significant increase of Saudi Arabia's population. Following, during king Fahd's period the population increase took a slighter path with an average increase of 3.4% and total of 24 million at the end of his period. This population growth decrease continued during King Abdullah period as well, with an average increase of 2.9% and total of 32 million. Finally, during King Salman's period, the Saudi Arabia's population shows the lowest average of changes of 2.16% and total population of 33.1 million, which is the notably lower than any other king's period (Fig. 16).

The majority of population is smaller cities is by Saudi's citizen while in a bigger city the proportion of the Saudi and non-Saudi is close (Fig. 17). The overall population consist of ~90% of Arab and ~10% of Asian-African combination.[158]

Overall, the Saudi Arabia's population was formed by both wandering and semi-wandering until 1930s when the population clusters changed due to the oil discovery[159.] Hence, the most of economic activities were focused on oil production and cities which are involved in such

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[156] https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/43 (14.02.2021)

[157] https://www.saudiembassy.net/history (14.02.2021)

[158] www.stats.gov.sa (14.02.2021)

[159] https://www.saudiembassy.net/economy-global-trade (15.02.2021)

production line such as Riyadh, Makkah and Medina. However, yet considering the total area of Saudi Arabia (2.15 million square kilometre), the proportion of people to the area is one the lowest globally (16.2 people per square kilometres).[160]
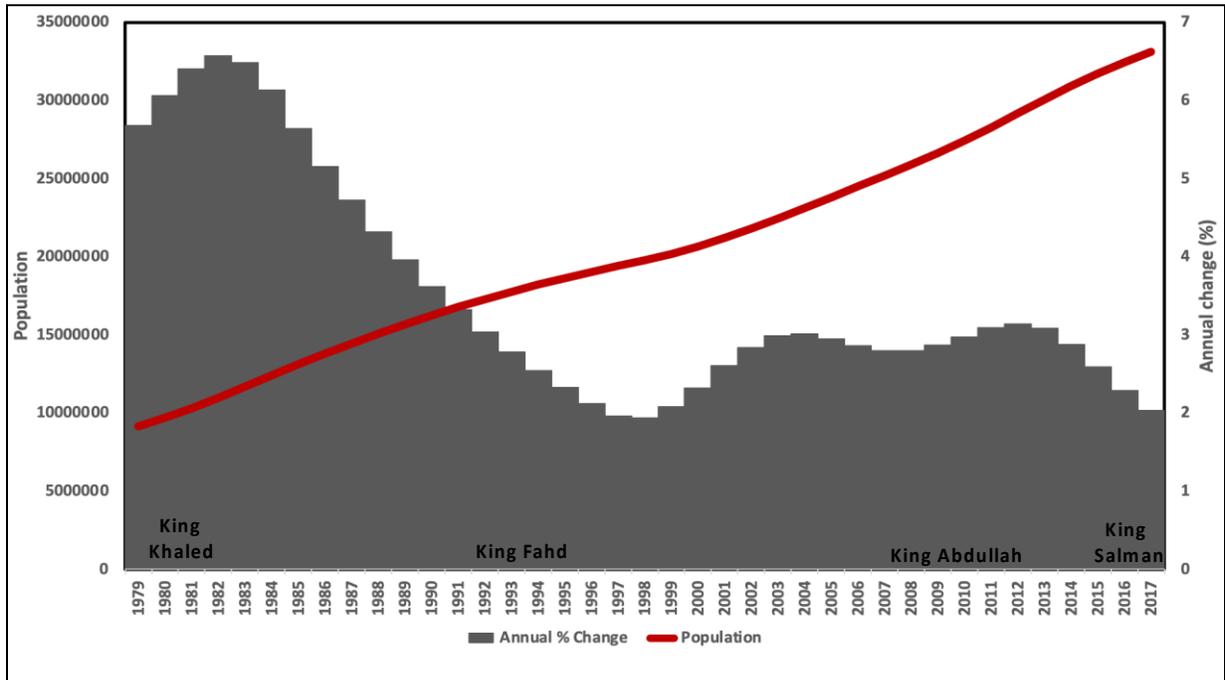

Figure 16 - Saudi Arabia population and annual change (%) from 1979 to 2017[161]
(data source: World Bank)

Due to majority of the business concentration, private and public sectors in the administrative areas of Makkah, Riyadh and Madinah, the highest population concentrations are in these areas consequently (Fig. 18).[162]

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[160] Philip Wexler et. all, *Information Resources in Toxicology (Fifth Edition)* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2020), 435.
[161] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[162] https://www.saudiembassy.net/economy-global-trade (15.02.2021)
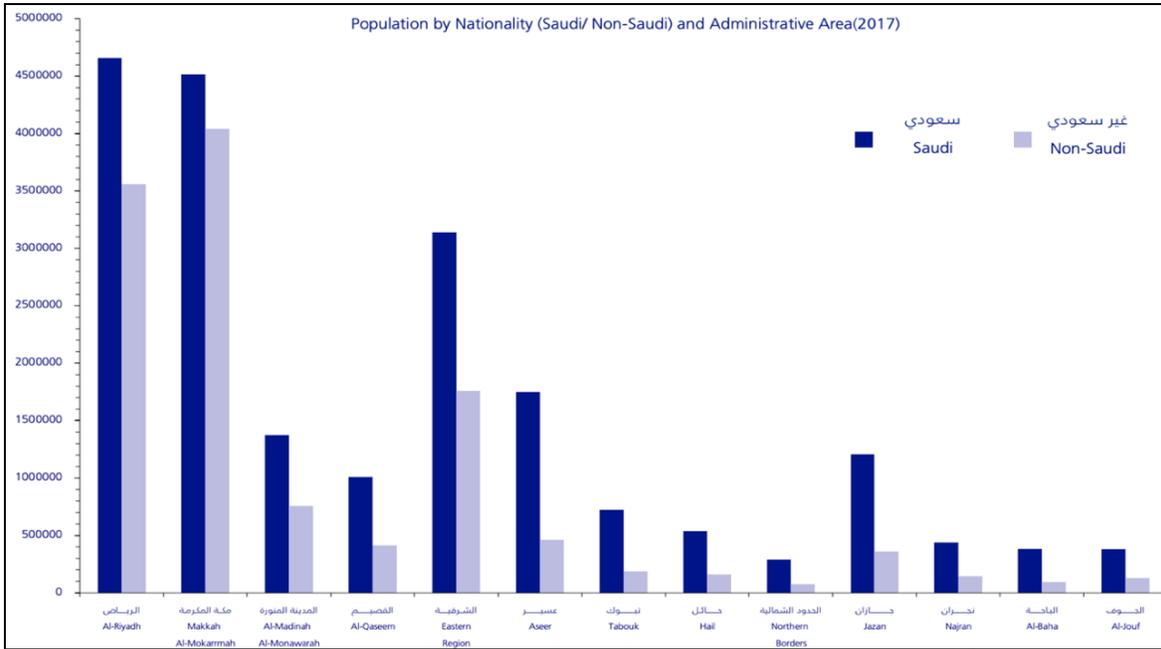
Figure 17 - Saudi Arabia population by nationality in 2017[163]
(source: www.stats.gov.sa)
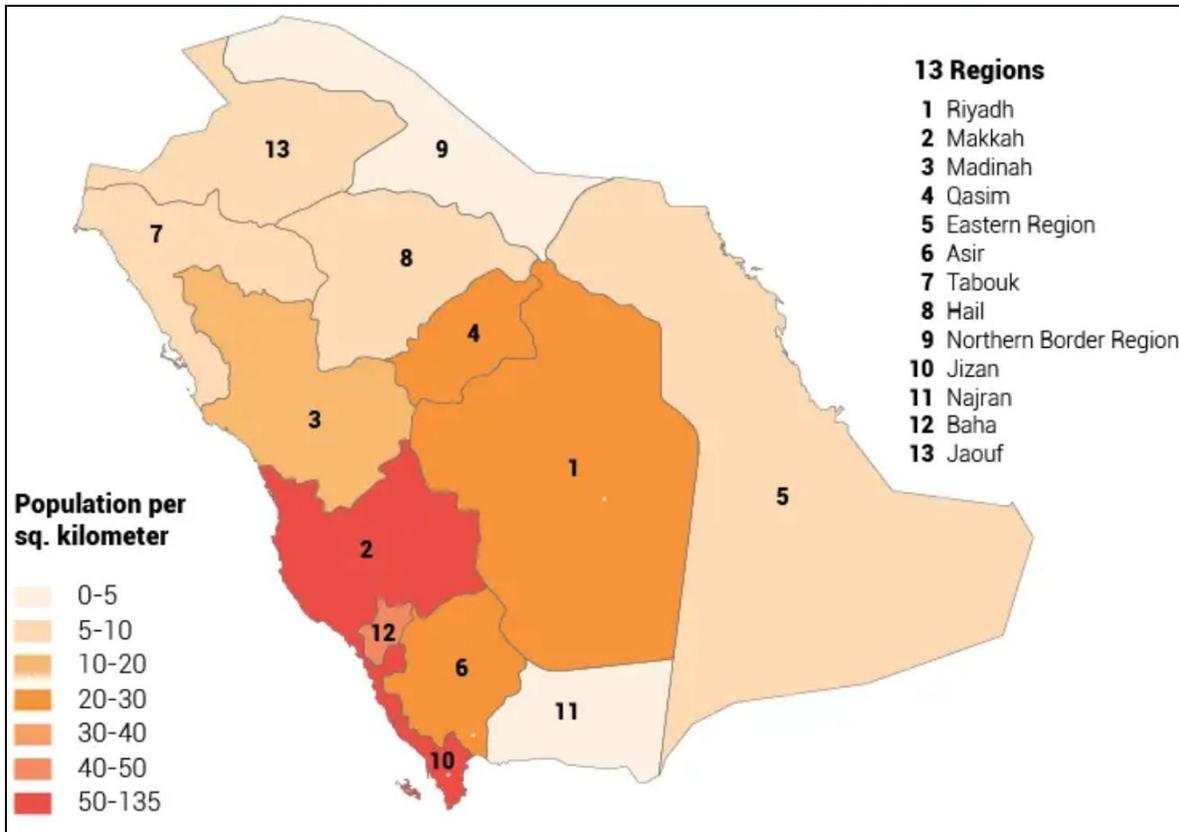
Figure 18 - Saudi Arabia population per square kilometres[164]
(source: Fanack Online Media Organization: https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography/)

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[163] www.stats.gov.sa (22.08.2021)

[164] https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography/ (22.08.2021)

We studied the fluctuation of the population during different king's period based on the life expectancy from birth, the death and birth per 1000 people rate and annual changes for period of King Fahd, Abdullah and Salman between 1989 to 2017 respectively (Table 2).

The highest birth and death rates refer to King Fahd period by 37.23 births per 1000 people (-2.54%) at 1989 to 24.45 birth per 1000 people (-1.55%) at 2005. Accordingly, the highest death rate follows the same trend for King Fahd's period compared to others. However, similar to the comparison made for Iran's life expectancy from birth, as the health infostructures and public services improved, the life expectancy increased consequently.[165]

Nevertheless, while the life expectancy has not changed significantly after the end of king Fahd's period, the birth has notably decrease which reached the historical lowest of -2.91% at the end of 2017 and king Salman's period. However, the death rate also reaches the highest annual change of 0.35% at the end of 2017 as well. Lastly, based on CIA FACTBOOK overall the median age of Saudi Arabia is estimated as 30.8 year with male median age at 33 years and female at 27.9 years. [166]

Table 2. Saudi Arabia's life expectancy, birth and death rates and annual changes. Colour categories indicates different king's period (King Fahd, King Abdullah and King Salman)[167]
(data: World Bank)

Date	Life Expectancy from Birth (Years)	Annual % Change	Births per 1000 People	Annual % Change	Deaths per 1000 People	Annual % Change
1989	68.29	0.67	37.23	-2.54	5.31	-3.73
1990	68.74	0.66	36.25	-2.61	5.11	-3.87
1991	69.20	0.66	35.28	-2.68	4.90	-4.03
1992	69.65	0.66	34.31	-2.75	4.70	-4.2
1993	70.11	0.65	33.34	-2.83	4.49	-4.38
1994	70.46	0.51	32.28	-3.18	4.36	-2.8
1995	70.82	0.51	31.22	-3.29	4.24	-2.88
1996	71.18	0.51	30.15	-3.4	4.11	-2.97
1997	71.54	0.5	29.09	-3.52	3.99	-3.06
1998	71.90	0.5	28.03	-3.65	3.86	-3.16

[165] Mohammed Almalki, Gerard Fitzgerald and M. Clark "Health care system in Saudi Arabia: an overview", *EMHJ - Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* vol. 17, no. 10 (2011): 784.
[166] https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/saudi-arabia/#people-and-society (15.02.2021)
[167] The table was created manually using data extracted from World bank.

1999	72.12	0.31	27.47	-2	3.81	-1.35
2000	72.34	0.31	26.91	-2.05	3.76	-1.36
2001	72.56	0.31	26.35	-2.09	3.70	-1.38
2002	72.78	0.31	25.78	-2.13	3.65	-1.4
2003	73.01	0.3	25.22	-2.18	3.60	-1.42
2004	73.10	0.12	24.84	-1.52	3.59	-0.36
2005	73.19	0.12	24.45	-1.55	3.57	-0.36
2006	73.28	0.12	24.07	-1.57	3.56	-0.36
2007	73.37	0.12	23.69	-1.59	3.55	-0.36
2008	73.46	0.12	23.30	-1.62	3.54	-0.37
2009	73.64	0.25	22.80	-2.14	3.51	-0.73
2010	73.82	0.25	22.31	-2.19	3.48	-0.74
2011	74.01	0.25	21.81	-2.23	3.46	-0.77
2012	74.19	0.25	21.31	-2.29	3.43	-0.75
2013	74.38	0.25	20.81	-2.34	3.40	-0.76
2014	74.48	0.14	20.25	-2.68	3.42	0.35
2015	74.58	0.14	19.70	-2.75	3.43	0.35
2016	74.69	0.14	19.142	-2.83	3.44	0.38
2017	74.79	0.14	18.58	-2.91	3.45	0.35

The main religion in Saudi Arabia is Islam, with Sunni dominating the percentage with 85-90% of citizens and Shiites taking 10-15% of Muslim's fraction. Moreover, there some scattered groups of Jews, Christian and Sikhs throughout the country (Fig. 19).[168]

Compared to the diverse combination of different ethnical groups in middle east (Fig. 33), Saudi Arabia is mainly dominated by Arab ethic. This is due to the restricted citizenship regulation imposed by the Saudi Arabia's government, stating that only Muslim are allowed to obtain the citizenship of Saudi Arabia or to visit the holy places.[169]

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[168] https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/saudi-arabia/#people-and-society (16.02.2021)
[169] https://gulfmigration.org/saudi-arabia-saudi-arabian-nationality-law/ (16.02.2021)
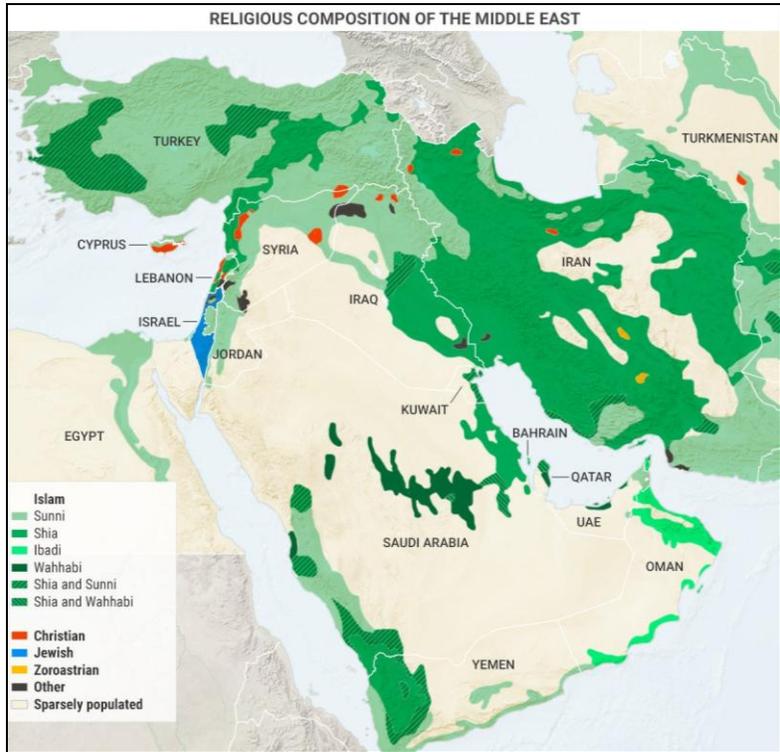
Figure 19 - Religious composition of Saudi Arabia and neighbouring countries[170]
(Source: Dr. Michael Izady at www.gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml)
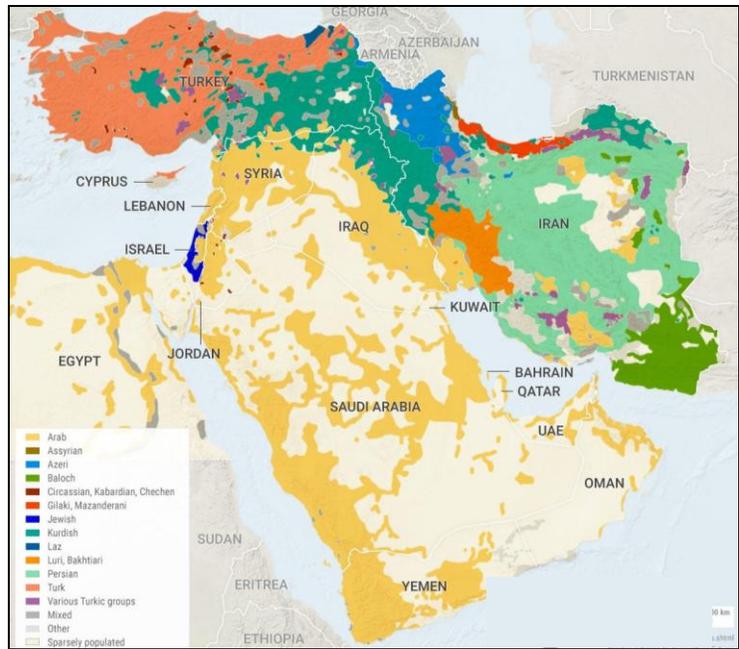

Figure 20 - Ethic groups of Saudi Arabia and neighbouring countries[171]
(Source: Dr. Michael Izady at www.gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml)

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[170] http://www.gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml (07.01.2021)
[171] http://www.gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml (07.01.2021)

However, we also illustrated the migration fluctuation and its percentage of total population within different king's period (Fig. 21) to better understand the functionality of strategies defined by different kings. Hence, similar to the Iran's migration statistical data, we imported similar data for Saudi Arabia from World Bank and classified them for period of King Fahd, King Abdullah and King Salman.
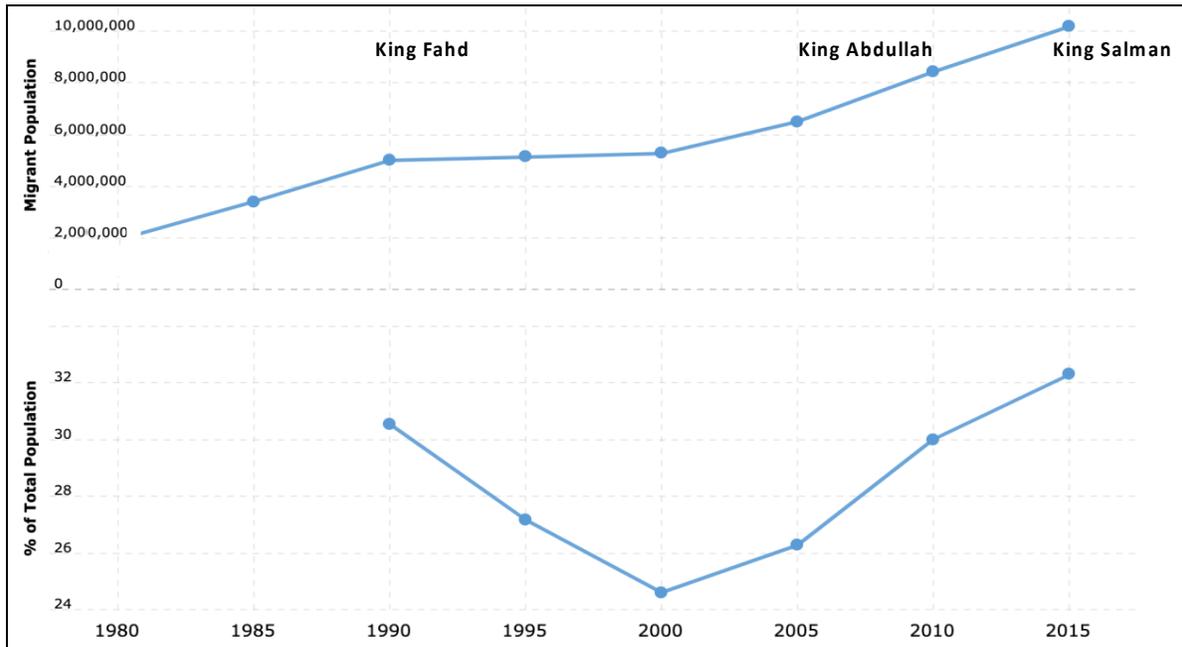
Figure 21 - Migrant population and percentage of total migrated population within different king's periods[172]
(data source: World Bank)

Economy

The first bloom of the Saudi Arabia's economy backs to the period 1970s to 1980s due to the significant increase in the oil exports and gained profit (Fig. 22). Therefore, the economy of the Saudi Arabia during this period relied notably on the hydrocarbon sectors until 1985. However, since 1985 with the instability of oil price (Fig. 23) Saudi Arabia's government introduced the new strategies to unload the economy dependency from oil sector to the agricultural, infrastructural and industrial sectors in order to sustain a higher stability in the economy. These strategies remained the same as the oil price remained relatively low during 1985-2002 compared to the 1970-1980.[173]

Consequently, other economic indicators such as GDP growth and inflation rate are following the same trend as the oil price changes (Fig 22 and 23). The Saudi Arabia's strategies succeeded to some extent in the administrative and industrial sectors. For instance, the fully development of

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[172] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[173] Niblock, Tim. "Saudi Arabia's Economic Development: Ambitious Visions, Difficult Dilemmas." *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* vol. 2, no. 2 (2008): 16.

the two industrial cities of Yanbu and Jubail was achieved and the petrol production industries begun to fully function.[174] On the other hand, in the agricultural sector, the practices such as irrigation was improved which significantly increased the agricultural products such as wheat and enabled Saudi Arabia to have an export from this sector as well.[175]
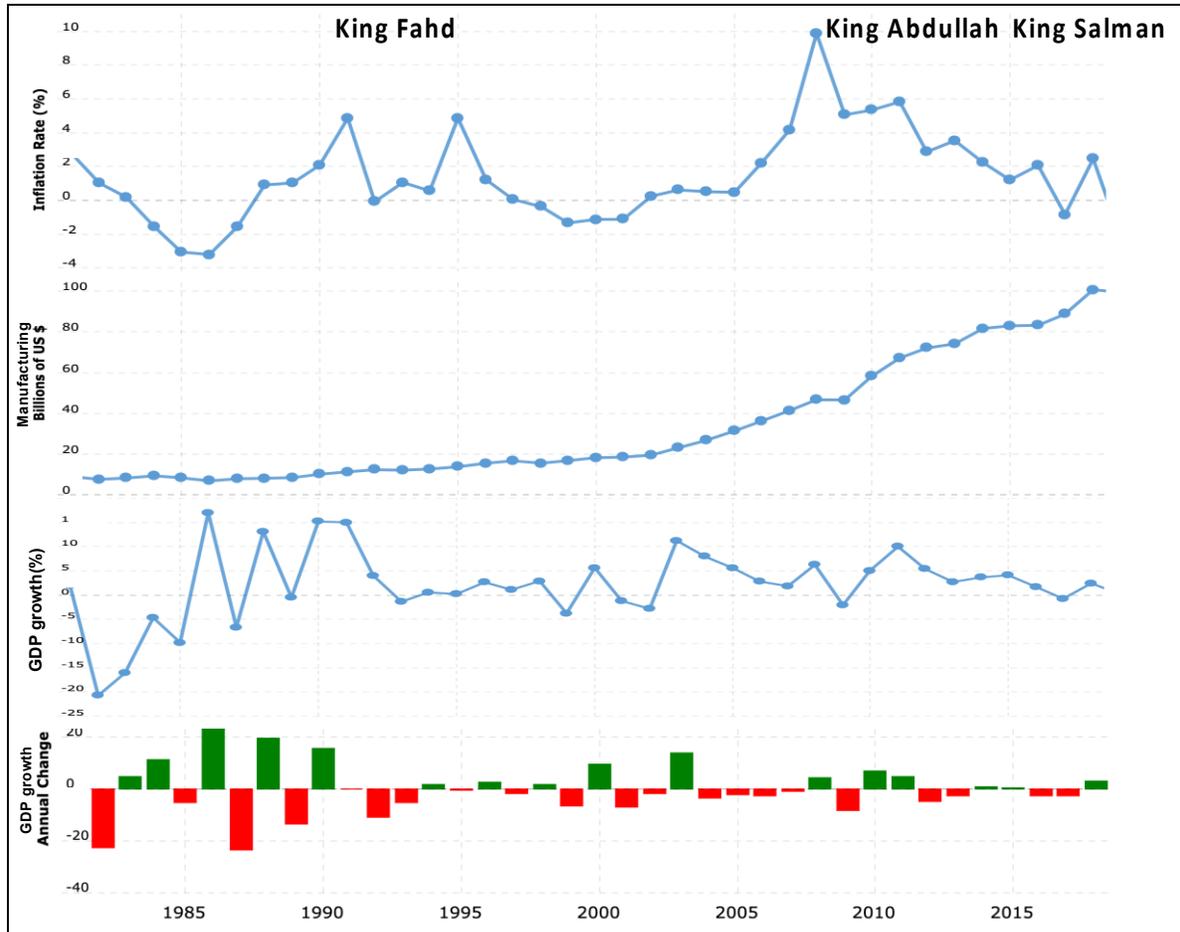

Figure 22 - Inflation rate (%), Manufacturing (billion U.S. $), GDP growth (billion U.S. $) and GDP growth annual change (%) within different king's periods[176]
(data source: World Bank)

As discussed above, the fluctuations in the oil prices since 1980s have significantly changed the economic strategical path of the Saudi Arabia. During King Fahd's period, the highest oil price in April 1980 (128$ per barrel) shaped the main route of Saudi Arabia's economy around the oil production. However, the oil market hit the lowest price of 31$ per barrel in February 1986 and a -10% drop in the GDP growth. This was an initial point for the government to begin shifting to the other sectors to improve the economic situation. However, as can be seen in Fig. 35, the investments in manufactures were a slow-paced path to the economic stability, starting from 1986. Nevertheless, although the oil price had some improvements since 1986, once again in November 1998 it reached the lowest historical price of 18$ per barrel. However, since the

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[174] Niblock, Tim. "Saudi Arabia's Economic Development: Ambitious Visions, Difficult Dilemmas.", 15.

[175] Tim Niblock and Monica Malik, "The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia" (London: Routledge, 2007), 120.

[176] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.

government through development plans already invested on non-oil sectors (Katanani 1971), experienced a lower fallback on the GDP growth of -5% compared to the 1986. The oil market recovery took until August 2000 to gain back the barrel's worth to reach 50$.

Based on my reaserch, furing King Abdullah's period, the oil market experienced some massive shocks. For instance, in June 2008 the oil price reached the highest historical price of 168$ per barrel. Despite, this significant jump in the price, six month later the market crashed and the oil price felt down to the 55$ per barrel. The recovery of the oil market took three years to again get back to stable prices with the highest price of 125$ per barrel in March 2011.

Lastly, according to the information on the website *WorldBank*, King Salman has so far experienced an instable oil market with a second lowest historical price of 19$ per barrel in April 2020. However, despite the significant drop of oil price, thanks to the designated development plans (Ministry of Economy and Planning 2009), the GDP growth stayed in the positive range.
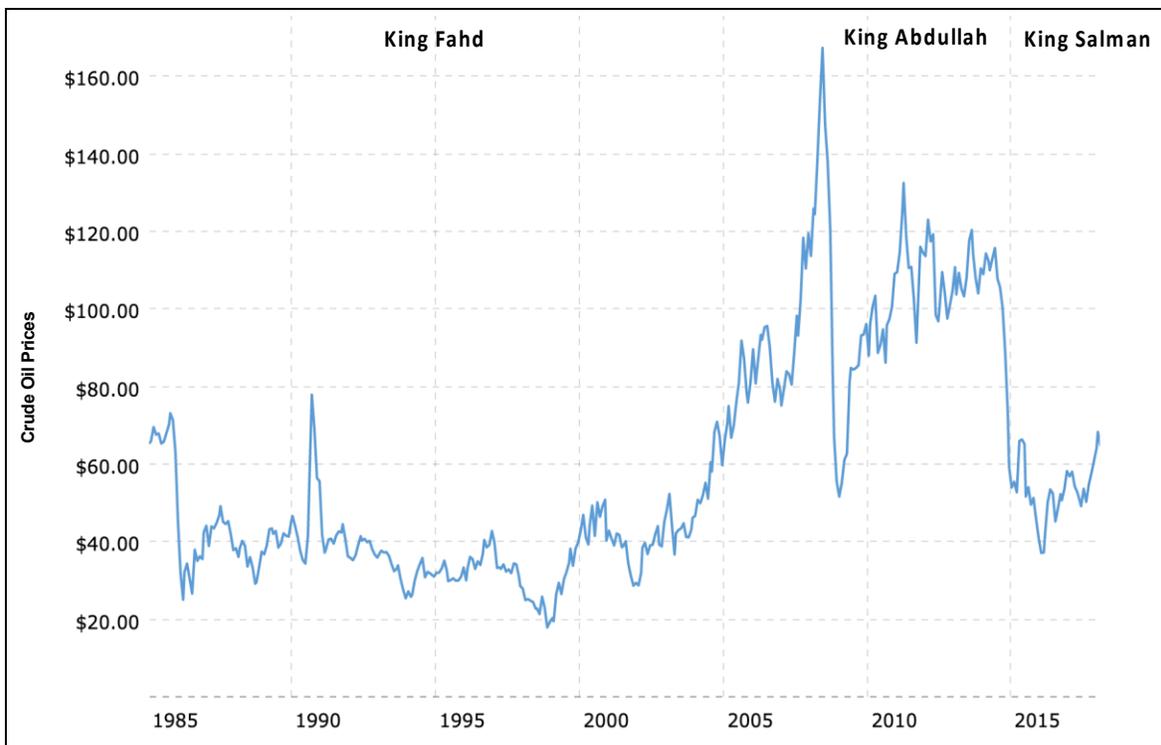
Figure 23 - Crude oil prices ($) within different king's periods[177]
(data source: World Bank)

Saudi Arabia's main exports include petroleum and petroleum products, and most imports include machinery, foodstuffs, and chemicals. "The principal trading partners are the United States, China, and Japan. The principal sources of imports are the United States, China, Germany, and South Korea."[178]

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[177] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[178] https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia (08.07.2020)

As reported on the website *WorldBank*, the increase in the percentage of trade's role in the GDP growth and its significant improvement during King Abdullah's period (Fig. 24) reflects the relative degree of success of the defined development plans. Nevertheless, the notable decrease of trade during King Salman's period reveals the fact that despite the unloaded economic reliance on the oil market, yet the historical drop of the oil price that was mentioned above, significantly affected the Saudi Arabia's trading capability.
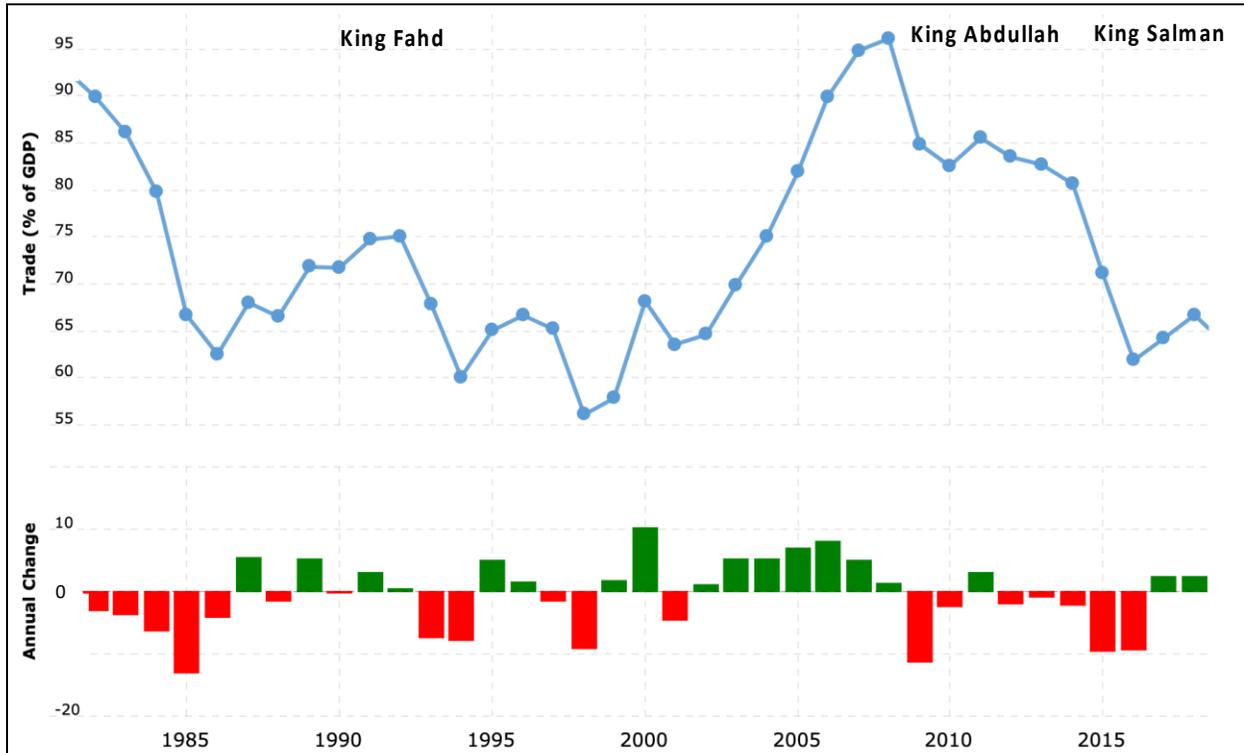
Figure 24 - Total trade (% of GDP) and its annual changes (%) within different king's periods[179]
(data source: World Bank)

Undoubtedly, oil revenues have played an essential role in the development and progress of industry, production, and services in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has made significant advances in technology, telecommunication, trade, and production over the past few decades, relying on its natural resources. The first breakthrough in Saudi Arabia began between the years 1970 and 1980, with increased oil sales. However, Saudi Arabia has always sought to limit its oil sales dependence, relying on new advances in industry and technology.

According to *Britannica*, "other mineral resources are known to exist, and the government has pursued a policy of exploration and production in order to diversify the economic base. Geologic reconnaissance mapping of the Precambrian shield in the west has revealed deposits

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[179] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.

of gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, iron, titanium, pyrite, magnesite, platinum   and cadmium. There are also nonmetallic resources such as limestone, silica, gypsum, and phosphorite."[180]

As mentioned above, Saudi Arabia has also made significant progress in manufacturing. Especially with the establishment of a SABIK company that is active in various fields such as industry, construction, electronics, transportation, and medical. "SABIK Ranked among the world's largest petrochemicals manufacturers, SABIC is a public company based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. 70% of the Company's shares are owned by the Saudi Arabian government, with the remaining 30% publicly traded on the Saudi stock exchange. SABIC began in 1976 by Royal decree and its growth has been nothing short of miraculous. Today, the company has operations in over 50 countries with a global workforce of over 33,000 talented individuals."[181]

Lastly, similar to the analysis to Iran we studied the unemployment rate which can indicate the success level of different development strategies applied within different king's period (Fig. 25). During beginning of the King Fahd's period, due to the significant drop in the oil price (Fig. 23) and the highly reliance of Saudi Arabia's economy on the oil export, the unemployment rate reached the highest 7%. Nevertheless, due to the oil price improvement and investments on the other sectors such as industry and agriculture the rate of unemployment decreased to 4.3% in 1998.[182]

However, the improvement in the employability was not constant during the King Fahd's period and at the end of his period it accelerated to more than 6% in 2005. Following, during King Abdullah's period, due to some fundamental reforms[183], the unemployment rate decreased significantly. Despite these improvements, during the second half of King Abdullah's period, the unemployment rate had no notable change while through King Salman's period we observe a slight increase in the unemployment rates.

[180] https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia (08.07.2020)
[181] https://www.sabic.com/en/about (23.07.2020)
[182] Tim Niblock and Monica Malik, "The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia, 191.
[183] https://www.aljazeera.com/program/episode/2010/10/20/saudi-arabia-fundamental-change (23.07.2020)
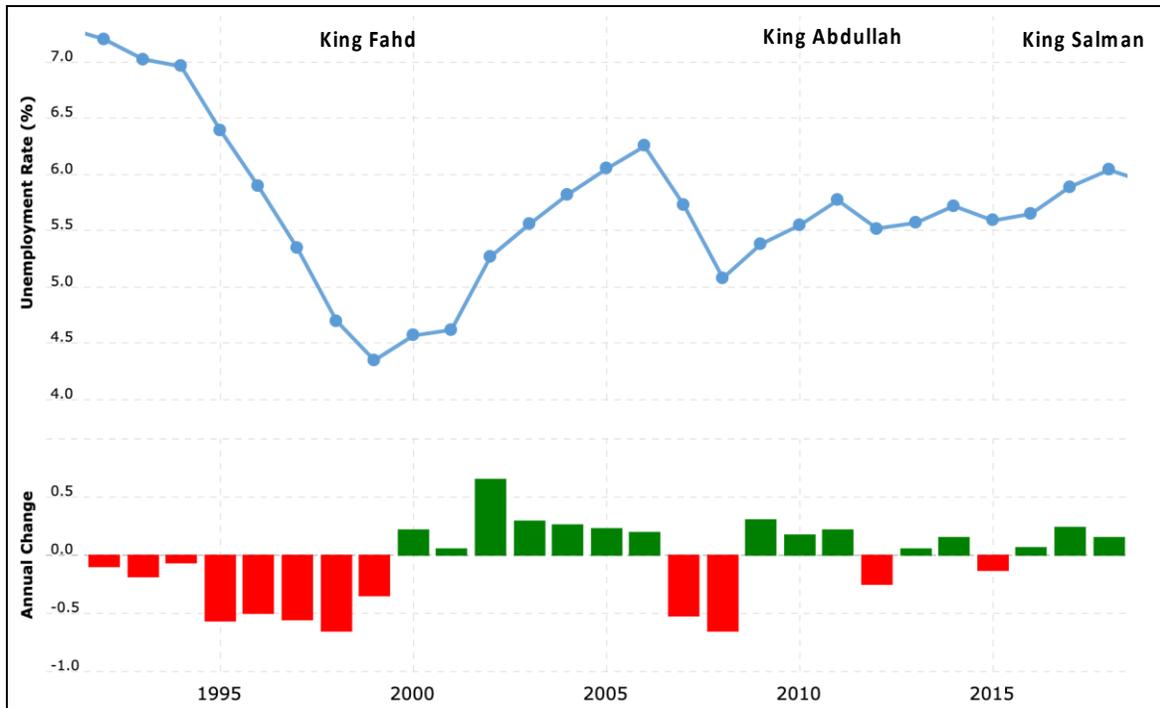
Figure 25 - Unemployment rate (%) and its annual changes (%) within different king's periods[184]
(data source: World Bank)

However, due to both unemployment rates and the massive human right volitation in different forms such as torture (as form of punishment), no freedom of speech and discriminations against women's right, the migrated population and the total percentage of it from population has significantly increased since 2005. [185]

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[184] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[185] https://www.amnesty.org.uk/saudi-arabia-human-rights-raif-badawi-king-salman (23.07.2020)
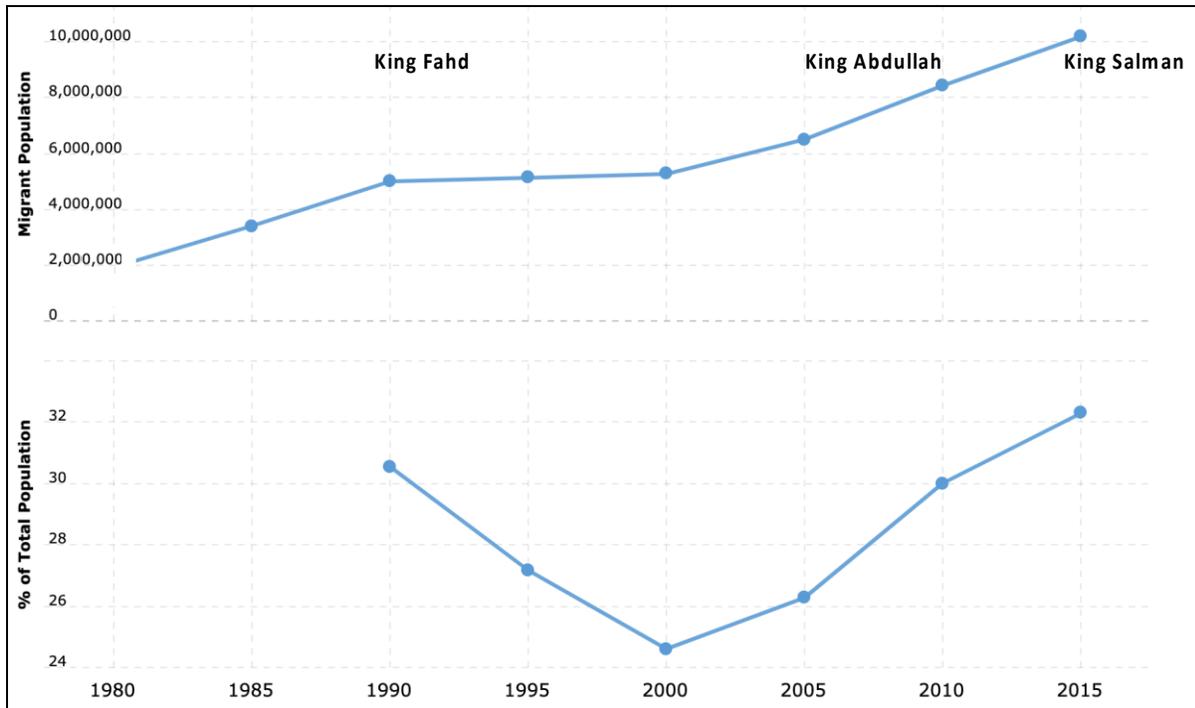
Figure 26 - Unemployment rate (%) and its annual changes (%) within different king's periods
(data source: World Bank)186

3.2.   Military capabilities

Iran

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the highest military authority of the armed forces in Iran and is responsible for policy-making and command of all Iranian military forces, including the army (Artesh), the IRGC (Sepah) and the police. This headquarter is directly under the supervision of the Supreme Leader. [187] While the army and police play a major role in maintaining security within the borders of the Islamic Republic, the Revolutionary Guards have significant influence both inside and outside Iran. According to the website *Council on Foreign Relations*, the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was established on April 22, 1979, by the command of Imam Khomeini, and became one of the most influential institutions protecting the achievements of the revolution.[188] This institution, which was created to preserve and protect the revolution and its achievements, soon became a powerful and active institution in all political, economic, and military spheres. According to Schahgaldian: "the formation and development of IRGC is to protect new clerical order and assist the ruling clerics in administering Islamic laws and morals.[189] The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is a

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[186] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[187] https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/203464/آشنایی-با-ستاد-کل-نیروهای-مسلح (28.01.2020)
[188] https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/irans-revolutionary-guards (28.01.2020)
[189] Nikola B. Schahgaldian, Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1987), 64.

85

separate organization from the Regular Armed Forces, although its activities run in parallel and are coordinated by the Armed Forces General Staff." [190]

Some believe that the IRGC was inspired by Lebanese Shiite movements, guerrilla movements, and even the ideas of Yasser Arafat or the Soviet Union at that time. However, Schahgaldian believes, the IRGC was gradually formed by the leftists and underground groups before the Islamic Revolution. He notes: "In fact, a close look at the Iranian newspaper of the time leaves no doubt that some of these elements had surfaced immediately before and after the downfall of the monarchy. In other cases, these undergrounds paramilitary groups originated much earlier. Known to the public at the time as pasdars (guards), many of these were usually the extension of various originally underground revolutionary leftists and extremist Islamic organizations whose members became fully armed in early February 1979 when military arsenals in Tehran and elsewhere fell into the hands of Shah's opponents."[191]

Iran is attempting to leverage pressure on the Persian Gulf region and, in particular, the Strait of Hormuz by upgrading its warships and boats. Katzman notes that Iran is developing forces and methods to control the approaches to Iran, particularly the Strait of Hormuz, according to Defense Department studies and intelligence community testimony, and the IRGC-QF remains a vital weapon of Iran's foreign policy and power projection. [192] Iran's naval strategy appears to be focused on improving the capacity to swarm US naval forces using its tiny boat fleet, huge quantity of anti-ship cruise missiles, and coastal defense cruise missiles (such as the Silkworm or Seersucker).[193]

During different presidential period, the total budget dedicated to the military sector has changed significantly (Fig. 22). For instance, during the first 4-year presidential period of Rafsanjani which was the end of Iran-Iraq war, the total budget dedicated to the military of its total proportion from GDP is remarkably higher than the second 4-year presidential period. This shows how the different Iranian national and international conditions affect the budget planning.

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[190] Claire Taylor, *The Islamic Republic of Iran: An introduction,* Research Paper 09/92 (London*:* House of Commons Library, 2009), 140.
[191] Nikola B. Schahgaldian, Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic*, 65.
[192] Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, (Washington: Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 2019), 17.
[193] Ibid.
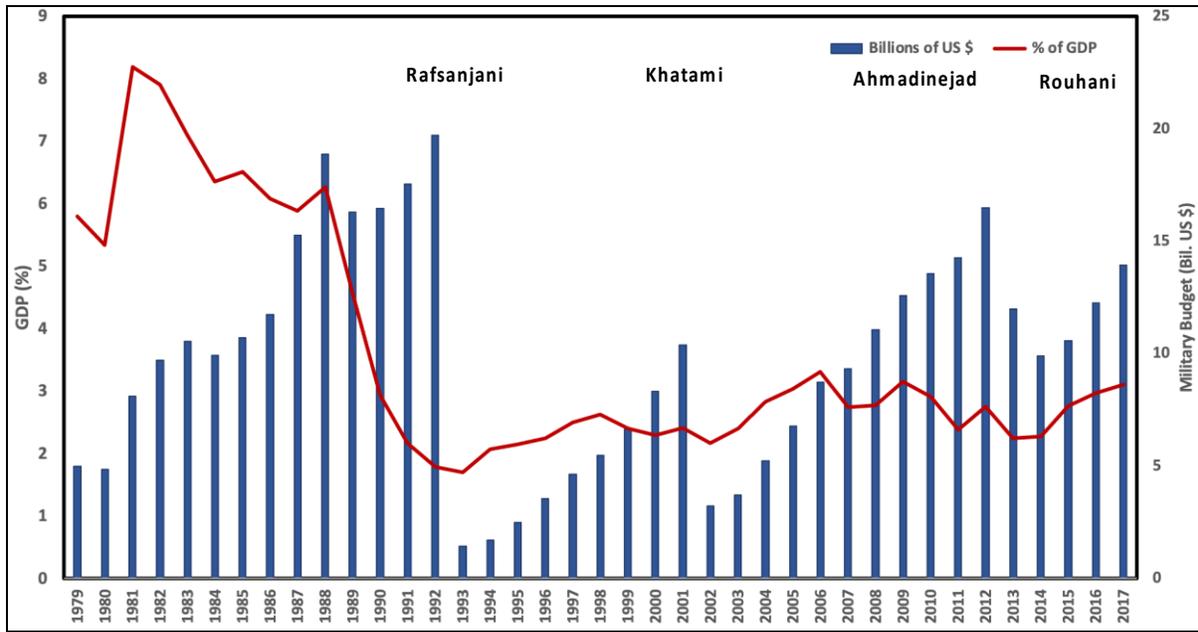
Figure 27 - Military budget (Bil. U.S. $) and GDP percentage of it (%) within different presidential periods[194]
(data source: World Bank)

During Khatami's period and his speech on "Dialogue Among Civilizations", Iran introduced an international friendly face with attempts to gather all the nations together at a civilized negotiating environment.[195] Ergo, the overall total military budget, especially during second 4-year presidential period of Khatami, decreased notably.

Ahmadinejad's strategy was utterly different than Khatami with an emphasis on the urge to stand against United States of America and putting Holocaust under question and quoting: "They [Western powers] launched the myth of the Holocaust. They lied, they put on a show and then they support the Jews."[196] This approach forced international threats over Iran and consequently a significant increase in the dedicated budget to the military sector. However, as mentioned above, due to the increased oil price, this increased budget took smaller proportion of the GDP compared to Rafsanjani's period. Finally, during Rouhani's period due to the nuclear agreement the military budget showed a lower increase compared to the Ahmadinejad's presidential period. The overall designated budget to the military sector is invested in either increasing the number of military personnel or developing military facilities.

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[194] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[195] http://hanskoechler.com/civ-dial.html (09.03.2021)
[196] https://web.archive.org/web/20110707075150/http://worldnews.about.com/od/iran/p/ahmadinejad.htm, (09.03.2021)
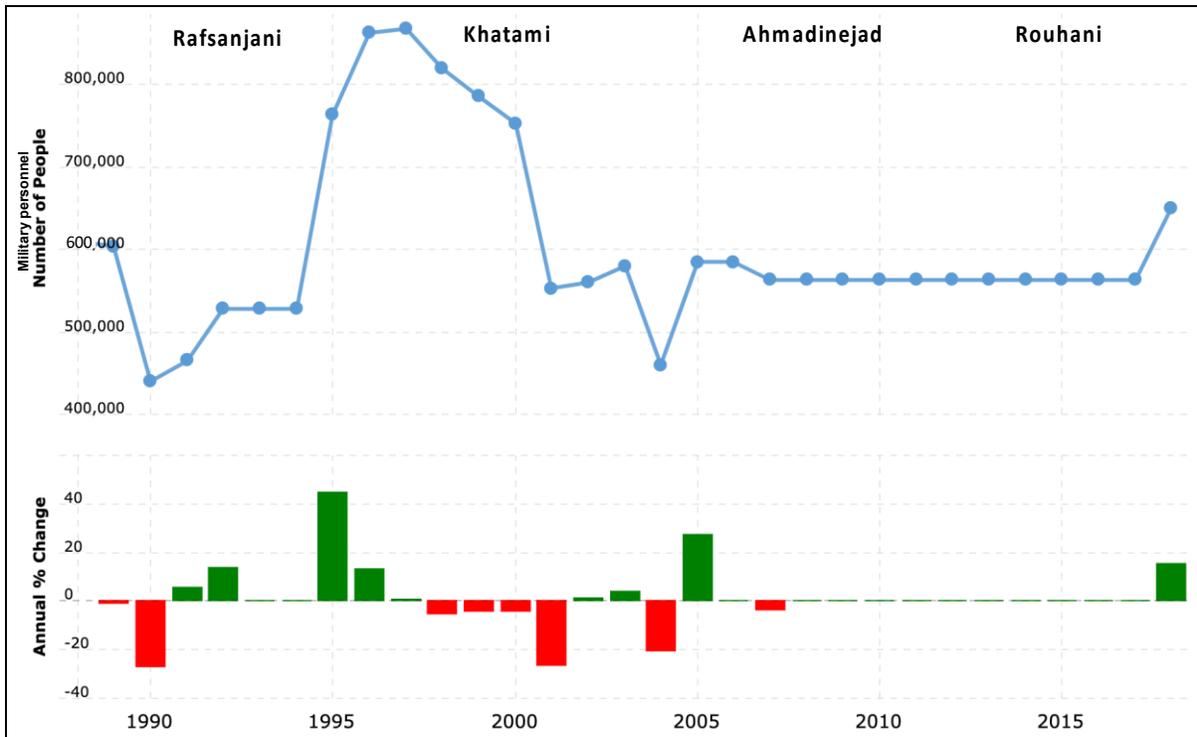
Figure 28 - Military personnel (number of people) and its annual changes (%) within different presidential periods[197]
(data source: World Bank)

According to the data retrieved form the website *WorldBank*, the information on the number of military personnel is very interwoven and not easily accessible. However, we obtained scarce data from World Bank for different presidential period with no information on Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's period. Based on the statistics from the website *WorldBank*, during the end of Rafsanjani's period and end of the Iran-Iraq war, due to high military personnel mortality and the urge of absorbing fresh personnel, we observe a significant increase in the military employment (40%). However, during Khatami's period and his peaceful international approach that was discussed above, the number of military personnel remarkably decreased (-25%).

As there is a lack of information on the number of military personnel during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's period, it is challenging to make a comparison with the prior periods. However, one for sure can state that during these two presidential periods, the focus was more on the facilities improvement rather than military personnel expansion. These facilities include chemical and biological weapons, missile-related and nuclear-related.[198]

While the chemical and biological weapon facilities are concentrated around Tehran and Isfahan, the missile-related facilities are spread within centre and sensitive cities throughout Iran, from Tabriz (at North-west) to Mashhad (North-East). This shows the government geographical understanding of its neighbouring nations and the missile approximation to them consequently.

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[197] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[198] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (17.06.2021)
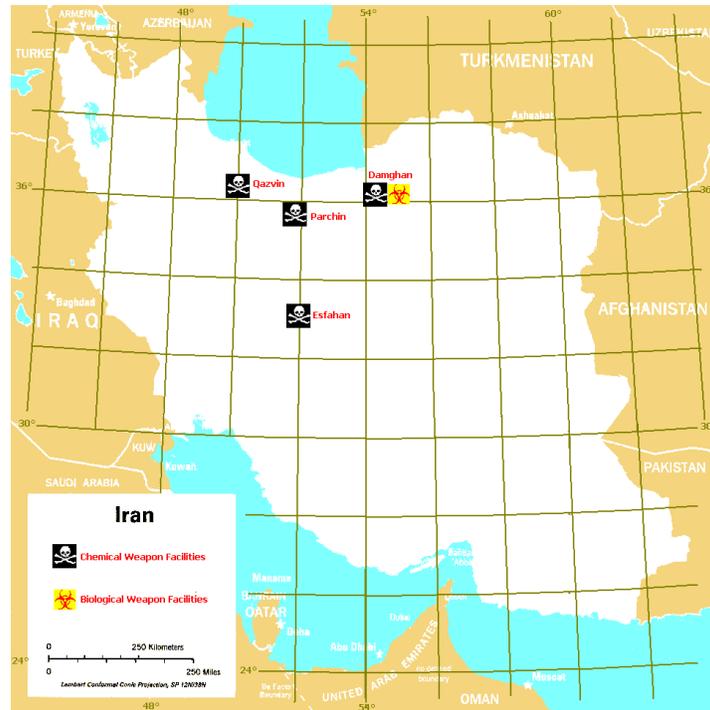
Figure 29 - Chemical and biological weapon facilities in Iran[199]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)
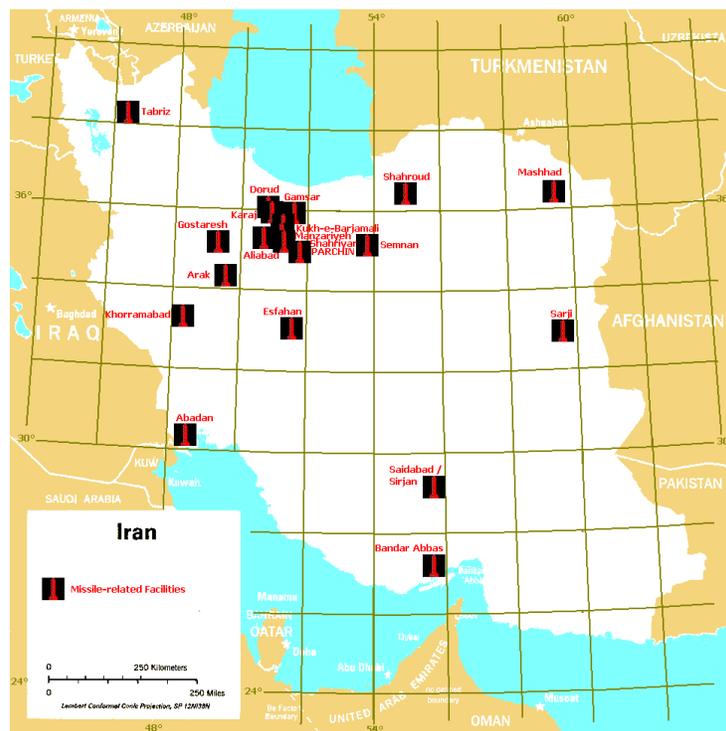
Figure 30 - Missile-related facilities in Iran[200]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

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[199] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (06.05.2021)
[200] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (06.05.2021)
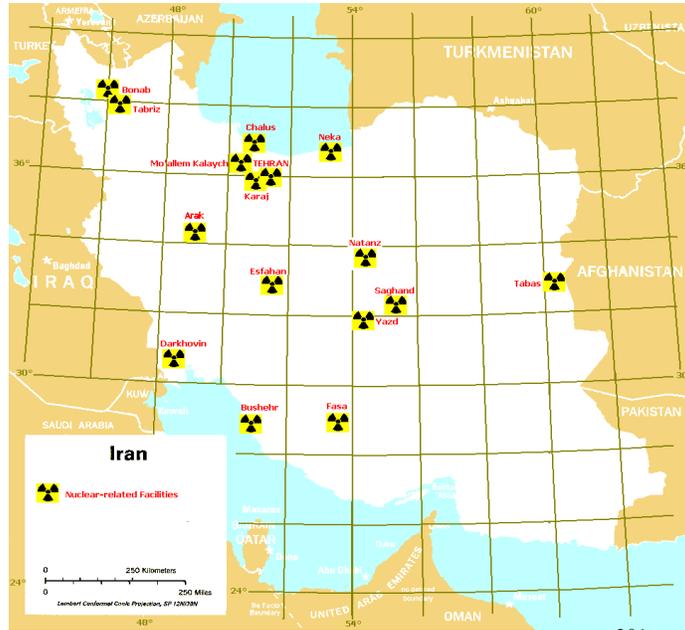
Figure 31 - Nuclear-related facilities in Iran[201]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

The four rings Iranian missiles can reach different ranges with SCUD B (inner ring) as shorter range to MRBM 2 (outer ring) as biggest approximate range.[202] The nuclear related facilities are located also through different parts of Iran. However, the number of these facilities took a steep increase during Ahmadinejad's period, as he compared Iran's nuclear program to "Train with no break".[203] Following we discuss in detail the Iran's Nuclear Program.
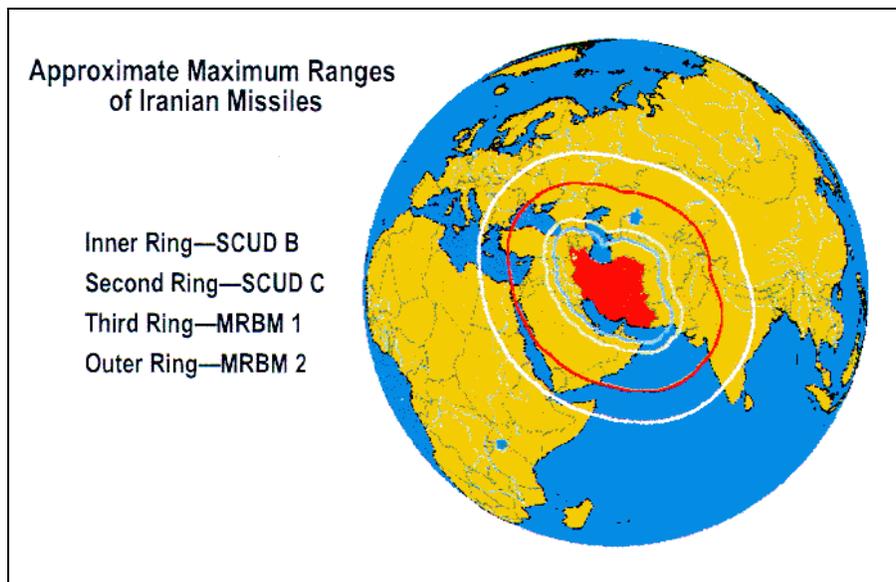
Figure 32 - Approximate maximum ranges of Iranian missiles[204]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

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[201] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (06.05.2021)
[202] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (17.06.2021)
[203] https://www.rferl.org/a/1074921.html (09.03.2021)
[204] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (06.05.2021)

The table below shows the expenses of the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on GDP percentage and in U.S. $m., at constant 2017 prices and exchange rates.

Table 3. Military expenditure of Iran constant (2017) US$ m., from 1988 to 2016[205]
(data: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database)

Year	Constant (2017) US $m	% of GDP
1988	5869	6.3%
1989	4341	4.6%
1990	3854	2.9%
1991	3475	2.2%
1992	3016	1.8%
1993	3531	1.7%
1994	4358	2.1%
1995	4275	2.2%
1996	4714	2.2%
1997	5259	2.5%
1998	5263	2.6%
1999	5323	2.4%
2000	5860	2.3%
2001	6524	2.4%
2002	7022	2.2%
2003	8196	2.4%
2004	10591	2.8%
2005	12594	3.0%
2006	15080	3.3%
2007	13867	2.7%
2008	13341	2.8%
2009	13959	3.2%
2010	14204	2.9%
2011	12809	2.4%
2012	13497	2.8%
2013	10661	2.2%

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https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/1_Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932017%20in%20constant%20%282016%29%20USD.pdf (16.06.2021)

2014	10574	2.3%
2015	11123	2.8%
2016	12604	3.0%

Note: Figures are in U.S. $m., at constant 2017 prices and exchange rates

3.3. Iranian Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program has created the most significant concern for Arab neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia. The United States has consistently stated that it will not allow Iran to make nuclear weapons. Katzman notes: "Iran's nuclear program has been a paramount U.S. concern, in part because Iran's acquisition of an operational nuclear weapon could cause Iran to perceive that it is immune from military pressure and produce a regional nuclear arms race. Israeli leaders have characterized an Iranian nuclear weapon as a threat to Israel's existence. Some Iranian leaders argue that a nuclear weapon could end Iran's historic vulnerability to great power invasion, domination, or regime change attempts."[206] According to *IRNA*, Iran has always stated that it does not intend to build a nuclear weapon, and only targets such as power generation, energy, and in some cases, medical purposes. Ayatollah Khamenei also stated in a fatwa that nuclear weapons are forbidden and un-Islamic.[207]

Iran, since the presidency of Ahmadinejad, gave remarkable speed to its nuclear program and made Saudi Arabia and its main ally, United Sates, very concerned. Eventually, due to the pressure of sanctions, the new presidential election, and motivation on both sides successfully resolved its nuclear issue with the 5+1 group. The agreement was established after several rounds of talks and years of negotiations. This agreement was named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions.

The P5+1 negotiation with Iran on a comprehensive solution began in February 2014, according to Kenneth Katzman, although many self-imposed deadlines were ignored. The parties achieved an agreement on a framework for a JCPOA on April 2, 2015, and the agreement was finalized on July 14, 2015. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council on July 20, 2015, and contains restrictions (less stringent than Resolution 1929) on Iran's importation and exportation of conventional arms (for up to five years), as well as development and testing of ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear weapon (for up to eight years). The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) verified that Iran has completed the work required for sanctions release on January 16, 2016, and 'Implementation Day' was declared.[208]

On Iran's conventional military arsenal, according to the Testimony of U.S. intelligence community officials, "from 2005 to 2018 Iranian missile arsenals consists of Shahab-3 ("Meteor"), BM-25/Musudan Variant, Short-Range Ballistic Missiles and Cruise Missiles, Anti-

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[206] Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, 8.
[207] http://www.irna.ir/fa/NewsPrint.aspx?ID=80839325 (14.05.2019)
[208] Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, 12.

Ship Cruise Missiles, Anti-Tank Guided Missiles, Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAM), Rockets, ICBMS, Space Vehicles, Warheads."[209]

Table 4. Iran's Conventional Military Arsenal
(data sources: IISS Military Balance (2019), DIA Annual Military Power of Iran, and various press reports) [210]

Military and Security Personnel	- Total military: 525.000 personnel - Regular army (Artesh) ground force: 350.000 - IRGC ground force: 100.000 - IRGC Navy: 20.000 - Regular navy (IRIN): 18.000 - Air Force: 30.000 - IRGC Aerospace Force: unknown - IRGC-Qods Force: 5.000 - Security forces: 40.000-60.000 - Basij: 100.000
Tanks	More than 1,650
Surface Ships and Submarines	- More than 100 (IRGC and regular Navy): 4 Corvette, 10 China-supplied Houdong; - More than 50 patrol and small boats which are controlled by IRGC; - Three Kilo subs controlled by Navy; - 14 midget subs designed by North Korea; - Iran possesses a large inventory of naval mines.
Combat Aircraft/ Helicopters	More than 330, among them are 25 MiG-29 and 30 Su-24. Still dependent on U.S. F-4s, F-5s and F-14 from Shah's period.
Artillery and Artillery Rockets	Iran has a variety of fixed and towed artillery weapons, as well as a number of rocket launchers. Iran produced EFPs, the anti-tank rockets that pro-Iranian militias have employed effectively against US soldiers in Iraq. Iran also distributes the weapon to regional partners and proxies.
Drones	- Ababil, Shahed (strike roles); - Mohajer (strike role); - Toufan (attack); - Foutros (strike role); - Fotros, Karrar, Hemaseh, IRN-170.
Naval Mines	From 3.000 to 5.000, including contact and influence ones.
Air Defense	Iran has a variety of surface-to-air missile systems, including Russian-made SA-14 (Gremlin), SA-7 (Grail), US-made I-Hawks. Iran may possibly possess Stingers that was obtained in Afghanistan. In January 2007, Russia supplied Iran with 30 Tor M1 anti-aircraft missile systems valued over $1 billion. Russia agreed to sell five batteries of the S-300 air defense system in December 2007. Although the sale of the equipment did not

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[209] Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, 16.
[210] Ibid.

| | legally violate United Nations Resolution 1929, Russia delayed to deliver the system until Iran agreed to the framework nuclear agreement on April 2, 2015. |
| | Iran is said to be interested in purchasing Russia's S-400 anti-aircraft system as well as the Bastian coastal defense system. |

In addition, along with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the country's army, Basij forces, and reserve forces that have previously served military service constitute a large defense community.[211]

3.4.   Saudi Arabia's Military Capabilities

After the First World War, some Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, along with the modernization of the army, began the process of creating the state and the bureaucratic system and fundamental changes. However, modernization of the Saudi Army took place after the emergence of oil and with foreign assistance in order to preserve the royal family. According to Stephanie Cronin: "In Saudi Arabia, however, no such military revolution, dragging society in its wake, took place. Military expansion was funded not by domestic taxation but by oil royalties provided by a foreign concession, recruitment remained voluntary, avoiding the administrative centralization and bureaucratic rationality demanded by conscription, while both the integrative function of conscription and the emergence of a professional officer corps were sacrificed to the imperative of sustaining the tribal and family ascendancy of the Al Saud."[212]

Important events between 1950 and 1960, such as the attempt for coup d'état against the royal family, and then after 1970, events such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Persian Gulf War, led to a great Saudis attention to Military power and military equipment.

However, the Saudis needed extreme help from the West and East for building their military. Not only did they receive military equipment from the United States and Britain, but also from countries like Pakistan to help developing their own air force.[213] Kenneth Pollack notes: "In the spring of 1973, Riyadh signed an agreement with the United States to provide comprehensive assistance in modernizing the SANG. Indeed, in 1980 the Saudis went so far as to hire 10,000 Pakistani troops to serve in the Saudi armed forces; about half of this contingent manned the Saudi Loth Armored Brigade in its entirety."[214] A huge number of American and European civilian and military personnel were in charge of Riyadh's maintenance and logistical networks, while poor laborers from South and East Asia performed the menial jobs related with these activities.[215] Along with this, Saudi Arabia hired thousands of American and British military

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[211] https://institute.global/policy/beyond-borders-expansionist-ideology-irans-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps (17.06.2021)

[212] Stephanie Cronin, "Tribes, Coups and Princes: Building a Modern Army in Saudi Arabia", *Middle Easter Studies* vol 49., no 1. (2013): 2.

[213]https://www.arabnews.com/node/1834846/saudi-arabia (17.06.2021)

[214] Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991 (Studies in War, Society, and the Military)*, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 427.

[215] Ibid.

advisers. The set of measures led to Saudi Arabia's strong dependence on Western countries and their lack of self-confidence.

However, Saudi Arabia has, in recent years, been attempting to have military superiority over Iran by importing military equipment and strengthening its forces, especially the air forces. According to the study presented by Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain: "In 2014, Saudi Arabia became the largest global weapons importer, purchasing $6.4 billion in arms that year alone. In addition to a continued and intensive security partnership with the U.S., the Saudi government has become increasingly reliant upon private military firms, so much so that 'even simple military exercises' are planned and organized by firms."[216] ADHRB also reports that, along with the Saudi Arabia National Guard (SANG), the Ministry of Defence and Aviation (MODA) is in charge of active defence. MODA is divided into four sections: "The Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLFs), the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF), the Royal Saudi Navy (RSN), and the Royal Saudi Air Defence Force (RSADF)".[217] While Saudi Arabia has spent a lot to modernize its army, its main problem, the management of various military forces, remained unsolved. Besides, Saudi Arabia is in difficulty with its human resources as well as their battle quality.

Saudi Arabia's military forces are divided between the National Guard and the conventional military force. According to the National Guard's website, the mission of SANG is as follows: "The National Guard is an armed military force that contributes to the defence of the lands and borders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, maintains security and internal stability and protects the holy places, property and property of the State."[218] The major goal of the National Guard is to keep the royal family in power and prevent a coup, as well as to safeguard sacred cities like Mecca and Medina, as well as Saudi Arabia's riches and reserves. Unlike the Army, the National Guard reports directly to the royal family, whilst the Air Force and Navy report to the Ministry of Defense.

Ministry of Defense and Aviation

The primary purpose of the MODA is to maintain security, territorial integrity, repatriation of threats and external pressures, and to work with all relevant institutions to preserve the stability and security of Saudi Arabia. According to the MODA website, the strategic objectives to form the Ministry are as follows:

1. "Develop and achieve joint operating capabilities
2. Improve MoD performance
3. Modernize weaponry and armament
4. Optimize spending efficiency and nationalize industrialization

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[216] Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, Mapping the Saudi State – Chapter 6: The Saudi Armed Forces. (ADHRB: 2015). Retrieved from: https://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015.09.02_MSS-Ch.-6-Armed-Forces_Final.pdf, 4.
[217] Ibid.
[218] https://www.sang.gov.sa/GeneralInfo/Pages/TaskOfNationalGuard.aspx (22.05.2019)

5. Nurture morale of MoD staff and improve individual performance."[219]

Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLFs)

These forces work in partnership with the National Guard. After the Gulf War, much attention has been paid by the government to its progress and modernization. According to ADHRB's study, The RSLFs are formed as a general-purpose ground force, capable of performing any land-based defense responsibilities required by the kingdom. The RSLFs are usually in charge of securing Saudi Arabia's borders, although they can also conduct offensive operations.[220]

Royal Saudi Air Forces (RSAF)

The Saudi air force has a great deal of strategic importance in maintaining security and stability. Saudi Arabia has paid great attention to investing in its air force and has excellent capabilities in modernized and improved this sector. Cordesman notes: "The air force is entrusted to defend Kingdom's vast territory with recurring emphasis on protecting the country's onshore and offshore infrastructure. Four major air bases in Dhahran, Taif, Khamis Mushayt and Tabuk were tasked with protecting oil facilities in the Gulf, holy cities near the Red sea, the region bordering Yemen and the ports of the upper Red sea near Syria, and Jordan and Israel, respectively."[221] After the Gulf War and the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait, Saudi Arabia tried to resolve its deficiencies in the air force. Saudi Arabia, in partnership with the United States, has been able to recover large amounts of these deficiencies.

Royal Saudi Navy (RSN)

Although RSN is not very large, it is relatively good compared to the regional level. Saudi Arabia's primary concern is the Iranian submarines and small, fast boats in the Persian Gulf. According to Anthony Cordesman: "Saudi Arabia is developing the forces needed to play an active role in defending Gulf waters, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea and faces major challenges from Iran's naval forces in terms of mine warfare, asymmetric threats, and antisubmarine operation against Iran's Kilo-class submarines."[222] Saudi Arabia's navy appears to be in need of modernisation and advancement. Saudi officials are likewise attempting to improve their skills with the help of the United States. RSN has allegedly begun to address some of these problems, according to the American Democracy & Human Rights Journal, It started planning to recapitalize and strengthen its entire Eastern Fleet in early 2015, negotiating a potential $20 billion deal with the US Navy.[223] The agreement reached by the Trump administration with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was considerably more important than those reached by previous US administrations. According to CNBC: "The agreement, which is worth $350 billion over 10

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[219] https://www.mod.gov.sa/en/Ministry/Pages/StrategicGoals.aspx (22.05.2019)

[220] Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, Mapping the Saudi State – Chapter 6: The Saudi Armed Forces. (ADHRB: 2015). Retrieved from: https://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015.09.02_MSS-Ch.-6-Armed-Forces_Final.pdf, 5.

[221] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region* (Washington: CSIS, 2009), 123.

[222] Ibid, 124.

[223] https://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015.09.02_MSS-Ch.-6-Armed-Forces_Final.pdf (23.05.2019)

years and $110 billion that will take effect immediately, was hailed by the White House as "a significant expansion of security relationship" between the two countries." [224] The deal, which was signed in 2017 and will last over the next ten years, demonstrates Saudi Arabia's ongoing security worries as well as Iranophobia.

Royal Saudi Air Defense Force (RSADF)

This force has been independent of other forces since 1984. RSADF has recently been part of the RSLFs but became utterly autonomous in the new Saudi decision-making process. According to *Global Security*: "RSADF is no longer subordinate to the Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLF). The impetus behind this shift is the ever-changing threat. The concern by the Kingdom of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their mechanism of delivery, resulted in the early understanding by the SAAF of the requirement to transform, and thus the creation of the RSADF."[225] The primary goal of these forces, according to Cordesman, is to safeguard cities, oil and gas resources, and ground forces. Although the Air Defense Force handles the country's principal surface-to-air missile station, the army controls the country's short-range and man-portable air defense system. Despite the fact that the RSADF is a self-contained fighting force, he notes that during times of conflict, it is subject to the command of the air force commander. [226]

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[224] https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/20/us-saudi-arabia-seal-weapons-deal-worth-nearly-110-billion-as-trump-begins-visit.html (23.5.2020)

[225] https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/rsadf.htm (22.05.2019)

[226] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region* (Washington: CSIS, 2009), 124.

Table 5. Military expenditure of Saudi Arabia constant (2017) US$ m., from 1988 to 2016
(data source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database)[227]

<u>Note: Figures are in U.S. $m., at constant 2017 prices and exchange rates</u>

Year	Constant (2017) US $m	% of GDP
1988	23298	15.2%
1989	22016	13.4%
1990	27667	14.0%
1991	26384	12.5%
1992	24798	11.3%
1993	26282	12.5%
1994	22685	10.6%
1995	19996	9.3%
1996	19964	8.5%
1997	27112	11.0%
1998	31319	14.3%
1999	27875	11.4%
2000	30722	10.5%
2001	32724	11.4%
2002	28724	9.8%
2003	28928	8.7%
2004	32100	8.1%
2005	38764	7.7%
2006	44157	7.8%
2007	50864	8.5%
2008	49921	7.4%
2009	51303	9.6%
2010	53396	8.6%
2011	54122	7.2%
2012	61251	7.7%
2013	70194	9.0%
2014	82732	10.7%
2015	88233	13.3%
2016	63141	9.9%

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[227]

https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/1_Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932017%20in%20constant%20%282016%29%20USD.pdf (16.06.2021)

Missile systems

Saudi Arabia's missile systems are in control of specific section of Air Defense Force so called: Royal Saudi Strategic Missile Force (RSSMF). Besides the defensive radar system, "Peace Shield"[228], Saudi Arabia purchased two missile systems from China as follows:

- **DF 3:**

The Dong Feng (DF) 3 missile is the main weapon used by RSSMF (Fig. 33) which was mainly purchased during 1987 from China at about 50 missiles in total[229]. This is the longest-range missile owned by Saudi Arabia (Fig. 30) and requires the Transporter Erector Launcher (TEL) in order to be dispatched. [230] Nevertheless, the first time that Saudi Arabia reveals its reservoir of DF3 missile was in 2014 during the pick of the conflict with Iran.[231]

Figure 33 - DF 3 missile system[232]
(figure source: http://www.b14643.de/Spacerockets/Specials/DF-3/index.htm)

- **DF 21:**

Despite the high range of DF 3, it is incapable of carrying other warheads than nuclear one. This feature makes it less efficient when it comes to the more accurate targeting and more rapid

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[228] https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/rsadf.htm (20.03.2021)
[229] http://www.sinodefence.com/strategic/missile/df3.asp (20.03.2021)
[230] https://www.38north.org/tag/transporter-erector-launcher/ (20.03.2021)
[231] http://defense-update.com/20140502_saudi-arabia-unveils-part-strategic-missile-force-deterrent-move-iran.html (20.03.2021)
[232] http://www.b14643.de/Spacerockets/Specials/DF-3/index.htm (20.03.2021)

attacks[233]. Therefore, in 2013 Saudi Arabia publicly announced that the plan is to order the newer version of DF missile so called DF 21[234] (Fig. 34).

However, it was later revealed that Saudi Arabia with the coordination of United State of America and CIA has purchased from China an unknown number of the new DF 21 missiles in 2007.[235] It's worth noting that the key stipulation of the CIA-Saudi Arabia deal was to prevent the DF 21 from carrying nuclear weapons. The RSSMF can attack faster and more accurately with the freshly obtained DF 21 missiles amid intense regional battles that need missiles with a shorter range and superior precision. (Fig. 35).

Figure 34 - DF 21 missile system[236]
(figure source: https://unofficialchina.blog/df-21-mid-range-ballistic-missile/)

Although the exact number or location of Saudi Arabia's missile launch sites are not well published, the main publicly announced bases are: Al Watah, Al Jufayr and Al Sulayyil. Moreover, Saudi Arabia purchased 84 latest version of F 15 fighter from United States of America with a total value of 29.4 billion dollars[237] that are based in three airbases of: Dhahran, Tabuk and Taif (Fig. 35).

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[233] http://www.b14643.de/Spacerockets/Specials/DF-3/index.htm (20.03.2021)

[234] https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/saudi-rattles-its-saber/ (20.03.2021)

[235] https://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-cia-helped-saudis-chinese-missile-deal-227283 (20.03.2021)

[236] https://unofficialchina.blog/df-21-mid-range-ballistic-missile (20.03.2021)

[237] https://web.archive.org/web/20150924161319/http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/29/us-usa-arms-saudiarabia-idUSTRE7BS0LJ20111229 (20.03.2021)

While the significant number of Saudi Arabia's fighter jets are immigrants from other countries, the Saudi's cabinet in 2017 approved a new law to increase the salary of these pilots by more than 60% and insecure their loyalty.[238]
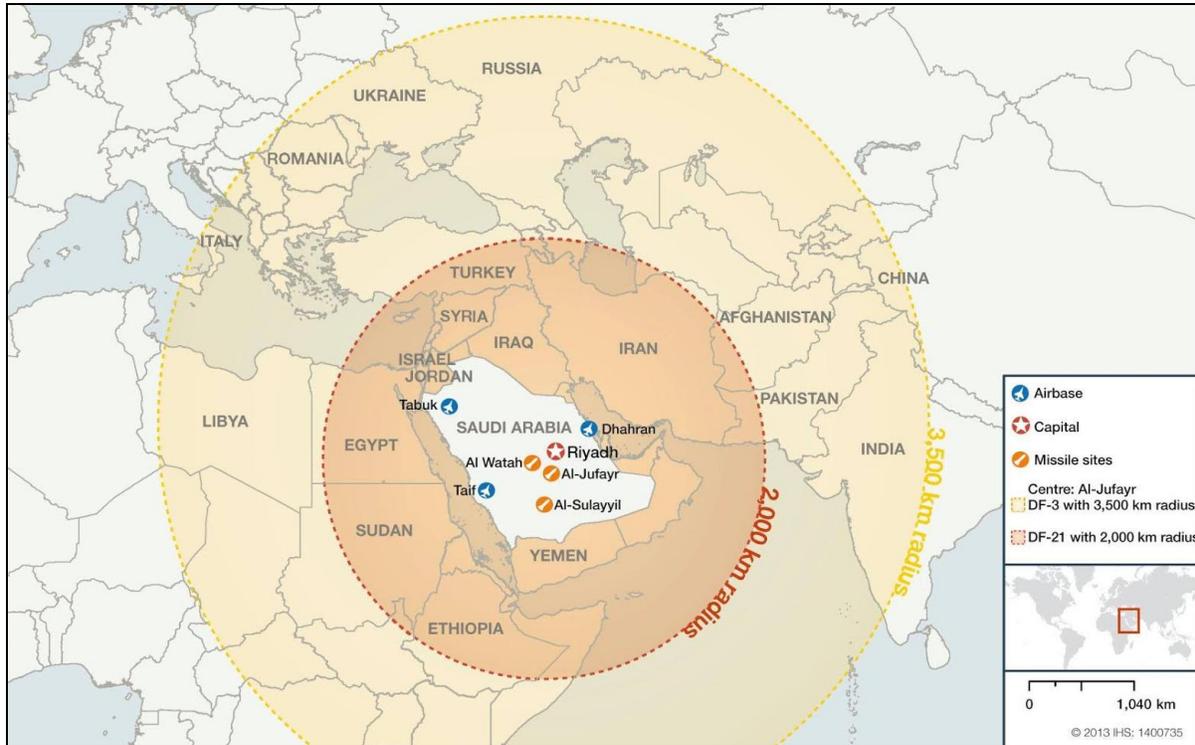
Figure 35 - Approximate maximum ranges of Saudi Arabia missiles[239]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/saudi_arabia.html)

Military budget

Like Iran, Saudi Arabia has invested heavily on the military facilities and personnel. Both of these countries have spent a significant portion of the GDP on the military section. More specifically, Saudi Arabia is among the top spender on the military section by 67 billion dollars only in 2018 on purchasing the military weapons. While Iran spent relatively a lower amount of 13 billion dollars within the same period. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is mainly purchasing its weapons from United States of America, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Turkey and Russia.[240]

However, during King Khaled and Fahd's period the military budget took more than 15% of the GDP in average (Fig. 35). This portion decreased at the end of King Fahd's period and increased

[238] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-airforce-payrise-idUSKBN1751LP (20.02.2021)
[239] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/saudi_arabia.html (20.02.2021)
[240] Pieter D. Wezeman and Alexandra Kuimova, "Military Spending and Arms Imports by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Uae", *Sipri* (2019): 4.

slightly at the end of King Abdullah's period. Following, during King Salman's period this portion decreased significantly to historical lowest amount of 2.5%.[241]

The highest investment on the military section was during King Abdullah's period due to the significant purchases made from United States of America in the form of warcrafts[242] and missiles from China[243] that was discussed above.
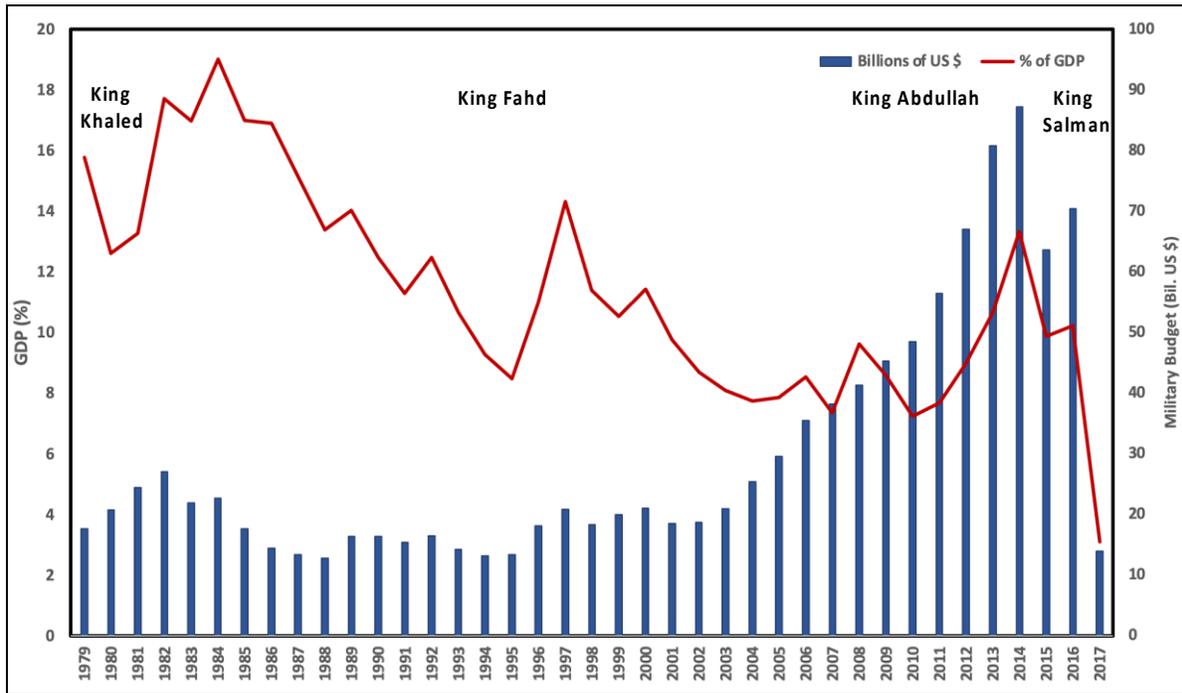
Figure 36 - Military budget (Bil. U.S. $) and GDP percentage of it (%) within different king's periods[244]
(data source: World Bank)

Due to the obscure data published by Saudi's government over the military personnel, it is challenging to relate the military sector's expenditure to the military expansion (Fig. 37). However, as it was discussed above, most of the military expenses were on the purchase of new weapons and facilities to improve the attach/defense ability of Saudi Arabia.

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[241] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/saudi_arabia.html (08.07.2021)
[242] https://web.archive.org/web/20150924161319/http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/29/us-usa-arms-saudiarabia-idUSTRE7BS0LJ20111229 (25.02.2021)
[243] https://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-cia-helped-saudis-chinese-missile-deal-227283 (25.02.2021)
[244] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
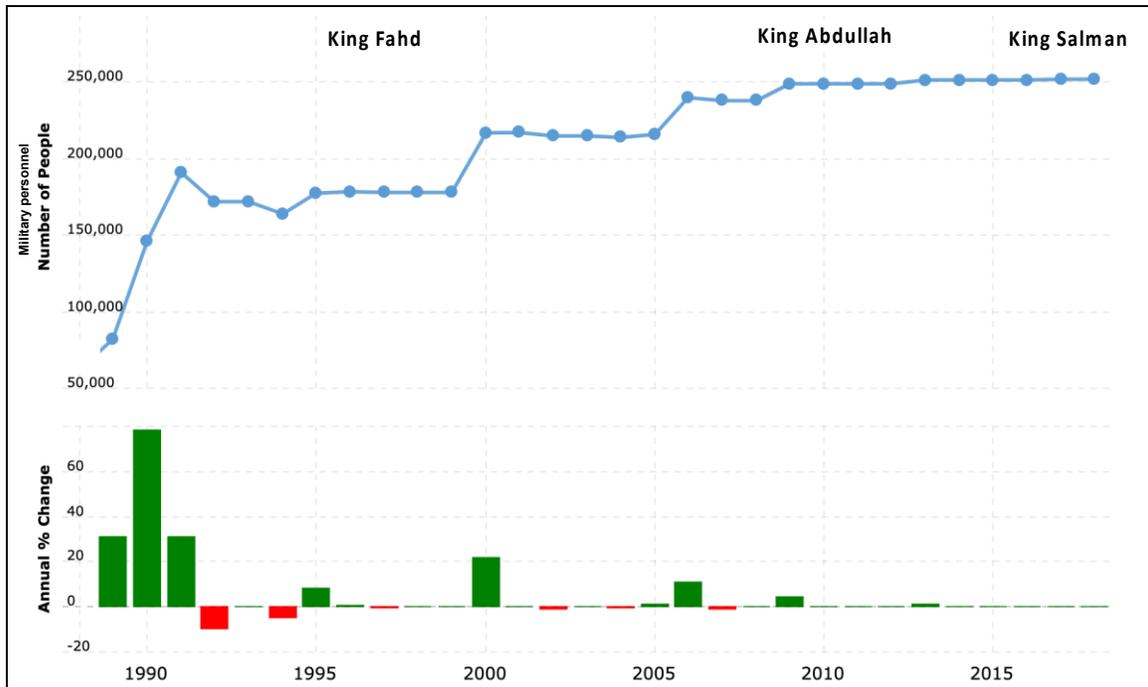
Figure 37 - Military personnel (number of people) and its annual changes (%) within different king's periods[245]
(data source: World Bank)

3.5. Technology and industry

Iran

Natural resources

Iran holds an important position in international energy security and the world economy as a result of its large reserves of petroleum and natural gas.[246] The major oilfields and pipelines are concentrated on the south of Iran which takes about 9% of world's oil supplies with 3.6% of global barrels per day (BP, n.d.). The oil industry takes about 70% of the total national export which is mainly to China, India, Korea, Japan and Italy (Unit 2012).[247]

However, Iran exported the highest number of barrels of oil during the Shah regime and around 6 million barrels a day, but many issues such as the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran-Iraq War in 1980, tensions in relations with the United States, and sanctions have had a massive impact on the sale of oil. Crane notes: "Oil production peaked over 30 years ago under the Shah, when it hit 6.0 million barrels per day (mbd), a level it has never regained. Output plummeted in the 1980s,

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[245] The figure was created manually using data extracted from World bank.
[246] https://en.mfa.ir/portal/viewpage/3996 (13.05.2019)
[247] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (08.07.2021)

a consequence of the Iran-Iraq war and lack of investment. A number of major fields had been depleted. However, oil production rose sharply between 1986 and 2005, more than doubling."[248]

Nevertheless, the future projections of the Iran's oil supply growth by the end of 2025 estimate at 7% of world's total barrels per day.[249] These projections reveal the significance of the oil industry's role in Iran's economy and the mitigation strategies which are reviewed every year to justify them accordingly.
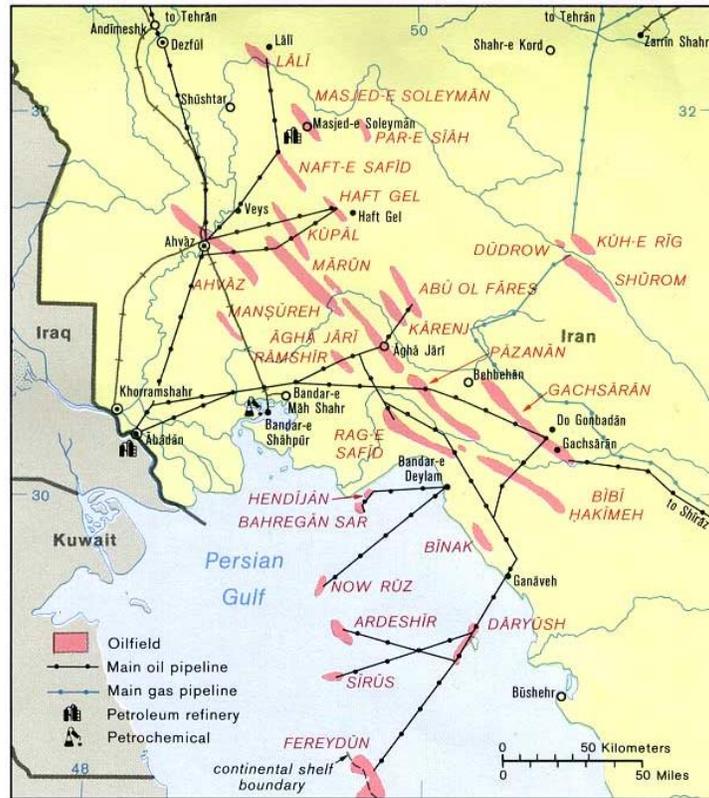
Figure 38 - Iran major oilfield, oil and gas pipelines and oil processing sectors[250]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

However, besides the oil industry, Iran is enriched with the other gas, heavy metal and mining (Fig. 39) and light and agriculture industries (Fig. 41).

The main gas fields and pipelines are spread on the west side of Iran, from north to south. The pipelines are starting from Astara in the north of Iran and ends in Shiraz on the south. Moreover, there are four main metals that form the majority of mines in Iran, which are: lead and zinc (Pb/Zn), iron ore (Fe), copper (Cu) and chromite (Cr). The biggest steel mills are located in Efahan and Bandar-e Abbas that produce about 9.24 million metric tons of steel which takes 24% of total Iran's export.[251] The main markets for Iran's steel products are Iraq, Thailand and United Arab Emirates (Trade 2019) (Fig. 39).

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[248] Keith Crane, Rollie Lal and Jeffrey Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities*, 68.
[249] Payam Abbaszadeh, Abbas Maleki, Mohammad Alipour, and Yaser Kanani Maman, "Iran's Oil Development Scenarios by 2025.", *Energy Policy* vol. 56 (2013): 615.
[250] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (20.05.2021)
[251] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (19.06.2021)

Figure 39 - Iran gas, heavy metal industries and mining[252]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)
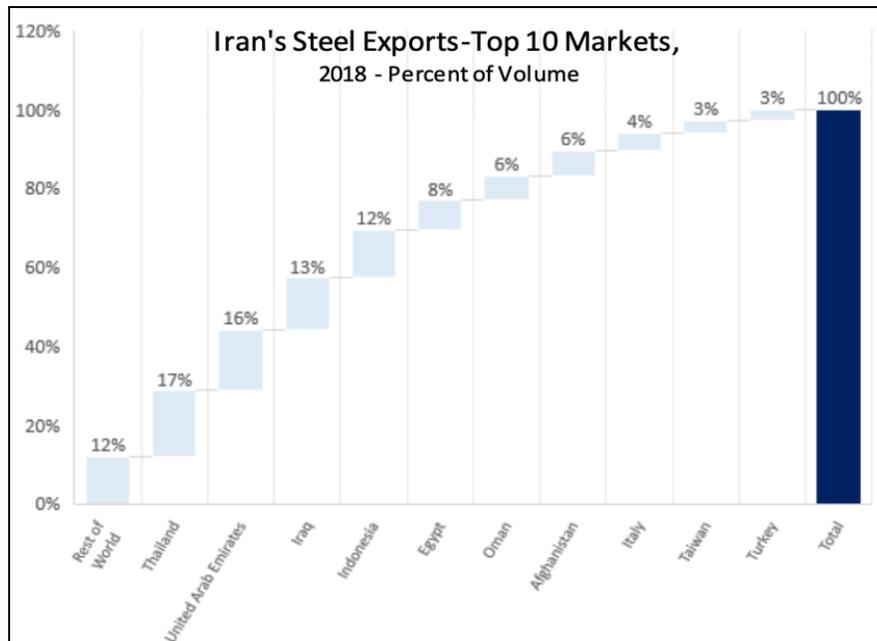
Figure 40 - Iran's steel exports markets by the end of 2018[253]
(fig. source: (Trade 2019))

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[252] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (19.06.2021)

[253] https://legacy.trade.gov/steel/countries/pdfs/2018/annual/exports-iran.pdf (19.06.2021)

The gas industry of Iran is estimated to take 16% of the world's gas supply with 6.2% of annual world's gas production (BP 2019).[254] However, the market for Iran's gas is limited and Turkey (with 8.4 billion cubic meters (bcm/year), Azerbaijan (with 0.25 bcm/year) and Armenia (with 0.45 bcm/year) are the top customers.[255]

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, Iran also benefits from light industries and agricultural production such as wheat, barley, rice and tea as well. On the other hand, the light industries such as cotton milling and rug centres have been a part of Iran's exports, mostly to the European countries since several decays ago.[256] (Fig. 40)
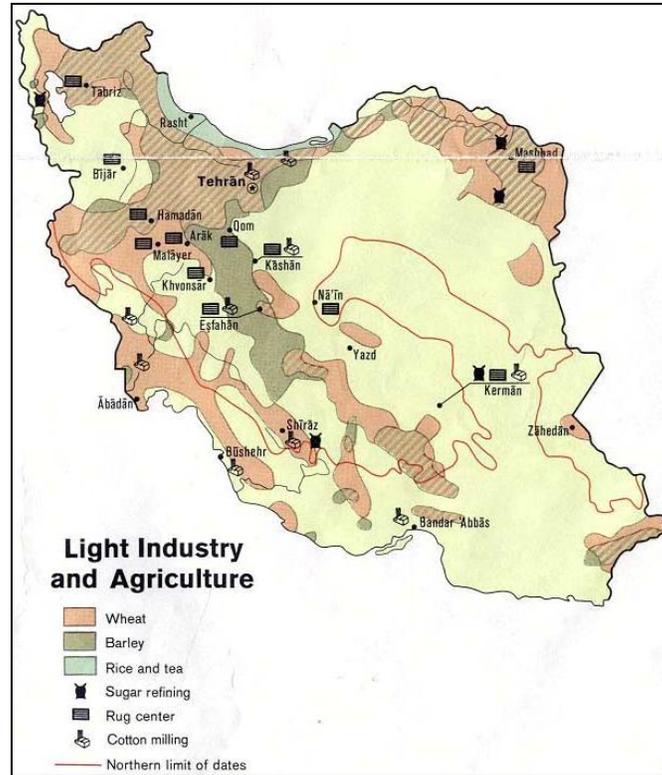
Figure 41 - Iran light industry and agriculture[257]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

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[254] https://www.nsenergybusiness.com/features/biggest-natural-gas-reserves-countries/ (19.06.2021)

[255] David Ramlin Jalilvand, "External Factors: The Limitations of Sanctions as Explanation, Iran's Gas Export, Can Past Failure Become Future Success", *The Oxford Institute for Energy Study* (2013): 2.

[256] Patrice Fontaine "The Carpet-Weaving Industry in the Arak Region: Permanence and Change in the Technical Organization of Production" in *CARPET PRODUCTION IN ARAK* eds. Robert Pinner and Walter B. Denny (Michigan: Hali OCTS 1987, 1987): 58.

[257] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (20.05.2021)
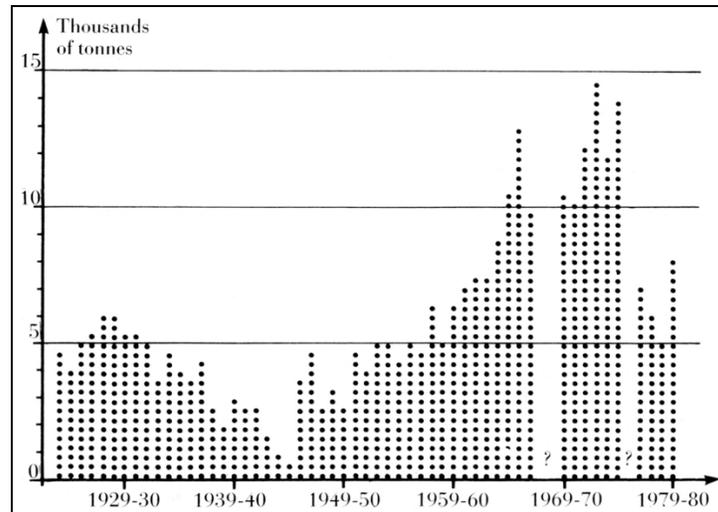
Figure 42 - Iran's carpet export between 1900 to 1980 (thousands of tonnes) [258]
(fig. source: (Fontaine 1987))

According to the website *WorldAtlas*, Iran has a mixed transitional economy that is dominated by gas and oil production industries.[259] The country has 10% of the world's oil reserves and has high development potential, and is a member of the Next Eleven countries (N-11). Iran has a centrally controlled economy with a large public sector. The government controls prices, and there are subsidies on some products leading to a strain on the economy.[260]

After the Islamic Revolution, Iran has always had many problems with U.S. sanctions for selling its oil. Undoubtedly, any disruption to oil sales will have a significant impact on Iran's oil-dependent economy, and that is why Iran's leader has always insisted that Iran should reduce its economic dependence on oil revenues. However, with the beginning of various U.S. economic sanctions, production, trade, technology, and investment in Iran have been negatively affected. Although in recent decades, Iran has achieved relative self-sufficiency in many cases of production, especially in the military sector.

According to the website *Invest in Iran*, steel, weaving, food processing, car, electrical, and Electronics industries are among the key sectors in the country.[261] Iran now produces a wide range of manufactured commodities, such as telecommunications equipment, industrial machinery, paper, rubber products, steel, food products, wood and leather products, textiles, and pharmaceuticals. Iran is also known throughout the world for its hand-woven carpets. The traditional craft of making these Persian rugs contributes substantially to rural incomes and is one of Iran's' most important export industries.[262]

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[258] Patrice Fontaine "The Carpet-Weaving Industry in the Arak Region: Permanence and Change in the Technical Organization of Production" in *CARPET PRODUCTION IN ARAK* eds. Robert Pinner and Walter B. Denny, 59.
[259] https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/important-facts-related-to-the-economy-of-iran.html (
[260] https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/important-facts-related-to-the-economy-of-iran.html (08.08.2019)
[261] https://investiniran.ir/fa-ir/sectors/industry (19.06.2021)
[262] https://www.investiniran.ir/en/sectors/industry (08.08.2019)

Saudi Arabia

Natural resources

Saudi Arabia like Iran, has an oil-dependent policy. Mostly the oil and gas fields are concentrated at the end East and West of the country within the close approxation of the terminal (Fig. 42). However, Saudi Arabia plans to reduce its dependence on oil exports in its future plans. According to the CIA, "Saudi Arabia has an oil-based economy with strong government controls over major economic activities. It possesses about 16% of the world's proven petroleum reserves, ranks as the largest exporter of petroleum, and plays a leading role in OPEC. The petroleum sector accounts for roughly 87% of budget revenues, 42% of the GDP and 90% of export earnings"[263] Rashid Alghunaim notes: "Saudi Arabia has a number of factors that allow it to maintain and preserve power. All the country's resources are in the hands of the Royal Family; this is possible due to the absence of a system for accountability. All these resources including the oil are used to develop the Kingdom and to maintain tribal structure and alliance in order to sustain the legitimacy of the Royal Family amid the people of the Kingdom (Hamzawy, 2006)."[264]
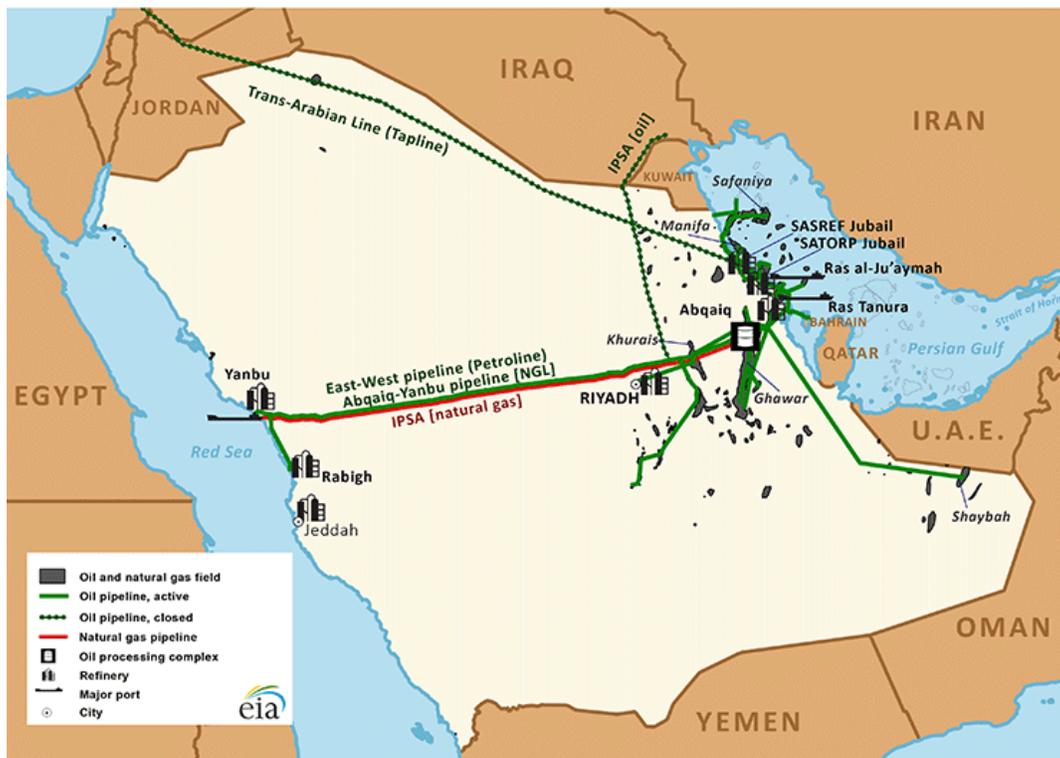
Figure 43 - Saudi Arabia major oilfield, oil and gas pipelines and oil processing sectors[265]
(source: University of Texas library: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html)

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[263] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html (13.05.2019)
[264] Ghadah Ghunaim Rashid Alghunaim, "Conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran: An Examination of Critical Factors Inhibiting their Positive Roles in the Middle East" (PhD thesis, Nova Southeastern University, 2014), 37.
[265] https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html (20.06.2021)

Besides the significant oil and gas supplies, Saudi Arabia due to its massive area in the Asian continent, contains a diverse environment and biodiversity of different species and lands.[266]
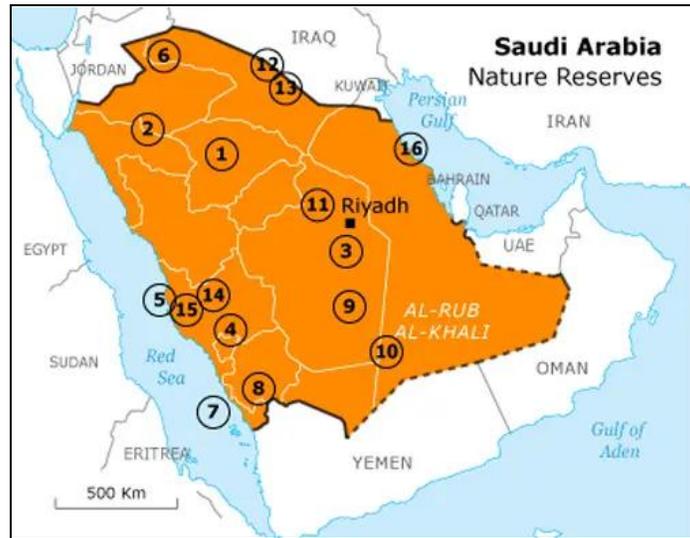
Figure 44 - Saudi Arabia natural reserves (numbers follow the description in Table 6) [267]
(source: Fanack Online Media Organization: https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography/)

Therefore, the Saudi's government since 1987 introduced a land protection scheme that conducted by Saudi Wildlife Authority[268], in order to protect 16 sites (Fig. 43) that contains 4 percent of total Saudi Arabia's land (Table Therefore, the Saudi's government since 1987 introduced a land protection scheme that conducted by Saudi Wildlife Authority[269], in order to protect 16 sites (Fig. 39) that contains 4 percent of total Saudi Arabia's land (Table 6).[270]

Besides these notable biodiversity, Saudi Arabia has an important place in global mineral production. As the end of 2014, Saudi Arabia was ranked at the third place in producing irons extracts, and an important place in production of bauxite, copper, gold, lead, magnesite, kaolin, nickel, phosphate, potash, silver and zinc (Fig. 40).[271]

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[266] Selim Z. Heneidy and Laila M. Bidak, "Biodiversity of the Plant Species in Bisha, Asir Region Southwestern Saudi Arabia", *Pakistan Journal of Biological Sciences* vol. 4, no. 11 (2001): 1324.

[267] https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/geography-of-saudi-arabia/ (20.05.2021)

[268] Yousef Ibrahim Al Wetaid, "The National Strategy for Conservation of Biodiversity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", *Diversity* (2005): 7.

[269] Ibid, 90.

[270] https://178.20.144.66/En/Wildlife/ProtectedAreas/Pages/default.aspx (08.07.2021)

[271] Mowafa Taib, "The Mineral Industry of Saudi Arabia", *USGS Mineral Resources Program* (2019): 67.1

Table 6. Saudi Arabia protected areas (site number follows the order in Fig. 43)[272]
Source: Saudi Wildlife Commission
(https://ncw.gov.sa/En/Wildlife/ProtectedAreas/Pages/default.aspx#:~:text=The%20currently%2
0existing%20protected%20areas,Al%2DKhunfah%2C%20Ibex%20Reserve%2C)

Site	Protected area	Administrative region	Area (km^2)	Year of Establishment
1	Harat Al-Hurra	Jawf	13775	1987
2	Al-khanfa	Tabuk	20450	1987
3	Al-Woaul	Riyadh	2369	1987
4	Mahazat Al-Said	Makkah	2100	1987
5	Um Al Gamari Islands	Makkah	1.0	1987
6	Tubaig	Tabuk	12200	1988
7	Farasan	Jazan	697.4	1988
8	Raida	Asir	9	1988
9	Magamea Al-Hadab	Riyadh	2200	1991
10	Erouq Bani maarid	Riyadh	11980	1992
11	Nufud Al-Ariq	Madinah	1960	1994
12	Taisiya	Hail	4262	1994
13	Al-Gandaliya	Northern borders	1160	1994
14	Saja Umm Al-Ramth	Makkah	7190	1994
15	Shada Al-ala mountain	Baha	67	2000
16	Jubail	Eastern region	2300	1992

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[272]

https://ncw.gov.sa/En/Wildlife/ProtectedAreas/Pages/default.aspx#:~:text=The%20currently%20existing%20protected%20areas,Al%2DKhunfah%2C%20Ibex%20Reserve%2C (08.07.2021)
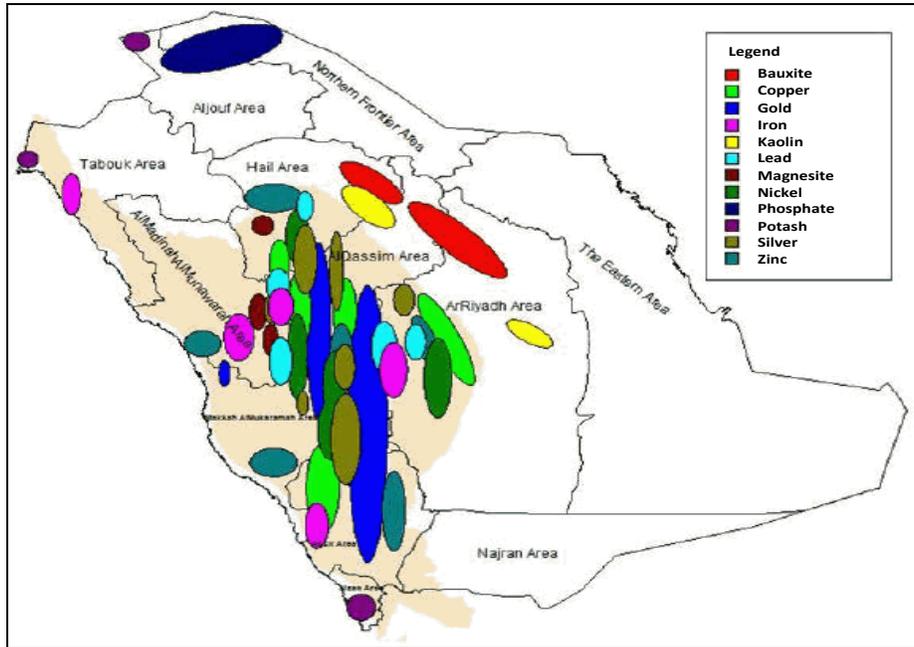
Figure 45 - Saudi Arabia natural resources[273]
(source: MODS database: https://ngd.sgs.org.sa/en)

These resources are distributed throughout the Saudi Arabia. For instance, Mahd al-Dhahab mine is located in Al-Madinah's province, and has a production capacity of 400 tonnes of gold per day [274].

The silver mines are located in the west and north-east of the country. Most notably the biggest silver mine is located in Al-Madinah's province with the potential of 866000 tonnes of silver production.[275] Iron mines are mostly concentrated near Riyadh and Tabuk with overall estimated 134 million tonnes of production. Similarly, zinc and copper mines are located at these regions with overall estimated 11 million tonnes of production.[276]

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[273] https://ngd.sgs.org.sa/en (20.05.2021)
[274] https://web.archive.org/web/20120625112057/http://focusmagazine.org/Articles/pishonriver.htm (25.02.2021)
[275] Abed Hakimi, "Saudi Arabia Mining Sector", *Australian Trade Commision (Austrade)* (2015): 4
[276] Mowafa Taib, "The Mineral Industry of Saudi Arabia", 67.2.

The detailed breakdown of Saudi Arabia's metal production by type of products and year is as follows:

Table 7. Saudi Arabia metal productions between from 2009 to 2014[277]
Source: Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (https://www.spa.gov.sa/419058)

Description	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Iron and Iron Ore Minerals						
Quantity (million tonnes)	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0		2.0
Precious metals						
Gold – raw (million tonnes)	5.0	5.0	6.0	7.0	7.5	8.0
Gold – metal (tonnes)	5.0	5.0	6.0	7.0	7.5	8.0
Silver (tonnes)	10.0	10.0	12.0	14.0	15.0	16.0
Metallic Minerals						
Lead (tonnes)	150.0	150.0	200.0	200.0	200.0	200.0
Zinc (thousand tonnes)	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7
Industrial Minerals						
Building materials (million tonnes)	387.0	301.0	316.0	332.0	348.0	366.0
Cement raw materials (million tonnes)	44.7	48.6	52.5	53.9	55.5	57.1
Cement (million tonnes)	34.4	37.4	40.4	41.4	42.7	44.0
Clay (million tonnes)	4.3	4.5	4.7	5.0	5.2	5.5
Gypsum (million tonnes)	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.1
Salt (million tonnes)	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1
Ornamental stones (million tonnes)	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.5
Other industrial minerals (million tonnes)	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1
Phosphate -raw (million tonnes)	0.0	2.3	5.5	11.2	11.2	12.3
Aluminium Biphosphate (million tonnes)	0.0	0.9	2.2	4.5	4.5	4.9
Raw materials utilized						
Quantity (million tonnes)	334.0	362.0	385.0	407.0	433.0	453.0

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[277] https://www.spa.gov.sa/419058 (25.02.2021)

Undoubtedly, oil revenues have played an essential role in the development and progress of industry, production, and services in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has made significant advances in technology, telecommunication, trade, and production over the past few decades, relying on its natural resources. The first breakthrough in Saudi Arabia began between the years 1970 and 1980, with increased oil sales. However, Saudi Arabia has always sought to limit its oil sales dependence, relying on new advances in industry and technology.

According to *Britannica*, "other mineral resources are known to exist, and the government has pursued a policy of exploration and production in order to diversify the economic base. Geologic reconnaissance mapping of the Precambrian shield in the west has revealed deposits of gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, iron, titanium, pyrite, magnesite, platinum   and cadmium. There are also nonmetallic resources such as limestone, silica, gypsum, and phosphorite."[278]

Saudi Arabia has also made significant progress in manufacturing. Especially with the establishment of a SABIK company that is active in various fields such as industry, construction, electronics, transportation, and medical. "SABIK Ranked among the world's largest petrochemicals manufacturers, SABIC is a public company based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. 70% of the Company's shares are owned by the Saudi Arabian government, with the remaining 30% publicly traded on the Saudi stock exchange. SABIC began in 1976 by Royal decree and its growth has been nothing short of miraculous. Today, the company has operations in over 50 countries with a global workforce of over 33,000 talented individuals." [279]

In terms of exports and imports, Saudi Arabia's main exports include petroleum and petroleum products, and most imports include machinery, foodstuffs, and chemicals. Saudi Arabia's main trading partners are the U.S., Japan and China, while the main sources of imports also the U.S., and China, along with Germany, and South Korea.[280]

3.6.   Strategic position in the region and in the international arena

Iran and Saudi Arabia both call themselves the leader of the Muslim community of the world and seek to exert greater influence among the Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East. From a geopolitical point of view, both countries are economically and politically opposed to each other. Economically, they are both among the top oil producer and competing in the oil market, while politically, they have a different political system based on a different interpretation of Islam.

Saudi Arabia is recognized as one of the most influential actors in the Persian Gulf region. Although it is known for its conservative policies, the kingdom has struggled in recent years to play a more aggressive role according to regional changes. Since the beginning of the Syrian war, Saudi Arabia has attempted to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime by supporting his opposition groups. Also, the formation of a coalition and a military attack on Yemen, and a

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[278] https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia (08.07.2019)
[279] https://www.sabic.com/en/about (23.07.2019)
[280] https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia (08.07.2019)

boycott of Qatar showed that Saudi Arabia does not seek to preserve the status quo and wants to change the situation for its own benefit. Saudi Arabia's political tools are usually based on oil and monetary diplomacy, and based on this diplomacy, Saudis typically focus on building and assisting link-minded countries in the region.

Saudi Arabia's relations with the United States, despite its ups and downs, have made the two countries close allies. The two countries' relationship is based on two pillars of oil and security. Saudi Arabia, having the world's second-largest oil reserves as well as a geo-strategic position in the Persian Gulf, is vital to safeguarding American interests. According to CFR, "Saudi Arabia is the top destination for U.S. arms, with U.S. defense sales to the kingdom totaling close to $90 billion since 1950, according to the Pentagon."[281] In addition, the two countries have had extensive military cooperation and exercise to secure the region and prevent Iranian influence.

According to Time, "The U.S. military's Joint Advisory Division works alongside commanders in each branch of the Saudi military to help fill their weapons needs. Once the Saudis commit to what they want — tanks, attack helicopters, missiles, ships, laser-guided bombs — the arms packages must be OK'd by the U.S. Defense and State Departments, and approved by Congress."[282]

In recent years, with regional evolutions and Iran's significant role in influencing countries in the region, such as Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, it seems that Saudi Arabia is no longer willing to maintain its existing strategy status quo. However, Saudi Arabia's reliance on the United States militarily, strategically and politically, has led this country to a lack of confidence and decisions making, which ultimately did not serve Saudi interests, and Iran has taken the upper hand.

3.7.   Conclusion

Prior to the Islamic Revolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, oil prices were also at odds with Saudi Arabia. Still, with the advent of the Islamic Revolution and its opposition to monarchical systems, relations between the two countries declined. Adding the element of ideology to the oil and economic competition has increased tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Historically both countries have a strong reliance on the oil export and their economic structures is significantly based on the oil industry. However, during latest decades both countries introduced several development plans to uplift the dependency from oil production and invest on other sectors such as agriculture, industry and technology. Despite these attempts, yet the oil market fluctuation impacts the economy of both countries notably.

However, both countries have invested heavily in their defence systems over the past decades. Still, with the attention to the military capabilities of the two sides, it seems that Saudi Arabia is suffering from a lack of confidence in military self-reliance, even though it has invested far more in the military industry than Iran. Also, given the two countries' demographic structure, Iran has more than two and a half times the population of Saudi Arabia, and the military conquest of Iran

[281] https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-saudi-arabia-relations (21.08.2019)
[282] https://time.com/5428669/saudi-arabia-military-relationship/ (21.08.2019)

seems almost unthinkable. The experience of Iran's war with Iraq has made Iran recognize its weaknesses and work to address them. Iran has also become self-sufficient in many of its military products due to the Western sanctions. On the other hand, Iran understands that a war with Saudi Arabia means war with the United States of America and has no interest in entering such a conflict.

For these reasons, it seems unlikely that the two countries will wage a direct war with each other and continue to influence smaller countries politically, economically, and culturally.

4. Leaders' image

4.1. Ayatollah Khomeini's perception

The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 was one of the most significant changes in the Middle East in the past half-century. In addition to the local scale, the Revolution created political, social, and economic upheavals in the region and international relationships. By proposing a new model, the Islamic Revolution has had a significant impact on the Middle East's political, cultural, and religious realms. We saw Arab countries in the region tremble as a result of Khomeini's revolution's victory and announcement of extending the revolution beyond Iran's borders.[283]

The Shah's kingdom was overthrown, and the revolution made its opposition to the imperialist system, the kingdom, and the West apparent. Khomeini intended to free the Islamic Republic of the dominance system with the slogan "Neither East nor West - but the Islamic Republic." The incompatibility of Islam and monarchy is the most serious challenge that revolutionary Iran poses to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Following the ascension of Ayatollah Khomeini to power in 1979, Iran's propaganda resurrected the call for all Arabs in the Persian Gulf to rise up against their corrupt rulers. For the Saudis, this was the destabilisation of Iran's Arab neighbours.

For the Saudi Kingdom, the Islamic Revolution in Iran was a hard challenge. Because Saudi Arabia didn't know how to deal with a phenomena that claimed to be a representative of true Islam, questioned the Saudi leadership's Islamic nature, and referred to the Saudis as a symbol of American Islam.[284] In a recent interview with the *Guardian*, Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, said that after the 1979 Iranian revolution, people in other countries wanted to follow the example of the Islamic Revolution model in their countries. [285] This problem extended throughout the Arab world, and Saudi Arabia was one of the countries that didn't know how to deal with it.[286]

According to Anne Todd: *"*Ayatollah Khomeini was born in Khomein, a remote village at the edge of the Iranian Desert some two hundred miles south of Tehran. The name Khomein means "two jars" in Arabic. His given name was Ruhollah Musawi. Ruhollah means 'soul of God'. The family lived in a house of mud brick. They were not wealthy, but they were considered special in the village because they claimed as one of their ancestors none other than the prophet Muhammad."[287]

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[283] https://www.csmonitor.com/1982/0729/072929.html (08.07.2021)

[284] Shireen T. Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilizations or Peaceful Coexistenc*e? (Washington: Praeger, 1998), 150.

[285] https://www.bbc.com/persian/world-41748209 (26.02.2021)

[286] https://www.bbc.com/persian/world-41748209 (26.02.2021)

[287] Anne M. Todd and Daniel Harmon, *Spiritual Leaders and Thinkers: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini* (Philadeplphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), 19.

In Ayatollah Khomeini's eyes, Islam was the roadmap for Iranian politics, and he did not believe in the separation of politics and religion. During his time, there were other Shiite leaders who had many religious activities but avoided direct opposition to the Shah. Todd also notes that: "The contempt he held for the Pahlavis, father and son, would lead Ayatollah Khomeini eventually to depart from the stance taken by other Shiite clerics. They, too, believed in strict Qur'anic ideals. However, they did not believe that they should take an active role in political matters. Khomeini disagreed."[288]

Khomeini, who accused many governments of the world of tyranny and corruption, sought to incorporate the idea of the Islamic Revolution into the whole world.[289] Ehteshami notes: "The profoundly Islamic character of the new regime sent ripples of unease through the Middle East region and the wider world as representatives of an unknown quantity, led by the apparently uncompromising and forceful figure of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, set about building an Islamic state at home and spreading its influence throughout the Middle East."[290] Alpher notes: "Khomeini faced a dual intellectual challenge in developing the revolutionary theory. From the theological standpoint, Islam could hardly launch and lead a revolution if its inherent political nature were not recognized and reaffirmed, and if it had no acknowledged political leader."[291]

In order to stabilize the Islamic Revolution, where various groups were trying to overthrow the Shah's government, it was necessary to cooperate with most of these groups in the first place. Khomeini was very patient and calmly pursued his plans to consolidate power. According to Joseph Alpher: "Khomeini's plan consisted of five stages. The first two-preparation of the revolution and the actual overthrow of the Shah--would be carried out with the aid of every possible ally, including leftists and anticlerical. The next stage-the establishment of an Islamic republic in Iran-would coincide with the purge of most nonclerical allies."[292] He argues that the revolutionary process would indeed be completed when the revolution is exported to the rest of the Islamic world and, finally, a single Islamic republic is formed.[293]

The existence of the monarchy in Saudi Arabia and its combination with Wahhabi ideology soon created tensions between the two countries. Khomeini challenged Saudi kings not only as of the leader of the Shiites but the leader of the Muslims in the world. In his article, Henner Fürtig notes: "Almost immediately after the triumph of the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini and the new Iranian leadership turned against Saudi Arabia and its ruling family. Iran's supreme leader accused the 'House of Saud' of "distorting the Islamic spirit… The Saudi monarchy has totally turned into an American satellite and Saudi Arabia has been rapidly becoming Americanized in every respect."[294]

Developments in the Middle East, such as the Palestinian Liberation Movement, Hafez al-Asad presidency, and Shiite influence in Lebanon, affected Khomeini's worldview in the years leading up to the Islamic revolution. Also, many Islamic movements, like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), quickly found common ground with Ayatollah Khomeini. Jaspal notes:

[288] Anne M. Todd and Daniel Harmon, *Spiritual Leaders and Thinkers: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini*, 25.

[289] https://institute.global/policy/fundamentals-irans-islamic-revolution (08.07.2021)

[290] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995), 11.

[291] Joseph Alpher, "The Khomeini International", *Washington Quarterly* vol 3, no. 4 (1980): 54.

[292] Ibid, 55.

[293] Ibid.

[294] https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-and-saudi-arabia-eternal-gamecocks (30.08.2019)

"Khomeini had very anti-Zionist views and placed the battle with them as the post-revolutionary priorities, which also inspired the Palestinians."[295] Hence, Khomeini's revolutionary policies were aimed at confronting the existing system and supporting the oppressed Muslims of the world to "win" over the "oppressors". Most of these policies generated numerous political, economic, and military challenges for Iran in the years that followed, as well as tensions between Iran and other countries in the region and around the world.

4.2.   Anti-American and antiimperialist policy

Before it became the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy, the phrase "neither East nor West" was a slogan of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, or at least that's how Iranian revolutionaries saw it. The slogan was created in response to Iranians' shattered national pride and their concern for their country's independence and sovereignty. After many Soviet Union and British government intrusions in Iranian foreign policy, the Iranian people no longer wanted the fate of their country to be decided in London, Moscow, or Washington.

Khomeini has repeatedly stated that there is no difference between the behavior of the superpowers.[296] He kept repeating that they are all materialistic, repressive, and oppressive of the Third World. They all wanted to put an end to the Iranian revolution, and Iran had no choice but to fight back. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union was not the "Great Satan" for the Iranian revolutionaries, it was referred to as the "Little Satan" since it was anti-Islamic and symbolized communism. As a result, foreign policy's first objective goal in the face of the two opposing camps of East and West was to ensure the regime's existence.[297]

The Iranian revolution took place during the Cold War period, when the atmosphere of the arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States dominated the international arena.[298] In such an environment, both the West and the East kept a close eye on Iran's revolutionary developments. Since any changes in Iran's political behavior could have an impact not only on the Persian Gulf and energy flows, but also on the rest of the world. For Americans, however, reunification with Iran was more important than reunification with the Soviet Union, because if Iran became communist, not only would it be more difficult for the US to control the Persian Gulf and energy, but it would also have to deal with new changes in Gulf countries and other regional allies.

In his resistance to the imperialist system, Khomeini saw it as a new, oppressive form of slavery that violated the rights of the underprivileged around the world. He was opposed to monarchical rule and considered equality and fraternity as the solution to the world's problems, but in a religious and distinctively Islamic way. [299] Arjomand notes: "When Khomeini overthrew the monarchy in 1979, he was already an old man. His Islamic revolutionary rhetoric was of course directed against Mohammad Reza Shah and the United States, but his formation predated the

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[295] Rusi Jaspal, "Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in Iran", *Israel Affairs* vol. 19, no. 4 (2013): 14.
[296] Ziba Moshaver, "Revolutions, Theocratic Leadership and Iran's Foreign Policy: Implications for Iran – Eu Relations", *The Review of International Affairs* vol. 3, no. 2 (2003): 283.
[297] Ibid.
[298] https://ap.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/age-reagan/essays/iran-and-united-states-cold-war (08.07.2021)
[299] Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors* (New York: Oxford University, 2009), 16.

advent of both the last Shah and the United States on the Iranian scene, as did the preoccupations that made him a revolutionary when he was already an aging Grand Ayatollah (Sign of God)."[300]

Despite his strong anti-Western and imperialist views, he was also opposed to the Eastern bloc. Because of the fact that Marxism contained materialist notions, Khomeini refused to embrace the Soviet Union. With slogans like "Na Sharghi, Na Gharbi," Khomeini sought a third route in the world order of the time. As a result, his goal was not just Iran and the region, but the entire world and humanity as a whole. Nonetheless, there are other reasons why this plan failed, but it appears that in Khomeini's perspective, neither democracy nor freedom were priorities, but rather Islam, as interpreted by him. Arjomand notes: "In December 1979, Khomeini declared that the nation that had so overwhelmingly approved the new Constitution "wants neither East nor West but only an Islamic Republic—this being so, we have no right to say that the nation that engaged in an uprising did so in order to have democracy."[301]

In his essay, Kamran Nayeri, a professor at the University of California, believes that the imperialist system and the fight against it were not a central issue during Iran's revolutionary days, but the problem seems to be that the Iranian society at the time had no idea who or what to vote for. He notes: "A key point is this: the joint claim of Islamic Republic and imperialism that the Iranian people rose up to bring down the monarchy and to install a theocratic capitalist regime is a lie. It is true that only a month after the February 1979 revolution, in an undemocratic referendum that Ayatollah Khomeini put before the Iranian people a large voted 'for' an 'Islamic Republic. However, neither Ayatollah Khomeini nor no one else at that time offered even an outline of what this regime would look like."[302]

As the CIA documents show, Americans were aware of Khomeini's anti-American and anti-Western views even before the revolution took place. Part of this document states: "General xenophobia, particularly anti-Americanism, Khomeini appeals to the deepseated Iranian belief that the Shah's government was imposed on the country by the U.S., that it does the bidding of the U.S., and that the Shah has "Subjugated Iran to foreign powers."[303] However, although the Americans were aware of Khomeini's negative attitude about them, they knew that he did not have a positive view of the Soviet Union either. Even at that time, he had also expressed opposition to the Communist Party of Iran. The next section of the CIA document is as follows: "Publicly Khomeini is opposed to any collaboration with Iran's communist, the Tudeh party. Last October he explicitly criticized the Tudeh for anti-Islamic beliefs and materialistic tendencies. Khomeini also blasted the Soviet Union for meddling in Iran's internal affairs in the past. In may he told L.E. Monde that" We will not collaborate with Marxists even to overthrow the Shah."[304]

Khomeini's views also posed a challenge to Europe, and he never accepted the Western political system. According to Vanessa Martin: "The only legitimate government in his view was a government based on Islamic principles. Khomeini points out the misfortunes brought down on other countries by Europe and its ambitions, and by its own disturbed state at the time,

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[300] Ibid.

[301] Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors*, 23.

[302] http://forhumanliberation.blogspot.com/2010/08/66-ecosocialism-iranian-revolution.html (15.08.2020)

[303] Huw Dylan, David V. Gioe and Michael S. Goodman, *The CIA and the Pursuit of Security: History, Documents and Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 206.

[304] Ibid, 208.

mentioning the injustice of dictatorship and the illegal conquests of Hitler. 'If Islam went to Europe', he said, 'these problems would not occur'."[305]

4.3.   Americans' perception of Islamic Revolution

Although the U.S. presence in Iran has ended with the victory of the Islamic Revolution, a new stage in the two countries' relations was opened. From the 1950s until the Islamic Revolution's victory, the United States became the most active foreign government in the Iranian political arena. It viewed Iran as its most important and robust strategically in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.[306] As a result, the US attempted to strengthen its position in Iran by backing the Shah's administration in accordance with its regional and international objectives, employing both incentives and pressure. On the other hand, the Shah's administration considered that having a powerful ally along the lines of the United States was essential in dealing with internal crises and external threats, and as a result, it made additional concessions and pursued prescribed policies in order to please White House officials.

The Islamic Revolution wreaked havoc on Iran-US ties and the US's standing in the region, if not the entire world. Of fact, this was the goal that the Iranian revolutionaries hoped to attain. The wave of revolution in Iran was expected to dissipate, according to American policymakers. Under a new banner, this country may resume its previous policies and interests in Iran. Nonetheless, the coming events determined a different outcome.

In the two years leading up to the revolution in Iran, the Americans were almost convinced of the Shah's collapse and Khomeini's ascent to power, so they tried to cooperate with the new Iranian administration based on Khomeini's assurance that contacts with the US would continue. However, the higher Khomeini rose in authority, the more open and direct his anti-Western remarks became. On the one hand, the 1953 coup and the overthrow of Mossadegh, as well as the American role, pushed Khomeini to challenge American policy toward Iran, while on the other hand, the ideals of liberation from domination and freedom based on Islamic principles pushed him to challenge American policy toward Iran. The United States was called "the Great Satan" by Khomeini and his supporters, and the U.S. embassy as the "Den of Espionage".

4.4.   Hostage Crisis

According to the website archives.gov: "The Iran Hostage Crisis was a major international crisis caused by the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and its employees by revolutionary Iranian students, who then held the Embassy employees as hostages, in direct violation of international law. The revolutionary government of Iran, under the Ayatollah Khomeini, supported the

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[305] Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), 107.
[306] https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/iran-dossier/iran-19-03-ch-1-tehrans-strategic-intent (08.07.2021)

hostage undertaking. The crisis ended with the release of the hostages after a captivity of 444 days, from November 4, 1979 to January 20, 1981."[307] The incident irrevocably altered US-Iranian ties. It was most likely at this moment in history that the Americans felt the Iranians' rage and animosity for their imperial policies over the previous few decades. The Iranians were enraged by the West's interventionist policies, particularly those of the United States, which had escalated after World War II. They held the "Westerners" (Gharbiha), particularly the Americans, responsible for overthrowing Mossadegh's democratic government, and they had a long-standing animosity against American involvement in Iran. Khomeini was able to follow up on the frustration of Iranians by emphasizing the contradiction between Islam and the West, leading the country into antagonism with the US. The hostage crises have made all of Khomeini's slogans come true, and the Americans' hope for negotiations with the new government has vanished. This event marked the most significant breakthrough in Iran's relations with the West, fueling nationalist sentiment in both Iran and the United States.

Iran explicitly made its hostility toward the U.S. and paid for its policy during all these years. The United States, in return, put numerous sanctions against Iran and supported its foes. The Iranian people, with historical cynicism about American interference in Iranian affairs, knew that the reason for the Shah's stay was because of Western support, and in particular, U.S. According to David Farber, "the Iranians' image of American dominance was based on historical events, particularly the regime-changing events of 1953, when explaining the hostage crisis. "'I owe my reign to God, my people, my army — and to you.' The Shah himself told the CIA's Kermit Roosevelt."[308]

Soon after, Iran became embroiled in a battle with Iraq during the hostage crisis throughout its revolutionary and ever-changing days. The war drew attention away from the hostage situation toward the war. According to David Farber, despite the fact that the Iran hostage crisis drew a lot of attention throughout its 444-day run, few Americans considered the lessons it may teach the American people in the aftermath. The horrible conflict between Iran and Iraq drew American attention away from Khomeini's regime's revolutionary nature and ambition of spreading his theocratic revolution throughout the Islamic world.[309]

Not only in Iran, but throughout the region, the hostage situation has sparked tremendous anti-American sentiment. In the aftermath of the crisis, Islamists banded together to forge an alternative path that may challenge American and Western dominance. Militant Iranian Islamicists, according to Farber, tried their utmost throughout the 1980s to preserve their revolutionary spirit and spread their ideology, which included a furious anti-Americanism. In 1982, a form of Islamic International met in Tehran, similar to the Communist Internationals that met in Moscow following the Bolshevik Revolution. Approximately 280 Islamic clerics from 70 countries gathered to discuss "the perfect Islamic government" and how to "remove foreign unbelievers from the region."[310]

The hostage crisis had come to an end, but the dispute between Iran and the United States had not. Many skeptics, distrust, resentment, and hostility between the two countries arose as a result

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[307] https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/iran-hostage-crisis (20.09.2019)
[308] David Farber, *The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 37.
[309] Ibid, 184.
[310] Ibid.

of the crisis. US-Iran relations have always been influenced by historical events between the two countries, and sadly, there has been little political urgency to settle the difficulties to date. The three sensations of fear, humiliation, and hope, which determine how various countries behave, develop gradually and through time, forming the country's political culture.[311] While the behavior of a country's citizens is influenced by its political culture at home, countries' strategic behaviors are not produced in a vacuum on the international stage. Rather, it is the outcome of the country's political culture and temperaments, as well as its setting, social conditions, historical, cultural, geographical, and economic experiences. These cultural, historical, and social layers must all be considered in order to fully comprehend Iran's revolutionary and anti-American actions during the period.

4.5. Saudi kings' perception of the Islamic Revolution

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia should be considered to have a completely conservative political system. Political power in this country is in the hands of a small group of political elites, and the transfer of power takes place in a completely undemocratic way. In this country, political power is in the hands of the Al Saud, and religious power is in the hands of the Al Wahhab. People outside the Al Saud family are not allowed to hold governmental positions. At the same time, any opposition to the ruling political system is prohibited and severely repressed by the regime. The press in this country is entirely under the control of the government. As a matter of fact, they reflect the country's ideology and policy and propagate the government's policy.[312]

In this regard, since the Islamic Republic's political model rejected the political systems of the monarchy, Western capitalism, socialism, and nationalism, including Arab nationalism, it was perceived as an increasing threat by the monarchical countries, especially the Saudi Arabia. The Islamic system of Saudi Arabia combines a monarchy with an overly conservative sharia law rooted in Wahhabi teachings. According to the regime, protesting against the monarchy is a sin, and the Wahhabi doctrine obliges Muslims to obey these rulers.[313] Meanwhile, the Islamic Revolution of Iran is perceived as a protest movement against the monarchy, which can be considered the most important ideological threat to overthrow Saudi Arabia's monarchy.

With the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the beginning of a new chapter in Iran's relations with the outside world, the idea of exporting the revolution was emphasised. Khomeini accepted the only form of Islamic governance and Shia rules. According to Ramazani: "The phrase "Export of the Islamic Revolution" is not simply a revolutionary slogan: it is a cardinal principle of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The conception of an "Islamic world order" is rooted in the idea of world order within the Imami or Twelvers' Shiite cultural tradition as interpreted by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini."[314] Such an interpretation of government soon concerned the Muslim countries of the region. They were worried that the Iranian Revolution would not inspire liberation movements in their countries.

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[311] Dominique Moïsi, "The Geopolitics of Emotion: How cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World", *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affai*vol. 18, no. 2 (2009): 93.
[312] John R. Bradley "Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis" (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 25.
[313] Aylin Unver Nois "A Clash of Islamic Models" *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 15 (2014), 94.
[314] R. K. Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy: Contending Orientations," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2 (1989): 202.

Anti-Western and anti-monarchical themes were obvious in the Islamic Revolution's core. All countries in the region and across the world, Khomeini said, must combat "domination." Iran has to meet two fundamental conditions, according to Ramazani, in order to sell their revolution to foreign countries. To begin, they must establish "real Islamic governments," which are governments led by anti-monarchical, pro-Iranian religious leaders that are comparable to, but not identical to, Iran's government. Second, they must attain actual independence, which will need a foreign policy that is anti-Western and anti-Soviet.[315]

King Khalid, who was known for his conservatism and status quo position, suddenly saw his governance in danger.[316] The slogans of the liberation of the Islamic Revolution invited Muslims to fight against his kingdom made it impossible for Saudis to maintain their status quo. According to Al-Rasheed: "Since 1979, the Saudi narrative has focused on a specific understanding of Iranian ambitions in the region. The Saudi perspective is that they are engaged in a defense of the status quo against a revolutionary, militaristic and expansionist Shiʿa theocracy. In this reading, Saudi Arabia is content to maintain the current regional order, whereas Iran is in its 'Trotskyist' stage, seeking to export revolution."[317]

As the revolution approached, the Saudis initially thought that an Islamic state with Islamic law should not have a severe disagreement with the Saudi monarchy. However, over time and even when they felt partially threatened by Iran, they still thought that the Iranian revolution was superficial and easy to overthrow. The Saudi royals in Riyadh, where the ill King Khalid sat on the throne with his younger half-brother Fahd as Crown Prince, were among those who failed to realise this key difference, according to Hiro. They expected to take the removal of the monarchy in Tehran in stride, just as they did the anti-royalist coups in Cairo and Baghdad. That is why, in January 1979, Fahd, the de facto Prime Minister, showed little anxiety in public, only remarking that what was happening in Iran was an internal issue best resolved by Iranians.[318]

After the victory, Ayatollah Khomeini went a step further, calling the monarchical and royal governments non-Islamic and introduced a new version of Islamic rule.[319] According to Dilip Hiro in the chapter headed "The Regime", Khomeini provided his interpretation of a passage in the Quran (Lahul Mulk), claiming that dynasty rule was un-Islamic in the Arab Gulf countries. The Gulf royal dynasties, who had sought legitimacy within Islamic norms, were disturbed by this claim. Khomeini's thesis, which was repeated by Iran's state-run media, constituted the most severe intellectual threat to them, especially the Al Saud family.[320]

As a result, the Saudis appear to have undervalued the Iranian revolution in the first place, and they lack a thorough understanding of the concepts of revolution and coup in the second. The Iranian Revolution was sparked by a number of internal and external factors that culminated in the demise of the Persian monarchy. The Saudis did not respond to Iran in the manner that they

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[315]R. K. Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy: Contending Orientations," 202.
[316] https://www.csmonitor.com/1981/1015/101554.html (20.04.2021)
[317] Madawi Al-Rasheed and Pejman Abdolmohammadi, "Saudi Arabia and Iran: Beyond Conflict and Coexistence?" *Middle East Centre* (2018), 5.
[318] Dilip Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2018), 63.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid, 64.

should have. However, as time passed and Saudi Arabia gained a better grasp of the situation in Iran and the region, it chose to combat and control Iran through a variety of tactics.

4.6.   The Seizure of Mecca's Grand Mosque

According *to Insidearabia.com*, "on 20 November 1979, the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Islam's holiest site, was seized by armed insurgents who declared the coming of the Mahdi, or the redeemer of Islam, and called for the overthrow of the House of Saud. The siege would last two weeks and lead not only to the deaths of hundreds of worshippers taken hostage during the rebel seizure but also to the hardening of a particularly virulent strain of extremism."[321] This incident was one of the most important factors in changing the attitude of Saudi Arabia towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. King Khalid, who at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution hoped to improve relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia based on Islamic propositions, realized the depth of the differences between the two countries and the disparity between his and Khomeini's views.

In Saudi Arabia's eyes, the seizure of the Kaaba was the continuation of Khomeini's revolutionary path that deeply concerned them. Although Ayatollah Khomeini condemned the attack, Saudi pessimism toward Iran did not diminish, and Saudi authorities put heavier control over Shia minorities in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia.[322] At this time, many other groups, although not 100 percent in line with Juhayman's intellectual framework, believed that Al Saud's government had to be eradicated in any way due to corruption.

Trofimov states that: "Even some of those who didn't fully share Juhayman's theological certitude agreed to take part. Mohammed Elias and fellow Egyptian jihadis in particular were impressed by the arsenal that Juhayman had managed to assemble. Mahdi or not, for them this was an uprising against a puppet regime of American infidels, and Juhayman seemed charismatic and well-connected enough to succeed possibly even igniting the entire region in the flames of Islamic revolution."[323] The attack sounded a severe alarm to Saudi Arabia over the project of exporting the Islamic Revolution.

As a result, if hostage crises were the trigger for the breakdown of Iran-US ties, the seizing of the Kaaba was the trigger for the breakdown of Iran-Saudi relations. Pessimism over Iranian influence among Saudi Shiites was on the rise, and the Cold War between the two neighbouring countries was just getting started. Tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia have escalated in recent years, with events such as the killing of Iranian pilgrims in Mecca and Saudi assistance for Iraq in the eight-year war between the two countries.

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[321] https://insidearabia.com/historical-perspectives-siege-grand-mosque/ (01.10.2019)
[322] https://www.nytimes.com/1979/11/21/archives/mecca-mosque-seized-by-gunmen-believed-to-be-militants-from-iran.html (08.07.2021)
[323] Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The 1979 Uprising at Islam's Holiest Shrine* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 109.

4.7.   Gulf countries' concern about the Islamic Revolution

Apart from the ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic differences that exist between Iran and the Persian Gulf states, the main issue is the fear of small countries towards their larger neighbors. Although rich in oil production, Gulf countries are heavily dependent on their security due to their defense capabilities. Most Gulf countries need US military assistance globally and Saudi Arabia regionally to counter potential threats. They felt that a revolutionary Iran, a combination of Islamic ideology and military power, would be a far greater threat to their survival than the previous secular Kingdom of Mohammad Reza Shah. They understood that the Iranian regime would use any means to infiltrate these countries. They knew that Islamic ideology was only one of their tools to secure the Iranian national interests.

As Marschall notes: "The foreign policy of the revolutionary state has been influenced to varying degrees by revolutionary and religious ideology as well as by geopolitics and national interest. Between 1979 and 1998, it evolved from a policy mainly driven by Islamic ideology to one mainly asserting the country's national interest. Both components, however, co-existed and sometimes overlapped ever since the revolution, their extent relating to the geographical regions and issues involved."[324] The idea of the Islamic Revolution of Iran was like fresh blood in the veins of all the world's movements against oppression, and especially the Islamic movements.[325] Most countries in the region, tired of their corrupt monarchies, saw the Islamic Revolution as the new season's beginning.

Most of the Persian Gulf states, which had a monarchical system, were soon confronted with Khomeini's anti-monarchical rules and saw their legitimacy at stake. Khomeini openly challenged these countries and their system of governance and defended Islamic liberation movements. The Muslims were gradually trusting in Khomeini's promises to cut off foreign influence and destroy the status quo in their countries. Hunter notes: "It has given them hope that Islam can be used effectively, and successfully, to bring about social and political change, and to diminish the hold and influence of foreign powers over Muslim countries. Therefore, it is indisputable that the success or failure of the Iranian revolution will have an impact on the fate of other Islamic movements."[326]

Iran seems to have taken a new step, after the Islamic Revolution, and sought to encourage countries of the region to uprise against the existing system by supporting "liberation" Islamic movements in these countries. As a result, as Hunter notes: "Iran has focused on relations with the Islamic groups of those countries with whom it has been at political loggerheads and has tried to manipulate its links to bring political pressure on their government."[327]

However, the Gulf countries view about Iranian policy in the region could be different from the public opinion. On the one hand, there is a view that Iran has intrusive policies, and its influence

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[324] Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: POLICY from Khomeini to Khatami* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 10.
[325] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kharijite (08.07.2021)
[326] Shireen T. Hunter, "Iran and the Spread of Revolutionary Islam", *Third World Quarterly* vol. 10, no. 2 (1988): 732.
[327] Ibid, 733.

should be cut off from the countries of the region. Still, on the other hand, Iran's stance on Israel, as well as the U.S. and its slogans against the west and east blocks, has made Iran popular among Arab people who are frustrated by their conservative governments. However, it should be noted that despite Iran's success in influencing the Shiites in the region, it has not been able to enjoy this influence among the Sunnis.

4.8.   Gulf cooperation council

According to *Britannica*: "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. The GCC was established in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 1981. The purpose of the GCC is to achieve unity among its members based on their common objectives and their similar political and cultural identities, which are rooted in Arab and Islamic cultures. Presidency of the council rotates annually."[328]

The axes were influential in the formation of the GCC were:

1. "Victory of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran;
2. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the military occupation of that country;
3. The fear of the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, that the Soviet Union was getting closer to the Middle East;
4. The Iran-Iraq War."[329]

The emergence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the change in the general policies of the ruling regime in Iran towards the world had increased the security concerns of the countries on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf. The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq also encouraged Arabs to form a Gulf Cooperation Council to provide full support to the Iraqi regime in order to counter Iran and prevent its possible threat.

After the war and with the emergence of the next governments, we are witnessing a more pragmatic foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the process of de-escalation with the whole world, especially with the Arab countries bordering the Persian Gulf. Still, Iran's relations with the Arab states on the Persian Gulf over Iran's nuclear program became cold and even competitive. This trend has intensified in recent years due to the escalation of the military crisis in Syria. The Islamic Republic of Iran has always opposed the continuation of the military crisis in Syria.[330] It can be argued that the most important or, to put it in another way, the only reason for the survival of the GCC in today's world is still the issue of fear of Iran and that the Islamic Republic is dangerous for the GCC members.[331]

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[328] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gulf-Cooperation-Council (09.10.2019)

[329] Ahmed Jalinus, Hamed Ghurjili and Amri Sajjad, "Nuclear Iran and its impact on the process of further convergence with the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council", *Political Research Quarterly* vol. 2, no. 5 (2012): 61-62.

[330] Kelsey Hampton, "Doctrinally and Politically Opposed on the. Battlefield in Syria: Iran and Saudi Arabia's Cold War in the Middle East" tenth Biennial Graduate Student Conference - Conflict Studies and Global Governance: The New Generation, Boston, MA, (October 31-November 1 2014): 7.

[331] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gulf-Cooperation-Council (08.07.2021)

Iranophobia is a project that states that if Iran becomes more powerful, it will become a severe threat to the countries of the region. In this way, the cost of promoting Iran's power among various countries, especially the GCC countries, will increase, and Iran will become a real threat to these countries. The GCC has also been hostile to Iran's friends; For example, "the council members were trying to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. In the summer of 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council called on Syria to refrain from repressing its citizens. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia spoke out against Bashar al-Assad in a speech broadcast on Saudi television. This was the most challenging political stance in the Arab world against Bashar al-Assad in the five months since the start of the uprising in Syria. Following this speech, Kuwait and Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia, and they called their ambassadors from Damascus."[332]

Although one of the reasons for the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council was the repudiation of Iranian influence in the region's kingdoms, not all countries shared the same view about Iran. These countries have always been at odds in various political, economic, and cultural areas. Marc Valeri notes: "While Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have been the states in the GCC least open to Iran's recent tentative international rehabilitation – viewing the United States' rapprochement with Iran as a zero-sum game which could impact their own partnership with Washington – Oman has been the most open. The multidimensionality in the relations between the GCC monarchies and Iran is best exemplified by the UAE's relationship with Iran."[333]

While Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are highly skeptical of Iran and its role in instigating Shiite movements, Oman, for example, was one of the countries that have always played a mediating role for Iran in negotiating with the United States. One of the reasons that countries such as Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE do not take a very anti-Iranian stance maybe because of the fact that Shiite families have a more significant influence on political and economic issues in these countries than in other Gulf states. According to Soage: "the GCC experienced internal conflict, chiefly between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, with a border dispute escalating into a diplomatic row. Behind the tensions was the determination of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who became the effective ruler of Qatar in 1992, to pursue an independent foreign policy and be a prominent political actor in his own right."[334]

In short, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the formation of which, in addition to the cooperation of the Arab countries in the region, pursued a main goal, which was to counter Iranian influence. This meant that the perceptions of the Arab leaders in the region towards Iran had changed, and they considered revolutionary Iran a potential threat. At the same time, in Iran, Khomeini and the Islamic Republic's propaganda apparatus attacked Arab kings and fueled ideological differences between the Middle East countries.

4.9. Conclusion

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[332] Kelsey Hampton, "Doctrinally and Politically Opposed on the. Battlefield in Syria: Iran and Saudi Arabia's Cold War in the Middle East," 7.

[333] Marc Valeri, "The Gulf Monarchies and Iran: Between Confrontation and Geostrategic Realities", *The Gulf monarchies beyond the Arab spring - Changes and challenges* (2005): 40.

[334] Ana Belén Soage, "The Gulf Cooperation Council, Iran, and the Limits to Integration", *Orient II* (2008): 47.

The occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran with its Islamic-Revolutionary model has led to the emergence of values and norms in the form of a new identity that has been so influential in the regional and global dimensions. Among these regional influences is the Islamic Revolution of Iran challenging the Saudi-Wahhabi conservative monarchy. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia and other conservative Arab countries, in cooperation with the U.S., have tried to counter the Islamic Revolution. These efforts were reflected in the full support of these countries from Iraq during the eight years of the war with Iran. In fact, one of the principal axes of the conflict between the Islamic Revolution of Iran and Saudi Arabia is in the conflicting identities that these two actors have assumed and imagined for themselves in the Islamic world.

The main axes of Saudi Arabia's confrontation with the Islamic Revolution can be examined in two dimensions: confrontation over Islam's role in domestic politics and confrontation over the desired regional order. In confrontation over the role of Islam in domestic politics, it is necessary to point out the contrast between the model of the religious government of the Islamic Republic with its focus on Shiites-revolutionaries' elements and the model of the traditional regime with a focus on conservative Wahhabism. Also, in terms of confrontation over the desired regional order, the Islamic Revolution of Iran seeks to create an order in which the Israeli and American regimes are not present as global arrogance and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict ends in favor of Muslims, while Saudi Arabia has taken the lead in the reconciliation process with Israel.

Hence, it is wrong to undermine our understanding of the relationship between countries only based on military and economic forces, because it will not give us a clear and wide range image of relations. What enhances our experience of the relationship between countries is a detailed analysis of all the influential dimensions within countries. Not only did the geopolitics, economics, and oil disputes have a profound impact on Saudi-Iranian relations, but also the element of revolutionary ideology sharply altered relations between the two neighboring countries. Ayatollah Khomeini was looking for a third way to get rid of the oppressed of mercenaries with the slogan of neither eastern nor western. However, Khomeini could not predict the reaction of the world to his revolutionary ideas. Khomeini's "third way", based on Shiite Islamic ideology, challenged the conservative kingdom of the Arab states in the region.

As Iran's understanding of the region and the world around it changed, so did the world's understanding of Iran. On the one hand, the Arab countries considered Iran a hostile, interventionist, and potential threat, and on the other hand, Western countries considered Iran an irrational, revolutionary, and problematic country. Iran and Saudi Arabia perceived each other as the main threats in the region, and therefore they were so pessimist for building a better relationship. This pessimism has manifested itself in many incidents such as the conquest of Mecca, the attack on Iranian pilgrims in Mecca, the Iran-Iraq war, and subsequent events.

These pessimism about the Islamic Revolution of Iran eventually led to the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council, whose main goal was to deter Iran. On one side, The Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia, sought to passivize Iran by controlling oil and other economic and political Leverages, while on the other side, Western countries, especially the United States, were trying to replace their lost ally with a new ally in the region. Iran, which became a country that not only was an American gendarme anymore, but also directly harmed the United States and its interests everywhere.

The Americans' perception of Iran was also changing rapidly, now they saw Iran as a rebel, a supporter of terrorism and extreme country, which they had to prevent by any means. While Iran sought to export its revolution to other countries in the region and to support revolutionary, anti-imperialist, and anti-monarchist movements, the United States and Saudi Arabia were taking political, economic, and military positions against it. Among these positions are the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council, support for Iraq in the war with Iran, and oil sanctions against Iran.

As a result, the Islamic Revolution has changed the perceptions of this country and its leaders about the outside world, as well as the perceptions of the outside world about Iran. The country that only a few years ago was the closest US ally in the region has now became its number one enemy. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, these perceptions have not changed much, and Iran is still considered a threat in the region, and Saudi Arabia and the United States are still trying to contain this country. The Gulf countries, which are politically, economically and militarily dependent on the United States, have also sought to follow the Saudi-style containment policies in this conflict.

5. Iran-Iraq war and Rafsanjani's presidency

5.1. Iran-Iraq War

Since the 1960s, Iran and Iraq have had serious problems in some areas, including support for subversive opposition movements and regional conflicts on both sides. The dispute over the right to use Shatt al-Arab (Arvand River) was among the most serious problem between these neighbors. During the Shah's reign, Iran was the dominant and undisputed power in the Persian Gulf region due to U.S. political and military support. The Shah sought to expand Iranian influence throughout the region. At the time, the Conservative Arab monarchies were outraged by the Shah's expansionist gendarme role in the Persian Gulf. However, because of the fact that Shah did not interfere in their internal affairs, not only did they remain silent in the face of the Iranian opposition group, but they all supported the Shah, especially in his struggle against religious groups in Iran.

Before the Islamic Revolution, Iran's relations with its neighbors were influenced by their relations with the two world poles. Because of the Shah's good relations with both the Eastern and Western blocs, as well as Iran's role as a gendarme in the region, the idea of a war with this country was unthinkable. However, with the victory of the Islamic Revolution, which came to power with the slogan "No East, No West", the balance of power changed in the region. After the fall of the Shah, the leaders of Arab countries started to worry about the Iranian potential threat. Still, following the prime ministership of Mehdi Bazargan, a moderate Iranian figure and the regime's new emphasis on Islamic brotherhood and not interfering in its neighbours' internal affairs, the new regime of Iran has succeeded to reduce the fear of the Arabs somewhat. In the summer of 1979, despite reciprocal efforts by the interim Bazargan administration and the Baghdad government to mediate the issue between the two nations, discontent among Iraqi Shiites across the northern Persian Gulf caused Iraq to doubt Khomeini's participation in stirring the rebellion.[335]

On the one hand, Ayatollah Khomeini, with his anti-Western views, sought to cut off American influence in Iran and the region, while on the other hand, he challenged other Islamic states by claiming Muslim leadership. Iran, which has a Shia majority and its leader sought to promote this religion in the region and worldwide, strongly threatened its neighboring Shiite-majority with Sunni leadership. Karsh notes: "Moreover, while neither of the two countries is demographically homogeneous, Iraq's ethnic and religious divisions are far deeper and more

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[335] Sharif M. Shuja, "Islamic Revolution in Iran and its Impact on Iraq", *Islamic Studies* vol. 19, no. 3 (1980): 224.

intractable than those of Iran. It is a country where the main non-Arab community, the Kurds, has been constantly suppressed, and where the majority of the population, the Shi'ites, has been ruled as an underprivileged class by a minority group, the Sunnis, less than one-third their number. In contrast, the Shi'ites of Iran (about 95 per cent of the population) are governed by fellow Shi'ites, while the proportion of Kurds in Iran's population is less than half that of Iraq."[336] Shiite loyalty to the ruling regime in the Arab Gulf countries was a concern. The Shiite majority's presence in Iraq and Bahrain and their minorities in Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, Iraq feared the Iranian revolution the most. As a matter of fact, the Iranian revolution's victory was seen as a kind of accelerator to opposition movements and pro-Khomeini activists in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.[337]

From the other side, the political, diplomatic, and military situation in the Persian Gulf region was such that it facilitated Saddam's attack on Iran. Other Arab countries in the region also feared the Iranian revolution but did not have the tools to counter it. Still, Iraq had this ability, and by moderating its extremism, it came out from political isolation. The Arabs also needed Iraq to contain the Islamic Revolution in the region. In return, Iraq needed Arab diplomatic and economic support to carry out its actions against Iran and advance its leadership goals in the area. Thus, from the very beginning, Saddam defended the positions of the Arabs and, together with the Saudis, played a prominent role in providing them with the means of collective security in order to confront the revolutionary government of Tehran. Iraq and Saudi Arabia quickly resolved their border dispute[338], which hampered their closer ties, and they started focusing on their common enemy.[339]

As realists explain, whenever the balance of power is changing, and one country is taking precedence over other countries, some countries will react, and one of these reactions could be a war. Iran, also, by following a policy of independence from both West and East blocs and leading the oppressed Muslims in the world, changed the balance of power in the Middle East, which led to the war between Iran and Iraq, the main pillars of the balance of power in the region.

With the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the coming of a revolutionary-led regime seeking to lead the Islamic world, Saddam Hussein was in danger. Hiro notes that the fall of the Shah, commander-in-chief of 415,000 troops, despite all odds in the middle of a thriving economy, inspired Iranian revolutionaries to believe that their example would encourage oppressed people across the world to rise up against their unfair, repressive rulers. They segregated the globe between oppressors and oppressed, declaring it their Islamic obligation to assist the national liberation struggles of the world's "deprived people".[340]

Ethnic, religious differences on one side and border issues, and the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution on the other led Saddam Hussein to decide to take a militarily conflict with Iran. On 22 September 1980, the Iran-Iraq War began with the Iraqi invasion of Iran and marked one of

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[336] Efraim Karsh, *Essential Histories: The Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988* (Oxford: Osprey Pub., 2002), 16.

[337] Sharif M. Shuja, "Islamic Revolution in Iran and its Impact on Iraq," 226.

[338] Gwenn Okruhlik and Patrick J. Conge, "The Politics of Border Disputes: On the Arabian Peninsula", *International Journal* vol. 54, no. 2 (1999): 231.

[339] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/saudi-arabia-and-the-iraq-war (30.06.2021)

[340] Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 27

the longest wars of the 20th century. According to BBC Persian data on the 35th anniversary of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran's casualties in the war are as follows: 190,000 killed, 672,000 injured, 97 billion dollars in damage.[341] After eight years of war and enormous losses on both sides, Iran was again in a position of weakness and was forced to accept the U.N. resolution. "The end came on July 18, when Iran accepted U.N. Resolution 598 calling for an immediate cease-fire, though minor Iraqi attacks continued for a few more days after the truce came into effect on July 20, 1988."[342]

However, what remained in the historical memory of Iranian leaders was the strong support of the USA, Western countries, and Saudi Arabia in the war against Iran.

5.2. Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries' support of Saddam

The Persian Gulf countries have always tried to maintain good relations with the Shah of Iran and to avoid tensions during the Pahlavi monarchy. However, with Khomeini's rise to power, these efforts came to end. Khomeini called the rulers of the Persian Gulf corrupt, cruel and despotic and sought to export the Iranian revolution to these countries. Although, after the Islamic Revolution and the beginning of the war, the Gulf countries fully supported Iraq, they had no desire for Iraq's victory. In fact, the interests of these countries were in the continuation of the war and the weakening of both Iran and Iraq because of the fact that they feared that they would be territorially involved in the war too. Sterner notes: "While Iraq has broadened its international support during this period, and diversified its sources of arms, Iran has become more isolated and is finding it increasingly difficult to acquire the arms it needs. Iraq has successfully generated American and Arab pressure to squeeze off some of Iran's sources of arms. Under U.S. pressure, Israel and South Korea have terminated any direct sales of arms to Iran. Iran is still getting arms from North Korea, Libya and Syria, and of necessity it has become resourceful at acquiring what it can on the international arms market."[343]

During the Iran-Iraq war, Al Saud political officials used all their diplomatic capabilities to isolate Iran and strengthen the Ba'athist regime in Iraq. Political consultations with various countries, including the United States, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, etc., were among the measures taken in this regard. During this period, Saudi Arabia launched an oil war with the aim of reducing the economic power and foreign exchange earnings of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Saudis tried to paralyze Iran's economy by lowering oil prices. Along with other oil-producing countries, Saudi Arabia disrupted Iran's oil production and exports by increasing production and saturating the oil market.[344]

The Persian Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia were unable to fight either Iran or Iraq militarily, so they sought to provide Iraq with financial, military, and intelligence assistance in order to stop Iran from gaining the upper hand during the war. Karsh in the Iran-Iraq war notes: "Put simply, Saudi Arabia and its smaller neighbors knew that they could not hope to stand up against any direct attack from Iran or Iraq. Therefore, they must avoid, at almost any cost, a direct

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[341] https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/09/150921_l12_iran_iraq_war35th_statistics (28.01.2020)
[342] https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/iran-iraq-war (28.01.2020)
[343] Michael Sterner, "The Iran-Iraq War:, *Foreign Affairs* vol. 63, no. 1 (1984): 133.
[344] https://merip.org/1984/07/oil-and-the-outcome-of-the-iran-iraq-war/ (30.06.2021)

confrontation."[345]Among the Arab countries, most assistance was provided to Iraq by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Karash states that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait sold part of its oil on Iraq's behalf, in addition to the 130 billion in loans (in practice, handouts). While the Saudis built a connection line to allow Iraqi oil to flow through their pipeline to the Red Sea, Kuwait permitted its port facilities to be utilized to import supplies and materials for Iraq. The governments of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have also lobbied the U.S. on behalf of Iraq - and the anti-Iran agenda.[346]

While Syria was the only Arab state backing Iran during the war, all other Arab and Arab-speaking countries in Africa also supported Iraq. However, Saudi Arabia's role beside the United States in the war was crucial, with the following aspects of the Saudi military and civilian assistance:

1. "Political support. Saudi Arabia's King Khalid, on September 25, 1980, in a telephone conversation with Saddam, declared his country's support for Iraq in the war against Iran.
2. Economic and financial assistance. Saudi Arabia contributed $ 30 billion of the $ 70 billion Gulf States aid to Iraq.
3. Intelligence assistance. While welcoming Saddam, Saudi Arabia provided Saddam with a complete account of Iran's economic, military, and social status, and even the number of military personnel, positions, and military equipment available, and other confidential information gathered by American Intelligence Services.
4. Military assistance. The Iraq-Saudi Mutual Security Treaty was signed a year before the war against Iran. Saudi Arabia also secretly supplied fuel to ships and aircraft."[347]

Despite all this assistance from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Iraq invaded Kuwait shortly after the end of the war with Iran, which surprised the Saudi kings. However, what remained in the historical memory of Iran's leaders in Saudi Arabia's multilateral support during the war against Iran, which intensified the tensions between the two countries, whose effects did not wane until years after the war.

5.3.   West's support of Saddam during the war

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the United States was deeply concerned about the spread of the revolution to the Gulf countries. The Americans were initially trying to find a way to talk to Iranian leaders and adapt themselves to the new situation in Iran. However, these hopes ended with the U.S. embassy being held hostage on the 4th of November 1979. The main reasons for the U.S. incitement and support of Saddam were first to prevent the penetration of revolutionary Islam into the conservative Islamic countries, and second and perhaps more

[345] Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 126.
[346] Ibid, 127.
[347] http://www.iribnews.ir/fa/news/1302470/%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B1%DA%98%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AB%DB%8C-%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C (29.01.2020)

importantly, because of the hostage-taking of American diplomats, which greatly angered them. According to Pierre Razoux: "Abol Hassan Bani- Sadr a few months after he was ousted from power, openly accusing the United States of having incited Iraq to attack Iran and claiming that the Iraqi regime would have been unable to go on the offensive without Washington's support."[348]

Although Saddam Hussein did not have good relations with the United States after a six-day war with Israel, Saudi Arabia tried to play a mediating role between the two countries to prevent Iranian influence. Razoux notes: "The Iraqi dictator was persuaded that the United States wanted to eliminate all the "progressive" regimes in the Arab world, including his own, to replace them with Islamic regimes considered more apt to resist Communist subversion. He was deeply suspicious of American politicians and had no direct contact with them. His only intermediaries were King Hussein of Jordan and King Khalid of Saudi Arabia, both of whom were in close contact with the American government. Saddam did not trust either of them." [349]

The United States remained silent on Saddam Hussein's use of weapons of mass destruction and backed Iraq with financial, arms assistance, and intelligence support during the war. According to recently declassified CIA papers and interviews with veteran intelligence officers such as Francona, the United States possessed solid proof of Iraqi chemical strikes dating back to 1983. Iran was publicly asserting that its forces had been subjected to unlawful chemical strikes at the time, and was preparing a case to bring to the United Nations. It lacked the proof that Iraq was involved, most of which was contained in top secret reports and memos provided to the US government's highest intelligence officers. The CIA refused to comment this article.[350]

U.S. policy-makers, like the kings of the Gulf countries, sought to balance the power in the Persian Gulf in order to prevent both Khomeini and Sadam to become a hegemon in the region.[351] For this reason, during the war years, cooperation between Iran and the United States and even Israel was formed, which is referred to as Iran Contra. According to the website history.com: "The Iran-Contra Affair was a secret U.S. arms deal that traded missiles and other arms to free some Americans held hostage by terrorists in Lebanon, but also used funds from the arms deal to support armed conflict in Nicaragua. The controversial deal—and the ensuing political scandal—threatened to bring down the presidency of Ronald Reagan."[352]

While the European powers had taken a neutral stand, they were openly refusing to cooperate with Iran, even disregarding the arms deals they had signed with Iran before the revolution and had received its money. Hiro, in *The Longest War*, notes: "London refused to release the weapons and spares - including tanks and tank engines - already paid for by Tehran. France applied its declared policies of neutrality and suspension of arms shipments to the combatants

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[348] Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, An Imprint of Harvard University Press; Illustrated edition, 2015), 68.
[349] Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 69.
[350] https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/26/exclusive-cia-files-prove-america-helped-saddam-as-he-gassed-iran/ (05.02.2020)
[351] Soren Scholvin, "The Three Gulf Wars: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POWER POLITICS IN THE PERSIAN GULF", *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* vol. 13, no. 3 (2009): 87.
[352] https://www.history.com/topics/1980s/iran-contra-affair (05.02.2020)

one-sidedly. While it refused to deliver even the three missile patrol boats for which Tehran had already paid, its airlifted weapons and spares to Iraq in November 1980."[353]

These behaviors from the West and the Arab world have led Iran to realize that it is in an extreme isolation and it must seek new allies both in the region and the world. Since then, Iran has thought of forming Shiite-based Islamic organizations / militians and has also sought to increase the cost of a direct war with this country by supporting the revolutionary groups in the region and proxy wars.

5.4.   End of the war and construction period under Rafsanjani's presidency

While Iranian forces had the upper hand against Iraq in the early years of the war, in the final years of the war, Iran lost its ability to confront due to U.S. support for Iraq and attack on Iranian positions in the Persian Gulf. Alaei writes: "From the summer of 1987 to 1988, there were very difficult conditions for both sides. During the period of war, cities and many civilians were directly exposed to war damage. Tehran, Baghdad and many of the big cities of the two countries were also targeted by air bombardment and missiles, the war has also expanded to the Persian Gulf and many oil tankers were damaged."[354]

Given the complexity of the Persian Gulf situation and the retreat of most of Iran's positions in Iraq, Iranian policymakers were getting ready to sign the peace treaty. According to Hiro: "Unknown to the world, a conclave of top political, military and theological leaders of Iran at the presidential residence in Tehran on Thursday 14 July discussed the war, and came out in favour of accepting the Security Council Resolution 598 unconditionally."[355] Rafsanjani, as vice-chairman of the Assembly of Experts, speaker of the Majlis, and acting commander-in-chief, communicated the Assembly's resolution to Khomeini, who alone had the constitutional right to determine questions of war and peace as supreme leader and commander-in-chief.[356]

Eventually, the war ended with the same policy that the U.S. pursued, the "no-win" policy. However, after the war, many issues between the two countries became ambiguous, one of which was the payment of damages by Iraq to Iran. According to BBC Persian: "Until the fall of Saddam, Iran could not pursue the issue of implementation of the resolution 598. After the fall of Saddam Hussein and the establishment of the government in Iraq, which is close to Iranian

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[353] Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 82.
[354] https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/926182/%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AA-%DA%86%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF
(06.02.2020)
[355] Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*, 242.
[356] Ibid.

government, the Iranian government suspended the issue of war casualties and, with the complicated conditions of Iraq, even began to help this country."[357]

After the end of the war with Iraq, Iran was worried that it would be put aside from the Persian Gulf's security arrangements by the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United States. At the same Iran sought to defuse tensions with the most important country of the Cooperation Council, namely Saudi Arabia. Velayati's visit to Kuwait in 1990 also was the step that Iran took to show it was willing to normalize relations with the Saddam's financial backers in the war against it. Also, Rafsanjani's government continued its relations with Kuwait's exiled government by declaring neutrality in the first Persian Gulf War. Following Iran's new gesture, relations with the Arabs of the Persian Gulf improved and the expansion of political-economic relations with Russia and the European Union has followed.

5.5. Rafsanjani's presidency

The goals of Iran's foreign policy during the Rafsanjani had two national and transnational dimensions. On the national dimension, he intented to rebuild the infrustruction of the country and focus on the economic development, while on the transnational demention, he attempted to improve Iran's relations with countries in the region, especially Saudi Arabia, and to avoid tensions with the Western countries, particularly the United States. Of course, during his presidency, due to the priority of reconstruction of the country, more attention was payed to the national demention and transnational goals were mostly serving the national goals.

The war completely destroyed the country's infrastructure, and the economic power was greatly diminished. Foreign debt and budget deficits, declining production, lack of capital, lack of investment in infrastructure due to war priorities, reduced foreign exchange earnings, war losses, and falling oil prices were weekend the Iranian economy of that time. By the end of the war, the Islamic Republic had not only thought about rebuilding the damage of the war but also had to transform and reconstruct cultural and social structures. Hence, Rafsanjani needed to pay more attention to the internal affairs and the requirements facing Iran after the war and prioritize the national dimension over the transnational dimension.

This prioritization did not mean the disappearance of transnational goals in Iran's foreign policy. A country like Iran, which is ideologically and geopolitically important, cannot have transnational goals. However, he had to be careful enough to balance goals and tools.[358] This is because an imbalance in each of the goals and tools will lead to a deviation in gaining national benefits. Therefore, transnational goals were necessary for Iran but the priorities of their national and transnational goals are important. It can be said that in this period, transnational goals were mostly in the service of national goals.

Amirahmadi notes: "debate is centered around four basic issues: rebuilding the military (both the institution itself and its equipment); energizing the national economy; promoting the economic well-being of the population (especially the families of those killed in the war), and reconstructing war damaged areas. Social justice, which had been the subject of continued

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[357] https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/09/150921_l12_iran_iraq_war35th_ba (06.02.2020)

[358] Paul Kennedy, *Grand Strategy in war and peace* (London: New haven, Yale university press, 1991): 12.

concern after the revolution, has been deliberately removed as a priority item."[359] With the election of Hashemi Rafsanjani as Iran's president in 1989, Iran's rebuilding period began. Rafsanjani's most important priorities were: Infrastructure development, Privatization of state enterprises, Foreign exchange liberalization, Establishment of free-trade zones, and elimination of subsidies and price controls.[360]

However, some of the most important issues that Hashemi Rafsanjani need to resolve during his presidency were as follow:

- Exporting revolution abroad;
- Support of Islamic movements;
- Preservation of territorial integrity and national sovereignty;
- Iranian foreign policy discourse during Rafsanjani;
- De-escalation and peaceful coexistence.

The export of the revolution has been one of the most basic foreign policy principles after the victory of the revolution. In the eyes of Iranian leaders, without the spread of the Islamic Revolution (export of the revolution) beyond the borders, the Islamic Republic's survival would be endangered.[361] However, in this period, the revolution's export did not have an ideological color; it was based on economic modeling. In this regard, Hashemi Rafsanjani believed that the export of the revolution should be considered through Iran's development and progress.[362] During this period, the idea was that if the Iranian government, which has an Islamic nature, could prove that it was an economically successful model, Muslims and Islamic countries would automatically and voluntarily follow its example. Therefore, Iran sought to export the revolution ideologically and expand its influence with the help of economic modelling.[363] Presenting Iran as an economic model for the countries of the region and the Islamic world, could serve both the national and transnational interests of the Islamic Republic.

The support for Islamic movements and backing the movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah have been seriously pursued since the victory of the revolution in Iranian foreign policy. Iranian politicians openly claimed that it is necessary to defend Palestine and the Islamic world should stand for the dignity of Muslims, and that they have to be prepared for divine purposes.[364] Although comprehensive support for the Islamic movements is one of Iran's foreign policy's main goals, there seems to be a difference in the type and amount of support for Islamic movements in this period. Before Rafsanjani, the support of the Islamic movements was widespread, covering almost all movements around the world. Still, in this period, it was limited to the Middle East, and It was focusing on conflicts with Israel.

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[359] Hooshang Amirahmadi, "Economic Reconstruction of Iran: Costing the War Damage", *Third World Quarterly* vol. 12, no. 1 (1990): 32.
[360] https://iranprimer.usip.org/sites/default/files/The%20Revolutionary%20Economy.pdf (07.02.2020)
[361] Ahad F. Fanani, "The Export of Islamic Revolution in Iran and Its Threat for the US, the Soviet Union, and Arab Countries", *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* vol. 8, no. 1 (2015): 1.
[362] Alireza Rezaei, "Explaining Iranian Foreign Policy Courses from the Perspective of International Relations Theories", *Quarterly Journal of International Politics and Relations* vol. 16, no. 48 (2008): 90.
[363] Mohammad Reza Tajik and Seyed Jalal Dehghani, "Patterns of Exporting the Revolution in the Foreign Policy Discourses of the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Quarterly Journal of International Politics and Relations* no. 27 (2003): 72.
[364] Javad Seyyed, "Jurisprudential principles of defending Islamic lands", *Islamic Government* vol. 28, no. 2 (2003): 67.

Although at the end of the war, it seemed that there was no fundamental threat to Iran's territorial integrity, Kuwait's Iraqi invasion countered this notion. Saddam's expansionism was again a threat to Iran's territorial integrity. Besides, the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf itself was a second threat to Iran's territorial integrity. With these descriptions, we can enumerate three categories of goals for Iran in the region at that time were as follow:

- First, to prevent U.S. from seeking expansion in the region,
- Second, to prevent Iraq from aggression in the region
- And third, to resolve distinctions with the GCC member states.

On the first goal, it does not seem that Rafsanjani was very successful, as the U.S. expansion during this period was very significant and the U.S. army was present in the region even after the Iraq-Kuwait war. However, on the second goal, to a large extent, he took a neutral stance and was also able to persuade other Arab countries to take a neutral stance on the Iraq-Kuwait war, and finally could see his old enemy completely weakened by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. On the third goal, Hashemi Rafsanjani traveled to Saudi Arabia and tried to improve relations with that country to lay the groundwork for improving relations with other GCC member states. As a result, during this period, Iran was able to greatly improve its relations with its Arab neighbors and prevent tensions in the region.

Hashemi's general policy included economic reconstruction, expansion of foreign relations, and privatization of the country's domestic economy. With Hashemi coming to power, the opportunity was provided to pursue economic policies that are in line with the new conditions, which created a broader role and partnership of the private sectors. The first and most important goal of this strategy was the modernization and development of the Iranian economy. Economic liberalization and the reduction of the state's role in the economy were the key to the economic recovery program. A financial and monetary reform was considered as the main foundation of government policy in the process of economic reconstruction. The main goal of the government was to improve the monetary conditions to compete with other international currencies.

Practical and behavioural policy in Iran in the field of foreign policy in the second decade of the revolution can be examined according to national interests and regional arrangements, which include avoidance of provoking others and coexistence. In line with efforts to encourage investment and loans from the *World Bank*, liberalization and economic cooperation with developed countries were also considered during this period. As a result, post-war policies should be considered a return to geopolitical components and period of restoring stability in the Persian Gulf region.

All in all, Rafsanjani set two missions for the post-war period of Iran. The first mission was enhancing the Iranian economy, by bringing foreign investors to invest in Iran, and second, in the political sector, to confront opposition forces. Hashemi Rafsanjani was in favor of Iran's nuclear program, though he insisted it was peaceful. In the field of domestic politics, he was closer to the spectrum of hardliners in the early days of the revolution and during the war, however, he chose more conciliatory and soft policies in foreign and domestic policy over a time.

In summary, the principles of Iran's foreign policy during the construction period can be summarized as follows:

1. Normalization of relations with other countries;
2. Communicating with other countries in the world;
3. Replacing the ideological understanding of international politics with the geopolitical understanding
4. Active membership in regional and international organizations;
5. Flexibility and expedient orientations to get Iran out of the isolation;
6. Emphasis on exporting the revolution through economic progress and development.

5.6.   Conclusion

The disputes between Iran and Iraq, which were rooted in geopolitical and regional disagreements, intensified after the Islamic Revolution due to Iran's transformation from a secular state to the Islamic Republic. Iraq never thought of war with Iran until the Shah's presence, due to Iran's military might and full US support. However, with the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the addition of an ideological element to the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic and inviting the countries of the world, especially Muslim countries to overthrow the existing regimes, the countries of the region and the world began to think about preventing Iranian influence.

Ayatollah Khomeini, who had won the revolution with the slogan of "Neither East nor West", had a great confidence in advancing the goals of the Islamic Revolution throughout the region. The countries of the region, however, were terrified of this revolution. On the one hand, most of the countries in the region were either monarchies or authoritarian, and on the other hand, Khomeini claimed to lead their people to overthrow the established regimes. Given the circumstances of the 1980s, Iraq was one of the pillars of power in the Middle East and was the best option to stop revolutionary Iran at the time.

The bloody Iran-Iraq war has started on 22 September 1980 and ended after eight years, in August 20, 1988, with billions of casualties and the loss of hundreds of thousands of Iranians and Iraqis. The border disputes between Iran and Iraq, on the one hand, and the financial support of Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf countries, and the West, on the other, motivated Saddam to wage war on Iran. Beside this, in Saddam's view, Iran became weaker since the revolution and had lost Western support, so it could be easily stopped. Saudi Arabia also, used its political, economic power, and intelligence, to support Saddam Hussein in preventing Iran from becoming the dominant power in the region.

Saudi Arabia's multilateral cooperation with the United States and the Arab countries has disrupted many of Iran's plans to occupy Iraq. Moreover, Saudi Arabia was helping Iraqi aircraft to refuel in Saudi territories by providing them with bases. These behaviours were due to their concern for a totally opposed regime to their monarchy and kingdoms. In addition to diplomatic, military, and economic means, Saudi Arabia used its important oil leverage during the war to

seriously damage Iran's oil-dependent economy. Besides, the Persian Gulf countries were also pleased with Saddam's role in stopping Iran. Although in many cases they did not take a direct stand on the Iran-Iraq war, they supported Saddam with financial assistance. However, Khomeini, who sought to export the Islamic Revolution to the whole world, seemed to have begun his work in the Middle East and nothing could stop him.

Though, what was significant was the U.S. and Saudi efforts to continue the war between Iran and Iraq, with the aim of weakening both sides. Neither the United States nor Saudi Arabia wanted victory or defeat of any side because of the fact that they knew that the winner would play a decisive role in the future of the Middle East. Saudi's direct and indirect support for Iraq has given Iran a strong sense of mistrust and these scepticisms, even years after the war, yet affect the Iran-Saudi relations.

Western countries, especially the United States, which not only did not see Iran as its ally, but also considered it as its definitive enemy, sympathized with Saudi Arabia in stopping Iranian revolution. Although the United States did not have good relations with Saddam Hussein, it saw Iraq as a suitable option for the war against Iran. During the war, in addition to providing arms to Iraq, the United States provided significant intelligence assistance to this country, which prevented Iran from occupying some Iraqi cities. All of this led Iran to become not only highly pessimistic about its Arab neighbours, but also to view the West and the United States as enemies. To this day, this pessimism has overshadowed Iran's relations with the West.

Finally, although Iran was superior to Iraq in the early years of the war, in the final years the situation seemed extremely difficult for both sides. The economies of both countries were severely damaged, and eight years of war had destroyed all of the two countries' infrastructure. Beside this, the increasing pressure from the international community and the UN led Iran and Iraq to end the war by singing the peace agreement in August 1988. At the end of the war, Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected President of Iran. Hashemi, who was also involved in the war, was well aware of the country's devastation. So, he sought to be more pragmatic in his foreign policy than ideological.

He tried to improve Iran's relations with neighbouring countries, especially Arab countries of the region and reduce tensions in international relations. In short, Hashemi's policy was economy-oriented and based on the reconstruction of Iran. Hashemi, who had more power than ever in critical decisions in the country after Khomeini's death, sought to build better relations with Saudi Arabia. At the time, cooperation between the two countries in the economic and religious (Hajj) field has significantly developed. His period, known as the *construction period*, draws on his efforts to build the country's infrastructure after eight years of war. Although Khomeini intended to export the revolution, Hashemi was realistic and well aware of the situation inside and outside the country. He made the export of the revolution one of the next priorities of the country and tried to get closer to the countries of the region.

The occurrence of some events in the late 1980s caused a change in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Ramezani believes that the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the adoption of Resolution 598 by Iran, the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, were among the events that had a significant impact on Iran

Saudi relations and reduced tensions between these two countries. [365] Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and condemnation by Iran improve relations with Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia.[366] During the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, Iran and Saudi Arabia felt that they faced similar regional threats. Thus, Iran and Saudi Arabia had a mutual goal to prevent Saddam dominates the region. It can be said that during Hashemi Rafsanjani's period, geopolitical factors were such that they not only hindered the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but even brought the two countries closer.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has always been based on different approaches that are influenced by the conditions and requirements of the international system and the internal conditions governing the atmosphere of society and the political system. During Hashemi's cabinet, given the war and the need to rebuild the country's economy on the one hand, and the international situation, along with pursuing the idealistic goals of the revolution (albeit in a modified form), the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was pursued based on idealistic realist discourse with priority given to the economy.

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[365] R. K. Ramazani "The Emerging Arab-Iranian Rapprochement: Towards an Integrated U.S. Policy in The Middle East?", *Middle East Policy* vol. 6, no. 1 (1998): 46-47.
[366] Gwenn Okruhlik, "Saudi Arabian-Iranian Relations: External Rapprochement and Internal Consolidation", *Middle East Policy* vol. 10, no. 2 (2003): 116.

6.   Khatami vs Ahmadinejad and acceleration of the nuclear program

6.1.   Khatami 1997-2005

Mohammad Khatami was elected president of Iran in August 1997 after Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. He was one of the prominent reformers in Iran who could give the Islamic Republic more credibility in the world of politics. As the hope of opening up relations in foreign relations grew, the hope for domestic reform at the time of Khatami increased significantly. Ehteshami notes: "Khatami was successful in improving the image of both the ayatollahs and Iran. The new, positive impression of the Islamic Republic helped it to gain a more prominent status and to play a more influential role in the Middle East and beyond."[367] Khatami, with the project "Dialogue among Civilizations", was trying to show the world another face of the Islamic Republic regime, which emphasized the cooperation, friendship, and closeness of different nations. Ehteshami also states that: "What Khatami did was perceived as a 'radical change' in Iranian foreign policy. This change had a deep impact on Iran's relations with a number of European countries, such as France, Spain, Greece and Italy. As a result, he was the first Iranian president to be received in those countries since the 1979 revolution."[368]

With Mohammad Khatami's election for a president in June 1997, other sub-discourses were formed in the heart and text of the grand discourse of Islamism. This discourse, which dominated the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy during the so-called reform period, can be called democratic pacifism or liberalism. [369] On the one hand, this discourse was a continuation of realism because it is based on rationalist expediency and pragmatism in foreign policy, while, on the other hand, it emphasizes the culture more than the economics and considers political and

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[367] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran's Foreign Policy from Khatami to Ahmadinejad* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2008), 15.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Jalal Dehghani, "Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran", (in Persian) (Tehran: SAMT, 2009): 224.

cultural development to be more important and necessary than economic development. Rationality and expediency are still the two fundamental principles of pacifism in foreign policy, but not mere instrumental rationality, rather communicative and moral rationality. A rationality based on dialogue and intersubjective communication, a society free from structural domination and violence, and the human right. [370] In the discourse of pacifism, emphasizing national values and giving importance to the Iranian nationality does not mean confronting Iranianism with Islam and replacing the ideology of nationalism with Islamism; Rather, it is the both elements of Iranian nationalism and Islamic ideology that mutually reinforce each other. Accordingly, President Khatami explicitly states that their identity is the Iranian-Islamic identity.[371]

In Khatami's view, modernity and Islam are not opposed, and Islamic democracy can be implemented in modern societies. He believed that there is no democracy, but there are democracies, and that democracy has to come out from the morals of the same society. According to Tazmini: "Khatami's blueprint for change was guided by the overarching goal of preserving Iranian-Islamic culture and the gains of the 1979 revolution. During his 1997 and 2001 presidential campaigns, Khatami stressed that reforms would not clash with Islamic principles. His route to reform was always via a broader interpretation of Islamic texts in order to adapt Islamic principles to the exigencies of the day."[372]

The peak of Iran's relations with the countries of the region was related to Khatami's visit to Saudi Arabia and several countries in the Persian Gulf in 1999. This trip was the first visit of the highest Iranian official to Saudi Arabia after the Iranian revolution and was so important for the two countries that King Fahd of Saudi Arabia arrived at the airport to greet Khatami with a wheelchair.[373]

Some scholars, considering the role of the agent in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, have pointed to the change in the two countries' high levels of government in the mid-1990s and consider it as a change in the relationship between the two countries.[374] They believe that King Abdullah in Saudi Arabia and Seyyed Mohammad Khatami in Iran decided to stabilize their internal position by adjusting the two countries' relationship.[375] One of the agreements reached between the two countries during this period was the cooperation to prevent the reduction of oil prices. While in March 1998, the price of oil reached $13, which was the lowest price of a decade, it was increased with the agreement of Iran and Saudi Arabia.[376]

Also, following Khatami's visit to Saudi Arabia, political, cultural, security relations expanded, and in the same year, the King of Saudi Arabia called on the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf

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[370] Mohammad Reza Tajik and Jalal Dehghani, "Foreign Policy Discourses of the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Strategy Magazine* no. 27 (2011): 73.

[371] Seyed Mohammad Khatami, *Political Development - Economic Development and* Security (Teheran: Tarhe No Publications, 2000), 151.

[372] Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran, The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 18.

[373] Akhvan Kazemi Bahram, "Divergence and Convergence in Iran-Saudi Relations", *Middle East Studies Quarterly* vol. 7, no. 2 (2000): 134.

[374] Gwenn Okruhlik, "Saudi Arabian-Iranian Relations: External Rapprochement and Internal Consolidation", 114.

[375] Ibid, 114-115.

[376] Valdani Asghar Jafari, "Iran and Egypt: From Competition to Cooperation", *Political and Economic Information Journal.* no. 231-232, (2006): 28.

to improve relations with Iran.[377]. However, perhaps the most important agreement in the history of Iran-Saudi relations was the signing of the Iran-Saudi Arabia security agreement.[378] The plan was a de-escalation model with a focus on regional conflicts that was achieved during this period and was unique in the history of relations between the two countries.[379] Even 9/11 initially strained Saudi-U.S. relations and brought Iran and Saudi Arabia closer together.[380] During this period, when the possibility of a direct U.S. attack on Iran was high, Saudi Arabia informed Iran of the details of a possible attack plan as a sign of a goodwill.[381]

6.2. The dialog of civilization and Iran-Saudi Arabia relations

Khatami has a BA in Western Philogophy, although he left the university in order to finish Islamic sciences in Qom. Hence, based on his acquaintance with the western philosophy, he sought to introduce a new concept of democratic Islam to the world.[382] His message to the international community was clear: "Iran is ready to come out of political isolation and ready for dialogue!" Here are Khatami's words about the importance of dialog: "Effective engagement in a dialogue among civilizations and across cultures requires an understanding of essential concepts and relationships. One of the most basic of these is the relationship between dialogue and knowledge. Knowledge is the product of dialogue and exchange: speaking and listening."[383]

After being elected president, Khatami sought to provide a better environment for engagement with the West, especially the United States, and based his foreign policy on dialogue and compromise. He, like Hashemi Rafsanjani, has largely tried to avoid tensions in the foreign relations, with the difference that in this period, political and cultural issues replaced the centrality of economics in comparision with the perivious presidency. In other words, in this period of Iran's foreign policy, the way of expression and the way of dealing with other countries changed significantly. The policy of economic adjustment was replaced by political development. In foreign relations, the acceptance of global pluralism, meaning the rejection of the unipolar system and the approval of the equality of cultures, became the central axis of foreign policy.[384]

Hence, the policy-oriented developmental discourse or the discourse of "negotiation" and "law" had two pillars:

- Political reforms in internal affairs;

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[377] https://fpif.org/iran-saudi_relations_rising_tensions_and_growing_rivalry/ (15.02.2021)
[378] https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/04/17/saudi-pact-with-iran-is-sign-of-growing-trust/fbdde133-8ef9-48d2-9deb-5393b7f314d4/ (30.06.2021)
[379] Reza Ekhtiari Amiri and Ku Hasnita Ku Samsu, "Security Cooperation of Iran and Saudi Arabia" *International Journal of Business and Social Science* vol. 2, no. 16 (2011): 246.
[380] Ahmad Saei and Mehdi Alikhani "A Study of the Conflict Cycle in the Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia with Emphasis on the Period 2003-2013", *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* vol. 9, no. 22, (2013): 117.
[381] Shirazi Habibollah Abolhassan, "Measuring the Impact of the Element of Competition on the Proxy Wars of Iran and Saudi Arabia", *Quarterly Journal of Political Research in the Islamic World* vol. 5, no. 1 (2015): 86.
[382] Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 18.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Alireza Azghandi, *Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran: Qoms Publishing, 2002), 18.

- De-escalating foreign policy to solve Iran's problems with other countries.[385]

Political reforms in internal affairs

Emphasizing that the foreign policy is a continuation of the domestic policy, as the domestic political reform is one of the pillars of the hegemonic discourse of foreign policy, it should be said that in this period, political realism required a kind of adaptation between the intellectual-perceptual environment and the operational environment of the foreign policy.[386] For this reason, the policies of gradualism were used, in some way, toward the liberation movements. As a matter of fact, in the era of policy-oriented developmentalism, civil society's growth led to the structural and functional reform of foreign policy, and structurally, we saw an increase in roles instead of individuals in the decision-making process.[387] This is due to the fact that the Western powers made the functioning of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran conditional on the fulfillment of their desired criteria in the domestic sphere, such as the observance of Western human rights and the political-religious freedoms they desired, domestic political reforms were placed on the foreign policy agenda in order to engage more with these countries.

De-escalation in foreign policy

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this period emphasizes a fundamental issue which is the de-escalation of Iran's foreign relations with the outside world. Hence, by de-escalation and distancing from foreign policy's ideological priorities, Iran sought to resolve the accumulated misunderstandings accumulated in the past and attempted to end any kind of international conflict and strive. As a result, it provides more ground for dialogue between civilizations and multilateral convergence of government.[388] With these explanations, de-escalation in Iran's foreign policy of this period had three essential pillars and elements:

- restraint,
- deterrence,
- detente.

Khatami initially sought to free the country from the shackles of American political, military and technological control. He then sought to strengthen Iran's defensive and deterrent position, given Iran's strategically important position in a tense region. In the third place, he tried to resolve conflicts between Iran and other countries of the region and neighboring countries, in the form of

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[385] Fakhreddin Soltani and Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, "Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution", *Journal of Politics and Law* vol. 3, no. 2 (2010), 203.
[386] Sara Fallahi, "A Comparative Study of Nuclear Diplomacy During the Presidency of Mohammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad", *Journal of Political Science*. (2007), 205.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Alireza Azghandi, "De-escalation in Iran's foreign policy: The case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1988-1998", *Foreign Policy Quarterly* vol. 13, no. 4 (1999), 104.

initiatives such as the Dialogue of Civilizations at the level of international organizations, especially the United Nations.[389]

Therefore, the principles of de-escalation policy in the Khatami era were:

- Promoting and improving Iran's relations with European countries;
- Strengthening dialogue between civilizations and cultures as a constructive message of the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- Reducing tensions between Iran and the United States, raising the issue of negotiations with the United States, and reducing tensions between the two countries at home and abroad;
- Sense of accountability and responsibility towards international forums and organizations, especially the Security Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency;[390]
- Promoting stability in the Middle East; Significant improvements in Iran-Arab relations, and the peaceful settlement of disputes between Turkey are among the most important indicators of this principle;
- Active participation of Iran in international organizations;
- Protection of national identity and values;
- Provide a peaceful environment in the world;
- Dialogue between civilizations;
- Strengthening the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement.[391]

Although Khatami made great efforts for the Dialogue of Civilizations project, there were many obstacles at home and abroad. On the one hand, he had to make clear his position on the disputes between Arabs and Israelis, the U.S., Hezbollah, and Iran's nuclear program, and on the other hand, he was strongly pressured by the hardliners not to compromise with the West. Along the lines of Rafsanjani, Khatami sought good relations with the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia to influence regional stability and OPEC policymaking. Marschall notes: "The Iranian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia declared that: Iran is keen to reassure the brothers in the Gulf, stress its readiness to begin a new phase aimed at restoring trust and reaffirm the strong and solid relations between Tehran and its neighbors in order to reinforce the stability and security of the region."[392] Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia have improved, and King Fahd congratulated Khatami on his election victory. Khatami's message also received a good response from the countries of the region, and other countries welcomed the message of Khatami's friendship.

Khatami's diplomacy and Rafsanjani's efforts have made new avenues for Iranian-Saudi relations. Rafsanjani's visits to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia aimed at improving trade, security, and oil relations during this period increased significantly. According to Marschall: "Further

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[389] R. K. Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy: Defining the National Interests" In: John Esposito and R.K. Ramazani, *Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Pal Grave, 2001): 227.
[390] Seyed Mohammad Tabatabai and Milad Topchi, "A Comparison of Iran's Nuclear Policies in the Era of Reform and Fundamentalism", *Quarterly Journal of Strategic Policy Research* vol. 4, no. 13 (2015): 126.
[391] Fakhreddin Soltani and Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, "Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution", 203.
[392] Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: POLICY from Khomeini to Khatami*, 142.

headway was made during the ICO summit which was held at the end of December in Tehran. On the Saudi side, it was attended by Crown Prince Abdullah and Foreign Minister Prince Saud. The summit was a great success for the new Iranian government. It lifted Iran out of its isolation in the Islamic world and was visited by senior members of royal families, vice-presidents and other high-ranking politicians."[393] However, With the onset of the US-Iraq war and the beginning of Iranian influence in Iraq, and the coming of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the office in 2005, Iran-Saudi relations entered a new era.

6.3.   Ahmadinejad and Iranian nuclear program

Khatami's presidency proved that cooperation between Iran and the Arab states is possible. With the change in policy making of both countries, the process of normalizing relations has progressed. On the one hand, Iran needed the cooperation of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to regulate the oil market. On the other hand, the Arab countries were well aware that stability in the region would not be possible without Iran's participation. With the start of the U.S. - Iraq war and the fall of Saddam Hussein, one of the most important players in the Middle East policy who played the role of deterrent against Iran, was removed. Approaching the end of Khatami's presidency, Iran had to choose the president to create the best political and economic conditions based on Iran's national interests in light of regional changes.[394]

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was elected to the presidency in 2005, is considered a conservative who has sought to rid the country of corruption in an Islamic revolutionary way and to consolidate Iran's position in the region and even in the world. Ahmadinejad, like other hard-liner conservatives in Iran, believed that nuclear energy was Iran's indispensable right.[395] Here are his words: "Iran has the full right to have a peaceful nuclear technology for energy, medical and agricultural purposes and scientific progress'; this is the 'the right of the Iranian nation'[396] Iran's nuclear activities, which had been delayed at the outset of the revolution due to Iran's opposition to the West and Germany's failure to cooperate in the construction of nuclear power plants, were secretly operating during Khatami's time.

However, as the secret unfolded, international community concerns increased, and even the United States threatened a military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. European countries, meanwhile, have tried to resolve the issue through a dialogue with Khatami. According to Kasra Naji on November 15th, 2004, Britain, France, and Germany, acting on behalf of the European Union, persuaded Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment efforts while negotiations proceeded. Hassan Rohani agreed with the ambassadors of the three European powers to suspend fully all of Iran's nuclear enrichment activities at a late-night meeting in the former Shah's palace in northern Tehran.[397]

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[393] Ibid, 143.
[394] https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/First-presidential-term-of-Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad-conservatives-return-to-power (22.05.2021)
[395] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran's Foreign Policy from Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, 123.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (Oakland: University of California, 2008), 122.

However, the suspension of nuclear activities, signed in a statement called the Tehran Declaration, ended soon after Ahmadinejad came to power. Naji also notes: "He described Iran's march towards nuclear capability as 'a flood which cannot be stopped by a matchstick'. Rhetoric such as this has a tendency to frighten diplomats and provoke strong responses from the international community, but Ahmadinejad was careful to always continue to offer the possibility of diplomacy. 'We will hold talks from a rational point of view and if they accept our legitimate right, we'll cooperate,' he said about the negotiations with the EU3."[398]

Accordingly, the international pressures on Iran have increased as its nuclear program expanded. In response, Ahmadinejad switched the negotiating team and tried to use more conservative and hardline negotiators. During the Ahmadinejad period, Iran's political atmosphere was increasingly opposed to Western domination. He sought to prove to the world, and in particular the West, by acquiring nuclear energy and advances in technology, that Iran would not be dominated by superpowers and continue to challenge world powers. Warnnar notes: "under Ahmadinejad the nuclear issue was framed as a situation in which the West seeks to maintain its dominance over science and technology, so to dominate other countries. This means that Iran's fight against nuclear proliferation can be seen as a manifestation of Iran's resistance against this Western domination of science."[399]

Iran's hardline foreign policy organizations have reacted to international security constraints on the country's security policy. New tendencies in Iranian policy emerged as a result of these conditions. Various variables such as the international system, internal conditions, and political elites play a part in the foreign policy process of countries, as described in the theory section, during a time when international constraints and pressure on Iran had increased. It seemed obvious that fresh policy indications would find their way into the growing discourse. Influential factions in Iran were expected to react to the current situation as Western demands on the Islamic Republic escalated. The government of Ahmadinejad might be seen as a new turning point in Iran's foreign policy.

What had been developed in the context of discourse and the Islamic pragmatism model during Rafsanjani's time and then replicated in the context of the Islamic democratic discourse during Khatami's time had lost its status. The new international environment, as well as the circumstances in which new political elites arose, affected this. Hardliner elements in Iran's foreign policy have been intensified by international pressure. To put it another way, fresh indicators of diplomatic pressure as well as a "security danger" have developed in the country's political context. Such indications might be viewed as critical aspects in Iran's foreign policy shift. Iran created the foundation for larger opposition to Western threats and restrictive policies under emerging circumstances.[400]

On the other hand, it can be concluded that the amount of international pressure on Iran had increased in a way that resulted in the emergence of reactionary measures. Such actions can be considered in Iran's nuclear policy. When Iran was in a state of transparency and confidence-building, Western countries not only did not consider rewards for Iran's new foreign policy, but

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[398] Ibid, 123.
[399] Maaike Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad Ideology and Actions* (Springfield: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 145.
[400] Ali Fathollah Nejad, "Why Sanctions against Iran Are Counterproductive: Conflict Resolution and State–society Relations", *International Journal* vol. 69, no. 1 (2014): 63.

also imposed more restrictions on the security structure of the Islamic Republic. This shows that the conditions for reactionary behavior in Iran's foreign policy have been provided and, most importantly, that Iran has been able to reconstruct and reproduce the trends of resistance in its foreign policy.[401]

Ahmadinejad was attempting to send a message to all countries throughout the world that the era of great powers is coming to an end, and that emerging countries will soon take their place. His attitude may be seen in the 2010 deal reached with Turkey and Brazil. Ahmadinejad's administration's foreign policy was centered on a new narrative that stressed how world politics neglected world peace. To put it in another way, the shift in Iran's foreign policy was precipitated by the new political elites' disappointment and fear of Western approaches, as well as the sociocultural context in the country. They denounced discriminatory practices and advocated for a foreign policy approach based on effective resistance. Such a pattern created a security response to Western world politics. In this way, justice-oriented frameworks in the field of domestic politics are also reflected in the field of foreign policy. Iran's foreign policy experience has shown that a model of flexibility cannot be maintained in the face of U.S. neoconservative groups. As a result of such a perception, the ground was created for reactive actions and reciprocal behaviors. This extended manifestations of fundamentalism in domestic politics to the realm of resistance in the Iranian foreign policy.

These changes can be seen in the resistance policy of Ahmadinejad, in compare with the Hashemi Rafsanjani's pragmatism and the trust-building policy of Khatami. In the new trend, the role of ideology is more highlighted and the anti-American rhetorics are emphasized in the Iranian foreighn policy. As a result, after sixteen years of more moderate presidents, Iran resumed its revolutionary trajectory under Ahmadinejad, emphasizing enmity toward the United States. In such situations and environments, fundamentalist rhetoric crosses the border from domestic politics to international policy. Fundamentalist speech establishes the identity-building component that distinguishes "self" and "others." This became the key focus and center of gravity of the fundamentalist narrative of Iran's national identity during that time period.[402]

In this regard, two indicators of international behavior can be considered as a reflection of the processes related to effective resistance in Iran's foreign policy. The first sign of this is the holding of three rounds of Iran-U.S. talks on equal terms. To put it in another way, in such a context, one can see signs that Iran's security resistance has led to U.S. policy flexibility, and they have agreed to consider a balanced and coordinated policy regarding Iraq. This can be regarded as a sign of acceptance of Iran's regional role in Iraq. In such circumstances, the Americans accepted Iran as an actor with a regional political role in Iraq. Obviously, the role of Iran's policy in neighboring countries and in the context of resisting U.S. threats can be considered an influential factor in achieving such a success. [403]

The second sign of a change in the framework of the effective resistance discourse can be seen in relation to the Islamic Republic's nuclear policy. The Americans, as well as European countries, have always stressed the need to stop and suspend uranium enrichment by Iran, and have made it

[401] https://www.president.ir/EN/87600 (09.10.2020)

[402] Firoozabadi Jalal Dehghani, "The Discourse of Justice-Based Fundamentalism in the Foreign Policy of Ahmadinejad's Government", *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* vol. 3, no. 5 (2007), 77.

[403] Eugene Whitlock, ed. "Iran and Its Neighbors: Diverging Views on a Strategic Region", *German Institute for International and Security Affairs* II (2003): 17

a precondition for face-to-face negotiations. Such a tendency was met with a reaction from Iran. The indicators of effective foreign policy resistance stem from Iran's strategic strength and asymmetric resistance in the security sphere. In such a situation and atmosphere, new signs of security emerged. Hence, Western countries changed what they had said as a precondition for direct talks on Iran's nuclear program, paving the way for the Geneva summit. Naturally, the transition from a situation in which the Americans emphasized a preconditional implementation policy can be considered another success of Iran's security policy.[404] The acceptance of the Geneva Conference took place at a time when the defense and strategic structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran had achieved new capabilities in the field of security. This gradually provided the grounds for the increase of Iran's national power from the 1990s onwards.

6.4.   Saudis' fear of Iranian nuclear program

With Ahmadinejad's victory in the election and his new orientation in the political arena, the Arab countires and the Persian Gulf countries felt threatened. Ahmadinejad, who sought to restore respect, dignity, and power to Shiite Islamic Iran, believed that the best way to achieve this goal was to achieve nuclear power. Ehteshami notes: "The GCC countries are anxious about three main issues: the Russian technology used by Iran, the programme's environmental impact and also the possibility of its acceleration and an American attack on Iran."[405]

In an effort to deter Iran from advancing in nuclear technology, the Gulf Cooperation Countries sought to bargain with Europeans and Americans, on the one hand, to halt Iran's nuclear program, and on the other, to seek a way to achieve this technology by themselves. It should be noted that while Iran's Arab neighbors strongly opposed Iran's nuclear program, they did not seek a U.S. invasion of Iran and additional tensions in the region. However, although most of the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia are allies of the U.S., the idea of advancing their nuclear technology seems unlikely to be welcomed by the Bush administration. One of the most important reasons for America's reluctance to assist Arabs in advancing nuclear technology is the fear of increased competition for nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Most interestingly, the United States has successfully identified Iran as the biggest threat to Arab states, not Israel.

The Iraq's invasion and Iranian intervention in Iraq was the best justification for America's success regarding this issue. Warnaar notes: "Saudi Arabia, however, saw its influence in Iraq and Lebanon threatened by the growing Iranian influence, curbed this challenge by stressing a 'Persian threat', and thus emphasizing Iran's Shi'a identity and regional sectarian conflicts. Saudi newspapers even called Iran 'more dangerous than Israel itself' and warned that the 'Iranian revolution has come to renew the Persian presence in the region'."[406]

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[404] Ebrahim Mottaqi, "Indicators and Function of Interactive Foreign Policy against Dominance", *Quarterly Journal of Defense Strategy* vol. 8, no. 95 (2010), 28.
[405] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran's ForeignPolicy From Khatami to Ahmadinejad* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2008), 125.
[406] Maaike Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad Ideology and Actions*, 118.

Ahmadinejad visited Saudi Arabia and attended the Hajj, while relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were in full swing. Although, many efforts have been made to normalize relations, but regional issues have left the two countries apart. On the other hand, as Iran's nuclear program accelerated, Saudi Arabia was worried that Iran would become a regional hegemonic power that would no longer pave the way for Saudi influence. Wikileaks documents show that Saudi Arabia has lost hope in a diplomatic solution and is seeking to eliminate the Iranian regime.

Warnaar states: "The 2010 'Wikileaks' were taken as evidence of the United States' hegemonic goals in the region, including regime change in Iran, but at the same time Ahmadinejad downplayed Arab hostility toward Iran (such as Saudi King Abdullah's remark that the United States should "cut off the head of the snake," implying a military strike on Iran) as "propaganda": "We are friends with the regional countries and mischievous acts will not affect relations," he said.[407]

The pre - Arab Spring conditions and the high oil prices seem to have allowed Ahmadinejad to continue his policy of resisting the U.S. and to pursue Iran's nuclear program despite threats of war, sanctions, and isolation. Despite Saudi Arabia's concern over Iran's nuclear program and pressure from the West, especially the United States, Ahmadinejad pushed for the Iranian nuclear program to the extent that Iran suffered the most severe sanctions during its lifetime. Ahmadinejad, however, has also created a new concept of foreign relations in the political world, in which the role of the major global players is "worthless", and the solidarity of developing countries is emphasized. During Ahmadinejad's eight-year presidency, tensions overshadowed relations between the two countries during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. Relations returned to the prevailing pattern of the first period after the Islamic Revolution. During this period, ideological and geopolitical rivalries intensified at the same time.

This period's distinguishing feature was Saudi Arabia's departure from a conservative orientation and the adoption of an active and aggressive approach in foreign policy, and the prominence of its ideological approach and support for extremist Salafism at the regional level. During this period, due to the emergence of some important new issues, such as Iran's nuclear program, the case of Iraq and the Shiite crescent, the problems of Lebanon, as well as Syria and Bahrain, and the tightening of Iran's security circle by the international system, divergence in relations between the two countries not only decreased but continued and even intensified.[408]

Looking at the history of Iran's relations with the Arab countries, we find that regional, structural and systemic variables, even during the presidency of Hashemi (who had a convergent personality with the Arabs), and during Khatami and Rouhani (who chanted slogans of de-escalation and moderation in foreign policy), have been influencing these relationships. During Ahmadinejad's presidency, the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia escalated. The acceleration of the Iranian nuclear program, Iran's influence in Iraq, the Lebanese case and Iran's support for the resistance in the region, the accusation of assassinating the Saudi ambassador to the United States, were among the most important tensions between the two countries at that

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[407] Ibid, 121.

[408] Ali Akbar Asaddi, "Saudi Arabia's New Foreign Policy; Implications for Iran's regional power", *Strategic Future Research Horizon* (2009), 6-7.

time. These tensions, both quantitatively and qualitatively, have probably never existed since the Iran-Iraq war.

In ideological foreign policy, there is generally not much belief in international organizations. It is considered a tool in the hands of powers to exploit other nations, and, as a result, this foreign policy seeks to challenge the status quo.[409] The Iranian nuclear crisis and the political and media stream against it made Saudi Arabia align itself with the West in its competition with Iran. They believe that Iran's nuclear weapons acquisition will allow Iran a wider hegemonic ambition to change the regional balance. Saudi Arabia fears of Iran's acquisition of the nuclear weapon stems from the region's resistance model's success and the strengthening of Iran's allies.[410] Thus, from the beginning of the Iranian nuclear issue, Saudi Arabia made efforts to acquire nuclear weapons; For example, Chas Freeman, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia in 2003 exposed some Saudi officials' private statements to obtain a nuclear weapon.[411] Of course, even though Saudi Arabia and other Cooperation Council members do not have the nuclear knowledge and uranium resources, even at the laboratory level, to acquire nuclear weapons. However, some Gulf Cooperation Council members, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, have reached nuclear energy agreements with the United States and France. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has tried to buy nuclear warheads from abroad, given good Saudi-Pakistani relations and Riyadh's financial aid to Islamabad.[412]

However, it seems that during Ahmadinejad's presidency, Saudi Arabia did not have a clear policy about Iran's nuclear program. On the one hand, Iran's entry into the nuclear club, the upgrading of its technical capability and knowledge, the possibility of greater domination of the Persian Gulf, and even the acquisition of nuclear weapons and environmental threats, was pushing Saudi Arabia to use any means in stoping Iran's nuclear program. On the other hand, there was also a possibility of endangering the security of the Persian Gulf. In the event of a military attack on Iran specially by the US and Israel, and the uncertainty of the level and extent of Iran's reaction to the conflict process in the region, led Saudi Arabia to emphasize the need for a diplomatic settlement.

6.5.   U.S. sanctions against Iran during Ahmadinejad

In the years following the Islamic Revolution, the United States imposed various sanctions on Iran. Still, the most severe round of sanctions against Iran coincided with the rise of Ahmadinejad. As the dimensions of Iran's nuclear program unfolded in Natanz in 2003, the

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[409] Shahrooz Ebrahimi, "Deconstructive Study of the Role of Ideology in Iran's Foreign Policy and Its Relationships with Realism and Idealism*" International Quarterly of International Relations* no. 4 (2016), 129.
[410] Shashank Joshi and Michael Stephens, "An Uncertain Future: Regional Responses to Iran's Nuclear Programme", the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, Whitehall Report 4-13 (2013), 11-12.
[411] Thomas Lippman, "Saudi Arabia: The Calculations of Uncertainty" in Mitchell Reiss, Robert Einhorn, and Kurt Campbell, (eds) *The Nuclear Tipping Point* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 2004): 129.
[412] Tariq Khaitous, *Arab Reactions to a Nuclear-Armed Iran* (Washington D.C.: Washington institute for Near East Policy, 2009): 12.

pressure mounted on the then-Khatami administration.[413] The threat of U.N. sanctions convinced Iran to temporarily sign an agreement with three European countries with the purpose of stopping enrichment. According to the website globalpolicy.org: "The U.S., however, alleged that the program is part of a drive to develop nuclear weapons and sought to refer the Iranian case to the Security Council. However, in November 2004, Tehran signed a temporary agreement with Germany, France and Britain to cease uranium enrichment and the IAEA issued Iran a clean bill of health, effectively avoiding Security Council intervention. Nevertheless, the IAEA said it could not confirm that Iran was not pursuing undeclared nuclear activities and referred the case to the U.N. Security Council."[414]

Ahmadinejad, who was the elected president in August 2005, went the other way. He accused Western powers of bullying, saying that the only way for Iran to progress was to resist the West, especially the United States.[415] Ahmadinejad defended Iran's nuclear program and refused to halt enrichment, and that was the reason that Iran experienced the heaviest sanctions since the Islamic revolution. The United States, which was convinced that they could not reach a compromise with Ahmadinejad at the time, tried to bring him back to the negotiating table by imposing the most severe sanctions in coordination with United Nations. According to the news agency *Euronews*: "U.N. Security Council adopts resolution 1929 on 9 June 2010, following the complexity of Iran's nuclear activities. The focus of the resolution was to establish a unified system of sanctions on Iran by stepping up pressure on Iran's energy, financial and air and maritime sectors to prevent the development of the Islamic Republic's missile and nuclear programs. Immediately after the Security Council resolution was passed, President Barack Obama signed the CISSADA Act, imposing a comprehensive sanction on Iran."[416]

The main factor in increasing the sanctions during Ahmadinejad's years has been discussing Iran's nuclear energy and the West's concern about the arms embargo. As Drezner explains: "the violation of the prohibition by the enemy will be met with a more severe reaction than violation by allies."[417] Furthermore, if large countries resort to hostile behavior, they are perceived as a threat more quickly than the small ones.[418] However, small countries can also be considered a threat because of their involvement in terrorist activities or nuclear power.

Hence, regardless of the size, goals, and capabilities of a country will create a balance against military or economic power. Drezner believes that countries' expectations for future conflict and the potential costs they may incur in the event of a stalemate situation, are key reasons for the sanctions to succeed. He speaks about "sanctions paradox" in which, if the problem remains the same, the countries imposing sanctions are ready to use force on enemy countries. Still, they are reluctant to do so against allies.[419]

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[413] https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security-council/index-of-countries-on-the-security-council-agenda/iran.html (08.07.2021)

[414] https://www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/index-of-countries-on-the-security-council-agenda/iran.html (18.03.2020)

[415] https://www.france24.com/en/20080923-ahmadinejad-lashes-out-western-bullying-iran (29.06.2021)

[416] https://farsi.euronews.com/2019/09/05/comparison-between-obama-trump-administration-sanctions-effects-iran-economy (18.03.2020)

[417] Daniel W. Drezner, *The sanctions paradox*: *Economic Statecraft and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 73.

[418] Ibid, 41.

[419] Ibid.

The paradox is that sanctions are often more successful against allies than the enemies themselves, and because of the relative interests, allies are more accessible to surrender than opponents.[420] On the other hand, the enemy country feels that if it surrenders, it will lose its position in the negotiations. Rather, it would directly increase the relative achievement of the applying country and increase that country's leverage in future disputes. That is why the enemies simply do not accept the demands of sanctions. According to neorealists, incentives are provided to enemy countries only in minimal circumstances.[421]

In this way, "the requests become non-negotiable, the incentives become very attractive for the target country, and in return, there is almost no cost for the host country."[422] Another discussion is about the financial and economic costs of sanctions from a Western perspective. The lower the expected costs (immediate or future), the more likely it is that sanctions will be considered as a viable option. The higher the cost, the less likely it is for sanctions to be imposed. This has been the case in previous studies, when U.S. interests are threatened, economic costs do not preclude U.S. sanctions.[423]

In summary, regarding sanctions, the following relations can be defined concerning the sanctioner and the subject to be sanctioned:

- The more a country that violates international rules and structure poses a more significant threat to major powers, especially the European Union and the United States, the more likely it is to impose sanctions;
- Enemies are likely to be sanctioned more severely than allies. Incentives are more likely to be given to allies than to enemies;
- The more important a country is in terms of trade, market, ownership of oil or nuclear energy, or geographical proximity, the less likely it is to impose a sanction against it.[424]

As Iran is not considered a friendly country and does not have much trade with the United States, it has not easily accepted these sanctions and has opposed them. Because of this low level of trade and economic exchanges between Iran and the West, especially the United States and Israel, these countries are trying to impose maximum sanctions; As they are not harmed in terms of severing economic ties. On the other hand, China and Russia are trying to balance these sanctions and prevent war because they have more interests than the West in Iran.

However, despite the heavy pressure of sanctions on the Iranian oil industry, the high price of oil in those days helped Iran not to be in a difficult situation and to tolerate the sanctions. As Ahmadinejad neared the end of his presidency, Iran was plagued by problems. On the one hand, economic corruption, and on the other hand, economic sanctions had a profound effect on the Iranian economy. With the fall in oil prices in the final years of Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran was no longer in a position of power and had to take a different approach with the West. It was at this time that dialogue with the West, and in particular the United States, again became a

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[420] Ibid, 52.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Richard J. Elling, *Embargoes and World Power: Lessons from America Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985): 40.
[424] Richard Nephew, *The Art of Sanctions: A View from the Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 40.

political discourse in Iran. Hassan Rouhani, who was backed by Mohammad Khatami, former reformist president and advocate of dialogue with the West, announced himself as a candidate for the presidency.

6.6.   Conclusion

Mohammad Khatami was elected president in 1997 after Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. He was one of the most influential reformers in the contemporary history of Iran, who was very successful in softening the image of the Islamic Republic in the international community. Khatami sought to improve Iran's relations with the outside world, including in the region, Europe, and the United States, through the "Dialogue of Civilizations" project. The Islamic Republic's relations with the countries of the region, the West and the United States were severely damaged after the revolution. However, Khatami was able to establish diplomatic relations with various countries through fundamental changes in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. Khatami wanted to lead the country towards modernization while preserving Islamic values in Iranian society. Although at the same time inside the country, extremists strongly criticized him and opposed relations with the West, Khatami had the support of many academic and elite groups.

The "Dialogue of Civilizations" project sent a clear message to the world that Iran was ready to come out from political isolation and engage in dialogue with all nations of the world. While the Rafsanjani's period was based on the model of economic development, the Khatami's period was based on the model of political development. During his presidency period, Khatami was able to relatively improve relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and some meetings were held between officials of the two countries. Nevertheless, important issues such as Iran's support for Hezbollah and Shiite groups in the region, disputes with the United States, and Iran's nuclear program were serious obstacles to improving Iran-Saudi relations. However, Rafsanjani and Khatami were able to mark a new era in relations with the outside world, especially with Saudi Arabia. And Khatami could effectively show the world that Iran is ready to cooperate with the international community and is a country that is rational and ready for dialogue.

Iran under Khatami has proven that it is possible to improve relations with Saudi Arabia if there is political will. There were also various issues and areas of cooperation between the two countries, at that time including cooperation in the field of terrorism, drug trafficking, Hajj, and economic cooperation. However, internal pressure on the one hand, and external barriers on the other, prevented Khatami to solve Iran and Saudi Arabia conflict even with a good idea of "dialogue between civilizations". Nonetheless, one should keep in mind that the problems of Iran and Saudi Arabia cannot be resolved without the resolution of the Iran - U.S. disagreements. Until Iran or the United States find a diplomatic solution to the dispute, the region and the hostility of Iran and Saudi Arabia will remain the same. Besides, the conflicts between Iran and the United States have made the U.S. present a wrong picture of Iran in the region, which is far from the truth. Israel's role in threatening the Middle East, and emphasizing its opposition to Iranian influence also reflects this American policy.

The final year of Khatami's presidency, however, coincided with the start of the U.S.-Iraq war in 2005, and the region's geopolitics were changing dramatically. While Iran had improved its international relations by this year, with the beginning of the occupation of Iraq and the collapse

of one of the pillars of power in the Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia were looking for a new position in the region. This drastic change in the geopolitics of the region exacerbated tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia as two regional powers.

While the tensions were rising in the Middle East, in Iran, the president came to power from the hardliners and close to the Iranian leader. Ahmadinejad, who was elected president in 2005, had revolutionary and anti-Western leanings. He was very pessimistic about the West, especially the United States, and therefore sought to strengthen Iran's military as much as possible. Although Iran's nuclear program was delayed under Khatami, it accelerated under Ahmadinejad, and uranium enrichment continued under his administration, regardless of U.S. and Saudi Arabia's concerns. Ahmadinejad sought to send a single message to the world that the era of superpowers was over. He believed that Iran could have better relations with other developing countries, such as Brazil or Turkey, in order to reduce its dependence on superpowers.

In general, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic under Ahmadinejad was exactly the opposite of Khatami's foreign policy. Khatami sought dialogue and improvement in the relations with the West, while Ahmadinejad did not see any need for dialogue and believed that by expanding cooperation with other countries, he could circumvent the West. During this period, Ahmadinejad increased uranium enrichment and caused concern in the region and European countries about Iran's intention to build a nuclear weapon. Saudi Arabia was one of the most concerned countries in the region about Iran's nuclear program. The Saudi kings knew very well that if Iran acquired a nuclear weapon, it would become a complete regional hegemon that could no longer be controlled. For this reason, they made many diplomatic efforts in front and behind the scenes against this program. The Saudi kings wanted to form a consensus with other GCC countries, in order to negotiate with European countries and the United States to stop Iran.

The Americans were also deeply concerned about the launch of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and sought to halt or at least slow down the Iranian program. For this reason, Iran went through one of the most difficult sanctions during this period. The United States has tried to put economic pressure on Iran by imposing sanctions on key industries such as oil and gas, in order to bring Iranian officials to the negotiating table. Although the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is reminiscent of the era of economic pressure, sanctions and the shadow of war with Iran, he was able to prevent the complete collapse of Iran's economy thanks to high oil prices and Oil vs. Commodities economic relations. Ahmadinejad never slowed down on enrichment and did not succumb to economic pressures that had caused severe domestic discontent in Iran.

During this period, Ahmadinejad travelled to Saudi Arabia and participated in the Hajj. However, while there seemed to be a chance to improve relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, key issues such as Iran's nuclear program, Iran's role in the region and support for Shiite militias, and disputes with the United States remain serious obstacles to improving relations. It can be said that Ahmadinejad's period was a return of Iran to the revolutionary ideals of Ayatollah Khomeini's time. He wanted to take the third path in which the superpowers did not decide the fate of other countries and did not impose their policies on them. Taking such a path, however, was costly for the country and the people of Iran, and the effects of sanctions continue to undermine Iran's economy.

With the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran has taken another approach in its regional and foreign policy. Accelerating the nuclear program and advancing foreign policy by relying on emerging powers, and not the great powers, were among Ahmadinejad's policies during his presidency. Although Iran experienced the toughest U.N. and U.S. sanctions during Ahmadinejad's presidency, it was able to resist the West and the U.S., mainly relying on high oil prices in those years. However, in the final years of Ahmadinejad, with the decline in oil prices and corruption within the political and economic system, discontent among the Iranian people increased, and internal and external pressures convinced Iranian people to vote for the candidate who has been backed by reformists and supporters of negotiation with the West.

7. Rouhani and Nuclear Deal

7.1. Rouhani's Election and Nuclear Deal

Hassan Rouhani, who was elected president of Iran in June 2013, began his campaign with the motto of devotion and hope. In addition to numerous domestic challenges, such as poor economic conditions, corruption, and the inefficiency of the political system, he also faced external challenges such as widespread international sanctions, proxy wars in the region, and the oil sales crisis. While Ahmadinejad had become an anti-Western (anti-American) and anti-Israeli figure, and both U.S. and Israel in some periods threatened to wage a military war against Iran. Still, he did not show any flexibility in his policymaking, especially when it came to nuclear energy. However, Rouhani was trying to lift the sanctions on Iran by talking to the West and the United States in particular.

Rouhani came to the presidency in Iran when the situation in the Middle East region was extremely complicated. The Arab Spring had affected all the countries of the region and even Africa. Iran was happy about the fall of some rulers on the one hand and worried about the fall of its backed regimes, including Syria on the other hand. Rouhani had to decide whether he wanted to follow Ahmadinejad's policy in regional politics or not. He tried to present a better image of the Islamic Republic in the international arena so that he could end the nuclear dispute successfully after years of dialogue with the West. At the same time, he wanted to maintain Iran's position in the region by interfering in the internal policy of the Middle East countries.

Rouhani, who was in charge of dialogue with the West during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, found the resolution of Iran's economic problems in resolving disputes with the West, especially the United States.[425] Also, he had studied in England and had been talking to Westerners for several years. According to Akbarzadeh: "Rouhani had garnered respect for his conduct in the role—the former-British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, described him as "warm and engaging...a strong Iranian patriot[who]was tough but fair to deal with and always on top of his brief." Straw added that, "Rouhani was plainly anxious to bring about a settlement of the long-running conflict between Iran and the West. The same year, Rouhani broke ranks with his colleagues by thanking the United States for the humanitarian aid it provided after the disastrous Bam earthquake."[426]

Hassan Rouhani has tried to open a new chapter in the Iran's relations on both regional and international level, which was based on a kind of detente approach and interaction with the international system. Moderation became Rouhani's dominant discourse, and an adjustment was made to the foreign policy ideology of the previous government. In the first post-election press conference, Rouhani expressed his desire to renew relations with Saudi Arabia and change it within the framework of respect and mutually beneficial arrangements.[427] Accordingly, Saudi Arabia, at the beginning of the new Iranian government, believed that this rationality had created a new atmosphere for both countries to have a more positive view of Iran.[428] However, in this period, the continuation of regional challenges and the competition of Iran and Saudi Arabia for regional influence caused the escalation of existing conflicts, including in Syria and Yemen. [429]

During this period, the escalation of regional conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, on the one hand, and the achievement of Iran and the West in a nuclear agreement, on the other, added to the deepening rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's main concern is the rise to power of Shiite groups such as Ansar al-Allah and the Houthis in Yemen, which are affiliated with Iran. Also, from Saudi Arabia's point of view, Iran's ambitions and military capabilities may increase its influence over OPEC and the Saudi Shiite minority.[430] In addition to eliminating economic sanctions, the Iranian nuclear agreement could strengthen links between Iran and Europe, improve Iran's economic power, and, as a result, strengthen Iran's strategic capacity to help its regional allies (such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Ansarullah). As a result, it is clear that one of the determining elements in the evolution of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia was the occurrence of events that altered the region's geopolitics and increased competition between the two countries. These issues are worsened by identity and ideological factors under these circumstances.

Iran's nuclear program has always caused many problems for Iran with the West. Sanctions by the United States, the United Nations, and the international community have caused many difficulties in Iranian oil exports. Rouhani, who had received the support of the Islamic

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[425] Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit, *Iran in the World: President Rouhani's Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), 3.

[426] Ibid.

[427] Meena Singh Roy, Rajeev Agarwal, Prasanta Kumar Pradhan and Mahtab Alam Rizvi, "Iran under Hassan Rohani: Imperatives for the Region and India", *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)* (2013): 5.

[428] Meena Singh Roy, Rajeev Agarwal, Prasanta Kumar Pradhan and Mahtab Alam Rizvi "Iran under Hassan Rohani: Imperatives for the Region and India", 5.

[429] Peter Salisbury, "Yemen and the Saudi–Iranian Cold War", *Chatham House* (2015): 1.

[430] Vali Nasr, "When the Shiites Rise", *Foreign Affairs* vol. 85, no. 4 (2006): 59.

Republic's leader under the slogan of "heroic flexibility", was soon ready to talk to the West. Akbarzadeh notes: "Rouhani quickly put this pledge into action. Within two months of inauguration, Rouhani had held a historic phone call with U.S. President Barack Obama, becoming the first Iranian and U.S. presidents to speak directly since the Iranian revolution in 1979. Over the following two years, Rouhani and Obama fomented an unprecedented thaw in U.S.–Iran relations, leading to a resolution of the nuclear issue and a significant improvement in Iran's international reputation."[431]

Hence, history of hostility between the two countries, did not prevent Rouhani from solving the problem with Americans. While Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was preparing to talk to P5+1, Israel and Saudi Arabia were taking every opportunity to oppose the deal. They believed that the nuclear deal would boost Iran's economic and military power and ultimately increase its influence in the region. Jett noted that Hasan Rouhani was elected president in August 2013, and three months later, Iran and the P5+1[432] struck a tentative deal. The Joint Plan of Action, the interim accord, went into effect in January 2014. The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that Iran respects the agreement, which requires it to suspend uranium enrichment to 20%, dilute half of its 20 percent enriched uranium stockpile to 3.5 percent, and halt construction on a heavy water reactor. In addition, the IAEA began conducting more intrusive and regular inspections. Simultaneously, the U.S. and the European Union made efforts to relax sanctions and free Iranian oil funds stored in other nations.

A nuclear agreement was finally reached in July 2015, after months of discussions between Iran and the P5+1. Iran and the P5+1 agreed to reduce Iran's enrichment capacity in order to end U.N., U.S., and EU sanctions. The obligations of Iran and the signatory nations are summarized in the table below.[433] The JCPOA between Iran and 5+1 and reaching an agreement on the program's implementation has significant implications for the political, economic, and diplomatic relations between the two countries. In Saudi Arabia's view, the nuclear deal has strengthened the Islamic Republic, instead of preventing it from emerging as a nuclear power. Some analysts even believe that the Nuclear Deal has intensified proxy wars in the region. As an oil actor, Saudi Arabia has tried to put pressure on Iran by taking measures such as increasing oil production, thus reducing Iran's oil revenues as much as possible. The nuclear deal's direct impact on improving the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in the region is so evident that Iran's regional opponents, including Saudi Arabia and regional rivals such as Turkey, have increased their military intervention and adventurism in the region, preferring political isolation and sanctions against Iran. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states are skeptical about the Nuclear deal, and believe that Iran's agreement will lead to Iran's unbridled power in the region.

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[431] Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit, *Iran in the World: President Rouhani's Foreign Policy*, 7.
[432] China, France, Russia, the UK, the US; and Germany

[433] https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance (29.06.2021)

Table 8. Key requirements and actions mandated by the The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)[434]

(Source: https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance)

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[434] https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance (22.06.2020)

Enrichment	• For 10 years operating centrifuges reduced to 5,060 IR-1 machines, total machines is 6,104 IR-1s • Excess centrifuges (over 13,000) dismantled and stored under IAEA monitoring • For 15 years level of uranium enrichment capped at 3.67 percent uranium-235 • For 15 years enrichment only at Natanz • For 10 years no production of additional IR-1 centrifuges • Between years 11-13 Iran can replace IR-1s with the equivalent capacity of IR-6 and IR-8 machines and limits lasting to years 14-15
Uranium Stockpile	• For 15 years the stockpile is kept under 300 kilograms of 3.67 percent enriched uranium in total (all forms) • Excess enriched uranium sold, shipped abroad for storage, or diluted to natural uranium levels • Uranium oxide and scrap material enriched up to 20 percent fabricated into fuel for Tehran Research Reactor, blended down, or shipped out
Fordow	• Converted to research facility for stable isotope production with Russian cooperation • 1,044 IR-1 centrifuges in six cascades will remain here, 328 for production, the remaining 700 are idle • For 15 years no introduction of uranium at the facility
Advanced Centrifuge Research and Development	• For 8.5 years Iran may conduct research with uranium on a single IR-4, IR-5, IR-6 and IR-8 centrifuge at Natanz • After 8.5 years test up to 30 IR-6s and 30 IR-8s • After 8 years manufacture up to 200 IR-6s and 200 IR-8s centrifuges without rotors • For 10 years Joint Commission review and approval of changes to the research and development plan
Arak Reactor	• Remove and disable the original core of the Arak reactor • Replace the core of the Arak reactor to reduce weapons-grade plutonium output, certified by the Joint Commission • For 15 years no reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel with an intention to never reprocess • Permanent commitment to ship out spent nuclear fuel • For 15 years no heavy-water reactors in Iran • For 15 years no accumulation of heavy water in Iran • Construction of hot cells or shielded glove boxes of certain specifications subject to approval of the Joint Commission

Monitoring and Verification	• By 15 October 2015 Iran fully implements PMD "roadmap" agreed with IAEA
	• For 10 years approval of the purchase of dual-use materials by the Joint Commission working group
	• For 25 years continuous monitoring of Iran's uranium mines and mills
	• For 20 years continuous monitoring of Iran's centrifuge production facilities
	• For 15 years Joint Commission oversight of IAEA access requests to inspect undeclared sites
	• Permanent prohibition of certain weaponization related activities
	• Implementation and eventual ratification of an additional protocol to Iran's safeguards agreement
	• Permanent implementation of modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements to its Safeguards Agreement
Joint Commission	• For 25 years Joint Commission (composed of P5+1, EU and Iran for a total of 8 voting members) will hold quarterly meetings, or by request, to oversee the deal
	• Dispute resolution mechanism within 35 days; 15 day dispute resolution mechanism within the Joint Commission, with optional 15 day ministerial review and/or arbitration opinion from a 3 member panel, followed by 5 day review of the arbitration opinion. If no resolution and complaining party sees action as "significant non-performance," the unresolved issue can be treated as grounds to cease performing commitments in whole or part, complaining party will notify UN Security Council
	• Any party can go to the UN Security Council to put sanctions back in place if there is noncompliance by vetoing a resolution calling for the continuance of sanctions
UN Sanctions	• UNSC resolution 2231 endorsing JCPOA outlines termination of all previous resolutions targeting Iran's nuclear program—1696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), 1835 (2008), 1929 (2010)—on implementation day.
	• For 10 years sanctions are subject to snapback by veto of a resolution calling for the continuation of suspension
	• After 10 years UN will cease to be seized of Iran's nuclear file
	• For 5 years the heavy arms embargo will remain in place
	• For 8 years the ballistic missile restrictions will remain in place
U.S. Sanctions	• Cease the application of economic sanctions against Iran's oil and banking sector allowing Iranian banks and companies to reconnect with international systems
	• Will remove designation of certain entities and individuals
	• Allows for licensed non-U.S. entities that are owned or controlled by a U.S. person to engage in activities with Iran permitted under JCPOA
	• Allows for the sale of commercial passenger aircraft to Iran
	• Allows for license for importing Iranian-origin carpets and foodstuffs into United States
	• United States takes appropriate measures to address laws at state or local level preventing full implementation of JCPOA – United States will actively encourage officials to adhere to JCPOA policy
	• For 8 years after Adoption date, or sooner if IAEA concludes that all nuclear activity in Iran remains peaceful, U.S. will seek legislative action to terminate/modify nuclear related sanctions
	• U.S. sanctions on Iran targeting human rights, terrorism and missile activities remain
	• United States can impose additional sanctions for non-nuclear issues (terrorism, human rights, etc.)
EU Sanctions	• Terminate all provisions of the EU Regulation related to Iran's nuclear program
	• Includes: financial and banking transactions; transactions in Iranian Rial; provision of U.S. banknotes to Iranian government; access to SWIFT; insurance services; efforts to reduce Iran's crude oil and petrochemical product sales; investment; transactions with Iran's energy and shipping sector; trade in gold and other precious metals; trade with Iran's automotive sector
	• Removes individuals and entities designated under sanctions
	• EU refrains from re-introducing sanctions terminated under JCPOA (Iran views any re-introduction as grounds to cease performing its commitments)
	• Refrain from policy intended to adversely affect normalization of economic relations with Iran
	• For 8 years after adoption day or at the finding of the IAEA broader conclusion EU's arms embargo and restrictions on transfer of ballistic missiles remain

7.2. Trump administration and withdrawal from JCPOA

While Obama and Rouhani were under enormous pressure from hardliners in their home countries, both of them were determined to reach the nuclear deal. The deep mistrust that had formed between the two countries over many years was the reason for the hardliners' insistence on disagreement. Also, the role of Israel and Saudi Arabia in creating barriers to an agreement should not be neglected. Israel has been trying to block the deal by spending millions of dollars and lobbying, and Saudi Arabia has insisted that a nuclear deal would help Iran expanding its influence among its Shia supporters and would threaten the security in the region.

However, politicians in both countries knew that the future of the political relationship between the two countries depended on this agreement. Akbarzadeh notes: "Iranian officials repeatedly emphasized that the future prospects for Iran–U.S. relations were intertwined with, and contingent upon, a resolution of the nuclear issue. As such, their ability to reach a comprehensive agreement will either serve to challenge their institutionalized enmity or reify the legitimacy of their grievances and mistrust." [435] As a result, according to Akbarzadeh, developments in the nuclear talks will likely influence the sorts of approach (cooperation vs. confrontation) that Iran prioritizes in areas where it interacts with the U.S.[436]

Donald Trump, who has repeatedly criticized Iran's nuclear deal during his election campaign, called the deal wrong and even horrible.[437] In his campaign, he has repeatedly insisted that he will reconsider a nuclear deal with Iran if he becomes the president. Although the IAEA has closely scrutinized Iran's commitments to the JCPOA since the nuclear deal and confirmed that Iran is committed to the deal, Trump was confident that the agreement was not enough and that Iran remained a major regional and global threat. Even those who worked with Trump in the presidential cabinet disagreed with him about leaving the deal. In his article, Zack Beauchamp notes: "Trump's recent Cabinet reshuffle also made his decision seem inevitable. The president fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, both of whom thought the U.S. should stay in the deal, and replaced them with Mike Pompeo and John Bolton, respectively."[438] Pompeo and Bolton are both Iran hardliners who have long opposed the agreement. Trump was effectively surrounded by yes men as he made one of the most important choices of his presidency.[439]

In line with this policy, he withdrew from many international treaties, restricted the illegal entry of immigrants into the United States, reduced the U.N. budget, excluded the United States from UNESCO, and began building a 3000 kilometres wall on the Mexican border. According to Richard Haas, president of the Council on Foreign Relations and author, Trump follows the doctrine of retreating from international responsibility as the hegemon of the established regime.[440] Salehian notes: "While the nuclear deal demonstrated the importance of diplomacy

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[435] Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit, *Iran in the World: President Rouhani's Foreign Policy*, 51.
[436] Ibid.
[437] https://www.newscientist.com/article/2168438-trump-says-the-iran-nuclear-deal-is-bad-heres-why-hes-wrong/ (29.06.2021)
[438] https://www.vox.com/world/2018/5/8/17328520/iran-nuclear-deal-trump-withdraw (27.03.2020)
[439] https://www.vox.com/world/2018/5/8/17328520/iran-nuclear-deal-trump-withdraw (27.03.2020)
[440] https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/05/27/trumps-foreign-policy-doctrine-withdrawal-doctrine/ (29.06.2021)

and negotiation in international conflicts and crises, the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement obscured this issue's future and the future of diplomacy by relying on international institutions such as the United Nations and the Security Council."[441]

Trump has not signed any international agreements since taking office, according to his withdrawal doctrine, and has only signed a multibillion-dollar arms contract with Saudi Arabia, which cannot be considered a multilateral international pact. Instead, the US president has played a questionable role in international treaties, withdrawing from key international agreements on several occasions. Conservative and radical nationalism are characteristics of Trump's actions under the "exit doctrine." Trump's opposition to free trade agreements, international agreements such as the nuclear deal, cuts in foreign aid budgets, reduced pre-NATO commitments, and even US Middle East allies such as Saudi Arabia, as well as increased U.S. military budgets, demonstrate extreme nationalism in American politics. Through a type of hegemonic isolationism, Trump's nationalism also insists on maintaining and growing America's national interests. Hegemonic isolationism strives to maintain American hegemony and avoid any threat to it, rather than restricting American influence in the international system. It has made the United States hesitant to promote foreign collaboration and interaction.[442]

However, while Trump was preparing to withdraw from the nuclear deal, he also warned other European countries not to compromise with Iran.[443] While other P5+1 countries criticized the United States, they were also concerned about the consequences of Trump's withdrawal from the deal. According to the website cfr.org: "Trump formally withdrew the United States from the agreement in May 2018, reinstating the banking and oil sanctions. They apply not only to U.S. nationals, who generally cannot transact with Iran in any case, but to foreign nationals as well. To deal in Iranian markets, they would give up access to far larger American ones, as well as access to the world's predominant banking system."[444]

With the U.S. withdrawing from its nuclear deal with Iran, Hassan Rouhani's government has been heavily criticized by hardliners inside the country. The issue of distrust with the United States has once again been raised in the Iranian political arena. Europeans pledged Iran to create a mechanism that even with the United States' withdrawal from the deal, Iran could conduct financial exchanges with European countries outside the shadow of sanctions. On the website dw.org it is noted that: "On January 31, 2019, the foreign ministers of France, Germany and the U.K. announced the creation of the Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges (Instex) to facilitate legitimate trade with Iran without breaching U.S. trade sanctions. The explicit purpose of the mechanism is to help salvage the Iran nuclear deal."[445]

However, the Iranians were enraged by the fact that most international firms were leaving Iran and were afraid to cooperate with Iran because of U.S. sanctions. To that end, even if European

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[441] Tajalddin Salehian, *American Unilateralism in the Trump Era and Its Impact on the International Order* (Tehran: Abrar Moaser Iran, 2016): 22.

[442] Brennan Stamman, "The Return to Isolationism in US Foreign Policy Under the Trump Administration" Paper prepared for the Midwest Political Science Undergraduate Research Conference Drury University, April 3-4 (2020): 19.

[443] https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-iran-nuclear-france/macron-warns-of-risk-of-war-if-trump-withdraws-from-iran-deal-idUKKBN1I70BU?edition-redirect=uk (29.06.2021)

[444] https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-status-iran-nuclear-agreement (27.03.2020)

[445] https://www.dw.com/en/eu-iran-instex-trade-channel-remains-pipe-dream/a-52168576 (27.03.2020)

countries could set up a financial exchange system with Iran in actuality, they couldn't compel their highly reliant on the US firms to collaborate with Iran. Taken together, these problems and obstacles have prompted Iran to back out of its nuclear deal commitments. According to *the Guardian*: "Iran has announced its partial withdrawal from the nuclear deal signed with world powers in 2015, a year after Donald Trump pulled out of the agreement. Rouhani said Iran wanted to negotiate new terms with the remaining partners in the deal, but warned that the situation was dire. He said: We felt that the nuclear deal needs a surgery and the painkiller pills of the last year have been ineffective… This surgery is for saving the deal, not destroying it."[446]

It seems that the Trump administration's approach to the Islamic Republic, rather than being substantive, would largely focus on limiting Iran's structural power. Thus, Donald Trump has shown a tendency to limit the Islamic Republic of Iran's structural power, rather than focusing on its regional power and influence. Efforts to review the nuclear deal with Iran or measures to limit its missile capability can all be explained by such an approach.[447] In this regard, Trump stated that the United States is re-imposing the highest level of economic sanctions against Iran and other countries would be held accountable if they violate these sanctions.[448] Many commentators believe that if Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal was due to preventing Iran from acquiring an atomic bomb, he could have stayed in the JCPOA with more rational behavior and made the agreement permanent through negotiations. If it were to reduce Iran's influence in the region, it would persuade them to put pressure on Iran by forming an anti-Iran coalition through regional powers.

The simple answer to Trump's decision is that he intends to keep Iran in the penalty box and prevent Iran from establishing a normal relationship with the world. Nonetheless, at the core of this decision is the motivation for regime change in Iran. The first is that increasing economic pressure will lead to increased public discontent. The second is to provoke Iran to resume its nuclear program, which will give the United States the pretext for a pre-emptive war.[449] In addition, the United States has sought to use its hegemonic leverage to limit Iran to circumvent sanctions by putting pressure on European countries and other countries with economic ties to Iran. At the same time, US lawmakers must design sanctions that include "trigger" features and mechanisms for tracking Iran's activities.[450]

To date, the fate of the deal remains unclear. The U.S. has withdrawn from the nuclear deal, and the Europeans cannot guarantee that it will survive without the U.S. Rouhani, who is widely criticized within the system for trusting the United States, is trying to pressure Europeans to facilitate economic exchanges by reducing Iran's commitment to the JCPOA. If we accept that the deal has failed, again, the two countries were still incapable of resolving problems and disputes after 40 years of the Islamic Republic. However, the role of Israel and Saudi Arabia was crucial, and the two countries were prominent supporters of the U.S. withdrawal.

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[446] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/07/iran-to-announces-partial-withdrawal-from-nuclear-deal (27.03.2020)
[447] Ghasem Monfared, "Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Theme and the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach", *Strategic Research Center* no. 258 (2016), 4.
[448] https://thebulletin.org/trump-withdraws-iran-nuclear-deal-what-now11791 (30.02.2021)
[449] http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/08/the-art-of-the-regime-change (30.02.2021)
[450] Mehdi Ahoei, "The Strategy of American Alliances in the Middle East and Possible Options for Iran", *International Relations Research* vol. 1, no. 23 (2017): 70.

7.3.   U.S. withdrawal from JCPOA and the Middle East

The Islamic Revolution of Iran has always followed a major manifesto since its victory. Exporting the revolution is one of the main goals of the Islamic Republic. Iran's best potential to "export a revolution" or influence in the area came through occupying Afghanistan and subsequently Iraq. Saudi Arabia has always been suspicious of Iranian influence, and the Al Saud family believes that if Iran gains nuclear weapons, it will no longer be able to be restrained. Hobbs notes: "In February 2010 Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister for Bilateral Relations, Khalid Al-Jindan, told an American diplomat that Saudi Arabia faced a 'clear and present danger' of an attack by a nuclear Iran. On a larger scale, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal identified 'Iran's continued interference in the affairs of the countries in the region as well as its suspicious nuclear programme' as one of the key threats to regional security and stability."[451]

There are two perspectives in explaining and analysing developments in the Middle East affected by the nuclear deal. The first view holds that the win-win model of the nuclear talks as a broader model in the Middle East requires greater transparency of Iran's leaders at the international level. Still, Iran's strategic culture is based on independence, and the concept of interdependence has not yet been well-received by Iran.[452] Iran's foreign policy, from this perspective, is a battleground between the two parties. The first group believes in the win-win paradigm and the relevance of the United States and Saudi Arabia in regional and international affairs. The second group feels that American dominance is waning and that Saudi Arabia is of minor consequence. As a result, Iran's foreign policy has become polarized. One depicts Iran's engagement with the West in the framework of nuclear talks, while the other depicts Iran's hegemonic supremacy in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.[453]

The rivalry between these two groups has always been going on since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution until today, but in different periods, one of these two groups has had the upper hand in the political arena of Iran, especially in foreign policy. The first group, known as the reformists in Iran, have more moderate policies and want to improve relations with the West, while the second group, known as the Conservatives, oppose relations with the West and are more inclined to China and Russia. This group is closer to the Iranian leader and promotes more revolutionary and extremist ideas.

Kenneth Pollack, author of *Which Way to Iran* at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on U.S. policy toward the Middle East after the nuclear agreement says that: "after the agreement, there were discussions inside Iran about using the negotiation model in a more extensive process and reopening relations, especially with the United States, but in the view of

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[451] Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, *Exploring Regional Responses to a Nuclear Iran: Nuclear Dominoes?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 32.

[452] https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/u-s-policy-toward-the-middle-east-after-the-iranian-nuclear-agreement/ (28.06.2021)

[453] https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/u-s-policy-toward-the-middle-east-after-the-iranian-nuclear-agreement/ (28.06.2021)

the Iranian leadership, the lifting of sanctions was done in exchange for imposing certain restrictions on Iran's program."[454]

According to this view, the nuclear talks are an American requirement that may ultimately lead to a strategic surprise for Iran on regional issues. In fact, the United States is building a new regional geopolitical order and incorporating the nuclear deal into it. Ultimately, the deal will become a tool for the continued reduction of Iran's regional power. Under this policy, Iran's regional sabotage will be interpreted as disrupting the implementation of the agreement. Suppose Iran continues to organize provocative and dangerous activities in the region and does not openly show that it can act as a reliable and transparent actor interacting in the financial system. In that case, it will not be in a position to return fully to the international community. Iran must decide whether to comply with international standards, norms, and commitments or not. If it does not follow these cases, it will still be a dangerous environment for any foreign trade, even if there are attractive opportunities in this country.[455]

In any case, what the new U.S. administration was concerned about the nuclear deal was that there was no indication in the text of the agreement that Iran would change its regional strategy. Therefore, there will be no change in the regional policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the short and medium-term. As a matter of fact, the agreement was only a nuclear deal that does not cover Iran's other disputes with the West in the areas of security or politics. To that end, perhaps, one of the main reasons why Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement is these issues. He called for an agreement that would include more issues such as Iran's missile capability, Iran's regional infiltration, and the issue of terrorism.

For many analysts, Steven E. Miller for example, Donald Trump made the wrong decision to leave the nuclear deal.[456] With the withdrawal of the agreement and the imposition of economic sanctions on Iran under the heading "maximum pressure", Trump did not play a new card in restraining Iran but applied the same approach more forcefully. However, this time the United States has less legitimacy to impose these sanctions internationally. Somehow, in this decision, the U.S., in addition to isolating Iran, also isolated itself. On the other hand, under pressure from the lobbyists of Ben Salman and Netanyahu, the United States has withdrawn from the deal, both of which face significant challenges in the domestic politics of their countries.

Ultimately, this decision will bring Iran closer to China and Russia, and the United States' credibility to international resolutions and agreements will be damaged. In one seminar about consequences of the U.S. withdrawal, which was held in 2018, Miller states that: "President Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA and openly violate the provisions of the agreement may not quite be a gift to Tehran, but it is at least as damaging to the United States as it is to Iran. It isolates the United States and positions it as the wrecker of the deal. It discredits the United States as a trustworthy negotiating partner – at least with Iran, if not more broadly."[457]

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[454] https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/u-s-policy-toward-the-middle-east-after-the-iranian-nuclear-agreement/ (02.04.2021)
[455] Juan Zarate, "The Implications of Sanctions Relief under the Iran Agreement", *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2015): 4.
[456] https://www.belfercenter.org/event/consequences-us-withdrawal-jcpoa (28.06.2021)
[457] https://www.belfercenter.org/event/consequences-us-withdrawal-jcpoa (30.03.2020)

However, Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal will undoubtedly have the most significant impact on the future of the Middle East. The U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear agreement reduced the power of reformists inside Iran and returned the hardliners to the Iranian political scene. The issue of mistrust of the United States was raised again, and the Iranian leader indirectly criticized the government for compromising with the West. Nevertheless, the United States has also lost its chance to negotiate with Iran on Middle East issues, and the problems of the region remain unresolved. Leonid Isaev in his article, notes: "side effect of Trump's decision is the difficulty of reaching a compromise on key policy issues concerning the Middle East. Without Iranian participation, it is impossible to resolve any conflict in the region, be it Syria, Yemen, or the problem of Kurdish self-determination." Making Iran a "rogue state," as Trump proposes, will simply encourage Tehran to pursue even more expansionist tactics in the Middle East. Isaev states that by sending a message to Washington's Middle Eastern partners that the U.S. takes a deterministic approach to Iran's position in the area, Trump deprives them of the willingness and the capacity to reach out to Tehran on their own, resulting in a push for a strong solution to the region's issues.[458]

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran, familiar with the bitter taste of U.S. sanctions, has learned many ways to circumvent sanctions in recent years. Besides, U.S. sanctions under the heading of "maximum pressure" may put a strain on the Iranian economy but cannot completely destroy it. Withdrawing from the nuclear deal was Trump's strategic mistake, which would not only diminish Iran's regional influence policies but would also make Iran expand its influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, costing the face-to-face war with the United States to the maximum.

7.4.   Future of relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia

While Iran and Saudi Arabia had economic and geopolitical rivalries before the Islamic Revolution, the victory of the revolution in Iran in 1979 became a new arena for their confrontation. Iran's foreign policy has added a Shiite element to its structure, looking at the world from the Islam point of view. This was of concern to Saudi Arabia because it claimed to be the leader of the Islamic world and even the Arab world, and this was challenged by Iran. On the other hand, proxy wars in the region pose the greatest challenge to improving relations between the two countries. Iran's role in Syria and its support for Bashar al-Assad, the creation of Shiite militias in Iraq such as the Hashd al-Shaabi (Shia mobilization forces), and the support of the Yemeni Hussites, has deeply disturbed Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia does not have a clear strategy for proxy wars, as it clearly has problems with Yemen and is trapped there.

More importantly, Saudi-Iranian relations are deeply affected by the two countries' relations with the United States. Since the Islamic revolution, the Iranian regime has declared its entire opposition to the imperialist, monarchical, and colonial regimes. Saudi Arabia is heavily dependent on the United States for its security, while Iran is more inclined to the east, especially Russia and China. It seems that any changes in relations between Tehran and Washington, and even Tel Aviv, will have a massive impact on Iran-Saudi relations, but under what circumstances is this likely? Chubin answers this question as follows: "On Iran's side a significant change in the dynamics of domestic politics or a marked departure in relations with the United States could

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[458] https://www.ridl.io/en/the-middle-east-after-the-uss-withdrawal-from-the-iran-nuclear-deal/ (30.03.2020)

precipitate such a change. De-Islamisation or the secularisation of foreign policy, with greater emphasis on national interest, diminished activism and less posturing in foreign relations, would be elements in this change. Greater pragmatism and more emphasis on building confidence with its neighbours would be another manifestation."[459]

Studying the current trends of each issue helps to identify the key factors as well as future events and incidents. Iran's interactive and communication policies (as one of the main players in the region) with Saudi Arabia (as the largest country among the Arab countries), have a significant influence in the middle East region. At various times, Saudi Arabia has pursued a variety of policies toward Iran, ranging from relative cooperation to overt rivalry and hostility and even severance. However, several scenarios can be envisaged in predicting Iran-Saudi Arabia relations. These scenarios include:

1. The first scenario (mutual cooperation):

   In the scenario of mutual cooperation, the factor of religion and foreign forces can be the driving force and reinforcer of the scenario; In such a way that Islam is emphasized as a unifying factor of Muslims and foreign forces do not cause divergence by entrusting the security of the region and not interfering in the affairs of the countries in the region. Of course, on the other hand, these two factors could also become obstacles; meaning, if instead of emphasizing unity, Shia and Sunni elements are strengthened, or their foreign forces (by recruiting like-minded group), then, tensions will be increased.

2. The second scenario (war and conflict):

   In this scenario, long-standing religious and ethnic differences between the two countries, the strengthening and expansion of the Shiite crescent by Iran, the occurrence of the Arab Spring and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and the establishment of Shiite governments in the region and Umm al-Qarai claim on both sides, can be a strong driving force; Therefore, they have the greatest impact in this scenario. However, it can be said that the religious factor, due to the common religion of both countries and the existence of holy places, has a great impact in this scenario, but not the greatest impact. Nevertheless, external forces and weapons of mass destruction are obstacles; Since the external and internal forces of the region are not looking for chaos and war in the region; Rather, they seek to establish security in the region for the sake of their own interests and the security of Israel. On the other hand, the weapons and nuclear power of both countries is both a deterrent and a cause of war. Saudi Arabia has worked hard to prevent Iran from negotiating with the West because it fears Iran's proximity to the West and its rise to power.

3. The third Scenario (blurring of relationships):

   Ideological and ethnic differences, the attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, the expansion of the Shiite crescent with the overthrow of the governments of Iraq and Yemen and the rise of the Shiites, Iran's help to neighbouring countries such as Syria and

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[459] Chubin Shahram and Tripp Charles "Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order", *The Adelphi Papers* vol. 36, n. 304 (2015): 74.

Yemen as a regional power, have been the most effective factors in increasing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Hence, we can say that the scenario of strained relations can be called the scenario of severe turmoil in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations.

4. The fourth Scenario (severance):

In this scenario, the ethnic and religious factor and the items listed in the third scenario can have a great impact; However, due to the fact that the religion of both countries is Islam and the most important order of the religion of Islam is to create unity among Muslims, and also due to the religious rituals of Hajj and the existence of holy places in Mecca and Medina, this factor cannot have the greatest impact.

However, Saudi Arabia is very concerned about Iran's involvement in the Arab countries of the region and the presence of Iranian militias in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and has expressed its dissatisfaction in various conferences and meetings held in the region. Though, foreign and regional forces are not seeking to sever relations between the two countries due to the establishment of balance and security in the region. Even now that diplomatic relations between the two countries have been severed, the neighbours are trying to re-establish relations through various negotiations. To that end, this factor can have a moderate effect on severing relationships; On the one hand, the proximity of any regional country to Iran or Saudi Arabia causes concern on both sides, and on the other hand, neighbouring countries, in order to protect their own interests and regional security, do not want the diverge between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Thus, the scenario of mutual cooperation is the least likely to occur and the scenario of strained relations will be the most likely to occur in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations in the next decade. Scenarios of severance and war are also more likely to occur.

7.5. Conclusion

With many economic pressures inside Iran, as well as the restriction of the political and social environment during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, people were severely dissatisfied. Public dissatisfaction with Ahmadinejad's policies was the reason for the election of the reformist president in 2013. Rouhani had various plans for changing domestic and foreign policy. He wanted the domestic politics to be more open and freer environment for activists and also give more opportunities to students and elites in the political-social scene. In economic issues, giving the pressure of sanctions, he saw the key for solving problems in negotiations with the West, especially the United States. Rouhani, who had become president of Iran from the reformist spectrum, promised to resolve disputes with the West over nuclear issues. Comprehensive economic sanctions on the one hand, and financial and administrative corruption on the other, put Iran in a very difficult position.

Rouhani had political tendencies close to Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, two previous reformist presidents of Iran. The summary of this policy is economic progress based on political development and international relations. However, when Rouhani was elected as the president of Iran, the geopolitics of the region was severely transformed, and he should decide on

some important issues such as nuclear enrichment, support for Shiite groups in Iraq and Syria and disputes with the United States, whether to follow Ahmadinejad's path or Khatami and Rafsanjani's path. He, just like Mohammad Khatami, was trying to show a better face of the Islamic Republic to the outside world and attract the confidence of the international community to Iran.

The most important issue during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani was the problem of uranium enrichment. Rouhani assumed that the key to solving Iran's economic problems is in the elimination of the sanctions by the United States and Western countries, and believed that as long as Iran does not talk to the West, its problems will remain the same. He himself with years of experience in negotiating with the West, formed a negotiating team to bargain with the Americans to overcome the sanctions. At the same time, in Iran, many radicals opposed the dialogue with the West and were very pessimistic about the nuclear deal. The hardliners inside Iran called the Americans unreliable, coercive, and liars, while the American hardliners called the Iranians supporters of terrorism, meddlers, and adventurers.

Nevertheless, the dialogue between Iranian authorities and 5 + 1 countries continued for months and eventually became a nuclear agreement known as JCPOA in July 2015. This agreement, in summary, declares that economic sanctions are halted against the reduction of nuclear enrichment in Iran. This agreement led to global optimism for resolving the international conflicts, and Americans and Europeans hoped to have more complete supervision on the Iran's nuclear program by implementing this agreement and prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Iran also hoped to find a better position in the economic relations with the outside world, after the elimination of the sanctions.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region were concerned about the elimination of sanctions and Iran reaching more power in the region. These countries believed that the elimination of sanctions not only does not prevent Iran's power, but also increases economic power of this country and as a result, increase their influence in the Middle East region. The officials of Israel and Saudi Arabia have thus put all their efforts to stop Barak Obama to sign this agreement with Iran. While Rouhani and Barack Obama were criticized by the hardliners inside their countries, the Obama presidency was approaching its end.

Donald Trump, who had a close relationship with Israel, and had a famous saying that "We will withdraw from a terrible agreement with Iran" was elected as the U.S. president. Trump was one of the serious critics of a nuclear deal with Iran and believed that U.S. can achieve better agreement with this country. He was a person with the nationalist trends who believed the United States has always give more than the other countries in the international treaties. For this reason, he has left many global treaties such as the Paris agreement and at the same time prepared himself to leave a nuclear deal as well. Despite many alerts from Iranian and American authorities, Trump has decided to withdraw from the nuclear deal in May 2018 and also asked the other countries not to collaborate with Iran. In fact, Donald Trump did not seek a war with Iran because he was well aware of the conditions of the Middle East and knew that the fall of Iran causes full chaos in the region, so he was looking to weaken and restrict Iran as much as possible.

While U.S. sanctions were coming back, Hassan Rouhani was criticized more and more inside Iran, and hardliners demanded more than 20% of uranium enrichment from the Iranian

government. The Iranian government, according to these pressures, prepared itself to speed up nuclear enrichment. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, which was very pleased with the withdrawal of the United States, wanted to lower Iran's power based on the policy of "maximum pressure" of the Trump administration. However, Rouhani, during this period, thanks to China and Russia's economic cooperation, was able to prevent the collapse of the Iranian economy despite the intense inflation.

Nevertheless, what is important is the practical outcome of the U.S. withdrawal and its impact on Iran-Saudi relations. First, not only has the United States failed to prevent Iran's adventure in the region, but Iran is still trying to harm U.S. forces in Iraq. On the other hand, by strengthening the Shiite forces in the countries of the region, Iran has angered Saudi Arabia. Second, the United States was discredited in the international arena in this agreement and remained alone among its allies. Third, in the realm of Iranian domestic politics, Hassan Rouhani was undoubtedly a complete loser, and in the eyes of the society, he had failed to make a good deal with the West. Fourth, with the agreement's failure, the reformists were once again pushed to the corner of the ring, and the extremists returned to the Iranian political scene. As a result, hopes of improving relations with, not only the United States, but also with Iran's neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, waned.

According to many analysts, Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from a nuclear deal was a hasty and wrong decision, and it was better for the United States to stay in the agreement, in order to supervise the Iran's behavior. However, Iran and Saudi relations are still tied up in some serious problems. Issues that without solving them no side will be able to advance friendly relationships. Iran's support for Shiite groups, Saudi Arabia from Sunni and Wahhabi groups, Iran's nuclear program, Iran and America's conflicts, collaborations of Persian Gulf countries and Oil prices are among the most important roots of these disputes.

At the same time, Iran and Saudi Arabia have the capability of cooperation in different field of economic, religious and political issues that can help improve their relationships.

8. Conclusion

In this research, the theory of neoclassical realism has been used to explain the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The reason for choosing this theory of realism is its comparative advantages over other realist theories for analysing the relations between the two countries. First, by combining both internal and external levels (systems), this theory provides a greater opportunity to understand the impact of different individual, organizational, governmental, social and foreign variables on foreign policy. Secondly, the diversity and differences in the foreign policy behavior of the two countries towards each other over time within the framework of this theory is acceptable and understandable. Third, the interplay of domestic and foreign policy based on the principles of neoclassical realism is understandable. Fourth, it is possible to explain the simultaneous influence of immaterial variables and factors such as ideology, nationalism, identity and material elements such as economic and military power on the foreign policy of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Iran-Saudi Arabia relations reflect the overlapping different internal and external levels such as resources, security concerns and geopolitical changes. Internally, Iran is a Shiite-majority country with Iranian nationalism and revolutionary country, while Saudi Arabia, is a Sunni-majority country, claims to lead the Islamic world, and a monarchy. In foreign policy, Iran supports Shiite groups and Shiite militias such as the Houthis and has anti-Western policies with an anti-monarchist and anti-imperialist orientation while Saudi Arabia supports Sunni and anti-Iranian groups and relies on the West, especially the United States.

The theory of neoclassical realism shows well that the understanding of the content of danger by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the victory of the Islamic Revolution has led this country to launch a campaign against the Islamic Republic in the region. While at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution most of the Islamic countries were optimistic about the revolution, over time Iran was seen as a potential threat that had to be stopped. It is true that geopolitical and economic rivalry has always caused conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but the victory of the revolution and the emphasis on the element of revolutionary Shiite Islam led to a conflicting understanding of Iran. On the other hand, Iran, ruled by a revolutionary leadership, ignored the signals of the international system and sought to destroy the capitalist, imperialist and monarchical regimes. Hence the theory of neoclassical realism well justifies the behavior of the Islamic Republic in different historical periods.

However, this theory also suffers from some limitations. For example, this theory places too much emphasis on domestic factors to analyze the Islamic Republic's reactions to the international system. Sometimes in this theory, the priority and importance of the internal and external variables in shaping foreign policy are not well defined. In such a way that sometimes it emphasizes the importance of internal factors and sometimes it emphasizes the external factors too much. Ultimately, in spite of the fact that, this theory is attempting to avoid reductionism, but has no choice to analyze foreign policy, since single-level and internal factors in this theory have a function and causal nature.

The two neighboring countries, that have the power to challenge each other in every aspect, can hardly be friends. However, even before the Islamic Revolution in 1979, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia had tensions over geopolitical, economic, and oil issues. Nevertheless, what brought the two countries at odds was the addition of non-materialist elements to Iranian foreign policy. The Shiite aspect has always existed within the Iranian society, and after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, it was reflected in the foreign policy. In 1979, Iran decided to shift from a secular monarchy to the Islamic Republic. This shift, however, had a great cost for the whole region, and Iran itself. Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolution leader, outlined a clear strategy for Iran's foreign policy, which includes anti-monarchy, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial policies. Relations with the United States were becoming cold, and hopes for a continued relationship with the Americans became diminished. Eventually, relations between the two countries reached the worst possible level, with the attack on the U.S. embassy and taking U.S. diplomats as a hostage. Cutting off the relations with the United States, eventually led to severely damaging Iran's relations with European countries as well.

Saudi Arabia, which is highly conservative and dependent on western countries, especially the United States, prepared to face the challenges of revolutionary Iran in the region. Saudi Arabia, which is a monarchy ruled by Wahhabism, was soon criticized by Khomeini. Khomeini accused, not only Saudi Arabia, but all of the Persian Gulf countries for corruption and despotism. On the other hand, he offered a third path to the bipolar world of those days, with a message of solidarity among the world's oppressed Muslims. Saudi Arabia was afraid of Iranian influence in the Arab world, and tried to prevent it by supporting Sunni groups. While tensions in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations have always existed, the question that has remained important since the Islamic Revolution and today is which one has more power in the event of a direct confrontation between the two countries?

To explain power, we must first divide it into three most important factors: economic, military, and population. Historically, both countries have oil-dependent economies, although in recent years they have invested heavily in technology, industry and agriculture. Also, the two countries have always invested heavily in their defense system, in spite of the fact that Saudi Arabia has invested far more than Iran, due to the Saudis' lack of confidence and a sense of danger from Iran's missile and nuclear program. While Iran has eight years of direct war experience with Iraq, Saudi Arabia has never fought a war alone and has no war experience. In terms of population, Iran has about twice the population of Saudi Arabia, and this superiority makes the military conflict and the occupation of Iran by Saudi Arabia almost impossible. Saudi Arabia remains concerned about Iran's nuclear program and has tried to push for a halt through the West, especially the United States. During the economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic, it has tried to fill the gap left by Iran for oil production, in order to harm the Iranian economy. However, given the region's geopolitics, direct confrontation between the two countries is unlikely, and the Middle East will continue to see conflict between the two countries through proxy wars.

As mentioned earlier, the theory of neoclassical realism places great emphasis on the role of perceptions of country leaders as internal factors. The occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran with its Islamic-Revolutionary model has led to the emergence of values and norms in the form of a new identity that has been so influential in the regional and global dimensions. Among these regional influences is the Islamic Revolution of Iran challenging the Saudi-Wahhabi

conservative monarchy. Hence, it is wrong to undermine our understanding of the relationship between countries only based on military and economic forces because it will not give us a clear and wide range image of relations. What enhances our experience of the relationship between countries is a detailed analysis of all the influential dimensions within countries. Not only did the geopolitics, economics, and oil disputes have a profound impact on Saudi-Iranian relations, but also the element of revolutionary ideology sharply altered relations between the two neighboring countries. Ayatollah Khomeini was looking for a third way to get rid of the oppressed of mercenaries with the slogan of neither eastern nor western. However, Khomeini did not have a clear understanding of the reaction of the world to his revolutionary ideas and wanted to change the world order at any cost. Khomeini's "third way", based on Shiite Islamic ideology, challenged the conservative kingdom of the Arab states in the region.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran was the result of changing the perceptions of the Iranian people and its leaders towards the outside world. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini believed that he could bring the Islamic world with him. Perhaps at the beginning of the revolution, some Arab countries and even the world saw this revolution as the beginning of a way to change unjust capitalist trends in the world. Nevertheless, shortly after the revolution, other countries' perceptions of the intentions of Iran's leaders changed, and this country was considered as a serious threat in the region. As a result, the Islamic Revolution changed the perceptions of this country and its leaders about the outside world, as well as the perceptions of the outside world about Iran.

Therefore, the foreign policy, military and economic power pass through this filter of perceptions and form the concept of friend and foe. The country that a few years ago was the largest US ally in the region has now became its number one enemy. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, these perceptions have not changed much, and Iran is still considered a threat in the region, and Saudi Arabia and the United States are still trying to contain it. The Gulf countries, which are politically, economically and militarily dependent on the United States, have also sought to follow the Saudi-style containment policies in this conflict.

Perceiving Iran as a threat to the region, the countries of the region, led by Saudi Arabia, thought of stopping Iran. Saudi Arabia, backed by the West, promised Saddam full support in the fight against Iran. Iraq, which has long had border disputes with Iran, entered the war with Iran with the green light of the United States and the support of Saudi Arabia. The bloody Iran-Iraq war has started on 22 September 1980 and ended after eight years, in August 20, 1988, with billions of casualties and the loss of hundreds of thousands of Iranians and Iraqis. During the war, Americans and Saudis were attempting to continue the war between Iran and Iraq, with the aim of weakening both sides. Neither the United States nor Saudi Arabia wanted victory or defeat of any side because they knew that the winner would play a decisive role in the future of the Middle East.

Finally, although Iran was superior to Iraq in the early years of the war, in the final years the situation seemed extremely difficult for both sides. The economies of both countries were severely damaged, and eight years of war had destroyed all of the two countries' infrastructure. Beside this, the increasing pressure from the international community and the U.N. led Iran and Iraq to end the war by singing the peace agreement in August 1988. After the war, Iran, in addition to rebuilding its infrastructure, sought to rebuild its foreign relations as well. Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was in charge of Iran's post-war presidency, was a rational man seeking to

normalize and improve relations with the outside world. Hashemi, who was also involved in the war, was well aware of the country's devastation. So, he sought to be more pragmatic in his foreign policy than ideological. He tried to improve Iran's relations with neighbouring countries, especially Arab countries of the region and reduce tensions in the international relations. In short, Hashemi's policy was economy-oriented and based on the reconstruction of Iran.

After the Khomeini's death, Hashemi had more power than ever in the country and therefore sought to build better relations with Saudi Arabia. At the time, cooperation between the two countries in the economic and religious (Hajj) field has significantly developed. His period, known as the construction period, draws on his efforts to build the country's infrastructure after eight years of war. Although Khomeini intended to export the revolution, Hashemi was realistic and well aware of the situation inside and outside the country. He made the "export of the revolution" one of the next priorities of the country and tried to get closer to the countries of the region. After the Rafsanjani, reformist President Mohammad Khatami, came to the presidency of Iran, proposing a "dialogue of civilizations" at a global level, seeking to improve relations with Saudi Arabia, the United States, and the European countries. Khatami believed that Iran was severely isolated after the Islamic Revolution and that it needed to make significant changes in its domestic and foreign policies in order to survive.

The "Dialogue of Civilizations" project sent a clear message to the world that Iran was ready to come out from political isolation and engage in dialogue with all nations of the world. While the Rafsanjani's period was based on the model of economic development, the Khatami's period was based on the model of political development. In spite of the fact that some serious problems such as Iran's support for Hezbollah and Shiite groups in the region, disputes with the United States, and Iran's nuclear program remained unsolved, Khatami was able to relatively improve the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and some meetings were held between officials of the two countries during this period. Iran under Khatami has proven that it is possible to improve relations with Saudi Arabia if there is a political will. Hence, both Rafsanjani and Khatami were able to mark a new era in relations with the outside world after the Islamic Revolution, especially with Saudi Arabia. They could effectively show the world that Iran is ready to cooperate with the international community and is a country which is rational and ready for dialogue.

However, internal pressure on the one hand, and external barriers on the other, prevented Khatami to solve Iran and Saudi Arabia conflict even with a good idea of "dialogue between civilizations". Nonetheless, the problems between Iran and Saudi Arabia cannot be resolved without the resolution of the Iran - U.S. disagreements. Until Iran or the United States find a diplomatic solution to their dispute, the situation in the Middle East region and the hostility of Iran and Saudi Arabia will remain the same.

The year 2005, the last year of Mohammad Khatami's presidency, coincided with the U.S. occupation of Iraq. While the geopolitics of the Middle East was changing rapidly, in Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an extremist-revolutionary politician, was elected as a president. Perhaps, he had the most challenging foreign policy in the contemporary history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ahmadinejad's most crucial decision was to accelerate Iran's nuclear program and to make a powerful Iran which does not obey the superpowers. He expanded nuclear enrichment, ignoring the West's threat of sanctions. At the same time, Saudis strongly opposed Iran's nuclear program because they were concerned about Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons and the possibility of becoming hegemonic power. During Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran

witnessed the immense amount of comprehensive sanctions by the United States, Europe, and the United Nations. However, given the high oil prices in those years, Iran was able to continue increasing its influence in the Middle East through the support of its affiliated Shiite groups. Meanwhile, the Arab Spring also provided Iran with an excellent opportunity to seek its national interest in the region by criticizing the rulers of the Persian Gulf countries.

Many analysts believe that Ahmadinejad pursued a policy similar to that of Khomeini at the beginning of the revolution in Iran, meaning that he pursued an anti-Western, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist policy. He wanted to take the third path in which the superpowers did not decide the fate of other countries and did not impose their policies on them. Taking such a path, however, was costly for Iran and the people of Iran, and the effects of sanctions continue to undermine Iran's economy. The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic under Ahmadinejad was exactly the opposite of Khatami's foreign policy. Khatami sought dialogue and improvement in the relations with the West, while Ahmadinejad did not see any need for dialogue and believed that by expanding cooperation with other countries, he could bypass the West.

While Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's policies toward Iran's nuclear program had left the country with the toughest sanctions and Iran's economic situation had become very difficult, public dissatisfaction was growing. With the Iranian presidential election approaching, Hassan Rouhani, who had the support of the reformists, became the presidential candidate. One of the highlights of his election campaign was resolving Iran's nuclear issue with the West. Rouhani saw Iran's economic and political problems in talks with the West. Soon after coming to power, he sought to resolve the nuclear issue with the P5+1, led by the United States. After months of dialogue with P5+1, Iran finally reached a nuclear deal in 2015 called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The agreement's purpose was clear to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, and in return, lifting comprehensive sanctions and facilitating economic exchanges for Iran.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Israel were very sceptical about this deal. The two countries believed that this would not reduce Iran's influence in the region and Iran's blocked money will be spent on Iranian like-minded militant groups in the region. With the end of Barack Obama's presidency, Donald Trump, during his campaign, called the nuclear deal a terrible mistake. Eventually, by the time he became the president of the United States, he withdrew from the deal. In addition to being strategically wrong and by undermining public confidence and U.S. credibility on the international scene, this decision did not reduce Iran's influence in the Middle East. Using its regional influence, the Islamic Republic has always sought to increase the cost of a face-to-face war with the United States.

However, the important point in Iranian foreign policy is to understand the relationship of the Iranian Supreme Leader with the other countries. Iran's leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, outlines Iran's most important strategies. The role of the president in Iran is essential, but no policy can be implemented without the consent of its leader. As a result, the Iranian leader's understanding of the internal and external environment is crucial for explaining the general policies of the Islamic republic. For example, although Ahmadinejad was the original designer of accelerating the nuclear program, if Ayatollah Khamenei did not agree to it, this policy would never have run.

As a result, leaders' perception of the concept of threat from the outside world, including the country's internal environment, culture, identity, and religion will all have an impact on the

process of decision and foreign policymaking. In the meantime, the role of the two countries' elites in building a new political environment, which is based on mutual trust, is crucial. In spite of the fact that Iran and Saudi Arabia are at odds with each other, but there are also various areas of cooperation such as economic cooperation, cooperation in the field of terrorism and trafficking, Hajj and oil issues. Finally, regarding the future relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, several scenarios can be considered briefly possible. These scenarios are as follows:

A scenario in which the unity of Muslims is emphasized and the two countries can establish better relations by emphasizing issues such as the fight against terrorism and smuggling and focus more on economic, tourism and oil cooperation. A scenario that emphasizes geopolitical differences, ethnic and religious differences, the leadership of the Islamic world, support for Shiite and Sunni groups, support for militias in the Middle East, proxy wars that lead to strained or severed relations. There is another scenario in which Saudi Arabia attacks Iran with the green light of the West, especially the United States, and destroys Iran's nuclear program and infrastructure. Iran is also attacking the Saudi oil refinery in response, threatening and possibly attacking Gulf countries, and targeting Western military bases in the region. However, this scenario is less likely than the other two scenarios.

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Author's biography:

Miad (Alireza) Nakhavali was born on September 16th, 1989. in Mashhad, Iran. He graduated from primary and secondary school in his hometown. After that, he had also completed bachelor studies in Russian literature and translation at Ferdowsi University in Mashhad with an average grade of 17/20.

Miad Nakhavali came to Serbia in 2011 after receiving a scholarship from the Serbian Government's program called "World in Serbia". When Nakhavali arrived in Serbia, he completed a Serbian language course, and he passed the B2 exam, which was required for the University entry. He enrolled in postgraduate studies at the University of Belgrade at the Faculty of Political Science, Department of International Relations, in 2012, and in 2013 he defended his thesis entitled "Relations between Iran and the United States after the Islamic Revolution in Iran", earning a master's degree in political science. His mentor was prof. Dr Dragan Simic.

After completing the master's degree, the candidate went to Austria, and he enrolled at the Faculty of Political Science in Vienna in the school year 2014/2015. Soon after that, in 2015, the candidate had received a scholarship from the Serbian Government, and he decided to continue

his doctoral studies in Belgrade. Up until now, the candidate is enrolled in doctoral International and European studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences, at the University of Belgrade.

Right now, Miad Nakhvali is a Ph.D. researcher at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, Serbia. His main interests are the Middle East issues, especially Iran's relation with Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries, and the United States of America. The title of Nakhavali's Ph.D. thesis is "Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia after the Islamic Revolution of Iran".

During his studies, Nakhavali published three authorial articles in the field of International Politics and Islamic Economics, which were published in prestigious scientific journals.

The articles are as follows:

- Overview of Islamic Financial System and its Efficiency. *European Scientific Journal*. (2017). ESJ. 13 (19). 108.

https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n19p108

- DIPLOMATIC, CONSULAR AND POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND UNITED STATES. *European Scientific Journal.* (2013). ESJ. 9(14)

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During the past five years, Miad Nakhavali has been employed in two different organizations that are involved in helping and supporting refugees and migrants.

From 2016 to 2020, Nakhavali worked as a Cultural mediator and translator in the CIM organization, in partnership with Save the Children. From 2017 to 2018, he used to work with the CRPC organization, in collaboration with UNHCR, as a Child protection officer and translator in Belgrade, Serbia.

Currently, Miad Nakhavali is employed in Brasidas Group as a Junior analyst. Brasidas Group is a risk management company, with headquarters in Zurich, and two branches in Belgrade and New York. Nakhavali is involved in analyzing data related to the Middle Eastern companies.