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IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA CONFLICTS CAUSES

The Iran and Saudi Arabia as two Regional Powers, due to their Geo-economic and Geopolitical position, are the most important Regional Players in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, which have long been known as the two main competitors in the Middle East. These two countries according to the benefit from their specific Strategic position in the region, are very vital in the Middle East. Due to the importance of these two countries in the region, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have a significant impact on other regional actors. Following the developments of recent years in the region, we have witnessed a serious rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia that was becoming more complex day by day, which above all, for the benefits of the Western Powers, especially the United States of America, and increases their influence in the region, and naturally, it is to the detriment of these two countries and other members of the Middle East. In this article, we will examine the most important causes of conflicts between these two states, Saudi Arabia's approach regarding Iran and the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran against the actions of the Saudis and the relations between these two powers in general.

Key words: *Iran. – Saudi Arabia. – Conflicts. – Middle East. – Persian Gulf.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional and International developments in recent years, including Iran's influential role in the crises of Iraq and Syria, and its presence in Yemen, and on the other hand, the Nuclear Agreement between Iran and Western countries (14 July, 2015)¹, have increased

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1 Information collected on the following website: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_Comprehensive_Plan_of_Action, accessed 23 October 2023.

Iran's regional power and caused the concern of Iran's regional rival, Saudi Arabia. Considering the realist atmosphere ruling the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region, Saudi Arabia considers any increase in Iran's power in the region to its detriment and seeks to confront Iran's Regional Power.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Middle East and Persian Gulf region, as a part of the scope of the international system, for specific Geopolitical and Geostrategic reasons, has always been an important part in different historical periods, especially in the current era when Economic and Energy issue has increased its role. The Persian Gulf is considered to be one of the regions that has always faced signs of conflict, strife and Regional Wars. According to Frederick Halliday, the contemporary Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf has been dominated by the conflict and competition between the three powerful countries in the region, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. He identified six areas of tension in this region, centered on these three countries: Territory, Religious and Racial Minorities, Oil, Arms Race, conflict in the field of Foreign Policy and Interference in each other's Internal Affairs. But the fall of Saddam Hussein, by removing Iraq from the competition with Iran and Saudi Arabia, caused the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia to increase in the Persian Gulf region, which was traditionally the most important field of their conflict for the development of influence.² It should be mentioned that during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war (1980–88), Saudi Arabia provided extensive Diplomatic and Economic Support to the Iraqi government,³ which shows that in the best possible situation, the cooperation and relations between these two countries have almost always been associated with suspicion and betrayal. It is important to examine the relations between the two countries during the 8 years war when Iran was attacked by Iraq. In the shadow of the ideological competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Riyadh's concern about the spread of Shiite

2 Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005.

3 Afshin Mottaghi, "Analysis of Incoherence Fields in Saudi-Iran Relations Based on Constructivism", *Quarterly Journal of Strategic Policy Research* 3/2015.

revolutionary ideas in the southern lands of the Persian Gulf, this country provided a huge amount of aids and large financial resources to Iraq. In fact, from Riyadh's point of view, the Iraqi government, which had one of the strongest Arab armies, was considered a great obstacle in promoting the revolutionary ideology of Shiites. Although Iran has always adopted the policy of de-escalation and improved relations in some issues, the Ideological conflicts of these two countries were not an issue that could be easily overcome.

During Sayed Mohammad Khatami's presidency and the theory of Dialogue of Civilizations, which formed the basis of his foreign policy, bilateral relations were strengthened more than in the past. Even these years of close relations were not without challenges, the bombing of the Khobar Tower in 1996, for which Iran was the primary suspect, and the attack on the Iranian consulate in Afghanistan, which resulted in the death of 8 Iranian diplomats, are among the acts of sabotage in this period; But, this improvement in relations did not continue after 2003; The year, with the US attack on Iraq, tension was created in bilateral relations. However, this era is referred to as the golden era of relations between the two countries. At a time when there was a high probability of a direct US attack on Iran, the Saudis, out of goodwill, informed the Iranian authorities about the details of the possible attack plan.⁴

3. SEVERANCE OF TIES BETWEEN IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

In 1987, the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia became very tense with the killing of 275 Iranian pilgrims during the *Hajj* ceremony in Mecca, and eight months after this incident, Saudi Arabia unilaterally severed its relations with Iran and expelled Iranian diplomats from the country, and had withdrawn its diplomats from Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini, in response to this behavior of Saudi Arabia, issued an order to stop sending Iranian pilgrims for the *Hajj Tamattu*. After three years and with the end of the Iran-Iraq war and Iran's condemnation of Iraq's attack on Kuwait, diplomatic relations between the two countries were re-established by reopening their embassies.

4 Alireza Saberfard, Hassan Kabiri, "Crisis Components in Iran-Saudi Relations (2000–2017)", *The Quarterly Journal of Political Studies of Islamic World* 8(2)/2019.

On April 7, 2015, a serious challenge in the relations between the two countries began when the Jeddah airport inspection officers assaulted two Iranian pilgrims aged 14 and 15 who were planning to return to their country.

The incidents of *Hajj Tamattu* in 2015 caused the relations between the two countries to worsen. The fall of the crane in Mecca (September 11, 2015) and the Mina disaster (September 24, 2015) were two occurrences that killed hundreds of Iranians and fueled the hostility of the two countries.

The attack on the embassy and consulate of Saudi Arabia in Mashhad on Saturday, January 2–3, 2016, which took place after the execution of Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, a cleric opposed to the Saudi Arabian government, fueled the escalation of tensions between the two countries.

Adel al-Jubeir, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, announced on January 3, 2016, that they have severed diplomatic relations with Iran and asked the Iranian diplomatic delegation to leave the country within 48 hours. A day after the announcement of Saudi Arabia's severance of relations with Islamic Republic of Iran, he explained that this severance includes the end of all commercial relations and also the cancellation of flights between the two countries but does not include the issue of Iranians traveling to *Hajj*.

4. CAUSES OF CONFLICTS

Iran and Saudi Arabia have never had a positive perception of each other due to the distinct Iranian-Arab identity and the rivalry between the two countries in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. Before the Islamic Revolution in Iran and during the second Pahlavi (Shah) period, these two countries were forced to cooperate with each other under the influence of the prevailing discourse on the Cold War and bipolar space, and especially to prevent the influence of Soviet Union in the region.

Pirouz Mojtahedzadeh has written, "History shows that despite territorial and border disputes in the Persian Gulf and in the past decades, Iran and its Arab neighbors have had also significant cooperation with each other. The best example in this regard is the cooperation of

these countries during 1968 to 1978 that the motivation of this ten-year period of cooperation between Iran and the Arabs was the sense of urgency caused by raising the issue of withdrawing British forces from the east of Suez and handing over the responsibility and security of the Persian Gulf to its coastal powers”⁵ These two countries, due to the fear of gaining power of another regional competitor, namely Iraq, with the two-pillar policy of Nixon-Kissinger, were to some extent side-by-side with each other, which with the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this two-pillar policy lost its effectiveness.

The rise of the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979), which should have led to the convergence and interaction between Iran and the Arabs, along with the approaches of the United States, especially in fueling *Iranophobia* and *Shiaphobia*, prevented the rapprochement between Iran and the Arabs.⁶ One of the policies that the United States took was friendship with Saudi Arabia and placing this actor in front of Iran; Obviously, one of the most important reasons for implementing this policy was the interest of energy access in this country.

Saudi Arabia and Iran, before the Islamic Revolution (in 60s and 70s) were considered as two ways of Western influence in the Middle East. The victory of Iran’s Islamic Revolution represented the most severe blow to the interests of the United States of America in the Middle East. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the United States lost one of its special allies and one of its Strategic areas of influence in the Middle East. In this regard, Saudi Arabia was proposed as a serious alternative instead of Iran. Saudi Arabia gradually became one of America’s Strategic allies in the region. This connection and coordination with the United States happens at a time when the relationship between Iran and the United States has turned dark after the Islamic Revolution. In other words, the presence and influence of one of the countries that are not aligned with the Islamic Republic of Iran in Saudi Arabia caused the common mentality and values between Iran and Saudi Arabia to disintegrate and the wall of distrust between the two became higher

5 Pirouz Mojtahedzadeh, *Security and Territoriality in the Persian Gulf. A Maritime Political Geography*, Cambridge University Press 1999.

6 Mohammad Sadeghi, “The Forms of Iranophobia and Shiitophobia in Today’s World; and Cultural Approaches to Coping with It”, *Center for Strategic Studies of Cultural Relations, Organization of Islamic Culture and Communications* 5(10)/2019, 6–35.

day by day.⁷ In addition to the factors of disagreement and conflict between Iran and the Arabs during Pahlavi's time, the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the confrontation with the United States caused Iran to enter into competition, conflict and divergence with the Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia, in various regional issues. Most of these conflicts are over the national goals and interests of the parties, including influence in areas with a power vacuum (Persian Gulf, Iraq, Lebanon), revisionism (regarding the order and systems of the region), conflict for supremacy in the Persian Gulf and West Asia, ideological conflicts (Shia and Sunni), economic competition in the issue of oil and economic relations with the countries of the region.⁸ Political competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia is natural in terms of Geo-strategy, and both actors have often experienced healthy competition throughout history, but because the balance of power in the Persian Gulf region and its recent history has always depended on the stability of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq; and, because the role of America in changing this balance and the relative strength of these three regional countries has been extensive, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been confused in their relations.⁹

Persian Gulf powers; the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, at least since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, have been involved in a hegemonic competition for power and influence among the countries of the region. Nationalism, revolutionary ideology, competition for regional hegemony, oil price, attitude towards the US military presence in the Persian Gulf Region and the issue of Hajj have been among the most important issues between the two countries.¹⁰

In the meantime, in order to further provoke these conflicts, the United States, by applying a new directive, induced the United States naval subordinate units to use the term "Arabian Gulf" instead of the "Persian Gulf", which provoked the mental stimulation of patriotic

7 A. Mottaghi, *op.cit.*

8 Alireza Azghandi, Mahdi Agha-Alikhani, "Investigating the Regional Factors of Divergence in the Relations Between Iran and Arabia (2005–2011)", *Politics Quarterly* 43(2)/2013.

9 Banafsheh Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends Or Foes?*, New York: Palgrave McMilla 1st Ed 2016.

10 Ali Fathollah-Nejad, "Brief aus Manama" [Letter from Manama], impressions from the IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies) Manama Dialogue 2016, *WeltTrends: Das außenpolitische Journal* 125/2017.

Iranians and has led strong reactions to defend this National Honor, and fueled the Pan-Arabism incitement and the fire of disputes.

The relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the tension-producing Middle East regional system entered the processes of open confrontation, the signs of which were evident after the attack on the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Tehran (January 2016) and the interruption of the Political and Economic Relations between the two States, Saudi Arabia's obstructs the issuance of Visa to Iranian pilgrims for *Hajj Umrah*, and due to the competitiveness relations at the regional level and the volume of historical differences between the two countries are in the process of intensification. In this framework and with the criticality of the disputed foci, especially in Syria and Yemen, which plays an important role in increasing or decreasing the rival's power, the existing tension can lead the process of hostilities to out-of-control processes. Although this situation is still a little far from a direct War, its destructive scope can lead bilateral relations as well as regional crises to a situation whose reconstruction requires time, cost and additional confidence-building measures.¹¹

The most dangerous and destabilizing competition in the region, between Iran and Saudi Arabia, extends from Levant to the Persian Gulf and has trapped the region in the Shia-Sunni and Fars-Arab poles. America also benefits a lot from this current diplomacy, and although it is not present at the Negotiating table, it can provide practical support to the current diplomacy by persuading and assuring Saudi Arabia in order to achieve its Final Goals, which require the reduction of Iran's presence and power in the region,¹² and in this way maintain its influence and interests in the region.

Here we will examine some of the most significant crisis-causing components in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.¹³

11 K. Karami, "The Role of Hashemi in the Architecture of the Relations Between Iran and Saudi Arabia", *Faratab News & Analysis Site* 1-2/2017.

12 World Economic, April 2022.

13 A. Saberfard, H. Kabiri, *op.cit.*

4.1. Energy price fluctuations (*The oil price*)

The OPEC report¹⁴ in 2017 indicates that Iran's oil production and OPEC's total oil production decreased in October 2017, while Saudi Arabia's oil production increased to 10 million barrels per day. OPEC announced in its report that Iran's oil production reached 3.823.000 barrels per day in October 2017, which is 11.3 thousand barrels per day less than the previous month. In the third quarter of 2017, i.e. July, August and September, Iran produced 3.833.000 barrels of oil per day. In the same months, Saudi Arabia has produced 16,900 barrels of oil more than September and the country's production has reached 10 million barrels per day (OPEC Monthly Oil Market Report, 11 October 2017).

In the case of the Iran's nuclear crisis, Saudi Arabia made an extensive effort to impose international community sanctions against Iran in order to reduce Iran's power of competition with itself in the region. While Iran's oil exports had decreased to less than one million barrels due to international sanctions, and in addition, the international financial restrictions prevented the dollars from the sale of this amount of exports from entering Iran, Saudi Arabia, with a sharp increase in its oil exports, greatly reduced the price of oil. Although this policy later caused serious damage to the Saudi Arabia's economy, but the price of oil fell sharply during those years. Saudi Arabia tried to target Iran's economy with a sharp drop in oil prices; This is while a high percentage of Iran's income comes from oil and gas, and the decrease in energy prices can cause inflation and factory closures, fuel unrest, and ultimately reduce Iran's support for Syria.

4.2. Competing over the leadership of the Islamic world

The occurrence of the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) caused this country to be ideologically opposed to the Saudi Arabia, and on the other hand, both countries claimed that they are the leader of the Islamic world and the *Umm al-Qura* of the region.¹⁵ Since the 1980s, the Islamic Republic of Iran has claimed the formation of *Umm al-Qara*, which means the mother of all cities, which refers to the entire

14 OPEC Monthly Oil Market Report, 11 October 2017.

15 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (CSIR) 2003.

Islamic world. On the other hand, in 1986, with a similar claim, the King of Saudi Arabia chose the title of *Khadim al-Haramin* as the leader of the Islamic world. The Islamic Revolution in Iran not only led to the continuation of Geopolitical competition between the two countries; Rather, with the revival of Shiites in the region, an Ideological factor was added to the competition between the two countries.

4.3. *The Strait of Hormuz*

Geographically, a strait is a part of the sea that is naturally formed and separated two lands from each other; Regardless of whether those lands belong to two countries or one country. Also, sometimes the strait connects two parts of the free sea or two oceans or even two parts of the same ocean. There is no owner or ownership rights over a particle of the vastness of the seas that the strait connects them with.¹⁶

From a legal point of view, not all the straits with these geographical characteristics are considered straits, but only the straits that are important for international maritime traffic are subject to legal regulations. Therefore, straits that are used for international shipping are legally considered straits. In other words, international waterways include straits that are basically used for commercial or military shipping of countries other than neighboring countries.¹⁷

The Strait of Hormuz is used by international shipping to a relatively large extent, especially by oil tankers belonging to countries other than Iran and Oman, and it is one of the most important trade channels in the world, through which two-thirds of the sea trade of crude oil passes. More than 13 ships, mainly tankers, use the Strait of Hormuz daily. As a result, the Strait of Hormuz should be considered as an international strait since it has all the geographical elements and the legal use of the strait.¹⁸

The Strait of Hormuz, with the annual traffic of 20,000 ships, is considered as one of the most important and vital international straits

16 Abbas Pour-hashemi, Akram Nemati, Flora Heidari, "The Legal Regime of the Environmental Protection of International Waterways with an Emphasis on the Strait of Hormuz", *Encyclopedia of Law and Politics* 20/2013, 87–102, 89.

17 M. Pour-nouri, *International Law of the Seas*, Tehran, Payam Haq Publication, 2nd volume, 1st edition 2004, 46.

18 *Ibid*, 64–65.

in the world. The Persian Gulf is a semi-enclosed sea that is of particular importance in international energy equations, and the Strait of Hormuz is the entrance key to this sea. The Strait of Hormuz is a 600-mile-long waterway that is the only water exit from the Persian Gulf. Iran's six strategic islands in the entrance area of the Persian Gulf (Hormoz, Lark, Qeshm, Hengam, Greater Tunb and Abu Musi) are located on a hypothetical defense curve. This is one of the most important factors that has made Iran a major actor in the Persian Gulf and has depended on the stable security in the Strait of Hormuz to this country.¹⁹ The possibility of blocking or making the Strait of Hormuz unsafe is one of the legal and political issues of interest in scientific circles. Some scholars believe that closing international straits is in conflict with the principle of freedom of navigation in the open sea in terms of international law and international customary.

Strait of Hormuz plays an important role in the world energy exchange. Every day, 2 million barrels of oil products, including oil and natural gas, are sent to other parts of the world through this strait. The gas export of one of the world's largest natural gas exporter, Qatar, is also sent to Asia and Europe through this strait. Japan and China are major buyers of Persian Gulf oil. China's imported oil is transported to China through the Strait of Hormuz through sea lanes across the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

The main reason of the importance of the Persian Gulf is the existence of huge gas and oil reserves in this region. The Persian Gulf holds more than 48.1% of the world's proven oil reserves and 30% of the world's oil trade. In 2009, the Persian Gulf countries produced about 28% of the world's oil. In 2011, the Persian Gulf countries exported a total of 19.1 million barrels per day, of which 17 million barrels went through the Strait of Hormuz, which is equivalent to one-fifth of global demand, and the rest went through the Turkish oil pipelines to the Mediterranean and from Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea.²⁰ Apart from the oil, the Persian Gulf region has a huge proportion of gas reserves of 2826.3 trillion cubic feet, which is 34.4% of the world's total discovered reserves, of which Iran's share is 15.9%, equivalent to 1168.6 trillion cubic feet.²¹

19 A. Pour-hashemi, A. Nemati, F. Heidari, *op.cit.*, 90–91.

20 EIA, Annual Energy Outlook 2009, DOE/EIA– 0383(2008), Washington, DC, June 2008 and 2012.

21 BP, 2012, 20.

The threats surrounding the possible closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the lack of supply of oil from this sensitive region to the international markets have caused countries bordering this region to take measures to transfer oil through pipelines. That is, based on the new measures, the importance of the Strait of Hormuz will decrease, and if relations become critical and the strait is blocked in certain circumstances, only Iran will suffer. In other words, the Persian Gulf countries' action in creating pipelines for oil transportation will reduce the role of the Strait of Hormuz as a lever of pressure and a tool of the power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this is something in conflict with Iran's national interests.

The special circumstances of the Persian Gulf and rising tensions caused the member states of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to try to build a pipeline, as an alternative way if their crude oil could not pass through the Strait of Hormuz. This pipeline was supposed to be a joint project of the member countries of this council, which started from Kuwait and continued to the Gulf of Oman, and it was used to transport crude oil from the member countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. For this purpose, America has been working with the GCC to bypass the Strait of Hormuz by building numerous oil pipelines. Washington is also putting pressure on Iraq to find another way to export its oil by talking to Türkiye, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The purpose of changing the route and moving oil transit away from the Persian Gulf is to separate and exclude a very important component of the strategic leverage that Iran has against Washington and its allies. This action will effectively reduce the importance of the Strait of Hormuz.

4.4. *The military presence in the countries of the region*

- Saudi Arabia in Yemen: The existence of a significant number of Shiites in Yemen and their cultural and political influence from Iran, especially in the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement, is one of the concerns of Saudi Arabia. Based on this, preventing Shiites from gaining power has been one of the most important strategic priorities of Saudi Arabia in the recent crisis in Yemen. In this regard, Farid Zakaria says: "What led the Saudis to attack Yemen is that they do not want a Shiite

government in Yemen”.²² The Wahhabi ideology puts Saudi Arabia in sharp conflict with the Shiites. The Saudi government believes that the Yemeni Shiites have a close relationship with the Iranian government and the Saudi Shiites in such a way that any success of the Yemeni Shiites will quickly affect the Saudi Shiites and will subsequently increase the influence and prestige of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

- Iran’s Presence in Syria, Lebanon etc.: Saudi Arabia authorities believe that Iran is seeking regional hegemony and re-establishing the Persian Empire. Saudis see Iran’s influence in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and beyond as a humiliation for themselves and the Arab world. On the other hand, Iran is only taking such measures in order to create security for itself, since in the past decades, Iran has been a victim of the presence and influence of regional and extra-regional powers.²³

5. NORMALIZATION OF TIES BETWEEN IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

Despite the many commonalities between these two countries in the Geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf in various Economic, Cultural, Political, Military, Geographical, etc. in the past decades, what has happened in the relations between the countries in the region, especially between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two leading and most effective powers in the region, apart from some limited bilateral and multilateral cooperation, it has not achieved anything other than competition, tension, war and conflict, and as a result, the aggravation of geopolitical crises; The conditions that have continuously brought heavy costs to the countries of the region and also destroyed the opportunity of any convergence and synergy to overcome the tensions and reach a constructive interaction.

In the 13th government of Islamic Republic of Iran, in line with the pursuit of the regional policy of interaction with the neighbors, on

22 Ali Nejat, Raziye Musavi, Mohammadreza Saremi, “The Strategy of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the Crisis in Yemen”, *The International Relation Studies Quarterly of Azad University*, 137–179/2017, 160.

23 Sayed Hossein Mousavian, “The Widening Saudi–Iran Divide”, *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs* 2018.

March 10, 2023, the news of the agreement of the two countries to resume relations was announced in a tripartite statement in Beijing.

The agreement was reached after two years of intensive confidential negotiations between Iranian and Saudi Arabian authorities, five rounds in Baghdad, Iraq and three rounds in Oman and the mediations of these two countries and was finalized within a week of consultations in Beijing.

In order to improve relations and explore ways to increase bilateral interactions, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Faisal bin Farhan, the foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, met and talked officially in Beijing on the morning of Thursday, April 6, 2023, after seven years of Severance of diplomatic relations. The foreign ministers Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a joint statement in the presence of the Chinese foreign minister to expand bilateral relations and cooperation.

In the joint statement issued by Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Faisal bin Farhan, it was decided that technical delegations would visit the capitals to review the process of reopening the diplomatic premises of the two countries, whose activities had been suspended since January 2014.

In this statement, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed on the resumption of diplomatic relations and it was agreed that the embassies and consulates will be reopened within a maximum of two months and the foreign ministers of the two countries will meet each other to implement this decision and make the necessary arrangements for the exchange of ambassadors.

In this regard, delegations were exchanged and finally, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Riyadh and the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Jeddah and the Permanent Representative of Iran to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) were officially reopened on Tuesday, June 6 and Wednesday, June 7, 2023. The embassy of Saudi Arabia in Tehran started its activities in a hotel in Tehran on August 3, 2023, and also the Consulate General of this country in Mashhad started its activities in a hotel in Mashhad, until to move to the previous premises after renewing the buildings.

On Thursday, August 17, 2023, and two months after the visit of Faisal Bin Farhan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, on

June 17, 2023, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in response to the invitation of his counterpart, and in his first official trip at the head of a delegation, traveled to Riyadh and then Jeddah, on August 18.

Now, in the shadow of the new developments in the region, whispers are heard about the reduction of tensions, which can affect the Geopolitical region of the Persian Gulf if it becomes operational and improve the future conditions of the region in terms of Economic, Security and Military bases.

6. THE IMPACTS OF THE RESTORATION OF IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA TIES AND THEIR CONVERGENCE ON THE REGION OF PERSIAN GULF AND THE MIDDLE EAST²⁴

The impacts are as follows:

1. Developing understanding in regional affairs and intensifying the feeling of Regionalism among the Persian Gulf countries, especially in Security Cooperation.
2. Reducing the tension in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia and its reflection on the supporters of these two countries in the Islamic world such as Pakistan and Afghanistan.
3. The increase in the price of oil in the world markets due to the cooperation of Iran and Saudi Arabia as the main producers and exporters of OPEC oil and the increase in the income of the countries of the Persian Gulf region and the improvement of the socio-economic outlook of the region.
4. Adjustment and refinement of the historical attitude of Shiites and Sunnis of the region and scholars and statesmen towards each other and facilities for pilgrimages to holy places, especially to the *Baqi* cemetery for Shiites. In general, this will improve the convergence of Shiites and Sunnis in the region and the world.
5. Expanding common interests and positions against the presence of foreigners and intervening countries in the affairs

24 Mohammad Hafeznia, Ebrahim Romina, "The Evolution of Relations Between Iran and Saudi Arabia and its Impact on the Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf", *Geographical Research Quarterly* 77(647)/2006.

of the Persian Gulf region, especially the United States of America.²⁵

7. CONCLUSION

Iran and Saudi Arabia, considering their capacities and characteristics, are two important and determining countries in the Middle East and Persian Gulf Region, and various reasons have caused constant tension in their relations. These two states have considered each other as rivals since the 1950s. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia includes the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, the Islamic world, and the international arena.²⁶ These two powers have seen themselves as serious competitors for influence in the Middle East, in particular the Persian Gulf region, especially after the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979) and the Iran-Iraq War. The competition between these two states is often intensified under the influence of Ideological and Geopolitical differences, which increase their enmity during regional riots and unrest.

In general, we can conclude that the Ideological and Geopolitical competitions of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Iraq, Lebanon, the Persian Gulf Region, and in the face of recent developments in Bahrain, Yemen, as well as their indirect confrontation in Syria, is a manifestation of the prevailing pattern of "Conflict". On the other hand, at the structural level of the International System, the denial of Iran's stabilizing role in the regional order and the intensification of *Iranophobia*, especially in the matter of Iran's Nuclear Program, and the highlighting of the Shia element (*Shiaphobia*) in regional policies in the process of the developments in Iraq and then Lebanon, have increased the Arab sensitivity and particularly Saudi Arabia against Iran. The pressure of Saudi Arabia and its allies on the Shia government of Iraq, the attempts to weaken the Shia and *Hezbollah* currents in Lebanon, supporting the Sunni ruler in Bahrain and preventing the establishment of Democracy and gaining power of the Shiites in Bahrain and removing Syria from the ranks of Iran's allies through by changing its regime, and by supporting Sunni-Salafi radical and Jihadist groups, the manifestation of

25 *Ibid.*, 80–81.

26 A. Mottaghi, *op. cit.*

the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been influenced by three factors: Identity, Geopolitics and Structural.²⁷

On the other hand, the increasing military role of Iran in Iraq since 2003 and in Syria since 2011 has caused the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf to be afraid of Iran's Hegemonic Ideals. The competition for power and influence in the region between Iran and Saudi Arabia has also manifested itself in the competition for identity, especially the confrontation between Shia and Sunni, Fars (Persian or Iranian) and Arab. The concern of the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf about a possible compromise between Iran and the United States is a reflection of their sense of insecurity regarding the long-term commitment of the United States to guarantee their security, and the recent changes in the global energy market and the change in the defense strategies of the United States have added to this concern. Thus, recently we have witnessed Saudi Arabia's new approaches, particularly reducing the supply of Oil and Energy to the US, which is supported by the Arab community.

After the Islamic Revolution of Iran, a Conflict Pattern has dominated the relations between these two countries, which according to many researchers can be called a Regional Cold War that the main reason of this is the Regional, Ideological and Geopolitical competition of these two states. Currently, due to regional developments, including the crisis in Syria, Iraq and Yemen and the Nuclear Agreement between Iran and Western countries, Iran's Regional Power and Influence has increased, and this issue is considered as a threat to Saudi Arabia from its point of view. Tensions and differences in the relations between these two countries have been increasing and continuing due to the two countries' perception of each other. These tensions and conflicts are not at all in the best interests of these two countries and in the Entire Region, but only strengthen the US in advancing its Goals in the Region. These two competing countries in the Persian Gulf Region must follow a path to get out of the confrontational situation, since their new convergence is the best opportunity to return Regional Stability to the Middle East and reduce or stop the influence and dominance of Aliens.

27 Ahmad Saei, Mahdi Alikhani, "Investigating the Cycle of Conflict in the Relations Between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia with an Emphasis on the Period 2005–2013", *Specialized Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 9th Year 22/2013.

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UZROCI SUKOBA IRANA I SAUDIJSKE ARABIJE

Rezime

Iran i Saudijska Arabija, kao dve regionalne sile, zbog svog geoekonomskog i geopolitičkog položaja, najvažniji su regionalni igrači u Persijskom zalivu i na Bliskom istoku, koji su dugo bili poznati kao dva glavna konkurenta na Bliskom istoku. Ove dve zemlje, zahvaljujući svojoj specifičnoj strateškoj poziciji u regionu, veoma su vitalne na Bliskom istoku. Zbog značaja ove dve zemlje u regionu, odnosi Irana i Saudijske Arabije imaju značajan uticaj na druge regionalne aktere. Prateći dešavanja poslednjih godina u regionu, svedoci smo ozbiljnog rivalstva između Irana i Saudijske Arabije koje je iz dana u dan postajalo sve složenije, što je pre svega u korist zapadnih sila, posebno Sjedinjenih Američkih Država, i povećava njihov uticaj u regionu, što je, naravno, na štetu ove dve zemlje i ostalih članica Bliskog istoka. U ovom članku ćemo ispitati najvažnije uzroke sukoba između ove dve države, pristup Saudijske Arabije prema Iranu i strategiju Islamske Republike Iran protiv delovanja Saudijaca i uopšte odnose ove dve sile.

Ključne reči: *Iran. – Saudijska Arabija. – Sukobi. – Bliski istok. – Persijski zaliv.*

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