Saudi Arabia and Iran: the Islamic Awakening Case

Ali Adami[*]
Najmieh Pouresmaeili[**]

Abstract

The Middle East has always been influenced by internal changes in regional countries, existing interactions at the regional level and power equations in the international system. Similarly, today we witness how changes in the political systems of some Arab countries, although considered internal affairs, have influenced the nature of interactions at the regional level. Developments called an "Islamic Awakening" have led to regime change in some Arab countries and posed a serious challenge for other ones, undermining the regional status of some countries and enhancing that of others. This article aims at studying the impact of the Islamic Awakening on relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia as two major regional states. The author, while assuming that the Islamic Awakening has undermined Saudi Arabia's regional status and in contrast has enhanced that of Iran, argues that Saudi Arabia has adopted a balancing policy against Iran in dealing with this problem. The main goal of this article is to study the different aspects of Saudi Arabia's balancing policy.

Keywords: Islamic Awakening, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Balancing, Security

Introduction

Since the advent of the Islamic Revolution, relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran (I.R.I) and Saudi Arabia have been mostly tense. Among the causes of these tense relations, we can mention the ideological opposition of the two sides, different interests in the various regions of the Middle East due to differences in attitudes and worldviews, and most importantly regional rivalries between the two countries. One of the realities of the Middle East region and distinctively the Persian Gulf region is the existence of rivalry to gain a higher status among the major regional states which in many cases led to some hostilities like the Iran-Iraq war.

Perhaps, it can be said that the Iran-Iraq war was the most important aspect of hostile competition between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Iran, on the other, in the 1980s. Iraq and Saudi Arabia along with other members of the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council regarded the formation of a political system based on political Islam in Iran as a threat to their regional status and for this reason, Iraq attacked Iran and Saudi Arabia supported Iraq in its endeavor. Although, there are other reasons for Iraq's attack against Iran, like Iraq's expansionist tendencies, Iraq and Saudi Arabia's concerns about the spread of political Islam among Muslim Arab states have played a great role in determining their behavior in this period.

With Iraq's attack on Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the I.R.I. expressed their concerns about Iraq's behavior and regarded its expansionism a threat against themselves and regional stability.

Therefore, to deflect the threat, the I.R.I condemned Iraq's action and urged the maintenance of Kuwait's national integrity. Saudi Arabia, which earlier had stood beside Iraq to confront political Islam as crystallized in the Islamic Republic of Iran, this time joined extra-regional powers such as the U.S. to counter Saddam Hussein's expansionist and dominating behavior and supported the war waged by a coalition led by the U.S. The common view of Saudi Arabia and the I.R.I. on Kuwait's issue reduced the degree of enmity between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but did not lead to the complete dissipation of their differences. Therefore, Iran-Saudi Arabia relations in the 1990s, based on a less hostile rivalry, continued until Iraq's occupation by the U.S. in 2003. The period following Iraq's occupation in 2003 is considered a turning point in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations because the situation gradually changed so that the I.R.I's regional status became enhanced.

The empowerment of Shia Muslims in Iraq and the increasing role of Hezbollah in Lebanon with the help of Syria contributed to the systematic and sustainable spread of the I.R.I's influence (Salem, 2006: 13-14). Along with the enhancement of Iran's regional status and influence, Saudi Arabia realized that its regional status was weakening; therefore, once again, its hostile rivalry with Iran began manifesting itself in post-2003 Iraq, the 33-day war between Hezbollah and Israel and the 22-day onslaught of Israel against the Gaza Strip and Hamas.

In addition, another factor instigated Saudi Arabia to the continuation and spread of its hostile rivalry with the I.R.I; Iran's progress in the nuclear field. Saudi Arabia believed that any progress made by Iran in the field of nuclear technology would be tantamount to the I.R.I's higher regional status which in turn, considering Saudi Arabia's backwardness in nuclear technology, would undermine its regional status. The clear manifestation of Saudi Arabia's hostile rivalry with Iran, affected by Iran's nuclear capability, is its cooperation with the U.S. to constrain Iran's nuclear activities.

The last factor influencing Iran-Saudi Arabia relations is the Islamic Awakening. In this article, the Islamic Awakening means that for the first time since the advent of modern states in Arab countries, it has become possible for Islamist groups and forces to take power. Since in the past, other schools of thought such as nationalism and socialism have been tested and failed in these countries, people now embrace Islamist groups. Election results in Tunisia and Egypt prove this claim. On the other hand, it should be noted that every Arab country may have its own perception of Islam, but a tendency towards Islamic teachings is the common feature of those Arab societies which undergo revolutionary upheavals. The question that this article tries to answer is what impact the Islamic Awakening has had on Iran-Saudi relations. To answer this question, the author argues that the Islamic Awakening has led to the lowering of Saudi Arabia's regional status due to changes in power equations in the Middle East region. For this reason, Saudi Arabia tries to adopt balancing behavior in cooperation with regional and extra-regional states to restore equilibrium at the regional level. The author first presents a theoretical framework for balance of power to analyze the Saudi behavior towards Iran affected by the Islamic Awakening and Iran's nuclear program. Then, a brief study of competition in the region and especially during the Cold War period as manifested within a triangle consisting of Iran-Iraq-Saudi Arabia and the post-Cold War era in which rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia culminated is provided. Then, the indices of balancing behavior of Saudi Arabia towards the I.R.I affected by Iran's nuclear program and especially Islamic Awakening is analyzed based on the article's theoretical framework. Finally, the author makes her conclusions.

I- Regional Security Complex

Many scholars in the field of international relations study relations among Middle East countries on the basis of a realist model. Joseph Nye believes that relations among Middle Eastern countries could be

better explained by the realist model of balance of power (Nye, 2006: 139-140). Meantime, Zeev Maoz says that the Middle East is a suitable place to analyze the traditional and pessimistic theories of international relations. On the other hand, Barry Buzan maintains that although some experts try to explain security interdependence in the Middle East on the basis of ideas such as Iranians vs. Arabs, Islam vs. Judaism, Shia vs. Sunni, etc, but these are only a part of the truth not the whole of it. Because so many interactions, competitions, friendships and hostilities in the Middle East can be only explained in terms of power (symmetrical or asymmetrical) and not by relying upon ideas (Buzan, 2002:638). Therefore, power structure has the greatest impact on the nature of interactions in the Middle East. Regional power structure means that whether power distribution in the region is equal or unequal. Thus, the statics or dynamics of the complex is a function of power structure.

The Persian Gulf security sub-complex is one of the Middle East regional sub-complexes which has been working on the basis of a competitive triangle consisting of Iran-Iraq-Saudi Arabia (which later led other Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region in the framework of the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council) (Buzan, 2002:640). Rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia intensified after the Islamic Revolution as the issue of the Islamic world leadership added to other outstanding issues between the two countries.

Each of these countries tried to at least maintain a balance of power and at most to tilt it in their own interests. Competition among the three countries was essentially based on power. In this competition, power was defined in terms of a material and concrete element which could see itself powerful if it enjoyed   factors such as vast territory, large population, appropriate geographical situation, military capabilities, etc. Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, when evaluating their respective foreign policies and behavior, paid attention to these factors and tried not to lag behind their rivals. To maintain this balance of power based on material elements, Iran, Iraq and Saudi

Arabia also resorted to extra-regional powers. They received military and economic aid from them or imported a huge amount of weapons in order not to appear weak. In this case, we can mention Iran and Saudi Arabia's weapon acquisition from the U.S., and Iraq from the Soviet Union. Within this balance and competition, the factor of Iranian nationalism against Arab nationalism as a non-material element of power had a secondary role, and in many cases, nationalism did not prevent cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Chubin & Tripp, 1996:12-20). With the emergence of the Islamic Revolution, rivalry among Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia did not fade away. Since political Islam advocated by Iran's new government was Shia in nature, the traditional competition between the two countries was revived in a new form. In other words, it seemed that under the condition that the I.R.I was not seeking to increase its military power and considered it insignificant, Iran should lay aside its previous rivalry with Iraq and Saudi Arabia and if any competition persisted it would be between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. But that was not the case, because although the new political system in Iran emphasized the non-material element of power, i.e. political Islam which could be much more powerful than military power, this kind of political Islam was based on Shia Islam. Hence, the rivalry was restored.

Fear of Shia political Islam drove Iraq's Sunni government to make an alliance with Sunni Saudi Arabia and other regional Arab countries. Saudi Arabia not only worried about the spread of political Islam throughout the region, but also, it was fearful that Iran would become a great power through provoking Shias in the region, particularly in Iraq where they enjoyed a majority. As a result, Iraq and Saudi Arabia aligned together for the first time to confront the I.R.I. Meanwhile, other regional countries that worried about the spread of political Islam and opposed Shia empowerment supported Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The culmination of this alliance against Iran's political Islam on the basis of Shia Islam was the beginning of Iraq's

war on Iran and the support of other regional countries led by Saudi Arabia for Saddam Hussein (Furting, 2006: 35-45). Following Iraq's attack on Kuwait and reaction of the international coalition led by the U.S. against it as well as the implementation of extensive political, economic and military sanctions against Baghdad, undermined gradually the Iraqi regime which collapsed totally with the U.S. attack in 2003. But traditional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia continued and gradually went beyond the Persian Gulf. Links between the I.R.I and Syria and Lebanese Shias helped Iran gradually enhance its regional status. However, Iran could not reach a hegemonic position in the region. Under these circumstances, the U.S. presence in the Middle East and especially in the Persian Gulf had become much heavier and Saudi-U.S. relations, despite tensions in the wake of the September 11 attacks, was ameliorating, suggesting the importance of their close ties at that period. However, regional competition, especially between Saudi Arabia and Iran, remained in vigor (Haass. 2006: 2-12).

With the fall of the Ba'ath regime in Iraq, an opportunity was provided for pro-Iranian Shias in Iraq to come to power. In Iraq, Shias can always gain a majority in the Parliament, because they compose the majority of population. On the other hand, Iraqi Kurds have always tended to form a coalition with Shias due to their bitter experience of mistreatment by Iraq's Sunni Arabs. This factor along with the role and impact of religious and ethnic variables in elections granted a significant advantage to Iraqi Shias. Thus, the I.R.I gained more influence in the region. In addition, the increasing role and influence of Lebanese Shias strengthened the idea among the opposition bloc that a "Shia Crescent" has emerged in the region, leading to a change in the balance of power in favor of Iran. To counter it, the opposition bloc led by Saudi Arabia reacted by supporting the opponents of Shia groups in Lebanon and Iraq and also trying to convince Syria to distance itself from Iran in order to restore equilibrium (Wehreyet, 2009). The culmination of Iran's

nuclear activity got Saudi Arabia increasingly worried about the enhancement of Iran's regional status. But what multiplied Saudi's concerns regarding its regional status since late 2010 are the developments called the "Islamic Awakening". Based on the adopted theoretical model, Saudi Arabia's balancing acts regarding Iran will be examined in the following section.

II- Saudi Response

The most essential policy pursued by Saudi Arabia since its establishment has been allying itself with Western countries, opposing existing revolutionary ideas in the Arab and Islamic world, and playing a balancing and conservative role in the region to prevent the spread of revolutionary ideas into Saudi Arabia and other conservative regional countries and thereby to pursue stability in the region. The Saudi government believes that any movement in the Arab and Islamic world will inevitably affect its political and social life. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has resorted to the consolidation of its relations with existing right-wing and moderate regimes in some Islamic countries, and to establish close contacts with Western countries. Along this line, Saudi Arabia aims to maintain the status quo through bandwagoning with the West (Gause, 2011:15). It becomes clear that Saudi Arabia's security and influence in the region is the function of the existence of stability and balance in the region and it reacts to every factor bringing about instability in the region and tries to preserve the regional balance and its resulting stability. As a result, the top priority of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East is preserving the balance of power and stability.

This Saudi policy was faced with challenges such as revolutionary ideas based on Marxism, Pan-Arabism and revolutionary Shi'ism inspired by the I.R.I's political system during the second half of the twentieth century. Under current circumstances, the most important challenge posed against Saudi policies is revolutionary developments resulting from the Islamic Awakening,

which is consistent with the I.R.I's progressive ideals for the region and is in conflict with Saudi policies based on maintaining the status quo and conservatism. Because of developments related to the Islamic Awakening, the balance of power has been tilted against Saudi Arabia and in favor of Iran.

As mentioned above, the regional security complex in the Persian Gulf is based on a competitive triangle consisting of Iran, Iraq Saudi Arabia. Following Iraq's attack on Kuwait and pressures imposed on Iraq, this country weakened during the 1990s and its regime was toppled in 2003, leading to the emergence of a new Iraq. Division between Shias and Saudi Arabia is the most influential factor in interaction between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Meanwhile, the emergence of a new government in Baghdad and its close ties with Tehran gradually changed the regional balance of power against the interests of the Saudis.

At the regional level, since Saudi Arabia always tries to play a leadership role in the region, the Arab world, and even the Islamic world, major developments and changes such as Shia empowerment in Iraq is not considered a positive phenomenon from the perspective of its regional interests and goals. In fact, Saudi Arabia has serious concerns regarding the existence of a Shia government in Iraq which may provoke Shias residing in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, creating a big challenge for Saudi dominance over the peninsula. On the other hand, close ties between Iraq and Iran can tilt the regional balance of power in favor of Iran. Saudis don't want the Iraqi government to establish close relations with Tehran and remain an Arab country in which Shias do not play a major role. To achieve these goals, Saudi Arabia tries to take simultaneously three actions.

First, it supports Sunni Arab rebels and anti-Shia groups. Saudis have done whatever they can after the advent of a Shia government in Iraq to interfere in Iraq's politics. Supporting the terrorist activities of Salafi and Wahabi groups in Iraq to make this country unsecure has been always a part of Saudi's policies towards Iraq (Lia &

Hegghammer, 2004:355).

Second, Saudis try to make contact with some political leaders and currents in Iraq to have an impact on Iraq's policies. For example, during Iraq's parliamentarian election, Iyad Allawi, head of the Iraqiya list and one of the opponents of the Shia government of Nuri al-Maliki, met with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to get support for his coalition. The presence of Iyad Allawi and other personalities opposing Maliki's government like Tariq al–Hashemi in Saudi Arabia indicates the lack of Saudi good faith towards the Iraqi government.

Third, Saudi Arabia has resumed its official relations with Iraq to influence the policies of this country and to encourage it to take distance from Iran. Despite pressure from the U.S., relations between Saudi Arabia and Iraq never turned normal following Saddam Hussein's fall. But after the passage of nine years, they changed course in February 2012. Saudi Arabia's actions had many reasons. One of them was the coming to power of a new elite in Iraq consisting of Shia Arabs and Iran's allies and friends, which naturally led to the enhancement of Iran's regional status and tilting of the balance between Shia and Sunni in the Persian Gulf and Middle East in favor of Shias. The Islamic Awakening and the consequent change of political systems in certain countries in the Middle East and North Africa was another factor influencing Saudi Arabia's new policy towards Iraq. Along with the West, Saudis have tried during the past year to transform the Islamic Awakening into an opportunity for ensuring their regional interest by removing the internal danger of these upheavals. Perhaps, the Syrian developments are now the most important issue for Saudis and having Iraqis on their side due to the existence of a common border between Syria and Iraq is strategically significant for them (Fordham, 2012).

The Islamic Awakening first affected Saudi allies such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain; therefore it was placed in a passive situation. The I.R.I supported the Islamic Awakening in Saudi-allied countries and considered it the uprising of nations against

the dependency of their governments on Israel and the West. Clearly, developments were in favor of the I.R.I and contrary to regional policies pursued by the Saudi Arabia, which saw its regional status in danger. The occurrence of unrest in Syria created an appropriate opportunity for the Saudis to relinquish their passive stance and adopt an aggressive approach to put one of the main allies of the I.R.I under pressure and thereby undermine its regional status in order to restore their weakened regional status.

In addition, it should be said that Saudi Arabia since the death of Hafiz al-Assad and coming to power of Bashar al-Assad has not led a favorable stance towards Syria, because Assad acted more independently from Arab regional policies. Relations between the two countries were tense for many years over Syria's support of Lebanese Hezbollah and Saudi's support of the U.S. as well as close ties between Damascus and Tehran (Gabill, 2005). To achieve this goal, Saudi Arabia has acted in two ways: first, by adopting an Arab-West approach, it tries to promote regime change in Syria. Along these lines, Saudis have had extensive consultations with U.S., Turkish and Arab politicians. Saudi Arabia is the main sponsor of conferences called "Friends of Syria" aimed at supporting the Syrian opposition groups. The first Friends of Syria conference was held in Tunisia on February 25, 2011 with the participation of 70 countries including Saudi Arabia. The second conference was held on March 3, 2012 in Istanbul with the participation of 83 states and international organization in which Saudi Arabia played an important role (Owens & Ryan, 2012). Official request for attacking Syria, suggesting the founding of an Arab army to invade Syria and manipulating the Arab League for exerting political and economic pressures on Syria are among other official and overt efforts made by Saudi Arabia against Syria.

Alongside the official and diplomatic efforts made by Saudi Arabia to put Syria under pressure, this country along with Qatar has provided financial and military assistance for Syria's opposition.

Financial support by Saudis for weapon acquisition and smuggling into Syria as well as presenting advice to prominent people among protestors and linking them with international media to create media pressure through news channels such as the al-Arabiyaa T.V. network, al-Hayat and al-Shargh-ol-Awsat are among other attempts made by Saudis against Syria. In the wake of the second session of the Syria conferences, Clinton said that arming Syrian opposition groups is an "obligation", because the opposition cannot defend itself without weapons (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012).

At the end of this section, it should be said that the Saudis have tried to restore the previous power equations at the regional level by exploiting Syrian developments, given the fact that the axis of Arab moderates became vulnerable following the fall of the Egypt government and other Saudi allies. In fact, Saudi Arabia considered that undermining the resistance axis meant strengthening the moderation axis, and for this reason, the best option was Syria, a country belonging to the resistance axis.

III- Iranian Factor

One of the most essential characteristics of Saudi foreign policy is that it fosters military-security cooperation with extra-regional powers and specifically the U.S. to increase its power in relation to its regional rivals as well as to maintain regional balance as a minimum goal. In fact, Saudi Arabia along with other Arab Persian Gulf countries adopted bandwagoning policies with the U.S. especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Walt, 1985:6). Today, U.S.-Saudi bilateral relations have become a constituent part of the Middle East regional order. During the Cold War era, and especially following Kuwait's occupation by Iraq, U.S.-Saudi relations took a strategic dimension. During the 1990s, security cooperation between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia which had been focused in the earlier decades on countering communism and the Iranian Islamic Revolution was concentrated on Iraq's threat. With the occurrence of the September

11 events and the introduction of a new U.S. strategy in the framework of the Greater Middle East plan, relations between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. became tense. Following Iraq's occupation, tensions between the two countries gradually started to reduce and they moved towards more friendly relations. Frequent meetings between the higher officials of the two countries in their respective capitals and also new partnerships in the field of security prove this fact. For example, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and other GCC members concluded a big arms deal worth of 20 billion dollars on July 29, 2007 (Pardos & Blanchard, 2007: 1-5). Also, Condoleezza Rice and Robert Gates arrived in Riyadh in late July. In June 2008, George W Bush visited Riyadh and the two countries agreed to a plan for nuclear cooperation. Also, the two countries concluded a new security partnership for safeguarding Saudi oil installations. Earlier, the visit made by Saudi King to Washington and Saudi support of the place process in Annapolis conference was another indication of strengthening U.S.-Saudi bilateral ties. With the election of Obama as U.S. president, Saudi Arabia has been faced by different U.S. policies in the Persian Gulf. Obama visited Riyadh in 2009. Leaving aside the policy of promoting democracy in Saudi Arabia by the White House, Saudi support of the Middle East peace process, and the statement made by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton regarding giving nuclear guarantees to Persian Gulf states when necessary are all strong signs suggesting the continuation of political-security cooperation between the two countries (Pardos & Blanchard, 2007:18). With the intensification of tensions over Iran's nuclear program and the advert of the Islamic Awakening, U.S.-Saudi political and security cooperation expanded with the aim of containing Iran.

Regarding Iran's nuclear program, Saudi Arabia has always tried to promote Iranophobia to introduce Iran's nuclear activities as an urgent danger which should be immediately dealt with. In a document revealed by Wikileaks in 2006, Saudi Arabia gave the green light to the U.S. to attack Iran. In this document, the Saudi King expressed his

concerns about the application of the Iranian model in Iraq and Iran's nuclearization (The Guardian, 2010). Along with the continuation of U.S.-Saudi political and security cooperation, foreign ministers of the two countries agreed on the establishment of a joint defense shield in the Persian Gulf, on April 1, 2013. In a joint news conference of foreign ministers of the two countries, the U.S. Secretary of State spoke of the U.S. pledge for ensuring the Persian Gulf security and described Iran as a threat for its security. Implementing joint military exercises with the U.S., Saudi's declaration regarding an increase in oil production in case of Iran oil sanctions to compensate the shortage resulting from stopping Iran's oil exports are among other Saudi attempts for bandwagoning with the U.S. against Iran.

According to the theoretical propositions of realism, states occasionally resort to foreign balancing in the framework of balancing acts. They try to mobilize and direct the capabilities of other countries against the target country (Walt, 1985:9). Saudi Arabia not only relies on its own capabilities for putting Iran under pressure, but also it has tried to utilize the capabilities of other countries. This behavior has become more salient since the advent of the Islamic Awakening. In response, we have witnessed the formation of a front called the royal anti-revolutionary club led by Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah invited [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council members to a conference held on 19, December 2011 in Riyadh, in a transition from he cooperation stage to unity stage within a single territory. Along these lines, Saudi Arabia is seeking to build an anti-Iranian coalition among Arab or non-Arab Sunni countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia to achieve this goal. It has also entered into negotiations with countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Central Asian states, and urged them to participate in oppressing Bahrain's Shias. For example, we can mention Saudi efforts to co-opt Pakistan in March 2010 for suppressing the protests of Bahraini people (Wall Street Journal, 2011).

IV- Bahrain and Yemen

Following the past uprisings of people against the Bahraini government during the 1990s, an agreement was concluded between opposition groups and government based on which constitutional monarchy was to be formed in that country and free parliamentary elections held. The Bahraini government's abrogation of the agreement on the one hand, and regional situation resulting from the Islamic Awakening on the other hand, sparked a new uprising in February 2011. The continuation and expansion of protests in Bahrain forced its government to request assistance from Saudi Arabia. Saudis responded positively to the request and in March 2011 sent their military troops to Bahrain. They were worried about Bahrain's developments for two reasons and tried to control them. First, Saudi Arabia believes that meeting the demands of Shia's in Bahrain in any extent has a direct impact on Saudi Arabia, which is home to at least 2 million Shias. Second, from the Saudi standpoint, any increase in Shia power would lead to an increase in Iran's influence. For this reason, Saudi Arabia's dispute with Iran intensified. The Saudis accused Iran of creating disorder, helping opposition groups and carrying out subversive activities in Bahrain, despite their own extensive military presence in that country (Spinedle & Coker, 2011). One of the plans envisaged by the Saudis to contain Bahrain's unrest is Bahrain's annexation to Saudi Arabia, with the aim of obliterating the Shia majority (75%) in Bahrain by reducing their share to 10% by making them part of the Saudi population. Saudi Arabia has adopted the same policy towards Yemen. Saudi Arabia and Yemen have established complicated and special relations with each other during the past three decades for different political and strategic reasons. Since the unification of North and South Yemen in the 1990s, these relations took more extensive dimensions. In the Saudi strategic view, Yemen's geographical situation and the nature and kind of their relation during the past decades places this country at the

level of GCC countries in terms of influencing Saudi national security. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has been an active and influential actor in all crises and developments taken place in Yemen during the past decades. The Saudis have closely observed Yemen's internal developments. Since the emergence of the Sa'ada Shia movement and the alliance of Shia tribes in Sa'ada and al-Emran provinces, Saudi Arabia has pursued these developments more carefully. In addition, Yemen's territory is considered a safe haven for the opponents of Saudi policies. Therefore, Saudi Arabia needs security along its long borders with Yemen. Since earlier times, these borders have always provided concerns and crisis for Saudi statesmen. Saudis have always accused Iran of protecting Yemen's Shia rebels (Murphy, 2009). In November 2010, Saudi Arabia conducted an air raid against the positions of Yemeni rebels.

With the beginning of the popular uprising in Yemen, accompanied by the fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, the Saudis were faced with another danger in South Yemen, which could spill into their territory. In a reaction to Yemen's developments, the GCC by Saudi's initiative presented a plan in March 2011 for a power transition in Yemen, so that it could be carried out gradually and in desirable manner for the Saudis. According to this plan, which was signed in November 2011 in Riyadh by Ali Abdullah Saleh and his opponents, it was agreed that Saleh would give up his powers to Yemeni vice president, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and a national unity cabinet would be formed by one of the opposition leaders (Hill & Nonneman, 2011:14). Following the enforcement of the agreement, he Yemeni parliament based on a clause of the accord, ratified a law giving full immunity to Saleh, and the president presented his resignation to the parliament and left the country. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has so far managed to control Yemen's developments to prevent sudden and quick developments. The main goal of Saudi Arabia in Yemen was maintaining balance in the Middle East and stability along the Yemen-Saudi borders. To reach this goal,

Saudi Arabia was forced to consent to the resignation of Ali Abdullah Saleh as its closest ally (Haykal, 2011:1-2).

V- Strategic Landscape

The most common method for increasing power and to take precedence of rivals is improving military power. This could be done in two ways: first, a state relying upon its domestic capabilities. This is a costly method, but due to the fact that it is indigenous, it is more reliable. The second way, which is prevalent in many Third World countries, is that some states consider that to become stronger in military terms, they should buy weapons from countries which produce them. Although this method may be useful in acquiring some modern weaponry through paying money, it leads to dependence on countries selling arms and the lack of indigenous capabilities leads to unrealiability (Sanjian, 2003: 714-15). The Saudis have chosen the second way for their military buildup. Saudi Arabia, as the biggest producer of crude oil in the world and by relying upon abundant financial resources, is one of the most principal arms buyers. Saudi Arabia is mostly dependent on the U.S. in military terms. Most of Saudi military personnel are trained in the U.S. or pass military course in Saudi Arabia under the surveillance of U.S. military trainers. It has been the case since the 1950s and the present time, given the high volume of Saudi military purchases from the U.S. But, the culmination of the U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia took place in the 1990s when the U.S. sold sophisticated weapons worth 14.5 billion dollars in total to Saudi Arabia. In the second half of 2007, a 20 billion dollar arms contract was signed between Washington and Riyadh during U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Saudi Arabia.

The biggest arms deal between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was concluded in late 2010. It was worth 60 billion dollars, and was considered the biggest military contract during the history of Saudi Arabia. According to this contract, the U.S. will provide the Saudi

military with jet fighters and offensive helicopters. This deal may be also the biggest one in the U.S. history. It includes 84 F-15 fighters, 132 helicopters, cruise boats and restoration of existing Saudi missiles (Cordeman, 2010). Saudis have also concluded similar contracts with Britain and Germany.

Irrespective of how Saudis look to Israel, it should be said that Saudis' goal in acquiring such weapons is not directed towards small Persian Gulf countries or a weakened Iraq. On the other hand, other countries such as Turkey and Pakistan have no enmity or hostile rivalry with Saudi Arabia. In the process, only Iran remains, a country regarded as a rival and even enemy by the Saudis. The advent of the Islamic Awakening to the disadvantage of Saudi Arabia, enhancing Iran's regional status and its progress in nuclear field, possible military confrontation between Iran and the West, and finally, necessity of ensuring security in the Hormoz Strait as well as strengthening Saudi's military power against Iran are among determining factors behind the Saudi military purchases.

It was said before that Saudis consider Iran's nuclear achievements as their backwardness leading to the enhancement of Iran's regional status and Saudi's weaker situation in the region. To compensate for this weakness, Saudi Arabia, as the biggest oil exporting country in the world, is seeking to build 16 atomic power plants by 2030 at the cost of more than 100 billion dollars. In February 2012, during the Chinese prime minister's visit to Riyadh, he declared that China has come to agreement with Saudi Arabia for building two nuclear power plants. Also, Saudi Arabia has invited France to participate in its projects for building nuclear power plants in that country. This decision is completely affected by Iran's nuclear activities. Saudis are worried about the strategic implications of progress in Iran's nuclear program for the regional balance of power.

According to the Oslo pact, the Fatah movement as one of the branches of PLO headed by Yasser Arafat would abandon its armed struggle, recognize Israel and 1967 borders, and agree to negotiate

with Israel. But the Hamas movement, contrary to Fatah, continued its armed struggle against Israel and did not recognize the existence of an Israeli state. In the process, regional states were divided into two groups. Most Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan etc supported Fatah and in political literature, were renowned as the "conciliatory camp". Conversely, countries like Iran and Syria supported Hamas and formed the "resistance camp". Therefore, these two currents began higher rivalry at the regional level.

Following the fall of Hosni Mubarak, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, who could not leave Gaza since 2006, began his diplomatic trips. On the other hand, Khaled Mashal, Hamas political bureau chief, who was expelled from Jordan in 1999 along with other Hamas leaders, visited Jordan. This indicated an essential shift in Hamas's positions. Finally, on May 4, 2012 and with the mediation of Egypt and participation of Arab foreign ministers (conciliatory camp), Turkish foreign minister and the UN Secretary General, an agreement was signed between Hamas and Fatah in Cairo, ending the differences between the two groups. This accord included the establishment of a transitional unity government, holding parliamentary and presidential elections before June 2012 and finally the integration of the security forces of the two rival groups. The most important terms of the accord was recognizing 1967 borders and complying with acts and decisions of the leadership. In the middle of February 2011, Khaled Mashal and Mahmoud Abbas agreed on the details of the accord signed in May in sessions held in Qatar with the support of Saudi Arabia (Greenberg, 2001). In fact, contrary to the past, Hamas adopted a moderate and pacifist attitude by accepting the 1967 borders. With the beginning of Syria's upheavals and the support by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas declared that it will leave Syria. With the acceptance of Qatar's mediation and Saudi support as two main countries opposing Bashar Assad, Hamas had already endorsed its taking distance from Bashar Assad and resistance camp and finally closed all its offices in Syria (Salhani, 2011). Therefore, the

"conciliatory camp" penetrated into one of the pillars of the "resistance camp".

Qatar, along with Iran and Russia, form a gas troika aimed at expanding cooperation between Iran, Russia and Qatar in gas fields (Nasseri & Walters, 2008:1). The I.R.I and Qatar together control the South Pars gas field, one of the largest gas reserves in the world. In addition to the oil and gas sectors, the I.R.I and Qatar have close cooperation in navigation. Contrary to some other Arab countries, Qatar has not publicly opposed the I.R.I's policies in the Middle East and its officials have even urged economic and security cooperation with Iran. Also, Qatar has never directly accused Iran of interference in Bahrain's affairs as Saudi Arabia has done. Qatar wants Iran's nuclear issue solved through peaceful means and has proposed to mediate between the U.S. and the I.R.I over the nuclear issue. Qatari officials defended Iran's rights to peaceful nuclear energy in their meeting with Hillary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State in 2010, and Dennis Ross, special advisor of the U.S. president in the Middle East and Persian Gulf affairs, and at the same time expressed their concerns about the beginning of an arms race in the region in case of Iran's access to a nuclear bomb (Associated Press, 209). Therefore, it should be said that Qatar does not take a hostile stance towards Iran because of its common interests with Iran, especially in the gas sector. But the Qatari government, which seeks to play a regional role, has carried out some actions in the region that indirectly challenge the I.R.I interests and policies at the regional level, the most important of which are the following:

1) Close alliance with the U.S.: Qatar is a country that defines its security in relation to extra-regional great powers, especially the U.S. For this reason, Qatar hosts many U.S. military headquarters in the Persian Gulf (United States Central Command, 2010). This policy pursued by Qatar is in conflict with that of the I.R.I based on the withdrawal of extra-regional forces from the Persian Gulf and the management of regional security by regional countries.

2) Membership in the GCC: the mere membership of Qatar in this organization does not pose a threat against the I.R.I, but Qatar as a member of the GCC has signed the statements issued by it in opposition with condemnation of Iran's interference in Bahrain, UAE's claims regarding three Iranian islands, etc.

3) Cooperation with Saudi Arabia over Syrian crisis. There were disagreement between Saudi Arabia and Qatar as two GCC members over the leadership and policy-making. But with the advent of the Islamic Awakening, the two countries agreed to cooperate with each other in an unprecedented manner. This cooperation especially manifested itself in the Yemeni and Syrian crises. During the Syrian crisis, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have provided the major part of financial and military assistance to opposition groups for toppling Bashar al-Assad's government. Saudi Arabia is seeking to end the 33-year alliance between Tehran and Damascus. But in observers' opinion, Qatar's motivation for toppling Assad is ambiguous, because in the past years, Qatar had developed its relations with Damascus and Tehran. Qatar was involved in the Libyan and Syrian crises. Perhaps, the main reason for this was making efforts to obtain regional and international prestige through playing an active role in the international affairs (Rabi & Mueller, 2012:17). With the beginning of upheavals in Syria from March 2011, Qatar intervened in the crisis by protecting the opponents of Bashar al-Assad and tried to take initiatives in the Arab League against Syria. The Qatari foreign minister was nominated as the chairman of the committee of Arab League Foreign Ministers for coordinating efforts against the Syrian government. Qatar, not only like in the case of the Libyan crisis is seeking extra-regional intervention in Syria, but it also urges Arab League military intervention (Barakat, 2012:27).

4) Making Efforts to moderate the Hamas Movement's Stances. With the beginning of unrest in Syria and its continuation, Hamas movement transferred its political bureau from Damascus to Qatar and Egypt in February 2012 and practically advocated for the

opponents of Assad. Although Qatar's efforts to mediate the Palestinian dispute date back to before the beginning of the Islamic Awakening, after Hamas' took a position against the Assad government, Qatar has more actively tried to push for reconciliation among Palestinian groups. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of Qatar made an official visit to Gaza in October 2012 and participated in the opening of a housing project in the Gaza Strip. The cost of implementation of this project, which amounted to more than 250 million dollars, was paid by the Qatari government. Qatar's efforts to reconcile Hamas and Fatah forced Hamas to adhere to many political positions of Fatah, a faction which tends to favor conciliation with Israel.

Conclusion

With the wave of the Islamic Awakening in the region, Saudi Arabia has been faced with undesired changes. This situation has constituted a challenge for Saudi's permanent policy based on maintaining the status quo.

Saudi Arabia saw itself in a weaker position compared to the past following the fall of its principal allies and its strategic importance and influence in the region, especially in comparison with Iran. The conservative axis in the region was weakened in favor of resistance axis consisting of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. In addition, the emergence of progressive and radical discourses at the regional level threatened Saudi Arabia's regional status. This situation led Saudi Arabia to adopt a balancing policy towards the I.R.I. According to the theoretical framework of the article, it should be said that Saudi Arabia's balancing act stems from two main reasons. First, the fall of their allies made the Saudis feel weakened in terms of power sources in competition with Iran. In other words, the collapse of Saudi Arabia's allies while Iran's allies stayed in power and the eventuality of increasing the number of Iran's allies is considered a serious flaw for Saudi power in regional competition. Second, based

on the theory of threat balance advanced by Stephen Walt, Saudi Arabia feels threatened by the developing progressive waves as an offensive ideology advocated by the I.R.I. Therefore; this country has resorted to balancing acts to counter this threat.

References

Busan, Barry. 2002. "The Middle East, a Conflict-ridden Structure", translated by Ahmad Sadeghi, *Foreign Policy Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No.3.

Busan, Barry. 1999. *People States and Fear*, translated by Strategic Studies Research Institute, Tehran: Strategic Studies Research Institute Publications.

Busan, Barry, Waever, Ole. 2009. *Regions and Powers*, translated by Rahman Ghahramnpour, Tehran: Strategic Studies Research Institute.

Busan, Barry, Waever, Ole, and De Wilde, Jaap. 2007. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, translated by Alireza Tayyeb, Tehran: Strategic Studies Research Institute.

Lake, David A. Morgan, Patrick M. 2002. *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, translated by Seyed Jalal Dehghani Firouzabadi, Tehran: Strategic Studies Research Institute.

Morgenthau, Hans J. 1948. *Politics among Nations*, New York: Knopf.

Associated Press. April 27, 2009. "U.S. Envoy on Iran Policy to Visit Gulf," U-T San Diego, http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2009/apr/27/us-us-iran-042709/?ap.

Barakat, Sultan. 2012. *"The Qatari Spring: Qatar's Emerging Role in Peacemaking"*, The London School of Economic and Political Science, NO.24.

Central Intelligence Agency, CIA World Factbook. 2011. "Natural Gas – Proved Reserves," https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2179rank.html.

Chubin,Shahramand Tripp, Charles. 1996. *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order*, Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Cordesman, Anthony H. 2010. *The New Saudi Arms Deal*,Center for Strategic and International Studies,http://csis.org/publication/new-saudi-arms-deal.

Fordham, Alice. 4 March 2012. "Iraq, Saudi Arabia show signs of improved relations after years of strain", *Washington Post with foreign policy*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraq-and-saudi-arabia-show-signs-of-improved-relations-after-years-of-strain/2012/03/04/gIQAXnxBrR_story.html.

Furtig, Henner. 1 Mar 2006. *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia Between the Gulf Wars*, Ithaca Press.

Gambill, Gary C. Fall 2005. "Syria after Lebanon: Hooked on Lebanon", *Middle East*

Quarterly, Vol. XII, No. 4.

Garner, James W. 1925. "Limitations on National Sovereignty in International Relations", *American Political Science Review*, Publisher: American Political Science Association, Volume: 19, Issue: 1

Gause, F. Gregory. December 2011. "Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East", *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council Special Report, No. 63.http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Saudi_Arabia_CSR63.pdf.

Greenberg, Joel. December 2001. "Hamas Adjusts to Arab Spring", *Washington Post*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/hamas-adjusts-to-arab-spring-reaches-out-to-moderates/2011/12/21/gIQAogOFAP_story.html

Haass, Richard. November/December 2006. "The NewMiddle East," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6.

Haykel, Bernard. June 14, 2011. "Saudi Arabia's Yemen Dilemma", *Foreign Affairs*, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67892/bernard-haykel/saudi-arabias-yemen-dilemma?page=show.

Herz, Monica. March 2006. *Regional Security- A critical Perspective*, Institute of International Relation Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro.

Hill, Ginny and Nonneman, Gerd. May 2011. "Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: Elite Politics", Street Protests and Regional Diplomacy, Middle East and North Africa Programme", *Chatham House*, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/19237_0511yemen_gulfbp.pdf.

Hürriyet Daily News. 7 November 2012. "Friends of Syria' 2nd meeting to be held in Turkey",http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/friends-of-syria-2nd-meeting-to-be-held-in-turkey-davutoglu.aspx?pageID=238&nid=14542

Lia, Brynjar and Hegghammer, Thomas. 2004 ."*Jihadi Strategic Studies*," Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 27, No. 5.

Milner, Helen. January 1991. "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1.

Murphy, Caryle. Nomber 14, 2009. "What is behind Saudi offensive in Yemen", *Global Post*, http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/saudi-arabia/091114/saudi-arabia-offensive-yemen-houthis.

Nasseri, Ladane and Walters, Greg. October 21, 2008. " Russia, Iran, Qatar form 'Gas Troika,' Gazprom says," *Bloomberg*, , http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aeFP4Z8bWzLE.

Nye Jr, Joseph S. July/August 2006. "Transformation Leadership and U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.85, No.4.

Oweis, Khaled Yacoub and Ryan, Missy. Apr 1, 2012."Syria's "friends" try to twist screw on Assad", Reuters,http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/04/01/syria-idINDEE82T08W20120401.

Pardos, Alfrd B, and Blanchard, Christopher M. 13 April 2007. *Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/

organization/70301.pdf.

Rabi, Uzi, and Mueller, Chelsi. Number, 2012. "Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Syrian Uprising", *Telavive Notes*, Vol. 6.

Salem, Paul. Number 9 -June 2008. "The Middle East: Evolution of a Broken Regional Order", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, http://carnegieendowme nt.org/files/cmec9_salem_broken_order_final.pdf.

Salhani, Claude. October 4, 2011. "Hamas Cools to Syria as the Arab Spring's tally mounts", The National,http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/hamas-cools-to-syria-as-the-arab-springs-tally-mounts

Sanjian, Gregory S, December 2003. "Arms Transfers, Military Balances, and Interstate Relations", JOURNAL OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION, Vol. 47 No. 6.

Snyder, Glenn H. July 1984, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics", *World politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4.

Spindle, Bill and Coker, Margaret. April 16, 2011. "The New Cold War", *Wall Street Journal*, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405274870411640457626274410640 83816.html

The Guardian. 28 November 2010. "Saudi Arabia urges US attack on Iran to stop nuclear programme," http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/28/us-embassy-cables-saudis-iran

United States Central Command. February 21, 2010. "Centcom HQ deploys to Qatar," United States Central Command, http://www.centcom.mil/press-releases/centcom-hq-deploys-to-qatar.

Wall Street Journal. April 16, 2011. "Saudi Arabia forming coalition against Iranian regime" ,http://ncr-iran.org/en/news/terrorism-a-fundamentalism/10680-saudi-arabia-forming-coalition-against-iranian-regime.

Walt,Stephen M. Spring 1985. "Alliance formation and the balance of world power", *International Security*, Vol.9, No.4.

Wehreyet. AlFrederic. March 2009. "Saudi-Iranian Relations since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry", Cooperation and Implications for U.S. Policy. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG840.pdf.

Zinnes, Dina. September 1967. "An analytical study of the balance of Power Theories", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.4, No.270.