INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF
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ACADEMIC STUDIES

The Impact of Iran-Saudi Arabia Competition on Security in the Middle East from 2011 to 2016 (Case Study: The Iraq Crisis)

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Abstract

Regional security equations and arrangements in the Middle East are influenced by several factors. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is primarily ideological. Saudi Arabia claims to be the leader of the Islamic world due to its dominance over Islamic religious sites, while Iran claims to be the leader of the Islamic world, especially the Shias. the question that arises in this research is; How has the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia affected the security of the Middle East, especially Iraq? Our hypothesis is that; The ideological rivalry and conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia have led to the formation and intensification of a kind of turbulent atmosphere in the Middle East, especially in Iraq. The present study was qualitative and descriptive-analytical, and data collection was Library research. The theoretical framework used in this research is the balance of regional power. The balance of power is the law of conduct of states, meaning that in the event of a confrontation with an aggressor and disturbing balance of power, they will establish a balancing coalition and prevent the emergence of dominant power. Accordingly, the balance of

power between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the primary determinant of regional hegemony.

Finally, both Iran and Saudi Arabia have worked hard to fill the lack of power in the Middle East, following a US-centric approach to Asia. These rivalries and efforts to maintain the balance of power, especially the military balance, have posed a severe challenge to the region.

Keywords: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Middle East, Iraq, Security

Introduction

Saudi Arabia and Iran have seen themselves as serious competitors for influence in the Middle East, especially in the Persian Gulf region, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq War in 1980-88. Saudi Arabia provided extensive diplomatic and economic support to the Iraqi government during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. The nature of this rivalry has fluctuated dramatically in the past decades after the Iranian revolution, and this rivalry has reached the level of the Cold War in the years after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran by the revolutionaries. In recent years, limited cooperation between the two countries has been possible in the general context of suspicion and competition. Nevertheless, at best, cooperation between the two countries has almost always been suspicious. In addition, in 2011, Saudi-Iranian relations took a surprising turn due to sharp differences over a wave of unrest known

as the Arab Spring and a Saudi-led military intervention in Bahrain to support the kingdom. The rivalry between the two countries is often intensified by ideological and geopolitical differences, which escalate during regional unrest. Saudi Arabia is under the control of an authoritarian Sunni monarchy with a political agenda that often focuses on maintaining the status quo in the Persian Gulf region. Saudi leaders work closely with smaller Arab kingdoms in the Persian Gulf, sometimes a benevolent country and sometimes playing the role of an older brother in an unfavorable situation (Terrill, 2011). Iran-Saudi Arabia relations are approaching a comprehensive crisis after the Islamic Awakening and the Arab Spring. Apart from the historical aspects of the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, in recent years, there has been an apparent rivalry between the two countries in expanding its influence in the region, especially in Islamic societies. With the release of the documents via WikiLeaks, some intimate relations between the two countries were revealed. The Saudis in Saudi Arabia looked at Tehran with hostility and called for military intervention by NATO member states against Tehran. In the past, movements such as the killing of pilgrims in 1366 AD have been a sign of the inflexibility of Arab rulers in the face of a new wave of Islamism in Iran. An issue that in its time caused the highest tensions in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations. However, within recent days, the interactions between Tehran and Riyadh have not seen very friendly positions. Threats to test Saudi military power, military movements in Iran that, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have maximized military maneuvering in Iran, and the issuance of bilateral statements by the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the Gulf Cooperation Council

Fars has pushed relations between the two countries to the brink of tensions beyond diplomatic statements(Parsapour, 2021).

Method of work
The present study was qualitative and descriptive-analytical, and data collection was Library research.ﺑ

The Main question
How has the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia affected the security of the Middle East, especially Iraq?

The research hypothesis
The ideological rivalry and conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia have led to the formation and intensification of a kind of turbulent atmosphere in the Middle East, especially in Iraq.

Theoretical Basis:
The theoretical Basis used in this research is the balance of regional power. The balance of power is the law of conduct of states, in the sense that in the event of a confrontation with an aggressor and disturbing balance, they will establish a balancing coalition and prevent the emergence of dominant and superior power(Rahimi Roshan, 2017). Meanwhile, the Middle East region is one of the strategic regions of the world, with 15 countries with different economic, social, cultural, political, and natural characteristics(Afshordi & Madani, 2009). Countries exposed to geopolitical threats need a balance of power more than any other. The Middle East and the Persian Gulf are in such a situation (Cox, 2016). In this regard, recent developments in the Middle East can be considered as the central axis of change in the balance of regional power. Any shift in the political power of the countries in the region will

have strategic consequences for different countries. In other words, any regional development can affect the balance of power between the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the developments related to the Arab Spring will affect the balance of power and the balance of the Middle East. In this case, the developments in Syria since March 2011 can be considered as one of the factors influencing Iran's security needs and formations. With the formation of developments in the Middle East, countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey sought to influence the regional balance; Some of the actions taken by Saudi Arabia can be considered factors and components that have affected the regional balance. In sum, it can be said that whenever the balance of power changes, the ground for conflict and war is created. Therefore, part of the current conflict in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations in the Syrian crisis can be considered a reflection of a change in the balance of power (Nejat, 2016).

Discussion:
Different periods of Iran's foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia:

First period: After the Islamic Revolution and the start of the Iran-Iraq War, which was historically the starting point of radical Iranian foreign policy. During this period, due to the ideological nature of the Islamic Revolution and the attempt to change the status quo in protest of the international system, a pattern of conflict prevailed in Iran's foreign policy. Confronting the system of domination and arrogant policies is the key to this transformation. Such an attitude towards the international system is best expressed in the framework of the principle of neither East nor West, in the framework of a strategy of balanced confrontation with the two powers of the bipolar world (Simbar, Salehiyan,

& Radgoudarzi, 2018). After the revolution, with the collapse of the regional equilibrium pattern, Iran-Saudi relations darkened. The Islamic Revolution brought with it a new identity for Iran. Accordingly, Iran broke away from the West and, due to its revolutionary and ideological nature, was considered a challenge to the monarchical and conservative regimes in the region. Accordingly, in the post-revolutionary period, Iranians and Saudis changed their perceptions of each other based on their identities, and the ideology on which the two actors based themselves and pursued it was in opposition to each other (Pourahmady, Ghyiasi, & Ghaimy, 2021). Since then, in the Persian Gulf region, Iran's goals have been to propagate Shiite-based Islam, expand its influence and establish itself as a dominant power in the region, reduce US influence and military presence, discredit the US presence in the region, and expand its influence on opposition groups. Moreover, the competition with Saudi Arabia was through exploiting the rifts within the Persian Gulf region (Cordesman, Alsis, & Allison, 2011).

Second period: It coincides with the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani and the adoption of a pragmatic orientation in Iran's foreign policy, which, of course, was a model of coexistence in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Of course, external factors were also influential in this direction, such as Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of the bipolar system. During this period, with the change of ruling elites in Iran and regional and international developments, pragmatic orientation based on domestic political, economic, and security requirements and conditions, regional and international orientation in Iran's foreign policy took precedence and ideological orientation based on the current situation to some extent. It

took a long time. These domestic developments, along with international developments, changed Iran and Saudi Arabia (Arm, 2016).

Third period: It coincides with the coming to power of the reformist government, which based its foreign policy on de-escalating tensions and establishing relations with countries around the world and Iran's neighbors. Principles such as Political and cultural development, de-escalation, confidence-building, pacifism, and multilateralism have become the guiding principles of Iran's foreign policy over the past eight years. Internationally, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the onset of the nuclear crisis are four significant developments that profoundly affect Iran's foreign policy. Efforts to de-escalate and build trust, along with creating a conducive regional and international environment, led Iran and Saudi Arabia to experience a period of calm and a sense of "friendship" with each other, and for the first time since the Islamic Revolution. Peak energy, politics, and security (Saei & Alikhani, 2013).

Fourth Period: With the coming to power of the ninth government and the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iran's foreign policy differs in nature from its two previous periods, and the revolutionary radicalism of the 1980s is revived. Therefore, it is natural that Iran's relations with the world and neighboring countries are cooling. We are still witnessing an acute pattern of conflict over relations between the two countries (Arm, 2016).

Identity conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia:

The political culture of the people of Saudi Arabia is closely linked to religious and sectarian values. The people of this region have both past and present values. A priori values mean commitment and loyalty to religion, ethnicity, sect, etc. Moreover, posterior values

mean values that include nationalism and the separation of religion from politics. Examining the layers of social behavior and dominant discourses in this region, it can be seen that most people in this region are influenced by a priori values and are more committed to sect, religion, and ethnicity than the nation. Believing people have a priori values and therefore have a rigid and inflexible mentality, weigh the world with several beliefs, and are not willing to bargain due to the beliefs of mindsets because beliefs are not negotiable. The internal situation of religiously disparate countries in the region shows the role of religious and sectarian loyalty in the political and security process. Major security crises in the region occur in ethnically and religiously diverse (Mirkoshesh, 2018).

Ethnicity: Ethnicity is defined by the American sociologist William Sumner as follows: To place the values and standards of one's own culture at the center of judging others, that is, to place one's own culture above all other cultures. Ghaderi says ethnic minorities, whether racial, linguistic, or religious, have a great deal of talent for rejecting or criticizing nationalism centered on one ethnicity, language, or religion. Since the rise of Islam in the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia have faced an Arab / Ajam dual ethnicity that represents two distinct peoples with different customs, languages, and cultures, which has led to differences and differences between them.

Religious Identity: Huntington highlighted the role of religion as the foundation of civilizations to rearrange the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union by highlighting cultural-civilizational conflicts. He thought that the ideological bipolar order of the Cold War era had given way to a multipolar order that was demarcated based on civilizational and cultural lines with a religious-cultural character. Iran and Saudi Arabia claim the two religions of Shiism and Sunni, and through this, many of the

rivalries and conflicts between the two countries stem from a different view of Islam and the claim of leadership of the Islamic world.

Political identity: In terms of the political identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is derived from the Islamic Revolution, with revisionist principles in the regional and international order, and in contrast, Saudi Arabia has a conservative government and supports the policy of maintaining the status quo. From the perspective of foreign policy, the Iranian government has defined its policy in opposition to the West, especially the United States, and in contrast to Saudi Arabia, it has chosen a policy aligned with the West, and in particular the United States (Mirkoshesh, 2018).

The Impact of Iran-Saudi Arabia Competition on the Situation in the Middle East

The Middle East has experienced the most political conflicts and tensions in the first decade of the 21st century. Although this region, like the Arab world and many other parts of the world, is witnessing coexistence and cooperation and literature of solidarity and unity, which is primarily due to the existence of Islamic identity on the one hand and the similarities and historical and cultural background of the countries in this region. They pass their most sensitive and crucial historical period. The Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iran-Iraq political crisis, Islamic fundamentalism and tensions between Islamic movements, and the strife of Shiite Islamic groups such as Hezbollah and Israel are all issues that have led to political instability in the Middle East today. It has led to a balance of power in the Middle East within the realism of the regional government's foreign policy approach. If we look at the internal conflicts in the Middle East, we will see that the political pressures of the influential actors of the international system have increased the continuation of these conflicts. The 21st century Middle East has become a competitive arena for the world's political powers, especially the United States, to assert their power and authority in the region. Thus, the crisis in the Middle East today is partly due to the divergence of views on the foreign policy approach of the organized states towards the changes in the international system, and on the other hand, to the cooperation and long-term plans of the world's powerful political actors to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East. One can see a shadow of the effects of the world's powerful political actors, which shows the political instability in the region and has led to an increase in the militaristic approach of regional governments towards each other, and the balance of power between countries has a growing trend. This is believed to increase central power in the Middle East today and gradually lead to the political divergence of existing countries from the foreign policy of Europe and the United States. The countries of the Middle East have allied themselves in important alliances, mainly because they are Arabic-speaking, and we are witnessing a kind of polarization of the region. The situation in the Persian Gulf countries is very similar to that in Saudi Arabia. The critical point is to what extent these countries can diversify their economic structures. Even if successful, the calm atmosphere will cause a crisis in the region. The economic growth of the countries in the region today cannot be attributed to their economic prosperity. Socially, the future of the region's countries will be involved in the interaction or confrontation of two social groups, stakeholders, and identities. Stakeholders are organized around the more prosperous economic axis of the social stratum (Hasanlou & Mohammadkhani, 2017)

Strategic rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Iraq crisis:

Iraq is the focus of both Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both are sensitive to the emergence of an unacceptable new government in Iraq. It is important to note that after Saddam's regime, this problem has become more challenging for Saudi Arabia than for Iran. In the post-Saddam scenario, Iran has the natural advantage of improving relations with Baghdad because of the existence of post-Saddam Shiite governments. This is not good for Saudi Arabia because it has strained relations with many Iraqi leaders, including Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (Wehrey, Karasik, Nader, Ghez, & Hansell, 2009). Iraq is also working on inviting and cooperating with international oil companies to rebuild their oil facilities to be one of the world's top oil exporters (Luft, 2005). This could weaken Saudi Arabia's position as a regional and international player in the world oil market. In addition, the Saudis are concerned that any Shiite organization in Iraq could create a favorable environment against Saudi Arabia, leading to diplomatic propaganda. Even a temporary alliance between Iran and Iraq could potentially harm Saudi interests in the Middle East (Zehraa, Fatima, & Khan, 2018). Iran is also aware that a pro-Saudi government in Iraq could do more harm to Saudi Arabia than a pro-Iranian government in Iraq. The history of the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted eight years, is a sad and disturbing event. As a result, thousands were killed on both sides, and many were disabled, and it is difficult for Iranian society to forget the war (Muir, 2003). Tehran still has a significant presence in Iraq due to the rapid increase in US military power and influence on the Afghan-Iraqi border. These efforts include austerity diplomacy, covert action, and the promotion of Iranian clients in the Iraqi political system, including the leadership of armed militias. This approach has been somewhat successful, and Iran has become a major force in Iraqi politics. By joining the alliance with Russia and Syria, as well as Iraq, Iran has continued its process of supporting and cooperating with its regional allies, which are currently in crisis in Syria. It has directed its foreign policy in the framework of supporting the Syrian government. Because by expanding the actions of this terrorist group and the areas occupied by this group, the possibility of Tehran's access to Syria was seriously endangered. In addition to the security issues mentioned, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that Iraq has an important place in the revolutionary religious narrative and strategy of Iran. With a population of 20 million Shiites, it is an important ally and partner for Iran in the region. However, Sunni areas of Iraq are influenced by Saudi Arabia and other Sunni countries in the region. Thus, the rise of ISIS prompted Iran to react to the threat, condemning Western interference, including by the United States, in Iraq, as well as Saudi support for strengthening the Syrian opposition. Nevertheless, apart from the above, the most important goal of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the form of the coalition that it seeks to achieve is the complete elimination of ISIS and the preservation of Iraq's territorial integrity. By dividing Iraq into three parts, Sunni-Shiite and Kurdish, it further weakens Iran's influence in Iraq and the influence of its rivals, including Riyadh and Jerusalem (Padervand & Babaei, 2017). However, the most important question that arises here is whether regional and trans-regional countries, as in the Syrian crisis, face each other in the Iraq crisis. The answer is yes, which means that there is competition for more influence in this country, and each of the countries involved in this crisis is trying to pursue its interests. Along with Russia, Iran is also in conflict with its rivals because of

common interests and consensus in identifying the threat in the Iraq crisis. Saudi officials, for example, had repeatedly stated that the US invasion of Baghdad in 2008 ended in favor of Shiites and Iran, even before the crisis in Iraq and the terrorist operations carried out by ISIS. Therefore, with the start of terrorist operations by ISIL, with the financial support and weapons, it sought to prevent Iranian influence. Following the tensions in Iraq, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir traveled to Baghdad to hold talks with Saudi officials. He considered the result important, so he stated that the two countries are ready to fight against terrorists in the region. This action shows that Riyadh intends to take a new approach to the Iraq crisis and to prevent the great influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran gained by the Shiites and the militias, or in other words, the popular forces fighting against ISIL (Riedel, 2020). In contrast, US officials, who have been a constant ally of Saudi Arabia in the Iraq and Syria crises, say they seek to help Iraqi forces fight and control ISIS with airstrikes and military aid. Nevertheless the military and civilian forces, as well as the current Iraqi government, have not yet been convinced that the US goal is to overthrow ISIS in the region and Iraq. By discovering a video of terrorist forces in the occupied territories, they realized the goals of Washington and its regional allies, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, in maintaining chaos in Iraq to achieve their goals, including the country's and the region's oil energy. The Iraqi media also stated that the United States had made no effort other than destabilizing Iraq and selling arms to countries in the region, strengthening its presence and influence, and establishing military bases (Salaheddin, Press, & George, 2016). Today, with the liberation of Mosul and the weakening of ISIL's power in Iraq, the issue of autonomy and the Kurdistan Region is one of the tensest

issues. In this regard, with the consultations that Mr. Barzani held for holding the referendum, Iran's regional rivals, including the occupying regime of Jerusalem and Saudi Arabia, support the holding of this referendum and the creation of an autonomous region to achieve their political goals in this country. In this case, the Prime Minister of the Zionist regime, Netanyahu, stated in 2015 that "the Kurds are a militant and politically moderate nation that can be more politically valuable than a state." After Massoud Barzani announced that Iraqi Kurdistan would hold a referendum on independence on December 24, 2017, Russia was told by its Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, that "although the referendum shows the legitimate aspirations of the Kurds, the Kurdish region must "International law works." Iran, along with Russia, another key ally of the Iraqi government, has stated opposition to holding a referendum (FRANTZMAN, 2017). Because Iran and Russia consider the support of the occupying regime of Quds and its allies in the region and the United States for holding a referendum in the Kurdistan Region as a lever for instability in Iraq and the current government, they are opposed to it (Akreyi, 2017).

Conclusion:
The balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the primary determinant of regional hegemony. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have worked hard to fill the power vacuum in the Middle East, following a US-centric approach to Asia. These rivalries and efforts to maintain the balance of power, especially the military balance, have posed a severe challenge to the region. The remoteness of national goals and the low level of cooperation between the region's powers have diminished the convergence in the Middle East region, so much so that it seems

unlikely that soon, we will see the expansion of cooperation and convergence in this region. The turbulent atmosphere in the Middle East requires a regional superpower that is in perfect balance and always keeps its distance from the region's second-tier powers. It seems that both Iran and Saudi Arabia are seeking to achieve this position. The future will determine whether the powers of the region will move towards convergence and act as a powerful actor on the world stage, or compete and compete with each other until one of these two powers, Iran or Saudi Arabia, will dominate the region, and we will see a period of calm again.

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