

## Iran and Saudi Arabia: the dilemma of security, the balance of threat

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**Abstract:** With the initiation of the Great Middle East Project by the United States of America, one topic which preoccupied politicians and the governments in this region and consumed their analytical and even executive resources was that of security. The implementation of this project was accompanied by desired and unforeseen changes and events which for various reasons resulted in creation of serious security challenge for political systems of the countries in this region. Up until the in the Arab world in 2010, security within the region was gained through the balance of power approach between regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, since the beginning of Arab uprisings, as various aspects and elements combined with the balance of power structure – such as ideology, unofficial and informal players and regional transformations – it seems the balance of power approach alone will not lead to security and the formation of a security structure in the region, in particular for countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. In this sense, what we are hoping to achieve in this article is to provide decisions-makers and experts in regional and international affairs with a new resolution for achieving security in the region, based on Stephen Walt's 'balance of threat' theoretical framework. Therefore the main question here is to define what Iran and Saudi Arabia, under the new circumstances, perceive as their most important threat and security challenge. Our hypothesis here is that for Saudi Arabia, aside from the uprisings in the Arab world, Iran and the resistance front with its Shiite core, is the main threat and security challenge. According to Walt's balance of threat theory, four main criteria are analyzed in relation to the balance of threat between Iran and Saudi Arabia: the source of threat, the intensity of threat, the threatening power, spectrums of defense against the threat.

**Key words:** Security dilemma; Balance of threat; Geopolitics resistance; Arab changes; Regional structure; Regional order

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### 1. Introduction

With the beginning of transformations within the Arab world in 2010 and the fading away of the regional order and structure, and as changes intensified in Middle East, security became such a precious commodity for countries and states in the region; as a result 'threat' also became the main concern of these countries.

Saudi Arabia as one of the most important and influential countries in the region, which has always followed the policy of maintaining the status-quo and being conservative, is one of the countries which feels a great deal of threat against the security of its political and internal systems. For this reason, since the ignition of the transformations in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia has tried to relieve itself from related threats and challenges through various means, tactics and policies; and all of such measures and actions have had a great impact on the states in the region. Confronted with such actions, the Islamic Republic of Iran as Saudi Arabia's old and traditional competitor in the regional so sees its security at risk.

The leaders and officials in Iran are well aware of mentality of Saudi Arabia regarding Iran - that if it

wants to attain and maintain its security, Iran should be under pressure and be suffering from lack of security. In fact, there is a direct relation between providing security in Saudi Arabia and having insecurity in Iran as Saudi Arabia's regional competitor. This relation results, amongst other factors, from the ideological gap between the two countries and the differences between their perceptions regarding regional order.

But a point of interest in Iran-Saudi Arabia relation and their perception of one another is the different threats they perceive from the other state as well as the status and content of such threats. The two countries have long seen other as competitors and upon any changes the regional functions, they observe and analyze very carefully the actions and movements of the other so to ensure that no threat is posed from the other side. Therefore, Iran and Saudi Arabia are in a constant state of competition and threat. Such approaches have resulted in the formation of a competitive and threatening relation between the two countries in the balance of threat structure.

Clearly up until now the relations and competitions between the two states, their regional role and influence, and their attempts to achieve security and power have only been analysed within

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the balance of power approach. However, such view so far has resulted in huge amount of costs and damages for both countries as well as for other states in the region. Our aim here is to suggest a more rapid, less costly path for the two countries to attain security and power and form regional order and structure based on defensive realism (balance of threat) theory.

The supporters of balance of threat theory, through logic and creating balance between aggression and defense, in favor of the defence, predict that countries often defend the status-quo. Creating balance and being prepared are suitable means for confronting concentration of power. This view itself is a theory relating to the 'dual balance of power' with a linear nature without having a structural and automatic form. Also here, causality is a factor. Rationalism and a balance of aggression - defense which is in favor of defense shows that governments create and implement balance (Walt, 2002; Glaser, 2003).

Therefore after the changes in the Arab world and taking into account all the problems in the region, it seems that a consensus is shaping up on adopting and enforcing defense rather than aggression as regional crisis such as in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq and Palestine are deteriorating. The authorities in Iran, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region have realized that the ideological aggression of armed hardliner groups not only do not create security and provide strategic interests, but also threatens their long-term security and their political existence and stability, as well as creating huge extra costs. Therefore with logical thinking and a sound analysis of the regional conditions, Iran and Saudi Arabia are trying to avoid more radical aggressions. In the current situation the two countries are in a state of balance of power - favoring towards Iran and the resistance front. This achievement of Iran was gained not through aggression, but instead through defense; Saudi Arabia, as the developer of various aggressive plans implemented by armed terrorist groups has lost the upper hand in the balance of power.

The main question of this article therefore is to define, relating to the recent changes in the region, what Iran and Saudi Arabia perceive as their main threat and security challenge. Our hypothesis is that for Saudi Arabia, in addition to Arab changes, Iran as the core and central element of the resistance front is most important threat and security challenge; this process had begun many years ago in form of Iran-phobia and Shia-phobia but reached its peak with the beginning of the changes in the region as can be witnessed in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

On this basis, we will first attempt to briefly described Stephen Walt's 'Defensive Realism' theory (balance of threat) which is the foundation of the attempts by Iran and Saudi Arabia to achieve national and regional security. Secondly, we will point out threats Iran and Saudi Arabia face in the region to attain security and shape their desired regional structure. In the third section, the two

countries' actions in relation to balance of threat will be discussed. The fourth section is dedicated to measuring actions of the two countries against the variables and principals of the balance of threat theory by Stephen Walt. Finally we will provide our conclusion.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Defensive Realism – Stephen Walt

Defensive realism is a theory with a structural view which puts stress on structural elements in international politics. Its main and most important concept is 'balance of threat' which is put forward as a replacement for the concept of 'balance of power'. Walt emphasizes that in international politics stability and balance shape up when, instead of balance of power, the attention is given to balance of threat. Based on this idea, the countries decide what to do according to the threats they perceive towards themselves; attaining security is the highest aim and the most important concern of the countries; to attain security countries defend against perceived threats. Therefore the best model to defend to balance the threat.

Defensive realists also pay attention on one hand, to the relation between anarchy and the necessities of international systems, and on the other hand, to the behaviour of governments; but they see this relation as being complex. Their hypothesis is that international anarchy is more or less benign. This means that attaining security is not a rare event and in many cases it does take place. Governments' realization of this fact decreases their chance of turning into aggressive responses. Therefore countries only react when they feel that there is a threat against them; and this reaction is often aimed at balancing and preventing the threatening factor. Harsher reactions in form of aggression then only happen when the security dilemma becomes too serious. However it is important to note that defensive realists don't see international anarchy as being completely Hobbesian or benign; instead they state that there is no cut and clear way of understanding it and that it falls on government authorities to analyze the degree of the threat or its absence in all situations (Rose, 1998, p.152).

According to Talia Ferro (1999) defensive realism is based on four criteria, as described below:

**1. Security enigma:** refers to a situation in which one government's measures for enhancing security results in the decreasing of another government's security. According to defensive realists expansionism not always results in increasing security; absolute security is never reachable unless a global hegemony is achieved. And as the chance of getting to such state is very slim and as the establishment of a global government would mean the end of international politics, governments would always be seeking security and therefore are faced with the security enigma.

**2. Delicate structure of power:** as defensive realists view it, the influence of the delicate structure of power - which is not a system-level variant - can be described as the relative distribution of material potentialities which enables governments to follow certain military and diplomatic solutions, which is more important than the raw or rough structure of power in its sense of relative share of the power resources in hands of a government.

**3. Leaders' mental perceptions:** the influence of the delicate structure of power and material potentialities affect the behaviour of governments through the perceptions and beliefs of the leaders of that nation. They often analyze the information they obtain through historical analogies and other cognitive shortcuts and then decide upon their analysis. Therefore, the agent becomes a highly important modifier.

**4. The interior policy arena:** according to defensive realists, independence of government from civil society, political alliance, the arena of institutional politics and the relations between civil and military sectors are all factors which influence the ability of the leaders to mobilize resources; the national political power, meaning the ability to mobilize human and non-human resources, is highly important for governments (Ferro, 1999).

The defensive realists also pay attention to the conditions under which war and aggression would emerge. When security enigma exists, it is possible that the governments who truly seek security suffer from misconceptions relating the intentions of other countries and therefore aggressions might emerge between countries. Also the governments that are dealing with reforms in their internal systems are unlikely to adopt aggressive or expansionist approaches.

Walt asserts the importance of 'balance of threat' instead of 'balance of power'. The criteria which form balance of threat can be described as the offensive strength of a country, its military capabilities, geographical proximity, and their possible aggression habits and tendencies. Therefore power is not the only determining factor and there are other important elements which play a role (Walt, 1987).

Walt describes that in relations between governments, the factor which plays an important role is the perceptions of governments of one another, not merely the power each of them possess. When governments are faced with an immediate threat against their existence, they adopt balancing towards the governments which are source of the threat. For security to increase in a system there are certain criteria which should be present: creating balance should have become a norm, ideology should not be playing a key role, and foreign influence and assistance should play relatively a small role in shaping up of alliances.

When confronted with a perceived threat, states often adopt the balancing approach; this means allying against the perceived threat. The more powerful the states are, or the chance of gaining

alliance seems higher, and the greater the perceived threat, the chance of states adopting the balancing strategy increases. But in some cases, states that are particularly less powerful would ally with the state which they perceive as more likely to win the conflict (Walt, 2002 - p.187).

### **3. Threatening actions of Iran and Saudi Arabia in regional level for attaining security**

Since the beginning of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the combination of republicanism with Shiite principals, the House of Saud became gravely concerned about the influence of Islamic revolution on the region and in particular on the Shiites of Saudi Arabia. This situation resulted in increasing alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States of America; and the two countries, sharing similar concerns, decided upon curbing the Islamic revolution in Iran. Such concerns were not limited to Saudi Arabia; other countries in Persian Gulf region also became more dependent on the United States for their protection against the waves created by the Islamic revolution. Therefore, the way for expansive and extended military presence of the U.S in this strategic region was gradually paved (Jafari, 2010).

Examples of Saudi Arabia's contrasts with Iran in the region can be seen in its measures to weaken Iran during the imposed war between Iran and Iraq. The prime of such events was the killing of Iranian pilgrims in Mecca by Saudi police which resulted in the halt of diplomatic relations between the two countries. During the Iran-Iraq war Saudi Arabia also plotted oil related plans against Iran. Other examples of Saudi Arabia's measures against Iran can be the Saudi deal on Israel boycott, financial and military assistance of Iraq during its war with Iran, efforts for putting military sanctions on Iran, and intentionally trying to widen the gap between Shiites and Sunnis (Sangdavini & Ghorbani, 2013).

During the presidency of Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani (reconstruction era) and Mr. Mohammad Khatami (reformation era), the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia relatively improved and recognizable steps were taken towards reconciliation between the two countries. The air of hostility and threat was gradually shifted to one of friendship and convergence, to the point that during an official visit in Riyadh, the Saudi King showed Iranian officials - as a sign of friendship and goodwill - a plan for an attack on Iran by the United States of America (Tebyan News and Analytics, 2013).

But as Mr. Ahmadinejad's government took power in July 2005 the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia once again turned cold due to series of wrong policies and appointment of unsuitable ambassadors. The main differences which emerged during Ahmadinejad's period had a geo-political and ideological nature and were mostly related to topics such as the war in Syria, conflict in Bahrain, Egyptian revolution, the issue of Palestine and Iran.

The most important regional and international factors which further fueled the tensions between

Iran and Saudi Arabia during eight years of presidency of Dr. Ahmadinejad was the revision of 'unbalanced war theory' by the U.S. against Iran in first place; to the point that an international and regional consensus and alliance was formed against Iran. West was relatively successful Iran's nuclear profile and Iran-phobia tactics in the region acted in such ways which during this time Saudi Arabia was seen as the leader of all anti-Iran activities. As Saudi Arabia and Israel became close, a discourse was clearly formed which intensified the regional conflicts in relations with Iran (Motaharnia, 2013).

The foreign policy of the 11<sup>th</sup> government has focused its attention on the doctrine of constructive interaction, based on which Iran is after forming suitable atmosphere for 'détente policy' from a powerful position based on a win-win situation with neighboring and other countries. Within such framework it can be observed that Iran is now trying to undergo a meaningful revision of its foreign policy within the current context of regional and international affairs, in order to pave the way for implementation of constructive interaction policy. This attempt can be described as a continuation of an old trend in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; a trend which emerged in reconstruction period under the term 'normalizing relations' and was later continued during reformation period as 'détente policy' based on the dialogue between civilizations but was halted during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> governments (Official site of Presidency, 2013).

The structure of power and politics in Middle East is in a way which there is always a spirit of competition present – be it constructive or destructive – between the key regional and trans-regional players. The formation of new political situations in form of conflicts and regional changes and many cultural, political and security realities in the region add more and more to the importance of the role Iran and Saudi Arabia play in shaping up of the regional systems.

In defining regional order (balance of power), Iran is faced with different variants considering its security concerns and its national benefits. Iran has always been after balancing based on cooperation and forming regional order based on revolutionary Islamist order. Some examples of Iran's variants in defining regional order can be described as: Iran's 20- year perspective, its nuclear issue, the new Silk Road plans, the Shia element, regional hegemony, existing and potential threats against security and benefits of Iran, its international as well as regional advantages etc.

Iran, as one of the most powerful countries in the region and considering its advantages and unique characteristics, will play a big part in formation of regional order based on the above mentioned variants. In relation to regional order, different scenarios have been put forward but taking into account the current situations and balancing competitions, two scenarios or visions seem more likely to take place in terms of regional order, with Iran and Saudi Arabia being the main designers and

implementers of these two orders or structures. In fact security concerns and the intensity of mutual threat between Iran and Saudi Arabia can be analyzed in relation to the formation of these two structures: the revolutionary Islamist order of Iran and the Salafi Islamist order of Saudi Arabia.

Revolutionary order is a version that Iran, considering its ideological needs, wants its expansion and establishment in the region. The revolutionary tendency lead by Islamic Republic of Iran wants the formation of regional order and security to be achieved through collective and multilateral management. In this model the establishment of regional order would not be the exclusive right and privilege of powerful states; in other words, Iran is seeking the input and cooperation of regional players in order to stop the interference of super powers and trans-regional states, and at the same time excludes the Zionist regime from the matrix of regional power (Salehi, 2013, p.82).

Iran, which is an advocate for the revolutionary Islamist order, believes that internal autocracy and foreign domination has humiliated the Muslims in Middle East in the last few decades. Such humiliation has forced Muslims in the region to do what Iran did three decades ago in order to regain their religious and Islamic identities; and this is against all the advertisements and infusions of the West to make secularism and liberalism popular. The experience of regional government as in the Islamic republic of Iran's experience, has caused this revolution to inspire all freedom and emancipatory movements in the world; self-confidence, begin religious, gaining identity and dismissing dominance are characteristic which have flowered in the discourse of the Islamic revolution and are what make this uprising different from other similar movements and uprisings.

This unique view of Iran is different from other regional and international approaches towards the recent changes in the Arab world. Therefore, Iran's definition and interpretation of order currently shaping up in Middle East definitely differs from other interpretations of such order. Therefore the basis of obliteration of the old order and the demolition of previous structures, and also the formation of the new order and structures are the main two goals persuaded by the new order in Middle East (Laipson, 2011). The Islamic Republic of Iran wants to implement its desired model (revolutionary order) in security relations in Middle East, using the course of changes in the region particularly those in Arab countries. This model can also be named 'cooperation- multilateral management'. In this model, the formation of regional order is not only the right and privilege of powerful states (Salehi, 2013).

Saudi Arabia alongside its allies has also been seeking the formation of a new regional order with membership of Israel, as well as isolating Iran and the resistance. In this new order, the Arab Union,

Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf Cooperation Council all have important places (Nematzadeh, 2013).

Saudi Arabia is currently most concerned about the dismissal of the regional balance and achieving more important role by Iran in Middle East which can create new sources of threat for Saudi Arabia. This concern explains why Saudi Arabia is strengthening and modernizing its military capacities and is defending and supporting terrorist groups in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria and further increasing the pressure on Iran through economic sanctions relating to Iran's nuclear program (Karami, 2013).

Saudi Arabia wants to decrease the role and influence of Iran in the region and this is a result of the difference which exists in the two countries' views regarding regional order. This difference in perception, combined with the Islamic and civil uprisings in the Arab world, make the two countries wanting to utilize every existing potential in the region to its maximum and eradicate threats to their benefits (Fazlali, 2013).

The emergence of Iran as one of the most powerful countries in the region would mean the weakening in power and the central role that Saudi Arabia is currently playing in leading the Emirates (Persian Gulf Cooperation Council) as well as in the world of Islam and Sunnis (Mousavi, 2007).

With the initiation of the Arab changes, Saudi Arabia has been faced with two kinds of threats in the region; one from domestic public uprising and revolt, and one from the tensions in its neighboring regions such as in Bahrain, Yemen, and countries in the Persian Gulf region. On this basis Saudi Arabia, unlike Bahrain and Arab countries, was faced with two battles – one inside of Saudi Arabia and one outside of it in neighboring countries such as Bahrain and Yemen. In other words, Saudi Arabia began a process of preventing mass protests domestically to maintain its position, after testing different means and making sure of their effectiveness (Ahmadian & Zare, 2011).

Following the revolts and changes in the Arab region, Saudi Arabia adopted a harsh, solid approach towards such changes and the Saudi Royal family was clearly forced to spend a lot of money to maintain its status among people.

Ultimately, the Salafi order desired by Saudi Arabia was form based on the teachings and political principals of Wahhabism which approves of domination and interference of foreign powers in the regions. The aim of such submission and making grounds for easier interference of foreign powers was on one hand balancing against and limiting revolutionary order and one the other hand, suppression of demands for reforms and freedom in Arab countries. In this framework, the model of Salafi order with the leadership of Saudi Arabia tries to tie up regional order with international security order and to define regional order in relation to that. Therefore Iran and Saudi Arabia as two agents of threat towards each other, are seeking to establish their own definition of security order in the region

so to attain and maintain security both internally and externally; they are both also after identifying means and measures to control and limit the other.

#### **4. Actions of Iran and Saudi Arabia towards balance of threat**

After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the scene of power and politics in the region was affected by Shiites gaining power in Iraq. As Iraq transformed from a threatening agent towards Iran to one of its friends and allies, and as Iran started so support the Shiites in Iraq, the role of Shiites in regional power and political changes grew stronger; as a result, the role of Iran and its influence also intensified and gained further stability in regional competitions. It is logical to believe that games in the Middle East region are based on roles and stabilizing spheres of influence aimed at threatening the other side. After this increase in the influence and power of Shiites in Iran, the forgotten Muslims of this country suddenly became one of the important determining forces in regional issues in Middle East. According to certain statistics, there are chances present for further potential growth of Shiite Muslims in Middle East in future (Bozorgmehr, 2006).

The role of Iran as the epicenter of Shiite changes will gain further importance in the region and internationally in future. Concerns regarding Shia Crescent have formed due to worries about the increase in the power and influence of Iran and the resistance front in the region. Discussion relating to the formation of the Shia Crescent was mentioned by King Abdullah of Jordan which is a clear evidence of the threat that the Arab world and in particular Saudi Arabia's leaders and Persian Gulf countries are feeling from increasing power of Shiites as their main source of threat in the region. They are concerned about the formation of Shia Crescent or Shia geopolitics as, firstly, it has resulted in an increase in the role of Shia element in regional power structure through growing alliance between Iran and Iraq; a condition which has resulted in changes in the structure of politics and power in the region against Sunni rulers.

Secondly, this alliance is taking place within districts (Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria) in which rulers in power are against the Salafi order; such strategic connection defies balance of power, type of threat, quality of threat and threatening spectrum in the region. Thirdly, the intensification of such alliance, with its different perceptions about the role and presence of super powers, is a threat for conservative Sunni states in the region. This issue is of particular importance regarding Shia minorities within the Persian Gulf region. There is no doubt that the establishment of a democratic Shiite system with an ideological foundation can become a real threat and a challenging factor for the legitimacy of closed political systems in the countries of the region (Bozorgmehr, 2006).

The resistance front as part of the Shia Crescent and the geopolitics of resistance is geographically

spread in form of a continued crescent which includes various threatening Shiite groups. This can be considered a relative benefit, in terms of their mean survival, as well as political and geographical existence. The aspect of close proximity with the threatening factor immensely increases the deterrence approach and considering the strategy of maintaining the status-quo and conservativeness by the threatening spectrum, vulnerability of the resistance front and the Shia Crescent have decreased and is now under control.

Therefore, formation and supporting Jahadi groups such as Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Palestine and Shiite groups in other locations seems inevitable. The importance of the resistance front can be described from two viewpoints; first, in terms of attaining security and decreasing threats towards Iran, and second, creating balance of threat in Middle East. The resistance front has played a vital role in creating peace in the region and also in confronting hardliner movements of terrorist Salafi and Takfiri groups. Iran is effectively using the resistance front in order to confront the threat from countries such as Saudi Arabia, USA and Israel. Numerous activities have taken place to weaken the resistance front; examples are: crises in Syria and Iraq, internal conflicts in Lebanon, Israeli aggressions in Gaza, limiting Iran with various sanctions, threatening Iran particularly in relation to its nuclear program and human rights issues and many more.

The prime of such measures is the design and implementation of the Great Middle East project by the United States of America with support of Saudi Arabia and their other regional allies. To weaken and eradicate the resistance front, various measures are being used example of which are: out of proportion threats, propaganda of international networks in different countries, use of organized terrorist groups, political and economic sanctions and pressure on main and active members of the resistance front, Iran and Syria.

It seems that Iran is using the resistance front towards balance of threat through the deterrence approach and is indirectly working towards attaining security and fulfilling its intentions in the region without getting involved in armed confrontation.

Saudi Arabia and the U.S perceive the members of the resistance front and Shia Crescent, with the centrality of Iran, as their main threat towards their policies, plans and programs in Middle East, considering that these states are after implementing a revolutionary order and resistance discourse in the region. On the other side Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Palestinian resistance groups as well as some governments and people in the region which feel close to the resistance front perceive as the main threat to their plans, policies and strategic towards the 'conciliation front' with the centrality of Saudi Arabia - which is after the domination of a Salafi structure and conservative discourse and maintaining the status quo in the region. This is

while Saudi Arabia and its allies are after the formation of a new regional order with the membership of the Zionist regime; their plan involves siege of Iran and the resistance front and in their new perceived order, the Arab Union, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf have important positions (Nematzadeh, 2013).

Such changes have nevertheless affected the regional alliance and have transformed the so-called axis of conciliation and have formed new regional axis and alliances.

Saudi Arabia is strongly after decreasing Iran's power in the region and in this sense is considered an ally of the Americans and the West. This situation results from the existing differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the topic of regional structures. This difference in perceptions alongside the civil and Islamic uprisings in the Arab world have created a situation in which both countries are after utilizing the regional chances available to them in order to eradicate - to the extent possible - the threats they are perceiving against themselves. Cooperation of Saudi Arabia with the West on its plan for limiting and weakening Iran can be analysed and understood in relation to this situation (Fazlali, 2013).

From foreign and regional viewpoints, the sum of Saudi Arabia's approaches towards changes in Middle East and the Arab countries have resulted in formation of an International discourse relating to these uprisings and revolts known as Saudi counter-revolution club. This club is seeking new members and is after its human geography expansion. Saudi Arabia has invited Jordan and Morocco to become members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. Saudi Arabia wants to save Arab monarchies from the waves of civil uprisings and uses their powers towards becoming more secure and narrowing the existing economic gaps. As an example the Peninsula Shield Force - the military force of the GCC - was revived, justifying this action by stating that the uprisings in Bahrain is supported by Iran. The member states of GCC declared that monarchy is the sustainable form of ruling in the region and they are faced with similar threats which challenge the status-quo. Therefore they need to form alliances (Salehi, 2013, pp. 94-95).

## **5. Measuring the actions of the two countries against the principals and theoretical framework of Stephen Walt**

According to the Defensive Realism's balance of threat, countries are always faced with certain threats but the intensity of such threats differs in different periods. Therefore the best model of attaining security is the one which allows countries to balance the threat at anytime. Stephen Walt recognizes four main principles in the threat equation:

### **5.1. The source of threat**

This aspect explores the state or player which is involved in posing threat against other states (Walt, 2002). In Middle East, and particularly Persian Gulf region, balance of threat is constantly taking place between Iran and Saudi Arabia; based on regional conditions, the two countries' measures within the framework of competition and confrontation can be analyzed. Changes and competition between the two states in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Palestine and generally in the region is in accordance with this theory.

## 5.2. The intensity of threat

This aspect explores how the threatening behaviour against a certain country takes place in terms of its intensity and model (Walt, 2002 – 189). For example, Saudi Arabia's threats against Iran have various types and natures. Intensity of threat refers, in this example, to the means Saudi Arabia uses to make threats against Iran. Current use of military powers in form of organized terrorist groups is considered a very strong threat. Implementation of sanctions against Iran, in which Saudi Arabia has joined the U.S in making stronger sanctions, is a sign of this threat. In fact the military measure is used for overthrowing and economic measures are aimed at changing behaviour; and both of these threats are used against Iran by Saudi Arabia based on the threats it perceives from Iran.

## 5.3. Threatening spectrums

This criterion deals with the spectrum of threats and investigates if a threat is a combination or sum of other threats or is a new, invented threat (Walt, 2002, 201). Saudi Arabia has always been after limiting Iran and confronting Iran's expansion of its role and influence in the region. Therefore, Iran is considered a constant threat for Saudi Arabia. This is why Saudi Arabia has always been active in creating balance of power with Iran so to decrease the amount of perceived threat against itself. The House of Saud has certain measure such as: confronting the resistance front, Iran-phobia and Shia-phobia, putting pressure on Iran for its nuclear program, further cooperation with the U.S and West, supporting terrorist groups in the region due to fear of disruptions to its internal political system and transmission of Arab changes from other countries to Saudi Arabia and forming closer relations with Israel.

## 6. Spectrums defending the threat

This criterion explores the states that are against the threat and is the key principle of the balancing equilibrium (Walt, 2002, p.203). Currently the alliance of Saudi Arabia and the U.S against Iran and Shiites is observed and the two countries share similar goals in this sense. They both see Iran and Shiites as a common threat and believe that Iran also

plays a central role in the resistance front and the Shia Crescent; they also consider Shiites in any location a possible threat and therefore are seeking to confront Iran and Shiites. Conclusion

The changes within Middle East since 2011 have had great implications for the region as well as internationally. What is clear is that these changes have pushed the region towards new arrangements and have put various choices and perceptions in front of political systems.

One of the most important results of these changes is the effort of regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia for shaping a new regional order based on their preferences and benefits in terms of fulfilling their domestic and regional security needs and decreasing the perceived threats from other countries.

From Saudi Arabia's side, the following measures have been adopted against Iran: establishment of Salafi and Wahhabi orders in the region for the continuation and stabilization of its political existence and attaining internal and regional security, plans for conciliation with Israel and generally working against the reformist movements in the region such as the resistance front lead by Iran.

Saudi Arabia also perceives the following threats from Iran:

Iran's leading of the Islamic world, dominance of the regional structure and order desired by Iran (revolutionary order), transformation of Iran into a prominent power in the region while Saudi Arabia loses its regional position and power, damage to internal political order and stability in Saudi Arabia, weakening of 'conciliation front' and conservatism and therefore slowing of cooperation with Israel which might result in resistance front and Shia Crescent gaining more power, decrease in legitimacy and prestige of the House of Saud in public eye as well as statesmen and leaders of its allies, transformation of states and nations of the region towards radicalization which might result in imbalance of power in the region and formation of new threats.

What is clear is that in order to face the threats from Iran and the spectrums under its influence such as the resistance front and the Shia Crescent, Saudi Arabia has designed and implemented plans in the region which will be briefly mentioned below:

1. Confronting Iran and the resistance through formation and supporting of terrorist groups in different regions and countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon,).

2. Participation in the process of putting pressure on Iran on the basis of its nuclear program, human right issues, support of terrorism, etc.

3. Continuation in forming relations and reconciling with Israel.

4. Soft war against Iran in the form of developing and expanding of news and media networks to confront Iranian networks; also establishing religious schools to expand Salafi and Wahhabi

ideologies in different countries such as Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

5. Causing insecurity in regions under influence of Iran such as in Iraq and Syria (the Shia Crescent) through widening the ideological gap and creating religious and ethnic conflicts which would have numerous negative effects on these countries in terms of their power structure, domestic politics and security – and would therefore impact negatively their economy, culture, etc.

6. Utilization of all structural and institutional potentials and capacities on regional and international levels such as Persian Cooperation Council, the Arab Union, Organization for Islamic Cooperation, OPEC and even the United Nations to put pressure on countries which support the discourse and approach of resistance.

7. Designing and implementation of various security plans, vital for confronting threats posed from Iran, the resistance front and the Shia Crescent such as plans for overthrowing Al-Assad's government in Syria or establishing ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

On the other hand, Iran is after: establishing a revolutionary order, ending submission and obedience, and continuation of the resistance process against Israel till complete freedom of occupied lands are achieved, confronting the U.S as the leader of imperialist states and defending the exploited deprived nations, creating models and inspiring nations and other countries in the region to support the resistance front and the resistance discourse, attempting to expand the model of religious democracy, expanding the Shia ideology regionally and internationally. In this sense Iran is faced with serious threats from Saudi Arabia and the spectrum of its allies such as U.S, Israel, the European Union, the countries in the southern region of the Persian Gulf, which will be briefly mentioned below:

Saudi Arabia's leadership of Islamic and Arab worlds, dominance of Saudi Arabia's desired order and structure (Salafi order) in the region considering the great number of Sunnis in the region and the close ties which exist between them due to racial and ethnic roots, Saudi Arabia's efforts for increasing pressure on Iran considering its old bond with the U.S.A, weakening of the resistance front and violating Palestinian rights, also the concerns regarding:

changes in the Shia geopolitics, the Shia Crescent and geopolitics of the resistance resulting from terrorist actions and plans in the region, decreasing validity of Islamic politics (religious democracy) desire by Iran both internationally and regionally in comparison with the modern, secular, and liberal interpretation of Islam put forward by Saudi Arabia, losing the influence Iran has through providing models and inspiring other nations both regionally and internationally, Saudi Arabia's plans and strategies which have numerous destructive consequences for nations and countries in the region, damages to Iran's security in regional and domestic politics due to actions, plans and policies of

Saudi Arabia, creation of void spaces in the region due to conflicts and terrorist wars which can have devastating security results for the region, further promotion of Salafi culture, principals and perceptions which would damage and limit the Shia ideology, expansion of Shia-harassment in the region due to expansion of Salafi and Wahhabi beliefs – as they perceive Shiites as their number one enemy – therefore escalation in religious, ethnic and racial conflicts in the region, and finally concerns relating to Saudi Arabia's policies of maintaining status-quo and supporting and insisting on the presence of trans-regional powers.

To defeat the mentioned threats from Saudi Arabia and the spectrums of its allies such as Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab Union, OPEC, organized terrorist groups like Al-Qaida and ISIS, Iran has developed and partially implemented following measures:

1. Strengthening its military and defensive capabilities, using its domestic and local resources.
2. Holistic support of the resistance front and assisting the regions in their war with groups supported by Saudi Arabia, so the resistance front can maintain its integrity and stability – examples of such actions can be pressuring the Syrian government, assisting Iraq as well as Hezbollah, Jahadi groups and the Palestinian resistance, etc.
3. Playing a role in destabilizing regions surrounding Saudi Arabia and under its influence such as Yemen and Bahrain.
4. Trying to influence public minds and perceptions of regional trans-regional governments in order to provide models for the nations of the region.
5. Pursuing its rights in relation to its nuclear power, considering existing threats and the threatening spectrums.
6. Utilizing structural and institutional potentials and capacities on regional and international levels to confront the influence and dominance of the Saudi Arabia, the U.S and Israel alliance in the region.
7. Taking the chances which have been created due to changes in the Arab world and the overthrow of allies of Saudi Arabia to expand its ideology and increase its role in the region.

To wrap up, considering the changes in the region and formation of new alliances in Middle East, it seems that the balance of power approach cannot alone solve the dilemma of security in the region. For Iran, considering its bold role in balancing and alliance formation, it would be beneficial to adopt the balance of threat strategy towards Saudi Arabia as a defining approach in formation of new structure and order in the region. Although Iran has a role in changes which are taking place in Yemen and Bahrain, such approach is not capable of fulfilling Iran's long-term security. Instead of forming alliances with trans-regional countries, it would be better if Iran tries to balance against the threatening spectrum through utilization of regional capacities. On this basis the Islamic Republic of Iran should take three major steps and adopt three approaches: firstly, it should gain optimum and realistic benefits

from the geopolitics of the resistance in the region towards balancing of threat against Saudi Arabia; secondly, it should create gaps between the spectrum threatening the resistance front through persuading the strategy of collective security through all legitimate players (governments)- which means providing equal opportunity to the countries in the region for playing their part in maintaining security which would have a great positive psychological- political impact; thirdly, It should create a balanced, moderate discursive process as an alternative for the ideological groups in the region which are active based on ethnic, religious, tribal and racial basis.

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