



COMPULSORY COOPERATION: THE PROSPECTIVE ISRAEL-SAUDI ARABIA RAPPROCHEMENT

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التقارب المرتقب بين إسرائيل والمملكة العربية السعودية

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Introduction

Middle East occupies the agenda of the international arena nowadays more than ever. The focus has centered on the growing influence of Tehran and its armed organizations stretching from Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain to Lebanon. To express this influence, the term ‘Shiite Crescent’ has been used for decades which emphasizes the sectarianism over politics and ideology. Over decades, Iran and Saudi Arabia shaped not only the way of Islamic country’s foreign and internal agendas but also the other actors’ relations in this area. In spite of the fact that Riyadh and Tehran often embrace their sectarian differences as a justification for their confrontations, it is not only one variable of their

complex relationships.¹ The roots of the conflict-based fighting behind the scenes for regional hegemony forces to confront against the threat of Iran as a new regional paradigm. Although the differences have a tectonic effect on the region, it has mostly been used as a tool for extending geographical stratagem. Each state considers the expansion of regional supremacy by the other as a net loss for itself. This paradigm stems from the complex and interrelated issues of Tehran's intention to compromise the region under Shia teachings and to have the nuclear technology which threatens other actors to death. Their complex, dynamic and multidimensional relations also shape their relations with other actors in a way to eventually turn a previous rival into a potential ally. Furthermore, it may seem unlikely to set a stage for one Muslim country (Saudi Arabia) and a Jewish state (Israel) to join against another Muslim country (Iran) but even this is possible in the Middle East.

Relations among actors create an atmosphere in which long-standing rivalry between Israel and Saudi Arabia is transforming into the pace of reconciliation due to not only Iran's sphere of influence but also the nuclear deal agreed –P5+1 and Iran in 2015 and its effects during President Obama and Trump era. Therefore, the political dimension of Tehran-Riyadh and Tel-Aviv are harboring content that can shed light on our understanding of critical developments in above-mentioned regions.

¹ “Out of the ashes, into the fire: The consequences of U.S. weapons sales for political violence,” *European Economic Review*, accessed 30 December, 2018, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0014292118300813#bf000118300813#bf0001>



The primary involvement of this study is to investigate and describe the trilateral relations -which not only have affected their whereabouts but also affected the actors of the international arena- among the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Israel. The analysis flows from the assumption that foreign policy in Israel and Saudi Arabia is currently rooted in power struggles and regional competition against Iran. Both Regional hegemony and Iran's legalized nuclear program drove them to cooperate. This study aims to crystallize how Saudi Arabia and Israel conspire to seize control of the Middle East against Iran.

After mentioning the key issues designing the framework of the relations up until now, what initiatives Iran has taken to create "Shiite Crescent" and how did the fruitful international circumstances help Tehran will be focused on in the first chapter. In the second chapter, within the framework of a rupture relations, attitudes and behaviors of these two states towards Iran which has essential national, regional and international developments that largely shape these relations will be analyzed. In the third chapter, how the nuclear issue consolidated two feuding nations without any diplomatic relations between the two and how these two countries joined their forces against the menace of Iran will be analyzed. In the last chapter, current relations of these three nations will be interpreted. What further steps are and will be taken to confront the growing influence of Iran and its possible repercussions in case of an intervention will be mentioned.

Section One: Relations of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran with each other

The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Israel are the important actors of the Middle East. Their policies have been closely watched over the years. Traditionally speaking, bilateral tensions have long existed among these actors. Israel have determined its politics to complete the sacred State of Israel inside the promised lands, while the political parties of Iran and Saudi Arabia have lifted aspects of Islamic ideology into politics and the latter have claimed a symbolic Islamic leadership in a contracting view of Sunni and Shia divergence which is crucial for their domestic constituents deeply focusing on sectarian or religious identity.¹ However, sectarianism is not the only determinant for the foreign policy of respective counties. Iran's shifting foreign policy is based on pragmatic, pro-active and geographical considerations while Saudi's are responsive and preventive against Iran's moves which came into consideration after the 1979 Revolution in the first place. Prior to it, both countries had a fluctuating relation.² The growing threat of Baath in Iraq and Pan-Arabism in Egypt by Gamal Abdel Nasser and her relations with Soviets opened a door for Riyadh and Tehran to close the ranks. The threat of communism had increased notably after 1968 and the US introduced the "twin pillars policy" in which Iran and Saudi Arabia acted as two regional pillars of resistance and maintenance of the Persian Gulf and Middle East's

1 Jaafar Alloul, "The 'Shi'a Crescent' Theory Sectarian Identity or

Geopolitics of Religion?" (MA diss., University of Gent, 2011), 23.

2 "Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Politics Collide," Carnegie Endowment Middle East Program, accessed 12 January, 2018, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/30/sectarian-dilemmas-in-iranian-foreign-policy-when-strategy-and-identity-politics-collide-pub-66288>.



trench for the Western camp.¹ Due to the nature of Iran and Saudi Arabia relations, the positive atmosphere had lasted for a short period when Iran paved the way for the 1979 revolution. When Shah was overthrown by the revolution, the Saudis immediately recognized the new regime to maintain good relations; however, Ayatollah Khomeini (Leader of the revolution) criticized the Wahhabi Saudi monarchy for evaluating the Saudis as an impediment to the spread of the revolution.

The strained relations began with the moment when Khomeini sought to influence the members of the Shiite minority living in Saudi Arabia against the regime by demanding the liberation of the oppressed people under the Wahhabi rule. Khomeini proclaimed, “Islam is not peculiar to a county, to several countries, a group, or even the Muslims. Islam has come to humanity... Islam wishes to bring all of the humanity under the umbrella of justice.”² Furthermore, when Iranians demonstrated against the rule of Saudis in 1979, it became clear that the Kingdom would no longer sustain relations with Tehran. King of Saudi Arabia realized that he had underestimated the growing threat. Several measures were taken to cease the progression of Tehran's influence. This is why opposing the Iranian type of Islam became an ideology for Saudis in some way. “Saudi government leaders have long sought to counter Iran by motivating Sunnis to fear and resist Iranian influence. Framing its rivalry with Iran in sectarian terms, Saudi Arabia has repeatedly accused Iran of fueling sectarianism by backing Shia militias who have targeted

1 “Twin Pillars Policy: Engagement of US-Iran Foreign Affairs during the Last Two Decades of Pahlavi Dynasty,” Asian Social Sciences, accessed March 17, 2018, <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/view/43510>.

2 Rouhollah K. Ramazani, “Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran’s foreign policy.” The Middle East Journal, 58(4): 549-559.

Sunnis in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria.¹” A particular concern in Riyadh has been to challenge Iran’s asymmetric power as Iran extends its sphere of influence by using proxies and curbing the alleged pursuit of a nuclear weapon which had failed for the most part.

Since 2011, Arab Spring has turned into the best example to represent how divided the Saudi–Iranian relationships were. On the one side, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regards the Spring as a disturbing tendency which may end up in tearing the Arab world apart and condescends Iran to expand its impact. On the other hand, Tehran viewed the Arab Spring as a door that would open many expected changes. The regional conditions were suitable to construct the new Middle East but an Islamic one in which power would sway from the USA to the hands of those who were a stranger to the system. In this system, Iran would be powerful enough to create its paradigms in which “the United States will be less able to depend on Saudi Arabia to contain Iran.”²

Following the toppling of Saddam, Iraq came apart, which allowed the Iranian influence to seep deeply into Iraq. Shia majority seized the power for the first time, through the fruitful environment of Arab Spring, Iran fiercely extended its sphere of influence, and gained the upper hand. Saudi Arabia protested United States by claiming: “We fought a war together... Iraq was driven out of Kuwait (in 1991) ... now we are handing the whole

1James M. Dorsey, “Saudi Arabia And Iran: The Battle For Hegemony That The Kingdom Cannot Win,” *Przeglqd. Strategiczny* no. 9 (2016):_1, DOI 10.14746/ps.2016.1.25.

2 Banafsheh Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends or Foes?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016): 227



country over to Iran without reason.¹ This statement is made mainly because of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy counting on American military support and supply while the United States needed to uphold a military presence in the region. At the beginning of the civil war, Iran had lost a lot of power in Syria. However, with the assistance of Russia, an opportunity sighted on the horizon: "Russia opens up the possibility of an Iranian corridor stretching all the way from Tehran to the Mediterranean – something that many Sunnis see as a foreign, Persian intrusion into the heart of the Arab Middle East."² The divergence between Iran and the Kingdom was not limited to Iraq and Syria; Bahrain was also in the equation. In 2011, as it happened in some other MENA countries, a popular revolt erupted in Shia populated but Sunni ruled country. The battle of regional hegemony resulted in a Saudi military intervention to squash the rebellion. Yemen had been under the Saudi influence for years until Ali Abdallah Saleh left the country during the Arab Uprising. Houthis who was backed by Iran, gained the power in the country. Saudis accused Iran of giving Houthis military backing. Saudi Arabia has led a military intervention since 2015 but it has not been successful so far.

Upon considering the previous paragraph, neither Tel Aviv nor Saudi Arabia could balance Iran's geographical weight due to the policy of United States to limit Tehran's aggressive regional policy through adopting Iran into the system. Despite all the efforts of Saudi Arabia and Israel to curb the engagement of

1 Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan Iran's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Real and Potential Threat (Washington, CSIS, 2006):20.

2 "Israel and Saudi Arabia: What's shaping the covert 'alliance'," BBC News, accessed April 14, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42094105>.

Tehran “with its more strategic understanding of Iraq and better connections to viable Iraqi opposition groups, helped undermine the United States¹” this limited the capability of other actors. Briefly, in almost more than fifteen years, Tehran has expanded its influence in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq and Syria.² It explains why the Egyptian and Saudi governments implicitly sided with Israel in 2006 when Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, which resulted in one of the most destructive conflicts. They sided with Israel due to the influence of Hezbollah; the Iranian government had created, as Hezbollah is an Arab origin. Recently, the rise of Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) in Saudi politics exacerbated the hostility in the region, whose assertive foreign policy was a signal of the upcoming changes in the Middle East. What it is clear, in these days, is that Riyadh forces America to reengage in regional politics through totally rejecting the vision of Obama. In the following pages, this issue will be detailed.

Israel’s main security concern, as a country strengthening its existence by going to war against its surrounding enemies, has been conventional wars for the most part. What is assumed as for the near future is that Israel would not face a conventional war since it has a peace state with Egypt and Jordan and that the Iraqi and Syrian armies were not powerful enough to be a challenging threat. However, because of the region’s new developments, the conventional threat was replaced by the non-conventional one which are nuclear developments and proxies (Hezbollah is a main source of security concern) supported by Tehran. Without the

1“*The Middle East and the Deal: In Search of a New Balance of Power,*” Taylor and Franchis Group, accessed May 14, 2018, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/10803920.2014.995054?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

2James Kitfi, “*Kings and Opportunists,*” *National Journal* (July 2011): 24–31.



continuous support of Iran and Syria, Hezbollah would not have been able to resist Israel in an unprecedented scale. Its weapon and missile capacity remarkably increased by the clandestine efforts in Syria. The main concern of Israel today is Hezbollah's domination in Lebanese politics, building a state within a state and this organization's military capacity level. On the other hand, dealing with Iran's nuclear project has been a top priority. Enrichment of uranium and transforming them into a lethal weapon had become a crucial issue also for other Arab countries. A nuclear Iran can act as a mediator for nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. "Iran's rise in power and influence in the region would challenge Israel's military supremacy in the Middle East... more critically, Israel's military deterrence was at risk and its survival depended on its military preeminence which a rising, more militarily powerful Iran might threaten."¹ Israel have an inclination for the status-quo, "if necessary by force, as it did in destroying the Iraqi reactor in 1981 and the Syrian one in 2007. Casus belli for Israel might be Iran approaching the production of a bomb, and then it might strike Iran."² Tel-Aviv and Riyadh perceived "P5+1, coupled to the lack of U.S. action in Syria, as that the United States is either unwilling to take risks in dealing with Iran, or may reach some rapprochement with Iran at their expense."³

1 Farhad Rezaei & Ronen A. Cohen, "Iran's Nuclear Program and the Israeli-Iranian Rivalry in the Post-Revolutionary Era," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2014): 9-10.

2 Efraim Karsh, *Rethinking the Middle East (Israeli History, Politics and Society)*, (London, Routledge, 2003):118.

3 "Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Clash within a Civilization," CSIS, June 15, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/saudi-arabia-iran-and-clash-within-civilization>.

On the other side, Iran has viewed their recent history as being a falling victim with regard to outside powers. This is the reason why “Iran’s foreign policy is a product of the ideology of Islamic revolution, blended with longstanding national interests¹” and Iran keeps concerning its security in the first sense. The revolution has created an atmosphere which led Iran to conceive regional actors, even international one sought an alteration of the regime. What drove Iran to regard in this way is the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war (in which Saddam received every means of support). Moreover, there were economic, technological and military based sanctions imposed in this direction. These concrete evidences have compelled Iran to constitute several policies. The first one is to follow proactive and pre-emptive politics in the region. This change and differentiation in the Iranian foreign policy has been usually regarded as a threat. Secondly, as in every country, Iran has also short-medium and long-term plans. When it is analyzed, it is clearly seen that regardless of the differentiations in foreign policy like during the Khatami (although he spent more money on military expenditures those leaders in previous period) who supported the peace proses with the West, the mentality for the nuclear development has been maintained in the same way since the Shah period. Another policy target is to be ‘a regional leader’ in the Middle East. The developments during the Arab Uprising provided Iran with enough geopolitical room to use the Shia identity in its foreign policy. A new phase appeared into the arena as “the Shia Crescent” which was mentioned by most of the leaders of the region. This policy is slowly shaping especially after Iranian-led forces Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS)

1 “Iran: Politics, Human Rights, and U.S. Policy”, The Congressional Research Service (CRS), December 11, 2018.
<http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf>.



in Iraq and Syria. It is asserted that the Sunni Arab countries surrounded by the Shia crescent stretches from Iraq (a quasi-Shia state) to Syria (under heavy influence of Iran) and Lebanon (Hezbollah which stands out undisputable political and military force). In accordance with this policy, Iran uses the Shia factor as a political tool to expand its influence over the region. In Yemen, Houthis are the resistance forces against the coalition forces led by Saudis. Hamas has been supported by means of military and in the economic sense by Iran.

Section Two: Iran's Nuclear Program

In regional equations, these three hold a game changing position. Appeared to validate such assessment, Iran was perceived as main security problem due to its commitment to most-spoken nuclear policy. "Furthermore, the basis for understandings between Israel and Saudi Arabia has expanded following the interim nuclear agreement signed by the major powers and Iran which was not reacted positively by Israel or Saudi Arabia.¹" Iran has agreed a long-lasting deal that ended one of the most significant crises in the Middle East. Under normal circumstances, it would be regarded as one of the most successful examples of a transatlantic cooperation that was concluded with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), imposing strict constraints on Iran's nuclear program, providing an enhanced transparency in return for a relief from international sanctions.² Under the JCPOA, Iran, United States, Germany, Britain, China,

1 Keynoush, Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends or Foes?, 162-165.

2 "Trump Preparing to End Iran Nuke Deal," ETH Zürich Center for Security Studies, 12 December, accessed 2018, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/fe01edc1-abc5-4367-b208-ee198d566b43/pdf>.

Russia and France agreed to lift the international sanctions including the ones in finance, trade and energy. Moreover, within the framework of this agreement, Iran's frozen assets would be released.¹

A conclusion to the agreement is important on a scale because Iran never had the tradition to make a success of an agreement on the nuclear issues, which in return, resulted in Tehran gaining extra time to push its agenda. It has been almost sure that in a day, Iran would get that technology; but the real concern is the possibility of Iran's encouragement to other Middle Eastern countries to follow the suit² or to submit them to radical organizations that have a hatred against Israel. Any conventional clash would possibly turn into a nuclear dimension³ through Iran's delivering some nuclear devices to terrorist organizations or at

1After substantial negotiations with President Obama, Congress passed the Review Act in May 2015, giving Congress the power to reject any final agreement with Iran. According to the Review Act, once the Obama Administration officially announced the nuclear agreement, Congress would have sixty days to review the Agreement between the United States and Iran. (School of Common Law. "President Obama's Legacy: The Iran Nuclear Agreement?." accessed December 20, 2018, <http://scholarlycom0mons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2236&context=, 13>).

2"The Root of All Fears Why Is Israel So Afraid of Iranian Nukes?," Foreign Affairs, December 12, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2009-11-24/root-all-fears>.

3 Shamsuz Zaman, 'Prospects of a Nuclear Armed Iran and Policy Options for Pakistan', Islamabad Policy Research Institute Journal 12(1) (2012), pp. 67–87; Amitai Etzioni, 'Can a Nuclear-armed Iran be Deterred?', CNN (February 6, 2012). Accessed 03.12.2018. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/06/opinion/etzioni-irandeterrence/index.html>.



least leading to dangerous arms race¹ among regional countries (Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Syria).

Israel had perceived Tehran's nuclear program as a threat for the first time in May 1992 but there was no information regarding Iran's capability. "While Iran has always maintained that its nuclear work was peaceful and that any nuclear programs undertaken were for civilian purposes, United States' intelligence agencies suspected Iran of using the civilian nuclear program as a cover for clandestine nuclear weapons development."² In 2001, it was clear that Tehran was seeking for nuclear, chemical or biological weapons or at least related technology. Iran's covert nuclear program in Natanz and Arak was declared by the Mujahidin-i khalq that gave the first signs of a nuclear weapons program. This time, The IAEA had released its report indicating that Iran may have the capacity to produce a nuclear weapon and planting it on a warhead. In the same year, 2008, President Bush left office and the first black President in the US history took the administration and faced the question of Iran in the Middle East (USA was dealing with the absence of an exit strategy in Iraq which made the invasion the very definition of a quagmire). Obama did not reject that Iran, since 1979, sought to reduce the influence of US in the region or support terrorist organizations against America or American allies. However, Obama, during his campaign and subsequently his presidency, promoted a key element over other issues. The new president was eager to settle down a peace among the actors or at least make a progress towards new relationships in the Middle East. He believed that

1 Ash Jain, 'Nuclear Weapons and Iran's Global Ambitions Troubling Scenarios', The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Focus #114 (August 2011), p. 15.

2 Nuclear Agreement, p.4.

without Iran, it would not be possible to stabilize the region extremely in Syria and Iraq where a fight against ISIS (in 2014, US Air Force provided indirect air support for Shi'a militias and Iranian advisers in Iraq in the fight against the ISIS¹) was going on. From this perspective, the President emphasized the importance of escaping 'the trap of the past' and making a step towards the future of mutual respect considering the settlement of the nuclear dispute. President Obama believed that "a military solution will not fix it. Even if the United States participates, it would temporarily slow down the Iranian nuclear program, but it will not eliminate it."² Despite all the initiative efforts, Washington-Tehran relations remained the same (new sanctions, accusations and waste of time) as it were for over three decades due to mutual mistrust, political lack of ability and domestic and international oppositions. President Obama's second term was perceived as another chance for the implementation of the negotiation. It raised hopes because there was no concrete success in the first term despite the fact that there was wide array of sanctions against Iran. The relationship between United States and Iran remained futile until President Hassan Rouhani was elected in 2013. He was more liberal and had a moderate view compared to his predecessor. US embarked on open-secret bilateral talks with Iranian officials in different states with the hope to establish forthcoming communication with Tehran. The year 2013 had witnessed a plenty of remarkable events such as historical direct phone call between Obama and Rouhani and Rouhani's talk in

1 Andreas Krieg, "Externalizing the burden of war: the Obama Doctrine and US foreign policy in the Middle East," Chathamhouse, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/ia/INTA92_1_05_Krieg.pdf. p. 1.

2 Karsh, Rethinking the Middle East (Israeli History, Politics and Society):121.



UN. Moreover, in order to limit the Iranian regional influence and reintegrate it into a moderate position, Obama was persuaded to include Tehran into the system, which materialized after several rounds of an interim agreement on November 24, 2013. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton announced that Iran reached an agreement with China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom and United States, collectively known as the “P5+1.” They agreed on a joint plan of action that regulated a long-term comprehensive solution regarding nuclear program. Iran had already been a party to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and by signing this agreement, Tehran accepted the IAEA to inspect the nuclear sites declared by Iran. Iran assurance to follow a peaceful nuclear program.

Israel regarded nuclear progress as a threat of its existence and mistakenly perceived Obama’s policies as being indifferent than the previous administrations since they have constituted an important part of the Democratic Party’s popular base and its donor’s. Israel was worried about Iran’s capability and not only criticized Obama administration but also expressed to act against Iran¹ after the negotiations moved forward successfully. In contrast to the view of Israel, Obama followed diplomacy, emphasized that ‘not talking does not work’, and put more efforts to engage a dialogue with Iran. To this challenge, the president significantly increased cooperation on intelligence and insisted, fervently and loudly, that his policy was to prevent Iran from

1The Israeli government, led by right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reportedly came very close to bombing Iranian nuclear facilities, knowing the United States would be obligated to come to Israel’s defense in case of Iranian retaliation. (John Glaser Trevor Thrall, “Obama's Foreign Policy Legacy and the Myth of Retrenchment,” CATO Institute, No: 43 (2017): 12).

acquiring a nuclear weapon by all means possible.¹ Displayed as an unprecedented success in Western countries, although, for Israel the negotiation was a great disappointment, USA shifted its policy from prevention of a Nuclear Iran to the containment of a nuclear-threshold Iran. Israel argued that the special relationship between Israel and United States entered into the most complicated cycle ever. Israel exasperated with the Obama administration's effort to use diplomacy to roll back Iran's growing uranium-enrichment program. Israelis believed that there was a significant change in US 'Grand Strategy' and Israel felt that the administration did not sufficiently address the outcomes of a nuclear Iran. An inductive for the further regional instability and existence of conflagration, Israel had begun to consider Iran to be an existential threat during especially hardline President Ahmadinejad who had denied the holocaust and threatened to wipe the Jewish state off the map.² Actually, the fear was not just based on Iran's nuclear capability but also the challenge Israel poses in terms of being a possible monopoly in the region. The extermination of rival powers (before Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and then Saddam Hussein in Iraq) that used to limit Iran opened a wide range of areas to exercise its hegemony through emboldening its proxies. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu harshly criticized the nuclear deal and during the call he told Obama that a deal based on this framework would threaten the survival of Israel. "Just two days ago, Iran said that 'the destruction of Israel is non-negotiable,' and in these fateful days Iran is accelerating

1 "Obama's Secret Iran Strategy," Mosaic, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2015/02/obamas-secret-iran-strategy/>.

2 "Ahmadinejad says Holocaust denial was his major achievement," The Time of Israel, accessed December 01, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ahmadinejad-says-holocaust-denial-was-his-major-achievement/>.



the arming of its terror proxies to attack Israel. This deal would legitimize Iran's nuclear program, bolster Iran's economy, and increase Iran's aggression and terror throughout the Middle East and beyond.¹ According to him, the framework of the deal was creating an opportunity for Iran to pursue its program under a legal cloth. Indeed, Tel Aviv did not oppose the solution but rather the way the deal has been shaped. However, "policymakers in Israel have expressed deep unease at what they consider the US "retrenchment" in the Middle East under the Obama administration, which they view as undercutting American supporters and emboldening US enemies in the region, in language that is strikingly similar to that in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and other Gulf capitals."²

Riyadh viewed the agreement as a quid pro quo that the deal was an evidence of American's declining interest to play both brokers and especially the role of security guarantor and also European powers were tacitly accepting the influence of Iran in the Middle East in return for ceasing its nuclear program. The discomfort of Riyadh was rocketing due to a Shia-led Iraq administration, American withdrawal from Iraq, Iran's meddling in Bahrain and Yemen, lack of support from America for the Syrian opposition and moreover Hezbollah's unpreventable growing influence. Saudi Arabia and many Gulf Arabs considered the situation as a potential plan of strategic encirclement by Iran which put Riyadh in a position to push for self-reliance in areas as its "*Lebensraum*" and also to take more proactive and assertive

1"Netanyahu to Obama: Iran deal threatens Israel's survival," The Time of Israel, accessed December 01, 2017, <https://www.timeofisrael.com/netanyahu-to-obama-iran-deal-threatens-israels-existence/>
2Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change," Center of Middle East Policies, (September 2016): 12.

policies such as in Lebanon and Egypt. Clearly, Saudi's concern with regard to the deal is not based on Tehran's better relations with Americans but rather to Iran's capability to counter Riyadh's initiated Sunni Islam.

While American and Riyadh perspective regarding the developments differs, implementing the policies in accordance with these developments not only resulted in giving a new trajectory to their relations but also in political jolts across the Middle Eastern political process. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia was in a situation in which, because of the realities and realignments even before the nuclear accord, collaboration became an agenda to exclude Iran from the regional order. JCPOA meetings created a pretext for both countries to negotiate against the existential threat of Iran. All the other issues were of secondary importance since Iran gained legitimacy in the region and they believed that once "the nuclear issue resolved, the U.S. would lose interest in countering Iran's destabilizing activities in the region and would leave Israel and the Arabs to manage their rivalry with Iran on their own.¹" Saudi Arabia along with Qatar and Kuwait armed the Wahhabi jihadists and pushed them inside Syria right at the time when P5+1 were reluctant to send their forces against the Assad regime. Jihadist unexpectedly were successful until the objection arose from the US and then the Russian support for the regime brought about a *mission failure*. 'The Syrian crisis' manifested the crack between the allies. First of all, Saudi Arabia cancelled its scheduled address in the UN General Assembly. Secondly, rejected rotating non-permanent member in the UN Security Council as well as criticizing the civil war in Syria.

1Trita Lo Parsi, *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy* (London, Yale University Press, 2017): 317.



Section Three: Contemporary Period and Israel-Saudi Arabia rapprochement

Iran has always been remembered with its ‘Nuclear issue.’ However, somewhere between 2012- 2013, nuclear talks gained a different momentum which concluded a diplomatic agreement with P5+1 countries to roll back and limit its progress. After the groundbreaking agreement, Western world raised hopes that Iran would be a player with a connection with the Middle East and Central Asia, in a time when Arab world is bogged down in hostilities and bloodshed.

The meticulous diplomatic process reasoned tension in the region (Iran against Israel and Gulf countries). The steps to resolve this painful issue was extremely consuming because of a list of separate but interwoven processes taking place at national, regional and international level. Each level was also related to each other. Despite the fact that Europe and the US were leading brokers interchangeably at international level, the most striking feedback was transmitted from the regional level (long-standing allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia). Israel took every precaution to derail the negotiations but it was of no use. JCPOA was barely announced on 14 July 2015 and Netanyahu rebuffed it as ‘a historic mistake for the world.’ adding that Israel was not bound and would not permit Iran to have any military nuclear capability. The issue has been sensitive for all actors because the process obliged them to make difficult decisions. Saudi Arabia embarked on funding Wahhabis to pull down whoever associated with Iran but at the same time considering the balance in Arab countries with Muslim majority. During the Obama term, on the other hand, Netanyahu showed a tendency to join Saudi’s vision. He expressed his resentment in the UN General Assembly by

declaring; “in the last six months, since the framework agreement had been announced, Iran had boosted its supply of weapons to Syria and sent thousands of Afghani and Pakistani Shiite fighters there to prop up President Assad’s regime. Iran had shipped weapons to rebels in Yemen, and every week Iran and Hezbollah set up new terrorist cells in various countries, including in the northern hemisphere.¹” He also added, “We see a world celebrating this bad deal, rushing to embrace and do business with a regime openly committed to our destruction.²”

The opposition against Iran became an apparent reason to establish the de facto alliance built on complementarity of interests. More explicitly, the policies of Tel Aviv and Riyadh coincided in keeping Tehran and its proxies contained and isolated if possible. Saudi Arabia represents a custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and embraces Wahhabism which calls for the elimination all apostates (Shias). However, Tehran’s every move Tehran posed challenges on Riyadh’s supremacy in the Islamic World. On the other side, as it is seen today, there are only two countries in the Middle East that support Palestinians, Turkey and Iran. The latter had enraged mostly the Israelis especially in Lebanon. Tel Aviv realized that in order to weaken Hezbollah, Iran must be kept isolated from the rest of the world.

Saudi Arabia and the other Arab States worried about the strategic edge of a nuclear capability, therefore, voiced extreme approval of military means against Iran although publicly

1 “Netanyahu Speech, General Assembly of the United Nations General Debate of the 72nd Session,” accessed December 14, 2017, <https://gadebate.un.org/en/70/israel>

2 “Israel’s Netanyahu launches all-out assault on Iran deal at U.N.,” Reuters, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-israel/israels-netanyahu-launches-all-out-assault-on-iran-deal-at-u-n-idUSKCN0RV57K20151001>.



supporting Iran to possess nuclear energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. “King Salman to President Obama in the telephone call initiated by the President after the agreement was signed: Saudi Arabia supports any agreement that guarantees preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.¹” Riyadh realized that relying only on Washington to provide security and protection was a potential mistake since Riyadh was left alone in respect of the conflicts in Syria and the nuclear deal. Those countries feared that removing the sanctions (Punitive international sanctions and international isolation long stymied Iran in claiming its position as regional hegemon²) would probably grant Tehran to retrieve billions of dollars of frozen assets that could be used to purchase advanced arms. Furthermore; it could be transferred to Iran’s allies (Syria, Hezbollah-Lebanon and Iraq) to intervene in various threats easily or recruit players for the regional axis (recent events in Qatar and Oman). Furthermore, apart from all the claims of both Israel and Saudi Arabia; Washington signaled their distinct view of nuclear question and the regional issues. “Obama has repeatedly stated...that the interim agreement “halted” the Iranian nuclear program. The ‘logic’ of the JPOA was to freeze the situation for a certain period of time to allow the negotiators to work.³” President conceived that there were no other suitable alternatives matching the interest of all parties since it guarantees security to the region.

1“Israel and Saudi Arabia: Is the Enemy of My Enemy My Friend?,” INSS Insight, accessed December 22, 2017,

<http://www.inss.org.il/publication/israel-and-saudi-arabia-is-the-enemy->

2“Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Battle for Hegemony the Kingdom Cannot Win,” E-international Relations, accessed December 14, 2018,

<http://www.e-ir.info/2016/05/20/saudi-arabia-and-iran-the-battle-for-hegemony-the-kingdom-cannot-win/>.

3 Mosaic, “Obama’s Secret Iran Strategy.”

However, according to Saudi Arabia, the agreement only froze the American actions to stop Iran from moving forward. In the meantime, Iran had grown stronger. The kingdom followed a similar way and declared its peaceful nuclear program when officially approved for uranium enrichment in Iran and signed nuclear cooperation agreements with many countries including Russia, Argentina, China, South Korea and France.¹ To expect Riyadh to remain indifferent was not a realistic hope especially when the prestige and influence that leads the way to seeking a medium-term response is taken into account. The main motive was to show that Riyadh also is in the nuclear game.

Towards the end of the Obama term, there was a clear picture of the ‘nuclear deal.’ It solved a prolonged crisis that seemed unsolvable. In the eyes of Israel and Saudi Arabia, Iran unshackled from the system and this created a “fear.” This fear, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region created an alliance which was once unthinkable with an ambivalent and inconsistent character in many respects. Irrespective of the threats they perceive from Iran due to decades of long suspicions and actions, Israel and Saudi Arabia relaxed when a candidate harshly criticized the negotiations as ‘stupidest deal of all time’ which clearly indicated that the new president would do so little to prevent the deal to be ratified. As a response to the criticisms, many claimed that he intended to decertify the agreement although “both the US State Department and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have confirmed that Iran has

¹“Saudi Arabia- Russia signed Nuclear Cooperation Deal, Reuters, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-saudi-russia-nuclear/saudi-arabia-russia-sign-nuclear-power-cooperation-deal-idUKKBN0OZ10R20150619>.



abided by the agreement.¹” Tehran was already aware of the consequences of going against the concerted nonproliferation efforts by the world powers and that is why it pursued its strategy with caution to avoid closing the red lines.

Since the election campaign, there was a considerable pressure on Trump on Iran’s nuclear issue both from Israel and Saudi Arabia officials who have been seeking ‘regime change’ in Iran. The reason for this was Trump’s first trip abroad as the US president which was to Saudi Arabia and directly to the State of Israel. These visits raised hopes both for Riyadh and Tel Aviv. After the visit, it was interpreted thus and so: “Trump's new strategy was essential to confront Iran's growing ballistic missile program, of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, interference in its neighbors’ affairs, and threats to the freedom of navigation.²” As Trump declared, Washington is laying the groundwork for withdrawal which antagonized the European signatories who now consider that ending the deal would lift the present limitations on Iran’s nuclear program.

EU foreign policy Chief Federica Mogherini stated that they cannot afford as the international community to dismantle a nuclear agreement that is working and that they share the same concerns over the Iran's destabilizing influence in the Middle East.

³ Same type of criticisms were expressed by the Prime Minister

1 “What are Donald Trump Objections to the Iran Nuclear Deal, DW News, accessed December 16, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/what-are-donald-trumps-objections-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal/a-40601669>.

2“UAE Joins Saudi-Israeli Backing of Trump’s aggressive Iran Strategy”, Alaraby, accessed December 16, 2018, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/10/14/uae-joins-saudi-israeli-backing-of-trumps-aggressive-iran-strategy>.

3 “EU and Russia Defend Nuclear Deal after Trump Threat”, Middle East Monitor, accessed December 16, 2018,

Britain Theresa May, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and President Emmanuel Macron; “standing committed” to the 2015 nuclear deal and that preserving it was “in our shared national security interest.”¹ Iran’s foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif has called on Europe to disregard and oppose Trump who torpedoes the international nuclear agreement with Tehran. Zarif stated that the only way Iran would be persuaded to continue observing the limits on its civil nuclear program would be if the other signatories – UK, France Germany, Russia, China – all remained committed to its terms and defy any subsequent US sanctions.²

As mentioned earlier, these two seemingly enemy countries found a fertile environment to negotiate mainly after the nuclear deal and Iran’s increasing sphere of influence. As there are many news about the secret talks during the Obama period, recent events have proved them out. There are many crystal-clear facts regarding the matter. First of all, neither Israel nor major Sunni Arab countries have a concern over Iran’s nuclear and regional ambitions and their source of concern is different from one another. They believe that United States has granted Iran considerable room to pursue its own regional policy which is mutually reinforcing with nuclear policy.³ Secondly, as related

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171014-iran-eu-and-russia-defend-nuclear-deal-after-trump-threat/>.

1The Middle East Monitor, “EU and Russia Defend Nuclear Deal after Trump Threat”

2“Iran's foreign minister urges Europe to defy US if Trump sinks nuclear deal,” The Guardian, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/29/iran-foreign-minister-zarif-europe-trump-nuclear>.

3 Michael Herzog, “Contextualizing Israeli Concerns about the Iran Nuclear Deal,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, No. 26 (June 2015): 1-10.

above, Iran gained ability to support the Non-State armed actors in the region to extend its sphere of influence. Lastly, according to them, policies during the Obama term were catastrophic. Not only the US but also the EU countries were unable to realize the growing threat for the Middle East and West. Each felt that they could only ensure the status-quo or at least insure themselves against the common enemy. “There was a time when Saudi Arabia considered its enmity for Israel to be a mainstay of its power. But the shifting tides of geopolitics are steadily undercutting the value of conflict between the two.¹” Shimon Shapira, an Israeli representative who participated in the secret meetings with the Saudis, put it this way: “We discovered we have the same problems and same challenges and some of the same answers.²” The cooperation is no longer based on a ‘take it or leave it’ style but rather on regional negotiations and this reconciliation between Tel Aviv and Riyadh had already indicated its signals.

Secret meetings³ between Israel and Saudi Arabia were started during the Lebanon War in 2006 because of the shift in the balance of power in the region. During Obama’s second term, according to WorldNetDaily report, Mossad chief Meir Dagan visited Saudi Arabia and they discussed Iran’s nuclear program. Furthermore, they spoke one voice about the defense coordination

1 “In the Middle East, Strange Times Make for Strange Bedfellows,” Stratfor, accessed December 14, 2019,

<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/middle-east-strange-times-make-strange-bedfellows>.

2 “Israel and Saudi Arabia: Strange Bedfellows in the New Middle East,”

Foreign Policy In Focus, accessed December 14, 2019,

<http://fpif.org/israel-saudi-arabia-strange-bedfellows-new-middle-east/>

3 “Israel and Saudi Arabia: Best frenemies forever?,” RT, accessed June 14, 2019, <https://www.rt.com/news/israel-saudi-alliance-us-950/>.

on matters related to possible military action.¹ What is more interesting is that London-based Saudi news site ‘Elaph’ published an interview with Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot who clearly expressed that Israel and Saudi Arabia are of the same mind regarding Iran’s intentions and that they are even ready to share intelligence.² The mentality of both sides coincides in a degree as the director of the Political-Military Affairs Bureau at Israel's Defense Ministry Amos Gilad said “our security cooperation with Egypt and the Gulf states is unique. This is the best period in terms of security and diplomatic relations with the Arabs³” while prince Talal Bin Waleed has urged all Arab nations to give up their acrimonious stance toward the Jewish nation and instead continue to strive for a more peaceful, prosperous and homogenous Middle-East.⁴ Saudi Prince Talal bin Waleed also added that “I shall exert all my influence to break any ominous Arab initiatives set to condemn Tel Aviv, because I deem the Arab-Israeli entente and future friendship necessary to impede the dangerous Iranian encroachment. ⁵” Secret dialogues were also

1“Claim: Mossad Chief Secretly Visited Saudi Arabia,” WND, accessed June 13, 2019, <http://www.wnd.com/2010/07/182649/>.

2 “Israeli Military Chief Gives Unprecedented Interview to Saudi Media: 'Ready to Share Intel on Iran,’” Haaretz, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.823163https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.823163>.

3“Gulf Alliances: Regional States Hedge Their Bets,” Huffingtonpost, December 14, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/gulf-alliances-regional-s_b_6974832.html.

4 “Prince Talal of Saudi Arabia: My Visit to Israel Shall Mark the New Age of Peace and Fraternity,” Pakistan Defence, Accessed December 17, 2019, <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/prince-talal-of-saudi-arabia-my-visit-to-israel-shall-mark-the-new-age-of-peace-and-fraternity.384377/>.

5“Al-Waleed bin Talal supports Israel against Palestinians,” Middle East Monitor, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20151029-al-waleed-bin-talal-supports-israel-against-palestinians/>.



documented by the WikiLeaks which reveals that Israel have assisted the Gulf countries in terms of training of local military forces, advanced military equipment sale and security consulting.¹ The more salient issue was that Israel softened its politics on arms export to the Gulf. Israel did not restrict or obstruct recent American arms sale to Saudi Arabia. The military dialogue entered a new phase when Saudi general Anwar Majed Eshki and Israeli diplomat Dore Gold shook hands in front of the cameras² which would not have been predictable just a few years ago. Saudi Arabia announced that they agreed on Israel using its airspace to attack Iran.³ Moreover, Abdul Aziz Al-Sheikh, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia stated that Hamas is a Palestine based Sunni-Islamic terror organization and ‘it is wrong in fighting against Israel.’ What Grand Mufti expressed reveals the degree of the relations.

1“WikiLeaks Blows Cover off Israel's Covert Gulf States Ties,” Haaretz, October 13, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/wikileaks-blows-cover-off-israel-s-covert-gulf-states-ties-1.327758>.

2“‘The Saudis Team up with Israel,’” World Affairs Journal, December 14, 2019, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/michael-j-totten/saudis-team-israel>.

3 “‘Unholy Alliance’ between Saudi Arabia and Israel. A US-Iran Nuclear Deal Would Trigger Regional Political Re-alignments,” Global research, December 14, 2019, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/unholy-alliance-between-saudi-arabia-and-israel-a-us-iran-nuclear-deal-would-trigger-regional-political-re-alignments/5439349>.

Conclusion

Indeed, Middle East is far more different than ever before. The conflict between Tehran and Riyadh is always on the agenda and it is expressed as a sectarian rift which is a consequence rather than the cause of the ongoing rivalry. The two Muslim countries have sought to undermine each other (Especially by Saudis) by using this sectarian understanding or at least emphasizing sensitive religious points (As in the case of Zeynabina shrine in Iraq) to mobilize their followers against deaf foe. On the other hand, Israel, which normally is regarded as an eternal foe for Muslims since they occupied the Holy site and emerged as a threat at the heart of the Middle East, has always fueled the sectarian divergence. However, Riyadh and Tel Aviv recognize that they have common points in response to the growing challenge posed by Iran.

Arabs alarmed at Iran's growing power is a culmination of geopolitical shifts since Iraq invasion steadily changed the balance of power of the region. Unending hegemonic rivalry exposes itself in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain and even in some other parts of the MENA after the notorious Arab Uprisings. Tehran's policy during this turmoil was successful in filling the vacuum left after the departure of Iraq and the weak and failed states emerged since 2011.

Iran's secret nuclear sites and considerable influence in the region obliged the actors to take precautions; yet mostly failed. Most striking one was the pleas from the Arab leaders to the Bush administration to take immediate military action - "cut off the head of the snake"¹ - against Iran. Although it never materialized,

1 Robert Singh, Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy The Limits of Engagement (New York, BloomsBurry, 2012):101.



Gulf countries enhanced their conventional weapons through defense deals and moreover, they embarked on their own nuclear programs.

The year 2009 was an important year for both the traditional US allies and also for the traditional enemy Iran. The different perspective of president Obama actually revealed a truth that allies are subject to be placated at the expense of its enemies as we see both in Iran and PYD case in Syria today. Obama administration's support towards the nuclear agreement is a watershed event for the region since Iran (Axis of evil) created a mistrust for Saudi Arabia (Deepened Riyadh's strategic disaccord) and Israel (Traditional allies). Both countries realized that in case a security threat, it would best to not wait for Americans to provide it.

Crown prince Muhammad bin Salman's pro-active policy against policies of Tehran, initially in Yemen, took another phase in January 2016 when the Saudi executed prominent Shiite cleric and activist Nimr Baqer al-Nimr prompted Riyadh and other Gulf countries to cut diplomatic relations. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called him as a martyr and warned Saudi government about a divine revenge. On the other side, Riyadh accused Iran of interfering its internal matters.

Western countries were also in this process and their enthusiasm for the deal was still present. Neither the US nor the Western powers were no longer considered as reliable allies although they seemed to be claiming the opposite. From the beginning of the Obama period, it is revealed that recently, both Israel and Saudis had secret talks aligned in their opposition to Iran. They united against the notorious foe whose influence stretches from the Mediterranean to the confines of Central Asia till the mid of East Asia.

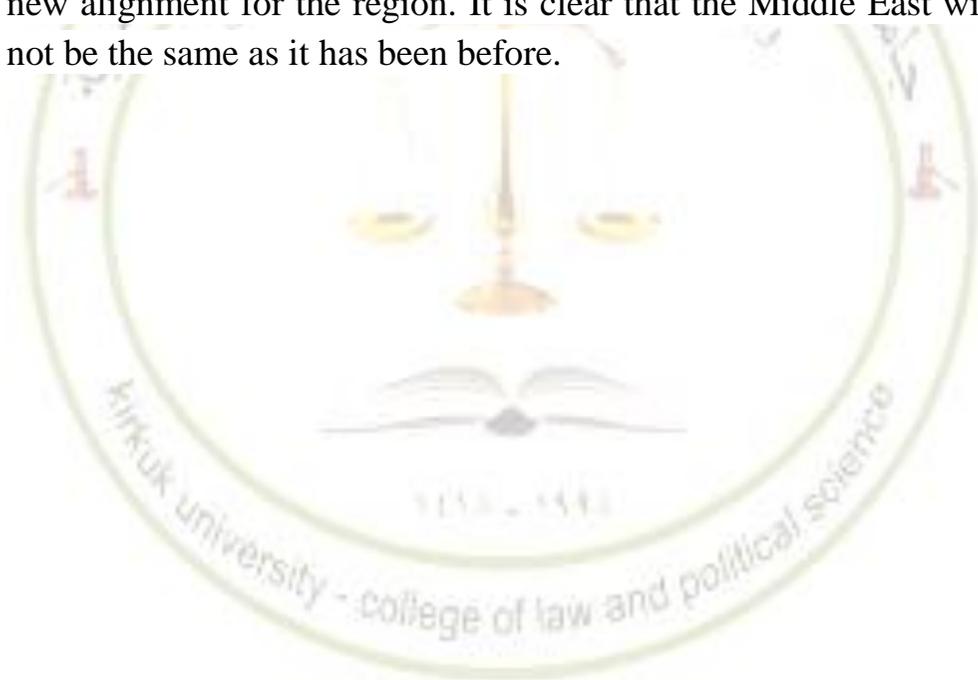
Their objection to the nuclear agreement allegedly paves the way for Iran to enhance its influence and to create a new cooperative spirit as well as mutual policies accordingly. Both country leaders threw off their gloves which indicated radical steps in further times. First step was the question the credibility of the agreement during the newly elected president Trump which resulted in failure due to both the support of Western countries and the declaration of IAEA. Second step was enable Saudi Arabia's return to moderate Islam which aimed to declare Iran to support radical organizations. The third step was the Saudi-encouraged resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to challenge Iran's Hezbollah proxy. Another step was to publish a new peace agreement to force Palestine to abide by. Recent news about Prince Salman's and Jared Kushner's discussions on improving Saudi ties with Israel would open the gate for the Israeli-Palestinian peace actually confirms it.

The alliance between Saudi Arabia and Israel changed the calculus of the Middle East and it will continue to change it day by day. The enemy in question is no other than Iran slowly but surely posing an existential threat to Israel and Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Sunni world. Obama administration somehow allowed Iran to peak its power while traditional allies in the region desired otherwise. However, the name in the power changed recently and so did the policy towards the region. Trump administration welcomed this new alliance which could serve for the purpose of US in the area. Both Israel and KSA regard Iran as a sponsor of terrorism and Washington also supports them but in reality, it can be observed that Iran's supported groups fight against ISIS. Furthermore, it should be noted that in the recent years, not a single Iranian has involved in any of the terrorist



attacks for such a long period of time but Wahhabis and Salafi people had been.

In conclusion, due to the overload influence of Iran in the region through geopolitical realities and the recent nuclear agreement, Riyadh found itself considering the region in an increasingly similar light as the Tel Aviv. The policy of US and EU supporting the nuclear agreement changed the view of two countries. They will continue to cooperate as long as this relationship serves to advance their interests. New realities are taking shape in the region. Recent summit of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Istanbul was the best picture showing the new alignment for the region. It is clear that the Middle East will not be the same as it has been before.



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ABSTRACT:

A power vacuum in the region has been emerged since the withdrawal of the American presence and due to the contributions of Arab upheavals. The clashes and the disputes in the region is the direct result of this vacancy. The attack on the Saudi Embassy by *en masse* in Iran was an indicator of the hatred after the execution of Shiite religious figure Nimr al-Nimr who was alleged to have sided with the terrorists in Saudi Arabia. The last example of the conflict between the sides testify the general understanding that the threat to world peace emerging from the Middle East does not only arise from terrorism but also from the danger of Sectarian clash between Muslims which began even earlier than the Arab Spring. Although the roots of the conflict dates back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the rising influence of Tehran may be dated back to the overthrowment of Saddam Hussein and the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon. Starting from Iraq, in 2003, US-led coalition ousted a Sunni-Arab counterweight to Shia-Iran and the geopolitics (It gained importance resulting from the territory under the control of weak states that invites the foreign intervention) of the region had mostly been shaped by Iran since then. The contributions of the withdrawal of the USA from the region and the Arab Spring for the destruction of the existing stability prepared a new power vacuum, which was also filled by Iran.

Keywords: Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran; Regional Hegemony and Religious Identity.

المخلص:

ظهر فراغ السلطة في المنطقة بعد انسحاب قوات الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية واضطرابات عربية في المنطقة، إن الاشتباكات والنزاعات في المنطقة هي نتيجة مباشرة وواضحة لهذا الفراغ، وبدأت معها الأبواق الطائفية تدق ناقوس الخطر بعدما أقدمت السعودية بإعدام الرجل الدين الشيعي نمر النمر والذي اتهم بمناصرته الإرهاب العالمي مما حدا بمناصري هذا الرجل إلى مهاجمة السفارة السعودية في إيران .

إن ظهور التنافس في الأطماع بين الكتل والتي أثرت سلبا على السلام العالمي في الشرق الأوسط ليس سببها العمليات الإرهابية فحسب، بل النزاع المذهبي المنشوب بين المسلمين التي سبقت زوبعة الربيع العربي، غير أن جذور هذا النزاع قد يرجع إلى الثورة الإيرانية عام ١٩٧٩م. وان النفوذ الإيراني قد ظهرت بفاعلية بعد سقوط صدام ربيع ٢٠٠٣م وكذلك بعد انسحاب إسرائيل من لبنان، لذلك فإن القوى الكبرى ومنها الولايات المتحدة اضطرت إلى التدخل في شؤون بعض الدول الضعيفة في المنطقة التي أوجدتها تلك التغييرات لحماية مصالحها في المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إسرائيل، السعودية العربية، إيران، الهيمنة الإقليمية، الهوية

الإقليمية.