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IRAN-SAUDI DYNAMIC RELATIONS
AND THE ROLE OF OMAN AS A NEGOTIATOR

by

NATALIE I. IKERD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Political
in the College of Sciences
and in The Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes Iran-Saudi relations in the context of growing regional hostility. This research encompasses the domestic and foreign policies enacted by both states since 1979, accompanying a discussion of the historical background of their ties. Moreover, the future prospects of their relations regarding the utilization of Oman as a neutral negotiator for regional conflicts are examined. The significant contributing factors of each state to such dynamic ties include: the leadership, national security, religion-politics connection, and their reaction to global instability indicators. Recently, Iran-Saudi hostility has been worsening due to their policies in the region in reaction to regional events. Thus, some may argue that the outlook of success for Omani role in negotiating between the two is seemingly less likely. The relations of these two Persian Gulf regional powers need to be examined further for future prospects.

DEDICATION

For those who find unity and cooperation in times of hardship.

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INTRODUCTION

The unfriendly relations between the Iranian government and the Saudi regime have dated back for hundreds of years. However, the Sunni-Shi'ite schism dates back much farther; beginning within the 7th century.¹ The significance in studying the differences in the religious and governmental aspects of these two states lies in the power play that happens inside of the Persian Gulf region. This power struggle has been occurring since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.² Even in times of crises, where national interests align among the Saudi and Iranian governments, cooperation seems to not be an answer. This research investigates the factors that contribute to the worsening of relations, the implications of Iran-Saudi disunity on regional events, and the possibilities for utilizing Oman as a neutral negotiator.

Background

The turbulent relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia can be traced back throughout political history. Some scholars suggest that there is more to this turmoil than merely disunity between two states, but rather a schism of one religion: Islam. The religious majority in Iran identifies with the Shi'a branch of Islam. In Saudi Arabia the majority of the Muslim population is known to be Sunni Muslim—the larger sect of Islam. While this century old disunion might seem insignificant after years of healing, the disparity between the Shi'a community and the Sunni community has possibly transferred over into forming fundamental gaps between states. Thus, religious disunity has the potential to be considered a contributing factor towards Iran-Saudi hostility.

However, religious disunity isn't the only factor that needs to be investigated throughout this research. Since the Arab Spring uprisings, regimes across the entire region have been

plagued with instability. This has resulted in an influx of states making foreign and domestic policy changes that are intended to combat the instability. Of these states, Iran and Saudi Arabia tend to be categorized as the more active ones, which might be attributable to their growing influence within the region. When the Iranian and Saudi states engage in dialogue with falling regimes, it is quite common for these two governments to develop and act upon opposing views. In this sense, the opposing policies seem to be effecting and possibly adding to the hostility between the two states. In any such instance, differing ideologies have not been noted as assisting in the warming of Iran-Saudi relations.

Furthermore, because the governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia are based upon Islamic law, it is not ideal to attempt to separate policies from Islamic ideology throughout this research. The schism between Sunnis and Shi'ites might not be the only contributing factor. However, the differing of religious ideology in regards to the way in which each state governs its people cannot be ignored. Therefore, the lack of consensus regarding religion as well as political matters appears to contribute to the dynamic Iran-Saudi relations.

Variables

The intention of this research is to discuss the extent to which differing domestic and foreign policies effects the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Over the course of this investigation it was found that due to the substantial amount of information the variables would have to be subdivided in order for more comprehensive research to be conducted. This approach has yielded variables within the general categories of: domestic policies and foreign policies. This research also led to understanding of a variable that affects the policies and therefore could potential affect Iran-Saudi relations: Islam. This discussion intends to study the policies of each

state in the way that they are enacted. Thus, research has been conducted regarding: religion, politics, and the way that these factors interact with one another.

Religion-Politics

One potential contributing factor regarding Iran-Saudi dynamic relations is the schism between the two central sects of Islam—the Sunni and Shi'a branch. There are said to be more Sunni Muslims than Shi'a Muslims in the world and this especially rings true in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where Sunnis represent between 85 and 90 percent of the Muslim population.³ On the other hand, in Iran, while the majority of the population is Muslim like in Saudi Arabia, the ratio of Sunni Muslims and Shi'ite Muslims stands in stark contrast to the data retrieved from Saudi Arabia. In Iran, approximately 90 to 95 percent of the Muslim population has identified themselves with the Shi'a branch of Islam.⁴

While it is significant to note and understand the differences between the general populations of both states in terms of religious preferences, another aspect of the religious schism between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the divide between these two states based on of different styles of governance. For instance within Saudi Arabia, the government follows a strict Wahhabi code of law which has been cited as restricted the way in which Saudi society fundamentally functions.⁵ While in Iran, the citizens are not subjected to following this strict form of law.⁶ There are many differences between both countries regarding societal function, but it is important to note that this research intends to study these dissimilarities to the extent that any such investigation assists in displaying the effect that the examined policies have on Iran-Saudi relations. Thus, religion will be discussed merely in comparative terms regarding the politics of Islamic implementation of each state.

Domestic Policies

Another possible explanation for the dynamic Iran-Saudi ties is due in part by the domestic political actions taken by each state. Since Iran and Saudi Arabia are situated across from each other, with the Persian Gulf acting as a natural separator, the domestic policies of each state could have a substantial impact on the other. This could potentially account for the progression of Iran-Saudi relations.

For instance, when the Iranian Islamic Revolution began in 1979, the Saudi government was not exactly pleased with the thought of revolutionary ideas spreading throughout the Persian Gulf region. These ideas could eventually threaten the very existence of the Saudi monarchy, educational systems, and Wahhabi movement.⁷

More recently, Iran has decided to pursue the development of nuclear technology. This has created discussion throughout the entire international community, and the Saudi state has been particularly vocal and active in reference to the opposition of a nuclear-armed Iran. When Saudi military expenditures are studied, the security dilemma unraveling between these two states becomes even more recognizable. The Saudi government has been cited as hiking up its military budget to about \$80.8 billion, which is about 10 percent of its annual GDP, making the Saudi military the fourth most expensive military in the world.⁸

The differing of policy choices has the potential to be perceived as offensive to each state. It is unfeasible to attempt to investigate every policy that each state produces. Therefore, the domestic policies included in this research have been chosen based upon the influential nature of each policy. Those policies include: Tehran's nuclear program and Riyadh's internal combat against Islamic radicals individuals. These policies will be discussed because they are not only affecting the national environment, but are also cited as having an effect on Iran-Saudi

affairs. Throughout the region, states are seeking accountability from Tehran and Riyadh in accordance with these domestic decisions because these issues have spread beyond each state's own borders.

Foreign Policies

The foreign policies pursued by the Iranian and Saudi governments have potentially affected the status quo of regional relations. Throughout the course of this research, it was found that both states tend to become immersed within regional affairs and this is due in part by the influential nature of each state. Throughout some recent regional conflicts, Tehran and Riyadh have developed and acted upon opposing beliefs. Therefore, a potential cause for the dynamic Iran-Saudi relations are the foreign policies that each state pursues.

Recently, this lack of unity over foreign policy choices is epitomized by the events and actions taken place in regards to the Syrian Civil War. While Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei insists on aiding Bashar al-Assad's regime, the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and his successor King Salman have been adamant about seeing the demise of al-Assad's rule. Key differences--such as this--between two incredibly vocal and prominent states in a progressing region are potential causes for unsteady Iran-Saudi ties.

Relationship

To fully understand the dysfunctional ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia, it is imperative to study each major factor influencing this relationship. Thus, as discussed previously, the varying factors being analyzed within this research are the influence of Islam within Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the domestic and foreign policies within these states. The causal factor

under examination is Iran-Saudi ties. Thus, the general outline of the main variable categories from this research suggests that the correlations between the variables are as followed:

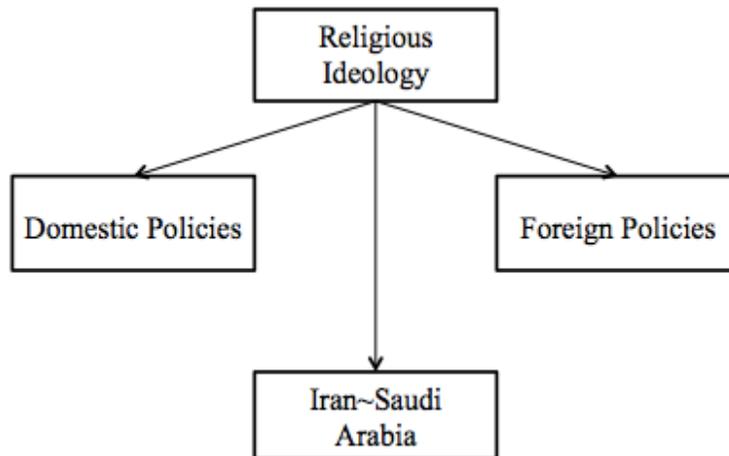


Figure 1: Wide-ranging relationship chart showing that the religious ideology within each state acts as an antecedent variable and affects the domestic and foreign policies which in turn affects the Iran-Saudi hostility

Moreover, for the sake of this discussion regarding the relationship between these three primary variables, religious ideology enacted by the state is understood and accounted for throughout the investigation of domestic and foreign policies. This research purports that the examined domestic and foreign policies are factors that contribute to the dynamism of Iran-Saudi relations. Thus, in some instances, the more committed the Iranian and Saudi regimes have become to their respective and opposing policies, the nature of the ties between these two states shift. Thus, the figures below depict the relationship between the specific areas of focus.

Religion-Politics



Figure 2: Positive relationship between increase in governmental religious discrimination and the increase in Iran-Saudi hostility

Domestic Policies



Figure 3: Positive relationship between increasing domestic security and increase in Iran-Saudi hostility

Foreign Policies



Figure 4: Shows a positive relationship between the increase in the individual efforts of each state and the increase in hostility between Iran and Saudi Arabia

Significance

Theoretical Importance

With the nuclear program at its peak in Iran, this state is aiming to gain influence and political significance in a region where power seems to be in the hands of oil-rich nations. Trying

to obtain this nuclear technology has come at a cost; tough sanctions have been imposed on Iran and the favorable opinion of Iranian policy has seen a downward spiral throughout the Persian Gulf region. Iranian foreign policy has not had a sense of focus on compromise in regards to nuclear technology located in the country and this has created a buzz of anxiety throughout the Middle East, especially in nations that are not friendly with Iran, like Saudi Arabia.

With the balance of power shifting or seeking to shift throughout the Gulf region, this geographic area is in a period of instability; fostering national identity crises, vulnerabilities, and extremism. It is imperative to understand and to therefore possibly facilitate improvement of the dynamics between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This is due to the opportunity for disunity between these states to foster violence, more instability, and radicalism. This is represented through the state of Syria—the Saudi monarchy has insisted that to dismantle al-Assad’s rule in Syria is of the utmost national interest for Saudi Arabia, while the Iranian government has insisted on keeping al-Assad’s regime alive. Due to the opposite stances regarding the Syrian Civil War, the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia had refused to work alongside of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in order to combat the forces of ISIS. Although Saudi Arabia and Iran have the same goal—to dismantle ISIS—these two states have chosen to not work with each other. King Abdullah had made it very clear that if the United States worked with Iran in order to combat ISIS, the friendly affairs between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would not continue. This has left the United States in an uncomfortable situation—wanting to gain leverage with a negotiating adversary while pleasing your largest Arab ally.

It is clear that a problem between two extremely influential Shi’ite and Sunni nations exists. Religion throughout the region is a dominating aspect of life—Islam affects a multitude of fundamentals of society from love and marriage, to wars and conflicts. In fact, the Islamic State

has utilized the schism between Sunnis and Shi'ites as a recruitment tactic. If these two influential Sunni and Shi'a states formed a bond against extremism and terrorism, the recruitment tactics of ISIS would have no merit.

It is significant to ensure the safety of citizens throughout the world and this is focused in nations that we call our allies. It is also important to note that conflicts between influential states in a region that witnesses the demise of many instable regimes could lead to a man-made disaster. This ongoing conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia should not persist as it does. Due to the influence these two states have, if the Iran-Saudi conflict is solved, the relations can serve as not only an example, but as a stabilizing agent throughout this region.

Policy Importance

Some scholars consider Iran and Saudi Arabia to be the biggest influencers of the Persian Gulf region due to the geographic size of the two countries, the natural resources within each country, and the persuasive nature of the governments.⁹ Thus, while the bipolar essence of the Gulf region had previously been managed, it is now beginning to see the commencement of a violent climax. Saudi Arabia is considered to be a regional power due to massive oil reserves that bring in billions in revenues, making this state one of the wealthiest Middle Eastern countries. Due to the influence that oil money has on the 21st century world and the fact that the United States and the Saudi regime have been longstanding allies, Saudi Arabia has always had an incredible influence throughout the relations that are formulated inside and outside of the Persian Gulf region.

Yet, in this region there is another large country that is beginning to seek more influence—Iran. Throughout the process of nuclear negotiations, this state has been attempting to

grasp influence wherever it finds possible. While the government is known to have the fourth-largest amounts of oil reserves in the world and is the third largest oil producer of the world, international sanctions have made producing this oil another challenge altogether. This has left the state and its citizens in poverty.¹⁰ So, the Iranian government has begun to look for influence in things that don't revolve around oil or extreme wealth. International negotiations and sanctions regarding Tehran's nuclear system have potentially hindered the relationship between negotiating states and those states' allies. For instance, there had been a considerable amount of opposition between Iran, the United States, and Saudi Arabia for the duration of nuclear negotiations. Thus, the tension between Tehran and Washington at this time might not assist in the efforts of rekindling the Saudi-Iran relationship and could potentially jeopardize US-Saudi ties. In this instance, a neutral state could be utilized for conflict to diminish and negotiations to produce admirable effects. The possibility of this neutral actor lies in a state that borders Saudi Arabia and shares a body of water with Iran: Oman. The Omani government has had experience as a negotiator with many states including Iran, which makes the possibility for the utilization of Omani negotiating tactics plausible. So, while Iran-Saudi cooperation is hibernating, applying regional neutrality into issue of concern could be the future of the Persian Gulf region. Thus, it is practical to understand the split between these two states, understand the dynamics throughout the Gulf region, and use this to benefit the citizens of this region.

Literature Review

In order to fully understand each state it is important to learn the foundations of Islam due to each state's implementation of Islam within its government. Also, studying the Islamic Revolution of 1979 is significant because many scholars have sited this event as the turning point

of Iran-Saudi relations. Within this chronological perspective, the Hajj will also be examined due to its ability to elaborate on the focuses of this analysis: Islam and politics.

Islamic Roots

The importance of studying Saudi Arabia not only lies in this state's contemporary influence, but also within the examination of the Islamic roots that were established in this country. Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad whom was the messenger of God and established the Islamic faith in order to establish unity throughout Arabia. This territory was divided and fighting over lack of resources and a similar belief in Islam among the people brought the society together.¹¹ However, this unity did not last forever and in 632 A.D., when the Prophet had died, disagreements had begun over who would become the successor. While one group of Muslims believed succession should be based on merit, the other believed it should be based on bloodline. Thus, the schism between the Sunni and Shi'a branches of Islam were formed respectively.¹²

Islamic Revolution of 1979

The Islamic Revolution or Iranian Revolution of 1979 marked a turning point in Iran due to modifications in the domestic and foreign political realities. After the fall of the Shah of Iran, who instilled a more secular governmental system and had a good relationship with the United States, Iran transformed into the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹³ The leader of this revolution and the subsequent Iranian government was Ruhollah Khomeini, who assumed the title of the Grand Ayatollah.¹⁴ The Islamic Revolution frightened the Saudi monarchy because the Saudi government felt that revolutionary ideas might begin to seep into their borders.¹⁵ What angered King Fahd of Saudi Arabia about the Islamic Revolution was that the Grand Ayatollah expressed

that Iran was the only pure Islamic state—this served as a direct threat to Fahd’s divine right to rule.¹⁶ After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the relations between Tehran and Riyadh never fully healed. This is apparent in the succeeding events involving these two states.

The Hajj

However, in some instances, Tehran and Riyadh have attempted to peacefully connect and find common ground. Islam connects almost every individual throughout the region. Thus, it seems appropriate that one such instance in which the Iranian and Saudi regimes have attempted to find common ground is through Islam. In Islam, one of the five pillars is called the *Hajj*, or the pilgrimage. This is a journey to the Mecca that each Muslim is expected to do at least once in their adult life in order to prove their commitment to God and Islam.¹⁷ Mecca is located in Saudi Arabia and on occasion, the Saudi government had instilled strict standards on those who could make the *Hajj*, especially those traveling from Iran.

However, a change of policy was implemented after the Iran-Iraq War and during Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. While Riyadh had previously acted as a catalyst throughout the Iran-Iraq War by supplying Saddam’s Iraq with airbases and money, King Fahd realized the true threat was not the weak and war-torn Iran; it was the Ba’athist regime in Iraq.¹⁸ Therefore, King Fahd made attempts at normalizing relations with Tehran. So, in 1991 a notable peace effort came forth with King Fahd’s allowing Iranians to make the pilgrimage and complete the *Hajj*.¹⁹

This benefited Tehran in the sense that it made it possible for Iranian citizens to complete the pillars of Islam and prove their commitment to God. It also pleased the Saudi state because the pilgrimage brings in thousands of tourists each year and analysis has shown that this brings in billions of dollars in revenue.²⁰ This was seen as a possible turning point in the foreign dynamics

between Saudi Arabia and Iran. While there was fear that Iranians and Saudis would clash during the annual *Hajj*, any type of conflict was quickly restrained and settled by Saudi officials.²¹ The demonstrations that did occur were geared towards Israel and the United States, and anti-Saudi chants were quickly stopped.²² However, these amiable relations did not last long and the Iranian and Saudi governments soon began to see years of division on key issues encompassing the entire Middle Eastern region.

Recently, the issues dividing these two states have been surrounded around the nuclear technology in Tehran, the policy choices of each state regarding al-Assad's rule in Syria, and the combat against Islamic extremism.

Nuclear Negotiations

In regards to the nuclear technology in Tehran, Riyadh has been very adamant on not allowing Iran to gain access to nuclear weapons. In fact, some scholars have cited that Saudi Arabia has funded other nuclear programs like those in Pakistan as a means of deterrence.²³ The nuclear technology in Tehran has also led into some disagreements between the United States and the Saudi Arabian government, where Saudi Arabia has felt that there is still much more that can and should be done on behalf of the United States.²⁴ Friction between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia is uncommon and would not be taken lightly. While the United States has a lot on the line in respect to nuclear negotiations, the Saudi monarchy has even more riding on this issue due to the close proximity of the two states and the hostile nature of the relations between Tehran and Riyadh. Thus, the nuclear capabilities and policy choices that Iran has undertaken will not be taken unconscientiously throughout the world, especially in the eyes of the Saudi government whom only have a peripheral role throughout the entirety of nuclear negotiations.

Syrian Civil War

Al-Assad and his secular regime in Syria have come to see a revolution that began during the Arab Spring involving the citizens of Syria seeking to overthrow their president. Due to geographical location, resources, and ideological values, the Civil War in Syria has been looked at as an opportunity and outlet for other states to pursue their own national interests.²⁵ Of these states, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been of discussion due to their influence throughout this region. The Iranian government wished to strengthen al-Assad's regime due to a history of close diplomatic ties.²⁶ Iran has done extensive work involving strengthening the Syrian military, even fighting alongside the military in some instances, and warding off the Islamic State, whom has been attempting to gain complete power within Syria.²⁷ On the contrary, the Saudi Arabian government has seen the Syrian Civil War in an opposite light and has been vocal about wanting to see the demise of al-Assad's secular rule. In his place, the government of Saudi Arabia is hopeful for a different government, because Syria borders a Shi'ite Iraq, a non-ally of Saudi Arabia.²⁸ This new government could potentially become an ally to Saudi Arabia and strengthen their foothold in the region, while weakening Iran's stance. Seeing the fall of al-Assad's government in Syria is one of the utmost national concerns for the Saudi government that the late King Abdullah had spoken about on several occasions. In fact, Abdullah had said that the combat against the Islamic State is less of a national interest than the instability in Syria.²⁹ The disagreements between Iran and Saudi Arabia on the Syrian Revolution have been effected by the stance that each state takes to combat Islamic extremism, and more specifically the organization that labels itself as the Islamic State.

Islamic Extremism

Although both Iran and Saudi Arabia have both agreed that fighting against the Islamic State is of their national interests, they do not agree to fight side by side.³⁰ Iran had been one of the first states to fight against ISIS, yet this state is not officially considered as one of the U.S.-led coalition partners against ISIS.³¹ This is potentially attributable to the fact that the Saudi government has refused to allow Iran to officially join as a partner.³² In fact, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia had threatened to boycott the Paris Conferences regarding forming the coalition against ISIS if Iranian representatives were going to be present.³³ This international crisis is one to be studied because of its complexities—while both Iran and Saudi Arabia have national interests aligned in bringing down the Islamic State, both states have drifted even further apart in regards to this issue.

Literature Fit

This research is intended to understand the divide between Iran and Saudi Arabia on a fundamental level and apply it throughout current regional affairs. This discussion is also focused on modern instances of how each state's dedication to specific policies and ideologies has potentially resulted in contributions to dynamic relations. In essence, this research is focused on the policies and current events that are contributing to the balance of power throughout the Persian Gulf region, with respect to Iran and Saudi Arabia as the central influencers.

While there is much research that has been conducted about the tense nature of Iran-Saudi relations, there is little discussed about the importance and potential for improving upon these relations, in respect to stabilizing the Gulf region. Furthermore, there is not a substantial amount of research regarding the potential role that the Omani government could play

throughout Iran-Saudi relations. So, this discussion will recognize this uneasy relationship as an issue of this region from a contemporary context as well as establish a stance regarding the neutrality of Oman. This discussion will also provide research that will benefit future analysis of relations between these states.

There is hope that there will be potential negotiation tactics between these two unfriendly states through the use of a neutral actor, such as Oman. While Oman has been utilized through strategic cooperation before, there is still little research done on the triangular Iran-Saudi-Oman relationship and the future prospects this holds. Therefore, this research will put forth an analysis of past Omani-led negotiations and an investigation of the relations that the Omani government has formulated with Iran and Saudi Arabia, respectively. While the Iranian and Saudi case studies are described in terms of their intrinsic value, the Omani case study will be discussed in terms of the instrumental value that this state will play throughout Iran-Saudi relations. These aspects of the research will assist in the establishment of prospects for the future regarding Iran-Saudi ties, with regards to Omani negotiation tactics.

Research Design

This research will have five segments; the first being an introductory chapter, the next two sections will be the case studies of Saudi Arabia and Iran, in respect to the variables discussed previously. The third segment is an analysis of Oman's role as a negotiating entity. A more detailed outline of this chapter will be discussed further. The final chapter of the research is a discussion of the implications of the research, with a focus on the possibilities and prospects for the future.

The first case study in this research is a discussion on Saudi Arabia. Within this study there will be research regarding the religion of this country from a political perspective. The methods in which the Saudi monarchy is attempting to prevent radical Islamism and modernity from seeping into their borders will be analyzed due to its consequential effect on the region. Finally, the role that Saudi Arabian foreign policy has played on the complex Iran-Saudi ties will be examined.

The next case study will be focused on Iran and will follow the same outline of the previous chapter in order to analyze consistent variables. However, this Iranian case study will differ in its content based on examining the Islamic Revolution of 1979 that greatly influenced Iranian domestic and foreign policies. Also, similar to the previous case study, within this chapter there will be an analysis of the role that Tehran has played in the Syrian Civil War, fighting Islamic extremism.

The last case study will focus on Oman in relation to the potential role of this government as mentioned previously. Within the discussion of Omani foreign policy there will be emphasis on the individual relations that Oman has with Saudi Arabia and Iran. The data configured in this case study has been formulated from previous Omani-led negotiations. Thus, the entirety of this chapter is focused on this role that the government has and will potentially play throughout the region.

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³⁰ BRODER, JONATHAN. 2014. "'All of Us Together Against the Infidel.'" *CQ Weekly* 72, no. 27: 1218-1220. *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost.

³¹ Almkhtar, Sarah, and Karen Yourish. "Old, New and Unusual Alliances in the Middle East." *The New York Times*. March 29, 2015.

³² BRODER, JONATHAN. 2014. "'All of Us Together Against the Infidel.'" *CQ Weekly* 72, no. 27: 1218-1220. *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost.

³³ ESFANDIARY, DINA, and ARIANE TABATABAI. 2015. "Iran's ISIS policy." *International Affairs* no. 1: 1. *Academic OneFile*, EBSCOhost

CHAPTER ONE: SAUDI ARABIA

Introduction

The significance in studying Saudi Arabia's domestic and foreign policies and relating this political system to Islamic thought is because religion is the basis for the government and the establishment for culture in this society. Islam is the religion of almost all of the people living in Saudi Arabia.¹ It is additionally the foundation of the Constitution in Saudi Arabia known as Sharia law.² Thus, it can be understood that religion has a lot of implications on Saudi society; Islam effects the way in which the people are governed, educated, and how they simply live their lives. While the integration of Islam throughout a state is not unique to Saudi Arabia, the way in which Islam is immersed in the lives of the Saudi citizens is distinctive due to its strict Wahhabi movement. Therefore, the domestic and foreign policy decisions that the Saudi government enacts are seen as unique as well.

It is critical to understand the impact of Islam as a religion, as well as an ideology throughout Saudi Arabia due to its vast amount of influence throughout this state and region. In order to grasp this significance, the roots of Islamic thought in Arabia must be articulated. Thus, the proceeding section will be a discussion regarding Islamic roots within Arabia and its effects.

It is widely known that Islam was born in Arabia. The prophet Muhammad had lived in Mecca, which is known as one of the two holy cities within the Islamic religion. When Islam had first begun, it was not a very popular religion. In fact, persecutors forced Muhammad out of his

home in Mecca and he ended up in Medina, where he spent the majority of the rest of his life. Fortunately, Islam gained a foothold within Medina and the religion was able to spread quickly after a better foundation. This is why Medina is known as the other holy city. However, Muhammad was not satisfied with the way in which he left Mecca—towards the end of his life he wanted to make amends with those who persecuted him and Islam. So, he set about journeying from Medina to Mecca. This journey would soon become one of the five pillars that all Muslims must follow—the Hajj.

The Hajj is an annual occurrence and every Muslim, if able and well, must complete this epic journey to Mecca. To this day, Mecca bursts at its seams with individuals seeking to complete this journey and therefore professing their commitment to Islam and God.

It is important to note that the world has significantly changed since Muhammad had trekked to Mecca—there are countries now that did not exist until long after the prophet had passed. This is vital to discuss because of the implications that regional hostility has on practicing Islam. While a majority of citizens residing within the Middle Eastern region identify themselves as Muslim, it is ultimately the Saudi government whom has the ability to dictate who can and cannot enter Mecca and Medina.³ After all, this holy city is within their borders. The issues regarding this entrance in reference to Iranians will be discussed later in this chapter.

However, Islam doesn't only affect the foreign policies that the Saudi government enforces, in fact the entire governmental system is based on Sharia law. This system of governance plays a significant role on the way in which the nation of Saudi Arabia functions.

Thus, a discussion must be held regarding the meshing of religion and government within Saudi Arabia's borders.

Domestic Policies

As mentioned earlier, the Saudi government uses Sharia law for its legal system. This legal system has its basis in Islam, but in order to understand the differences between Saudi Arabia and other states, it must be known that the Islam practiced within the Saudi government is Wahhabism. Wahhabism is a strict Sunni Islamic movement that began in the 18th century and it is considered by the Saudi government to be the most pure form of Islam.

The Wahhabi movement within Arabia has resulted in some particular policies that are unique to this state and have caused uproar from within and outside of Saudi borders.

The Saudi government has had to deal with issues regarding the rights of individuals within the nation. Minority religions residing in Saudi Arabia are sometimes considered to be repressed by the government. Some of the oppression has even resulted in protests and small uprisings. Thus, the Shi'a community within Saudi Arabia will be evaluated as it affects not only a community within Saudi Arabia, but also a community existent throughout the entire region.

A fair amount of Shi'a Muslims living inside of Saudi Arabia took advantage of the opportunity to revolt during the 2011 Arab Spring because it was a time in which many people began to participate in demonstrations against the government. These disconcerting stirrings eventually spelled disaster and chaos for the Saudi government. The worst of the uprisings resulted from the youthful interventions—as the younger generations felt that the policies inflicted upon the entire nation was not equal. The Saudi government tried desperately to counter the Arab Spring demonstrations and while the efforts seemed to look successful, the protests

enacted by the Shi'a Muslims residing in the Eastern Province in 2011 turned into the longest and largest protest movement in the Kingdom's modern history.⁴ The Saudi government prides itself on the stability of the nation. While states surrounding this regime seem to be changing due in part by modernization—Saudi Arabia has managed to continue some of the same policies that were enacted when the state was formed.⁵ The reason for this stability is sometimes given the label of repression, but whatever name it is given, it is undoubtedly understood that stability within this region is a feat. Understandably, such an accomplishment is guarded and intended to be eternally secured—many moves the Saudi government takes or doesn't take is due to the desire to keep the stability alive in this state.⁶ So, when minority groups, such as the Shi'a Muslims inside Saudi Arabia, threaten this stability with protests and uprisings, there will be unforgiving consequences.

There have been indications that the Shi'a protests have been due in large part because of uneven development and the discrimination against the Shi'a population led by the state. The Twelver Shi'a population of Saudi Arabia constitutes about 10% of the population approximating at 2.5 million people.⁷ These Shi'a Muslims are mostly concentrated in and near the regions of al-Hasa and Qatif, which make up two of the major oases in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.⁸

From October 2011 to September 2012, many young Shi'a Muslims have been affected by state-led violence including the firing of weapons on Shi'a civilians by security forces. Some of the funerals of those individuals whom were killed during the violent incidences turned into the site of the largest demonstrations since an uprising by Saudi Shi'a groups in 1979-80.⁹ These modern Shi'a protestors utilized resistance to mobilize the public and had adopted the general

themes of the Arab Spring uprisings—*karama*, *hurriyya*, and *huquq*; meaning dignity, freedom, and rights, respectively.¹⁰

Clashes between the Sunni and Shi'a population in Saudi Arabia seemed inevitable due to the domestic policies within Saudi Arabia. For instance, the state does not provide nearly as much funding for Shi'a charities or infrastructures as provided for the Sunni population.¹¹ This has created a civil society that has become independent from the state, marginalized and pushed to a brink. This society has grown immensely due to the use of community websites and news outlets such as *Rasid*. While the Shi'a community seems to multiply by the usage of these outlets, this rhetoric is available to all Saudi citizens including Sunni Muslims, which has resulted in widening the gap between these two differing communities even further. The subsequent protests resulting from the usage of the limited but valuable Internet access has demotivated the Sunni population of Saudi Arabia to rise against the government.¹² Not only does the Sunni population see the consequences of such anti-government rhetoric, the rhetoric attacks the Sunni branch of Islam. Interestingly enough, the state has successfully prevented Sunni Muslims from joining the anti-government rhetoric by denouncing the Shi'a branch of Islam as “an Iranian fifth column...”¹³ While there might be many Sunni Muslims whom are not satisfied with the way in which their government functions, they identify themselves with the Wahhabi government rather than the Shi'a protestors.

The counter-revolutionary strategies of the Saudi regime has included: denouncing all protests as foreign schemes, sending military officials to Bahrain to assist with the Shi'a protests there, and to take a pre-emptive position on the uprisings in Syria.¹⁴ These efforts were intended to refract the anger of the Sunnis away from the royal family.¹⁵ However, while the strategies have more or less succeeded on ensuring the safety of the Sunni majority of Saudi Arabia, the

efforts have also created a bigger detriment in the gap between the Saudi regime and the Shi'a civil society as well as those Shi'a Muslims throughout the entire Persian Gulf region whom are dissatisfied with Saudi policies.¹⁶

Foreign Policies

While Islam seems to influence every policy that the Saudi government enacts, this influence is not necessarily a direct relationship. The foreign policies enacted are merely ways in which the Saudi state is able to protect and serve the nation through relations with other states. One such protection is based on the idea that stability in the region will help in continuing the stability of the Saudi regime. Unfortunately, the status quo of this delicate region has deemed stability to be farfetched, but the Saudi government is attempting to isolate the issues and attack them at their core. Two global headliners apparent in this region are the issues regarding the Syrian Civil War and the nuclear technology of Iran. The Saudi state has found themselves entangled in these issues not only because these states are close in proximity to Saudi Arabia, but also because Saudi Arabia is seen as one of the largest influencers of the Persian Gulf region.

The civil turmoil within Syria has acted as a magnet for surrounding states, and even those states' allies from overseas. Saudi Arabia has not been immune from this magnetic attraction and is considered one of the most active states of this conflict.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Iran and Saudi Arabia have butted heads more than once regarding what to do about the Syrian uprisings. In fact, these two states have picked opposite policy paths and have managed to fight one another through Syria's turmoil. This is why the Syrian Civil War is occasionally deemed as an Iran-Saudi proxy war.¹⁸ The civil distress within Syria has been substantially shaped by the Iran-Saudi dispute. While the relationship between these two states is notorious for being

turbulent, the Syrian Civil War has given the Iran and Saudi states the ability to continue their unfriendly relations. This issue has not only provided a landscape for direct confrontations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but it has also exacerbated the justification for the fighting between these two states.

While there are many instances in which the Syrian Civil War has been titled as purely a sectarian conflict—Sunnis against Shi'ites, each actor within this issue has its own reasons for continuing to engage in this conflict. What is known regarding religion pertaining to this issue is that Bashar al-Assad, the President of Syria at the time of this conflict, was considered to run the government based on a small branch of Shi'a Islam. Thus, at the time of this conflict, it can be stated that Iran and Syria are Shi'ite states, while Saudi Arabia is a Sunni state. The Iranian regime has repeatedly backed the Assad regime, while the Saudi government has continually gone against Assad and this is why this conflict is sometimes discussed as being a battle between Sunnis and Shi'ites. However, as stated before, each individual actor involved in this turmoil has its own reasons for continuing the fight and it is therefore not accurate to simply state that this is a purely sectarian conflict. So, although the policies of all three states discussed are based on Islamic ideology, this does not necessarily result in a battle between opposing Islamic branches.

In order to understand this conflict and potentially aide in the stopping of such exacerbation of future conflicts, it is significant to begin with the discussion of ways in which the main actors have progressively reacted towards the Civil War. In this chapter, there will be a discussion regarding Saudi Arabia's role in this conflict while the proceeding chapter will go into detail about Iran's reactions towards this battle.

It is well known that the Saudi government has intended, from the very start, to unseat Assad.¹⁹ Regarding this aspiration, there have been speculations as to who or what the Saudi

regime desires in Assad's place, but so far none of these speculations have been confirmed. What is known is that among other states, Saudi Arabia has pursued policies of aiding the Syrian opposition, known as the Free Syrian Army.²⁰ While it's ideal to assume that all states aiding the Syrian opposition have gotten along famously, this has simply not been the case. In fact, Saudi Arabia is noted as having skirmishes with Qatar. The disagreements between Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been described as especially damaging for the Free Syrian Army because the forces are split into two, making the ability to overthrow Assad's regime even more difficult. However, the Gulf States had not always disagreed on the issue of the Syrian Civil War. In fact, in the beginnings of the conflict there was consensus among the Gulf coalition that Assad should remain in power because it would be more beneficial for future aspirations.²¹ It has been speculated that if the Gulf States had continued down this path, the Syrian regime would have gradually detached from the influence of Iran, which had been a side goal of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.²²

At these beginning stages, Qatar had been the most substantial defender and longest Gulf ally of Assad's regime.²³ Unfortunately for Assad, Qatar as well as Turkey, had encouraged the broken government to undergo significant reforms such as allowing Islamic involvement in the government, as well as diverging from Iran.²⁴ Qatar had received the backing of the Saudi monarchy at the time; the King sent a warning to Assad and insisted,

What is happening in Syria is not acceptable for Saudi Arabia... Syria should think wisely before it's too late and issue and enact reforms that are not merely promises but actual reforms. Either it chooses wisdom on its own or it will be pulled down into the depths of turmoil and loss.²⁵

Assad was not willing to complete these changes and Qatar, with the support of the Gulf States, pulled the decision on backing his regime. As if the Saudi monarchy had predicted the

future, the Assad regime was in fact pulled down into the depths of turmoil and loss. Soon after this statement was issued, the next phase of the Syrian Civil War was initiated. All Gulf States had come together to mobilize the Arab League in order to counter the Assad regime. This coalition, led by Saudi Arabia, gradually ensured that Syria would become politically isolated by internationally and regionally condemning Syria as well as applying sanctions.²⁶

Yet, there are more reasons behind the Saudi desire to come out victorious with their efforts in Syria than simply having distasteful thoughts about Assad's regime. With Tehran growing larger in influence by each passing day and obtaining Syria as an ally, Riyadh had noted that their own influence was beginning to sway. Thus, the Syrian Civil War became an event in which the Saudi government intended to correct the recent changes in the balance of regional power that had shifted in favor of Iran.²⁷ Understanding this allows light to be shed on why the Syrian Civil War has escalated into what most scholars consider a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. For Saudi Arabia, there was a lot to lose if the Syrian Civil War wouldn't turn out in their favor. If the Assad regime would last, Iran would gain an important victory—a trusted, allied neighbor. The Saudi government could not afford another loss to Shi'a dominant parties; they had experienced this loss after the fall of Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the developing of Iranian influence within Baghdad. The Saudi regime intended to not lose another, which would result in Iran gaining more allies throughout the delicate region. If the Saudi regime was able to defeat Assad and another political power emerged, then this would sever the ties between Iran and Hezbollah, Iran's principal ally. The Saudi government understood the gravity of this situation and expressed that a victory would in fact change the winds in the favor of their influence.

This calculation was farfetched and required some imagination regarding the events that would take place after the Syrian Civil War was over, however it was a calculation nonetheless. The Gulf States, led by Saudi Arabia, supported this estimate with the fact that a majority of Syrians identify themselves as Sunni Muslim, and these individuals sincerely opposed Assad's Alawite regime.²⁸ Even more evidence for this calculation was developed due to the links that the Gulf States had with Syria—there were a large number of Syrians whom had tribal affiliations or lived within Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait.²⁹ The Gulf States claimed to be very familiar with the way in which the Syrian society and government functioned—there were many shared business and international interests between the ruling elites of the Gulf States and Syria.³⁰ All of this had developed into an assumption that if Saudi Arabia, supported by the Gulf coalition, were able to unseat Assad, they would begin to gain more influence throughout the region once again.

However, as mentioned before, there were quite a lot of disagreements between Saudi Arabia and allied states, such as Qatar. In any scenario, the ability to dismantle a regime in the middle of such civil turmoil is a difficult task indeed, but coupled with the fighting between allied states, the task became even more insurmountable. The Saudi government and Qatar didn't fight about everything revolving around the Civil War—they agreed on and successfully recruited Western allies, the UN, and the Friends of Syria to help the opposition.³¹ However, these two states employed independent and often contradictory efforts to see the fall of Assad. Where they disagreed most was when discussing the favored allies within the Syrian opposition, as well as regional allies.³²

Saudi Arabia had a broad list of contacts within Syria that were known to support the Syrian opposition. These individuals were understood to be businessmen, government officials,

liberals, chiefs of tribes, as well as Muslim clerics from differing branches. The regional actors that aligned with Saudi Arabia was the UAE and the Jordanian government, the latter became Saudi's principal ally.³³ The disagreements between Saudi Arabia and Qatar managed to develop into power struggles between the two states in regards to positions available inside the Syrian opposition. Unfortunately for the Gulf States, the skirmishes between the Riyadh and Doha ate away at the credibility of the opposition. Not only did the international community begin to feel uneasy over the disagreements, but also within the Syrian opposition many individuals felt that their leaders were merely being used as pawns in a chess match between the most influential Gulf States. While the Syrian opposition became weakened from the inside out, the two states that were responsible for this withering had not taken on the task of completely training and providing operational aide on the military front. The opposition became more disorganized and this provided the Syrian army with numerous opportunities to weaken the rebel forces even more so. Saudi Arabia was now witnessing a nightmare; their trusted allies had caused the rebellion to diminish and their main adversary, Iran would once again take the lead on spreading their influence throughout the region.

Yet, the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia in particular had a few more tricks up their sleeves. The Saudi government found themselves allying with the Jaysh al-Islam, a large Salafist group within Syria. While this would help Saudi's efforts in the short-term, the more support the regime gave to this group; the number of radicals that intended to dominate the rebellion grew substantially. Saudi Arabia's disagreements with Iran and Qatar would eventually result in the rise in jihadist movements within the rebellion. But for a short-term solution, the Saudi led coalition, with the exception of the Emirati government, concluded that it was worth the risk to support those who aided radical groups especially if this meant the demise of the Assad regime.³⁴

It is at this point that an individual can truly discover the commitment that Saudi Arabia has towards ousting Assad. To the dismay of Saudi Arabia, this calculation of victory would be short lived; the rise of al-Qaeda affiliated organizations and the revival of ISIS developed into antagonistic rhetoric towards the Gulf States.³⁵ As of recent, ISIS has begun to dominate Syria and millions of citizens have been killed, displaced, or have been forced to flee from the wrath of jihadist groups. This was clearly a detrimental and deplorable mistake on behalf of the Saudi government. The international community has condemned the Gulf monarchies as being, at the very least, negligent in preventing the development of dangerous jihadist organizations. In a seemingly inevitable change of events, the monarchies lost a considerable amount of credibility and influence; the victory of this drawn-out battle appears to continually fall in the palms of Iran.

Conclusion

The current Saudi state has evidently gone through many developments over time, but what is most curious is the fact that this state has more or less stayed the same throughout these developments. Due to the continuing of certain policies and maintaining a stable regime, the Saudi government has been able to develop a sense of honor around their state system. This honor has been well deserved; it has become a difficult task to maintain order in such a large state throughout this region in the late 20th and 21st centuries. Threats to this stability have come from every which direction—internally and externally. One external threat had come from Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The government of Iran announced that it was the only pure Islamic state, however that position was supposedly already filled by Saudi Arabia. While this might not seem like a huge issue, this statement by the Iranian government served as a direct threat the stability of Saudi Arabia. As discussed earlier, Saudi Arabia runs a government based

on Islamic law; the king of Saudi Arabia is considered to have merit because of religious confirmation. When Iran made a statement about their state being the only one in which pure Islam was being practiced, it directly undermined the value and ability for a Saudi king to rule the nation. So, while religion is only an indirect variable in this process, an individual is able to see how domestic policies, which are affected by religion and ideology, have the ability to cause more hostility between two differing states.

The domestic policies and statements that Iran had made in 1979 are only part of the picture that needs to be painted. Saudi Arabia's domestic policies are also capable of causing and contributing to more hostility between these two states. One of the issues that have been arising from Saudi Arabia is the amount of individuals that are pledging to the radical Islamic ideology. Many of these individuals have been joining terrorist organizations that have been creating trouble throughout the Middle Eastern region. Thus, many states throughout this region are under the impression that Saudi Arabia should handle this issue internally and develop a system in which citizens will not be so attracted to radicalizing. Unfortunately, the understanding is that Saudi government has done little to punish and/or detract individuals from radicalizing. Of the states that are unimpressed and angry over Saudi Arabia's lack of passion on this issue is their Saudi's Persian Gulf Neighbor: Iran. So, as stated earlier, while religion is the motivator for policies and actions throughout governmental systems, it is the domestic policies in which the state does or does not enact that truly debilitate the relationship that state has with its neighbors.

The geography of Saudi Arabia has influenced the development of the state as a whole. There is not a lot of livable land within the country, so a majority of the population lives in densely populated cities. Since Saudi Arabia has major coastlines on the Persian Gulf and Red

Sea, these costal areas provide the state with opportunities to trade extensively. This especially helps the state when trading and shipping oil.³⁶

Moreover, the Saudi government benefited immensely from the discovery and production of oil. Saudi Arabia is known for being the world's number one oil exporter as well as one of the most active members of OPEC.³⁷ Like many of the states in the region however, the leadership is looking into the diversification of the economy through the means of privatization and developing more jobs for Saudi nationals. Similarly, the youth of Saudi Arabia is cited as being uneducated and unskilled in terms of being able to work within the private sector. This has led the government to focus on this youth population, in more ways than one.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's geography in relation to land borders has also affected the development of the state. Surrounding the country are many states that have been afflicted by instable regimes. These states include, but are not limited to: Yemen, Israel, and Iraq. The instable regimes have proved as a threat to the stability and wellness of the Saudi state. The reasons behind the instability within these other states are varied, but what has been established is that the Saudi government has become surrounded by states that have gone through political turmoil. Some of these have developed into Shi'ite states, and this has not provided any sense of relief for the Saudi monarchy. Since Saudi Arabia is known as a strict Sunni state, the idea of opposition being so close to home is unsettling, to say the least.

Yet, it isn't just the opposition from neighboring governments that has provided an outlet of worry for the monarchy. Also on the list of concerns is Islamic extremism within and surrounding the state. On multiple occasions there have been discussions regarding the amount of Islamic extremists that have roots in the strict Sunni state. This has angered states within the region because of a lack of accountability from the monarchy. On the other hand, there are many

radicals that have not sprouted from Saudi Arabia. However, these individuals are concerning to Saudi Arabia because they are performing malicious acts very close to the state's borders. This is why the state is known to be very active throughout the combat against Islamic extremism in the region.

In essence, geography and resources have provided the Kingdom with opportunities for wealth and growth. However, some of the geographical aspects have not ended in the same beneficial way. While the government is attempting to focus on developing a more diverse economy, educating the youth, and stabilizing the state, there are many internal and external factors that are forcing the government to focus on matters of security.

¹ Vogel, Frank E. 2012. "SHARI'A IN THE POLITICS OF SAUDI ARABIA." *Review Of Faith & International Affairs* 10, no. 4: 18-27. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

² Ibid.

³ Okruhlik, Gwenn. 2003. "Saudi Arabian-Iranian Relations: External Rapprochement and Internal Consolidation." *Middle East Policy* 10, no. 2: 113-125. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁴ Matthiesen, Toby. 2012. "A "Saudi Spring?": The Shi'a Protest Movement in the Eastern Province 2011-2012." *Middle East Journal* 66, no. 4: 628-659. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁵ Jones, Toby Craig. 2011. "Saudi Arabia Versus the Arab Spring." *Raritan* 31, no. 2: 43-59. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Blanchard, Christopher M. "Islam: Sunnis and Shiites." CRS Report for Congress 7-5700, no. RS21745 (2009).

⁸ Matthiesen, Toby. 2012. "A "Saudi Spring?": The Shi'a Protest Movement in the Eastern Province 2011-2012." *Middle East Journal* 66, no. 4: 628-659. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Friedman, Brandon. 2012. "Battle for Bahrain." *World Affairs* 174, no. 6: 74-84. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hokayem, Emile. 2014. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Survival* (00396338) 56, no. 6: 59-86. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁸ MONSHIPOURI, MAHMOOD, and ERICH WIEGER. 2014. "Syria: The Hope and Challenges of Mediation." *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 2: 149-165. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁹ Hokayem, Emile. 2014. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Survival* (00396338) 56, no. 6: 59-86. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

²⁰ MONSHIPOURI, MAHMOOD, and ERICH WIEGER. 2014. "Syria: The Hope and Challenges of Mediation." *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 2: 149-165. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

²¹ Hokayem, Emile. 2014. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Survival* (00396338) 56, no. 6: 59-86. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ MONSHIPOURI, MAHMOOD, and ERICH WIEGER. 2014. "Syria: The Hope and Challenges of Mediation." *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 2: 149-165. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

²⁸ Hokayem, Emile. 2014. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Survival* (00396338) 56, no. 6: 59-86. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The World Factbook 2013-14. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2013 .

³⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO: IRAN

Introduction

In this chapter, Iranian domestic and foreign policies are evaluated. These characteristics will be discussed in comparative terms in order to connect and compare similar features of other states, especially Saudi Arabia. Among the current events that are evaluated within this chapter are the nuclear program occurring within Tehran and its involvement in the Syrian Civil War. However, before the discussion on Iranian policies, it is necessary to understand the implications of institutionalizing religion within the Iranian government. This is because Iran follows similar governmental patterns as Saudi Arabia does—Tehran abides by and enforces Sharia law. The differences between the ways these laws are implemented lie in the differences between each country's state religion. While it was previously discussed that Saudi Arabia follows a strict form of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabi, the Iranian state guides its nation based on Shi'a Islam. These differences might not seem expansive, but it has led to historical as well as contemporary divergences between both states. Therefore, it is imperative that a discussion must be held regarding the transformation of the Iranian state—from a more secular government, to one that pronounces itself as the only pure Islamic state. In order to develop a complete understanding of this incredible alteration, one must dive deep into the event that began it all: the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the only country on the globe in which a far-reaching Islamic revolution has occurred and Shi'ism was subsequently deemed the state religion.¹ However, the historical relevance of Shi'ism within Iran didn't begin with this revolution, the political institutionalization of Shi'ism in Iran began in 1501 when Shah Esmail I founded the

Safavid Empire.² Shah Esmail I adopted Shi'ism as the Empire's religion in order to distinguish his country from their adversary—the Sunni Ottoman Empire.³ This is important to note because this might help explain the long history of dysfunctional relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, it wasn't until the 1960s in which Shi'ism began to culminate politically when Ruhollah Khomeini began to lead Iran with his concept of *velayat-e faqih*, meaning the authority of the jurisconsult.⁴

However, before the Islamic Revolution and Khomeini became the Ayatollah and instilled a different type of governmental organization in Iran, the Shah of Iran ruled over the masses. Thus, the reasons for the start of the 1979 Islamic Revolution are identical to the reasons for the demise of the Shah's regime—the collapse of the Pahlavi regime led right into the Islamic Revolution. This revolution was religiously inspired, fueled by an utter disapproval for the Shah's regime and disgust due to the amounting level of Iranians dipping underneath the poverty line.⁵ The leader of this Islamic Revolution was Ruhollah Khomeini who became the Ayatollah of Iran due to his ability to connect with the Iranian people, before, during, and after his fourteen-year exile from Iran. Khomeini stressed specific values of justice, independence, and Islamic-piety. He rejected the influence of western culture and secularization that were enacted in policies within the 20th century under the Shah's rule. Khomeini managed to integrate religion, economics, and societal issues and this pleased the Iranian population very much—especially in comparison to the Shah's policies.⁶

The Islamic Revolution brought about fundamental changes in the Iranian government. This Revolution led the Iranian government to update the outdated constitution. This resulted in the development of the Iranian constitution of 1979. However, over time Iran has gone through

more transformations—laws have been altered and the Iranian constitution has changed once again.

After the Revolution, the theory and institutionalization of *velayat-e faqih* began which had deemed the supreme leader as the ultimate decision maker of important domestic and foreign affairs—state power was said to essentially be in the hands of one person.⁷ However, in 1989, at the end of the Iran-Iraq War and after the death of Khomeini, the Iranian constitution was revised. In this revision, the prime minister's position was abolished and his tasks were taken over by the president. The president is now considered the head of the government, but this position is thought to be the second most influential political office and does not have a final say on foreign policy decisions and does not have any control over the armed forces. The decision making process goes from the foreign minister to the president to the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), and then finally to the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader is in charge of signing all bills.⁸ Yet, these transformations have not been as severe as the changes that occurred during and immediately after the Islamic Revolution. This state is described now as a semi-theocratic rule that has origins in the Iranian constitution of 1906 and 1979.⁹

Domestic Policies

The Pahlavi regime did not have the best track record with the greater majority of the Iranian population—both Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and his father did not have the much support from the Iranian people.¹⁰ The Shah came to take the throne because he was next in line and his father was abdicated by the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. The Shah was inexperienced and continued his father's policies even though the opinions of the Iranian citizens were constantly spiraling downwards.¹¹

Among the policy choices that eventually led to the demise of the Shah were the economic and social policies—a majority of Iranians outwardly expressed their disapproval. At the time, many Iranians felt alienated from the lack of economic policies that would sincerely benefit those who were living in poverty.¹² The White Revolution that the Shah pursued was seen, to many, as merely a symptom of the failures of the Shah's economic policies—these failures include: the failure to improve the healthcare of Iran, the failure to expand education, and the failure to create jobs on a scale broad enough to be effective.

However, almost every nation has experienced low economic times and this is not seen as enough to overthrow the throne and pursue an ideologically opposite replacement. There are more reasons behind the beginning of such a widespread revolution. The Shah's regime was notorious for violating many human rights regulations and the general population of Iran was not satisfied with this. The Shah insisted on enforcing the modern laws through the use of the *Sazman-I Ittili'at va Amniyat-I Kishvar* (SAVAK) or the National Intelligence and Security Organization. This organization was known for being extremely forceful especially when dealing with any individual that would not submit to the Shah's policies or when an individual would speak out against the government.¹³

While these violations are not to be overlooked by any means, it is important to note that there is another reason for the start of the Islamic Revolution. This reason lies in the dissatisfaction for the relations that the Iranian government had with the West—the United States in particular. These relations resulted in making the Iranian masses fearful and angry. While the Shah seemed to benefit from and enjoy the cozy relations with Western states, the Iranian people did not align with the same mentality. It has been noted that many Iranian citizens felt isolated

and would consistently worry that the Shah would ultimately make choices that would benefit the West more than their own nation.¹⁴ There was fear that the Shah was more reluctant to defend the rights and needs of his people, especially if it meant that he would possibly alienate Western allies. Along similar lines, many Iranians felt that the close ties with the United States and other western states led the Shah to enact policies that seemed too modern and too secular for a more conservative, Islamic society.¹⁵ Examples of these policies are the prohibition of Muslim women wearing veils, the restriction of teaching the Qur'an in schools, and the use of civil courts instead of Islamic courts. This conservative Shi'ite society saw these policies as direct attacks on Islamic belief and tradition and this would eventually need to be dealt with accordingly.

Ruhollah Khomeini understood that the general Iranian population was eager to make political and ideological changes to the state and willingly took this opportunity to become the leader of the revolution. For the general population of Iran, the close ties with the West resulted in the Iranian government shifting priorities; the citizens did not feel comfortable with the idea of the Shah making so many changes regarding the way in which the society functioned. So, while the Shah tried to convince the Iranian society that his policies would bring them prosperity, the words of Khomeini soon began to drown out the desperate attempts of the Shah rationalizing with a nation that felt as if their identity was being taken away from them.

Nuclear Technology

The desire to obtain a nuclear weapon is not unique to Tehran; it is seen throughout the Middle Eastern region. Although much is still kept secret and myths have replaced facts about

the nuclear technology within this region, it is widely believed that Israel has obtained a weapon, Pakistan with financial assistance from Saudi Arabia has had a nuclear weapon since 1998, and Saddam's Iraq had attempted to deter Iran by gaining nuclear technology. Many view that this attraction to have a nuclear weapon is due to a security dilemma prevalent throughout this region, and this dilemma seems to consistently attract many states. Saudi Arabia is not immune from the desire to create a security system within this region that puts their state at the top. Riyadh has made indications that if Tehran gains a nuclear weapon then they will pursue the same policy. In fact in 2011, Prince Turki al-Faisal explicitly stated that the Gulf States should create a group that would pursue nuclear power if Iran refuses to cease their nuclear program.¹⁶ The reason the Prince gave as to why he wanted this coalition to be formed was due to the desire for Iran's nuclear program to be balanced-out.¹⁷ However, the threat of a Saudi-led nuclear coalition along with the scorn Tehran receives from the international community has yet to result in a cease in nuclear aspirations.

One of the most crippling products of the nuclear negotiations for Iran has been the sanctions placed on this state from a wide array of actors.¹⁸ These tough sanctions have left Iran's society in a state of despair as a majority of its citizens are dipping into a pool of poverty. Iran does not have enough internal revenue to continue domestic services that many citizens rely on for economic security. Numerous scholars have suggested that if Iranian officials were more open to negotiations, the economic situation in Iran would improve dramatically, over a reasonable amount of time. Furthermore, the relationship that Iran has with Israel, the Western hemisphere, and Sunni Arab states would noticeably improve. Yet, Iran has been reluctant to budge even an inch on any type of negotiation. In fact, there is talk in the international

community that suggests Iran is taking their time with negotiations as a tactic—once they obtain a nuclear weapon, negotiations would shift dramatically, in the favor of Tehran. Time is not on Iran's side, so the state is hoping to make up for this on their own terms.¹⁹ However, both sides of the negotiation table are so far apart that reaching an agreement seems improbable at this point, especially because neither side is willing to budge on their conditions. Unfortunately and fortunately, incidents within the Middle Eastern region concerning Iran and the P5+1 have the potential to be used as political tools during these negotiations.

Yet, regardless of the manifesting situations, Iran (like many other states) seems completely invested on continuing and further developing their nuclear program. Therefore, while the Syrian Civil War has potential to cultivate into a political tool throughout nuclear negotiations, the reality is that international headlines like the Civil War seem to rank lower than nuclear aspirations do on the Iranian priority list. Further adding to this dilemma is the idea that Iranian efforts towards the Syrian Civil War seem to be paying off, so to speak.

This overwhelming dedication to such an internationally taboo policy begs the question as to why Tehran chooses to endure such dramatic consequences. Unfortunately, that answer will only be speculated upon, and will be given many different ideas from many different faces. However, what should be studied is the fact that Tehran chooses to pursue this policy and Saudi Arabia's reaction to this policy choice. What can be confirmed is exactly what many authors have previously stated: Riyadh is not enjoying Tehran's nuclear aspirations. Even more is that Saudi government has spoken on multiple occasions about their ability and desire to obtain nuclear technology if Iran refuses to stop their program. So, now it is time to connect the dots between actions and reactions.

First, Iran should be analyzed. For the sake of this discussion speculations will only be made in regards to the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It has already been stated that the bond Riyadh and Tehran share is one of unfavorable nature. This has more or less been on the increase since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, but is the threat from Saudi influences enough to keep the nuclear plans alive? The answer is probably no, especially because Saudi Arabia does not have a nuclear weapon of their own. However, it likely doesn't help that the Saudi military has been increasing in size and capacity over the past decade.

So, while there are a lot of unknowns regarding the reasons as to why nuclear ability has become very attractive to Tehran, what is known is that each state's domestic policies concerning state security has the ability to affect the other's policies. When states are close to one another and pursue security policies that are looked at as offensive in nature, it is quite evident as to how and why a vicious cycle of offensive and defensive strategy is able to formulate so quickly. To put this in comparative terms, let's take the United States as an example. The United States has the advantage and disadvantage of having only two bordering neighbors: Canada and Mexico. While the United States enjoys, for the most part, good relations with each state, the policies regarding border protection that the U.S. has enacted have been seen in a negative light. Securing and monitoring the border between the U.S. and Mexico has been considered offensive to many Mexican citizens and officials. This lack of consensus on the issue has led to a decline in the relations between Mexico and the United States. So, while securing the border is considered a domestic policy, the United States is also aware of the international affairs that are being dramatically affected. Bringing this back to Iran and Saudi Arabia, each of these gulf states has more than triple the amount of bordering neighbors that the U.S. has. So, while

domestic policies might seem insignificant or purely internal to Iran and/or Saudi Arabia, the fact of the matter is that states are affected by their neighbors' policies. Taking this even further, Iran is pursuant of a weapon that could wipe out an entire nation, so the offensive nature of this policy is seen as even more intense than securing a border or two.

Foreign Policies

While it is well known that Iran and Saudi Arabia have a dysfunctional relationship, this has not always been the case. In fact, in some instances, mutual interests have been cited as being a factor for producing an amiable bond between these two Persian Gulf states. There is research that supports that both monarchies bonded over the fear of colonialism especially in 1958 when Iraq's King Faysal II was overthrown.²⁰ It was then that the Shah of Iran and King Sa'ud formed an alliance termed as the Twin Pillars policy. This alliance was purely a foreign policy stance that supported and encouraged pro-Western, conservative influence in the region.²¹ Unfortunately this foreign policy alliance was at the expense of their Gulf neighbor—Iraq. The Twin Pillars policy lasted from 1968 until 1979, when the Islamic Revolution broke out in Iran, and this would be the last time that an extended period of friendly relations existed between Iran and Saudi Arabia.²²

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 did not just have domestic implications; it had major effects on foreign affairs as well. As Iran developed into a state whose basis of law was Islam, Saudi Arabia's own establishment was automatically threatened. Al Sa'ud of Saudi Arabia claimed to rule according to basic Islamic traditions, however Ayatollah Khomeini expressed that Saudi Arabia's form of government was not valid and Iran would be known as the only pure

Islamic state.²³ Essentially, Al Sa'ud's legitimacy had been threatened by a state that had successfully overthrown their leader. This severely angered the Saudi government—Iran had begun to gain quite a number of influential adversaries.

Around this time, Saddam's Iraq was also not pleased with the Iranian government. So, in 1980, the Iraqi military invaded Iran. However, this could not have been done without any assistance from one influential neighbor: Saudi Arabia. Due to geographical constraints, it was essential for Iraq to seek assistance from Riyadh and the Saudi government responded positively. Saudi officials allowed Iraqi aircrafts to be stationed at some Saudi airbases.²⁴ Although the Saudi government viewed the Iranian regime to be offensive and distasteful, Arabia was not completely friendly with Saddam's Iraq either, so Iran never received full-force combat from Riyadh.²⁵ Iran was, however, severely weakened domestically and internationally due to the Islamic Revolution and the Iraqi invasion. So, following the Iran-Iraq War, the balance of interregional relations began to change once again. The Saudi government concluded that Iran was weakened to such an extent that this state was no longer a significant threat. In fact, the boisterous Iraqi government seemed to pose a larger threat to the balance of regional influence.²⁶ Thus, the world witnessed yet another shift in regional order as Saudi Arabia attempted to secure and defend their spot as the leading Persian Gulf influencer.

Following the cease-fire of the Iraqi invasion, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia developed a stance that shocked many. In 1989, King Fahd spoke about Iran-Saudi relations in an interview and stated,

We cannot change the geographic reality of Iran and Iran cannot change our geographic reality...On our side, we do not ask Iran for anything more than mutual respect and good neighborliness, which are the same things that Iran requests.²⁷

So, in 1991, for the first time in four years, Saudi Arabia allowed Iranians access to fulfill the fifth pillar of Islam—the pilgrimage to Mecca.²⁸

Syrian Civil War

Civil War that has acted as a magnet to many Middle Eastern states including the two leading Persian Gulf states--Iran and Saudi Arabia. When discussing the extent of the involvement that Iran has decided to enact, it is imperative to understand the basics behind this civil strife. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the current President, President Bashar al-Assad is not popular amongst his masses, his foreign neighbors, and even his allies have not spoken highly of his regime. However, even though there is much agreement that Assad's government is condemnable, the efforts that each Gulf state has conducted have exposed rivalries between friendly states and especially between adversaries.²⁹ In fact, some scholars have named the Syrian crisis as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.³⁰ Saudi Arabia has taken a direct stance on supporting the Free Syrian Army, which means the Saudi government now must discuss its foreign policy choices with its number of allies that have taken a similar stance but an opposing route to achieve the mutual goal. Yet, Iran has stood in a category of their own as one of the most supportive allies of al-Assad's regime in this Syrian conflict.³¹ The picture of Iranian support should not be painted as one free from blemishes, however. So in order to understand why Iranian officials have conducting policy in such an isolated, yet specific manner, it is important to note the dynamics of the relationship between Iran, Syria, and Turkey before this conflict erupted.

Syria and Iran have had a fairly close relationship since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 that occurred within Iranian borders. Even though Syria is considered to be a secular state and Iran an Islamic republic, the mutual political interests between these two had resulted into forming a strategic bond. When the Iran-Iraq War broke out, Syria came to assist Iran in countering Iraq, as they both shared a common enemy—Saddam Hussein. Yet, in 2003 with the fall of the Baath regime in Iraq, decision makers of Iran began to see Iraq as a potential ally.³² Some scholars site the change of government in Iraq as a reason for foreign policy shifts within the Iranian government. Of these shifts that occurred was the roller coaster of a relationship that Iran now faced with Syria due to allying with Iraq—militarily and economically.³³ At first Iran-Syrian relations seemed unaffected; in 2005 both governments agreed to a mutual defense pact.³⁴ On the contrary, behind the scenes, Damascus was seeking more security and commercial relations with Ankara and the relationship that Tehran had with Ankara at this time was not seen as admirable.³⁵ The thought of Syria growing closer to a state in which Iran was not friendly with did not settle well in the minds of Iranian officials.

Therefore, there was a push for relations between Iran and Turkey improve, and they did, due to instances of mutual adversaries, like Israel. In 2008, the Turkish population and government were greatly upset due to a military offensive instigated by Israel against Gaza. In response to the Israeli decisions, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan criticized Israeli President Shimon Peres at the 2009 World Economic Forum.³⁶ Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad thanked Erdogan for his criticism of Peres; the Turkish Prime Minister then went on to congratulating Ahmadinejad on winning reelection.³⁷ While this might all seem insignificant, in October of 2009, Erdogan went public to describe Iran's nuclear program as "an exercise in

nuclear energy, an exercise with peaceful and humanitarian goals.”³⁸ While the relations with Turkey seemed to look bright, especially in 2009 and 2010, the rift that occurs between these two states regarding the decisions of the Syrian Civil War would later result in an immediate dissipation of amiable relations.³⁹

Although one might presume that the close association that Ankara and Tehran began to develop could potentially put Damascus in a state of competitive angst, this was not the case. These three states worked well together for the few years of their alliance.⁴⁰ Yet, this delicate triangular relationship was certainly not one in which each state would conduct policy solely based on the other states. For instance, the Syrian government has made decisions counter to Iranian choices. One of these decisions occurred in March of 2011, when President Assad refrained from condemning the Gulf state’s intervention in Bahrain, which earned him some lenience with the Gulf States, but not any friendly concessions with Iran.⁴¹ While the Iranian-Syrian relationship may seem as mutual as transnational ties might come, there is much to be said that occurs behind the scenes. Thus, it is important to discuss the transformation of the Syrian conflict while specifying the foreign policies that the Iranian government had enacted in accordance to the Syrian conflict from 2011 until present day.

In 2011 when the Syrian conflict took a hold of Assad’s nation, his government might have expected to see Iran as a forefront actor in assisting in measures to ensure the survival of Assad’s regime, however this was not the case—Qatar and Turkey became the most substantive allies at this time.⁴² Qatar and Turkey drafted up approaches to and for Assad that many presume were fundamentally flawed because Assad was never willing to allow any sort of Islamic participation in his government or to part ways with Iran.⁴³ While the list proceeds regarding the

failures and weaknesses of the Qatari and Turkish approaches, it is important to note that Bashar al-Assad refused to follow the advice of the two trusted allies that came to his assistance. Was the Assad regime waiting for a more regionally dominant state? At the time of these failures, the Syrian rebels were gaining a better foothold in the country due to the dramatically increased assistance from many of the Gulf States.⁴⁴ Iranian involvement up until this time had been merely but a watchful eye on the situation. However, when the crisis became severe enough Iranian officials came to the realization that there was a grave possibility Assad's regime would falter due to the pressure that the Syrian rebels and their Gulf States alliances have subjected onto this regime. Therefore, Iranian policy flipped 180 degrees.

In 2011 during the early motions of the Syrian uprising, Iranian representatives only advised Syrian officials on how to conduct domestic policies in a manner that would avoid estranging a majority of Syrians.⁴⁵ Yet, quickly Iranian officials found themselves contacting and moderating agreements between Islamist forces in Tunisia and Egypt that would be favorable to Assad; however the Syrian president and the Muslim Brotherhood's representatives in Syria were not in agreement to any settlements, marking a failure for Iran.⁴⁶ Nearing the end of 2011, Iranian officials soon began to agree that Assad's regime did not have the wherewithal to survive, and the foreign policies within Iran on dealing with the Syrian crisis made a 90 degree turn—there was a mission to find a replacement for President Bashar al-Assad that would continue to relationship with Iran as Assad's regime had and would be suitable for the Syrian population.⁴⁷ In essence, the Iranian government wished to remove Assad and his top officials while keeping his system of government in place. However, the establishment of the Syrian government based upon kinship made this mission impossible, and Iranian officials soon found

themselves in a decision-making pickle. It was soon decided that the next initiative would be to again, assist al-Assad's regime and insist the survival of such. However, this time the Iranian government would not hold back on the amount of support that would go towards this objective. In 2012 the commitment was confirmed when General Qassem Suleimani commander of the Quds Force, an exclusive group within the Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) visited Damascus. After this meeting, Iranian assistance increased dramatically in amount and visibility.⁴⁸ Iran helped in providing an outlet for Syria to by-pass Western and Arab sanctions and allowed credit lines to extend to their country's ministries and national bank. Iran also assisted in mobilizing Iraq in helping with the efforts such as establishing financial agreements within Iraqi banks and trading routes that would facilitate Syria to receive weapons and goods.⁴⁹ Tehran also supplied its own uninterrupted flow of weaponry and helped to reorganize Syria's military. However, many scholars point to Iran training and developing the National Defense Force for Syrian support as one of the greatest contributions to the efforts to ensure the survival of Assad's regime. In 2012 and 2013 pictures surfaced that shows Iranian units fighting alongside Syrian forces, proving how utterly involved and committed the Iranian government has now become in this crisis.

The list goes on regarding the ways in which Iran has become engrossed in this conflict and while much is still kept quiet about the exact involvements of the Iranian government; Western intelligence has estimated that about \$15-19 billion has been used thus far on direct assistance to Assad's regime.⁵⁰ However, there is much speculation as to why Iran has put their own nation at risk and isolated themselves in such a time of strife and delicate negotiation to see the survival of a decimating state that a majority of Iranians feel indifferent for on their best

day.⁵¹ In fact, even the Iranian diplomat in charge of Middle Eastern affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian explained that Iran is “not seeking to have Assad remain president for life...”⁵² So, the questions remain, what is the motivation behind allying with a government that is falling and further alienating your own state from neighbors interested in seeking the definite the demise of this ally state of yours? Just as intriguing is the how this Syrian Civil War has resulted in the splitting of decisions within the Iranian government, yet the decision still persists—continue to supply Assad’s regime with support. Western détente is at its weakest point with Iran due to the policy choices regarding the Syrian conflict and the nuclear negotiations, however all of these presumably surmounting costs seem to be petty compared to the benefit that the survival of Assad’s regime would mean for Iran. This benefit seems to be masked by a myriad of speculations, but one protrudes like no other is the desire for the Iranian government to be the prominent state in the Levant region—a primarily Shi’ite society that balances out the dominating majority Sunni societies of the Middle East.⁵³ However, even as secular as the Syrian government attempts to make their state, the rise of radical jihadism and the penetration of this radical ideology into the borders of Syria has made this Syrian Civil War much more complicated than it ever intended to be.

Conclusion

Due to the security dilemma between Iran and Saudi Arabia as discussed in this chapter’s section on nuclear technology, it is quite evident that each state’s domestic policies has the ability to aggravate the hostility between both states. In this instance, it is Iran’s nuclear aspirations that have led to a decline in friendly relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While Iran claims to lust after nuclear power for peaceful purposes, the Saudi regime has been backed

into a corner of doubt and fear. The security dilemma is as follows: Iran seeks nuclear technology and Saudi Arabia—being Iran’s largest adversarial neighbor—is under the impression that Iran’s policies are offensive in nature. Unfortunately, this takes a spiraling affect in which Saudi Arabia begins to boost up their military capabilities and the cycle makes a full circle when Iran then feels threatened by Saudi policies.

Furthermore, the foreign policies that Iran has chosen have had a substantial effect on Iran-Saudi ties. The section labeled the Syrian Civil War has provided many key details as to the progression of Iran’s stance in Syria. Subsequently, it is beneficial to note that Iran’s decisions regarding this state run counter to those that Saudi Arabia proposes. This lack of unification on such a delicate and timely issue purports the idea that foreign policies are capable of furthering the hostility between both states.

While religion and ideology seems to affect both states in foreign and domestic policy realms, it is important to state that this does not necessarily mean that religion and ideology are the only factors that have created and exacerbated Iran-Saudi hostility. So, while it is neither confirmed nor denied that Iranian or Saudi foreign and domestic policies have created the rift between these two, it is understood that the rift is only worsened by policies that are seen as offensive or unfavorable by either state. Moreover, it cannot be confirmed nor denied that religion and ideology directly affect the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but each state’s form of law is directly related to religion, which means that religion has the potential and the ability to indirectly affect this hostility.

The geography of Iran has played a significant role in shaping the politics of the state. The country’s entire northern border is shared with countries that were previously part of the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ Iran’s western borders are shared with Turkey and Iraq. The Eastern borders are

connected with Afghanistan and Pakistan, while the Southern part of Iran is directly connected to the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. All of these borders have influenced the political approaches taken by the government throughout Iranian history. Moreover, these borders have affected, in some condition, the way in which the Iranian state has been perceived. For instance, after the Islamic Revolution took place, surrounding states became uneasy with the idea of an entire governmental overthrow occurring so close to home.

Similarly, the geographical aspects within Iran itself have shaped the state. Iran is said to be a fairly mountainous country. The mountain ranges have provided the opportunity for agricultural and urban growth to sprout due to the way in which the mountains enclose large areas of water.⁵⁵ These mountains also contributed to the way in which Iranian society functioned before modern technology and roads were established. Before there was access to trains, cars, and other modes of transportation, the society of Iran was split into different pockets of communities that were known to be isolated due to the dense mountains. Since there are not any major river systems in the country transportation was limited and done through the use of caravans.⁵⁶ This foundation of Iranian society had the potential to unevenly develop the nation.

The mountains not only influenced the way in which society grew, but also the economy of Iran. The mountains inhibited the easy access to the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Thus, the ranges played a key role in the state's development of industries that were not incredibly dependent upon the usage of waterways. During the oil boom, Tehran had realized that it hit the jackpot. The state began to become dependent on oil money, as with most of the states in this region. However, similar to the fates of surrounding states, the resources began to dwindle, with the money following suit. The government had realized in the 1980's that other industries needed

to quickly develop. However, major changes to the economy have yet to be seen. The state had continued on the path of oil-money dependence.

This is why the sanctions imposed by the international community have crippled the Iranian government. The sanctions have frozen Iranian money and thus, the entire process of oil development has been ceased, for the most part. The Iranian economy has been known to be lacking throughout the past few decades, and the implementation of harsh sanctions has resulted in the worsening of this situation for the entire nation. Furthermore, there is well over double the amount of people living in Iran than in Saudi Arabia. Saudi oil reserves and revenues have far surpassed those of Iran. Both states are known to be extremely dependent upon oil-money. Yet, when comparing these two it becomes clear as to how the entire population and government of Iran seems to be struggling at a rate that others are not able to fathom. The Saudi government might be able to rely on oil revenues, for now at least, but the Iranian government is not able to enjoy that privilege. This is why diversifying the economy and adding new industries is so vital to the government—the state has more than 83 million citizens to account for.

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³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

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⁷ Rakel, Eva Patricia. 2007. "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006." *Perspectives On Global Development & Technology* 6, no. 1-3: 159-187. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁸ Ibid.

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¹⁰ Rieffer-Flanagan, Barbara Ann, *Evolving Iran: An Introduction to Politics and Problems in the Islamic Republic*. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

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²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hokayem, Emile. 2014. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Survival* (00396338) 56, no. 6: 59-86. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Legrenzi, Matteo, and Fred H. Lawson. 2014. "Iran and Its Neighbors since 2003: New Dilemmas." *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4: 105-111. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hokayem, Emile. 2014. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Survival* (00396338) 56, no. 6: 59-86. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Helem Chapin Metz, ed. *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1993.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: OMAN

Introduction

Oman is known as one of the most neutral states existing in the Middle East. In fact, this state has been compared to and described as a Switzerland of this region. Many Omani leaders have attributed their state's neutrality to the way in which this state practices and incorporates religion. The state religion of Oman is known as Ibadi, a sect of Islam. However, this particular sect is practiced differently than the more widely known Sunni and Shi'a branches. One of the most recognizable aspects of Ibadi Islam is the tolerance of other religions. When residing within Oman, an individual is allowed to practice any religion that they choose, in fact, in Oman's capital there are multiple Christian churches that are situated right beside mosques. This

picturesque view stands as a strong metaphor for the way in which tolerance is practiced throughout all of Oman. In a region and world where stability and tolerance seems inexistent, this state gives hope towards a more positive future in which differences are celebrated, not attacked.

However, Oman had not always been considered this tolerant, nor was this nation continuously active throughout the international community.¹ Before the current leader, Sultan Qaboos bin Said came to power, his father was the ruler of this secluded nation. It was during his father's rule that this state refrained from engaging in international affairs and, in some instances, was considered isolated.² Sultan Qaboos wanted to change this—he wanted his country to participate more throughout international affairs and by instilling a sense of tolerance throughout the entire state, the Sultan was able to achieve his goals.

For Omani officials, working with their neighbors is at the top of the priority list in order for stability and openness to be spread throughout the Persian Gulf region. As Sheikh Abdullah Al Salimi, Oman's Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs expresses:

Being in this part of the world we feel it is part of our moral mandate to do whatever we can to maintain peace. If any part of this region goes to war we are all affected. We do not want that so our efforts and our overriding agenda is to bring about peace in troubled areas if we can do so, and this has always been the policy of the Sultanate. We believe there are lots of things that can be worked on to bring peace to all regions of the world and in trying to help achieve these ends, we are only doing what we are supposed to do, according to our beliefs and values.³

Oman-Iran Relations

One of the most interesting examples of displaying Oman's ability as a neutral state is comparing the relations that Omani officials had with Iran before and after the Islamic

Revolution. As previously discussed, the Islamic Revolution completely morphed the Iranian government; it should be noted that these changes were not merely changes to domestic policies, but foreign policies as well. After the demise of the Pahlavi regime, Ayatollah Khomeini desired a state that would stand in stark contrast to the Shah's Iran. One of the more encompassing themes of these changes was Khomeini's aspiration for a state that was pure and independent from the rest of the world, especially the West—the leader wanted to develop a more self-sustaining, Islamic state. After Khomeini came to power, Iran's list of allies had a major makeover—almost all of the states that the Shah had grown cozy with would immediately find themselves on the long list of adversaries. One notable state that appeared to defy the odds of this seemingly inevitable outcome was Oman.

In 1970, at the time of the Shah's rule in Iran, Sultan Qaboos became the leader of Oman. The Sultan and the Shah had developed a relationship that was considered pleasant and open to discussion. In fact, in 1972, Qaboos was faced with a substantial rebellion known as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman—the Sultan had just come into power and the state's military was not able to quickly quell the revolts.⁴ The Sultan felt that it was necessary to seek external aid for ceasing the rebellion and had requested the Shah to enter and assist in dispelling the insurgency. Even though the Shah received many complaints from Arab neighbors, Iranian forces entered Oman and quickly extinguished the uprisings.⁵ In doing so, the Iranian government had ensured their regional security while also earning the eternal gratitude of the Omani government. At this point it becomes clear that Oman and the Shah's Iran had developed peaceful relations that, at times, led to unequivocal assistance.

Yet, the dynamic between the Sultan and the Shah is not necessarily surprising given national and regional interests that both states shared. What is surprising is that the Omani

government managed to continue the peaceful dynamic with Iran. While the relations between Oman and Iran have fluctuated over time, it is important to note and understand that these fluctuations have not hindered the ability for peaceful relations to continue and flourish.⁶ One of the more outstanding instances in which this can be articulated is through a discussion of the role that Oman has played throughout nuclear negotiations between Iran and the West, particularly the United States.

At the request of American officials, the Omani government has hosted and neutralized meetings between Tehran and Washington. These meetings were considered top secret and there is still little known on the specific dealings that have occurred in these ‘backdoor’ gatherings.⁷ What is known is that Omani officials had encouraged and facilitated the warming of relations between Iran and the U.S. especially through the use of negotiating conferences regarding the Iranian nuclear program. The results of these meetings have resulted in not just direct effects, such as explicitly warming the relations between Tehran and Washington, but have also indirectly affected interregional affairs. One of the more indirect and noticeable effects was the softening of the animosity between Iran and the Sunni Gulf states. This is significant to note because any nuclear deal brokered between Iran and the UN Security Council essentially required the Obama administration to convince the surrounding Arab states to agree with the nuclear deals.⁸ If there wasn’t support stemming from the entire Gulf region, then multiple scenarios could potentially deem the nuclear deals unsuccessful.

However, this isn’t the only instance in which the Omani government had established itself as a neutral actor in a time of chaos. It seems that Oman has racked up quite an extensive historical record of asserting its state as one of impartiality and peace. As previously stated, the warm relations between Muscat and Tehran seemed to have truly flourished when the Shah had

sent in forces to extinguish the rebellion that threatened the Sultan's standing. This favor was intended to secure the stability of both states, and Omani officials further cemented the peaceful relations by establishing its state as one of the only states that remained neutral throughout the Iran-Iraq War. As many surrounding states had begun to financially assist Saddam's efforts in this insurrection, Sultan Qaboos stood in deep contrast as he established neutrality throughout the entire conflict. Additionally, the Omani government had paid 1.5 million dollars of bail for the subsequent release of American hikers whom were detained in Iran in 2011.⁹ These are just a few of many incidences in which Omani officials have proved that their state has the ability to broker deals and establish itself as one of the most, if not most, neutral states existent within this region.

The Omani government has realized that they carry an extremely valuable and rare quality—they have amiable relations with the U.S. and Iran. Even more exceptional is the fact that Oman is a member of the GCC. Omani officials have enjoyed the opportunity and ability to remain peaceful with their Gulf neighbors as well as continue friendly relations with the U.S. This phenomenon is not purely unique to Oman, however this state has developed into one of the most active international mediators throughout nuclear negotiations. Remarkably, this state has managed to establish consistent neutrality in a region and time in which tensions and a lack of stability has manifested into the falling of many influential-neighboring regimes. Even with the crumbling of these surrounding governments and the worsening of affairs between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Oman has succeeded in continuing national and regional tolerance and strength. This seemingly unprecedented feat begs the question of how this was made possible for a state that was previously isolated from the rest of the world.

For Sheikh Abdullah Al Salimi, the explanation for this question is quite simple:

As Omanis and Ibadis, we are doing what we are supposed to do in maintaining good relations with our neighbors. In this part of the world we have Arab neighbors, Indian neighbors, Persian neighbors and we try - and have always tried - to foster good relations between all these peoples. If we can help, we are happy to do so but it is not our policy to interfere in other people's internal affairs and we do not allow other people to interfere in our own internal affairs.¹⁰

The Minister has explained on numerous occasions that religious practices sincerely assist in developing peaceful relations with Oman's neighbors. Along these lines, the Minister has explicitly stated that the state has a mandate to guide tense situations into an arena of peace. It is well known that this region is considered one of the more tense regions in the entire world. Thus, Omani officials have delegated their power and established their standing as neutral actors in order for peace to be seen throughout this region. It seems that a sense of responsibility had washed over the Omani government and had resulted in an unrelenting dedication to become not only a good neighbor, but also an active citizen of the world.

Oman-Saudi Relations

Iran and Oman have seemingly enjoyed good relations since the beginning of Sultan Qaboo's rule, however research has provided evidence that suggests the relations between Muscat and Riyadh have not always been agreeable. After the 1970 coup d'état, the Sultan insisted on normalizing relations with all neighboring states, including Saudi Arabia.¹¹ The Sultan had formally established relations during a 1971 state visit to Riyadh. After this state visit, the relations between Riyadh and Muscat dramatically improved. A few years after this state visit, the pressing territorial dispute regarding the Al Buraymi Oasis between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman had also been formally dealt with in the form of a treaty.¹² The treaty resulted in the sharing of villages located in this region between Oman and the UAE. The Saudi

government was satisfied with this agreement because the UAE would allow Saudi access to the gulf. Shortly after this issue was resolved, Oman acted as a mediator between Tehran and Riyadh. Around this same time period, an additional territorial issue regarding the formalization of the border between Saudi Arabia and Oman had been resolved.

Additionally, Muscat and Riyadh had joined with 4 other gulf states to form the Gulf Cooperation Council. While the Omani and Saudi governments have not agreed on every issue that has come about since the formalizing of relations, it is important to note these instances in which unprecedented cooperation between these two states had resulted in the improvement of regional relations.

Clearly, Sultan Qaboos did not desire to establish relations with only the Iranian government. Muscat has intentionally and strategically befriended many surrounding states and Oman has managed to form close ties with the Saudi government as well. Due to the status quo of this area of the world, it seems very unlikely that a state would develop close relations with both sides of the bipolar Gulf region. Nevertheless, the Omani government is known to not only work in accordance with Tehran, but also Riyadh. While Iran and Oman share mutual interests such as ensuring security and vitality of the Gulf of Oman and establishing economic ties, Oman has also been noted to share economic, social, and political interests with Saudi Arabia. Additionally, these two states share a border, which must be accounted for due to geopolitical issues.

In order to speculate the implications and reasons for many decisions made by Saudi Arabia, it is vital to understand the geography, as well as political atmosphere of this region. When studying a map of the Gulf region while integrating the understanding of relations and internal politics of each state, it becomes clear that Saudi Arabia has begun to slowly face a

dilemma. This dilemma is related to the idea that Saudi Arabia seems to be gradually engulfed by a region in which friendly relations are difficult to keep and regime takeovers are the norm. As previously discussed in the Saudi Arabia case study, the Saudi government has intended to keep their state as stable as possible, and they have more or less succeeded for many decades. However, currently, it is in the best interest of Riyadh to assert itself as a strong and able state, while attempting to establish good relations among neighbors, even if this means to compromise on certain issues. This balance relies solely on the ability for Saudi officials to walk a fine line between too much and too little. Yet, Saudi Arabia is not alone in fearing the developments of tensions throughout this region--every Gulf state has its own unique fears in regards to the tension. In fact, most members of this community had come together in May of 1981 to form a committee that would unite and supply outlets for answers to difficult situations. This group is known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). With exception to Iraq, all Arab-Gulf states are members of this council, including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar. This organization was founded under the intention for these 6 member states to unite on economic fronts. However, the actions and involvements of the GCC have surpassed merely ensuring economic stability. The GCC meets on a number of occasions to discuss, among other things, the security of the region and strengthening the relations between each nation.

The GCC intends to unify the Gulf States and desires to ensure that there is a level of responsibility as well as security throughout this region. While not all decisions have been made unilaterally, it is significant to note that the GCC allows for intercommunication between all members. This is a luxury of the alliance between Oman and Saudi Arabia that the Iranian government does not have.

Conclusion

These events and scenarios that place the Omani government in the regional position it currently is in are not mere coincidences. Ever since obtaining power in 1970, Sultan Qaboos has managed to make every decision with future implications in mind. This has led to the creation of a state that has established its independence and ability as well as established its moral obligations as a citizen of the Persian Gulf region. The mediation of nuclear negotiations and the ability to warm the ties between Iran and the surrounding Arab-gulf states has proven to be one of many situations that the Omani government has been able to handle.

Not only does this state recognize its valuable ability as a mediator, but it has also understood its role as a provider for its own citizens. The Omani government has come to realize that religious tolerance is key to establishing peace—inside and outside of their borders. There are indications that because Oman's state religion is of a different sect than Sunni or Shi'a, the government does not feel compelled to actively engage or take a firm stance on the sectarian conflicts throughout this region.

State officials have expressed that through Ibadi Islam and the integration of this sect into the government and culture of this state, tolerance on a national, regional, and global scale has been achieved. This state's practices can be used as an example throughout the entire world, especially in situations that are as tense as the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Oman had faced decades of isolation from international affairs. Some scholars have attributed this isolation to two factors: geography and politics. Before the 1970s, the leader of Oman had intended for the state to become secluded due to a desire of independence. Said bin Taimur insisted on raising his country in the same manner that he raised his son: in isolation. Soon after Said bin Taimur's son, Qaboos ibn Said had become educated in Britain, Said

bin Taimur had faced the ultimate dilemma of his life. Qaboos intended to overthrow his father and become the Sultan of Oman. It wasn't until Sultan Qaboos came to power that the state began programs that would integrate Oman within regional and global relations.

Yet, the political process that the Omani state endured throughout the past decades isn't the only factor contributing to isolation. The physical geography of Oman and the surrounding region is said to be another attribute. Oman is situated on the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. While it shares borders with the UAE, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, a majority of the Omani perimeter is linked to the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. The border that Oman shares with Saudi Arabia is connected to the Saudi Arabia's most intense desert—it is known that there are not many, if any, inhabitants that live in this region of Saudi Arabia. In fact, the majority of the population of Oman lives along the coast and in major metropolitan cities near the coast. This is because of the type of industry that was developed within Oman when the state was formed. A majority of the resources are located along the coast and the waterways provided the opportunities for Oman to trade and connect with the rest of the world.

After some time, these connections provided Oman with the ability to become stable and independent all while developing the economy of the state. The oil boom within the Middle East had peaked at a vital time for the Omani government. It was during this time that the state began to contribute to the growing trend of globalization. Oman was known to be one of the many states within the region that benefited from the oil market due to the oil supplies that the state sat on. So, Muscat was able to enjoy some of the spoils that oil money brought. Recently, however, the government has become too reliant upon this type of revenue and, the Omani government is looking into diversifying the economy. Some of these tactics include: focusing on tourism and developing more gas-based industries. The ultimate goal of the Omani

government is to reduce the amount GDP that the oil industry is bringing in from 46% to 9% by the year 2020.¹³

Thus, while politics played a key role in the development of the Omani state, it is important to note that geography plays a vital role as well. Geography is known to impact almost every aspect of a state including: society, economy, and politics. Currently, Sultan Qaboos is working towards regional and global integration—continuing his agenda and legacy from when he first came to power. The Sultan is well acquainted with the limitations that Omani political history and geographical aspects have placed on his state. The development of technology that makes it increasingly easier for people and states to connect has led to many different opportunities for the state. Some of these opportunities have developed into scenarios in which the Omani government is able to provide a unique resource to the region and the world: negotiation tactics.

¹ Sevier, Caroline. 2008. "The Costs of Relying on Aging Dictators." *Middle East Quarterly* 15, no. 3: 13-22. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

² Ibid.

³ Lancaster, Pat. 2014. "Oman: an oasis of tolerance." *Middle East* no. 453: 60-61. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁴ Goode, James F. 2014. "Assisting Our Brothers, Defending Ourselves: The Iranian Intervention in Oman, 1972–75." *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 3: 441-462. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁵ MA, ANDREW. 2014. "The Omani Backdoor." *Harvard International Review* 35, no. 4: 7-8. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁶ Goode, James F. 2014. "Assisting Our Brothers, Defending Ourselves: The Iranian Intervention in Oman, 1972–75." *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 3: 441-462. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁷ MA, ANDREW. 2014. "The Omani Backdoor." *Harvard International Review* 35, no. 4: 7-8. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁸ Bowman, Bradley L. 2008. "The 'Demand-Side': Avoiding a Nuclear-Armed Iran." *Orbis* 52, no. 4: 627-642. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁹ MA, ANDREW. 2014. "The Omani Backdoor." *Harvard International Review* 35, no. 4: 7-8. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰ Lancaster, Pat. 2014. "Oman: an oasis of tolerance." *Middle East* no. 453: 60-61. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹¹ MA, ANDREW. 2014. "The Omani Backdoor." *Harvard International Review* 35, no. 4: 7-8. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹² Morton, Michael Quentin. 2015. "THE BURAIMI AFFAIR: OIL PROSPECTING AND DRAWING THE FRONTIERS OF SAUDI ARABIA." *Asian Affairs* 46, no. 1: 1-17. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹³ The World Factbook 2013-14. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2013 .

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this discussion was to explore the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. After performing this research, it was found that these two states have a long history of hostile ties. Although, there were some years where the regional environment gave way to cooperation between Tehran and Riyadh, these years are not considered to be an accurate rendition of the overall relations. In order to dig deeper into what caused this hostility and what events have exacerbated it, this research required an analysis regarding the major facets of each state. The varying factors that were evaluated were the leadership, national/domestic security, regional stability, and integration of Islam in government. These factors will be discussed in further detail at a later point in this chapter.

When evaluating Saudi Arabia, it was found that the government's form of Wahhabi Islam has greatly influenced the society and the relations that the state has with neighboring states.

While the Saudi government has strived to maintain stability since the beginnings of the al-Saud monarchy, the Iranian government has changed dramatically over the past few decades. One of the most important and far-reaching changes happened after the 1979. This year not only marked a change for Iran, but its neighbors as well. Before 1979, when the Shah was in power, Tehran enjoyed friendly relations with western states. After the fall of the Shah, and during the time in which Ayatollah Khomeini was in charge, Tehran had made some major modifications: the state became more isolated and no longer had warm relations with the western hemisphere. This would complete change the way in which Iran was viewed across the entire world.

One divergence was the way in which Tehran postulated itself. Ayatollah Khomeini had decided to articulate Iranian authority by claiming to be the only true and pure Islamic state. This was clearly perceived as offensive in the eyes of the al-Saud monarchy, which had claimed the title of the only pure Islamic state a long time ago. Since the rise of Khomeini, the relations between Tehran and Riyadh had, for the most part, completely plummeted. Thus, for the sake of this discussion, the 1979 Islamic Revolution is considered the root of the current relations between these two states. However, there is another aspect that has been little touched on throughout political literature regarding the effect of the Revolution on Saudi Arabia.

Besides the obvious declaration that Tehran broadcasted throughout the world regarding their status, there lies another, almost invisible point of tension. States, like biological specimens, have instinctual and major goals. One central goal that is shared amongst animals, plants, people, and states is the desire to survive. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia seems to be a perfect example of this goal. While monarchs have come and gone, the same family has been governing the Kingdom for decades. In fact, the policies and laws have more or less stayed the same. There is clear evidence stipulating that Riyadh attempts to combat instability on an everyday basis. However, this is not a profound discovery; as articulated earlier: all states attempt to remain alive. What is distinctive regarding the circumstances surrounding Riyadh is that this state has been severely affected by the instability of the entire region, and this is not limited to current events. The Islamic Revolution in Iran stood as a personal symbol of warning in the eyes of the Saudi monarchy. The King and his men had witnessed the rise and fall of a state that was seemingly strong for many years. If a state as developed and strong as Iran could crumble in the matter of a few years, couldn't the Kingdom see the same fate? The citizens of Saudi Arabia were able to see what the Iranian citizens were able to accomplish. Could they not get rebellious

ideas of their own? Additionally, the blow that Riyadh received personally from Tehran regarding the purity of Islam seemed to completely undermine the authority of the King. In Saudi Arabia, the King and the ruling al-Saud monarchy has a mandate from God to govern the citizens of the Kingdom. So, when Khomeini asserts that his state is the only true and pure Islamic state, he is negating the authority that the Saudi king has. After all of these components are mixed together, it becomes quite evident as to why the Saudi leadership has seemed almost paralyzed in fear. This explains why the government has combated modernization, rebellion, and regional instability at such an intensive level. This state has been surrounded by threats since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and it has only grown more severe.

Different Levels of Interaction of Each State:

Comparative Factors Case Studies	Leadership	Domestic Security	Regional Stability	Integration of Islam in Government
Iran	The Shah Vs. Ayatollah Khomeini And Ali Khamenei	Iranian Nuclear Aspirations	Providing Assistance to Assad's Regime	Islamic Revolution And Shi'ism
Saudi Arabia	The al-Saud Monarchy	Islamic Fundamentalism And Protecting Borders	Aiding the Free Syrian Army	Wahhabism: Women's Rights And Shi'ite Discrimination
Oman	Said bin Taimur Vs. Sultan Qaboos	Maintaining Good Relations with Neighbors	Continuing Role as Neutral Negotiator	Ibadi Islam: National, Regional, and Global Tolerance

Figure 5 Shows the various levels of interaction of the comparative factors within each state.

The three case studies that were analyzed were Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. It was found that there were striking similar factors that were explored throughout each case study. These factors are the leadership, national and domestic security, regional stability, and integration of Islam in government. The section below is a closer examination on these factors throughout each case study.

Throughout the phase of research on Iran it was found that there have been many influential leaders scattered through Iranian history. However, the leaders that attributed to a majority of the relations between Tehran and Riyadh and Tehran and Muscat were the Shah of Iran and Ayatollah Khomeini. These two leaders had opposite policy-tracks and were known for their complete opposition.

The Shah was known for his desire to remain friendly with the Western hemisphere. In fact, during and after the fall of the Shah's influence, he had received cancer treatment in a hospital in New York. On the other hand, the Shah was also known for establishing and maintaining, or at least attempting to maintain good relations with neighbors in the region. Of those neighbors, one in particular had enjoyed the good-natured relations with the Shah: Oman. Unfortunately, these types of international and interregional affairs developed into reasons for Iranian citizens to overthrow the throne. On the journey towards becoming the United States' top partner within the Persian Gulf region, the Shah had managed to isolate his own constituency. Whether this was an unfortunate by-product of attempting to ensure security for Iran or this was intentional neglect, is not relevant. What is important to note is that the Shah was attempting to fundamentally change parts of Iranian government and society that were not ready to change at the time. The Shah was establishing a state in which government and religion were separate and this led to a spiraling chain of events. The secular nature of Iran and the subsequent tightening of relations with the West had left the citizens of Iran in a frightened and frenzied state of mind. This frenzy allowed the formerly exiled religious leader, Ruhollah Khomeini to reach and comfort the citizens on a level that the Shah had not been able to achieve.

The rising action before the Islamic Revolution climax consisted of the Shah managing to worsen his status, as well as increase the likelihood for a leader like Khomeini to establish a concrete foothold within the state. The creation of the SAVAK was initially needed to enforce the modern laws that the Shah had set in place. However as the tide worsened, the organization was soon established as the general policing agency and its enforcing tactics were infamous for being brutal and extremely forceful.

The medley of events and actions taken by the Shah had developed into full outrage and created the perfect environment for a leader to surface. While Khomeini soon filled that role, the situation in Iran was so delicate that it has been suggested that any leader that preached ideologies opposite to those of the Shah would have developed into the leader of Iran. Subsequently, the path that the Iranian government and society took after the Islamic Revolution stood in stark opposition to the former path of the Shah. It seemed that everything had changed in light of this Revolution—the constitution and laws, the way of life, the government style, etc. Khomeini had managed to develop Iran into an Islamic state in every aspect of the title. This also leads to the complication of relations between Tehran and neighboring states. However, the cooling of relations is attributed to other aspects of Khomeini's policy choices as well.

If the Shah was known for his aspirations of friendly relations within the region and across the world, Khomeini's response was identical to most of his actions in contrast with the Shah: opposite. The Ayatollah desired a state that was independent from outside influences—the desire was for the Islamic Republic of Iran would be, for the most part, self-sufficient and to be viewed at as a powerful state. Consequently, most of the resources and effort that the Shah had poured into guaranteeing that certain states remained on the better side of Iran would go to waste when Khomeini gained influence. As far as the Ayatollah was concerned, there was neither need

nor desire to be cozy with the United States—the U.S. only wanted to use Iranian influence in the region and develop the state into one of secular nature.

Eventually, the newfound desire for the state to become independent would become the hallmark for decisions down the road. For instance, there is a clear connection between the lust for self-sufficiency and independently ensuring the protection of the state. No longer did the Iranian government feel it was safe to rely on other states for security or protection. In this sense, some of the Iranian political maneuvers that are witnessed in the late 20th and early 21st century have root in Khomeini's domestic and foreign policy choices. Through analyzing a chain of events beginning with the Islamic Revolution, it becomes evident as to why the Iranian government had worked so hard to establish nuclear technology.

While it is only speculated whether the nuclear aspirations within Tehran were for peaceful purposes or not, either answer helps to explain the desire for independence within this region. It is not farfetched to speculate that Iran's nuclear intentions were due to the need to develop an energy supply that would stabilize the state. It is well known that as a world, we are using oil much faster than it can be reproduced, therefore there will come a time in which generating energy from oil cannot be relied on. On the other hand, if the Iranian government intended to generate nuclear technology for the purpose of creating a nuclear weapon, it could also explain how far the desire for independence has gone. Continuing on with the legacy that Khomeini left, Ali Khamenei had managed to formulate policies that would push Iran closer to the brink of self-sufficiency. Although, globalization is said to have taken a strong hold across international affairs, the Iranian state has put up a good fight. It seems that the lust for a state that does not rely on others' for security or supplies is stronger than the trends of globalization would

have predicted. Thus, the discussion of Tehran's nuclear aspirations has developed into one of the most important topics regarding this region.

The Iranian nuclear program has become a problem not just for the state, but for neighboring states as well, especially for Saudi Arabia. The idea of Saudi's number one rival attaining capacity for a nuclear weapon has sparked fear, once again, in the eyes of the monarchy. However, it isn't just the situation inside Iranian borders that has worried the Saudi leadership, it's also the policies that the Iranian government has enacted in accordance with global headlines—such as the Syrian Civil War.

As discussed in previous chapters, the Iranian government has guaranteed assistance to Bashar al-Assad and his regime. While Iran is not the only state that has assisted the Assad regime, the state is one of the most substantial providers of assistance. In fact, on several occasions there have been sightings of Iranian soldiers fighting alongside Syrian loyalists. These efforts go directly against the efforts of the Saudi leadership. Riyadh has increased the aggression towards ensuring that Assad's regime falters and Tehran is in the way of that ultimate goal. Saudi Arabia has not only become the leader of the coalition against Assad, but this state has also provided funding and even physical support through the use of air strikes. This is why the Syrian Civil War is notoriously known as a proxy-war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The inter-conflict hostility between these states has exacerbated the fight between Syrian citizens and their government.

Yet, there has been another effect of this proxy-war: the rise of the world's most infamous terrorist organization, ISIS. In this instance, Saudi efforts regarding this war have created a gap within the society that became the perfect breeding ground for extremism. The blame shouldn't be placed all on the Saudi monarchy—there are a multitude of actors involved

in the chain of events leading to this ultimate environment. However, the Saudi government had realized that their choices would support the rise of extremism pockets. After much analysis, the leadership had come to the conclusion that the objective was worth the risk. Thus, the Syrian Civil War became the perfect example of how the game of politics is a game best played by opportunists. In some cases, the fighting between different actors has managed to drown out the fundamental fighting. Syrian citizens are left fleeing the country as terror and mass chaos has taken over their precious homeland. Saudi's efforts of aiding the Free Syrian Army have only worsened the status of this delicate nation. While the ultimate goal might have revolved around ensuring that Iranian influence does not spread throughout the region and thus ensuring that Assad's regime falls, the Saudi leadership has become a lead developer of a massive security problem.

It has been mentioned on more than one occasion that the al-Saud monarchy has been combating instability for decades. In fact, one of the reasons why the first Saudi state failed was because of domestic instability. As if the leadership had learned its eternal lesson, the state has become one of the more stable states existing within the region. When looking at a map of the Persian Gulf and Levantine region, it becomes apparent that almost every state surrounding Saudi Arabia has been inflicted with instability at one time or another. It's as if the Saudi leadership has been backed into a tight corner and each time a policy fails or a nation falls to instability, the corner becomes smaller. The fight against this tightening corner has been the inheritance of each Saudi King when he is given the throne.

This feeling of being cornered has been affected by and effects more than just regional events; the Saudi government has developed domestic issues and policies that directly relate to the threat of instability. Islamic fundamentalism is a national issue for Saudi Arabia because of

the amount of extremists that originate from this country. In order to ensure stability within the state, the leadership has developed policies of combating internal extremism, protecting key borders, and ensuring that modernization does not seep in through the walls.

Although these efforts seem harmless and proactive, some policy decisions that have roots in these efforts have an effect opposite of the one desired. In order to examine this properly, it must be noted that the Saudi government relies on a Wahhabi code of law. This is one of the more strict forms of governmental Sunni Islam and has even been described as extreme in some instances. The Wahhabi movement within Saudi Arabia gave rise to a governmental system that insisted on continuing to practice law and religion in a fundamental way. In essence, Wahhabism targets modernization, as any sign of the creation of a new system would be seen as a threat to fundamental Islam. In this way, some of the policy choices and laws that encompass the state might seem a little “outdated” or “old fashioned.” One such law is the banning of driving for women. This has seen outrage and defiance, and has developed into a fight regarding modernization between the citizens and the leadership.

Additionally, the Saudi government has received opposition from another sect of the nation as well. The Saudi citizens whom practice Shi’ite Islam are noted as feeling discriminated against through governmental and societal outlets. There are indications that the government supplies more resources towards those who are faithful to Sunni Islam. However, the source of the discrimination is not only the government, but also how society acts towards those of another branch of Islam. Those who do not practice Islam accordingly or go against the norms provided by the Saudi leadership will not be accepted by the government or society. These internal issues have resulted in international and regional badgering due to the globalization of news. Leaders and citizens from across the world have voiced their opinion regarding Saudi

discrimination. As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia governs the two Islamic Holy cities as well as oversees the happenings of the Hajj, governments and people from differing states have established that the discrimination should not be tolerated. This is yet another point of contention between Riyadh and capitals across the world, especially Tehran.

Yet, there is a state that has maintained warm relations with and between Arabia and Iran. Throughout all of the conflicts and issues described earlier, the Sultanate of Oman has played a background role. In order to explain this role in more detail, a discussion must be held regarding the leadership of this state.

As in the case of Saudi Arabia and Iran, the leadership has always been an outlet for analysis and a root for understanding the state as a whole. For Oman, the leadership and change in leadership are factors that are helpful in analysis due to the ability to provide a comprehensive chain of events. Before Sultan Qaboos came to power, his father, Said bin Taimur led the state. However, this succession was not seen as cooperative in nature--Said bin Taimur was overthrown and his son began to lead the state in a direction opposite of his father.

Since 1970, Qaboos had developed a state in which tolerance was the hallmark of each decision. The Sultan has established that all religions are accepted within the borders of Oman. In a region that is heavily dominated by Islam and tension between sects, the establishment of tolerance regarding religion is significant, to say the least. Key leaders of this state have provided reason as to why Oman practices tolerance at such a high level and the reason lies in the religion of the state. The government has asserted that Ibadī Islam is the reason for the national, regional, and global tolerance. This tolerance has allowed Oman to mold into the role of a neutral negotiator throughout the region. Sultan Qaboos has established his neutrality between Iran and Saudi Arabia on many occasions. Oman is a founding member of the GCC and continues to

serve as a financial and trading partner with Tehran in accordance to the sharing of the Gulf of Oman.

The Minister of Religion and Affairs within Oman has acknowledged that Muscat attempts to stay out of other states' relations and domestic affairs. In this way, Oman considers itself as neutral state, however when Muscat's services are requested in regards to acting as a negotiator. This role has proved to empower the state within regional and international affairs. The Omani government has provided the world with an example of how a change in leadership could allow a previously isolated state to become one of the world's leading negotiators.

Throughout most of the conflicts that plague this region, Oman's skills and status have the potential to relieve some pressure. This is significant because some of the tension throughout regional relations has incapacitated states to merely sit at the same table, nevertheless come to compromising. The Omani government has the ability and tactics to open up the table for states-- such as Saudi Arabia and Iran--to discuss key issues.

This research was conducted in order to answer a few questions regarding the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Among those questions, this discussion intended to answer or at least narrow down the possibilities of the roots of the hostility between these two states. Additionally, this research provided analysis regarding the factors that appear to be worsening the hostile and fragile ties. This analysis was compiled with information regarding the potential for cooperation through the use of a neutral negotiating state. In essence, the results of this research have provided outlets and understandings of not only the political history of and between these states, but it has also provided an avenue for further discussion on future prospects.

Throughout the entirety of this research, a multitude of questions have surfaced. It is quite common for other questions to appear throughout the research process, as it is not reasonable to attempt to answer all relevant questions regarding a topic. This seems especially true throughout the research of international relations because it is not an exact science; it is ever-changing and dependent upon many different dynamic environments. Thus, this research should be continued in order for the results to be tailored in accordance with the dynamic political environment existent at the time. The nature of this research aligns with the nature of international relations. This topic is of great importance in the 21st century, and the trend of current international and interregional relations seems to indicate that the significance of this research is constantly increasing.

The next phase of research concerning this topic should encompass the idea of establishing what to do from here. The intelligence is available regarding the role each state plays, the decisions that have made the hostility worse, and the status of each state within the region. This region is difficult to discuss because of the mass amount of actors, conflicts, policies, and so on. This research has provided key details regarding two of the more influential states of this region. In this sense, this area could be considered a bipolar region, with Iran and Saudi Arabia on either side. While conflicts are escalating and tensions are worsening, the research purported has provided information that could be used to deescalate issues and possibly reverse the hostility.

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