

# The Prospect of the Relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Saudi Arabia: Plausible Scenarios

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Received: January 7, 2017

Accepted: January 19, 2017

Online Published: June 1, 2017

doi:10.5539/jpl.v10n3p83

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v10n3p83>

## Abstract

Islamic republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia are identified as two effective countries in sub-region of the Persian Gulf, that the radius of their influence covers whole great region of the Middle East. The relationship between the two countries have been full of tension during last decade, and during this period changes of political authorities of these countries were not able to improve this relationship. The cause is the resources of foreign policy behavior of the two countries, historical backgrounds of each country, as well as conflict of interest of each in the region of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. The most competition atmosphere between the two countries is inside the three climacteric countries of Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Accordingly, the prospect of bilateral relations is a consequence of their behaviors in the region and also their dealings with these three countries. Three scenarios presented regarding the two countries' foreign policy in the region can be discussed: efforts to establish governments, attempts to maintain political structures of collapsing countries, and finally, continuation of current trends that may lead to disintegration of these climacteric countries. By studying these scenarios and drivers, blockers and their wild cards, this paper considers the second scenario best for both countries, which is consistent with their national interests, and with the region's history and general situation.

**Keywords:** Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, foreign policy, Persian Gulf, Middle East, making scenarios

## 1. Introduction

Iran and Saudi Arabia are considered to be two major effective countries in the region of the Persian Gulf; so that improvement or tension in their relationships, not only affects the region of the Persian Gulf severely, but also the range their spheres of influence expands from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Middle Asia, and the Caucasus to the east of Mediterranean and north of Africa. This means that behaviors of these countries – cooperation or conflict – can affect the so called great region of the “Middle East”. This is not true about Iraq or even Turkey, and Saudi Arabia which is considered to be an effective remaining regional country along with Iraq and Turkey from the Ottoman Empire, believes a more considerable role for itself - whether in the Arab world and the Muslim world - than the two countries in the region.

Since the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971, it is near to half a century that Iran and Saudi Arabia have independent relationship. During this period, the relationship of the two countries has not been as strategic and stable as it must be, except in the 1970s. Although, in some periods of presidents or kings this relationship has improved, this improvement was mainly in reduction of tensions and gradual recovery, indicating the point that the resources of disagreements between them is much more than the level of cooperation between them. Therefore, a review of these resources of cooperation and disagreement in the relationship between the two countries would reveal the backgrounds of stability and conflicts in the region. In other words, the prevalence of the resources of cooperation over the resources of disagreement in domestic, regional and even international dimensions not only can better meet the interests of both countries, but also meets the interests of the Middle East and north of Africa, and somehow helps to manage the issues of disagreement in the region.

Accordingly, the main question of the paper is: which prospects and plausible scenarios are predictable in the

relationship between Islamic republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia? According to the resources of foreign policy behaviors of both countries, history of this relationship, and also concentration on conflicts between the two countries in regional issues, it seems that the three scenarios of establishing governments in the region, maintaining political structures of collapsing countries, and disintegration of climacteric countries of the region would mainly affect the future of relationships between the two countries.

In order to survey the plausible scenarios in the relationship between the two countries, it is necessary that the scenario writing method of the present study to be made clear in its various aspects in future studies. The term scenario means “general sketch of a series of natural or expected events” (Enayatollah, 2009, p14). Also scenario can be identified as “a description of a future situation and the course of events, which allows one to move forward from the original situation to the future” (Wilson, 2011, p34). The goal of scenario is increasing and improving understanding of future situations, creating new decisions, and reframing current decisions (Enayatollah, 2009, p220).

Scenario is along with two approaches: first, future backwards, which means to review future by regarding past developments, and latter, future forwards, which means framing believable futures by considering current and present process. Here, both approaches are being used, and in order to apply the approaches, it is necessary to pay attention to the structure of scenario writing of the present paper. In the raised plausible scenarios about the relationships between Iran and Saudi Arabia, subjects and desired condition would be investigated first, then drivers, meaning the forces behind a process which makes it slow or fast (Gordon, 2008-9, p141) will be raised, in continue, blockers of each scenario will be raised, and finally, wild cards will be considered in the process of scenario writing. According to the logic of scenarios, the process of optimistic scenarios will be led to the pessimistic.

## **2. The Resources of Foreign Policy Behaviors of the Islamic Republic and the Saudi Arabia**

Understanding the foreign policy behavior resources of Iran and Saudi Arabia plays an important role in understanding the history and possibility of future scenarios in the relationship between the two countries. Here, we attempt not only to clarify the most important behavioral characteristics of the two countries in foreign policy and its similarities and differences, yet due to so many misunderstanding about Saudi Arabia in our country, we effort to present a more clear understanding of sensitivities and behaviors of this country. In this case, by better understanding the causes of its behaviors in the region, the reason of foreign policy of Saudi Arabia will be more clear, which would help us to adopt more accurate positions against this country.

In a general look, it seems that four behavior resources in the foreign policy of Iran and Saudi Arabia have more priority, and reviewing these general subjects carefully not only provides the groundwork for better relations between the two countries, but also the regions of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East will witness a more balanced trend. As Vali Nasr noted that the results of ideological competitions between the two countries “Provides a platform for extremism, which finally led to September 11 attacks” (Wehrey et al. 2009, p14), this trend has led to burning the Middle East during recent years.

### *2.1 First Axis, the Different Political Structure of Iran and Saudi Arabia*

Islamic Republic is a system established by the Islamic Revolution. Since the ancient system had been overthrown by the Iranian people, a new system based on beliefs and demands of people and constitution was formed, in which all officials are somehow elected by the vote and decision of the people. This process of changing political system in the form of revolution and also the fact that the political system of the Islamic Republic is based on the popular vote, which is considered to be a proud for its architects who made an appropriate combination of indigenous issues and the cultural circumstances.

In contrast, the political system in Saudi Arabia is a conservative monarchy system. This system has two distinct features: first, it is a monarchy system which is substantively different from republic system emerged from the public, and second, it is conservative “here the purpose of being conservative in nature is that to be frightened of internal threats due to people oppositions, modernist forces, and family competitors are considered to be three disincentive factors for such regimes to adopt an aggressive and active position in the international and regional arenas, or to insist forcibly on their demands against other states” (Karimipour, 2000, p174). Hence, when political or even military movement of the political regime is activated in Saudi Arabia, indicates that the country’s position and dignity has been assailed and at the same time internal conflict or resorting to violence should not be so broad, making it impossible to control and manage the conditions. This type of understanding of the political system that is based on the longstanding traditions of the region, is the willingness of Saudi Arabia and other countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and “all governments of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council have confirmed the idea that conservative monarchy is an accepted and legitimate political

culture of the region” (Belami, 2007, p244), as it is eighty years that this structure has been stable in Saudi Arabia in spite of all challenges, and Saudi is identified as the only country confronting the least serious political changes.

Here this question may be raised: what is the relationship between the differences of political systems of the two countries and theirs ties? The answer is that both political systems try to show themselves as an efficient system in the region. The Islamic republic due to its revolutionary nature tries to show that conservative political system of Saudi Arabia is an old-fashioned system, and in new era an individual cannot control all affairs in the position of a king. Therefore, part of the difference is that Iran’s strategy is based on “Export of Revolution”, Iran endeavors to offer its model of political system to the whole region. In this type of view, not only those of proponents of the Islamic Republic or Shiite groups try to make a model of Iranian political system, but also secular groups and new and educated generations of Saudi Arabia at least in terms of its political system which is outdated would be affected by the issue and would put the Saudi political system under pressure from within (Nola, 2001, p1-2). Saudi Arabia tries to show that conservative monarchy structure is an appropriate method for the region because of two reasons: on one hand, this sample is native and based on past trends, and the people of the region are much more familiar with it, and on the other hand, this structure not only has survived against pan-Arabism, Baathism and other extremist groups, but also is identified as a sustainable structure, and by this structure, there is both internal persuasion to accept it, and prevention of pressure of powers from overseas.

### *2.2 Second Axis, Islamic Feature of Both Countries*

Islamic Republic is formed with the suffix of “Islamic”, and is seeking to show that this structure is fully based on Islam. Part of this view goes back to the first axis as well, that monarchy structure is a kind of Iranian structure of the pre-Islam period, and Islam does not support monarchy systems. Hence, a monarchy political system cannot be considered as an Islamic system. Yet, this political system that claims leadership of Muslim world has not been successful in the results, and therefore does not have the competence to lead the Muslim world. Also the issue of Palestine is another fault of the relationship between the two countries, the Saudi officials does not pay attention to the Arab-Muslim people of the region as much as they should do, and therefore threat of Israel is not the country's first threat, and meanwhile their past policies were not efficient. Finally, one of the major axes of Iran's criticism on Saudi Arabia which is also considered by other moderate and extremist Islamic groups of the region is a close and strategic partnership with the United States of America, that why should a Muslim country be so close to a Christian non-Muslim country, which is in contrast to the Qur'an teachings about lack of non-Muslim friend.

On the contrary, because of various reasons Saudi Arabia insists on this feature. “Islam defines the role of Saudi Arabia in the world” (Grigori, 2011, p360); because:

- 1) There are two Islamic holy city of Mecca and Medina in the country, and also the advent of Islam in this country, and establishment of one of the most important rituals of the annual Islamic in the vicinity of the Kaaba, has given an exceptional credit and position in Islamic world to this country. In fact, the phrase “Servants of the Two Holy Harems” implies being an axis in the Muslim world.
- 2) This country is being managed based on Qur'an, constitution and Shariat law. Although the type of Shariat and its recitation is Wahhabis, it endeavours to address itself not only an Islamic structure, but also a propagator of Islam in the world as well.
- 3) Saudi Arabia believes that it pays the most expenses of propagating Islam and building Mosques and publishing Holy Qur'an among Muslims of the world.
- 4) Saudi Arabia considers a leading role for itself among Islamic countries. “ Saudi Arabia plays a basic role in the establishment of Organization of the Islamic Conference [and current Organization of Islamic Cooperation] which is identified as an international organization of Islamic countries, also Saudi is the most important provider of its budget” (Behjat, 2010, p219).
- 5) The other point goes back to the gap between Shiite and Sunni in the two countries. Not only the epistemic structures of the two countries differ from each other in some major axes such as correspondence legitimacy / solving and contract theory, substituent, council and domination; caliphate / reign; justice / power, and finally enjoining good and forbidding wrong / stability and security (Enayati and Raki, 2012, p21-28), but also the Shiite minority in Dhahran, Saudi, is one of the serious discrepancies between the two countries. The movements of the Shiites of this area is not just a mere interpretation of the separatists, rather is considered to be a tapping into Saudi economic power and its rentier wealth. Hence, any stimulation in this area will bring a serious reaction from the Saudi government.

6) Saudi Arabia believes that it has performed all its efforts against Israel. Riyadh was active in wars of 1947, 1967, 1973 against Israel. "Saudi Arabia financially supported the front lines governments (Egypt, Syria and Jordan) and Palestine Liberation Organization. Saudi Kingdom took part in the sanctions against Israel- which was performed in the mid-1990. Also this country supported all general resolutions in the United Nations condemning Israel. Riyadh opposed peaceful efforts of Egypt in the late 1970s which led to the emergence of signs of the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arabic country in 1979" (Behjat, 2010, p224). Saudi Arabia even tried to bring up an Islamic-Arabic peace plan- and yet more appropriate than the peace treaties of Arabic countries which were mainly based on a nationalist attitude - with the plans by King Fahd in 1981, and king Abdullah in 2002. However, according to Behjat, Saudi Arabia had a kind of restricted opposition to the Israel, and as mentioned earlier, to some extent it is because of its conservative structure, but the country has not been indifferent to the issue of Israel (Behjat, 2010, p225). Based on what has been posed so far, the major reason the Saudi Arabia considers Iran a more serious source of threat than Israel is that Israel is neither looking for regime change in this country, nor seeks to destroy the system's legitimacy and its domestic and foreign behavior. Therefore, it is certain that restricted opposition to the Israel is for reaching an appropriate condition, and yet this country is not identified as Saudi's competitor in the region. Hence, when competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia increases, the issue of Israel is marginalized more.

### *2.3 Third Axis, Rich and Gifted Revenue of Fossil Energy, Behavior Resources of Iran and Saudi Arabia*

This feature is being used by Saudi Arabia more and more. For instance "with the constant increase in oil revenues in the 1950s and creating a huge mutation in the 1970s, Al Saud was able to construct a new state management, centralized army, police, health and education, and to make more interests for its own citizens (Grigori, 2011, p366), and by doing this, Saudi Arabia increased its domestic legitimacy. Also by having asymmetric interdependency (Grigori, 2011, p354, 355) has used it to preserve its political system, government's independence and regional influence, and by using this as a lever, Saudi Arabia was able to prevent Arabic abortive coups inside the country and from outside.

In the meantime, oil policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the form of OPEC are another axis of their discrepancies. "Saudi policy in this regard is based on the viewpoint that high price of oil is not in favor of the Kingdom. One of the most obvious reactions to the increase of oil prices can be considered as the development of resources of the competitor with apposition energy, which can reduce the importance of oil sources" (Behjat, 2010, p330). Thus, in the conditions that Iran and Saudi Arabia are in a state of conflict, by doing so the Saudi Arabia increases the costs of oil production for Iran, and in opposite, the oil revenues will be reduced; even in some cases, they perform it by an increase in oil production and export, and accordingly, use this capability in order to develop an oil war and tapping into Iran. Certainly, in 1973 Iran used such strategy against Arabs. Therefore, in the relationship between the two countries, oil has always been identified as a lever of pressure to control the other party rather than the economic activity in the form of OPEC, which acted well in sensitive cases, such as in 1973 and during the years after 2011 that Iran had been under severe international sanctions. This feature has caused that these two countries not only to have an appropriate financial facility in order to pursue their policies, but also enables them to expend more than needed. However, if these two important countries in oil and gas resources of the region and the world reach an agreement, the ability to manage regional issues will increasingly be strengthened, but both countries try to severely scold each other for expending improperly or squandering the property of Muslims and frivolity. This attitude existed in the tendencies of Arabic Unity, which considered the Saudi oil revenues not for this country, but for the whole Arabic Nations, and was trying to extort from this country.

### *2.4 Fourth Axis, Type of Relationship with the United States of America*

With Islamic Revolution in Iran and overthrown of Pahlavi Dynasty, the two-column system of regional order that after British withdrawal had emerged with cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia collapsed. The axis of this breakdown is the opposition of Iran to the colonial and imperialist policies of the United States inside the country and in the region. In contrast, the United States of America so far has spared no effort to change the regime of the Islamic Republic. Accordingly, close and strategic cooperation of Saudi Arabia and the United States of America not only is controversial to the Islamic view, but also can be considered as a lever of pressure to the Islamic Republic.

But from Saudi's point of view, their strategic relationship with the United States of America which began on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1945 between Sultan *Abdul Aziz* and ex-president Roosevelt on the deck of the American ship "Queens" in the Mediterranean (Aghaee, 2015, p102) is identified as a new chapter of the relations of the two countries which is continuing till the present time. "This informal alliance is based on two fundamental: Riyadh

provides America's required oil and uses its lever of influence to preserve the oil price on a rational level, and in return, Washington guarantees the security of the Kingdom against any foreign threats. Both sides have fulfilled their share in this deal to some extent (Behjat, 2010, p222). Of course this point should be considered that due to lack of colonial experience in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, because of the experience of the Ottoman Empire, Saudi Arabia is suspicious to the Europeans' behaviors, and yet does not act involuntarily against Americans. For instance, Saudi has always criticized the United States for supporting Israel in the wars between Israel and Arabs, also it was discontent of Washington for vetoing the resolutions against Israel, and played an axis role during the oil crisis of 1973.

From Islamic view, the Relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States is being criticized greatly by both inside and the region. The most attacks from inside began since the 1990s. In 1995 five Americans were killed in Riyadh and in 1996 nine Americans were killed in Dhahran, which paved the way for American troop's deployment in Qatar in 2003. "In terms of regional affairs, the regional radical leaders such as Naser, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi blamed Saudi leaders to take part in the continuous presence and increase of the power of Israel by its alliance with the United State, which is considered to be the main economic and military supporter of Israel" (Behjat, 2010, p226). In lieu of this kind of cooperation, Saudi Arabia believes that "In Islam, Christians and Jews are called "People of the Book". On the other hand, they are monotheists who are subject to divine principles. Islamic principles permits to peacefully cooperate and to interrelate with followers of monotheist religions (Christians and Jews)" (Behjat, 2010, p220). Of course Saudi Arabia distinguishes between Judaism and Zionist as Iran does (Behjat, 2010, p220).

In total, by having an instructive look at this relationship, Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1991 was an important turning point for the countries of the region, especially for Saudi Arabia and continuity of the relationship with the United States. Saddam signed a military pact with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, according to the pact Iraq is liable to defend these two countries against the threats of Iran, but in fact the main enemy of these two countries was Iraq. Also, which countries saved Kuwait and retained the government?

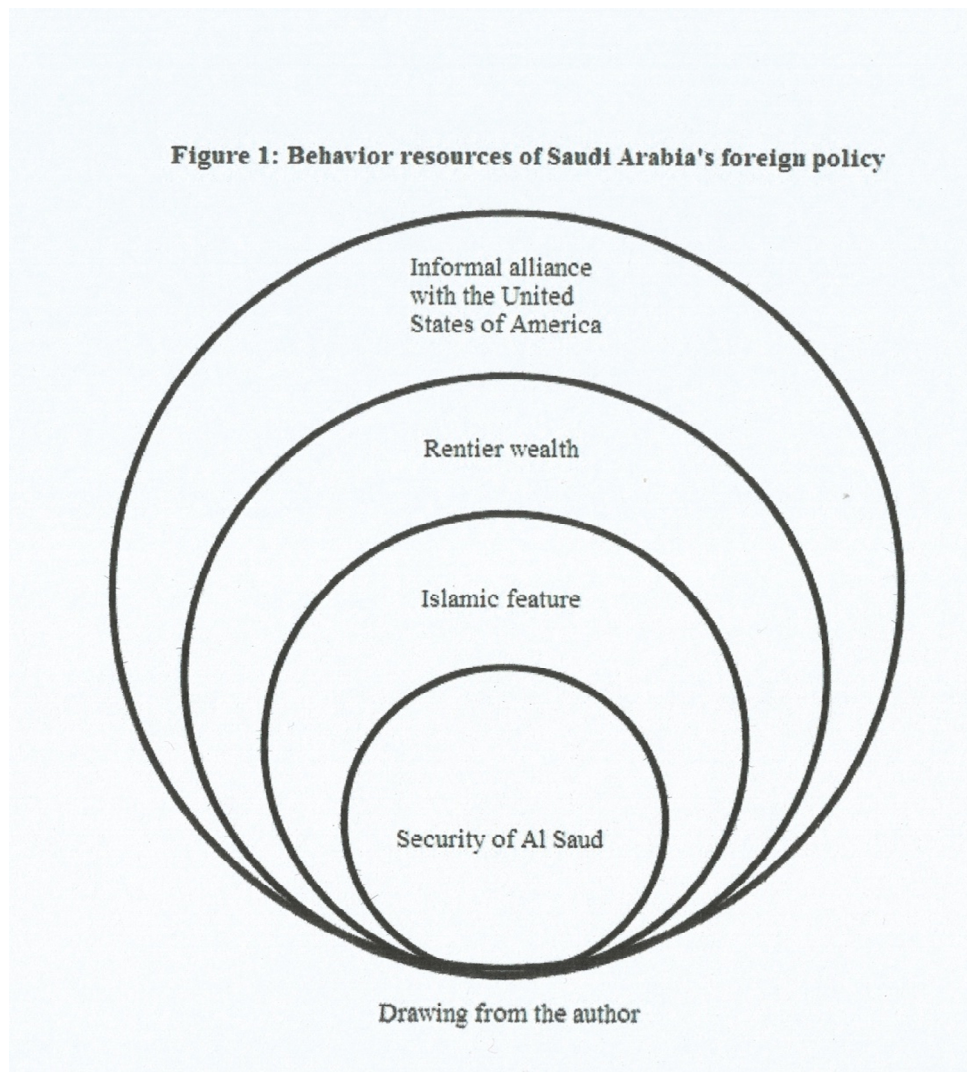


Figure 1. Behavior resources of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy

According to these quadruplet axes, the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is pursuing to maintain an Islamic way of life at home and abroad, preventing foreign and regional threats, welfare, increase in economic aids and finally survival of the regime (Maisel, 2007, p108). What is notable in the four behavior resources of foreign policy of the two countries is: these four axes are severely interrelated with each other, and meanwhile both sides have their own certain reasoning which are justifiable for themselves. In continue, we will see that these behavior resources in the foreign policies of the two countries were efficient, and have reached a desirable result.

### 3. History of the Relationship between Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia

According to these behavior resources of foreign policies of the two countries, four historical periods of the relationship between the two countries after the Islamic Revolution are as follows:

First Period, the period after the Islamic Revolution and Iraqi imposed war against Iran. The occurrence of the Islamic Revolution and the discussion of export of revolution and inspiration to Muslims around the world, especially disgruntled Shiites of the region caused a hope and movement among Shiites of Saudi Arabia (Intifada) and occupation of Kaaba in 1978 "Saudi Arabia had not experienced any religious opposition movement for half a century after suppression of Akhavan uprising during the years of 1928-1930. Conquest of the Great Mosque of Mecca in 1979 challenged the legitimacy of the rule of Saudi Arabia" (Aghaee, 2015, p94). Apart from

supporting the Islamic Revolution Organization in the Arabian Peninsula, Bahrain Liberation Front, Iraqi the Dawa Party, various groups of Hezbollah in Kuwait and other countries of Persian Gulf and Hezbollah in Lebanon were engaged and started activities as well. This led to the deployment of America Central Command in Saudi with AWACS radar equipment in the years of 1980-1981 based on Carter Doctrine (Wehrey et.al, 2009, p16). At the same time in this period the issue of Iranian Islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa was raised from the United Arab Emirates. All these issues caused the countries of the region feel panic and serious threat from the Islamic Revolution. Hence, Iraq as a country with approximately 60 percent of Shiites who were under the rule of Sunni minority, was severely scared from the propagandas of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, and by using this opportunity, Iraq introduced itself as the preserver of the eastern front of the Arab world (Adib Moghadam, 2009, chapter 2). The support of Arabic countries from Saddam imposed a destructive war on Iran. The Saudi support of this war was because Saudi Arabia believed that a weak Iraq may increase the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, while a strong Iraq may control the situation (Wehrey and et.al, 2009, p16). Hence, Saudi Arabia by using the weapon of oil, increased its oil production in the fall of 1985 from 3.5 million barrels per day to 4.5 million barrels per day, and in 1986 to 6 million barrels per day, which declined Iran's revenue from anticipated figure of \$15 billion to \$5.8 billion (Amir Ahmadi, quoted from Hafeznia and Romina, B., p71-72), this figure was not less than the 1973 oil shock. Forty-billion dollar cash assistance and seventy-billion dollar in-kind assistance of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and also Iraqi oil export from Yanbu' al Bahr, Saudi Arabia, were performed in this regard (Sadat Azimi, p72). Another notable issue in this period is the suppression of Iranian pilgrims in annual ceremony of Hajj, because of ceremony of disavowal of pagans that 450 Iranian pilgrims were killed and diplomatic relations between the two countries was cut off for three years. In total the goal of Saudi Arabia in this period was to hold the breathe of the Islamic Revolution by the war, and given the point that revolutionary Iran immediately entered into a war of attrition, it seems that they partially achieved their objectives.

Second period, was the period after Imam Khomeini passed away in 1989 and presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Muhammad Khatami (1997-2005). During the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani some efforts was conducted to detente in the relations between the two countries. Thus, during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait Iran declared neutrality; it did not intervene in clashes of Shiites of southern Iraq in 1992; and did not intervene in the internal developments of Saudi Arabia, which was due to increasingly unemployment of the country and some of rebellions, especially in the eastern region of the country, and finally Saudi Arabia did not blame Iran in the attack on Kheibar, and in return Iran resumed the diplomatic relations and ceremonies of Hajj. All these measures were performed because Iran in the condition of post-war reconstruction and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait after the shock Iraq's invasion of Kuwait were following a revision in their regional approach.

In the period of Muhammad Khatami the groundwork to improve the relations between the two countries was provided, and Iran and Saudi Arabia near to one decade were in accord to oppose Al Qaeda and the events after September 11th of 2001, also US invasion of Afghanistan and second invasion of Iraq in 2003, showing a kind of coordination in their positions. The most important sign of this gradual recovery of this relationship was holding the eighth summit of Islamic countries in Tehran in 2007, and Khatami as the first Iranian president to visit Saudi Arabia, as well as the signing a security pact between Iranian and Saudi defense ministers. "Reduction the pressure of Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, forbidding the excommunication of Shiites by the Council of Saudi Kabar, efforts for cooperation of the two countries in religious issues, reduction of religious conflicts in Pakistan and Central Asia, signing anti-terrorism and anti-drug agreements, are identified as some of the consequences of bilateral relationship in this period (Hafeznia and Romina, B., p75).

Third period was the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). In this period, the relationships of the two countries changed once more time from political process to strategic process, and the fields of disagreement increased. During this period, the issue of Iranian nuclear program turned into a crisis again, and regarding its importance in the boost of Iran's position in the Middle East, it was faced with great sensitivity of the Saudi Arabia. Increasing the attacks on Israel and criticism from west and conservative countries of the region because of weakness against Israeli aggression in Iran's foreign policy led to escalation of Israel-Hamas conflicts in 2006, and then escalation of Israel-Hezbollah conflicts in 2008, also during this period, the issue of Syria has increased the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia; so that both sides claimed leadership of the opposite sides in the region. Eventually, overflowing the crisis and civil war from Syria to Iraq caused that the terrorist group of ISIS to occupy the eastern and north eastern parts of this country, and Iraq entered into a very weak stage or even into a condition of disintegration. Based on traditional assumptions that a weak Iraq would lead to more erosion of relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, this issue along with the issue of Syria put this relationship in the worst condition after the imposed war of Iraq against Iran; so that according to the documents leaked from Wiki

Leaks, Saudi Arabia was looking to provoke West to invade Iran.

Fourth period started with the presidency of Hasan Rouhani in 2013, that against preliminary predictions about the possibility of improvement of the relations between the two countries, regarding the records of relationship from the second period, level of disagreements left from the third period, and also the nuclear agreement of Iran and West caused Saudi Arabia to perceive itself as a victim of these regional developments, and to imagine that Iran has reached its objectives in spite of the opposition to the United States, and provoked a kind of old notion that Shiites are fifth column in the region. This issue was so important in improvement the situation of Iran in post-Saddam period that occurrence of carelessness events in Hajj and Mena in 2015 set the groundwork for crisis and increasing the mutual rhetoric between the two countries, and execution the Saudi Shiite clergyman, Sheikh Baqir Nimir, led to domestic stimuli inside Iran, and protesters against the Saudi policies attacked Saudi embassy in Tehran, and diplomatic relations were cut off. Thus, it seems to be necessary to pay more attention to this issue.

First, in terms of geopolitics, solving the Iranian nuclear issue will increase its regional power, which grants Iran a stronger position in the region. Iran not only has a serious presence in the region of the Persian Gulf, but also can extend the sphere of its influence in the Mediterranean beaches by pursuing rational strategic policies in this region. When Iran is in a desirable domestic condition, and there is not a national issue in opposition to the world, its presence in the regional developments will be highlight, and this is what the Saudi officials are worried about. The issue of Iran's nuclear dossier was a pretext for Persian Gulf countries to claim that Iran is seeking to dominate the region, but presenting required guarantees to the international authorities by Iran about its nuclear programs, such seeking excuses that prepared opportunity for Arabs to limit Iran within its borders seems to be irrelevant after Geneva accord.

Second, Iran's policy based on emphasis on resistance front against West caused Arabic Syria and some groups in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine to get in the path of resistance against West and Israel, which challenges the hegemony and historical position of Saudi Arabia among Arabs. Saudi authorities attempt to reduce the Iranian influence in the region while calling the regional issues "Arabic", and at the same time scold pro-Iranian countries and groups in order to reduce Iran's influence in the region, to eliminate the focal point of resistance front, and in the meantime to continue the Saudi hegemony in the region.

Third, Saudi Authorities have always been afraid of Iranian influence in the region after the Islamic Revolution, and thus provoked the discussion of Shiite and Sunni. They believe that Iranians misuse Shiite congregation and try to provoke Safavi-oriented, which would lead to superiority and dominance of Iran in the region. They suppose that Shiite Crescent is a new type of Iranian structure beside the resistance line which can be a security belt of resistance line to protect the Shiites of the region. This Shiite structure in the region begins from Lebanon, passes from Syria and reaches the borders of Iran through southern areas of Iraq. Also after Arab Spring in Arabic countries and especially in Bahrain, Saudi authorities are opposed to this process from two points of view: on one hand, the Arab Spring is Iran's new message to incite the people against tyrants of Arabic countries and this is somehow considered to be the export of the Islamic Revolution in the region which is still growing after thirty and a few years. On the other hand, regime change in Bahrain not only changes the political composition of the country for the Shiites, but also develops a sort of domino change in southern shores of the Persian Gulf which is very dangerous for these countries.

Fourth, during recent years, due to the sanctions against Iran, part of Iran's oil sales was reduced, which was replaced by Saudi Arabia and then by Iraq. Replacement of about 1.5 million barrel per day of Iran's share of production by Saudi Arabia was a kind of retaliation for Iran's behavior in oil shock in 1973 and the Arab boycott against the West, that Iran took the most advantage out of it. Thus, at the present time lifting the sanctions against Iran in the framework of Geneva accord would lead to the reduction of oil incomes that Saudi Arabia have acquired in recent years.

Fifth, finally the Geneva accord with the West took place in conditions that Iran has not retreated from its revolutionary positions against West, as well as the pursuit of national interests, and follows its idealistic goals in Syria, Bahrain, Palestine and the West.

It seems that at the current situation the concerns of Saudi Authorities to be about three specific areas:

- 1) Iran's nuclear accord with the West has destroyed the opportunity of pretext to put pressure on Iran by the Arabs.
- 2) Nuclear accord with Iran has been carried out regardless of other considerations, including the issue of Syria, Palestine, Bahrain and other regional issues. Arabic countries found themselves cheated in this accord and

accordingly, in Security Forum in Manama in December 2015, foreign minister of Qatar declared that Persian Gulf Cooperation Council must be part of the accord and thus, 5+1 must be turned to 5+2.

3) The Saudi Authorities are worried that the interim agreement is supposed to convert to a comprehensive agreement of Iran and the West. If it happens, the gain of Iran's regional strategic weight as before the Islamic Revolution would cause Saudi Arabia to be placed under the strategic umbrella of Iran, and Saudi feels that they have been double crossed by the Westerners, and after thirty years the agreement of Iran and West has boosted Iran's dignity in the region again, and it was with agreement and cooperation of the West, and they left them alone in the region in difficult condition of Arabic spring. It seems that the third issue of concern to be more important than previous issues.

Saudi officials in addition to these political and formal statements follow some other actions as well. They try to change the issue of Syria in their own favor at any cost. Syria not only has turned into a significant focal point in the region, but also it is considered to be the main point to disconnect Iran and regional issues for Arabs and Saudi Authorities, and somehow it has turned into a matter of honor for them. If Iran comes out of this process successfully, it would expand its influence in the region in spite of opposition to great countries of the world and significant countries of the region, thus, problems in Bahrain and domestic unrests of southern states of the Persian Gulf will continue.

Yet, during this period, crisis in Yemen has been deteriorated, that advances of Houthis to Sana'a and even to Aden severely irritated Saudi military against this country, that in spite of holding various meetings to solve the crisis and Houthis withdrawal from Aden, it still continues. These issues provide groundwork to review the plausible scenarios in the relationship between the two countries in the next section.

#### **4. Plausible Scenarios in the Relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Saudi Arabia**

As it was mentioned in the introduction, scenario is identified as the natural, probable and expected events in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Till a decade ago, the most important issue in setting the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia depended on Iraq, but today, the issue of Syria in addition to the issue of Iraq, nuclear program of the Islamic Republic and future of relationship between Iran and the United States are identified as four axes forming the plausible scenarios of the future of the relationship between the two countries. Since three other key factors instead of an axial factor have been introduced, future scenarios will be more complex. Based on the process introduced in the preface, here, three scenarios in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia from optimistic to medial and cynical are raised, and then drivers, blockers and wild cards will be investigated in each scenario in the relations of the two countries.

##### *4.1 First Scenario, Efforts to Establish Governments in the Region*

In this scenario which is considered to be the most optimistic, the objective must be concentrated on strengthening of establishing governments in crisis-prone countries of the region, Yemen, Syria and Iraq. In this scenario, military approach must be stopped, and political process must be prioritized. Iran and Saudi Arabia as regional powers, who are beneficiary in both sides, can develop a kind of consensus among their regional and international fans. In this process, the issue of Yemen is a priority, and given that Mansour Hadi had been the elected as the president, he would come to power again, and an agreement about the position of Houthis in power would be achieved. The main point in this agreement is that Yemen will almost be placed in the domain of Saudi Arabia's backyard; this will be balanced with Iran's position in Syria. After the issue of Yemen, by any political formula that is running, the issue of Iraq is considered to be more talented to be solved rather than the issue of Syria. In spite of some disagreements among Iraqi political groups, helping to establish government in this country would be able to set the groundwork to eliminate Daesh from this country, and through this, the political integrity of Iraq would be preserved and terrorist groups would be eliminated. After these two countries, the issue of Syria is raised, in which a kind of political transition may be reached to an accord, in this case, the atmosphere of forming the future government would be along with the more support of beneficiary countries, which could reduce the future issues and problems of transition such as what happened in Iraq.

Drivers of this scenario are as follows:

- 1) Political process would help to strengthen the government in the region, and to weaken the government would not be ultimately in favour of any country in the region.
- 2) Spreading insecurity provides the groundwork for deteriorating the situation in the future. No country of the region has ever been able to change the situation in Syria with the support of trans-regional powers. On the other hand, continuity of the crisis in Syria shows that both sides are not able to defeat the other side, and continuity of

the current situation is not in favour of any country and the more the level of conflict, the harder its solution and compensation will be.

3) The objective of emphasis on political process is that a government with domestic and regional consensus comes to power in the future, and by the help of future governments in these countries, and the issue of reconstruction which cannot be carried out by a single country alone, the future of those governments to be strengthened after fading out the disagreements, and at least their blockers to be reduced. Political process and strengthening the governments would provide the groundwork to annihilation terrorism in the region.

The most important blockers of this scenario are:

1) Iran and Saudi Arabia accept the domain of backyard of each other. Iran in Syria and Saudi Arabia in Yemen to be more active and to achieve an appropriate political solution to attract Sunnis in Iraq. It is almost impossible to estimate that to what extent the two countries have the possibility to accept this backyard.

The future of Syria would not be in favor of Bashar al-Assad, the Alevis and Iran in its best conditions. Even if the process of political transition to be peacefully, and the role of Alevis to be specified in Syria's future, they would have a condition similar to the condition of Sunnis in Iraq after Saddam, and this would be so difficult for them to accept. This is not acceptable for Iran as well; because marginalization of the role of Alevis in Syria means weakening resistance line and physical connection with Lebanon and Palestine.

#### *4.2 Second Scenario, Maintaining Political Structure of Countries of the Region*

In this scenario political process is still a priority and instead of preserving the governments, attempts would be concentrated on maintaining the political structure of the countries. This maintenance of political structure of the countries would be possible in two forms: either a weak government such as governments of Libya and to some extent Iraq come to power, that in this case the countries of the region should continually strengthen the political structures of these after- discrepancies governments, or the political structure to be preserved with a federal government, that the latter approach means the acceptance of a backyard for beneficiary, internal and regional groups inside these countries. In first scenario, the amount of power in the rule is negotiated, and in this scenario the share of land in the form of present countries is negotiated.

Drivers of this scenario are:

1) If in Yemen, Syria and Iraq a political united government with specific share of political power cannot be formed, it is better to form a federal government with land shares of parties to the disputes, and each beneficiary group takes the control of its territory under supervision of the federal government.

2) In this process Iran and Saudi Arabia would preserve their influence in different parts of Yemen, Iraq and Syria. Thus, Iran's influence among the Houthis in the north of Saudi Arabia continues. In Yemen, Sana'a and Aden may be under control Saudi fans, but Iran's influence in the north of Yemen and southern borders of Saudi Arabia would be preserved. Saudi Arabia would have Sana'a and Aden under its sovereignty. In Syria, Sunnis deprived from power would have more roles in future power and the share of Saudi's power in Syria would increase; as Iran's share in Iraq is more. Iran would preserve its influence in Syria, Iran's continued presence in Latakia Governorate - habitats of Alevis – and nearby areas in access to Israel will preserve the resistance line. Also in Iraq it will persuade Sunnis to take the control of the area and to annihilate Daesh. In present situation Sunnis believe that ISIS withdrawal means to leave the area to the Shiite rulers, and Kurds and Shiites do not tend to fight for Sunni area and to enter that area, and Bagdad's efforts for clearing areas such as Fallujah was useless, because after troops withdrawal it had gone under the control of Daesh again.

Main blockers of this scenario are:

1) The issue of Kurds in Iraq and Syria will be a debate for the countries of the region. In Iraq, regarding the point that Kirkuk is locating in the Kurdistan Region is still disputed, and in Syria, according to the borders with Turkey, to reach a proportional structure with the Kurds seems to be very difficult.

2) In case of federalization, not only the number of Iraqi Sunnis is less than Kurds and Shiites, but also geographically they are living in an area of Iraq that is not very fertile for agriculture, and at the same time they are almost deprived from petroleum resources contrary to Kurds and Shiites.

3) In case of Syrian federalization, the disagreements of Syria and Israel on Golan Heights and maintaining Iran's sphere of influence in Eastern Mediterranean will increase. This may provoke the conflicts of Israel and pro-Iranian groups in the region.

4)

#### *4.3 Third Scenario, Continuing Current Situation and Finally Disintegration of Crisis-Prone Countries*

In this scenario the military and political process is being pursued simultaneously. Since reaching a political solution in the three countries, particularly in Syria, seems to be very difficult, political movements continue, but overcoming takes place by the military process. Here continuing this procedure may take several aspects. Since the consensus procedure was not achieved among the parties of the dispute, the military priority finally puts mentioned areas in the second scenario at the disposal of the parties. The only difference here is that the political structure of the country will not be preserved anymore, and each area will act autonomously. This may lead to the elimination of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and Daesh to take the control of its occupied territories, or Shiites to have their own areas in Iraq, and the countries of North Yemen and South Yemen to be established again.

Drivers of this scenario are as follows:

- 1) First driver is Israel's interest and stimulation of the countries of the region. Small countries have the most interest for Israel, and in the meantime Israel may help to eliminate Bashar al-Assad or continuity of Daesh.
- 2) The domestic developments of Iran and Saudi Arabia have not helped the improvement of the relationship between them.
- 3) Without achieving a political consensus, different groups will not leave the military condition.
- 4) The United States as the most important military force does not have the possibility to enter into Syria, Iraq and the region independently; this will not be possible until changing the US president in 2017.

Blockers of this scenario are:

- 1) Disintegration somehow means decline of government's role in security engineering of the region; meaning that the authorities of the region's countries, particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia are not able to manage the issues of the region.
- 2) The future of small and weak countries of the region is not promising, disintegration neither economically nor security will reduce current security issues of the region.
- 3) The role of non-governmental forces such as Daesh will increase and this may spread to other governments in the region.
- 4) By increasing the power of ISIS, Israel may misuse by equipping it with mass destruction weapons, and may provide the groundwork for Daesh invasion of Iran and Saudi Arabia.
- 5) Disintegration of Yemen will lead to increase the power of Shiites in the north of the country, and disintegration of Iraq will lead to increase the power of Shiites near the area of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which is very dangerous for the Saudi Arabia, also disintegration of these three countries will lead to increase the power of Kurds, which is very important for Iran and Turkey, the situation of Israel will improve, which is not in favour of Iran and Saudi Arabia, and finally minimum influence of Iran in the form of second scenario seems to be impossible; because the possibility of running a small region in Latakia and its autonomous management seems to be very difficult.

Aforementioned triple scenarios have been rated from optimistic to pessimistic or from desirable to undesirable. These three scenarios are possible and probable scenarios with maintaining the general situations and opportunities of the countries and the region. But three wild cards may affect all the three scenarios. On the other hand, if each of the cards takes place, a major part of aforementioned scenarios will change. A specific sample of this card is the seizure of power by military in Egypt in 2014 which affected all developments in the region, or during the stalemate in Afghanistan at the end of twentieth century that there was no way to get out of it and ninety percent of the country was occupied by Taliban, the event of September 11 of 2001 created a dramatic transformation in the country and the region.

One of the wild or disturbing cards is political regime change in Saudi Arabia. If it happens, not only extremism would grow in the region, but also restraining the problems of the region would be very difficult, while it is not in favor of Iran as well. "Until the monarchies and Arab states of the Persian Gulf remain, these countries are not identified as independent threats for Iran; on the contrary, collapse of these systems and replacing them with nationalist or fundamentalist republics can bring a new era of tension, controversy and bilateral threats" (Karimipour, 2000, p173).

Second wild card is expansion of Daesh and occupying more areas in Syria and Iraq with equipping this group with weapons of mass destruction, which will turn the region into a very dangerous situation. In this case, the situation should be managed supernaturally, and then new security engineering with cooperation of participant

countries in operations against Daesh should be provided.

Third wild card is Iran's, Israel's or Saudi Arabia's taking advantage of Daesh against each other, which may lead to war or conflict of Shiites and Sunnis or even in more serious conditions, conflict of the two countries in the whole region. These cards are wild or disturbing because probability of their occurrence is too weak, but their weak signs must be considered, and in case of probable occurrence, readiness to take action against them must be at hand.

## 5. Conclusion

Iran and Saudi Arabia are considered to be two major countries in the region of the Persian Gulf and the great Middle East. The resources of foreign policy behaviors of the two countries in about half a century indicates that except the decade of 1970 that a kind of appropriate security structure in the Persian Gulf was established, in a manner that in Dhofar with the request of Arab states of the Persian Gulf, Iran performed military operation in Arabic country of Oman, and after clearing the area of the leftist opposition, gave the area back to them again, and especially after the Islamic Revolution, there was not an appropriate and stable relationship between the two countries, but a relationship full of ups and downs and even sometimes full of tension.

In reviewing historical periods of the relationship between the two countries, the current situation has a specific property, this period is neither like the period of war that the issue of survival was raised for countries of the region, nor similar to the period of Hashemi Rafsanjani that the need to reconstruction had concentrated the attentions to domestic environment, neither like the period of Khatami that Iran was only following the improvements of relationships and changing the face of revolutionary country in the abroad, nor similar to the period of Ahmadinejad that it was seeking for redefining the regional security environment; yet in current situation Iran is pursuing all aforementioned issues simultaneously. On the other hand, the discussion of survival of countries of the region, especially Syria and Iraq, the issue of improving economic conditions in post-sanctions period, regarding the prestige of system in regional and global environments, and meanwhile, reviewing regional policies under the new conditions and post-JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) simultaneously is on the agenda. If the issue of Iraq has not been an axis in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia till the present time, and it is playing a retaining role, at the present time, the issue of Iran's nuclear accord with the West, domestic crisis in Syria, and the probability of improvement of the relationship between Iran and the United States are identified as four axes which severely affect the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and have complicated the regional issues more.

Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are subject to regional issues and competition and showdown between the two countries in the region. Accordingly, three scenarios, efforts to establish governments, attempts to maintain political structures of involved countries, and finally, continuation of current trends that may lead to disintegration of the three involved countries, affects future relations of Iran and Saudi Arabia. At the present time, the best scenario for both countries is the second one, which could lead both countries to achieve their objectives. Based on the second scenario, the procedure of both countries should be first conflict resolution, then managing the area, and finally in its idealistic form achieving a security regime and order for the region. In this process, many benefits for both countries according to their behavior resources can be conceived; including: elimination of Daesh, prevention of terrorism, participation of main countries of the region in expansion of nuclear program such as cooperation of Brazil and Argentina in South America, management of energy issues, regulating a public backyard in the region, lack of intervene of both sides into each other's domestic affairs, management of Islamic issues of the region, especially the issue of Hajj, reducing the necessity of presence of great powers like the decade of 1970s, and finally concentrating regional and trans-regional countries on the issue of Israel and Palestine. These issues not only have many advantages for the both countries, but also would help the security management of the region, and at the same time are also based on historical experience.

First Scenario	Second Scenario	Third Scenario	Wild Cards
Efforts for establishing governments Agreement on the share of power in the future of crisis affected countries Priority of the political process	Maintenance of political structure Priority of the political process Federal government	Disintegration of crisis-prone countries Priority of military process	Regime change in Saudi Arabia Increase of extremism or nationalism and difference between Iran and Saudi
Drivers: Weakening of the governments is not in favor of any country in the region Possibility of a worsening situation	Drivers: In federal government the area of influence of sides of dispute would be preserved Iran and Saudi will preserve their domain of influence Share of Iran and Saudi in the three involved countries will continue	Drivers: As a supporter government of this plan, Israel provokes it The relations between Iran and Saudi has not improved so far There is not the possibility of American military presence in the region	Expansion of Daesh and access of this panic raiser group to the weapons of mass destruction
Blockers: Acceptance of the domain of backyards is difficult for both countries Role of Iran and resistance line is not so clear in the future government of Syria	Blockers: Issue of Kurds Environmental problems Increase of difference of Israel with the continuing influence of Iran near its borders	Blockers: Declining of role of governments of the region Continual of crisis of small governments Increase of the role of non-governmental forces Possibility of taking advantage of Daesh by Israel Increase of risks of sovereign for Iran, Saudi and Turkey	Taking advantage of Daesh by Iran, Saudi and Israel against each other which may lead to the provoke of war between governments or proxy wars in the region

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