

Significant Changes in Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy towards Iran (2021) Reasons and Motivations

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Abstract

Objective: The recent and significant shifts in Saudi foreign policy from an aggressive stance towards Iran and Syria to a policy of dialogue and engagement especially after the Democrats came to power in USA, raise questions about the reasons of the shifts. While Saudi officials have previously declared that the negotiation with Iran is useless and not possible, today they try to recover their relations with Tehran. Accordingly, the present study aims to evaluate the foreign policy of these two major poles of the Islamic world, and therefore, seeks to elaborate the reasons of the conspicuous and significant shifts of Saudi foreign policy towards Iran.

Method: As a methodological framework, the study uses the method of document content analysis. The opinions and views of experts as well as the official and unofficial positions of Riyadh have shaped the basis of our analysis.

Results: The Democrats' rise of power in USA as well as Iran's determination on its policies have changed Saudi foreign policy.

Conclusion: Numerous factors have led to this change in Saudi Arabia's approach, including accepting Iran's regional power and surrendering to the realities of new regional circumstances.


Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Foreign Policy, Iran, Democrats in USA.

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1. Introduction

1-1.Statement of Problem

The developments of the Arab Spring in 2011 fueled the idea among Riyadh officials to use various means to reduce Iran's influence in strategic areas, including Syria, Lebanon, and the "New Iraq". Creating and strengthening Takfiri groups and leading them to attack and occupy parts of Syria and Iraq, and directing ISIL's policies against the Shiites, effectively turning the territory of Syria and Iraq into a hotbed of civil war, all were a part of offensive policies against Iran.

The recent and significant shifts in Saudi foreign policy during 2020-2021 from an aggressive stance towards Iran and Syria to a policy of dialogue and engagement especially after the Democrats came to power in USA, raise questions about the reasons of the shifts. While Saudi officials have previously declared that the negotiation with Iran is useless and not possible.²

The meetings made recently between Riyadh and Tehran are a new progress in the relations between two poles of the Islamic World, which were severed in 2016. The immediate context is the change of administration in the United States. The Biden administration has begun a dialogue with Tehran about a return to the nuclear agreement, and has severely criticized Saudi Arabia. The changed stance in the White House has led to adjustments in Saudi foreign policy, including a reconciliation with Qatar in January 2021, the offer of a ceasefire agreement to the Houthis in Yemen in March, and most recently, the beginning of a dialogue with Iran. For its part, Saudi Arabia seeks a solution that will end the war in Yemen, and is aware of the regional changes that are likely to occur if Washington and Tehran return to the nuclear agreement.

As our major question, we try to elaborate the reasons of the conspicuous and significant shifts of Saudi foreign policy towards Iran during 2020-2021. There are certainly many domestic and international explanations, which should be discussed.

As the methodological framework, we use the method of document content analysis. The opinions and views of experts and the official and unofficial positions of Riyadh have shaped the basis of our analysis.

1. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

2. Five years after Riyadh broke off relations with Tehran; there are increasing reports of direct political contacts between the two states. In the TV interview broadcast 28 April 2021, Prince Mohammed said Saudi Arabia did not want "the situation with Iran to be difficult". At the end of the day, Iran is a neighboring country and all that we hope for is to have good relations. He added, "We are working with our regional and global partners to find solutions to these problems and we hope to overcome them for good relations that benefit everyone" (Image CopyRightReuters.2021).

1-2. Previous Literature

The literature examination of the Iranian-Saudi challenge has surged in waves based on political events and endings. The publications as well as the manuscripts could be classified into two categories.

The former highlights the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and it became a key issue of study after the happenings of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and reappeared in 2003 after the US invasion of Iraq. Here the literature encompassing the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia seeks to explain the regional chaos through the lens of religious ideologies, political ideologies, and economic power. Several argue that the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has become a Cold war in the Middle East, which may be explained through the zero-sum game (Pike, 1990).

Micaela Tierce has prepared his thesis by analyzing the rivalry to regional hegemony in Yemen. Basing on his comments, Iran and Saudi Arabia's challenge is influenced by political and religious ideology (Tierce, 2020).

Relying on "Offensive Realism Idea", Al Sulaib has tried to look at the issue through a theoretical framework. He combines historical data with theoretical topics and sees the roots of the Iranian-Saudi challenges mainly arising from the ideological orientations (Al Sulaib, 2020).

Terrill offers a similar assessment and argues that political ideology has played a key role in establishing the political agenda of both Muslim country (Terrill, 2011: 1-2).

Simon Mabon seeks to elaborate the dimensions of crisis in the South-West Asia region. His report examines the impact of the increasingly fractious rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran upon politics across the Middle East, focusing upon Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. (Mabon, 2018). Nonetheless, each source can agree upon the assumption that the continuation of Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalry has created political and economic chaos in the Middle East region.

In his 2016, Mosallanejad states that Saudi Arabia's aggressive policy towards Iran has a long history and has taken a more aggressive approach since 2006. According to him, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards Iran became aggressive due to Shiite issues, the new regional situations in Iraq, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. Mosallanejad believes that the creating crisis has been part of Saudi Arabia's policy for balancing with Iran (Mosallanejad, 2016:1067).

Agha Mohammadi and his colleague have published an article in 2018 entitled "Saudi Arabia's Future Studies in the Light of Relations with the United States in the Middle East (2017-2025) Challenges and Strategies" and they believe that Saudi Arabia is moving increasingly to be more dependent on US support in future (Agha Mohammadi and colleague, 2018 :12).

Based on Randall Schuler's theory of balance of interests, and using scenario-writing method, the authors seek to examine the future scenarios of the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States of Trump, and Saudi Arabia's role in the Middle East. Agha Mohammadi has been based his comments by assuming that Trump will remain in office for two terms.

The latter category aims to encompass the new circumstances leading Riyadh to be more disposed for some steps in favor of reconciliation with Iran. Hussein Ibish in his manuscript titled "Saudi Arabia's New Dialogue with Iran was Long in the Making" believes that the Iranian-Saudi dialogue is also emerging in an extended period of diplomatic maneuvering throughout the region and a declining emphasis on hard power and armed conflict, either directly or through proxy. He tries to give an overview explanation of the issue (Ibish, 2021).

By his news report, Kabir Taneja, while highlighting the disagreements and conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia, claims that the failure of Saudi army operations in the Yemen War is the major reason leading Riyadh for conciliating measures (Taneja, 2021).

Darabi and his colleague discuss in 2018 the new Riyadh's aggressive policy approach, stating that stability and continuity have played a role as a component of conservatism in Saudi foreign policy, but changes in the regional environment in Syria, Iraq and Yemen and the increasing role of Iran have made Saudi policy aggressive (Darabi and colleague, 2018:61).

Yoel Guzansky and his colleague elaborate the issue through a more detailed revision but their analysis is rather influenced by the Israeli perspectives (Guzansky, 2021).

Fred Kaplan by preparing a report entitled "Saudi Arabia and Iran are starting to solve their differences without America" describes the new circumstances of regional equations and considers the gradual departure of USA from the region as the main factor in new foreign policy of Riyadh (Kaplan, 2021).

Enea Gjoza and his colleague like Kaplan believe that US departure from the region has a definite effect on the new foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. As USA support for Saudi Arabia in the Yemen war declined, the war itself became an increased economic and political drain on the Saudi kingdom, in addition to causing what the United Nations described as "the worst humanitarian catastrophe in the world". In the Yemen war, Saudi Arabia has incurred estimated losses of more than US \$100 billion (Enea, 2019).

The distinction of the present study from previous works is its comprehensive view and the nature of unbiased analysis. Although we look at the issue through the Iranian elite perspective, we put a special emphasis on respecting neutrality.

1-3.Theoretical Framework: Foreign Policy Analysis Approach

For more than 40 years, academics have argued whether the Saudi-Iranian rivalry is mostly motivated by realist concerns for power, security, and relative gains or constructivist concerns surrounding issues of identity and ideology (Usjid U, 2017: 16).

This article employs "Foreign Policy Analysis Approach" "to examine the new shift in the foreign policy of Riyadh in order to prove that the recent shifts alongside the constant rivalry are motivated by issues of power, as well as identity, and domestic politics. This theoretical framework combines the variables of both realistic and constructivist theories.

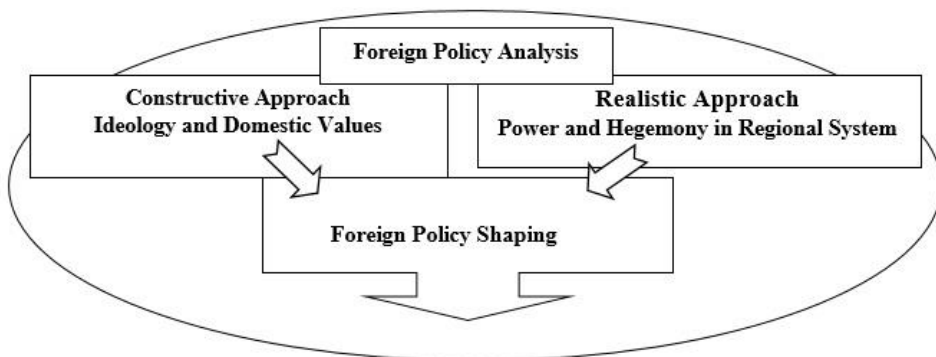
Although separate examination of power or identity offer insights into state behavior, they do not provide a nuanced explanation for the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as this recent shift of Saudi Arabia approach. Thus, an unconventional perspective, the foreign policy analysis (FPA) approach is required to analyze the issue.

FPA is an agency-based theory in which concerns regarding relative power and ideology are weighted, but with attention given to domestic decision-making factors as well. “FPA” provides a path to evaluate state behavior without the potentially distorting restraints of realism and constructivism. Along with external factors, it considers domestic political concerns and changes in the broader political climate as significant factors in decision-making.

The need to rely on powerful allies is defined in the context of realism, but Saudi Arabia, as the key keeper to the Kaaba, is committed to pay attention to ideology and Islam in order to achieve and maintain the support of Muslims around the world. In other words, in its foreign policy, Saudi Arabia must take a middle ground between the two scales, relying on the principles of realism as well as relying on the assumptions of the constructivism.

In general, it should be noted that in the structure of the foreign policy formation of Saudi Arabia and Iran, both in external and international level and at the domestic level, there are commonalities and convergence too. For instance, maintaining hegemony in the Persian Gulf is a factor of divergence, while maintaining the security of it is a factor of convergence for both. On the other hand, the difference between Shia and Sunni Wahhabism is the cause of divergence, but maintaining the unity of the Islamic world is the cause of convergence. Therefore, in the face of major crises, the Riyadh authorities may shift the balance of the foreign policy to convergence factors. In our view, the new circumstances in the regional level lead Saudi foreign policy to move towards cooperation with Iran, emphasizing the common interests and sensitivities with Iran.

Chart No 1: Foreign Policy Analysis Framework, Case of Saudi Arabia



Source: Authors

2. Factors influencing the change of Saudi Arabia`s foreign policy

According to the foreign policy analysis agenda, the influential factors are discussed in a combined pattern: realistic and constructivist framework.

2-1.Arguments based on realistic framework

Considering the context of realism conception, the following factors can be traced in the recent Saudi foreign policy.

2-1-1. Gradual departure of USA from the Region

The United States has long decided, in line with its macro-policy, especially since the Obama administration, to move out of the Middle East, West Asia, and even the Persian Gulf, and to expand its capacity and financial resources to East Asia. The issue of the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and even the reduction of American troops from Iraq is in this direction. The United States believe that allied governments such as Saudi Arabia and the Arab states south of the Persian Gulf must strike a regional balance. The rise to power of Biden and the Democrats has further accelerated that policy. Therefore, Saudi Arabia cannot count on US support and presence in the regional equation. The Biden administration`s desire to move its focus away from the Middle East has encouraged Saudi Arabia to take matters into its own hands.

By all accounts, this shift was spurred by recognition that the United States is moving away from the Middle East. A senior Biden adviser told, during the transition between election and inauguration, that the region would rank “*a distant fourth*” in Biden`s priorities, after Asia Pacific, Europe, and South America. Trump also talked about pulling away from the Middle East, but he always kept his heart—and the taxpayer`s wallet—open for Saudi Arabia. The key change is that Biden is hardening his attitude toward the Saudi royal family (Kaplan, 2021).

In early February 2021, Biden announced the end of “all forms of American support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen,” as well as arms sales to both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as part of his administration`s endeavor to find a diplomatic solution to the seven-year-old “humanitarian and strategic disaster” that the Yemen war brought about (The White House, 2021). The Biden administration had previously announced the suspension and review of arms deals with the two Gulf countries that had been approved by the Trump administration (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021:2).

The Saudi steps towards Iran clearly reflect Washington`s policy to reduce tensions between the two countries as key to decreasing US involvement and reviving the Iranian nuclear agreement. The Biden administration`s national security document places a strategic focus on China and Russia, as well as on climate change and the proliferation of epidemics (The white House, March 2021).

2-1-2. Improving relations with Democrats

Because of its closeness to the Trump administration and anger among Democrats over the Yemen war, human rights abuses, and the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul in October 2018, Saudi Arabia needed to take significant steps to shore up damaged relations with many leading Democrats in Washington. As well as seeking to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal, President Biden has withdrawn US support for Saudi offensive operations in Yemen, been critical of Saudi Arabia's human rights record (Image Copy Right Reuters, 2021).

It is not only the Biden administration that the Saudis have to worry about; the president has a Democratic Party behind him with control of both chambers of Congress that is increasingly critical of Riyadh. The gruesome killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a US-based journalist, was a turning point for US-Saudi relations, particularly in Congress, where Democrats are still pushing for measures to punish perpetrators of crime beyond Biden's moves (Harb, 2021).

2-1-3. Yemeni war crisis

The war in Yemen today and during last decade is also a potential subject of agreement, which is why the initial bilateral talks in Iraq focused on. The level of Iran's engagement and influence with the Houthis is disputed. But it is clear that while ending the Yemen war has become a major priority for both Saudi Arabia and the administration of President Joseph R. Biden, such an outcome would not necessarily be contrary to Iranian interests. Tehran's relationship with the Houthis is relatively distant compared to the fairly vertical integration of groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon or the pro-Iranian Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq. Therefore, the Yemen conflict and Iran's role can be addressed without directly confronting the most intractable obstacle to a wide-scale rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

For years, Saudi Arabia has recognized it is stuck in a quagmire in Yemen. Saudi forces and its loyal fighters in the conflict in the north of the country have steadily lost ground in recent years. The Houthi forces are engaged in a prolonged effort to seize control of the last major government stronghold in the north, Marib. If they lose Marib, Riyadh and the Hadi team will have been effectively defeated in northern Yemen, and the Saudi-led coalition will essentially have to prevent a generalized Houthi takeover.

Such concerns intensified following the September 14, 2019 missile and drone attacks on Saudi Aramco facilities. Not only did the attacks show Saudi Arabia's vulnerability, the use of precision guidance was technically very impressive. Few of the projectiles failed to hit their marks, and planners had chosen cannily what to strike and when in order to do maximum damage. So, Saudi Arabia's decision to diplomatically engage with Iran, in part, arose from a genuine desire to avoid conflict and real anxiety about how dangerous tensions had already become (Ibish, 2021).

Saudi Arabia has wanted to find a formula to end its intervention in Yemen. However, the Houthis have shown little interest in coming to any political

solution that could facilitate a Saudi withdrawal – the war has gone very well for them, and they believe they can gain further ground through more fighting. In addition to a political solution among Yemeni factions, for its withdrawal, Saudi Arabia would require significant assurances that the security of the kingdom itself would not continue to be threatened by the Houthis or others from Yemeni territory (Ibish, 2021).

The thaw with Iran is significant for Yemen policy because Iran and its network of non-state actors, primarily Hezbollah, are the main external supporters of the Houthis. It is unclear how much influence Tehran can exercise over their most significant decision-making, but Iran and some of its client groups could try to extend the conflict by encouraging Houthi intransigence or offering increased support and other inducements.

Iran has benefited significantly from Saudi Arabia being bogged down in a conflict the outcome of which is not crucial to Tehran's vital national interests. The Saudis hope that an easing of tensions with Iran could see Tehran facilitating an end to the Yemen war or, at least, not acting as a spoiler (Ibish, 2021).

Despite their massive arms purchases over the years, the kingdom lacks adequate defense capability, not to mention offensive capability. The war in Yemen has become a bone of contention with Washington, which has eyed the humanitarian crisis there with much concern (Guzansky, 2021).

2-1-4.Changing the regional balance to the detriment of Saudi Arabia

In parallel with the Yemeni crisis, Saudi Arabia did not succeed to reduce Iran's regional influence. To explain the Saudi failures, we can point out to the ineffectiveness of Saudi policies in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon over the past two decades.

The strategic alliance between Syria and Iran has continuously hampered the policies of conservative states in the region, including Saudi Arabia, on various issues. Saudi Arabia supported efforts to weaken, and even overthrow, the Syrian government, for decreasing the Iranian influence. With the rise of the Arab Spring, the protests spread to Syria, but these protests quickly turned into an international crisis with the intervention of foreign powers and the operations of their armies in Syria. In this regard, the two coalitions faced each other, the Iranian coalition for the Assad regime and Saudi coalition against it. The confrontation lasted for about five years and even pushed the Syrian government to the brink of collapse, but ended with the victory of the pro-Bashar al-Assad coalition. This was a complete defeat for Saudi wing. Hence, great majority of governments including Riyadh gradually turned to normalizing relations with Syria.

In Iraq, Saudi policies have failed over the past two decades. The fall of Saddam in 2003 changed the power structure in Iraq and gave Iraqi Shiite, backed by Iran, and Kurdish groups a strong foothold in the Iraqi power structure. The course of events was not in Saudi Arabia's favor. However, after 20 years, the course of events was going to the detriment of Saudi kingdom and it was the Iranian influence, which was increased.

Lebanon is another area of rivalry between two. The developments of the last

two decades in Lebanon have caused Saudi Arabia to feel failure in this area as well. The 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, known as the 33-Day War, ended with Israel failing to achieve its goals. Israel's failure expanded the Hezbollah group's influence and its credibility in Lebanon. Under Saudi support, Saad Hariri, prime minister, tried hard to neutralize the influence of Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran. However, these efforts did not end well for Riyadh and Lebanese Hezbollah is now enjoying an effective role, maybe stronger than before, on Lebanese society.

2-1-5. Damaging consequences of dark relations between Riyadh and Tehran

The devastating impact of the negative rivalry in which Riyadh and Tehran have become involved in, has encouraged both to minimize the destructive effects as much as possible. The grave loss of financial and human resources of the two countries, the general flagging of the Islamic World as well as the abuse of the rivals and enemies from the divisions, may be considered as the destructive consequences.

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the two states have become embroiled in an increasingly vitriolic rivalry that is shaped by geopolitical aspirations and given existential importance by claims to Islamic legitimacy, with repercussions felt across Muslim communities worldwide (Mabon ,2018:1).

2-1-6. Iran's welcome to Saudi Arabia's de-escalation policy

For Tehran, restoring relations with Riyadh is perceived as contributing to limiting the consequences of normalization between the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain and Israel, alleviating the confrontational atmosphere in the (Persian) Gulf, and improving Iran's regional standing (Guzansky,2021).

As a result, in addition to considerable quiet diplomacy behind the scenes, Iran and Saudi Arabia signaled their interest in a renewed conversation through a variety of more public symbolic messages. Particularly, a pair of jointly authored articles, by Iran's former nuclear spokesman, Hossein Mousavian, who is close to the political faction that includes Iran's ex-president and ex-foreign minister from one part, and Abdulaziz Sager, a Saudi scholar and analyst with strong connections to the royal court and King Salman bin Abdulaziz from other part, called for precisely such a dialogue. These articles, the first in *The New York Times* in May 2019 and the second in *The Guardian* in January, strongly signaled a willingness on both sides to communicate more openly (Ibish, 2021).

2-1-7. Collaborative space and common strategic issues

There are common points of view and fundamental differences between two sides. For example, maintaining self-superiority in Persian Gulf is a factor of divergence and conflicts, but simultaneously, maintaining its security is a base of convergence. On the other hand, the religious differences between Shia and Wahhabism are the cause of differences, but maintaining the unity of the Islamic World is the cause of convergence. Therefore, in facing to major crises, the Riyadh authorities may shift balance of their foreign policy towards convergence factors. Therefore, this is the happened situation now, and Saudi Arabia is moving

towards reconciliation steps with Iran, emphasizing the common interests (Ibish, 2021).

There are several obvious starting points for a new Saudi-Iranian dialogue. Maritime security in the waters of the Persian Gulf itself is probably the least onerous lift. Both countries and most of their local allies are energy exporters that rely on freedom of navigation and safe passage through these waters. Iran's concentration on attacking maritime targets as part of its "maximum resistance" was driven by the desire to assert Tehran's de facto right to be part of a maritime security framework in the Persian Gulf. Iran had felt excluded from this and wanted to send message that, if it could not sell its oil because of sanctions, its neighbors would eventually not be able to sell their oil either because of Iran's disruption of maritime security. But, ultimately, all parties in the region have real interest in security as well as freedom of navigation and commerce (Ibish, 2021).

Almost conciliatory line adopted by Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states towards Iran and towards the Biden administration stands in sharp contrast to the position displayed by Tel Aviv to the negotiations with Iran. Furthermore, a concrete Iranian-Saudi rapprochement (following on the heels of the measured thaw in relations between the United Arab Emirates and Iran) will constitute an important crack in the anti-Iran front that Israel has sought to create it. More importantly, it will eliminate a key element in the opposition to the US return to the nuclear agreement (Guzansky, 2021).

2-2. Arguments inspired from constructive approach: Recent social-political conditions of Saudi Arabia

Dominated beliefs and values in Saudi Arabian state are influenced by socio-political variables such as the structure of the pyramid of power, religion, and economic strength or weakness. These variables have a decisive effect on the foreign policy process for Riyadh.

2-2-1. Domestic economic crisis

The reduction of Saudi Arabia's foreign exchange reserves, which had been announced at more than 730 billion dollars before the fall in oil prices, was announced in June 2017 by the Central Bank, 493 billion dollars. Some believe that is why Saudi Arabia agreed to reduce oil production in order to increase prices in December 2016 in OPEC. In this regard, Saudi Arabia reduced its exports by almost 700,000 barrels per day. On the other hand, reforms were made in the direction of oil dependence, the most important of which is the transfer of part of the shares of the world's largest oil company, Aramco.

Together with the shock caused by the interruption of business operations and the loss of revenue from the tourist industry, particularly ahead of the yearly Hajj pilgrimage, the contraction of the global economy has dramatically decreased oil demands, causing the prices to plummet to unprecedented levels.

The significant decline in Saudi Arabia's economic asset has led Saudi Arabia to pursue a policy of stabilization in the region, given the economic downturn caused by the Corona, which has also had a significant impact on oil exports. The implementation of the ambitious Program of 2030 requires a calm atmosphere in

the region as well as in the domestic system alongside the economic stability, which all require the reduction of tensions with Iran.

2-2-2. Instability in power pyramid

The change in approach is also due to internal developments, according to which power in this country is in transition, especially since the physical condition of king has deteriorated and Bin Salman seeks to come to power with minimal internal challenge. Of course, this body of royal family is mysteriously but actively suffering from competition tensions of power. Saudi Arabia has consistently pursued a conservative foreign policy since before the bin Salman era, and has now concluded that adventuring in foreign policy is detrimental to its interests and security.

Saudi Arabia has reached to the conclusion that it must reduce its reliance on the United States in order to defend itself; because during Trump's presidency, which was allied with Saudi Arabia, Saudi oil facilities such as Aramco and other areas and military bases were targeted by Ansar al-Momenin, but the United States, contrary to Riyadh's expectations, had not do anything for defending or supporting Saudi Arabia.

Hence, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia should try to ensure his own security and must not jeopardize Saudi national interests by intensifying confrontation with Iran. It is understood that advanced military technology does not necessarily bring security. Most of the exported equipment under Donald Trump could not prevent attacks on Aramco or Yemeni missile strikes.

All of these factors call for a conservative foreign policy for Riyadh. The conservative approach has always been an important value and policy in Saudi foreign policy direction.

3. Conclusion and Practical Recommendations

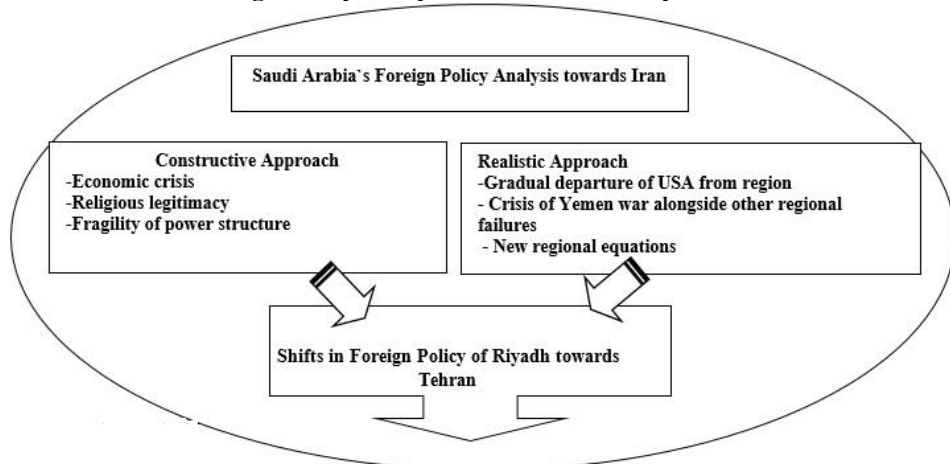
The recent reported meetings between Iran and Saudi Arabia are a new development in relations between the two countries, which was cut off in 2016. This is one of the effects of change of government in the United States. The Biden government has begun talks with Tehran on returning to the nuclear deal, and has strongly criticized Saudi Arabia. A change of position in the White House has led to adjustments in Saudi foreign policy, including reconciliation with Qatar in January 2021, a proposed ceasefire agreement with the Houthis in Yemen in March, and, most recently, the start of talks with Iran. Saudi Arabia is looking for a solution to end the war in Yemen and is aware of the regional changes that could occur if Washington and Tehran return to the nuclear deal.

Numerous factors have led to this change in Saudi Arabia's approach, including accepting Iran's regional power and surrendering to the realities of new regional circumstances. Saudi Arabia realizes that cooperating with Iran better serves the interests and security of its country.

These and many other developments have convinced Saudi leaders to view Iran as less threatening, albeit formidable, than it was a few years ago. Iran has long publicly pressed for negotiations with Arab neighbors and even the development of a broad regional security framework.

The foreign policy analysis framework helped us explain the reasons for the change in Saudi Arabia's approach. In this regard, the set of factors based on the theory of realism alongside on the theory of constructivism was elaborated.

Chart No 2: Foreign Policy Analysis Framework of Riyadh towards Tehran



Source: Authors

Paying attention to the following practical recommendations will effectively help develop bilateral relations and expand cooperative areas between two countries:

- Iran should welcome the proposals for dialogue and de-escalation from Saudi Arabia, but it should notify that the developing of final negotiations and cooperation is conditional on the recognition of the Houthi government in Sanaa and the non-continuation of the Arab coalition attacks. In return, the Houthis will stop the launching missiles and drone strikes on Saudi Arabia territory.
- Iran should assure Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf countries that Iran's nuclear program does not aim to violate the sovereignty or rights of them, and is completely peaceful in nature. Iran stands ready to assist in the transfer of peaceful nuclear technology to them under the supervision of the Agency. Iran must raise and repeat the idea of a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East in all negotiations.
- Concluding cooperation agreements to ensure the security of the Persian Gulf with Saudi Arabia will help strengthen the relations between the two poles of the Islamic World. This agreement will bring satisfaction and support for Russia, China and even the United States, and the only loser will be Israel.
- The two sides must move towards convergence and creating a “grand bargain” that brings them into the space for bilateral dialogue on the regional issues.
- Riyadh should stop the use of language such as ‘Shi’a Crescent’ that plays such a damaging role in deepening divisions within and between Muslim communities.

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