


Iran-Saudi Arabia Rivalry in Lebanon: Contexts and Consequences

Seyed Hossein Mousavi Kordmiri 

Master's degree in International Relations, University of Guilan, Department of Political Science,
Rasht, Iran, hossein.mousavi78s@gmail.com

Seyed Amir Niakooee 

Associate Professor, University of Guilan, Department of Political Science, Rasht, Iran,
niakooee@guilan.ac.ir

Abstract

Purpose: As one of the arenas of competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, Lebanon is always of great importance. From this point of view, the present study tries to analyze the competitive acting of Tehran and Riyadh in Lebanon from the point of view of the balance of threats, in order to determine the factors influencing what and why this confrontation is, as opposed to the purely constructivist approach, which is a common approach in this field.

Method: The research method is descriptive and the method of collecting sources is a library and seeks to answer the question that; What have been the grounds and consequences of the Iran-Saudi rivalry in Lebanon?

Findings: Lebanon's important geopolitics and multiplicity of ethnicity and religion, which cause internal conflicts and prevent the formation of a strong nation-state, are among the factors that have influenced the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon. The consequences of this competition have been the intensification of the fragility of the socio-political and economic structure, the expansion of the sphere of influence of regional and sometimes global competitors, and the rule of the security atmosphere in Lebanon.

Conclusion: Lebanon's crisis is rooted in the history and geography of this country. The existence of many ethnic and religious groups is one of the main reasons for the presence of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon. Understanding the existing international realities, these two countries took many measures to form a coalition with their aligned groups in Lebanon, and with political, military, economic, etc. support in this field, in addition to trying to empower the currents under their support as much as possible in the field. The internal affairs of Lebanon tried to increase their power and influence in this country and weaken each other's status and interests.

Key words: Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Regional Competition, Threat Balance, Lebanon.

Article Type: Research

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Corresponding Author: Seyed Mahmoud Mousavi Bojnordi (hossein.mousavi78s@gmail.com)

Introduction

Governments, as the main actors in the international arena, engage in communication and interaction or competition and confrontation with other actors, including their neighbors, in order to gain more benefits and use opportunities. This research is trying to investigate the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the main regional rivals of each other who established relationships to gain superiority in different countries of the region.. This research is an attempt to examine the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the main regional competitors who established communication in order to gain superiority in different countries in the region. The main goal of this article is to analyze the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh in the social, political and economic fields of Lebanon as one of the main countries where the parties compete. The theoretical framework of the research is Stephen Walt's balance of threat. Like neorealism, the balance of threat also believes in the structural nature of the international system and accepts that the anarchic state of the international system does not allow the powers to expand further (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2021: 233-234). In Walt's view, security is more about threats than about power, and he attributes the behavior of states to achieving something beyond power, because in his view, balance as a theoretical concept cannot explain why the creation of balances has failed (Walt, 1985: 90). He believes that states form alliances in the anarchic state of the international system to protect themselves. Also, the perception of threat and consideration of the power of other actors affect the performance of states (Walt, 1987). In relation to the background of the research, there are some books and articles about the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia in different countries, in which different parts of the book examine the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia with different parties in Lebanon, which can be referred to as Mehdi Alikhani's book (2023) entitled "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia; Foreign Policy, Bilateral Relations, and Regional Order" and Abbas Mosalinezhad's article (2016) titled "Regional Balance Policymaking in Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations," but the innovation of this research is that it has been able to analyze the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon using an explanatory approach using the theoretical framework of the balance of threat. It should be noted that most research in this field focuses on Constructivism.

Materials and Methods

The plan of this research is to analyze the main underlying factors in the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon and to determine the consequences of this competition for both actors and for the country of Lebanon. The target population of the research is the people, the government, and the political, social, and economic structure of Lebanon. The research method is Explanatory and qualitative, and the method of collecting library and Internet resources is.

Results and Discussion

In the Middle East, the existence of numerous gaps provided grounds for confrontation between social and political currents, and their inability to create a compromise has resulted in violence (Niakooee, 2014: 85). The Lebanese National

Pact, which was formed in 1943, was also able to minimize differences over national identity and led to an agreement that rejected any foreign intervention in Lebanese domestic politics. This pact was a compromise solution for Lebanese society, which had been divided in its understanding of the republic (Haddad, 2002: 292). However, over time, and despite the fact that the Lebanese were always looking for a way to create lasting stability and successfully overcome unrest, the realization of this has become somewhat unattainable, considering the influential components; Because the lack of a national vision and the widespread identity crisis caused various religious and political groups to strive for a greater role in the political structure of this country and to prioritize clan and party interests over national interests so that they could have a more prominent presence in the political arena. In this regard, the strategic location of Lebanon, which has been the location of the presence of various ethnic and religious groups throughout history, has provided competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Because, along with Christians, Sunnis and Shiites are among the main religious groups in Lebanon that overlap with the policies of Saudi Arabia and Iran. What is important in this regard is that the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia and their support for aligned currents is not only religious and ideological. These two countries, by understanding the realities of the international system and the issues related to balancing and creating alliances and coalitions that were raised earlier, cooperate with groups close to them in Lebanon and, along with the ideological approach that is part of the basis of each of these countries' work in the field of foreign policy, form alliances to increase their regional and international role. In this regard, Galvin explains that the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia for greater influence in the region, despite all the plans to change the Middle East and also to create a greater gap between Shiites and Sunnis, cannot be considered a religious competition; rather, the principle of the confrontation between these two main powers in the West Asian region is a geostrategic competition. Because if we look at this issue from a religious perspective, Iran's unwavering support for the Sunni Hamas movement in Palestine or Qatar's close relations with Iran nullifies the foundation of the issue (Glovin, 2010: 129). In this regard, Iran, through a strategic alliance with the Shiites of Lebanon, was able to provide them with political, diplomatic, economic, military, etc. support, which promoted their status, expanded their sphere of influence, and increased their role in the internal developments of this country and even in the regional arena. Of course, this closeness was not limited to the issue of identity, but rather, due to Lebanon's geographical proximity to Israel, which is considered the main enemy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is an important factor in increasing Iran's deterrence against Israel and reducing its power of maneuver. Iran's support for movements close to it in Lebanon increased Tehran's influence in this country. In contrast to Iran's policies, Saudi Arabia also tried to make many investments in various dimensions to increase its position in Lebanon. Although Saudi Arabia was able to achieve significant successes in some areas; But unlike Iran, it failed to organize a broad spectrum of the population to support its interests. While Iran was able to expand the group's position and its own position in Lebanon by supporting Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia not only did not support all the movements close to it, but by supporting the Hariri family, it was able to gain more power and benefits than Iran

in certain periods; but overall, it seems that Iran's policies have been more successful compared to Saudi Arabia.

Conclusions

This study attempted to examine the factors involved in the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the main regional countries in the Middle East and each other's most important rivals in the social and political arena of Lebanon. In addition to the crisis-causing components of Lebanon, the role of these two regional actors in the social, political, and economic developments and campaigns in Lebanon and the consequences of their presence and support for the main currents aligned with each were examined. Lebanon has always been of interest to foreign actors due to its special geographical and demographic location, both before and after independence. The fragmentation of the population and the social context of this country, in the sense that it consists of many ethnic and religious groups, always provides a place for different groups to engage with each other to gain more power and play a role in the political arena. Instability in such societies also provides an opportunity for the presence of foreign countries to gain maximum share in the arena of power by acting and supporting specific political groups. In short, despite the common approach to why and how Tehran and Riyadh compete in Lebanon, which examines this competition only from an ideological perspective, what is important is a realistic view and understanding of the actors towards international issues and an effort to use all dimensions of power to gain maximum benefits. In fact, applying the balance of threat theory to the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon makes it clear that any attempt to influence the ruling and influential current in Lebanon by Tehran and Riyadh is with a competitive perspective and to consolidate and strengthen their position against a regional rival.

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Conflict of Interest

This article has no conflicts of interest.

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