

# The Competition Between Iran and Saudi Arabia: Internal Factors

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## Abstract

The rivalry between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East can be examined based on fundamental variables affecting the foreign policy behavior of each of these two actors. Among the effective variables are internal factors and resources that have a significant impact on the process of foreign policy behavior. Internal resources can be defined on two principles: first: material internal factors, such as military power, political system structure, economic power, and geopolitical position, and second: intangible internal factors, such as identity and ideology. Each of these can explain how the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia compete in the Middle East; Accordingly, this article tries to answer the question with a descriptive-analytical method, what are the internal factors affecting the competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia? In this regard, it tests the main hypothesis that domestic factors are the main source of regional competition between the two countries. Therefore, in this research, an attempt is made to examine each of these factors using theoretical framework of neoclassical realism and with emphasis on a single level of this theory.

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## **Introduction**

The competition of international actors, especially in one area, is more than the competition between two great actors. Regional actors compete to expand their influence on a region and create the right conditions for the benefit of all the resources and interests that every nation in the region embodies. There are many factors and variables to achieve these goals and benefits for competing countries in the region. It influences the internal factors to the effective regional and international factors that both rival actors in the region can use for these variables in their favor. The conditions for benefiting from regional and international factors are more affected by internal factors. The internal factors of one of the most important or other language sources are a way of achieving the goals of each side. These factors can be summarized in two groups of material and immaterial (spiritual) factors. Among the domestic material agents, one can mention the financial resources, economic conditions, military power, and government structure, each of which is described in detail in this article. From non-material (spiritual) factors one can also refer to identity and ideological factors. To examine the regional competitiveness of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, attention to internal factors can be a way to explain other variables in the region and the international arena. This paper tries to explain these factors.

## **I. Theoretical Framework**

neoclassic realism is a title given by Gideon Rose to a series of international relations theories, that, in explaining the foreign

policy and beyond, use many realistic insights in defining international relations, and insists that "the scope and ambition of a foreign policy of a country, First of all, stems from its position in the international system, and in particular its capabilities in the field of military power. But at the same time, it is emphasized that" the impact of these capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex because the pressures of the system should be translated through intermediate variables at the level of units, that is why they are neoclassicisms. "The attention of the non-classic realists to power is more than anything else; they define power as the realist based on ability. Unlike new realists, most of the novels, not only focus on the system-level factors, but also emphasize on mental conception and internal structure of governments, and somehow emphasize the need to look at different levels of analysis. They, while realizing the anarchy as real-life realists, also emphasize the insights of classical realism and therefore call them "neoclassic "(Moshirzadeh, 129: 2013). The key presupposition of this theory is that "in a complex world, no meaning theory can be true at all times, and no policy can be right for all situations.

The most important task of the experts is to determine in which conditions, in which different theories of discovering the causal relationships are important, to provide a basis for describing policies that are most likely to be effective. neoclassic realism, based on this belief, tries to use useful variables in other theories to explain events or to reject their significance based on objective events; however, it still maintains itself to the realism paradigm, and despite critiques of explanatory power Realism, especially after the failure of neo-realism in the anticipation of the end of the Cold War, still maintains realism. (Salimi, Ebrahimi, 16: 2014) The neoclassic realism approach in response to these allegations blended the classical realist elements with non-realism. On the one hand, and the anarchy's influence on the behavior of states, with the assumption that the "anarchy international system" of foreign policy options and choices is independent of the

systemic variables. In other words, these goals and ambitions of the foreign policy of countries are preceded by their relative material power, but on the other hand, like classical realism, the influence of the characteristics of countries and variables on the level of a single unit on the behavior of states is considered. (Haghshenas. 65: 2013).

The neoclassic realism examines the central role of the state and tries to explain how and under what conditions the internal characteristics of countries are between their decision-makers' assessments of international threats and opportunities and their foreign policy. So, the goal of reforming the theory of neo-realism by adding intermediary variables, such as the structure of the international system, does not mean that it can explain the foreign policy and its behavior in the sense of the distribution of power and the level of external threats alone. But also a combination of international constraints and opportunities, the level and extent of foreign threats, and the opportunities and limitations of domestic foreign policy behavior. In the sense that the definition and definition of stabilization and change in the distribution of power and threats and external conditions have a decisive role in determining the response of the countries to them (Firoozabadi Dehghani, 93: 2011). The neoclassic realism as a foreign policy theory affecting the relative power of the state in the international system (as an independent variable) through the structure of government and perceptions, understanding, and estimates of decision-makers from the relative strength of the country (as a mediator variable) on foreign policy and strategic behavior of countries in the international system as a dependent variable). (Firoozabadi Dehghani, 93: 2011). According to some scholars, a more classicist realism is a realist theory of foreign policy.

While the theory of international politics seeks to explain international phenomena, the theory of foreign policy seeks to explain why behaviors? To achieve such a goal, neo-realism, due to deliberate explanation of causes, is too inflexible and realistic, such as liberal theory and other theories of domestic politics, is

too specific, and for this reason, the explanation of international behaviors and the drawing of a vision of the future require a more developed theory Which can include the system agent and the inside surface of both. To this end, the neoclassic realism breaks out the general view of systematic theories and is in search of the internal mechanisms of the units and the reason for the appearance of certain behaviors and events, and therefore, the case. Neoclassical realism, meanwhile, is an attempt to systemize a wide variety of realistic views. While acknowledging the complexity of the world of international relations and reflecting events as a reflection of diverse factors, it introduces this diversity into a theoretical study and, based on that, identifies reforms for other realistic theories (Salimi, Ebrahimi, 17: 2014).

## **II. Internal Factors Affecting the Competition**

Basically, foreign policy is the continuation and sequencing of the domestic policy of the countries, which includes the fundamental principles and objectives pursued the national interests of the countries, and the elites active in the field of foreign policy, pursue and provide these goals as a leader of their activities and movements in the field of foreign policy. (Aghaei, Ahmadian, 2: 2009). Until the twentieth century, many theorists in the field of international relations, especially the theoretical look of realism, considered foreign policy to be completely separate from the internal affairs of the countries, and viewed the international situation of each of the actors in the world as billiards, and the interpretation of domestic politics, like the box Black was thought to be, but with the advent of developments and theories of decision making and the changing conditions of the international system, the influence of policies and internal factors on the theorists was apparent. The internal influential factors that can be mentioned are economic power, geopolitical and geostrategic position, decision-making bodies, and government structure, but these are affected by material factors and can be referred to as intangible factors such as identity, culture, ideology.

### III. Domestic Material Factors

**Government structure:** Structuralisms' are one of the major think tanks in the field of political science and international relations, which after the Second World War, and especially since the 1960s, their thoughts have found a special place in the issues of social development and social renewal. Proponents of this intellectual movement believe that they are in a state of instability and instability to examine the status of governments and to realize that governments have firmness and stability. It is imperative to pay attention to the socio-political structures governing society. In the opinion of the structuralisms' of each society, various constructions and contexts are formed, and on this basis the relations governing the way exchanges and interactions between these textures and, in other words, different structures of society, indicate the strength or weakness of that society. The Saudi government is in fact a kind of royal and tribal government in which the king has the loyalty of various tribes and tribal chiefs always obey his commands. The government in this country is a hereditary inheritance based on the custom of the eldest son of King Abdul Aziz of the Saudi family (Zeraatpisheh, 2012: 112-111).

According to the classification of political systems, the political system of Saudi Arabia, based on the ideas of a Western thinker named John Blundell and based on his criteria, has a conservative political system, in which both the king rule and reign, the legitimacy of the system to the rights of God is the king and the ruler of the Faith, which of course has religious beings. This system is very limited in terms of political participation and is in the ranks of authoritarian regimes (Zeraatpisheh, 114: 2012). In the structure of the distribution of power in Saudi Arabia, the royal family is the first and foremost group. In addition to the Al Saud family, one of the critical forces influencing Saudi politics and government is ulama(Religious scholars) or religious leaders, tribes are other forces that are in the power structure in Saudi Arabia and are considered an important element, Saudi Arabia has

had a latent tribal-based structure. The main tribes in this country, which include the eight main tribes and at least fifteen sub-tribes, are among the most influential power groups in the traditional economy, which are considered to be Saudi Arabia's most important and influential families. However, it should be noted that power in Saudi Arabia is based on traditional patrimonialism, authoritarian, and patriarchal (Al-Rasheed, 2005: 189). The nature of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the structure of government, and the bureaucracy play a decisive role in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since the Islamic Republic of Iran is a system based on the rule of law, the leader plays a decisive role in foreign policy. Therefore, Iran is a semi-parliamentary, semi-presidential, and dual-pronged state, because part of the executive branch is exercised by the leadership and is composed of three distinct powers. Also, there are other pillars, such as the Expediency Council, and others that are effective in foreign policy. There are, of course, several political, military, security, and economic agents in the country that influence foreign policy (Qaziyani, 2015: 41).

Generally, the conditions for the establishment of two sovereignty and the structure of the sovereignty and the degree of dependence of nations and systems show significant differences between the two countries. It is clear that there is a set of fundamental differences between the structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the most important of which is that the constitution of Iran is not a gift from the king, but following the popular revolution of Iran by choosing the founding council for the drafting of the law A fundamental and then democratic referendum has been put in place to prove it, contrary to the Saudi constitution, which was issued as a gift from Fahad after 90 years of rule. In explaining the competition between the two actors, in particular in a certain region, some elements are very influential in determining the foreign policy behavior of two rival actors. One of the most significant and influential factors in the foreign policy behavior of countries is political system and

government structure. In the region of the Middle East, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been trying to target conservative political systems in the region due to the revolutionary nature that precedes global and regional behavior, and in this respect, Saudi Arabia has an old system and Also, in the new era of states, an individual as the supreme authority cannot control all matters in the position of the king. In the same strategy and based on the revolutionary nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and one of the basic principles of the Iranian revolution, the issuance of revolution to The other points are among the Middle East countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran is trying to model in this regard, not only some of the supporters of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the Shiites in the countries of the region who try to dominate the Islamic Republic of Iran's governing structure in their own countries but also some of the group Educated and new generations in the countries of the region, especially in Saudi Arabia, are demanding a change in the political order and the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia.

This is under pressure from the conservative political system of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is trying to show that the royal structure and the conservative system of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are a good way to run the country in the Middle East. For this reason, it explains the reasons for maintaining political stability. On the one hand, this kind of government system is an indigenous example and is followed by patterns and processes of governance past, and most people in these areas are familiar with this kind of rule, and on the other hand, the conservative Saudi system against a Pan Arabism is Ba'athist and other radical groups, which is a source of motivation in Saudi Arabia by which Saudi government maintains itself as a constant political power over the pressure of foreign groups, including the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Diansae & Yurtaev.2017: 85-84). At the end, the result is that the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the bases for the issuance of the revolution, seeks to increase its influence over the other countries of the



region; and the opposition groups of the political system of the countries of the region are in the same position as the Islamic Republic of Iran and try to have the power to overthrow the political system of the country and this is a manifestation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's attempt to represent its political system into other regional systems and political systems. The efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran are in opposition to the efforts of Saudi Arabia, for these reasons there have been competition between the two countries in the region.

**Economic power:** The energy economy is considered a strategic topic in international relations literature. Energy is one of the most influential issues in the world community's struggles, the country's efforts to save and conserve its energy are abundant and do nothing to reduce the extent to which many scholars, wars and unrest in the Middle East originate from the existence of rich energy resources, in particular, Oil and gas are known in this region. (Mottaghi et al., 2015: 5). Energy sources are the key elements for government power, with each other having a greater government resource. Of course, energy resources are capacities that, if a government can extract and use it properly, the government power will increase. Looking at energy sources as the material elements of power, according to what scholars have said, will lead to the speculation that energy resources in the field of foreign relations should be analyzed using two theories of realism and idealism (Shirkhani, Mohajeripour, 2012: 4). Saudi Arabia's economy is largely based on oil, with oil sales and the resulting revenues affecting many domestic and foreign policies and economic programs. Saudi Arabia holds about 25% of the world's crude oil resources and has the largest capacity to produce and exploit these resources (Masihi E Kuhestani, 2013: 85). Saudi Arabia is a single-state product that generates its oil revenue. The economy of this country is structurally linked to the world capitalist system (Rahmanian, 2015: 87). Saudi Arabia is definitely important to the world economy because of its dominant position in oil affairs. The kingdom has more than a quarter of the

world's most proven oil reserves and is the largest world's oil producer (Cappelen&Choudhury, 2000:10).

The economic structure of Saudi Arabia is based on the production and sale of oil. In this country, oil dollars are centered on economic and political orientations. Saudi Arabia's economic system was largely based on the trade and revenues from the hajj's journey to the country over the past decade, but in recent decades the decisive economic movement has been able to transform the face of society (Rahmanian, 2015: 87). Saudi Arabia's oil revenues are very impressive compared to other oil companies in the region, due to the high oil production in the country. As Saudi Arabia has always been the world's leading oil producer in the last decades of the 20th century, It has begun efforts to reduce its dependence on oil during last two decades, which has been successful since the trade, agriculture, and especially industry sectors have gradually become the country's economy (Asadi, 2011: 4-263). Saudi Arabia's economic structure is very fragile due to its dependence on oil, as all other economies activities, including industrial, service, and commerce are dependant on the state of oil (Zaraatpisheh, 2005: 279). The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a Saudi competitor, has an almost identical structure and economic resources, so that the economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a single product based on foreign exchange earnings due to the extraction and export of oil. Therefore, the most important economic activities in the Islamic Republic of Iran are: The oil industry (Asadi, 2011).

The Islamic Republic of Iran holds the second place in the world for the reserves of natural gas after the Russian Federation. Of course, apart from major oil and gas reserves, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the only Gulf state Whose non-oil minerals like its vast hydrocarbon is of great importance. In another perspective, it should be emphasized that Iran has a special position since It belongs two main sources of energy in the world, the Gulf, and the Caspian Sea. However, agriculture in the economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is not desirable

considering the potentialities of the country and the world standards, and it does not make a significant contribution (Asadi, 226:2011). The Islamic Republic inherited the characteristics of the socio-economic system based on oil and the oil status of Iran in the division of the international economic instrument. While in the first years after the revolution, the new elites attempted to hand over Iran's economy and trade system, the war with Iraq effectively ruled out opportunities for the removal of the economy from the extreme dependence on oil, and thus the prospect of a change in Iran's relations with the system International capitalism is out of reach (Hayne Bush, Ehshamami, 2011: 505). The economic approach of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on huge energy resources, is being pursued competitively in the region. This approach is important for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, which suggests that both countries having rich economic resources, including energy, will determine the kind of relationship with other countries, including the world's top powers, in terms of their goals and desires. Saudi Arabia, for example, is considered a major player in the global oil market, and the country's most important geopolitical component has 25% of the world's resources. Saudi Arabia can produce up to 12.5 million barrels of oil per day and thus play a decisive role in the global oil market. Average daily oil production of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia and the member states of the brand Says Saudi Arabia alone has more than 30% of OPEC production, but the Islamic Republic's share of OPEC production in October 2016 is only about 11% (Hassantash.2014: 9-10). However, Saudi Arabia's role in reducing oil prices was one of the policies that emerged as part of the regional competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia in terms of economy and energy. Saudi Arabia's oil policy was the economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but the Islamic Republic seems to have suffered less damage than Saudi Arabia. The Islamic Republic of Iran's economy was accustomed to the lack of oil revenues due to international sanctions. After the

conclusion of an agreement on the payment of blocked money, Iran entered the Iranian economy, and with the gradual removal of barriers to trade with other countries, Iran's oil exports rose and the republic Islamic Iran could also expand in other non-oil fields (industry, tourism, and transit) (Hassantash.2014: 9-10).

The competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia has always been related on their economic terms since both countries are known as single-country, but the important point in discussing the economic competitiveness of these two countries is the discussion of renewable resources such as natural gas that the Islamic Republic Iran is one of the main holders of this energy source in the world. The Islamic Republic of Iran is ranked as the second in the world concerning gas resources after Russia, which creates a competitive advantage for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Because today, according to the Paris agreement, as well as the climate change debate, most countries are moving towards replacing renewable sources rather than fossil fuels. Natural gas is a clean fuel that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, provides a solution to environmental challenges, and provides a road map for a sustainable future. It has essentially changed the global energy equation, where oil has been challenged by natural gas. Some non-OPEC actors, like Russia, dominate the market (gas), and it is anticipated that a cartel such as OPEC that can regulate the gas market is expected to be realized by establishing the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). An international organization was created to plan and establish policies based on long-term contracts, market supply for producers, sustainable supply for consumers, and infrastructure maintenance. (Vrushal.Ghoble, 2017: 83). Gas resources of the Caspian Sea are also one of the main sources of energy in the Islamic Republic. In this regard, the gas sources of the Islamic Republic of Iran and some Central Asian countries, such as Turkmenistan, could shake Saudi Arabia's oil in the Eurasian region. Finally, the various routes of gas sales to the Islamic Republic of Iran can be summarized as follows: (1). The

Anatolian pipeline route from Turkey to the European Union (2). The peace pipeline route, which moves from Pakistan to India and China, and ultimately (3). The countries of Arizona are working through Turkmenistan. The policies of Iran's natural gas exports to other parts of the world could create a variety of energy policies and outperform Saudi Arabia's competitive energy markets.

**Military power:** Within the framework of the military power, military and military equipment, military personnel, leadership, military bases, military techniques, troop movements, and logistics facilities should be taken into consideration. The correct and accurate assessment of the elements constituting military power Concerns this subject that foreign policymakers need to consider their ability to influence the structure of other political units to achieve their goals and provide their own national interests (Qawam, 2011: 92).

Although the Saudi government's desire to assign national defense to the domination of the international forces, it is important to understand the historical progress of the armed forces, which is a sign of the larger political calculations of the ruling family in Saudi Arabia. Saudi elites want a strong army to dominate their neighbors to avoid regional competition, but they are not strong enough to deal with this issue. The armed forces are divided between sectarian and tribal groups and this force is not possible without the help of the foreign kingdom (Royal Saudi land force history [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org)). The kingdom's military hierarchy is sensitive to changes related to the royal structure, however; apart from the Ministry of Defense and the National Guard of Saudi Arabia, overseeing the four major branches of the Royal Army, the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Defense Forces, directly under the command of the court Royal and crown prince. With all these interpretations, the number of military personnel in Saudi Arabia is about 205,000 to 227,000 personnel in the forces under the control of the king (Cordesman, 2; 2009).

Military power is one of the main components of the foreign

policy behavior of countries towards others; that is why a country with great military power in the region tries to play an active role in terms of military power, competition, and threats against other powers of the region. For nearly two decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia have been competing, and both regional actors are trying to establish a balance of power with each other. The military rivalries of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran can be highlighted in two main directions: the first is the purchase of military weapons, which Saudi Arabia collects a large number of dollars each year for military weapons, Saudi authorities have expressed their aim for buying military weapons the Islamic Republic of Iran's excessive influence in the region and the possibility of dealing with the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on the import of Saudi Arabia's advanced weapons that the weapons transfer database will bring a long list of weapons imported by Saudi Arabia in 2013-2017. Since these weapons are generally advanced, Saudi Arabia is well armed in the Gulf region because of its modern equipment. Just a few examples to illustrate the latest types of weapons that are crucial to assessing Saudi Arabia's ability to fight in Yemen, while at the same time making domestic military maneuvers, maintaining military power on the border with Iraq, confronting the Islamic Republic of Iran is militarily considering the possibility of deploying its army in Syria, which is of great importance to Saudi Arabia (Wezeman, 2018: 14 December). Since early 2015, when Saudi Arabia leads coalition leadership in a military campaign against rebel forces in Yemen, the intervention has included air strikes, land operations, and air and sea siege of Yemen. Instead of a quick victory or conflict resolution, the struggle continues, and hostile parties have been accused of violating international humanitarian law. The United Nations and non-governmental organizations accuse Saudi Arabia of widespread and systematic attacks on civilian targets. Saudi Arabia also has military conflicts, including support for insurgent

groups in Syria, the use of military aid to influence Lebanon and the fight against Shiite minority groups in the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia, or even one a direct clash between Saudi Arabia and its allies. A high level of military planning in Saudi Arabia needs analysis to understand how this will help the country's ability and willingness to become a military force in regional conflicts and tensions. The second issue, that military competition of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, is the proletarian wars that can be referred to Yemen as the most important pro-war with the passing of Syria. Saudi Arabia has participated in two global and regional alliances for the fight against terrorism (in the global coalition) over the past four years and for the Houci and Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen to fight with. The fate of the coalition was so unsuccessful that, according to American circles, ISIL's proliferation of influence was also culminating. But the alliance that was formed on the initiative of Saudi Arabia for the war against Yemen has become one of the most humorous treaties of the world. The Pakistani government has declined to form the coalition, with the Egyptian government contributing to the provision of refugee services and several warplanes, despite having received \$ 5 billion in the form of a strengthening of its banking system.

The Sudan, which has the largest share of its membership in the coalition, did not even survive the preservation of several harbors and freebies in Aden. The United Arab Emirates, which had taken dozens of deaths in the ranks of high commanders following a military strike on their command center in the outskirts of Aden, gradually returned troops to the country. This is the fate of Saudi Arabia's major military alliance. Saudi Arabia has also stated that the presence of Iranian forces and Hezbollah fighters and Russian forces is a reason for the difficulty of war in Syria. The third factor is the existence of paramilitary groups in the region, in which Iran's power is much higher than Saudi Arabia due to strong militias including Lebanon's Hezbollah, Hashad Sha'bi in Iraq, Ansar al -Allah in Yemen, which reflects

the influence of Iran in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has been trying to equip Sunni radical groups in the region with dollars spent on oil and ideological views but based on the international approach and the process of radicalization of these militant groups of international alliances to eliminate these militia-backed groups the Saudi side has been formed. These include the ISIS, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda.

**Geopolitical position:** The foreign policy of neighboring countries is severely affected by one another, with joint geographic features, an area of regional convergence infrastructure. In such regional structures, if there are multiple poles claiming power, the most competitive among the poles in the flow has a relative geopolitical balance, and if this competition deepens and prevents regional macro-materials, the region will face a lot of challenges and its effective functions will be weakened (Hafez Nia, Romina, 11: 2017). The competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia has been struggling over the past decades. One of the most important competitive factors that will be mentioned in this study is the geopolitical rivalry of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, in which the geopolitical competition of these two countries can be examined based on two important issues. One of the important axes of the geopolitical position of the two countries in the region, as mentioned above is the important geopolitical identity of the Islamic Republic of Shiite and Saudi Arabian Sunnis.

**Geopolitical Identity:** Each of the sects based on Islam has different intellectual and ideological centers. These centers provide the intellectual and religious backing of their believers. Since these centers may be in the geographical space of rival countries, they will have geopolitical action. Each country of Iran and Saudi Arabia has geopolitical interests within each other's borders that these geopolitical interests provide the basis for interference in the internal affairs of each other. Sunni sector of Iran is regarded as a geopolitical interest of Saudi Arabia, and the



Shiites sector and Mecca in Saudi Arabia is the geopolitical interests for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Another geopolitical position is the identity between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Eastern Mediterranean, where there has always been disagreement and competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. In this region, due to the existence of Lebanon and parts Of Syria, where Shiites live and in history, they have also had cultural and commercial ties with Iran, and have always been in favor of Iran because of the presence of pro-Iranian groups, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Assad government in Syria, between two Regional power (the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia) has been rivaled. This geopolitical rivalry of identity does not just end in the eastern Mediterranean (Lebanon and part of Syria), and there are other competitive spaces such as western Iraq and eastern Syria, northern Yemen, the Persian Gulf (Bahrain and the three islands).

Of course, it can be said in a brief statement that, based on the different identities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the geopolitical identity of the identity of each region that exists alongside Shiites is considered to be the geopolitical code for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, both countries have an inseparable approach to real or imagined interests in space and periphery. This approach provides for the persistence of conflict and a constant competition and challenge between the two countries (Hafez Nia, Romina, 1396: 18 -14) The Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia have been more and more geopolitical in their competition than at any other time. At the beginning of Saudi Arabia's interpretation, after the Arab Spring and its associated instability, it was understood by the threat, but the Islamic Republic of Iran Take an opportunity (Diansae & Yurtaev.2017: 85-86).

**Identity:** Identity is a series of interpersonal features that are rooted in the actor's understanding, which is affected by the fact that other activists represent the actor in the same way (Went, 2013: 326-325). The national identity is capable of influencing

through various forms of foreign policy and foreign affairs. First, through the influence of norms, the identity variables of society that are produced and reproduced in a two-way process in society are the form and nature of the political system that determines which characteristics can form the identity of that society.

Foreign diplomacy in Saudi Arabia, like many other countries, is affected by domestic features. The first feature of Islamic Sharia is the Arab-Islamic identity. Saudi Arabia's diplomacy, like many other countries, is affected by domestic features. The first feature of Islamic Sharia is the Arab-Islamic identity. Saudi Arabia is a good example of the influence of the internal components of foreign policy. Cases such as baptism protection, the land of revelation, and the world's largest oil producer have all contributed to pursuing Saudi Arabia's policy based on a particular identity (Ebrahimi, 6: 2015). Saudi Pan-Islamism, led by Saudi Arabia, to overcome national-territorial differences and the unification of various entities in the region, has become an element of divergence and disagreement. Saudi Pan-Islamism, as a great ideology, is a controversial issue with rival identities such as Pan-Islamic Shi'a and the brotherhood of Pan-Islamism (Darwich, 2014, 5). In the case of the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we can say that the Iranian national identity is composed of three distinct layers. Iranian identity from the beginning of Iranian history to the coming of Islamic states in Iran, and from this particular time point, the norms and characteristics of many positive and negative characteristics have been inherited to us by Iranians, and the scope of these norms has been drawn up to the present time. (Parastar, 013: 141). The second layer is the Islamic stratum, which, with the norms of oppression and protection of the oppressed, the expedient and the united nation, is also one of the sources of the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has become a kind of political ideology, and in addition to the formation of a specific identity for the Islamic Republic of Iran, moral and special value for judging policies have established and determined the actions and

behaviors of this country with other countries (Mirbagheri, 2004: 558).

The third layer forms the Iranian identity triangle on a modern and modern level, with norms such as international law, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for international law, which is mainly of a legal and international nature. The historical and collective memory of Iranians seems to have played a key role in adopting this strategy. The reason for this statement by Imam Khomeini at the beginning of the victory of the revolution was Iran's dependence on the superpowers and the domination system that had reached its highest level during the reign of Pahlavi (Parastar, 2013:144). The discourse of the Islamic Revolution of Iran made a new step towards the spread of the wave of social revolutions within the framework of Islamic discourse. In this way, the discourses and norms underlying the Islamic Republic of Iran are liberation and justice, the fight against oppression and corruption, anti-American and anti-Israeli anti-Semitism. But on the other hand, the main norms of Saudi foreign policy are always the leadership of the Muslim world and the mission of the universal publication of Islam based on Sunni religion. In the Persian Gulf region, these norms are based on attempts to lead the region, the unity of the Arabs of the region, and their leadership, preventing the Shiites and revolutionary centers and pro-Islamic movements of Iran from gaining power and limiting the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. From a security perspective, Saudi Arabia also emphasizes a security order linked to the West, especially the United States.

Saudi Arabia and the United States have common interests in controlling the Islamic Republic of Iran, ensuring the free flow of the Gulf oil, stability in Yemen and the Horn of Africa, and eliminating the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran among the Arabs. In the whole identity of the Iranian political system, Iranian identity is Islamic, Islamic revolutionary, and non-aligned Shiite, while in contrast to the identity of Saudi Arabia, it is an Arab identity, Sunni Salafi Islamic, conservative, and western-

oriented Islam. Identifies these identities with the definition of "self" and the perception of "the other" and defines the interests, preferences, and roles of each actor. These identities in each era of relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia have been influenced by internal, regional, and international conditions in a prominent or diminutive manner or different from the "other" to play a role in relations (Samii Isfahani et al. 2015: 11-13)

**The ruling ideology:** Concerning the theoretical background of the ideology of Saudi Arabia, we can say that the turning point of this ideology is Wahhabism. Wahhabism was founded by Mohammad bin Abdul Wahhab in the 12th century as one of the Islamic sects, with the help of Ibn Taymiyyah and others in the seventh and eighth centuries of the Lunar ages (Jamshidi rad, 2: 2010). The Saudi government is one of the Middle Eastern identity states, the government in Saudi Arabia established a political-religious system in Saudi Arabia based on the Wahhabism tradition, and on the one hand, a new impetus for political centralization was provided because the importance of jihad in the teachings of Wahhabi, It allowed the occupation of Islamic lands. The expansion of Wahhabism, the removal of Saudi Arabia from non-Orthodox religious forms, and the empowerment of Sharia within the Arab community were the main demands of the Wahhabi movement. Wahhabism provided Saudi leadership with a new instrument that was essential for the coherence and development of Saudi rule. Indeed, Saudi leaders, using this religious tradition, provided an ideological justification explaining why they should rule it? This ideological justification is used as the main source of legitimacy and its claim to power, and the root cause of their sovereignty is the same religious thought (Ataee & Mansouri Moghadam, 2013: 136).

in Iran and with the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution led by Imam Khomeini in 1979, it led to the emergence of an independent and new political system in the international system called the Islamic Republic of Iran, the identity of which, the most

important foundational meanings of it, the norms in culture, the Islamic religion has been emphasizing the Shiite element. These norms led to the emergence of a "revolutionary-Islamic" identity for the country in the international system. Ms. Mushirzadeh said: "the identity of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in addition to safeguarding the country's independence and national interests, includes transnational responsibilities and duties in the framework of numerous transnational roles and a military value and judgment or a new intellectual form has created" (Moshirzadeh, 2010: 156).

However, it is concluded that Islamic ideology and discourse influence in several ways the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. First, ideology plays a very important role in determining and defining the national identity and national role of Iran. Second, Islamic ideology and discourse define national interests and goals through the identification and national role of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic of Iran has ideological and Islamic interests, such as preserving the existence of Islam and Shi'ism, preserving religious and revolutionary values, and defending Muslims. Third, the ideology creates a certain intellectual form, in which the realities, messages, and references of the external environment and other countries are within that context. Fourth, Islamic ideology provides a specific picture of the present and future of the world by defining the main stages of historical development and socio-political development, according to which it outlines a certain perspective and horizon for this country (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2009: 29-22). At the moment, the issue of leadership of the Islamic world, on the one hand, and the dispute over the interpretation of Islam, has been the most influential factor in the relations between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Following the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the developments in Iraq after Saddam, which led to the power of the Shi'ites in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states became more concerned with the region, as the developments in Iraq strengthened the position of the Shiites in

the region.

Each of the two countries carries a dynamic ideology. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Shi'a political and revolutionary ideology has quickly rebelled against Saudi-led Sunni Wahhabi ideology, in which both ideologies questioned the legitimacy of each other. Both of these countries are considered as two possible contenders for this type of ideology. This Focalism of the two countries, by emphasizing the other influential variables, has increased contradictory action (Hafeznia, 1396: 5-4). Saudi Arabia considers the Islamic Republic of Iran as the main source of instability in the region and believes that the Islamic Republic of Iran is seeking to establish a Shiite crescent to dominate Sunni Arabs in the region.

These two countries, especially after the Islamic Revolution, have always been the two rivals in the Persian Gulf region, whose ideological rivalry is at the core of their rivalry in geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economical areas. Relations between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been tense in recent years due to major political developments in the Middle East. Saddam's fall for Saudi Arabia was the end of Sunnis' dominance over Iraq and the power of the Shiites and the promotion of the regional status of Iran in the region. The upgrading of the regional status of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the revolutionary developments in the Arab world and Iran's nuclear deal has also led Saudi leaders to realize that the regional power and influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran has increased and the balance of regional power is changing in favor of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## **Conclusion**

This article examines the effective factors of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran and answers the question of the hypothesis that there are effective domestic factors in the competition between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. It can be said that the internal factors affecting the

competitiveness of these two actors include material factors, such as the structure of government, geopolitical position, military power, and economic power, as well as non-material factors that include identity, ideology. Based on the political order in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the basic principles of competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia can be summarized as follows: The Islamic Republic of Iran, following the principles of the issuance of the revolution, has more influence over other countries of the region; and opposition groups in the regional political system have been working together with the Islamic Republic of Iran and are trying to overthrow their country's political system, and this effect of the Islamic Republic of Iran's efforts to present a political system itself to other political systems and political systems in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran is opposed to the efforts of Saudi Arabia and this has created a rivalry between the two countries in the region. Each of them, based on its political order, tried to prove its effectiveness and also the Islamic Republic of Iran following the issuance of a desirable political order, and Saudi Arabia seeks to preserve royal and conservative systems. This is the most important issue in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalry about the political structure. This kind of competition is an obvious example of economic competition and even ideological and identity competition in the region. The efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia to surpass each other in the regional arena based on internal factors provide a broader field of activity for both actors.

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