

Cultural Foundations of the Iran-Saudi Arabia Conflict

Morteza Nourmoahammadi * - Assistant Professor of International Relations, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

Anahita Seifi - Assistant Professor of Women Studies, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

Received: 06/06/2019

Accepted: 12/12/2019

Abstract

Since 1950s, Iran and Saudi Arabia have considered each other as a rival and competition between two countries includes a wide range of issues. This field of competition along with a number of material and spiritual factors has caused conflicts in the relations of Tehran-Riyadh. Owing to this fact, a series of perceptions have occupied their minds which can be called a discourse. The discourse consisted of a set of factors such as religion, ethnicity and the nature of the political system. This research seeks to study the role and position of culture in advent of conflicts in Iran and Saudi Arabia's relations. The methodology of the article is based on data analysis and content analysis. The results of the research indicate that the dualization of Arab/Ajam, Shiite-Sunni antagonism, and the conservative/revolutionary approaches are the cultural foundations of conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. These findings show that an increase in cultural interactions, especially through non-governmental organizations and informal channels can reform perceptions and decrease tensions. Iran and Saudi Arabia can improve relations through emphasis on common grounds e.g. common beliefs, common interests in confrontation terrorism and stability in region.

Keywords: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Culture, Conflict, Otherness.

* E-mail : mnourmohammadi@atu.ac.ir

1. Introduction

Iran and Saudi Arabia have always been considered as two influential powers in the Middle East region and each one based on reasons, considers themselves the superior role in regional developments. According to their capacities and qualities, Iran and Saudi Arabia are considered as the two significant and decisive countries of the region (Alvandi, 2012: 369-370). Iran and Saudi Arabia have unique strategic and geopolitical features that are prominent among the countries in the region.

However, the relationships between the two countries since the first Pahlavi have always had ups and downs. Since the beginning of the revolution, Saudi Arabia has been suspicious of the Islamic Republic about attempting to spread its "Shiite revolution and anti-West ideology" (Al-Rasheed, 2018: 239). Practically, two years after the Islamic revolution, Saudi Arabia stepped up for countering and eliminating worries of the existence of a new Iran in the region by creating the GCC. Each two states have a rivalry over their cultures and identities. By resorting to cultural tools, Riyadh and Tehran attempt to convince domestic and international public opinion to achieve their preferred interests and national security.

Since foreign policy is considered as a continuation of domestic politics, and international relations is also defined as a set of cross-border flow of relations, including cultural relations, the culture is stretched towards foreign policy and international relations. Governments, people and leaders of countries are affected by their specific cultures that are reflecting their different values, interests and ambition. The incorrect assessment of these differences leads to inappropriate impression, misunderstandings, and incorrect judgment (Johnson, 1995). So that today, not only do most countries try to formulate a cultural policy and incorporate organizations such as affiliation or culture advisories within their foreign ministry but also religious and cultural factors play a significant role in the general orientation of their foreign policy.

Accordingly, the cultural elements of Iran and Saudi Arabia have had a great influence on the quality of their relationship. The conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia are an ideological and cultural encounters. Which has taken place between Iran as a country with culture and norms that have affected its foreign policy and Saudi Arabia which sees the cultural and ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat. Hence,

the current research seeks to look into the role and position of culture in conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

2. Methodology

The main question in this article is about cultural foundations of conflict in Iran and Saudi Arabia's relations. The methodology of the article is descriptive – analytical and based on data analysis and content analysis. Research hypothesis is that dualization of Arab/Ajam, Shiite-Sunni antagonism, and the conservative/ revolutionary approaches are the cultural foundations of conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia

3. Theoretical framework: Discourse theory

In this study, we use discourse theory to analyze the cultural foundations of the Iran-Saudi conflict. Discourse is a semantically constructed system which in which a particular identity is reproduced. The basic idea of discourse analysis centers on the notion is that “all objects and actions are meaningful” (Howarth & Stavakakis, 2000: 2). Based on discourse analysis, all social practices such as political phenomena are contextual and relational, depending on the social context where they take place (Howarth & Stavakakis, 2000: 4). Discourse creates a shared way in which people make sense of social reality within a given culture.

In Laclau and Mouffe' view, discourse is a scope in which a set of signs becomes a network and their meaning is fixed there. Every sign which enters this network and is cemented to other signs by the action of articulation is a one time. The meaning of these symbols is the result of their difference from each other. The meaning of the symbols within a discourse is fixed partially around a central point. The central point is a significant and distinct symbol from which other symbols become regulated and articulated to each other. The fixation of the meaning of a symbol within a discourse takes place through rejection of other possible meanings of that symbol (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 111). Accordingly, the discourse reduces the possible meanings.

This theory emphasizes on the role of language in representation as well as in the construction of social reality. According to this theory, reality is only accessible through language. In fact, the world is the result of discourses, and things and phenomena are achieved only through discourse. Change in discourse causes change in social world and conflict in discourse leads to

change and reproduction of social reality (Hosseinizadeh, 2004: 189). Discourse theory focuses on the meaningful role of social actions and ideas in political life and assesses the semantic systems and discourses that human perceptions of their particular role in society and politics are in a historical time period. According to discourse theory, all social changes are the result of semantic conflicts between discourses. Discourses constantly try to retain the meaning of "insider" and reject the meaning of "outsider." In this view, semantic domination of public opinion is the best and most effective way of exercising power. Through semantic strategies, discourses compete to attract public opinion and other social transformations are subject to semantic conflict (Soltani, 2004: 73).

According to Laclau and Mouffe, there is no distinction between discourse and non-discourse phenomena. Production, reproduction and changing the meaning are political actions. Politics has a general meaning and refers to a state in which we continuously construct the society in a way that rejects other ways (Jorgenson & Philips, 2002: 36). In fact, politics is organizing society in a specific way so that, it rejects other ways, and different discourses may challenge and conflict with each other over the organization of society with their own method.

Therefore, to form a discourse, elements, signs, and phenomena by articulation of action create a constructed whole together (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105); any action that communicates between dispersed elements in such a way that the identity and meaning of these elements are corrected and modified as a result of this act, is called Articulation (Hosseinizadeh, 2004: 189). They are like fishing net knots and their meaning is based on "positions based on their differences" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2010: 56).

Articulation is central concepts of discourse analysis by which a discourse can take a hegemonic position in a society. Laclau and Mouffe argue that a discourse originates from articulation. They define articulation as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:105). Articulation of a political discourse centers round a nodal point. Nodal point constructs the core of each discourse. Laclau and Mouffe define nodal points as follows: "any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a center. In fact, other signifiers of a discourse are articulated

around the nodal point. Nodal points, before articulation, were floating signifiers and placed in the field of discursivity. Hence, the meanings of nodal points are partially fixed by articulation in a given social field (Torfing, 1999).

All human entities, including individuals, groups, and states may on the basis of a variety of discourses have various identities. Yet, in some cases, there is a hegemonic discourse that defines the primary or major identity of an actor and in some others, there is no hegemonic discourse and therefore identities become more fluid. As for states, one may say that in cases, it is the international discourse or culture that determines the main identity of a state in its relations with others, while in others, elements of some other discourses (with domestic or regional origins) articulate with the elements of the predominant discourse and even may become the dominant discourse. Discourses by specifying what constitutes the self, define the other potentially as whoever is not identical to the self. Thus, representations of self and other not only impact those who produce them, but also those who are represented. This view leaves space for ongoing struggles over the definitions of society and identity. Different discourses that represent different ways of understanding the social world struggle against each other.

4. Findings

4.1. Cultural Foundations of Iran and Saudi Arabia Conflict

Identity and foreign policy of Iran and Saudi Arabia has been constructed by some important discourses which articulated around the nodal point of revolutionary identity and conservative identity. These discourses give meaning to Saudi Arabia and Iran's foreign policy behavior and and it creates the grounds for conflict between the two countries. In fact, understanding these cultural elements have an effective role in the analysis of conflict between the two countries.

-Shiite-Wahhabi Confrontation

The Shiite Islamism is the most important intellectual and ideological structure that consolidates the national identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Shia element, which forms one of the foundations of Iran's identity, has been mixed up with the culture of the Iranian people as the official religion of Iran and is interspersed and penetrates among all classes (Mottaqizadeh, 2005: 29). Commemoration and recourse to the Imams and

holding celebrations and mournings, and thousands of other signs indicate the role of the Shia element in Iranians culture.

In particular, the political system of Islamic republic of Iran is also the Shia government and by using the norms of this school it regulates its relations with the world system (Turkmeni Azar, 2011: 17). Being Shia in the Muslim world is part of an identity issue that returned to the basis of society and politics in the Arab world and Islam. The issue of Shia identity as a key element in political and social matters has double significance, but when it becomes a factor in determining the attitudes of non-Shias, it becomes extremely important (Fuller & Franke, 2005: 37-38). In general, this religion apart from political discussions in history has played the role of identifying various populations. One of the most important elements in Iranian identity is the growth of the Shia religion among the people of this land, and Iranians with a tendency towards Shia religion have been able to differentiate themselves religiously from the Arabs (Badiee Azandehie & Kiani, 2014: 90-92).

In contrast to the Shia element, the "Wahhabism" element is also one of the important components of Saudi Arabia culture. In Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism has played a prominent role not only in shaping the individual's private and collective identities but also in consolidating its national values, as religious norms and practices are encouraged, promoted and even enforced by the state (Bunzel, 2018:193). This element relies on doctrines and attitudes that are different from the Shia element ,for examples ,the way of Islamic Governance as well as differences in religion and social rituals that are the central point of the Shi'a issue ,is a set of stereotypical beliefs in Sunni traditional thought (Fuller & Franke, 2005: 40). From this point of view, Shi'as has been an unfortunate split in Islam. In this stereotypical description, the Shiites are a distinct religious group whose Islam is cognizant and suspicious.

These deep and fundamental differences with the entry into the agenda and the foreign policy behavior of countries have been the basis for regulating their relations (Mossalanejad, 2012:7). Wahhabism is the official religion of Saudi Arabia, while not the only pillar in shaping its domestic politics. The Arab rulers, with a pragmatic view of it, seek to reinforce Wahhabism as one of their important strategic-identity pillars (Erickson, 2017). Given Saudi Arabia's shared ethnic and religious characteristics with the region's

Arab nations, it seeks to contain the influence of Iran's Shiite-revolutionary identity in the region. Wahhabism, therefore, transforms Saudi strategies from conservative to aggressive and, by altering the discourse of revolutionary Islam in Iran and even Brotherhood Islam in Egypt, gives new form to Saudi regional strategies and intensifies the identity distinctions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

-Persian Nationalism versus Arabism

Another cultural element of Iran is Persian nationalism and the emphasis on the element of being Iranian as a great civilization. Due to its ancient history and civilization, the Iranian society also has the culture and ideas that distinguishes it from other societies. Accordingly, a sense of historical pride and identification with glory of the Persian Empire, culture and civilization is widespread in today's Iranian people. In other words, the national component of Iranian identity is a production of the feelings of resentment and pride with respect to Arabs (Soltaninejad, 2019: 113).

In fact, the national identity of Iran is an artificial issue that by storytelling has been developed and narrated over time, and then it has been established as a collective memory. This process has been expanded from a folkloric core and consolidated with the help of the imagination and the process of generalization in the form of a nation. Consequently, prejudice has been formed meaning within the context of traditions, history, language, religion, political-social entities and environmental and geographical factors, and some narratives linked this collection (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2016: 3).

On the other hand, the culture of Saudi Arabia has been shaped and consolidated by the 'Arabiat' element. Occurrence of ceremonies and special social behaviors in this land also arises from this element. Racial orientation of Arabs has always played an important role in creating unity among them. Accordingly, the Arabs regard themselves as Sami Race and regard themselves as superior and distinct to Iranians of the Aryan race. Many Arabs have sought to place ethnicity as one of the constituent elements of Arabic ethnicity despite Islam's opposition (Lynch, 2018). Some Arabs believe that before being Muslim, they are Arabs, and Muhammad is Arab before being the Prophet (Mansfield, 2006: 264). Therefore, the two elements of "Iraniat" and "Arabiat" have different foundations and attitudes, which have formed part of the culture of Iran and

Saudi Arabia and set up the culture, policies and their foreign policy behaviors.

-Revolutionary Culture versus Conservative Culture

The Iranian revolution which has a cultural basis, is one of the elements of Iranian culture. Based on this element, many of Iranian's collective and individual attitudes and behaviors can be analyzed. The cultural perspectives of this revolution have played an effective role in the narrative of the identity and "otherness" of Iran. This revolution has caused normative and valuable changes inside and outside of Iran and a paradigmatic change in the structure of Iranian identity (Khajehsarvi, 2011: 78). Furthermore, Islamic Revolution created an independent identity within the framework of the religious revival movement which has been tested in all stages and decisions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the practical arena of post-revolutionary period

This revolution with using a semantic system and the original thinking system, could connect itself to certain historical roots in strong memory, show up as a politically alive alternative and forms a new identity based on religious teachings and values. This process formed the "knowledge system" and the formation of a religious discourse that has emerged as a guideline of action and liberation ideology (Tajik, 2005: 187). Thus, this revolution brought with itself the teachings and ideas that became the source of Iranian culture. This culture has been also the basis of the internal and external policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the teachings of this revolution is the emphasis on the "issuance of the revolution" to the peripheral and non-peripheral cultural environment and tends to spread and expand in the global, regional, homogeneous and heterogeneous cultural arenas. It is from here that the doctrine of issuance the revolution in relation to the foreign policy of the revolutionary government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is of extraordinary importance and has greatly influenced the foreign relations and policy of Iran (Halliday, 1999: 147-148).

In this regard, the issuance of the Islamic Revolution within the framework of revolutionary culture has been defined in the form of explaining and promoting the thoughts and ideas of the Islamic Revolution from the enlightenment and liberation of Muslims and the poorest nations of the world. The concept of the issuance of the revolution means promoting the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, which involves the liberation of others,

a discourse that can inspire other nations to liberate and escape from the structures of domination and suppression at the internal and external levels (Hunter, 2010: 24-29). Because Muslims and poor nation become aware of domestic and international conditions and the desirable situation in these two levels through understanding and recognizing the facts and moments of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, the practical result of this self-consciousness is also the attempt to implement this discourse, which will provide release from the structures of domination and oppression. (Dehghani Firoozabadi & Radfar, 2010: 128-129). Accordingly, the teachings influenced by the Islamic Revolution have become part of the cultural foundations of Iran, which is one of the important and influential elements in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia, in contrast to the revolutionary culture in Iran, there are doctrines that have established conservatism in themselves. These attitudes have created part of the cultural of foundation these countries. From the historical point of view, in Saudi Arabia what has always been stable and will be stable is the rule of the authoritarian culture. It is in the shadow of this culture that the Arab leaders and elites count their status as their "legitimate" rights, and the goal is to maintain the culture of authoritarianism and make it more radical (Al-Rasheed, 2009: 597). In such hereditary systems, monarchy and rule are inseparable elements. Accordingly, these systems are traditional, conservative and the legitimacy of the system returns to the divine rights of monarchy and tribal roots.

Therefore, the cultural context governing this country is different from the cultural environment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the one hand, Iran's culture includes components such as Shi'ism, Iranian, and revolutionary culture, and these elements form the cultural space. On the other hand, the cultural space of Saudi Arabia includes elements such as Sunnis, Arabic, and conservative culture. These differences in the normal state do not create a problem for relations between countries, but when they get out of the ordinary, they cause the emergence and development of fear and cultural tension and have a devastating effect on relations.

4.2. The Development of Cultural Conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia

Cultural elements of Iran and Saudi Arabia are different. This difference in itself and in the normal state cannot be the basis of tension in relations,

especially in cultural relations. But if it comes out of the natural state, it becomes a factor for conflict and confrontation. The cultural elements of Iran have found this situation a factor in the cultural tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This situation is also affected by the meaning given to them by Saudi Arabia and is placed on the brink of security, which has been termed as "offensive antagonism" and considered in their mental space as a corruptive factor of identity and ultimately causes the creation and development conflict.

-Culture as a factor in conflict

Culture in international relations is also a factor in cooperation and a factor in conflict and contrast. Some theories have spoken of culture as a factor in conflict, encounter, confrontation and resistance (various reference). Whether we are speaking about disputes and antagonisms between individuals or nations, "culture" can be considered both as a source of conflict and the means for its resolution. By ignoring culture in the mediation of conflicts, the opportunities for understanding, compassion, and empathy are reduced or negated (Marsella, 2005: 653). Therefore, if countries do not properly express their legacy and cultural achievements today and don't seek to obtain accurate information from the international cultural environment, they will suffer a loss because their illustrations represent their status in the international arena.

Hence, culture can be a major factor in conflict. In the contemporary history of Iran, since the formation of Iran's Safavi, this issue is very evident. The political role of religion in creating a conflict between Iran and the Ottoman and the creation of sectarian tensions, indicates the importance of culture as a factor in conflict. Also, many of the problems between Iran and Saudi Arabia have had cultural roots. Religious differences and claims arising from the emergence of extremist nationalist currents in the Arab world point to the role of culture in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Ahmadi, 2010: 82).

How culture can both act as a conflict factor and cooperation link to another nation is an important issue in foreign policy. In fact, foreign policy is the most important tool for using culture and manifestation of cultural relations and interactions. In other words, the main route of cultural interactions, that is controversial or friendly, depends on the type of foreign policy and how to apply culture and cultural interactions in foreign policy (Ahmadi, 2010:

62-64). On this basis, what most appears from the relation events between Iran and Saudi Arabia is that the cultural foundations of Iran and Saudi Arabia have played a role in conflict and their cultural elements have become meaningful in contradicting each other.

-Securitizing Culture

Cultures can be the basis for cooperation or conflict through the difference they have with each other. As discussed in the previous section, Iran and Saudi culture have caused cultural conflicts due to the differences that they have with each other. Now, when culture plays this role, there is another issue that is the security of culture and cultural security. Cultural security is the most important aspect of national security and is created when people do not feel threatened and insecure in their lifestyle and customs. Cultural security means creating a safe situation, free of any threats and invasions to the religion, thoughts and ethics, customs, beliefs, values, cultural heritage and literary works. According to this definition, cultural security in the objective sense is the lack of threat to cultural heritage and the gained effects and values acquired (Haji Naseri, 2019: 29). In the subjective sense, there is the lack of fear of attacks and assaults that destroy values, customs, traditions, beliefs and ideas

For this reason, one of the issues that play a fundamental role in reducing cultural security and creating cultural challenges is the issue of the security of a country's culture and identity (Salehi Amiri & Mohammadi, 2010: 22). The pursuit of security has always been a good justification for the policies and actions of governments. In this regard, Weaver states that naming something as a matter of security makes it of importance and necessity, and legitimizing the use of special criteria out of the usual political process (Smith, 1999: 14).

Securitizing an issue means finding a convincing justification for specific measures and outside of the usual procedures and may be used for illegal purposes. There are two basic factors in turning identity issues into the existence threat and being secure: first, the concept of "perceptions" of identity owners and what their sensibility is. Second, only when threats and social vulnerabilities can lead to existential threats, which lead to the spread of conflict and disputes among governments (Abdulah Khani, 2004: 142-146). In this regard, the exchange of ideas and communications can create important social and cultural threats. Cultural issues are all effective in

thinking about the government, and it may be necessary to support them against the dominant and distracting cultural imports.

So, once a culture is secured, the perceptions of the owners of an identity become different and they look at the culture in a directional way. Relations and interactions are eliminated from the normal state and are deployed in a state of urgency and emergency (Buzan, 2010: 1). The actions and reactions are biased and unreasonable and create a climate of insecurity on the adoption of policies and strategies. One of the examples of this is securing the Iranian culture and identity in the Persian Gulf States.

For example, the perceptions of these countries of the developments in Iraq are that Saddam's defeat and the Sunni regime mean the failure of the oriental front of the Arab world, because the Iraqi Shiites victory removes Iraq from the Arab countries (Ahram & Lust, 2016: 23), it means the country where its president is Kurd, the prime minister is Shiite, and his foreign minister is Kurd too, would no longer be an Arab country for a Sunni or traditional Arabs. Therefore, it is very important that the identity of Iran and Shi'a are no longer a culture but a political and security factor.

In contrast, Iran regards Saudi Arabia's involvement in the Yemeni, Syrian and Iraqi developments as an attempt to undermine the resistance and empowerment of Sunni groups in these countries and also considers Saudi leaders' actions in support of Syrian opposition, to reduce Iran's influence there and to take an active role as the leader of the Islam world.

Therefore, in the light of the securitizing of Iran's culture in Saudi Arabia, the cultural elements of Iran have lost their true meaning in this country, and the meaning based on their imagination has been given to the cultural elements. It means all the actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran that based on "Iranian" cultural elements, Shi'ism and revolutionary culture, have created security boosts for this country. In fact, Saudi Arabia strongly tries to securitize and delegitimize the Islamic Republic of Iran by portraying the country and Shia religion as a major threat to the regional peace and security. On the other hand, Iran tries to appeal the Muslim world and the Shia populations of the region (especially Bahrain and Saudi Arabia) to lose the legitimacy of pro-U.S. policy of the Saudi regime (Gause, 2014: 5). In addition, Saudi Arabia's military presence in Bahrain can also be explained in terms of cultural and identity conflict. Saudi Arabia views Iran's support for Bahraini Shiites to strengthen Shiites in the region. But Iran considers

the Saudi military presence in Bahrain as an attempt to reduce Iranian influence and anti-Shiite. The Saudi amplification of the Iranian threat is used as a pretext to justify a shift in foreign policy from diplomacy to direct military interventions in Arab regions (Al-Rasheed, 2018: 11).

-The Role of Culture in Antagonism

The next stage in the process of the development of the cultural conflict is the consolidation of a "cultural antagonism" between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In the first stage, culture has provided the sources of conflict, and this conflict has led to the securitizing of Iran and Saudi Arabia culture. At this stage, the antagonism is formed; in other words, the cultural elements of both countries have acquired meanings that result in the creation of antagonism. Culture, especially as it has been securitized, leads to the two poles of "us" and "others" (Moshirzadeh, 2007: 537). In fact, the space of "us/others" creates impenetrable frontiers and each culture finds itself in conflict and contrast with another's identity.

Iranian culture is also naturally different with other cultural features, with features such as Shia, Iranian, and revolutionary culture. There are two modes for this situation. These differences are accepted among other societies, which are influenced by the meaning that other societies have gained from Iranian culture. This kind of meaning and semantic impression is also influenced by the features and traces of their culture (Moshirzadeh, 2007: 533). That is, their culture and civilization have such a depth and breadth that they do not regard the spread and cultural exchange with Iran as a threat. In this case, culture cannot be securitized and will not be a conflict and dispute factor. Therefore, there is no fear and enmity and relationships develop normally.

But in Saudi Arabia, due to their culture and identity, this narrative has a different image. The country's elites have come to different and contradictory conceptions which give the meaning to Iranian cultural features. The meaning that they attribute to the properties of Iranian culture denies the existence of other meanings (Gause, 2014: 10). In fact, they do not accept the existence positions based on difference in the features of Iran's culture with their own culture and they do not consider it to be synonyms and in the same direction as their own culture.

When this type of meaning influenced by many factors will spread, gradually Iranian culture is regarded as others for them. In the light of this

practice, the frontiers of the created antagonism are drawn ,it means that the Iranian culture with its special features as others is considered. Antagonism is produced and reproduced by mechanisms such as highlighting, marginalization, and Hyperbole. With the development of such policies, created antagonism is consolidated. In, fact, discourses of culture and identity can delineate, direct, and restrain the political choices of regimes. This helped produce the notion of an Arab public sphere that is created through satellite televisions, internet, and latterly, social media (Hammond, 2018: 156). It means that, Saudi Arabia has reached the definitive conclusion that Iran's culture for its country is considered as "others" and cannot mean anything to them. Therefore, we see the consolidation of Iran's culture as a source of threat. As a result, Riyadh regards Iran's culture as a factor that intends to destroy its culture and identity (Ghoble, 2019: 47). In fact, fear of the components of Iranian culture has been constructed and institutionalized in such a way that elements of Iranian culture are equated with threat and fear. That way ,Saudi Arabia consider the elements of Iranian culture equal to threats and fears.

For instance, during the process of sectarianism and uprisings in the Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia states use different strategies. Saudi Arabia uses Salafi elements, and the Islamic Republic of Iran relies on the mobilization of the transnational network of Shia minorities (Gause, 2017). Saudi Arabia which plays a key role in Sunni sectarianism has introduced the Shias as a pagan minority and emphasized the role of Iran as a non-Arab actor in the Arab world seeking to exploit the majority of the Sunni world against Iran. On the contrary, Iran aims to reinforce Muslim resistance against the United States, Israel and their regional partners (led by Saudi Arabia).

5. Conclusion

Iran and Saudi Arabia relations have experienced various developments and competition between two countries includes a wide range of issues. The quality of relations between the two countries has been mainly the basis of tension and conflict. Along with material factors, culture plays an important role in the quality of relations between two countries. Culture plays a different role in the quality of relations between countries. In some countries, culture is the basis of cooperation and convergence, and in others it causes tensions and conflicts. There are countries that despite cultural

differences are in a good level of cooperation and cultural convergence. This is somewhat different in countries that are neighbors, usually because they are in the same environment, and any of them seeks to preserve, gain and increase its benefits and capabilities, as well as try to maintain and expand their culture, which leads to conflict.

According to the results of this research, Iran and Saudi Arabia are examples of this issue. The arena of culture among these two countries has created a position of conflict and tension. The existence of elements such as Shi'ism, Iraniat, and revolutionary culture in Iran's culture, which is different from the Sunni elements, Arabism, and conservatism culture in Saudi Arabia, has set them against each other. In that way, the existence of differences in their culture has led to the consolidation of cultural struggle, and this struggle has always been reproduced in time, so that culture in this geography has become a political and security issue.

Saudi Arabia recognizes the cultural elements of Iran as being overwhelming with the relative and security meanings and as elements that seek to transform their own cultural elements and their identities. Injecting such meanings into Iranian cultural elements has led to the consolidation of cultural antagonism. In the light of this otherness, cultural elements have become meaningful and after being equated with each other have formed a chain, which the end of it is the development of a set of meanings that can be named as cultural Iran phobia discourse.

The cultural conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East has been intensified by the Arab uprisings, so that the two countries launched acrimonious criticism against each other and continued mutual accusation of supporting identity groups in the highly divided countries of the region such as Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and more recently in Bahrain and Yemen. It has led to Saudi military intervention in Bahrain and its aggression against Yemen. In fact, the identity-based foreign policy of Iran and Saudi Arabia is the root cause of enduring tension between the two rival countries.

This finding has several implications for decreasing conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia. An implication of this is the possibility that an increase in cultural interactions, especially through non-governmental organizations and informal channels can reform perceptions. Iran and Saudi Arabia can improve relations through emphasis on common grounds e.g. common interests in confrontation terrorism and stability in region.

6. Acknowledgment

We would like to express our gratitude to the editorial board of the Geopolitics Quarterly for cooperating with us and publishing this article.



Reference

1. Ahram, Ariel I. & Lust, Ellen (2016). "The Decline and fall of the Arab State", *Survival*, Vol.58, No.2 pp. 7-34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1161897>.
2. Akbarzadeh, S., & Barry, J. (2016). "State Identity in Iranian Foreign Policy", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.43, No.4, pp.613–629. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1159541>
3. Al-Rasheed, Madawi (2018). "Introduction: The Dilemmas of a New Era", in: Madawi Al-Rasheed (editor), *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, New York: Oxford University Press.
4. Al-Rasheed, Madawi (2018). "King Salman and His Son: Winning the USA, Losing the Rest", in: Madawi Al-Rasheed (editor), *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, New York: Oxford University Press.
5. Al-Rasheed, Madawi (2009). "Modernizing authoritarian rule in Saudi Arabia", *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol.2, No.4, pp. 587-601. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17550910903244976>.
6. Abdullah-Khani Ali (2004). "Security Theories", Tehran: Cultural Institute of International Studies and Research Abrar Moaser, **[In Persian]**.
7. Alvandi, Roham (2012). "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: the origins of Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf", *Diplomatic history*, Vol.36, No.2, pp. 337-372. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2011.01025.x>.
8. Ahmadi, Hamid (2010). *Iran's Cultural Relations with Neighbors; Case Study of Turkey*, Tehran: Research Center for Culture, Arts and Communication, **[In Persian]**.
9. Badiie Azandehie, Marjan & Kiani, Vahid (2014). "A Critique on Shia Geopolitics Discourse, With Emphasis on Genealogical Approach", *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 83-106.
10. Bunzel, Cole (2018). "Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic State: 'Abdullah ibn Jibrin and Turki al-Bin 'ali'", in: Madawi Al-Rasheed (editor), *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, New York: Oxford University Press.
11. Buzan, Barry (2010). "Culture and international society", *International Affairs*, Vol.86, No.1, pp.1–26.
12. Dehghani Firoozabadi, Seyyed Jalal & Radfar, Firoozeh (2010). "The Pattern of Exporting Revolution in the Foreign Policy of the 9th Administration", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.5, No.10, pp. 123-150. **[In Persian]**.
13. Erickson, Amanda (2017). "What's behind the feud between Saudi Arabia

- and Iran? Power.” The Washington Post. Located 22 September 2018. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/12/20/whats-behind-the-feud-between-saudi-arabia-and-iran-power/?utm_term=.f2aa6be89c52
14. Fuller, Graham E. & Franke Rend Rahim (2005). *Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims*: New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
 15. Gause, F.G. (2014). *Beyond Sectarianism: The new Middle East Cold War*, Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, 11, Brookings Doha Center. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/English-PDF-1.pdf>
 16. Gause, F.G. (2017). “Ideologies, Alignments, and Under balancing in the New Middle East Cold War”, *Political Science and Politics*, Vol.50, No. 3, pp.672-675. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096517000373.
 17. Ghoble, Vrushal T. (2019). “Saudi Arabia–Iran Contention and the Role of Foreign Actors”, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.43, No.1, pp. 42-53. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2019.1573772>.
 18. Hosseinizadeh, Seyed Mohammad Ali (2004); “Theory of Discourse and Political Analysis”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.28, pp. 181-212. [In Persian].
 19. Halliday, Fred, (1999); *Revolution and Word Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press.
 20. Haji Naseri, Saeed (2019). “States, Culture and Identity Movement in Chaos Geopolitics”, *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol.14, No.4, pp.21-45.
 21. Hammond, Andrew (2018). “Producing Salafism: From Invented Tradition to State Agitprop”, in: Madawi Al-Rasheed (editor), *Salman’s Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, New York: Oxford University Press.
 22. Howarth D. & Y. Stavrakakis. (2000). “Introducing discourse theory and political analysis”. In D. Howarth, A. Norval and Y. Stavrakakis (eds.), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
 23. Hunter, Shireen (2010). *Iran’s foreign policy in the post-Soviet era*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
 24. Jonson, Alastair I, (1995). *Culture Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
 25. Jorgensen, M. & Philips, L. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage Publications.
 26. Khajehsarvi, Gholamreza (2008). “Islamic Revolution and Narrative of National Identity”, Tehran: Imam Sadiq University. **[In Persian]**.