

## The Bahrain Crisis and the Religious and Geopolitical Conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

The Bahraini crisis has particular geopolitical importance for regional and trans-regional powers regarding the limited ability of domestic actors and the interests of foreign actors in it. The present study aimed to examine the crisis in Bahrain and the religious and geopolitical conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia. To this aim, investigated the causes and roots of the conflicting approaches of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia to the Bahrain crisis using the theoretical framework of constructivism and descriptive-analytical research methods. The results indicated that these conflicts began before the Islamic Revolution of Iran and culminated in the recent uprising of the Bahraini people. Iran and Saudi Arabia are two prominent regional actors in the Bahraini crisis that pursue active but conflicting approaches. This contradictory approach has caused severe tensions in Saudi Arabia's relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Keywords:** Bahrain Crisis, Geostrategic Situation, Religious and Geopolitical Conflicts, Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia.

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## The Bahrain Crisis and the Religious and Geopolitical Conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia

### Introduction

The first security challenge for countries is the tension that nations face between internal and external pressures. With the increasing influence of multinational, transnational, and supranational forces, governments find themselves in a dilemma between globalism and pursuing their interests, supporting society and the individual, and the need for international cooperation and limited local pressures (Mandel, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 147).

Recent developments in the political geography of the Middle East region that are organized in the face of profound transformation and profound political change have changed regional and supra-regional relations and interactions. Indeed, the popular uprising in the Middle East and North Africa has posed an intellectual and geographical challenge to the powers that be, the most important outcome of which is to transform the foreign policy audience of countries from regional governments to regional nations. There are three different analyzes of the revolutionary and reformist movements of the Middle East peoples. The first considers the Middle East movements as a result of the Islamic Awakening. The second considers these movements as democratic movements, and the third considers the movements formed in the Arab world as a total of subversive, sectarianism and pseudo-Talabani movements.

The most crucial herald of the first analysis is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Perhaps Turkey can be considered the most vital herald of the second analysis. The central pillar of the third analysis is the political regimes of the Arab countries. Arab officials, in the face of these movements, presented an unfavourable picture of the movements formed in their country to make them a threat to their sovereignty and the Middle East and a threat to the whole world. As one of the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Bahrain has been in a deep crisis regarding its particular historical and structural context in the regional process of popular uprisings in the Arab world, which has continued since February.

However, this crisis and its dimensions, consequences, and related reactions are not limited to the borders of this country and have gained high regional dimensions and importance. Iran and Saudi Arabia, as regional powers influential in regional developments, could not be indifferent to the created opportunities and threats. From the beginning, they have tried to fulfil their desires by relying on their ideals and goals. The present study aimed to examine and explain the main regional two-player approaches to the Bahraini crisis. We believe that the two countries have adopted different and conflicting procedures to the situation in

Bahrain regarding the differences in goals and interests towards Bahrain and the levels of religious, political, security, and geopolitical ties with this country.

### **1. Theoretical Framework: Structuralism**

Theories study foreign policy from three perspectives. The first category considers material and environmental factors (internal and external) as the main reason for forming the governments' foreign policy. These categories, known to rationalists in the history of international relations theories, fall into two categories. First, some ideas deal with the macro-level and consider the structure of the global system as the primary determinant of the behavior of states. The second are theories that explain governments' foreign policy at the micro-level and prioritize internal factors in determining governments' foreign policy (Martin, 1999: 49).

The second category is semantic theories that emphasize the role of immaterial and cultural factors in foreign policy. The third category is theories that defend the integrated approach. While paying attention to material factors in these theories, semantic components' role and importance are also emphasized. One of the most important of these theories is the constructivist approach. This approach, which has been the subject of international relations since the early 1990s, is rooted in the sociological problem posed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in the 1970s. Friedrich Kratochwil, Nicolas oned, and Alexander Wendt lead international relations (Billy and Smith, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 564).

From the structural point of view of identity, norms and culture play an important role in countries' foreign policy. Decision-makers make decisions based on norms and rules with a background of the mental factors of historical experience, identity, culture, and presence in institutions. Among the immaterial factors that constructivists have most considered for influencing foreign policy is the issue of identity. Constructivism is based on three main assumptions: The interrelationships between the agent and the structure, the role of identity in shaping interests and the construction of identity, and the importance of semantic and intellectual networks in it (Mushirzadeh, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 135).

Based on constructivism, the actors interact according to their mental meanings, language, and perceptions, and this interaction creates reality, and then they are made in interaction with reality. The natural consequence of this view in explaining the behavior of a country's foreign policy is that governments build the world for themselves based on their underlying

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identity and then, in interaction with reality, are constructed and acted. In this interaction, they create the existence of the international system. The constructivist theory has great potential to explain the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran towards Bahrain. The United States has not opposed the actions of Saudi Arabia and the Bahraini government to avoid further discontent with its Arab allies (Fazli, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 222).

Its interests were maintained, especially about the supply of energy in the capitalist system's current crisis, and ensured stability in Bahrain with the establishment of the Al-Khalifa system. According to US military alliances, the strength in Bahrain is in the direction of US military interests in the region (Hafezian, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 21).

Saudi Arabia praised the Al Khalifa regime for talking to protesters after protests erupted in Bahrain. The Bahraini government used violence against protesters who had staged peaceful demonstrations (Choi, 2003: 142). The ruling regime in Bahrain is one of Saudi Arabia's main allies in the region, and no doubt any change in this region could ultimately affect the interests of Saudi Arabia and its Western allies. Therefore, with the direct green light, the Al-Khalifa government has widely suppressed the defenseless people of Bahrain, and when the government's weakness was seen in the face of this massive wave of people. Saudi military forces entered the country in coordination with the White House to counter the Bahraini uprising. Saudi Arabia in Bahrain worries that the fall of Al-Khalifa and the rise to power of a Shia-led government could increase Iran's influence in the region and affect Bahrain's military relationship with that country in the area.

But Iran's foreign policy toward Bahrain seems to be more understandable in a constructivist context. For constructivists, chaos is meaningless in itself and is nothing but what governments build. They believe that the study of international politics under the influence of the realism approach has caused a lack of attention to the cultural and normative dimensions of the pattern of behavior of actors (Jackson, 1385 AH/ 2006 AD: 135).

Constructivism is a new approach to the role of rationality in human beings' collective situations and phenomena. Just as it emphasizes material-social structures, it also considers normative and spiritual systems necessary. Constructivism is one of the study approaches of international politics consisting of a combination of different approaches. It tries to somehow eliminate the shortcomings of various theories by using some of

their propositions and providing a more realistic picture of the pattern of international political behavior (Mottaqi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 79).

The determining factor of Iran's behavior towards Bahrain is not objective and material factors but norms that directly impact the interests and identity of Islamic Iran (Qawam, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 84).

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards this country has joined a chain of numerous influential elements. Regarding the diversity and entanglement of these elements, determination of the weight of each of them is difficult. According to the constructivist approach, the importance and position of norms with such characteristics and coordinates, by understanding how norms affect identity, one can understand how to define national interests, which are the basis of a country's foreign policy. With this approach, it seems that after the Islamic Revolution, "Our religious and traditional norms before Islam and we after it" has a particular weight and credibility among the various identity and cultural layers of foreign policy (Qawam, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 118).

The constructivist view of the status and influence of religious norms today, in particular, explains Iran's ideological status in the external dimension, especially at the level of regional public opinion, is a model for Islamist movements (Azghandi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 20). With its constructivist approach, Islamic Iran is the most severe blow to US interests in Bahrain, and this revolution has primarily triggered many social protests in the country (Valipour, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 226).

## **2. Bahrain's Position and Importance in the International Arena**

### **2.1. Bahrain's Geostrategic Position**

Access to the sea has always been one of the most critical factors for the development of countries. The complete form of maritime position is the island position (Ezzati, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 80-81).

All the world islands have a military role, and the geostrategic part of these countries affects their geopolitical goals. Time has shown that if the people of an island do not understand their geopolitical position and do not react appropriately in international politics, they will soon lose the benefits of independence and freedom of action (Ezzati, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 84).

Bahrain has always been considered regional and supra-regional powers and organizations with its geostrategic position as an island in the Persian Gulf. After Iraq invaded Kuwait and jeopardized US interests in the Middle East, Bahrain suddenly came to the attention of the Americans to be used as a base to support American fighters to repel Iraqi forces from

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Kuwait to the region (<https://www.aftabir.com>: 01/16/2012). Noam Chomsky knows Bahrain's importance for two factors:

- 1) Bahrain has long been of particular importance regarding its geostrategic and geopolitical position. Bahrain's lack of a robust defense system and sense of weakness in this regard have made Bahrain lean towards other powers, especially the United States and Saudi Arabia. The presence of the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, Bahrain's geographical proximity to Iran, and its Sunni rulers' obedience have led to very close US relations with Bahrain. The ruling regime in Bahrain has always been one of the leading US allies in the region. In this area, it can ultimately affect the United States and its allies (Chomsky, 2011 AD/1390 SH);
- 2) Regarding the importance and security situation in Bahrain, from the 1970s to the recent developments in Bahrain, the political and social movements in this country, in addition to trying to eliminate domestic tyranny and gain political and social freedoms, gained a prominent image, which was: The wave of Islamism and the movement towards Islamic values, the influence of Islamic reformist ideas from Egypt, Iraq, and Iran to this country and especially the victory of the Islamic Revolution allowed Muslim fighters to seriously and actively seek the implementation of Islamic principles and values in their society. It was inherently in conflict with the principles and goals of the Bahraini government on the one hand, and on the other hand against the interests of Western countries, especially the United States, led to critical Islamic movements that doubled the importance of this country.

### 2.2. The Bahrain Crisis

For thousands of years, the geography of the Middle East has been a significant factor in determining the military and economic presence in the region and access to its resources (Camp and Harkawy 2004 AD/1383 SH: 353).

The emergence of Bahrain has provided the country with a lack of political maturity and a kind of dependence on regional and supra-regional powers. So, short critical waves cause internal tension and instability (Akhbari and Nami, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 195).

Anti-government demonstrations in several Middle Eastern countries also engulfed Bahrain in early 2011, leading to violent clashes between protesters and government forces, and police. Protesters, inspired by recent events in Egypt and Tunisia, began their demonstrations on February 14. For a long time, there have been tensions between the Shia-majority masses and the Sunni ruling class.

The presence of neighbouring Sunni forces in a Shia-majority country has fueled sectarian strife. Mass detentions and torture were on the agenda. The declaration of a state of emergency, the growing divide between the government and society, and the discriminatory policies of the Al Khalifa dynasty were the leading causes of the current political developments and protests in Bahrain. Some of the most critical components in the emergence and intensification of recent protests in Bahrain are:

1) Existence of authoritarian and undemocratic government. According to the constitution adopted in 1973, the king can elect the prime minister and supervise his activities. The prime minister delegates much power to the king, quickly implementing his desired menus and policies. On the other hand, Bahrain has a hereditary government in the constitution, and the people have no role in electing a king;

2) The Bahraini government's dependence on supra-regional powers and the adoption of policies in line with them, and the disregard for public opinion in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. Looking at Bahrain's policies in the face of regional developments, Bahrain, instead of adopting independent decision-making and taking an active role in regional products, has always followed and supported the United States and other trans-regional powers (<https://www.bahrainembassy.org/1/20/2008>);

3) Existence of ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination. From Bahrain's population of about 1.3 million, about 46% are Bahraini citizens, making up about 600,000 of Bahrain's population. Seventy percent of Bahrainis are Shias, and 30 percent are Sunnis. The other fifty-four percent of Bahrain's population are predominantly immigrants who have been relocated from other Arab and Sunni countries to upset the Al-Khalifa government's balance of people and political goals by granting concessions or jobs. Despite this combination, political and economic power is in the hands of the minority. In the distribution of political and economic power, many abuse waves have been committed against the Shia of Bahrain. This majority group in their country has constantly been subjected to various discrimination, especially religious discrimination (ibid., 2011: 41);

4) Parliamentary elections (background to the formation of the Bahraini protests). The critical reason for the emergence of the Bahraini people against the country's government dates back to before and after the parliamentary elections on October 23, 2010. This election showed that the people mainly voted for pragmatic and independent candidates who promised to pursue economic, political, and social problems. Therefore,

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the parliament of this period witnessed the presence of representatives who mainly reflected the wishes and interests of the people, so that the Bahraini government and it is natural that this is very worrying for the Bahraini government (Bahrami and Khodadadi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 55).

### **3. Iran's and Saudi Arabia's Approaches to the Bahrain Crisis**

One of the compelling reasons for Saudi Arabia's response to the popular Bahraini uprising is that it knows Bahrain as its sphere of influence. Therefore, it wants to maintain the rule of Al-Khalifa in this country and does not accept any fundamental changes. Consequently, it has taken a radical and military approach to the popular uprising in Bahrain. The second factor is its authoritarian and traditional political structure and a Shia minority in the eastern part of the country, making it vulnerable to popular uprisings in the Arab world, especially the Bahraini protests. The third factor is the Saudis' view of the issue from the regional power balance in the Middle East.

According to Saudi, regional developments in the Middle East over the past decade after 9/11 have upset the balance of regional influence to the country's detriment. Accordingly, the Saudis see any regime change in Bahrain as a red line to further weaken their regional position. Saudi officials believe that any Shia participation in the power structure in Bahrain will increase Iran's influence in the country, and the consequence will be at the regional level. The fourth factor is Al Saud's growing distrust of US leaders as a strategy over the past decades. Some reforms began, and during the US invasion of Iraq, Saudi criticism of US action became apparent. This distrust of the Saudis increased significantly after the recent developments in the region, especially the lack of US support for the Mubarak regime.

On the other hand, among the crises of the Arab world in 2012, the problem of Bahrain is of great importance for the Islamic Republic of Iran for various reasons. Second, Bahrain has been part of Iran for centuries under the rule of Iranian rulers, part of its population are Iranians, and there are strong historical ties between Bahrain and Iran. Third, the most crucial issue regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach to the Bahrain crisis is Bahrainis' religious affiliation, who make up most of the country's population. Fourth, Iran's interests and regional policies in the Persian Gulf and its rivalries with Saudi Arabia are essential factors in Iran's approach. In particular, Tehran sees the democratic transformation in Manama as forming a kind of political system in Bahrain, improving relations. The



factors mentioned above have caused Iran to have a more sensitive view of Bahrain's developments and take an active approach in this regard.

#### **4. Religious and Geopolitical Conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Bahrain**

Conflicting interests and goals are cases in which countries and governments have opposite and inconsistent attitudes and perceptions. Therefore, they try to overcome the interests and resources by eliminating others (Hafeznia, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 313).

The infrastructure's distinctive geographical features create divergence and segregation among governments (Hafeznia and Kaviani Rad, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 73). Factors of conflict and conflict cause political units to move away from each other and provide the ground for crisis (Taheri Mousavi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 106).

Conflicting goals and interests are also the source of competition, conflict, and engagement between the actor claimants and the governments and countries involved. The competition process is formed and developed in bilateral or multilateral interactions and coalitions of neighbouring or rival governments. It may eventually lead to a military confrontation (Hafeznia, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 130).

As an international waterway, the Persian Gulf region has a unique geostrategic and geopolitical position and importance in the Middle East and the world. The Persian Gulf has long witnessed the challenge of power and the constant competition of regional and supra-regional powers (Ezzati, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 27).

In recent years, Saudi Arabia's regional concerns and rivalries with the Islamic Republic of Iran have made relations between the two countries colder than in the past, and diplomatic relations and ties between the two countries have become weaker. Saudi Arabia has taken many measures to counter the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region. It tries to improve its position in Iran by resolving the existing problems and crises in the area. In the framework of regional and trans-regional alliances and coalitions against Iran to reduce Iran's regional power and influence (Naderi Nasab, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 334).

The foreign policy of Iran and Saudi Arabia is based on significant goals that determine and explain the scope and manner of action of the two countries in the region and abroad (Aghaei and Ahmadian, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 2). The intense conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia must be attributed in part to the policies of the major powers, especially the United

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States, in the region. Also, Iran's political-ideological influence in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait after the Islamic Revolution shows this fact (Hafeznia and Romina, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 71).

Of the total population of this country, 81% are Muslims, and 18.8% are non-Muslims. The majority of the Muslim population in Bahrain is Shia. Shias make up 61 percent of the country's population. A significant number of Bahraini Shias who have lived in Bahrain for hundreds of years are initially from the southern regions of Iran and have maintained contact with Iran. It is a situation that existed even before Islam. The Sunni population makes up 20% of the people of Bahrain. Although the Shia have a majority in Bahrain, they do not participate in political, economic, and cultural affairs. It is one of their most critical challenges with the ruling government of Bahrain (Geographical Organization of the Armed Forces, 2007: 59). Today, the majority of Bahrain's Shias have a very chaotic social and religious situation. The Bahraini government relies on its Saudi neighbour (Ezzati, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 164-165).

The Saudis fear the Shia uprising in the Persian Gulf in the religious tensions of Bahrain. According to Brzezinski, almost all countries with a predominantly Muslim population face spiritual problems (Brzezinski, 2007: 76). Religious conflict between Shias and Sunnis in Bahrain is one of the reasons for the recent protests against the Sunni Al-Khalifa government to seek their rights. The most important causes of the conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia regarding Bahrain can be mentioned as follows.

### **4.1. Iran's Territorial Claim to Bahrain**

The role of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the last years of the sixties and the whole seventies of the twentieth century, as two mainstays of Western influence in the region, required them to always be cautious in their foreign relations with each other. It has different causes, such as maintaining the security of the Persian Gulf oil pipeline, maintaining political stability in the region and pro-Western countries, preventing infiltration of communism, and the cleansing of the area from leftist movements (Soleimani, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 76).

When British troops withdrew from the Persian Gulf in 1971, the United States tried hard to make Iran and Saudi Arabia their local allies, but with the fall of the Shah, America's friendly policy collapsed (Drissdell and Blake, 2005 AD/1374 SH: 48).

More than any other place in the Persian Gulf, Bahrain shows the dilemma of Iran's involvement in the region. Iran's territorial claim to

Bahrain dates back to the seventh century AD when one of the Sassanid kings sent Iranian troops to the island and controlled the island until the fall of the Iranian government to the Arab Muslim armies in the same century.

After World War II, Iran repeatedly claimed the island, declaring it the 14th province of the country, citing several historical periods in which Bahrain was under Iranian control. Iran's attention to the island changed from a fundamentally territorial and nationalist claim to a geopolitical, strategic, and security issue. In the late 1960s, Iran agreed to compromise on Bahrain for concessions on the Tunb and Abu Musa Islands. With the agreement of Iran and Britain, it was decided that the United Nations would hold a referendum among the Bahraini people to determine the political destiny of Bahrain. Bahrain's political independence was recognized in a 1971 referendum (Hafeznia, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 345).

Iranian lawmakers also accepted the UN investigation group's vote, and Bahrain formally seceded from Iran (Bahrami and Khodadadi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 31). Then, Bahrain has come under Saudi influence with the support of the ruling Sunni minority.

#### **4.2. The Islamic Revolution of Iran and the Emergence of Religious Conflicts**

The 1979 revolution in Iran added a vital ideological element to its rivalry with Saudi Arabia, and both countries competed for leadership of the Islamic world (Bozan and Weaver, 2009 AD: 105). From the beginning of its existence, the Islamic State of Iran engaged in a serious confrontation with the United States and has always called the United States the greatest enemy of Iran (Young, 2005: 401). This revolution is the most severe blow to US interests in the Middle East (Cohen, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 666).

The Islamic Revolution of Iran also affected the small countries of the Persian Gulf. This revolution, first and foremost, triggered many social protests in the region. In 1981, the Shias of Bahrain carried out an unsuccessful coup to overthrow the country's ruling regime (Valipour Zarumi, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 226).

By proving the possibility of change to Muslim nations, the Islamic Revolution of Iran, caused them to distance themselves from the atmosphere of sluggishness and stagnation. By following the example of the methods and values of the Iranian Revolution, they became active and pursued their demands more seriously.

#### **4.3. Conflicts based on Shia Influence in the Region**

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According to the Persian Gulf Arab states, a change has increased Iran's power and the Shia's role in the Middle East. From their point of view, a Shia crescent has been created from Lebanon to Pakistan. In their opinion, Iran is trying to increase its power by creating a Shia bloc in the region and using it against the interests of Sunni countries and the regional interests of the United States and Israel (Ahmadi and Jamali, 2009: 7). Most of the Shias of the minority of Saudi Arabia live in the eastern regions of the country (Resalat newspaper, 10/29/2011). One-third of the population of 1.5 million people in the province's east are Shia, whose dissatisfaction with the ruling regime has increased since the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Cohen, 2008 AD/1387 SH, 682).

Saudi Arabia tries to introduce the Shias of that country as an essential factor of its internal threat (Ezzati, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 23). Geopolitical divisions in Saudi Arabia can be the basis for political divisions in times of internal pressure. So far, Saudi Arabia has maintained the military and political power needed to strengthen unity in the kingdom through oil wealth, repression, US military support, and alliance with a religious fundamentalist leadership in this country (Cohen, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 682). Regarding the developments in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia claims that Iran supports the Bahraini Shias to overthrow the government.

#### **4.4. Conflicts based on the US Military Presence in the Region**

Iran is the only self-reliant military power in the Persian Gulf (Ezzati, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 133), the most severe change in the region's strategic environment. It has changed the balance to the detriment of Iran (Khademi, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 203). The United States seeks to prevent Iran from a central role in regional convergence in the Persian Gulf and dominate the political will of the countries in the region. US strategists believe that the United States has a broad interest in preventing the emergence of any regional power.

As a trans-regional factor, the United States has always sought to instill a dangerous Iranian nuclear mindset to jeopardize countries' interests in the region and the world. Strong opposition to Iran's nuclear program and threats and aligning public opinion with expansionist and one-sided policies are the problems facing convergence and conflict in the region (Ezzati, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 16). Putting Iran in a tight spot by limiting Iran's sphere of influence in the region and playing Iran's role as an influential regional power is one of the essential goals of the US military presence. The United States has repeatedly called the Islamic Republic of Iran to declare significant threats to its national interests (Chubin, 1995: 109). The United States, with its presence in the Persian Gulf and its

peripheral countries, reduces Iran's regional competition and creates an atmosphere for the development of Iran's sphere of influence while increasing the power of Iran's rivals (Akhbari and Nami, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 194).

US dependence on Saudi oil quickly turned into an important military and economic alliance between the two countries. From the US point of view, this commitment arises from strategic necessity (Cohen, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 706). Saudi Arabia has sought to achieve an exogenous hegemonic order through an alliance with the United States, which has led to divergence and conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Rezaei, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 158). Iran opposes the US presence in the region and the deployment of its fifth navy in Bahrain, which is an obstacle to Iran's role in the region. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia wants the US presence in the Persian Gulf and Bahrain, reduce Iran's influence and take control of the region.

#### **4.5. Establishment of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and the Emergence of Conflicts**

The Persian Gulf Cooperation Council was established in 1981 with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, supporting the United States of America (Mojtahedzadeh, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 134-133). Most of the council's regional strategies are in the form of existing conflicts. It makes sense with Iran (Majidi et al., 2008 AD/1387 SH: 69). It is also, in practice, an organization that only serves the goals of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf and the Peninsula (Pishgahifard, 2007 AD/1388 SH: 493).

On the other hand, Bahrain's presence in this council, with a Shia majority population, cannot be acceptable to Iran, so that the council's goal is to limit Iran's influence. On the other hand, Bahraini Shias, who have political-religious affiliations with Iran, oppose a pact with the leadership of Saudi Arabia, which supports the ruling Sunni minority.

#### **4.6. Conflict based on Saudi Military Intervention in Bahrain**

By building a road from Saudi Arabia to Bahrain, which makes it very easy for troops to enter Bahrain in times of turmoil, Saudi Arabia has put Bahrain on the path to becoming dependent on Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is reluctant to support the irregularities created by the Shia majority in the country, mainly since it could spread to its Shia-populated areas in Saudi Arabia's eastern province. Following the widespread protests in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with the forces of the United Arab Emirates, sent its military forces to suppress the protesters.

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### 4.7. Iran-Saudi Arabia Arms Rivalry

Saudi Arabia's core strategy is increasing military power, purchasing new weapons, and supplying state-of-the-art weapons from various sources. This country is always one of the first to import weapons (Sadeghi and Ahmadian, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 152).

Iran is also emphasizing its military role and presence in the region by conducting military manoeuvres in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, especially after the whispers of the Iranian oil embargo by Western countries and Saudi support for this plan. This arms race adds to the tensions and conflicts between the two countries in the region.

### Conclusion

After the Arab world developments, a new field is being formed regarding the geopolitical changes in the form and construction of power. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States want to maintain the traditional balance with complete control over the political-security currents in the region. On the other hand, Iran does not necessarily want to upset the situation. But by increasing its power base and role in the light of regional developments, it wants to play a more significant role with a regional approach and protect its national interests. Widespread protests in Bahrain have caught the eye of two rival Shia and Sunni rival countries in the region, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia sees Bahrain as a strategic complement and has resorted to military intervention to quell the protests.

On the other hand, Iran, which has ruled this island throughout history and has religious similarities with most Bahrainis, cannot just watch these developments and not play its role in the region. The products in Bahrain have caused geopolitical conflicts for Iran and Saudi Arabia as two powers in the Persian Gulf, each of which seeks to oust the other actor with various and sometimes hostile strategies.

Iran by strengthening the revolutionary sense of the Islamic Revolution and supporting the more significant role of Shias in regional developments, opposing any interference and presence of inter-regional interventionist power in Bahrain, holding military manoeuvres in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to play its role in the region and the arrival of the Bahraini Shias to a more favourable situation and the participation of the Shias in the administration of the Bahraini state is emphasized. On the other hand,

Saudi Arabia seeks to isolate further and make Iran look dangerous. It follows its aims with the following actions:

- Support of Bahrain's Sunni ruling minority;
- Allied with the United States to participate in the region and Bahrain;
- Factionalized and countered Iran's revolutionary influence by forming the Gulf Cooperation Council;
- Purchased advanced military weapons to compete with Iran;
- Military intervention to deal with protests by Bahraini Shias and even Saudi Shias.

Saudi Arabia wants to help maintain the power of Sunni religions in Bahrain to advance its goals and those of its Western allies and make Bahrain a desirable and influential state. Therefore, this country has a long history of hostility to Iran and the most hostile positions against this country. Given the circumstances and evidence of domestic, regional, and international will, there are no peaceful ways to end the Bahrain crisis. Accordingly, a possible scenario for Bahrain, and perhaps even its escalation, will inevitably lead to the continuation of tensions and problems in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations. The win-win approach is to abandon the existing game and the win-lose policy. Ensuring the political and social rights of the Bahraini people caused different results:

- Changing Saudi Arabia's approach from a win-lose game to a win-win game;
- Accepting the power of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the security of the region;
- Changing the view of the countries of the Persian Gulf region from resorting to supra-regional powers to intra-regional powers to maintain their existence and regional security.

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