

SECURITY DILEMMA OR GEOPOLITICS: IRANIAN-SAUDI SECURITY POLICIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By

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Submitted to

Central European University
School of Public Policy

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Public Policy*

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Budapest, Hungary

2017

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, the undersigned **Syed Ali** hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. The thesis contains no material, which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines whether its geopolitics or security dilemma that plays the primary role in the formulation Iranian-Saudi security policies in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. It further analyzes the role of security dilemma and geopolitics in the comprehensive national security strategy of Iran and Saudi Arabia. By examining the security policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia, we can suggest policy measures to improve security/foreign relations between both the countries. Academic papers written by renowned security policy experts and policy papers published by Brookings Institution, Rand Corporation, Carnegie Endowment for international peace and United States congressional research service were analyzed in order to apply the theories of security dilemma and geopolitics in the context of Iranian- Saudi conflict in the Middle East. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the leaders of both Shia and Sunni factions in Pakistan, who send their supporters to fight with both Iranian and Saudi proxies in the Middle East. Interviews were also instrumental in understanding the underlined motivations of these conflicts. Even though, security dilemma and geopolitics are not mutually exclusive, findings represent that Iranian-Saudi security policies in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and their comprehensive security strategy is primarily motivated by security dilemma. Research also applies Paul Roe's categorization of security dilemma in the research model and finds out that Iranian-Saudi security dilemma fits into the category of "difficult to resolve short of war". This provides us with some policy options to resolve the longstanding ideological differences between "Shia revolutionary republic" and "Wahhabi conservative monarchy".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late father. Thank you, also, to my mom for always supporting me in my endeavors. I am also thankful to rest of my family and friends for aspiring me to fulfill my ambitions.

In helping me formulate an early concept and research framework of this paper, I am thankful for the support and encouragement of my supervisor, Prof. Nick Sitter. I am also incredibly grateful to the Central European University to provide me with an opportunity to study at this great institution.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IRCG: Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps

IRCG-QF: Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – Quds Force

SANG: Saudi Arabian National Guard

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Introduction

Iran and Saudi Arabia are obviously sectarian regimes at home, propounding very specific Sunni-Wahhabi (in the Saudi case) and Shia (in the Iranian case) legitimacy arguments to bolster their rule. (Gause 2014, s.a). As the war has progressed, Iran has facilitated the entry of Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia militias, and eventually Shia Afghan and Pakistani mercenaries to help the loyalist effort. (Ostovar 2016, s.a). For Iran, Sunni dominance in Syria will jeopardize its geopolitical aspirations in the region and Iran does not want its regional rivals i.e. Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries to gain foothold in Syria. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries have been the largest funder and sponsor of many factions of the rebels and have provided them with weapons and military support. Moreover, one of the major objective of Saudi Arabian security policy is to counter the rising influence of its regional rival Iran in the Persian Gulf and beyond. Saudi Arabia is aware that the only factor that unites the Sunni Arab world against the demands of political reforms or democratization is the growing regional influence of Iran. Therefore, regime claims that external agents are determined to undermine the country's stability and security (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Furthermore, in Yemen, IRCG-QF provided the Houthi rebels with weapons, training and military advisors to help them with their military maneuvers against Saudi Arabia. Saudi government also alleged the presence of Hezbollah fighters in the northern Yemen. Iran supports the Houthi movement not only because they are Shias but also because they challenge the regional hegemony of its rival Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Saudi Arabia launched operation decisive storm to crush the Houthi uprising.

Sectarianism must also be understood in light of events in the neighboring Bahrain, where a Sunni royal family rules over a Shia majority (International Crisis Group 2011, s.a; Kerr and Jones 2011, s.a). Bahraini Shia majority population demanded their rights in terms of

increased representation in the government structure. After the Shia uprising in Bahrain, protests also started to emerge in the Shia majority eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia in solidarity with the demonstrators in Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia, deliberate, well-documented political exclusion and systematic religious discrimination against the Shia pushed this community to rally around its own sectarian leadership, which provides support and resources denied in the national arena (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Ibrahim, 2006; Jones, 2010). This gave Saudi Arabia an opportunity to paint the Bahraini uprising as an Iranian project, meant to increase its influence in the Persian Gulf. Initially Sunni majority also favored the demonstrators, their calls for more political rights and transparency. However, Saudi Arabia compelled the Sunni majority to follow the sectarian discourse that considers Shia's as heretics. They presented the regime as a protector against Shia conspiracies backed by Iran and hoped that Sunni majority will abandon the calls of political change. The regime called upon Wahhabi religious interpretations – in particular sectarian discourse against the very politically active Shia minority, estimated at two million (Jones, 2009).

In the light of above mentioned analysis, my analysis would examine whether Iranian-Saudi security policies are primarily motivated by security dilemma or geopolitics in the conflicts of Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. Outcomes will further be analyzed to access the comprehensive national security strategy of both the countries to find out whether they are predominantly motivated by security dilemma or geopolitics. It is of utmost importance to bridge the gap between international security theories and the current Iranian-Saudi security policies in the Middle East. It would help us to understand the difficulties involved in the resolution of current conflicts. My hypothesis is not mutually exclusive and in reality security policies of both the countries would have some features of both security dilemma and geopolitics but the objective is to find the primary factor. My research will be focused on answering the following questions.

- *Is it geopolitics or security dilemma that plays the primary role in the formulation Iranian-Saudi security policies in the Bahrain, Syria and Yemen?*
- *What role does security dilemma and geopolitics play in the formulation of Iranian-Saudi comprehensive national security strategy?*

Thesis will also argue the importance of these questions and will offer insights into how security and geopolitical aspirations have evolved into broader conflict in the Middle East. The cases of Syria, Iraq and Bahrain and will offer significant insights into security policies that have evolved into broader conflict. Chapter 1, provides the brief theoretical framework established by different international relations and security policy scholars, which addresses the theories of security dilemma and geopolitics. Chapter 2, analyzes the Iranian-Saudi security apparatus and how their national security design-making is formulated. This chapter also discuss role of different Iranian-Saudi institutions that influence their security policies in the region. Chapter 3, examines the conflicts of Bahrain, Syria and Yemen in order to understand the underlined motivations that forced Iran and Saudi Arabia to get involve in these conflicts. Chapter 4, explains the research framework and answers the research questions. The chapter explores the theories of geopolitics and security dilemma to determine which theoretical model best fits the Iranian-Saudi national security strategy. The chapter also applies the Paul Roe's categorization of security dilemma on the research model of Iranian-Saudi conflict in the Middle East. Chapter 5, offers brief policy recommendations based on the research findings. I argue that is of utmost importance to understand the underline motivations of Iranian-Saudi national security doctrine in order to propose policy measures to improve the diplomatic/security relations between both the countries.

Chapter 1 - Theoretical Framework

One state's gain in security...is another state's loss. The second state is compelled to fortify its strength, which then rebounds to the first state's disadvantage...leaving all sides worse off than they were at the start (Bruce Blair, quoted in Collins 1995, 20)

Security dilemma and geopolitics are one of the most important ideas in international relations and security studies. “The security dilemma is arguably the theoretical linchpin of defensive realism, because for defensive realists it is the security dilemma that makes possible genuine cooperation between states. Alternatively, for offensive realists, however, the security dilemma makes war inevitable and rational.” (Tang 2009, 588). Even though, it's difficult but of utmost importance to analyze the defensive and offensive nature of Iranian and Saudi military establishments to comprehend their security policies in the Middle East. “Unless the requirements for offense and defense differ in kind or amount, a status-quo power will desire a military posture that resembles an aggressor: For this reason, others cannot infer from its military forces and preparations whether the state is aggressive or not” (Jervis, 1976: 64). Herbert Butterfield argued that the security dilemma can drive states to war even though they may not want to harm each other: “The greatest war in history can be produced without the intervention of any great criminals who might be out to do deliberate harm in the world. It could be produced between two powers, both of which were desperately anxious to avoid a conflict of any sort.” (Butterfield 1951, 19-20).

“Butterfield's writings contain six propositions about security dilemma: (1) its ultimate source is fear, which is derived from the “universal sin of humanity”; (2) it requires uncertainty over others' intentions; (3) it is unintentional in origin; (4) it produces tragic results; (5) it can be exacerbated by psychological factors; and (6) it is the fundamental cause of all human conflicts”. (Tang 2009, 35). John Herz, who originally devised the term “security dilemma,”

elaborated it as: “Groups and individuals who live alongside each other without being organized into a higher unity must be concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attacks, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the effects of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Because no state can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on” (Herz 1951, 157). I will narrow down the interpretation of security dilemma for the purpose of evaluating Iranian-Saudi conflict and will use three categories of conflicts characterized by Paul Roe – “resolvable short of war [Butterfieldian security dilemma]; difficult to resolve short of war [required insecurity] and irresolvable short of war [security problem]” (Roe 2000, 374). For the purpose of this research, war has not only been characterized as conventional warfare between both the militaries but it also includes the ongoing proxy war in the Middle East. Paul Roe’s categorization of security dilemma will enable us to comprehend the possibilities of dispute resolution between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Based on the same criteria, we can also propose policy measures about how to improve security and diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia

Geopolitics also belong to the realist approach of security and plays a significant role in the security policies of states to safeguard their national interests. Even in the absence of substantial threat to the homeland, states react to protect their allies and assets abroad in order to reinforce their political and military might. Geopolitics played significant role in the military campaigns of both the countries, which are based on perceived security threats emerging from a particular region. Geopolitics is primarily about a dominant power’s pursuit for hegemony or the maintenance of the primacy of the hegemon. According to Tiberiu Condulescu, traditional geopolitical theories assume states to be actors that are in pursuit of supermacy, which can only

be achieved by means of power and armed force. Thus, in addition to power, state-centricism is another determining characteristic of geopolitical theory. Geopolitical theorists believe that global space is a concept controlled primarily by states. And, since the only entity that can possess, control, and rule on any given piece of territory is the state, geopolitics is by definition state-centric. “Geopolitics deals with power rivalry focusing on the analysis of the relation between geography, and political power within a political entity” (Agnew 2002, 14-15).

However, in reality geopolitics is more than just geography and political power. Hard power and military might plays dominant role in geopolitics, while addressing substantial national security concerns of the states. It is therefore particularly useful to analyze security relations which often have a strongly spatial dimension, especially in the Middle East where territories are contested for various reasons in a relatively small area. Geopolitics also scrutinizes the interaction between security, politics and space. “There are three dimensions of analysis in case of any state: internal geopolitics, focusing on demographic structure and territorial integrity; regional interaction, focusing on relations with the neighboring countries and interaction with the great powers” (Friedman 2008, 2). “It was meant as a guideline to harnessing geographic knowledge to further the aims of specific nation states having an instrumental purpose as well, today referring mostly to how foreign policy elites and mass publics construct geographic imaginations of the world to inform world politics and how they utilize geography for specific aims” (Agnew 2002, 14-15).

The purpose of this research is not to separate the phenomenon of geopolitics and security dilemma because they both belong to the same realist school of international relations but to analyze how one phenomenon overshadows the other in different Middle Eastern conflicts. I will operationalize the literature by analyzing Iranian-Saudi security policies in the conflicts of Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, where they are militarily confronting each other through

their proxies. Furthermore, interviews with both the Shia and Sunni religious leaders in Pakistan, who possibly sent their followers to fight on both sides of the conflict, will help me understand the underlined motives of the conflict. It is of utmost importance to understand the motivations of the people, who practically participate in the Iranian- Saudi conflict in order to analyze whether it has features of security dilemma or geopolitics.

Additionally, I will examine the security apparatus of both Saudi Arabia and Iran to analyze how the decision makers in Riyadh and Tehran perceive their security and foreign policies in the Middle East. States can decrease the security of others because of the actions they take to strengthen their own. “This is because the measures that states employ to make themselves more secure, their neighbors and rivals also resort to the same means and as a result this trends make all states less secure” (Lieber 1991, 5-6). “Decision makers often do not empathize with their neighbors; they are unaware that their own actions can seem threatening. Often it does not matter if they know this problem. The nature of their situation compels them to take the steps that they do” (Posen 1993, 28). I will also examine the defensive and offensive maneuvers of both Iranian and Saudi militaries in the Middle East. “The military preparations of one state create an unresolvable uncertainty in the mind of another as to whether those preparations are for defensive purposes only [to enhance its security], or whether they are for offensive purposes [to detract from another’s security]” (Wheeler and Booth 1992, 30).

Chapter 2 - Iranian-Saudi Security Apparatus and Decision-Making

It is significantly important to understand ideologies, doctrines and instruments of Iranian-Saudi national security institutions in order to comprehend the motivations of their security policies in the Middle East. In this chapter, we will also analyze the structures of their national security apparatus and the security related design-making of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

2.1 Iranian security policy

We have no recourse but to mobilize all of the faithful forces of the Islamic Revolution, and with the mobilization of forces in every region, we must strike fear into the hearts of our enemies so that the idea of invasion and the destruction of our Islamic Revolution will exit from their minds. If our revolution does not have an internationalist and aggressive worldview the enemies of Islam will once again enslave us culturally and politically (IRCG, 1980)

Iranian security policies are based on multiple historical identities namely Persian, Shiite and revolutionary (Katzman, 2017). Tehran believes it has the fundamental responsibility of protecting Shia populations everywhere in the world. Iran presents itself as the leader of Islamic world but its regional sectarian policies undermines this objective and pushes itself in the sectarian discourse. “In recent years, two major regional shifts have played an important role in the formulation of Iranian foreign and security policies in the Middle East. The United States war on terror after September 11 attacks in New York and the Arab spring uprisings across Middle East in 2011” (Brookings Institution 2013, s.a). The former established the Shia dominant government in Iraq and the latter destabilized Syria, Bahrain and Yemen.

These events redefined the paradigm of Iranian security policies in the Middle East and also resulted in the creation of Iranian proxies across the region. The proxies not only gave the new outlook to Iranian foreign and security policies but also played an eminent role in

strengthening the Iranian influence in the region. “Iran’s foreign and defense policies are comprised of complex, overlapping and sometimes contradictory motivations. Iran has faced a constant dilemma about whether it’s a nation or cause” (Sadjadpour 2013, s.a). Iranian policy makers constantly evaluate their revolutionary and religious ideologies against the demands of Iran’s national security interests.

2.2 Security Decision Making in Iran

The concept of guidance of Islamic jurist *Velayat-al-Faaqih*¹ plays an important role in the Iranian national security decision making. Through this principle, Islamic jurist (Supreme leader) provides guidance to the government but does not directly engage in state affairs. However, the supreme leader is also the commander in Chief of the armed forces. According to Iran’s constitution, Supreme leader has the final authority over all major foreign policy decisions. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran often expressed the need for ideology based foreign and security policies. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRCG), mandated to defend Iran’s revolution and the Islamic outlook, often expressed support for Khamenei’s decisions. However, moderate Iranian leaders, including President Hassan Rouhani, argues pragmatic foreign and security policies meant to reduce Iran’s international isolation. “Complex institutional structures, importance of personal ties, influential nongovernment actors and lack of clear mandate among security and foreign ministries often results in conflicting policy outcomes” (RAND Corporation 2001, s.a).

¹ The doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih forms the central axis of contemporary Shia political thought. It advocates a guardianship-based political system, which relies upon a just and capable jurist (faqih) to assume the leadership of the government in the absence of an infallible Imam

Furthermore, IRCG and *Artesh* (military) have duplicate mandate in terms of their security operations, which further overlaps with Iran's intelligence services. For instance, it is impossible to separate the defense of revolution (mandate of IRCG) from the defense of Iran's external borders (mandate of *Artesh*). However, the complex decision making structure is balanced through the cultural and procedural emphasis on consensus among political and religious elites. According to the constitution, the President enjoys incredible oversight over national security issues but in reality the Supreme leader exercises tremendous influence not only over Iranian armed forces and intelligence services but also over revolutionary institutions like IRCG.

2.3 Instruments of Iranian National Security Policy

"Iranian religious ideology is based on the concept of martyrdom, which not only plays an important role in the Iranian strategic thinking but also provides ideological basis to fight in the conflicts overseas". (Grotto, 2009). Shiites revere *Imam Hossain ibn Ali*, grandson of *Prophet Muhammad*. He was killed by the Umayyad Caliph in the battle of Karbala in 680 CE after he refused to pledge allegiance to him. Shiites worldwide gets inspiration from the martyrdom of Hossain to fight against injustice, oppression and persecution. The members of Iranian revolutionary guard corps (IRGC) killed in different conflicts abroad are termed as martyrs. The supreme leader of Iran declared Major General Qassem Suleimani a living martyr for his services in building the resistance network comprised of multiple Iranian proxies in the Middle East. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard - Quds Force (IRCG-QF) is the foremost operational instrument used by the Iranian regime to protect its national security interests in Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and Iraq. "As an instrument of its security policy, Iran not only provides weapons, training and military advisors but also political support to its allies in the region" (Katzman, 2017).

Iranian military support is not only limited to its allied governments but also encompasses armed militias like Hezbollah, Houthi rebels and various armed factions in Iraq and Syria. Generally, Major General Qassem Soleimani of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRCG) leads the covert military operations outside Iranian borders in order to provide military support to its allied governments and factions. Major General Qassem Soleimani leads the Quds Force of the IRCG and presumably reports directly to supreme leader Khamenei. Previously, commanders of the IRCG-QF took the credit for the establishment of “Liberation Army” comprised of various Shia militias in order to protect Iranian security interests in numerous Arab countries. IRCG-QF has also played an instrumental role in the creation of Popular Mobilization forces, an umbrella organization of about 40 Shia militias in Iraq. Furthermore, it has provided the Houthi rebel movement called “Ansar Allah” with the anti-tank missiles, RPG’s and other weapons. Similar military support has been extended to some of the factions of the opposition movement in Bahrain.

2.4 Saudi Arabian Security Policy

While Iran claims its top foreign policy priority is friendship, its behavior shows the opposite is true. Iran is the single-most-belligerent-actor in the region, and its actions display both a commitment to regional hegemony and a deeply held view that conciliatory gestures signal weakness either on Iran’s part or on the part of its adversaries (Al-Jubeir, 2016)

Saudi Arabian national security apparatus has evolved since Muhammad bin Salman Al-Saud became the deputy crown prince and defense minister of the Kingdom. In the last decade, Saudi Arabia has faced some major challenges including regime changes, Arab Spring revolutions and increased sectarian strife in the Persian Gulf and beyond. At present, Saudi defense doctrine is focused on consolidating its regional status as the Arab leader, protect its Sunni Arab allies and to counter the increased Iranian influence in the Middle East. “In addition to massive oil rents, the Saudi regime has at its disposal a potent religious ideology, commonly

known as Wahhabism, that is renowned for its historical rejection of the Shia as a legitimate Islamic community” (Steinberg, 2001).

Wahhabism, is a form of Islam only developed in the late 18th century. Wahhabi school of thought presents strong opposition to Shi’ism and accuse them of heretic innovations called *bidah*². The same Wahhabi ideology has been followed by many radical terrorist factions in the Middle East including ISIS and Al-Nusra Front. Moreover, Saudi Security apparatus also recruited its own proxies and provided them with weapons and training required to engage Iranian allies like Hezbollah and Houthi rebels (Fisher 2016, s.a). Saudi Arabia also sent their regular troops under the Peninsula Shield Force of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to crush the Shia uprising in Bahrain in February, 2011. However, demonstrations in the Shia Eastern Province (Saudi Arabia) were more brutally suppressed. “The government allowed small protests around economic grievances but was very swift with demonstrators who expressed political demands or criticized the regime’s repression.” (Human Rights Watch 2011, s.a).

2.5 Security decision making in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia exercises strict civilian control over its security apparatus. King Salman bin Abdul Aziz is commander in chief of Saudi armed forces and exercises complete control over security decision making process. Deputy crown prince and defense minister Muhammad Bin Salman steadily started to play a significant role in the formulation of Saudi security policies in the Middle East. He is considered to be the mastermind behind the Saudi campaign in Yemen and the recent blockade of Qatar by four major Arab countries including UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. Minister of Defense also formulates the major security decisions involving the Saudi regular troops. However, Saudi deputy crown prince and Minister of interior

² The concept of Bidah refers to innovation in religious matters.

effectively controls the “General Security Services (internal intelligence services), the Public Security Administration Forces (the police), the Civil Defense Forces (fire service), the Border Guard, the Coast Guard, the Passport & Immigration Division, the Mujahadeen Forces, the Drug Enforcement Forces, the Special Security Forces, and the General Investigative Bureau” (Cordesman 2004: s.a).

Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) follows the different chain of command and is under the control of Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah, the current head of the Ministry of National Guard. Furthermore, Saudi security apparatus is divided in three separate categories with separate chain of command under three different royal princes. Important security decisions regarding the internal and external security issues are taken after the consultation at various levels. However, the lack of well-known and recognized structure of collective decision making makes it difficult to analyze the effectiveness of the Saudi decision making process.

2.6 Instruments of Saudi National Security Policy

At present, the Saudi security apparatus consisted of regular armed forces, an independent National Guard and various intelligence agencies. Saudi Arabia also has large paramilitary forces responsible for internal security and to protect the strategic assets inside the Kingdom. Despite the huge investments that have been made for the security sector reform, Saudi Arabia still lacks well-trained manpower and well-established infrastructure for its armed forces. Strategically, it depends heavily on other regional militaries to protect its national security interests in the Middle East. Apart from GCC, Pakistan has been one of the foremost ally of Saudi Arabia in terms of providing training, weapons and ex-soldiers for the Saudi armed forces.

Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries also formulated Peninsula shield force to protect their security and strategic interests in the Persian Gulf. The same force has been used in the

past to crush Shia popular uprising in Bahrain. Except the Shia majority eastern region of Al-Qatif, Saudi security apparatus does not face any internal security problems. Historically, some princes also campaigned for the constitutional monarchy in the Kingdom. “The constitutional monarchy movement should therefore be seen in the context of power struggles within the Saudi royal family.” (Al-Rasheed, 2005). “Moreover, tribal and economic elites in the country are still tied to the regime through networks of patronage.” (Hertog, 2010), which plays an integral role in the stability and internal security of the Kingdom.

Chapter 3 - Case Studies of Conflict Zones

In this chapter, we will analyze the conflicts of Bahrain, Syria and Yemen in order to understand the involvement of Iranian-Saudi military and security agencies. After the examination of Iranian-Saudi security apparatus and design making in the previous chapter, we will further analyze how their national security institutions perceived the threats emerging from these conflict zones and what were the underlined motivations that led to their engagement in these conflicts.

3.1 Bahrain

Iranian military and political campaign in Bahrain was of aggressive and offensive nature to overthrow the Sunni ruling Al-Khalifa family and to create another Shia dominant country in the Persian Gulf. Iran did not encounter any substantial threat emerging from Bahrain against its territorial integrity or sovereignty. On the contrary, Iran was in pursuit of regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf, which will certainly be strengthened by carving out another Shia-led state at the doorstep of its arch rival Saudi Arabia. Iran has been actively involved in terms of providing military and political support to Shiite opposition groups in Bahrain. Although, initial protests were indigenous and were result of political exclusion and religious discrimination against the Shia majority, Iranian regime did ignite the anti-government violence by providing weapons, funding and training to multiple Shia opposition factions. Bahrain accused the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC-QF), an elite force that directly operates to help Iranian regional allies and proxies, of providing military training to Bahraini citizens to support the popular uprising. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia feared that the regime change in Bahrain can potentially trigger protests inside the country affecting

the internal security and stability of the Kingdom. Evidently, Iran was seeking more power in the region by challenging the status quo existed in favor of Saudi Arabia. In other words, states can decrease the security of others because of the actions they take to strengthen their own. “In seeking power and security for themselves, states can easily threaten the power and security of other states” (Buzan 1991, 195)

Saudi Arabia has about 10 percent Shia minority, which is densely populated in the oil rich eastern province of Al-Qatif. Saudi fears came true when after the successful protests in Bahrain, there were large demonstrations by the Shia minority within the Kingdom. Shia populations in both the countries were repressed as second class citizens by the Sunni dominant governments. Therefore, protesters in Bahrain and in Saudi Arabia had similar demands of equal rights, increased representation in the public sector and greater political participation. “However, some Saudi religious scholars denied the accusation of Shia alienation in the Kingdom and argued that the Shia are not the worst off in the country. Sunnis in the marginalized southwestern area of Asir are worse off in their poor villages.” (Al-Rasheed, 2007). 11 March, 2011 was declared as the Day of Rage by the opposition groups. This was the first time for Sunni and Shia opposition groups to call for demonstrations on the same day (Al-Rasheed, 2011). However, “the Day of Rage failed utterly, thus pointing to the limitations of so-called Facebook and Twitter revolutions in the absence of real organization and civil society willing to engage in protest”. (Morozov, 2011). Furthermore, Saudi government considers it as an existential threat posed by Iranian proxies in the region, which not only has the potential to overthrow the ruling Al-Khalifa family in Bahrain but can also destabilize the Kingdom itself.

However, it is of utmost importance to mention that in the beginning, popular uprising in Bahrain was a homegrown movement against the discriminatory policies of the state towards

Shia majority population. Iran exploited the situation for its own geopolitical ambitions to assert itself in the Persian Gulf. Iranian approach was of a hegemonic power, who wants to expand its area of influence and political power in the Persian Gulf. Iran also considers itself as a self-declared protector of Shia causes across the globe, which in nature is closer to the principles of geopolitics as compare to security dilemma. However, Saudi Arabia played a reactionary role in the Bahraini conflict and was concerned that the Iranian influence in the region can potentially diminish its regional hegemony. Evidently, in Bahrain, security policies of both the countries has features of security dilemma and geopolitics. However, *prima facie*, Iranian security policy was closer to geopolitics meant to extend its regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf and beyond. However, Saudi Arabian counter-revolution strategy was closer to security dilemma meant to acquire more and more power to counter the Iranian incursions, which affects the security and stability of GCC countries including Bahrain.

3.2 Syria

Iran considered the popular uprising of Syria in 2011 as an existential threat. Iran has major stakes in the region ranging from the preservation of emerging Shia crescent comprising Iraq and Syria, to protecting its militant wing Hezbollah in Lebanon. Sunni- led government in Damascus would have a devastating effect on the Iranian security policies in the region. Syria has been a forward-operational base for the IRGC to conduct its activities in Lebanon and Palestine. Iran calculated that loss of Syria would put an end to its strategic depth in the region and would bring all of Iranian adversaries on its doorstep. In order to counter the emerging threat, Iran not only operationalized its existing resistance network in the form of IRCG-QF and Hezbollah but also employed new Shia militias to counter the emerging threat from its Sunni rivals including Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Iran adopted the strategy of offensive defense in the Syrian conflict based on the principle that “it is easier to destroy the others army and take its territory than it is to defend one’s own.” (Jervis 1994, 315). Iran did not want to fight its

adversaries at home and preferred to encounter them away from home in Syria. Iran also avoided direct conventional military confrontation with the United States or other Sunni military powers in Syria. However, Iranian strategy was to preserve its strategic depth through the creation of trans-regional militia army with expeditionary command and control. Iran does not want its Sunni adversaries including some radical and lethal factions like Al-Nusra front to strike them first at home. Instead, the strategy was to get the first strike advantage and to militarily engage them far from home in Syria. “A specific precondition of any security dilemma is that in case of confrontation it is better to move first than to wait for the adversary to make its move. This is to say that there must be first strike advantages associated with available actions.” (Melander 1999, 21)

Damascus was perceived as the most important Iranian outpost and strategic asset by Saudi Arabia. Riyadh believed that the outcome of Syrian conflict would define the balance of power in the Middle East for the coming decades. Saudi Arabia feared that if Assad regime survives, Iran would emerge as a regional superpower, which can potentially threaten the sovereignty, territorial integrity and dominance of Arab Gulf monarchies in the region. The objective of Saudi campaign was also to halt and reverse the Iranian-led Shia dominance ranging from Afghanistan through Iran, Iraq, and Syria into Lebanon. Saudi Arabia did not encounter any emerging existential threat out of Syrian conflict but it provided them with an opportunity to implement their geopolitical ambitions in order to counter the Iranian regional hegemony. Furthermore, overthrow of the Assad regime would effectively restrict the Iranian access to strategic regions that are crucial for its Lebanese ally Hezbollah. It would be extremely difficult for the IRGC to provide Hezbollah with the much needed military support without the presence of Assad regime. Recognizing the threat posed by Saudi Arabia and other Sunni adversaries, Hezbollah launched the first major foreign military intervention in the Syrian conflict. Consequently, Saudi Arabia, GCC and the Arab league declared Hezbollah a

terrorist organization. Saudi Arabia also stopped \$4 Billion in the military aid to Lebanon (Bernard, 2016: s.a), which also opened the door for Iran to enhance its cooperation with the Lebanese government. Saudi Arabia accused Hezbollah of reported subversive activities in the Gulf on the behest of Iran. Their greatest fear was about the potential disloyalty of Shia populations in Bahrain and in Saudi Arabia itself. Therefore, Saudi agenda was to strike the blow at the heart of Iranian hegemonic ambitions by ensuring that Syria is no longer an Iranian asset.

3.3 Yemen

The Houthis officially known as “Ansar Allah” (Partisans of God) are Iranian backed Shiite Muslim movement in Yemen. The group belong to the Zaidi sect of Shia Islam and has political and military ambitions in the region. Zaidi Shias are the offshoot of Twelver Shia Islam, which is officially practiced in Iran. Houthis seized the capital Sana’a and overthrew the country’s government in 2015. Their foremost political and military objective was to protect the Zaidi sect and to stop the export of Salafism and Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia into Northern Yemen. Iran initially denied but later on acknowledged that they provided the Houthi rebels with the much needed military and financial assistance. IRCG-QF also sent their military advisors for the training and operational planning of the Houthis military maneuvers. Saudi government also alleged the presence of Hezbollah fighters in the northern Yemen. Iran supports the Houthi movement not only because they are Shias but also because they challenge the regional hegemony of its rival Saudi Arabia. Iran has the geopolitical ambitions meant to engage Saudi Arabia and to increase its influence in the region. Increased Iranian presence and the Houthi takeover of the government led Saudi Arabia to launch one of the intensive military campaign in its history.

Saudi deputy crown prince and defense minister Muhammad bin Salman Al-Saud, considered to be more belligerent in terms of Saudi security policies towards Iran, was instrumental in launching military operation called “operation decisive storm” against Houthis in Yemen. “Belligerent leaders provoke mass hostility creating a security dilemma which in turn encourages even more mass hostility and leader’s belligerence” (Kaufman 1996, 109). Both Iranian and Saudi security policy makes perceived Yemen as an opportunity to undermine each other’s assets in the region. Primarily, the success of Houthi movement was not because of Iranian support or Saudi belligerence. It was the result of increased alienation of Houthis and they demanded increased role in the central government with tribal autonomy in Northern Yemen. It was the anarchic state system in the region that further infuriated the crises and led to the structural security dilemma. “A structural security dilemma refers to a situation which has occurred not by state design, but of the anarchic nature of the system in which it exists”. (Kaufman 1996, 151). Furthermore, both Saudi Arabia and Iran recognizes the degree to which their security measures threaten each other but because of the anarchic nature of state system and regional security politics in the Middle East, the security dilemma prevails.

Chapter 4 - Research Framework

Research Question: *Is it geopolitics or security dilemma that plays the primary role in the formulation Iranian-Saudi security policies?*

My objective of designing this research is to find an unbiased assessment of Iranian-Saudi conflict in the Middle East and the underlined strategic motivations behind the security policies of both the countries. “Iranian-Saudi relations are based on misunderstanding, ignorance, and isolation. Combined with heightened sectarian prejudice, which has emerged largely in the fertile landscape for hatred and division sown by the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the long-running enmity between the two nations has only worsened.” (Brookings Institution 2006, s.a). The findings can help to better understand the current security policies and will shed some light on the alternate policies in order to improve the cooperation and collaboration between both the countries. Furthermore, most practical way to obtain the required information involved the academic papers and analysis of policy papers regarding Iranian- Saudi security policies in the Middle East. In the framework of this research, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted with thorough scrutiny of primary and secondary sources.

4.1 Research Background

Iranian-Saudi activities were analyzed from the time period 11 March, 2011 – 22 December, 2016. 11 March, 2011 was chosen as the starting point of the conflict because that was the first time when both Sunni and Shia opposition groups called for demonstrations in Bahrain and termed it as the “Day of Rage” (Al-Rasheed, 2011). In the same month, Arab spring begin to unfold in Syria resulting in violent protests that led to regime’s crackdown

against the protesters. The end date was chosen keeping in perspective the battle of Aleppo, which for a long time was the foremost battleground for Iranian and Saudi proxies. 22 December, 2016 was the day when Aleppo fell to the Syrian regime forces, the major tactical victory for the Iranian allies in the region. The end date was also chosen due to time constraints of this thesis.

Primarily, the academic papers written by renowned Middle East experts were analyzed in order to apply the theories of security dilemma and geopolitics in the context of Iranian-Saudi conflict in the Middle East. Moreover, policy and research reports issued by Brookings Institution, Rand Corporation, Carnegie Endowment for international peace and United States congressional research service were scrutinized. It is significantly important to understand the historical background, nature of the conflict and complexities of Iranian-Saudi security apparatus through the analyses of these academic papers, research documents and policy reports. Official documents from Saudi and Iranian governments regarding their security policies are heavily guarded and were not accessible. However, official documents and reports of the Pakistani government were analyzed regarding the involvement of Pakistani citizens in the Middle East either as an Iranian or Saudi proxies.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to broaden the scope of this research. Interviews were significant part of this research based on the inside information, experience and involvement of the respondents in the Iranian-Saudi conflict. The interviewees had in-depth understanding and considerable knowledge regarding the security policies of both the countries. The participants of these semi-structured interviews were two leaders of Shia and Sunni factions in Pakistan. Both the participants had information regarding the followers of their respective sect, who went to the Middle East to fight with either Iranian or Saudi sponsored outfits. Interviews were significant to examine the underlined motivations of people

who are participating in different Middle Eastern conflicts and also how respondent perceives the aims and ambitions of Iranian-Saudi security policies in the region. Some of the responses of the interviewees may not be accurate or subjective because of respondent's affiliation with either side of the conflict but this is part and parcel of conducting the research. I circumvented this possible bias by selecting wide range of questions for both the respondents, which included variety of events in order to evaluate the given responses. However, I am confident that my assessment of their responses is generally accurate.

4.2 Research Analysis and Results

The participants of the semi-structured interviews expressed conflicting assessments of their rival's foreign/security policies and geopolitical ambitions. The Iranian covert and overt involvement was discussed and analyzed in relation with the role played by IRCG-QF, Hezbollah and various other Shia militias. Alternatively, Saudi financial and armed support to various Sunni militant factions were scrutinized. Saudi direct military interventions in Bahrain and Yemen also came into consideration. However, regardless of difference of opinion about the objectives of Iranian-Saudi security policies, both the interviewees expressed fairly similar motivations which enabled them to fight in these conflicts. The respondents mentioned that their particular allies e.g. Iran and Saudi Arabia are fighting the belligerence of their rival. Moreover, they stated that their strategy is of offensive defense in order to protect their religious shrines, followers of their respective sects and strategic interests.

At first, the role of Iranian-Saudi political and security institutions was discussed in the formulation of their respective security policies. The amount of logistical and financial support provided to different factions was scrutinized in order to evaluate the exact motivations of both Sunni and Shia followers. Particularly, religious perspectives were dominant throughout the interviews. Expert 01 claimed that the foremost objective of those who are fighting in these

conflict zones is to protect the Shiite religious holy shrines in the cities of Samara, Najaf and Karbala. In addition, he mentioned that even those who are fighting outside these cities are meant to stop the advance of radical Sunni militants towards these holiest places. He also contested the argument that there is any organized movement of people from Pakistan to these conflict zones while stressing that it is purely voluntary and not meant to gain any financial benefits. (Ex 01, June 5, 2017, see appendix)

However, in discussion with Expert 02, an interesting claim emerged that Iran is waging an undeclared war of aggression against Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Arab world. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has every right to defend itself and its allies in order to prevent the Iranian hegemony. He stressed that Iran has geopolitical ambitions of overthrowing the current Saudi regime by encouraging the Shia minority to rise up against the Saudi government, which is the custodian of two holy mosques. Particularly, he mentioned Bahrain and Yemen as an example, where Iran did aggravate the crisis through its proxies. However, despite the difference of opinion, both the interviewees gave the same response that there is no organized recruitment of fighters from Pakistan and some people went to the conflict zones purely on voluntary and individual basis. (Ex 02, June 8, 2017, see appendix)

Both the experts (Ex 01, Ex 02, June 5-8, 2017, see appendix) had consensus that Iran and Saudi Arabia are defending themselves and their allies in the region to counter the aggression of their rival. Expert 01 (Ex 01, June 05, 2017, see appendix) also claimed that Iran is fighting the war to stop the spread of radical Wahhabi ideology, which possess the danger not only to Iran but to its allies as well. Similarly, Expert 02 (Ex 02, June 8, 2017, see appendix) stressed that Sunnis are fighting the Shia insurgence in the Persian Gulf and beyond, which not only threatens Saudi Arabia but the whole Sunni Arab world as well. It was quite evident from the responses of both the interviewees that they feel their ideologies, religious sects and de

facto guardian states of Shia or Sunni faiths e.g. Iran and Saudi Arabia are threatened by the hostile policies of their rivals.

Expert 01 (Ex 01, June 05, 2017, see appendix) was reluctant to admit that Iran has geopolitical ambitions in the Middle East, instead he stressed that Iran is fighting to defend and protect the Shia Muslim minorities of the Arab world from the radical militant groups like ISIS and Al-Nusra Front. While, Expert 02 (Ex 02, June 8, 2017, see appendix) did agree that Saudi Arabia has some geopolitical ambitions but they are only meant to maintain the decades old balance of power existed in its favor. His accusations regarding the involvement of militant Shia groups were similar to Expert 01. He specifically mentioned about Hezbollah and its operations in the Syrian civil war, which he considered as part of the undeclared Iranian war against Saudi Arabia in particular and Sunni Arab world in general.

Furthermore, research and policy reports published by different renowned think tanks and academics seems to have consensus that both Iran and Saudi Arabia have strategic security interests and the end game of current conflicts will shape the future of the new Middle East and its politics. It was further evaluated that both the countries have high stakes in the region because they consider themselves as the protector to two different and sometimes conflicting religious ideologies namely Shia and Sunni Islam. Likewise, the prominent finding during the research was that both the countries did not engage directly through their conventional militaries but they do consider each other's hostile and aggressive security policies as threat to their homeland. And to overcome that insecurity they are engaging each other indirectly through proxy warfare.

4.3 Findings and implications

The implications of my findings are enormous. The data collected through interviews, official documents and independent policy reports allows us to make several conclusions.

Primarily, we have learned that both Iran and Saudi Arabia feel threatened by each other's military maneuvers and hostile policies in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. They are on a dangerous trajectory, which can also lead to direct confrontation. This is also an ideological warfare and both the countries consider its utmost responsibility to safeguard Shia and Sunni assets in the Middle East. Role of religious ideologies is fairly evident in the foreign and security policy formulation of both the countries. Revolutionary features are quite prominent in the Iranian security apparatus and Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is effectively engaged with Saudi Proxies in most of the conflicts.

Saudi Arabia also follows ideology-based security policies and Saudi policy makers has strong ties with the Wahhabi clergy in the kingdom. The emphasis on consensus between political and religious elites is also embedded in the constitution and government structures of both the countries, which also plays an important role in the formulation of their hostile security policies. Furthermore, findings of my research are multipronged. Initially, research was operationalized to analyze the underlined motivations of Iranian- Saudi security policies on conflict by conflict basis. I analyzed whether its security dilemma or geopolitical ambitions that forced both the countries to participate in different conflicts of Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. Additionally, I examined the dimensions of their overall grand strategy to evaluate whether it originates because of security dilemma or geopolitical aspirations. Furthermore, Paul Roe's categorization of security dilemma was applied to the research model of Iranian-Saudi security policies in the Middle East.

Table 4.3.1

Primary motivations of Iranian–Saudi security policies. (Security Dilemma vis-a-vis Geopolitics)

	Iran	Saudi Arabia	Paul Roe's Categorization
Bahrain	Geopolitics	Security Dilemma	Difficult to resolve short of war
Syria	Security Dilemma	Geopolitics	Difficult to resolve short of war
Yemen	Geopolitics	Security Dilemma	Difficult to resolve short of war

Source: Author generated

My hypothesis was not mutually exclusive and findings also displayed that the features of both security dilemma and geopolitics were noticeable in all the three conflicts. However, the objective was to assess which notion played the foremost role, which forced both the countries to engage in these conflicts.

Bahrain

Findings of interviews and document analysis determined that the motivation of Iranian engagement in Bahrain was to extend its influence in the Persian Gulf. Iran supported the Bahraini uprising financially and militarily in the absence of any active threat emerging from Saudi Arabia. In 2011, there was no substantial threat neither to Iranian mainland nor to its allies in Bahrain. Iran used the Bahraini uprising to challenge Saudi Arabian hegemony in the

region. Additionally, at the beginning of the conflict, diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were fairly normal. However, Iran supported the Bahraini uprising to create another Shia state in the Persian Gulf, which represents predominant features of geopolitics. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia interpreted the Iranian involvement in Bahrain as an active threat against its strategic interests. Saudis were also concerned about the spillover of Bahraini protests into Saudi mainland. It also led to mass protests in the Saudi Shia majority eastern province of Al-Qatif, which had the potential to challenge the Saudi ruling elite and their policies. Saudis feared that potential unrest in the kingdom and consequently sent their troops to Bahrain in order to crush the uprising. Findings of the research represents that the fear of Iranian resurgence in the Persian Gulf and its potential spillover in the kingdom forced Saudi Arabia to fortify its allies, which has prominent features of security dilemma.

Syria

There were significant features of security dilemma, which resulted in the Iranian engagement of the Syrian Conflict. Research signifies the Iranian fears that the success of Sunni radical factions will not only hurt its geopolitical interests but also its religious duties to protect the holy Shia shrines. Fall of Assad regime would effectively disrupt its access to Hezbollah in Lebanon, the major Iranian outpost in the region. Likewise, triumph of extremist Sunni militants would have resulted in the destruction of Shia holy shrines. It clearly demonstrates that Iran had considerable threats to its Shia ideological doctrine (protection of shrines) and to its foremost ally Hezbollah. It confirms that the Iranian military campaign was primarily motivated by security dilemma. However Saudi Arabia, considered it an opportunity to assert itself in Syria and to overthrow two major Iranian allies. Saudi ambitions meant to weaken Hezbollah and the Assad regime to accomplish their strategic interests. At the beginning of the conflict, there was no credible threat emerging from Syria or Iran to the Saudi mainland and

there were no substantial Saudi allies inside Syria. It demonstrates that the Saudi engagement in the Syrian conflict was motivated by its geopolitical ambitions as compare to security dilemma.

Yemen

However, findings represent significant similarities between the motivations of Saudi and Iranian security policies in Yemen and Bahrain. Iran supported the Houthi rebels to overthrow Saudi allied government in the absence of any reliable security threat from Yemen. Although relations were tense between the two governments at the beginning of the conflict but Saudi Arabia did not engage militarily with the Houthi rebels until Houthis received financial help and weapon shipments from Iran and showed aggressive military maneuvers near its southern border with Yemen. Therefore, Iranian involvement in Yemen was predominantly inspired by long-term geopolitical interests as compare to security dilemma. Whereas, Saudi Arabia feared that the Houthi takeover of government will threaten their national security and will install another Iranian ally right across the border. Findings represent that “operation desert storm” was result of credible national security fears on part of Saudi Arabia. They were not only concerned about the security of their southern border but also realized that Iran is trying to encircle them with its allies. It validates that the Saudi military engagement in Yemen was result of security dilemma.

4.4 Iranian-Saudi Grand Security Strategy Triggered by Security Dilemma

The foremost finding of the research is that even though geopolitics played the leading role as compare to security dilemma for either Iran or Saudi Arabia in some of the conflicts as mentioned above in the table 4.2.1, Iranian –Saudi security policies are motivated by security dilemma in its entirety. Comprehensive security strategy of both the countries is predominantly inspired by fear and uncertainty about the intentions of their rival. Besides political and military

battles, Iran and Saudi Arabia are also engaged in psychological warfare. Heightened sectarian prejudices has exacerbated the conflict and as a result both the countries have offensive defense military postures. They consider each other as an aggressor affecting the status quo because their security policies are based on the strategy of offensive defense. As a result of this security dilemma, the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on which led them to militarily engage in the conflicts of Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. The primary finding of my research is that geopolitics is just one major component that creates a security dilemma between both the countries. Therefore, security dilemma plays the foremost role in the formulation of security policies of both Iran and Saudi Arabia at the grand level.

4.5 Findings about Paul Roe's Categorization of Security Dilemma

As mentioned in chapter 1, Paul Roe characterized security dilemma into three categories of conflicts – resolvable short of war, difficult to resolve short of war and irresolvable short of war. I have applied Paul Roe's categorization of security dilemma in the research model mentioned in Table 4.3.1. Findings represent that the conflicts of Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and the existing security dilemma in the comprehensive national security strategy of both the countries falls into the category of "Difficult to resolve short of war". For the purpose of this research, War has been characterized as any direct or indirect military engagement between both the countries. It not only includes direct conventional warfare but also includes the ongoing proxy war in the Middle East.

Conclusion have been made considering the role of religious and revolutionary ideologies in the security apparatus and national security design-making of both the countries as mentioned in chapter 2. It was evident during the interviews that Iranian-Saudi engagement in each of the conflict was focused on protecting holy religious shrines and followers of their respective sects. It represents the sectarian discourse of both the countries, which is difficult to

resolve short of war because of the centuries old rivalry and animosity between Shia and Sunni political Islam. Security dilemma between both the countries stems from fears of Shia or Wahhabi hegemony in the Middle East, which not only incites religious sentiments of their followers but also provides them with the motivation to get recruited in Iranian-Saudi proxies. As mentioned in Chapter 4, people who joins these proxies from Pakistan are primarily motivated by religious ideologies as compare to Iranian-Saudi strategic interests, which makes it even difficult to control these proxy forces. It also raises the questions about how much operational control does the Iranian-Saudi security apparatus has over their proxies fighting in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. In order to resolve this security dilemma short of war, Iran and Saudi Arabia have to abandon the sectarian discourse which is ingrained in their national security apparatus. Therefore, at present, the existing security dilemma between Iran and Saudi Arabia falls into the category of “difficult to resolve short of war”.

Chapter 5 - Policy Recommendations

The foreign and security policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia are poles apart. Iranian security apparatus represents a revolutionary republic while Saudi national security strategy characterizes a conservative monarchy. The sectarian tendencies and the Shia-Sunni divide has further exacerbated this ideological conflict. Even though, it is extremely difficult to resolve existing security dilemma short of war but efforts should be made to improve the relations between both the countries. As mentioned in chapter 4, Iranian-Saudi security dilemma emerges from misunderstandings, ignorance and isolation, which includes the fear and uncertainty about each other's intentions. Iran and Saudi Arabia cut off their diplomatic ties in January 2016, which has further aggravated the security dilemma with no channels of communication open between the two countries. Therefore, as per my findings I believe there are four policy recommendations that can improve the existing security dilemma and can pacify the Iranian-Saudi military and political engagements in the Middle East.

- **Normalize the Shia-Sunni Divide:** It is of utmost importance to normalize the sectarian differences in order to resolve the conflicts in the Middle East. This would involve willingness and effort by the governments of both Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as their proxies. Keeping ideological differences intact, Iranian and Saudi government should restore necessary communication between Shia and Sunni school of thoughts. Educational and cultural exchanges can play an important role to bridge the gap between two conflicting religious ideologies. Iranian-Saudi security policies are also result of an ideological war and security situation in the Middle East will further deteriorate without resolving these religious differences.

- **Restoration of Diplomatic Ties:** Governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia should take constructive steps in order to restore the diplomatic ties between both the countries. It will be significant to understand each other's regional priorities, strategic interests and to explore avenues of mutual cooperation. It would not only enable both the countries to stop the vicious circle of power accumulation but will also provide with the opportunity to have meaningful dialogue and negotiations. Absence of diplomatic channels resulted in the formulation of hostile foreign and security policies, which has further exacerbated the security situation in the Middle East.

- **Back-Channel Diplomacy:** Both the countries should have unofficial but direct lines of communication at the highest possible level. Back-channel diplomacy will provide with an opportunity to both the countries to engage in low pressure settings in order to reduce the existing tensions. It will also enable them to scrutinize and analyze some of their geopolitical interests to provide some political space to each other. As discussed earlier, security policies of both the countries emerges from unnecessary apprehensions about the intentions of their rivals and unofficial avenues of cooperation will enable them to understand each other's aggressive military postures without media or political pressure.

- **Stop the use of Proxies:** Security policies of both the countries are focused on achieving their geopolitical ambitions through their proxies in different Middle Eastern countries. These proxies have political and religious motivations to fight in the conflict zones. As mentioned earlier, most of the people who are fighting in these armed militias are motivated to defend their religious shrines

and holy cities. There is a need for Iran and Saudi Arabia to abandon the strategy of proxy warfare because it not only exacerbates the Shia-Sunni divide in the region but also fuels hatred and animosity between both the countries. It would be an important step to address the underlined motivations of this conflict, which plays an important role in the emergence of existing security dilemma between both the countries.

Conclusion

The study has hopefully enlightened the reader whether its geopolitics or security dilemma that primarily formulates the Iranian-Saudi security policies in the Middle East. By bridging the gap between international security theories and current Iranian-Saudi security policies in the Middle East, we are able to obtain the accurate picture of the complexities involved in the resolution of ongoing conflicts. Findings shows that even though some of the conflicts were initiated by either Saudi Arabia or Iran mainly to fulfill their geopolitical ambitions, security dilemma plays the foremost role in the formulation of Iranian-Saudi comprehensive national security strategy.

Furthermore, research is categorically crucial to understand Paul Roe's categorization of security dilemma in terms of conflicts in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen and also with regard to comprehensive Iran-Saudi security strategy. By applying his categorization of security dilemma into our research model, we conclude that security dilemma regarding all of the above mentioned Middle Eastern conflicts and the comprehensive Iranian-Saudi security strategy falls into the category of "Difficult to resolve short of war". This conclusion has been made considering the predominant role played by religious, sectarian and revolutionary ideologies in the security policymaking of both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

By analyzing the motivations behind their national security decision-making and determining the type of current security dilemma between both the countries, we are able to recommend alternate policy measures that may improve the bilateral relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Irrespective of the limitations of this research, we conclude that normalizing the centuries old Shia-Sunni divide can play a significant role in weakening the underlined

ideological motivations that infuriate the Iranian-Saudi rivalry. It is of utmost importance to bridge the gap between conflicting religious ideologies through educational and cultural exchanges. As Ayatollah Khomeini said in the declaration of 1980, “More saddening and dangerous than nationalism is the creation of dissension between Sunnis and Shi’as and diffusion of mischievous propaganda among brother Muslims....I extend the hand of brotherhood to all committed Muslims in the world and ask them to regard Shi’as as cherished brothers”.

Appendix

Interview Protocol

The interviews were carried out in person in a period of June 5- June 8, 2017. The interviews lasted about 120-160 minutes each. When carrying out the interviews, this author explained the concepts of geopolitics and security dilemma, and then allowed the interviewees the lead the general discussion around the Iranian-Saudi Conflict in the Middle East. Expert 01 belonged to the Shia community and Expert 02 represented the Sunni perspectives.

The interviews were semi-structured and tailored to an extent. The interviews were not recorded. However, the author took notes. As per the request of the interviewees, the author decided not to disclose their identities. Request was made by the interviewees not to mention their names in any form or shape at any online or print publication or media platform. Below mentioned were the generalized questions asked by the author to start the conversation with the interviewees:

1. What do you think about Iranian- Saudi military/foreign policies in the Middle East?
2. Do you consider Iranian- Saudi Rivalry as a Shia- Sunni rivalry as well?
3. Do you think Saudi- Iranian conflict is because of Shia or Wahhabi religious ideologies?
4. Do you think Iran and Saudi Arabia are threat to each other's national security, If yes, what kind of threat?

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