

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF STATE IDENTITY IN
FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING**

*The Rise and Demise of Saudi–Iranian
Rapprochement (1997–2009)*

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Doctor of Philosophy

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To Mom and Dad—for everything.

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the thesis is to study the concept of state identity and its role in foreign policy decision-making through a constructivist analysis, with particular focus on the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997. While there has been a recent growth in the study of ideational factors and their effects on foreign policy in the Gulf, state identity remains understudied within mainstream International Relations (IR), Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), and even Middle Eastern studies literature, despite its importance and manifestation in the region’s foreign policy discourses. The aim is to challenge purely realist and power-based explanations that have dominated the discourse on Middle Eastern foreign policy—and in particular, the examination of Saudi–Iranian relations.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have played key roles in Gulf security for the past four decades, yet there have been few studies addressing their bilateral relations. Traditionally, differences—including sectarianism, nationalism, revolutionary ideology, competition over regional hegemony, oil prices, policy towards US military presence in the Gulf, and disagreements over the hajj—are often cited as reasons for their rivalry, yet these differences do not on their own offer a convincingly clear explanation as to why the rapprochement took place at that particular time, or why it thrived—and subsequently declined—despite the continuing presence of these issues.

The primary purpose of the thesis is to analyse and understand the reasons behind the rise and demise of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997. By focusing on ideational and materialist factors, the thesis seeks to demonstrate how changes in state identity—particularly in the official foreign policy discourse—indicates changes in policy, and therefore a shift in the amity–enmity pattern between the two states. Without discarding the value of realist explanations, the thesis will argue that the rapprochement process of 1997 has been significantly (though not exclusively) influenced by changes in state identity in each state. Moreover, this thesis provides a theoretical framework based on the concept of state identity and role theory (“self versus other”) to study the evolution of enmity, the rise of the rapprochement process during the Khatami presidency (1997–2005), and the subsequent revival of Saudi–Iranian rivalry during President Ahmadinejad’s first term (2005–2009).

The main argument of this thesis is that ideational and materialist factors were instrumental in the demise of the rapprochement process, but the change in Iran's state identity during the first term of President Ahmadinejad altered the perception of each state towards the other. Thus, the relationship transformed from a state of relative friendliness to a state of enmity and rivalry. This is explained by examining the *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse and the “moderates” versus “radicals” debate that consumed the narrative of Saudi–Iranian relations between 2005 and 2009.

The methods employed in answering these research questions and hypotheses are largely structured around a chronological account of the development and formation of state identities and an analysis of each state's foreign policy discourse during the period in question. This will be supplemented by qualitative interviews with individuals who participated in the rapprochement process, and will draw upon new archival material that has hitherto not been utilised in the literature on this subject.

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FRONT MATTER

Note on Translation and Transliteration

Where possible, I have used the translation and transliteration style of the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.¹ This incorporates the transliteration style of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.² Definitions for Arabic and Persian terms have been provided with reference to the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*.³ Any translated material within the text was translated by the source cited, except as otherwise noted.

<i>Ahl al-hal wal-'aqd</i>	Those qualified to elect or depose a caliph on behalf of the Muslim community. In medieval political theory, the term refers to legal scholars whose task it was to offer the caliphate to the most qualified person. (<i>lit.</i> those who solve and bind)
<i>as-salaf as-salih</i>	Usually used in the sense of “pious ancestors,” especially the first three generations of the Muslim community, who are considered to have lived the normative experience of Islam. Often referred to in works by Hanbali jurists, particularly Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. (<i>lit.</i> ancestors)
<i>bay'ah</i>	An oath of allegiance to a leader; an unwritten pact between the subjects by leading members of the tribe with the understanding that, as long as the leader abides by certain responsibilities toward his subjects, they are to maintain their allegiance to him.
<i>da'wa</i>	The teaching of Islam. (<i>lit.</i> propagation)
<i>diyana</i>	(<i>lit.</i> theological knowledge)
<i>fatwā</i>	Legal ruling on Islamic law by an Islamic scholar.
<i>faqīh (pl. fuqahā')</i>	An expert in Islamic law; a jurist.
<i>Iranīyat</i>	Iranian Nationalism.
<i>Al-Islamiyyun</i>	Islamists. A term used to describe an Islamic political or social activist. Coined in preference to the more common term “Islamic fundamentalist”. Islamists are committed to implementation of their ideological vision of Islam in the state and/or society.
<i>Islamiyat</i>	Shi'a political Islam.
<i>ijtihād</i>	Independent reasoning through individual study of scripture.
<i>majlis</i>	Used to describe various types of special gatherings among common interest groups be it administrative, social or religious in countries with linguistic or cultural connections to Islam; the Iranian parliament. (<i>lit.</i> a place of sitting)
<i>Majlis al-Shūrā</i>	The Consultative Council
<i>Marja al-Taqlid</i>	The most learned of the Shi'a, literally means “religious reference” or “source to imitate”.

¹ British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies; "Instructions for authors". Available at: < <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=cbjm20&page=instructions> >.

² International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies October 2010: "IJMES Translation and Transliteration Guide". Available at: < <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/ijmes/pages/transliteration.html> >.

³ Esposito 2003: Oxford Dictionary of Islam.

<i>mostazafin</i>	The lower classes; the term also refers to those who are deprived of the opportunity to develop their full potential. Khomeini spoke of two diametrically opposed versions of Islam: that of the <i>mutakbirin</i> (the rich and arrogant) and that of the <i>mostazafin</i> . (<i>lit.</i> the oppressed)
<i>mustakbirin</i>	The opposite of <i>mostazafin</i> , it refers to those in power who oppresses people. (<i>lit.</i> proud and mighty)
<i>mumana'a</i>	Passive resistance.
<i>muqawama</i>	Active or armed resistance.
Salafi	Follower of a Sunni Islamic movement that takes the <i>salaf</i> (pious ancestors) of the patristic period of early Islam as exemplary models.
Shari'a	The moral code and religious law of Islam.
<i>Shura</i>	Consultation of the people in the management of religious and worldly affairs. A duty prescribed in the Qur'an to leaders at all levels, from family to government.
<i>tabligh</i>	To disseminate the message of Islam. (<i>lit.</i> calling)
<i>ulama'</i>	Muslim religious scholars. From the ninth century onward, the primary interpreters of Islamic law and the social core of Muslim urban societies.
<i>umma</i>	The world community of Muslims.
<i>vilāyat-i faqīh</i>	Guardianship of the Jurist.
Wahhabi	Follower of a conservative Sunni Islamic religious movement that arose in the Arabian peninsula during the eighteenth century. Wahhabism is Saudi Arabia's dominant faith. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, (<i>d.</i> 1791) was a conservative theologian and Hanbali jurist who proclaimed the necessity of returning directly to the Qu'ran and <i>hadith</i> , rather than relying on medieval interpretations. Wahhabism denounces the practices of shrine cults, saint worship, as heretical innovations.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABII	Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran
AFP	Associated Foreign Press
AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (later BP)
ANLF	Arab National Liberation Front
AP	Associated Press
ARAMCO	Arabian American Oil Company
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CSCCI	Council of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry
EGFI	Export Guarantee Fund of Iran
EIU	Economic Intelligence Unit
FBIS-NES	Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FNA	Fars News Agency (Iran)
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
G8	Group of Eight
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GIP	General Intelligence Presidency of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
GMEI	Greater Middle East Initiative
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICP	Islamic Coalition Party (of Iran)
IR	International Relations
IRGC	Army of the Guards of the Iranian Revolution
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency (Iran's official news agency)
ISE	Islamic Society of Engineers (of Iran)
ISNA	Iranian Student's News Agency
KUNA	Kuwait News Agency
MEED	Middle East Economic Digest
MEES	Middle East Economic Summary
MEI	Middle East International

MEM	Middle East Mirror
MER	Middle East Report
MENA	Middle East and North Africa region
MFN	Most Favoured Nation
MOD	Ministry of Defence (in Saudi Arabia)
MOI	Ministry of the Interior
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
NPC	Iranian National Petroleum Company
NRF	National Reform Front
NLF	National Liberation Front
OAPEC	Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
SABIC	Saudi Arabian Basic Industries Corporation
SANG	Saudi Arabian National Guard
SAVAK	Organization of Intelligence and National Security (Iran)
SDF	Saudi Development Fund
SNC	Saudi National Security Council
SNSC	Iranian Supreme National Security Council
SoCal	Standard Oil of California
SPA	Saudi Press Agency
SWB	Summary of World Broadcasts
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPAP	Union of the People of the Arabian Peninsula
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Timeline of Events

August 1929: Saudi Arabia and Iran sign a Friendship Treaty.

March 1930: Reza Shah appoints Habibollah Khan Hoveida as his minister to Jeddah.

May 1932: King Abdul Aziz sends his son, Prince Faisal, on a visit to Iran.

September 1941: Reza Shah's pro-Axis allegiance in World War II leads to the Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran and the deposition of the Shah in favour of his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

August 1948: Saudi Arabia appoints Hamza I. Ghouth, from a Shi'ite background, as its first ambassador to Iran.

April 1951: Iranian parliament votes to nationalise the oil industry, which is dominated by the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Britain imposes an embargo and a blockade, halting oil exports and damaging the economy. A power struggle between the shah and Mossadegh ensues.

August 1953: Mossadegh is overthrown in a coup engineered by the British and US intelligence services. General Fazlollah Zahedi is proclaimed prime minister and the shah returns.

November 1953: King Abdulaziz dies and is succeeded by the Crown Prince, Saud bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. The new king's brother, Faisal, is named crown prince.

August 1955: King Saud visits Iran.

March 1957: The shah visits Saudi Arabia.

September 1960: Saudi Arabia and Iran become founding members of OPEC.

November 1964: King Saud is deposed by his brother, Crown Prince Faisal. Prince Khalid is named crown prince.

December 1966: King Faisal visits Iran.

October 1968: Saudi Arabia and Iran sign the Continental Shelf Boundary Agreement.

November 1968: The shah visits Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

January 1969: Iran drops its claims to Bahrain.

September 1969: The OIC is formed in Jeddah; Saudi Arabia and Iran are founding members.

November 1971: Iranian forces occupy three islands, including the strategic island of Abu Musa at the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz, claimed by both Tehran and the United Arab Emirates. The UAE agrees to share control of Abu Musa but continues to call for the return of the other two islands, Lesser Tunbs and Greater Tunbs.

March 1975: King Faisal is assassinated; he is succeeded by his brother, Khalid al-Saud, and Prince Fahd is named crown prince.

October 1978: Ayatollah Khomeini leaves Najaf after spending 14 years in exile. Khomeini leaves for Kuwait, where he is denied entry and diverted to Paris.

January 1979: Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the shah of Iran, is ousted from power.

February 1979: Khomeini returns to Tehran and is installed as leader and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

May 1979: Saudi Arabia recognizes the Islamic Republic of Iran.

November 1979: Iranian students storm the US embassy and take several US citizens hostage. The siege lasts 444 days and comes to be known as the Iran Hostage Crisis.

November 1979: Extremists seize the Grand Mosque of Mecca; the government regains control after 10 days and those captured are executed.

September 1980: Khomeini calls for Iraq's Shi'a to rise up against Saddam Hussein's government. Saddam responds by annulling the 1975 Algiers Agreement. Both countries shell each other's borders.

September 1980: Iraqi military forces invade Iran.

December 1981: Saudi Arabia and other GCC states issue a joint communiqué in response to Iranian threats to target oil facilities.

June 1982: King Khalid dies and is succeeded by Fahd bin Abdulaziz al-Saud; Prince Abdullah becomes crown prince.

May 1984: An Iranian F-4E fighter bomber attacks the 80,000-ton Kuwaiti tanker Umm Casbah as it steams off the Saudi coast carrying a load of petroleum bound for the United Kingdom.

June 1984: The Saudi Air Force downs an Iranian F-4 fighter crossing the "Fahd Line" over Saudi offshore oil facilities in the northern Gulf.

July 1987: More than 400 Iranian pilgrims are killed during the hajj in Mecca when they clash with Saudi security forces during an anti-Iraq and anti-US demonstration.

April 1988: Saudi Arabia cuts diplomatic relations with Iran.

August 1988: Iran and Iraq sign a United Nations-brokered ceasefire ending the war. Some two million soldiers and civilians are killed and wounded during the eight-year conflict.

June 1989: Khomeini dies; he is succeeded by the president, Ali Khamenei. The Speaker of the Parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani, becomes president.

July 1989: Saudi authorities execute 16 Kuwaiti Shi'as, alleging that they plotted a number of bombings that killed two pilgrims in Mecca. Riyadh blames Tehran for the attacks.

August 1990: Iraq invades Kuwait. Iranian policy-makers opt for non-involvement.

March 1991: Saudi-Iranian relations are restored.

April 1992: Iranian forces take full control of Abu Musa.

March 1997: Crown Prince Abdullah and President Rafsanjani meet during the OIC conference in Islamabad, hailing the start of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement process.

December 1997: Crown Prince Abdullah attends the eighth OIC meeting in Tehran and meets with Ayatollah Khamenei.

August 1997: Mohammad Khatami, head of the National Library of Iran, is elected president of the Republic of Iran.

May 1998: Saudi Arabia and Iran sign the Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement.

May 1999: Khatami visits Saudi Arabia.

November 1999: The GCC fully supports and backs the UAE’s diplomatic efforts to regain control of Abu Musa and other contested islands.

April 2001: Iran and Saudi Arabia sign the mutual Security Accord.

March 2003: US-led coalition forces invade Iraq.

June 2005: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former mayor of Tehran, is elected president.

August 2005: Abdullah becomes king of Saudi Arabia and his brother, Prince Sultan, is named crown prince.

December 2005: Ahmadinejad visits Saudi Arabia and meets King Abdullah on the sidelines of the Islamic Summit.

April 2006: Saudi Arabia and Iran commence “strategic talks” in a bid to revive the rapprochement process. Saudi Arabia is represented by Bandar bin Sultan, secretary general of the National Security Council. Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, represents the Republic of Iran.

March 2007: Ahmadinejad visits Saudi Arabia at the invitation of King Abdullah.

Table of Contents

Front Matter	7
Note on Translation and Transliteration	7
Acronyms and Abbreviations	9
Timeline of Events	11
Introduction	18
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework	27
1.1 The Predicament of Foreign Policy Analysis	29
1.1.1 The definition of the “state” in FPA literature.....	30
1.1.2 Realist and constructivist approaches to foreign policy	32
1.1.3 Structure and agency	34
1.2 The role of norms	37
1.2.1 Socialization.....	38
1.2.2 Normative change	39
1.2.2.1 Internalization.....	39
1.2.2.2 Identification.....	41
1.3 Conceptualizing State Identity	41
1.3.1 From corporate identity to state identity	43
1.3.2 National identity versus state identity	45
1.4 How state identity influences foreign policy	46
1.4.1 State identity as matter of sovereignty	48
1.4.2 Causal and constitutive effects of state identity on foreign policy.....	49
1.4.3 Two sources of state identity formation	52
1.4.4 Internal and external constraints on state identity.....	53
1.4.5 The limits of state identity.....	56
1.5 Conclusion	59
Chapter 2: The Role of Norms in the Contemporary Middle East	62
2.1 The Difficulty with Maintaining State Identity Explanations	63
2.1.1 Identity discourses about the Middle East	63
2.1.2 Regional norms: the individualism–holism debate	66
2.1.3 How exceptional is the Middle East?.....	68
2.1.4 The evolution of regional norms.....	70
2.2 Competing Perspectives on Identity and State Formation	73
2.2.1 Contested identities.....	74
2.2.2 Contested states	75
2.2.3 The consolidation of state identity in the Middle East.....	78
2.3 Introducing the Saudi–Iranian Case	80
2.3.1 Examining the literature on the role of state identity in Saudi–Iranian relations	81
2.3.2 Three approaches.....	85
2.3.3 An alternative approach	89
2.4 Conclusion	89

Chapter 3: The Making of Saudi–Iranian Relations.....	91
3.1 The King and the Shah (1925–1979)	93
3.1.1 The Emergence of Saudi Arabia	93
3.1.2 The shah of Iran.....	95
3.1.3 Competition between the monarchs, 1925–1945.....	96
3.1.4 The beginnings of the modern oil economy.....	98
3.1.5 Saudi-Iranian Relations from World War II to 1979.....	99
3.1.6 The Baghdad Pact (1955).....	101
3.1.7 The threat of Nasserism to Saudi and Iranian security in the 1960s.....	102
3.1.8 From Pax Britannia to Pax Americana (1970–1978).....	107
3.1.8.1 British withdrawal from the Gulf.....	108
3.1.8.2 The US’s Twin Pillar strategy.....	110
3.2 The Evolution of State Identity in Saudi Arabia and Iran.....	112
3.2.1 Persian nationalism and state identity under the shah	113
3.2.2 State identity under King Faisal	115
3.2.2.1 The king’s dilemma: Wahhabism, modernisation, and state identity.....	116
3.2.2.2 Saudi state identity from Pan-Arabism to Pan-Islamism	117
3.2.2.3 The US–Saudi alliance and its implications for Saudi state identity.....	120
3.3 Conclusion.....	122
Chapter 4: The Evolution of Enmity in Saudi–Iranian Relations	125
4.1 After the Revolution: The Saudi Response to Change of Regime in Iran	126
4.1.1 From appeasement to confrontation	128
4.1.2 The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) and its implications for Saudi–Iranian relations.....	132
4.1.3 Disagreements over the hajj and the 1987 incident.....	134
4.2 The Construction of State Identity in Saudi Arabia.....	137
4.2.1 The Saudi state and the revival of Wahhabi expansionism in the 1980s.....	139
4.3 Vilāyat-i faqīh: Khomeini’s vision of Iran’s identity.....	141
4.4 Competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran: Redefining the Normative Order of the Gulf.....	146
4.4.1 The mostazafin–mustakbirin discourse in Iran	146
4.4.2 Saudi Arabia and the status quo.....	149
4.4.3 The balance between state identity and state interest for both Iran and Saudi Arabia	151
4.5 Conclusion.....	154
Chapter 5: From Détente to Rapprochement	156
5.1 Years of Détente: The Rafsanjani Presidency	159
5.1.1 The implications of the Second Gulf War, 1990–1991	161
5.1.2 Obstacles to the 1991 détente.....	164
5.1.3 Saudi Arabia and Iran’s conflicting normative views of Gulf security after the Second Gulf War	165
5.1.4 Iranian state identity under Rafsanjani	167
5.2 Years of Rapprochement: The Khatami Presidency.....	169
5.2.1 The reformist discourse.....	170
5.2.2 State identity under Khatami	173
5.2.3 Continuity and change in Saudi–Iranian relations in 1997	175
5.3 Conclusion.....	179

Chapter 6: Foreign Policy Decision-Making	181
6.1 Factions, Policies, and Positions in Iran’s Foreign Policy in the 1990s	182
6.1.1 Policy positions in Iran in the 1990s.....	185
6.1.2 Factions and the control of Iranian foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia in the 1990s	188
6.2 Abdullah’s Accession to Power: New Priorities for Saudi Foreign Policy	193
6.2.1 The general structure of the Saudi decision-making apparatus	194
6.2.2 Who decided Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy towards Iran in the 1990s?.....	198
6.2.3 The challenge of the 1996 Khobar bombings to Abdullah’s conciliatory approach to Tehran	202
6.2.4 State identity under King Abdullah.....	203
6.3 Conclusion	204
Chapter 7: Issues in the Saudi–Iranian Rapprochement	206
7.1 What was the Rapprochement About?	207
7.1.1 The Cooperation Agreement of 1998.....	209
7.1.1.1 The Outcomes of the Cooperation Agreement.....	212
7.1.2 The Security Accord of 2001.....	213
7.1.2.1 What did the Security Accord include?	218
7.2 The Economic Dimension: The Rise of Trade and the Expansion of Business Relations 1996–2005	220
7.2.1 How oil prices incentivised the rapprochement process.....	222
7.3 Constraints on Rapprochement	228
7.4 Conclusion	234
Chapter 8: The Demise of the Rapprochement	236
8.1 Why the Rapprochement Collapsed	238
8.1.1 President Ahmadinejad’s first term and the return of Saudi–Iranian rivalry	240
8.1.2 The strategic talks of 2006–2007	244
8.1.3 The demise of the rapprochement process in 2008–2009.....	251
8.2 Moderates versus Radicals	255
8.2.1 The evolution of the muqawama–mumana’a discourse	256
8.2.2 The muqawama–mumana’a discourse and the demise of the rapprochement	258
8.2.3 The moderates discourse	263
8.3 Conclusion	268
Conclusion	270
Theoretical Implications	272
Key Findings	277
Future Research Questions	282
Appendix A	285
Friendship Treaty between the Kingdom of the Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies and the Kingdom of Persia, 1929	285
Exchange of Decrees of Conclusion	288
Appendix B	289
Text of the Saudi-Iranian Cooperation Agreement of 1998	289

Appendix C.....292
 Joint Communiqué of 19 May 1999.....292

Appendix D296
 Official Announcement of the Security Accord, 27 April 2001296

Appendix E.....304
 The Memoirs of Hashemi Rafsanjani.....304

List of Interviewees312

Bibliography313

INTRODUCTION

Saudi–Iranian relations are by far one of the key determinants of Middle Eastern politics. In fact, since the 1979 revolution in Iran, the two states have been effectively involved in a bitter rivalry that has played out all across the region, from Iraq to Lebanon. In one way or another, they defined alliances and security arrangements for a number of countries in the 1980s and 1990s. It has long been argued that the improvement of Saudi–Iranian relations meant the decline of a number of political struggles in the region, where the two countries have enormous influence both economically and culturally. (Chubin and Tripp 1996) Initially, the rivalry was the product of the Iranian revolutionary challenge to Saudi Arabia’s sovereignty and was instrumentally shaped by Ayatollah Khomeini’s goal of exporting Iran’s Islamic model of governance to neighbouring Gulf states. Furthermore, it was institutionalised during the Iraq–Iran War (1980–1988) and remains marred by sectarian and nationalist sentiments characteristic of that period. From an Iranian perspective, Saudi Arabia—with its absolute monarchical system of governance, adherence to the Wahhabi school of Islam and reliance on Western (mainly US) forces for protection—constituted a threat to its own revolutionary model. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, saw danger in the new Islamic Republic and considered Ayatollah Khomeini’s ascent to power as a Shi’ite revival that would eventually ignite dissent within its own Shi’ite minority. Thus, during the war Saudi Arabia sided with Iraq both diplomatically and financially, in a bid to halt Iran’s growing regional ambitions, while Iran engaged in hostile rhetoric against what it considered a Saudi plot to undermine its security. The war of words between the two states had escalated considerably by the mid-1980s, nearly reaching military confrontation in 1984. By 1987, diplomatic relations had been suspended.

Nevertheless, as the war ended and Ayatollah Khomeini passed away in 1989, the two countries began to see prospects for normalisation. The administration of President Hashemi Rafsanjani indicated that mending relations with its Arab neighbours was a priority of its new foreign policy agenda. Thus, Saudi Arabia and Iran began to discuss their differences. However, the talks and shuttle diplomacy between Tehran and Riyadh merely restored diplomatic relations, but stopped short of achieving cordial relations between the two sides. The period between 1991 and 1996 was an era of *détente*, as each side aimed at containing the other. Following the rise of new leadership

in both states in 1997—King Abdullah in Saudi Arabia and President Mohamed Khatami in Iran—a rapprochement process started that would culminate in the signing of a number of treaties and memorandums that aimed to expand their relations. As a result, the rapprochement played a major role in stabilizing Lebanese politics (where the two countries hold immense influence), strengthening the support for the Arab–Israeli peace initiative, and more importantly reducing sectarian and nationalist divisions across the region.

Once President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed power in 2005, the rapprochement came to a halt and relations became so strained that the two countries were publicly declaring their differences, and sometimes threatening one another. The terrorist attacks in Iraq, political disturbance in Lebanon, and most importantly the resurgence of sectarianism in the region, have all been seen as evidence of renewed Saudi–Iranian rivalry.

Different explanations have been given for this sudden change of course, namely realist school explanations that attribute the failure of the rapprochement partly to a shift in the balance of power in the region after the fall of Iraq’s Ba’thist regime in 2003, and partly to Saudi fear of Iran’s nuclear ambitions. (Wehrey et al. 2009b) Nevertheless, these two events happened years before the relations witnessed a clear setback in early 2006, hence alone they cannot account for the revival of the rivalry between the two states.

The literature on Saudi–Iranian relations often cites a number of issues that have been causing tension between the two countries over the years, including sectarianism, nationalism, revolutionary ideology, competition over regional hegemony, oil prices, policy towards US military presence in the Gulf, and disagreements over the hajj. (Fürting 2002: 219) However, these differences on their own do not offer a convincingly clear explanation as to why there was an enmity in the first place, why rapprochement took place at that particular time, or why it thrived—and subsequently declined—despite the continuing presence of these issues.

Unfortunately, there have been few studies dedicated to the understanding of Saudi–Iranian relations, and the rapprochement of 1997 in particular has received little attention despite its importance. In general, the literature on Saudi–Iranian rivalry can be summarised into three approaches. The first are realist accounts (Chubin and Tripp 1996; Marschall 2003; Terrill 2011) that centre around hegemony and assume the

presence of on-going balance of power patterns that are inherent in the nature of the regional system. From this point of view, Iran and Saudi Arabia cannot fully enjoy cordial relations because they are competing for regional power in a region that lacks any (inclusive) security framework. Accordingly, they are locked in a “prisoner’s dilemma” that cannot be averted.

A second approach, social constructivism (Adib-Moghaddam 2006; Wastnidge 2011), focuses on the ideational characteristics of the rivalry, such as sectarianism, the divide between Arabs and Persians, and the revolutionary discourse in Iran. This approach suggests that the war over Pan-Islamism and religious leadership of the Muslim world has prevented the two countries from normalising relations, as both sides continue to advocate their own version of Pan-Islamism. Accordingly, due to the presence of Islamic holy sites in Mecca and Medina Saudi Arabia bears a “Arab” and “Sunni” responsibility towards the rest of the “Arab and Muslim World”, which places it in opposition to what is perceived as an Iranian plot to spread Shi’ism and undermine Arabs.

A third approach, Foreign Policy Analysis (Korany and Fattah 2008; Ramazani 1992), argues that both states are structurally bound to rival each other due to the nature of their political regimes and the way foreign policy is made and practiced in both states. Advocates of this explanation suggest that critical Saudi foreign policy decisions, such as normalization of foreign relations, are concentrated in the hands of the king and close associates in the royal court. On the Iranian side, Iran’s revolutionary principles are vehemently anti-monarchical; they formalize clerical authority in politics and they advocate an explicitly populist line, which is combined with intense factionalism. The net effect of this dynamic is a state that seems unable to articulate a coherent foreign policy and whose frequently erratic behaviour may be serving the parochial goals of key elite rather than the state’s larger interests. (Wehrey et al. 2009b) Therefore, the Iranian state is seen as fundamentally in conflict with its Saudi neighbour.

Although these approaches make valid arguments and there are many additional schools of IR scholarship that advance different theories of the relations, they do not offer a comprehensive framework for understanding Saudi–Iranian relations. It is true the regional hegemony has led Saudi Arabia and Iran to play out their differences through distant proxies—such as Lebanon, Palestine, Bahrain and Iraq—yet they have

been careful to avoid direct military confrontation. Furthermore, neither the type of regime nor its political ideology have prevented Saudi Arabia and the US from being allies; neither did they prevent Saudi Arabia and China from normalising their relations in the early 1990s. In fact, Syria and Iraq enjoyed good relations with Saudi Arabia in the 1980s despite being Ba’thist. Moreover, Iran’s Islamic regime and ideology did not prevent it from fostering strong ties with Russia or Cuba, nor did it prevent the state from building an alliance with the Ba’thists in Syria to confront Iraq’s Ba’thist party.

In fact, Saudi Arabia and Iran have shown the ability to move beyond their perceived enmity. The rapprochement of 1997 in itself is a reminder that they have the potential to overcome structural causes of rivalry and achieve normalisation. Furthermore, regional hegemony, balance of power, sectarianism, nationalism, type of regime and political ideology are all important, but they need to be understood in historical context and incorporated into a larger framework. There is a need to integrate ideational and materialist factors to understand a complex issue like the rise and fall of the 1997 rapprochement process.

This dissertation will seek to elucidate the reasons that Iran and Saudi Arabia have been rivals since the Iranian Revolution, which must be considered in light of the fact that they did experience rapprochement for a brief period at the turn of the century. Furthermore, the aim of this dissertation is to discuss a number of approaches applied to the study of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement and to provide an alternative approach in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Moreover, studying the role of state identity in formulating foreign policy decisions regarding the rise and fall of the 1997 rapprochement is key not only to understanding a complex matter such as the Saudi–Iranian rivalry, but also to explaining a number of conflicts that were highly influenced by this prolonged rivalry. This dissertation debates the different methods often employed by researchers in this area of the world, and will outline a methodology suitable to study this important case. In addition, it will provide a theoretical framework to study the role of state identity in foreign policy and explore the agent/structure problem in state identity theorization.

Drawing on Holsti (1970), Wendt (1999), and Telhami and Barnett (2002), I assume that state identities are social constructions in the sense that states are social actors that interact with each other to produce a social reality. States are concerned about their ontological presence, which means they seek to explain themselves in ways

meaningful to other actors. There are ontological questions in IR that justify the mere existence of states: what states think of their role in world politics, what they stand for in matters of ideas and values, norms¹ that they subscribe to and—more importantly—how they perceive themselves and others. Hence, state identity becomes an important symbol of what the state is about and what it means to the outside world, and this is manifested in a state’s foreign policy.

Moreover, state identity embodies a state’s own ideas about its status and role in the international sphere. This self-conception is constructed in a thinly institutionalised international system and thus is formed by internal factors as well as external ones: norms exist in the formal sense, but these are created merely through beliefs and attitudes formed during the interaction of states with each other. Even where there is no formal structure for the enforcement of these norms, the desire states have to “make friends” with other states will ensure that a state will conduct itself in concordance with the norms held by the larger grouping of states it wishes to be associated with.

I would argue that state identity plays a causal and a constitutive role in foreign policy decision-making. This argument begins with the notion that state identity can be treated as a variable, can represent different values at different times, and can be accurately measured on some scale. In particular, I challenge the general view taken by IR theorists that state identity is solely a concept that develops and changes only over long periods of time, an idea that cannot accommodate the kind of rapid change experienced in, say, Iran in 1979. Rather, “state identity” must be malleable enough to engage with both long- and short-term state identity formation. I then attempt to establish an association between changes in the independent variable of state identity and changes in the dependent variable—for instance, foreign policy orientation.²

The relationship between state identity and foreign policy can best be explained through role theory. Roles are defined as positions within a group of states and repertoires of behaviour, inferred from others’ expectations and one’s own conceptions. Furthermore, state identities are most easily understood as roles that the

¹ Here, norms are defined as collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity. (Jepperson, *et al.* 1996: 54) Therefore, norms can be considered the medium in which state identity functions.

² Foreign policy orientation is a state’s general attitudes and commitments toward its external environment, its fundamental strategy for accomplishing its domestic and external objectives and aspirations and for coping with persisting threats. (Holsti 1983: 98)

self assumes in relation to the *other*. The contents of state identity, as role conception, are determined by the intersubjective understandings that become embedded in discourses or norms that are shared by both states. In this dissertation, I argue that the concept of “role” provides us with a conceptual tool to operationalize more precisely how state identity informs foreign policy, whilst also expressing the relevance of systemic, geographic, and economic variables to a particular foreign policy action. Furthermore, drawing on Wendt’s (1999) constructivist theory on international politics, I suggest three mechanisms of change affecting state identity: socialization, normative change, and internalization. I also suggest two sources of state identity formation: cognitive and institutional.

State identity plays a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy decision-making at certain times—I would suggest times of great change or flux. However, it plays a constitutive effect on foreign policy during periods of political stability in a regime because states develop a *raison d’état* that requires a specific ontological stance on world politics. Therefore, a state will remain an enemy with some states, a rival to others, and a friend to whom it may think conforms to its norms and interest. However, when a state redefines its state identity, it actually redefines its relations with other states.

Empirically, I will argue that state identity is the best place to look for answers. The period since 2005 can be seen as a revitalisation of Iran’s revolutionary identity as a state. The Saudi–Iranian rapprochement was a result of changes in state identity in both countries. Saudi Arabia witnessed a change in its political regime on the ascendance of King Abdullah and his proclaimed reform programme. On the other hand, Iran experienced a relative change in its leadership in the election of Mohamed Khatami and his reformist foreign policy allies. Both sides changed their foreign policy approach towards each other, which in turn started a process of change in their respective state identities. Iran during the Khatami years sought to revive its relations with Saudi Arabia based on its “good neighbour” policy; however, when the neo-conservatives took over they decided to reverse Iran’s integration with the rest of the world, emphasizing the revolutionary and Islamic identity of the state.

This research will argue that Saudi–Iranian relations, and the regional role it plays, has been a matter of state identity politics, more evidently so after 2005. When the two states defined their identity in difference to each other we witnessed strained

and hostile relations, and when the definitions of state identity were defined closely to shared and mutual interests the two countries witnessed a rapprochement. Therefore, state identity plays a major role in defining the foreign policy of the two states towards each other. This approach would help us explain the rise and fall of Saudi–Iranian of 1997 and assist us in anticipating future outcomes.

State identity is expressed through key decision-makers. The identity of key decision-makers is uncovered through textual sources, including speeches, official statements, interviews, memoirs, and archival material. The goal is to provide a qualitative method of observing how state identity is formed in the context of the state and international realms. The methodology chosen here does not involve an explicit account of foreign policy decision-making or a model to test the personality of foreign policy leaders, but rather is concerned with the state as the constituent unit of the international system and as the authoritative agent formulizing the state identity discourse.

Furthermore, the methodology employed assumes that identities form through intersubjective interactions between states. States interact as “state-society complexes”, where society influences the state but does not determine state action. (Wendt 1999: 197-198) Although domestic politics inevitably affect the external stance of the state, I draw on Alons’s (2007) argument that domestic politics influence a state’s foreign policy most heavily when they are in period of extreme flux or radical change. This process occurs through the exchange of symbolic information that takes place any time two or more social actors recognize and ascribe meaning to the actions (perceived or real) of another actor. These actions can include explicit rhetorical exchanges between states (such as a declaration of war or a diplomatic condemnation), material exchanges (such as the movement of troops to the border or the firing of a shot across the bow of another state’s naval vessel), or even implicit generalized exchanges (such as the lowering of a monetary exchange rate or raising oil prices). Any state action that can be interpreted by another state as intentional can produce an interaction that can generate new, intersubjectively held beliefs. Moreover, the methodology assumes that a state’s identity is formed from the history of its social interactions with other states in the international system. These identities are most easily understood as roles that *self* assumes toward the *other*.

My methodological choice rests on three key steps. First, I addressed the history of social interaction between the two states. Second, I conducted qualitative interviews with key political figures involved in the rise and fall of Saudi–Iranian rapprochement. The most notable of these were HRH Prince Turki al-Faisal, His Excellency Adel al-Jubeir, and Ambassador Nasser al-Braik from Saudi Arabia, and Dr. Ata’ollah Mohajerani, His Excellency Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, and Dr. Seyed Hossein Mousavian from the Iranian side, amongst others. Finally, I applied discourse analysis to key documents and statements that are deemed essential in formulating and expressing state identity for example the statements produced by political leaders and institutions. In Iran, these institutions are the Supreme Leader’s Office, the president, the Supreme National Security Council, the Foreign Ministry and the parliament (majlis), the Guardian Council, and the Expedience Council. In Saudi Arabia, these are the Royal Court and the Saudi Foreign Ministry. Particular documents are of great importance, such as the Cooperation Agreement Between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran (May 1998), the Saudi–Iranian Security Accord (April 2001), and the Saudi Statement on the War in Lebanon (July 2006). Furthermore, the research will draw upon new archival material that has hitherto not been utilised in existing literature on this subject. This includes—but is not limited to—the memoirs of former President Rafsanjani published in 2005, 2009, and 2010; of former Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam (2010); and of Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri (1999).

The dissertation is divided into three parts: Literature review and theoretical framework (Chapter 1), historical background (Chapters 2 and 3) and empirical analysis and findings (Chapters 4–8). Chapter 1 will discuss the identity-based theories in IR literature, approaches using foreign policy analysis, the realist versus constructivist debate on foreign policy, and the structure/agency problem in IR theorization. The chapter will then focus on the conceptualization of state identity in foreign policy decision-making approaches and explore the role of norms in state identity and how they are consolidated and internalized. Furthermore, it will present a theoretical framework to study the role of state identity in foreign policy.

Chapter 2 will review identity discourses on the Middle East and the formation of states identities in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, it will discuss current debates concerning the evolution of regional norms and the normative

constraints that Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism impose on foreign policy decision-making in the region. It also examines a number of approaches applied to the study of Saudi–Iranian relations and suggests an alternative approach.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to exploring the people and histories that came to shape Saudi–Iranian relations and the Arab-Persian historic dichotomy. It will highlight important events that are crucial to understanding the fundamentals of their relationship prior to 1979. In addition, it will describe the formation of Saudi state identity under King Faisal and Iranian state identity under the shah.

Chapter 4 will explore the roots of Saudi–Iranian enmity following the 1979 revolution and aim to denote the reasons that led to the start of rivalry. It will introduce the *mostazafin–mustakbirin* discourse and the redefining of Iran’s state identity under Ayatollah Khomeini during the 1980s.

Chapter 5 will discuss Saudi–Iranian détente during the Rafsanjani presidency in the period between 1991 and 1996 and the subsequent rise of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997. Moreover, it aims to describe Iranian state identity under President Khatami and Saudi state identity under King Abdullah, and to discuss continuity and change in foreign policy in this period.

Chapter 6 examines foreign policy decision-making in Saudi Arabia and Iran in the 1990s and how a change in leadership in both states helped establish the 1997 rapprochement.

Chapter 7 explore key issues that came to shape the rapprochement process and to discuss the main agreements and accords that emerged or came about a result of long deliberations and compromises, namely the Cooperation Agreement of 1998 and the Security Accord of 2001. Furthermore, it will discuss the expansion of economic ties and conclude by examining the shortcomings and obstacles that limited the rapprochement before it witnessed a complete halt when President Khatami left office in August 2005.

Chapter 8 will discuss the circumstances that led to the demise of the rapprochement process and assess how a change in Iran’s state identity under President Ahmadinejad reignited the rivalry. This will be explained by examining the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse and the debate between *moderates* against *radicals* that consumed the narrative of Saudi–Iranian relations between 2005 and 2009.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The idea that identity is a concept central to the study of foreign policy, war, and rivalries between states, is not new. (Saurette 2000: 35) In fact, scholars have argued that certain national identities are more inclined to aggression and war, or that some national identities are hostile to others. (See: Kelman 2001; Billiet, *et al.* 2003) Mary Kaldor (2007) reminds us that elites can manipulate the politics of identity to justify war,¹ while Guibernau (2004) argues that among the main tools commonly employed by the state in its pursuit of a single national identity capable of uniting its people is the invention of a common enemy. Therefore identity has played a central role both in attempting to understand foreign policy and in the useful planning for such eventualities. (Saurette 2000: 35)

Moreover, the role of national identities—particularly during 1960s—was highly examined by International Relations (IR) researchers, particularly in the context of early integration studies published by Karl Deutsch (1966) and Ernst Haas (1964).² Over the years, however, identity theories were superseded by theories centred on scientific, neorealist, and rational choice models. While the influence of identity cannot be entirely ignored, it was mostly marginalised in these models, which assumed that all states have identical national interests. (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 2) In fact, the theorization of identity appeared to fall out of favour with the progress of IR as a discipline, and was until recently largely regarded as unscientific, prejudiced and altogether dated in light of grander theoretical projects or more particular historical studies. (Saurette 2000: 36-39)

However, the theory of identity has been receiving increasing attention in IR scholarship—what Lapid and Kratochwill (1996) have termed ‘the return of culture and identity in IR theory’. ‘Return’, however, should not be understood as merely a renewed interest in the identity theories of the past (Hosu 2003: 5); rather, this new spate of theories has moved away from the former essentialist versions constructed on

¹ The term “identity politics” refers to movements that mobilize around ethnic, racial or religious identity for the purpose of claiming state power. (Kaldor 2007: 80)

² In his introduction to the second edition of *Nationalism and Social Communication*, Deutsch (1966: 4) observed that the nation–state is ‘still the chief political instrument for getting things done’, and underlined his view that supranational integration had inherent limits given the resilience of nationality.

theoretical foundations such as feminism and multiculturalism. New identity theories focus instead on the construction of social relations.³ (Hosu 2003: 5) Furthermore, the nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s have brought to prominence the idea that identity can be a crucial focus for political struggle, linked to an increasing recognition that social theory itself must put the politics of identity at centre stage. (Calhoun 1994)

As a result, the debate over identity has largely informed IR research in recent decades. Although identity-based theories cannot account for every change in foreign policy or claim universal assumptions about the behaviour of states in the international sphere, they nevertheless offer great explanatory value for a range of case studies in IR where identity politics dominate. (Kelman 2001) Like many IR concepts, identity is contested and a number of studies have pointed to its inherent weaknesses. (See: Kowert and Legro 1996) Moreover, variations of identity, such as national identity, state identity, trans-national identities, and other forms are strongly challenged, which will be demonstrated later in this chapter.

Investigation of state identity can demonstrate hidden links between the two main schools of thought I discuss, realism and constructivism, in the arguments each makes about the role of identity in foreign policy. Since identity can be exhibited in many forms and varies over time and place, it is difficult to make sense of—never mind to build ontological assumptions on—the unsettled character of identity in world politics. Nevertheless, the goal of this chapter is to reaffirm the importance of identity in enhancing our understanding of foreign policy by focusing on the conceptualization of state identity, emphasizing its origins, discussing different approaches to state identity formation and—most importantly—what role state identity plays in foreign policy decision-making. Although other aspects of identity politics, such as national, ethnic, and religious identities at the domestic level, are important, this chapter will argue that state identity in particular holds explanatory power in cases where the identity of the state—as perceived by the decision-makers—plays a dominant role.

In order to do this, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed. First, we must determine what a “state” is, and explain its actions in the international domain—its foreign policy. Since I argue that norms play a central role in foreign policy, it is necessary to determine what “norms” are, how they function, and how they

³ See: Albert, et al. 2001, *Identities, Borders and Orders: Rethinking International Relations*; Lapid and Kratochwil 1996, *The Return of Culture and Identity in International Relations Theory*; McSweeney 1999, *Security, Identity, and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations*.

are accepted and altered by the states that comply with them. I do this in the second part. This brings us to state identity, the third part of this chapter: it is obviously necessary to define “state identity”, explain how it is created and how we may identify it. In the fourth part, I will outline how state identity influences foreign policy.

1.1 THE PREDICAMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

It has been common to regard the discipline of IR as a discourse of the state, since politics and the state have frequently been defined in terms of each other. (Bartelson 2001: 30) When Weber (2002: 310) famously defined the state as a ‘human community that . . . claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’, he simultaneously defined ‘politics’ as ‘striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state’. The question of state identity is actually a question of the state itself as an acceptable unit of analysis. If the state as a concept is clearly recognized, then the task of identifying its identity is feasible; however, where the concept of “state” itself is contested the opposite is true.

Traditionally, foreign policy has been explained from a rational actor perspective common to the realist and power politics tradition. The assumption has been that governments, and their political leaders, think and act in a rational manner in their quest for power and order. (Rosati 1995: 50) Such rationality—as articulated by neorealists—assumes that individuals perceive the world accurately and arrive at decisions through rational choice.⁴ This rationality assumes that goals are ordered, a search is made for relevant information, a wide range of alternatives is considered, and the option that maximizes the benefits while minimizing the costs is selected. Therefore, one should focus on how the international system constrains foreign policy action, treat the government as a rational actor, and speak in terms of an overriding shared national interest in the making of foreign policy. (Rosati 1995: 50) Nevertheless, in practice foreign policy decision-makers are not always rational in their choices—not to mention that the definition of interest may vary from one individual to another, or certainly from one state to another.

⁴ For rational choice approaches to FPA see: Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives*; Strom 1990, *Minority Government and Majority Rule*; Fearon 1994, *Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes*.

1.1.1 The definition of the “state” in FPA literature

There is an academic dispute about what the term “state” should refer to. On the one hand, much of the literature describing the state does so from an inward-looking perspective on political science and sociology. Much of the analysis in this literature rests on distinguishing between “state” and “society” within the domestic realm, and trying to understand how they interact. This distinction leads directly to a definition of the state in Weberian terms, where state and society are viewed as separate phenomena and the state is seen almost entirely in politico-institutional terms. From this perspective, the “state” means nearly the same thing as “central government”. (Buzan 2007: 66-67) On the other hand, mainstream traditional IR uses an outward-looking perspective, since it focuses on the state as a politico-territorial entity placed among similar entities in the international realm. Accordingly, the state is a unit operating within a system and the interaction between those units is what constitutes the international system, and therefore the existence of the state. In this systemic perspective, one is compelled to see states as territorially defined socio-political entities. (Buzan 2007: 66-67)

Both perspectives are necessary to make sense of what is meant by state identity: the operationalization of state identity as a concept requires a comprehensive definition of the state that combines both of these perspectives. (Buzan 2007: 66-67) Moreover, the “state” has to be defined broadly enough to encompass not only the relationship between internal dynamics of individual territory-government-society elements, but also the larger systemic dynamics of the way in which these elements relate to each other. (Buzan 2007: 66-67) Therefore, investigating state identity requires a view that takes into consideration the nature of the state (for example, the regime type, ruling party’s ideology, and various identities within its society) and its relationship with other neighbouring states (rivalries, regional antagonisms and enmity between states).

According to Buzan (2007: 83-88), the state can be defined by acknowledging three of its structuring components: (1) the ideational component of the state (or its purpose), the basic governing functions of providing civil order, collective goods and protection from external threats; (2) the institutional component, which comprises the entire machinery of government, including its executive, legislative, administrative, and judicial bodies, and the laws, procedures and norms by which they

operate; (3) the physical component, its population and territory including all of the natural resources and man-made wealth contained within its borders.

This definition of the state might imply that states are alike because they share similar characteristics; nevertheless, the truth is that states differ considerably from one another. They certainly share fundamental similarities, like a centralized government, defined territories, constitutions (or codes of governance), and membership in international institutions such as the United Nations, yet they vary in many ways. This conclusion is important in order to understand why states behave differently, even though they share similar characteristics.

The fact that this definition of the state and its epistemic underpinning seem both so clear-cut and indispensable to us testifies to the ease with which it was later incorporated into the lore of mainstream IR theory. Today, however, some scholars oppose this ease of use, and even conclude that the state is unlikely to remain the source of political authority in the future. As Bartelson (2001: 1) noted, ‘The state is challenged by new forms of authority and community which transcends the inherited divide between the domestic and the international, and it will therefore ultimately be replaced by new forms of political life which know nothing of this distinction and what once followed from it’. Moreover, the critics of the traditional definition of the “state” contend that the corrosive effects of globalization will eventually force the state to face the same fate as that of the tribe, the city republic, and the empire. (Bartelson 2001; Clark 1998) If this is the case, why should we even bother to study the state, let alone investigate its identity?

The simple answer is that we need to start from somewhere; if we accept the critique of the state, we face immense difficulties in explaining relationships in international politics. Although the idea of the state is one of the most abstract components in IR, it remains the most central concept. (Buzan 2007: 74)

No agreement exists as to what the state is as a behavioural unit, let alone whether or not such anthropomorphic notions as life-cycle, growth, development, purpose, progress, identity, and similar are relevant to it. Yet despite its elusive character, IR studies make identity the central focus of analyses for a number of reasons. First, states are by far the most powerful type of unit in the international system. Second, as a form of political organization the state has transcended all other political units to the extent that it has become the universal standard of political

legitimacy. As Buzan (2007: 65) notes, ‘In theory, the state dominates both in terms of political allegiance and authority, and in terms of its command over instruments of force’. In other words, the state is the institution that administers and coerces the peoples and territories over which it rules and over which it claims supreme authority, including its state identity. (Halliday 2005: 41)

1.1.2 Realist and constructivist approaches to foreign policy

Foreign policy is the most common subject of analysis in IR; however, understanding a state’s foreign policy is problematic. Governments, politicians, and non-state actors compete to influence foreign policy formulation. States decide to go to war; they erect trade barriers; they choose whether and at what level to establish environmental standards; they enter international agreements, or not, and choose whether to abide by their provisions. (Lake 2008: 41) In addition, observing the intention of a state is difficult because we can only observe expressed policies—through foreign policy discourse and actions—which do not necessarily reflect the preference of the state. Therefore, analysing how preferences are developed, aggregated into the national preference, and expressed in the international environment is crucial to understanding world politics.

While there are many approaches to explaining foreign policy, this study will limit its discussion to realism and constructivism.⁵ The first, realism, suggests that the most significant driving forces behind foreign policy decisions are materialistic factors such as military power, economic power, and striving to attain as many resources as possible in order to survive in an anarchic environment. The second, constructivism, argues that ideational factors (such as the role of culture as an instrument of social

⁵ It is important to note that the study of identity, including and state identity, is not limited to only the realist and constructivist schools. Several approaches within IR have addressed the role of identities in foreign policy from different perspectives. For example, critical theorists (Keyman 1997) and liberal peace theorists (Kahl 1999; Moravcsik 2008) are only a few among the many who examine the subject. Advocates of historical sociology have made substantial footprints in IR since the 1980s, contributing to debates ranging from the emergence of the modern states-system to unravelling the role of identity in world politics. (Stets and Burke 1998: 1) Identity theory had its beginnings in structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker 1980); social identity theory began with work on social categorization (Tajfel 1978). In addition, Hogg et al. (1995) examined social identity theory with emphasis on socio-cognitive processes, contextual responsiveness, group behaviour and intergroup relations, and argued for a clearer distinction between role and group. (Stets and Burke 1998: 2) Identity theory has also been used to examine group phenomena in terms of the attitudes and values held by members of a racial group or age group. (Mutran and Burke 1979a, 1979b; White and Burke 1987) It has further been used to examine intergroup phenomena in terms of gender. (Stets 1997; Stets and Burke 1996)

mobilization or in generating threat perceptions) are best to explain the patterns of amity/enmity between states. (Katzenstein 1996: 26-27)

Realists aim to identify causal correlations among different variables. Realist theory posits that foreign policy may be understood as a product of rational choice. Actors (states) are assumed to act rationally through a process of self-help and utility maximization. (Elman 2007: 13-14) For realists, foreign policy can be a product of the competition among states for materialistic gains, either because they calculate how to act to their best advantage, or because those that do not exhibit such behaviour are selected out of the system. (Elman 2007: 13-14) As Morgenthau (1973: 5) notes, 'State strategies are understood as having been decided rationally, after taking costs and benefits of different possible courses of action into account'. According to this paradigm, armament policies and intervention are the most revealing cases of foreign policy. (Waltz 2008: 345) Moreover, realists believe that foreign policy is largely shaped by the material structure of the international system. The distribution of material capabilities among states is the key factor for understanding world politics. (Mearsheimer 1995: 91) Furthermore, neorealism contends that international politics is essentially repetitive. Waltz (1979: 66) provided the clearest statement on this assumption: 'The texture of international politics remains highly constant, patterns recur, and events repeat themselves endlessly'. As a result, states' foreign policy will not (and cannot) change that much either: they will balance, seek hegemony, and largely eschew cooperation.

In contrast, constructivism rejects neorealism's conclusions about the determining effect of anarchy on the behaviour of states in world politics. Alternatively, foreign policy can be a product of socialization: states can decide to follow norms because they calculate it is to their advantage, or because the norms become internalized. For constructivists, identities and interests are central determinants of foreign policy: they rely on ideational factors to explain the international structure and foreign policy, whereas neo-realists rely on material factors. Furthermore, constructivists do not necessarily target their analysis at the state; rather, writers in the school such as Finnemore (1996) and Wendt (1999) use ideational factors and systemic processes to explain the social construction of interests—and identities—in multiple domains.

Despite these differences between schools of IR on how to explain foreign policy, there is somewhat of a consensus on why we need to explain behaviour. In fact, investigating foreign policy is fundamental to neorealism (Waltz 2008) and neoliberal institutionalism. (Keohane 1984) It is also a key in many constructivist and English school theories. (Bull 2002; Reus-Smit 1999; Wendt 1999) Even critical, postmodern, or feminist theories, which have arisen in opposition to existing forms of social power, often focus on problematizing foreign policy. (Lake 2008: 41)

Two general reasons are often given to justify the centrality of foreign policy in IR. First is that studying behaviour can increase our prediction of actors (states), and therefore anticipation of their actions. Second, interaction between states is a phenomenon that can be reduced to causal relationships. While the ability to make predictions arising from the second point might be seen as an important product of IR theory, it opens a problem of reductionism. Since states are not completely free in pursuing policy, foreign or domestic, it is impossible to reduce their actions to certain causes. In some countries, single individuals or ruling parties have more influence on state foreign policy, while in other cases (for example, in Western, democratic countries) foreign relations are highly influenced by domestic debates and by institutional and constitutional laws. Moreover, states vary in size and type, but more significantly they follow different norms when pursuing foreign policies. As a result, the interpretation of sovereignty, the understanding of the world, and more importantly the definition of national and state interest, varies from state to state and from one period of time to another.

Even though foreign policy seems inscrutable, some scholars argue that states characteristically exercise considerable independence, or autonomy, in what they do and this gives them room for manoeuvre with regard both to the societies over which they rule and to other states. (Halliday 2005: 42) This state “autonomy” lies at the heart of the conduct of foreign policy rejects arguments that would reduce foreign policy to being an expression of some determinate internal factors, such as despotism, class, religion, or ethnic relationships. (Halliday 2005: 42)

1.1.3 Structure and agency

How can we characterize foreign policy? As discussed earlier, there is no consensus in IR on explaining foreign policy; however, despite important differences, Waltz (2008), Wendt (1999), and many others have sought to explain foreign policy by

developing systemic theories. Others have suggested different models to describe the road to war or the evolution of rivalries between states.

For example, the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) approach that emerged in the 1960s offers different contextual paths that states follow depending on their character and nature, whether describing a super power or a weak state, a pro-status quo or a revolutionary (revisionist) one. (See: Hill 2003; Jensen 1982) FPA is concerned with the study of the conduct and practice of relations between different actors—primarily states—in the international system. Diplomacy, intelligence, trade negotiations, and cultural exchanges all form part of the substance of foreign policy between international actors. (Alden and Aran 2008: 1) Its most important contribution to IR theory is to identify the point of theoretical intersection between the most important determinants of state behavior: material and ideational factors. The point of intersection is not the state; it is human decision-makers. (Hudson 2007: 7) Furthermore, the FPA approach is more concerned with foreign policy decision-making, and the individual decision makers, processes, and conditions that affect foreign policy and the outcomes of these decisions.⁶ As Alden and Aran (2008: 1) note, ‘FPA is necessarily concerned not only with the actors involved in the state’s formal decision-making apparatus, but also with the variety of sub-national sources of influence upon state foreign policy’.

What links these approaches together is their use of some aspects of structural analysis to explain and measure foreign policy. However, their understanding of structure (system), and therefore of structural explanation, is quite different. (Wendt 1987: 335) As a consequence, the status of structural theorizing seems increasingly uncertain, if not untenable. On the one hand, many of those who hold a causal view of the international system have all but abandoned the anti-reductionist programme and begun to theorize systemic effects from the standpoint of the states. (Leon 2005: 2) This has been a main feature of neoclassical realist, coalitional, and “second image reversed” theories, which seek to explore how domestic structures were influenced by systemic variables rather than simply acting as variables themselves in explanations of foreign policy.⁷ On the other hand, the democratic peace literature (Owen 1997)⁸, agentic

⁶ For rational choice approaches to FPA see: Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman (1992) and Fearon (1994).

⁷ See: Snyder 1991; Solingen 1998; Zakaria 1998; Schweller 2003; Gourevitch 1978; Lobell 1999; 2002; Rose 1998.

⁸ See also: Russett and Oneal 2001; Doyle 1986.

strands of constructivism,⁹ a reformulated liberal theory (Moravcsik 1997, 2003), and the new wave of institutionalism (Keohane and Martin 2003) all tend to downplay or even dismiss systems and structures as ‘abstractions’, aiming instead to elucidate the micro-foundations of international outcomes. (Leon 2005: 2-11)

The opposition between these views has played a fundamental role in structuring IR theory, and foreign policy in particular. (Wight 2006: 62) In fact, this debate demonstrates an inherent methodological divide in IR inquiry, or perhaps an ontological partition.

Politics in general is the land of competing ontologies, and IR theories are all about competing visions of how the world is and how it should be. Therefore, each theory represents an attempt to answer the ontological question of the nature of the object: what its constituent elements are and how they are inter-related. This ontological question has come to be known as the agent–structure problem. As Wendt (1987: 337) notes, ‘All social scientific theories embody an at least implicit solutions to the agent-structure problem’.

How much do structures constrain and enable the actions of actors, and how much can actors deviate from the constraints of structure? In world politics, a structure is a set of relatively unchangeable constraints on the behaviour of states. (Hopf 1998: 172) Although these constraints can take the form of systems of material incentives and disincentives, such as a balance of power or a market, equally important from a constructivist perspective is how an action does or does not reproduce both the actor and the structure. (Hopf 1998: 172)

The structure–agency problem generates another problem: the causation problem in IR. If we were to accept a systemic approach to solving the foreign policy question, then we have to answer another yet difficult question: what rules and causal relationships affect the system? Are they material in nature, as realists argue, or rather ideational, as social constructivists claim?

From an ontological point of view, the answer to this question should take into account what states, in terms of state elites and institutions, think of themselves. The rules and norms that dictate foreign policy are central to our understanding of world politics. States may choose to act according to a set of rules and norms that they believe

⁹ For example, Finnemore and Sikkink 1998.

in or claim to stand by, or because they are forced to abide by them; however, they might decide to forgo these norms and rules for many reasons. Thus rules and norms are very important when it comes to explaining foreign policy. But the state, according to its critics, is an abstraction; therefore, it is difficult to know actually what the state thinks or indeed is at any given time. In reality, however, it is not an abstraction, which yields a challenge to any attempt at forecasting foreign policy. Therefore, conventional foreign policy explanations do not account for the temporal aspects of the state, especially the identity that state chooses for itself at any given time. In order to answer this challenge, one must resort to the role theory approach. (Holsti, 1970; Harnisch, 2011) The role theory approach seeks to address the ontological case of foreign policy by focusing on the role conceptions and norms that constitute international politics. (Abdelal, *et al.* 2005: 8)

1.2 THE ROLE OF NORMS

Roles are usually defined as positions within a group (or any socially-recognised category of actors). (Thies 2003: 545) They are collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity. (Jepperson, *et al.* 1996: 54) More specifically, roles refer to ‘repertoires of behaviour, inferred from others’ expectations and one’s own conceptions, selected at least partly in response to cues and demands’. (Walker 1992: 23)

Since the state is composed of individuals bound together into a collective political unit, one might expect the difficulties encountered in the debate over the theory of the state to be compounded when trying to make sense of identity at the state level. (Buzan 2007: 65) This is where role theory can prove its value, by offering a model of international interaction that explores the normative influence of fundamental institutional structures and the connection between normative changes and state identity and interests. (Griffiths, *et al.* 2008: 51) This takes the form of regulative and constitutive functions of international institutions.

As identity-based theorists argue, without constructivist norms, state action would be unintelligible and beyond explanation. (Griffiths, *et al.* 2008: 51-53) Norms set the meanings and rules of foreign policy, where some actions are considered bad or forbidden behaviour while other actions are encouraged as good behaviour. Advocates of this approach claim that most states are restrained by more than just the material factors, such as balance of power, and that international norms and practices are the key

to explaining foreign policy choices. In the identity-based approach, the state is seen as inextricably related to identity, and foreign policy to the nature of state identity. (Griffiths, *et al.* 2008: 51-53)

When aiming to study the role of state identity in foreign policy-making, it is essential that we lay out a theoretical framework that explains the process of state identity change and discusses the causal and constitutive effects of state identity on foreign policy. The first focus must be on two important normative elements that shape the debate over state identity change: socialization and normative change.

1.2.1 Socialization

State identities are social constructions in the sense that states are social actors that interact with each other, producing a social reality. (Wendt 1999: 198) States are concerned about their ontological presence, which means they need to consciously explain themselves in ways meaningful to other actors. (Wendt 1999: 198) In international relations, there are ontological considerations that justify the mere existence of states: what states think of themselves, what are they about, what they stand for in terms of ideas and values, and more importantly, how they perceive themselves and others. (Herrmann and Shannon 2001: 632) Here, state identity becomes an important symbol of what the state is about and what it means to the outside world, and this is precisely the manifestation of a state's foreign policy. Identity itself is a construction of internal and external factors; nevertheless, state identity is a creation of the state as body of institutions and domestic actors. Therefore, state identity refers to the state's perception of what role it should play and what status it should enjoy in international relations. (Matsumura 2008: 3) A state's identity may shift over time. Each state's political leaders must construct such an identity through practice under inherent domestic constraints—economic growth and development, technological capabilities, military power, and public opinion, among others—and in the context of the changing power structure of dynamic international relations. (Matsumura 2008: 3)

Moreover, state identity refers to sets of relationships where, based on their chosen identity, states recognize others as friends, enemies, or rivals. The link is to assume that one's state identity is either threatened or preserved when interacting with other states. In other words, state identity plays a role in defining relationships between states. From a role theory approach, socialization can be perceived as a role process

occurring between actors in a role relationship. (Thies 2003: 545) Every role that an actor attempts to adopt produces a counter-role in order to form a relationship.

Barnett (1993: 274) argues that states operate in overlapping social and historical contexts. As a result, their roles are multiple—and potentially conflicting. Some roles, such as that of a sovereign state, are formal and constraining; others, such as that of being Arab, remain informal and relatively flexible. At the intersection of domestic and international pressures, leaders need to reconcile competing demands or contradictions in order for the state to function as an international actor. (Barnett 1993: 274)

1.2.2 Normative change

Norms can be considered the medium in which state identity functions. A state can embrace certain norms and it can reject others.¹⁰ Different identities have competed with each other; some were sub-state identities such as religious sects or ethnic groups, others were transnational identities such as the Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamist movements. Moreover, state identity, as a representation of the state's ontological choices, sums up the state's stance in the normative debate.

Moreover, norms and beliefs operating on the role expectations and demands of relevant others refer to the regulative content of international politics, while norms and beliefs operating on an actor's own role conceptions, or role identities, refer to the constitutive accounts of actors themselves. (Thies 2003: 545) There are two processes by which normative change occurs: internalisation and identification.

1.2.2.1 Internalization

Internalization is the process in which states seek to spread a particular norm that serves their foreign policy agenda, and more importantly to make actors' interests conform to their state identity. Norms may become so generally accepted that they are internalized by actors and reach a "taken for granted" value that makes conformance with the norm almost automatic. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 904) Thus, internalized norms can be highly influential—because behaviour according to the norm is not questioned—and hard to discern, because actors do not acutely consider whether to conform or not; they just conform. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 904)

¹⁰ There are two types of norms: (1) regulative norms set the basic rules for standards of conduct by encouraging or prohibiting certain behaviours; (2) constitutive norms define a behaviour and assign meanings to that behaviour. (Griffiths, *et al.* 2008: 51-53)

However, because they are not controversial, norms are often not the centrepiece of political debate and for that reason tend to be taken for granted by most states. Such norms include the idea of sovereignty, self-determination, interdependence, and so on. By trying to explain variation in foreign policy, scholars find themselves confused by the extent of similarity, or “isomorphism”, among states and struggle to explain how those similarities have increased over time. (Wight 2006: 188) Their justifications for these similarities indicate that past norms have accumulated over time, pushing states to take up new responsibilities and commitments or bequeath new rights. Over the past few decades, state bureaucracies and international institutions have become somewhat connected and integrated; we have seen policy gradually reflecting the normative biases of the leaders and political elites in decision-making organizations. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 905) note, ‘Diplomatic tools such as confidence-building measures and Track 2 diplomacy may follow a similar logic. Generalized, this argument suggests that routes to normative change may be similarly indirect and evolutionary: procedural changes that create new political processes can lead to gradual and inadvertent normative, ideational, and political convergence.’

In recent years, empirical studies have acknowledged a role for highly internalized norms held by leaders in determining policy. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 905) Another powerful and related mechanism contributing to the consolidation and universalization of norms is that after a norm is acquired, it may be iterated behaviour and habit. Internalization of norms is not a guaranteed process, however, since states compete with each other to internalize their own norms within the regional or international realm. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 905) As Wendt (1999: 250) notes, ‘It is useful to consider three reasons—degrees of internalization—why actors may observe cultural norms: because they are forced to, because it is in their self-interest and because they perceive the norms as legitimate’.

The degree of acceptance may also vary across different states at the same point in time, and the strength of the norm may vary across time as well. Thus in assessing the impact of the norm on foreign policy, one must include measurements of strength at both the international and national levels. (Goertz and Diehl 1992: 646) Scholars have observed the influence of these mechanisms for some time; nevertheless, they have not linked them theoretically to norms and social construction debates. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 905) For example, frequent interactions among states

involving joint work on technical tasks have created a level of predictability, stability, and habits of trust. As trust becomes habitual it becomes internalized, and therefore causes change in the balance of norms regulating behaviour in the international system. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 905)

1.2.2.2 Identification

Identification with a particular norm means that a nation “accepts” and “encourages” a behaviour or a position in relations with other actors. Furthermore, identification runs on a continuum from negative to positive, from conceiving the other as anathema to the self to conceiving it as an extension of the self. It also varies by issue and time. (Wendt 1994: 386-387) In any given situation, however, it is the nature of identification that determines how the boundaries of the self are drawn. For example, in the absence of positive identification, interests will be defined without regard to the other, who will instead be viewed as an object to be manipulated for the gratification of the self. (Wendt 1994: 386-387) Through the process of identification, identity and norms change as empathy and identification with others shifts. Diplomatic tools such as confidence-building measures and diplomatic gestures may be seen as a process of positive identification, while threats and hostile behaviour are evidence of negative identification. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 905)

1.3 CONCEPTUALIZING STATE IDENTITY

There are at least three conceptually distinct types of identity: personal, social, and collective. Although they often overlap, one can be differentiated from the other. Our focus here is on the collective as represented by the state.¹¹ State actors constitute the structures of the social reality of world politics through inter-subjectively held beliefs. Furthermore, the ideational processes—or alternatively socialization—between actors among themselves involves their identities. In turn, these structures constitute actors by defining their goals and roles in the international system, and thus their identities. (Tidy 2008: 16) Identities tell actors who they are and what interests they have, provide actors with a method of predicting the behaviour of others, and—since interests are constituted by identities—provide a framework for guiding action.

¹¹ Personal identities are the attributes and meanings attributed to oneself by the actor; they are self-designations and self-attributions regarded as personally distinctive. They are especially likely to be asserted during the course of interaction. (Snow 2001: 4) Moreover, social and personal identities are different yet typically overlapping and interacting constructs; such is the relationship between collective, social, and personal identities. (Snow 2001: 4)

Thus, identities are formed in relation to others, and arise out of interaction with other actors; in the case of the state they arise out of interaction and participation of actors in institutional contexts both at the international and domestic levels. (Tidy 2008: 16)

State identity therefore appears to be conditioned by the absence of authority and community in the international sphere. (Bartelson 2001: 12-13) If there were to be a set of universal norms and values that all states recognized, state identity would cease to be a concern because differences between states, especially ideational differences, would not exist.

When acknowledging that the identity of the state is contested in practice, it is unclear whose view of the state's identity ought to inform the interests of the state. While it is believable that the views of a dominant identity can overshadow other identities within the state, it is not possible to identify precisely how and to what extent such identities influence state identity. Moreover, state identity is conditioned by the implicit assumption that the state is distinct from the domestic society over which it supposedly holds sway. This differentiation inscribes the state as the sole locus of authority within a polity composed of a multitude of other agents, individual or collective, and makes it possible to describe relations between state and society in terms of conflict and harmony. When viewed from the external, international perspective, the state appears as a unified whole marked by its sovereignty and individuated through reciprocal recognition by other, similar entities.

While constructivists such as Wendt (1992; 1994) accept that identity is central to understanding a state's behaviour, there is no agreed-upon model of identity in that tradition. To constructivists, it remains undetermined how identities are made, how the domestic and international spheres interact to influence identity, or even how to define and measure identity. (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001: 399) Abdelal and his co-authors (2005: 1) asked, 'If identity is a key variable explaining political, economic and social behaviour, how does it vary, why does it vary, and how would one know variation if one saw it?' They conducted an analysis of around 600 social science articles that used identity-based ideas, and discerned two facets of social identity: content and contestation. (Abdelal, *et al.* 2005: 12) "Content" includes constitutive norms, relational comparisons with other social categories, cognitive models, and social purposes; "Contestation" requires us to examine whether or not members of the group agree upon the "content" of identity.

Another key question concerns the time periods over which state identity is formed and expressed. While for many (if not most) IR scholars state identity is a relatively slow-forming and unchanging concept, taking such a view might unnecessarily limit the usefulness of state identity as a tool to understand a state's foreign policy. The fact that most state identities are often formed over long periods of time, and endure unchanged over similarly long periods of time, cannot be questioned. However, in states that experience rapid or radical change, our concept of state identity must be able to accommodate the idea that identity may accordingly be malleable and rapidly changing in some circumstances.

Furthermore, conceptions of identity are sometimes widely shared; at other times, they are not. (Catalinac 2007: 76-77) State identity can be considered an exception in this regard, due to the development in corporate identity studies that promise to provide state identity a conceptual basis that make it meaningful, easily to observe, and measurable over time (both in this formation and as it changes).

1.3.1 From corporate identity to state identity

In the past decade, corporate identity has received an increasing amount of attention from practitioners and academics alike. Despite significant contributions in the last several years towards understanding and identifying this concept, a definitive construct of corporate identity and its measurements does not yet exist. For example, firms have become increasingly aware of the importance of developing and managing their corporate identity. Markwick and Fill (1997: 397) define corporate identity as 'the organization's presentation of itself to its various stakeholders and the means by which it distinguishes itself from all other organizations'. Moreover, the identity of a corporation has been recognized as a strategic resource and source of competitive advantage. Effective management of corporate identity can serve to address the needs of the firm's important stakeholders by, for example, motivating employees, and by generally inspiring confidence in the company amongst all target groups. (Melewar and Jenkins 2002: 76)

Like firms and corporations, states also share similarities in aiming to construct and manage external identity image. In fact, some scholars suggest that based on materialist and ideational factors, the corporate identity of the state can be considered as an ontological prior platform from which the state is constructed. (Mielniczuk 2008:

1) The state represents a corporate actor for international politics. Furthermore, it is an

organizational actor embedded in an institutional-legal order that constitutes it with sovereignty and a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence over a society in a territory. (Wendt 1999: 213-215)

Wendt (1994: 385) holds that the identity of the state informs its interests, and in turn, its actions. He distinguishes between a state's corporate identity, or its internal human, material, and ideological characteristics, and its social identity, or the meaning an actor attributes to itself based on others' perception of it. Wendt works within systemic theory, and thus minimises a state's corporate identity in favour of a narrow structuration process centred on international social interaction. His idea is relatively simple: international institutional structures constitute states as legitimate actors, and state behaviour in turn produces the international institutions. It cannot, however, explain changes in state identity: by not recognizing the influence of groups outside or below the international sphere, it forces us to take an excessively narrow and unchanging view of identity. (Price and Reus-Smit 1998: 268)

Studies of corporate identity lead to the development of state identity as a distinct concept by the early 1990s. As a result, there are a number of studies that have attempted to conceptualise state identity, namely Lynch (1999) Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel (1999), and Telhami and Barnett (2002). Drawing on these works, we can define state identity in a number of ways: according to one definition, state identity consists of 'the set of beliefs about the nature and purpose of the state expressed in public articulations of state actions and ideals'. (Lynch 1999: 349) It is basically about the definition of a state's rights, obligations, and responsibilities on the international level, but also of the meaning attributed to other actors. (Demirtas-Coskun 2008: 33) In a way, it is about setting boundaries between oneself and others: Who are you relative to others? And who are they in relation to yourself and other actors? (Chafetz, *et al.* 1999: viii) Furthermore, Telhami and Barnett (2002: 8) define state identity 'as the corporate and officially demarcated identity linked to the state apparatus'. Moreover, the state here refers exclusively to public institutions, differentiated from—and autonomous of—other social institutions, and exercising a monopoly of coercion and extraction within a given territory. (Smith 1991: 14-15)

In this dissertation, the term "state identity" will refer to the state's perception of what role it should play and what status it should enjoy among other states. Each state's domestic political apparatus—mainly its leaders—will construct a

role for the state within constraints imposed by domestic factors including the economy, military capabilities, and public opinion, amongst others. (Matsumura 2008: 3) There will also be constraints imposed by the international system through the relative strength of other states and corresponding changes in their own state identities. Finally, state identity refers to a set of relationships where states base their chosen identity on their recognition of other states as friends, enemies, or rivals. In other words, state identity plays a role in defining relationships between states.

The relationship between state identity and foreign policy—as argued earlier—can best be explained through role theory. In fact, a number of IR scholars who have studied state identity formation prefer to discuss roles and role identities (Wendt 1999; Barnett 1993; Thies 2003) Wendt (1999: 251) argues that the: ‘concept of “role” should be a key concept in structural theorising about the international system’. Furthermore, role identities are ‘idealized self-conceptions’, which are internalised designations of positions derived from the individual’s existing structured role relationships. (Thies 2003: 545) As Le Prestre (1997: 5-6) points out, defining a role and having it accepted by others is one of the basic objectives of a state: roles reflect ‘a claim on the international system, recognition by international actors and a conception of national identity’. In this, the concept of role provides us with a conceptual tool to operationalize more precisely how state identity informs foreign policy, whilst also expressing the relevance of materialistic factors to a particular foreign policy action. Nevertheless, it is very important to distinguish between national identity and state identity.

1.3.2 National identity versus state identity

The nation can be defined as a group of people who have (or aspire to) a historical homeland, share common myths and historical memories, have legal rights or duties for all members, and have markers to distinguish them from others. (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 8) Therefore, national identities are bodies of concepts developed domestically, over time and by many individuals within a nation to define the collective character and common will of the polity. (Toffolo 2003: 46)

The distinction between state and national identity is designed not only to offer analytical nuance, but also to provide greater historical and conceptual clarity. According to Toffolo (2003: 46-47) national identities typically include formative history, ethnic components such as dress and language, and ideas about the collective

political values. However, state identity is a set of qualities symbolically ascribed to the state by elites, meaningful to the international community and understood to determine the state's foreign policy orientation. Therefore, state identities can be built on any set of principles. For example, in the Cold War years, an identity such as "revolutionary" or "non-aligned" would signal a state's position in relation to the United States and the Soviet Union. However, in the post-Cold War period, identification as "liberal" and "democratic" help distinguish states' preferences and positions towards the rest of the world. (Toffolo 2003: 46-47)

Another angle for distinguishing between national and states identity is that the former is always determined internally, while the latter can be defined by external actors—states or international organizations—to justify sanctions or reprisals, such as by labelling states as "evil states", "outlaw states" or "terrorist states". (Tidy 2008: 12) Moreover, state identity can be seen as composed of a number of identities, sometimes competing with each other. A clear example would be a state aspiring to embody a nationalistic and a revolutionary identity. (Tidy 2008: 12) While national identity may be closely related to state identity, due to the former's implications for the latter. (Matsumura 2008: 3) Yet the two concepts are distinct. State identity also differs from political regimes, because the latter concept focuses on the organizing mechanism of domestic political rule and control under the authority of a leader or party, not on the external policy of the state in international relations. (Matsumura 2008: 3)

To summarise, national identity means that the people share a communal sense of unity and cohesion; it primarily depends upon their history, but also could be founded on a commitment to a community to which they belong. In other words, how people in the state have to fit into an international society, what role is a state to play in international society and what kind of status a state has among other states.

1.4 HOW STATE IDENTITY INFLUENCES FOREIGN POLICY

State identity affects the kind of foreign policy that a state will pursue. One of the most significant ways for states to acquire a new identity or protect the previous one is through foreign policy practices. (Campbell 1992: 76) Interactions with other states offer a way for states to get themselves accepted as part of a certain international community and to gain respect. In fact, during the process of policy-making, state identity becomes a key instrument decision makers use in order to realize their foreign policy goals. (Demirtas-Coskun 2008: 33) In *Writing Security*, Campbell (1992)

questioned the then-dominant method of investigating foreign policy, where scholars tried to link foreign policy to the fulfilment of national interests. His approach was a direct challenge to the old method, which perceived identity as static: he argues that the practice of foreign policy itself creates a dynamic, changing identity for states that engage in it in response to external threats. (Hosu 2003: 5)

State identity is an inescapable dimension of existence. It is also a ‘site in which political struggles are enacted’. (Campbell 1998: 226) Campbell distinguishes between “foreign policy”, the representational practices of a general kind that lead us to dichotomize relationships between self and other, and “Foreign Policy”, which is the conventional phenomenon associated with the state. In this view, the latter is a privileged discourse that reproduces the boundaries of identity already achieved by the persistent fears in any society of danger and enmity with outsiders. Either way, “foreign policy” is a key means to ensuring that an “us and them” mentality—an exclusive rather than an inclusive form of identity—is perpetuated within the sovereign states out of which it has grown. (Campbell 1992: 68-72) Furthermore, Adib-Moghaddam (2008: 43) suggests two interdependent sources of this “foreign policy”: “cognitive” sources, referring to the intellectual production and processing of categories of the self and other; and ‘institutional’ sources, denoting the formulization of cultural artefacts as authoritative narratives of the state. He argues that:

Both moments of cultural production and reproduction claim the quality of objectiveness, resisting attempts to be altered. Both are interdependent, they inhabit the same foreign policy culture. Both are legitimated by authoritative narratives of discourse, wielding mechanisms of social control to enforce their reality. However, both are also under permanent pressure from competing and oppositional ideas, which may succeed in transforming the prevalent culture altogether. (Adib-Moghaddam 2008: 43)

A central debate concerning the role of identity in foreign policy is a chicken-and-egg problem: which came first, policy or the state? The conventional argument suggests that the state is prior to policy; however, Campbell has contested this position. Instead, he suggests that states are in a process of continual change and transformation, and so ‘for a state to end its practices of representation would be to expose its lack of pre-discursive foundations,’ or state identity existing prior to engagement in the international system. (Campbell 1992: 11) Simply put, state identity is created when the state is formed, and is never static: it changes each time the state engages in policy-making (whether domestic or international). Furthermore, Campbell

argues that the main policies that influence state identity are those crafted in response to danger: 'The constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state's identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility'. (Campbell 1992: 12) He couples this with an assertion that identity is also constructed in threatening others, and so is a response to both externally imposed boundaries (threats from other states) as well as good relations with other states fostered by domestic decisions. (Hosu 2003: 6)

1.4.1 State identity as matter of sovereignty

A number of studies have been conducted since the emergence of state identity as an explanatory tool for foreign policy. Lene Hansen's (1996) investigated Slovenian identity after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia; Jutta Weldes (1999) looked at how insecurity arises and is dealt with using case studies such as the Cuban missile crisis; Alina Hosu (2003) has investigated the relationship between state identity and European integration in Romanian foreign policy. But perhaps the most significant work is the one co-edited by Telhami and Barnett (2002), which makes a theoretical and methodological contribution to the relationship between state identity and foreign policy in the Middle East. These studies have all placed identity at the centre of a state's interests, and they all proceeded on the assumption that changes in how a state reacts to threat or characterises its enemies signal a change in state identity. (Hosu 2003: 6)

In addition to articulation of friendships in terms of fear, trust, and danger, sovereignty is also a key component to a state's maintenance of its identity. Brown (1988: 5) states that the 'ability to sustain such sovereign statehood requires substantial cooperation among the people living within the territory'. He argues that:

The idea of the nation remains an ambiguous term, but refers to a common identity shared by groups with strong bonds, including cultural, religious, and ethnic ties amongst others. States elicit this type of loyalty with the creation of a distinctive flag, national anthem, oaths, and rituals of citizenship. (Brown 1988: 5)

An example of this loyalty being expressed is the Olympic Games, where passionate fans cheer for their country. It is this loyalty that characterizes the nation-state. (Abdelal, *et al.* 2006: 695-711) In this sense, state identity appears as an identity construct of the state designed to project its character externally, and at the same time sells it internally to convince people to adopt it as their own.

Fearon and Laitin (1996: 715-35) similarly argue that one's identity is as a member of a particular social category, and part of the definition of that category is that all members follow certain norms. Change in the accepted norm happens when so many states accept a new norm for state behaviour that it becomes the new standard. It may also be that normative change happens within a subset of states—perhaps linked by geography or political ideology. According to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 902-910), there are three possible motivations for responding to such peer pressure: legitimacy, conformity, and esteem. (Fearon and Laitin 1996)

States have recognized the role of international organizations as sources of legitimization within the international community. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 903) Legitimacy within international organizations is seen to promote both a state's image amongst other states—there are consequences for not adhering to group norms, for example when a state is labelled “rogue”—and in reinforcing a government's domestic legitimacy. International organizations not only regulate undesirable behaviour, but also promote good behaviour by states. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 903)

Conformity refers to a state's compliance with norms to demonstrate that they have adapted to the social environment to which they belong. It presumes states have a need to be recognized as sovereign within the international community, and that abiding to internationally recognized norms of behaviour will secure this. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 904)

State leaders conform to norms in order to avoid the disapproval aroused by norm violation, and thus to enhance national esteem (and, as a result, their own self esteem). In the international sphere, conformity with norms is enforced mainly through words—through diplomacy, debates, publicity, reports, and so on. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 904) This enforcement seeks to highlight the discrepancies between accepted norms and a state's actions, and hopefully encourage the state to act in accordance with these norms in the future in order to increase its esteem amongst other states. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 904)

1.4.2 Causal and constitutive effects of state identity on foreign policy

It is important to ask how and where state identity can be located. It may be easier to locate the “how” of state identity through a state's official discourse—but the

“where” of state identity is not easy to uncover. This is because the state’s discourse is not always assumed to reflect true intentions—let alone the fact that the official discourse sometimes contradicts itself. Although the model proposed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) implies that state identity has a major role in shaping foreign policy, it should be noted that the relationship goes both ways: state identity influences foreign policy, and in return foreign policy influences state identity over time. In fact, foreign policy can influence state identity in at least two ways.

First, it can change the salient meaning of certain identities of which state identity is composed. As a result, identities change over time as the international or regional environment forces them to compete, cooperate, or oppose each other. In this sense, foreign policy can be seen as a symbolic battlefield for identity conflicts.

Second, foreign policy can drive politicians to adopt changes in their own perceived state identity, especially under the pressure of other states or international organizations. External events and involvement of foreign actors can change domestic agendas, causing some issues and identities to surface. For example, foreign involvement in international conflicts can prolong the conflicts and increase their cost, but more significantly can empower or deprive some ethnic groups, parties, or social elites, causing identity balances—and state identity in particular—to shift.

Similar to what has been described above, state identity can influence foreign policy in many ways. First, state identity can be a tool for mobilizing support or diffusing opposition. Second, it can serve as constraint on action or imagination. Third, it can be a device for justifying or legitimising policy. Finally, it can provide an opportunity for stabilizing other countries. (Saideman 2002) This raises a key question: What is the process that regulates the relationship between state identity and foreign policy? Despite differences among scholars, there are some building blocks for a general consensus on how state identity evolves and what causes it to change or transform. Since state identity is all about norms in international politics, the study of how norms are consolidated and universalized is essential.

There have been three broad explanations as to what role state identity plays in foreign policy decision-making: that there is a causal relationship, that identity intervenes between the foreign and domestic spheres, or that the relationship is both causal and constitutive. First, there is the theory that it plays a causal role in defining the state’s ontological position in world politics. The second explanation suggests that state

identity may merely be an intervening variable in foreign policy, between external threat and domestic mobilization.

Advocates of a third explanation argue that state identity plays a causal as well as constitutive effect on foreign policy. (Telhami and Barnett 2002; Klotz and Smith 2007b) Following this explanation, Mattern (2001) and Risse-Kappen (1995) have incorporated the Suez Crisis as a case study of how state identity played both a causal and constitutive effect on Britain's foreign policy during the Suez Crisis of 1956, arguing that Britain was in a phase of redefining its state identity from being an imperial power to being a centre state. In addition, Hopf's (2002) work draws a connection between broad Russian social discourses and the decisions of Soviet foreign policy-makers, stressing the domestic construction of state identity. Cederman's (2001) theory of the formation of state identity in Europe takes Switzerland's state identity as an example of how four distinct political cantons, each with their own unique political institutions and social histories, can interact with each other over time to construct a shared national identity. In the United States, Nau (2002) demonstrates how the contestation between isolationists and internationalists over the appropriate state identity for US foreign policy influenced the use of military force and the success or failure of long-term US alliances. Johnston (1995) uses cognitive mapping to bring forth several potentially competing versions of China's strategic culture held by contemporary and historical Chinese leaders.

The third explanation, however, suggests that since people and leaders—who in fact are the foreign policy-makers—seemed to care a lot about something that, according to realists for example, was deemed unimportant. Since that justification, according to Maloney's argument, is an important justification and generates significant foreign policy outcomes, it is then worthy of explanation. (Kratochwil 1991) As Saideman (2002: 171) argues, if material interests drive foreign policy, it is not clear why politicians delay or refuse to alter their foreign policy according to new international circumstances. In this case, we can ask why Saudi-Iranian rapprochement did not occur immediately after the Second Gulf War, when both states had a clear interest in balancing the power in the region following the defeat of their mutual enemy, the powerful Ba'thist regime of Iraq. Iraq had been a great rival of Iran since the revolution and became an enemy of Saudi Arabia after the invasion of Kuwait; both states had clear interest in taming Iraq's aggression during Saddam Hussein's rule.

Perhaps the most interesting study on the relationship between state identity and foreign policy is Ashizawa's (2008) work on the role of state identity in Japanese foreign policy. Ashizawa argues that state identity generates a specific "value" (a "pro-attitude" toward a certain kind of action), which in turn determines a state's preference for a particular foreign policy option. This causal mechanism is then demonstrated by the empirical analysis of Japan's foreign policy toward post-Cold War regional institution-building. She found that identity was part of a duality in foreign policy-making—value and action—and because it cannot wholly account for action, we must carefully consider when identity is playing a role in state behaviour. Thus, Ashizawa's study reveals a critical flaw in excessively deterministic approaches to identity.

1.4.3 Two sources of state identity formation

State identity, although created by the political apparatus of the state—the political elite and designated state institutions—plays a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy decision-making at certain times. It has a constitutive effect on foreign policy during the period of political stability in the regime, because states develop a *raison d'état* that requires a specific ontological stance on world politics. A state will remain an enemy with some states, rival to others and friend to those it may think conform to its interest; however, when a state redefines its state identity, it actually redefines its relations with other states. It is important to recall that key source of state identity formation can be located in the state's institutions that deal with foreign policy decision-making. Each state has its own structure of institutions, which means that each country has a different institutional method to forming state identity.

Following on Adib-Moghaddam's (2008) work on the relationship between Iran's state identity and its stance in world politics, I suggest two interdependent sources of state identity in "foreign policy" decision-making: "cognitive", referring to the intellectual production and processing of categories of the self and other, and "institutional", denoting the formulization of cultural artefacts as authoritative narratives of the state. The cognitive perspective emphasizes the importance of examining the individuals involved in the foreign policy-making process, for they are likely to view their environment differently. The cognitive origins of state identity are rooted in ideas that seek to explain the purpose of the individual, the state and the outside world.

1.4.4 Internal and external constraints on state identity

In order to make the discussion of foreign policy meaningful, we need to use a methodology to inform our understanding of the root causes of foreign policy decision-making. Since state identity has both a causal and constitutive relationship with foreign policy—past foreign policy influences present state identity, which in turn influences future foreign policy, in an ongoing cyclical relationship—it is the best place to locate constraints on foreign policy. Indeed, as Alons (2007) explains, the relationship between domestic and external constraints and foreign policy fluctuates. In his convincing view, either domestic or external factors will be a greater influence on a state's foreign policy decision-making at any given time based on the way that power is distributed both domestically and internationally.

Scholars who favour the idea that external factors play a greater role in constraining foreign policy decision-making often argue that domestic politics are normally both too fragmented and too quotidian to have any extensive influence on outward-facing policy. This is the view taken by Mandelbaum (1988: 6) when he argues that domestic political processes “have particular influence on foreign policy when they are acute, when a government is unstable, and when the legitimacy of a regime itself is in dispute.” He continues his argument by positing a sort of ‘league table’ of states, with each state being neither completely free of nor completely constrained by external factors; rather, in his (1988: 6) argument each state's policy is “determined totally by its position in the [international] system” with any gaps being filled by domestic policy considerations.

However, Mandelbaum (1988: 6) acknowledges that the sort of extreme domestic conditions he feels might influence foreign policy decision-making have been relatively common since the middle of the last century. As such, we need to ask whether domestic politics influence foreign policy more extensively than is often thought. Scholars who focus on the role of domestic political processes in foreign policy decision-making often emphasise that foreign policy decisions are taken by those people and groups who have reached the apex of domestic politics: kings, presidents, prime ministers, and senior government officials. As such, there is a certain intuitive logic in the idea that domestic politics influences foreign policy. If we accept this, then we must open the “black box” that is the state in traditional realist scholarship and examine domestic political constraints on foreign policy decision-making.

However, finding evidence to support this idea has been much more difficult, and scholars disagree on both the extent to which domestic politics influence foreign policy and the best methodology for studying potential links. Furthermore, as IR scholars embarked on their project to incorporate domestic political processes into explanations of interactions between states, it became clear that domestic politics and its influence on a state's external behaviour can be defined in many competing ways, and that not all scholars were using the term "domestic politics" in the same way. It is a difficulty perhaps best elucidated by Fearon (1998), who writes that "what counts as a domestic-political explanation is defined by opposition to systemic or structural explanations." For example, an author could define "domestic politics" only as the influence that causes all instances of suboptimal foreign policy decision-making, instead of taking a more black-letter view that defines "domestic politics" as any consideration that involves treating the state as something other than a unitary, rational actor.

In assessing the literature on the foreign policy of small states, Hey (2003: 6–7) exposed methodological problems that very likely plague much of the work on the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy. Specifically, she argues that there are two main flaws in the scholarship that challenges the traditional assumption that small states' foreign policy is constituted solely at the systemic (external), rather than domestic, level: while some scholars are willing to debunk that traditional explanation on the basis of inadequate evidence, those in favour of the status quo seem unwilling to consider domestic factors or argue why they are unsatisfactory explanations for foreign policy behaviour. (Hey 2003: 6–7) Hey (2003: 6–7) challenges the conventional hypothesis that small states generally lack the sort of internal politics and sense of collective identity that would contribute to anything other than "passive and reactive" foreign policy.

Even if we can set aside such definitional and methodological problems, there is still a lively debate in IR scholarship on the role of domestic political processes in external politics, as well as on the specific aspects of domestic politics that can be said to influence a state's foreign policy. One of the first political scientists to examine the connection wrote in the late 1980s. Levy (1988) noticed a discrepancy between the historical and political science literature in the way that the role of domestic politics was linked to a state's decision to go to war. While historians were quite comfortable placing the causes of various wars—Levy considers predominately European

conflicts—in domestic political struggles, equivalent analysis was lacking in mainstream political science scholarship.

In their 1989 empirical study, Hermann and Hermann proposed an early model to examine the role that the structure of domestic power played in foreign policy, which they used to analyse the internal and external politics of twenty-five states over the course of a decade. In that study, the authors considered whether each state was controlled by a “decision unit” of a predominant leader, a single group, or a collection of multiple autonomous actors. (Hermann and Hermann 1989: 362) In doing so, they found a strong correlation between a state being controlled by a leader or leaders who act cohesively and the likelihood that the state would show more extreme foreign policy behavior.

Also in the late 1980s, Putnam (1988) commented on the lack of an adequate theory to account for the role of domestic politics in international relations. Choosing to focus on the process by which states ratify international treaties, Putnam highlights one way that a state’s leaders must engage with both domestic and international political processes simultaneously, which he terms a “two-level game.” In brief, Putnam argues that if a national leader has to seek approval for a treaty from other players in his or her state’s domestic political structure (up to and including a referendum of the citizens themselves), that leader must engage with the state’s domestic political circumstances *at the same time* as considering the international implications of ratifying or not ratifying the treaty. He also argues that his “two-level game” model could be applied equally usefully to other political processes, including legislative committees or multiparty coalitions.

Scholars have proposed countless other domestic policy factors that could potentially influence foreign policy. In discussing liberal democracies, Risse-Kappen (1991) noted that public opinion in that type of political system tends to interplay with the unique political apparatus in the state. Through his examination of the anti-Soviet policies of Japan, Germany, France, and the United States during the 1980s, Risse-Kappen found that while public opinion was substantially the same in each of those four countries, their foreign policy varied quite significantly. He located the cause for this phenomenon in each country’s differing domestic political processes.

Of course, in a non-democratic state the role of public opinion in foreign policy decision-making is likely to differ significantly, if it plays any role at all.

Relevant to a wider variety of states—not merely liberal democracies—is the idea that the personal characteristics of political leaders might influence foreign policy behavior. (Hermann 1980) In an empirical study similar to that she would undertake nine years later, which is discussed above (Hermann and Hermann 1989), Margaret Hermann identified and examined both interest in and experience of foreign affairs in forty-five world leaders and found a correlation between the leaders' characteristics and the extent to which those leaders concerned themselves with foreign policy. This is a particularly interesting idea to apply to a study of foreign policy in the Middle East, where both traditional culture and often-autocratic rule combine to form a political climate in which charismatic figures can find opportunities to lead and to influence foreign policy more easily than they might in other places.

In the end, however, there is no convincing reason to adopt either a purely internal or a purely external perspective on foreign policy. It is reasonable to argue that foreign policy is constrained by both domestic and external factors, so we can also accept that state identity does as well; however, determining which influence comes first is an unnecessary endeavor. Since this study assumes that there is social interaction between states, the influence of past foreign policy on current state identity can be taken as indication that both internal and external factors can be attributed to this process.

1.4.5 The limits of state identity

Several points of criticism may be noted when it comes to the use and implementation of state identity, which bear upon the discussion of a theoretical framework appropriate to the understanding of the concept. These points highlight some deficiencies concerning our current understanding of state identity as concept.

State identity is based on the assumption that states are like units, their properties irrelevant to the explanation of their foreign policy. This paradigm is contested because it prioritizes identity over interests. As McSweeney (1999: 127) points out, 'The "I", or subject, who formulates preferences, wants, interests, is linguistically placed prior to the action of satisfying them. What kind of entity I am is made to determine what kind of wants I have. What we want follows from who we are'. This is an anti-behaviourist way of expressing the issue, and empirically it is not clear that the causal connection between identity and interest of the state is unidirectional, as advocates of state identity suggests. The range of interests available to states can cause

them to reinvent the state identity. They can become more self-assertive, egoistic, kind, or cooperative states if they choose to pursue interests consonant with such a definition.

Another limitation relates to the concept of state identity and the source of its change or stability, which state identity theorists locate in the interaction process. The difficulty here is one that points out the problem of adopting the state actor as the unit of analysis. The state is a collectivity, and collective identity formation is an appropriate and necessary topic if we are to make sense of actions that carry with them the power and resources of the state. But it is not only the process of state interaction with other states in the international arena that provides the theory by which collective identity, made relevant to foreign policy, is fashioned. It is also the domestic process of state interaction with sub-state actors that influences the sense of commonality brought to bear upon international relations. (Hopf 2002) Advocates of state identity note the distinction in passing, but they do not allow it any purchase on their theoretical development of the determinants of state identity. This allows the working assumption that sub-state relations have no bearing on the process by which states learn to mould and modify their sense of statehood. Furthermore, it implies that the identity acquired in and from the process of interstate negotiation is necessarily consistent with that which characterizes the collectivity domestically at any particular time. (Busekist 2004: 81-86)

Third, despite the centrality of identity within constructivism, there exists, as Tidy (2008: 12) notes, a distinct lack of agreement concerning precise definitions of state identity. The relative weighting of international and domestic political environments in shaping states identities is also subject to some disagreement. State identities may be the product of a complex interplay between international and domestic discourses, producing some identities that are more stable than others. (Neumann 1999; Klotz and Smith 2007a) In addition, the distinction between social and corporate identities may not be clear in practice. (Rae 2002)

Finally, the state identity approach suggests that foreign policy is affected by the identity the state chooses to embrace. This identity is formed over time by the political apparatus of the state and is constructed of prevailing religious and nationalistic identities. Furthermore, it assumes that foreign policy choices are a product of state identity preferences. In other words, a state will always act according to its identity in its foreign policy.

However, this is not always the case. To illustrate this problem we will consider two cases: in the first case, a state might claim that it is a revolutionary state driven by revolutionary principles, such as self-determination and opposition to foreign occupation; nevertheless, we might discover that the same state is itself engaged in occupation of a foreign land. For example, Iraq under Ba’thist rule (1968–2003) advocated for Arab self-determination and called for collective defence among Arab states, but it also invaded Kuwait and violated the same principles of Arab unity that it claimed to represent. (Mufti 1996: 221) In the second case, a state that considers itself a socialist state might engage in peaceful and cooperative relations with a liberal capitalist state; it could even embrace free-market policies and vote in international organizations in a way that serves its material interest rather than the fulfilment of its principles. Furthermore, the same state might be engaged in a bitter rivalry with another socialist state that shares similar principles. A good example here would be Chinese foreign policy towards the USSR and the US during the 1970s: while China chose to open up to the West and strengthen its relations with the US, its relations with the USSR remained strained despite both states being communist. (Johnston 1996: 225; Xinbo 2003: 61)

These two cases suggest that foreign policy does not correspond with state identity, and that states do not appear to be constrained by what state identity they choose when it comes to foreign policy. A general reason given here to justify this contradiction is that some policies are made out of necessity (or for survival), even though it goes against what the state, as a body of institutions and players, thinks of itself or claims to be. Some critics would consider this part of state hypocrisy and point out that when it comes to state matters, the state will always act according to what it knows best when ‘fighting for survival’. (Hill 2003: 34) Others, however, would consider this contradiction between a state’s identity and its foreign policy choices a matter of pragmatism or practicality. (Rezaei 2008: 28) One might conclude that state identity is merely a tool to mobilise a ruling party’s base or satisfy popular opinion within a nation; however, it does not inform a state’s foreign policy towards the outside world.

This paradox challenges the notion that a state’s identity matters when it comes to critical foreign policy issues that it confronts. Realists emphasize that identities, and the norms they embrace, matter little in foreign policy decision-making because states seek power to maintain their survival in an anarchic system. (Wendt

1999: 350) Structural realist theories, for example, ignore identity differences among states as well as differences in regime type, mainly because the international system creates the same basic incentives for all Great Powers. As Mearsheimer (2007: 72) notes, ‘Whether a state is democratic or autocratic matters relatively little for how it acts towards other states. Nor does it matter much who is in charge of conducting a state’s foreign policy’. As a result, realists treat states as if they were black boxes: they are assumed to be alike, no matter how they differ on state identity. In contrast, constructivists argue that discounting the influence of identity in explaining foreign policy implies a belief that foreign policy is a matter of rhetorical practice that does not reveal the truth about a state’s real intentions when it comes to foreign policy decision-making. However, both neo-realists and social constructivists acknowledge that states do need to construct an identity that symbolises what the state stands for and what it represents.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Scholars have had difficulty evaluating—and even conceptualizing—the possibility that identity might shape foreign policy because of the strength of existing theoretical dispositions. This chapter has investigated a number of theoretical approaches to the answer of foreign policy in world politics. The debate over identity has largely informed international relations research in recent decades. Although identity-based theories cannot account for every change in foreign policy or claim universal assumptions about the behaviour of states in the international sphere, they nevertheless offer great explanatory value for a range of case studies in IR where identity politics dominate.

“State identity” has been presented as the state’s perception of what role it should play and what status it should enjoy among other states. Through examining the multiple systemic and normative approaches to identity in IR, several conclusions can be drawn. First, by focusing on key aspects of state identity, constructivist scholars have provided new theoretical leverage on interaction dynamics and led to practical solutions for important problems in world politics. Acknowledging that state identity essentially constrains foreign policy and that state identity is, in turn, defined by the cultural-institutional context within which states act, has been an important contribution of recent norms research. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 902)

Identity has been conceived as “normative”, or composed of norms of behaviour. These norms are essentially constitutive rules that define a state’s corporate identity and lead other states to recognize it; identity is thus linked to behaviour through the performance of roles. States, in the majority of cases, are compelled to act a certain way in a situation because of what they—and others—conceive their role to be. Identities provide roles that are internationally, or regionally, appropriate. In addition, the distinction between social and corporate identities is necessary, since the latter is accountable for conceptualizing state identity.

The relationship between state identity and foreign policy can best be explained through role theory. Roles are defined as positions within a group of states and repertoires of behaviour, inferred from others’ expectations and one’s own conceptions. Furthermore, state identities are most easily understood as roles that the “self” assumes toward the “other”. The contents of state identity, as role conception, are determined by the intersubjective understandings that become embedded in discourses or norms that are shared by both states. The concept of role provides us with a conceptual tool to operationalize more precisely how state identity informs foreign policy, while also expressing the relevance of systemic, geographic and economic variables to a particular foreign policy action.

However, state identity as a concept remains underdeveloped and suffers from a number of deficiencies. Perhaps the most important limitation to state identity is that states do not abide strictly to what we perceive as their shared culture, or their identity. In other words, international norms do not always regulate the foreign policy of states. How to account for acts that seem beyond a state’s perceived identity is a challenge to the whole collective identity approach. In order to overcome this predicament, and many other limitations discussed in this chapter, it is necessary to build a synthesis between the collective identity approach and the practice of power approach. The aim is to combine material and ideational variables to account for foreign policy decision-making.

Any conclusion regarding the significance of viewing state identity as a variable in foreign policy decision-making rests on whether such an approach enhances our understanding of outcomes, especially for key events that are considered game-changers, like the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement. Saying that we are interested in understanding the difference that state identity makes does not mean that we see state

identity as fixed. This view begins with the notion that state identity can be treated as a variable, can take different values, and can be accurately measured on some scale. It then attempts to establish an association between changes in the independent variable of state identity and changes in the dependent variable—for instance, foreign policy orientation. In this example, a typical hypothesis is that the more Pan-Islamic a state is, the more antipathy and conflict it will express toward Israel. Another typical hypothesis is that the more revolutionary the state is, the more likely it will form an identity of rivalry and enmity with a non-revolutionary state.

In this dissertation, I follow on the argument that state identity plays a causal and constitutive effect on foreign policy; however, I will refrain from seeking a particular framework to explain foreign policy decision-making. This is primarily because we argue that state identity—and perhaps identity in general—is of a temporal nature, and because I believe that assigning a particular framework model of explanation to a specific foreign policy limits our understanding of changes in state identity itself. Arguing that state identity is of a temporal nature means that it not only changes over time, but that foreign policy and state identity both affect each other correspondently. Therefore, assuming that one manufactures the other is empirically—and perhaps methodologically—biased. It is true that state identity profoundly guided Saudi–Iranian relations following the 1979 revolution; nevertheless, the study of Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997 will demonstrate that changes in foreign policy practices may have a major effect on state identity itself.

THE ROLE OF NORMS IN THE CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EAST

Introducing the State Identity Approach to Saudi–Iranian Relations

You as Persians have no business meddling in
Arab affairs.
*King Abdullah*¹

The bloodthirsty Saudi puppet rulers are
unmistakably carrying out the very same crimes
that were committed against humanity by the
criminal regime of Israel in Gaza.
*Hossein Shariatmadari*²

State identity is part of every state's character and image, yet there appear to be wide disagreements among Middle Eastern scholars on what type of role it plays in foreign policy and to what extent it informs decision-making in the region. Although this problem is not limited to the Middle East, the region does stand out in the debate on identity and foreign policy due to the growing role of sectarianism and religious and nationalist movements. Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism and Political Islam are active forces in the region, and it is difficult to mention any regional feud that has not been coloured by identity in one way or another.

As two leading scholars argue, 'No student of Middle East international politics can begin to understand the region without taking into account the ebb and flow of identity politics'. (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 5) They were referring in part to the rise of fundamentalist Islamic groups that operate without much regard to territorial

¹ King Abdullah is directly quoted mainly on Iran's' role in Arab affairs. One US cable reports the king's account of his heated exchange with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. The March 2009 cable said the king gave Mottaki an ultimatum to improve relations within one year. "After that, it will be the end," he reportedly said. See: Tehran Bureau, *et al.* 29 November 2010, *What are the Most Significant WikiLeaks Revelations?*

² Kayhan editor Hossein Shariatmadari, who is close to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, is considered one of the vocal critics of Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997. See: Shariatmadari 17 November 2009, *Save Shi'a: Saudi Regime on Verge of Collapse!*

borders. This disregard of the boundaries of the state is facilitated in part by media networks that can easily transcend the old geographical constraints. The rise of such groups not only threatens the often-weak states in the region, but has also left them vulnerable to foreign interference and invasion. (Hinnebusch 2005: 5) However, the role of identity is complicated and general observations are difficult to maintain. As Ray Hinnebusch (2005: 8) notes, the debate about how identity matters remains unresolved.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I will explore the evolution of regional norms in the Middle East, especially the implications of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism, and the formation of state identities in the region in the 1950s and 1960s. The second part will focus on the Saudi–Iranian case and the role state identity has played in those two countries.

2.1 THE DIFFICULTY WITH MAINTAINING STATE IDENTITY EXPLANATIONS

States in the Middle East are quite vocal about their identity and do claim to match action with principle. For the past few decades, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been considered among the most active players in shaping the foreign policy agenda within the region. Moreover, the two states stand as vivid examples where state identity often informs foreign policy decisions, yet the two states have acted in some cases in ways that seem contradictory to what they claim to be. However, the region provides a number of examples where foreign policy decisions and choices do not match what the state claims to be or stand for—its state identity. This can be clearly seen in how Saudi Arabia and Iran dealt, albeit differently, with the effects of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism on their respective foreign policies. Since the 1950s, Saudi Arabia’s strong alliance with the US has been a burden on its posture in the region: since Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism both contain an anti-American element and are integral parts of its state identity, Saudi foreign policy was always criticized by hard-line Arab nationalists and (later) revolutionary Iran for this contradiction. (Klotz and Smith 2007b: 23)

2.1.1 Identity discourses about the Middle East

Nowhere is the divergence of identity and state sharper than in the Middle East. (Hinnebusch 2003: 54) Scholars have always acknowledged the importance of identities for understanding the region. (Barnett 1998: 5) However, it took a large change for this to be acknowledged in IR literature, mainly because the dominant materialist/structuralist approaches rarely paid attention to the changing nature of

identity prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The only exception was the study of Pan-Arabism, which occupied a considerable space in the area studies literature due to the fact that most newly independent states in the region showed strong aspirations to Arab solidarity and unity. (Dawisha 2003: 8)

In Middle East IR, neorealist and dependency theories tend to focus on the huge power asymmetries between the states of the region and the international players that pursue their national interests in the region. Thus, internal splits, conflicts, and lack of regional institution-building are considered a product of external superpower intervention, asymmetric economic integration with Europe and the United States, and balance of power politics. In an early study, Binder (1958) depicted the Middle East as a subordinate subsystem. Hudson (1999: 17), and Amin and El Kenz (2005) all talk about a ‘penetrated’ and dependent system. Despite being viewed as penetrated by Great Powers, the region’s history does show that the states enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. In fact, Great Power interests during the Cold War were often used, and sometimes invited, in interstate rivalries and military conflicts between Middle Eastern states. However, the search for state identity among newly independent states in the form of nationalism had a greater effect in shaping the region’s norms and identities.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt’s Nasser used Pan-Arabism to put normative constraints on the ability of Arab states to conduct sovereign policies. (Hinnebusch 2005: 152) Popular opinion in a number of states across the region was influenced by the mix of nationality, non-alignment policies and opposition to colonial rule, as the Egyptian state had demonstrated.³ (Author’s Interview, Mousavian, 25 October 2010) Nevertheless, other states—particularly monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Iran—were in bitter rivalry with neighbouring revolutionary nationalist states on the outside and rising nationalist and Leftist dissidents on the inside. (Gause 1994: 155) Therefore, the states were constantly under normative constraint to act independently; even Nasser found it difficult to negotiate with Israel publically following the 1967 War, since Arab public and official attitudes were against negotiations. (Lippman 1989: 6)

Moreover, the complex aspects of state identity were hardly investigated and the identity debate was limited to issues such as the roots of Pan-Arabism, the early weakness of states in the region and the lack of fit between the boundaries imposed by

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colonial powers and existing identities. (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 1) This would all start to change following the Camp David Accords in 1978, when Egypt concluded a peace treaty with Israel. The shift in Egyptian foreign policy was seen as an ‘end to Pan-Arabism’ (Ajami 1981), or ‘the return to geography’ in Arab politics, as Ghassan Salamé (1988) puts it. The notion was that Pan-Arabism has reached its limits and was beginning to witness its demise.

The 1980s were clouded by the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) between the Iraq’s Ba’thists and the new Islamic Republic of Iran. From the neo-realist point of view, the war was clear evidence of a “balance of power” between the aspiring Iraqi power and the wounded Iranian might. However, as some scholars have demonstrated, the war was a natural product of state identity rivalry in the age of competition, one nationalistic and the other taking a political-religious form of Islam. (Adib-Moghaddam 2006: 49) Since the so-called *an-Naksah* (The Setback) of 1967, when the Arab countries lost to Israel, Political Islam has been on the rise, although it was only in the early 1980s that it enjoyed a wide following and began to affect social and political policies in the region.

Pan-Arabism was still active throughout the 1970s and 1980s at least at the state level, though it was highly weakened by the Second Gulf War (1990–1991), when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. In fact, the war was a clear test of state identity in two ways. The first was the notion of one Arab state invading another and annexing its land, which meant that Arab unity was a mere tool for expansionism by dominant revolutionary regimes. Second, states were torn apart by their need to oppose foreign intervention (the US-led coalition), to absorb Pan-Arab sentiments among their citizens, and also by the desire to support the liberation of Kuwait to tame Saddam’s aggression. (Browsers 2009: 24) Mapping the past four decades, it would be difficult to argue whether foreign policy was driven by regime survival or ideological differences manifested in the state identity struggles.

The retreat of Pan-Arabism after the Second Gulf War led some scholars to argue that the normative constraints on Arab states has been finally removed, leaving decision-makers free to choose which foreign policy to pursue. (Al-Ansari 2000; Al-Najafi 2008) The clearest example of this is the Damascus Declaration of 1991, in which three key Arab states—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria—agreed to cooperate and maintain regional order following the 1991 crisis. (Barnett 1996: 598) In many respects,

this virtual framework of understanding opened the door for the Middle East peace process, and later to the Oslo Accord in 1993. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), backed by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, gave up its arms and accepted negotiating a future Palestinian state with Israel. Jordan, which had sided with Saddam Hussein during the Second Gulf War, signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, while a number of Arab states opened commercial missions and exchanged diplomatic visits with Israeli representatives. (Abadi 1996; Rabi 2009) This shift in the regional foreign policy practices signalled a shift in regional norms and ideas, and practices that were once considered forbidden in foreign policy became accepted —or at least justified — by some states. Although normalising relations with Israel was still opposed by the majority of citizens in almost every Middle Eastern state, states appeared to have more confidence to pursue foreign policy decisions which did not enjoy popular acceptance.⁴

One might ask whether changes in foreign policy practices were associated with changes in state identity. It can be argued both ways. There were some states that experienced fundamental changes to state identity, notably Qatar in 1996, Kuwait in 1990, and Jordan in 1991; others experienced what can be called minor adjustment to their perceived state identity, such as Iran in 1997 and Saudi Arabia in 1996. More significantly, regional norms were affected. Pan-Arabism, though alive, no longer dominated foreign policy decision-making, so Arab regimes became more willing to compete with Political Islamic movements over religious legitimacy, and for the first time in many years the idea of resorting to war among Arab states was no longer viable or acceptable. (Gause 1994: 31) Still, it is not possible to point to a precise event or time in which norms changed, which leads us to the question of how norms are treated when it comes to debates over foreign policy decision-making in the Middle East.

2.1.2 *Regional norms: the individualism–holism debate*

Perhaps the crucial question here is whether state identity is affected by the regional context; it may be that state identity plays a more prominent role in foreign

⁴ I assume here that state identity and norms are mutually constituted. Following on Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein (1996), an argument can be made about the identity of some states as “sovereign”, which presupposes a system of mutual recognition from other states with certain competencies. The properties of a state, as well as its foreign policy, depend upon a specific social context. The identities that states project, and the interests that they pursue, can therefore be seen as partly constructed by their environments (the Middle East in our case). Therefore, certain state identities embrace specific sets of norms. In other words, state identity affects interstate normative structures such as regimes or security communities, leading states to pursue certain foreign policies towards each other and maintain specific relationships such as friendship, rivalry, or enmity. For further explanation on the relationship between state identity and norms, see Chapter 1.

policy in some places and less in others. In other words, do specific regions tend to embrace certain norms that in turn generate particular foreign policy practices?

The foreign policy analysis of the region has been polarized between mainstream IR theorists, who insist that universal norms apply to all regions and areas, and specialists, who defend the normative uniqueness and consequent political exceptionalism of the Middle East. (Hinnebusch 2005: 243) In addition, mainstream IR theorists (for example, neo-realists, neo-liberalist, Democratic Peace theorists and Marxists), all consider norms to be dominant; therefore, foreign policy practices follow particular patterns that can be predicted and rooted to those universal norms.

Neo-realism for example, rests broadly on three normative conceptions: statism, survival, and self-help. These norms are fixed in an anarchic system. Marxism, on the other hand, rejects the realist/liberal normative view of state conflict or cooperation; instead it focuses on the economic and material aspects. It makes the assumption that the class struggles trumps other concerns, allowing for the elevation of class as the focus of study. Marxists view the international system as an integrated capitalist system in pursuit of capital accumulation. (Kubálková and Cruickshank 1985; Callinicos 2004) Unlike realism, Democratic Peace theory argues that norms can change; therefore, liberal democratic norms may make the leaders accustomed to negotiation and compromise. Moreover, normative values such as human rights may make people in democracies reluctant to go to war, especially against other democracies. (Müller 2004: 27)

Regionalists, however, argue that regions such as the Middle East encompass a set of well-recognized norms and beliefs; whether they are enduring (fixed) or of a temporal nature is a matter of debate. (Rezaei 2007: 21) Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism are perhaps the most dominant forces affecting regional norms; however, old historical feuds—sectarianism, anti-Westernization, and differences over territory and resources—also make important contributions. Halliday (2005: 62) concludes that there are at least three strands of ideology that have almost certainly contributed to the formation of Middle Eastern norms: nationalism, revolutionism, and Islamism.

These prevailing norms produce patterns of foreign policy behaviour that are responsible for certain security problems in the region. As Buzan and Wæver (2003: 187) note, ‘The insecurity of ruling elites within their domestic sphere plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of (in)security overall. On the surface, this is a

region composed largely of postcolonial modern states, albeit mostly weak ones. But this structure is riddled with still powerful pre-modern elements of clan, tribe, and religion'. In their book, *Muslim Politics*, Eickelman and Piscatori (2004: 12) imply that there are both constructivist and rationalist ingredients in Islamic states' policies. They believe that Islam constitutes the language of politics in the Muslim world, although through multiple interpretations: 'Islamic vocabulary contains words of undoubted political resonance and a review of their historical development helps to explain their durable attraction'.

2.1.3 How exceptional is the Middle East?

Drawing on the legacy of fifty years of research, James Bill (1996: 503) wrote: 'Middle Eastern political processes defy observation, discourage generalization and resist explanation'. Furthermore, Paul Aarts (1999: 911) speculated more than a decade ago that 'in terms of regionalisation the Middle East appears to exemplify the region's status of being the "exceptional" case, eternally out of step with history and immune to the trends affecting other parts of the world', although his study then qualified that assertion. So is this the case?

When it comes to state identity, norms are considered the medium in which state identity functions. The Middle Eastern states do exhibit a number of common features: their geographic proximity; the relatively high degree of social, cultural, and religious homogeneity; as well as political, economic and military interaction. Nevertheless, they have a relatively low degree of institutional regional cooperation and integration. (Harders and Legrenzi 2008) The reasons for this low degree of cooperation vary according to the different theoretical assumptions. (See: Fawcett 2005; Hudson 1999; Korany, *et al.* 1993) It can be seen as evidence of the marginal role that shared identity plays in defining the region's foreign policy practices. However, it can be argued that the lack of strong regional institutions is the reason why norms—on the regional level—are a reflection of a broken region in terms of states and institutions.⁵

⁵ While I do not intend to discuss the role of regional institutions, it is important to clarify the connection between norms at the regional level and regional institutions. Regional institutions resemble a form of collective identity, and therefore generate a normative structure. A clear example here is the Arab League, which is based on the norm of Arab unity. However, the presence of norms does not dictate compliance. Any new or emergent norm must compete with existing, perhaps countervailing, ones. This is a political process that implicates the relative power of international or domestic coalitions. But norms make new types of action possible, while neither guaranteeing action nor determining results. (Jepperson, *et al.* 1996: 56) However, institutions can enforce certain norms and provide a legitimate case for them. For example, Saudi Arabia and Egypt sought during the Second Gulf War the endorsement of a resolution

Those who advocate the uniqueness of the region tend to make general assumptions about the region's prevailing norms. As constructivist Michael Barnett (1998) argues, shared Arab identity infuses the content of the foreign policy roles that states assume and generates norms that constrain state sovereignty. The core issues that define Arabism are rejection of Western domination, defence of the Palestinian cause, the desirability of Arab unity, and the expectation that the Arab states should act in concert in world politics in defence of all Arab interests. Since the actions of one state regarding common Arab issues affects them all, all have an interest in participating in the definition of all-Arab interests and norms through Arab collective institutions such as the Arab League. (Barnett 1998: 2, 7; Sela 1998: 12; Thompson 1970)

Nevertheless, the region does not operate in a vacuum. According to Brown (1984), the Middle East is a heavily penetrated system—especially by the West—and is particularly vulnerable both because of its strategic location (including the presence of Israel) and its oil resources. (Brown 1984: 5) Moreover, Halliday (2005: 303) acknowledges the existence of regional norms; however, he states: 'Norms of the region, while they draw selectively on the past, are not traditional but modern phenomena that have to be related to the interests of these contemporary states and their apparatus'.

These factors, as advocates of the regionalism approach suggest, contribute to a regional set of norms that are not always in line with international norms. (Harders and Legrenzi 2008: 5) For example, the rejection of Israel by a number of Middle Eastern states can be considered as an act of protest against international norms, such as sovereignty of member state of the UN and peaceful coexistence between nations, which are seen—in some cases—as Western imposition. Human rights as an international norm is also another case where the majority of Middle Eastern states have had difficulty in compliance due to cultural and religious differences, such as with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'.⁶

that called for Iraq's immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. This institutional resolution provided the legitimate basis for the Arab military involvement in the liberation of Kuwait on the basis of Arab solidarity and sovereignty of its member states. For further discussion of the relationship between norms and institutions, see: Jackson 1993, *The Weight of Ideas in Decolonization: Normative Change in International Relations*; Jepperson 1991, *Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism*.

⁶The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. There has been an on-going discussion on the normative dimension of universal human rights versus Islamic norms. Muslim majority states have often been unwilling to accept certain rights embodied in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights,

Although these arguments are persuasive, there are other scholars who challenge this special treatment of the Middle East, arguing that the region shares the same norms of anarchy, such as self-help, as the rest of the world, as realism would frame it (Marden 2003: 20), or that the Middle East is only trapped in a set of norms that can be transformed if certain conditions are applied, as neo-liberalists would argue. For example, in his classic realist study, *The Origin of Alliances*, Stephen Walt (1994) argues that rather than being a unique regional normative structure, Pan-Arabism was simply another tool by which states could gain power, no different to such methods employed outside the region. If we apply Walt's claims, then the region appears to be similar to the rest of the world; thus norms on the regional level either do not exist or do not have a decisive role in shaping the foreign policy of a state. As Fawcett (2005: 8) argues:

There is no such thing as an "Arab" or an "Islamic" foreign policy, for example, and neither the major Arab institution, the Arab League, nor the Organization of the Islamic Conference has so far aspired to promoting one. Hence identity clearly does matter, but as a means of influencing perceptions and thus state behaviour, rather than displacing states and state power.

However, there are attempts to take a third way. Richard Norton (1991), for instance, avoids the term "exceptionalism", but he acknowledges the fact that the Middle East region has been slow in respect of embracing international norms such as democratization. Moreover, the weak integration with the world economy, the persistence of conflict, the nature of incumbent regimes, and the ambiguity over the relationship between democracy and Islam are quite exclusive to the region (Fawcett 2005: 12).

2.1.4 The evolution of regional norms

The evolution of state identity in the region has taken different paths. Though we speak about Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism as two great contributors to state identity formation, the truth is that both have encountered many changes to their definition and purpose over the past few decades. In fact, what were once considered as normative values of either Pan-Arabism or Pan-Islamism have often changed over time. The bitter rivalry between states of the region over the two had caused them to change, as every state sought to reinterpret what it means to be a Muslim nation or what

such rights include the freedom of worship and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender. See: Rehman and Breau 2007, *Religion, Human Rights and International Law: A Critical Examination of Islamic State Practices*.

constitutes a faithful Arab cause. As a result, regional norms were often transformed and redefined according to the changing interests of regional regimes. (Owen 2004: 164) This was evident following the Iranian Revolution (1979), when the change of regime led to a whole new identity for the state and a quest by the newly-formed Islamic Republic to re-shape regional norms had started. It is important to note that regional norms have evolved before and after the Iranian Revolution. Following Middle Eastern political history, we can trace five apparent phases in which regional norms have evolved, before settling to their current form: the eras of independence, Nasserism, the Cold War, the Second Gulf War, and the fall of Baghdad.

The Independence Era (1916–1956): This was the period when regional norms began to develop following the demise of the Ottoman Empire. It was marked by the Arab revolt, the creation of Israel, World War II, the struggle for independence by some Arab states and the creation of a new regional system. Most importantly, it witnessed the aspiration of Middle Eastern states to join the United Nations (formed in 1945) and the acceptance of newly established international norms, as well as the establishment of the Arab League (1945) and the Baghdad Pact (1955) to establish regional norms of autonomy and self-determination at home.

The Nasserism Era (1956–1970): regional norms were highly altered following the Suez Crisis. Nasserism dominated the political scene by exploiting Pan-Arabism and advocating a non-alignment policy towards the Cold War. In effect, it created a clear divide between countries that were considered revolutionary and progressive with those that were seen as backward. (Halliday 2002: 21) Sovereignty as the main goal of foreign policy was undermined by the supra-state identity appeal of Nasserism. The rivalry between Egypt and Saudi Arabia—namely in Yemen between 1962 and 1967 (Alam 1993: 104), and the Dohfar Rebellion in Oman (1962–1975), which also involved Iran—were all part of a broader conflict between two alignments, revolutionary states against pro-Western monarchies. (Halliday 2002: 386) Nevertheless, this era was also the intense era of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite the rivalry between the Great Powers on the international level and rivalry between political regimes on the regional level, most countries in the region exploited the Palestinian cause, which went on to be an integral part of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism.

The Cold War Years (1970–1989): The 1970s can be regarded as the decade of state identity, as the defeat (and later death) of Nasser helped remove many of the

normative constraints imposed on the foreign policy conduct. In fact, the rise of Ba'athists to power in Syria and Iraq at the expense of Nasserism, and the subsequent rivalry between them, helped break the semi-unipolarity of Egyptian power in the region. (Dessouki 2008: 187) As a result, regional norms had to change as each newcomer—as well as old ones—vied to enforce their ideological agenda on regional norms and regional players. However, many of the states did experience a chance to construct a state identity that was independent from Pan-Arabism; a transformation into what Mohamed Jaber al-Ansari calls 'the return to the nation-state'. (Al-Ansari 2000) Nevertheless, the 1970s and 1980s did witness a major shift in regional norms regarding peace with Israel, with the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978. It also saw the demise of a powerful monarchy in Iran and the resurgence of Pan-Islamism.

The Second Gulf War Years (1990–2001): The Middle East, together with the rest of the world, was directly affected by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Most Arab regimes that had been exploiting the rivalry between the US and the USSR by relying on the economic and military assistance of one side or the other were forced to redefine their foreign policy choices as the world became increasingly unilateral. Regional norms were strongly affected by the increasing US role in the Gulf. Saddam Hussein wanted to enforce new regional norms by invading Kuwait, but the consequences of the Second Gulf War proved that sovereignty was more enforced by the new international order than before. (Owen 2004: 60) Although the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 led to few practical and legal solutions, it still signifies a remarkable twist in regional norms that were built on mutual hatred between Arabs and Israelis and the rejection of Israel. Moreover, as Iraq's power was tamed, the region experienced more normative change towards peace and bilateral cooperation. In this context, Iran witnessed the rise of the reformists over the old conservative guards of the revolution. The results were monumental: Iran under President Mohamed Khatami began its Good Neighbour Policy, in which it sought to normalise relations with neighbouring Arab states. Furthermore, it also advocated a Dialogue among Civilizations in an aim to reconnect Iran with the rest of the world. This indicated a shift in Iran's state identity, as the country sought to abide by regional and international norms (to some degree) and slowly relinquish its revolutionary past. (Takeyh 2009: 5)

The fall of Baghdad (2003–present): The events of September 11 can be seen as an attempt to alter regional and international norms by inflicting terror on the

U.S. The leader of al-Qa'ida Osama bin Laden's justification for those events was the desire to drive the US away from the Holy Land of Islam. The whole experience to follow was al-Qa'ida's (and its affiliated persons' and groups') war to capture power in Muslim societies and to impose a radical interpretation of Islam on the rest of the world. The US-led invasion of Iraq was also part of a broader U.S. plan to overthrow Saddam and establish a democratic model in a Middle Eastern country; however, the invasion failed to establish the basis for democratic norms in the region. On the contrary, the fall of Baghdad opened the door for the rise of sectarianism as Sunni and Shi'ite radical groups fought for control. Iran's conservatives became emboldened when the U.S. moved into Iraq and Islamic radical groups—which were bred during the Afghan War (1980–1992)—intensified their destructive operations in many Muslim countries. (Wehrey 2009: 104) Here, there is again a clear divide between two alignments: one represented by what are often referred to as the “moderate states” (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan) and the “resistance axis” represented by Iran and Syria, as well as non-state actors such as Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

Throughout this long period of state formation and the later histories of succession, regime change, consolidation of power, and ideological wars, state identity has been important and of clear analytical value in assessing foreign policy behaviour in the region. As states sought to give a meaning to themselves—and most importantly to their views of the world and relations with others—state identity became the tool with which ruling regimes manifested their normative values and foreign policy choices. Egypt in the 1970s, Iraq in the 1980s, and Iran in the late 1990s all sought to redefine their state identity and as a result their foreign policy was changed—for better or worse.

2.2 COMPETING PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY AND STATE FORMATION

In order to explore the debate over exceptionalism, identity and how it relates to the making of regional norms needs to be examined in respect of how those norms contribute to the process of foreign policy decision-making in the region. To assume the uniformity of a Middle Eastern identity, as a result of shared language, religion, and ethnicity, is perhaps misleading. (Kamrava 2011: 1) In fact, while the Islamic religion and Arab ethnicity are dominant, the region comprises a wide range of ethnic and religious minorities. Islam itself is divided into as many as 25 sects and denominations that are in some cases considered hostile to each other. Also, Arabism

itself is inherently divided between Arabs of the north (Arabs of the Levant), the east (Arabs of the peninsula) and the west (Arabs of the Maghrib). (Kamrava 2011: 1)

2.2.1 Contested identities

There are ethnic minorities in all Middle Eastern countries—notably the Kurds, spread between Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey, and the Berbers who spill across North African boundaries, such as in Morocco and Algeria. Iran and Iraq are among the most multi-ethnic states; their Persian and Arab cores are flanked by Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Turkmen, and Baluchis. Religious pluralism is even more striking: Sunni Islam is the dominant branch of Islam in a majority of Arab states, while Shi'a Islam forms the majority in countries like Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq. (Hinnebusch 2005: 154) Other Islamic sects are considerably represented in domestic politics, such as the Druse in Lebanon, and in some cases they are politically dominant, such as the 'Alawites in Syria, Zaydis in Yemen, and Ibadies in Oman. Moreover, a multitude of Christian minorities are scattered across the region. (Hinnebusch 2005: 154)

Most of the time, the size of each minority or sect is disputed for varying political and economic reasons. In Saudi Arabia, there are no reliable sources or official surveys of minorities or sects and as a result the percentage of Shi'a Saudis is disputed between 5 per cent and 15 per cent. (Ibrahim 2006: 18) States in the region are highly sensitive about religious and ethnic identities, to the extent they are considered taboo issues; nevertheless, most civil and interstate rivalries are riddled with ethnic and sectarian antagonisms. (Binder 1999: 11)

It is important to acknowledge two issues when discussing identity in the contemporary Middle East. First, the complexity and variety of the different identities which can be held at the same time by individuals, groups, societies and states. (Lewis 1999: 3) Thus, identity is not singular, but rather a composition of identities. For an individual, it can be defined by race, language, culture, economic and class status, ethnic origin(s), and by personal or ancestral religion or ideology (Lewis 1999; Telhami and Barnett 2002: 8) Likewise, state identity is often a composition of identities and beliefs on how the state perceives itself and others and what it is supposed to stand for; in other words, its purpose or function. Second, identity is of temporal nature, which means it changes over time and varies over location. The Middle East has witnessed a constant evolution of its identities—whether state or individual—and in the way people

perceive themselves, the societies or states to which they belong, and differences between themselves and others.

Bernard Lewis (1999: 4) notes that ‘in the Middle East as elsewhere, historical and literary records show that it was not by social or economic, nor yet by generational and gender differences, that people saw the basic definition of their own identity, the dividing line between self and other. These were—or have hitherto been—determined by more traditional criteria’. He divides historical identities in the region into two sets of identity, one acquired by birth and the second by allegiance. Birth identity is of three kinds. The first is by blood, or the ascending order of family, clan, and tribe, eventually developing into the ethnic nation. The second is by place, village, neighbourhood, or province, developing in modern times into the state. The third is by religion—which may be subdivided into sects—developing into an intangible community, the Muslim *umma*, or world fellowship of Muslims. Lewis (1999: 4) concludes that for many in the region, ‘religion is the only loyalty that transcends local and immediate bounds’.

The other broad category of identity is that of allegiance to the ruler, historically the caliph (the leader of an Islamic polity) or the king; today, it is the allegiance to the state, where the caliph or king is replaced by a ruling party and a president. This is usually also acquired by birth, but can change due to transfer of power or naturalisation. However, Lewis (1999: 5) acknowledges that ‘in modern times, under the influence of the West, a new kind of identity is evolving between the two—the freely chosen cohesion and loyalty of voluntary association, combining to form what is nowadays known as the civil society’.

2.2.2 Contested states

These varied forms and types of identity have been challenging the mere existence of the modern state for decades. As explained earlier, there was an on-going struggle in the region between multiple competing identities for power and recognition even before the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), which loosely ruled most of the region. (Owen 2004: 5) Sub-state groups contested loyalty to the state and its boundaries, spreading irredentism. Though the sense of a unified identity had driven communities to attain a state in the past century, the lack of a unified identity has been also a source of disunity and disloyalty to the state. The globalized Westphalian model of the modern state has been embraced in the region since the turn of the last century.

The issue was not whether to have a state or not, but whom to include in it. This problem takes root in the absence of recognized borders between major territories in the region. The new artificial states that were allocated during and after the colonial period have made states and institutions in places that were traditionally contested between local tribes, sects and ethnic groups. (Saikal 2008: 73) The congruity of identity and state brought about by the Westphalian model has driven new states to consolidate new national identities and to seek recognition inside and abroad by manufacturing legitimacy. By mobilising identity, political leaders in the region have been able to claim legitimacy through the call for independence from foreign rule. As Pasic (1998: 17) explains: ‘Movement and home country connections across borders make the boundaries of states and nations more nebulous. They can also have an adverse impact on indigenous peoples with close ties to the land, especially tribal populations’.

Nevertheless, one consequence of these new, artificial states was that loyalties often remained attached to pre-existing sub-state identities that spilled across the chaotically imposed boundaries, thus becoming trans-state and giving rise to irredentism. This has in turn generated inter-state conflicts as states contested each other’s borders or interfered in each other’s internal affairs by supporting irredentist groups. (Hinnebusch 2005: 154) Even though the Arab World has made up a single political arena since the 1930s, inter-state competition has been endemic due to the challenge of trans-national identities. As Hinnebusch (2003: 152) notes: ‘Pervasive trans-state identity movements, Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islam, have mobilised popular loyalties more than the state’.

The contradiction between the international norm of sovereignty, in which state interests are legitimately the object of foreign policy, and the regional norms of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism that expect these interests to be compatible with the values of the indigenous supra-state identity community, have caught Arab foreign policy making elites, in Korany’s (1988: 165) words, between the logics of *raison d’état* and of *raison de la nation*. While they have tenaciously defended the sovereignty of their individual states, legitimacy at home has depended on their foreign policies appearing to respect Arab-Islamic norms. For more ambitious states, supra-state identity presented the opportunity to assert regional leadership by championing Pan-Arab or Islamic causes. (Hinnebusch 2003: 5) While this dualism is a constant, the

relative balance between supra-state identity and state sovereignty has evolved over time through the interactions of states and the actions of state builders, in favour of the latter. (Barnett 1998) This is why the realist paradigm for explaining foreign policy in the region remained more relevant than elsewhere for many years because, as Yaniv (1987: 92-141) argues, transnational norms restraining inter-state conduct are the least institutionalised there. In turn, this is arguably because the conditions that pluralists expect to generate power-taming norms—democratic cultures and economic interdependence—are absent or weak in the region, and its few democratic states are more pacific than their authoritarian counterparts. (Hinnebusch 2003: 11)

Historically, identification with the territorial state has been weak, with popular identification tending to focus on the sub-state unit—the city, the tribe, the religious sect—or on the larger Islamic *umma*, the world Muslim community. Moreover, in an arid environment of trading cities and nomadic tribes, peoples—notably the Arabs—lacked the defined sense of territorial identity and attachment to the land associated with peasant societies. The important exceptions, as Hinnebusch (2003: 54) explains, are those societies with substantial peasantries, such as Turkey, Iran, and Egypt. This is not to say that states of the region are either territorial states (based on territory only) or national states (based on a recognized nation). On the contrary, both territorial states and national states were subjected to the same challenges due to the fact that until independence most borders were considered arbitrarily drawn. (Hinnebusch 2003: 54)

Furthermore, while inter-state competition in the region was intense, it was not chiefly over territory or other tangibles, but also over the desired normative order of the regional system. Crucially, the typical currency in this struggle was military power; indeed, the monopoly of violence was a great force, but it was also about ideological appeal. (Barnett 1998: 2) In fact, it was legitimacy, derived from being perceived to observe the norms and play roles grounded in Arabism, which gave the power to affect outcomes. (Barnett 1998: 2) As Hinnebusch (2003: 63) notes: ‘To speak of a supra-state community assumes that common norms, regimes, or collective institutions to some extent substitute for the absent common government in constraining the use of violence in political competition’.

Having discussed some arguments about the relationship between identity and the state, it is important to note that despite the challenges transnational-identities

pose on the modern state in the region, states have been able to survive, and voluntary unification initiatives between Arab states have been unsuccessful with the exception of the United Arab Emirates (1971) and Yemen (1990). It is true to say that national identity served as the dominant force amongst Arabs, Turks, Israelis, and Iranians for most of the twentieth century. Despite affirmation of a single identity, as Halliday (2005: 62) argues, there was never one nationalism or one clear ideology within each people, but rather a variety of interpretations along religious/secular and liberal/revolutionary lines of division. Transnational or subnational identities, while important, should not be overstated. (Brown 2001; Owen 2004) Despite being contested, and at times fluid properties, the modern state in the Middle East has proved remarkable for its survival and durability, and it is the contention of some that the older features of regional identity have increasingly surrendered to, or at least been conditioned by, more powerful considerations of state interest. (Fawcett 2005: 5)

2.2.3 *The consolidation of state identity in the Middle East*

In the region, state identity has evolved as the solution to competing sub-state and supra-state identities. It also worked as an alternative for territorial states that lacked the prerequisites for a national identity. More significantly, state identity has evolved as a state-centric identity that overrides all other sub-state and trans-state identities. As states sought to consolidate their power and legitimacy, the need to build an identity for the state, especially when it came to foreign policy, was crucial. (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 19) Most newly independent states had arbitrary borders and therefore lacked the national cohesion from which to derive state identity. In other cases, the existing national identity contained elements that were considered hazardous to those running the state, political regimes, or nationalist and religious parties. As a result, the state had to invent an identity for itself that generally represented major elements of national identity, but which nevertheless safeguarded the ruling regime's interests. (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 19)

Given the greater popular credibility of Arab-Islamic identity over most alternatives, rulers in the contemporary Arab states vacillate between legitimising themselves as Arab-Islamic leaders and relying on state identities. (Hinnebusch 2003: 57) They cannot fully rely on Arabism or Islam since adherence to Arabism may sacrifice state interests and their borders are not congruent with the Arab or Islamic communities, and yet they cannot fully rely on state identities that lack sufficient

credibility. They may try to overcome this dilemma by “statising” a supra-state identity as the official state identity, as when Ba’thists of Syria or Iraq claim to be the special champions of the Arab cause or when Saudi Arabia and Iran declare themselves the guardians of Islam. (Hinnebusch 2003: 57)

Ruling regimes often assumed power by suppressing potential societal contenders or preserved some traditional structures of power within the society. This is why making a state identity that embodied important components of the national identity but maintained the regime interest was essential. Even during the height of Nasserism regional states sought to build a state identity that showed a great level of autonomy and independence from Nasser’s influence. In 1955, two key Middle Eastern states, Iraq and Iran, joined a mutual security agreement with Great Britain, Turkey, and Pakistan. The main purpose of the Baghdad Pact (1955) was to block possible expansion by the Soviet Union into the Middle East. However, Nasser considered the Pact a colonial framework that undermined Arab interests and independence. Iraq, which was then ruled by the Hashemite family, signed up to the Pact not because it was threatened by communism or felt immediate risk from Egypt or other revolutionary regimes, but largely because it wanted to secure more autonomy and independence from regional influences. In fact, the Hashemites saw themselves as rightful representatives of the Arab cause—more than Nasser’s Egypt. As Elie Podeh (1995: xi) notes:

The struggle over the Baghdad Pact had a profound impact on the ideological orientation of the Arab world. Apart from being a power struggle, this dispute was also a clash between two schools of thought of Pan-Arabism: one propagated by the old pro-Western Iraqi elite; the second by the young nationalist leaders in Egypt.

While the multitude of identities from which citizens can choose seems compatible with a post-modern world, the considerable extent to which this means states cannot depend on being their citizens’ primary political loyalty has pushed state-builders into authoritarian strategies. (Hinnebusch 2003: 57) The more stable Arab states have, with few exceptions, advanced through a process of primitive power accumulation, in which authoritarian state-builders established tightly-knit ruling cores through extensive use of sub-state loyalties (kin, tribe, sect) while exploiting supra-state identities—Arabism and Islam—as official ideologies. (Hinnebusch 2003: 57) For example, in Saudi Arabia the state’s legitimacy was based on sub-state loyalties. During the unification period (1902–1932), King Abdul Aziz al-Saud, founder of modern Saudi Arabia, sought the recognition and loyalty of local tribes through rewards and

distribution of land and authority. He also earned religious legitimacy among Islamic scholars and the trust of influential families in the Hijaz region by proclaiming himself the protector and servant of the Holy Lands. However, religion—and later Arabism—played a great role in forming the modern Saudi state identity. (Al-Dakhil 2009: 23) Wahhabism, a religious movement that arose during the eighteenth century, helped unify what is now called Saudi Arabia under the Al Sa’ud family. It affected how the Saudi state saw its role in the region as the defender and custodian of the Holy Land of Islam. After capturing Hijaz from the Hashemites, the newly formed Saudi state had to stand for the Arab cause to deny its opponents this regional card. Despite keeping the tradition of sub-state loyalties, such as loyalty to tribes, the state’s foreign policy was rarely affected by these traditional sub-state loyalties. Instead, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism played the larger role in shaping state identity. (Al-Dakhil 2009: 23)

2.3 INTRODUCING THE SAUDI–IRANIAN CASE

Like any other inter-state relationship, understanding Saudi–Iranian relations is dependent on how we understand foreign policy and interstate rivalry in world politics today. In their notable book, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, Hollis and Smith (1990: 1-2) argue that social scientists face a basic choice between two approaches to their subject matter: the first—explaining—is aimed at finding causal mechanisms and social laws, which is usually identified with a positivist approach to IR (Wendt 1998: 102). The second—understanding—that seeks to make sense of events and what they mean by recovering the individual and shared meanings that motivated actors to do what they did. This approach is usually identified with post-positivism. (Hollis and Smith 1990: 3-4)

In light of this argument, one might question whether we are trying to *explain* or *understand* the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997. According to this debate, employing state identity as an explanatory tool is different from using state identity as a way of understanding the case study. In the first approach, the explanation requires establishing a causal association between state identity and a state’s foreign policy, and therefore exploring the effect and causation of state identity as an agent in determining foreign policy. Understanding the role of state identity is more about detailing its different meanings in the language used in foreign policy discourse, its meaning for the social actors, its meaning regarding actions and their contexts, and

finally how it comes to be perceived as a sign or symbol. (Hollis and Smith 1990: 68-71)

Drawing on the works of Weber (1964), Wendt (1998) and Wight (2006), we can find an intermediary position between pure explanation and understanding: it is possible to mediate between objectivism and subjectivism, positivism and post-positivism. Taking such a position entails understanding the world prior to constructing and testing hypotheses about it, but this does not logically exclude researchers from forming hypothesis that test the empirical world in order to explain social interaction. (Jackson and Sørensen 2003: 263)

As Wight (2006: 229) argues, a position between positivist and post-positivist approaches is unnecessary because there is nothing epistemologically fundamental to bridge. For Wight (2006: 255), even the long-debated argument between *explaining* and *understanding* (Hollis and Smith 1990: 255) is not a matter of epistemology, but rather of methodology embedded within certain ontological assumptions. Therefore, research can proceed on a methodological middle ground between subjectivism and objectivism, and between explaining and understanding. Drawing on Jackson and Sørensen (2003: 263):

There is not an insurmountable gulf between positivist and post-positivist methodological extremes. Instead of an “either/or” it is a “both/and”: rather than having to choose between extremes on the two dimensions we have discussed (subjectivity versus objectivity and explaining versus understanding) it is a question of finding a place somewhere on the continuum between the extremes.

2.3.1 Examining the literature on the role of state identity in Saudi–Iranian relations

It is not surprising that many scholars have investigated a relationship as important as that between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Even though they are key players in the Gulf, the reasons behind the foreign policy decision-making of the two states are often obscured by the complexity of the processes that underlie their decisions. While some scholars attempt to locate the explanation in materialist factors, others focus on ideational factors; taken on their own neither material nor ideological factors are a satisfying explanation for the complexity of those bilateral relations. Still other works provide useful analysis to a point, but cannot explain the relationship until the present due to the time at which they were published.

One of the first scholars to consider Saudi–Iranian relations was Saeed M. Badeeb (1993), who wrote *Saudi–Iranian Relations: 1932–1982*. Despite the title of his work, Badeeb begins in the 1920s by examining the influence of the people who would later form Saudi Arabia and Iran as modern states; it is a foreshadowing of the in-depth historical narrative that constitutes the remainder of the book. He also engages in extensive discussion about Iraq, which is understandable because in that time period the three countries were often treated as the ‘three pillars’ of the Persian Gulf. This is an important discussion in a historical context but less important to a modern understanding, given the progressive weakening of the Iraqi state. While Badeeb’s book doubtlessly contributes to our understanding of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran during the reign of the shah, it suffers from a lack of a sound analysis as to by Saudi–Iranian relations became strong in the 1950s and 1960s, a period of intense nation-building in the two states. Badeeb also chooses an endpoint for his narrative that seems arbitrary in hindsight, stopping his analysis in 1982 even though his book came out in 1991. His conclusion that relations between the two countries had “stabilized” by the early 1980s can only be seen as premature given all that transpired after the Iranian Revolution.

In his important book on Saudi–Iranian relations, *Iran’s Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars*, Henner Fürtig (2002) focuses on the role of ideologies in the relationship between the two countries during a period of rivalry. While the role these competing ideologies played in the Saudi–Iranian rivalry cannot be discounted, the fact that Fürtig uses ideology almost exclusively to encompass the transnational movements of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism means that his study cannot shed light on how each *state* viewed itself or defined its identity. Even where he discusses what are potentially more domestic factors—namely the Shi’a–Wahhabi rivalry—Fürtig concludes that the ideology that theoretically underpinned the two states remained relatively constant, while the foreign policy decisions taken fluctuated quite significantly. Therefore, ideology, while important, cannot stand up as an explanation for the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran in light of the past thirty years of their relationship. There have not been any significant ideological shifts in either state in that time, yet the two countries have gone from rivalry to rapprochement and back. This means that ideology—at least, ideology when used as broadly as Fürtig does—is insufficient to explain the relationship between the two states.

In their 1996 book, *Iran–Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order*, authors Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp examine the relationship between the two states in the early 1990s, roughly the same time period considered by Fürtig (2002). Their study differs from that of Fürtig in that they emphasise the balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran, arguing it was an artificial balance imposed by the United States over which the two Gulf countries had little control. While it is not possible to discount the fact that the balance of power and power politics generally affect Saudi–Iranian relations, whether at the end of the first Gulf War or indeed at any other time, these factors alone cannot explain many of the phenomena observed in their relationship. For example, power politics and investigations into the balance of power cannot explain why the two states tried to contain each other at the end of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991; neither can they explain why there was a rapprochement in the late 1980s. A better interpretation of these factors would find a correlative link between the changing balance of power and the changing nature of Saudi–Iranian relations, rather than the causal link that Chubin and Tripp use in their study. In other words, a better explanation for the events examined by Chubin and Tripp would be that each state was redefining its identity during the relevant time periods, which affected both the balance of power in the Gulf and bilateral relations between the two countries. This makes state identity a superior analytical tool for understanding the changing relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In another important book on the subject, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: Power politics in transition 1968–1971*, Faisal bin Salman (2003), gives an extensive account of the role of power politics. His broad thesis is that the Gulf states were capable of engaging in foreign policy decision-making without the outside interference that western states, and particularly the US, seemed find necessary; he demonstrates this by considering the intra-Gulf foreign policy of a number of states at (broadly) the end of British colonialism in the area. In his analysis, bin Salman takes a realist stance that considers material factors in the bilateral relationship quite extensively—for example, he discusses the dispute over Bahrain and the territorial issues regarding the Tunbs and Abu Musa. The study does not, however, discuss the ideational factors that contributed to the Saudi–Iranian relationship, such as (for example) how the two countries united against the nationalism of Nasser in Egypt in the middle of the last century. However, the study is of great importance because it relies on material relating to the GCC states that was not available to most scholars before his book was published.

In *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A cultural genealogy*, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (2006) takes a constructivist perspective that stands in nearly complete contrast to the work of bin Salman. Although the main object of the work is to advance a theoretical argument, the author does offer a survey of the region that covers roughly the period in which the three Gulf Wars were fought, i.e., 1980–2003. Adib-Moghaddam makes the pure constructivist argument that traditional realist analyses of the Gulf fail to take into account the ideational factors that underpin foreign policy decision-making in the region; the opposite criticism might be made of the author for hardly considering the material factors that do indeed influence actors in the Gulf.

Editors Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweir have compiled an impressive array of essays on Iranian foreign policy from the late 1990s to the present in their 2008 book, *Iran's Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad*. The essays, which were contributed by a selection of leading academics and government officials, treat a variety of topics from the fundamental principles of Iranian foreign policy to Iranian relations with a variety of western and Arab states. While the breadth and depth of analysis on Iranian policy and the Iranian perspective presented in this book does indeed illuminate that side of the Saudi–Iranian relationship, it necessarily fails to include the Saudi or GCC perspective on the rivalry and the problematic relationship between the two states.

Another book on the Iranian perspective is *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy from Khomeini to Khatami*, by Christin Marschall (2003). Her work covers the evolution of Iranian foreign policy from the 1979 revolution until the late 1990s, and given the nature of her work it is a much more focused analysis than that offered in Ehteshami and Zweir's 2008 anthology. The author strikes a balance between material and ideological factors by considering historical events including the Iran–Iraq War and the election of the reformist President Khatami, as well as the ideological underpinnings of the Iranian revolution and the Iranian opinion of Arabs. Her work, however, suffers from a similar constraint to that of Ehteshami and Zweir's in that it focuses almost exclusively on the Iranian perspective, in part because the author was denied permission to travel to certain Arab Gulf states (including Saudi Arabia). It is also limited by the fact that the majority of the research was completed during the late 1990s, and so while

the author touches on the 1997–1998 rapprochement, she does not cover its downfall in 2008 and 2009.

A new perspective on the Saudi–Iranian relationship is proposed by Gween Okruhilk (2003) in her article, ‘Saudi Arabian–Iranian relations: external rapprochement and internal consolidation’, which challenged the standard argument that there must necessarily be rivalry between the two states. She points out that the two states share a number of similar interests, from oil to Islam to dissatisfaction with their relationships with the United States. In her view, a better perspective on the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia after the second Gulf War would focus not on the rivalry, but on the changing domestic and international circumstances in the two countries and the Gulf in that time period. In a similar vein, in this 2001 article Charles McLean argued that the improvement in relations between the two states can be attributed to both domestic and international factors (for example, the failure of the Dual Containment Policy of the United States).

The value of these studies and their contribution to IR scholarship on the Middle East cannot be questioned. However, their drawbacks leave open a number of questions, both theoretical and material, that this study aims to address. One such drawback that I wish to highlight in this study is that identity-based theories of the foreign policy-making of Gulf states tend to take an overwhelmingly static view of state identity formation and change; such a stance can be seen to fall short when analysing the kind of rapid political change that often happens in the region. For example, Iran did indeed experience a “typical” period of state identity formation under Mohamed Reza Shah Palavi, the ruler of Iran, from his ascension to the throne in 1941 until his eventual downfall in the 1979 Iranian revolution. The aftermath of that revolution can illuminate a number of difficulties in the theories proposed in the existing literature; for example, between 1979 and the early 1980s Iran underwent a period of rapid (at times chaotic) re-formation of its state identity, which tests the common view of state identity as a trait that is stable over the long term. It also highlights the time-sensitive nature of studies on Gulf politics, and thus emphasises the need for further study of these events.

2.3.2 Three approaches

In the literature on Saudi–Iranian relations, there have been three prevailing approaches. The first is a power politics approach, which has focused on the balance of power between the two states. The second focuses on religious and ideological

differences in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. The third focusses on on the personalities of leaders and the structure of foreign policy decision-making. These three approaches have been active in shaping the way we see Saudi–Iranian relations today. In examining two major works on the topic—one written from a Western perspective, *Saudi–Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam* (Wehrey 2009), and another written from a regional point of view, *Arab–Iranian Relations* (Haseeb 1998)—it is quite striking how similar the conclusions are despite arriving from different ontological and theoretical backgrounds. Both works emphasize the power dynamics of competing Saudi and Iranian interests, arguing that the relations are destined to rivalry as each side aspires to enforce its hegemonic influence. Even issues such as sectarianism and nationalism are assumed to be political forces employed to win hegemonic competitions, or at least constrain the rival’s regional role.

The power politics approach traces the Saudi–Iranian rivalry to an early stage, when a majority of modern Gulf states were still under British protection. For advocates of this approach, the Saudi–Iranian rivalry started with the British announcement of withdrawal in the early 1970s, which ignited a rivalry between the two emerging powers for the control of the Gulf region. (Al-Saud 1997: 10) The competition was constrained by the conditions of the Cold War, and the two states were forced to forego their differences and accept a silent *détente*. They were both allied with the US against communism and Arab Nationalism during the 1970s, and shared an interest in recognizing newly independent Gulf states to ensure regional stability. This arrangement was due to change as Saddam Hussein and his radical Ba’thist Party rose to power, and as Iran experienced a transformation to revolutionary state in 1979. In summarizing the power politics approach to the case, Ehteshami (2002: vii) notes that:

In terms of regional balance of power and the role local actors in the political life of the Persian Gulf, however, it is an indisputable fact that three countries—Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia—have played an instrumental role in the drawing of its current political and strategic map . . . they have been the Gulf’s main movers and shakers, and the three combined have, in pursuit of their respective national interests, made their mark on the sub-region, sometimes with vigour and commitment, sometimes with dangerous overzealousness.

Moreover, the power politics approach located three major issues working as forces behind the foreign policy of Saudi–Iranian relations. First, there was the dispute over maritime and territorial borders. This has been illustrated in Iran’s claims over Bahraini and Kuwaiti oil fields, and more importantly its occupation of three Arab

Islands—Greater Tunbs, the Lesser Tunbs, and Abu Musa in the Persian Gulf—belonging to the United Arab Emirates. Second, there was the competition over regional order, emphasizing the Iranian opposition to US military presence in the region, and more significantly the threat of Saudi–US alliance to Iranian security. Third, economic competition, namely over oil prices and the frequent fights over OPEC control, has had an immense effect on the two countries, which are highly dependent on oil revenues to survive. (Gause 2010: 2) Finally, the arms race between the two countries has created a competitive environment of fear. With Iran pursuing a controversial nuclear programme, Saudi Arabia has felt threatened by a possible nuclear Iran that would enforce its supremacy and blackmail neighbouring states.⁷ (Gause 2010: 33)

The second approach, which focuses on sectarian or ideological differences, is linked primarily to the breakout of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Shi'a revival it generated across the region. The literature of this approach came in two waves. One wave followed the 1979 revolution and the threat it posed to neighbouring Saudi Arabia, which has a considerable Shi'ite minority; the second wave followed the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad in 2003, which paved the way for the resurgence of Shi'ite rule in Iraq. In both cases, researchers argued that the central source of contention in Saudi–Iranian relations was the religious and ideological differences between the two states. (Fürtig 2002; Keddie and Matthee 2002)

Accordingly, the Saudi monarchy saw the Shi'ite Islamic Revolution as a threat to its survival, and has acted to confront the Islamic Republic in Tehran to ensure its own stability. As Nasr (2007: 143) notes, 'The effects of that revolutionary project spread like a ripple across the region. Once the reality sank in that a Shi'a uprising would not take place through the sheer force of example, Tehran began spreading money and organizational help to create Shi'a militants and revolutionary groups that would call for Islamic revolutions'. In response, Saudi Arabia backed Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War, thus turning the conflict into an ideological battle. Moreover, 'Saudi propaganda underscored Khomeini's Shi'a identity on the one hand and the divide between Shi'ism and Sunnism on the other'. (Nasr 2007: 156)

⁷ For discussion on of the Iranian nuclear programme and its regional implications, see: Shahram Chubin 2006, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*.

The religious-ideological approach was centred on two assumptions about why Saudi Arabia and Iran have become immense rivals. First, following the Iranian Revolution the two states became obsessed with claiming religious and spiritual leadership of the Islamic world. Both sides were actively challenging the authority and legitimacy of each other within the ideological competition over the region and beyond. The hajj riots and demonstrations by Iranian pilgrimages are a vivid example of these religious battles. Second, the fall of Baghdad and the Shi'ite revival it generated challenged Saudi domestic authority, and therefore transformed the rivalry into a ferocious, sectarian "cold war" that is likely to survive for decades to come.

A third approach, Foreign Policy Analysis (Korany and Fattah 2008; Ramazani 1992), argues that both states are structurally bound to rival each other due to the nature of their political regimes and the way foreign policy is made and practiced in both states. Advocates of this explanation suggest that critical Saudi foreign policy decisions, such as normalization of foreign relations, are concentrated in the hands of the king and close associates in the royal court. Therefore, personal experience and age play a crucial role in whether the state is willing to take risks to normalize with its adversaries. On the Iranian side, Iran's revolutionary principles are vehemently anti-monarchical, they formalize clerical authority in politics and they advocate an explicitly populist line. Furthermore, Iran's political system is characterized by factionalism, competing bureaucratic interests, and informal networks fighting for privilege and power. The net effect of this dynamic is a state that seems unable to articulate a coherent foreign policy and whose frequently erratic and escalatory behaviour may be serving the parochial goals of key elite rather than the state's larger interests. (Wehrey et al. 2009b) Therefore, the Iranian state is seen as fundamentally in conflict with its Saudi neighbour.

Although these approaches have informed our knowledge of Saudi-Iranian relations, they nevertheless fail to account for a number of facts, notably that despite those areas of Saudi-Iranian contention the two countries enjoyed a healthy rapprochement between 1997 and 2005. Furthermore, they were able to restrain themselves from going to war throughout the turbulent period following the Iranian Revolution, and instead played out their differences through distant proxies—such as Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq—without engaging in an outright confrontation. The two approaches have lacked a proper IR theory about the relationship; therefore, it has not

been possible to explain the current relationship in terms meaningful to International Relations research.

2.3.3 *An alternative approach*

To date, there has been no adequate theorization of this important relationship and how it functions, let alone its significant regional implications. Attempting to put this master relationship of Middle Eastern politics in a proper theoretical context is a very important, yet very challenging, task. The 1997 rapprochement is key to understanding those states that are considered the “movers and shakers” of contemporary Middle Eastern foreign policy. The study of state identity and its role in foreign policy decision-making is needed to establish a proper understanding of what is labelled the longest Islamic “cold war” of modern times.

It has been evident that since the 1979 revolution, that state identity in Iran and—in direct reaction to it—Saudi Arabia has been altered dramatically, to the extent that they have produced a foreign policy towards each other that unmistakably frames the ‘other’ as an enemy. This has been the case for thirty years, and is the prime reason why both states suffer from an endless rivalry. (Al-Mani 1996: 159) The 1997 rapprochement was only possible when both states were attempting to redefine their respective state identities, and it failed when neo-conservatives⁸ assumed power in Iran in 2005 and revived Iran’s radical, revolutionary state identity. Since then, Saudi Arabia has been uncertain about how it should deal with its Iranian neighbour. It has been convinced that it is best to retain its cautious approach towards its Iranian rival while keeping its relations friendly with some elements of Iran’s political leadership, such as Rafsanjani, Khatami and Mehdi Karroubi; however, those friendly elements are no longer responsible for shaping Iran’s state identity. If Saudi Arabia and Iran were to redefine their state identities to an extent that they ceased to consider each other as enemies, there is a strong possibility that this unsettling rivalry would cease to persist.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, the idea of state identity was defined and discussed with regard to the debate in contemporary IR literature. This chapter has sought to place state identity in a Middle Eastern perspective, explaining the rough road it took states in the

⁸ As will be explained in Chapters 6 and 8, I draw a distinction between traditional conservatism in Iran in the 1980s and 1990s, and the neo-conservatism that rose in the early 2000s as a reaction to the reform movement (*Eslâh-Talibân*)—or the “Second of Khordad Front,” as it is sometimes referred to—of President Mohammad Khatami. It came to power in 1997.

region to develop. Identity politics has long been part of the Middle Eastern region and has shown great influence over foreign policy decision-making. One of the lessons of this chapter is the importance of regional norms and how they affect foreign policy conduct and state image—not only in the region but abroad as well. Great power penetration is real, however, as it has been argued in this chapter, it cannot account for why specific Middle Eastern states have followed a certain path of rivalry or friendship. Furthermore, this chapter argued that regional norms are very important in dictating whether a foreign policy act is acceptable or not. However, this has not prevented states from violating the normative system, whether it be regional or international.

State identity is important when it comes to explaining a state's foreign policy, and states are continuously active in shaping and redefining their state identity, as well as attempting to make regional norms abide by that identity. However, this dynamic does not happen in an equal-opportunity environment, as social constructivism might suggest. In fact, the socialising process that produces norms—whether international or regional—is not a given option for every state. Rather, it is a matter of unequal power relationships in which strong actors attempt to project their own values and norms onto weaker actors in the international or regional system. Although powerful extra-regional actors have multiple means to influence regional environments—including material, economic and military instruments such as in the case of the US—the projection of norms is a critical element of extra-regional strategy to reshape regions in ways that match perceived self-interests and identity.

On an empirical level, no matter what Saudi–Iranian relations look like today, the truth is that they have experienced a gradual rapprochement that started in late 1996 and continued well over a year after the fall of Baghdad. This reality undermines mainstream explanations and thus requires a new approach. In the following chapter, a theoretical framework will be presented that accounts for changes in state identity in states like Saudi Arabia and Iran, and how they affect regional and international norms. Moreover, the aim is to demonstrate the explanatory power of the state identity approach and how it informs foreign policy decision-making. The story of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement holds valuable lessons that will help us understand one of the most important relationships that are shaping the region as we see it today.

THE MAKING OF SAUDI–IRANIAN RELATIONS

1929–1979

History has recorded the stature of Ibn Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia. He was wise and brave and an excellent administrator. When one considers the fatal events for which Iran is now the theater, one cannot but rejoice at seeing Saudi Arabia still free and independent. One can only pray to God that it remains so.

-*Muhammad Reza Pahlavi*¹

Faisal was absolutely different. He had lived abroad and was a good man and wanted to change his country. It was not easy. Saudi Arabia was the center of Islam, and making changes was very difficult or impossible.

-*Memoirs of a SAVAK officer's wife in Jeddah, 1965–1969*²

In 1924, Abdul Aziz al-Saud (also known as Ibn Saud) captured Mecca, the holiest place in Islam, after ousting the Hashemites that had ruled the holy city since the eleventh century. Days later, the news spread across the Middle East and concerns were raised in a number of Muslim countries for the safety and future of the holy places. Allegations were made that Ibn Saud and his zealous *ikhwān* (Brethren) warriors had seriously damaged the holy shrines in their attempt to control the city.³ However, the main fear was that the new occupiers would restrict access to the holy places to those who espoused the fundamentalist doctrines of their religious revival. (Clayton and Collins 1969: 110)

¹ Pahlavi 1982: 134.

² Razmara 2007: 41.

³ During the period between 1917 and 1930, the *ikhwān* played an active role in the wars and politics of the Sultanate of Najd (the nucleus state of Saudi Arabia). According to the usual portrait, the *ikhwān* were bold fighters, fanatical and absolutely devoted to their country and to the spread of Wahhabi tenets. See: Habib 1978, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910–1930*.

Alarmed by the unfolding events in Hijaz, Reza Shah's government issued an official announcement condemning the Saudis in exceedingly strong terms. (Badeeb 1993: 33) Condemnations were also voiced across the region: King Fouad of Egypt and other senior political and religious figures objected to Abdul Aziz al-Saud's acquisition of Hijaz and its holy cities. In response to mounting criticism and distress, Ibn Saud refuted all allegations and declared that he fully welcomed an investigation of the holy places by any Muslim state. (Kostiner 1985: 314) Reza Shah was the first leader to respond to the offer, sending two delegations. The first arrived in Jeddah on 21 October 1924 to investigate the situation in Mecca and consisted of Mirza Ali Akbar Khan Buhman, Persia's minister to Egypt, and Habibollah Khan Hoveida, Persia's consul general in Palestine. The delegation was received cordially, and Ibn Saud offered his private automobiles to facilitate their travel. The second delegation, led by Persia's consul to Damascus, went to investigate the situation in Medina. In talks with the first delegation, Ibn Saud affirmed his commitment to the access and safety of Persian travellers and pilgrims. Although no comments were made by the Persian delegations to their counterparts, the general feeling was that they were unhappy at the Ikhwan Warriors' destruction of some venerated domed tombs and Shi'ite religious sites. (Badeeb 1993: 33)

This early encounter gives some insight into how the two countries came to discover each other in the years after Saudi Arabia became a unified state. The formative years in Saudi-Iranian relations are fundamental to the understanding of the roots and causes of the recurring rivalry in the two states' history. Although the relationship did experience years of mutual understanding, and at times featured a clear alignment with the West (particularly during the 1960s), there seemed to be recurrent events that kept both states cautious towards the intentions of one another.

First, I will highlight state-building in Saudi Arabia and Iran during the 1930s and 1940s, when relations started to materialise, and then chart the evolution of state identity in both states during the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter is dedicated to exploring the people and histories that came to shape Saudi-Iranian relations and to highlight important events that are crucial to understanding the rise and fall of the 1997 rapprochement. There is some focus on King Abdul Aziz and the shah of Iran, and also on how King Saud and King Faisal came to understand the importance of having Iran on its side with regard to building a consensus in the region over common issues—

especially communism and Nasserism. Moreover, the chapter will help demonstrate the state of Saudi–Iranian relations before the 1979 revolution; and in doing so, it should serve as a guide to distinguish between what is ideological and what is *realpolitik* in modern relations. The Islamic Revolution in Iran had immense ramifications on both sides that led to hateful rivalry and confrontation; however, there are disagreements and antagonisms that date back to the start of the Saudi–Iranian relationship. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: it will outline both the relationship between the two countries and their state identities in the period before the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

3.1 THE KING AND THE SHAH (1925–1979)

On the eve of World War I, three major rulers were competing for control of the Arabian peninsula: Abdul Aziz of Najd, Saud Ibn Rashid of Jabal Shammar, and Sharif Husayn of Mecca. The war temporarily brought the region into the arena of Great Power politics, with the British and the Turks in competition for the support of these local rulers. (Vassiliev 1998: 235) Ibn Rashid sided with the Turks and the Germans, while Ibn Saud and Sharif Husayn chose to side with the British. By the war’s end, Ibn Saud had managed to defeat Ibn Rashid while maintaining peace with Sharif Husayn; however, once the Ottoman caliphate was dissolved on 24 July 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne Sharif Husayn seized the opportunity to proclaim himself “King of the Arabs” and claimed precedence over the House of Al Sa’ud, whom he regarded as mere desert chieftains. (Long and Reich 1995: 65) This led to Ibn Saud’s invasion of Hijaz the following year, and by January 1926 he had forced the Hashemites into exile. During the war over Hijaz, however, Reza Shah offered to mediate between the two parties in an attempt to secure a ceasefire before the hajj season. The mediation effort failed as al-Saud’s forces advanced into Medina; nevertheless, the effort constituted a major step towards establishing political relations between the two countries. (Badeeb 1993: 35)

3.1.1 The Emergence of Saudi Arabia

After conquering Hijaz, Abdul Aziz al-Saud declared himself the king of Hijaz and the Sultanate of Najd, and by the year 1932 the two areas were consolidated as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In essence, King Abdul Aziz had regained his family’s traditional kingdom, which dates back to the late eighteenth century, after years of exile in neighbouring Kuwait. His major accomplishment, however, was unifying the country and laying the foundations that still govern the state. The founder of the Al Sa’ud dynasty was Amir Muhammad Ibn Saud (1704–1792), ruler of Dariyyah, a small oasis

town located in central Najd. In 1744, Amir Muhammad became the patron of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a religious revivalist who had been driven from his home due to his strict, puritanical religious beliefs. The amir and the shaykh formed a bond that has provided religious and political cohesion for the Saudi state to date. (Long and Reich 1995: 62)

King Abdul Aziz is considered a monumental figure in modern Middle East history. Through the process of military conquests, the spread of Wahhabi doctrine and courting the leaders of tribes, King Abdul Aziz was able to transform Saudi Arabia from a tribal polity into a modern monarchical state. He skilfully utilized the Ikhwan Warriors to fight his opponents while maintaining close relations with the British Empire. (Hogarth 1925: 71) The restoration and consolidation of the kingdom brought peace to Saudi Arabia for one of the few times in recent history; however, the Ikhwan Warriors became restless and critical of Abdul Aziz's dealings with the West and eventually grew angry about his adoption of Western technology—telegrams at that time—that they considered heretical. However, their main objection was to King Abdul Aziz's willingness to modernize his country and accept Western influence in education and government. A major uprising broke out, and the Ikhwan Warriors challenged King Abdul Aziz's authority as "The Imam", a title which embodies religious as well political authority. In 1929, the king faced the Ikhwan Warriors in a decisive battle at al-Sibilah, where he emerged victorious. The Ikhwan were subsequently disbanded. (Long and Reich 1995: 66)

Although King Abdul Aziz assumed unquestioned authority after defeating the *ikhwān* religious uprising, he chose to set a careful balance between the traditional religious establishment authority and the political authority,⁴ as well as between the conduct of domestic and foreign politics. They formed an understanding that King

⁴ It is important to draw a distinction between the *Ikhwan* movement (1908–1930) and the traditional religious establishment in Saudi Arabia. The *Ikhwan* were religious warriors that adhered to Wahhabi teachings and fought with King Abdulaziz during his bid to unify the Arabian peninsula and reclaim the rule of his ancestors. They insisted on the unity of religion and the state and formed the Ikhwan communities—known as *hijars* (settlements)—in which the Bedouin tribesmen could settle and adopt a sedentary way of life. In contrast, the traditional religious establishment were the Wahhabi scholarly schools and institutions that remain to date the officially recognized religious authority in the country, these institutions include (but are not limited to) the General Presidency of Scholarly research and Ifta, which is the house of the Grand Mufti and senior Wahhabi scholars; the Supreme Judicial Council and the Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University and its Scholarly Institutions (*i.e.*, high schools) that are designed to educate Imams (preachers) who give the Friday sermons; and other informal religious charities associated with these institutions. See: Habib 1978, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910–1930*; Kechichian 1986, *The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia*.

Abdul Aziz would receive the legitimate backing of the religious clerics; in exchange, he would ensure the enforcement of the Wahhabi teachings upon the people and act as the guardian of the Islamic faith and shari'a laws. (Kostiner 1993: 77) In general, King Abdul Aziz honoured the pact, but in practice he always pushed for building a modern state—which involved welcoming Westerners into the country against the will of the religious clerics. Through a combination of reward and punishment, the King was able to override his critics within the religious establishment and among the tribal communities. (Kostiner 1993: 106)

3.1.2 The shah of Iran

In contrast to King Abdul Aziz's careful modernization and balancing of religious and tribal forces, Reza Shah was a different sort of man; he was originally a soldier who he rose to power in the early 1920s and declared *coup d'état* with the support of the British, who feared a communist takeover of Persia. Overthrowing the Qajar dynasty, he declared himself shah and went on to advocate an Iranian nationalism distinct from Islam and based on pre-Islamic, imperial glory. (Ghods 1991: 43) He despised the Shi'ite religious establishment and challenged it continuously throughout his rule of Iran. During his reign (1925–1941), Reza Shah undertook a radical transformation of Iranian society in imitation of Kemal Ataturk's Westernization of Turkey. (Ghods 1991: 39) He believed that religious traditions kept Iran backward and subservient to foreigners. Relying on his military base, he crushed separatist and tribal rebellions, established an effective central government, and rebuilt the Iranian army. (Long and Reich 1995: 46)

Since he cared little about religion, Reza Shah's interest in the new developments of the Arabian peninsula was opportunistic. First of all, Iran had historical claims over several territorial lands and boundaries along the Arabian side of the Gulf. Alarmed by the rapid advancement of Saudi forces, the shah wanted to engage this emerging power and monitor it closely. He too was in a phase of consolidating his own power and control of a large, decentralized country. Second, there were legitimate religious concerns about the resurgence of Wahhabism in the Arabian Peninsula and the effects it could have on the practice of other forms of Islam.

Third, and perhaps most important, Reza Shah saw in King Abdul Aziz a potential competitor on the regional level, as he saw British attention deviating from Persia to the new emerging state (Zahlan 1989: 180). The British were in direct contact

with Abdul Aziz and thought he would act as balance to counter other local forces. (Philby 1935: 627) They were also negotiating with Ibn Saud—and at times threatening to withdraw their support for him—but as he advanced and secured his authority over the peninsula, they started to deal with him as a regional player. Reza Shah was not impressed with the Saudi king; however, he followed suit in 1927 and sent Habibollah Khan Hoveida to visit what was then known as the Kingdom of Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies. Hoveida held talks with the Saudi king and expressed the willingness of the shah's government to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. (Badeeb 1993: 35)

3.1.3 Competition between the monarchs, 1925–1945

Between 1925 and 1929, the two monarchs were competing locally and regionally to assert the integrity and hegemony of their respective state borders. A significant event was the annexation of Khuzistan to Persia on 20 April 1925. Shaykh Khazal, a local Arab ruler, was seeking the recognition of an independent state of Arabistan. Reza Shah considered the area to be historically part of Persia and thought that the British were conspiring to separate it from Iranian territory, mainly because of its oil resources. (Majd 2001: 146) The annexation of Khuzistan alarmed King Abdul Aziz, although he was reluctant to recognize some of the Arabian Sheikdoms on the eastern coast that were then under British protection. Thus on 20 May 1927, King Abdul Aziz signed a bilateral treaty with the British in Jeddah in which he recognized the governments of Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman, as well as their special treaties with Britain. Reza Shah was furious, as he perceived the treaty to undermine Iranian claims in the Gulf. Moreover, he considered it a direct challenge to Iran's sovereignty over Bahrain and a number of islands in the lower Gulf, namely Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa. Reza Shah ordered his envoy in Cairo to submit a Memorandum of Objection to the Saudi government demanding the return of Bahrain to Iranian authority, and by 26 November Iran had lodged an official complaint with the League of Nations. (Badeeb 1993: 22) Although the conflict over Bahrain was not resolved until the late 1970s,⁵ it remained a source of contention between the two states.

⁵ See Chapter 3.

Despite territorial disagreements,⁶ the Saudi and the Iranians concluded a Friendship Treaty on 24 August 1929. The treaty was signed in Tehran by a Saudi delegation led by Shaykh Abdallah al-Fadl, the supervisor of foreign affairs. In essence, the treaty set out the basic principles for establishing political, diplomatic, and commercial relations between the two countries. The two monarchs notably exchanged congratulatory telegrams acknowledging the beginning of official diplomatic relations. In March 1930, the shah appointed Habibollah Khan Hoveida as his minister to Jeddah.⁷ (Badeeb 1993: 35) In an effort to solidify relations, in May 1932 King Abdul Aziz sent his son, Prince Faisal, the viceroy of Hijaz, on a six-day goodwill mission to Tehran.

The political dimension of Saudi–Iranian relations in the 1920s and 1930s was characterized by a number of similarities and differences. As Badeeb (1993: 37) notes, ‘The processes of nation-building in what would become Saudi Arabia and Iran . . . were significant not only in themselves, but also in the fact that they occurred at a time when nearly all Middle Eastern countries were still under colonial rule’. By 1932, both countries were internationally recognized as fully sovereign and independent states. In addition, both states experienced similar processes of political consolidation and adoption of some forms of modernity; however, their bilateral relations were marked by both friendship (in the form of the 1929 treaty) and rivalry as Reza Shah tried to assert his claims over the Gulf.

King Abdul Aziz was more interested in consolidating his rule than expanding his territorial ambitions, and unlike Reza Shah he decided not to pursue some historical territorial claims whenever these clashed with Great Britain’s interests. He saw the value of maintaining peace with Great Britain as a means of gaining recognition as a peaceful and confident leader in the region; on the other hand, Reza Shah tried to emphasise Iran’s historical claims to land and water to enhance its position in negotiations with Britain. Once World War II started, both states chose to be neutral. By 1941, however, King Abdul Aziz broke his neutrality and joined the Allies in light of the escalating war. In August 1941, Reza Shah rejected British and Soviet demands to

6 The two leaders, Abdul Aziz and Reza Shah, laid claim to different parts of the Gulf states, and were engaged in a forward policy in those areas during the inter-war years. King Abdul Aziz considered parts of the inland territories of Oman, Qatar and the Trucial states as belonging to his kingdom. Likewise, Reza Shah revived the old Iranian claim to Bahrain, and Iraq regarded Kuwait as part of the Ottoman province of Basra from which it had been separated by the Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty of 1899. See: Zahlan 1989, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman*: 14)

7 Habibollah Khan Hoveida, known as “Eyn el-Molk”, was Amir Abbas Hoveida's father. Amir Abbas was the prime minister of Iran from 1965 to 1977. (Milani 2000: 55)

expel German expatriates and to allow transit routes for military supplies. The Allies invaded Iran and forced Reza Shah to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Shattered by his beloved army's rapid collapse, Reza Shah went into exile, first in Mauritius and then in South Africa, where he died in 1944. (Long and Reich 1995: 46)

3.1.4 The beginnings of the modern oil economy

Britain's initial interest in the Gulf had little to do with the region itself; rather, the British wanted to protect India, the "jewel" of their empire. British India was bordered on the Gulf by tiny, poorly-governed and piratical political units that destabilised the region and were an easy excuse for intervention by foreign powers; therefore, Britain took control of these islands in order to impose order and protect their interests in India. For over a century, this was the extent of British interest in the Gulf: there was little market for British-made goods amongst the poor Arab tribesmen, who had few sources of legal income beyond diving for pearls. (Hurewitz 1972: 112) When oil was discovered in the 1930s, British interests began to change, but this was slow to develop. The new interest in the region's oil reserves did eventually change British interest in the Gulf, but did little to decrease their control of Western military presence in the region. (Hurewitz 1972: 110) In fact, British control lasted well into the 1960s, with only a token US military presence allowed from 1949 in the form of a shared military base in Bahrain. Hurewitz (1972: 111) notes that even when the British did allow the US to establish its military presence, it was only to promote and enhance their own credibility.

Britain had been the primary economic power in the Gulf region before the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia; British companies controlled the oil fields in Iran and Iraq. King Abdul Aziz, who was a clever negotiator despite his lack of contact with the outside world, did not want the British to have dominion over whatever oil might be found in his country. More than anything else, the king feared Western interference in his country's affairs. Moreover, because the British had already secured abundant oil from neighbouring countries, he suspected they would be in no hurry to begin production in Saudi Arabia. Instead, he invited US companies to explore oil reserves in the country. (Lippman 2004: 9)

King Abdul Aziz signed a concession with Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) in 1933, the year after he formally unified the kingdom. Drilling began in

1935, and commercial fields were first developed in 1938. Texaco bought into the concession at that time, which helped provide the overseas markets that SOCAL lacked. Official US government involvement soon followed. The outbreak of World War II interrupted two of the king's main sources of oil revenue, as well as the Mecca pilgrimage. In February 1943, President F. D. Roosevelt wrote to the secretary of state that 'the defence of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defence of the United States'. (Stork 1980: 24) SOCAL and Texaco renamed this joint venture the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in 1944, and by 1948 brought in Jersey Standard (now Exxon) and Mobil and their extensive European markets and access to capital funds for projects like the Trans-Arabian Pipeline. US policy after the war, as formulated by corporate and government officials, had two primary goals. The first was to maintain and expand US control of Middle Eastern reserves, particularly against greatly-exaggerated British competition. A second goal was to increase Middle Eastern production and 'to substitute Middle Eastern oil for Western hemisphere oil' in Europe and other eastern hemisphere markets. (Stork 1980: 24)

In the 1950s, Saudi Arabia accounted for nearly 40 per cent of total oil industry investment in the Middle East, and nearly 30 per cent of total production. (Stork 1980: 24) By the time of his death in 1953, King Abdul Aziz had constructed a firm foundation on which his successors could build a modern oil state. (Long and Reich 1995: 66) He had also defined Saudi Arabia's role in the region and ensured US and British support for his country's security.

3.1.5 Saudi-Iranian Relations from World War II to 1979

While Saudi Arabia emerged strong and prosperous in the early 1950s, Iran was facing external penetration by Great Britain, along with internal turmoil. Subsequent to Muhammad Reza Shah's succession as shah after the Allies ousted his father in 1941, Iran became a major conduit for British—and later US—aid to the USSR during the war. This massive supply effort became known as the Persian Corridor, an involvement that would continue to grow until the successful revolution against the Iranian monarchy in 1979. (Gasirowski 1987: 267)

The new shah maintained normal relations with the Saudis until December 1943, when the Saudi authorities arrested an Iranian *hajji* (pilgrim) accused of throwing excrement at the *Ka'ba* (the holy shrine in Mecca). That pilgrim was later executed. Iranian reaction to the incident quickly threatened the Friendship Treaty, which had kept

relations between the two countries relatively stable since 1929. The Iranian Embassy in Jeddah vigorously protested at the beheading of the pilgrim in a letter to the Saudi Foreign Ministry on 12 December 1943. The Saudis replied, denouncing the Iranian claims and asserting their right to prosecute the case. As a result, the two nations recalled their representatives and broke off diplomatic relations in March 1944. It is surprising how a single case could bring relations to a halt; however, the issue was not the death of the Iranian pilgrim but the way the Saudis handled the matter. Iran considered it a matter of honour and prestige, while Saudi Arabia perceived it as a matter of state sovereignty. The estrangement continued until 15 October 1946, when King Abdul Aziz wrote a letter to the shah urging renewal of Saudi–Iranian relations. Shah Muhammad Reza responded favourably to the Saudi letter and expressed his willingness to do so. Saudi–Iranian diplomatic relations resumed in early 1947. (Badeeb 1993: 50-51)

The world's oil economy in the 1950s was experiencing rapid change. Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO had negotiated a 50–50 revenue split at a time when the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) was paying more in British taxes than it was in royalties to Iran.⁸ (Lippman 2004: 101) As a result, Iranian support for nationalization of the country's oil industry grew. In 1949, the majlis approved the First Development Plan (1948–1955), which called for comprehensive agricultural and industrial development of the country. The Plan Organization was established to administer the programme, which was to be financed in large part from oil revenues. Politically conscious Iranians were aware, however, that the British government derived more revenue from taxing the concessionaire, the AIOC, than the Iranian government derived from royalties. The oil issue figured prominently in elections for the majlis in 1949, and nationalists in the new majlis were determined to renegotiate the AIOC agreement. In November 1950, the majlis committee concerned with oil matters, which was headed by Mossadegh, rejected a draft agreement in which the AIOC had offered the government slightly improved terms. These terms did not include the fifty-fifty profit-sharing provision that was part of other—namely Saudi—Gulf oil concessions. (Paine and Schoenberger 1975: 22)

Disrupted by the turbulent state of Iran's internal politics, Saudi–Iranian relations derailed completely. In 1951, Mohammed Mossadegh, a nationalist politician, rose to prominence in Iran and was elected prime minister. He became enormously

⁸ AIOC would later become British Petroleum.

popular in Iran by nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which controlled the country's oil reserves. (Ansari 2003: 106) In response, Western countries embargoed Iranian oil and began plotting to depose Mossadegh, who was reliant on the *Tudeh* (Communist Party), to stay in power. Although the Saudis feared the rise of communist influence in the region, they nevertheless decided not to interfere in Iranian politics and continued their normal relations. (Badeeb 1993: 51) In any event, the shah regained power after the ousting of Mossadegh in 1953 and began an alignment with the US, which helped return him to power. As a result, Iran joined the US-proposed Baghdad Pact, a mutual security agreement signed by Great Britain, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan in 1955. (Ansari 2003: 146)

3.1.6 The Baghdad Pact (1955)

The 1955 Turkish-Iraqi Pact of Mutual Co-operation, which transformed soon after into the short-lived Baghdad Pact, was direct result of the initiative taken by the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles after his historic trip across eleven Middle Eastern capitals in May 1953. Dulles concluded that the prospect of an anti-Soviet collective defence alliance was more encouraging in Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria, where political leaders seemed to be more aware of the communist threat. (Sanjian 1997: 226)

The Saudis opposed the pact for three reasons. First, it undermined their position and role in the region as a key player. Second, it threatened to divide the Middle East between pro-Western and anti-Western sides. Third, the pact included Jordan and Iraq, both Hashemite states that had a lasting feud with the Saudis. (Vassiliev 1998: 356) Following the Iranian decision to join the Baghdad Pact, King Saud (*r.* 1953–1964) accepted an invitation by the shah to visit Iran. The trip was hailed as a big step in solidifying Saudi–Iranian relations; however, an intense dialogue between the shah and the king centred on the issue of the Baghdad Pact. While no understanding was reached, the two monarchs published a bilateral communiqué reiterating the two nations' friendship and calling for more cooperation in political, economic and security matters. Weeks later, it was reported that the king was angry at the unenthusiastic reception he had received in Iran and the unwillingness of the shah to consider Saudi reservations regarding the Baghdad Pact. Moreover, the king ordered the Saudi authorities in Dhahran not to admit Bahrainis they suspected of being of Persian origin or who had Persian names. The shah also was not pleased with King Saud. In a

private interview, he expressed to a US journalist his distaste and surprise at seeing King Saud's private secretary kneeling on the floor of the car beside the king. (Badeeb 1993: 53)

Another source of disagreement centred on the shah's decision not to align Iran with Egypt and other Arab countries during the Suez crisis of 1956. A 1952 *coup d'état* brought Gamal Abdel Nasser, a young nationalist military officer, to power in Egypt. Within a few years, Nasser had started to advocate Pan-Arabic rhetoric and called for Arab unity and independence. (Vassiliev 1998: 350) Gradually, King Saud embraced Nasser's narrative, and with the addition of Syria they start to form the core of the Pan-Arab alignment in the region. Iran, which enjoyed close relations with Iraq under Hashemite rule, was not part of Nasser's Arab worldview and became distant and suspicious of Arab Nationalism. (Vassiliev 1998: 354)

The strain over the Suez Crisis was eased somewhat by the shah's visit to Saudi Arabia in 1957. The shah brought with him a large delegation to impress his counterpart and overcome the failure of their last meeting in Tehran. He was determined to push the Saudis away from Egypt and Syria by highlighting the anti-monarchical behaviour of Nasser—and went further by suggesting a Saudi–Iranian Defence Pact aimed particularly at easing Saudi Arabia's position on the Baghdad Pact. The Saudis were surprised by the shah's offer, and while they were not interested in forming such a pact they appreciated the change in the shah's attitude towards them. Another sign of improvement was the shah's attempt to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Britain. Following the 1956 War, King Saud suspended Saudi–British relations; however, he told the shah that he was willing to forego differences with Britain if they would concede to his claims over the Buraimi Oasis, an area disputed by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf shaykhdoms under British protection. (Badeeb 1993: 54)

3.1.7 *The threat of Nasserism to Saudi and Iranian security in the 1960s*

Despite the antagonism that grew out of the Baghdad Pact, relations continued undisturbed—but the region would hit a turning point on the eve of the Iraqi military coup of 1958. Both monarchies feared the rise of Arab Nationalism posed by Abdul Nasser's Egypt, and sought to overcome their differences in order to handle their mutual security concerns. (Vassiliev 1998: 381) Thus throughout the 1960s and 1970s both Saudi Arabia and Iran were allied to the West, and the US in particular, and

provided a bulwark against radical Iraqi nationalism and the proto-socialism supported by the Warsaw Pact.⁹

As mentioned earlier, by 1958 the Middle East was divided along two lines: the Arab nationalist states aligned with Nasser's Egypt, and the group of monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and Iran. This division fit well within the prevailing international split: Nasser sought to align with the USSR in reaction to the friendly relationship the monarchies had with the West. (Sullivan 1970: 437) This divide was even further reinforced by Egypt's union with Syria to form the United Arab Republic (UAR) and the coup in Iraq by General Kassem—events prompted by propaganda and agitation of the “Arab street”, and which the monarchies sought to prevent in their own countries. As Sullivan (1970: 437) notes, ‘In early 1958 it briefly appeared that the Arab state system would be terminated and Arab unity of sorts restored via the seemingly irresistible force of revolutionary Arab Nationalism.’

By necessity rather than desire, Saudi Arabia was forced into a more active international role. Its economy became more and more dependent on the sale of its oil internationally. The appeal of Pan-Arabism as advocated by Nasser began to grow within Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, other issues—including Palestine, Yemen and a boundary dispute with Britain over the Buraimi Oasis—involved international rather than domestic concerns. (McHale 1980: 623) Although the Saudis cautiously embraced Pan-Arabism, they became to be wary of it as political dissent inspired by Arab Nationalism started to challenge the king's authority. The Saudi leadership viewed these radical ideologies—Nasserism, Ba'thism, Arab socialism, and communism—as disruptive forces that served to advance Soviet interests in the Arab world.

There were, of course, other sources of concern with regard to new, radical ideologies. For example, the Saudi Communist Party originated in the National Reform Front that was founded following the 1953 ARAMCO strike. In 1958 it abandoned the call for communism and became associated with Arab Nationalism, renaming itself the National Liberation Front. Five years later it entered the Arab National Liberation Front (ANLF). The ANLF's programme sought to transform the country into a constitutional regime, and wanted a referendum on the choice between monarchy and republic. The programme also included a revision of the agreements with the oil companies and an

⁹ For more information of US–Soviet rivalry in the region, see: Safran 1985, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*; Yodfat 1983, *The Soviet Union and the Arabian Peninsula: Soviet Policy Towards the Persian Gulf and Arabia*: 2-28; David 1991, *Explaining Third World Alignment*: 233-256)

international policy of active non-alignment. Nasser, who supported the ANLF, is said to have told them to form a liberation army, a rather unrealistic proposal. The ANLF also had some support from Iraq. (Salameh and Steir 1980: 20)

There were other Saudi opposition groups that emerged on the fringes of Arab Nationalism—all with scant followings—and were closely related to the Ba’th Party, the Arab Nationalist Movement, or the Egyptian Nasserists. The Union of the People of the Arabian Peninsula, founded in 1959 and supported by Cairo, was the most important and the most heterogeneous of these groups. The UPAP, led by Nasir al-Said from the Shammar capital of Hail defined itself as ‘a revolutionary Arab organization, believing in scientific socialism, and struggling to bring down the corrupt monarchy’. (Salameh and Steir 1980: 21) The UPAP was committed to the total unification of the Arabian peninsula, which included other Arab states such as Oman and Yemen. Another, less important, opposition group was the Socialist Front for the Liberation of the Peninsula which, contrary to its name, was a Hijazi group dedicated the autonomy of that province. (Salameh and Steir 1980: 21)

These opposition groups, although limited and elitist in a conservative society, did pose a concern to the Saudi leadership. The leadership was experiencing inner conflict between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal on a number of issues, including how to handle political opposition and the growing Egyptian threat. At first, King Saud sought to appease Nasser, but this policy failed following the rise of dissent supported by Egypt. The king thus started to openly confront Nasser. Unlike Saud, Crown Prince Faisal considered confronting Nasser openly as a risky policy, one that would alienate Saudi Arabia regionally and open the door to anti-Saudi sentiment. However, Saud’s foreign policy missteps and the rise of dissent were not the only concerns. King Saud had alienated many in the ruling circle by appointing his young sons to ministerial posts and giving them privileges denied other royals. His on-going dispute with Faisal between 1958 and 1964 had also nurtured opposition to his monarchy. (Wynbrant 2004: 217) As a result, Saudi foreign policy became distracted and often reactionary.

The Saudi–Iranian relationship was put to the test in July 1960, when the shah declared that Iran had extended *de facto* recognition to Israel since 1950.¹⁰ The

¹⁰ During the 1950s, the Arab–Israeli conflict started to put constraints on foreign policy decision-making. Pan-Arabism, which was still evolving, would come to pressure regional leaders to conform with

statement created anger and protest among Arab countries. The UAR, led by Nasser, called on the Arab League to break relations with Iran. In response, the shah threatened to exchange ambassadors with Israel. King Saud found himself in a dilemma: he was reluctant to cut relations with Iran, even though pressure from radical Arab states demanded that he do so. The issue was resolved when King Hussein of Jordan travelled to meet the shah and managed to mediate between Iran and the Arab League by securing the shah's commitment not to recognize Israel. (Badeeb 1993: 55) Despite the incident, the shah became more interested in pushing Saudi Arabia away from the hard-line Arab nationalist states, such as Egypt and Syria. Thus, in 1962 he appointed his eighth ambassador, Afrassial Navai, to Saudi Arabia. The Iranian policy towards Saudi Arabia during this time was vividly expressed by Prime Minister Ali Amini to the *Foreign Reports Bulletin*:

The Arab countries seem to be getting more and more unstable with the exception of Saudi Arabia, which I heard is in good shape. Nasser is fomenting all this disorder now that he has virtually ruined his own country. I hear that conditions in Egypt are very bad. Iran must save itself from being infected by disorders in the rest of the Middle East.¹¹

Despite what was considered modest progress, a window of opportunity would open in Yemen. On 19 September 1962, a military *coup d'état* in North Yemen supported by Nasser overthrew the imamate and replaced it with a revolutionary government hostile to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and Iran both withheld recognition of the new government and extended military assistance to the ex-imam, who was fighting to regain his throne. Nasser's military intervened to aid the Arab revolutionaries, and soon North Yemen became the site of a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. (Wynbrant 2004: 220) In an interview with the *Foreign Reports Bulletin*, the shah expressed his worries over Egyptian intervention in Yemen and said that it was aimed at Saudi Arabia and at gaining control of the Gulf's oil resources.¹² By 1964, the shah's support of Saudi Arabia grew immensely, as he feared the fall of Gulf Shaykhdoms to Arab Nationalists. He even went as far as pledging his air force to protect Saudi Arabia

the norms of resistance, anti-Zionism, and anti-imperialism. It is for this reason that the shah had to downplay his comments regarding Israel. As Assadolah Alam, personal secretary to the shah, recalls, the shah forbade anyone from the imperial court or the government to attend Israeli celebrations. See: Alam 1993 69.

¹¹ Foreign Reports Bulletin, 17 April 1962.

¹² Foreign Reports Bulletin, 20 November 1965.

from any possible attack by Egypt.¹³ As Asadollah Alam (1993: 176) remarks on the shah's position during this period:¹⁴

His Imperial Majesty is extremely anxious about the general outlook in the Middle East and worried by Moscow's growing influence in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean which threatens the very survival of so-called "moderate" Arab regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Emirates. These, according to His Imperial Majesty, are in any case doomed to extinction. "We can depend on no one except ourselves," said His Imperial Majesty, "not even the Americans or the British can be relied upon. They're not nearly such desirable allies as the Soviets."

Nevertheless, the cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iran reached a high level, and Saudi Arabia started channelling arms sent by Iran to North Yemen.¹⁵

Upon the accession of King Faisal to the Saudi throne in 1964, Saudi-Iranian relations entered a new phase. King Faisal was well known to the shah of Iran and many of his government officials, who held a high opinion of the king's competence as a statesman. The shah had sent his foreign minister, Abbas Aram, to Saudi Arabia in early 1964 to confer with the then-prince. Upon his return to Tehran, the minister stated that he was 'immensely impressed' by Faisal. (Badeeb 1993: 57) While King Faisal and Shah Mohammed Reza shared many common interests, they had different worldviews. While the shah believed in Western modernization and secularism, the Saudi monarch was reluctant to embrace Western ideals and opted to minimize Western influence on Saudi society. King Faisal pushed for building a modern state system and did his best to transform Saudi Arabia from a desert kingdom into an active member of the international community. In addition, he instituted an elaborate welfare system with free health care and education for all Saudis. More importantly, King Faisal consolidated his power inside the country and managed to weaken the political opposition that had been aided by Egypt.

Despite the differences between the two monarchs, they nevertheless shared mutual interest in defeating Nasser and aligning with the West. Shah Mohammed Reza may not have approved of King Faisal's religious conservatism; however, he saw in him the only Arab leader capable of challenging Nasser and bringing Arab nationalist revolts to an end. (Vassiliev 1998: 382) To his credit, King Faisal proved to be a superb ally to the shah. In fact, one of the first visits he made during his reign was to Iran, in

¹³ Los Angeles Times, 11 July 1965.

¹⁴ He is referring specifically to 26 November 1970.

¹⁵ New York Times, 18 April 1965.

December 1965. The shah received him warmly and the two parties formed the Iran-Arab Friendship Association, chaired by Prime Minister Hoveida and with two branches, one in Tehran and the other in Riyadh. Relations improved further when King Faisal opted to mediate between Iran and Iraq over their border dispute. Moreover, King Faisal, who advocated Pan-Islamic solidarity, managed to secure Iran's participation in a number of Islamic organizations, notably the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). (Vassiliev 1998: 386)

The June War of 1967 provided the opportunity for the Saudis to extend their influence more broadly in the Arab political arena. Nasser's defeat led to strikes and demonstrations in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, resulting in numerous arrests and deportations, along with some damage to ARAMCO property. These were easily contained. The Saudis moved quickly to use their financial leverage over President Nasser to terminate Egyptian support for radical nationalist activities on the peninsula. (Stork 1980: 25)

3.1.8 From Pax Britannia to Pax Americana (1970–1978)

On 16 January 1968, Britain's Labour government announced that it would withdraw its forces east of Suez by the end of 1971. The announcement immediately caused anxiety and concern over the possible vacuum of power resulting from Britain's departure. For the first time in modern history, the Gulf was to become an autonomous sub-region in world politics. This meant the independence of new Arab states, the resolution of disputed borders—and more significantly, new questions about the region's new rules of coexistence and the nature of its foreign relations with the outside world. (Al-Saud 2003: 125)

Saudi Arabia and Iran were not alone in their concerns—or their ambitions for further gains. Iraq, Kuwait and other small Trucial States under British protectorship were also voicing discontent and distrust of neighbouring states' intentions. (Vassiliev 1998: 185) To the small Trucial States there was no regional alternative to the British security umbrella. The large Arab Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, were no substitute. Iraq's Pan-Arab ruling regime was perceived as a source of threat rather than regional stability, particularly following the former regime of General Kassem that had threatened to invade Kuwait in 1961. Saudi Arabia had unresolved disputes with some of the emirates, namely Qatar and Abu Dhabi, and lacked the military might to play the role of "Gulf protector". Iran did have sufficient military capacity to pursue the role of

security provider; however, given its claims to Bahrain and a number of scattered islands across the Gulf waters, it became difficult for other states to concede to its power. (Al-Saud 2003: 23)

3.1.8.1 British withdrawal from the Gulf

Given the situation, US security planners in the State Department became uneasy. In their view, the central structure of the Western security system east of Suez would be dismantled at a time when the United States could not adequately replace it. The primary anxiety was to protect Gulf oil sources for Western security, industry, and the international balance of payments. Britain's last-minute, patchwork design to knit the Trucial States together in a durable union seemed more impossible than Anglo-American efforts to erect a stable regional system in the Gulf, given the endemic territorial disputes from which no riparian state is exempt. (Hurewitz 1972: 106)

The Saudis decided to coordinate their efforts with Kuwait and Bahrain to tackle the uncertainties in the region following British withdrawal. On 15 January 1968, shortly before the shah was due to pay an official visit to Saudi Arabia, the Emir of Bahrain visited Saudi Arabia. Iran interpreted the Saudi move as hostile to its interests, and the shah decided to cancel his visit in protest against Saudi actions.¹⁶ Manuchehr Fartash, the shah's personal envoy, travelled to Saudi Arabia to raise Iran's complaint regarding Bahrain. Meanwhile, another disagreement flared up. Saudi Arabia and Iran had differences over offshore oil in the Gulf dating back to the early 1960s. The two countries started exchanging accusations that the other's oil companies were drilling in the disputed waters. (Al-Saud 2003: 29-34)

Tension escalated, and relations were at stake. The shah went to the extreme of declaring Iran's determination to occupy three islands belonging to the UAE once the British had withdrawn from the Gulf. He even threatened to occupy any sheikdom that fell into the hands of Leftist or subversive elements. (Al-Saud 2003: 36) King Faisal stood firm to the shah's claims and in an interview with the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Siyash*, he extended the invitation to the shah to visit Saudi Arabia despite the flaring disagreements; however, he asserted the existence of 'mutual rights on the Gulf for all countries concerned'. (Al-Saud 2003: 42) The US State Department asked its ambassador to Riyadh, Hermann Eilts (1965–1970), to intervene and suggest that the two monarchs receive envoys to help ease the tension. The US effort paid off, and the

¹⁶ Los Angeles Times, 5 February 1968.

shah made a stopover in Jeddah on his way to Ethiopia on 3 June 1968 to meet King Faisal. The visit—though short—was largely symbolic of a resumption of meetings at the highest level, rather than an occasion designed to achieve specific agreement on particular issues. (Al-Saud 2003: 42) Nevertheless, the two sides managed to reach an agreement over their maritime boundaries after a few months of marathon negotiations between the two capitals. This culminated in the ratification of the Agreement over the Islands of al-‘Arabiya and Farsi and the Delimitation of the Maritime Boundary.¹⁷

A great development shook the Gulf in July 1968, impacting Saudi–Iranian relations and pushing both countries to forego their immediate differences: the Ba’th seized power in Iraq in a bloody coup. The new regime, facing regional and international opposition and intent to solidify its position, could not appear weak in foreign policy. It therefore resorted to reviving its territorial claims. The Ba’th leadership was eager to assert both its Iraqi nationalist and its Pan-Arab credentials. Several other features of the regime were disturbing to Saudi Arabia and Iran. It adopted socialism at home, a stridently anti-Western posture in foreign policy, and a revolutionary rhetoric directed at Persian Gulf and Arab monarchies. It developed a close military and economic relationship with the USSR—the Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship was signed in 1972—which was an issue of particular concern to the Saudis and Iranians. Moreover, the Ba’th began to support an amorphous front for the liberation of Khuzistan in Iran; the insurgency in Dhofar, Oman; the Left-leaning revolutionaries in Yemen; and the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf in Saudi Arabia. These activities placed Iraq on one side and Iran and Saudi Arabia on the other. (Potter and Sick 2004: 17) Accepting this new reality, King Faisal and the shah began relentless rounds of deliberation on the future of the Gulf’s security. By 29 January 1969, the two parties had concluded a treaty outlining the disposition of the Arabic and Persian islands and the demarcation of the continental shelf; in 1971 they managed to resolve the dispute over Bahrain through UN channels. (Al-Saud 2003: 51)

Nevertheless, the shah remained adamant about the issue of the islands Abu Musa and Tunbs. Having compromised on the issues of the Gulf median line and

¹⁷ For an analysis of this treaty, see: Young 1970, *Equitable Solutions for Offshore Boundaries: The 1968 Saudi Arabia-Iran Agreement*. For the full text of the treaty, see: <<http://www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/SAU-IRN1968SA.PDF>>

Bahrain, it was now a matter of prestige for Iran to have its way on this issue. (Vassiliev 1998: 381) More importantly, the strategic value of the islands to Iran was increasing as the imperial government expanded its navy and emphasized its role as the principal guardian of the Strait of Hormuz. (Fain 2008: 186) Shortly before the end of the British protectorate and the formation of the United Arab Emirates, Iran seized partial control of Abu Musa with the Emirate of Sharjah under an agreement of joint administration together, with both sides nominally upholding their separate claims. A day later, on 30 November 1971, Iran forcibly seized control of the Tunbs Islands and Abu Musa against the resistance of the tiny Arab police force stationed there. The Arab states' response to the incident varied. While most Arab states publically disapproved of Iran's actions, they disagreed on the appropriate response to the issue. Radical Arab states including Iraq, Libya, Algeria and South Yemen asked that the Arab League and the UN sanction Iran. However, Saudi Arabia and Egypt refused to severely criticize Iran, and due to this objection the proposal advanced by Iraq within the Arab League for Arab states to cut relations with Iran failed. (Miglietta 2002: 250)

3.1.8.2 The US's Twin Pillar strategy

From the British departure in December 1971 until the revolution in Iran in February 1979, the two sides managed to improve their mutual interest and relations. In fact, both countries became more active regionally under the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, which was aimed at supporting conservative, pro-Western policy in the region. (Chubin and Tripp 1996: 9) The so-called Twin Pillar strategy brought diplomatic, economic and military support to both Saudi Arabia and Iran in order to encourage them to protect law and order in the region. (Haas 1981: 151-169) Richard Nixon became president of the United States in 1969. At first, his Middle East policy was focused predominantly on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which overshadowed developments in the Gulf region. As a result, the Nixon administration regarded the Gulf region as a backwater. (Fain 2008: 182) Asked later about his conception of the Persian Gulf in 1969, Henry Kissinger responded, 'I did not have one'. He also expressed his personal lack of knowledge about the details of Gulf issues, stating, 'I did not know how Saudi-Iranian relations worked, my priority was to get the Soviets out of the Middle East'. (Al-Saud 2003: 65) However, the 1973 War and the subsequent oil embargo by Saudi Arabia in aid of Egypt and Syria forced US focus onto the Gulf.

The Nixon Doctrine was a device used to achieve strategic advantage for the US during the US-Soviet détente. It attempted to identify ways in which the United States could most effectively exploit its limited power and to make active use of the United States' allies in the developing world as instruments of its containment policy. Articulated in July 1969, the doctrine stipulated that the United States would furnish allied nations with 'military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defence'.¹⁸ Although it was most famously applied to Vietnam, it was soon adopted in the Gulf region. (Fain 2008: 182) Accordingly, the Nixon Doctrine evolved into a policy of subsidizing and arming a series of regional "policemen", medium-sized states in key locations that acted as proxies for US power and building blocks in the structure of containment.

In the Persian Gulf region, Iran would eagerly assume this role in the wake of Britain's departure. (Fain 2008: 182) However, Saudi Arabia continued to be the United States' most important ally in the Arab world, and the Nixon administration recognized its critical value to achieving an overall Persian Gulf political settlement before the end of 1971. (Fain 2008: 185) The State Department advised that as the largest and wealthiest state in the Arabian peninsula, Saudi Arabia was 'capable of playing a leading, but not dominant, role in the area' and that it must continue to build a cooperative relationship with Iran. On that front, the department noted, 'Periodic high level exchanges of views have taken place, though with less frequency and fewer results than might have been hoped'. US and British diplomats further appreciated that Saudi endorsement would be crucial to the success of the Federation of the Arab Emirates, but that 'the Saudi attitude toward the area is still encumbered by tribal grievances, border disputes and deep seated suspicion of Iranian intentions'.¹⁹

At first, the Saudis were reluctant to play the role, fearing that Nasser and other radical Arab states would exploit the Saudi-US alliance to prove that they were traitors to the Arab cause. King Faisal found more room to conduct his foreign policy without the need to appease radical Arab states. In fact, the Saudis took advantage of

¹⁸ Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon 1971: 544-545.

¹⁹ United States Department of State 31 March 1970, *U.S. Policy Assessment: Saudi Arabia 1970*; United States Department of State 12 February 1970, *Persian Gulf: Factors Inhibiting Saudi-Iranian Cooperation in the Gulf*; United States Department of State 24 May 1971, *Memorandum for the President: Saudi Policy in the Peninsula and the Gulf*.

Nixon's policy to enhance their standing in the region, but maintained a cautious distance when it came to sensitive Arab issues—such as the Arab-Israeli conflict—and sustaining its Islamic posture. In contrast, the shah went so far as to advance the idea of securing the Gulf to proclaim Iran as the leading power in the region. (Badeeb 1993: 63) Although the Saudis were irritated by the growing personal arrogance of the shah, they tried to avoid rivalry with him, especially in OPEC, and they were relieved when the shah shifted his focus to the mounting political turbulence inside Iran. (Badeeb 1993: 63)

By 1975, Saudi–Iranian relations were stronger than ever. Their main goal was to promote conservative foreign policies designed to maintain the status quo in the region, which meant aiding other pro-Western governments against revolutionary and communist elements. Among the states that they both helped were North Yemen, Zaire, Somalia, and Oman. In addition, they both sought to destabilize radical states such as South Yemen (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen). Another example of their cooperation was their coordinated policy towards the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, where they extended support to Kuwait against Iraq's attempt to gain port concessions. The Saudis also supported Iranian attempts to subvert the Iraqi government, forcing Iraq to make concessions on the Shat al-Arab dispute. (Miglietta 2002: 251) Reflecting on his relationship with Saudi Arabia in this period, the shah wrote:

I had traveled on several occasions to Saudi Arabia, a country whose integrity and independence are sacred for all Muslims. Twice I had the great joy of making the supreme pilgrimage. As a faithful Muslim and Defender of the Faith, I hope that Saudi Arabia will always remain the guardian of these holy places, Mecca and Medina, where millions of pilgrims travel every year on the path to God. (*Pahlavi 1982: 134*)

3.2 THE EVOLUTION OF STATE IDENTITY IN SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN

For the majority of the second half of the 20th century, both Saudi Arabia and Iran were experiencing significant and constant changes in their state system—and thus, in their state identities. Both also faced unique challenges in creating a modern state. Until his overthrow in 1979, the shah of Iran was able to rely on long-existing—often ancient—facets of “Iranianness”, including the concept of a “territorial Iran”. However, in Saudi Arabia the king had to focus more on defining his kingdom as a territorial unit and promoting its modernisation. Thus the two countries provide two contrasting case studies through which we can see how state identity was formed and expressed.

3.2.1 Persian nationalism and state identity under the shah

The history of Iranian nationalism is varied and multifaceted. As Kashani-Sabet (2002: 162) has pointed out, there are many different emphases in Iranian nationalism, including linguistic, territorial, ethnic, and religious. What is perhaps unique to the nationalist discourse in Iran is the way in which the varying emphasis on these complementary—but often competing—articulations of nationalism has transformed Iranian politics. If at one time language was the primary defining characteristic of the modern Iranian, in other times religion would supplant language as the principal marker of “Iranianness”. Perhaps the most persistent themes have concerned the nations’ territorial integrity. In addition, different constructions of Iranian nationalism became related to different stages of Iran’s modern history and its relationship with the outside world. (Kashani-Sabet 2002: 163) Similar to many modern nations, Iran had several pre-modern features favourable to the development of nationalism. The concept of territorial Iran (*Iranshahr*) went back to ancient times. A single state or empire had ruled a territory roughly comparable to modern Iran in some pre-Islamic periods and again under the Safavids (1501–1722), with a revival of unity beginning under the Qajars (1796–1925). (Kashani-Sabet 2002: 163)

In Iran, the two dominant markers of identity are Islam and Iranian nationalism. The two have at times reinforced one another, and at other times have represented different political ideals. Iran became Muslim following to the Arab invasion of Iran in the seventh century. Iranians are unique among the early civilizations that converted to Islam in that they did not adopt the Arabic language and culture. This has created tensions between Iran’s nationalism and its faith. (Nasr 2005: 399) Islam and Shi’ism have played an important role in defining Iranian identity; however, emphasis was placed on secularism with the advent of the modern state, which demanded separating Islam from Iranian nationalism. In place of Islam, Iranians were to identify themselves by their ethnicity and language, which as secular concepts were seen to be more compatible with modern nationalism.

In the 1920s, Reza Shah implemented a policy of fostering Iranian nationalism by merging the identity of the Iranian state and nation with those of the Persian people and the Persian language. In this manner, Reza Shah merged state identity with the identity of the largest ethnic group in Iran, the Persians. As part of the policy, the regime aggressively attempted to assimilate the various ethnic groups in

Iran. This policy included closing minority language schools and publications. (Shaffer 2002: 48) Moreover, Reza Shah was convinced that making Iran strong and fostering its economic development would be fundamental to establishing the country's identity and social relations—an ambitious project of cultural engineering that required a coherent state identity. The state secularized the judiciary and the educational system, and it restricted the powers of the clergy. It mandated the change of traditional dress to Western dress and promoted secular values. In place of Shi'ism, the state promoted nationalism defined in terms of pre-Islamic Iranian identity. Such an identity would be secular and would provide an ideological foundation for monarchical power and Iranian imperial pride. As Nasr (2005: 399) notes, 'It was then believed, largely because of imperialist propaganda, that Iranian cultural beliefs could not promote discipline and the values that are necessary for a modern society. Secular nationalism would remedy that problem'.

Nevertheless, the most recognizable moment of Iranian nationalism came during the rise of the nationalist movement under the charismatic leadership of Mosaddeq. Defending Iranian independence and overthrowing US and British support made him an enduring national hero. Unlike Reza Shah, Mosaddeq came to represent a nationalism that was deemed distinctly anti-Western, as his version was directed against Western control of Iran's most profitable resource, and was therefore "authentically Iranian". Moreover, nationalist discourse during the oil crisis was not cosmetic in nature. Rather, it related to one of the most abiding symbols of Iranianness: the nation's land and resources. (Kashani-Sabet 2002: 177) After Mosaddeq's fall, Mohammed Reza Shah pursued a nationalist agenda akin to that of his father. He took the grand title *Arya Mehr* (Light of the Aryans), and revived Persian mythology by hosting a lavish (and highly reviled) 2,500th-year celebration of the monarchy in 1971.

In early 1960s, the shah carried out the White Revolution, which was aimed at reforming the state and transforming Iran's traditional society. He advertised the White Revolution as a step towards modernization, but there is little doubt that the shah also had political motives: it was a way for him to legitimize the Pahlavi dynasty. Part of the reason for launching the White Revolution was that the shah hoped to force land distribution in order to weaken powerful landlords and the traditional *bāzārī*, who opposed his modern view of Iran. (Ansari 2003: 148)

The powerful Shi'a clergy were also angered by the reforms that removed much of their traditional powers in the realms of education and family law, as well as lessening their previously strong influence in the rural areas. A large percentage of the upper echelon of the clergy came from landowning families deeply affected by the reform, and much absentee rent income went directly to the clergy and their institutions. (Mackey 1996: 221) Nevertheless, the shah was able to suppress the domestic opposition and opted to construct an identity for the Iranian state that appealed to the historical elements of Iranian national identity, but was at the same time modern and adoptive of liberal, Western values. This state identity is the way the shah wanted to present and place Iran in the region and to its Western allies. A number of states in the region, particularly the secularist Arab regimes, shared with Iran the goal of abandoning traditions; however, the pre-Islamic identity that helped revive Iranian nationalism had also revived antagonisms and distrust of its neighbours. (Ansari 2003: 230)

3.2.2 State identity under King Faisal

During the period of independence, King Abdul Aziz was mostly concerned with consolidating his power within the borders of the new kingdom. Relations with the outside world were in the hands of the king alone, and often included some of his close advisors who mostly offered technical advice and carried the king's messages to world leaders.²⁰ King Abdul Aziz wanted to modernise his newly independent state; however, he was often concerned about how much his society could modernise could accommodate without threatening its social or territorial integrity. (Kostiner 1993: 191) He was also hesitant to open the country to Westerners. The import of Western skilled labour was conducted under the guise of the royal court and later organized in such a way as to prevent direct interaction between the public and outsiders. This did not mean that the Saudis were prevented from mingling with foreigners; on the contrary, it was designed to avoid cultural clashes in a highly conservative society. Westerners, and Western-educated Arabs, did teach, work and train in Saudi Arabia; however, the state was always vigilant against foreign cultural and ideological influences. (Lippman 2004: 72)

Among Saudi monarchs, King Faisal is credited with rescuing the country's finances and implementing a policy of modernization and reform, while his main

²⁰ Since the conquest of Mecca in the 1920s, the state's foreign policy has been aimed at promoting Islamic values, decreasing tensions between Muslim states, and lessening foreign fear and dislike of Wahhabi doctrine so as to promote the pilgrimage. (Ochsenwald 1981: 275)

foreign policy themes were Pan-Islamism, anti-Communism, and anti-Zionism. (Vassiliev 1998: 344) This might seem quite contradictory: the monarch who devoted his rule to modernity and reform is the same one who ruled by strengthening the religious establishment and the codes of Islamic law in the country. During the reign of King Faisal, Saudi Arabia became one of the strongest allies of the United States and the West in the region, yet he championed Pan-Islamism and made resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict his personal quest. In fact, the foreign and domestic record of King Faisal is mixed with both achievements and setbacks. Nevertheless, he earned respect—and even compassion—in his country and across the Arab and Muslim communities.

3.2.2.1 The king's dilemma: Wahhabism, modernisation, and state identity

In his book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Samuel Huntington (2006) describes what he calls 'the King's Dilemma', in which a traditional polity faces the dilemma of modernizing the society or risking isolation from the outside world. If the state embarks on modernization society will ultimately transform, thereby weakening the traditional powers and doctrines that legitimized monarchical rule in the first place. The evolution of a new middle class and the influx of new ideas, ideals, and ideologies would eventually create movements and groups that want to share power and wealth or defy existing social and political structures. At the same time, modernization would deprive traditional and conservative groups of their power, pushing them to resist as well. Huntington (2006: 177) argued that Saudi Arabia was facing perhaps one of the most difficult dilemmas any monarchy would face in the twentieth century, since it was a traditional society—a sheikdom of ruled tribes—that lacked any form of modernity, yet was surrounded by regional and international contenders for its energy resources.

In 1964, King Faisal encountered a two-dimensional challenge to his rule. At home, the Saudi rule was based on a traditional contract between the Al Sa'ud House and the Wahhabi ulama' that gave the ruler a religious legitimacy unmatched anywhere in the region. In addition, the Al Sa'ud House commanded political authority via a traditional acceptance and loyalty of the country's tribes and influential wealthy families. (Al-Dakhil 2009: 25) Yet the emerging educated working class demanded more participation in the country's affairs. Other countries in the region also defied the monarchy and opted to infiltrate the country with different ideologies aimed at weakening the state. King Faisal's internal response was to develop a balance between

modernization and the strengthening of religious and traditional institutions. Abroad, he chose to follow a narrow (largely regional) focus in his foreign relations. He avoided military alliances or bloc commitments and sought to keep the Kingdom free from entanglements within the Arab world that might promote serious internal dissent. (McHale 1980: 623) He once said:

The important thing about a regime is not what it is called but how it acts. There are corrupt republican regimes and sound monarchies and vice versa. The only true criterion of a regime, whether it be monarchical or republican, is the degree of reciprocity between the ruler and ruled and the extent to which it symbolizes prosperity, progress and healthy initiative. (In: Vollmer 2007: 212)

This formula, although doubted at the time, proved to be working, and for three decades to follow Saudi Arabia survived and thrived against all odds.²¹ Nevertheless, Faisal's model of balance for Saudi Arabia would encounter significant challenges in the 1980s and 1990s.

3.2.2.2 Saudi state identity from Pan-Arabism to Pan-Islamism

Since it contains within its borders two of the three Muslim holy cities—Mecca and Medina—Saudi Arabia plays a unique role in the Middle East, where religion is highly integrated into daily life. Consequently, Saudi Arabian foreign policy had at its disposal a powerful ideological tool with which to respond to the appeals of secular Arab radicalism. (Sullivan 1970: 443) However, as Saudi Arabia's economy industrialised from the 1960s onward, the new sedentary, urban population became an easy target for secular Nasserist propaganda. While the Kingdom was able to use its religious credentials (amongst other things) to downplay the effect of a weak-but-radical Iraq, it was unable to tolerate a strong, Nasserist Egypt. By 1965, then-King Faisal had emerged as a serious contender to Nasser and the Ba'athists by using Pan-Islamism as a foreign policy tool; specifically, he advocated an "Islamic Entente" after the failure of the Jeddah Agreement designed to bring peace to Yemen. (Sullivan 1970: 439)

The war in North Yemen polarized Arab politics. Through the Egyptian intervention in North Yemen, Arab Nationalism had a major impact on the Arabian

²¹ The unintended consequence of even cautious reforms may be an out-of-control change that wipes out the very ruling elite who initiated the reform. The fate of the shah of Iran is a prime example of the unintended consequences of top-down reforms. He promoted a "White Revolution" to modernize the country, but was eventually deposed by a religious movement that developed—at least in part—in response to the dislocation resulting from the White Revolution. See: Ottaway and Dunne 2007, *Incumbent Regimes and the "King's Dilemma" in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reform*: 4.

peninsula for the first time. Yet it was here that the conservative leadership in the Gulf was able to fight back and use the Egyptian failure to build the future Cairo-Riyadh alliance. Radical Arab states condemned Faisal as a reactionary. In response to Faisal's advocacy of Islamic solidarity, the revolutionary Arab states held a conference in Damascus in 1966, to counter what they perceived to be a projected conservative alliance. Since this was also one of the innumerable Syrian bids to wrest ideological leadership of Arab radicalism away from Cairo, little came of the counter move. Moreover, the proposed Islamic Entente was not appealing at the time. The first state to follow the lead offered by Faisal was—somewhat unexpectedly—Somalia. In August 1966, its President Osman on a visit to Riyadh called for the convening of an Islamic Summit Conference. The revolutionary Arabs reacted with predictable scorn, but since Faisal did not follow up on President Osman's plea, nothing came of the matter. The only subsequent reactivation of the idea of an Islamic Entente was in November 1968, when the shah of Iran was on a state visit to Saudi Arabia, but this too proved to be little more than an expression of conservative sentiment. (Sullivan 1970: 440)

After the Israeli defeat of Egypt in 1967, King Faisal forced Egypt to pull out of North Yemen in return for financial aid that Egypt desperately required. Egypt ceased its support opposition movements in the Arabian peninsula, and from Nasser's death in 1970 until 1978 the Cairo-Riyadh axis was the most influential in the Arab world. Faisal's sponsorship of the idea of an Islamic Entente offered a conservative ideological response to revolutionary Arab Nationalism: it set up Faisal and Saudi Arabia as the political opposition to Nasser and Egypt. It thereby demonstrated Saudi Arabia's conscious acceptance of conservative leadership. In addition, the obviously secondary importance of Islamic ideology pointed toward providing justification for its foreign policy at home. As Sullivan (1970: 440) explains:

The resurrection of the Islamic theme in Saudi Arabian foreign policy clearly has been half-hearted. The remarkable aspect of the movement to form an Islamic entente was that it happened at all, and the explanation for it is to be found in the nature of the Arab state system and the challenge posed by Cairo rather than in the style of Saudi Arabia or its leader, King Faisal.

When Nasser died in September 1970, a new era began in Arab politics—one much more congenial to the conservative Saudis. Sadat, Nasser's successor, was one of the few top Egyptian officials whom the Saudis had cultivated over the years. Under King Faisal's leadership, the Saudis began to try to use their influence to weaken

the Soviet position in the Arab world. In November 1970, General Hafiz al-Asad ousted the extreme Leftist regime in Syria. The Saudis offered the new regime support. Sadat put down a challenge from a pro-Soviet faction early in 1971, which further convinced Faisal that Sadat was the right person to back in Egypt. Shortly thereafter, Sudanese President Gaafar al-Nimeiry crushed a coup attempt led by the Sudanese communist party. Sadat rushed Egyptian troops to Nimeiry's support. Once again, moderate forces backed by Saudi Arabia prevailed. Most gratifying of all to the Saudis was Sadat's abrupt decision in July 1972 to expel the Soviet military presence from Egypt. (Quandt 1981b: 48)

By 1973, King Faisal's view of Saudi state identity had materialized. This would comprise four elements: conservatism, Pan-Islamism, anti-communism and anti-Zionism.²² The conservative element entailed his adherence to the regional status quo; in other words, opposing radical revolutionary elements from overthrowing friendly governments and preventing foreign political ideologies and movements from corrupting traditional politics. In this respect, Pan-Islamism became an alternative to the secularism of Pan-Arabism. It is important to note that King Faisal was not opposed to Arabic solidarity and compassion. In fact, the majority of his speeches and statements were overwhelmed with sentiments of Arabic unity and solidarity. Nevertheless, he opposed the secular nature of Pan-Arabism and its commitment to radicalism and revolutions; thus King Faisal's understanding of Arab unity did not conflict with Islamic unity and solidarity. He perceived Islam as the source of Arab advancement as a people and civilization. Therefore, Islamic unity would empower Arab unity and would serve Arab interests at the international level. Faisal had to find a cause for unity between Arab and Muslim states, but he was unable to advocate anti-communism in this regard at first. He found his answer in the Arab-Israeli conflict. From the 1960s, Faisal would promote the Arab-Israeli conflict as a Muslim-Zionist war. He was personally convinced that Zionism was the source of evil and wrongdoing in the world. Moreover, he felt that the West's reluctance to accept Arab claims over the whole of Palestine was due to Zionist control of Western finance, media, and politics. (Vassiliev 1998: 344)

Eventually, Faisal's advocacy of Pan-Islamism—and his version of Pan-Arabism—would bring the two closer to each other, as Muslim majority states began to

²² In fact, King Faisal seemed to see these doctrines as linked; he once stated that 'Communism is one of the subversive doctrines mothered by Zionism to bring about universal demoralization'. Associated Press, 19 September 1969.

sympathize with the Arab cause. However, Faisal's Pan-Islamism did not succeed on its own. Financial wealth, a result of the oil boom, would provide Saudi Arabia with unmatched means of sponsorship and patronage. (Halliday 1980: 9) In 1973, Saudi Arabia earned US\$28.9 billion by selling nearly one-fifth of all the oil consumed by non-communist countries. The King granted a large part of the US\$2.35 billion that the Arab oil producers pledged at Rabat to the "confrontation states" in the battle against Israel.²³ In the second half of the 1970s, Saudi Arabia became the primary foreign bankroller of the Egyptians, Syrians, Jordanians, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. It also granted billions of dollars in multilateral loans and grants to poor Muslim countries. The influx of Saudi money soon paid off, and the Saudis would emerge from the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s stronger and more powerful.

3.2.2.3 The US–Saudi alliance and its implications for Saudi state identity

King Faisal was particularly outspoken in his hostility toward communism as an alien ideology that fostered instability and revolutionary change. He suspected that the Soviet Union was encouraging Zionism as a means to weaken and divide the Arab world, noting that it was one of the first countries to recognize the Jewish state in 1948 and to supply it with weapons to fight for its independence. (Quandt 1981b: 47) In this respect, Saudi Arabia's relations and dependency on the United States became essential to Saudi security. The relationship between the two states has outlasted any other relationship Saudi Arabia had, even with its close Arab neighbours. Moreover, the strategic alliance between Saudi Arabia and the US would become a source of stability and reliability. The US would be the first to explore Saudi Arabia's oil and help develop it to its maximum potential, and it would eventually protect Saudi security, as demonstrated in the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, and become its main provider and provider of military equipment and assistance.

Nevertheless, Saudi–US relations have always suffered from two sources of contention; first, the US commitment to the security of Israel made Saudi Arabia's enduring alliance with the US questionable in the eyes of Arab nationalists and Saudis at home. (Lippman 2004: 274) Second, the US's varying commitment to democratization and human rights often sparked tension and discomfort between the two states. Radical Arab regimes often criticized Saudi dependency on the US and

²³ Time Magazine, 6 January 1975.

accused Saudi officials of hypocrisy when it came to supporting Arab causes. Inside Saudi Arabia, relations with the US—and consequently US influence within the country—would create an enduring friction with the religious establishment. (Lippman 2004: 338) While the Saudi government publicly portrayed itself as abiding by shari'a, its dependency on the US for security was deemed un-Islamic by radical clerics. However, the Saudi government would eventually separate foreign policy from domestic policy. At home, the government would still maintain a hard-line stance on issues like the Arab-Israeli conflict and solidifying the unity of the Muslim *umma*.

In one of his public speeches, King Faisal emphasized Saudi foreign policy as being based on religious doctrine: 'The affair of Israel and usurped Palestine is neither political nor economic. It is an affair putting in question the basics of Islam'. (Ochsenwald 1981: 276) The holy places of Jerusalem, which were under Jordanian administration between 1949 and 1967, were regarded with particular affection by King Faisal, who longed to visit them after their return to control by a Muslim state. He called for a holy war against Israel on 23 August 1969. Opposition both to the Soviet Union and to Israel led to a basic contradiction in Saudi foreign policy, for the United States was both the chief opponent of Soviet expansionism and yet also the chief ally of Israel. This contradiction is exemplified in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Though supporting the Palestinians, the Saudis avoided becoming too directly involved in the conflict and did not participate with troops in any Arab-Israeli war. The Saudis were willing to commit financial and diplomatic assistance to the cause, but did not allow their citizens to volunteer for the "holy war" against Israel. (Bowen 2008: 124)

The Saudi foreign policy discourse seemed to appear, and as a result the Saudis were able to spare their interests with the West by maintaining an anti-Zionist stance for domestic and regional consumption while aligning themselves with the US politically. (Bowen 2008: 117) This does not mean that their religious or Arab attitudes were not sincere—on the contrary, Saudi leaders did believe in most of what they were voicing when it came to communism and Israel. Nevertheless, they drew a line between the security of their own interest and that of the Arab or Muslim ones. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia would tirelessly opt to convince—or pressure—a succession of US Presidents to side with them against Israel in order to show that they made use of their close relationship with the US to serve the Arab and Muslim cause. The only time they used oil to pressure the US and the West was during the 1973 War. (Lippman 2004:

155) Even then, Saudi Arabia would retrieve its close relationship with the US and publicly promised the US not to consider oil as a weapon or use it to pressure the US at any time in the future. The close military, diplomatic, and economic ties between the Saudis and the US based on a convergence of interests on a world level have so far prevailed over Saudi dislike of the US's pro-Israeli policies in the Middle East.

By the time of his death in 1975, King Faisal had achieved international recognition as a skilful and experienced statesman, a major Arab figure, and a strong opponent of communism. Soviet commentators made it clear that they hoped King Khalid would be a less implacable adversary. The indications of continuity under Khalid, Crown Prince Fahd, and Saud al-Faisal, the outspoken new foreign minister, must have disappointed the Soviets. (Quandt 1981b: 49) In the years to follow, the Saudis would commit to their special relationship with the US; however, the overthrow of the shah in 1979 was to cast some doubt on the future of Saudi–US relations. The Saudis perceived that the US had abandoned one of its allies, and therefore the dependency on US support had to be questioned. (Lippman 2004: 209) In his last days, the shah would turn to the Saudis for support.

The same state that the shah has showed his dislike for would prove to be one of his last friends. When Iranian oil workers went on strike before the revolution, the Saudis started sending fuel to Iran to assist the shah. (Huyser 1986: 47) This contribution was essential to maintaining the readiness of the Iranian army amid the civil unrest. Eventually the shah would flee his country, and the army would not intervene in the crisis. In his last book, *Answer to History*, the shah (1982: 134) recounted his positive relations with Saudi Arabia, and in a grateful way he wrote:

As a faithful Muslim and Defender of Faith, I hope that Saudi Arabia will always remain the guardian of these holy places, Mecca and Medina, where millions of pilgrims travel every year on the path of God.

3.3 CONCLUSION

In retrospect, Saudi–Iranian relations had played an important role in the political and ideological history of the modern Middle East. The two states came to discover one another during the stage of state formation and consolidation of internal and regional power. The founders of Iran and Saudi Arabia were suspicious of each other. They differed on faith, race, culture—and more importantly—they shared a history of antagonism as two peoples who looked down upon one another. However,

these differences did not deter them from building a healthy relationship. Differences over faith and nationality would arise from time to time, but the two states were always willing to forego their differences in pursuit of mutual interests. From the 1950s to the 1970s they shared similar characteristics: they were both monarchies opting for modernization, and enjoyed a close relationship with the West as active allies of the United States.

The age of nationalism helped bring the two states together. In fact, the two states shared interest in containing Pan-Arabism and fighting to reduce communist influence in their region. They did have differences in some areas, including those over territorial boundaries and oil policy; nevertheless, those differences were always dealt with through dialogue and cordial diplomatic talks. The test of the British withdrawal from the Gulf is a clear example of how cooperation and diplomacy eased tensions and made the two states focus on their mutual security interests. Saudi–Iranian relations before the fall of the shah were at their best, and it is a vivid testament to the fact that their relations are not destined to enduring rivalry and hatred.

The political leaderships in both states opted to construct state identities that were not in conflict with each another. The shah’s vision of Iran’s state identity as a secular, modern and Westernized state did not threaten Saudi interests. In fact, Iran’s anti-communist stance and rejection of Pan-Arabism, Nasserism, and Ba’thism were in line with Saudi regional policy. In addition, Saudi state identity, which was expressed in conservative policies, complemented Iran’s own state identity. The two foreign policies were oriented at protecting the status quo and fighting those who threatened to revise the normative order of the day. Remarkably, the two states prevailed over communist and nationalist forces of the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, the state identities they devised were prone to fault, since they contained conflicting components.

The shah’s secular and modern vision for Iran clashed with the religious traditions of the country and formed the basis of opposition that came to portray the shah as an anti-religious figure. Moreover, the shah’s model of nationalism was also unsuccessful. The promotion of Iran’s pre-Islamic history did resonate among the well-educated elite; however, modern Iranians—especially during the Mossadegh episode—harboured nationalist sentiments that were profoundly anti-Western and suspicious of foreigners. There are several causes of the fall of the shah and the ignition of the Iranian Revolution; nevertheless, there seems to be sufficient evidence to argue that the state

identity envisioned by the shah was eventually opposed by a large segment of the Iranian society. The newly-revolutionary regime transformed Iran's state identity so radically that it altered Iran's relations with the outside world, including Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia continued to portray itself as a conservative Muslim state, anti-communist and aligned with the US. However, the Saudi model of Pan-Islamism and its religious conservatism would take it on a new path. This change would be highly influenced by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. As a result, both states' identities would be revised in a way that was destined bring them into opposition.

THE EVOLUTION OF ENMITY IN SAUDI–IRANIAN RELATIONS

1980–1989

The followers of the camel grazers of Riyadh and the barbarians of Najd, the most infamous and the wildest members of the human family . . . If you think these camel-grazers are a model for development . . . Why don't you invite advisors from the Saudi royal court to teach you civilization and eradicate superstition from among you.

Ayatollah Khomeini

Letter to a group of Iranian clerics in 1977¹

On 20 November 1979, the first day of the Muslim fifteenth century, a group of young Saudi Islamists seized the Grand Mosque of Mecca and took several hundred pilgrims hostage. The rebels were led by Juhayman al-Utaybi, a Wahhabi zealot, who had elaborated the ideology of the group in a collection of letters. The rebels demanded a return to the Islamic society of their pious forefathers, whom they referred to as *as-salaf as-salih* (the true followers of the Prophet Muhammad), and harshly criticized the Al Sa'ud royal family for their corruption, the Westernization of the country, and their alliance with the “infidel” powers (especially the United States).² Between 500 and 1,000 rebels held out for about two weeks against the Saudi forces. Initially, the Saudi authorities were reluctant to face the group in the Grand Mosque out of religious sensitivity and fear of harming the mosque, which is dearly sacred to Muslims. Nevertheless, the Saudi authorities obtained a religious fatwā from the senior clerics and ousted the group. The leader, al-Utaybi, and sixty-three of his followers were executed in January 1980. (Steinberg 2006: 27)

¹ In: Moin 2000: 62.

² For analysis of Juhayman's thought, see: Kechichian 1980, *Islamic Revivalism and Change in Saudi Arabia: Juhayman Al-Utaybi's "Letters" to the Saudi People*.

The event sparked a lot of controversy over the Saudi ruler's ability to provide security and safety of worship in the Holy Land. Among the political and religious leaders who voiced their criticism of the Saudi handling of the Grand Mosque crisis was Ayatollah Khomeini. In a communiqué from Khomeini's office in Qom aired by Tehran Radio, Khomeini accused the United States and Israel of orchestrating despicable horrors in Mecca. In the communiqué, Khomeini announced:

It is not far-fetched that this act has been perpetrated by the criminal American imperialism so that it can infiltrate the solid ranks of Muslims by such intrigues . . . it would not be far-fetched to assume that, as it has often indicated, Zionism intends to make the House of God vulnerable. (In: Trofimov 2007: 108)

This statement, and many to follow in the years to come, met with Saudi discontent and signalled the first rift between Saudi Arabia and the newly established Islamic Republic in Tehran.

While historically Saudi–Iranian relations could be perceived in the personal relationship between the two monarchs, it is more useful to use an explanation that is embedded in the transformation of state identity—as illustrated in the foreign policy discourse—in the respective states in the post-revolution era. The state identity was revised in both states, and the rivalry³ can be located in the struggle to redefine the normative order of the Gulf in the 1980s. In this chapter, I will explore the roots of Saudi–Iranian enmity following the 1979 revolution, as well as denote the reasons that led to the start of rivalry that characterised the diplomatic history of the two states in the 1980s through the period of détente⁴ until the culmination of the 1997 rapprochement.⁵

4.1 AFTER THE REVOLUTION: THE SAUDI RESPONSE TO CHANGE OF REGIME IN IRAN

In the first days of the Iranian Revolution, the Saudis were surprised and puzzled. The shah had fled the country, and Iran fell quickly into chaos. At the time, the

³ Used—casually—to characterize feelings of enmity between states, Thompson (2001: 557) defines rivalry as 'a relationship characterized by extreme competition, and usually psychological hostility, in which the issues and positions of contenders are governed primarily by their attitude toward each other'. (Vasquez 1993: 75)

⁴ Détente means 'relaxation' (as in the string of a bow in archery). It has been used to describe the easing of international tensions, especially between the superpowers after 1945, resulting supposedly in an increased insecurity. Détente can be seen, therefore, as a goal of policy, or as a period or era in international affairs. (Fry 2002: 553)

⁵ Originally derived from the French *rapprocher* (to bring together), in IR rapprochement is defined as the establishment or restoration of cordial and friendly relations after a period enmity. In Foreign Policy Analysis it is more likely to be the restoration of such relations and a move of convenience rather than of conviction. (Fry 2002: 553)

Saudis were more concerned with rising oil prices as Iranian oil production came to a halt. Initially, Saudi authorities aimed at increasing their oil production and waited to see the outcome of the revolution. The Saudi foreign ministry remained silent about the unfolding events. (Author's Interview, al-Faisal 1 November 2010) Recalling their response to the shah's departure in the Mossadegh era, the Saudis decided to "wait and see", as the return of the shah was still possible. The Iranian government collapsed shortly after the shah fled, and in a space of few days guerrillas and rebel troops overwhelmed troops loyal to the shah in armed street fighting. Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile in Paris to Tehran to be greeted by several million Iranians. (Keddie and Richard 2006: 238) The Saudis did not think that the religious clerics would assume power themselves. Prince Turki al-Faisal, director of Saudi intelligence at the time, recalled, 'We thought that Ayatollah Khomeini would not rule, and instead act as a spiritual leader not the head of the state'. (Author's Interview, al-Faisal 1 November 2010) Furthermore, Saudi officials' perception of Khomeini prior to the revolution was limited to the sermons and pamphlets he used to deliver in Najaf, and later in Paris. 'We knew that he was radical in his political views towards the shah . . . however, we did not sense that he was hostile to Saudi Arabia in particular', noted al-Faisal.⁶

Following a landslide victory in a national referendum aimed at abolishing the monarchy in April 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini declared an Islamic republic with a new constitution reflecting the Islamist movement's ideals of Islamic governance. In the new republic, Ayatollah Khomeini became the supreme leader. Despite some reservations, Saudi Arabia recognized the new government and expressed its willingness to continue co-operating on all levels. (Badeeb 1993: 113) In a letter sent by King Khalid to Ayatollah Khomeini, the Saudis congratulated the success of the new republic and expressed their friendship and good intentions. (Ramazani 1986: 90) The letter stressed that 'Islamic solidarity could form the basis of close ties between the two countries'. (Badeeb 1993: 113) Following Khalid's letter, Prince Abdullah, then head of the Saudi National Guard, indicated to the press that Saudi Arabia actually preferred Iran's new regime to the shah's. (Safran 1988: 354) In response, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered Iranian pilgrims to respect Saudi laws and pray in peace during the hajj season

⁶ Author's Interview, al-Faisal 1 November 2010. During his exile in Najaf, Khomeini sent a message to Muslims attending the hajj pilgrimage in Mecca every year. The messages were printed and distributed by Khomeini's followers traveling to Saudi Arabia. The first message was dated 6 February 1971. According to Algar (in: Khomeini and Algar 1981: 195), the Saudi authorities arrested several Iranians accused of disrupting the letters, which attacked the shah. They were imprisoned for two years before release.

of 1979. (Fürtig 2002: 24) The Iranian pilgrims caused little trouble in Mecca that year beyond passing around posters and leaflets about Khomeini that glorified their revolution. (Trofimov 2007: 63)

In Iran, however, the political situation was far from stable. The formulation of the new republic's foreign policy was subject to a tug-of-war between the interim government headed by Mehdi Bazargan and various revolutionary forces, clerics and laymen clustered around Khomeini, the undisputed supreme leader. Bazargan defined Iran's role in the Gulf as one of promoting stability through cooperation with the countries bordering it, whereas some of the revolutionary leaders spoke of exporting the revolution and protecting the rights of Shi'a minorities in neighbouring countries. (Safran 1988: 354) With regard to Saudi Arabia, the revolutionaries—as well as the interim government—were willing to test the Saudis' professed good intentions through their actions over the coming months. Even the militants, it seems, did not want Iran to court Saudi Arabia, even though they were willing to accept Iranian alliances with smaller Gulf States. (Safran 1988: 354)

4.1.1 From appeasement to confrontation

In mid-1979, Saudi foreign policy was facing difficulties on the regional level. Losing the shah—who had maintained friendly ties with Saudi Arabia—made the Saudis feel rather exposed and uncertain about their dependency on the US for security. (Quandt 1981a: 39) Furthermore, regional developments in Iran, Iraq, and Egypt posed a series of challenges. From a Saudi point of view, the new regime in Tehran was radical, and its real intentions were ambiguous. In Iraq, there was the rise of a new Ba'thist leadership that often provoked tension and controversy through its unapologetic rhetoric. Furthermore, the relationship with Egypt was still strained over the Camp David Accords and the unwillingness of King Khalid to reconcile with President Sadat. (Quandt 1981a: 15) To deal with all these challenges, the Saudis first tried to simultaneously pursue a number of rather incompatible policy objectives: appeasing Iran without antagonizing Iraq; enlisting US support for Gulf security without incurring the hostility of the anti-Camp David states, Iraq and Iran; relying on Iraq as a counterpoise to Iran without provoking the latter; and finally rallying the Gulf countries around it in building a unity without threatening Iraq, without arousing the latter's ire. (Safran 1988: 353)

In efforts to appease the new Iran, the Saudis decided to make some generous gestures. Iranian fuel supplies were affected during the oil refinery strikes in the months that preceded the fall of the shah, who in a moment of despair asked the Saudis to ship fuel in order to overcome the shortage caused by the riots. In a display of good will, the Saudis rushed emergency Kerosene supplies to alleviate crippling shortages. (Trofimov 2007: 63) Moreover, the new regime indicated that Iran would limit oil production and seek higher prices, a policy that would oblige Saudi Arabia to try to hold other OPEC countries in line to keep prices from soaring. Nonetheless, in 1979 oil prices jumped from US\$18 to US\$28 a barrel as the oil market reacted to the downfall of the shah and the success of the revolution. The world oil market, in which prices were fluctuating rapidly due to a recession, could not sustain the jump in prices and soon resumed its downward turn (Fesharaki and Isaak 1983: 243). Consequently, a confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran was averted more by the market than Iranian policies. (Badeeb 1993: 113)

Despite initial hesitation about the changes in Tehran, the Saudis soon started a policy of engagement with the new regime. Their policy towards the new Iran was articulated by Prince Abdullah, then head of the Saudi National Guard, in an interview with a Kuwaiti daily newspaper:

The new regime in Iran has removed all obstacles and reservations in the way of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Islam is the organizer of our relations. Muslim interests are the goals of our activities and the Holy Qu ‘ran is the constitution of both countries . . . Our cooperation will have an Islamic dynamism against which no obstacles facing the Muslims can stand . . . The material potential—money and oil—possessed by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic and Arab worlds, will be utilized and directed by an Islamic spirit . . . The fact is that we are very relieved by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s policy of making Islam, not heavy armaments, the organiser of cooperation, a base of dialogue, and the introduction to a prosperous and dignified future.⁷

The Saudi position on Iran was reinforced in several statements made by the Saudi Council of Ministers between April and October of 1979.

However, the Saudi leadership differed internally on how it perceived the Iranian Revolution. (Safran 1988: 354) While King Khalid and Prince Abdullah saw an opportunity to confront Iran, Crown Prince Fahd, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz and Prince Turki al-Faisal were more sceptical about the prospects of appeasing Khomeini.

⁷ In: Al-Siyasah, 23 April 1979; Author’s translation.

Crown Prince Fahd, who was committed to fighting Soviet influence in the Gulf, feared that the radical Leftist elements within the revolution coalition might seek Soviet assistance to counter US interests in Iran. In a meeting with US Ambassador John C. West on 2 October 1979, Crown Prince Fahd told the ambassador:

Instead of pressuring the shah into bringing his thoughts and actions up to date so as to pull the rug from under the communist agitators, you let him go . . . Look at what has happened in Iran! They have killed the cream of their society—the best brains in the military, the professions, and the civil service have all been executed or forced into exile. (In: Trofimov 2007: 60)

Prince Fahd's fears were reinforced after the hostage crisis of 1979. On 4 November 1979, the Iranian hostage crisis began. Iranian students managed to hold 66 US diplomats hostage for 444 days, while the US's Saudi allies remained silent. Iranian Prime Minister Bazargan was so disgraced—personally and internationally—by his failure to secure the release of the hostages that he resigned his post. (Keddie and Richard 2006: 249)

The constitution of the new Islamic Republic vocally announced its “Islamic” goals, and specifically its intention to prepare the world for the formation of a ‘single world community’. (Algar 1980: 19) Achieving this would require Iran to export its revolution and support revolutionary groups and movements in foreign states; to begin, it aimed its focus on groups in the Islamic world with the express goal of securing ‘political, economic, and cultural unity’. (Algar 1980: 19) It appears that Khomeini recognized that this could not be achieved within a democratic framework, and indeed felt that ‘it is right that the supreme religious authority should oversee the work of the president and other state officials, to make sure that they don't make mistakes or go against the law and the Qu'ran’. (Takeyh 2009: 28)

While the Saudis were alarmed by the collapse of the civil interim government of Bazargan, whom they considered moderate, the real concern stemmed from the unfriendly rhetoric of Khomeini and his associates. (Safran 1988: 354) Iran's harsh criticism following the siege of Mecca was disturbing; however, the real threat of the revolution came two weeks later when Shi'ites rioted in the Eastern Province—which the Saudi authorities had not expected. For decades, the Shi'a minority suffered from neglect and social distrust from the majority Sunni population. A small group of young Shi'ite clerics had been inspired by Khomeini's message and speeches in the years prior to the revolution. (Ibrahim 2006: 117) Once Khomeini returned to Iran to

lead the country—and potentially Shi'ite aspirations around the world—those young followers and other Shi'as inspired by him decided to voice their contempt of the Saudi government. They displayed posters of Khomeini to demonstrate support for the new revolutionary regime, which promised to liberate Shi'ites across the region. When government security forces attempted to suppress riots started by those young supporters, fighting broke out and the National Guard intervened. Several protesters were killed. The ramifications of the Shi'a riots and similar disturbances in February 1980 were widespread: the government began spending more money on infrastructure and facilities in Shi'ite areas. It also increased police surveillance and persecution. (Wilson and Graham 1994: 251)

Shi'a demonstrations in Kuwait and Bahrain during 1980 inspired by Khomeini's sermons and speeches further elevated the fear among GCC states. Seizing the moment, Saddam Hussein issued his first warning to Tehran late 1979, saying, 'Iraq's capacities can be used against any side which tries to violate the sovereignty of Kuwait or Bahrain or harm their people or land. This applies to the entire Gulf.' (In: Wright 1981: 278) In response, the Iranian leadership rebuffed Saddam's accusations and argued that the misfortune and poor state of rights enjoyed by Shi'a in the region was a credible cause for the agitation, and that those countries had no right to suppress protests. Khomeini replied that its principle was 'to liberate the discontented masses of Muslims, whether they lived in the independent states of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco or under non-Islamic governments'. (Takeyh 2009: 20)

However, the efforts to appease Iran failed. Saddam reached out to the Saudis asking for their help in an effort to rally against the new regime in Iran. In a secret communication with Crown Prince Fahd, Saddam discussed his plan to invade Iran, citing the liberation of Iraqi land under Iranian occupation and the prospects of liberating Khuzestan (Arabistan), which had been annexed during Reza Shah's era. The Saudis politely declined the opportunity to work with Saddam.⁸ (Author's Interview, al-Saud 15 December 2009) Nevertheless, Iraq continued to rally against Iran in Arab political circles. Saddam Hussein warned the Gulf states of Iranian attempts to export the revolution to Shi'a communities in the region. He alluded to the Islamic conquest of Iran in propagating his position against Iran on several occasions. For example, in a

⁸ According to Dr. Faisal, following the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 King Fahd told a group of Saudi royals that Saddam was planning well in advance his War on Iran and had requested Saudi's approval and financial backing.

speech at al-Mustansiriyyah University in Baghdad on 2 April 1980—five months before the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War—he drew parallels with the seventh century defeat of Persia in the Battle of al-Qadisiyah. He declared, ‘In your name, brothers, and on behalf of the Iraqis and Arabs everywhere, we tell those Persian cowards and dwarfs who try to avenge al-Qadisiyah that the spirit of al-Qadisiyah as well as the blood and honour of the people of al-Qadisiyah who carried the message on their spearheads are greater than their attempts’.⁹ Interestingly, in a 1979 meeting with senior members of the Ba’th leadership, Saddam described the balance of power in the Gulf during that period as he saw it. He argued:

Saudi Arabia wants to balance us out with Iran, and balance us with Syria, and balance us with Jordan. And Jordan wants to balance us with Syria, and wants to balance us with Saudi Arabia, and wants to balance us - we are a priority weight balance over all ... All of this is a soap opera. We know all of this and we are disturbed. (Woods, *et al.* 2011: 131–132)

In return, Khomeini argued that Muslims, particularly the Shi’ites in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—whom he saw as oppressed—could and should follow the Iranian example and rise up against their governments to join a united Islamic republic. Iran’s Islamic revolutionaries despised Saddam’s secularist, Arab nationalist, Ba’thist regime in particular, labelling it as un-Islamic. They often referred to Saddam as a “puppet of Satan”. (Khomeini and Algar 1981: 122)

4.1.2 The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) and its implications for Saudi–Iranian relations

Despite realizing their failure to reconcile with Iran, Saudi officials remained neutral as Iraq and Iran accelerated their propaganda. Saudi officials remained concerned about the new regime’s policy. Furthermore, upon realizing their failure to normalise relations with Iran they became even less interested in pursuing reconciliation. On 22 September 1980, Iraq launched a simultaneous invasion of Iranian territory by air and land, citing the long history of border disputes and fears of Shi’ite insurgency influenced by the Iranian Revolution. The Iraqi invasion reflected Saddam Hussein’s ambitions, which ranged from the occupation of disputed Iranian territories, Shatt al-Arab and Khuzestan, through to the overthrow of the Khomeini regime, to the desire to assert Iraq as the pre-eminent Arab and Gulf power. It has even been suggested

⁹ Address by Saddam Hussein, Voices of the Masses in Arabic, 2 April 1980, quoted in: Bryant 2007.

that, by defeating Iran, Saddam Hussein hoped to become the most influential leader of the Non-Aligned Movement. (Karsh 1988: 83)

As the war broke out, the Gulf monarchies were effectively on Iraq's side. The extent of support and the ways in which it was expressed differed among the Arab Gulf states, with care being taken (to a greater or lesser extent) to avoid burning any bridges with Iran. Saudi Arabia, where both local rumours and intelligence reports indicate that Iraqi planes were allowed to traverse Saudi air space and to land, still cloaked its support for Baghdad in neutral language about the conflict. (Nonneman 2004: 174) The first phase of the attack failed to produce the expected quick win, and so Iran began to threaten the Gulf states for cooperating with Iraq. Responding to the threat, the six GCC states hastened to express their official neutrality in the conflict; Saudi Arabia persuaded Iraq to drop the plan to recapture occupied UAE islands. It also sent back Iraqi planes that had been stationed in its borders once it received its purchase of US AWACS. (Hiro 1989: 131) Yet the underlying support for Iraq remained; indeed, even the insistence by Saudi leadership on a peaceful resolution of the conflict was in line with Iraq's position from 28 September, when it accepted a UN ceasefire appeal. The tone of most of the region's governments and media at this time also confirmed pro-Iraqi leanings in the Arab Gulf states. (Nonneman 2004: 175)

The Tanker War (1984–1988), which started when Iraq attacked Iranian tankers and the vital oil terminal at Kharg island in 1984, was another a dark period in this strained era of Saudi–Iranian relations. The Saudis felt pressured to take action against the aerial threat from Iran, which resulted in the shooting of an Iranian fighter plane. The Saudis promptly described the incident as 'strange', 'unfortunate' and 'not to be repeated'. (Jansen 1984: 962) Nevertheless, Iran struck back by attacking tankers carrying Iraqi oil from Kuwait and continued to threaten any tanker from the Gulf States supporting Iraq. The air and small boat attacks did very little to damage the economies of either country, and Iran never really tried to close the Strait of Hormuz. (Hiro 1987: 368) Yet more surprisingly, Iran did not have adequate access to sophisticated arms in the late stages of the war, and had clearly become dependent on Saudi Arabia for refined petroleum products due to the destruction of nearly all of its refineries. (Razi 1988: 705)

Nevertheless, the Arab Gulf States themselves were ambivalent about the war. Although they had been footing much of the bill for Iraq's weapons, they had also

always feared both Iran and Iraq, the only two countries strong enough to exert leadership over the region.¹⁰ In the past, both had used military force and intimidation to expand their influence. (Renfrew 1987: 104) The direct implications of the Iran–Iraq War can be perceived on two levels. Politically, it divided the region between those who opposed the expansionism of the Iranian Revolution and those who vowed to save the Arabic identity of the Iraqi state from Persian intervention. Therefore, siding with Iraq meant trying to protect the current status quo, whilst siding with Iran was more in line with supporting the revolt against ruling Arab regimes. (Kechichian 2001a: 289) As a result, Arab Gulf states were soon to find themselves obliged to back the Ba’thist regime of Iraq despite the ideological differences between Iraq and the monarchies and sheikdoms of the GCC. Ideologically, the war further revived religious and sectarian differences between the majority Sunni Muslims in the Middle East and prompted the rise of Shi’ite revolutionary sentiments. Moreover, the respective regimes started rallying their own citizens against the other side in the war by employing sectarian propaganda. (Hunter 2001: 435)

4.1.3 Disagreements over the hajj and the 1987 incident

In Mecca in 1981, large demonstrations by Iranian pilgrims resulted in violent clashes with Saudi police in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina and the Great Mosque in Mecca, resulting in the death of one Iranian pilgrim in Medina. (Fürtig 2002: 45) While disagreements over the hajj were not new (a similar incident had occurred in 1949), the new, revolutionary activities of the Iranian pilgrims gave the situation unwelcome political overtones. They used the holy mosques as forums to protest against Iraq and its Arab supporters, as well as to disseminate revolutionary literature and recordings of Ayatollah Khomeini’s sermons. (Fürtig 2002: 45) While Khomeini was committed to unity among Muslims—including Sunnis—he excluded Wahhabism deliberately, considering it a deviation from ecumenical Islam. In return, the Saudi authorities often repeated their commitment to serve all Muslim pilgrims regardless of their individual beliefs. However, they still considered the practice of politics during the hajj unacceptable—and more importantly, un-Islamic. (Abir 1993: 129)

¹⁰ Once Iraq’s financial resources ran out it was the Gulf States that paid for the Iraqi war effort—mainly Saudi Arabia, which gave Iraq at least US\$20 billion in cash up to June 1984. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait allotted up to 300,000 barrels a day from their oil production, which was sold as if it was Iraqi oil. Arab ports in the Gulf were open to Iraqi transit trade to replace Basra. All this was done in spite of dire warnings of reprisals from Iran. (Jansen 1984: 955)

In the decade after the Iranian revolution, the two nations had increasingly severe disagreements over the hajj. As early as October 1980, King Khalid had written a letter to Khomeini, asking the Ayatollah to ensure that Persian pilgrims acted in a manner appropriate to the holy occasion—but with the unwritten implication that Persian pilgrims would defile the Great Mosque with their blasphemous chants of ‘God is great, Khomeini is great’ and ‘God is one, Khomeini is one’.¹¹ (Kramer 2008: 168)

While such chants would have certainly been blasphemous, it is unclear whether the pilgrims ever chanted such things. Kramer (2008: 168) has shown that the pilgrims were likely chanting homophonic revolutionary slogans. They were declaring not that Khomeini was on the same level as God, but using Persian words that sounded similar to Arabic words and were thus open to misinterpretation. Specifically, they likely used the Persian word *rahbar* (leader), which was likely confused with the Arabic word *akbar* (great). (Kramer 2008: 168) Even the Iranians’ Arabic chants could have been misinterpreted, with the Arabic *qa’id* (leader) potentially being mistaken for *wahid* (one). If the pilgrims chanted the slogans Kramer (2008) suggests, Khalid’s accusations are false; it is therefore unclear whether the king had a genuine concern about the pilgrims’ behaviour or if he was reverting to the longstanding idea that Shi’ites would defile the holy places. In his reply to King Khalid, Khomeini evoked the old Shi’ite charge that Saudis failed to respect the refuge provided by the Great Mosque: ‘How is it that the Saudi police attack Muslims with jackboots and weapons, beat them, arrest them, and send them to prisons from inside the holy mosque, a place which according to the teaching of God and the text of the Qur’an, is refuge for all, even deviants?’¹²

Between 1983 and 1986, the reciprocal tension in Saudi–Iranian relations increased annually near the hajj season.¹³ The mutual criticism that accompanied the pilgrimage reflected the political and sectarian chasm between the two states. Arabic newspapers printed in Tehran (mainly *al-Shahid*, *al-Umma*, and *Hizb al-Jumhuri A-Islami*) turned Saudi Arabia into a target of criticism. They portrayed Khomeini as ‘the Imam of all the Muslims,’ while highlighting the ‘treacherous’ character of the Saudi

¹¹ Sawt Al-Umma--The Nation's Voice, 31 October 1981; 'The Khalid-Khomeini Correspondence', Al-Nashra Al-Arabia Lil-hizb Al-Jumhuri A-Islami--The Arabic Bulletin of the Islamic Republic Party, 19 October 1981.

¹² Kayhan Newspaper, 10 October 1981.

¹³ In 1982, the Iranian pilgrimage took an even more radical turn when Khomeini appointed Hojjatolislam Musavi-Khoiniha as his pilgrimage representative. Khoiniha was the mentor of the students who had seized the US embassy in Tehran. Saudi police clashed with demonstrators, whom he had addressed in both Medina and Mecca. He was arrested in Mecca, and a speech delivered in Medina after the pilgrimage earned him expulsion as an “instigator”. (Sivan and Fridman 1990:183)

royal family. (Shay 2005: 196) The protests and clashes with Saudi security during the hajj—often instigated by Iranian official delegates—were often exploited to expose the Saudi failure to supervise the religious ritual in an effective and neutral way.¹⁴ The main Iranian propaganda claimed that Saudi Arabia should be divested of the right to manage the holy places. Hujat al-Islam Khaniya, who was Khomeini’s personal representative at the hajj until 1985, claimed that the Saudi leaders were ‘the emissaries of Satan’ and that the Wahhabi ulama’ were ‘representatives of [the] secret police’. He even called on the Muslims ‘to put an end to the government of manipulators controlling God’s house’. (Shay 2005: 196)

The Iranian government, with the blessing of Khomeini, responded to the Saudi measures by boycotting the 1988 pilgrimage altogether and accusing the Saudis of preventing Muslims from fulfilling the fundamental obligation of pilgrimage. In Khomeini’s message on the first anniversary of the 1987 “massacre”, he accused the ‘centres of Wahhabism’ of ‘sedition and espionage’. He went further, saying, ‘The sword of blasphemy and division, which had been hidden in the hypocritical cloak of Yazid’s followers and descendants of the Umayyad dynasty, God’s curse be upon them, had to come out again from the same cloak of Abu Sufyan’s heirs to destroy and kill’.¹⁵ (In: Kramer 2008: 177) Khomeini’s resort to historical analogy constituted a sectarian allusion that portrayed Saudis as Sunni agents aiming to destroy and inflict pain on Shi’ite Muslims. In 1985, Ayatollah Montazeri—for many years considered to be Khomeini’s successor—asked rhetorically if the Wahhabis were true Muslims at all. In a series on Radio Tehran he declared:

Wahhabism was originally established by mercenaries or foreigners whose main objective was to divert the Muslims, and to encourage them to fight each other ... This sect is neither committed to Islam nor to the Qur’an, it is rather interested in eliminating Islam and its history. Therefore Shi’ites as well as Sunnites are rejecting them. (In: Fürtig 2002: 41-42)

¹⁴ In his memoirs, Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri—the deputy supreme leader of Iran (1985–1987)—confessed that Khomeini ordered the IRGC to use the annual hajj season to undermine Saudi Arabia’s religious authority and security by instigating demonstrations and physical disturbance by IRGC members disguised as pilgrims. According to Montazeri (1999: 613): ‘One of the things that IRGC had done at the hajj was to use the pilgrims’ suitcases to transfer explosives to Saudi Arabia. After the explosives were discovered in Saudi Arabia and left Iranians with no grace, the IRGC initiated a rumour that it was Mehdi Hashemi’s—son-in-law of Montazeri—plan. One of the IRGC members came to me and told me: “My supervisor at IRGC insists that I have to put the blame on Mehdi Hashemi. They have spread this rumour in majlis and the cabinet”.’

¹⁵ Abu Sufyan was the father of Yazid (*d.* 640 AD), a Sunni governor of Syria who is considered by Shi’ites a hetic for killing Imam Hussain Ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, at the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. This is considered a source of antagonism between Shi’ites and Sunnis. For more on the differences between the two sects, see: Ahmed 1989, *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*: 57-58.

While differences—even hostilities—over the hajj found their justification in past sectarian antagonisms, the reality was that Saudi–Iranian relations were quickly evolving into animosity that went beyond religious disputes. By the mid-1980s, enmity between the two states would be a central character of the region’s security and political landscape. This enmity can be attributed to two forces. First, there was a radical transformation of state identity in Iran, along with a stark shift towards the right (religious conservatism) in Saudi state identity. Second, two competing discourses regarding the regional normative order were rapidly evolving. One called openly for religious revolution; the other demonized Shi’ite political expansionism.

The Iran that the Saudis saw after the Islamic Revolution was different from the one they had known before. Its new regime was fundamentally alien to them. They had certainly had differences in the past over the hajj, oil prices, territory, and regional security; nevertheless, the new regime began to deepen the Saudis’ concerns and fears. Iran, which was once a trusted partner in the region, transformed into a fearsome foe after the revolution. This was not due to a sudden change in heart in Tehran or Riyadh, but rather a result of dramatic change in the Iranian regime itself and the way in which policy makers viewed the role of the state.

4.2 THE CONSTRUCTION OF STATE IDENTITY IN SAUDI ARABIA

Religion has provided an almost exclusive source of legitimacy for the rule of the Saudi royal family. A secondary source of legitimacy is tribal allegiances. (Nevo 1998: 34) The rise of Pan-Arabism in the second half of the twentieth century pushed Saudi Arabia to embrace a certain kind of Arab cause that was limited to independence and liberation of occupied Arab land—at first. However, Saudi Arabia did not submit to the different ideologies—including Nasserism and Ba’thism—that championed the Arab cause; neither did it manufacture its own ideology. King Faisal’s response to Nasserism was to advocate Muslim solidarity in an attempt to promote Saudi Arabia’s role as the cradle of Islam and protectorate of the Muslim cause. (Wilson and Graham 1994: 98) This led the Saudi political elite to devise an identity for the state that was somewhat contradictory. It called for strict observance of Wahhabi Islam, opposition to Pan-Arabism in its organized (populist) form, and strong support of Arab cause. Contradictorily, it also fostered a strong alliance with the US (against communism in particular) and had an inclination towards building a modern welfare society to co-opt its rising middle class. Oil revenues and a conservative foreign policy, which often

sought to preserve the status quo, provided formidable stability. (Wilson and Graham 1994: 98)

Three events in 1979 drove Saudi Arabia to redefine its state identity: the siege of Mecca, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Iranian Revolution. The first was an internal challenge that contested the religious identity of the state. The second threatened Saudi security: the Soviet Union inched closer to the Gulf, thereby empowering radical Arab states—South Yemen in particular—to overthrow certain Arab Shaykhdoms. Nevertheless, the Iranian Revolution posed the most dangerous threat to Saudi Arabia following the Iraq-Iran War, not merely because it undermined Saudi Arabia's regional role, but also because it threatened the very existence of the Saudi state. (Wilson and Graham 1994: 104)

Understanding the transformation of Saudi state identity in the 1980s requires a careful assessment of the effect of these major events on Saudi the political elite and society. Saudi Arabia found itself more reliant on US arms—and more importantly, on US protection—to disperse immediate threats to its own security and to the security of its close Arab Gulf neighbours. Furthermore, the collaboration with the US and other Western countries meant there was more involvement, both direct and indirect (mostly financial), from Saudi Arabia on regional and international levels. According to Bronson (2006: 168):

Saudi resources were particularly attractive in places such as Nicaragua, where Congress was systematically reducing financing for policies near and dear to [President Reagan's] heart. In Afghanistan, Angola, the Horn of Africa, and elsewhere, Saudi Arabia's contribution helped the Reagan administration aid and abet anti-Communism activities on a worldwide scale.

Despite this active involvement in the anti-communist movement globally, the evolving animosity with Tehran was more influential on Saudi state identity. The contestation of the religious identity of the Saudi state by Juhayman and Khomeini urged the Saudis to revise their own vision of the role of religion in their foreign policy. Two choices were presented. The first was to moderate the state, revising the strict Wahhabi practice of religion advocated by senior ulama' since the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia. The second choice entailed pursuing a more conservative religious path, including strengthening the alliance with senior ulama' and sponsoring Sunni political Islamic movements that were keen on combating communism and Iran's Shi'ite expansionism. The Saudi policy-makers would decide to take the latter option,

embarking on a campaign to promote Wahhabi Islam in the face of Shi'ite expansionism at home and abroad. (Abir 1993: 13) It was a policy that would make Saudi Arabia the leading Arab country to instrumentally employ Sunni political Islamic movements—such as the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood International Organization—as a shield against its political opponents. (Roy, *et al.* 2007: 290) As Nevo (1998: 34) argues, 'By employing religion for this purpose, the Saudi monarchy has actually availed itself of Islam to change the situation in which religion constitutes the predominant provider of the regime's legitimacy'.

4.2.1 *The Saudi state and the revival of Wahhabi expansionism in the 1980s*

In 1981, Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abidin, a Syrian Muslim Brotherhood teacher turned Wahhabi preacher, published a book entitled *The Role of the Magi: the historical and ideological dimensions of the Iranian Revolution*. (Gharīb 1981) The book, published under the pseudonym Abd Allah Muhammad Gharib, was a critical Wahhabi assessment of Shi'ite political movements, and Khomeini's revolution in Iran in particular. It was also something of a Sunni propaganda statement against what was perceived as a Shi'ite conspiracy aimed at corrupting the Muslim faith with the aid of Western "infidels" and extending ancient Persian control over Arab and Muslim countries. Surur had taught in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s, and became a prominent figure in the Islamic revival movement—often referred to as *al-Sahwa* (awakening)—and later travelled to teach in Kuwait before he settled in the United Kingdom in the mid-1980s. He was a transnational political Islamic figure with a great following in the Gulf region. (Lacroix 2009: 435)

The Saudi Permanent Council of Senior Scholars, the highest religious authority in the country, had been considering the case of the Iranian Revolution until a prominent figure recommended Surur's book. The book soon influenced the Council's position against what was labelled an ill-fated "Shi'ite" plot.¹⁶ According to Surur, one hundred thousand copies were published and distributed in Saudi Arabia and other states including Egypt, North Yemen, the Arab Gulf states. The book remains an essential read to date among young Saudis joining the *al-Sahwa* movement, which

¹⁶ The ruling authorities have never dominated the *ulama'* in Saudi Arabia. According to Kechichian (1986: 62), they acted 'as defenders of the public interest it is their legal practice (*fuqahā'*) and their theological knowledge (*diyana*), which granted them a degree of legitimacy in the Kingdom under the protection of the ruling family'.

would have provided Saudi authorities with devoted Islamists ready to join the Islamic cause. As Steinberg (2006: 28-29) notes:

Driven also by the ideological challenge from the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Saudi government tried to enhance its religious legitimacy by enforcing a stricter Wahhabi code of conduct, authorizing Ibn Baz—the grand Mufti—and his colleagues to fight non-Wahhabi phenomena in religious and social life . . . As a consequence, the number of religious students rose significantly, and in the 1990s, about one quarter of all students in the kingdom studied in one of the religious colleges.

In the early 1980s, Saudi Arabia would begin allowing its youth to join the war in Afghanistan, and offered financial assistance to the so-called “Afghan Arabs” fighting the “godless” Soviet communists. This effort earned Saudi authorities praise from leaders of the Jihad in Afghanistan, and pushed them closer to the Islamic revival movements. (Gerges 2005: 75-76) Nevertheless, the Saudis’ active role in supporting political Islamic movements presented a growing conflict as their ties with the US—an enemy of most such groups—grew stronger. It also earned Saudi Arabia criticism from other secular Arab countries for supporting what they perceived as radical religious groups threatening their rule.

In order to emphasize his commitment to Islam, King Fahd formally assumed the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in 1986. This symbolic change in the monarch’s title was seen as a direct response to Iranian criticism and propaganda that often loathed the monarchy and thought it was unfit to serve and guard the holy places. A direct cause of Saudi–Iranian hostility was the Shi’ite minority in Saudi Arabia, which found itself hostage to two conflicting identities. Saudi school textbooks—under the influence of Wahhabi scholars—referred to the Shi’ites as *Rafida* (rejectionists) in a derogatory way, reflecting the new institutionalisation of old prejudices. Reflecting mainstream Wahhabi teachings, Shi’ites were blamed for introducing new beliefs (*bida*) into Islam that did not exist during the Prophet’s lifetime. (Prokop 2006: 68)

Despite the contradictory aspects of Saudi state identity during the time, it helped to provide Saudi citizens with a sense of identity and shared values in the face of danger. This is because Saudi Arabia was not a nation-state in the vein of Egypt or Iran in that it lacked a national identity;¹⁷ (Kostiner 1990: 229) however, attempts by Saudi

¹⁷ It is important to note that the nature of the Saudi society—being composed of various tribes, clans, and nomadic bedouins—did not allow it to evolve as a nation-state *per se*. In modern times, the Arabian peninsula was rarely ruled as a united nation-state until the Saudi forces succeeded in unifying the

authorities to devise a state identity provided Saudis with a sense of pride and unity. In the 1960s and 1970s, few Saudis were exposed to the outside world. The increase in Saudis travelling abroad for business, study, and work exposed them to alien ideas and ideologies.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia consists of various territorial units: the most notable are Najd in the centre, Hijaz in the west, Asir in the south, Ha'il in the north and al-Hasa in the east. Each of these regions has a unique local identity: it is important to remember that the territory was unified as a state only in very recent centuries, and then always under the Al Sa'ud family. (Nevo 1998: 47) As a result, national identity did not develop naturally, as it did in other states. Nationalism—which is usually associated with a secular, modern society—was alien to the tribal society of the Arabian peninsula. Saudi state discourse and educational institutions during the heyday of Nasserism depicted nationalism per se as a secular, Western ideology aimed against Islam. (Nevo 1998: 46) In other words, they saw nationalism as a threat and utilised religion to reject it. This would change over time, as Saudi officials resorted to devising a state identity that substituted for the common national identity it was lacking.

Efforts to articulate a state identity based on the country's commitment to Islam and the true (Wahhabi) understanding of the Prophet's teachings have served as a unifying element for most of the people of Saudi Arabia, underlining the common values and helping to overcome regional, ethnic, demographic, and social differences. As Piscatori (1981: 115) notes, 'Both traditionally educated ulama' and more modern, foreign-educated intellectuals have conformed to the idea of national pluralism and thus accept the accommodation between Islam and the nation-state. The growth in national awareness and consciousness of common identity has also enhanced the regime's legitimacy'.

4.3 VILĀYAT-I FAQĪH: KHOMEINI'S VISION OF IRAN'S IDENTITY

Unlike Saudi Arabia, which struggled to find itself in the turbulent period of Arab Nationalism, the new Islamic Republic of Iran was able to quickly formulate an identity that was radically different from that of its predecessor. In essence, the revolution transformed Iran's international politics, economy, and society, and reconfigured the regional landscape, the geostrategic balance in the region, and the

country (whether by force or consent) in the early 20th century. See: Kostiner 1990, *Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State in Saudi Arabia*: 226–251.

foreign policy discourse of its main players. (Maloney 2002: 88) The impact of this new state identity was especially clear in Iran's post-revolutionary foreign policy. The shift towards an Islamic conceptualization of the state and the use of an ostensibly religious rationale in institution-building informed Iran's approach to its neighbours and its interpretation of particular threats and opportunities.

In fact, the new leaders of Iran found great significance in the issue of state identity as they evoked the ideal of legitimacy and modified the new government's position on world politics. (Maloney 2002: 90) Furthermore, revolutionary elements in Iran's state identity have served as the focal point for intense and protracted political contention that continues to date. This internal wrangling over the nature of the new state has had a formative impact on Iran's foreign policy and its relationships with states like Saudi Arabia. As Maloney (2002: 89) notes, 'The evolution in the country's institutions and international relationships has helped to shape conceptions of national identity that resonate and find expression in its politics'. Yet during his life, Khomeini remained the ultimate voice and final say when it came to Iran's standing in the world. Islam as Khomeini interpreted it had to remain the basis of any governing order, which meant that religious clerics were the only ones capable—and legitimately able—to govern. This ultimately gave the clerics control of the foreign policy of the Islamic state.

In his seminal work, *Hukumat-i Islami* (Islamic Government), Khomeini outlined his concept of *vilāyat-i faqīh* (guardianship of the jurist), which called for direct assumption of power by the clergy. He argued that government should be run in accordance with traditional Islamic shari'a, and for this to happen a leading Islamic jurist (*faqīh*) must provide political guardianship—*vilāyat-i faqīh*—over the people.¹⁸ A modified form of this doctrine was incorporated into the 1979 constitution, with Ayatollah Khomeini as the "first *faqīh*", or Supreme Leader, of Iran. Khomeini ensured the clergy's control over the fate of the revolution at the expense of all other members of the revolutionary coalition in order to maintain continuity and purity of *vilāyat-i faqīh* in his populist theocracy. At the same time, he was well aware that his departure from the political scene would create an enormous vacuum—hence his concern with the institutionalisation of the Islamic Republic. As Moin (1988: 191) notes, 'To help the

¹⁸ The theory of *vilāyat-i faqīh* was delivered as a series of lectures in 1969 in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, where Khomeini was in exile. Published as a pocket-sized book and distributed clandestinely in Iran before the revolution, it was in this book that Khomeini laid out the theoretical groundwork for an Islamic government.

fledgling institutions grow in strength, he has allowed them to go through the process of trial and error, intervening only if and when he thought they may go astray’.

Since the revolution, religious institutions and personnel have been in the ascendance; after defeating, banishing, or subordinating its opponents and rivals, the Islamic Republic became basically a government by clergy.¹⁹ In the late 1980s, the clergy occupied most of the senior positions in government, parliament, the revolutionary organizations, and the institutions of recruitment and mobilization of supporters and soldiers. The religious functions and ceremonies that they led acquired political significance. (Zubaida 1988: 6) As a result, the open political arena was entirely “Islamicized”. Islamic justification and rhetoric became the final criterion of legitimacy for a political position or foreign policy. Antagonists berated one another in terms of non-authenticity of their advocacy. Factions of radicals and conservatives, Left and Right, emerged within this Islamic field. (Zubaida 1988: 6) Moreover, there were common characteristics of the new political elite among the young clergy, most of whom were socially conservative, anti-American, vehemently anti-communist, and resented Western cultural influence.

The new state identity of Iran became prone to isolationism from Western powers and regional opponents on the one hand, and extremely dedicated to the export of the revolutionary ideals to fellow Muslims worldwide on the other. Having taken Khomeini’s anti-American and anti-monarchist view as an indication of his opposition to regional states—especially absolute monarchies such as Saudi Arabia—that were allied with the US. In fact, long after the fall of the shah, the “Great Satan” (the US)—and to some extent its regional “puppets”—continued to be denounced as the deadliest enemy of the revolution. Rubinstein and Smith (1988: 43) argue that ‘the new regime [found] it useful to manipulate anti-American sentiment, as in the instrumental variant . . . but it is the revolutionary process that has pushed anti-Americanism to the centre of both the regime’s ideology and the mass consciousness’.

Maloney (2002: 94) suggests three predominant elements that helped shape the Iranian state identity in the post-revolutionary era: Great Power nationalism, Islamism, and anti-imperialism. Each of these dimensions has played an important, if variable, role in shaping the foreign policy agenda of the Islamic Republic. The rivalry

¹⁹ Not all the clergy approved of Khomeini’s rulings: many of the conservative senior clerics remained quietly opposed to *vilāyat-i faqīh* and the direct involvement of religious leaders in government. See: Keddie and Richard 2006, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*: 307-309.

among them has been a central feature of the struggle among the diverse groups sparring for control of Iranian politics. Persian nationalism has never escaped Iranian foreign policy or ceased to influence Iran's state identity; nevertheless, Khomeini—like the Saudis—always tried to downplay institutionalised nationalism, although he had left some room for it when it came to denouncing Western powers. A clear example of this is the on-going debate between Iran and its Arab neighbours over the reference to the Persian Gulf as the “Arabian Gulf”, a name that has been protested extensively by members of the majlis, the Guardian Council, and the Assembly of Experts. The other important element in shaping Iran's state identity was anti-imperialism, which involved standing up to both sides of the Cold War. In the early days of the revolution Khomeini adopted a policy of “Neither East, Nor West”, which became a familiar slogan chanted by supporters of the Ayatollah. While Iran did communicate with the USSR—and sometimes bought arms from it—Khomeini continued to condemn the Soviet Union in his sermons and fatwās as an “infidel Jewish plot” directed at controlling the Muslim world (Arjomand 2009: 23).

A year before his death in 1989, Khomeini delivered a speech that clearly outlined Iran's state identity as he saw it:

Some persons of dubious motives accuse us of pursuing a policy of hostility and disdain in international forums. With their pretended sympathies and childish objections they contend that the Islamic Republic has incited enmities and lost prestige in the eyes of the East and the West. They should be asked: at what point did the Third World nations and Muslims, especially the nation of Iran, enjoy any esteem and credit with the East or West so that they should lose them now? . . . If the Iranian people should set aside all Islamic and Revolutionary principles and norms and demolish with their own hands the house of honour and credibility of the Prophet(s) and the pure imams, then it is possible that the world-eaters accord to them official recognition as a weak and poor nation devoid of culture. . . . That will not be an Iran with an Islamic identity, but an Iran whose identification card grief of lamentations of the US and USSR, of the East and West are for this reason, that Iran has not only gone out of their patronage but invites others to escape from the domination of tyrants. (In: Koya 2009: 112)

It is evident from this passage, and other statements by the Ayatollah, that he always used esteem and credit to push the idea that Iran was an unappreciated state. Thus, the slogan “Neither East, Nor West” is an indication that he sought an Iran that was not dependent on anyone; an Iran that would become more confident in the face of the world powers he despised. This sense was shared by many of Khomeini's supporters in Iran and abroad, and therefore it strongly influenced Iranian state identity.

While Khomeini's view of Iran's state identity was dominant in the state's discourse on foreign affairs, it is necessary to note that other voices and views existed throughout the 1980s. In fact, Precht (1988: 119) argues that it was only in 1984 that Iran came to formulate a consistent and unified voice on regional and international affairs. Accordingly, in the early years of the revolution Iran's state identity suffered from factional disputes over who had the right to decide the country's foreign policy. Once the feud was resolved on a domestic level in favour of the parties Khomeini supported, the discussion shifted to tactics and the scope of implementation. Here, the debate was between the ones who advocated an aggressive approach and those who favoured less engagement in foreign territories. This debate is a product of the state's 'romanticized utopia', as Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (2008: 57) describes it. In other words, Iran's state identity was in fact based on a utopian vision of what Iran should be in the world. "Khomeinism" elevated the Iranian nation-state to the status of a vehicle of divine substance. Inevitably, the Islamic Republic felt destined to change what was perceived to be an overbearing, hierarchical world order. As Adib-Moghaddam (2008: 57) explains, 'This was by no means merely an abstract self-perception. It was formalized, inscribed in the current constitution of Iran which declares that the revolution aims to bring about the triumph of the *mostazafin* against *mustakbirin*'. Moreover, the constitution states that this worldview of struggle 'provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad ... [we] will strive with other Islamic and popular movements, to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community'. (Adib-Moghaddam 2008: 57)

Iran's foreign policy in the years following the revolution was about more than expanding national interest or vying for regional hegemony. The foreign policy discourse of Iran was immersed, as Adib-Moghaddam (2008: 57) notes, in a utopian vision that was in stark contradiction with the region and the world as they actually were. Perhaps the greatest challenge to the revolution in the Cold War era was that it sought to redefine the normative order away from the influence and policies of the US and the USSR. Moreover, it sought to export the revolutionary ideology to neighbouring states that were different in many ways. The majority of Arab states were ethnically Arab and followers of Sunni Islam. The sudden ideological engagement with the region by Iran presented a threat at the regime level, and at the societal level it was also a threat to ordinary citizens who were sceptical of Iran's Shi'ite revolution.

Nevertheless, the Iranian Revolution and its subsequent foreign policy did not enter a vacuum, but rather found its place in an already-divided Middle East. The region had been divided relatively evenly between radicalism and conservatism since the late 1950s; however, the emergence of a revolutionary Iran increased that divide and undoubtedly reignited ideological tensions. There was a traditional rivalry between revisionary states—often militantly nationalist regimes—and pro-status quo states that were mostly monarchies. (Quandt 1981a: 11) This was reinforced when Iran became a revolutionary state. Iran's departure from the shah's policies was welcomed by radical Arab states and political groups including Syria, Libya, Algeria, South Yemen, the PLO, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Furthermore, Iran's opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process and to US presence in the region solidified its image as a revisionist state challenging Western intervention and pushing for armed liberation.

4.4 COMPETITION BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN: REDEFINING THE NORMATIVE ORDER OF THE GULF

The intense rivalry that ensued between Saudi Arabia and Iran was far more complicated than disagreement over policy or certain interests; rather, it was the interaction of two opposing agendas on the regions' security and stability. The clash of the two state identities was inevitable, as the two countries found themselves pursuing divergent normative orders. On every issue—whether it was the war with Iraq, the treatment of Shi'ite minority in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, regional security, the hajj, or oil prices—Saudi Arabia and Iran were locked into a vicious cycle of conflict and disagreement. The bitter rivalry between the two states produced two distinct discourses on the right normative order that the region should follow: one that sought to preserve the status quo, citing stability and promotion of economic development, and another that advocated resistance and the return to Islamic ideals for self-liberation.

4.4.1 *The mostazafin–mustakbirin discourse in Iran*

Iran's revolutionary state did indeed function as a distributive radical state, but with different sets of clients and priorities than its Arab contemporaries. At that time, the most pressing priority was the Iran–Iraq War, an issue that dominated Iran's foreign policy discourse until the Second Gulf War (1990–91). The populist emphasis of the revolution and its championing of the *mostazafin* was translated into handouts and various forms of military and financial assistance to militias and dissident groups in the region. A clear reason as to why Saudi and Iranian leadership did not see eye-to-eye

can be best explained in Iran's foreign policy discourse, which saw Iran's revolution as a model and catalyst for Islamic revolutions throughout the region. Even after hopes for a wider upheaval in the Persian Gulf and Arab Middle East began to wane in the late 1980s, Iran's political elite continued to treat Islam—in the politicized sense—as the preeminent weapon for the world's exploited peoples to use against rival states such as Saudi Arabia. (Bakhash 2004: 248)

There were two identifiable components shaping Iran's discourse in this period. First, there were intensified religious sentiments and references that can be attributed to such abstractions as Shi'ism—in the modern Political Islamic sense—and its penchant for the glorification of resistance, martyrdom, and the promise of Shi'ite Millennial return of the Hidden Imam.²⁰ Second, there was a clear revisionist view that sought to remake the region into one that adhered to the norms and values of political Islam in the wider Islamic Resurgence understanding, which includes establishment of religiously-based states to replace the current regimes and identification with the oppressed communities in other places in the world.

Furthermore, Iran's political elite claimed for Ayatollah Khomeini a kind of spiritual leadership for Muslims everywhere, an issue that the Saudis took very seriously as a challenge to their own Islamic leadership. Khomeini took his role as spiritual leader for the Muslim world with utter seriousness. His words and actions implied a transnational Islamic responsibility that extended beyond Iran's borders. He felt little compunction in publically denouncing other Muslim heads of state, arguing it was an Islamic duty to denounce the tyrants (*mustakbirin*), the corrupt leaders who had strayed from the Islamic path. (Bakhash 2004: 248) Saudi Arabia in particular received the biggest share of Iranian attacks. It represented a conservative monarchy ruled by a family that supported an “ill-fated” version of Islam; furthermore, it was an ally of Iran's ultimate enemy, the US. Iran's official media agency often referred to Saudi Arabia's senior officials as “agents of America”, and on several occasions Khomeini called for the public cursing of the rulers of Saudi Arabia for their alleged “treachery” against the house of God. (Bakhash 2004: 248)

Vilāyat-i faqīh is founded on the idea that the head of state of a Shi'a country stands in for the twelfth imam until his return; therefore, the Ayatollah's only

²⁰ The Shi'ite Millennial faith is premised on the disappearance of righteous leader—the twelfth imam, al-Mahdi—and his reappearance at the end of time. It also includes a belief that the oppressed would inherit the earth. See: Nasr 1989, *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History*.

role was to prepare for his coming. This idea resonated among Shi'ites worldwide, as before this idea was developed they felt constrained by the traditional Shi'a teaching that they were to have no representation until the coming of the Mahdi. This new doctrine gave them hope that they could have their own Muslim representatives, along with the reassurance that this was in line with their anticipation of the coming of the imam.

Nevertheless, Iran's foreign policy discourse was not limited to attacks on foreign leaders or animosity toward the West. Although religion has certainly played a role in Iran's foreign policy, it is likely that this role has been misunderstood. Nikki Keddie (1988: 37) has observed that this may be partly because of Western bias—she draws parallels between the idea of the 'Iranian martyr complex' and the excessive focus on 'Japanese suicide bombers' during World War II. She further argues that the characterisation of Shi'a Islam's Third Imam, Husayn, as a glorious warrior-martyr to be emulated is fairly recent, and for much of history he would have been seen simply as a wise moral guide and 'intercessor with God'. (Keddie 1988: 37)

Nevertheless, Saudi society did build up negative sentiments towards the Iranian leadership and Shi'ite Iranians in general, perhaps as a result of the portrayal of the hajj incidents and the Iran-Iraq War. The perception of a militaristic, messianic Iran was also shared by a number of Sunni populations in the Gulf, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, all of which had severed relations with Iran at one point or another. Furthermore, orchestrated propaganda against a number of Arab regimes emanating from Tehran contributed to the demonization of Iran in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states; misperceptions about the causes and the goals of the Iranian Revolution were evident from the outset of the revolutionary upheaval.

The second component of Iran's foreign policy discourse in the 1980s was far more political than ideological. The Supreme Leader's Office and the government often cited independence, self-determination, and a great sense of Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity as a priority of foreign policy. This entailed resistance to Western cultural hegemony, suspicion of Western motives, and unease with even the appearance of friendly relations with the West. (Bakhash 2004: 249) The Islamic Republic was cognisant of the potential threat to its security and territorial integrity; therefore, it increasingly came to view the US as the major *agent provocateur* and the most immediate threat to the security of the Islamic Republic. From Tehran's point of view,

the massive US naval build-up in the Persian Gulf was not intended to guarantee the free flow of oil from the region; rather, it was a clear manifestation of US hostility towards the Iranian Revolution. The Iranian leadership also believed that the US, in collaboration with Saudi Arabia, intended to “internationalise” the Iran–Iraq War in order to prevent an Iranian victory on the battlefield. (Entessar 1988: 1427) Post-revolutionary Iran considered the regional normative order unacceptable and sought to change it, employing what others considered a violent use of religious principles to construct a new reality based on the notions of liberation and resistance to Israel, Western powers, and their associates in the region.

4.4.2 Saudi Arabia and the status quo

The Saudis were on the other side of the normative debate: they sharply opposed forces calling for violent change in the status quo, whether from the Marxist Left, the Islamic Right, or any of the variations and combinations of those ideological currents in the region. (Quandt 1981a: 10) They considered Iran’s foreign policy discourse destructive and often challenged its calls for uprising and the use of violence to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict or to overthrow Arab leaders. Iran was an essential topic of Saudi foreign policy discourse, in which the Saudis clearly identified the revolution as a direct threat to their territorial integrity and sovereignty. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia sought to normalize with Iran on a number of occasions, only to reach a point where it felt that Ayatollah Khomeini was unwilling to concede to friendship with the Saudi leadership. (Al-Mani 1996: 168)

The Saudi disappointment with Iran is clearly elaborated in a 1988 interview with King Fahd in the *Al-Ahram Daily*, an Egyptian newspaper. A year after Saudi Arabia severed relations with Tehran, the king expressed utter frustration with Iran’s leadership:

I don’t know where it will end. We say the spirit of tolerance should make the Iranians think we are weak. We hope Iran will not act too irresponsibly. We do not want it to test our people’s ability to defend themselves. The question is: What does Iran want from all that is happening? Iran has harmed relations not only with us but also with its neighbours and the whole world. We ask Iran: For how long will this war continue—a war that is destroying Muslims and depleting their money? . . . Iran has attacked Kuwait and the UAE and struck at our merchant ships. Who benefits from this? Why undermine peace in the region while it is possible to attain coexistence and spare Muslim blood and money? Iran has tried many times to undermine security in the Gulf region, the Arabian peninsula, and the world. What has Iran gained? Iran has gained nothing.

When talking about Iran here, we do not presume that there are no masterminds in Iran, but we want reason and logic to triumph so that peace will prevail in the region. We want the moderate minds to play their role in Iran.²¹

Saudi foreign policy discourse became increasingly complex during the 1980s: they had accumulated immense power in economic terms as one of the leading oil exporters, and as a regional power as other competing rivals either withdrew (as did Egypt after the assassination of Sadat) or resorted to war against each other (like Iran and Iraq). The threats were serious; however, the prestige and power they enjoyed was vast. The Saudis developed a sense of pride in what they had achieved while others faced difficulties; King Fahd once reminded his fellow citizens of the fortune they enjoyed, thanking ‘God Almighty for his grace and gifts’ (Jerichow 1998: 20). A sense of being a state “chosen by God” prevailed throughout Saudi official media and in its dealings with other Muslim nations. The Saudi official discourse would often cite its “divine” role as a protector of Islam’s holy places and its mission to spread the word of his messenger.

In some respects, the Saudi official discourse became religiously oriented in an unprecedented way. The Saudi leadership felt obliged to confront the Islamic challenge of Iran’s revolution; nevertheless, the shift towards the far religious Right, as exemplified in the resurgence of Wahhabi expansionism, had placed Saudi Arabia even further in opposition to Iran’s Shi’ite Islam. The financial resources provided the Saudis with enough economic leverage to influence fellow Muslim states and to mobilize Muslim sentiments on a number of issues, especially against Iranian pilgrims after the bloody 1987 clashes.²² Furthermore, they tried to build a consensus against Iran. For example, in March 1988, the Saudis pushed for condemnation of Iran’s acts in the foreign minister’s conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Amman, and voiced support for Saudi measures to prevent a repetition of the violence.

While embracing a state identity highly dependent on Muslim causes and support of Sunni revival movements was effective in rebuffing Khomeini’s accusations, the Saudi state identity of the 1980s represented a contradictory discourse. While it championed peace and coexistence, it was highly involved in aiding the Jihad in

²¹ Al-Ahram, 15 January 1988; 'King Fahd on Iran Ties, Hajj, Missiles, Hijack', FBIS-NES-88-084, 2 May 1988.

²² Throughout the October 1987 ordeal, Saudi Arabia maintained relations with Iran despite the storming of the Saudi delegation in Tehran by an angry crowd that resulted in the death of a Saudi diplomat. Relations were severed in April 1988, with the clear purpose of preventing Iranian pilgrims from making the hajj. (Kramer 2008: 176)

Afghanistan and provided immense financial backing for the Iraq war with Iran. A particular challenge was the Saudi acquiescent stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which was often exploited by Iran and other states critical of Saudi foreign policy. The Palestinian diaspora, which evolved into a more potent political element in the mid-1980s, demanded of all Arab countries—especially those well-endowed with money and influence—maximum efforts to reclaim Palestine. The Saudis were vulnerable because of their traditional political structure and conservative tendencies, their weak military capabilities, and their dependence on the US for security in a political environment that associated the US with Israel and held both as the Arabs' common enemies. (Faksh and Ramzi 1993: 277)

4.4.3 The balance between state identity and state interest for both Iran and Saudi Arabia

Despite the messianic mission of Iran's revolution, the debate between identity and interest remained at the forefront of political contestation in the Islamic Republic. As Maloney (2002: 91) notes, 'The simplistic view of Iranian foreign policy since the revolution has tended to juxtapose religion and rationality, when in reality the trade-off entails more variables and a more complex interrelationship'. As mentioned above, Iranian state identity embodied different—and often divergent—identities, which were variously invoked as domestic political struggle and international circumstances demanded. The saga of the Iran–Iraq War is a clear example, as Iranian leadership shared a consensus that Iraq's defeat and the fall of the Ba'th regime was an ultimate goal. However, popular support for the war started ebbing away, volunteerism declined, and draft-dodging rose. The Iranian political elite were divided between those who argued for the continuation of the war and those who favoured ending it. The real outcome of the debate gave victory to those who favoured the state's survival over ideological zeal. (Hinnebusch 2003: 199)

Nevertheless, the idealists held to Khomeini's original line that since there were no "just" governments in the region similar to their own regime, Iran should aid their overthrow rather than make alliances with them. As speaker of the parliament at the time, Rafsanjani countered that through deliberate rejection of the legitimacy of the state system and the conventions of diplomacy, Iran had so isolated itself that Iraq was able to mobilize regional and international pressure on Iran. In a self-confessional criticism of his country, Rafsanjani stated, 'By the use of an inappropriate method . . .

we created enemies for our country . . . If Iran had demonstrated a little more tactfulness in its relations with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, they would not have supported Iraq'. (In: Menashri 1990: 289-293)

Gradually, the Iranian political elite started to ease revolutionary stances and accept more pragmatism. In the first attempt to mend fences between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Saudi foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, visited Tehran in May 1985 and met with President Khamenei. Although the ceasefire presented by the Saudis to Iraq and Iran did not materialise, the visit established dialogue at the highest level. (Hiro 1987: 381) Moreover, the Saudi authorities agreed to allow the Iranian pilgrims to demonstrate in favour of Islamic unity and against the US, the Soviet Union, and Israel, provided they did so peacefully and without banners or pictures.

In about 1984, Iran shifted to a soft policy toward its Gulf neighbours. Unable to force its will on them, Tehran tried reducing its stridency. In 1982, Khamenei had denounced the Gulf state monarchs as 'greedy pigs . . . shaykhs who have spent their whole life plundering your wealth . . . We will destroy all the dwarfs'. (In: Precht 1988: 119) But three years later, the line was different: 'We have friendly feelings towards [our] Gulf neighbours . . . [we] have begun to establish more sincere relations. They have welcomed them'. A consistent theme in Tehran's message during the years of soft policy toward the Gulf Arabs was its reiteration that it sought to serve as the inspiration for revolution rather than to export the revolution by force. (In: Precht 1988: 119)

In December 1985, the Iranian foreign minister, Velayati, returned the Saudi visit. He met with King Fahd in Riyadh. According to the Islamic Republic News Agency, King Fahd said that his country respected the Iranian nation and its leaders, and that the former regime of Iran had been neglectful of Islam. (Hiro 1987: 382) Stressing the need for unity among Muslims, the King stated that both Iran and Saudi Arabia could play an important role in strengthening Muslim unity. In reply, Velayati declared that 'peaceful coexistence with its neighbours' was an important principle of Iran's foreign policy. (Hiro 1987: 382) To show its goodwill towards Riyadh, Iran tried South Yemenis who had hijacked a Saudi plane from Jeddah and Riyadh to Tehran about a year before.

Given the intense animosity between the two sides and Iraqi intensification of the war after 1986, this goodwill was not enough to bring about a rapprochement. As Walt (1996: 264) puts it:

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic rested on a distinctly unrealistic set of ideologically inspired goals. Khomeini's ideology questioned the legitimacy of the existing state system. He initially welcomed Iran's international isolation as means of preserving its independence and revolutionary purity. . . Iran's behaviour in the immediate aftermath of the revolution showed little sensitivity to the limits imposed by the international system.

Following the 1987 hajj incident, however, tensions were heightened and for over six months the two sides were trading accusations. This led to the termination of relations in 1988. Despite the termination of relations and continued hostility, Saudi Arabia and Iran avoided direct military confrontation. Furthermore, Iran tried to isolate its deteriorating relationship with Saudi Arabia from its relations with the rest of the Gulf, where it maintained relatively open channels with some GCC states. Iran, in fact, actually maintained relatively open channels with some GCC states, such as Oman and the UAE. The 1984 shift in Iran's policy towards reducing activities of revolutionary export was part of a conscious effort to encourage Arab countries to stop providing overt assistance to Iraq. For their part, the GCC countries also tried to be cautious in their dealings with Iran. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Iran did cooperate—at times—on oil pricing to serve their mutual interests. (Hooglund 1987: 17)

Nevertheless, when it came to Saudi Arabia, these differences did not justify the severe hostility that marked their relations at the end of the decade. However, as Khomeini acknowledged in February 1986, 'The predominant requirement is to safeguard the Islamic Republic'. (In: Precht 1988: 113) It can confidently be asserted that Iran under Khomeini was not ready to make peace with Saudi Arabia, as the supreme leader often argued that Islam and hereditary kingship were incompatible. Khomeini saved his greatest assault on Saudi Arabia for his last will and testament, read after his death in 1989. Directing his advice to Iranians and the Muslim *umma*, he wrote:

[Muslims] should curse tyrants, including the Saudi royal family, these traitors of God's great shrine, may God's curse and that of his prophets and angels be upon them . . . King Fahd spends a large part of the people's wealth every year on the anti-Qur'anic, totally baseless and superstitious faith of Wahhabism. He abuses Islam and the dear Qur'an. (In: Moin 2000: 305)

Not surprisingly, Riyadh maintained complete silence in reaction to Khomeini's death. While other GCC and Arab countries sent bland messages of condolence to Tehran, the Saudis were in fact relieved by the news of his demise.

The change in Iranian leadership did not bring about any immediate improvement in the relations. As Nonneman (1991: 121) notes, 'The continued presence within Iran of more radical factions, as well as the difficulty in shaking off at least Khomeini's legacy on Saudi Arabia, remain[ed] causes for concern'. Indeed, Saudi-Iranian relations in the post-Khomeini era would continue to suffer from that legacy for years to come. King Fahd summarized the stagnation in Saudi-Iranian relations by saying, 'We cannot change the geographic reality of Iran, and Iran cannot change our geographic reality . . . On our side, we do not ask Iran for anything more than mutual respect and good neighbourliness, which are the same things that Iran requests'.²³

4.5 CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from Saudi-Iranian relations in the 1980s is that it started and ended with extreme exchanges of hatred and enmity, and instead of reconciliation over time it ended with the suspension of diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, behind the veil of animosity the two countries continued to follow a policy, whereby one country's abstention from meddling in a certain issue would be reciprocated in the same manner by the other country. Moreover, despite the negativity of the bilateral foreign policy discourse between the two states, they both showed extreme self-restraint by not resorting to the use of force. Minor clashes and incidents did happen, but physical escalation was always averted at the last moment. The first years of the revolution did raise fears of Saudi Arabia falling victim to the export of revolutionary ideals; nevertheless, in the post-1984 period the Saudis learned to differentiate between Iran's rhetoric and its practice.

The great impact of the Iranian Revolution on Saudi-Iranian relations is that it helped redefine state identity in ways that made both parties prone to conflict and enmity. The revolution did, in fact, transform Iran's state identity dramatically from a pro-status quo, Western-oriented state into a radical revisionist regime vying to transform the norms and values of the regional state system. Even Saudi Arabia, which prided itself as peaceful interlocutor of the region, shifted towards the far Right,

²³ Kuwait News Agency, 3 May 1988.

utilizing Islamic revivalist movements to counter revolutionary Iran. It ended up building institutions and centres abroad to advance its Wahhabi version of Islam.

The rivalry in the 1980s represented a clash of state identities, and furthermore a struggle between two conflicting normative orders on the regional scene. The normative order of resistance and anti-imperialism stood opposite to a pro-status quo conservatism that was reliant on US military presence for security. However, there were incidents when reason was employed and the prospect of goodwill was demonstrated. The shuttle diplomacy of the mid-1980s presented an opportunity as Iran sought to reconsider its unapologetic rhetoric; nevertheless, Khomeini was intent on keeping Saudi–Iranian normalisation off-limits. Indeed, Khomeini’s legacy in Saudi Arabia was far more damaging for the relationship than any other factor, and it locked the two state identities in a cycle of competition, contempt, and deep suspicion. The state’s national interests were maintained, especially when regime survival depended on it; nevertheless, the state’s foreign policy discourse, its strategic orientation and its regional affairs and friendships all went along with the way the state perceived its identity and role in world politics.

FROM DÉTENTE TO RAPPROCHEMENT

Stops and Starts on the Road to Friendly Relations 1990–1997

I am a person who likes to be frank and tell it as it is. We have a saying in our country: your friend is the one who tells you the truth, not just who believes you.

Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz¹

During the Islamic Conference Organization (OIC) meeting in Islamabad in March 1997, Crown Prince Abdullah met with President Rafsanjani. In the meeting, Rafsanjani expressed to Abdullah that Iran was serious about normalising relations and foregoing past animosity. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 24 November 2010) A few years earlier, President Rafsanjani had sought to break Iran's isolation by restoring relations with its Gulf neighbours; however, his efforts were often undermined by revolutionary hardliners who maintained that Saudi Arabia was an existential enemy that could not be reckoned with, let alone be trusted. (Hiro 2001: 222) This hard-line position rested on a number of facts: Saudi Arabia's resistance to Iran's export of its revolutionary ideals, its support for Iraq during the war with Iran in the 1980s, its close alliance with the United States (the ultimate Iranian enemy), and the continued presence of US forces in the Gulf and Saudi assistance for them. (Potter and Sick 2002: 357-358)

Despite these obstacles, President Rafsanjani had prepared the ground for a fruitful meeting with Crown Prince Abdullah by declaring that the hajj pilgrimage was strictly a spiritual ritual, thus disagreeing with the hard-liners at home who maintained that it was also a political congregation where anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiments should be expressed. Rafsanjani even spoke frankly with his Saudi counterpart, saying that this meeting would upset some of his fellow statesmen in Iran, but that he wholeheartedly felt it was time to turn the page on the past and start a new chapter. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 24 November 2010) Crown Prince Abdullah said that he

¹ 'Interview with Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia', *Time Magazine*, 11 May 1988.

welcomed the gesture: he stated that the presence of US troops in the region, meant to contain Iran, was inadvisable in the long term, and gave his unequivocal support to Iran's presidency in the OIC. (Keynoush 2007: 157) Nevertheless, Abdullah noted that Saudi Arabia had tried to stabilize relations with Iran in the past, only to be rebuffed later by senior officials in Tehran. While he valued the President's efforts, Abdullah needed to see some positive change from the Iranian side. Rafsanjani promised to follow words with action, and told Abdullah that he would be seeing positive gestures from the Iranian leadership in addition to mere agreement. Nevertheless, Rafsanjani explained that because Iran is a "democracy", there would be people who could not support this step; he felt that Saudi Arabia needed to help those who believed in peaceful coexistence between the two nations. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 24 November 2010) The meeting ended positively, and soon the Saudi press would hail this as a constructive approach to easing the tensions between the two states. (Hiro 2001: 222)

Following the meeting, Rafsanjani summoned Iran's trusted diplomatic envoy to Germany, Dr. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, to Tehran. Mousavian was instructed to travel to Marrakech, where Crown Prince Abdullah was vacationing, to conduct secret talks with the Saudis on the issue of normalization.² (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010) Mousavian and Rafsanjani's son, Mehdi, travelled without a visa to Morocco and were escorted to the private, unreported meeting. Crown Prince Abdullah had a four-hour discussion with Mousavian, telling him, 'I talked with you extensively so I can test if you are a man that I can trust and make a deal with. Let us meet in Jeddah'. (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010) Mousavian told the Crown Prince, 'The message I carry is that we are willing to put the past behind us and work a framework of cooperation that can help revive and normalize the relationship between the two states'. (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010)

Mousavian travelled again with Mehdi to see Crown Prince Abdullah in Riyadh. The talks spanned four nights, culminating in an agreement on an extensive 16-point framework.³ Crown Prince Abdullah asked Mousavian to meet with King Fahd to brief him on the talks. He was then asked to meet with Prince Nayef, the Saudi interior minister. Mousavian (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010) later recalled

² According to Mousavian, 'After Rafsanjani returned from the Islamic Conference in Islamabad, he called while I was serving in Germany and asked me to communicate with the Saudi Crown Prince's office to set up a meeting'.

³ See Chapter 8.

that Prince Nayef appeared pessimistic about the prospects of rapprochement. Both sides agreed to cooperate, however, and it was suggested that the heads of state meet after the ministerial meetings were concluded. Mousavian went to see Crown Prince Abdullah one final time, and the prince reaffirmed that he heartily believed in the prospect of friendship between the two states. He even joked about ‘buying land and marrying a young lady from Iran’. (Author’s Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010)

On a more public level, Saudi Arabia reacted favourably to a series of Iranian speeches calling for improved relations, such as those of Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati at the end of March 1997. As a result, Velayati visited Saudi Arabia in the spring of 1997—his first visit since 1993. (Cordesman 2003: 45) A few months later, Crown Prince Abdullah said in an interview with *Time Magazine*:

I came out of the Islamic Summit in Tehran in December 1997 with a strong impression of their desire for dialogue and to adopt a different approach. I felt that many of them are looking seriously for better ways to emerge from isolation and open a window through which they can reach out to others.⁴

As a result, the state of enmity and mistrust that had overshadowed relations since the 1979 revolution started to thaw. The difference between the détente of 1991 and the rapprochement of 1997 was a result of change in the normative regional order⁵ desired by each state; the policies of the two states became less conflicting and closer in their goals. As will be demonstrated, public opinion in the two states regarding what norms and values should define the regional order—such as security, peace and coexistence—became so similar that both Saudis and Iranians would be making similar statements on issues such as the necessity of union and cooperation between Muslim countries and the rejection of foreign intervention. We will be discussing the changes to, as well as the stable points of, Saudi–Iranian relations between 1990 and 1997, highlighting the issues that can be considered part of the old pattern, and offering some insight into changes in matters of state identity and foreign policy choices. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the process of this change in state identity is different in each case.

⁴ 'Interview with Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia', *Time Magazine*, 11 May 1988.

⁵ A normative regional order is any system of rules and shared expectations governing a particular social situation. Moreover, normatively-defined obligations on the whole are perceived to be accepted, while conversely collectivities might have normative sanctions in performing their functions and promoting their legitimate interests. (Bruce and Yearley 2006: 215)

5.1 YEARS OF DÉTENTE: THE RAFSANJANI PRESIDENCY

Following Ayatollah Khomeini's death on 3 June 1989, President Ayatollah Seyed Ali Hoseyni Khamenei became the supreme leader; Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was elevated from his role as speaker of the parliament to the office of president. Saudi–Iranian relations remained severed, and the boycott of the hajj by Iranian pilgrims continued. Despite the departure of Khomeini and the end of the Iran–Iraq War, tensions between the two states continued with no sign of improvement. This was reflected in the continual attacks levied between the countries through the media. As Iraqi armed forces entered Kuwait, the Iranian political establishment responded carefully: they condemned Saddam Hussein's acts of aggression, but stopped short of supporting any foreign intervention to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait. As Hunter (1993: 198) notes, 'Clearly, Iran could not condone Iraq's invasion of Kuwait given its own bitter experience with Iraqi aggression. Nor could Iran be comfortable with the prospect of seeing Saddam Hussein emerge as the hegemon of the Persian Gulf, then perhaps once more turn his aggression toward Iran'.

The prospect of foreign—mainly US—intervention in ousting Saddam sparked a strong debate in Iran between those who opposed increased US presence in the Gulf and those arguing for a neutral position towards the crisis. (Ahmadi 2008: 146) President Rafsanjani expressed Iran's main fear when, in response to those arguing for Iran to join hands with Iraq in an Islamic union against the 'Western imperialist onslaught', he asked rhetorically, 'Do you want Saddam Hussein this time to really turn the Persian Gulf into the [Arabian] Gulf?'⁶ (Hunter 1993: 198)

Iran condemned the foreign intervention publicly. Iranian Vice President Hassan Habibi conveyed Iran's support for the ousting of Saddam through its Syrian ally, at the time a member of the International Coalition. The Vice President also hinted at the prospect of exchanging visits with neighbouring Gulf states. (Khaddam 2010: 210) Iran pursued a cautious policy after the war. It did not take advantage of Iraq's internal problems: for example, even when Saddam besieged Najaf during the Shi'a uprising of 1991, Iran essentially remained on the sidelines. (Hunter 1993: 199) Nevertheless, Iran called on the GCC states to minimize their dependence of the US and

⁶ The argument behind supporting Iraq as a Muslim state can be traced to the series of Iranian–Iraqi letter exchanges that started with President Saddam's April 1990 letter to President Rafsanjani promising normalization of relations. (They are fully published in Khaddam 2010; For analysis of the letters, see: Ragai 1997)

rely on themselves to maintain regional security. A keynote speech by Ayatollah Khamenei warned:

Anyone who fights America's aggression, its greediness and its plans to encroach on the Persian Gulf region has engaged in Jihad in the cause of Allah and anyone who is killed on that path is martyr . . . We will not allow the American to gain a foot-hold in an area where we are present and turn it into their sphere of influence. (Hunter 1993: 198)

In the eyes of those revolutionaries, Iran's practical choice not to take sides in the conflict was contrary to Ayatollah Khomeini's teachings. Moreover, the Rafsanjani government's overtures to some Arab states and the careful messages it sent through its Syrian mediator angered many within Iranian society, who were opposed to reconciliation with GCC countries. Foreign Minister Velayati met with some of his GCC counterparts in New York on 3 October 1990. Iran also received the Kuwaiti foreign minister, who latter expressed regret at his country's past support of Iraq.⁷ (Tarock 1997: 203) Moreover, initial signals from GCC countries were promising and well received in Tehran. (Ahmadi 2008: 147) It scored a success when the GCC members declared that the GCC would welcome better ties with Iran and that Iran should be included in any future regional security system following their summit meeting in Qatar in December 1990. The Iranians responded, 'This [communiqué] could be regarded as a welcome beginning for some fundamental collaborations between the countries of the region to end the need for the presence of foreign troops in the region. Iran would be ready to collaborate in all aspects of the Gulf security plan'. (Malek 1991: 17) In addition, during the Third Conference on the Persian Gulf, held in Tehran in January, Velayati said, 'We hope the Persian Gulf countries maintain [Gulf] security without foreign intervention . . . Let us manage our own affairs'.⁸ (Tarock 1997: 203)

In response, Arabian Gulf states individually started talking regarding the role of Iran in the region. Sultan Qabus of Oman called for regional cooperation, which was to include Iran, to establish security in the region. According to Rakel (2007: 174), Oman favoured a regional security arrangement that included Iran, probably as a counterweight to Saudi Arabia. During a visit to Tehran in March 1992, Omani Foreign Minister Alawi talked about the possibility of giving Iran a consultative role in

⁷ BBC, 3 October 1990; FBIS-NES, 1990.

⁸ The Iranian Journal, 1991.

establishing a regional security arrangement.⁹ Kuwait's minister of state for foreign affairs, Shaykh Nasser al-Sabah, stressed that 'without the powerful presence of Iran, no regional security is possible or practical'. (Pasha 1992: 389) Qatari Foreign Minister Mubarak al-Khater stressed that Iran would be included in any regional arrangements and contacts were already under way. (Ahmadi 2008: 147)

Rafsanjani's cautious approach to the war seemed to pay off. The quick defeat of Iraq dealt a major blow to his opponents and increased the prestige of Iran's foreign policy. (Baktiari 1996: 214) His approach didn't succeed in preventing a foreign intervention; nevertheless, what mattered was Iran's moral victory over the Gulf states, who had applauded Saddam Hussein for his attempts at halting the Islamic Revolution. As Tarock (1997: 203) notes, 'Iran now claimed that it too had been a victim of Iraqi aggression and that the Arabs' support of him was morally wrong'.

5.1.1 The implications of the Second Gulf War, 1990–1991

Despite the change of heart, Saudi Arabia, the biggest member of the GCC, remained cautious towards Iran. It even quietly criticized other members of the GCC for warming to Tehran's overtures without waiting to discover Iran's true intentions. This situation would change considerably a few months later. In an unprecedented step, President Rafsanjani conveyed to the Syrians his desire to meet with Crown Prince Abdullah, head of the Saudi delegation, while attending the OIC meetings held in Senegal in December 1990. The meeting was the first and—thus far—highest-level encounter between the two leaderships following the revolution. (Pasha 2003: 72) Rafsanjani and Abdullah had a lengthy meeting in which Rafsanjani stated that his approach to Saudi Arabia was likely to be received negatively at home due to their handling of the 1987 hajj incident, where 402 people, including 275 Iranians pilgrims, died in a violent clash with Saudi forces. He also hinted that relations could be resumed if the issue of the hajj was resolved.¹⁰ (Fischer 2003: 371)

Rafsanjani mentioned that Iran was comfortable with the positive messages from the GCC, but stated that Gulf states should consider a broader regional security framework that moved away from the reliance on foreign (*i.e.*, US) troops. Abdullah responded cautiously, welcoming the gesture and promising to revise the quota for

⁹ *Gulf News*, 10 March 1992.

¹⁰ In April 1990, one hundred and forty deputies of the Iranian parliament issued an open letter, setting terms for the return of Iran's pilgrims. The Parliamentarians demanded that the Saudis apologize and pay blood money to the families; however, Saudi Arabia rejected this. (Kramer 2008: 177)

Iranians in the 1991 hajj season. Following the historic meeting, Foreign Minister Velayati travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet his counterpart, Prince Saud al-Faisal, in mid-March 1991. After successful, though extensive, talks, Velayati announced: ‘The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran have reached understanding on solving all problems between them and will be restoring diplomatic ties within the next 48 hours’.¹¹ The Saudi Press Agency quoted a joint statement issued after the talks as saying the two men ‘touched on the question of hajj and bilateral ties in a positive framework, and an understanding was in principle reached between the two sides’.¹² As a result, the two countries agreed to reopen their respective embassies in each other’s capital cities and elevated their diplomatic representation to an ambassadorial level on 2 March 1992.¹³

While hostile media exchanges were the common practice throughout the 1980s, this started to change on both sides following the new developments in Saudi–Iranian relations. In 1991, droves of Muslim pilgrims from Iran demonstrated peacefully in Mecca and Medina—something they had not done since 1980. (Al-Mani 1996: 169) The earthquake in Iran in June 1991 provided the Saudis with an opportunity to show goodwill, and within days the Saudis had dispatched a large-scale mercy mission delivering medical and relief supplies. (Goldberg 1990: 601) Tehran expressed gratitude for the ‘humanitarian Islamic behaviour’.¹⁴ Prince Saud al-Faisal visited Tehran later that June and indicated that Iran should play an active part in future security arrangements for the Gulf. President Rafsanjani received the Saudi foreign minister warmly, and maintained that political and economic co-operation between the two countries would have ‘important consequences for the whole Islamic *umma*’. (Marschall 2003: 116) The Saudi minister also extended an invitation for a state visit to Saudi Arabia to Rafsanjani on behalf of King Fahd. Iran proposed a regional nonaggression pact for the Gulf countries. According to Baktiari (1996: 214), the details of this pact

¹¹ Reportedly, Saud Al-Faisal privately offered to accept a larger number of Iranian pilgrims in 1991. The Saudi minister also proposed that the Iranians hold their rally in a ‘fixed’ place, without marching through the streets of Mecca. Khamenei’s annual message could be read to the pilgrims at that rally, just as Khomeini’s message had been read in the past. (Kramer 2008: 178)

¹² ‘Saudi-Iranian Relations Are Being Restored’, *New York Times*, 18 March 1991.

¹³ Gargash (1996: 145) and Tarock (1997: 203) claim that President Rafsanjani made an official visit to Saudi Arabia where he met with King Fahd in Riyadh April 1991; however, during this research I have not found any evidence of this visit. It may perhaps have been confused with Velayati’s visit to Saudi Arabia in the same period.

¹⁴ *Ukaz Newspaper*, 14 June 1991; Saudi Press Agency, 25 June 1991; Saudi Press Agency, 27 June 1991.

were not revealed, but Velayati stated in an interview that Iran was seeking a ‘demilitarized Persian Gulf’.

In July 1991, the official Saudi government bulletin characterized relations with Iran as ‘excellent’.¹⁵ A possible contributing factor to this euphoric assessment may have been Iran’s promise to Saud al-Faisal that the Islamic Republic would in the future stop offering support to ‘dissenters of any colour’ in Saudi Arabia and the other member-states of the GCC.¹⁶ (Kaim 2008: 128) The Saudis attached great importance to Rafsanjani’s attempt to show that Iran was willing to give national interest priority over exporting ideological ideals. (Fürtig 2002: 108) As prominent Saudi journalist Othman al-Omeir observed, this was considered a true turnabout in Iran’s foreign policy, in which the Islamic Republic had finally transformed from a revolution to a state.¹⁷

More importantly, Riyadh and Tehran were discussing the future of Iraq after the predicted “withering away” of Saddam’s regime. The Saudi leadership felt betrayed by Saddam after a decade of financial and political support against revolutionary Iran. Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, a close friend of Crown Prince Abdullah, succeeded after much persuasion to align both Saudi Arabia and Iran against his long-time rival, Saddam Hussein. Abdullah agreed to meet with the Iraqi opposition leader, Ayatollah Sayed Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim.¹⁸ He also urged King Fahd to aid the Iraqi opposition, which had close ties with Iran and Syria. The King met with al-Hakim and other members of the Iraqi opposition, where he promised assistance and financial aid. (Author’s Interview, Chalabi 18 January 2008) According to Pasha (2003: 72), King Fahd told al-Hakim: ‘I hope to see you in Baghdad soon’. This led to extensive secret talks between Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia on the prospect of overthrowing Saddam using the Iraqi opposition. The process—which was led primarily by Syria—was concluded in a secret trilateral conference held in Tehran on 27 June 1992. The result was inconclusive, mostly due to Saudi reluctance to move forward with a plan that might bring pro-Iranian leadership to power in Iraq. (See: Khaddam 2010)

¹⁵ 'Saudi Government Bulletin', Saudi Arabian Embassy in Washington, D.C., July 1991.

¹⁶ *Mideast Mirror*, 7 June 1991.

¹⁷ *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 5 June 1991.

¹⁸ Al-Hakim was leader of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, an Islamic militant organization supported by Iran, from 1982 to 2003.

5.1.2 Obstacles to the 1991 détente

Despite the remarkable improvement in Saudi–Iranian relations, a number of important issues remained unresolved. They had differences *inter alia* about Afghanistan, where they supported opposing factions. They also differed on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process—especially after the Madrid Conference in October 1991—which was tolerated by Riyadh but contested by Tehran. President Rafsanjani wrote to King Fahd, expressing his concerns that supporting such peace with Israel might slow progress towards a larger cooperation on common regional security issues. (Ramazani 1992: 399) However, the Palestine issue was not a significant concern of the relationship, particularly because Syria was already participating in the Madrid Conference.

At that time, bilateral problems were more pressing than third party conflicts. As Marschall (2003: 117) notes, the fact that Saudi Arabia and Iran began talking did ‘not signify that they were agreeing, it only means they were talking’. The differences between the two sides were fundamental, and it seemed that throughout these discussions often too precedence over all others. Nevertheless, these discussions were significant because they were proof that Saudi–Iranian relations were being revived.

A clear example of this was the regional crisis that broke out in 1992 over three small but strategically important islands overlooking the Strait of Hormuz. (Rakel 2007: 162) A series of claims and counterclaims between Iran and the UAE over the ownership of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunbs began after Iran expelled and denied entry to non-UAE citizens working on the jointly-administered island of Abu Musa between April and August 1992. (Marschall 2003: 121) By the end of 1992, Iranian policy on the three islands was noticeably harsher. By late December, Iran had deployed additional Islamic Revolutionary Guard troops to the islands, and President Rafsanjani said that Gulf Arabs would ‘have to cross a sea of blood’ to reach the islands, implying that Iran would only give up its claims as a result of defeat in war.¹⁹ At the same time, several hard-line newspapers in Iran called for the country to reassert its claim to Bahrain, despite the Shah’s earlier recognition of Bahrain’s sovereignty. (Caldwell 1996: 54)

¹⁹ ‘Iran Asserts Claims to 3 Disputed Islands in Gulf’, *New York Times*, 27 December 1992.

Saudi Arabia found itself in a difficult position. On the one hand, it had been pleased with prospects of normalization with Iran and saw real benefits in befriending it to keep Iraq at bay, but on the other hand it could not tolerate Iran's attempts to assert its claims over other GCC territories. For the Saudis, it was unclear whether Rafsanjani supported the escalation of this dispute, or whether it was unilaterally administered by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard. In any event, even if Rafsanjani was not behind the agitation himself, Iran's actions threatened his diplomatic efforts to improve Iran's relations with its Arab neighbours in general, and with Saudi Arabia in particular. (Caldwell 1996: 53) Saudi Arabia reacted strongly to what it called "false claims" and joined other GCC states in describing Iran's occupation as a breach of UAE territorial integrity and a threat to regional security. The GCC states went further, demanding an end to Iran's annexation of the islands as a precondition to the normalization of relations with Tehran. ('Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf', Regional Survey of the World 2004: MENA, 2004)

Iran responded forcefully, repudiating the Saudi and GCC statements. The Islands Dispute became a sensitive matter and an issue of national pride to be exploited by those elements opposed to rapprochement with Iran's Arab neighbours. Consequently, Rafsanjani became much more assertive in his support of Iranian claims to the islands, rejecting the international arbitration suggested by the Saudis and—carefully—criticizing the position of the Arab Gulf states. Thus, as Caldwell (1996: 56) notes, 'Iranian policy toward Abu Musa and the Tunbs may be viewed as an indicator of Iranian domestic politics'. Although the dispute did not escalate into a confrontation as was anticipated at the time, it remained an obstacle to Saudi–Iranian rapprochement and would be raised occasionally by both sides.

5.1.3 Saudi Arabia and Iran's conflicting normative views of Gulf security after the Second Gulf War

Gulf security was indeed a fundamental cause for disagreement on a strategic level between the two states after 1991. The weakening—or perhaps taming—of Iraq following the war pushed policy-makers to advocate a new regional security framework. In mid-February 1991—even before the end of the war—GCC, Syrian, and Egyptian representatives met in Cairo and considered the establishment of a 'body for co-operation and co-ordination amongst themselves in the economic, political and

security fields'.²⁰ After the war, the “six plus two” signed the Damascus Declaration, under which Syrian and Egyptian troops were to be stationed in the Gulf in return for US\$10 billion. (Milani 1994: 344) Cairo opposed any Iranian role and insisted that the main movers in post-war security should be Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt.²¹ Syrian President Asad, however, assured Velayati that Iran would have a significant role in the post-war Gulf security order; even President Bush, seeking limited rapprochement with Tehran, stated that Iran ‘as a big country’ should not be forever treated as an enemy by the countries in the region.²² (Marschall 2003: 117)

Despite Iran’s reservations towards the Damascus Declaration, it refrained from opposing it publically, so as not to embarrass its Syrian ally—but it still made tremendous efforts to keep the US out of any regional security arrangements. To this end, Iran emphasized the GCC’s own concepts of self-reliance and “Gulfanisation”. (Kaim 2008: 129) Iran hoped that such a strategy would reduce the GCC’s foreign dependence and its reliance on the US in particular. Iran could then solidify its image as the guardian of autonomy and conscience in the GCC. (Amirahmadi 1990: 23) Only by removing the high-profile Western—and especially US—military presence in the Gulf could the Iranian leadership could again attempt to reassert its authority as the dominant power, and the only one equipped to ensure tranquillity. (Kaim 2008: 129) As Ehteshami (1995: 147) argues, ‘Thus what may have started as a short-term Iranian policy of isolating Iraq though rapprochement with the West and its Gulf Arab allies was to blossom into a new framework of reference to guide Iran’s foreign policy after the ceasefire’.

But Tehran would quickly be disappointed. Following the war, the US made a series of defence ties with each of the Gulf States, including a formalized defence agreement with Saudi Arabia.²³ This minimized Tehran’s chances of becoming part of a regional security arrangement devised by the countries around the Gulf in order to facilitate the departure of US forces from the region. When Kuwait signed a formal ten-year defence pact with Washington, Iran denounced it, arguing that it would encourage more US military intervention than before. The GCC States paid no heed. (Hiro 2001: 196)

²⁰ 'Egypt and the Gulf Crisis', Egyptian Press & Information Bureau, 1991.

²¹ 'Egypt and the Gulf Crisis', Egyptian Press & Information Bureau, 1991.

²² 'News Digest for March 1991', Keesing's Record of World Events, 1991.

²³ For the defense agreements between the US and Saudi Arabia, see: Katzman 21 December 2005, *Persian Gulf States: Post-war issues*: 27.

Although there remained serious differences over regional policy in Saudi–Iranian relations, the heart of the problem can be located elsewhere: there has been mistrust between the Saudi and Iranian leaderships. From the Iranian point of view, the Saudi leadership was too dependent on US military presence, and failed to recognize Iran’s Islamic role and its commitment to support the resistance against the oppressors. This suggests that differences over security was not the sole reason; rather, it is likely that this was a clash of two state identities with irreconcilable differences. As for the Saudis, Iranian politicians had been incoherent and contradictory over the years. As Prince Turki al-Faisal, former director of Saudi Intelligence, asks:

You cannot make sense of Iranian officials, they would tell you or promise you something only to discover later that they are plotting something sinister . . . there is the Supreme Leader, the President, the Parliament and the Revolutionary Guard, which seem to operate independently from the official government . . . which one should you listen to? (Author’s Interview, al-Faisal 1 November 2010)

Furthermore, the mistrust was also an issue felt within the Iranian leadership towards Saudi officials. In his reflections on this period, President Rafsanjani notes that differences between Iranian officials and agencies over the reconciliation with Saudi Arabia were significant at that time. His administration felt that it would be difficult to suggest any moderation of Iran’s stance towards Saudi Arabia—let alone normalisation. This was due to the animosity that characterised the 1980s and memories of the 1987 hajj incident. As Rafsanjani (2011: 185–186) recalls, ‘Members of the Expediency Council showed mixed reactions to [a] Saudi invitation [for Iranian officials to visit Saudi Arabia]. Some found it positive and some found it concerning.’

Thus, the events in 1991 resulted merely in a *détente* between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the prospect of normal relations failed. While bilateral trade, flights and the hajj all resumed, strategic differences and serious security issues remained.

5.1.4 Iranian state identity under Rafsanjani

Although Rafsanjani would come to be viewed as a conservative by many of Iran’s reformists in the period between 1998 and 2005, he was considered a moderate or a pragmatist—both at home and abroad—when he took over as the presidency in 1989.²⁴ (Herzig 2004: 504) His vision of Iran’s state identity in the 1980s had been similar to that of Ayatollah Khomeini: he prioritized radical ideological interests over all

²⁴ Prior to the 2005 elections in which he ran for president, Rafsanjani would have been considered a centrist figure by both reformists and conservatives.

other foreign policy concerns and rejected the international status quo, particularly in the Gulf. Reviewing his statements in this period, one can conclude that he had a tendency to cast neighbouring GCC states—most importantly Saudi Arabia—as enemies who had to be overthrown to safeguard Iran’s regional supremacy. He advocated the export of Iran’s revolutionary ideals, and often declared that the Saudis were inciting and aiding foreign interference in the region’s security. These views and positions were in line with the regime’s attempt to exalt religious culture within the political boundary of Iran, and ‘to solidify a national identity with a more complicated definition of identity’ in the country. (Vaziri 1993: 200) Nevertheless, this vision would change over time, and by the time he became responsible for the country’s foreign policy Rafsanjani advocated an alternative definition for Iran’s state identity. The experience of invasion and the existential struggle for survival during the Iran–Iraq War made him more concerned with conventional national interests—namely territorial integrity and national sovereignty—and of the ways in which the international system and its rules could be used to secure these interests. (Herzig 2004: 504)

In this context, Rafsanjani began to modify and moderate the role of religion—and revolutionary ideals in particular—in Iran’s state identity. His administration took note of Iran’s pre-Islamic past, which during Khomeini’s time had been rejected outright. (Vaziri 1993: 200) He channelled the patriotic sentiment in contemporary political Islam that rejects the nation–state paradigm in favour of the all-encompassing Islamic *umma* at the national level. As al-Taie (1996: 51) notes, ‘The Iran–Iraq War, the accommodation of both certain opposition groups outside and supporters inside, and the emergent foreign threats of different sources and directions altogether have caused these recent tendencies to generate and to develop into some form of religious nationalism in the country’.

As a result, Rafsanjani’s vision of Iran’s state identity was based on three considerations. First, he felt that Iran could not change the region’s political map. Second, he wanted Iran to try to adjust to a new balance of power in the region, in which US had played a major role in creating this new balance of power. Third, he wanted to initiate relations with Saudi Arabia, mostly because it is a major country in the GCC. Rafsanjani’s prime objective in pursuing such policies was to recover ground lost during the eight years of the Iran–Iraq War, and consequently to reassert Iran’s influence in the region. (Alam 2000: 1631) Nevertheless, these considerations were

presented not as a diversion from the past, but rather as a continuation of the revolution's principles. Indeed, Rafsanjani would always cite Khomeini's statements and sermons to support his position, reminding his audience that the *Rahbar* (Khomeini) was 'the source of all the country's divine blessings'. (Faruqui 1998: 2071)

This shift of priorities in Iran's state identity generated some inconsistencies and contradictions in the state's foreign policy. On the one hand, there was a dawning realization that the Islamic Republic's negative image abroad and its international isolation were at least in part self-inflicted, and this in turn led to a focus on building trust and functioning relationships with all but a handful of states that were still beyond consideration—namely, the US and Israel. On the other hand, there was on-going distrust of the international system and its institutions and of broader processes such as globalization insofar as they were seen as vehicles for US hegemony. Thus Tehran continued to pursue self-reliance in security, with an emphasis on developing the capacity to deter and counter likely threats. (Herzig 2004: 505)

Despite efforts made by the Rafsanjani administration to open up to the world, Iran remained somewhat isolated, if not a pariah, in the world community. (Amuzegar 2006: 67) Rafsanjani's policies merely achieved a tenuous relationship with the European Union; revealed suspicion from Sunni Muslim countries such as Lebanon, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia regarding the Islamic Republic's propagation of Shi'ism in the region (e.g., Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia); a lack (and need) of a final peace treaty with Iraq; and continued sporadic disputes with Iran's neighbours, including Pakistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan under the Taliban, and the United Arab Emirates. These were all formidable challenges to his foreign policy agenda.

5.2 YEARS OF RAPPROCHEMENT: THE KHATAMI PRESIDENCY

The 1997 presidential election was of far-reaching importance to the intensifying power struggle between Iran's rival political factions, namely the conservative religious Right and the reformists who inherited Rafsanjani's pragmatic agenda. As Buchta (2000: 25) notes, '[The election] was also out of the ordinary, insofar as it offered the Iranian public a choice, for the first time since 1980, between two very different political tendencies'. The resounding victory of reformist cleric Seyed Mohammad Khatami took the Iranian polity by surprise: a moderate and mostly unknown clergyman had ousted the hard-line candidate, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, who enjoyed the support of the conservative establishment. (Keddie and Matthee 2002: 318)

While the majlis was still dominated by the conservative Right, the reformists' ascent to power was a watershed in Iran's return to the international scene, in particular in the Arab world. Indeed, while the hardliners wished to keep the revolutionary dogma, those who were more pragmatic—namely the technocratic elite—favoured greater realism aimed at creating better relations and closer ties with the Arabs. (Menashri 2001: 243)

Perhaps the greatest outcome of the elections was that it put an end to the dual leadership of Khamenei and Rafsanjani that had restricted decision-making on important matters of state between 1989 and 1996. The dual leadership had its limits, and one reason for the break between the hardliners and the pragmatists within the conservative camp was the growing power of the former, which led to the side-lining of moderate and pragmatist candidates and parties in the 1996 parliamentary elections. The reformist movement was led primarily by former associates of Rafsanjani and former Left-leaning intellectuals and clerics who shifted towards the centre, opting for moderation and more open relationships with the outside world.

Khatami retained five key ministers from the Rafsanjani government. He also retained Hasan Habibi as first vice president, an important office whose holder functions as cabinet chief and can serve as interim president in case the president is incapacitated, dead, or deposed. Thus Khatami's cabinet choices signalled a continuation and desire for consensus rather than radical change. As Buchta (2000: 42) notes, 'There were no true outsiders . . . nearly all ministers and vice presidents had served as officials, provincial governors, or ministers in the previous Rafsanjani or Musavi governments'.

5.2.1 The reformist discourse

By the mid-1990s, it was obvious that the state had failed to create the society that Khomeini had envisioned, and it was experiencing a growing social and ideological disenchantment. (Mahdavi 2011: 96) It was grappling with the consequences of a demographic change in which seventy per cent of the population was under age thirty. Rapid urbanization and the expansion of higher education were two more structural factors pushing for greater social change. Moreover, the regime's cultural revolution was far from successful. Mahdavi (2011: 97) notes that 'the clerical ruling establishment failed to grasp the dialectics and dynamism of socio-political changes'. As a result, Iran's growing middle class remained economically dissatisfied: they were using their savings, selling off their assets, and engaging in the underground

economy. (Mahdavi 2011: 97) Inflation and foreign debt levels had reached historic highs. (Amuzegar 2006: 59) Moreover, there was dissatisfaction with the absence of some social freedoms, rights and political aspirations in the face of a predominately conservative ruling coalition. (Mahdavi 2011: 97)

It was against this backdrop that the reformist movement of the mid-1990s evolved. The essence of the reform movement was that democratic accountability at home mandated a foreign policy that respected prevailing conventions. (Takeyh 2009: 5) It also sought greater socio-cultural opening and economic opportunity. Originally, the reformist discourse stemmed from the *jihad-ijtihādi* debate within revolutionary clerical groups, and advocated that the time had come for Iran to move rapidly from a political culture of *jihad* to one of *ijtihādi* if it was to keep pace with changing conditions in Iran and in the international environment. (Saikal 2003: 173) To realize this objective, it called for the intertwined goals of achieving “Islamic civil society” as a precondition for (and in tandem with) “Islamic democracy”, and rationalising Iran²⁵’s foreign relations based on the principles of cross-cultural understanding within the international system of nation–states. In essence, its discourse was calling for the advent of a new Shi’ite Islamic vision in accordance with the changing times and conditions—a vision that they claimed was consistent with Iran’s revolutionary principles. (Saikal 2003: 173)

President Khatami—who was the key figure in the reformist movement—argued that the reform agenda treated Iran’s Islamic constitution as sacrosanct and operated within it. Nevertheless, he stressed that not only does Islam have its own concepts of civil society and democracy, but also that the Iranian Islamic constitution was committed to the promotion of such concepts as a means to serve the common good. (Saikal 2003: 173) To the reformists, then, economic development, access to information technology, education, efficiency, and globalization should be the concerns of the state—even an Islamic state. (Sariolghalam 2008: 428) Nevertheless, the reformist intellectuals argued that while concepts such as civil society and democracy had their roots in Western rationalist and liberal values, they were also compatible with Islam. As President Khatami noted, ‘This is exactly why we should never be oblivious to the judicious acquisition of the positive accomplishments of Western society’. (Saikal

²⁵ The term *ijtihād* describes using one’s faculties to form an opinion. The term *jihad* is derived from the Arabic verb *jahada*, which connotes exerting oneself (as in one’s labour or toil). *Jihad-ijtihādi* is an expression of endeavour and struggle in the cause of Allah. (Rehman 2005: 51)

2003: 173) In addition, Khatami argued that the ‘respect for human rights and compliance with their relevant norms and standards is . . . the natural consequence of [Islamic] teachings and precepts’. Furthermore, he made it clear that an Islamic civil society ‘seeks neither to dominate others nor to submit to domination’, but at the same time, ‘as instructed by the Holy Qur’an, [it] considers itself entitled to acquire all requisite means for material and technical progress and authority’. (Saikal 2003: 174)

The evolution of the reformist discourse centred heavily on the promotion economic prosperity; therefore, economic growth, sustainable economic development and the enhancement of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with all neighbouring countries—especially the Arab countries—became a top priority of the Khatami administration. (Alam 2000: 1642) The Islamic Republic, once a staunch opponent of foreign investment, was now also eager to make its market suitable for such involvement. (Yaghmaian 2002: 191) As a result, the reformists’ discourse became more interest-oriented and pragmatic, and this paralleled a general shift in Iranian politics. As Alam (2000: 1642) notes, ‘Regardless of which ideological factions and political factions they belong to most of them are willingly prepared to cooperate with the neighbouring countries in building mutual trust and increasing regional cooperation, harmony and prosperity’.

In a public address explaining his economic revitalization programme, President Khatami emphasized the need to promote investment in manufacturing, including direct foreign investment. His programme proposed the ‘attraction of foreign capital’ while ‘guaranteeing foreign capitals’ principle and profits’, and facilitating the issuing of permits for investment in Iran. (Yaghmaian 2002: 191) To create jobs, the programme proposed ‘using the financial resources of the private sector, foreign credit and investment, and protecting and securing investment’.²⁶ (Yaghmaian 2002: 191)

As a result, Iran showed signs of steadily improving relations with formerly important trading partners including Britain, Germany, and Russia. It also nurtured closer ties with Turkey, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Iran desperately needed foreign investment and expanded trade in order to improve its devastated economy and provide employment and a better life for its rapidly growing population of almost seventy million people. (Clinton and Rubinstein 2000: 208) The Khatami administration moved

²⁶ Khatami’s reformist agenda was supported by intellectuals and urban youth, and his presidency was accompanied by expectations of social reform that would mitigate the harsher aspects of Islamic rule. (Juergensmeyer 2008: 53)

cautiously to encourage foreign investment in the oil and natural gas sectors of the economy and to ease this economic restriction. (Clinton and Rubinstein 2000: 208)

5.2.2 State identity under Khatami

On foreign policy, the reformist discourse of President Khatami argued for the normalisation of Iran's relations with most other countries—notably excluding Israel. Some reformists even called for an informal exchange of intellectuals with the United States. (International Business Publications USA 2001: 132) (The reformists came short of calling for normalisation with the US government itself.) In an interview with CNN in January 1998, Khatami could barely conceal his willingness to open a new chapter between the two governments.²⁷ Nevertheless, Khatami sought to redefine Iran's state identity into one that adhered to international norms and acted in accordance with international institutions and conventions. He stressed the importance of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. (Saikal 2003: 174) In doing so, he persistently underlined the need to promote the common humanity that can bond people together in peace, rather than those 'earthly distinctions' that lead them to conflict. He also sought to apply this approach to the conduct of Iran's relations with not only its archenemy—the US—but also its traditional regional rivals, including Saudi Arabia. (Saikal 2004: 174)

However, Khatami was cautious not to present his own vision of Iran's state identity as opposite to that of Khomeini. As Amuzegar (2006: 67) notes, 'Following the *Rahbar*'s tripartite principles of Iran's foreign policy based on dignity, rationality, and national interest, Khatami began his diplomatic manoeuvres with due diligence'. Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that Khatami's vision of Iran's state identity resembled a continuation of the policies of Rafsanjani, but with a more open and conciliatory approach. (Alam 2000: 1631) In particular, Khatami's administration adopted a *détente* policy in order to fulfil its national interests. Khatami said, 'We have taken some positive steps in relation to the policy of *détente*—steps which must be sustained. We must progress from the stage of *détente* to that of building trust and subsequently to the establishment of lasting regional cooperation'. (Alam 2000: 1631-1632) He stated that 'Iran pursues a policy of *détente* not out of need but out of wisdom and a concern for ourselves and the world'.²⁸ In speech on 5 March 2000, he argued

²⁷ IRNA, 7 January 1998.

²⁸ Ibid.

further that ‘Iran’s détente policy is not at all tactical but a strategy and that Iran believes that the interest of the country, region and the world is linked with stabilisation and expansion of the policy’. (Alam 2000: 1631) Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia-Pacific Affairs, Mohsen Aminsadeh, stated that ‘the détente policy is reliance—building guidelines as well as developing regional and international peace and stability in line with Iran’s political and economic development are the main foundations of Iran’s foreign policy’. (Alam 2000: 1632)

Perhaps an important theme in Khatami’s state identity was his adoption of the “dialogue of civilizations” discourse.²⁹ In a series of public appearances after he became president, he advocated the rejection of any unipolar form of international order and argued that the logic of dialogue was the only viable way to resolve differences between peoples and nations.³⁰ (Petito 2007: 103) According to Khatami, it was necessary to search for a model of international coexistence inspired by the principle of ‘unity in diversity’: he wanted ‘a world that has commonalities, co-existence, but that also has differences and variety’. This model was based on respecting the rights of others and adopting a ‘communicative rationality’. (Amanpour 7 January 1998) Furthermore, the “dialogue of civilizations” entailed a critique of power politics—in particular a rejection of Huntington’s thesis—combined with a commitment to a paradigm for conducting international relations where morality has a prominent role. In a speech made at the UN conference to launch the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Khatami spelled out this concept even more clearly:

We ought to critically examine the prevalent paradigm in international relations based on the discourse of power, and the glorification of might . . . From an ethical perspective, the paradigm of “Dialogue among Civilizations” requires that we give up the will-to-power and instead appeal to will-to-empathy and compassion. Without the will-to-empathy, compassion and understanding, there would be no hope for the prevalence of order in our world. (Khatami 5 September 2000)

²⁹ The global political discourse of ‘dialogue among civilizations’ emerged in the 1990s in the context of the political debate on world order, and against the background of the two competing and powerful discourses of the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1993) and the “end of history”. (Fukuyama 1992)

³⁰ Particularly significant have been the speech he gave in 1999 at the European University Institute in Florence on the occasion of the first visit of a president of the Islamic Republic of Iran to a Western country since the Islamic Revolution. See: Lynch 2000, *The Dialogue of Civilisations and International Public Relations*.

Khatami's introduction of this discourse proved to be positive for Iran's regional and international standing.³¹ First, it presented Iran as nation that seeks coexistence and respect of others values. This marked a departure from the state identity of the Khomeini era, since it entailed the recognition of other states' sovereignty—most importantly that of the neighbouring GCC states. Second, it characterised Iran as a peaceful state seeking communal interests and friendship with the rest of the world. In Khatami's new definition of Iran's state identity, the *mostazafin–mostakbirin* dichotomy was replaced by the idea of dialogue and adherence to international norms. Khatami often used phrases like “multipolar”, “multicultural civilization”, and “search for unity in diversity”, which promised change in Iran's foreign policy. In turn, this resonated with the aspirations of Iran's neighbours, who longed for Iran to abandon its confrontational approach to the region. Arab intellectuals in particular welcomed this discourse, and Khatami's writings and speeches became very popular shortly after they were translated. Regional statesman began to applaud what they saw as rise of a moderate voice in Iranian foreign policy. (Author's Interview, al-Braik 9 January 2012)

In this context, Khatami's vision of a new state identity entailed that Iran no longer try to impose its normative views on the region, either by exporting revolutionary ideals or seeking to incite trouble in neighbouring countries. (Author's Interview, Abtahi 3 March 2008) On the issue of Gulf security, Khatami stated that his country, ‘while emphasizing cooperation among states in the Persian Gulf region for the preservation of regional peace and stability, considers the conclusion of collective defence security arrangements in the Persian Gulf an assured step toward the establishment of lasting security in the region and toward the defence of the common interests and concerns of all the countries and nations concerned’.³²

5.2.3 Continuity and change in Saudi–Iranian relations in 1997

Many senior Saudi officials saw Khatami's election as president of Iran as an indication that Iran might be evolving into a state with which Saudi Arabia could have friendly relations, and that the new Iranian regime would focus on domestic issues rather than on regional and ideological ambitions. (Cordesman 2003: 45) They believed that they might be able to reach an accommodation with Iran that traded Saudi support

³¹ On 4 November 1998, the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted the resolution proposed by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, and designated the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations. (Petito 2007: 103)

³² 'OIC Should Play Active Role in Shaping New World Order: Khatami', *Arab News*, 1 September 2001.

for better relations between Iran and the Arab world for Iranian non-interference in Saudi affairs and an easing of the Iranian military build-up in the Gulf. (Cordesman 2003: 45) Anticipation from the Saudis following Khatami's elections would actually be fulfilled in some aspects.

In the course of three years, Khatami and his team managed to popularize significant concepts that would shake the conservative elite, emphasizing civil society, rule of law, tolerance, pluralism, and freedom of expression. Internationally, Khatami opted for improving relations with other nations based upon mutual respect and the "dialogue of civilizations". (Keddie and Matthee 2002: 318) More important—from a Saudi point of view—Khatami's policies were a continuation of Rafsanjani's consolatory approach towards Saudi Arabia. In fact, the Saudis received assurance and confirmation from their Iranian counterparts that Khatami would continue Rafsanjani's efforts to improve relations with the Saudis. They even suggested that Khatami had room for improvement to overcome the hard-liners' resistance to strengthening relations with Saudi Arabia, especially given his landslide win in the elections. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 24 November 2010)

Thus, Iran and Saudi Arabia began to cooperate in key areas like bilateral trade and oil policy. For example, they made a joint effort to persuade OPEC to cut back oil production in June 1997, and in November Saudi Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi met with his new Iranian counterpart, Bijan Zanganeh, before an OPEC meeting in Jakarta.³³ In addition, Iran Air resumed its flights between Iran and Saudi Arabia in September 1997, and Iranian representatives attended a large trade fair in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (Keddie and Matthee 2002: 319)

The Saudis moved further to accommodate the new Iranian president. In a gesture of assurance, Prince Sultan, the Saudi defence minister, stated in July 1997 that 'ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran will never be severed'.³⁴ Furthermore, King Fahd sent Minister of State Abdulaziz al-Khuwaytir to Tehran with messages from himself and Crown Prince Abdullah on 1 July, congratulating President Khatami on his win and expressing their desire to continue the rapprochement that had started when Rafsanjani met with Abdullah in March. Khatami responded positively, and on 26 November he sent an invitation to King Fahd to attend the OIC meetings in Tehran in December

³³ 'Saudis to Push for Higher Quotas at Opec Talks', Reuters, 25 November 1997.

³⁴ 'Saudi Says We'll Never Sever Ties with Iran', Reuters, 17 July 1997.

1997. Although Khatami knew of the king's illness, he had invited the king after Crown Prince Abdullah had already privately agreed to attend. (Cordesman 2003: 45)

The eighth meeting of the OIC was perhaps the largest gathering of Islamic leaders in Tehran since the 1979 revolution, and the timing was very fortunate for Iran. With a new, popularly elected president, Iran was uniquely situated to capitalize on the event to boost its Pan-Islamic credentials. More significantly, Saudi Arabia shunned invitations to attend a US-backed regional economic conference that Israel had attended in Qatar. (Keddie and Matthee 2002: 319) Crown Prince Abdullah's attendance was warmly received in Tehran for its symbolic importance.³⁵ (Author's Interview, al-Oboudi, 14 December 2008) In a statement before the opening session of the conference, Prince Abdullah praised his Iranian hosts: 'With the immortal achievements credited to the Muslim people of Iran and their invaluable contributions . . . it is no wonder that Tehran is hosting this important Islamic gathering'.³⁶ He also called on the OIC to focus on resolving the problems of the Islamic community and promote unity:

The relationship between a Muslim and another Muslim has to be founded on amity, cooperation and giving counsel on a reciprocal basis. . . [We] have to eliminate the obstacles which block the way and be aware of the pitfalls which we may come across as we make our way towards a better future.³⁷

During the course of the conference, Prince Abdullah held extensive meetings with Iranian officials, which included Ali Khamenei and former President Rafsanjani.³⁸ He also held two rounds of private talks with President Khatami. During the second round of talks, President Khatami departed from protocol by calling on the Saudi leader in his suite for a meeting that lasted forty-five minutes. (Menashri 2001: 244)

Yet Prince Abdullah was also careful to qualify his remarks. He attacked terrorism and extremism in the Islamic world. He also made an offer to Iranian officials to mediate between Iran and the US to overcome hostilities:

³⁵ Tariq al-Oboudi is press Secretary to King Abdullah; a position he has held since 1996.

³⁶ 'Crown Prince Abdullah's Speech at 11th OIC Summit', Saudi Embassy, 12 December 1997.

³⁷ *Saudi Embassy*, 12 December 1997.

³⁸ According to al-Oboudi, Iranian officials were highly enthusiastic about Crown Prince Abdullah's visit, as they wanted to show that Iran was not isolated from the Sunni world that Saudi Arabia symbolises. In fact, when Crown Prince Abdullah met with Khamenei, the Iranians allowed the prince to disregard protocol that required him to remove his shoes, as is customary in Iran. The Iranian authorities even removed the photo of Imam Khomeini that is usually placed above the visitor's chair beside the supreme leader. (Author's Interview, al-Oboudi, 14 December 2008)

I do not think it would be difficult for the brotherly Iranian people and its leadership and for a big power like the United States to reach a solution to any disagreement between them . . . There is nothing that will make us more happy than to see this sensitive part of the world enjoy stability, security and prosperity . . . If the United States asks us we will not hesitate to contribute to efforts to bring stability to the region. (Cordesman 2003: 46)

In short, the OIC changed the political language between the two countries. Accusations of treason and betrayal traded by Iranian officials and their Saudi counterparts a decade before were replaced with words of praise. (Keddie and Matthee 2002: 319) Saudi media praised Iran's great efforts to prepare for the Islamic summit, stressing that Iran's success with this summit constituted a new era of Saudi–Iranian relations.³⁹

Khatami's presidency gave impetus to the critical reinterpretation of Iran's foreign policy strategies. In other words, he—along with his predecessor, Rafsanjani—opted to moderate Iran's foreign policy without straying from Ayatollah Khomeini's ideals. Khatami's well-choreographed and effectively organized framework for the introduction of the Iranian dual policy of democratization at home and constructive engagement and dialogue abroad marked the change in Iran's foreign policy. However, Iranian foreign policy-makers continued to employ revolutionary ideas—third-world cooperation, Islamic communitarianism, anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism—but as means rather than as end goals. (Adib-Moghaddam 2006: 85) The adoption of pragmatic foreign policies to attain Iran's long-term strategic preferences reassured regional states and opened up the path towards reconciliation.

The Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997 was of great importance, since it offered the two states a framework for resolving differences and a way of improving mutual interests. A sense of both continuity and change was achieved in their relations. Continuity was maintained as Iran, a Persian Shi'ite state, would continue to be viewed with suspicion by Sunni regimes like that of Saudi Arabia. However, the end of the revolutionary onslaught of the early years—and the prolonged war with Iraq—gave the country an opportunity for peaceful co-existence and cooperation. Saudi Arabia, with its conservative Sunni credentials, US backing, and oil wealth, would still be seen as a hegemonic rival to the Iranian Pan-Islamic leadership in the Gulf. Nevertheless, if Iran could learn how to live with—and accommodate—Saudi Arabia, it could transform the Saudi threat into a partner able and willing to safeguard Iranian interests. Outstanding

³⁹ 'Saudi Prince Reroutes the Ship of State', *International Herald Tribune*, 30 December 1997.

issues in the Saudi–Iranian relationship—US presence in the Gulf, the UAE Islands, Bahrain, OPEC, and the hajj—remained. Nevertheless, there was growing cooperation over mutual bilateral issues, such as trade, regional security, and Iraq. Normalization with “little Satan”—as Khomeini once referred to Saudi Arabia—required almost a decade of relaxing views in Iran’s revolutionaries and courting Saudi interest in improved relations.

5.3 CONCLUSION

Iran’s state identity in the 1980s placed it in a state of enmity against Saudi Arabia, as revolutionary Iran was determined to challenge Saudi Arabia’s religious authority and the legitimacy of its rulers. In particular, the Iraq-Iran War created unprecedented tensions between the two neighbours. The Saudis felt bound to aid Iraq out of fear of Iran’s hegemonic ambitions, religious-ideological threat, and its instigation of Shi’ite minorities across the Gulf. Nevertheless, after the death of Khomeini and the rise of the “dual leadership” of Khamenei and Rafsanjani, Iran was poised for significant change. The Islamic Republic’s isolation and its economic plight invited policies that were designed to reassure the Arab states of Iran’s benign intentions. Indeed, the early 1990s witnessed a change in Iran’s foreign policy behaviour and in its discourse about Saudi Arabia.

The 1991 resumption of relations was a huge step, even though it only amounted to a state of *détente* and not *rapprochement*. The reasons for this can be attributed to two main factors. First, factional politics in the post-Khomeini era made it difficult for pragmatist forces to construct a coherent policy aimed at achieving normal relations with Saudi Arabia. Second, Fadhi and Khamenei remained at the helm of their respective states, and this meant that there was a limit as to how much relations could improve. As a result, the legacy of enmity left over from the 1980s continued to cause fear and opposition on both sides.

Furthermore, we can emphasize that the period between 1991 and 1997 was crucial for both states to test the limits of their cooperation and competition. Here, we can stress that historical differences—such as sectarianism, the US military presence in the Gulf, the UAE Islands, Bahrain, OPEC, and the hajj—remained unresolved throughout the period between *détente* and *rapprochement*, which indicates that their effect was rather more modest than previous research has contended. The fact that Saudi

Arabia and Iran pursued rapprochement despite those differences suggests that changes in state identity might have helped reduce the sense of enmity and rivalry between them.

This is not to suggest that these issues were not significant, but to stress that they can be seen as part of the *continuity* of Saudi–Iranian relations and to shift focus to the elements of change in the relationship, which are their respective state identities. Moreover, continuity and change can also be detected in foreign policy priorities, strategic goals and more importantly in desired norms and values. The important lesson of the détente years is that despite their differences, Saudi Arabia and Iran came to understand how to accommodate each other. The process of accommodation, or learning how to live with differences, is the key to answering the question of rapprochement.

FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING

Saudi Arabia and Iran in the 1990s

In his memoir about the formative years of the Iranian Revolution, President Rafsanjani (2000: 7) notes that in the first few years governmental officials conveyed orders verbally or used trusted messengers to communicate with each other. This was due to the fear that written documents would fall into the hands of the *munafiqeen* (hypocrites), referring to *Mojahedin-e Khalq* (People's Holy Jihadis), and/or remnants of the Shah's regime—namely former SAVAK officers. This example illustrates one of the challenges associated with the study of foreign policy in states such as the ones in the Middle East where secrecy and unwritten conventions prevail: how can we understand foreign policy decision-making in states that lack proper institutional procedures and in which single individuals within the ruling elite can override rules and government bodies? This is why it is necessary to focus on the structure of a regime and identify the key players and influential—sometimes informal—groups and institutions that have a say in politics, whether domestic or international.

The absence of documentation and the hesitation of key policy-makers to speak for varying reasons make it difficult to establish an understanding of often-changing situations. There is a need to reconstruct events and chart important developments in order to reach meaningful outcomes. For example, defining how foreign policy was decided in each state, and who decided it, is necessary to establish an understanding of the 1997 rapprochement and its implications. Moreover, an assessment of the policies adopted following the Second Gulf War is required to explain why the 1991 reconciliation attempt amounted only to a *détente*, while the 1997 meetings yielded a rapprochement process.

In order to answer these questions, this chapter will explore two key factors that have affected the rapprochement process. First, factional politics in Iran saw a power struggle between different components of the Iranian polity after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. This led to the rise of the reformist movement in the 1996 legislative elections, President Khatami's win in 1997, and the introduction of the

“Good Neighbour” policy that aimed to transform Iran’s image in the region. Second, the emergence in 1995 of Crown Prince Abdullah as Saudi Arabia’s chief foreign policy-maker heralded remarkable changes in the country’s standing in the region and its relations with other countries. In this chapter, we will discuss foreign policy decision-making in Iran in the mid-1990s and how the policy towards Saudi Arabia was formulated prior to and during the rapprochement to assess both continuity and change in Iran’s state identity. Moreover, we will discuss Saudi foreign policy decision-making in the same period, examine how policy towards Tehran was formulated and to observe continuity and change in Saudi state identity in this period.

6.1 FACTIONS, POLICIES, AND POSITIONS IN IRAN’S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1990s

Differences between senior figures and groups over foreign policy have been a key feature of post-revolutionary Iran. Negative attitudes and positions towards Saudi Arabia have been present since the beginning, and their expression in Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwās and sermons—as well as his last will and testament—represented an obstacle to normalization with Saudi Arabia. As Mousavian (Author’s Interview, 25 October 2010) notes, ‘In Iran, the public opinion of Saudi Arabia was poor [*sic.*] and people had negative feelings as a result of the 1987 hajj incident’. Advocating rapprochement with Saudi Arabia was not on the agenda for many Iranian officials. In fact, attacking Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries over the islands or the hajj was considered a source of popularity, since it invoked nationalist sentiments. Therefore, Rafsanjani’s—and later, Khatami’s—decision to normalize with regional neighbours including Saudi Arabia and to open up to the West faced a number of challenge; it can be argued that these challenges were inherent in the structure of the Iranian political system. As Ehteshami (2002: 292) explains:

Factionalism and institutional competition were from the beginning an important feature of the post-revolution Iranian political system. The factions themselves are rather fluid, and as they are normally comprised of a variety of tendencies and blocs built around powerful personalities, they tend to act as *fronts* and as such do not always function as a single entity.

There are five primary centres of power in the Iranian state: the Supreme Leader, who is both the spiritual and temporal ruler of Iran and the ultimate arbiter of power; the Assembly of Experts for Leadership that elects him, and which supposedly monitors his performance (Author’s Interview, Abtahi 3 March 2008); the President, who is the chief executive; the majlis, the legislative organ; and the judiciary. In

addition, there are two secondary centres of power. (Hiro 2001: 228) The first is the Council of Guardians of the Constitution, which ensures that legislation is not at odds with shari'a or the Iranian constitution, and which supervises elections for the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, the presidency, and the majlis. The second is the Expediency Council, which resolves differences between the president, the majlis and the Council of Guardians. Both of these bodies are appointed by the Supreme Leader, as is the chief of the judiciary.

Until he died in 1989, *vilāyat-i faqīh* as embodied by Khomeini was the country's most powerful institution of command. On religious matters, Khomeini's fatwā was the law, and on political issues his was the final word. The sources of his immense power were not merely constitutional: his stature as a spiritual and religious father of the nation enabled him to communicate with the lower classes in simple language and thus win their allegiance. (Milani 1993b: 363) After Khomeini's death, Iran went through a series of power struggles between different factions and personalities. The factionalism can be seen on two levels. At the system level, there was rivalry between the Supreme Leader and the president on one hand and the majlis and the Council of Guardians on the other, and this was inherent in the constitutional structure. At the societal level, there were different religious organizations, parties, and clerics operating independently from the state, which were all able to override government agencies and the rule of law.

In the constitution, three mechanisms were devised to put limitations on the president's power and subordinate him to the supreme leader. (Milani 1993b) First, the supreme leader, not the president, became the commander of the armed forces. Second, the constitution empowered the Supreme Leader and the Council of Guardians, half of whose members were to be appointed by the Supreme Leader, to disqualify potential presidential candidates. Finally, the constitution decentralized and divided power within the executive branch between the prime minister, the president and different agencies overseen directly by the Supreme Leader's Office. The rationale for this design, as Milani (1993a: 90) states, 'was the perceived gullibility of the masses to demagogic leaders'. In other words, the Iranian political system was devised in such a way as to ensure that no single person or institution within the system could monopolize power and use it against the supreme leader.

This duality of power was not restricted to the president and supreme leader; it ran like a thread through nearly all political spheres of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was particularly pronounced in the legislative branch, for example, with parliament pitted against the Council of Guardians. It was also evident in the armed forces, where the regular military was played against the Revolutionary Guard. (Buchta 2000: xii) The vagueness of roles and authority in the majlis and the Council of Guardians also created tensions. The Council repeatedly rejected bills that were passed by the majlis and supported by the government, such as one to nationalize foreign trade in the mid-1980s. (Milani 1993a: 92)

This duality of power was responsible not only for enormous inefficiencies and incoherence in the country's foreign and defence policies, but also for the paralysis that affected the political system of Iran. It created grey areas where numerous religious semi-opposition groups were able to thrive. They mainly called for peaceful reform and liberalization of the Islamic system within the limits set by the constitution. These groups retained a degree of influence over political and religious developments, and in the event of a confrontation between the main camps of Iran's political leadership they could tip the scales in favour of the reformers. (Buchta 2000: xii)

To resolve this conflict, new amendments were made to the constitution in February and July 1989. The amendments eliminated the need for the Supreme Leader to be *Marja al-Taqlid*, or chosen by popular acclaim; they also eliminated the post of prime minister. In addition, the Supreme National Security Council and the Expediency Discernment Council of the System were created, with the power to resolve differences between the majlis and the Council of Guardians.¹ Despite these changes, the Supreme Leader's powers were augmented. In addition to the powers bestowed on him in the 1979 constitution, he now had the authority to determine and supervise the general policy of the Islamic Republic in consultation with the Assembly to Determine the Interests of the Republic, whose members he appointed. He also appointed the directors of the radio and television networks. (Milani 1993b: 363)

¹ *Marja al-Taqlid*, the most learned of the Shi'a, literally means "religious reference" or "source to imitate". It is the label given to a Twelver Shi'ite Grand Ayatollah with the authority to make legal decisions within the confines of Islamic law for followers and subordinate clerics. The reason for this amendment was to allow Ali Khamenei, who did not possess the necessary religious credentials, to assume the position of Supreme Leader. See: Walbridge 2001, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*: 231.

In the Iranian constitutional setup—as in most states—competing factions must temper their ideologies and compromise with competing factions in order to realise their goals through the governmental structure. On occasion, these factions will even reinterpret their beliefs in order to prevent conflict between ideology and desired policies. Iranian constitutional scholar Saïd Arjomand (2005: 505) has noted that principles of order encoded in constitutions may be clustered into ideologies and promulgated by the law. These can be heavily contested by the public both when they are enacted and in times of political or social crisis, which shows that constitutions may allow political groups to manipulate a contested legal system to structure governance in a way that overrides existing laws and their technical effect. (Arjomand 2005: 505)

6.1.1 Policy positions in Iran in the 1990s

Following the defeat of liberal and secular Leftist forces in early 1982, three general political positions emerged within the power elite. These have been referred to as radical, reformist, and conservative—or Left, Centre, and Right. Moreover, the central issues that divide the elite include questions about economic reconstruction, Iran's relations with the outside world, and cultural values. Solutions to these issues were proposed, and they claimed an ability to preserve and further the cause of the revolution.² As Siavoshi (1992: 92) explains:

Depending on whether the issue is socioeconomic, political, cultural, or one of foreign policy one can identify not simply two but at times three positions or arguments . . . These positions or arguments cannot easily fit into organizational divisions. In fact, depending on the issue, one can at times find a greater degree of affinity among individuals belonging to or allying with the other organization than among members of the same group.

Although these categorizations—radical, reformist, and conservative—are commonly used, they are highly contested because they disregard certain overlaps between among the factions.³ For instance, although the Leftists were hard-liners on economic issues, they were moderate or relatively liberal regarding socio-cultural policies. While some members of the Right (the conservatives) remained moderate when foreign policy issues were considered, as proponents of traditional *fiqh* they

² For a sample of previous works on the classification of different political groups in post-revolutionary Iran, see: Akhavi 1987, *Elite Factionalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran*; Baktiari 1996, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran: The Institutionalization of Factional Politics*; Moslem 2002, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*.

³ It is important to note that these cannot be considered monolithic and unified forces. In fact, there are numerous shades of each group in Iran and they are continuously changing. Defections also occur from time to time. (Akbari 15 September 2011)

maintained a hard-line position on socio-cultural policies. To add to the confusion, other members of the Right who adhered to dynamic *fiqh* and liberal socio-cultural policies—including Rafsanjani—actually had far more in common with the Left than with other members of the Right. (Moslem 2002: 91)

Above and beyond the three branches of the government stood one individual, the supreme leader, whose opinions and behaviour had a significant bearing on the outcome of the factional struggle in Iran. As the Supreme Leader, a position devoid of any concrete administrative content, Khamenei had to distance himself from the factions and create unity among opposing forces. As Siavoshi (1992: 44) explains:

His role, unlike that of Rafsanjani, required him to act as the potential leader of the Islamic community of which Iran is only a part. Such a role suggests taking stands which strengthen the whole Islamic community, the logical implication of which would be to reject certain aspects of the status quo in the region, a position advocated by the radicals. Moreover, as the successor to the charismatic and militant Khomeini, Khamenei cannot abruptly break with the directives set by his predecessor.

Given this, it should not come as a surprise that the Supreme Leader cannot easily fit into any of the three factions in Iran. In fact, the supreme leader is meant to be a neutral party, and during presidential elections many of Khamenei's speeches merely urged people to support the government and criticized those who questioned the executive branch and the judiciary, both of which were controlled by non-radical forces. Nevertheless, he emphasized social justice and the need to eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor—issues that are close to the heart of the radicals. (Siavoshi 1992: 44) In this respect, factionalism, as in other areas of policy making, played a crucial role in both the making and direction of Iran's foreign policy. (Moslem 2002: 176) In fact, Iran's state identity was the subject of endless debate between those who favoured revising Iran's hard-line stance towards the US, Europe, and regional Arab states, and those who opposed any change to Iran's revolutionary stance in the region.

According to the radical-Leftist position,⁴ the major struggle was between the Muslim masses on the one hand and the 'usurper states' of Israel and certain Arab

⁴ "Radical-Leftist" is used to describe groups that advocated clandestine activities to export the revolution and called for the use of force and armed resistance to topple regional regimes. They were associated with socialist—social and economic—programmes like the redistribution of wealth and anti-imperialism. In the start of the revolution, *Mojahedin-e Khalq* and *People's Fedayeen* were the most active in promoting socialist programmes that stemmed from an Islamic interpretation of Marxist-Leninist ideals. (They were not pro-Soviet, however.) In the mid-1980s an offshoot of those two groups came to support Ayatollah Khamenei's *vilāyat-i faqīh*, but with a special emphasis on social and economic equality and populist issues. In the 1990s, radical leftists consisted of the *Mojahedin-e Enqelabe Eslami* (Warriors of the Islamic Revolution), among others. See: Zabih 1986, *The Left in Contemporary Iran*: 6-12.

countries on the other. These Arab leaders were thought to have lost sight of the suffering of the Palestinians, and instead were flirting with Israel in meaningless and compromising negotiations. (Siavoshi 1992: 36) Moreover, the radical Left contended that Iran had to do everything in its power to support the Palestinians and the Lebanese masses, whom they saw as victims of Israel's aggression. In addition, they believed that Iran should refrain from developing close relations with those Middle Eastern governments that promote the interests of the Western "oppressor world". Examples of that "oppressor world" included some of the oil-rich countries of the Gulf, and especially Saudi Arabia. Iran's radical Leftists considered the United States to be the biggest threat to genuine independence of the oppressed world (led in the Middle East by the Islamic Republic) and in conjunction with this they maintained that it would be unwise for Iran to entertain any genuine co-operation with Saudi Arabia and other GCC states. (Siavoshi 1992: 36)

The pragmatist-centrists⁵ argued that economic reconstruction after the Iran–Iraq War mandated a foreign policy of moderation. While Khomeini—like the radical Left—had routinely rejected the prevailing international and regional systems, the pragmatists associated with him acknowledged both their importance and interdependence. (Takeyh 2009: 161) As Rafsanjani argued, 'If people believe we can live behind a closed door, they are mistaken. While we must be reasonably independent, we are in need of friends and allies around the world'.⁶ Given the centrality of the Gulf to Iran's economic vitality and practical security, Iran's pragmatists understood the need for a different relationship with Saudi Arabia. (Takeyh 2009: 130) Nevertheless, the pragmatic-centrists were considered a minor group compared to the Right-conservatives and the radical Left.

The Right-conservatives⁷ were more occupied with Iran's internal politics than foreign affairs, but even when they discussed foreign affairs they were more

⁵ "Pragmatist-centrist" refers broadly to the *kargozaran-e sazandegi* (Agents of Reconstruction), who represented the traditional bazaars and technocrats beholden to ex-President Rafsanjani. (Amuzegar 2006: 72)

⁶ *Ittila'at*, 10 August 1991.

⁷ The traditional "right conservatives" consist mainly of four groups: the *Jame'e-ye Rowhaniyat-e Mobarez* (Combatant Clergy Association), founded in 1978, which played an important role in deciding the conservative political agenda during the 1980s and 1990s; the *Jame'eh-ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmiyyeh Qom* (Society of the Lectures of Qom Seminary), founded in 1961, which had been associated more with religious clergy in Qom seminaries who supported *vilāyat-i faqīh*; the *Hezb-e Motalefeh-ye Eslami* (Islamic Coalition Party), founded in 1962, which had been associated with traditional bazaari merchants; and, the, *Jebhe-ye Peyrovan Khat-e Emam va Rahbari* (Followers of Imam's Line and the

inclined to see Iran as a Shi'ite Muslim state and leader for all Muslim communities. Rafsanjani and his centrist supporters found it more practical to convince the conservatives that Iran could lead by example rather than by force—revolutionary Iran could achieve its goals better through soft power than through violence and intimidation. In an important departure from his predecessor, Rafsanjani acknowledged that Iran's own conduct was responsible for Saudi Arabia's unease. He even blamed the Saudi subsidization of Iraq's war effort partially on Iran's ideological stridency. (Takeyh 2009: 130) Rafsanjani stressed this point: 'If we had demonstrated a little more tact, they would not have supported Iraq'.⁸ Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Muhammad Bihishti similarly conceded that it was time for Tehran to 'turn [over] a new leaf' and temper its ideological posturing.⁹

6.1.2 Factions and the control of Iranian foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia in the 1990s

Iran's policy towards its neighbours was inescapably disputed by competing factions. These factions used institutional and legal powers to advance their interests, and justified their actions with interpretations of religious texts. The Iranian foreign policy machinery after the 1989 constitution was comprised of the foreign ministry, the president, the leader, and the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). (Moslem 2002: 176) This constitutional reform had strengthened the presidency, placing it at the heart of the executive power structure of the republic. The president and his staff controlled the SNSC, which had become the nerve centre of policy-making in Iran and the main body where foreign policy was debated. Thus, after 1989 the president had the main responsibility for foreign policy-making, and was allowed to use his new powers to formulate and direct Iran's international relations. Accordingly, the foreign minister reported directly to the president, who heads the Council of Ministers. Thus, implementation of foreign policy initiatives through the foreign ministry was monitored through the president's office. (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2002: 292)

As a result, Iran's foreign policy between 1989 and 1992 was under the heavy influence of a pragmatist, President Rafsanjani, and a staunch conservative in the form of the foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati. Under the dual leadership of Khatami

Supreme Leader), which consisted over time of different conservative groups subscribing to the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini. (Akbari 15 September 2011)

⁸ IRNA, 19 November 1988.

⁹ IRNA, 21 November 1989.

and Rafsanjani, the government adopted a pragmatic stance that was indispensable in making a judicious and prudent foreign policy. (Moslem 2002: 176) For example, the SNSC needed the approval of the Supreme Leader and the president—therefore, in the new foreign policy machinery of the Islamic Republic, the Left had little sway. The only institutional device that could impact foreign policy controlled by the Left was the majlis; however, its influence in this realm was confined to legislative oversight and the ratification of international agreements.¹⁰ Consequently, during this period the Right was able to dominate the Left in foreign policy-making.

Following the 1992 parliamentary elections, the conservative Right and—to some extent—the pragmatists gained more power and influence. As a result, Rafsanjani started to enjoy more power to manoeuvre and pursue those who opposed his consolatory approach towards Saudi Arabia. In the period between 1992 and 1996, Iran’s government pushed towards more openness to the outside world, focusing on expanding international trade and foreign investment—and more importantly decreasing Iran’s hostility towards its Arab neighbours, including Saudi Arabia. This period can be seen as a phase in which Iran was revising its state identity: it shifted from radicalism to accommodation. Velayati acknowledged this shift by stating, ‘Iran respects the independence of all—and particularly its neighbouring states—and stresses détente and the pacific settlement of disputes’. (In: Takeyh 2009: 131)

Saudi Arabia presented a particular challenge to Rafsanjani’s consolatory approach. As discussed in Chapter 4, Ayatollah Khomeini often harshly criticized the Saudi rulers, and in his will he warned of Saudi Arabia’s “evil intentions” towards Iran. Consequently, the pragmatists’ alliance with the conservative Right had its problems—and the failure to convince the Right of the benefit of rapprochement with Saudi Arabia was one of them. While pragmatists argued for cooperation with neighbouring Arab states, they were constantly obstructed—and sometimes publically humiliated—by the conservative Right when pushing to normalize with leaders who Khomeini had condemned. The conservative Right wanted to break Iran’s regional isolation, but maintained that the principle of exporting the revolution and supporting Islamic and liberation movements around the world should also be considered foreign policy objectives of the Islamic Republic. (Siavoshi 1992: 35) Therefore, détente with the Saudis was accepted, but normal and friendly relations were rejected.

¹⁰ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1979: Articles 113–132.

In his bid to convince the conservative Right, Rafsanjani argued that Khomeini's statements on political matters should not be considered final religious fatwā, but rather political advice directed to the times in which they had been given. According to Mousavian (Author's Interview, 25 October 2010), Rafsanjani once described a favourable action by Khomeini towards Saudi Arabia to a group of conservative clerics in the hope of tempering their hard-line stance: the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, had sent Velayati a letter expressing Saudi Arabia's desire to repair severed relations after the war ended with Iraq—only to be rebuffed. Once the Ayatollah learned about the incident, he summoned Mr. Velayati and rebuked him. The minister answered that he only wanted to follow the Ayatollah's stance, to which Khomeini stated that, 'My sermons should not be considered a form of fatwā, it is my own personal take on issues that matter to the faithful. Issues of the state are left to statesmen to decide based on the interests of the Islamic Republic'. (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010)

In practice, five government agencies were involved in dealing with Saudi Arabia: the Presidency, the Foreign Affairs Ministry (which has a special department for Arab affairs), the SNSC, the foreign affairs committee in the majlis, and the Hajj and Welfare Organization (which is linked directly to the Supreme Leader's Office). While the president and his foreign minister advocated rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, the majlis often rejected and criticized such moves. For example, when Abdulaziz al-Khuwaytir, the Saudi Education Minister, visited Iran on 4 February 1993 to meet with President Rafsanjani, he handed the President a formal invitation to visit Saudi Arabia from King Fahd.¹¹ At first, President Rafsanjani welcomed the invitation and extended his own invitation to the Saudi king—an action that provoked the conservatives in the majlis. Around 150 members of parliament signed a petition pressuring the president to revise his policy of rapprochement toward Riyadh, stating that 'Iran will never give up' and that it was a 'religious duty . . . and absolute right' to refuse normalization unless Saudi Arabia respected Iran's revolutionary duties and recognized Iranians' rights with regard to the hajj and political demonstrations in Mecca.

¹¹ 'Kuwaiti and Saudi Ministers in Iran', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 5 February 1993.

Rafsanjani tried to dispute this notion, but was subjected to a harsh press campaign by conservatives and radicals aimed at forcing him to retract his position.¹² An editorial in *Salam* newspaper, an Iranian publication associated with the radical Left, noted that Saudis ‘do not understand any language but that of force . . . Those Iranian officials who have been boasting their statesmanship, are they still of the belief that King Fahd should visit Iran?’¹³ Another radical publication, *Jomhuri Islami*, denounced the Saudi royal family and stated that Iranian ‘foreign ministry officials have to be aware that the interest of the Islamic Republic would only be guaranteed through revolutionary means’.¹⁴ *Kayhan* newspaper—which was associated with the Supreme Leader’s Office and the conservatives—argued that Saudi Arabia was a proxy of the United States in the region and that ‘Iran should not risk its reputation among Muslims by getting close to Riyadh’.¹⁵

Another source of agitation was the Hajj and Welfare Organization. Despite resuming the hajj following the 1991 détente, Saudi and Iranian officials never reached a comprehensive deal to resolve the hajj issue. While the Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry negotiated with the Saudis, the Hajj and Welfare Organization always ignored these agreements on the ground. As a result, the hajj demonstrations would become a continuous source of antagonism between the Saudi and Iranian authorities. The reason behind this was the unwillingness of Khamenei—in his capacity as a Supreme Leader overseeing the agency—to grant Rafsanjani full support in his bid to contain the Saudis.

It is evident from a number of Khamenei’s speeches and statements about Saudi Arabia made between 1991 and 1996 that the supreme leader was wary of provoking Saudi Arabia for fear they might return to helping Iraq. Indirectly, Khamenei was critical of rapprochement for two reasons: the first being that Saudi Arabia’s alliance with the US and its reliance on foreign forces to secure the Gulf undermined the Iranian regime’s security; the second was that Khamenei was deeply concerned with Saudi efforts to position themselves as representative of Sunni Muslims worldwide, challenging Iran’s Pan-Islamic credentials. The rapid spread of Saudi-sponsored

¹² Interestingly, the Iranian press in the 1990s reflected the divide between different factions of the Iranian polity. While most newspapers were owned and controlled by the state, there were several private newspapers and media outlets that often took a critical stance towards the ruling regime. During the mid-1990s the government-sponsored media was considered pro-conservative, while private media was broadly associated with the reformists. For insight into the relationship between the media and the state in Iran. See: Shahidi 2007, *Journalism in Iran: From mission to profession*.

¹³ *Salam*, 30 May 1993a.

¹⁴ *Jomhuri Islami*, 30 May 1993b.

¹⁵ ‘Iran’s Parliament Condemns Saudi “Insult” to Islam’, AFP, 30 May 1993.

religious schools, preachers and centres across Asia and the former Soviet Republics and to the Muslim diaspora in the US and Europe did little to calm these fears.

In fact, the Supreme Leader had always doubted Saudi intentions and had negative attitudes towards the Saudi leader, King Fahd. Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam (1984–2005) recalled that Ali Khamenei had deep mistrust of King Fahd and Saudi officials in general. (Khaddam 2010) In a meeting with Khamenei during the Tanker War crisis of 1986, Khaddam delivered King Fahd's response to allegations that Saudi Arabia was aiding Iraq in targeting of Iranian ships. Khamenei dismissed the Saudi letter, describing King Fahd in harsh words and accusing him of being a liar working secretly to undermine Iran. According to Khamenei:

King Fahd does not always maintain truthfulness in what he says. Mutual relations should be based on trust and confidence. If trust and confidence are shattered, then the person becomes suspicious. In his statements, official messages, through his envoys and by telephone—and I have talked to him twice—he stresses the necessity to enhance the relations, but when critical issues are raised, it's often something else . . . As for the media, we are prepared to compare our media with the Saudi's targeted campaign against us; hundreds of books were published by the Muslim World League with Saudi knowledge that attack Imam Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution . . . King Fahd's talk does not represent truthfulness that leads to serious dialogue . . . Saudis do not speak the truth and they do not show their true intentions. (Khaddam 2010: 118-120)

On another occasion, Khamenei downplayed Saudi Arabia's regional power: 'Saudi Arabia is not a Great Power, it is a name that became larger due to the increase of its oil income'. (Khaddam 2010: 124) Khamenei's opinion of Saudi Arabia and his public criticism of Saudi leaders were common among other Iranian officials during the 1980s; however, following the resumption of relations in 1991 he avoided direct criticism of Saudi officials and tended to level his warnings against the GCC leaders in general. The only exceptions were made over the hajj issue. Nevertheless, Khamenei—as Ambassador Mousavian notes—privately stated on a number of occasions that détente with the Saudis was important. (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010)

Rafsanjani continued to emphasise the importance of opening to Iran's Arab Gulf neighbours. Between 1990 and 1996, the SNSC became a forum for debate about the Saudis and the GCC countries.¹⁶ (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010) A great obstacle—at least according to some statements from the SNSC—was the

¹⁶ Ambassador Mousavian also served as head of the Foreign Relations Committee of the SNSC during Khatami's presidency (1996–2005).

continuous build-up of armaments by Saudi Arabia following the Second Gulf War, and the increase in US naval warships present in the Gulf with Saudi approval and assistance. In reality, the SNSC saw in these developments a hidden Saudi aspiration to undermine Iran's security. Due to the gridlock in power discussed above, Rafsanjani was unable to develop a concerted strategy to co-opt the Saudis and push them away from dependence on the US military. Furthermore, factional politics limited the president's ability to maintain a coherent policy towards Saudi Arabia and its neighbours.

6.2 ABDULLAH'S ACCESSION TO POWER: NEW PRIORITIES FOR SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY

On 29 November 1995, King Fahd suffered a debilitating stroke that left him incapacitated. Crown Prince Abdullah became the *de facto* ruler of Saudi Arabia. From 1996 to 2005, Abdullah worked actively—though gradually—to re-shape Saudi foreign policy priorities. By the time he became king, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy had been transformed. One of his first initiatives was to break with King Fahd's cautious approach towards Iran and seek active engagement, which arguably led to the 1997 rapprochement.

Abdullah was brought up in the desert in accordance with bedouin tradition. As a child, he was a shy boy who spoke with a stutter; as an adult, he became the Commander of the Saudi National Guard through his support of King Faisal in the 1962 power struggle with King Saud. During the 1970s and 1980s, Abdullah had strong ties with Arab leaders like Hafiz al-Asad of Syria, Kamal Jumblatt of Lebanon, and Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Western officials viewed Abdullah sceptically, and were at best suspicious of his dealings with states like Syria and Iraq. According to Alfred Prados (2002: 183), 'Various sources describe Prince Abdullah as more traditional and less Western in outlook than King Fahd and more oriented toward the Arab world'. He reportedly argued against the use of US troops during the Second Gulf War and favoured decreasing Saudi Arabia's dependence on US military presence in the Kingdom. He played a minor role in the country's foreign policy before assuming power, and was often considered less talented and educated than his predecessors. Nevertheless, Abdullah proved to be far more active and more willing to take risks than anyone had predicted.

Prior to his takeover as Saudi's chief foreign policy maker, Saudi–Iranian relations started to show signs of recovery. Abdullah was no stranger to Saudi–Iranian relations: in fact, he was engaged—along with his Deputy, Shaykh Abdulaziz al-Tuwaijri—in Syrian efforts to mediate between Iran and the GCC states in the mid-1980s. He met with President Rafsanjani in Senegal in December 1990, and again with other Iranian delegates once relations were resumed in 1991. During the Arab Interior Ministers Summit in Tunis in January 1995, Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz said that Riyadh was inclined to want normal ties with Iran. He stressed that ‘Iran is a powerful Islamic neighbouring country and all the member countries of the GCC, view Iran from the same angle’.¹⁷ Iranian officials responded positively, with Iran's official news agency reporting that ‘improving relations with Saudi Arabia will benefit all the states in the Gulf region’.¹⁸ Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Hashemi, Rafsanjani's younger brother, said in an interview with *Iran Daily* that he hoped bilateral relations could be improved: ‘Iran has friendly relations with the Gulf States, and these countries know that Iran does not threaten them,’ and ‘problems over the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina can be solved through negotiations’.¹⁹

6.2.1 The general structure of the Saudi decision-making apparatus

Unlike in revolutionary Iran—where there were competing centres of power and factional politics played a key role—foreign policy-making in Saudi Arabia is conducted through a sophisticated bureaucratic system in which the king has final say.²⁰ (Author's Interview, al-Aiban, 8 April 2012) As an absolute monarchy, the Saudi state system functions in a manner similar to a modern state system, where the state is supposedly responsible for welfare of its citizens and providing all sorts of services like education, housing, medicine, subsidization of food, electricity, water and fuel among other services. There are no elections and political parties—as well as political activism—are prohibited. Moreover, the power is centralized in the hands of the king and administered through bureaucratic bodies run by members of the ruling family or Western-educated technocrats. The king in his role as prime minister is the highest

¹⁷ 'Iranian Radio Reports Saudi Interior Minister's Comments on Ties with Iran', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 10 January 1995.

¹⁸ 'Iran Says Improving Relations with Saudi Arabia Benefits Gulf Region', IRNA News Agency, 31 January 1995.

¹⁹ 'Iran Says Improving Relations with Saudi Arabia Benefits Gulf Region', IRNA News Agency, 31 January 1995.

²⁰ His Excellency, Dr. Mosaad al-Aiban, is a minister of State and member of the Cabinet of the Saudi Government. He has held these positions since 1995.

authority on every single decision made on the national level, whether domestic or international. (Author's Interview, al-Aiban, 8 April 2012)

In practice, the king needs to consult others and has to receive the consent of different groups and members of the society. There are several reasons for this. First, according to Wahhabi teachings King has implement *shura* (consultation) with the *ulama'*, to ensure that his conduct is in line with Shari'a rulings. Second, because of traditional Bedouin tribal customs, the king is considered the "shaykh" above all tribes, in return for which he is obliged to consider the interests and needs of the tribes and clans under his patronage. Third, as a head of the ruling family the king has to secure the backing of senior members who are his brothers (quasi-equals), which makes his status almost that of *primus inter pares*. (Korany and Fattah 2008: 366)

The king's status as "first among equals" means that in practice, key decisions are taken by senior members of the Al Sa'ud family—who are usually selected based either on their official position in the government or (informally) by their reputation. In periods where the king does not have a forceful personality, as under King Khaled, the decisions are in truth taken by this council of brothers and other relatives. However, a strong king (for example, King Abdul Aziz) is often able to circumvent this process, meaning that decisions are taken more by one person—perhaps in consultation with others—than by a group. Furthermore, people who are not members of the Royal Family can have influence through positions as ministers, technocrats, and advisors, but it is rare for them to have direct say in the process of governing. (Gause 1992: 204).

The Saudi monarch derives his legitimacy to rule from the tradition of *Bay'ah* (oath of allegiance to a leader), which is the contract that binds the ruler to the ruled in Islamic Shari'a.²¹ What this entail is that the ruler commits himself to follow and protect rulings of Shari'a, to safeguard the welfare of the citizens, and to protect the land and the security of the country. The ruled, in turn, are bound to give advice and to be loyal to the ruler in everything except those decisions considered in violation of Shari'a. (al-Faisal 2007) Moreover, the *Bay'ah* has been part of Bedouin custom in the region for centuries and is considered a tribal—and now political—commitment to the

²¹ On 20 October 2006, King Abdullah issued a Royal Order establishing the "*Bay'ah* Council", institutionalizing the process for determining the future succession in the Royal Family. The council consisted of senior members of the ruling family and their descendants. See: Kechichian 2008, *Affirming the Saudi will to power: Domestic challenges to King 'Abdullah*.

ruling family. In return, the king provides protection and financial handouts to tribal chiefs and government jobs to members of their tribe.

Broadly, there are five institutions that govern the making of decisions in the Kingdom. They are, in descending order of importance: the king; the Council of Ministers, the principal executive structure of government; senior advisors at the *diwan* (royal court); senior members of the royal family; the *ahl al-hal wal-'aqd* (“those who solve and bind”); and the *Majlis al-Shūrā* (Consultative Council). (Zuhur 2011: 80) At the heart of all this are the royal family and its tribal and religious partners, who are made either through marriage or some other social alliance. At the top of the pyramid is the king, who presides over the cabinet in his *ex officio* role as prime minister. (Korany and Fattah 2008: 366) The king’s influence is felt in the case of major issues, and he has the final decision in case of dispute within the bureaucratic system. Nevertheless, if the king does not manage to calm dissent and build consensus around his person and policies, he loses his legitimacy—as in systems of basic tribal democracy—and is quickly deposed. (Korany and Fattah 2008: 367)

Foreign policy decision-making in Saudi Arabia usually follows a clearly hierarchical bureaucratic system, rather than being based on one individual. This hierarchy is a reflection of the social structure, with its tribal organization and political culture, and is a direct consequence of the character of the Saudi state. At the top of this hierarchy are those members of the royal family responsible for the highest positions of internal and external security, including the Ministries of Defence, the Interior, and Foreign Affairs, as well as the National Guard. These ministers are assisted by members of the influential technocratic elite, business families, religious scholars, and tribal shaykhs. (Korany and Fattah 2008: 367) Moreover, there are sufficient countervailing interests and forces—in both the society at large and in the key decision-making structures themselves—to complicate the process considerably. (Nonneman 2005: 337) William Quandt (1981a: 12) has observed that the effect of these factors has been that when the Saudi leadership are ‘pushed and pulled in various directions, they will try to find a safe middle ground, a consensus position that will minimize pressures and risks’.

This group dynamic has often complicated Saudi foreign policy—and this has been growing since the death of King Faisal in 1975, as senior princes took greater roles in—and thus gained increasing influence over—decision-making. (Nonneman 2005: 337) As in any group, each prince often has different views regarding the correct

course of action, and so ‘decisions may be postponed or compromises forged to preserve the façade of consensus’. (Quandt 1981a: 190) Due to this change, the royal family could no longer be treated as the monolithic entity it had been before Faisal’s rule. Instead, divisions in views and political orientation have often been present: for example, the family’s need to count on religious legitimization brings prominent *ulama*’ from the religious establishment into the decision-making process, notably the Council of Senior *Ulama*’. The decision-making circle can get even bigger if differences among prime members become so strong they necessitate alliances with those outside the family. (Korany and Fattah 2008: 366)

The *ulama*’ have an advisory role—at least in theory—but their actual power and influence is open to question. While it is clear that they have a particularly important role in matters of religion, in matters of foreign policy it seems more likely that they have no real power and can only influence decisions. As Gause (2002: 205) notes, ‘The Saudi regime looks to the religious leaders to validate and approve important decisions in the area of foreign policy,’ but can overrule them if necessary. For example, King Fahd invited the *ulama*’ to support the use of foreign troops to defend the country and help liberate Kuwait in 1990, but once some senior members objected—citing religious discontent at using non-Muslims to fight Muslims—the king was able to push them into retirement. (Nonneman 2005: 336)

The power to actually make decisions in foreign policy rests firmly—almost uniquely—with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since the foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, has been in office since 1975, he has been able to gain an exceptional amount of independence from the other organs of state, although his ministry still operates in conjunction with the royal court and takes direction from the king. It is also common for individuals with particular expertise²² or experience to act with considerable independence in relation to their speciality. For members of the royal family, this may mean taking over relations with specific countries: Crown Prince Abdullah was responsible for relations with Syria and Iran before his coronation, Prince Sultan was responsible for Yemen, Prince Bandar bin Sultan handled the US-Saudi relationship, and Prince Turki al-Faisal dealt with Pakistan. (Gause 2002: 204) The ability of those outside the royal family to influence foreign policy rests mostly on a combination of

²² According to al-Aiban (Author’s Interview, 8 April 2012), the *diwan* has a committee called the Bureau of Experts and the Council of Ministers. He stated that the Council of Ministers has its own body of experts to advise it on numerous matters, both foreign and domestic. In addition, there are a number of consultants within the *diwan* responsible for certain files, such as relations with Iran.

their personal status and their technical ability, with those who are able to either hold private meetings with the king and senior royals or influence the budget having the most say. (Nonneman 2005: 337)

The final two government bodies, the *Majlis al-Shūrā* and the Council of Ministers, have decidedly little direct influence over foreign affairs and act instead as advisory bodies. Interestingly, as the tasks of governance have become more technical and labour-intensive, the Council of Ministers has gained more influence over policy-making. (Nonneman 2005: 336) This is not to say that the ruling family does not retain the majority of power; rather, it is simply an effect of the expansion and complexity of the modern world. As Gause (2002: 204) notes, ‘There is a fluidity to the decision-making process that depends more upon the dynamic of intra-family politics than upon neatly defined bureaucratic lines of responsibility’.

6.2.2 Who decided Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy towards Iran in the 1990s?

Five key institutions exerted great influence in formulating Saudi Arabia’s policy towards Iran in the 1990s: the Royal Court, the Saudi National Guard (SANG), the Defence Ministry (MOD), the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MOI), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the General Intelligence Presidency (GIP). During the 1990s, these institutions dealt collectively with Iranian officials and commented regularly on the state of Saudi–Iranian relations. (Author’s Interview, al-Aiban, 8 April 2012) While Prince Saud al-Faisal, head of the Saudi Foreign Ministry, handled the official talks with Iran, King Fahd often assigned other officials to conduct secret (or occasionally direct) talks with Iranian officials. They included Crown Prince Abdullah and Shaykh Abdulaziz al-Tuwaijri, who handled the Saudi–Iranian talks through Syrian mediation; Shaykh Ali bin Musalam, a confidant of King Fahd, who met with senior Iranian officials privately in 1986 (Faksh 1987: 44); Abdulaziz al-Khuwaytir, who met with Iranian officials in 1993 and 1997; and Prince Turki al-Faisal, who discussed post-Second Gulf War security cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Although it is difficult to know for certain the opinions of these officials regarding Saudi–Iranian rapprochement—especially as some of them have since passed away, including Musalam and al-Tuwaijri—we can nevertheless assert that most of them had a somewhat negative perception of Iran after the 1979 revolution. As Kechichian (2001b: 120) states, ‘With few exceptions, Al Sa’ud family members

perceived Iran as a genuine regional threat, one which needed to be handled with kid gloves'. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Saudi polity considered the Islamic Revolutionary regime as an ideological foe that was growing stronger after Iraq's defeat in 1991—and one that remained a troubling neighbour despite the resumption of relations in the early 1990s.

Although a consensus existed on the Iranian threat, views differed on how to deal with Tehran, and equally importantly on whether to follow US lead in the region. For example, several younger Al Sa'ud officials believed that Saudi Arabia should not emulate the US position on Iran, and instead should distance itself from Washington. What was curious—and somewhat misplaced—were the beliefs that key princes held about how best to deal with revolutionary Iran. Those who perceived the Islamic government as a threat to the fundamental construct of the Kingdom—namely, Riyadh's claims to the custodianship of the two holy places—were keen to match Iran missile for missile and airplane for airplane. (Kechichian 2001b: 120)

The MOD and the GIP in particular were concerned about Iranian military recovery after the Second Gulf War and the increasing advancement in plastic missile development in Iran. The GIP was closely following the increase of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's covert activities, despite statements by Iranian officials that Iran would refrain from aiding dissident movements in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. According to Prince Turki (Author's Interview, 1 November 2010), 'While relations with Iran improved in the 1990s, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard continued a policy of covert action to undermine regional security and stability'. Prince Khalid bin Sultan, the assistant defence minister for military affairs, adopted the larger strategic view that Saudi Arabia needed to deter both Iraq and Iran militarily, lest Baghdad and Teheran assume that Riyadh would not defend itself or call on allies to help defend it. (Sultan and Seale 1995: 143) The Iranian threat was on the Saudi officials' mind even as Riyadh embarked on a rapprochement with Tehran in the late 1990s. Some members of the Saudi ruling family articulated clear ideas as to how best to behave towards Iran—mindful of the ideological divide that separated them from their neighbour—and considered it their duty to stand up to religious fervour and regional hegemony. Others were more pragmatic, given Iran's military capabilities. Nevertheless, most agreed that Iran represented a concrete challenge to Saudi Arabia's own regional aspirations. (Kechichian 2001b: 120)

Once Crown Prince Abdullah assumed control of the country's foreign affairs, he worked on improving relations with Tehran. This was perhaps triggered by Abdullah's efforts to revive Saudi Arabia's image and standing in the region. It is true that Saudi Arabia found itself strategically confident, due to both the defeat of Iraq in the Second Gulf War and its improving relations with Egypt, Syria, and Iran following the 1991 war; nevertheless, its Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic image was damaged to a considerable extent as it defied popular discontent at home and abroad by inviting US troops to fight a Muslim country. At home, the growing religious fundamentalist movement *al-Sahwa Islamiya* (Islamic Awakening) presented a challenge to King Fahd's policies of reform and close dependency on US military assistance.

Saudi Arabia struggled to develop a coherent state identity in the 1980s as it tried to maintain its Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arab position without risking instability in its foreign policy. It was able to maintain stability in its foreign policy by focussing on its own security and sovereignty, but balanced this inward focus with its close relationship with the US and a sensitive and pragmatic approach to regional affairs. (Gause 2002: 206) During ordinary times, Abdullah could have effectively maintained this continuity, but following King Fahd's illness Saudi Arabia seemed to be lagging behind and somewhat reactionary in conducting its foreign policy.

Although Crown Prince Abdullah was expected to maintain close ties between Saudi Arabia and the US, he had long harboured doubts about US policy in the Middle East—especially with regard to Israel. The crown prince's visit to the United States in September 1998 (as well as his visits to various European countries and Japan) was generally viewed in Washington as reinforcing the Saudi-US link, although his parallel overtures to Iran worried some senior US officials. With regard to Iran, Prince Abdullah made it clear that Saudi Arabia would formulate its own policy and would not be led by the US. Indeed, he felt that constructive engagement with Iran could strengthen moderates in that country, and could even assist in an eventual US-Iranian reconciliation. (Eilts 2006: 239) In Abdullah's view, the fact that Iran is a permanent neighbour was paramount; in contrast, he viewed the US as an outside transitory phenomenon. Saudi Arabia would therefore take the opportunity to improve relations with Iran so long as any agreements would not hinder earlier bilateral military agreements with the US. (Eilts 2006: 239-40) This change in Saudi policy towards Iran can be read clearly in the statement of Shaykh Abdulaziz al-Tuwajiri, deputy

commander of the SANG, that ‘Iran and the Arabs are heading for more cooperation and coordination, which will allow them [to] take their natural place in the world and to serve the Islamic nation’.²³

There was another reason for Saudi Arabia’s softening stance towards Tehran. Domestically, the Iranian Revolution caused fear of instigating the Shi’ite minority within the Saudi political establishment, which was underscored by fears of a repeat of the Shi’ite uprising of 1980. Iranian aid to Saudi Shi’ite dissidents and militant groups hoping to replicate its Islamic Shi’ite revolution was a great threat to Saudi national security throughout the 1990s. Nevertheless, the end of the Iran–Iraq War led Shi’ite militants to realise that Iran was likely unable to liberate the region’s Shi’ites without risking its own national interests. (Fuller and Francke 1999: 188) Moreover, Saudi Shi’ite dissidents in exile gradually grew tired of aggressive messages and tactics and recognized that, given their limited numbers, Shi’ites could not wage a successful revolution. However inspiring it might be, the example of Iran was of little relevance; violence was unlikely to achieve concessions on religious, political, or social issues.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the government took steps to improve inter-sectarian relations with then-Crown Prince Abdullah’s active support.²⁴ In a 1993 meeting, King Fahd promised Shi’ite leaders that he would relax political restrictions in exchange for their ending active opposition from abroad. Furthermore, the government released political prisoners it had held since the 1980s, and allowed hundreds of exiles to return by restoring their passports and right to travel. Importantly, Saudi Shi’ites were also assured that fundamental social and religious issues would be addressed.²⁵ Accordingly, Saudi rulers ordered government departments to curb discriminatory practices and that school text books be amended to remove disparaging references to Shi’ism. (Fuller and Francke 1999: 190)

While some Shi’ite opposition groups remained in Iran and elsewhere, the Rafsanjani government decided to promote the Saudis’ reconciliation with their own Shi’ite minority. As Cordesman (2003: 45) notes, ‘Iran pulled back from efforts to encourage Saudi Shi’ite unrest and terrorism, halted its attacks on the Saudi royal family, and stopped supporting riots and protests during the hajj’. As a result, Saudi

²³ ‘Saudi Minister Sees Healthy Sign for Arab–Iran Relations’, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 12 December 1997.

²⁴ Crisis Group Middle East 19 September 2005: i.

²⁵ Crisis Group Middle East 19 September 2005: 4.

authorities felt less politically threatened by Iran, and future relations seemed set for further improvement.

6.2.3 The challenge of the 1996 Khobar bombings to Abdullah's conciliatory approach to Tehran

On 25 June 1996, two trucks were used to bomb the American military compound in Khobar, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. In the aftermath of the attacks it became clear that Hizbullah al-Hijaz, a Shi'a militant group established in Saudi Arabia by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and lead by perennial militant Imad Mughniyah, was responsible for the attacks. While that attack was unexpected, the US government was aware of the possibility that such attacks were likely, given that the US's "enemies" saw attacks against its forces stationed abroad to be an efficient, inexpensive, and effective way to attack the US. The US government adamantly demanded that its allies help protect American troops from such attacks.²⁶ (US Secretary of Defense 1996)

The Khobar incident was a clear and early test of King Abdullah's commitment to the rapprochement process. (Cordesman 2003: 197–201) Although in the aftermath of the incident it was initially felt internally that radical Sunnis were responsible, within a few weeks the Saudi government knew that the attack had indeed been perpetrated by Hizbullah al-Hijaz. The Saudis were then confronted with the difficult choice of either remaining silent or implicating Iran—the latter of which would have potentially triggered a military retaliation against Iran by the US, in addition to destabilising the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement. In the end, the king chose not to disclose what he knew about Iranian involvement in the Khobar attacks, choosing to see it as a 'spillover' from the domestic struggle between moderates and radicals in Iran, rather than an attack by Iranian officials. Seeing his decision as a move to bolster moderate forces in the Iranian government, the Saudi king was thanked by the Iranians for his decisions—but condemned by the United State, who remained unaware of the true perpetrators of the attack for years.²⁷

Imad Mughniyah was incidentally responsible for further test of the Saudi leadership. Mughniyah was also responsible for the deaths of 241 US Marines in Lebanon in 1983. (Pintak 2003) In 1998, a plane carrying the Shi'ite militant entered

²⁶ Kozaryn, Linda D. 'DoD Releases Report on Khobar Tower Bombing', American Forces Press Service, 18 December 1996.

²⁷ Leonnig, Carol D. 'Iran Held Liable in Khobar Attack', *Washington Post*, 23 December 2006.

Saudi airspace. The US government asked the Saudis to order the plane to land and to arrest the Hizbullah leader. However, due to his status as a Hizbullah leader in Lebanon and his connections with Iran, the Saudis were hesitant to comply with the US request. (Author's Interview, anonymous Iranian official, December 2009) Still unwilling to jeopardise their budding rapprochement with the Iranians, the Saudis did not order the plane to land—much to the consternation of the United States government. (Pintak 2003)

At that time, Iran was going through a wave of internal political change, with infighting between its various political and social factions. In addition, Rafsanjani was ending his second term and could not seek re-election due to the constitution's term limits. (Menashri 2001: 79) The fate of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement was hanging in the balance, and the Saudi leadership was refraining from taking further consolatory steps towards Iran until Rafsanjani's successor was chosen. (Devine 2004: 74)

6.2.4 State identity under King Abdullah

After King Abdullah took control of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, the country gradually took a conciliatory approach towards some of its former foes, such as Iran and Libya. While Saudi state identity was not radically altered, as was the case in Iran during the 1980s, it was still somewhat different in 2009 than it was in 1981. Saudi state identity under King Abdullah still subscribed to Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism, yet the emphasis on Saudi Arabia's Islamic role shifted from solidarity with troubled states—such as Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion—to the promotion of dialogue between faiths and religious tolerance. This has been a result of Saudi efforts to distance itself from religious extremism associated with the war on terror in the period following the September 11th attacks. Moreover, the Saudi state opted to position itself as world player in anti-terrorism activities, which had a direct impact on *Wahhabi* missionaries abroad and the financial support Saudi Arabia was providing to Islamic centres in Europe and Asia through its informal religious charity networks.

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy grew to support state consolidation, securing the nation, and preventing challenges to the regime (and subsequently the petroleum industry). Saudi Arabia's revised state identity initiated and strengthened certain relationships to preserve Saudi Arabia's stewardship of the hajj and secure the country from any threats to its own integrity or to pilgrims. (Zuhur 2011: 103) Beyond this, Islamic leadership prove to be a strong tool for advancing Saudi Arabia's interests in the

region. Saudi Arabia has supported Pan-Arabism and its own sovereign and national interests, but not the secular, revolutionary, and anti-monarchist Arab Nationalism supported in various periods by countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Saudi state identity had firmly opposed communism and attacks on other Muslim states, including those by Israel on the Muslim holy places in Palestine. Moreover, it opposed terrorism by Muslims through an active security and counterterrorism forces. It has also acted ideologically, by promoting Islamic moderation supporting an Islamic legal stance against terrorism, and promoting respect for the authority of Islamic rulers. (Zuhur 2011: 103)

While Crown Prince Abdullah was active in shaping Saudi Arabia's policies, it is important to note the limitations and constraints on this power. The king (and his regents) can only set the foreign policy orientation and influence the development of state identity, even in an absolute monarchy like the Saudi state system. Constraints on the implementation of policy, such as bureaucracy in key ministries, do exist. During the period of rapprochement, King Abdullah opted to redefine Saudi Arabia's foreign policy priorities; however, the Interior Ministry in particular was reluctant to normalize with Tehran, and the Security Accord negotiations took more than four years to reach an agreement. While commerce and business progressed and restrictions on trade were overcome (at least to some extent), education and cultural exchanges barely scratched the surface of long-held societal and cultural differences between the two nations. (Author's Interview, al-Aiban, 8 April 2012)

6.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate how factional politics can be an obstacle to rapprochement and normalization. The divisions with Iran's polity had constrained its foreign policy and acted as an obstacle to the state's ability to overcome regional differences. Furthermore, its foreign policy (and therefore its interests) was impacted by the continuing struggle between different factions, which made it difficult for statesmen to conduct policy and oversee significant changes on the regional and international levels.

In addition, it is important to note that changes in foreign policy decision-making in both states have highly significantly and positively affected the bilateral relationship. Since the ascent into power of King Abdullah in Saudi Arabia and the reformist movement in Iran, the perception of the other side in each state has altered

both states' identities. During this period, their enmity transformed into relative friendliness. This is due in part to the change in leadership, but more importantly to the resulting change in state identity. Each side had their own domestic reasons for change, but even further both sides found that cooperating and forgoing their differences yielded more advantages. This proves that foreign policy decision-making—when designed in a certain way—can turn former foes into friends in order to achieve what is best for both of them. After the September 11th attacks on the US, Saudi Arabia downplayed its former success in exporting its Wahhabi ideology as means to expand its role on the regional and international level. Similarly, Iran under the reformists saw the advantage of minimising its revolutionary past to ensure the continuity of its regime.

It is important to note that once state identities were revised, regional norms shifted. For example, the norms that represented conflict and competition between the states—including the *mostazafin–mustakbirin* discourse and the debate over the superiority of Arabs or Persians (or, Persians or Arabs)—have become less relevant, thus opening the door to reconciliation. Another aspect of this process was the rise of dialogue and compromise, as each state sought to revive itself after a period of difficulty. Saudi Arabia saw the dangers of following an extremist interpretation of religion as means to expand its authority, while Iran realized the negative outcomes of resorting to force to export its model. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia and Iran found themselves in need of each other to achieve stability.

During the period, Iranian state identity momentarily revived itself from its former stagnation, showing the possibility that the Islamic Republic might change its act to evolve from *revolution* to a modern state. Saudi Arabia also started to show signs of transformation, giving hope that it would be able to assert itself regionally and internationally without relying on its Wahhabi ideology. These were major changes, and one result was the rise of the 1997 rapprochement process—a first in Saudi-Iranian relations after the 1979 revolution. We will discuss the rapprochement and its effects in the following chapter.

ISSUES IN THE SAUDI–IRANIAN RAPPROCHEMENT

Ideology, Security and the Economy 1997–2005

Ties between the two courtiers are improving,
and this will benefit reciprocal interests and the
world of Islam. This Islamic world needs true,
close and sturdy ties more than ever.
*Ayatollah Ali Khamenei*¹

In the early days of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement, there was a sense of change and anticipation. The 1997 rapprochement, which was announced with a clear commitment from the leaders of both countries, promised to bring change and moderation to a relationship that was marred by suspicion and mistrust. (Buchta 2002: 281) Nevertheless, the change of heart on both sides did not immediately translate into action. At first, even some government officials did not know how to respond to the unexpected normalization with the former foe. As Ata’ollah Mohajerani (Author’s Interview, 25 August 2011), former Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, explains, ‘The decision to improve relations was monumental, and it took time for officials on both sides to translate it into reality.’² The reason for this, as Mohajerani (Author’s Interview, 25 August 2011) suggests, was the lack of mutual interest and direct communication between the people of the two countries prior to the rapprochement:

Correspondences between the two nations before 1997 were limited to the annual hajj affairs,’ he said, ‘which were normally handled by the foreign ministries (and occasionally the interior ministries) in both states. Therefore, when the two leaderships decided to have better relations, senior officials in respective countries did not know how to proceed and to

¹ 'Saudi King Invites Iran's Supreme Leader for Landmark Visit', AFP, 19 February 2000.

² Ata’ollah Mohajerani is an Iranian politician and historian. He served as the vice president of Iran for legal and parliamentary affairs (1989–1997) and in 1997 he became minister of culture and Islamic guidance under President Mohammad Khatami, until he was forced to resign in 2000.

what extent they are allowed to work with the other side. It took time to build trust and understanding.

Despite initial hesitation, Saudi–Iranian relations began to experience a slow-yet-substantial movement towards strengthening and establishing ties in defence, the economy, the judiciary, sports and culture. Between 1997 and 2005, many Saudi and Iranian officials exchanged visits; committees and dedicated commissions were established to oversee progress in business deals, joint projects, and a new series of memorandums and contracts. In fact, the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997 was of far greater importance than being a mere improvement in bilateral relations because it went beyond the point of normalization to becoming a source of stability and harmony to the rest of the Gulf region. As Alkhatlan (2003: 59) argues, the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement was ‘more comprehensive than most observers believe . . . [Saudi Arabia and Iran] ha[d] gone beyond the point of return, despite the existence of some standing issues’. In some respects, the 1997 rapprochement excelled at a level and speed unexpected by both leaderships. As Saudi ambassador Adel al-Jubeir (Author’s Interview, 26 September 2011) recalls, ‘The rapprochement brokered by Crown Prince Abdullah and President Rafsanjani succeeded beyond what many have suspected for it to produce taking in consideration the past animosity between the two states following the 1979 revolution’.

7.1 WHAT WAS THE RAPPROCHEMENT ABOUT?

A remark made by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to a Syrian envoy on 23 August 1986 helps to answer this question. Highlighting his country’s differences with Saudi Arabia, Khamenei told Abdul Halim Khaddam, the Syrian vice president (1984–2005):

Our differences with the Saudis consist of three issues:
-Their reluctance to take a decisive position against Israel.
-The second is their support for Iraq [during the Iran–Iraq War].
-The OPEC problem, we always asked them why do you manipulate the [oil] markets and now since this issue had receded we say that if the problem of Saddam [Hussein] is resolved all other issues can be solved.
We hope that Saddam falls soon. (Khaddam 2010)

Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq would not fall until 2003; in the years between 1980 and then, Saudi support for Iraq transformed into enmity. In retrospect, the differences highlighted by Khamenei represented the strategic challenges to Saudi–Iranian normalization during the 1980s. Nevertheless, Saudi–Iranian differences were reduced significantly during the 1990s: Saudi Arabia had disassociated itself from Iraq

in 1990, and distanced itself (at least briefly) from the Arab-Israeli peace process after the collapse of the Oslo Accord in 1996. (Bahgat 2000: 112) Most importantly, Saudi Arabia began to advocate in OPEC for a reduction in oil production for higher prices to offset its growing budget deficit, a position closer to Iran's own oil policy in the late 1990s.³ (Amiri and Ku Samsu 2011a: 176)

This does not suggest that Saudi–Iranian differences ceased to exist: on the contrary, Saudi Arabia and Iran were still at odds in the strategic sense. Regionally, the two regimes were still vying for power and consolidating their ideational tools—namely their state identities—to mobilize their respective audiences at home and abroad. Nevertheless, the conventional thinking in both states was still geared at considering the ‘other’ as an existential threat. It is true that the previously-discussed period of *détente* (1991–1996) had loosened some of the foreign policy rhetoric based on enmity and suspicion; however, the change of leadership in Saudi Arabia with the selection of Crown Prince Abdullah as the new heir and the election of President Khatami had opened the door to new opportunities for dialogue and normalization.

Crown Prince Abdullah and President Rafsanjani's met in Islamabad in 1997. Following this meeting, the two governments stressed the need to establish a new framework to stabilize and improve the normalization process. In a series of official visits conducted between 1997 and 2005, the two sides sought to iron out differences between them—often with positive results. (Alkhatlan 2003: 56) In chronological order these were: Rafsanjani's visit to Riyadh in February 1998; Crown Prince Abdullah's visit to Tehran in September 1998; Saudi Minister of Defence Prince Sultan's visit to Tehran in March 1999; President Khatami's visit to Riyadh in May 1999; Iranian Minister of Defence Ali Shamkhani's visit to Riyadh in April 2000; and finally Saudi Minister of the Interior Prince Nayef's visit to Tehran in April 2001. There were also notable visits on ministerial level, including ministers of education, justice, cultural and Islamic affairs, agriculture, and transportation.

Between 1997 and 2005, the rapprochement process resulted into two key agreements: the Cooperation Agreement of 1998 and the Security Accord of 2001. The Cooperation Agreement provided a comprehensive framework for improving bilateral

³ The huge cost of the 1990 Gulf war, coupled with a decline in crude oil prices, posed enormous financial and organizational challenges to the Saudi economy. According to Niblock and Malik (2007: 103) the immense strain on the government finances in the fifth development plan (1990–1995) had to be reduced due to a fall in oil revenue.

relations in the fields of economics, investment, science, culture, and sports. It also included the creation of new consular offices, expansion of communication services, more air and sea transport links, and cooperation on environmental issues. (Cordesman 2003: 49) The second—perhaps more significant—agreement was the Security Accord of 2001, which promised a new beginning for cooperation and trust building between the two former foes. The Accord focused on cooperation in fighting terrorism, drug trafficking, organised crime, money laundering, and illegal immigration, as well as the surveillance of borders and territorial waters. Moreover, great progress was made in economics and joint investment. In 1997, a US\$15 million joint industrial committee was established, and by 2005 Saudi–Iranian commercial exchanges stood at US\$550 million per annum.⁴ The expansion of bilateral trade was manifested in the establishment of the Saudi–Iranian Economic Commission, as well as through holding trade exhibitions, lowering exchange tariffs, boosting bank cooperation, and joint investment in industrial, service, and transportation projects. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 59)

7.1.1 The Cooperation Agreement of 1998

The 1998 Cooperation Agreement was hailed as a historic development in Saudi–Iranian relations in the period since 1979. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, there had been a number of attempts to normalize Saudi–Iranian relations—namely in 1984 and 1991—which failed to produce a written agreement that covered key issues in their bilateral relations. Even after the 1997 meeting between Crown Prince Abdullah and President Rafsanjani, there were doubts on both sides that the rapprochement process would survive the great differences between the two states. In fact, the accession of President Khatami into office left both sides uncertain about how to continue the talks initiated at the end of Rafsanjani’s presidency.

Three factors helped pave the way to the 1998 agreement. First, President Khatami indicated his approval of his predecessor’s new approach to Saudi Arabia upon his inauguration in 1997. (Author’s Interview, Abtahi, 3 March 2008) Second, at the request of President Khatami—and with approval from the supreme leader—former President Rafsanjani continued to lead the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement process.⁵

⁴ 'Riyadh to Host 7th Iran-Saudi Joint Economic Commission Session', *Asia Pulse*, 2 May 2005.

⁵ Although Rafsanjani left office in August 1997, he continued to have influence over some foreign policy issues in his capacity as chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council (EDC). As According

Finally, Crown Prince Abdullah's attendance at the OIC in Tehran as a goodwill gesture gave the rapprochement more credibility and value. As Ambassador Mousavian (Author's Interview, 25 October 2010) notes, many Iranian officials considered the visit an important form of recognition for Iran's Islamic credentials and regional role from its former Sunni rival.

The 1998 agreement took more than 14 months of deliberation and negotiations. In fact, the final layout of the agreement was approved just weeks before it was signed in May 1998. The process that led to the final agreement can be divided into four phases:

First, there was the initiation phase (March 1997–December 1997). In the OIC meeting, Crown Prince Abdullah and President Rafsanjani exchanged views on the obstacles to the normalization of Saudi–Iranian relations. Following the meeting, Ali Akbar Velayati, the Iranian foreign minister, visited Riyadh on 18 March, when the idea of signing a cooperation agreement was discussed. Nevertheless, the framework for negotiations (which included 16 points) was set privately during ambassador Mousavian and Mehdi Rafsanjani's two meetings with Crown Prince Abdullah in Marrakesh in March 1997 and Riyadh in June 1997.⁶

The second phase was the formulation phase, which lasted from December 1997 to February 1998. In December 1997, Crown Prince Abdullah led a large Saudi delegation to Tehran so that he could meet Iranian officials privately on the side-lines of the OIC meetings. Crown Prince Abdullah's visit included meetings with Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, President Mohammed Khatami, and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. As the talks progressed, the Saudis extended an invitation to Rafsanjani to visit Saudi Arabia to continue the discussion. Rafsanjani then led a large delegation on a ten-day visit to Saudi Arabia. It included Ali Akbar Velayati, the former foreign minister and then-advisor to the supreme leader; Bijan Zanganeh, Iran's oil minister; Issa Kalantari, the minister of agriculture; and Hussein Kamali, the minister of labour. The visit was hailed as a success, and the two sides issued a joint communiqué that announced the establishment of a joint committee on the ministerial level to be headed by Kamal Kharazi from Iran and Prince Saud al-Faisal from Saudi Arabia. It was tasked with drafting an agreement of cooperation between the countries.

to Hooman Majd (2008: 246-247), the Supreme Leader 'delegated some of his own authority to the council—granting it supervisory powers over all branches of the government'.

⁶ For more information regarding the details of the 16-point agreement, see Chapter 6.

Third, there was the security clearance phase (25 March–1 April 1998). In March 1998, Iranian Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri flew to Saudi Arabia to meet with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Nayef. The purpose of the visit was not declared, although in Iran it was reported that Nouri was traveling to discuss claims of harassment of Iranian pilgrims; however, the true purpose of the visit was to negotiate the security dimensions of the cooperation agreement and clarify pending security issues before approving the draft agreement. (Author's Interview, al-Turki 13 May 2011) The resulting dialogue between Nouri and Prince Nayef did not solve many problems, and in the end the two parties agreed that security issues were to be excluded from the cooperation agreement and would be left for future negotiations. (Cordesman 2003: 48; Author's Interview, Mohajerani 25 August 2011) Nouri also met with Crown Prince Abdullah and Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan and briefed them on what the Iranian side would be doing to conclude the talks.⁷

Finally, there was the approval phase in May 1998. Once the draft agreement was cleared by the necessary agencies in both countries, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal flew to Tehran to meet his Iranian counterpart, Kamal Kharazi. The two ministers signed the Cooperation Agreement in a public ceremony on 27 May 1998. The Agreement received further endorsement when the Supreme Leader received Prince al-Faisal in a show of approval. The official Iranian media reacted favourably, and President Khatami was quoted as saying that Tehran was determined to establish 'friendly and brotherly' relations with Saudi Arabia as a prelude to their cooperation to ensure peace and security in the Gulf region.⁸

The Cooperation Agreement was produced in Persian, Arabic, and English, and had eight articles. (See appendix B) The recitals stated the importance of strengthening the existing ties of friendship between the two countries, in 'support of the Islamic, cultural and historic bonds between the two peoples', and in 'recognition of the potential benefits to both countries of strengthening bilateral co-operation'.

Part I (Articles 1-5) was dedicated to cooperation in economics, trade, and investment. This included projects in diverse industries: manufacturing, minerals and mining, oil and petrochemicals, agriculture, health, transport, tourism, communications, housing, town planning, and technical and engineering services. Article 6 of Part II

⁷ 'Iranian Interior Minister Meets Saudi Crown Prince', AFP, 1 April 1998.

⁸ 'Iran, Saudi Arabia Sign Cooperation Accord', AFP, 27 May 1998.

focused primarily on the fields of science, culture, and sports. It emphasized the importance of encouraging cooperation between universities, educational institutions, and charitable foundations through conferences, exhibitions, exchange visits by experts, training professionals, and cultural activities such as publishing and teaching the Arabic and Persian languages. The agreement went even further, suggesting that each country should be, ‘Showing documentaries about both countries, their people, heritage and cultures’. Part III (Articles 7-8) set out general guidelines for the execution and implementation of the agreement by setting up a joint committee at the ministerial level that would meet regularly in alternating countries to study ways of developing bilateral relations. Furthermore, the agreement was to be valid for five years from the date of the exchange of memoranda after ratification, in accordance with the laws in force in both countries. After the five-year period ended, the agreement was to be automatically renewed for subsequent periods of one year unless either party notified the other in writing six months in advance of a desire to terminate the agreement.

7.1.1.1 The Outcomes of the Cooperation Agreement

The agreement seemed to promise a new beginning for Saudi–Iranian relations, even though it stopped short of addressing sources of contention. These included such issues as differences over US military presence in the Gulf, political rallying and demonstrations by Iranian pilgrims during the hajj, or the on-going rivalry in OPEC over oil production and prices. Despite this, the agreement was symbolically valuable because it emphasised strengthening bilateral ties between government agencies and the peoples of the two countries. As President Khatami noted, signing the agreement was not the end of the process, but rather the start of many agreements to come. Mohajerani (Author’s Interview, 25 August 2011) confirms that the significance of the agreement was not in its actual content, but in giving the rapprochement a legal form of recognition and authority so officials, businessmen, and ordinary people from both sides could engage with each other formally, without upsetting the authorities or facing legal punishment for doing business with the “other side”.

Moreover, the agreement was instrumental because it provided the first legal reference for resolving governmental and commercial disputes through international trade law. As stated in the Cooperation Agreement, ‘The contracting parties will do their best to activate and diversify trade between their two countries and, to this end and within the bounds of international trade law, they will apply to this trade the principle of

most favoured nation status'. The mention of international trade law offered for the first time a point of reference for settling disagreements. In the past, the two states did not have any institutional form or reference law to settle their differences, whether in trade or political matters. Although, the term "international trade law" did not indicate which international body was to be responsible for this task, Mohajerani (Author's Interview, 25 August 2011) informed me in an interview that the understanding was that both states could refer to the international institutions and treaties of which both were members or to which they were both signatories, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA). In effect, this step provided both sides with means to develop their businesses and joint projects with government and state protection.

The most significant result of the agreement was that it institutionalised the rapprochement process through the establishment of ministerial committees, joint councils, and annual meetings between government officials and legislators in both countries. This is evident in the business deals, joint projects, and further contracts and agreements signed in the period between 1998 and 2005. As Alkhatlan (2003: 59) argued, 'It must be understood that the current rapprochement is not merely focused on political interests, and ties between Riyadh and Tehran have become too attached to split again'.

7.1.2 The Security Accord of 2001

Despite the great importance of the rapprochement process between 1996 and 2000, the Security Accord of 2001 was to be considered the highest point of normalization between the two states. (Amiri and Ku Samsu 2011c: 246) After more than two decades of rivalry in the mid-1980s, the two states concluded a security agreement that addressed some of the security differences between them for the first time.⁹ Although the Accord was confidential, the two sides issued a Joint Communiqué¹⁰ stating that they would cooperate to fight all forms of crime, terrorism,

⁹ 'Saudi Interior Minister in Tehran for a Landmark Visit', Iran Press Service, 15 April 2011.

¹⁰ The Security Accord remains a confidential document, yet several sources have quoted it extensively: Aghababaei and Rezaei (2010) provide details of articles 2 and 3; Ain Al-Yaqeen Online Magazine ('Saudi Arabia and Iran Sign Security Pact' 20 April 2001) published excerpts of the document including articles 4 and 5. Moreover, Lotfian (2007) and Amiri and Samsu (2011c) provide a general description of the agreement. The description offered here is based on a briefing provided in a personal interview with an anonymous senior minister responsible for the Asian section of the Saudi Interior Ministry, which occurred in Riyadh in 2009.

drug smuggling, and money laundering.¹¹ Furthermore, the communiqué stressed that the two parties agreed to non-interference in each other's internal affairs, the observance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and adherence to all international laws. Nevertheless, the Accord was not limited to cooperation in the fight against terrorism and crime; rather, it was a comprehensive security agreement on the bilateral level, and the regional level as well. As Rihab Massoud (Author's Interview, 18 November 2011) notes, the agreement was 'far more significant in its importance since it contained articles that covered major differences in the security dealings between the two states. It did not resolve all security issues but it presented a framework for cooperation and implementation'. Nevertheless, the Security Accord did not include any military dimension, nor did it address regional security differences such as the presence of foreign military bases and Western naval ships in the Gulf waters. (Lotfian 2007: 14)

It is important to note that prior to this Accord, both Saudi Arabia and Iran had proposed various security and defence proposals to address the differences between them. In the early 1970s the shah had suggested that Iran and Saudi Arabia—along with other Gulf States—form a regional security organization; the Saudis paid polite attention before letting the matter drop quietly. (Wilson and Graham 1994: 103) Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the resumption of Saudi–Iranian relations in 1991, Ali Akbar Velayati proposed to the Saudis the establishment of a regional security arrangement for Iran and the Gulf states. (Rakel 2007: 161) However, the Saudis were not ready to forgo their own security agreements with the US and replace them with an agreement with Iran. Throughout the 1990s, Iran continued to advocate a regional security framework in the Gulf that would include the GCC states and replace their dependence on US military presence, yet the GCC states continued to decline the offer.

Nevertheless, the success of the 1998 Cooperation Agreement raised the prospect of achieving much-desired cooperation on regional security. In general, the

¹¹ The Joint Communiqué was published in Arabic and Persian. According to the Communiqué, 'The Security Accord is based on the need to promote bilateral security cooperation, and reflects the mutual respect of the two countries, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, observance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and adherence to all international laws. The two sides stressed their earnest intent to implement the articles of the security agreement, which covered areas such as the fight against drug smuggling, and issues related to the movement of Saudi and Iranian nationals into each other's country. They also stressed the need for cooperation in regard to peace and stability in the region, considering themselves the leaders in their concern for vital regional issues that are, they said, a joint responsibility to be shared by all the Gulf countries'. For the Arabic version, see: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs 18 April 2001.

negotiations can be divided into two dimensions: domestic security and regional defence cooperation in Gulf waters. While Iran was eager to pursue a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia that would lead to a wider Iranian agreement with other Gulf states, Saudi Arabia was reluctant to strengthen its military ties with its former foe and preferred to focus on the domestic security concerns that Iranian covert activity had raised over the years. These differences in views over security and defence issues occupied a large part of the rapprochement talks and negotiations between 1998 and 2000. For example, Iran's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Reza Nouri Shahrودي, explained in an interview with a Saudi newspaper that defence talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran was discussed on several occasions. He was even quoted as saying:

Iran's missile capabilities are at the disposal of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia . . . We believe that Iran's power is the Kingdom's power, and the Kingdom's power is Iran's power. Our relations with Saudi Arabia have reached a historical stage where we are complementing one another, and if we have a missile or non-missile capability, it is at the Kingdom's disposal.¹²

The first serious attempt to explore ways to expand Saudi–Iranian rapprochement to include security and defence matters was during a visit by Prince Sultan al-Saud, the Saudi minister of defence, to Iran on 3 May 1999. In a statement before his arrival the Iranian defence minister, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, had called on the Saudis for the creation of a joint army 'for the defence of the Muslim world'. He was even quoted by Iran's official news agency saying, '[The] sky's the limit for Iranian–Saudi Arabian relations and co-operation, as the whole of Islamic Iran's military might is in the service of our Saudi and Muslim brothers'.¹³ The two sides held a round of talks that centred on drafting a common policy for the defence and security of the Gulf. According to Shahrودي, the Iranian side tried to convince the Saudi delegation to sign a defence agreement with Iran during the visit, but the Saudis decided to postpone the talks. Prince Sultan was quoted as saying, 'Military cooperation is not easy between two countries that did not have ties for years'. Despite the failure to produce a defence agreement, the two countries did agree to exchange military attachés. Moreover, the two sides agreed on cooperation in internal measures and mutual non-interference in the other state's internal affairs. (Cordesman 2003: 49)

¹² 'Interview with Iran's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Mohammad Reza Nouri', *Al-Hayat*, 29 July 1998.

¹³ 'Saudi Defence Minister Visit to Iran Good for Persian Gulf Peace and Security', Iranian Press Service, 3 May 1999.

A second round of talks over a possible defence agreement took place in Jeddah on 27 April 2000, during the Iranian defence minister's visit to Saudi Arabia. Admiral Ali Shamkhani proposed the formation of a Gulf defence pact that would include the six Gulf Cooperation Council nations and Iran. The talks continued for three days, yet the Saudis declined to attend because they were unwilling to jeopardize their relations with the US. (Litvak 2000: 232) In addition, a Saudi–Iranian defence agreement would have alienated neighbouring countries—namely Iraq and the smaller GCC states, which feared that a deal between the two largest powers in the region could put their own security and territorial claims at risk on both sides. Despite Iranian efforts, the Saudi side appeared willing neither to alienate its GCC allies nor to provoke Iraq. As Cordesman (2003: 49) explains:

Saudi officials and military planners recognize that Saudi Arabia must continue to plan to meet military threats from Iran's conventional forces, unconventional forces, and its weapons of mass destruction until a new Iranian regime has proven its moderation over a period of years. They continue to be concerned about Iran's attempts to build up the military capability to threaten tanker and other shipping through the Gulf.

Following those talks, the Iranian delegation expressed its disappointment at the Saudi's hesitation and warned that the window of opportunity to improve relations with the Saudis would not be there forever. In an effort to win over the Iranian delegation, the Saudis offered to resume Saudi Airlines flights to Iran as a show of goodwill. It accepted the gesture even though the Iranian delegation was hoping to achieve more from the visit; Admiral Ali Shamkhani and members of his delegation were reported to have boarded the first Saudi commercial flight to Tehran.¹⁴ Facing Iranian discontent over the rejection of a joint defence deal, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal travelled to Tehran on 7 October 2000 to reassure the Iranian side of Saudi commitment to the rapprochement process. Following meetings with President Khatami and other senior figures in the Iranian government, the Saudis managed to dispel Iranian concerns. The trip also coincided with an escalation of violence in the Palestinian territories; therefore, it presented an opportunity for the two sides to issue a joint statement condemning excessive use of force by Israel.¹⁵ As the Saudi delegation ended its visit, President Khatami described Iranian relations with Saudi Arabia as 'very

¹⁴ 'First Saudi Passenger Flight to Iran in Twenty-One Years', AFP, 5 May 2000.

¹⁵ See: 'Saudi Foreign Minister in Iran to Discuss Jerusalem Clashes' 7 October 2000; 'Saudi Minister, Iran to Talk' 7 October 2000.

successful', stressing bilateral cooperation in OPEC and on the Palestinian problem. (Litvak 2000: 232)

Military ties did eventually improve between the two sides. Ali Shamkhani (Shamkhani 2004: 13) Iran's minister of defence, acknowledged years later that the Iranian officials had convinced the Saudi military officials to purchase defence equipment from Iran. Iran had also encouraged the Saudis to take part in military research projects. Both sides announced that they had inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on security, and had even signed an agreement that did not include US presence in the region. (Taeb and Khalili 2008: 34-35)

Despite the setbacks in defence talks, Saudi officials seemed more concerned with the prospects of cooperation with Iran on terrorism and other security issues that related directly to Saudi domestic security. Following a meeting of GCC interior ministers in Riyadh in late October 2000, the Saudi government expressed that it was ready to sign a security cooperation agreement with Iran and urged Tehran to push ahead with the accord. Apparently, the Saudis had sent Iran a formal letter a month earlier asking for a cooperation agreement that centred on security. (Author's Interview, al-Faisal 1 November 2010) In a statement to the press, Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef al-Saud said, 'The Saudi kingdom is ready to sign a security agreement with Iran', and called on Iran 'to give a positive response to signing the agreement'. The Saudi initiative was driven primarily by domestic security concerns, and it was evident that Saudi officials were not ready to upgrade relations without ensuring an Iranian commitment (especially from the IRGC) to withhold any activity in Saudi Arabia and other GCC states. (Author's Interview, al-Faisal 1 November 2010) As Litvak (2000: 232) notes, 'Facing terrorist attacks on its soil, some of them apparently linked to Iran, Saudi Arabia was more interested than Iran in signing a security accord dealing with joint combat against drug trafficking and terrorism'. Iran responded favourably, announcing that it would send a team of security and legal officials to Saudi Arabia to discuss the proposed security agreement. That meeting happened in Riyadh on 21 November 2000, and included Iranian Deputy Interior Minister Ali Mohagar and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Nayef al-Saud. The goal was to exchange views over the proposed agreement before proceeding with further talks.¹⁶

¹⁶ 'Iran Delegation Off for Saudi to Work on Security Pact', AFP, 21 November 2000.

After five weeks of intensive talks between experts in both states, Iran's government announced that it had reached a deal with Saudi Arabia. In a public statement, Iranian Interior Minister Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari said, 'The text of the agreement has been finalized by experts on both sides and will be signed in the near future'.¹⁷ Following the Iranian announcement, the Saudi government approved the agreement's text in a cabinet meeting on 29 January 2001 and instructed the interior minister, Prince Nayef al-Saud, to sign the agreement. As a result, Prince Nayef and Mousavi-Lari signed the long-anticipated agreement in Tehran on 17 April 2001.¹⁸ Lari commented that 'this agreement promises peace and friendship and Iran has always reached out a hand of friendship to its neighbours'.¹⁹ Prince Nayef, feeling a sense of achievement at having convinced Iranian officials to accept the deal, commented, 'We have decided to take a big step toward security between our two countries. We consider Saudi Arabia's security as Iran's security and Iran's security as our security'.²⁰

7.1.2.1 What did the Security Accord include?

Following the signing of the Security Accord, the two sides issued a communiqué highlighting its purpose and main articles. The communiqué stated that the Security Accord was a result of a mutual understanding and cordial atmosphere with which the two sides 'expressed full satisfaction'. It stated that the Accord was 'based on the need to promote bilateral security co-operation, and reflects the mutual respect of the two countries, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, observance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and adherence to all international laws'.²¹ Moreover, 'the two sides stressed their earnest intent to implement the articles of the security agreement, which covers areas such as the fight against drug smuggling, and issues related to the movement of Saudi and Iranian nationals into each other's country'. The communiqué also stressed the need for co-operation between them in regard to 'peace and stability in the region', considering themselves the leaders in their concern

¹⁷ Hojjatoleslam Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari was Iran's Vice-President for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs (1997-1998). He replaced Abdollah Nouri as Minister of Interior, where he served between 1998-2005. See: 'Iran Delegation Off for Saudi to Work on Security Pact', AFP, 21 November 2000.

¹⁸ The Security Accord negotiation party included: Prince Nayef, Saudi minister of the interior, Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari, Iranian minister of the interior, Prince Mohamed Ibn Nayef al-Saud, Saudi Ambassador to Iran, Jameel Ibn Abdullah Al Jeshi, Iranian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ali Asghar Khaji and Major General Saud al-Dawood, Director of the Interior Minister's office for Studies and Researches.

¹⁹ 'Iran, Saudi Arabia Sign Long-Awaited Security Deal', AFP, 17 April 2001.

²⁰ 'Iran, Saudi Arabia Sign Landmark Security Pact', AP, 17 April 2001.

²¹ 'Saudi Arabia and Iran Sign Security Pact', *Ain Al-Yaqeen* Online Magazine, 20 April 2001.

for vital regional issues that are, it stated, ‘a joint responsibility to be shared by all the Gulf countries’.

According to Article 1 of the Accord, both sides were to respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from inciting any violence or lending any support to groups or organizations that seek to undermine the internal security of either state. Article 2 of the agreement stated that both countries were committed to preventing and combating organized crime and terrorism. They agreed to coordinate their counter-terrorism and anti-organised crime activities by exchanging three things: information about people and groups related to organized crimes and terrorism; experiences about time, place, situation, style, and method of organized crime and terrorist activity and the necessary legal measures for the prevention of such acts; and experts and specialists for expanding common mutual cooperation about scientific research in the fields of criminology and crime detection. They also agreed to hold common police educational activities with the agreement of concerned parties, and to organize and exchange joint working groups about the scientific research in criminology and crime detection. (Aghababaei and Rezaei 2010: 338)

According to Article 3 of the agreement, both sides were committed to coordinating their activities in order to make the best use of their resources. For that reason they were to regularly discuss their cooperation in fighting human trafficking and smuggling goods at borders, rescue operations at sea, and prevention of any hostile political activities by opponents of each of the two countries in another country. (Aghababaei and Rezaei 2010: 338) Article 4 of the Agreement covered the fight against money laundering and the exchange of information regarding financial transactions associated with terrorist activities or crimes committed in either state. Under Article 5, both sides agreed to extend collaboration among their law enforcement forces in order to secure their borders. (Lotfian 2007: 14)

Perhaps most important was Article 6, which dealt with the extradition of suspected criminals and members of terrorist organizations. This Article—which raised some concerns in the press—‘was the most valuable compromise the two states had to undertake if they wanted to overcome the animosities of the past’, argues Rihab Massoud. (Author’s Interview, 18 November 2011) Due to the Accord’s secrecy, some experts contended that the accord contained no extradition clause, as such a clause would have forced Iran to turn over its citizens if US assertions about Iranian

involvement in the 1996 al-Khobar bombing were true.²² (Cordesman 2003: 49; Okruhlik 2003: 119) Nevertheless, a senior official responsible for the Asian section of the Saudi Interior Ministry confirmed the existence of an extradition clause, citing that in June 2002 Iran demonstrated its commitment to the Security Accord when its security agencies handed 16 Saudi nationals allegedly linked to al-Qa'ida over to Saudi authorities. (Author's Interview, Anonymous December 2009)

7.2 THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION: THE RISE OF TRADE AND THE EXPANSION OF BUSINESS RELATIONS 1996–2005

The expansion of economic ties, lifting of trade restrictions, and partnership in business and industry were among the most important issues discussed during the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement process of 1997–2005. In some respects, the 1998 agreement was written in a way that favoured the expansion of economic ties and the promotion of bilateral trade as means to build strong relations. As a result, the two sides established a US\$15 million joint industrial committee during the first year of the agreement. Moreover, Saudi–Iranian trade rose from US\$100 million in 1998 to hit a record high of about US\$300 million in 2001. A year later, bilateral trade exceeded US\$280 million. As trade between the two nations grew, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to provide insurance cover for exports to each other's markets, per a protocol signed in Riyadh in March 2003.²³ The Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) and the Saudi Fund of Development (SFD) were signatories to the exports insurance deal, which envisaged exchange of information and technical expertise as well as educational, market assessment, and re-insurance services.

In the Fifth Tehran-Riyadh Economic Cooperation Commission session, Saudi Arabia agreed to provide insurance for US\$100 million worth of Iranian goods destined for its markets and US\$50 million more in cash for exchange of information in related fields. As a result, the two countries undertook 18 joint venture projects, at a cost of more than US\$260 million.²⁴ In 2009, Saudi exports to Iran stood at US\$260 million, while Iranian exports to Saudi Arabia exceeded US\$612 million and accounted for 34 per cent of GCC-Iranian trade. (IMF 2010) In the Joint Economic Commission of 2005, Saudi Commerce Minister Osama Jaafar Faqih and Mohammed Shariatmadari of

²² Iran still rejects the US charge of involvement; the United States is steadfast in its assertions. (Okruhlik 2003: 119)

²³ 'Iran, Saudi Arabia Stress Economic, Trade Cooperation', *Asia Pulse*, 13 May 2003.

²⁴ 'Iran, Saudi Arabia Agree to Provide Insurance for Exports', *Asia Pulse*, 12 March 2003.

Iran, who co-chaired the annual meeting, hailed the sharp rise in bilateral trade and opted to sign a maritime transport agreement and another accord on the promotion and protection of investments.²⁵

Nevertheless, the moderate expansion of economic ties was considered to be of symbolic importance, rather than a strategic partnership. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 65) It is important to note that even before the revolution of 1979, Saudi–Iranian trade was minimal and insignificant. While Saudi Arabia imported fruits, vegetables, seeds, and carpets from Iran in the 1970s, Iran hardly imported any goods from Saudi Arabia except through hajj pilgrims buying souvenirs from the holy cities. This had been historically a product of two factors. The first was that oil, petrochemicals, and gas dominate regional exports and oil prices drive imports, which caused poor intraregional trade. Gulf economies produce and export similar products and lack diversified manufacturing bases to stimulate intra-industry trade. (Australia 2000: 128) The second factor was that smaller Gulf states—namely the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Oman—have traditionally acted as entrepôts. This meant that Saudi Arabia and Iran could resort to these entrepôts to export and import from each other without a need for direct trade. This helps to explain how they managed to buy each other’s products during the 1980s without having to normalize their relations.

There were other structural factors that contributed to the lack of Saudi–Iranian trade prior to 1997, namely economic policy and strategic partnerships. First, oil dominates exports in Saudi Arabia and Iran; it also provides feedstock for non-oil exports and finance imports. However, the importance of trade in economic activity varies considerably; it is most important in the UAE and Bahrain, and least important in Iran and Saudi Arabia. (Australia 2000: 112) The UAE’s high import levels largely reflect its role as an entrepôt, while the main driver of Bahrain’s imports is Saudi crude oil used by the Bahraini refining industry. Bahrain and the UAE also have large service exports. In Saudi Arabia and Iran, regional trade is secondary because they have larger economies thus more restrictive tariffs and non-tariff barriers. (Australia 2000: 112) Nonetheless, in 1998, Saudi Arabia had the highest absolute exports at US\$40 billion and the highest absolute imports at US\$28 billion, followed by the UAE and Iran. (Australia 2000)

²⁵ 'Saudi Arabia, Iran to Sign Trade Agreements', AFP, 8 March 2003.

A second—and perhaps more significant—reason for the lack of trade between Saudi Arabia and Iran was the fact that both had different economic partners and clients. The United States was a particularly prominent trading partner for Saudi Arabia; in contrast, while there was trade between Iran and the US it was absent from Iran’s reported trade statistics due to international sanctions. The EU nations and South Korea are important import suppliers to Iran, and due to their strong industrial base they have dependence on energy imports from Iran. (IMF 1999) As Habibi (2010: 4) explains:

Both Iran and the GCC countries trade more with developed countries than with each other or with other developing countries. As oil-exporting countries, they have similar economic needs, and export few products that they can offer one another. Their main imports are industrial products, machinery, and capital goods, which they obtain, for the most part, from developed industrial countries. As a result, the volume of bilateral trade between Iran and the GCC has historically represented only a small share of each side’s total trade.

Despite these historical and structural factors, both sides were eager to do business and expand economic ties. President Rafsanjani was determined to break the economic isolation imposed on Iran during the Iran–Iraq War. The reconstruction of Iran’s infrastructure and improvement of its economic circumstances were the highest priorities of the Iranian leadership after the war. As Amiri and Samsu (2011a: 172) argue, eight years of conflict created enormous socio-economic problems that had to be settled. These problems were the main cause of popular discontent and the harsh criticism of the Rafsanjani presidency in the 1990s. Even after President Khatami took power in 1997, Ayatollah Khamenei made it clear to the new president that ‘the most important problem of the country today is the economic problem’. (Menashri 2001: 106)

7.2.1 How oil prices incentivised the rapprochement process

In the early part of the 1990s, both Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic experienced economic distress due to the sharp decline in oil prices in that decade—prices fell below US\$10 per barrel in early 1997 (Aumzegar 1999). It was not an unexpected problem for two countries so heavily dependent on oil exports to have, but it led to an unprecedented cooperation between the two sides on oil and other economic issues, which, while not the paramount factor in the rapprochement, was a key incentive to it. In order to stabilise oil prices, and thus their domestic economies, the leaderships of Iran and Saudi Arabia looked to cooperation through OPEC, an organization in which

they were both members and through which they could work together to artificially increase oil prices while benefitting from the mediation of other OPEC member states. The extent of the economic distress in both countries—and the corresponding desire for a solution, even if it came at the cost of having to cooperate with a sometime rival—cannot be understated.

In Iran, a 1997 speech by President Khatami underlined that his country was experiencing low GDP growth due in part to high unemployment and the US sanctions, large foreign debt exacerbated by a drop in the current account surplus and a low credit rating, and inflation caused by a combination of internal and external factors. (Amiri and Samsu 2011: 174; Abootalebi 2004: 42) These difficulties, along with the corresponding ambitious plan to push GDP growth above six percent while bringing unemployment from 40 to ten percent and inflation below 16 percent, were putting intense pressure on the Khatami government. (Amuzegar 1999)

Saudi Arabia's economic situation was different, but not much better.²⁶ (Gause 1994) In 1991, the government deficit was 27 percent of GDP. The government not completely successful in lowering its deficit solely through spending cuts: by 1997, the deficit still accounted for ten percent of GDP. (Ghali 1997) At the same time, its oil revenues were shrinking and the corresponding trade deficit caused by its lack of export diversification was pushing the country toward a real crisis. (International Trade Centre 2006) The king implemented austerity measures throughout the mid-1990s, scaling back earlier reform projects and privatizing certain state-owned industries, but this alone was not enough to resolve the economic issues. (Olds 2009)

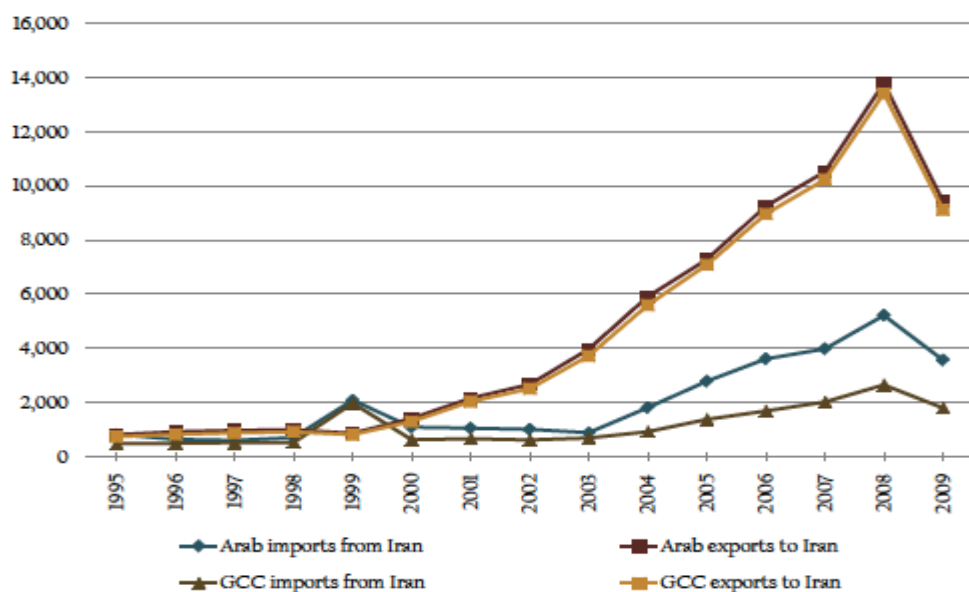
Therefore, Saudi–Iranian economic cooperation and coordination in the late 1990s was highly desired by both sides for domestic reasons. The decline in oil prices in the mid-1990s and Iran's attempt to open its economy and reform its business practices provided incentives for both sides to pursue the economic and business advantages of the rapprochement process. (Habibi 2010: 4) As a result, improved relations allowed for better coordination of OPEC production quotas that eventually led to higher oil prices after 1999. As Murden (2002: 73) notes, 'The Saudi–Iranian reconciliation was a

²⁶ For more on Saudi Arabia's economic challenges in the 1990s, see: Chaudry, K. A. 'The Price of Wealth: Business and State in Labor Remittance and Oil Economies', *International Organization* 41.3 (1989): 101–145 and *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997); Karl, T. L. *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms in Petro-States*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

significant factor enabling producer restraint within OPEC by mid-2000, and it led to marked increases in the price of oil in 2000-2001’.

However, achieving the advantages of full economic ties required more than oil coordination in OPEC. At the time when the rapprochement process started, Iran’s exports to its Arab neighbours consisted primarily of agricultural and textile products and handicrafts. Soon after, GCC countries expressed an interest in purchasing natural gas from Iran both for residential consumption and as feedstock for their growing petrochemical industries. At the time, both Iran and the GCC countries were making advances in low-tech and intermediate manufacturing that resulted in a moderate amount of trade in manufactured and industrial products between them, mainly in petrochemical products and light consumer goods. (Habibi 2010: 4)

**Figure 1. Iran-Arab Trade as Reported by Arab Countries
(in millions of dollars)**



Source: International Monetary Fund, Direction of Trade Statistics, June 2010.

Until 2000, the volume of trade between Iran and the GCC countries was very limited. As shown in Figure 1, the volume of Iran’s imports from and exports to the GCC was less than one billion dollars in the years prior to the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement. However, after the normalisation process started, GCC exports to Iran grew, from US\$1.3 billion in 2000 to US\$13.4 billion in 2008. Iran’s exports to GCC countries also increased—albeit at a slower pace—from US\$630 million in 2000 to US\$2.62 billion in 2008. As a result, the GCC countries have enjoyed a sizeable trade

surplus with respect to Iran, which reached a peak of US\$10.7 billion in 2008 and decreased to US\$7.3 billion in 2009. (Habibi 2010: 4)

Yet the push to expand Saudi–Iranian economic ties was not only a result of pure economic calculus: growing cooperation between Saudi and Iranian officials played a significant role. In this regard, there were two men whose roles were of great significance. (Author’s Interview, al-Braik 9 January 2012) On the Saudi side was Shaykh Abdulaziz al-Tuwaijri, the deputy of the National Guard and close advisor and confidant of Crown Prince Abdullah; his Iranian counterpart was Mohammed Reza Nouri Shahroudi, Iran’s ambassador to Saudi Arabia. (Author’s Interview, al-Braik 9 January 2012) The two men were close advisors and emissaries of their respective patrons, and over a short period of time they cultivated a strong friendship and became advocates and staunch defenders of Saudi–Iranian rapprochement.

Shaykh Abdulaziz al-Tuwaijri had gained considerable leverage over Saudi foreign policy following Crown Prince Abdullah’s rise to power, which he used to make the improvement of bilateral relations a high priority. (Author’s Interview, al-Braik 9 January 2012) Likewise, Mohammed Reza Nouri Shahroudi was—according to a number of observers—an extraordinary ambassador for his country in Saudi Arabia. (Author’s Interview, Mohajerani 25 August 2011) He befriended a number of Saudi officials, journalists, and intellectuals, and was able to extend his ties to the Saudi Shi’ite community in the Eastern Province without aggravating the authorities. (Author’s Interview, Mohajerani 25 August 2011) However, the appointment of Shahroudi did not come as a coincidence. In fact, he was sent deliberately by President Rafsanajni to take personal responsibility for improving bilateral relations, and to make sure no other agency or group in Iran could act to jeopardize the rapprochement process. (Author’s Interview, Nourizadeh 28 September 2010)

As a senior Iranian official at the Iranian foreign ministry explains, Rafsanjani acted ‘precisely and cleverly for selecting individuals as Iran’s agents in Saudi Arabia and attempted to choose those who could make Saudis to feel secure in order that to develop Tehran-Riyadh relationship . . . [the] selecting of the ambassador, Nouri Shahroudi, showed that Hashemi had concrete intention to introduce a person, on one hand was close to himself and on the other hand could improve the mutual relations.’ (In: Amiri and Ku Samsu 2011b: 111)

Nourizadeh (1996) asserts that the appointment of Shahroudi as Iranian ambassador to Riyadh was of great significance. Nouri Shahroudi ‘had succeeded in Libya in improving relations . . . [and also] succeeded in obtaining military equipment from Libya, which led to his promotion’.²⁷ Nevertheless, Nourizadeh also notes that the Saudis were initially suspicious of Nouri Shahroudi ‘because he was a cleric. But during the first two months of his stay, he had a positive impact on senior Saudi officials, and met with Crown Prince Abdullah and other Saudi statesmen’.²⁸ Apparently, personal relationships between some officials on both sides paid off. As Nourizadeh (Author’s Interview, 28 September 2010) argues, ‘The importance of Nouri Shahroudi’s role as an ambassador is that he worked hard to earn the trust of his Saudi hosts and he worked tirelessly to promote Iranian businesses in Saudi Arabia’. Thus, Shahroudi managed to build relations with Saudi merchants and facilitated his relationship with al-Tuwaijri to earn a place for Iranian companies in the Saudi market. (Author’s Interview, Nourizadeh 28 September 2010)

Even after he left his post in May 2000 to become a senior advisor to Iran’s Expediency Council for International Affairs, Nouri Shahroudi continued to advocate for strong Saudi–Iranian trade. When he visited Saudi Arabia years later to deliver a message from Rafsanjani, King Abdullah praised his role as a promoter of bilateral relations and called him ‘an asset for Iran and the world of Islam’.²⁹ Thus, later Iranian ambassadors to Saudi Arabia relied on his contacts to open doors and overcome differences. As Nourizadeh (Author’s Interview, 28 September 2010) notes, ‘The gap he left after his departure was big and never replaced. Although succeeding Iranian ambassadors tried to follow suit by lobbying for Iranian businesses, they never seemed to replace him’.

Although Saudi–Iranian trade was facilitated in large part by personal contacts and growing friendships, the institutional character that bilateral trade took was also very crucial in maintaining trust in the business community and sustainable growth in annual trade. The role of the Saudi–Iranian Joint Economic Commission, which alternated annually between Riyadh and Tehran, was instrumental not only in expanding, but also in negotiating and implementing agreements and bilateral contracts to facilitate and finance joint projects and direct investment. As Mohajerani (Author’s

²⁷ 'Saudi Arabia and Iran Improve Relations' 17 December 1996.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 'King Abdullah Hopes for Truce in Lebanon', FARS News Agency, 30 July 2006.

Interview, 25 August 2011) points out, ‘The personal and family relations that developed between King Abdullah and President Rafsanjani were very important.’ The same can be said about Sheik al-Tuwaijri, Nouri Shahroudi, Sheik Muhammad al-Jubeir, Mehdi Karroubi, and others who became friends of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, the annual joint committees in economics and security made the rapprochement more institutionalized.³⁰ Differences might have arisen between both sides—and some promises were never fulfilled—yet as Mohajerani (Author’s Interview, 25 August 2011) notes, the personal relationships ‘helped to mend differences and push some agreements and projects whenever the bureaucratic organizations were unable or unwilling to agree and cooperate’. Ali-Asghar Khaji, Iran’s ambassador to Saudi Arabia between 2000 and 2005, emphasized that ‘the establishment of a joint council of the two countries’ merchants in 2002 was an important step taken in boosting bilateral trade ties’.³¹

The Joint Economic Commission, for example, played a significant role in expanding trade ties; it managed to push banks to open branches and extend their financial services and insurance coverage to firms in both countries. Accordingly, an MOU on investment promotion and protection was signed on 14 May 2003 by the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CSCCI) and the Iran Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in Kish Island, southern Iran. The MOU envisaged the creation of a joint business council aimed at promoting mutual investments, increasing tourism cooperation, and boosting the volume of trade between the two countries. One result was that 70,000 Saudi tourists visited Iran in 2003. The remarkable increase in Saudi tourists came at a time when Tehran witnessed the arrival of around 400,000 Arab tourists, a testament to the influence of Saudi–Iranian rapprochement on other Arab countries.³²

The Iran-Saudi Arabia Joint Economic Commission’s sixth session on 15 March 2004 produced an MOU covering seven additional fields. That MOU was signed by Saudi Minister of Commerce and Industry Hashim bin Abdallah bin Hashim al-

³⁰ Sheik Muhammad al-Jubeir was the Chairman of the Saudi Consultative Council 1991-2001. Mehdi Karroubi was chairman of the parliament from 1989 to 1992 and 2000 to 2004, and a presidential candidate in the 2005 and 2009 presidential elections. In an interview with an Arab News Channel during the Iranian elections of 2009, Karroubi reflected on his friendship with Sheik Muhammad al-Jubeir during the Saudi–Iranian visits. See: 'Interview with Mehdi Karroubi', Al-Arabiya TV, 10 June 2009.

³¹ 'Saudi Official: Four-Fold Iran-Saudi Trade, Sign of High Potential', IRNA News Agency, 19 July 2004.

³² 'Iran Witnesses High Saudi Tourist Inflow', *Saudi Gazette*, 29 August 2002.

Yamani, and his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Shariatmadari. In the MOU, the two sides agreed to avoid double taxation, boost and support investment, lower customs, promote tourism, and improve transport by air, ground, and sea. The two sides also agreed on cooperation to establish an export guarantee fund and set up new cities in their border areas. Moreover, they agreed to cooperate in enforcing quality control and product standardization in manufacturing. They also reached agreements on cooperation in their economic, commerce, investment, technical, communications, and energy and trade delegation committees.³³

Despite the progress in bilateral trade, the relative share of Iran and Saudi Arabia in their respective foreign trade remained small. As Habibi (2010: 5) notes, 'It seems unlikely that trade and economic considerations will serve as a major determining factor with respect to diplomatic relations between the two countries'. Yet Saudi–Iranian trade grew as a result of the agreements. After 2004, Saudi Arabia emerged as the second-largest GCC importer from Iran. Saudi imports, which remained well below US\$100 million annually until 2000, grew to US\$900 million in 2008 before experiencing a sharp decline in 2009. The progress in trade led both sides to set up a joint commerce committee in May 2007 in order to prepare grounds for future economic cooperation. Mehdi Ghazanfari, head of Iran's Trade Development Organization and Deputy Commerce Ministry, declared that issues relating to customs agreements and avoidance of double taxation would be settled and trade ties between both sides would make further boost in trade more than ever before. He also expressed that the new commerce joint committee would bring about a new era in bilateral relations.³⁴ As a result, Saudi–Iranian trade gained more importance as Iran began to enjoy a trade surplus.

7.3 CONSTRAINTS ON RAPPROCHEMENT

While Saudi–Iranian relations evolved significantly after the 1980s, on the societal level there remained many unresolved issues.³⁵ Positive interaction between the leaders of both countries created an environment of reconciliation and understanding,

³³ 'Iran, Saudi Arabia Sign MOU in Seven Fields', *Payvand News*, 15 March 2004.

³⁴ 'Iran, Saudi Arabia to Set up Joint Commerce Committee', *Asia Pulse*, 22 May 2007.

³⁵ In a 2002 Zogby International study entitled *What Arabs Think: values, beliefs and concerns*, Iran received modest favourability ratings from Saudi respondents compared with other Arab countries. Nevertheless, the study did note that Saudi public attitudes towards Iran were in fact improving compared to earlier years. (Zogby 2002: 61) In 2005 survey released by InterMedia, research institute based in Washington, DC, 45 per cent of Iranians viewed Saudi Arabia favourably. See: 'New Survey Finds Iranians Support Their Country's Nuclear Program', PR Newswire 26 May 2005.

but it did not translate into strong (or even improved) relations between the citizens of both countries.³⁶ We can identify three major obstacles that prevented Saudi–Iranian rapprochement from fulfilling its goals: deep religious differences, a cultural gap between the two societies, and the unresolved issue of regional security.

The first of these obstacles was sectarianism. Religious differences, in particular between religious institutions, continued to express themselves through fatwās and Friday sermons emphasising historical differences between Sunnis and Shi’ites. (Alkhatlan 2003: 58) Saudi society continued to view Iranians as Shi’ite heretics that aspired to corrupt the truth faith of Islam, while Iranians remained sceptical of Saudi Wahhabi Islam that opted to deny them true observance of their religious doctrine in the annual hajj. (Lipton 2002: 93) As the war in Iraq unfolded in 2003, Saudi public opinion grew to exhibit feelings of mistrust and enmity towards Shi’ites everywhere, and especially against the Iranian brand of Islam. (Jones 2005b) A group of 38 ulama’, including Shaykh Safar al-Hawali, defied the Saudi government in the fall of 2006 by proclaiming holy war against the Shi’ites in Iraq—and their patrons in Iran—whom they described as ‘collaborators’ with the US occupation of Iraq.³⁷ (Kaim 2008: 181)

As Ambassador al-Braik (Author’s Interview, 9 January 2012) argued, it is true ‘that good relations remained on the leadership level but failed to transcend to the societal level’. A clear indication of this was be the unwillingness of both governments to face the growing domestic objections to the resolution of regional issues, including Lebanon and Iraq. For example, the Saudi government faced pressure from Salafi clerics to take an anti-Shi’a position in its dealings with Iran. As Wehrey (2009: xi) notes, ‘In late 2006 there was indeed mounting Saudi public pressure to protect Sunnis in Iraq. At the same time, the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia appear to have exploited or tacitly endorsed this rhetoric as a way to counter the greater threat of Iran’s Pan-Islamist populism’.

³⁶ During the rapprochement period of 1997 to 2008, the Saudi public’s attitudes towards Iran were increasingly positive. This approval hit a record high in 2005, then began dropping slowly after the 2006 war in Lebanon until it reached an all-time low by end of 2011. For example, in 2006, Iran was rated favourably by 85 per cent of Saudis. By 2008, the rate had dropped to 72 per cent and by 2009, only 35 per cent of Saudis had a favourable view of Iran. In a 2011 poll, positive views of Iran have plummeted to a scant 6 per cent in Saudi Arabia. See: Telhami and Zogby 2011, *Arab Public Opinion Survey*.

³⁷ Safar al-Hawali (b. 1950) is a shari’a scholar and a prominent leader of the Sahwa movement in Saudi Arabia. Samuel P. Huntington mentioned al-Hawali in his book *Clash of Civilizations*, and cited a widely-circulated tape in which al-Hawali said, ‘It is not World against Iraq. It is the West against Islam’. (Huntington 1997: 249)

In Iran, the rapprochement with Saudis was not widely accepted. The Iranian leadership did seek to normalize its relations with the Saudi side, but it did not succeed in obtaining an approval from its revolutionary loyalists base. Revolutionary utopias, as Adib-Moghaddam (2008: 67) argues, were institutionalized as central narratives of the state, and the Islamic Republic followed them at the level of interest as well as behaviour. In other words, the radical wing that took over the Iranian state did not see a contradiction between the revolutionary ideals and ‘the’ national interest of the country. Iran found itself increasingly in contradiction with its revolutionary past. This was exemplified by Iran’s cooperation with regional states despite warnings expressed in Khomeini’s will, which explicitly warned against rapprochement with the ‘government of the Hijaz’ (*i.e.*, Saudi Arabia).

The Iranian political and religious elite accordingly became uneasy with the growing normalization efforts with Saudi Arabia. As Adib-Moghaddam (2008: 70) notes:

From the perspective of contemporary Iranian decision-makers there appears to be no contradiction between the utopian-romantic *Leitmotif* of the revolution and multilateral engagement and détente—two elements that were central to the “dialogue among civilizations” initiative put forward by the Khatami administration. Although the Islamic Republic has distanced itself from some of the confrontationist policies characteristic of the first decade of the revolution, *tabligh* (calling) and *dawat* (propagation) continue to provide the strategic means to realize the preferences of the state.³⁸

This uneasiness with accepting rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and maintaining a revolutionary ethos was aggravated by the clashes over Lebanon and Iraq. Iranian religious officials began to oppose Saudi discourse and action after the fall of Baghdad in 2003.

By the time Saudi clerics began attacking Iran for its interventions in Sunni states such as Iraq, Bahrain, Syria, and Lebanon, tensions between the two sides had begun to manifest more broadly. As Wehrey (2009: xiii) observes:

Tehran’s posture toward Saudi Arabia and the Gulf has been affected by an internal debate between factions who see the Gulf as a zone of economic enrichment and multilateral diplomatic cooperation, and those

³⁸ In classic Islamic theology, *tabligh* (propagation) is dissemination and diffusion of some principle, belief, or practice. It is the increase or spread of a Muslim belief by natural reproduction; in other words, it is the action of branching out. (Mowlana 2003: 308) *Da’wa* (*dawat*) usually denotes the preaching of Islam. (Jones 2005a: 2225) In this respect, Shi’ite religious preachers continued to advocate their call among Sunni during the annual hajj, and Saudi Wahhabi preachers continued to spread their own interpretation of Islam among Shi’ites and other denominations of Islam.

who take a more hegemonic, proprietary view, preferring the instruments of intimidation and threat. It should be emphasized, however, that both sides in Tehran are united in the view that the US presence as an external security guarantor should end—a view that is unacceptable to Saudi Arabia.

The second obstacle to Saudi–Iranian rapprochement was cultural. Three decades of enmity prevented both sides from forming natural channels of influence and cooperation. A clear example of this was the inability of ambassadors to foster relations and improve dealings in both communities. Although the 1998 Cooperation Agreement stated that both parties should seek to educate the other nation about their country and undertake programmes geared at fostering societal rapprochement, the result was insignificant and never achieved its planned goals. This was due to the inability of ambassadors to fulfil the promise of normalisation because they lacked either the proper skills—namely in language and cultural understanding—to convince citizens of the benefits of rapprochement. Many officials also lacked the ability to engage with ordinary people in their respective states to foster good relations and prevent mistrust and suspension.

Put simply, there were cultural barriers³⁹ that both sides failed to overcome. As Mohajerani (Author’s Interview, 25 August 2011) explains:

Except for ambassador Nouri Shahroudi, who managed to foster personal relationships with the Saudi elite and public, successive ambassadors in both countries failed to cultivate political and personal relationships with the other part. An Iranian ambassador in Riyadh would feel lonely and unable to form relations and blend with the larger Saudi society due to the cultural and religious barriers. The same thing can be said about the Saudi ambassador to Tehran, who could not associate himself with the larger Iranian community.

In a personal interview, former Saudi Ambassador to Iran, Nasser al-Braik (9 January 2012), agreed with this assessment and stated that he tried to break through the political elite and relate to the Iranian community with only modest success. He acknowledges that the lack of understanding of Iranian culture and willingness to entertain Iranian traditions excluded Saudi ambassadors from important parts of society they were supposed to interact with.

A third obstacle to rapprochement was the lack of agreement over regional security. It is true to say that Saudi–Iranian rivalry receded even prior to 1997

³⁹ Cultural barriers between Saudi society and Iranian society are due to a lack of cultural exchange prior to 1979, and the subsequent two and half decades of isolation between the two sides. Rarely was Saudi culture introduced to Iranians, and vice versa. (Author’s Interview, Al-Braik, 9 January 2012)

rapprochement, yet a comprehensive agreement over regional security and the presence of foreign militaries in the Gulf was never achieved. Due to the cultural and sectarian divisions described above, settling the differences over regional security remained difficult; while the two states worked toward better relations they proceeded without bringing up the issue of regional security in order not to jeopardize the gains of rapprochement. (Author's Interview, Mousavian 25 October 2010) Prince Turki al-Faisal (Author's Interview, 1 November 2010) explains that the central difference between Saudi and Iranian perceptions of regional security can be identified as follows:

Iran contends that regional states should seek to establish a new security framework that does not include the US and Europe, while GCC states argue that good intentions on the part of Iran is a good development, but they are not ready to forego their security agreements with West until [the] Iranian political elite prove their commitment towards issues like the occupied Emirati islands and the recognition of Bahrain's independence and sovereignty. And it should be viewed that Iran's conditioning of security by asking GCC states to disassociate themselves from their security agreements with any part of the world is in its own an imposition that these countries refuse.

Cultural and historical differences became great obstacles to rapprochement. Alkhtalan (2003: 67) notes that in order to overcome these obstacles, important formal and informal steps should have been taken to improve societal ties and interaction between the peoples of the two nations. Borders should have been opened to encourage citizens to travel around and know each other personally. He argues: 'If implemented, these steps should help discard the many negative feelings that may stand in the way of establishing a solid and agreeable security regime'. (Alkhatlan 2003: 67)

A final obstacle to the rapprochement was economic. The volume of Saudi-Iranian trade was never able to overcome the political and structural obstacles in its path. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 65) First, the Saudi leadership was not entirely trusting of some elements of the Iranian leadership, so mistrust continued to strain bilateral economic relations. Under those circumstances, Saudi Arabia preferred to import gas from sources other than Iran, such as Qatar. On the other hand, Iran was not keen on Saudi and GCC Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and preferred—for example—Chinese FDI, which had no political strings attached. As a result, 'minor economic steps taken are largely politically motivated: Iran reaches out to the GCC to disrupt US policy in the Middle East, and some "Gulfis" reach back to keep cross-Gulf relations within the realm of normality'. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 65)

The second problem in growing economic ties was structural. This obstacle was largely an Iranian problem, and can be summed up as problems of trade regulation and economic governance. The Iranian government had no control over parts of its economy; notable examples include the huge economic power of many *bonyads* (foundations), and the trouble the government experienced in establishing new economic partnerships with other states or in accommodating foreign investment in general. The economic situation in Iran was therefore highly volatile, and specific interest groups actively defended their turf. All this severely limited the possibility of large-scale FDI projects. Several Saudi and GCC companies were known to want to invest in Iran, but the tough economic restrictions and lack of business-friendly government policies resulted in limited success. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 65) For example, at the start of the rapprochement process the billionaire and entrepreneur Prince Waleed bin Talal announced his eagerness to invest in Iran if invited to do so. There were also talks between the Saudi Arabian Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) and Iran's National Petroleum Company (NPC) about petrochemical cooperation, although most of these initiatives never materialized. (Okruhlik 2003: 116-119)

While Iran boasted about foreign—and especially Asian—direct investment, Gulf investors realized that this is very different in nature and duration from participation in their home countries. Foreign investments in the GCC countries tend to be massive and fixed for decades. In Iran, however, contracts involve less capital, are fixed for a limited period and generally contain escape clauses for the foreign partners. As such, Iran also needed a better overall investment climate for non-Gulf FDI to inspire Saudi and other GCC investors. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 65)

Despite efforts on both sides to use security and economic cooperation as means to improve relations, the rapprochement was not fully achieved as a result of these factors. Talks and agreements do not necessarily entail action. It is true that both sides managed to successfully conclude a set of agreements and MOUs, but security and identity remained obstacles to the realisation of full rapprochement between the two states. Regardless of the importance of trade, some doubts—as Aarts and van Duijne (2009: 59) argue—still existed between the states about the Iranian investment climate. Despite the moderate progress of relations, ‘it is worthwhile to assess whether, in the long run, investments in core industries can cross-cut sub-regions and achieve full rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran’. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 59)

7.4 CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997 had a mixed record of achievements and failures. The resumption of normal relations and the signing of two key agreements, the Cooperation Agreement of 1998 and the Security Accord of 2001, can be considered historic achievements. For the first time since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia and Iran found a way to settle their differences and conduct relations without resorting to violence or intimidation. The expansion of their economic and business ties in the period stands as a vivid example of reconciliation and good relations. Further, the increase in Iranian pilgrims travelling to the holy sites in Saudi Arabia and the influx of Saudi tourists to Iran proved that better relations between the two sides could exist. On the regional level, the rapprochement between the two largest states of the Gulf brought stability and improved trust and cooperation between the GCC states and Iran. It also had an important effect in reducing sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shi'ites, and enabled efforts at increasing religious tolerance in the region.

Nevertheless, the rapprochement's modest initiatives fell short of addressing the issue of regional security. Its failure to endure exposed its limits to transform Saudi–Iranian relations beyond the level of the political elite: beyond opening new tourist destinations to the average Saudi or Iranian, rapprochement failed to reach the societal level. Modest improvements in public attitudes did occur, but never reached a level in which Saudi and Iranian societies could enjoy health and strong ties. From this example, we can see that in order to have good lasting relations between two states, societal ties should be strong enough that they can work to underpin the pursuit of mutual interests and act as a bulwark against deterioration in inter-state relations.

The history of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement can add to our knowledge of what elements truly improve inter-state relations, and inform us about the obstacles that can prevent bilateral relations from improving. Expansion of economic ties and cooperation over oil, gas, and petrochemicals brought great gains to both states. Equally, establishing joint councils and committees and facilitating banking agreements and insurance coverage improved relations between the trade sectors in both states. Failing to address religious differences and the inability to contain radical religious preachers and sectarian practices nevertheless undermined the rapprochement process on the social level.

A continued inability to reconcile differences over regional security made the rapprochement process vulnerable to sudden changes, as the invasion of Iraq has proven. Iran failed to assure Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies of its intentions regarding the sovereignty of Bahrain and fate of the disputed Emirati islands. Equally, Saudi Arabia failed to dispel Iranian worries about US and European military presence in the Gulf. It can be asserted that both sides failed to reassure each other, and attempts to delay discussing such crucial issues as the security of the Gulf eventually undermined the rapprochement process in the long run. This was reinforced after the rise of the conservatives to power in Iran following the 2005 elections.

THE DEMISE OF THE RAPPROCHEMENT

How the *Muqawama–Mumana*'a Discourse Revived Saudi–Iranian Rivalry

“Cut off the head of the [Iranian] snake.”
-King Abdullah¹

“Those [Saudis] who choose to fuel the flames of conflict, must know that the fire will reach them.”
-Manouchehr Mottaki²

On 3 August 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a conservative non-cleric, became Iran's sixth president. Although he was a relatively obscure figure in Iranian politics, his name had become known when he was elected mayor of Tehran in 2003. (Dodson and Dorraj 2008: 71) The son of a blacksmith, Ahmadinejad was born in 1956 in Garmsar, near Tehran, and holds a PhD in traffic and transport from Tehran's University of Science and Technology, where he was a lecturer. When he became mayor of Tehran, he earned a good reputation among conservatives for fighting corruption and fixing the failed traffic system that had plagued Tehran's streets for years. (Naji 2008: 40) Nevertheless, he reversed changes made by previous moderate and reformist mayors and opted to please his conservative base by supporting religious charities, and by imposing segregation policies between men and women in the capital's municipality offices. (Naji 2007: 84) As a result, the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran (*E' telāf-i Ābādgārān-i Īrān-i Eslāmī*) supported his campaign for the 2005 presidential election, in which he garnered 62 per cent of the runoff election votes.

¹“Cut Off Head of Snake”, Saudis Told U.S. On Iran' Reuters 20 November 2010; Tehran Bureau, *et al.* 29 November 2010.

² 'FM Urges Regional States to Avoid Interference in Yemen's Affairs' FARS News Agency 10 November 2009.

Since he became president, he has advocated strong rhetoric against the United States and Israel (Rakel 2007: 161) supported social adherence to Islamic values, and taken an unbending stance on Iran's nuclear programme, which earned him some popularity in his first year among ordinary Iranians. (Ehteshami and Zweiri 2007: 64)

Nevertheless, Ahmadinejad's statements and policies would prove to have far more consequences and ramifications on Iran's world image and the country's foreign policy orientation. With regard to Saudi–Iranian relations, Ahmadinejad's first presidential term (2005–2009) significantly altered the rapprochement process, leading to deterioration. By the time he was re-elected in June 2009 in a controversial race plagued with accusations of fraud, the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement had come to a halt. The rivalry between the two states was subsequently revived. It is important to emphasize that Saudi Arabia and Iran did not sever their relations as they had done in April 1988; nevertheless, their diplomatic skirmishes over a number of regional issues—Iran's nuclear programme, rise of Shi'ites in Iraq, the sectarian divide in Lebanon, the Gaza War of 2008, and the Saudi–Houthi War on the Yemeni borders in 2009—have all borne resemblance to the Saudi–Iranian rivalry of the 1980s. As President Ahmadinejad entered his second term in office, Saudi–Iranian joint ministerial and commerce committees ceased to meet, and when the newly-appointed Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, (2010–present), hinted at a possible visit to Riyadh in a show of goodwill towards Saudi Arabia, his gesture was turned down by his Saudi counterpart.³

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the circumstances that led to the demise of the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997, and to assess the role of state identity in determining the fate of the rapprochement process. While it is necessary to reaffirm the importance of ideational—mainly sectarian—and materialist or balance of power factors, it nevertheless asserts that these factors are always co-dependant. In other words, there needs to be a position or perception of mistrust and enmity between the two sides for those factors to operate. For example, sectarianism has always been present in Saudi–Iranian relations, but it has only been used instrumentally when both states were experiencing a period of mistrust and rivalry. Furthermore, the balance of

³ On his first working day as Iran's foreign minister, Ali-Akbar Salehi said: 'In order to achieve a pragmatic and effective foreign policy, we should focus our attention on the Islamic world and our neighbours ... Saudi Arabia has a special position which accordingly also needs special political attention as Iran and Saudi Arabia can solve many of the problems of the Islamic world'. See: 'New Iranian Foreign Minister: Relations with Saudis Top Priority' DPA 18 December 2010.

power has always been fluid and has often changed as states in the region realigned themselves to resist intimidation from one another. (Pradhan 2008: 266) The cases of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are clear examples: both states inched closer to Saudi Arabia when Iran was threatening to export its revolution in the 1980s, yet both became ambivalent towards Saudi–Iranian rapprochement. Nevertheless, when the rapprochement process derailed, Qatar significantly improved its relations with Iran,⁴ while the United Arab Emirates sided with Saudi Arabia in advocating a stronger response to Iran’s nuclear programme. (Author’s Interview, Zayed 26 June 2011)

8.1 WHY THE RAPPROCHEMENT COLLAPSED

While it is difficult to point to a single event that ended the rapprochement process, a few key regional and domestic developments—namely the fall of Baghdad in 2003 and the rise of neo-conservatives in Iran’s parliamentary elections in 2004—are often cited as reasons why Saudi–Iranian relations shifted from relative warmth to hostility. (Ehteshami and Zweiri 2007: 111) As Ata’ollah Mohajerani (Author’s Interview, 25 August 2011) notes:

You can’t put a date as to when relations witnessed a setback, nevertheless the gap between the Iranian leadership’s views and its regional discourse and that of Saudis continued to grow during the Ahmadinejad presidency until trust was lost and the two sides seemed unwilling to compromise or even talk any more.

It is important to note that the deterioration in bilateral relations occurred over an extended period of time between 2006 and 2009. The two sides conducted several rounds of talks during this period to resolve differences over regional issues. The most notable of these efforts were the strategic talks of 2006–2007 between Ali Larijani and Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the respective heads of their countries’ national security councils, which started in Riyadh in April 2006 and concluded with President Ahmadinejad’s visit to Riyadh in March 2007. Nevertheless, the rapprochement process would continue to deteriorate, thereafter reviving a Saudi–Iranian rivalry similar to that of the 1980s.

⁴ Between 2005 and 2008, Qatar became more associated with the *muqawama–mumana’a* front. It cultivated close relations with Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas. In fact, President Ahmadinejad was invited to the GCC Summit in the Qatari capital, Doha. President Ahmadinejad approached the GCC with proposals for a security agreement between Iran and the GCC member states. Speaking at a GCC Summit in Qatar, Ahmadinejad stated, ‘We want peace and security . . . based on justice and without foreign intervention’. Nevertheless, since Saudi Arabia and Qatar reconciled in 2008, Qatar distanced itself from the Iranian–Syrian axis. See: ‘Saudi and Qatar to Fix Borders’, *The National Newspaper*, 2008.

Ideational and materialist factors were instrumental in the demise of the rapprochement process, but the change in Iran's state identity during President Ahemednejad's first term altered the perception of each state towards the other, turning from relative friendliness to enmity and rivalry. This can be clearly explained by examining the *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse, and the debates between moderates and radicals that consumed the narrative of Saudi–Iranian relations between 2005 and 2009. Throughout the history of Saudi–Iranian relations, a number of issues that have always been constant in the relationship can be identified, including the dispute over the hajj, the Sunni-Shi'ite divide, oil prices, the UAE islands, Bahrain's sovereignty, regional security and US military presence in the Gulf. (Shanahan 2009: 3) Nevertheless, Saudi–Iranian relations have been determined at times by the dynamics of state identity, mainly after 1979. When state identity was defined in a way that created a perception of enmity, both sides engaged in rivalry; when state identity was defined in a way that provided common interests, both sides were peaceful and engaged in cooperative and friendly relations.

This chapter will seek to identify what changes to state identity—mainly in Iran—led to a renewed perception of enmity on both sides, and will discuss areas where changes to state identity manifested itself. While this chapter considers the first term of President Ahmadinejad as a period of declining bilateral relations, it emphasizes that the *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse reflected the change in Iran's state identity. It nevertheless acknowledges that the change in state identity was not a product of Ahmadinejad's government alone—the presidency office in Iran is a strong player, but it is not the dominant force. Rather, it is a product of a broader shift in Iran's political establishment, namely the growing role of the Army of the Guards of the Iranian Revolution (IRGC) in parliamentary politics and the reliance of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on the hard-line conservative clergy who sought to revive Iran's revolutionary ideals.⁵ In this regard, the rise of the conservative faction within Iran following the parliamentary elections of 2004 inevitably led to the redefining of

⁵ The use of the term “conservatives” (or “neo-conservatives”), as discussed in Chapter 7, refers to a broad coalition of parties, religious seminary figures and former revolutionary guard officers who helped elect Ahmadinejad as president in 2005. These include—but are not limited to—the Islamic Society of Engineers (ISE), the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran (ABII), Islamic Coalition Party (ICP), the Council for Coordinating the Revolution Forces (which includes older leaders of the Conservative Alliance of the 2000 parliamentary elections). (Gheissari and Nasr 2006: 141-143) However, some scholars prefer to describe this coalition as “revolutionary hardliners”. As Arjomand (2009: 14) argues: ‘Our revisionist sociology of revolution shows that the return of the hardliners is not as anomalous as it seems, and suggests that the group is much more accurately described as (revolutionary) “hardliners”, as they purport to recover the original purity of the Islamic revolution’.

Iran's state identity into a radical confrontation path resembling that of the early revolutionary period of the 1980s. Furthermore, the change in Iran's state identity led to the emergence of the debate between moderates and radicals that engulfed the period between 2005 and 2009. It is for this reason that the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement process stalled.

8.1.1 President Ahmadinejad's first term and the return of Saudi–Iranian rivalry

Prior to President Ahmadinejad's election in August 2005, differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran over Iraq were starting to show. From the Saudi perspective, Iran's revolutionary guards were infiltrating Shi'ite militias in an attempt to influence the Iraqi political process at the expense of Iraq's Sunnis and moderate Arab Shi'ites. During his visit to Washington DC, on 23 September 2005, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal voiced Riyadh's worry over Iran's increasing role in aiding Iraqi Shi'ite groups. Answering a question about Iran's role in Iraq, al-Faisal said: 'Iraqis are complaining of interference by Iran. If there is indeed such interference, especially in southern provinces neighbouring Iran, that would be quite serious . . . these concerns includes people coming in, money being brought in, weapons too, and interference in the political life'.⁶ In response to the Saudi accusations, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, said Iran was disappointed over Saudi allegations that it was meddling in Iraq and dismissed Saudi concern as 'surprising and irrational'.⁷ Nevertheless, Asefi downplayed the incident, saying:

The Islamic Republic of Iran does not expect such remarks from its friends at such a sensitive time in the region . . . there suspicious hands that are seeking to spread differences among Muslim groups and sects in the region and in Iraq . . . Instead of making accusations, we should support the Iraqi government and nation to reach stability and reinforce security.⁸

Despite differences over Iraq, the Saudis welcomed the outcome of Iran's 2005 elections. In fact, King Abdullah was among the first heads of state to congratulate President Ahmadinejad, and similar sentiments were expressed by other GCC states. Although the Saudis were hoping for the return of Rafsanjani to power, they showed great interest in strengthening ties with the new president. (Hafezian 2010) Iran, on the other hand, announced that it would continue to pursue détente with the Arab and

⁶ 'Prince Saud Al-Faisal Press Conference During U.S. Visit', Saudi Press Agency, 23 September 2005.

⁷ The dispute led Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki to delay a planned visit to Saudi Arabia in October 2005. See: 'Iran FM Puts Off Saudi Visit Amid Row over Iraq', AFP, 5 October 2005.

⁸ 'Iran: Iraq Meddling Allegations 'Surprising, Irrational'', AFP, 24 September 2005.

Muslim worlds. In his first press conference after the election, President Ahmadinejad said: 'Considerable progress has been made thus far and more progress will be made. We will witness expansion of relations with the Muslim world and regional states'. Commenting further on relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, Ahmadinejad announced, 'This is a priority for our foreign policy. The Persian Gulf is the Gulf of peace and justice and we seek understanding with the Persian Gulf states and friendly relations to defend its interests'. (Hafezian 2010) Following on Ahmadinejad's friendly remarks, a senior Iranian envoy delivered a message to Saudi King Abdullah from the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, assuring Saudis of continued friendship and support for the rapprochement process. According to Ali Akbar Velayati, a former foreign minister and advisor to the supreme leader on international affairs, the message 'came in the course of the close brotherly relations linking the two countries'.⁹ Responding to Ayatollah Khamenei's gesture, King Abdullah noted:

The message by Ayatollah Khamenei is a valuable move. The relations between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran are very long-standing and solid, and we have a great deal of respect for the Iranian leadership and nation. We value the viewpoints and moves of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran towards the objective of bringing the Islamic countries closer to one another, and fostering the resolution of the current issues of the Muslim world.¹⁰

In retrospect, the Saudis received positive signals from Tehran and sought to engage the new President closely in order to calm the rising tensions over Iraq and Lebanon. Riyadh's understanding was that the election of Ahmadinejad provided an opportunity to engage Iran's conservatives—who had been critical of the rapprochement process—and achieve a conclusion to the normalization efforts.¹¹ On the occasion of the Third Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC in Mecca in December 2005, the Saudis extended an invitation to the newly-elected president to attend the meeting. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged Ahmadinejad to accept the invitation and advised him to reassert Iran's commitment to the rapprochement process.¹²

President Ahmadinejad did travel to Saudi Arabia, where he was greeted by King Abdullah and offered an exceptional audience with Saudi officials on the side-

⁹ 'Iran Daily Comments on Importance of President's Saudi Visit', 9 December 2005.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 'The Diplomatic Mirage of Amman, Riyadh, Cairo, and Sana'a', *Kayhan Newspaper*, 20 December 2010.

¹² 'Iran's Leader Receives President Ahmadinejad Ahead of Saudi Visit', 6 December 2005.

lines of the OIC meeting to reaffirm Saudi–Iranian cooperation and continuation of the rapprochement process. During the summit, President Ahmadinejad delivered a speech where he made an unequivocal denial of the Holocaust and called on Europeans to open their land to Jewish settlement. (Michael 2008: 11-18) The remarks caused international condemnation and overshadowed the OIC agenda, which was designed to fight terrorism and advocate adherence by Muslim countries to peace and the rejection of the radical use of violence to promote Islamic causes. Although the Saudis were dismayed at Ahmadinejad’s attempt to override the summit, they looked the other way and embraced the Iranian president in an effort to contain Tehran.¹³ (Wehrey and Project Air Force 2009: 36)

Since becoming president, Ahmadinejad and his conservative cabinet have been instrumental in redefining Iran’s foreign policy orientation by advocating a discourse based on defiance and the incitement of Persian nationalism. Changes in Iran’s foreign policy were evident as Ahmadinejad sought to return to the populist policies of the Islamic Revolution’s early days. Moreover, his confrontational political style, authoritarianism, and incendiary remarks against the West rendered him a polarizing and controversial figure. As a result, his government became assertive in promoting a Pan-Islamic agenda and in strengthening Iran’s regional influence. (Dodson and Dorraj 2008: 71) In this regard, the populist rhetoric and ideals espoused by Ahmadinejad were strongly shaped by the regional context. As Barzegar (2010: 173) explains:

Iranian foreign policy [during Ahmadinejad’s presidency] had two key enduring components. First, Tehran sought to deal with Iran’s new security dilemma brought about by the US presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan after 2003. Iran responded with an “accommodating policy”, which consisted of expanding cooperation after Saddam’s fall with the main Arab world actors, principally Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and seeking direct talks with the United States . . . In this way, Iran hoped to avoid both a new round of rivalry with its Arab neighbours and a new security dilemma in its relations with the United States. The second component was to seek an “alliance policy” while regionalizing the nuclear issue, in which Iran sought to tie and interweave the nuclear issue with broader regional dynamics such as Israel’s undeclared nuclear arsenal and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As for Saudi–Iranian relations, the Ahmadinejad’s presidency—especially the first term—proved to be an important juncture in the rapprochement process for two

¹³ It has been reported that Saudi Arabia sent a letter of protest concerning President Ahmadinejad’s anti-Semitic remarks during the OIC meetings; nevertheless, an official talking to an Iranian news agency denied the story. See: ('Iran Denies Receiving Protest Letter from Saudi Arabia', 24 December 2005).

reasons. First, although Iran's foreign policy discourse opted to reflect a revised state identity based on Islamic defiance of the West and "Iranianism",¹⁴ it avoided alienating Saudi Arabia in the process. Second, Ahmadinejad followed a containment approach towards Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries, aiming at pushing neighbouring Arab concerns away from the US and Europe.

To illustrate this approach we can note to some examples. Between 2005 and 2007, President Ahmadinejad toured GCC states in a bid to diffuse growing tensions with its Arab neighbour over Iraq and Tehran's controversial nuclear programmes. In fact, President Ahmadinejad would become the only Iranian president to visit Saudi Arabia more than four times while in office. He attended the OIC meeting in December 2005, made an official visit to Saudi Arabia in March 2007, participated in Riyadh's OPEC summit in November 2007, and accepted a Saudi invitation to perform the hajj in Mecca in December 2007. President Ahmadinejad also avoided direct criticism of King Abdullah even at the height of a Saudi-Iranian row over the Hizbullah-Israel War in July 2006. Despite his radical regional discourse—and incendiary remarks—President Ahmadinejad refrained from singling out Saudi Arabia, as other conservative clerics and MPs did in their Friday sermons or in the majlis. As Ambassador Nasser al-Braik (Author's Interview, 9 January 2012) explains:

President Mohammad Khatami was sincere about improving Saudi-Iranian relations despite the negative implications of the War on Iraq in 2003, and he often tried to downplay negative comments by prominent conservative figures in Iran against Saudi. However, the situation began to change once Ahmadinejad rose to power and conservatives started to voice harsh criticism against Saudi regional polices. It is not clear to me if Ahmadinejad approved the rise of negative sentiments towards Saudi; nevertheless, he did nothing to stop it.

On the other side, Saudi official statements rarely criticized Ahmadinejad even after the strategic talks of 2007 failed. In fact, for almost two years the Saudis tried to persuade the new Iranian president to reach an understanding with the conservatives. Nevertheless, as Rihab Massoud (Author's Interview, 18 November 2011) notes, the Saudis would come to the conclusion that Ahmadinejad was not able to commit to any agreement that would diffuse the growing tensions between the two sides, and—more importantly—the foreign policy of Iran appeared to be controlled in practice by the

¹⁴ Iranianism advocates solidarity and reunification of Iranian peoples living in the Iranian plateau. President Ahmadinejad made Iranianism an essential part of Iran's foreign policy discourse. In a meeting with prominent members of the Allamah Tabatabaei National Festival in 2012, Ahmadinejad argued that Iranianism is not a racial ideology, but it is a culture and a perspective on the world of creation and humanity. See: 'President Says "Iranianism" Is a Culture, Rather Than a Race', IRIB 7 March 2012.

Office of the Supreme Leader, rather than the president. As a consequence, Saudi policy towards Iran changed from talking to the president to engaging directly with the Office of the Supreme Leader. This can be clearly illustrated during the strategic talks 2006–2007, where the dialogue shifted from the foreign ministries in both states to the national security councils and private messengers exchanging letters between King Abdullah and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

8.1.2 The strategic talks of 2006–2007

On 16 October 2005, King Abdullah appointed Prince Bandar bin Sultan—a veteran diplomat who presided over his country’s relations with the US for more than two decades (1983–2005)—as Secretary-General of the National Security Council (NSC).¹⁵ The appointment of Bandar was perceived as a shift in Saudi foreign policy from accommodation with Iran to an active—or perhaps assertive—attempt to contain Iran.

Prince Bandar was known to be critical of rapprochement with Tehran and had been active in the past in coordinating US and European policies to contain Iran’s influence in the region—especially during the Iran–Iraq War. (Simpson 2006: 154; Woodward 2004: 231) Nevertheless, he has also been recognized as a top negotiator; therefore, his appointment was also perceived as a way to improve Saudi Arabia’s position in its negotiations with Iran. (Simpson 2008: 340) As noted earlier, four institutions—the Foreign Ministry, Interior Ministry, Hajj Ministry and the Intelligence Directorate—in Saudi Arabia have played different roles in conducting relations with Tehran at various times. The establishment of the NSC in 2005 was considered an effort to concentrate Saudi strategic planning in a single entity.¹⁶ Accordingly, the NSC was given powers that include the right to declare emergency and war, and more importantly it had a duty to oversee and approve diplomatic and military strategies involving foreign

¹⁵ Prince Bandar bin Sultan al-Saud (b. 2 March 1949) has played a key role in Saudi foreign policy since the 1980s. He has been known for his roles in mediating the Taif peace accord of 1989 that ended the civil war in Lebanon, the formation of the International Coalition of 1991 to oust Saddam from Kuwait. He also helped to conclude the Lockerbie bombings settlement between Libya and the victims’ families in 1999. See: Ottaway 2008, *The King’s Messenger: Prince Bandar Bin Sultan and America’s Tangled Relationship with Saudi Arabia*.

¹⁶ The first article of the NSC laws and regulations directs the council to protect Saudi Arabia’s political, economic, military, security and social interests. The structure of the NSC is as follows: the King is the NSC chairman and the Crown Prince is the deputy chairman. Other NSC members include the commander of the National Guard, the ministers of the interior and foreign affairs, and the head of the Intelligence Directorate. Under the terms of its charter the NSC is required to meet regularly with at least two-thirds of its members in attendance. 'Ex-Envoy to US Heads New Saudi National Security Council', AFP, 16 October 2005; 'Saudi Arabia Creates New Security Council', UPI, 21 October 2005.

threats.¹⁷ It is for this reason that the tense situation with Iran eventually became a priority for the new institution.

Prince Bandar's approach consisted of two-sided diplomacy. At first, he opted to rally international support to pressure Tehran on its nuclear programme and to convince Iran's top trading partners—Russia, China and India—that Saudi Arabia could replace and supplement Iran's oil exports. In exchange, he offered to buy weaponry and increase trade with those states if they distanced themselves from Tehran. (Author's Interview, Massoud 18 November 2011) On the other hand, he tried to persuade Tehran by offering to mediate between Iran and the West, and even supported its civil nuclear programme on the condition that it agreed to allow IAEA inspectors to monitor its enrichment facilities. (Author's Interview, Massoud 18 November 2011)

In this context, Prince Bandar conducted a series of trips to the main countries involved in the debate over Iran's nuclear programme, most notably Russia and China.¹⁸ After meeting with the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Moscow on 4 April 2006, Bandar indicated that Saudi Arabia and Russia shared the same view regarding Iran's nuclear programme, yet he surprisingly 'urged Russia to strive to prevent the adoption of a U.N. Security Council resolution, which the United States could use as justification to launch a military assault to knock out Iran's nuclear facilities'.¹⁹ This message was positively received in Tehran: Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), visited Riyadh on 11 April 2006, where he met with Prince Bandar and other top Saudi officials. Prince Bandar's tactic seemed to work. As the Iranian leadership was wary that his tour was designed to build international and regional pressure on Tehran—but having shown he was prepared to support Tehran as well—the Iranian government was eager to engage Saudi Arabia in a dialogue. (Author's Interview, Massoud 18 November 2011) Prince Bandar told his counterpart that if Iran suspended its uranium enrichment projects and allowed IAEA inspectors into the country, Saudi Arabia in exchange would support Tehran's right to develop its civil nuclear programme. Although the two parties did not reach an understanding, Iranian officials praised the Saudi position. In a statement released by

¹⁷ Aside from its security functions, the NSC was designed to hold great political power, including the ability to recall ambassadors, reduce diplomatic representation and sever diplomatic relations. It is also responsible for investigating security agencies and for dealing with corruption and negligence in the execution of public duties. (Cordesman and Center for Strategic and International Studies 2009: 121)

¹⁸ 'Chinese Premier Meets Saudi Prince Bandar', *People's Daily*, 30 March 2006.

¹⁹ 'Riyadh Seeks Russian Help to Prevent US Strike on Iran', AFP, 11 April 2006.

IRNA, President Ahmadinejad praised the visit as a success and noted that the ‘expansion of ties with regional countries, in particular Saudi Arabia, is a basic policy of Iran’s government’.²⁰

This visit would be considered the start of the strategic talks between both countries. Following on the meeting, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal travelled to Tehran, where he met with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and delivered a message from King Abdullah. The leader indicated Iran’s willingness to dissipate Saudi–Iranian tensions and voiced his support for the strategic talks to resolve differences over regional issues, including Iraq. He even asked to resume the “activity of the joint committees and the finalization of previous agreements”.²¹ After concluding his visit, Prince Saud announced that ‘the Islamic Republic of Iran is aware of its regional and international responsibilities and has made clear it is not after nuclear weapons’.²² Responding to the Saudi gesture, President Ahmadinejad declared in an official statement that: ‘Tehran-Riyadh relations should expand . . . Iran-Saudi Arabia cooperation in different fields is beneficial for both countries, the region and Islamic world’. He also added that ‘Tehran-Riyadh can play a more effective role in settling regional problems’.²³

Despite this show of goodwill, sharp divides between the two sides continued to grow as they failed to reach an understanding. Accepting an invitation from his Iranian counterpart, Prince Bandar flew to Tehran on 16 June, where he met with Ayatollahs Khamenei and Larijani. The main purpose of this visit was to raise Saudi concerns over Iran’s nuclear programme and the continued discord between Lebanese political factions on the issue of Hizbullah’s disarmament as called for by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559.²⁴ In the meeting, Prince Bandar expressed that Saudi Arabia was willing to support Iran’s right for a civil nuclear programme and to mediate with the US to avoid an unnecessary confrontation. Former President Rafsanjani came out to encourage the Saudi proposal; *Jumhuri Islami* newspaper noted that the Expediency Council chairman met with Prince Bandar to stress the need to

²⁰ 'Iran’s Larijani Arrives in Riyadh on 1-Day Visit', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 11 April 2006.

²¹ 'Saudi FM Meets with Ayatollah Khamenei', The Office of the Supreme Leader, 12 June 2006.

²² 'Saudi Foreign Minister Stresses Iran's Inalienable Nuclear Right', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 12 June 2006.

²³ 'President Calls for Expansion of Iran-Saudi Arabia "Brotherly" Ties', IRNA, 12 June 2006.

²⁴ Council Resolution 1559, adopted on 2 September 2004, called ‘upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon’ and ‘for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias’.

revive the rapprochement process and assure Saudi Arabia of the peaceful nature of Tehran's nuclear programme.²⁵

Even as the talks progressed, a Hizbullah attack on the Israeli-Lebanese border provoked the Israeli army to retaliate, hitting the Shi'a militias' headquarters in Beirut. As the Israelis intensified their attacks, the situation evolved into an open war (12 July–14 August 2006) between Israel and Hizbullah, leaving the Lebanese government incapacitated and divided. The sudden war surprised regional Arab states and put an immense pressure on pro-peace states such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. (Bahgat 2007: 7) The Saudi government condemned Hizbullah's acts, accusing it of instigating a war at the behest of its Iranian patron, and went further at an emergency meeting of the Arab League by lobbying other Arab states to distance themselves from Hizbullah's "adventurism".²⁶ From its side, the Iranian government criticized the Arab League meetings for what it called an 'un-Islamic' response to the crisis in very harsh words, yet it refrained from singling out the Saudis' (Rubin 2009: 4) Nevertheless, the press in both states began to accuse the other of instigating sectarianism and plotting to undermine security.

In an attempt to diffuse the growing tensions, the Iranian government despatched Ali Larijani to Saudi Arabia on 15 July to deliver a message to King Abdullah and to meet with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Bandar.²⁷ In his meeting with Prince Bandar, Larijani reaffirmed Tehran's commitment to continue the strategic talks and explained that Hizbullah never intended to start a war with Israel, but rather wanted to capture Israeli soldiers in order to exchange them for Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners—which was in line with its resistance practice—and that Israel has acted in an excessive way to crush the resistance movement. Larijani added that 'Iran [was] committed to help the Lebanese government in this crisis and that it will support any efforts to reach a cease-fire'. He also noted that in Iran's view, Israel was using the situation to demand the disarmament of the resistance movement. Later, Larijani met with King Abdullah, where he received a strong condemnation for Hizbullah's acts. The king warned Iran against using Lebanon as battleground to advance its influence at the expense of an Arab state. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 26 September 2011) Larijani

²⁵ 'Prince Bandar Bin Sultan Visited Iran Last June', KUNA, 31 July 2006.

²⁶ 'A Conflict That Will Stay Close to Home', *The New York Times*, 18 July 2006.

²⁷ 'Iran's Top National Security Official Heads to Saudi', AFP, 15 July 2006.

failed to persuade his Saudi hosts, the visit concluded with no agreement, and the war continued. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 26 September 2011)

In a bid to bypass Iranian support for Hizbullah, senior Saudi officials including the foreign minister and the NSC secretary travelled to Washington to convince the US to pressure Israel to halt its military campaign.²⁸ Although a ceasefire was adopted after 34 days of war, the event derailed the strategic talks and intensified rivalry. Nevertheless, the political stalemate that followed the war. (Salem 2006: 16) In the period between August and December, several (unannounced) correspondents were exchanged by national security officials on both sides. This included a number of visits by Rihab Massoud, who met with Khamenei and Ahmadinejad, a trip made by General Mohsen Chirazi of Quds Force to Riyadh, and a visit by Prince Salman bin Sultan to Tehran. (Author's Interview, Sultan 2011) According to Massoud (Author's Interview, 18 November 2011), those meetings represented unpublicised discussions to resume the strategic talks in general, and to negotiate a deal between the Lebanese factions.

An opinion article written during this period by Nawaf Obaid, a security advisor to the Saudi ambassador to Washington, suggested that Saudi Arabia was planning to step into Iraq once US troops were withdrawn to aid Iraqi Sunnis to counterbalance the Shi'a militias endorsed by Tehran.²⁹ That the article appeared before the planned US surge alarmed observers, who feared an open sectarian war in Iraq between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Although the Saudis dismissed the suggestion—and fired the advisor—the Iranian press raised questions about Saudi intentions to target Iran, possibly by endorsing an attack against Iran's nuclear sites by the US and Israel.³⁰

Amid growing speculation about a US-led attack on Iran—and ahead of the visit by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Riyadh—Larijani travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet King Abdullah and Prince Bandar.³¹ The intensive meetings produced more controversy and discord. According to Saudi press, Saudi officials claimed that Larijani conveyed a letter from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei asking the Saudis to deliver a message of goodwill to Washington about Tehran's interest in cooperating with the US; the Iranian side denied that such a letter was delivered, stating that Iran

²⁸ 'Saudi FM Calls on US to Press for Lebanon Ceasefire', AFP, 23 July 2006

²⁹ 'Stepping into Iraq', *Washington Post*, 29 November 2006.

³⁰ 'Saudi Arabia Fires Security Consultant for Iraq Remarks', Reuters, 7 December 2006.

³¹ 'Diplomatic Activity "Cause for Reflection"', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 15 January 2007.

only assured the Saudis of Tehran's peaceful nuclear intentions and urged a reduction in sectarian tensions in the region.³²

As the strategic talks stagnated, Saudi policy shifted to a more active role in challenging Iran's sphere of influence. It opted to reconcile with Hamas in order to push the militant party away from the Iranian–Syrian axis, and it fostered better relations with Russia in order to convince the country to pressure Iran over its nuclear programme. Prince Bandar travelled to Tehran to meet Larijani and assured him that Saudi Arabia had not joined a bloc against them, and neither would Saudi Arabia support any efforts to interfere in Iranian domestic politics.³³ A similar message was echoed in an interview with King Abdullah in the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Seyssah*, where he 'advised Larijani that Iran should be careful to observe limits in its dealings with outside powers'. He also added that Sunni-Shi'a tensions were 'a matter of concern, not a matter of danger,' and that if handled correctly those tensions would not become dangerous. When asked in the same interview about allegations of Shi'a efforts to convert Sunnis in Arab countries, the King said that "such efforts would fail".³⁴

The new Saudi strategy would therefore include cultivating international pressure on Iran, attempts to appease some of Iran's allies, and fostering a regional Sunni-Shi'ite dialogue. The Saudis sponsored a meeting in Mecca in October 2006 at which Sunni and Shi'a clerics from Iraq issued a statement condemning sectarian violence, the shedding of the blood of fellow Muslims, attacks on religious sites, and forced migration. (Gause 2007) Moreover, the Saudis invited high-ranking Hizbullah officials for a consultation over the Lebanese crisis, in an attempt to mediate between the Shi'ite party and its rivals.³⁵ In addition, the Saudis brokered a deal between Fattah and Hamas in Mecca on 8 February 2007, to reconcile the Palestinians with each other and form a unity government.³⁶ On another level, Prince Bandar pushed for a strengthening of Saudi–Russian ties, to offer Saudi Arabia more room for manoeuvre

³² See: 'Iran Denies Report on Saudi Mediation between Tehran, Washington', IRNA, 15 January 2007; 'Iran Says Sunni-Shi'ite Ties Discussed in Saudi', AFP, 16 January 2007; 'Iran's Larijani Did Not Carry Letter by Leader for Saudi Officials', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 15 January 2007; 'Nuclear Chief Assures Saudi King of Iran's Peaceful Nuclear Ambitions', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 15 January 2007.

³³ 'Rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia Now in Talks to Defuse Regional Tensions', AP, 5 February 2007.

³⁴ 'Interview with King Abdullah', *Al-Seyssah*, 27 January 2007.

³⁵ 'Visiting Hezbollah Delegation Discusses Lebanon with Saudi King', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 5 January 2007.

³⁶ 'Saudi Arabia's Diplomacy', *Washington Post*, 7 February 2007.

with Iran.³⁷ (Author's Interview, Massoud 18 November 2011) The same month, Russian President Vladimir Putin made a historic visit to Saudi Arabia, where both sides agreed to increase their ties. Saudi Arabian also promised to make military purchases from Russia.³⁸

The Saudi policy of containment and appeasement appeared to work—temporarily. Larijani returned to Saudi Arabia in February 2007 in an attempt to revive the strategic talks, and at the end he declared that ‘the goal of this meeting [was] to discuss Iran’s nuclear case and review regional developments with [Saudi] political and security officials’.³⁹ According to Massoud,⁴⁰ on that occasion the Iranians indicated their readiness to resume the strategic talks on the highest level. As a result, President Ahmadinejad made an official visit to Saudi Arabia in March 2007. In a rare gesture reserved for Saudi Arabia’s closest allies, King Abdullah greeted the Iranian president at Riyadh Airport, and was pictured holding Ahmadinejad’s hand as they walked from the tarmac.

During Ahmadinejad’s trip, the Saudi press referred to the two countries as “brotherly nations” and hailed Ahmadinejad’s visit as another sign of deepening ties between the two countries. (Mafinezam and Mehrabi 2007: 70) Yet the visit failed to address Saudi concerns, and only concluded with weak promises of cooperation on reducing Sunni-Shi’ite tensions. As for Lebanon, President Ahmadinejad argued that Hizbullah was an independent actor that could not compromise its right to armed resistance. Furthermore, Ahmadinejad tried to reassure his Saudi hosts that Iran intended no harm to Saudi Arabia—and especially its nuclear programme—and that it could help mediate a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and the ruling Shi’ite coalition in Iraq, as they had done in Lebanon.⁴¹ Apparently, the Saudis were somewhat disappointed when Ahmadinejad’s visit fell short of the intention of the strategic talks. In fact, Iran’s radical rhetoric continued, leaving Saudi officials feeling that their interests in Lebanon and Iraq were threatened.

³⁷ 'Russia and Saudi Arabia Discuss Ways to Increase Security Cooperation', BBC Monitoring, 30 January 2007; 'Saudi Official in Moscow to Prepare for Putin Visit', AFP, 30 January 2007.

³⁸ 'Russian TV: Saudi Arabia Honours Putin, Signs Cooperation Deals', BBC Monitoring, 12 February 2007.

³⁹ 'Iran's Larijani in Saudi Again', AFP, 14 February 2007.

⁴⁰ 'Visiting Hezbollah Delegation Discusses Lebanon with Saudi King', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 5 January 2007.

⁴¹ 'Iran, Saudi Foreign Ministers Discuss Lebanon Crisis', Mehr News Agency by BBC Monitoring, 27 May 2007.

8.1.3 The demise of the rapprochement process in 2008–2009

By the end of 2007, the strategic talks had come to an end, and Saudi officials started to publically voice their discord with Iran. The Saudi strategy towards Iran between 2005 and 2007 had consisted of three approaches. First, Saudi officials tried to appease the Ahmadinejad administration in order to diffuse tensions—it even offered to support Iran in its nuclear programme if the later committed to IAEA inspections. Second, as that approach failed, they entered the strategic talks, which were designed to engage directly with Iran’s supreme leader and his aides to bypass the Iranian president’s tough stance. This approach did achieve moderate—and somewhat temporary—results in Lebanon, but at the final stages it hit a dead end as the supreme leader’s aids—especially in the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)—indicated that any agreement with the Saudi government should include the Ahmadinejad administration. Third—and perhaps most important—the Saudis thought that lobbying for international pressure would convince Tehran to soften its stance on contentious issues. This had been evident in Prince Bandar’s tour of a number of world capitals to persuade foreign governments to put pressure on Iran.

On the other hand, Ahmadinejad’s government seemed more inclined to not intimidate the Saudis, while still continuing to maintain a tough position when it came to the nuclear issue and advancing its defiant approach towards regional matters. Yet the government found itself pressured by its conservative constituent—namely radical elements inside the parliament and the IRGC—who advocated a no-compromise approach towards Iran’s nuclear programme and Quds Forces activities in the region.

This strategy proved to be counterproductive to the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement process and the efforts to revive it. For example, President Ahmadinejad refrained from criticising the Saudi leadership directly and often downplayed differences between the two countries, while influential conservative clerics like Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Emami-Kashani, and Ahmad Khatami, publically voiced their disapproval of Saudi Arabia and its religious and political stances.⁴² In an official statement following President Ahmadinejad’s talks with King Abdullah, the President said, ‘Since they [the Western enemies] do not dare to face

⁴² In addition to those conservative clerics critical of Saudi–Iranian rapprochement, Ayatollah Naser Makarem-Shirazi and Ayatollah Hoseyn Nuri-Hamedani both accused Saudi Arabia of igniting Sunni extremism against Shi’ites. ('Saudi "Fatwa" on Shi'i Shrines Angers Iran', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 27 July 2007)

nations, enemies of Islam intend to divide Muslim nations, especially the Iranian and Saudi nations . . . the Islamic Republic of Iran stands by the Saudi nation and is prepared to share experience with the country in nuclear technology under the IAEA supervision'.⁴³

In this context, we can identify two key developments that caused the rapprochement revival efforts came to a complete halt. The first issue was the growing criticism by Saudi Arabia of Iran's nuclear programme following Tehran's refusal of its proposal,⁴⁴ the second was Hizbullah's May 2008 invasion of Beirut. The Beirut invasion angered the Saudi government because it considered the act as an Iranian–Syrian plot to oust the 14 March Lebanese government—composed of Sunni and Christian parties—and aimed at undermining Arab interests.⁴⁵ The latter event in particular had caused Saudi Arabia to publicly confront Iran and Syria, citing that using violence to push for change in Lebanon reflected the desire of those two states to secure their regional hegemony at the expense of other Arab states, namely Saudi Arabia and Egypt. (Author's Interview, Khaddam, 23 September 2012) As Khaddam explains:

Bashar mistakenly ditched his father's careful handling of the Saudis, and instead went to assassinate their man [Hariri] and inched closer to Iran, upsetting the balance that evolved since 1991. He portrayed himself as member of the *muqawama–mumana'a* axis, thinking that he was an equal partner of Iran when he was not. Iran treated him as a follower—like Hezbollah—and everyone knows that the so-called resistance of Bashar was a manufactured illusion, as he never fired a bullet nor intended to fight Israel. It is obvious that the Saudis started to mistrust him and lead an isolation campaign; however, when the Saudis reconciled with him this was a big mistake. It gave him a false impression that making trouble was rewarding. The Iranians might have also told him that we advised you to act tough and use force and now everyone is respecting you out of fear.

As Saudi–Iranian rapprochement turned into rivalry, King Abdullah summoned Iran's Manouchehr Mottaki, who was attending the February 2008 OIC meeting in Riyadh, and delivered a strong warning indicating that Saudi Arabia would suspend its relations with Tehran.⁴⁶ The King said that 'Iran should stop interfering in

⁴³ 'President Ahmadinejad: Enemies Intent on Sullyng Iran, Saudi Unity', IRANA by BBC Monitoring Middle East, 15 September 2007.

⁴⁴ Saudi Arabia persuaded GGC countries to offer Iran a proposal to end the dispute over its nuclear programme in June 2007, which offered to set up a body in a neutral, third-party state such as Switzerland to provide enriched uranium for Iran and GCC nuclear projects. ('Saudi Leader Says No Response from Iran on Gulf Nuclear Proposal', *Al-Riyadh newspaper* by BBC Monitoring Middle East, 19 November 2007)

⁴⁵ 'Iran Commentary Says Saudi Arabia Adopting 'Dangerous Behaviour'', *Qods* by BBC Monitoring Middle East, 27 May 2008; 'Saudi Arabia Criticizes Iran's Hezbollah Support', AP, 13 May 2008.

⁴⁶ 'Mottaki Arrives in Saudi Arabia', IRANA, 2 February 2008.

Arab affairs', and gave Iran until the end of the year to improve its relations with Saudi Arabia. Iran responded in defiance to this ultimatum and expressed displeasure at Saudi arm purchases from Western countries—namely the US—citing a Saudi plot to aid a Western strike against Iran.⁴⁷

In an effort to bypass the conservative camp in Iran, the Saudis reached out to former President Rafsanjani, who had become a friend of King Abdullah when they met in 1997. In May 2008, Rafsanjani was invited to visit Saudi Arabia for the purpose of attending an Islamic conference. (Barzegar 2008: 92) The invitation angered Ahmadinejad's camp, although the supreme leader gave his approval. Once he had arrived in Saudi, Rafsanjani conferred with the Saudi monarch. He later gave an interview to the Saudi Press Agency, in which he stated that 'Iran and Saudi Arabia can resolve differences in the Muslim world'.⁴⁸

Despite the optimism following Rafsanjani's visit, the escalation of tension in Lebanon after Hizbullah's invasion of Beirut a month later, and the harsh criticism of Saudi Arabia from Ahmadinejad's government put an end to their aspirations. Rafsanjani appeared more weak and incapable of changing the tide or reversing the deterioration in relations, despite his sincere intentions. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 24 November 2010) As the tense situation progressed, Saudi policy makers shifted their tactics towards Syria by attempting to persuade President Bashar al-Asad to temper his country's regional stance. Although the Saudis did not expect al-Asad to abandon his alliance with Iran, it offered to bring Syria back into the Arab fold, ease the pressure on Damascus in regards to the Hariri tribunal, and offered a way out of its regional and international isolation.⁴⁹ While relations between SA and Syria had ended in March 2008, the two sides decided to resume relations and in early 2009 the Saudi ambassador returned to Damascus.

During the Kuwait Economic Summit in January 2009, King Abdullah called for reconciliation between Arab states, hinting at the rift with Syria. In response, President Asad went to meet King Abdullah at his residence. As a result, the king visited Damascus in July 2010, and subsequently he and President Bashar al-Asad

⁴⁷ 'Iran Senior Cleric Says US-Iraq Deal "Truly Shameful"', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 13 June 2008.

⁴⁸ 'Saudi King Abdulla Invites Iran's Rafsanjani to Saudi Arabia', Bloomberg, 15 May 2008.

⁴⁹ The Special Tribunal for Lebanon—commonly referred to as the Hariri Tribunal—is an international tribunal mandated to hold trials for the people accused of carrying out the 14 February 2005 attack that killed 23 people, including former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, and injured many others. Based on UN Security Council Resolution 1757, the STL was inaugurated on 1 March 2009 and had faced opposition by Syria, Iran and Hizbullah party in Lebanon.

jointly travelled to Beirut for a reconciliation summit with the Lebanese government and major political factions in Lebanon. (Hassoun 2001) Saudi officials appeared content with the initial prospects of normalization with Syria, as tensions in Lebanon started to ease. (Author's Interview, al-Jubeir 24 November 2010) The 8 March parties that were backed by Iran and Syria endorsed a unity government to be led by Sad Hariri of the 14 March parties that were backed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Iran even agreed to receive Hariri in a show of approval. Moreover, President al-Asad visited Saudi Arabia to meet King Abdullah in October 2010, and the two sides appeared content with the results of normalization. (Hassoun 2001)

Despite the Saudi–Syrian reconciliation, relations between Riyadh and Tehran remained hostile. In fact, one of the main criticisms of the reconciliation is that it did not cause Syria to change its position on any of the major regional issues; neither did it help reduce Iran's growing discord with Saudi Arabia. (Author's Interview, Khaddam, 23 September 2012) There was, however, a modest attempt to revive the already-defunct strategic talks: in February 2009, Mottaki summoned the Saudi Ambassador, Osama al-Sonosi, and conveyed to him the Iranian leadership's request to resume talks with Saudi Arabia in order to overcome their differences. The Iranian government news agency quoted Mottaki as saying:

[The] Islamic *umma* expect the two countries to play their roles in safeguarding the Islamic world's interests in the Middle East . . . the Islamic world expects Saudi Arabia to meet [the] Islamic *umma*'s demand and help foil enemies' plots . . . [we need] diplomatic shuttles between the two countries . . . Iran is ready to talk.⁵⁰

Although Saudi officials agreed to receive Mottaki, Riyadh did not hide its discord with Tehran. Prince Saud al-Faisal told a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on 3 March 2009 that 'in order to cement Arab reconciliation we need a common vision for issues that concern Arab security and deal with the Iranian challenge'.⁵¹

Prior to Mottaki's visit, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria held a summit in Riyadh in March 2009 in an attempt to pressure Syria to convince Iran to halt its growing interference in Arab affairs. The summit generated modest outcomes, as Egypt and Syria were reluctant to forgo their differences and the atmosphere of discord continued. When Mottaki arrived in Riyadh to meet King Abdullah, the SPA reported

⁵⁰ 'Iran Foreign Minister Underlines Regular Talks between Tehran, Riyadh', IRNA by BBC Monitoring Middle East, 5 February 2009.

⁵¹ 'Saudi FM Criticises Tehran as Iran Counterpart Visits', AFP, 15 March 2009.

that Mottaki had delivered a message from President Ahmadinejad. Following the meeting, Prince Saud al-Faisal held a press conference with his Iranian counterpart, where it was evident that the visit had produced more tension than resolution.⁵² Answering reporters, Prince Saud stated: 'I met [Mottaki] afterwards and discussed with him all these questions in a spirit of honesty, clarity and transparency . . . As much as we appreciate Iran's support for Arab causes, we would like to see it channelled through Arab legality and be in harmony with its objectives'.⁵³ According to al-Jubeir (Author's Interview, 24 November 2010), King Abdullah delivered a clear warning to Iran and noted that Saudi Arabia would not continue to talk to Tehran unless it stopped interfering in Arab affairs, and that it would consider all options to defend its interests against Tehran's aggression.

This meeting would be considered the last meeting in the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement process, as both sides did not hold any officials talks afterwards. A leaked US embassy cable dated 20 April 2008 and published by the New York Times asserted that King Abdullah urged a US delegation including General David Petraeus, the US central commander in the Middle East, and then-US ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, to attack Iran and put an end to its nuclear weapons programme. The cable quoted the king as saying, 'Cut off the head of the [Iranian] snake'.⁵⁴

As a result, Saudi–Iranian relations between March and June 2009 were on the verge of collapsing. Both sides mistrusted each other, and were working covertly and openly to undermine each other. While Iran was due for presidential elections in June 2009, Saudi officials were hoping for the return of the reformist camp, as they felt it was the only way to improve their deteriorating relationship—or perhaps avoid confrontation—with Tehran. Those hopes dissipated as Ahmadinejad and his neo-conservative allies won a second —yet disputed—term in office in 2009.

8.2 MODERATES VERSUS RADICALS

When reviewing the implications of the fall of Baghdad in 2003, we can clearly observe that the regional order—which has always been contested—was interrupted by foreign intervention, and it is difficult to dismiss the vacuum of power it left. As explained in Chapter 2, the contemporary Middle East had always been divided

⁵² 'Saudi King Receives Message from Iranian President', SPA by BBC Monitoring Middle East, 16 March 2009.

⁵³ 'Saudi FM Criticises Tehran as Iran Counterpart Visits', AFP, 15 March 2009.

⁵⁴ 'Fears of a Nuclear Iran', *The New York Times*, 28 November 2010.

into blocs. Some states advocated “radical” change—or even revolution—with a strong emphasis on anti-Westernization, while others—mainly conservative monarchies—opted to preserve the status quo by relying on Western military purchases and protection, and smaller states often realigned themselves according to their perceived interest. (Dawisha 1986) Although the 2003 war did not create this environment, it contributed to an exacerbation of previously existing problems. (Fawcett 2011: 41)

In this context, Saudi–Iranian relations were bound to decline further, as fear and sense of suspicion between the two sides deepened. Yet the main source of contention stemmed from a change of perception of the other country in both capitals. The Iraqi sectarian war—and later the Lebanon crisis—provided the environment in which rivalry and enmity were reignited; nevertheless, the change in Iran’s state identity over the course of President Ahmadinejad’s first term redefined Saudi Arabia as a “rival” rather than “friend”. Accordingly, the failure of the strategic talks represented a disagreement over foreign policy orientation, rather than differences over issues. In other words, Tehran was ready to compromise with Riyadh if it would have accepted its position on—or perhaps normative view of—the region. For Saudi Arabia, the new discourse advocated by Tehran also made it a rival.

8.2.1 The evolution of the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse

To illustrate this argument, we can turn to the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse and examine how it reshaped perceptions—and therefore differences—during the period of strategic talks of 2007 and 2006. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, any change to the normative order often results in a change in state identity, as states opt to internalize their own view of norms that should govern—or at least be accepted by—regional actors. In this case, the Gulf region, which enjoyed relative stability between 1991 and 2003, came to face the effects of the fall of Baghdad in 2003 at the same time as two rather conflicting regional normative views began to develop. The change did not occur suddenly, but rather grew over time to divide the region between two distinct blocs. The first bloc were the “moderates”, or states that preferred stability and resorted to peace initiatives (namely with Israel), and which included Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. The second bloc were the “radicals”—or *Jabhat al-Muqawama wa al-Mumana’a* (Resistance and Defiance Front)—and included Iran, Syria, Hizbullah, Hamas, and other non-state actors. *Al-mumana’a* (passive resistance) is used to describe countries that did not engage in war

or direct military resistance with the enemy. In this respect, advocates of this discourse consider the Syrian regime's policy of supporting armed resistance against Israel and foreign occupiers as a form of *mumana'a*. Moreover, states or non-state actors who engage directly in military action with the enemy—Israel for example—are considered a form of *muqawama*, such as Hizbullah and Hamas.⁵⁵

Originally, the moderates-versus-radicals debate stemmed from a US proposal to reform the Middle East after the September 11th attacks, which were attributed to authoritarianism, lack of democratization, and the culture of Islamic radicalisation in the region. During the G8 summit in June 2004, the US introduced the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI), which was part of President Bush's Forward Strategy of Freedom and aimed at the expansion of political rights and political participation in the Muslim world as means to combat the appeal of Islamist extremism. (Wittes 2004) Initially, the initiative was harshly criticized, raising an outcry among Arab leaders that the US was attempting to impose external political models on the region. (Wittes 2004) As the war in Iraq degenerated into a sectarian war and regional states become embroiled by conflict over Lebanon and Gaza, the GMEI fell out of favour and the focus turned towards supporting moderate Arab states to counter those advocating militancy to resolve regional matters. As Lynch (2010) explains: 'The Bush administration sought to polarize the Middle East into an axis of *moderates*; grouping Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and other like-minded Sunni autocrats with Israel against *radicals* such as Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas'.

However, the split between moderates and radicals was not limited to the notion of pro-Western or anti-Western alignments, but it is rather a deep divide between two distinct normative views of regional order. One advocated resistance and the use of force as means to challenge the existing status-quo; the second was reactionary and aimed at preserving the status-quo. Needless to say, the status-quo—either for those who oppose it or seek to preserve it—is of a temporal nature, meaning that it often shifts over time. Moreover, the genesis of the moderates-versus-radicals divide find its roots in the progressive-regressive debate of Arab Nationalism and the Left arguments of the 1960s (Barakat 1993: 162), as well as the Islamist discourse of the *Dawallah al-*

⁵⁵ The Greater Middle East included Arab states along with Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and Turkey. For a summary of GMEI, see: Sharp 2005, *The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: An Overview*.

Islamiyah (Islamic state) and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which resorted to exporting the revolution in the 1980s under the ‘oppressed–oppressors’ mantra.

Nevertheless, the rise of the *muqawama* and *mumana’a* is somewhat different. While former regional normative debates centred around specific nationalist and ideological inclinations, the *muqawama* and *mumana’a* discourse represented a societal divide between governments and the general public in their respective states.

Although the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse may not seem particularly new to the region’s history—the call for resistance against Israel and defiance of Western powers and their regional collaborators have been present for decades—it represented a departure in Iranian foreign policy from the ‘good neighbour’ discourse of President Khatami and his pro-reform camp, which had effectively played a role in strengthening ties with GCC states and a further reconciliation with Europe and other parts of the world. It is true that Iran’s revolutionary legacy has always emphasized the notion of helping the oppressed to challenge its oppressors, yet Iran’s Shi’a credentials were highly dominant in its foreign policy discourse throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Nevertheless, the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse was somewhat different in its appeal, as it was not based on the export of Iran’s revolutionary ideals or the call to overthrow opponent regimes. Instead, the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse was rather inclusive, as Ahmadinejad’s government sought to build a regional census centred on the idea of a regional security framework that kept outside powers such as the US out of the region’s affairs. Accordingly, the Iranian aim was not to challenge states like Saudi Arabia, but rather to persuade them to share Iran’s view of how the regional order should look. It was only when Saudi Arabia started to challenge this discourse that Iran began to see Saudi Arabia as a rival.

8.2.2 The *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse and the demise of the *rapprochement*

The rise of the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse can be traced to the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000, which gave the Iranian- and Syrian-backed Hizbullah an unprecedented popularity as a symbol of resistance across the Arab world. The withdrawal was supposed to end the state of war between Israel and Lebanon, and possibly even the disarmament of Hizbullah so that it could become a civilian party. (Salem 2006: 17) Nevertheless, the proclaimed victory of Hizbullah led it to dominate Lebanese politics, and military operations against Israel continued. This

happened at the same time as major Sunni states—such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt—were pushing for a peace plan to resolve the conflict and help reach a deal that would lead to an independent Palestinian state. As a result, the regional debate produced two camps: one that supported a peace plan, and a second that argued that only resistance and defiance would answer the region’s problems. (Rubin 2009: 4)

In this context, the new power of the neo-conservatives in Iran and the subsequent election of President Ahmadinejad ensured that the *muqawama–mumana’a* approach would become the core of Iran’s foreign policy discourse. According to Homeira Moshirzadeh (2007: 523), the central norms and values around which Iran constructed its foreign policy discourse were ‘independence, justice and resistance’. These elements were featured in President Ahmadinejad’s statements, and were reflected more broadly in Iran’s response to different regional and international pressures. Moreover, resistance (*muqawama*) was treated as strategic tool to counter the “illegal” demands of rivals, and as means to reach Iran’s ambitious goals. Thus, President Ahmadinejad depicted Iran as a brave nation that will never concede to injustice: ‘The secret for achieving victory in various issues, particularly in the nuclear programme, is resistance, because otherwise they would deprive us of our independence in other fields as well’. (In: Chamlian 2009)

Furthermore, resistance is directly ascribed to the norm of independence, which helps explain why Iran, as a sovereign state, was not willing to back down from its regional position. President Ahmadinejad articulated this very clearly regarding Iran’s nuclear programme following UNSC sanctions:

By the grace of God, the wisdom of our nation, and the farsightedness of our leader, we resisted . . . they demanded that Iran should halt its nuclear activities, but the Iranian nation resisted and kept on paving the right path, and the path of taking advantage of the nuclear energy. We are now enjoying one of the best statuses Iran has ever experienced during the past 30 years . . . the world public opinion is almost unanimously with the Iranian nation. The resistance of the Iranian nation put under question the unilateral, unjust world order and the philosophy behind it, proving that it is quite inefficient. (In: Chamlian 2009)

However, it is important to draw a distinction between Iran’s state identity under Ahmadinejad and that of the 1980s. It is true that both versions of state identity were composed of *Iraniyat* (Iranian nationalism), *Islamiyat* (Shi’a political Islam), and anti-Westernization, yet they were different not only in practice, but also in the way

they interpreted these elements.⁵⁶ Khomeini's vision of Iran's state identity, as we have discussed in Chapter 5, was—to some extent—based on the rejection of the international order and was represented in the slogan “Neither East, Nor West”. Most importantly, Khomeini's Iran had the desire to export the revolution as means to change the normative regional order. On the other hand, Ahmadinejad's presidency sought to construct a state identity that placed Iranian national interests first, without disowning Khomeini's revolutionary ideals.

Here, we can identify two new components of this approach. First, the Ahmadinejad presidency did not seek to export the revolution or threaten to overthrow neighbouring regimes, but rather wanted to persuade them to accept Iran's vision of regional security. In other words, it did not opt to alter the regional order, but rather utilised it to improve Iran's international stance. Second, Iran under Ahmadinejad did not seek to oppose international norms, but argued that its ambitions were in line with those norms. For example, Ahmadinejad interestingly referred to international treaties and laws to justify the civilian nature of Iran's nuclear technology, and argued that the only way to achieve peace with the West was through dialogue and negotiations. As Chamlian (2009: 27) notes:

The Iranian discourse on the nuclear issue, constantly referring to peaceful norms and values, makes clear that Iran depicts itself as a victim of unjust and unfair treatment as global powers do not grant the nation's rights to nuclear technology and scientific progress. Furthermore, Iran's global self-perception equates with that of a particular and innocuous nation that seeks to lead globally and peacefully.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the role of Ahmadinejad's presidency in transforming Iran's state identity had been challenged by other centres of powers within the state's institutions, such as the Assembly of Leadership Experts headed by Rafsanjani, and by competing conservative figures such as Ali Larijani. However, there seems to have been a general acceptance within the conservative camp—namely the supreme leader, the IRGC and key clerical figures such as Ayatollahs Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi and Ahmad Jannati—on the utilisation of the *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse to advocate Tehran's normative view of the region.

⁵⁶ In *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance*, Shabnam Holliday (2011: 9) argues that the construction of Iranian identity is far more complex than the simple *Iraniyat–Islamiyat* dichotomy.

It is true that some of Ahmadinejad's controversial remarks were criticized by leading conservatives concerned about the implications of his provocative stances in international venues such as the U.N., yet there appeared to be a consensus—at least among conservatives in the Consultative Council—about the need to revive Iran's state identity to reflect the original ideals of the revolution. This can be clearly illustrated by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's endorsement of the Iranian–Syrian alliance and his appeal to Muslims abroad to embrace the *muqawama–mumana'a* line represented by Hizbullah and Hamas. (Thaler, *et al.* 2010: 104) Khamenei's January 2009 letter to Hamas leader Ismail Haniya following an Israeli attack on a Hamas stronghold in Gaza vividly reflects the utilisation of *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse as means to convince—or even force—regional states to accept Iran's normative view of regional security. The letter denounced Arab “traitors” and “hypocrites”—particularly Saudi Arab and Egypt—during the Gaza crisis:

Be proud of your patience, courage and sacrifice . . . your Jihad up to this day has exposed America, the Zionist regime and its supporters, the United Nations and the hypocrites among the Islamic nation . . . The Arab traitors should know that their fate will not be better than that of the Jews in the Battle of Ahzab . . . Nations are with the people and combatants of Gaza. Any government that acts contrary to this deepens the gap between itself and its nation . . . You are victorious this very day and by continuing this noble resistance you will bring the hopeless and anti-human enemy further defeat.⁵⁷

Ahmadinejad's emphasis on the necessity of the *muqawama* in his foreign policy statements was often endorsed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other leading conservative figures. At times, this meant criticising the moderate Arab states for undermining the *muqawama* camp that Iran represented. For example, during a televised Friday sermon Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for a boycott of the Annapolis Conference in 2007, accusing Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries of “mischievous deception”. This caused the Saudis to respond angrily to what they considered an evident use of the *muqawama* discourse to interfere in Arab affairs. Prince Saud al-Faisal responded that ‘from their [Iranian] media they have been attacking this conference and declaring anybody who attends this conference a traitor’.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ 'Iran Leader Denounces Arab 'Traitors' in Gaza Crisis', AFP, 16 January 2009.

⁵⁸ The Annapolis Conference was a Middle East peace conference held on 27 November 2007 at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, United States. See: 'Iran Leader Urges Summit Boycott', BBC, 13 October 2007; 'Prince Saud Al-Faisal Holds Press Conference in Washington D.C.', Saudi Arabian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26 November 2007.

While the degree to which the Ahmadinejad presidency—especially in the first term—was able to redefine Iran’s state identity can be debated,⁵⁹ there is nevertheless significant evidence that the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse had become a central element of Iran’s foreign policy. In turn, that placed Iran in opposition to other regional actors—namely Saudi Arabia—who preferred peaceful resolutions that included the participation of Western states. Furthermore, the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse and the regional normative view it advocated altered Iran’s foreign policy orientation significantly, making the pragmatic approach of the Rafsanjani and Khatami eras a mere transitory stage. In this context, the eventual assertion of control by conservatives of the central government and their dominance in the country’s institutions of decision-making made Iran’s foreign policy more aggressive rather than more moderate. As Arjomand (2009: 205) argues:

The establishment of routine channels for input from the Revolutionary Guards and the intelligence services under Ahmadinejad has certainly not made for moderation but, on the contrary, for a push for regional hegemony. This push by the hardliners is not inconsistent with Iran's geopolitical interests, especially as the United States offered Iran little incentive for pragmatism at critical junctures.

Despite the relative popularity of the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse—even inside moderate states—the glorifying of armed resistance had its limits. First, its backbone was mainly Shi’ite, and as a consequence Sunnis (including Islamists) often saw the rise of Shi’ite Iran as a threat to traditional Sunni primacy. Moreover, major Sunni states—Saudi Arabia and Egypt in particular—mobilized against the Iranian–Syrian axis and utilised traditional religious establishment scholars to warn against the spread of Shi’a Islam, which made it difficult for the *muqawama–mumana’a* front to keep Sunni Islamists in its orbit. (Kramer 2007b: 3) In addition, Sunni communities in Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq, which had become disadvantaged at the expense of the Shi’ite revival after 2003, placed a moral burden on Sunni members of the *muqawama–mumana’a* front, such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine. The second reason likely stems from the fact that Iran and Syria were keen to utilise proxy groups such as Hizbullah and Hamas, rather than fighting directly with Israel to liberate—for example—the Syrian Golan Heights, which was occupied by Israel in

⁵⁹ According to an editorial in *Kayhan* newspaper, which is considered close to the office of Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, ‘Everyone knows that it is not the executive branch [i.e., the president] that is charged with [determining] Iran’s [foreign] policy, but that this policy is determined by a higher echelon and with the participation of all the senior officials in the country, with Supreme Leader [Ali Khamenei] at their head’. See: ‘The Diplomatic Mirage of Amman, Riyadh, Cairo, and Sana’a’, *Kayhan*, 20 December 2010; ‘Student Rally against Saudi Embassy in Tehran’, *ISNA Iran*, 20 October 2009.

1967. Furthermore, Iran was itself criticized for occupying Arab land—the UAE islands—while intending to liberate another Arab land occupied by Israel. Those opposing the *muqawama–mumana’a* front had often accused it of merely using the Arab cause to advance Iran’s dreams of reviving its Persian Safavid Empire.⁶⁰ As Barzegar (2008: 89) explains, ‘The inappropriate depiction of Iran’s regional aims as attempting to establish a ‘new Safavid Empire’ has roots in this kind of analogy of Iran’s regional ambitions.

8.2.3 The moderates discourse

Alarmed by the growing influence of Iran in Iraq and the challenges posed by the Syrian-Iranian axis on its regional interests in Lebanon and Gaza, Saudi foreign policy decision-makers started to advocate what has been labelled as the “moderates” discourse. (Aarts and van Duijne 2009: 63) The Saudis initially rejected the moderates-against-radicals dichotomy when it was first used by the Bush administration in 2004, though they nevertheless embraced the title and went further to provide an alternative discourse on regional matters to defy the opposing camp. (Valbjørn and Bank 2007: 7) The peak of this discourse was articulated during the Hizbullah-Israel War of 2006, in which the Saudis issued not only a condemnation of Hizbullah’s instigation of the war, but went further to define the “right and justified” *muqawama*. A statement issued on 13 July 2006 by the court of King Abdullah indirectly accused Hizbullah of “adventurism” by provoking Israel’s onslaught on Lebanon and putting all Arab nations at risk:

It is necessary to make a distinction between legitimate resistance (to occupation) and irresponsible adventurism adopted by certain elements within the state and taken without its knowledge, without legitimate authority or coordination and consultation with Arab countries . . . It is time that these elements assume by themselves the total responsibility for their irresponsible actions and it comes down to them to put an end to a crisis that they created . . . These elements risk putting in danger all the Arab countries and their achievements before these countries have said a word.⁶¹

The Saudi statement surprised Hizbullah’s leaders, but most importantly indicated a wider rift between Saudi Arabia and Iran.⁶² Furthermore, condemnation by the Saudi public encouraged other Arab states—Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, amongst others—to take a critical approach to Hizbullah’s actions in

⁶⁰ The Safavid Dynasty (1502–1736) was an Iranian ruling family who established Shi’a Islam as the state religion of Iran. See: Newman 2005, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*.

⁶¹ 'Saudi Accuses Hezbollah of 'Adventurism'', AFP, 13 July 2006.

⁶² 'Hezbollah Surprised by Saudi Position, to Issue Statement', BBC Monitoring Middle East, 14 July 2006.

particular, and against the *muqawama* discourse in general.⁶³ In other words, Saudi Arabia led its Sunni Arab allies, in an action at variance with Arab norms, to publicly challenge an Arab movement's decision to confront Israel and to criticize it for being nothing but a pawn of Shi'ite, Persian Iran and its "quasi-Shi'ite" Syrian ally. (Valbjørn and Bank 2007: 7).

In practice, the 'moderate' discourse began to represent everything anti-Iranian. This would include the opposition to Iran's controversial nuclear programme, the rejection of Iran's interference in Iraqi politics, the criticism of the Syrian-Iranian alliance and the non-state actors like Hizbullah and Hamas that ascribed to it, and most importantly the advocacy of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as the only solution to the Arab-Palestinian conflict. (Teitelbaum and U-Medinah 2009: 3) In a speech at the Arab League summit on 27 March 2002, Crown Prince Abdullah articulated the necessity of "peace" and "normalization" with Israel in an attempt to move the "Arab Cause" away from the *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse:

The use of violence, for more than fifty years, has only resulted in more violence and destruction . . . Peace emanates from the heart and mind, and not from the barrel of a cannon, or the exploding warhead of a missile. The time has come . . . to put its trust in peace after it has gambled on war for decades without success . . . We believe in fighting in self-defence and to deter aggression. But we also believe in peace when it is based on justice and equity, and when it brings an end to conflict. Only within the context of true peace can normal relations flourish between the people of the region and allow the region to pursue development rather than war and destruction.⁶⁴

Moreover, the emphasis on the "moderate Arab state"—as opposed to the "*mumana'a* state" encouraged by the Syrian-Iranian axis—was prominent in statements made by Saudi officials in the period between 2002 and 2007. As Prince Saud al-Faisal explains, 'The Kingdom believes that the road to this is independence of the national decision, focusing on the common interests between the Arab states, and supporting

⁶³ In a joint statement, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Jordanian King Abdallah II charged Hizbullah with "dragging the region into "adventures". See: Murphy and NaGuib 18 July 2006, *Hizbullah winning over Arab street: Key Arab leaders condemn the Shi'ite group, despite its popularity with their citizens*.

⁶⁴ The Arab Peace Initiative was hailed as an important step since it was adopted unanimously by members of the Arab League, representing a major shift from the Khartoum Declaration of September 1967 that was famous for containing (in the third paragraph) what became known as the "Three Nos": 'no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it'. Moreover, Crown Prince Abdullah's speech was considered of great importance, since it included an unprecedented direct appeal to the Israeli people: 'I would further say to the Israeli people that if their government abandons the policy of force and oppression and embraces true peace, we will not hesitate to accept the right of the Israeli people to live in security with the people of the region'. (Teitelbaum and U-Medinah 2009: 12-13; 'Speech by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia at the Arab Summit in Beirut', SPA, 27-28 March 2002)

moderate and legitimate tendencies in the Islamic world, and dealing with all world countries in openness and on equal footing'.⁶⁵

For example, Saudi Arabia resorted to internalizing the moderate discourse through regional bodies such as the GCC and the Arab League, hoping to create an Arab consensus to oppose the growing Iranian threat. (Cronin and Masalha 2011: 19)

As another example, Saudi officials successfully lobbied other GCC states to issue a warning to Iran over its nuclear programme during the 27th session of the GCC Supreme Council (the Jaber Summit):

On the Iranian nuclear file, the Supreme Council reiterated its call for the importance of reaching a peaceful solution to this crisis, urging Iran to continue international dialogue and full cooperation in this regard with the International Atomic Energy Agency . . . Iran should live up to the international standards of security and safety and consider the environmental aspects of this matter in cooperation with the IAEA.⁶⁶

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia was instrumental in lobbying for sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme. In the UN General Assembly in 2008, the Saudis circulated a letter warning of Iran's nuclear threat to the region and advocating tough measures to pressure the Iranian government on the issue. It stated:

We take very seriously the undertakings of Iran to fully and strictly respect its obligation to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction . . . We hope that this obligation will be put into practical effect in such a way as to ensure a peaceful and rapid solution to the problem of the Iranian nuclear programme and save the region from devastating conflicts, futile arms races and serious environmental hazards.⁶⁷

The moderate discourse was also about preserving Arab sovereignty from Iranian interference. During the Arab Summit of 2007 held in Riyadh, for example, Saudi Arabia called on the Arab states to help Iraq regain its sovereignty and its role in Arab affairs. This call was aimed at singling out Iran in particular from the regional equation. As a result, Libya—which had boycotted the summit due to the apathy in Saudi–Libyan relations—criticized the Riyadh summit: 'All the Arabs now consider Iran to be the main enemy and have forgotten Israel'.⁶⁸ In response to this accusation, Prince Saud al-Faisal argued that Iran's nuclear programme was as much a threat as Israel's nuclear weapons: 'We have to finish and bring peace whether Iran is developing

⁶⁵ 'Press Briefing by HRH Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Jeddah', Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 August 2007.

⁶⁶ 'GCC Summit Issues Final Communiqué', Saudi Arabian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 December 2006.

⁶⁷ 'Comply with Nuke Norms, Saudi Tells Iran', AFP, 28 September 2008.

⁶⁸ 'Libya to Boycott Arab Summit', AFP, 4 March 2007.

weapons of mass destruction, or whether it is interfering in Iraq or not. One thing is not the cause for the other, although we do live in a dangerous neighbourhood and I wish we could change some of our neighbours. But we can't'.⁶⁹

The evolution of the moderate discourse can be read as a re-orientation in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards Iran. While the process of redefining Saudi state identity under King Abdullah continued, the change in policy towards Iran became a dominant issue in Saudi foreign policy during this period. Like Iran, Saudi Arabia's sense of its relationship with the Iranians began to change significantly after Ahmadinejad rose to power. In this regard, the Saudi perception of its role in relation to Iran shifted from mild friendship to rivalry.

This has been clearly illustrated in the speeches and statements of key Saudi officials during the period of 2006 to 2009. In this context, Saudi state identity—which in the past had relied on financing liked-minded Islamic charities and religious groups abroad to strengthen its Pan-Islamic appeal as discussed in Chapter 2—resorted instead to advocating dialogue among different faiths, promoting religious tolerance against sectarianism, and lobbying for international cooperation to combat terrorism.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, in practice the Saudi regional discourse did not include Iran in this effort, but on the contrary sought to alienate Tehran as a foreign intruder in Arab affairs that was behind the plight and suffering of Sunnis in Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere. During a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on 3 March 2009, Prince Saud al-Faisal called for a joint Arab strategy to deal with the threat emanating from Tehran: 'In order to cement Arab reconciliation we need a common vision for issues that concern Arab security and deal with the Iranian challenge'.⁷¹ From a Saudi perspective, Iran was utilizing the Iranian–Syrian axis to weaken Saudi leadership in the Arab world. For example, the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009 were, from a Saudi point of view, driven by Iranian influence on Hamas. This was designed, as the Saudis argued, to place pressure on the Saudi-led moderate block to reinstate its peace initiative. As a result, Saudi Arabia remained silent

⁶⁹Prince Saud Al-Faisal Holds Press Conference in Washington D.C.', Saudi Arabian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26 November 2007.

⁷⁰ On 5 February 5, 2005, Saudi Arabia organized an international conference aimed at combating terrorism. The event, which was attended by delegates from more than 50 countries, supported King Abdullah's call to form a worldwide an information-sharing centre to coordinate international efforts to fight terrorism. See: 'Saudi Leader Calls for International Center to Combat Terrorism', AP, 5 February 2005.

⁷¹ 'Saudi FM Criticises Tehran', AFP, 15 March 2009.

while resisting holding an emergency meeting of the Arab League, a position that was also supported by Egypt as it closed its borders with Gaza. Moreover, Saudi Arabia refrained from criticizing Hamas publically—although it had criticised Hizbullah in 2006—even as it refused to recognize the Hamas government. Kramer (2007a: 3) notes the reason for this was that ‘While the coordination between Iran and Hizbullah is total, Hamas has its own strategy, which reflects its own predicament and the constraints imposed by its Arab patrons’.

From an Iranian perspective, the moderate discourse as was in fact immoderate—and perhaps anti-Iranian in disguise. Iranian officials often referred to the categorization of the regional states into two camps—moderates and radicals—as a Western plot to divide Muslim countries and to weaken the rightful resistance of the people of the region. Furthermore, the moderate discourse was viewed as a Saudi-led bifurcation—“Iran versus the rest” or “the rest versus Iran”—to undermine Iran’s regional standing and its interests. In an article entitled ‘America’s divide and rule strategies in the Middle East’, Nazemroaya (2008) explains what Iranian officials thought of the moderates-against-radicals debate:

Those in the Middle East who opposed foreign intervention and hegemony in the region, either because of their own agenda or because of the right for self-determination, were labelled *extremists* and *rejectionists*. These anti-hegemonic forces in the Middle East were categorised as members of the *other camp* even though in some cases they had no links aside from fighting foreign tutelage.

In addition, Iranian officials in the Ahmadinejad government sought to portray the moderate discourse as a wave of anti-Iranianism by Arab states driven by the growing emergence of Iran as world power. As some Iranian officials argue, this notion in particular suggests that moderate Arab states fear a US-Iranian deal that might undermine their own security and regional interests. As Mohtadi notes:

With Iran increasingly recognized as a regional power and talks about its likely negotiations with the United States, Arabs are concerned that their regional role may fade away. Therefore, they try to create an anti-Iranian atmosphere.⁷²

While Saudi Arabia and Iran resumed the rivalry between them, on the official level the two states avoided direct confrontation. Yet on the societal level, the moderates-against-radicals debate often involved discussions of sectarianism and nationalism. The Iranian press would often accuse Saudi Arabia—the champion of

⁷² 'Arabs' New Anti-Iranian Wave: Interview with Mohammad Ali Mohtadi', Iranian Diplomacy, 26 February 2009.

Wahhabism—of igniting sectarian divide, plotting to kill Shi'ites in Iraq, and more importantly of being behind the escalation of terrorist attacks inside Iran.⁷³ On the other hand, the Saudi press—along with those of other moderate states—would accuse the clerical regime in Tehran of attempting to spread Shi'a Islam among Sunnis, opting to rebuild the Safavid Persian empire on Arab land, and imposing *Vilāyat-i faqīh* on Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen.⁷⁴ However, it is important to note that on the state level, both sides have always resorted to downplaying what had been published or aired on their respective media against each other while being silent about popular sectarian and nationalist sentiments. One reason for this is that the non-official discourse has been used supplement what the official discourse would not—or could not—say. As Valbjørn and Bank (2007: 7) note, 'This anti-Iranian policy, however, is controversial in Sunni Arab public opinion, for Iran and Hizbullah have attained considerable popularity. Anti-Shi'i rhetoric may therefore be explained as a way of selling a policy based on non-sectarian motives'.

8.3 CONCLUSION

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the first term of Ahmadinejad's presidency proved to be an important juncture in Saudi–Iranian relations. It started with a renewed hope that it would revitalise the stagnating Saudi–Iranian rapprochement—but it ended up being a period of declining bilateral relations. The rise of the conservatives in the 2004 parliamentary elections would alter the path of rapprochement between the two states and reignite the rivalry. The two sides did attempt to reconcile differences and advance the rapprochement, as illustrated in the strategic talks of 2006–2007, but these attempts ultimately failed.

The debate between moderates and radicals in the foreign policy discourse of the region—which prevailed between 2005 and 2009—proved to be damaging to rapprochement process. Key developments, such as Iran's nuclear programme, the rise of Shi'ites in Iraq, sectarian divides in Lebanon, and the Gaza War of 2008 were all areas where the differences between the two states manifested. While ideational—namely sectarian—and materialist or balance of power factors played an important role, it was the change in state identity in Iran after 2005 that brought the demise of the

⁷³ 'The Diplomatic Mirage of Amman, Riyadh, Cairo, and Sana'a', *Kayhan*, 20 December 2010; 'Student Rally against Saudi Embassy in Tehran', ISNA Iran, 20 October 2009.

⁷⁴ See: 'Experts Say: The Language of Blood Is a Persian Way to Establish Safavid Empire', *Al-Watan*, 16 October 2011; 'Turki Al-Sudairy, "Iran First, Israel Is Second"', *Al-Riyadh*, 13 October 2011.

rapprochement process. The Ahmadinejad presidency sought to utilise the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse as means to convince—or even force—regional states to accept Iran’s normative view of regional security. As a result, the Saudis, who initially followed a containment policy, resorted to advancing an Arab moderate camp to challenge the Iranian–Syrian axis.

The *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse proved to be an important strategic tool for internalizing Iran’s state identity regionally, but ended up destroying the rapprochement process. Nevertheless, the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse was merely a product of the redefining Iran’s state identity. We have noted that Iran and Saudi Arabia—despite the revival of rivalry between them—tried to avoid direct confrontation or the outright severing their relations as they had done in 1988. This suggests that Iran’s state identity in the 1980s—which had relied heavily on exporting its revolutionary ideals as means to internalize Iran’s normative regional view—was different than its state identity under Ahmadinejad. The latter sought to argue that Iran’s normative view of security and the regional order was in fact based on—or perhaps aligned with—accepted international norms of sovereignty and self-determination. However, the Saudis viewed the redefined Iranian state identity as one to be treated with enmity and mistrust, and they considered Iranian–Syrian axis and the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse it advocated as a threat to its regional standing and interest. At the same time, Iran viewed the moderate Arab camp as an anti-Iranian coalition in disguise, supported by Western powers and dedicated to undermining its security.

The *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse did put an end to the 1997 rapprochement, which was in fact a result of change to Iran’s state identity. It was only when the two states returned to perceiving each other as an enemy that the rivalry was revived. Differences have always been present in Saudi–Iranian relations, but they were only utilised when the state identity in respective states was defined in a way that made each one perceive the other as an enemy and rival. Rapprochement was possible during the Khatami presidency only because the states redefined their state identities in a way that produced trust and common interests, and it subsequently failed when it was defined in a way that produced enmity and mistrust.

CONCLUSION

As the ballot boxes closed in the June 2009 presidential elections, Iranian officials issued conflicting statements about who won the elections before the final vote count was formally announced by the state electoral body. President Ahmadinejad was challenged by a former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi (1981–1989), a reformist candidate who had been a staunch conservative until he was ousted from power by the Rafsanjani–Khamenei camp in the late 1980s. Ahmadinejad was declared president for a second term, an outcome that sparked dissent and demonstrations in Tehran’s streets. For more than two weeks, adversaries of Ahmadinejad and opponents of the regime protested the results and demanded a re-election.¹ However, the so-called “Green Movement” was successfully tamed by Iranian state authorities assisted by the *Ansar-i Hizbullah* (The Supporters of the Party of God) and the *Basij*, two paramilitary conservative groups loyal to the *vilāyat-i faqīh* line.²

During these events, Rafsanjani delivered a Friday prayer sermon critical of the way authorities handled the protest. Arguing against Ahmadinejad’s policies, Rafsanjani expressed dismay at what the revolution had come to: ‘Don’t let our enemies laugh at us by putting people in prison . . . We had the chance to become the best, but we let it slip’.³ Consequently, he would lose his position as the chairman of the Assembly of Experts, while gaining a position as chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council.⁴ However, years later Rafsanjani would confess his disappointment at Ahmadinejad’s presidency that sought to alienate Iran’s neighbours and undo his efforts—and those of Khatami—to normalize relations with Iran’s former foes, including Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, he accused the Ahmadinejad government of being responsible for the downward trend in ties between the two countries and expressed concerns about the international oil embargo on Iran over its nuclear programme. He argued that:

¹ These protests would become known as the “Green Movement”, and was the largest civil disobedience campaign that Iran had witnessed since the 1979 revolution. The “green” refers to the green symbol that was used to identify Mousavi’s campaign. Furthermore, the movement included notable Iranian politicians such as President Khatami and former speaker of the majlis, Mehdi Karroubi (2000–2004), among others. See: Milani 2010, *The Iran Primer: Power, politics, and US policy*.

² MacFarquhar, 19 June 2009.

³ ‘Iran Crisis: Rafsanjani Attacks Regime’, *The Guardian*, 17 July 2009.

⁴ Due to the involvement of the Rafsanjani family in the Green Movement, the former president’s daughter, Faezeh Hashemi, was put on trial for igniting anti-regime sentiments, while his son Mehdi Hashemi—who participated in the rapprochement process—was prosecuted for corruption. See: ‘Daughter of Iran Ex-President Rafsanjani on Trial’, AFP, 17 July 2009.

Saudi officials are keen to have sensible relations with Iran and to cooperate with her . . . If we had good relations with Saudi Arabia, would the West have been able to impose sanctions on us? Only Saudi Arabia can replace Iran [as an oil exporter] . . . If Saudi Arabia produces its [normal] share of OPEC output, no one can threaten us, because the world economy cannot continue without our oil. But there are individuals here who don't want [to improve relations with Saudi Arabia] . . . If we have warm relations with the countries of our region alone, Iran's true power will be preserved in the region. The centre of Iran's strength is in the region.⁵

Rafsanjani's disappointment over the deterioration in Saudi–Iranian relations was shared by a number of Iranian reformist figures of the 1990s—including Khatami and Karroubi—and has been also echoed by Saudi officials frustrated by the resurgence of IRGC activities in the region in the post-2005 period. (Author's Interview, Sultan 2011) Moreover, there seems to be a shared belief between those Iranian and Saudi officials that the Ahmadinejad presidency is responsible for the thaw in relations. On a personal level, President Ahmadinejad himself always showed interest in engaging Saudi Arabia and refrained from criticizing King Abdullah—or even Saudi Arabia—publically. Yet the resurgence of the neo-conservatives in Iranian politics after 2005 has brought with it negative implications on the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement process. The strategic talks of 2006–2007 represented an opportunity to revive the rapprochement, but it also proved that the two countries had far greater differences to overcome in this period. Furthermore, Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, Bahrain, and Yemen have all been affected by the renewed rivalry.

However, one can conclude that Saudi–Iranian rivalry that emerged after 2005 is indeed different from that of the 1980s: First, the rivalry of the 1980s was far more intense in matters of direct confrontation—witnessing the 1979 Shi'ite uprising in *al-Ehriqah* (the Eastern Province) in Saudi Arabia, the Iraq–Iran War, the Tanker Wars, the 1987 hajj incident—while the rivalry of 2005–2009 was played out more through distant proxies such as Lebanon. Second, in the rivalry of the 1980s each side saw the other as an existential threat; therefore, each side was publically threatening to overthrow the other—rhetoric heard especially from the Iranian side. Third, while sectarianism has been a key feature of the renewed rivalry, both sides often indicated that they were against sectarian escalation. Fourth, the 1980s rivalry reached a breaking point and relations were severed, while in the 2000s, Saudi Arabia and Iran—despite their differences—refrained from threatening to sever relations. They continued to treat each other cordially—at least in public—by extending diplomatic invitations to

⁵ 'Interview with Hashemi Rafsanjani', BBC Monitoring Middle East 4 April 2012.

conferences and regional summits. Fifth, while Saudi officials in the 1980s had an all-out rejection of the Islamic Republic of Iran and what it represented in terms of values and revolutionary principles, the rivalry in the 2000s was limited in scope and reduced to criticism of only the neo-conservative faction within Iran, and to some members of the Iranian government. Saudi officials stopped short of attacking Iran's president or the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The objective of the thesis was to study, through a constructivist–structural realist analysis, the concept of state identity and to understand its role in foreign policy decision-making, with particular focus on the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement of 1997–2009. In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed a number of approaches—namely realist, constructivist, and FPA—that have been utilized by IR and Middle East studies scholars to study Saudi–Iranian relations. I discussed identity-based theories in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I charted the historical evolution of norms and state identities in the region in the second half of the 20th century. I also discussed different approaches applied to the study of Saudi–Iranian relations and offered a theoretical framework for studying the 1997 rapprochement process. The aim was to incorporate realist and constructivist methods to enhance the understanding of this case. I also reviewed the literature to examine traditional differences—including sectarianism, nationalism, revolutionary ideology, regional hegemony, oil prices, policy towards US military presence in the Gulf, and disagreements over the hajj—which have often been cited as reasons for the rivalry. I have argued that these differences cannot on their own offer a clear explanation as to why the enmity evolved in 1979, why rapprochement took place in 1997 and why it thrived—and subsequently declined—despite the continuing presence of these issues.

In Chapter 1, I discussed two mechanisms of change affecting state identity: socialization and normative change. I also pointed to two sources of state identity formation: cognitive and institutional. Furthermore, state identity as created by the political apparatus of the state—the political elite and designated state institutions—plays a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy decision-making at certain times; I have suggested that the time in which domestic factors most heavily influence foreign policy-making is the period of grand political changes either in the regime (internal effect) or in the international or regional realm. However, it plays a constitutive effect on foreign

policy during the period of political stability in the regime, because states develop a *raison d'état* that requires a specific ontological stance on world politics. A state will remain an enemy with some states, rival to others, and a friend to those it thinks conform to its norms and interests. However, when a state redefines its state identity, it actually redefines its relations with other states.

I have tried to emphasise that materialist factors are important in bilateral relations; nevertheless, when states experience enmity and mistrust ideational factors become more important. As I have argued, if material interests alone drive foreign policy, it is not clear why politicians delay or refuse to alter their foreign policy when regional or international circumstances change. In this case, we can ask why Saudi–Iranian rapprochement did not occur immediately after the Second Gulf War, when both states had a clear interest in balancing the power in the region following the defeat of their mutual enemy, the powerful Ba’thist regime of Iraq. Iraq had been a great rival of Iran since the revolution, and became an enemy of Saudi Arabia after the invasion of Kuwait; both states had clear interest in taming Iraq’s aggression during Saddam Hussein’s rule.

Another important conclusion derived from the use of this theoretical approach is that state identity plays a different role in each individual case and at different points in time due to fluctuations in its state identity. When there is a weak and fragmented system, foreign policy decision-making is often fluid and inconsistent, and is always contested by competing factions; therefore, formulating policy might seem easier but in fact is difficult to maintain. On the other hand, when there is a semi-centralised, bureaucratic system of government where the decision-making is much more concentrated, foreign policy decision-making is often consistent and institutionalised; therefore, changing foreign policy orientation is difficult and requires an extended period of time. The structure of the Iranian presidency is an example of the first, where there is a weaker president who is overruled by the supreme leader and the Guardian Council and often challenged by informal networks of revolutionary activists. Saudi Arabia is an example of the second, where the current king is considered a strong leader and the dominant figure in foreign policy decision-making, yet in practice the bureaucracy itself might constrain the process—and therefore the outcome of such policies.

Nevertheless, the influence of personal identities (for example, of leaders), discussed in previous chapters, should not be overstated. Key individuals might play pivotal roles during the decision-making process, and shifts in a state's foreign policy orientation indicate a possible transformation in its state identity. A leader or influential statesman can influence how the identity of the state is developed and might play an immense role in a bilateral relationship—but the important element is state identity and not persons, because a person will eventually depart while his or her policies remain. As in the case of the 1997 rapprochement, King Abdullah and President Rafsanjani initiated the process, but it continued despite the change of leadership in Iran on the election of Khatami. In addition, the 2006–2007 strategic talks occurred during President Ahmadinejad's first term—and so did demise of the rapprochement—which indicates that the role of a single individual did not dictate the outcome. Rather, the change in perception among a group of decision-makers on both sides altered the process.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, there are two sources of state identity formation: cognitive and institutional. The cognitive perspective emphasizes the importance of examining the individuals involved in the foreign policy-making process, for they are likely to view their environment differently. The cognitive origins of state identity are rooted in ideas that seek to explain the purpose of the individual, the state and the outside world. In Saudi Arabia, the state rested on a strict interpretation of Islam, *Wahhabism*, which made its state identity fundamentally opposed to communism on a religious basis. The state felt comfortable aligning with other states—such as the US—where the majority of citizens adhered to a religion against those states that prohibited religion, such as Russia and China. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's attempt to counter secular Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s led it to forge alliances with political Islamic movements, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, and to welcome active Sunni Muslim groups from around the world into its schools and universities. As a result, the Saudi openness to various Islamic ideas transformed *Wahhabism* and produced a globalized, Saudi version of pan-Islamism. (Commins 2006: 204)

Iran, on the other hand, is an interesting case of intellectual production and reproduction of ideas before and after the revolution. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Iranian revolution was comprised of a number of intellectual and ideological influences,

including Shi'a revivalism, communism, socialism, Farsi nationalism, and more.⁶ Although the new republic declared its rejection of both Soviet and American superpowers in Iran with the slogan “Not Eastern, Nor Western—Islamic Republican”, its official discourse maintained that revolt, and especially martyrdom, against injustice and tyranny was part of Shi'a Islam and that clerics should mobilize and lead their flocks into action, not merely advise them. The foreign policy of the new republic introduced Qur'anic terms—*mostazafin* (weak) and *mustakbirin* (proud and mighty)—for the Marxist vocabulary of “oppressed” and “oppressors”. (Adib-Moghaddam 2008: 57)

A second source of state identity formation is found domestically, in the state's institutions that deal with foreign policy decision-making. Each state has its own structure of institutions, which means that each country has a different—yet varying—institutional role in forming state identity. In Saudi Arabia, the royal court has complete authority over foreign policy decisions, while the Foreign Ministry executes the day-to-day foreign policy activities and missions. In Iran, there are at least seven institutions involved in Iran's foreign policy process: the Office of the Supreme Leader, the Office of the President, the Foreign Ministry, the Head of the Expediency Council, the Supreme National Security Council, the Majlis (primarily through its National Security and Foreign Policy commissions), and the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations (established in June 2006 to oversee President Ahmadinejad's performance). There is no doubt that these institutions follow different agendas; nevertheless, there appears to be a constituted consensus about the country's role in international affairs that is strong enough to transcend the factions and divisions of Iranian politics. (Adib-Moghaddam 2008: 71)

Despite the importance and relevance of the concept of state identity in this dissertation, several points of criticism may be noted. These points highlight some deficiencies concerning our current understanding of state identity as concept. First, state identity is based on the assumption that states are like units, their properties irrelevant to the explanation of their foreign policy. This paradigm is contested because

⁶ Above all other intellectual influences were the writings of Ayatollah Khomeini—in particular his book *Velāyat-e faqih* (1970), also known as *Islamic Government* in English. Khomeini argued that government should be run in accordance with traditional Islamic sharia, and for this to happen a leading Islamic jurist (faqih), must provide political guardianship (velayat) over the people. A modified form of this doctrine was incorporated into the 1979 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, foreign policy decision-making became subjected to the ruling of Islamic jurists known as The Expediency Discernment Council of the System (Brumberg 2001: 88).

it prioritizes identity over interests. Moreover, the “I”, or subject, who formulates preferences, wants, and interests, is linguistically placed prior to the action of satisfying them. What kind of entity I am determines what kind of wants I have: what we want follows from who we are. (McSweeney 1999: 127) This is an anti-behaviourist way of expressing the issue, and empirically it is not clear that the causal connection between identity and the interest of the state is unidirectional, as advocates of state identity suggest. The range of interests available to states can cause them to reinvent the state identity. They can become more self-assertive, egoistic, kind, or cooperative states if they choose to pursue interests consistent with such a definition.

A second limitation relates to the concept of state identity and the source of its change or stability, which state identity theorists locate in the interaction process. The difficulty here is one that points out the problem of adopting the state actor as the unit of analysis. The state is a collectivity, and collective identity formation is an appropriate and necessary topic if we are to make sense of actions that carry with them the power and resources of the state. But it is not only the process of state interaction with other states in the international arena that provides the theory by which collective identity, made relevant to foreign policy, is fashioned. It is also the domestic process of state interaction, with sub-state actors that influence the sense of commonality brought to bear upon international relations. (Hopf 2002) Advocates of state identity note the distinction in passing, but they do not allow it any purchase on their theoretical development of the determinants of state identity. This allows the working assumption that sub-state relations have no bearing on the process by which states learn to mould and modify their sense of statehood. Furthermore, it implies that the identity acquired in and from the process of interstate negotiation is necessarily consistent with that which characterizes the collectivity domestically at any particular time. (Busekist 2004: 81-86)

A third difficulty concerns the hard question of how a change of identity can be inferred from the only observable datum that indicates it: a change of behaviour. It should be noted that such an inference is critical to establishing the constructivist’s thesis against the alternative inference of neo-realists. It is not so much the causal direction of the relation of identity to interests that is problematic, as the absence of any substantive role for interests in the formation of identity.

Despite these limitations, I can argue that the state identity approach offers an important contribution to the study of rivalry and the amity–enmity patterns in world

politics. Differences do exist between states (alongside mutual interests), but they are only utilised in a certain way depending on how states perceive themselves and others in the international realm. The personalities of leaders are important indications, but identity of the state itself is what others observe, and its official discourse is what is interpreted. What matters is how states, through their constructed identity, come to perceive each other as friends or adversaries. Once a state considers another state as an enemy, minor differences can be blown out of proportion and it would not matter whether there was room for common interest or not. When states restore ties with former foes or issue statements emphasizing friendship and common interests, they say something about how the states perceived each other. Equally, when they go to war or threaten each other, it is an indication that they do not see eye to eye: in other words, their identities clash with each other.

KEY FINDINGS

The state identity approach used throughout this dissertation has proven its theoretical use and empirical importance to study rivalries between states. Using qualitative interviews, discourse analysis, and previously-unavailable material I have tried to denote key themes and characteristics of Iranian and Saudi state identities over the past few decades, with particular focus on 1997–2009. Furthermore, I charted the making of Saudi–Iranian relations between 1929 and 1979, described similarities in state identity formation in both states during the 1960s and 1970s, and discussed state identity under King Faisal in Saudi Arabia and the shah in Iran. By focusing on ideational and materialist factors, I have demonstrated how changes in state identity—particularly in the official foreign policy discourse—indicates changes in policy, and therefore a shift in the amity–enmity pattern between the two states. This was supplemented by qualitative interviews with individuals who participated in the rapprochement process and drew upon new archival material that has hitherto not been utilised in literature on the subject. Without discarding the value of other IR and Middle East studies approaches, I have argued that the rapprochement process of 1997 has been significantly—though not exclusively—influenced by changes in state identity in both states. Furthermore, ideational and materialists factors were instrumental in the demise of the rapprochement process, but the change in Iran’s state identity during the first term of President Ahmadinejad altered the perception of each state towards the other, transforming it from a state of relative friendliness to a state of enmity and rivalry. This has been explained by examining the *muqawama–mumana’*a discourse, and the debate

between moderates and radicals. I will summarise a few lessons derived from this research:

First, perhaps the main lesson derived from this research is that state identity in Iran has suffered from a problem faced by most nations that experience great upheavals—such as revolution—which is how to transform from a *revolution* into a functioning *state*. (Taheri 5 February 2007) This has been evident in the continuous conflict between proponents of the *state* and those of the *revolution*; the *reformist* versus *conservative* struggle described in previous chapters illustrates this conflict, which in turn makes the development and practice of moderate foreign policies difficult, if not impossible. As a nation-state, Iran may be a rival and competitor for other nations. But it would not be an existential threat. As a revolution, however, Iran has been perceived as a threat not only to its neighbours but also to the international community. (Taheri 5 February 2007)

Furthermore, the revolution has not succeeded in destroying the idea of Iran as a nation-state, nor did it eliminate completely historical family linkages, informal bureaucratic practices, or nationalist (Persian) sentiments embedded within the state institutions over the years. Thus, the *revolution* did not overcome the *state*, and neither did the *state* overcome the *revolution*—leading to periods of stagnation. This is evident in the structurally embedded strain between the presidency and the Supreme Leader's Office, as discussed in chapter 7. The first is thought to represent the interest of the state and speak for the Iranian people, while the second supposedly represents the interest of the wider Islamic *umma* and speaks on their behalf. The neoconservatives intended for these differences to exist—whenever they have been forced to consider opening up regionally or internationally when confronted by economic pressures and other domestic interests, they would employ Islamic solidarity and utilize past history and fears of foreign powers intervention to threaten other political rivals from changing Iran's foreign policy. As a result, each time the proponents of the *revolution* found themselves on the defensive, they resorted to invoking fear from Western powers including regional neighbours like the GCC states, to restore their legitimacy and regain their breath. This is usually done through informal networks—namely Friday sermons, religious seminaries, and paramilitary organizations associated with Iran's conservative factions.

In 1997, the Khatami presidency gave impetus to the critical reinterpretation of Iran's foreign policy strategies. In other words, he—along with his predecessor, Rafsanjani—opted to moderate Iran's foreign policy without straying from Ayatollah Khomeini's ideals. Khatami's well-choreographed and effectively organized framework for the introduction of the Iranian dual policy of democratization at home and constructive engagement and dialogue abroad marked a change in Iran's foreign policy. Revolutionary ideas, such as third-world cooperation, Islamic communitarianism, anti-Zionism, and anti-imperialism were still entertained as useful means—but not as goals in themselves. The adoption of pragmatic foreign policies to attain Iran's long-term strategic preferences reassured regional states and opened up the path towards reconciliation. Thus, the *state* was given priority over the *revolution*.

The second lesson derived from this research concerns foreign policy discourse. As I discussed in Chapter 1, each state adopts a foreign policy discourse that supposedly reflects its identity and how it perceives itself and others. Here, Iran's revolutionary discourse during the 1980s was considered threatening in some states in the region—Saudi Arabia in particular—which in the end created perceptions of mistrust and enmity. This changed considerably during the Rafsanjani and Khatami presidencies; the perception of enmity eroded and opened the path for reconciliation. Let us take, for example, the Islamic Republic's establishment of what is known as the protection of *mostazafin*, the deprived or oppressed people, which is a consistent theme in Iran's revolutionary principles. Ayatollah Khomeini often said that Iran's most important foreign policy goal was standing up to the “Satanist world order” (referring to the US) by championing the protection of the *mostazafin* who suffer at the hands of the oppressors, the Western great powers. (Adib-Moghaddam 2008: 56) This belief remained an integral part of Iran's state identity, and was especially reinvigorated in the sermons of Ayatollah Khamenei—and more recently during the Ahmadinejad presidency. Viewing the world as a war between oppressed and oppressors underpins Iran's ontological vision of the world, and it further explains why Iran undermined norms like state sovereignty and human rights as it sought to export its revolutionary ideals. This is not to say that Iran's foreign policy practice completely ignored the international community, its organizations, and laws; rather, it is to say that Iran's foreign policy discourse rarely acknowledged the authority of international norms and often challenged the legitimacy of international institutions. (Keddie and Richard 2006: 346)

The third lesson is about leadership. In essence, the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement was a result of changes in state identity in both countries. Saudi Arabia witnessed a change in its political regime on the ascendance of King Abdullah to power; Iran also experienced a change to its regime on the election of Mohamed Khatami and his reformist foreign policy allies. Both sides changed their foreign policy approach towards the other, which in turn started a process of change in their respective state identities. During the Khatami years, Iran sought to revive its relations with Saudi Arabia based on its “Good Neighbour” policy; however, when the neoconservatives took over they decided to reverse Iran’s integration with the rest of the world by emphasizing the revolutionary and Islamic elements of Iran’s state identity.

In Saudi Arabia, however, the king—while still the crown prince—gradually began a conciliatory approach towards some of Saudi Arabia’s former foes, such as Iran and Libya. While Saudi state identity was not radically altered, as was the case in Iran, it is still somewhat different in 2009 than it was in 1981. Saudi state identity under King Abdullah still subscribed to Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism, yet the emphasis on Saudi Arabia’s Islamic role shifted from solidarity with troubled states—like Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion—to the promotion of dialogue between faiths and religious tolerance. This has been a result of Saudi efforts to distance itself from religious extremism associated with the war on terror in the period following the September 11th attacks.

Moreover, the Saudi state opted to position itself as world player in anti-terrorism activities, which had a direct impact on *Wahhabi* missionaries abroad and the financial support Saudi Arabia was providing to Islamic centres in Europe and Asia through its informal religious charity networks. Nevertheless, as we have discussed in Chapter 6, the king can only set the foreign policy orientation and influence the development of state identity even in an absolute monarchy like the Saudi state system. Constraints on the implementation of policy, such as bureaucracy in key ministries, do exist. During the period of rapprochement, King Abdullah opted to redefine Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy priorities; however, the Interior Ministry in particular was reluctant to normalize with Tehran, and the Security Accord negotiations took more than four years to reach an agreement. While commerce and business progressed and restrictions on trade were overcome (at least to some extent), education and cultural

exchanges barely scratched the surface of long-held societal and cultural differences between the two nations.

The fourth lesson concerns normative change. As discussed in Chapter 1, rival states always seek to impose their normative order over others. A clear example in the case of Saudi–Iranian rapprochement is the debate over the right of *muqawama*—armed resistance against the occupiers—against the commitment to peaceful resolutions following the 2006 Lebanon War. (Wehrey 2009: 25) These two conflicting normative choices have played an interesting role in illustrating the differences in state identity between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Syrian–Iranian axis advocated a normative order that not only legitimized the armed resistance of groups such as Hizbullah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad groups in Palestine, but considered the support of such resistance—which also included targeting US military presence—as a duty and obligation of Muslim and Arab states.

However, the split between *moderates* and *radicals* (2005–2009) was not limited to the notion of pro-Western or anti-Western alignments, but was rather a deep divide between two distinct normative views of regional order. One advocated resistance and the use of force as means to challenge the existing status quo; the second was reactionary and aimed at preserving the status quo. Needless to say, the status quo—whether for those who oppose it or those who seek to preserve it—is of a temporal nature, meaning that it often shifts over time. Moreover, the genesis of the moderates-versus-radicals divide finds its roots in the progressive–regressive debate of Arab Nationalism and the Left arguments of the 1960s (Barakat 1993: 162)—as well as the Islamist discourse of the *Dawallah al-Islamiah* (Islamic state) and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which resorted to exporting the revolution in the 1980s under the ‘oppressed–oppressors’ mantra. Nevertheless, the rise of the *muqawama* and *mumana’a* is somewhat different. While former regional normative debates centred on specific nationalist and ideological inclinations, the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse represented a societal divide between governments and the general public in their respective states.

Although the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse may not seem particularly new to the region’s history—the call for resistance against Israel and defiance of Western powers and their regional collaborators have been present for decades—it represented a departure in Iranian foreign policy from the ‘Good Neighbour’ discourse

of President Khatami and his pro-reform camp, which had effectively played a role in strengthening ties with GCC states and a further reconciliation with Europe and other parts of the world. It is true that Iran's revolutionary legacy has always emphasized the notion of helping the oppressed to challenge their oppressors, yet Iran's Shi'a credentials nearly dominated its foreign policy discourse throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse was somewhat different in its appeal, as it was not based on the export of Iran's revolutionary ideals or the call to overthrow opponent regimes. Instead, the *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse was more inclusive, as Ahmadinejad's government sought to build a regional census centred on the idea of a regional security framework that kept outside powers such as the US out of the region's affairs. Accordingly, the Iranian aim was not to challenge states like Saudi Arabia, but rather to persuade them to share Iran's view of how the regional order should be. It was only when Saudi Arabia started to challenge this discourse that Iran began to see Saudi Arabia as a rival.

The fifth lesson concerns *roles* in foreign policy. The Ahmadinejad presidency never intended to make Saudi Arabia an enemy—at least based on its official statements—nevertheless, its internalization of *muqawama–mumana'a* discourse regionally and the millenarian dimension in Ahmadinejad's rhetoric alarmed the Saudis. By defying the regional security structure, refusing to cooperate with the IAEA on its nuclear programme, and threatening to use force in the Gulf to close the Strait of Hormuz, President Ahmadinejad revived the inferiority–superiority complex between Iran and its Arab neighbours—perhaps unintentionally.

FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this thesis, I have offered a theoretical framework to study a particular historical development, the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement of 1997. I believe this framework can be extended to examine further developments in Saudi-Iranian relations. For the purpose of this research, I have limited the time period to 2009—the end of President Ahmadinejad's first term. However, regional developments—namely the 2011 popular uprisings that swept a number of Arab states—have aggravated the rivalry between the two sides. The downfall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, a close ally of Saudi Arabia, and the present conflict in Syria that has weakened President Bashar al-Asad, a close ally of Iran, have all contributed to further deterioration in Saudi-Iranian relations. These developments did not alter the usual course of relations between the

two sides—on the contrary, they re-enforce the argument made here regarding the nature of Saudi-Iranian rivalry and the important role state identity plays in foreign policy decision-making on both sides.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework can be extended to study similar regional cases, namely the Iraqi–Syrian rivalry (1971–2003) where two branches of the same Ba’th party that shared similar principles worked to overthrow each other for over three decades. In the early 1980s, Syria formed an alliance with the new Islamic Republic in Iran, and Iraq relied heavily on its GCC donors to finance a brutal war with the new republic. Another interesting case might be the transformation of Egyptian state identity during the Sadat era. In that case, the state’s foreign policy orientation was radically altered from a Pan-Arabist view of the region to nation-state-centric position. This is easily represented by the slogan “Egypt comes first”, articulated by the presidency to justify the country’s peace with Israel in response to some Arab efforts to isolate and punish Egypt for its break with Pan-Arabist and Pan-Islamist norms of that era.

In Chapter 2, I focussed on two broad approaches to understanding the politics of the region, one (realism) that overemphasizes materialist factors and the balance of power, and another (constructivism) that discards them in favour for ideational factors. In this thesis, I have argued for a synthesis between these factors and suggested state identity as a bridging theoretical framework to make sense of both factors through the context of state identity. Future research to develop this approach is required. I would suggest a focus on two interesting dimensions of state identity. First, I would recommend study of the process of state identity continuity and change for key states that shape regional interaction on matters of security over an extended period of time. Second, it would be necessary to chart normative order, how norms are internalized among states, and how identification with certain norms is voluntary adopted or forced upon actors. For example, I have demonstrated how the *muqawama–mumana’a* discourse consumed the debate between 2005 and 2009 and divided the region into two loose alignments: moderates and radicals. Taking into account the 2011 developments (which are still ongoing at the time of writing), it would be interesting to study whether this debate might continue under different banners or if it will be dissolved as a consequence of these developments.

Another area that is perhaps worthy of investigation is to see whether the attempts to redefine state identity in Saudi Arabia and Iran will continue on course, or if they will be interrupted by these new developments. Indeed, in the near future new archival material might be available to test some of the findings in this study and to measure whether state identity did play the role that I have presented here. In conclusion, I hope that this alternative approach benefit from future advances in the field of identity studies in the region and will complement the existing literature on the topic.

APPENDIX A

Friendship Treaty between the Kingdom of the Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies and the Kingdom of Persia, 1929

Tehran, 24 August 1929

Praise be to Allah alone and Prayers and peace be upon the last of the Prophets;¹

We, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Faisal al-Saud, King of Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies have concluded a 'Friendship Treaty' with His Majesty the Emperor of Iran, with the view of establishing and strengthening the relations between our countries, which has been signed by two representatives on behalf of Ourselves and one representative on behalf of His Majesty the Emperor of Iran, the three who were equally entrusted with full authorization. The signing ceremony took place in the city of Tehran on:

18 Rabie al-Awwal 1348 (of Hijra)

2 Yur 1308 (Persian calendar)

Following is the operative text of the treaty:

Friendship Treaty

between

the Kingdom of Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies

and

the Kingdom of Persia

His Majesty the King of the Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies

First Party; and

His Majesty the Emperor of Iran

Second Party

Upon mutual wish to establish and promote ties of friendship between the two countries; and

Believing that establishing these relations will serve the development of the two nations and help promote their welfare;

The two parties have decided to conclude a friendship treaty for this purpose:

His Majesty the King of the Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies has appointed:

Shaykh Abdallah al-Fadhil

¹ Source: Badeeb 1993: 133-135

and Shaykh Muhammad Eid al-Rawwaf,
and His Majesty the Emperor of Iran has appointed:
His Excellency Haj Mahdy Qulli Khan Hedayat
the Prime Minister of Iran,
as authorized representatives on behalf of them.

Upon examining their credentials, which proved to be identical to the original documents, the representatives agreed on the following articles:

Article I

Inviolable peace and sincere and durable friendship will reign between the Kingdom of the Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies and the Empire of Iran, including the nationals of the two countries. The two contracting sides confirm their wish to exert all efforts to make such peace and friendship durable and to bolster the relations between them.

Article II

Whereas the two contracting parties rightfully wish to exchange Plenipotentiary Ministers and Consuls, they have agreed that the representatives of each party in the country of the other side will be accorded reciprocal treatment in accordance with the rules of international law.

Article III

Both parties will extend to the nationals of the other party, while in their countries, all the rights and privileges extended to the nationals of the most preferred countries. The Government of the Kingdom of Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies will also treat the Iranian pilgrims in all kinds of transactions on the same footing with other pilgrims. It will not put any obstacles in their way to observe their hajj rituals and religious obligations. It will otherwise facilitate for the pilgrims means of security, convenience and safety.

The two parties express their wish to add supplementary memorandums when the time is ripe for concluding agreements on political and economic matters.

Article IV

The original of this treaty has been signed in 4 copies in Arabic and Persian. The Arabic and Persian texts are to be regarded officially as equally authentic.

Tehran: 18 Rabie al-Awwal 1348 (of Hijra)

2 Yur 1308 (Persian calendar)

(signed) Abdallah al-Fadhli

(signed) Muhammad Eid al-Rawwaf

(signed) Mahdi Qulli

Upon perusing and examining the foregoing treaty, we have endorsed, accepted and authorized it as a whole and as articles and paragraphs. Therefore, we endorse and conclude this treaty and give Royal Promise that we shall, God willing, execute and observe, honestly and sincerely, the items thereof. We shall, God willing, do our best to prevent any kind of violation of its rules.

Confirming the authenticity thereof we seal and sign this document before Allah, the best of all witnesses.

This treaty has been concluded at Our palace on:

10 Jumada al-Thaniah 1348 (of Hijra)

AD 2 November 1929

Exchange of Decrees of Conclusion

The undersigned, fully authorized by their respective governments, met in the Foreign Affairs Office in Jeddah for exchanging the decrees of conclusion of the friendship treaty between His Majesty the King of Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies and His Majesty the Shah of Iran, which was signed in Tehran on:

18 Rabie al-Awwal 1348 (Hijra)

2 Yur 1308 (Persian calendar)

and concluded by the two governments in accordance with the ceremonies and procedures observed in the two countries.

Having verified the decrees of the concluded treaty, which proved to be of one and the same content, the undersigned exchanged the decrees on this same day in accordance with the formal ceremonies observed.

In confirmation thereof the undersigned have put their signatures on this certification.

Written in Jeddah, this twelfth day of Muharram, one thousand three hundred and forty-nine.

(signed) Habibullah Hoveida

Representative of Iran in Jeddah

(signed) Fouad Hamsa

Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs

APPENDIX B

Text of the Saudi-Iranian Cooperation Agreement of 1998

The complete text of the agreement follows:¹

Tehran, 27 May 1998.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (referred to henceforth as the contracting parties), out of a desire to strengthen the existing ties of friendship between the two countries, in support of the Islamic, cultural and historic bonds between the two peoples, in recognition of the potential benefits to both countries of strengthening bilateral co-operation and in accordance with the regulations and laws applied in both countries, have agreed the following:

Part I

Article One:

The contracting parties will endeavour to develop and support cooperation between their two countries in a spirit of friendship and mutual respect and understanding. This cooperation will be in the fields of economics, trade, investment and technical matters.

Article Two:

The contracting parties will work to encourage co-operation in economic, trade, investment and technical matters between the two countries and their citizens, both native and naturalised. This cooperation will comprise, by way of example and not exclusively:

- A. Cooperation in all economic spheres including industrial, mineral, oil and petrochemical, agricultural, livestock, and health projects, and also in the fields of transport, tourism, communications, housing, town planning, and technical and engineering services.
- B. Encouraging the exchange of information on scientific and technical research.
- C. Encouraging and paving the way for the exchange of the technical experts and professionals required for this co-operation.
- D. Private sector co-operation, including chambers of commerce.
- E. The two parties will undertake to conclude other separate agreements, when required, in accordance with regulatory measures applied in both countries.

Article Three:

- A- The contracting parties will do their best to activate and diversify trade between their two countries and, to this end and within the bounds of international trade law, they will apply to this trade the principle of most favoured nation status.
- B- This principle, as set out in clause A of this article, will not include distinctions accorded by either of the contracting parties to citizens or companies of a third country

¹ *Ain al-Yaqeen Online Magazine*, 28 May 1998. www.ainalyaqueen.com/issues/1998.

as a result of their participation in free trade in the region, a customs union or common market or any other form of regional economic regulatory structure.

Article Four:

The two contracting countries will work to encourage and facilitate investments by citizens of both countries in all areas other than those prohibited or confined to citizens of the host country. The two parties will also provide the necessary facilities to undertake joint investment projects within the framework of the laws and regulations applied in both countries.

Article Five:

The two contracting parties will work to encourage exchange visits by economic, trade and technical representatives and delegations, including exchange visits and delegations from the private sector, and they will work to encourage the setting up and participation in exhibitions, providing the necessary facilities for these exhibitions, with the aim of supporting cooperation between the two countries.

Part II

Cooperation in the fields of science, culture, sport and youth:

Article Six:

The two parties will work to encourage co-operation in the fields of science, culture, sport and youth and cooperation in these areas will include, by way of example and not exclusively:

- A. Scientific and technical co-operation through the exchange of information in areas of common interest; exchange visits between officials, researchers, experts and technicians; the training of experts; participation in scientific meetings and conferences of common interest; and also co-operation in drawing up scientific plans, setting up centres and research laboratories.
- B. Cooperation in cultural areas through the exchange programmes between cultural institutes, groups and government and popular bodies; facilitating the setting up and participation in cultural conferences, festivals and exhibitions in both countries; exchanging and showing documentaries about both countries, their people, heritage and cultures; in addition to encouraging cooperation between universities, foundations and other educational institutes through exchange visits by experts; training professionals in cultural spheres and coordinating in the areas of publishing, and Arabic and Persian language teaching.
- C. Cooperation in the area of youth and sports through co-ordinating activities in Islamic and international events and exchange programmes between foundations, groups, sport and youth unions; exchanging documents and audio-visual and written materials; exchanging visits and experts among officials in charge of youth and sports; co-operating in the training of professionals in the fields of youth and sport; and extending invitations to attend national, regional and international conferences and meetings organised in both countries.

Part III

General rulings

Article Seven:

The contracting parties will set up a joint committee at ministerial level which will meet regularly each year in alternating countries, to study ways of developing bilateral relations.

Article Eight:

- A. Work will begin on this agreement and it will be considered valid for five years from the date of the completion of the exchange of memoranda after their ratification in accordance with the laws in force in both countries. After this period has ended, the agreement will be automatically renewed for subsequent periods of one year unless either party notifies the other in writing six months in advance of a desire to terminate the agreement.
- B. In the event of the termination of the treaty, its rulings will continue to be applied in relation to uncompleted programmes, projects, agreements, contracts or other obligations entered into and relating to the terms of the treaty; as will its rulings remain in force in relation to any rights arising out of the general accord and not yet settled and similarly to any outstanding financial obligations before the end of the operation of the treaty, whether all these relate to governments or to native or naturalised citizens.

APPENDIX C

Joint Communiqué of 19 May 1999

Proceeding from the fraternal relations and Muslim amity between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran; out of their desire to strengthen and consolidate the bilateral relations between their two countries; and at the invitation to the Servant of the Two Holy Places, King Fahd Bin Abd al-Aziz Al Sa'ud, king of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, HE President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, paid an official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 29th Muharram to 4th Safar 1420 AH, corresponding to the period from 15th to 19th May 1999.¹

His Excellency received a warm welcome which reflects the extent of the relations of fraternity and friendship between the two countries.

Talks were held during the visit between HE President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami and the Servant of the Two Holy Places, King Fahd Bin Abd al-Aziz Al Sa'ud, and viewpoints were exchanged in an atmosphere dominated by mutual trust and a spirit of fraternity and understanding as they discussed bilateral relations and the regional, Islamic and international situation.

The two sides expressed their satisfaction with the steady growth of their relations in various political, security, economic and cultural areas, and their desire to continue developing cooperation between them in the interest of the two countries and peoples.

The two countries called on the Muslim states to increase their cooperation on the basis of Islamic fraternity and to work towards strengthening the principle of Islamic solidarity with all the means which serve its objectives, and to realize the common interests of the Muslim nation.

They stressed their determination to work together to strengthen this solidarity and the role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The two sides also reviewed the current regional situation and the development of Iranian relations with the states of the region, noted the growth in the level of these relations and stressed the importance of strengthening the special relations between them on the basis of good neighbourliness, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, respect for national sovereignty and independence and peaceful coexistence derived from the ties of religion and heritage which bind the states of the region, with a view to establishing good neighbourly relations in order to serve their common interests

¹ SPA news agency, 19 May 1999 (in Arabic); 'Saudi, Iranian leaders issue joint statement' *BBC Monitoring*, 19 May 1999 (in English) Available at: <
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/348176.stm>>.

and the stability of permanent peace and security in the region through cooperation between all the regional states.

They stressed the need to solve every case of misunderstanding or disagreement between any of the states of the region through direct dialogue and understanding on the basis of amity and out of consideration for common interests.

The Saudi side valued highly the policy adopted by HE President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami to improve relations with the states of the Cooperation Council and increase bilateral contacts and meetings between them.

The two sides also expressed their optimism that official meetings and visits between the two sides will lead to positive results which will strengthen mutual trust.

The two sides stressed the need to protect the independence of Iraq and its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

They said that its internal affairs are issues to be decided by the Iraqi people alone.

They expressed their sympathy for the suffering fraternal Iraqi people, stressing their determination to continue their efforts to ease their suffering, while calling on Iraq to accept the will of international legality by implementing all the UN Security Council resolutions.

The two sides condemned Israeli repressive measures which are contrary to all international laws and principles, stressing the need for Israel to end its occupation of all Palestinian territories in order to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to set up a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

They condemned the Israeli policies and the measures aimed at the Judaization of Jerusalem, by wiping it out of all its Palestinian Islamic identity.

They called on the international community to oppose these policies.

The two sides support the unshakable stance of the Arab Republic of Syria regarding the end of the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights.

They also support the Lebanese resistance against Israeli occupation and they denounce continuous Israeli threats and attacks against civilians.

They see these aggressive acts as the main reason for the increase in tension and lack of security in the region.

They stressed the need for Israel to end the occupation of southern Lebanon without conditions and in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425.

The two sides stressed the importance of preventing the proliferation of all types of weapons of mass destruction and called on the states which have not signed the treaty

on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the treaty on the total ban on nuclear tests to sign these two treaties quickly.

The two sides expressed their support for turning the Middle East into a zone free from weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, expressing their absolute belief that Israel's policy, based on producing and stockpiling types of weapons of mass destruction and its non-compliance with international laws and treaties poses a real and serious threat to peace and security in the region.

The two sides expressed their deep concern about the current situation in the Kosovo Province and what the Muslims of Kosovo have endured and are still enduring, and their condemnation of the barbaric actions and the abominable ethnic cleansing carried out by the Serb troops and militias.

The two sides expressed their support for any international effort aimed at achieving a just solution of this issue, praising the efforts of the Islamic contact group made in this respect.

They said that any solution to the Kosovo problem had to be based on the withdrawal of the Serb troops from the province, their replacement with an international force and the return of the refugees.

The two sides urged the international community to endeavour to bring those responsible for the acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing to justice and give them a fair trial for the crimes against humanity they have committed.

The two sides expressed their concern about the situation in Afghanistan and stressed the need to preserve Afghanistan's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and highlighted the necessity to achieve stability and peace, which should be derived from a broad base of national reconciliation.

They expressed their support for the current efforts made by the UN and its special envoy to Afghanistan.

The two sides expressed their strong condemnation of all forms and types of terrorism, whatever their origin, and they noted that the fight against terrorism required united international measures under the auspices and supervision of the UN.

The two sides reviewed the current state of the oil market and expressed their satisfaction with the improvement in oil prices achieved thanks to the OPEC decision taken at its recent meeting in March 1999.

They reaffirmed their commitment and serious endeavour, together with the other states, to continue the implementation of what has been agreed upon in order to preserve the gains which have been achieved.

They also stressed their resolve to go on cooperating in joint action, together with the other oil-producing countries, in order to ensure the stability and growth of the oil markets, which will help realize the interests of oil producers and consumers.

The two sides reviewed the progress achieved in developing economic and commercial relations and reaffirmed their determination to boost trade cooperation between them.

In this respect, they called for the continuation of the efforts of the joint committee aimed at strengthening and consolidating joint cooperation, endeavouring to remove the obstacles impeding an increase in commercial and financial exchanges between them in all areas and encouraging the relevant departments in the two countries to examine and study ways and means of developing and managing economic and cultural relations between them.

HE President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressed his deepest appreciation and gratitude to the Servant of the Two Holy Places, King Fahd Bin Abd al-Aziz; HRH Prince Abdullah Bin Abd al-Aziz, the crown prince, deputy prime minister and commander of the National Guard; and to the government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to his excellency and the delegation accompanying him.

His excellency also extended an invitation to the Servant of the Two Holy Places, King Fahd Bin Abd al-Aziz, to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran, who accepted it with appreciation and gratitude to his excellency.

APPENDIX D

Official Announcement of the Security Accord, 27 April 2001

Iranian President Mohamed Khatami announced that strengthening ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran will have a great effect on the Gulf region and the Middle East.¹

The Iranian President's remarks came during his meeting with Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Saudi Interior Minister, in a hint to the security agreement which was signed between the two countries in Tehran and was described by political sources as the most important event in the history of the two countries during the last two decades.

President Khatami said Prince Naif's visit affirms the strong relations binding the two countries calling for developing the economic relations also.

The Iranian President requested Prince Naif to convey his greetings and good wishes to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Ibn Abdul Aziz and Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard.

On his part, Prince Naif conveyed to President Khatami the greetings of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz and their interest to strengthen ties of cooperation between the two countries.

Prince Naif also praised the noble and good feelings towards the Kingdom's leadership and people and the sincere co-operation he received from all Iranian officials he met during his visit.

Pointing to the security agreement, Prince Naif considered that the implementation of agreements between the two great countries, Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will benefit the whole region.

On the other hand, President Khatami denounced the Israeli "domination" in the Middle East, and called for solidarity among the Islamic countries to face this threat.

The Iranian President added that the "domination" of the Israeli regime in the Middle East, and its daily violation of the international laws need a solidarity among the Islamic countries to face this threat.

President Khatami confirmed that exchanging visits between the two leaderships of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran is the best indicator of the strong ties binding the two countries.

In a statement to the Saudi media, following receiving Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Iranian President said: 'Our region is a very important and sensitive region not only for the countries of our region but also to the world, and within the region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran are very important countries.'

He pointed out that Saudi-Iranian understanding is an advantage not only for the countries but also for the whole region and the world. 'A stable, secure and prosperous region benefits all,' the Iranian President told the Saudi reporters.

¹ 'Saudi Arabia and Iran Sign the Security Agreement; Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz pays a fruitful visit to Tehran; Prince Naif: Saudi Arabia is fully convinced of the importance of having a security co-operation agreement with Iran; President Khatami: Strengthening relations with Saudi Arabia serves the interest of the region', *Ain-Al-Yaqeen Online Magazine*, 27 April 2001. Available at: < <http://www.ainalyaqeen.com/issues/20010427/feat4en.htm> >.

President Khatami expressed hope that the co-operation between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran in security, political and economic fields would be a model for all countries.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran had signed the historic security agreement at the Iranian Interior Ministry headquarters in the Iranian capital of Tehran.

Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz the Saudi Interior Minister signed the accord for the Kingdom while his Iranian counterpart, Abdul Wahid Mousavi-Lary, initialled it for Iran.

The signing ceremony was attended by Prince Mohamed Ibn Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs, members of the official delegation, and the chief editors of Saudi media.

Iranian Assistant Interior Minister for Security and Police Affairs, Gholam Hussein Bilandian, several high-ranking officials and Iranian and foreign reporters also witnessed the signing ceremony.

The signing ceremony followed the second and last official meeting held between Prince Naif and Abdul Wahid Mousavi-Lary at the Iranian Interior Ministry headquarters.

The meeting was attended by Prince Mohamed Ibn Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, Mohamed al-Shawi, General Supervisor of the Interior Minister's office, Lieutenant General Mahmoud Bakhsh, Deputy General Director of the General Investigations, Lieutenant General Asa'ad Abdul Karim General Director of the General Security, Lieutenant General Talal Anqawi, Commander of the Boarder Guard, Dr. Saad al-Harhi, Advisor to the Interior Minister, Major General Sultan al-Harhi, General Director of the General Anti-Drug Department, Major General Abdul Aziz Sejini, General Director of Passports Department, Major General Saud al-Dawood, Chief of the Interior Minister's office for Studies and Researches, Nasser al-Sultan, the Advisor at the Interior Ministry and Dr Saud Al Mosaibeih, Chief of the Guidance and Information at the interior Ministry.

At a joint press conference following the signing of the Security Agreement, Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz reiterated that the Agreement constitutes a framework for co-operation between the two countries in various spheres of common interest, notably the fight against all forms of crime, terrorism, drug smuggling and money laundering.

In reply to a question on Iraqi threats to Kuwait, Prince Naif said this issue was reviewed with the Iranian officials, and declared that Iran is fully supportive of the Kingdom's position.

On the Palestinian issue, he confirmed that the Iranians are concerned with restoration of the Palestinians' legitimate rights, and stressed the importance of an effective and integrated Arab and Islamic stance to end Israeli intransigence, reiterating the Kingdom's condemnation of Israel's recent aggression against the Syrian forces on Lebanese territory.

Prince Naif reiterated that the Security Agreement signed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran aims at the realization of joint security. 'The Security Agreement also constitutes a framework for co-operation in various spheres in a manner that serves common interests,' Prince Naif said.

Addressing the press conference along with Iranian Interior Minister Abdolvahed Mussavi-Lari, Prince Naif said: 'The Agreement stipulates combating all forms of crime, drugs, terrorism and money laundering.'

On the possibility of granting the agreement a comprehensive security perspective in the light of the challenges facing the countries of the region, Prince Naif said: 'The comprehensive security perspective was reviewed with our Iranian brothers. The two sides have agreed to work for realization of mutual security so that the security of the Kingdom as the security of Iran and vice versa'.

In reply to a question if the Iraqi threats to Kuwait were reviewed with Iranian officials, Prince Naif said: 'This matter concerns the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which will never tolerate any form of threat to Kuwait. Our brothers in Iran support us in this respect and they are keen to end the existing situation. However, they do understand the existing situation in Kuwait and the stance of the Kingdom in this regard.'

On the impact of the Saudi-Iranian Security Agreement on the countries of the region and on the Palestinian cause, Prince Naif said: 'As regards the countries of the region, I am certain that they will welcome the Agreement because it will serve the interests of all.'

Referring to the Palestinian cause, Prince Naif said: 'The Saudis and Iranians support the Palestinian cause. They are eager that the Palestinians should regain their rights under international law, especially in relation to al-Quds', he added.

Prince Naif underscored the importance of an effective and integrated Arab and Islamic stance in ending Israeli intransigence and reiterated the Kingdom's condemnation of the Israeli aggression on the Lebanese territories and the Syrian missiles bases.

Prince Naif said his visit to Iran has gone far beyond signing a Security Agreement and covered all problems of the region, notably the Palestinian issue and other issues of mutual interest: 'Iran is concerned with neighbouring countries as well as with the entire security of the region', he said.

Prince Naif said he had reviewed with Iranian President Mohamed Khatami the sufferings of the Iraqi people: 'The situation in northern Iraq is different than the situation in central or southern Iraq.

'It is hoped that the mass media will shoulder its responsibility in this respect and make the facts clearer in both the Arab and the wider world', he added.

'The Iraqi people are part of the Arab and Muslim nation. We pray to the Almighty God to enable Iraq to restore its normal status in the Arab world and to free Iraq from its sufferings and ordeal', Prince Naif noted.

On his part, Iranian Interior Minister Abdul Wahid Mousawi Larry said the Security Agreement, signed by the Kingdom and Iran, concentrates on the responsibilities of the Interior Ministries in the two countries.

The Iranian Interior Minister pointed out that the Security Agreement has paved the way for a more comprehensive and wider co-operation between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran: 'The Security Agreement includes articles pertaining to combating organized crime, economic crimes, drugs, smuggling and facilitating exchange of security data', he noted.

'It will have a significant impact on the region. We view the security of the Kingdom as the security of Iran and the vice versa', Larry said.

He noted that the Iranian leadership, notably the supreme leader of the Iranian revolution, has demonstrated support for the Agreement.

'With the grace of the Almighty God, we will have genuine co-operation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the implementation of all articles of the Agreement,' the Iranian Interior Minister said.

He said the Iranian Shura Council would honour all articles of the Agreement. 'The Islamic Republic of Iran has been playing a positive role in this region to enhance the foundations of security and co-existence', he said.

Iran's security was akin to Saudi Arabia's security and vice versa, he said. Considerable groundwork was done prior to the visit at both public and private levels.

The Saudi Interior Minister Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz had arrived in Tehran for a high-profile visit that included the signing of the historic Security Agreement

Prince Naif was welcomed by his Iranian counterpart Abdul Wahid Mousawi Larry at the start of his four-day visit.

Prince Naif said that he would convey the greetings of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Crown Prince, and the Second Deputy Prime Minister to President Mohamed Khatami of Iran and to the fraternal Iranian people.

In an arrival statement, Prince Naif said to reporters that his visit to Iran will provide him with a good opportunity to review with his Iranian counterpart issues pertaining to the security of the two countries and security co-operation in addition to meeting with President Mohamed Khatami and a number of senior officials to discuss issues of mutual interest.

Prince Naif noted that the Saudi-Iranian Security Agreement will be signed during the visit, and added that signing of the Security Agreement will benefit not only both countries but also the entire countries of the region.

Prince Naif said Saudi-Iranian relations are good and they will be further enhanced with the signing of the Security Agreement. 'The two countries are fully convinced that the Security Agreement will have a positive impact on joint security, and will make us feel that the security of Iran is the security of the Kingdom and the vice versa', he said.

On information co-operation between the two countries, Prince Naif said: 'Information co-operation is assumed to exist in a manner that serves mutual interests' and added the media men should shoulder their responsibility in this respect.

Prior to departure to Tehran, Prince Naif said his visit to Iran comes in response to an invitation from his Iranian counterpart, Abdul Wahid Mousavi-Lari.

He said the visit aims at enhancing bilateral relations and discussion of security issues that concern the Kingdom, Iran and the countries of the region in general.

Prince Naif expressed happiness for visiting Iran and said the visit will provide him with a good opportunity to exchange views with the Iranian officials on a number of economic, cultural and commercial issues.

'It is hoped that the Saudi-Iranian relations will be based on solid foundation taking into account the joint higher interests', Prince Naif said. combating terrorism, drugs and crime in addition to co-operation in all security matters and opening of channels between the two countries, will be published.

Prince Naif noted that the meeting of the GCC interior ministers will be held in Bahrain soon.

On smuggling of weapons from Yemen and Iraq to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, he said such activity is very limited and on an individual basis.

On the impact of the Saudi-Iranian Security Agreement on the issue of the three islands, disputed by Iran and the United Arab Emirates, Prince Naif said that this issue has nothing to do with issues like co-operation between the countries of the region and Iran and lessening the foreign military existence in the Gulf region.

'We are not in need of assuring our brothers in the United Arab Emirates, because the matter is not doubtful', he added.

Following his arrival in Tehran, Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz and the Abdul Wahid Mousavi-Lari, held at the Iranian Interior Ministry headquarters a meeting which was attended by members of Prince Naif's accompanying delegation, notably Prince Mohamed Ibn Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs.

On his departure from Riyadh, Prince Naif declared that the aim of his visit is to promote bilateral relations as well as discuss security issues, adding that the security agreement to be signed includes articles on combating terrorism, drugs and crime.

Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz said that ties between the neighbours were 'solid and founded on mutual convictions over the common interests of the two countries. All security questions which concern the two countries as well as the Gulf region' will be covered

During his first visit to Iran, the Interior Minister said, stressing the Security Agreement had 'nothing to do' with a long-running islands dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

In his address to the first session of the official Saudi-Iranian talks that was held at the Iranian Interior Ministry headquarters in Tehran, Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz referred to the signing of the Agreement as of benefit to the entire region.

The first session of the official Saudi-Iranian talks was held under the co-chairmanship of Prince Naif and his Iranian counterpart, Abdul Wahed Mousavi-Lari.

The Iranian Interior Minister highlighted the significant role being played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to strengthen regional stability. 'We hope that your visit to Iran will yield positive results and contribute to further enhancing bilateral relations in various spheres,' he said.

He described the Saudi-Iranian Security Agreement as an important development in the Saudi-Iranian relations. 'This Agreement will have a positive impact on the region and will open new horizons of constructive co-operation,' he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Prince Naif expressed his happiness to attend the meeting which, he said is aimed at discussing security issues of concern to the two countries.

Prince Naif said the security agreement between the two countries would benefit the two countries as well as the whole region. The Saudi Interior Minister said he looked forward to the day when the two countries would work together to realize security in the region, Islamic countries and the world at large.

The two sides also held talks that focused on ways of promoting co-operation between the two countries in the security field and other issues of common interest.

In a press statement following the meeting, Prince Naif said there was no disagreement on points of view. 'This meeting was not meant for preparing the Security Agreement because the Security Agreement had previously been finalized', he said.

In a similar statement, the Iranian Interior Minister Mousawi Larry described the talks as 'useful and constructive'.

The talks were attended by Prince Mohamed Ibn Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, Saudi Ambassador to Iran, Jameel al-Jeshi, and the delegation accompanying the interior minister.

On the Iranian side, the talks were attended by the Assistant Interior Minister for Security and Police Affairs, Gholam Hussein Blindian, and a number of high-ranking officials.

During his visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Prince Naif met former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who is now Head of the Expediency Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Rafsanjani stressed the significance of strengthening the Saudi-Iranian relations. 'It was and has been excellent', he said.

The former president expressed his respect and appreciation for Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Ibn Abdul Aziz and Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard.

He commended the role being played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in strengthening relations with Iran in the interest of the two countries and the peoples of the region.

Prince Naif conveyed the greetings of King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdullah and Prince Sultan, Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Aviation and Inspector General to the Iranian leader.

The prince also said the Kingdom realized the importance of relations with Iran, notably security relations and explained that strong relations should be based on clarity, sincerity, frankness, trust and mutual respect.

The meeting was also attended by the Iranian Interior Minister, Prince Mohamed Ibn Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, and other officials.

Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz also met with Mahdi Karoubi, President of Iran's Shura Council.

The Speaker of the Iranian Islamic Consultative Council expressed his thanks and appreciation to Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz for his visit to the Council, confirming that the visit to Iran would culminate in success and result in many advantages.

At the end of the visit, memorial gifts were exchanged between the two sides.

During the visit, Prince Naif was accompanied by the Iranian Interior Minister, Abdul Wahid Mousavi-Lari, Prince Mohamed Ibn Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, Saudi Ambassador to Iran Jameel Ibn Abdullah al-Jeshi, Iranian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ali Asghar Khaji and Major General Saud al-Dawood, Director of the Interior Minister's office for Studies and Researches.

Prince Naif attended a dinner banquet hosted by the Iranian Interior Minister in his honour at Hafiziah Palace in Tehran.

Prince Naif received at his residence at Hafiziah Palace in Tehran the Iranian Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance, Ahmed Masjed Jameiy, During the meeting, they exchanged cordial talks and discussed bilateral relations between the two countries.

The Saudi Interior Minister attended the dinner party hosted in his honour and his accompanying delegation by Saudi Ambassador to Iran, Jameel Ibn Abdullah al-Jeshi,

Prince Naif also met several Arab ambassadors in Tehran and explained to them the salient features of the Agreement. For their part, the ambassadors congratulated Prince Naif on the occasion of signing the Security Agreement between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Minister of Interior, has highlighted the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to serve the pilgrims.

During a meeting with the Iranian Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance, Ahmad Masjed Jamei in Tehran, Prince Naif urged the Islamic countries to educate their pilgrims on hajj rituals before they come to the Holy Sites in the Kingdom.

Prince Naif noted that Saudi expenditure on pilgrimage and care of pilgrims was much more than that the money spent by the pilgrims.

Prince Naif emphasized that the Kingdom treated all pilgrims equally regardless of the pilgrim's country, nationality or colour.

On his part, the Iranian Minister expressed thanks to Prince Naif for his remarks on pilgrimage and the Kingdom's efforts to serve the pilgrims.

The meeting was attended by Prince Mohamed Ibn Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs, the Saudi Ambassador to Iran, Jameel al-Jishi, the Iranian Ambassador to the Kingdom, Ali Asghar Khaji and the official delegation accompanying Prince Naif

Following the official visit to Tehran of Interior Minister Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran issued a joint communiqué.

The communiqué expressed support for the Palestinian people in regaining their usurped rights, condemned the repressive Zionist policy against them, and stressed the need for the return of exiled Palestinians to the country of their fathers and grandfathers.

The two sides also expressed support for Lebanon, and solidarity with Syria. They strongly condemned the recent Zionist attacks in the Baka'a area of southern Lebanon, stressing the right of the Lebanese to resist occupation, and voiced full support of Syria in its right for the return of its occupied lands.

The two sides also expressed sympathy with the Iraqi people, declaring that the current situation in Iraq is unacceptable, and needs to be addressed at the level of the United Nations. The sanctions against Iraq, they said, should be reviewed, in order to relieve the sufferings of the Iraqi people.

They stressed the need, however, to observe the integrity of Iraq's territory and non-interference in its internal affairs.

The communique stated that Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz's meetings and talks with senior Iranian officials were dominated by an understanding and cordial atmosphere of which the two sides expressed full satisfaction.

It said that the Security Agreement that was signed is based on the need to promote bilateral security co-operation, and reflects the mutual respect of the two countries, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, observance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and adherence to all international laws.

The two sides stressed their earnest intent to implement the articles of the security agreement, which cover areas such as the fight against drug smuggling, and issues related to the movement of Saudi and Iranian nationals into each other's country.

They also stressed the need for co-operation between them in regard to peace and stability in the region, considering themselves the leaders in their concern for vital regional issues that are, they said, a joint responsibility to be shared by all the Gulf countries.

Minister of Interior Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz left Tehran at the end of a four-day visit to Iran during which he held talks with a number of Iranian officials. He also signed the Security Agreement between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Prince Naif was seen off at Mehrabad International Airport, by Iranian Interior Minister Abdul Wahid Mousavi-Lari and other officials.

Prince Naif arrived back in the Kingdom after his official visit to Iran, which, he said, had achieved very good results, with the views of the two sides identical in all that had been discussed in talks that were clear, frank and courteous.

Prince Naif reiterated that there is complete agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran on having stronger relations and working together.

Concerning movement of nationals between the two countries, Prince Naif pointed out that Saudi citizens can easily visit Iran as tourists or on business, and that visits to the Kingdom for Iranians will be facilitated by the Umrah establishments that will start functioning next month.

In reply to a question on the implications of signing the Agreement on reducing the number of foreign troops in the region, Prince Naif said: 'I can only talk on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the Kingdom, there are no foreign troops by all means. There are only flights according to the Security Council resolutions, and whenever the Security Council decides, or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wishes, to put an end to these flights, they will be stopped. Regarding the other countries, eventually, I can not talk about this matter as each country has its justifications'.

APPENDIX E

The Memoirs of Hashemi Rafsanjani

In 2005, Hashemi Rafsanjani started publishing his memoirs in instalments. So far the memoirs, which form several volumes, cover the period between 1978 and 1989. These volumes contain valuable information regarding Iranian foreign policy decision-making in the 1980s and shed some light on the nature of factional politics among various groups in Iran at that time. I have reviewed volumes three and four and have extracted from them Rafsanjani's reflections on Saudi Arabia during that period.¹

From: *End of Defense, Beginning of Rebuilding, 21 March 1988 to 20 March 1989*, (Tehran: Publishing the Thoughts of the Revolution, 2011)

25 February 1989, Code: ۱۵۱۴۰

Mr Hadi Najaf-Abadi, Mr. Kamal Kharazi, Hossein Kazempour Ardebili came for a meeting. We discussed Salman Rushdi's case and measures to improve ties with Saudi Arabia.

31 January 1989, Code: ۱۵۱۰۱

Footnote: Mr. Rafsanjani answered a few questions about Iran–Saudi Arabia ties in a conference on Islamic thoughts.

14 December 1988, Code: ۱۵۰۰۴

Omani envoy came for a visit. They delivered Mr. Fahd and Sultan Qaboos's message regarding the importance of the Iranian–Saudi Arabian relations. They find the demonstration during hajj a major setback in improving ties. They want us to compromise. I emphasised the importance of the ties. I told them to negotiate with Mr. Velayati and pointed that they should cooperate with about oil price.

28 November 1988, Code: ۱۴۹۹۰

Mr. Aghazadeh [Iranian oil minister] informed us that Saudi Arabia retreated from its stance on the oil price. Oil price remains at 18 dollars a barrel.

13 November 1988, Code: ۱۴۸۳۱

The Pakistani foreign minister [Mr. Sahebzadeh Yaghoub Khan] came for a visit. We talked about improving ties with Saudi Arabia. They will continue their role as a mediator in improving the ties.

25 October 1988, Code: ۱۴۷۶۴

Oil minister came to my office. He handed in a report on a trip for OPEC and a private meeting with the Saudi oil minister. They negotiated and agreed on oil price, shares and cooperation in

¹ The memoirs were published in Persian (Farsi); some are in Arabic. The text provided here has been translated from Farsi to English and reviewed with some Arabic translations provided by the Rafsanjani website: <http://www.hashemirafsanjani.ir>. Mr. Hassan Fahs, journalist and translator, has helped review the Farsi-to-English translation.

the region. Saudi Arabia will cut its oil supply to the Iraqis. They stated Saudi Arabia provided Iraq with 200,000 barrels of oil per day.

22 October 1988, Code: ۱۵۰۳۱

Mr. Ahmad [Khomeini] delivered Imam's message saying now that Malek Fahd ordered Saudi newspapers to stop propaganda against Iran, we should stop propaganda against Saudi Arabia.

8 October 1988, Code: ۱۵۰۱۷

Oil minister [Aghazadeh] received permission to hold talks with the Saudi oil minister on the side-lines of OPEC.

4 October 1988, Code: ۱۵۰۱۳

Mr. Mostafa Tajzadeh, the culture minister's deputy, is talking about the publicity about Saudi Arabia. He believes this publicity will cause problems between Shi'ites and Sunnis, which no parties would benefit from; and Saudi Arabia spends so much more on this publicity in the Islamic world.

10 September 1988

Omani foreign minister paid a visit to Iran to discuss the Iran and the Persian Gulf states and delivered a Saudi Arabian proposal. He asked for a private meeting to discuss oil price and propaganda against Saudi Arabia.

13 August 1988, Code: ۱۴۸۷۱

Omani foreign minister arrived for another visit. He urged a private meeting again. In the meeting he handed in UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Malek Fahd's messages regarding the improvement of Iran-Saudi Arabian ties. I said we did not disagree under our terms; they should compensate the past and SA should agree with our limited demonstrations.

1 June 1988, Code: ۱۴۷۱۰

Mohammad-Hassan Rahimian brought some Saudi currency for the war.

24 May 1988, Code: ۱۴۷۰۲

Mr. Kalim Siddiqui, the founder of Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, came to Iran. He interviewed me about the Islamic Revolution, leadership of the Revolution, and Saudi Arabia and its danger to the world of Islam for his latest book.

21 May 1988, Code: ۱۴۶۹۹

Our ambassador in Brazil came back to Tehran for a short visit. He said Brazil was trading with Kuwait, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Brazil is willing to buy our oil and pay with goods.

19 May 1988, Code: ۱۴۶۹۷

Mr. Mohsen Rezaei informed me that two Saudi oil tankers were targeted. The US was supposed to protect neutral ships. US must count it as defeat. It might have consequences.

28 April 1988, Code: ۱۴۶۵۰

Iranian–Saudi ties being cut took was popular in the media headlines.

27 April 1988, Code: ۱۴۶۴۹

Dr. Velayati informed us that Saudi Arabia cut its ties with Iran. Probably, they want to put pressure on us.

4 April 1988, Code: ۱۴۶۱۵

Aghazadeh [oil minister] reports damages that shaykhs in the Persian Gulf states cause. Taking such measures, they think they can put us under pressure.

From: *Defense and Politics, 21 March 1987 to 20 March 1988*, (Tehran: Publishing the Thoughts of the Revolution, 2008)

29 December 1987, Code: ۱۴۹۶۴

I discussed Iranian–Saudi ties with Dr. Velayati. We are going to give Saudi Arabia a two-week deadline and set our terms; Saudi Arabia must apologize, they should pay blood-money, hajj must become normal like the past.

22 December 1987, Code: ۱۴۹۵۷

Mr. Khamenei suggests we compromise with Saudi Arabia.

22 October 1987, Code: ۱۴۸۰۱

Mr. MirHossein Mousavi handed in his report on his visit from Syria. Syria will support us until Saddam falls. Syria is amazed how firmly Iran is standing before the US. They want to be a mediator to make Iran closer to the Eastern Bloc. Syria asked our permission to be a mediator between us and the Saudis. They delivered the US officials' message to us, which has both threats and promises.

18 October 1987, Code: ۱۴۷۹۵

Mr. Khamenei said Gadhafi's envoy came to Tehran for a visit. The Libyan representative suggested that Iran would wrap up the war with Iraq and would attack Saudi Arabia. He said they would cooperate with us in that case. We declined their request.

17 October 1987, Code: ۱۴۷۹۴

Bodies of 59 Iranians killed in Saudi Arabia [during the hajj incident] were delivered to Tehran. It took so long because SA is inflexible for no reason.

3 October 1987, Code: ۱۴۷۶۰

Our forces went to the water borders with Iraq. American and Saudi forces were lined up.

2 October 1987, Code: ١٤٧٥٨

Dr. Velayati called at night. He told me that Abdolhali Khoddam of Syria told him that Saudi Arabia said Iran would attack both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Velayati promised an answer to the Syrians. Khoddam also thinks that it is not a good idea before the Arab leaders's meeting. I told Mr. Velayati to wait for a couple of days before he answered.

30 September 1987, Code: ١٤٧٥٠

Mr. Rajayi Khorasani [Iranian envoy to the UN] is leaving for the UN. He asked for permission to take some steps in improving ties with Saudi Arabia. I permitted him to do so under conditions that Saudi Arabia apologizes and makes up for past actions.

16 September 1987, Code: ١٤٦٢٩

The British channel ITV asked for an interview. I agreed. I answered questions about the war, UN Security Council, hostages and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Hosseini Shahroudi, MP for the city of Shahroud, came for a visit. He believes we were also to blame for the incident at the hajj.

6 September 1987, Code: ١٤٦٠٦

Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, reported the outcome of the members of the council's visit to Saudi Arabia. They were welcomed warmly; however, the talks were to improve ties and were not about the hajj incident. He promised some independent measures would be taken in south Iraq.

2 September 1987, Code: ١٤٦٠٠

IRGC reported that six ships were targeted on their way to Kuwait and SA

31 August 1987, Code: ١٤٥٩٥

A group of students of theology from eastern Saudi Arabia came for a visit.

24 August 1987, Code: ١٤٥٨٦

At the Arab foreign ministers conference held in Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and some other countries condemned Iran.

23 August 1987, Code: ١٤٥٨٥

Mr. Karimi, MP for the city of Marand, brought copies of a number of Saudi newspapers; they spread repulsive propaganda against Iran.

19 August 1987, Code: ١٤٥٧٨

The head of the judiciary and the head of the executive were my guests. We discussed ties with Saudi Arabia. No conclusion was reached.

16 August 1987, Code: ١٤٥٧٤

Mr. Khalai, Secretary of the Defense Commission, reported the Mecca incident. There was evidence the Saudis would initiate conflict. The incident started with Saudis who threw stones at

Iranian pilgrims from a parking lot close to the Iranians' spot. After that, they attacked the pilgrims with wooden sticks; it was followed by shooting and tear gas canister was thrown at Iranians. The Iranians tried to defend themselves but were not organized because they didn't see such an attack coming. They used iron bars and wooden sticks that they found around them. It led to some pilgrims' martyrdoms.

14 August 1987, Code: ۱۴۵۶۹

It was reported in news that a Saudi minesweeping ship was damaged by a mine explosion. The news was corrected later that the mine explosion happened on a beach and two Saudi officers were killed or injured in the incident.

12 August 1987

The head of the judiciary and the head of executive system and Imam were my guests. We discussed various matters. We agreed to return the status of the Kuwaiti and Saudi embassies to normal.

9 August 1987, Code: ۱۴۵۶۱

The heads of the judiciary, executive, and legislative bodies held a meeting. We agreed to continue the propaganda against Saudi Arabia and the US.

6 August 1987, Code: ۱۴۵۵۷

The imperialists are trying hard to manipulate the news about the hajj incident. The West and Saudi Arabia want to put the blame on us. The West is at the service of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic centers and people are by our side.

1 August 1987, Code: ۱۴۵۵۱

The hajj incident hit the headlines. The West and Saudi Arabia aim to spread lies and put the blame on Iran, saying that Iranian pilgrims attacked pilgrims from other countries. It is the US's conspiracy and Saudi Arabia is employing it. In Mr. Khamenei's office, he and I as well as the prime minister and Mr. Mousavi Ardebili held a meeting. We examined the Mecca case. The cabinet held an urgent meeting as well and decided to announce three days of public mourning and a public demonstration. Iranian officials called Saudi Arabia. Mr. Karroubi, the Imam's representative at the hajj pilgrimage, said the bodies of 51 Iranian pilgrims were returned to Iran. The rest are still in Saudi Arabia. Injured pilgrims are still in Saudi Arabia and they are refused of any visits with anyone.

There are rumours that Mr. Mortezaeifar was killed and Mr. Abdollah Javad Amoli was injured. Mr. Karroubi said a number of injured pilgrims were supposed to be sent back to the country along with the bodies. A crew of Iranian officials are to be sent to Saudi Arabia to examine the situation. However, their visas will not be issued until 1:30 this afternoon.

People in Tehran held protests against Saudi Arabia. They held protests close to the Saudi and Kuwaiti embassies. Some attacked the embassies. Workers and students held demonstrations too.

Mr. Fereidun Mehdinejad reported the latest news from Mecca. His sources in Europe said that around 600 people were killed. His reports say that a number of officials were injured too, including Messrs. Karroubi, Hejazi, Ghayouri, and Hashemian. Mr. Mortezaeifar is alive. We

talked about the measures that we can take to answer back the Saudis' maltreatment. It is suggested that we release a group of German hostages via the Syrians.

Dr. Velayati reported on his trip to Germany and Switzerland; and the strategies against Saudi Arabia. We discussed the Saudi decision to refuse issuing visas for Iranian officials. They are supposed to fly to Saudi Arabia without a permit.

From: *Heading to Destiny, 21 March 1984 to 20 March 1985*, (Tehran: Publishing the Thoughts of the Revolution, 2005)

4 April 1984, page 56

Mohtashami volunteered to be a negotiator with Saudi Arabia.

14 April 1984, page 67

Saudi ambassador is following Iranian–Saudi ties.

27 April 1984, page 82

Saudi oil tanker was burnt. Hashemi discussed it with Mousavi and the President. There are doubts over whether it was an explosion or a mine or missile. We don't want to rush to a conclusion that it was done by Iraqis.

28 April 1984, page 84

The West doesn't want to exaggerate the Saudi oil tanker explosion. We don't disagree with such policies either.

30 April 1984, page 89

Dr. Mohamad Ali Hadi believes that we should restore our ties with Saudi Arabia. He quoted Ayatollah Montazeri saying it was to our favour during the war.

7 May 1984, page 97

Dr. Velayati reported on the state of relations with Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union.

8 May 1984, pages 97–98

The prime minister reported another Saudi ship named al-Houd (الحدور) was targeted in an attack on its way to Italy. We will decide our reaction in the Suprem Council meeting.

We discussed the report on the Saudi oil tanker incident, to study new approaches to Iraq's new policies—which will affect our oil exports too.

9 May 1984, page 99

Saudi officials have agreed about Iraqis hitting their oil tanker with missiles. It shows a group conspiracy.

10 May 1984, page 101

I talked to Mr. Khamenei about the urgency of the oil tanker crisis in the Persian Gulf.

11 May 1984, pages 102–103

Mr. Khamenei said that orders for counter-attacks have been issued. There's going to be real changes in war.

16 May 1984, page 109

Another Saudi oil tanker is hit by a missile. Kuwait announced that Iran hit two of its ships. Malek Fahd sent a soft message and asked us to not target ships.

At night Messrs. Khamenei, Ahmad, and Mousavi Ardebili, and Dr. Velayati, were my guests. A response to Malek Fahd and Kuwait was issued. Oil is in headlines around the world now.

23 May 1984, page 120

Mr. Mahmoud Borujerdi gave us a report about Mr. Mohtashami and Saudi officials' latest talks in Germany. It didn't have many important points.

24 May 1984, page 122

I met Hafez al-Asad's Deputy and Farog al-Shar'a, we agreed on so many subjects, like Saddam's fall, defusing the enemies' conspiracy, our oil, keeping Saudi Arabia and Kuwait away from Saddam.

25 May 1984, page 124

The UN Security Council has a meeting to review a Saudi and Kuwaiti complaint about their oil tanker. The West is not happy with our victory. Internationall ambience isn't in our favour.

6 June 1984, page 142

Our F4 plane was hit in Saudi air space. Saudi Arabia took responsibility. It could initiate conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

5 July 1984, page 174

Mr. Khamenei informed me that a Liberian oil tanker with Japanese crew that were shipping oil bought from Saudi Arabia has a serious crash.

14 July 1984, page 185

Mr. Mohammad-Hosseini Rezaei informed us that the Saudi invited me, Mr. Ahmad [Khomeini] and Mr. Nategh-Nouri to their country.

Footnote: Malek Fahd's official invitation message was delivered to Mr. Rafsanjani along with a report on the Saudis' good cooperation with Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization. Mr. Rafsanjani expresses thanks to the Saudi officials for the invite and said: 'Such interactions can be fruitful in the bilateral ties in future'.

15 July 1984, pages 185–186

Members of the Expediency Council showed mixed reactions to the Saudis' invitation. Some found it positive and some found it concerning.

17 July 1984, page 187

Saudi invitation hit the headlines. There are various speculations; mainly because Saudi Arabia kept its silence and I haven't replied back yet. News agencies call a lot to find out about my response.

Footnote: The *Financial Times* reported that such an invitation can change the destiny of the four-year-old war.

28 July 1984, page 190

Mr. Velayati reported that the Saudi foreign minister has postponed his visit to Iran. Saudi Arabia said their minister would visit Iran under one condition, that Iran releases a statement that we have invited the Saudi official to Iran.

We talked about it and agreed to do so for them.

25 July 1984, page 207

We find Saud al-Faisal's visit to Iran was a positive event.

26 July 1984, page 207

I read the news and it was mostly about the arrest of a group of Iranians in Madrid. The Spanish claim that they aimed to hijack a Saudi plane.

31 July 1984, page 215

The Japanese ambassador paid a visit. He wanted to know our stance about the war and the Saudi government.

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