

**NORMATIVE CONSENSUS AND REGIONAL ORDERS:
SAUDI REACTION TO SYSTEMIC CRISES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

by

Abdullah Enes Tuzgen

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and International Relations

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Abdullah Enes Tuzgen

Approved: _____

Julio Carrion, Ph.D.

Interim Chair of the Department of Political Science and International
Relations

Approved: _____

John Pelesko, Ph.D.

Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved: _____

Douglas J. Doren, Ph.D.

Interim Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education and Dean of
the Graduate College

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Muqtedar Khan, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of dissertation

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Stuart Kaufman, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Kassra A.R. Oskooii, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Erik Ringmar, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Recep Senturk, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Arab League
ARAMCO	Arabian American Oil Company
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
E.U.	European Union
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IR	International Relations
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MWL	Muslim World League
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UAR	United Arab Republic
U.N.	United Nations
U.S.	United States of America
WWI	World War I

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the systemic crises in the Middle East regional state-system. The main question I deal with is “why are there frequent systemic crises in the region?” The current Middle East regional state-system, which was established after the First World War, has gone through various political crises in the last century, such as the revolutions and uprisings caused by the Arab Nationalism in the 1950s and 60s, by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the following decade, and by the Arab Spring in 2010s. The argument I put forward is that the root causes of these crises are a) legitimacy deficit, b) lack of foreign-domestic distinction, and c) disagreement over the normative consensus in the system by the main actors in the region. While the legitimacy deficit (i.e.: lack of legitimacy of individual governments and the system in general in the eyes of peoples), and lack of foreign domestic distinction (i.e.: porous borders which quickly turns an international crisis into a domestic one, and vice versa) act as permissive causes, proposal for an alternative normative consensus (i.e.: alternative sets of ground rules for the system) acts as the efficient cause. To verify if such an explanation is correct, I focus on foreign and domestic politics of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during three episodes of crises: Arab Nationalism, Iranian Revolution, and the Arab Spring. By using process tracing, I reconstruct these episodes of crises from the eyes of Saudi policy makers. I test whether their perception of crises and the precautions they took correspond to causal claims of my argument. I demonstrate that Saudi policy makers also saw the legitimacy deficit, porous borders and normative consensus proposal as the main causes of systemic crises in the Middle East; and designed precautions to curb their influence.

Chapter 1

SYSTEMIC CRISES AND NORMATIVE CONSENSUS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: DYNAMICS OF ORDER AND DISORDER IN A REGIONAL STATE-SYSTEM

1.1. Introduction:

The Arab Spring erupted as a moment of regional transformation and crises for the Middle East. In the last 8 years, we saw mass protests, revolutions, counterrevolutions, civil wars, refugee flows, and foreign interventions in the region. All members of the regional state-system have been affected from the crisis in one way or another.

Is this event an exceptional case in a region that is known for its “robustness of authoritarianism”?¹ Is it the 4th wave of democratization in the world following the last experience of Eastern Europe?² Or is it a case of Islamic resurgence or sectarian strife?³ What is this event a case of? What are its causes and how to interpret the position of actors in it?

¹ Bellin, Eva. (2004) The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 139-157

² Howard, Philip N. and Muzammil M. Hussain, (2013) *Democracy’s Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring*, Oxford University Press, 2013

³ Salman, Talal. “Arab Uprisings Hijacked by Sectarianism” Al-Monitor (<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2013/05/arab-uprisings-hijacked-sectarianism.html#>) Retrieved in 4/16/2016

I think a good way to answer these questions is to analyze the Arab Spring as a crisis of regional state-system in the Middle East, and compare it with other similar systemic crises. As an attempt to do this, in this chapter I will contextualize the Arab Spring as the final episode of a series of events that take place in the Middle East in the last century. I will contend that since the creation of the Middle East regional state-system after the WWI, there is a fight between alternative visions for the region that propose alternative governing principles and regional norms for the system. The regional crises took place between those who demand change and those who defend the existing order of things. The Arab Spring is also a fight between defenders of the existing normative consensus and those who propose an alternative.

If we look at the systemic crises in the Middle East in the last century, by which I mean social and political transformations (such as mass uprisings, revolutions, civil and inter-state wars) that affect all members of the regional state-system in one way or another, we see that there is almost a pattern that in every 30 years, there is regional crises in the Middle East. The dynastic conflicts of 1930s, Arab Nationalism of 1950s and 60s, Iranian Revolution and Islamism in 1980s, and finally the Arab Spring in 2010s can be cited as the main ones. The unifying theme in these events is that they are the manifestation of competing visions for the region.

I will do two things in this chapter: first, I will briefly discuss 5 historical examples of region-wide crisis that challenged the Middle East state-system either directly or by their implications. Second, I will discuss the reasons why the Middle East experiences such systemic crises constantly: 1) the problem of legitimacy, 2) the problem of foreign-domestic distinction, and 3) the problem of constitutive norms. My

main argument will be the challenges to the system, both in the form of revisionist leaders or as dissident social movements, mainly stem from a clash over the constitutive norms of the regional state-system. Neither explanations based on material capabilities nor the ones based on regime type are sufficient to give an account of the last century's crises. Rather the clash is primarily over what the governing norms of the regional foreign and domestic relations should be. While the problems of legitimacy and foreign-domestic distinction act as permissive causes, proposition of an alternative vision acts as the efficient cause.

My analysis of the Arab Spring as another episode of regional instability is an attempt to adapt Maridi Nahas' and Michael Barnett's analyses for the Middle East politics as a conflict over normative principles in the regional state-system.⁴ Though I differ with them on certain points, this chapter shares their theoretical framework.

1.2. An Overview of Change and Continuity in the Middle East State-System

The Middle East regional state-system is established in the immediate aftermath of the WWI and collapse of the Ottoman Empire.⁵ Following the Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain and France, the Middle East was divided into new states, and they became mandates of the two European superpowers. While Syria, Lebanon,

⁴ Nahas, Maridi. 1985. "State-Systems and Revolutionary Challenge: Nasser, Khomeini, and the Middle East." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (04): 507–27; and Barnett, Michael. 1993. "Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System." *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (3): 271–96, Barnett, Michael N. 1995. "Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Regional Order in the Arab States System." *International Organization* 49 (03): 479–510

⁵ For discussions on regional state system and the Middle East: Thompson, William R. 1981. "Delineating Regional Subsystems: Visit Networks and the Middle Eastern Case" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13 (02): 213–35; Lebovic, James H. 1986. "The Middle East: The Region as a System" *International Interactions* 12 (3): 267–89; Binder, Leonard. 1958. "The Middle East as a Subordinate International System." *World Politics* 10 (03): 408–29; Podesh, Elie. 1998. "The Emergence of the Arab State System Reconsidered." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 9 (3): 50–82

and most of North Africa were controlled by France, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula were dominated by the British Empire. “With these boundaries, the Western conception of sovereignty was introduced in to the political lexicon of the region.”⁶

Carving out new states from the former Ottoman lands resulted in certain novel developments (or anomalies). Both religious identity and common language (mostly Arabic), and shared historical experiences were making a common ground for trans-national socio-political consciousness. However, despite common religious, ideational, ethnic, lingual, cultural and historical ties that make (not the political but) the societal inter-connections obvious, the dividing lines of state borders have been real and resilient in the last hundred years. This contradictory/conflicting situation (commonalities at the societal level but political borders at the state level) produces a *double movement*. On the one hand, we see that in the last hundred years there are various attempts and movements that aim at making the shared identity at the societal level a political reality. Certain ideologies and mass movements which try to make state borders less real in the region gained considerable public support. We can think of Arab nationalism and Islamism as examples of this phenomenon. And certain other movements, most considerably pro-democracy movements of different sorts, though not directly aim at trans-national political transformation, do have significant political and inter-national impactions for region-wide change.

⁶ Ismael, Jacqueline S. and Tareq Y. Ismael. 1999. “Globalization and the Arab World in Middle East Politics: Regional Dynamics in Historical Perspective” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 21 (3) p. 133

On the other hand, confronted with these popular political movements, the established state-system, and sovereign states as its agents, have survived and succeeded in securing the continuity of the status quo. Neither Islamism, nor Arab nationalism of 1950s, nor pro-democracy movements and revolutions of the last decade were successful enough to transform the existing regional state-system. It is safe to say that if any one of these ideologies/movements won (i.e.: Islamism, Arab nationalism or democracy), we would see impactful change in the organizing principles of the Middle East state-system, if not real change in the borders. However, they fail in their confrontation with the defenders of status quo. Carl Brown expresses this dichotomy in the following words:

In effect, two major contradictory political ideologies prevail throughout most of the area. The one is revisionist and irredentist. Examples can be readily cited: (...) Syrian aspirations in Lebanon, Morocco's claim to the western Sahara, Iranian claims to hegemony in the Gulf, the persistent Kurdish aspirations to autonomy if not statehood which challenges the integrity of four different Middle Eastern states-Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, the diffuse revolutionary claims to a totalistic political change in the name of militant Islam or the equivalent Christian or Jewish varieties of political fundamentalism in Lebanon and Israel. The countervailing ideology (or perhaps political syndrome is more accurate) is largely unstated but seemingly more powerful in daily politics. It is

a posture of grudgingly accepting the status quo with all its faults rather than risking the unknowns of major change.”⁷

Historical examples of different revisionist movements and disruptions in the state-system

An interesting observation we can make concerning the Middle East is that, since its inception in early 20th century, the Middle East state-system has experienced different region-wide crises and challenges almost in every 30 years. Either in the form of uprisings, revolutions, or wars, domestic and international crises in the region very often turned into a widespread regional phenomenon that attracted masses and elites alike. Although the conflicts were articulated as fights between different ideologies or national interests, the main theme that connects these regional moments of crises is that they are fights between defenders of status quo and those who propose some kind of a revision to the consensus of regional state-system. In other words, almost in every 30 years, another fight between revisionist and status quo actors take place.

The meaning of revisionism, however, is slightly different when we talk about the Middle East compared to standard use of the term in IR. Usually, revisionism means, especially in the realist terminology, a challenge to the already existing balance of power in a system. In that sense, it is a question of foreign affairs and about material capabilities of states. An attempt for revision in the Middle East, on the other hand, does not necessarily have to be about an attempt to change capabilities of states or balance of power. Radical changes in domestic politics, regime types, state-society

⁷ Brown L. Carl. 1987. “The Middle East: Patterns of Change 1947-1987.” *Middle East Journal* 41 (1) p. 35

relations, or ideology, even if not accompanied by a parallel foreign policy ideology, can equally be considered by neighboring states as revisionism as changes in army sizes or occupation of a foreign territory. This is because, the interconnections at the societal level through language, culture, and religion in the region make a domestic problem an international one very easily.

Let me briefly present five examples of regional crises, and show the interplay of the forces that defend status quo vs. those who propose change: Dynastic contest in the 1930s, Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, Iranian Revolution in the 1980s, First Gulf War of 1990 and 1991, and the Arab Spring of 2010s.

1.2.1. Dynastic Contest of 1930s

After the creation of modern states in the region, one of the important regional conflicts in the Middle East was about the legitimacy of governing dynasties. The question of which house (dynasty) has the legitimate power to rule which country was the central theme around which other issues were tied to. Rather than being directly a question of material capabilities or territorial dispute, the problem is more about governing principles of the system. It was a question of systemic norms in the sense that the issue at stake was about access to legitimate authority in the eyes of other actors.

The main actors in the conflict were Saudis on the one hand, and Hashemites on the other. The House of Saud who expelled the Hashemites from Hijaz, and completed the capture of Hijaz by 1926 were seen as illegitimate and temporary actors in the regional system by the Hashemite monarchies in Iraq, Jordan, and Muhammad Ali's grandchildren in Egypt. Iraq, Jordan and partially Egypt were reluctant to recognize the Saudis as their peers, and made several attempts to replace them with the

expelled previous rulers of the land. Saudis were considered as a challenger to the accepted norm of the system by dynasties that have historical legitimacy both as the previous rulers of the territory and as the heirs of the Prophet.

This rivalry affected many other regional issues like discussions over the new caliphate, Palestinian question, and the possible Syrian throne.⁸ The main purpose of Saudi foreign policy in that era was to attain recognition from other members of the regional state-system, particularly Egypt. An indication that being part of the normative consensus (recognition as an equal in the system) is more important than material losses can be found in the offer Saudis make to Egypt in January 1933. The Saudi representative declared: “For every step forward the Egyptian Government took, Ibn Sa'ud would take twenty.”⁹

As Podeh writes the “Hashemite-Saudi conflict would remain a central feature of Arab politics throughout the 1940s and the 1950s. It dissipated only in the late 1950s, with the rise of the Nasserist threat to the conservative monarchies of Iraq, Transjordan and Saudi Arabia.”¹⁰

1.2.2. Arab Nationalism of 1950s and 1960s

Although the contest among dynasties was the first regional problem, the real threat to regional state-system arises in 1950s with the Arab Nationalism. The dynasties realized that they had more in common than their differences in terms of the governing principles of the system when they faced a more serious challenge of the new ideology

⁸ Podeh (1998)

⁹ Podeh (1998) p. 54

¹⁰ Podeh (1998) p. 59

and its implications. As a result, they constituted the defenders of status quo alliance against the revolutionary republics that represent revisionism at its best.¹¹

The revolution in Egypt that took place in 1952 marked the beginning of a new era in Middle Eastern politics. Following 20 years witnessed revolutions, uprisings, and civil wars which were the results of two conflicting visions concerning the future of the region. On the one hand, traditional monarchies were defending the “normal” order of things: territorial states with sovereignty as primary actors, monarchies as legitimate forms of rule. On the other hand, revolutionary republics were proposing a transformation of the existing order by transcending territories with the Arab unity, and taking monarchs down to replace them with popular rule.¹²

What made Nasser’s vision a serious challenge and effective strategy is that it was appealing to the millions of Arabs not only in Egypt but also in other states.¹³ The anti-colonialist and nationalist rhetoric captured the hearts and the minds of the masses because they were seen as mechanisms for articulation of widespread grievances in the region. To put it differently, the grievances and problems of the masses in the region which have various causes such as colonial past, economic inequality, closed channels of politics etc. functioned as permissive causes for the popular endorsement of an alternative vision. Since these sets of problems were shared by citizens of different states, the revisionist vision easily found support in many countries. “The Arab ‘cold

¹¹ Nahas (1985)

¹² Nahas(1985)

¹³ Barnett (1993)

war' was not simply another instance of balancing dynamics but rather represented a debate over the desired regional order."¹⁴

1.2.3. Iranian Revolution of 1980s

The fight between status quo powers represented by monarchies and revisionist republics came to an end by early 1970s. With Nasser's death and Sadat's ascend to power in Egypt, two opposing blocks came to an agreement. Sadat renounced the goals of Nasserist vision for the region; and monarchies promised to support Egyptian economy financially.¹⁵ A new era of restoration had begun. This also shows a new consensus for governing principles of the regional system, and a shared vision among governing elites. The victorious side of the conflict was the status quo block. Not surprisingly, their preferred norms made the basis for the new vision: territoriality, sovereign equality, rejection of pan-Arab political rhetoric. Nonetheless, no compromise is without concession. The monarchies had to accept new republican regimes as legitimate actors in the system.¹⁶

While things went smooth for some years, another challenge that sent destabilizing waves to the system emerged with the Iranian revolution of 1979. Overthrow of the Shah who was a Western ally (or puppet in the eyes of many) and establishment of a regime based on (so-called) Islamic principles were perceived positively by the masses in the region. This is mainly because it touched sensitivities of millions by showing, by a practical example, both a victorious revolution against the West and a government that declared itself Islamic. To put it differently, peoples of the

¹⁴ Barnett, Michael (1996) "Regional Security after the Gulf War," *Political Science Quarterly*, 111, 4. p. 600

¹⁵ Lebovic (1986) p. 278

¹⁶ Nahas (1985)

region who do not have positive attitude towards colonizing forces, and towards their secular (or unsatisfactorily Islamic) governments found a new alternative as a source of inspiration. These two reasons of influence, namely anti-Western and anti-government sentiments of the masses in fact are the common features that are shared by the challenge of Nasser and Iranian Revolution to the system.

The 1980s are the years generally associated with the rise of Islamism in the Muslim world. Erbakan's Welfare Part was established and became a rising actor in Turkish politics, Hamas was established in Palestine, Muslim Brotherhood in Syria engaged in militant activism, FIS in Algeria is officially established etc. These developments signaled replacement of the pan-Arabist ideology by Islamism as the language of protest and alternative vision. In other words, while demands for revision persisted, its dominant representative discourse changed. The influence of Iranian revolution in the Middle East is both a cause and effect of these developments. Although Shia, Islamic and anti-Western discourse of Iran resonated in the minds of Sunnis who share similar sentiments. Another factor that helped Iran to overcome sectarian difference is that, compared to its policies during the Arab Spring as the defender of Baath regime in Syria against Sunni revolutionaries through atrocities when necessary, during the post-revolutionary years, the goals declared by the new regime were also shared by the Sunni majorities in the region such as emancipation of Palestine from the Israeli occupation.¹⁷

¹⁷ Imad Mansour discusses how post-revolutionary Iran uses Hamas, Hezbollah, and Shia minorities in the region as an asset in designing grand strategy: Mansour, Imad. 2008. "Iran and Instability in the Middle East: How Preferences Influence the Regional Order." *International Journal* 63 (4): 941–64

1.2.4. Saddam's occupation of Kuwait of 1990s

Although it did not have long lasting repercussions like other attempts of revisionist movements, Saddam Hussain's occupation of Kuwait and following first Gulf War can be read as another challenge directed against the existing regional system. The meaning and implications of this war are discussed in many works. From the point of view of this paper, however, both the rhetoric used during the crises by the Iraqi side, and its influence on the region need to be highlighted. Although, at the end, the status quo side won, as always, Saddam's attempt is important to see how social and political cleavages among state and non-state actors in the region can create mass mobilization and instability.

The occupation was against the most fundamental norm of international system: sovereignty. Despite that (i.e.: violation of a basic norm with no valid excuse), the region was divided between supporters and opponents of the war. While Jordan, Yemen, Libya and the PLO were on Iraq's side, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, along with Egypt and Syria, were supporting American led operation.¹⁸ The picture becomes more complicated when we take non-state actors into consideration. There were mass protests and demonstrations against the Gulf War in most of the states in the region. Even branches of same organizations in different countries had different opinions. For example, while the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood was against anti-Saddam operations, the headquarters in Egypt split between pro-Saudi and anti-occupation factions.¹⁹ The situation is depicted by Brynen and Noble as follows:

¹⁸ In the Iran-Iraq war of September 1980s, a similar division occurred. While Egypt, Jordan, and most of the Gulf States supported Iraq, Syria and Libya supported Iran.

¹⁹ Brynen Rex, and Paul Noble. 1991. "THE GULF CONFLICT AND THE ARAB STATE SYSTEM: A NEW REGIONAL ORDER?" *Arab Studies Quarterly* 13 (1/2) p. 139

In Jordan, thousands volunteered to provide aid or fight alongside Iraq; Moroccans held their largest demonstration in history in January 1991 as three-hundred-thousand marched in support; in Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria and among Palestinians in the occupied territories similar public attitudes were predominant. The weakly and only partially constructed barriers of the Arab system seemed to collapse amidst an apparent return to the regional ideological ferment that had characterized Arab politics in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁰

While the conflict over Kuwait's independence manifests many realist concerns such as territorial growth, control over natural resources and geo-strategically important areas, similar to other projects aiming revision, at the very basis it is a conflict over two visions for the region, and two different regional norms proposals. To understand this clearly, we can ask the question how and why peoples in the region supported a person like Saddam? What did he offer that was appealing? The answer is similar to the ones we gave in the previous examples of revisionist projects: a combination of Arabist-Islamist discourse, anti-Western rhetoric, and distribution of natural wealth more equally.²¹ That means, Saddam was offering alternative governing principles for the region. People who were not happy with the existing order of things saw an alternative vision in his speeches.

Saddam Hussein sought to capitalize on widespread Arab discontent with the regional order - regional disparities, the apparently dominant position of the United States and its lack of receptivity to Arab concerns, Israeli intransigence

²⁰ Brynen and Noble (1991) p. 131-2

²¹ Aarts writes Kuwait invasion "exposed the poorer countries' deep resentment towards the opulent lifestyle of the oil-rich conservative monarchies (...)" Aarts Paul. 1999. "The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or the End of Exceptionalism?" *Third World Quarterly* 20 (5), p. 912

and the continuing Palestinian question - to mobilize significant public support. His attacks against the legacies of past colonialism (i.e., contemporary state borders) and contemporary imperialism (the deployment of Western troops on Arab soil, in the land of the two holy shrines) were rooted simultaneously in Arab nationalism and Islam.²²

1.2.5. Arab Spring of 2010s

The Arab Spring is the final episode of region-wide turbulences in the Middle East in the last hundred years. Started in Tunisia by self-immolation of a street vendor in December 17th 2010, it has been the main event that determines domestic and foreign policies of regional as well as international actors for the region. The results of the events are different in each country: democratization in Tunisia, civil wars in Libya, Yemen and Syria, elections followed by military coup in Egypt. Every actor had to determine its position by taking various parameters into account. The main conflict was actually between forces that aim at deposing dictatorships through democratization in the region and those who oppose such a proposal. In other words, Arab Spring is another episode of conflict between defenders of a revision in the regional consensus and those who oppose it.

At first glance, demands of democratization may be seen as non-related to international politics or regional order. However, it is not the case for several reasons. First, though regime change may be seen as a domestic event, simultaneous uprising in different countries in the region actually is an indication that the issue at stake is the regional order. Since in the regions where domestic politics and international politics is

²² Brynen and Noble (1991) p. 131

closely linked a component of the regional order is the domestic regime type, uprisings for democratization cannot be regarded simply as a domestic issue of an individual country. One can understand how type of government and regional orders are intertwined by recalling the effects of French Revolution and the Holy Alliance that aimed at bringing monarchy back to the country. Second and related to the first one, regime changes have implications of foreign policies. As will be discussed more below, it is not a revelation to predict that victory of revolutionary movements would change certain traditional foreign policies of states especially the ones which are closely associated with protection of the previous status quo.²³

While in the previous conflicts between status quo and revision the parties to the conflict were usually states supported by publics, in the Arab Spring, as far as the front of change is concerned, it is more an event of the masses rather than states. Although as the process continued, some states also supported the revolutionaries, such as NATO in Libya, and Iran in Yemen, initially it did not start as a new proposal by a state supported by the people of the region, as it was the case, for example, in Arab Nationalism under the leadership of Nasser and the Egyptian state. Turkey, and partly Qatar, can be seen as exception to this. Turkey supported the revolutions from its very beginning in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria; it did not have direct involvement in Yemen and Bahrain though. On the other hand, the status quo side is formed again under the leadership of Saudi Arabia. Similar to the experiences in 1950s, 80s and 90s, the monarchies came together to fight against revisionist quests for the regional order to uphold the previous consensus.

²³ Walt, S. (1996) *Revolution and War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

The Arab Spring demonstrates another episode of clashes between two visions of the region, and two alternative sets of organizing principles. To give an example, democratic Egypt does not represent a worse military challenge to Saudi Arabia than the autocratic one; however, it challenges the national role conception that is agreed upon by other members of the regional system. A democratically elected Islamist government of Muslim Brotherhood is seen as more threatening to the Saudi Arabia, the champion of non-democratic Islamic rule, than a quasi-secular Mubarak Egypt.

1.3. Lessons from Regional Crises:

From these system-wide challenges and disruptions to status quo which shook the stability of the region from its very foundations, we can infer three conclusions. First, and obvious one, is that there is a problem with the legitimacy of both individual states and state-system in general in the eyes of significant actors in the region. Second, the commonly accepted division in IR analyses between domestic and foreign realm is questionable. Third, and most important, the main source of tension and region-wide attempts of transformation is the contest over constitutive norms and organizing principles for the state-system. In other words, it is a clash of alternative visions for the region. Let me now elaborate on these three assertions.

1.3.1. The Question of Legitimacy

The region-wide challenges to the status quo, either in the form of Arab unification, pan-Islamism or pro-democracy movements, attracted millions of people, masses and elites, in the last century. That popular support to attempts of revision shows that people living in the region in general have problems with existing state-system as

well as their individual states.²⁴ They have problems with their own states because many of the attempts targeted either the regimes or orthodox foreign policies of these states. And they have problems with the state-system because many challenges to the existing status quo either openly declared that they want to change the state-system (like Arab unification talks) or they relied on certain ideologies which see existing state structures as problematic (like Islamism).²⁵

An important source of this problem of legitimacy is historical. Although a more relevant issue until 1980s, we can still observe its influence on everyday politics and political consciousness of the masses. In other words, while state borders gained more recognition from citizens over time compared to early years of their institutionalization, borders are still porous, to say the least.

As pointed out by many scholars, the borders of modern states in the Middle East were regarded as artificial by many people in the region especially in the first three quarters of the last 100 years. For example Binder writes that “the political boundaries which have been established in the area have little historical significance and frequently less ethnical validity. Moreover, these boundaries are often associated with imperialist intervention (...)”²⁶ One of the reasons for this is that none of the states created after the fall of Ottoman Empire by the European powers, Britain and France in particular, had been independent political entities in the known past. Never in human history, there had been a state called Kuwait or Qatar, for example. Second, and corollary to the first, people living in these newly-created states had not associated themselves with the new

²⁴ Hudson, Michael (1977) *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*. Yale University Press

²⁵ Brown (1987)

²⁶ Binder (1958) p. 416

political authority in terms of political allegiance. Rather, political loyalties were historically to either subnational (i.e.: tribal) or supra-national (i.e.: empire, caliphate etc.) actors. Ismael and Ismael write that the concept of sovereignty which is introduced to the region by the new boundaries “was not only culturally alien to the tribal character of the area but also incompatible with the nature of the interior land trade economy.”²⁷

Third, as far as the “nation” side of the “nation-state” concept is concerned, it was (and to a certain extent, it is) difficult to talk about nationhood of citizens of the newly created states distinct from nations of neighboring states in the region. Common language, culture, history, religion, worldview shared by nations of different states connect the societies to such extent that the usual criteria generally used to define a distinct nation from its neighbors do not work in the same way in the Middle East. To be more exact, primordialist definitions of nation as shared attributes do not give us a useful litmus test. When we look at more constructivist understanding of nation, on the other hand, such as Gellner’s definition of “common will to the future” it becomes easy for the citizens of different nation-states in the region to see themselves as part of the same nation by sharing certain ideologies that provide them with this “common will” for a shared future. There is the “incongruity of nation and territorial state.”²⁸ It is argued that “the borders were not based on natural geographic, ethnic, linguistic or religious cleavages; they were political facts, not geographic or demographic, and were part of Britain’s grand design to preclude any unity of Arabs by creating rival but pro-Western regimes in Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.”²⁹

²⁷ Ismael and Ismael (1999) p. 133

²⁸ Binder (1958) p. 417

²⁹ Ismael and Ismael (1999) p.133

With regard to the question legitimacy, not only territorial borders of the states, hence the state-system itself, but also the regimes in those states experience legitimacy problems in the eyes of their citizens. Different from challenges directed at the organizing principles of international relations in the region, the legitimacy problem of the regimes has more to do with everyday practices of the state. The way citizens experience the state authority usually works as an accumulation of dissatisfaction felt by the people for the regime. A combination of repressive regime apparatus, low level of economic development and uneven distribution of wealth affect the lives of millions of people living in the region in a negative way, especially for those living in oil-poor countries such as Egypt or Jordan.

For the oil-rich countries, on the other hand, although not deficient in wealth, there are other structural problems which hinder securing loyalties of the majority of the population to the state. Sectarian divisions are an important one that make certain groups in the society (and even majorities) untrustworthy in the eyes of the state. Seventy percent of the population in the Gulf States are Shia,³⁰ for example, which creates a “domestic security dilemma” for these countries: to increase satisfaction of the citizens, the state has to empower them through political and economic opportunities; yet the more powerful these groups become, the more threatened feel the states.

Socio-economic inequalities and absence of the opportunities for political participation are two most important source for legitimacy problem of the regimes. The

³⁰ Turner, John. 2012. “Great Powers as Client States in a Middle East Cold War.” *Middle East Policy* 19 (3): 124–34

combined effect of historical and domestic lack of legitimacy creates favorable conditions for the emergence of social movements that challenge the existing status quo and revisionist political leaders, who feel they can channel these dissatisfactions and lack of legitimacy for their purposes. “Cultural, historical, religious and linguistic homogeneity, communication flows, politically mobilized masses, and prohibitions against inter-nation violence elevated the power of ideas in the Middle East.”³¹

1.3.2. The Question of Foreign-Domestic Distinction

A second conclusion we can draw from the turbulent events in the Middle East state-system is that the demarcating lines between domestic politics and foreign policy are very blurred. Foreign policy decisions of states in the region have impact not only on other states but also to their own societies and societies of their neighbors. What is more, events that should normally be considered as internal affairs of a state also have serious trans-border repercussions. The “ease with which domestic politics may affect affairs in neighboring countries” is very remarkable.³² The way a state deals with a religious or sectarian minority can trigger responses from societies of neighboring states. For example, Turkey’s relations with its citizens of Kurdish origin affect both Turkey’s relation with Kurdish Regional Authority in Iraq and Kurdish minority in northern Syria.

The porous boundaries among the states in the region makes it appealing for political leaders to manipulate sensitivities of the societies of neighboring nations. In other words domestic cleavages within societies and ideological differences are used as

³¹ Lebovic (1986) p. 272

³² Binder (1958) p. 417

foreign policy instruments by politicians. The ease with which a regime can threaten its rival and even destabilize it by taking advantage of social grievances allow regimes to use this as bargaining chips in international relations. We can recall Iran's influence on Shia populations, Saudis' influence on Salafi movements, and Kurdish question as examples of this phenomenon.

The spillover effect of domestic politics becoming a foreign issue and vice versa makes the Middle East a unique state-system.³³ This is because the most accepted norm of modern international relations, which is sovereign territorial state, is relatively under-developed compared to other regions of the world.³⁴ Whether the world should, in fact, be organized around sovereign states is another question which I will discuss below with reference to the Middle East.³⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that in the Middle East, states are not practically the only sovereign units within their territory, and that they usually do not observe the norm of non-interference are important reasons for exacerbation of certain crisis into becoming a challenge for stability and the state-system itself.³⁶ Lebovic expresses how domestic and regional instability are linked in the following words:

³³ It can also be called "demonstration effect": Nahas (1985)

³⁴ One can compare Middle East and Africa in this respect. Barnett writes that in the African state system states agreed on the principle of non-interference; so the threats to the states can only come from within. It relieved most states just to deal with internal problems. Thus a more stable system is created. Barnett (1993) p.280; Gause III makes a similar argument: Gause III, F. Gregory. 1999. "Systemic Approaches to Middle East International Relations." *International Studies Review* 1 (1): 11–31

³⁵ Berger, Mark. 2006. "From Nation-Building to State-Building: The Geopolitics of Development, the Nation-State System and the Changing Global Order" *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 1: 5-25

³⁶ Although similar problems are observable almost in all post-colonial states, the Middle East display certain extreme indicators on this: Krause Keith, 2003 "State-making and region-building: the interplay of domestic and regional security in the Middle East" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26:3, 99-124

(...) disorder in the Middle East was driven by political instability within Middle Eastern nations. Turbulence in the regional system, in turn, promoted national political instability. Nations politically and militarily intervened in the internal affairs of others and internal factions seized upon regional issues. Leaders in the Middle East lacked a solid base. (...) Conflict crossed national boundaries as elites employed external conflict to mobilize internal support and internal factions looked abroad for support.³⁷

One aspect of the interaction between domestic and foreign policies is theorized by Benjamin Miller by the concept of “state-to-nation imbalance.”³⁸ According to Miller, the peace and stability in a regional state system very much depends on this factor. If the existing borders reflect the demarcation lines between homogenous nations, the region is peaceful. If, on the other hand, the state borders do not correspond to national borders, we should expect war and instability. It can happen in two ways: either the supply of states is more than the demand (unification movements) or the supply of states is less than the demand (secessionist movements). The Middle East suffer from both. While the Kurds think there are less number of states than necessary, Arab nationalist and Islamists think it is more than necessary. Both lead to war. Miller writes that the state-to-nation imbalance “produces regional insecurity by spreading transborder instability. Incoherent states produce regional instability because they offer targets for intervention to their neighbors, tempted by the possibility of profit and

³⁷ Lebovic (1986) p. 272

³⁸ Miller, Benjamin. 2005. “When and How Regions Become Peaceful: Potential Theoretical Pathways to Peace1.” *International Studies Review* 7 (2): 229–67; and Miller, Benjamin. 2009. “Between the Revisionist and the Frontier State: Regional Variations in State War-Propensity.” *Review of International Studies* 35 (Supplement S1): 85–119

expansion or owing to these neighbors' insecurity and a fear of the possible spread of instability.”³⁹

There are two other pathways which connect the domestic and foreign realm in the region. First, regional stability is linked to stable expectations from neighbors; and stable expectations is linked to domestic stability. A turbulent domestic realm complicates the relations and policies of a state, and hence damages the stability of expectations. Second, and related to that, domestic instability leads state to invest more on security apparatus; and this is usually perceived as a threat by neighboring states by creating security dilemma.⁴⁰ Almost all of the states in the region have some kind of secessionist or “unreliable” ethnic and sectarian minorities. The precautions central authorities take for threats from domestic actors are at the same time perceived as threatening for external actors. Although this can be applicable to all regions, it is especially true for the Middle East because domestic threats to central authority in the region is more widespread and real than any other region in the world. To give an example, “in Iraq under the Ba’ath the threats to the regime came from Shia’s, Kurds, and non-Tikritis living within Iraq and in neighboring states, and the narrow base of legitimacy of the regime made accommodations with neighboring states (for example, Iran) difficult to sustain politically.”⁴¹

Besides, as Krause demonstrates, the problems in domestic politics affects not only bilateral relations but also the general regional security mechanisms.⁴² Krause

³⁹ Miller (2005) p.234

⁴⁰ Maoz, Zeev “Domestic politics of regional security: theoretical perspectives and Middle East patterns” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26:3, 19-48; Miller (2005) p.234

⁴¹ Krause (2003) p.81

⁴² Krause (2003)

analyzes why regional security building mechanisms are absent or inefficient by focusing on the historical experiences of state-building in the region. She concludes that since during the state building period, the security apparatuses are not made subservient to civil authority, the militarized lenses of security dominated the foreign policies and hence regional (in)security.⁴³ As a result, because of the lack of effective regional security institutions and trust building mechanisms in the Middle East, the sources of security dilemma discussed above work in a more serious way.

1.3.3. The Question of Constitutive Norms

Almost cyclical pattern of the rise and fall of challenges to the regional state-system in the Middle East has to be traced back to the constitutive norms and organizing principles of the system. This is because without paying attention to the normative aspect of the international order, we cannot fully grasp threat perception, friend-enemy distinction, and behavioral expectations from the other. To put it differently, if paying attention to material capabilities were enough to understand foreign policy behavior, a change in regime type would not be a cause of a change in classifying a state as friend or enemy since there is no change in the army size of that state overnight. Yet, overthrow of the Shah in Iran or Mubarak in Egypt meant a threat to Saudi Arabia so they suddenly changed their foreign policy orientation towards these two regimes.

We can follow the critical importance of constitutive norms of a system for sustaining stability also in the following way: stability in a system is closely related to

⁴³ A similar emphasis on domestic politics and regime survival can be found in Etel Solingen's analysis. Solingen argues the main explanatory variable in the turmoil in the region is the path of political survival taken in the Middle East that rely more on ISI policies. Solingen, Etel. 2007. "Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East." *American Political Science Review* (04): 757–80

expectations from the other concerning their behavior; the more expectable behaviors are the more stable the system is. And stable expectation of behavior can be guaranteed if actors believe that they share similar norms. Living in a shared normative environment and knowing that others share similar normative beliefs with you allows you to expect consistent behavior from others. As a result, a more stable system is created. In other words, when the foreign policies of a state is “consistent with the normative expectations of the society of states” stability is more easily achieved.⁴⁴ Conversely, a policy or behavior performed by a member of a system which other actors consider as unexpected and inappropriate indicates that this actor is outside of the normative consensus of the system. In other words, causing instability in the system generally results from having an alternative normative premise. Rejection of the norms that others have consensus on implies proposing a different set of rules which should be the governing principles of the system.

What complicates the problem of normative expectations even more is that, as Barnett discusses, sometimes there appears a conflict between the expectations of the society and that of the international system. In other words, the states may be entrapped between demands from its own society and that of the larger international environment. Such a situation can also cause regional instability, which is often the case in the Middle East. When there is no correspondence “between normative expectations that society has of the state and the normative expectations amongst the society of state” instability is likely.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Barnett (1996) p. 598

⁴⁵ Barnett (1996) p. 614

Depending on the preferences of actors and requirements of international environment, the things that are seen as significant to create a functioning order vary. Acceptable regime type, religious affiliation, styles of diplomacy, ideological orientation, military posture etc. may become a component of the normative consensus depending on the past historical experience or political preferences. One can think how these factors shaped the criteria for acceptable behavior in an international system by comparing how they varied, in ancient China,⁴⁶ early Islamic Empires,⁴⁷ modern Europe,⁴⁸ and other ancient civilizations like India and Rome.⁴⁹

These general rules of engagement or normative consensus are explained by various scholars with different terminology: “constitutive principles,”⁵⁰ “basic rules of the game,”⁵¹ “socially recognized and collectively legitimated principles,”⁵² “broad organizing principles,”⁵³ “competing sets of principles, norms and rules,”⁵⁴ “a sense of common interest,”⁵⁵ and “normative balancing.”⁵⁶ Differences in terminology notwithstanding, they all aim at describing the same phenomenon.

⁴⁶ Tin-bor Hui, Victoria (2005) *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press

⁴⁷ Kennedy, Hugh (1986) *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the 6th to the 11th century*. Longman Publishing

⁴⁸ Schroeder, Paul (1996) *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, Oxford University Press

⁴⁹ Kaufman, Stuart et al. (2007) *Balance of Power in World History*, Palgrave Macmillan

⁵⁰ Gause III (1999)

⁵¹ Barnett (1995)

⁵² Kissinger, Henry (1973) *A World Restored*, Mariner Books. p.488

⁵³ Barnett (1996)

⁵⁴ Lebovic (1986) p. 279

⁵⁵ Bull, Hedley (1977). *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. (London: Macmillan)

⁵⁶ Nahas (1985)

A major, yet under-theorized, source of the pattern of instability in the Middle East regional state-system is about the governing rules and the normative consensus of the system. The movements that create a region-wide challenge to the existing system almost always proposed alternative organizing principles for the Middle East international and domestic politics. In that sense, as I briefly gave some of the examples above, the conflict occurs between the defenders of existing governing rules (the status quo norms) and those who try to reorganize the region through alternative sets of principles (the revisionist norms). Thus, the systemic crises is about the answers actors give to the following questions: what is the Middle East? What kind of a region should the Middle East look like? What should be the organizing principles for inter-state relations? How should be the relations of the regional states with super powers? What is the best form of state-society bargain for the states in the region? The answers to such questions are important to understand the normative consensus of actors in an international system.

Year	Actors	Normative Clash
1930s	Hashemites vs. Saudis	Historical Legitimacy vs. De facto Rule
1950s – 60s	Monarchies (Hashemites + Saudis) vs. Republics	Territoriality and Hereditary Rule vs. Unification and Popular Rule
1980s	States (Monarchies + Republics) vs. Shia and Islamist Activists	Hegemonic vs. Counter-hegemonic Interpretations of Islam
2010s	States vs. Masses	Authoritarianism vs. Democracy

Table 1: Normative clash in systemic crises in the Middle East in the last century

Another indicator that the challenges to the regional order have to do more with changing the constitutive principles and normative consensus in the system is that those who propose a change in the normative consensus usually experience a transformation in identity before their attempts. That is to say, what we observe is a change in identity and vision, not in capabilities or power sometime before an actor proposes a change in the regional order. Thus, those who propose an alternative normative order answer the question “who are we?” different from other states in the region. This is closely linked to re-definition of the “national role conception.”⁵⁷ When states think that the existing order has to be changed, that drive more often than not is preceded by a redefinition of the state-identity of that state and the role it should play in the system. An alternative state-identity creates alternative interest conceptualization.⁵⁸

The systemic crises in the Middle East is illustrative from this point of view. Until 1930s, Egypt did not consider itself a part of the Arab nation. Arab affairs were watched from some distance by Cairo.⁵⁹ “Egyptians characterized the Arabs as backward and inferior, and as a nation distinct from the Egyptian nation.”⁶⁰ However, by mid-1930s, Egyptian state underwent a transformation in state-identity, and previously ignored components of the answer they give to “what is Egypt?” gained more relevance. Once the national self-conception is transformed, the Arab state-system became a real concern for Egypt, and the role Egypt should play in that system

⁵⁷ Holsti, K. J. (1970) “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 233-309; see for an alternative systematic theory of the roles regional powers play in regional security: Frazier, Derrick, and Robert Stewart-Ingersoll. 2010. “Regional Powers and Security: A Framework for Understanding Order within Regional Security Complexes.” *European Journal of International Relations* 16 (4): 731–53

⁵⁸ See Barnett (1996)

⁵⁹ Barnett (1993) p. 285

⁶⁰ Barnett (1993) p. 285

needed to be different from the previous one. The ideology of Arab nationalism that Egypt defended in the 1950s and 60s as an alternative ordering principle for the region was made possible by first answering “what is Egypt?” and “what should the region look like?” questions.⁶¹

A similar example is that of Iran’s. As Egypt was not an Arab state until 1930s, Iran was not a Shia state until 1980s. Pre-revolution Tehran was a modernizing Western ally and a secular regime. Although the population of Iran was predominantly Shia at that time too, the sectarian influence was not a main determinant of foreign policy making. Iran’s relations with secular states like Turkey, and American allies like Saudi Arabia and Jordan were good. Iran could be considered as a status quo states at the time. However, with the Islamic revolution, Iran re-defined its self-conception in politics and state-identity. That new identity created new interest conceptualization and that leads to the proposal of an alternative regional order. The example of Iran shows that the roots for the attempts of revision and the proposal for an alternative regional order have to be searched in the field of normative consensus in the state-system which, in turn, is linked to national role conception.

A final example of how alternative visions for the region is linked to the national role conception and state identity is the case of Turkey after 2002. Like the transformations in Egypt and Iran, Turkey undergone a transformation in how it views the Middle East and how the region should be organized. As Egypt was not an Arab

⁶¹ Jentleson and Kaye discuss another example of how Egyptian national self-conception and preferred type of regional order affect foreign policy by analyzing the rise and fall of ACRS (Arms Control and Regional Security) agreement of 1991-94: Jentleson, Bruce W., and Dalia Dassa Kaye. 1998. “Security Status: Explaining Regional Security Cooperation and Its Limits in the Middle East.” *Security Studies* 8 (1): 204–38

state before 1930s and Iran was not a Shia state before 1980s, Turkey was not a “Middle Eastern” state before 2000s. The official state discourse before 2000s was that Turkey is a European nation, and it should distance itself from the crises in the Middle East. However, especially after 2003, Turkey’s self-conception is transformed to the extent that political leaders started to consider themselves as part of the Middle East. Such a change in state-identity is accompanied by an alternative vision for the Middle East. While previously the governing rules of the Middle East state-system were not a serious concern for Turkey, with a changed national self-conception these principles mattered more. As a result, a revision in the system became desirable.

The examples of Egypt in 1930s, Iran in 1980s, and Turkey in 2000s show the link between attempts of revision in the system and normative consensus in the system. The states that defend some kind of an alternative vision for the region are usually undergone a transformation in state-identity and national role conception. And these transformations are not about a change in military capabilities, economic power or other indicators of material power. Rather they are more about identities, the norms that are compatible with these identities, and interest conceptualization that is a result of these two.

How the attempts of revision and challenge of normative consensus are linked can also be observed from the viewpoints of the defenders of the status quo. What are the things that they perceive as threats? What kind of changes in the region are considered as threatening to their national interests? The answers to these questions are very much related to threats to norms in the system. Without an increase in military or economic capabilities, a state can become a national security concern for the system.

The Arab Spring is an illustrative example for this point. The status quo block, Saudi Arabia in particular, reacted to the series of revolution in the Middle East with a will to stop them, and reverse them if possible. The Tunisian dictator Bin Ali seek refuge in Saudi Arabia, and Saudis were the primary supporter and financier of the military coup in Egypt against the elected government. What was it that alarmed the Saudis that much? Why does a change of regime in a distant neighbor matter so much? The questions become more interesting if we consider that neither democratically elected government in Tunisia nor in Egypt declared an ambitious foreign policy towards the region, let alone an anti-Saudi foreign policy. They showed a change neither in military posture nor in material capabilities. In fact, these were very difficult for post-revolutionary states like Egypt and Tunisia that suffer from budget deficits, high levels of corruption, and lack of a functioning state-mechanism due to recent revolution. The threat for Saudis, and other monarchies that defend status quo, was less material than normative. The revolutions showed the possibility of an alternative order and represented a different normative consensus. Post-revolutionary regimes in the region were illustration of an alternative vision for the region. It is this challenge to the normative order that threatened the Saudis. More specifically, for the Saudis whose source of legitimacy is a combination of Islamic rule and monarchy, newly elected Islamist governments showed that you can be a democracy without compromising your Islamic character. It showed that the norms and values of the West such as democracy, liberalism, imperialism etc., which are usually demonized, can be selectively engaged.

Thus, the conflict over alternative visions for the region creates non-traditional threat sources. During the era of Arab nationalism in 1960s, for example, the status quo front felt threatened from the Voice of the Arab radio of Egypt more than conventional

weapons. The broadcast from this radio had the potential to mobilize thousands of people from different countries against the will of their governments.⁶² And that mobilization can only be done by convincing these people to an alternative regional order. In such a system, a small country can be a real threat to a neighboring state than a more powerful country.

Political and constitutional instability, coupled with the attraction of Islam and Arabism as political symbols, make the direct interventionist appeal a rewarding circumvention of the frequently inadequate or inefficient diplomatic process. (...) Among the Arab states, it is well understood that an Egyptian editorial will threaten the stability of the Jordanian government, while a Syrian military coup will encourage Iraqi politicians or terrify Lebanese leaders.⁶³

Looking from a realist standpoint, even Walt writes on how role of ideas make the Middle East a region of “different” balancing behavior: "a different form of balancing has occurred in inter-Arab relations. In the Arab world, the most important source of power has been the ability to manipulate one's own image and the image of one's rivals in the minds of other Arab elites."⁶⁴

Let me now discuss two important analyses about the regional order in the Middle East in a little more detail – Benjamin Miller and Michael Barnett. I will try to show how they are useful in understanding the regional order, and in the light of the recent events, what aspects of their analyses should be reconsidered.

⁶² Nahas (1985)

⁶³ Binder (1958) p. 414-17

⁶⁴ Walt, Stephen. (1987) *The Origin of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, p. 87.

Benjamin Miller's argument that state-to-nation imbalance is the main explanatory variable in explaining regional stability is a powerful attempt to give an account of variation in war propensities in different regions. I think he rightly argues that if there is a high degree of state to nation imbalance (the problem of too many states or too little number of states), it is more likely that region will experience more instability. Although this argument has some explanatory power, there is a problem in deciding how the imbalance is measured. Who does decide if there is the imbalance and how? The concept of imbalance is not an objective fact or unconstructed material reality in the outer world. It is the visions and norms of the people, which are shaped as an answer to "who are we?" question of identity, that determine if there is a state-to-nation imbalance or not. Without taking norms and visions into consideration, it is not possible to explain how people think that there is a more (or less) than necessary number of states in a region. Miller does not exclude the visions of the people component in explaining the imbalance. He writes that the important factor is the "national sentiments of the people" in the region concerning the congruence of the regional states.⁶⁵ However when it comes to measurement, he proposes the following way:

The state-to-nation balance in a certain region can be measured by assessing the balance of power between the coherent status quo states on the one hand and the revisionist states and non-state political movements (irredentist, pan-national, or secessionist) on the other. The more powerful all these nationalist-

⁶⁵ Miller (2005) p. 232-3

revisionist forces are in relation to the coherent status quo states, the greater the state-to-nation imbalance, and vice versa.⁶⁶

The problem with such a criterion of measurement is that, the balance of power (considered as hard power) does not always give us a useful indicator for measuring the national sentiments for compatibility or congruence between the regional states and sentiments of the people. In other words, a skewed balance of power in favor of status quo position does not necessarily show that the status quo is legitimate in the eyes of the peoples. When there is disconnection between the preferences of the people and preferences of the states (power holders), a consensus reached by states in a region to uphold the status quo can be both powerful and incongruent. This is the case in the Middle East. While, in the current situation, those who control power are in favor of the existing status quo, the powerless masses do not think that they live in a congruent or coherent regional system, and they support alternative normative principles.

I think such a theoretical differentiation is important in understanding the Middle East. This is because while Miller's original explanation is important in understanding ongoing instability, the nuanced explanation helps in understanding the cyclical rise and fall of moments of regional instability. Seemingly stable regional politics does not show that there is state-to-nation balance or congruity in the regional state system. I think Hudson makes a similar observation when he writes that outward stability in the regional system is misleading because while there is consensus at the elite level on stability, at the level of societies the powers of revisionism are building up beneath the surface.

⁶⁶ Miller (2005) p. 233

There is reason to believe that politicized Arab opinion remains committed to general Arab political values - Islam, the Arab homeland, Palestine - because these values seem increasingly threatened by outside forces. Furthermore, the fact that this opinion in general is denied access to formal decision-making process adds another load to beleaguered Arab political systems - a challenge to existing patterns of authority. Inevitably the detachment of public opinion from real political life. .. generates frustration and anger on the part of those who are excluded. One might therefore hypothesize that strong pressures are building up that do not have adequate institutional channels for expression or resolution.⁶⁷

I think the way Barnett deals with this problem is by introducing the pressure people insert over decision-makers. Barnett analyzes the dynamics of stability and instability in the Middle East state-system and comes to the conclusion that while until late 1970s and early 1980s the region suffers more from systemic instability, after 1980s it turns out to be a more “normal” and stable regional system. The reason for this is that there were conflicting norms in the system during 1950s and 1960s, which were Arabism on the one hand and sovereignty on the other. However, by 1970s and 1980s, the states in the region agreed to interpret both norms in a compatible way, not in conflict to one another. That normative consensus made the region a more stable one as far as challenges arising from nationalism are concerned. To use the concepts of Miller, while in the 1950s and 60s state-to-nation imbalance is a more serious problem in the region, by 1970s its effect decreased. By 1980s, the Middle East state-system

⁶⁷ Hudson, Michael. (1986) "Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Arab Politics," *Journal of Arab Affairs* 5, 2 (Fall 1986), p. 139.

turned into a “normal” system in which states internalized the norm that the territories are real and the existing states that control them are legitimate rulers in the system.⁶⁸ What that means is the idea of a unified Arab nation is over, and each state would respect sovereign authority of other member in the system.

However, the Arab Spring and the events that follow it portrayed a little more complicated picture of the region. Barnett’s assessment is challenged from two points. First, almost all of the states in the region violated the norm of sovereign non-intervention in the system. Saudi and Iranian operations in Yemen, Egypt and Syria are primary examples of that. States intervened in their neighbors both militarily and economically to attain their preferred outcomes from the revolutions, and these interventions are not condemned publicly by almost all other members of the system. Second, the policies of other states resulted into a de facto division of territorial unity in some cases like Syria and Libya. While Barnett’s observation that “Arab unity lost and sovereign units won” is correct as far as the aspirations of the Middle Eastern powers to create a united region is concerned, it is still not a “normal” system in which states saw the borders of others as real. What is more, even when regional unification is concerned, an organization like ISIS can still attract thousands to fight for a new state which controls some unified territory of Syria and Iraq’s lands, and according to its “citizens” which will unite all Muslim land in the future.

1.3.4. Inferences and Conclusions

I think we can make the following conclusions from the analysis above:

1. In the last hundred years, the region experienced various systemic crises.

⁶⁸ Lebovic also makes a similar claim: Lebovic (1986) p. 277

2. A crisis by definition indicates that there are some actors who are unhappy with the existing order of things.
3. Mass support for these actors shows that there is a problem of legitimacy with regard to the status quo.
4. The fact that instability and crises spread easily in the region indicates that a) people in the region have similar grievances (legitimacy problem) and b) the region is highly integrated that a spark in one corner can easily turn into a fire in a distant place (domestic vs. foreign distinction).
5. The conflict in the region occurs between alternative visions. The moments of instability question the organizing principles of the regional state-system. Friend and enemy distinction is made based on the positions of the actors about normative consensus in the region. Alliances are formed amongst those who support similar organizing principles for the region.

What is the relation between problems of legitimacy, foreign-domestic distinction, and normative consensus? The problems of legitimacy and foreign-domestic distinctions are relatively constants in the region. They create favorable conditions for exacerbation of instability. However what makes them effective is the proposition of an alternative vision which addresses the sources of legitimacy deficit in the region. In other words, their interaction with the proposal of a new vision leads to systemic crises. Problems of legitimacy and foreign-domestic distinctions act as permissive causes for the challenge to the normative consensus by an alternative vision (the efficient cause).

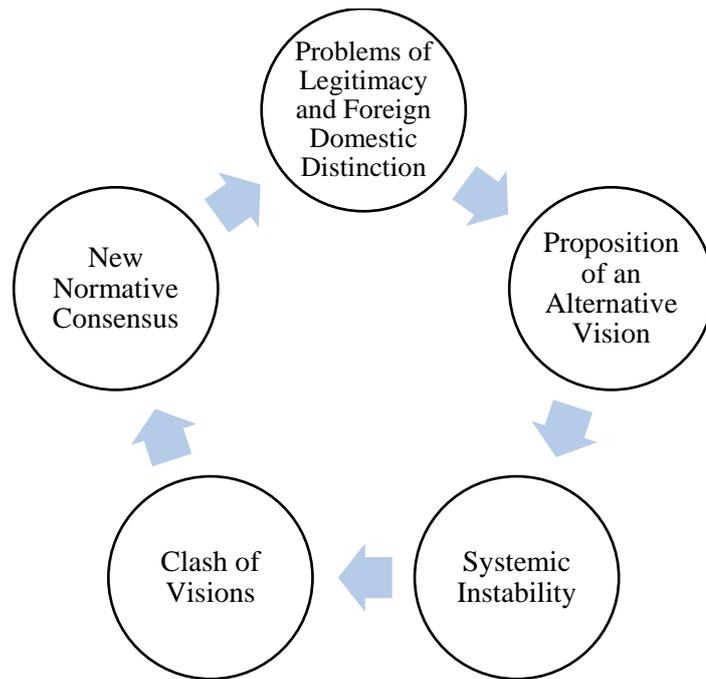


Table 2: The cycle of regional crises in the Middle East

1.4. Question, Method, Cases and Mapping the Literature

1.4.1. Question, Argument, and Variables

Research Question: What does explain repetitive systemic crises in the Middle East? Why are there frequent systemic crises in the Middle East regional state-system?

Answer and Argument: The source of the systemic crises in the Middle East is the proposition of alternative ground rules for the state-system. Major systemic crises in the Middle East, as we see in the nationalist wave of the 1950s, Islamic Revolution in 1980s, and the Arab Spring in 2010s, were mainly propositions to change the normative consensus in the Middle East. These alternative visions for the region interact with the two structural problems in the region: legitimacy deficit and porous borders (i.e.: lack of developed foreign-domestic distinction). While the legitimacy deficit and porous borders act as permissive conditions, alternative normative consensus proposal act as effective cause. If the proposed ground rules that challenges the existing order

offer solutions to causes of the legitimacy deficit, then we observe a systemic crisis in the region.

Dependent Variable: Systemic crises in the Middle East

Independent Variables: Alternative *proposals for the normative consensus* in the region, interacting with *legitimacy deficit* of the regimes, and *porous borders* (i.e.: lack of developed foreign-domestic distinction)

1.4.2. Method and Case Selection

1.4.2.1. Case Method and Process Tracing

As stated above, the question of the dissertation deals with the causes of systemic crises in the Middle East. How can we find an answer to this question, and see if the argument holds true? I think a good way to do this is to look at the actors involved in the crises. How did the actors see the crises? How did they perceive it? Especially according to the influential actors in the region, what were the sources of the episodes of crisis in the region? What do their thoughts, comments, decisions, and policies say about the causes of instability; and do they confirm with the argument? The involved parties' perceptions and reactions are important because through these perceptions and reactions international politics is constructed. To put it differently, inter-subjectively constructed nature of international politics makes the perception of international actors significant to understand the world, and to answer questions about it.

To this end, I focus on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I analyze the Saudi perception of, and reaction to, three influential episodes of systemic crisis in the Middle East: Arab nationalism, Iranian Revolution and the Arab Spring. By applying process tracing, I reconstruct the events from the Saudi eyes, and answer my research question.

Before discussing why I chose Saudi Arabia and these three episode of crises as my cases, let me mention a few things about the case method in general and process tracing in particular.

Each methodological choice involves tradeoffs. The researchers have to sacrifice something with these choices in order to attain some other benefits. As Gerring writes, the case study research design is advantageous to other designs in 1) hypothesis generating as opposed to hypothesis testing, 2) internal validity as opposed to external validity, and 3) explaining causal mechanisms as opposed to causal effects.⁶⁹ Similarly Guy Peters writes case study is useful to understand 1) causal complexity and 2) how events and processes are embedded in local contexts as opposed to assuming “isolation of political events from their surroundings.”⁷⁰ In that sense, it offers “thick description” in the Geertzian sense. The way I approach to the question I am dealing with can best be answered if we look closely to few cases because I think the episodes of regional crises in the Middle East requires “opening the black box,”⁷¹ and go beyond the start-finish points. The regional crises in question are not single events in a certain moment in history, but rather they are processes in which regional transformations take place over some years. The thoughts and perceptions of involved parties in the crises are developed and constructed over certain time. Understanding the construction of an actor or an ideology as a threat to regional stability from the eyes of regional actors necessitates analyzing the details of the processes of opinion changes of these actors.

⁶⁹ Gerring, J. (2006). *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press. p.37

⁷⁰ Peters, B. G. (1998). *Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods*. NYU Press Peters p. 67. Similar advantages of case studies are also mentioned by: George, A. and Bennet, A. (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press

⁷¹ Hedstrom, P. (2005). *Dissecting the Social*. Cambridge University Press. p. 25

Process tracing as a research technique offers a post-positivist perspective in social science research.⁷² As Little argues in defense of the process tracing approach, this method allows the researched to “think of the social world as a fabric built up out of a myriad of overlapping ‘local social environments’.”⁷³ In the most general sense, it is “to trace the links between possible causes and observed outcomes.”⁷⁴ One of the significant features of the process tracing method is that “multiple layers of evidence are employed” to answer the research question.⁷⁵ By using these evidence, the researcher can reconstruct the events in the time-period under study in accordance with the theoretical framework in mind into a convincing narrative. In that sense, process tracing does not offer a rigorous test of each single scene in the narration, but rather by “linking various parts of the story,”⁷⁶ multiple layers of evidence, such as accounts of important actors, certain chain of events, comments of outsider observers etc., make the total story plausible and convincing.⁷⁷

As mentioned above, process-tracing is a useful method to study social and political processes. Instead of the “causal effects”, process tracing offers insights on “causal mechanisms.” As Stephan van Evera writes, “in process tracing the investigator explores decision-making process” of involved actors.⁷⁸ In a similar vein, for George

⁷² Little, D. (2009). The Heterogeneous Social : New Thinking About the Foundations of the Social Sciences. In C. Mantzavinos (Ed.), *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice* Cambridge University Press. p. 162

⁷³ Ibid, p. 162

⁷⁴ George, A. and Bennet, A. (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press; p.6. See also Brady, H. E., & Collier, D. (2004). *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Rowman & Littlefield.

⁷⁵ Gerring, J. (2006). *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press. P.173

⁷⁶ Little, D. (2009). The Heterogeneous Social p. 28

⁷⁷ Gerring, J. (2006). *Case Study Research*. p. 182

⁷⁸ Evera, S. van V. (1997). *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. P. 64.

and McKeown this method is about tracing of the “decision process by which various initial conditions are translated into outcomes.”⁷⁹ The motivations and perceptions of actors in the processes are particularly important for process-tracing method.⁸⁰ The method involves “searching for evidence about the decisional process by which the outcome is produced.”⁸¹ In that sense, process tracing sheds light on discovering “how” the end-point is attained. This, according to George and Bennet, stands in opposition to the focus of covering laws and general theories on “start” and “finish” points.⁸²

1.4.2.2. Why Saudi Arabia?

To answer the question of the dissertation I use process tracing to understand how Saudi rulers saw the sources of the regional crises. Let me know discuss why I focus on Saudi Arabia and the three specific crises as my cases. I think Saudi Arabia is one of the best countries to study to understand the dynamics of (in)stability in the region. This has five crucial reasons.

To begin with, Saudi Arabia is one of the most stable countries in the region. It have been under the control of same dynasty since early 20th century. It remained stable, and deserves to be treated as the same actor with same state-identity throughout the last century. In fact, since the Saudi decision making cadre was limited to seniors of al-Saud family, the individual policy makers were almost same people in all of the crises: King Faisal (1906-1975) and his sons Prince Saud (1940-2015) and Prince Turki (1945-

⁷⁹ George, A. and McKeown, T. (1985) "Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making,"

in Robert F. Coulam and Richard A. Smith, eds., *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, Vol. 2

(Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press), p.35 quoted in Van Evera (1997) p.52.

⁸⁰ King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press. p. 227

⁸¹ Ibid p. 227

⁸² George, A. and Bennet, A. (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development*. Chapter 1

present), King Khalid (1913-1982), King Fahd (1921-2005), King Abdullah (1924-2015), King Salman (1935-present), Crown Prince Sultan (1931-2005), Crown Prince Nayef (1934-2011), Crown Prince Muqrin (1945-2015), Crown Prince Muhammed bin Nayef (1959-2015) were in decision-making positions at least in two of the crises. This is important because tracing the Saudi reaction to Middle East state-system in general, and to the crises in particular becomes meaningful only with such a continuous, uninterrupted state-identity. Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia experienced revolutions, coups etc. and they experienced change in state-identity.

Second, Saudi Arabia is one of the most active actors in all of these crises. It wanted to shape the outcomes of each epoch of crisis. Hence, it followed a pro-active foreign policy to affect the state-system, and to contain the implications of the revolutionary waves. This was in a certain way a requirement of its geographical location, which forced it to pay attention to developments in the Gulf region, Iran, Egypt and Iraq very closely. In that sense, Saudi Arabia is more important to understand systemic crises in the region than, for example, Morocco, Tunisia.

Third, Saudi Arabia is one of the powerful countries in the region. It was not only active in all of these crises and wanted to shape the outcome, it was also able to do so thanks to its material and ideational resources. As a result of the vast oil revenues, the Saudi regime used “riyal diplomacy” in all of the crises to influence cost-benefit calculations of relevant actors in the region. The Saudis used their wealth first to form a status quo alliances during the crises, and second to rehabilitate normative challengers to the state system after they lost power. In this sense, Saudis are more influential than other monarchies in the region such as Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain etc.

Fourth, the religious legitimacy and propaganda of the Saudi regime (being the “custodians” of the holy places) are another sources of strength that allows the Saudis to be relatively powerful actor during the epochs of crises. As Islam is an important point of reference for millions of people in the region either as a religion in their daily life or as an ideology in the political life, a state with an official Islamic outlook has more advantages in the region than a strictly secular state, such as pre-revolutionary Tunisia.

Fifth, Saudi Arabia is a Sunni Arab country. In a region of multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian identities, Sunni and Arab nature of the kingdom places it within the predominant ethnic and sectarian majority of the Middle East. This is important because on the one hand, such an affiliation forces Saudi Arabia to pay attention to developments in the region; and on the other, makes it a part of regional events as an actor to shape them. Countries like Iran (Shia Islamic) and Turkey (non-Arab secular), despite their material power, have never been in a position as central as Saudi Arabia especially in the Arab Middle East.

1.4.2.3. Why Three Episodes of Crises?

Let me now turn to the question why I focus on the three episodes of crises in the region: Arab nationalism, Iranian revolution, and the Arab spring. To begin with, all of these three crises are truly regional events. That is to say, the revolutionary waves I analyze have affected almost all countries in the region from eastern Arab world to the west. To understand the dynamics of stability in the region, it is useful to focus on events that affected not just a single country or a handful countries, but the ones that have wider implications.

Second, these crises have “intrinsic importance”⁸³ in the sense that they caused most turbulence in the region. The mass protests, uprisings, revolutions, civil wars etc. have plagued the entire region as a result of these three episodes of turmoil. As Van Evera notes one way to choose cases is to focus on the intrinsic human or historical importance, which means selecting cases “in accord with the magnitude of their human consequences.”⁸⁴

Third, these three episodes of regional turmoil as research cases are important because they have certain distinct features in various respects, which is helpful to understand what exactly made them a threat in the Saudi eyes. To put it differently, while these three episodes of crises display different characteristics in many ways, Saudi foreign policy makers perceived them in a similar way, and designed almost identical policies in foreign and domestic realm to fight with them. This allows us to answer the question “what does make these revolutionary waves a source of threat for Saudi Arabia?” in a convincing way by finding out the common point among them despite outward dissimilarities. For example, the ideologies proposed by these revolutionary waves are different (nationalism, Islamism, democracy), as well as the regional countries who supported them (Egypt, Iran, Qatar). Similarly, while two of the crises emerged in Sunni dominated countries (Egypt, Tunisia), one of them started in a Shia majority nation. Moreover, in terms of the inter-state relations, while Nasser was proposing unification, Iranian revolution emphasized more integration, and Arab spring protestors underlined more cooperation. In terms of the prime actors in these episodes,

⁸³ Evera, S. van V. (1997). *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. p. 86

⁸⁴ Evera, S. van V. (1997). *Guide to Methods*. p. 87

while an Arab state initiated the nationalist wave, it was a non-Arab state in the case of Islamic revolution, and non-state Arab actors in the case of Arab Spring. Lastly, in terms of the global systemic factors, they took place in early bipolarity, mature bipolarity, and “late unipolarity,” respectively.

Despite these differences, what was the uniting factor of these distinct events in the eyes of Saudi Arabia? The common point is, I argue, their challenge of the ground rules of the region and proposal of alternative normative consensus. If I can prove such an assertion in my case chapters, selection of these distinct cases would increase the power of the argument. The summarized comparison of the characteristics of the cases are in the following table:

Episodes / Factors	Arab Nationalism	Iranian Revolution	Arab Spring
Inter-state relations	Unification	More integration	More cooperation
Ideology	Nationalism	Islamism	Democracy and Human rights
Sectarian identity	Sunni	Shia	Sunni
Prime Actor	Arab State (Egypt)	Non-Arab State (Iran)	Non-state Arab (peoples)
Global system	Early/mid-bipolarity	Mature/late-bipolarity	Late-unipolarity

Table 3: A comparison of three episodes of regional crises.

A possible concern that may arise regarding the crises as research cases is that whether or not the crises are all positive cases, i.e.: the classical criticism of “selection based on dependent variable.” According to some scholars, selecting cases based on the

values in dependent variables is a methodological sin. For example, according to King, Keohane and Verba, a researcher should avoid selecting his/her cases by just the positive values in the dependent variable.⁸⁵ I think there are two main reasons why the selection I use in this work is valid. First, I agree with the scholars who argue that if the researcher is applying process tracing, then selection based on dependent variable is acceptable. Van Evera writes that selection based on dependent variable is legitimate under three conditions: 1. If you compare cases to a known average situation; 2. “If cases have large within-case variance on the study variable;” and 3. If the researcher uses process tracing.⁸⁶ This is because, process tracing try to uncover the chain of events, development of perceptions and decisions, the change in the course of incidents that lead to a certain outcome.

Second, although focusing on crises seems to represent all “positive cases,” actually each case represents more than one observation in itself. As Gerring writes, a single case provides at least two observations.⁸⁷ This can either be temporal variation i.e.: pre- and post-event (as he writes, French revolution provides at least two cases: pre-revolution, post-revolution); or spatial variation i.e.: implicit comparison with another geography, or counterfactual, or an accepted standard situation. In the case of three episodes of crises, as I show in each case chapter below, when I reconstruct the events from the Saudi eyes, I analyze how a “non-threat” becomes a “threat” and then “non-treat” again. In other words, in each case I study, I start with the “normal” order of things, and trace how the challenges in the system are perceived as threat/crises, and

⁸⁵ King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry*. p.108

⁸⁶ Evera, S. van V. (1997). *Guide to Methods* p. 47

⁸⁷ Gerring, J. (2006). *Case Study Research* p. 30

then how re-equilibrium is constructed by reintegrating the source of threat into regional state-system. In that sense, each episode of crises provides at least three cases: 1. non-crisis situation (status quo order / pre-crisis); 2. the duration of crisis (years of revolutionary wave that challenge the status quo order with alternative normative proposal), 3. Re-institution of status quo order (post-crisis).

1.4.3. Mapping the Literature and the Aimed Contribution

This study aims at contributing two strands of literature. Theoretically, I engage in a dialogue with the constructivist international relations (IR) writings on order and norms. And practically, I aim at contributing understanding the politics in the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia specifically. Since the second chapter discusses issues pertaining to theory with the relevant literature in detail, and first and case chapters discuss the regional aspects, what I would like to do here is to locate this study in the wider map of literature with reference to certain well-known works to give the reader a sense of orientation before going into next chapters.

Theoretically, this study is part of the wider constructivist literature in IR that deals with the question of order in international politics. Accordingly, this study stands in opposition to different variants of realist explanations that treat order as an *ahistorical* condition and *automatic* outcome of balancing (Waltz) or hegemony (Gilpin).⁸⁸ Instead, in parallel with the constructivist thinking, I assign causal influence to norms and identities in the construction of order.⁸⁹ Within the constructivist

⁸⁸ Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of International Politics*; Gilpin, R. (1983). *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press

⁸⁹ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press; Holsti, K. J. (1970) "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy" *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 233-309; Checkel, Jeffrey (1999) "Social Construction and Integration," *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6:4. 545-560

literature, the theoretical contribution I aim is to advance understanding the link between norms and orders by bringing regional norms (as opposed to global); norms of the non-state actors (as opposed to state actors); and bad norms (as opposed to good ones) into discussion.⁹⁰ With this in view, this study diverges from more liberal variants of constructivism,⁹¹ and wants to insert some realist leanings to the theory. I do this by borrowing certain concepts and frameworks from English School.⁹²

More specifically, we can locate the present study within the literature that takes regional state-systems and regional norms seriously for production of order. Amitav Acharya, Andrew Hurrell, Louise Fawcett deserves special emphasis here.⁹³ Following pages can be read as a part of such strand of literature. In addition, we can also consider this study as a follower of the writings that discuss the “ground rules” in regional state-systems such as Schroeder,⁹⁴ Tin-bor Hui,⁹⁵ and Kaufman et al.⁹⁶

As far as the Middle East politics is concerned, this study follows the tradition of scholars who analyze the region as a “regional state-system.”⁹⁷ That means it is not

⁹⁰ The detailed discussion on these concepts can be found in the second chapter.

⁹¹ Finnemore, M. and Sikkink, K. (1998) “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change” *International Organization*, Vol. 52 No. 4; Keck, M and Sikkink, K. (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Cornell University Press

⁹² Buzan, Barry. (1993). “From international system to international society: structural realism and regime theory meet the English school” *International Organization*, 47(3), 327–352.; Buzan, B., & Little, R. (1994). “The Idea of “International System”: Theory Meets History” *International Political Science Review*, 15(3), 231–255.

⁹³ Among their other works, one can look at: Acharya, A. (2011). “Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World”. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55(1), 95–123; Hurrell, A. (2007). “One world? Many worlds? The place of regions in the study of international society” *International Affairs*, 83(1); Fawcett, Louise (2004) “Exploring Regional Domains: A Comparative History of Regionalism,” *International Affairs* 80:3, 429-446.

⁹⁴ Schroeder, Paul (1996) *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, Oxford University Press

⁹⁵ Tin-bor Hui, Victoria (2005) *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press

⁹⁶ Kaufman, Stuart et al. (2007) *Balance of Power in World History*, Palgrave Macmillan

⁹⁷ See for example Buzan, Barry (2009) “The Middle East through English School Theory” in Buzan, B., & Gonzalez-Pelaez, A. (ed.s.) *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*. Springer; Gause III, F. Gregory. 1999. “Systemic Approaches to Middle East

part of the literature that gives an account of the Middle East political history,⁹⁸ or that analyzes foreign policy of a single country as an end in itself.⁹⁹ Rather, although there are idiosyncratic features of each country, in a higher step in the ladder of abstraction, this study shares the assumption of scholars who believe that analyzing the Middle East as a state-system is useful, at least for certain questions. Nevertheless, in such an endeavor, due to theoretical reasons, I diverge from realist explanations of Walt,¹⁰⁰ and realist/historical explanation of Ian Lustic.¹⁰¹ Although Lustic offers a compelling analysis of the outcomes of systemic crises in the Middle East, his explanation based on outside great powers, I think, does not offer a full picture. As an alternative (and possible contributory) point of view I propose is the necessity to look at the events from the regional actors. Although there is definitely decisive influence of outside powers in the course of the events in the region, these outside actors can only do this by aligning with a regional actor who shares their interpretations of events. That is why, I believe, it is important to understand how local actors perceive and construct the events.

The works of two scholars of the Middle East international system have highest influence in this study; and I aim at advancing their strand of literature on regional order

International Relations.” *International Studies Review* 1 (1): 11–31; Gause, F. G. III (2004) ‘Theory and System in Understanding Middle East International Politics: Rereading Paul Noble’s “The Arab System: Pressures, Constraints and Opportunities”’, in B. F. Salloukh and R. Brynen (eds) *Persistent Permeability?* (Aldershot: Ashgate), pp. 15–28; Hinnebusch, Raymond (2009) “Order and Change in the Middle East: A Neo-Gramscian Twist on the International Society Approach” in Buzan, B., & Gonzalez-Pelaez, A. *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*. Springer.

⁹⁸ For example: Kamrava, M. (2011). *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*. Berkeley Calif.: University of California Press; Gelvin, J. (2005) *The Modern Middle East: A History*. Oxford University Press.

⁹⁹ For example, Partrick, N. (2016). *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation in Uncertain Times*. London New York: I.B.Tauris;

¹⁰⁰ Walt, Stephen. (1987) *The Origin of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press

¹⁰¹ Lustic, Ian, “The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political “Backwardness” in Historical Perspective” *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No.4

and norms: Maridi Nahas and Michael Barnett.¹⁰² Nahas' article written in the early years of the Iranian Revolution pioneers the basic argument of this study. The difference from Nahas, and the contribution I make, is to add the cases of later years of the Iranian revolution and the Arab Spring, and to check whether we can verify the argument by looking at the issues from the Saudi eyes. As for Barnett, I think his writings on Arabism as an ordering norm in the Middle East is the most convincing account of the regional politics in the constructivist literature. I would consider the present study as an updated version of Barnett's book after 20 years.

There are certain differences, however, with Barnett's work, which, I think, corresponds to the contribution I want to make. First, while Barnett focuses on Arabism as the ordering norm in the Middle East, I add Islamism represented by the Iranian revolution, and demands for democracy and human rights as two additional normative proposals in the region. Second, my focus on a single country (i.e.: Saudi Arabia) throughout all episodes of crises allows a more detailed and comprehensive narrative. Moreover, the organization of this study around three cases allows verification of certain arguments from the eyes of a single consistent actor.

1.4.4. Hypotheses

Although in the method of process tracing, the chain of the events narrated by the research in its entirety is the evidence for the verification or falsification of an argument, (as a complementary step to that and as a way to convince readers who prefer

¹⁰² Nahas, Maridi. 1985. "State-Systems and Revolutionary Challenge: Nasser, Khomeini, and the Middle East." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (04): 507–27; Barnett, Michael. (1993). "Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System." *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (3): 271–96 Barnett, Michael N. 1995. "Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Regional Order in the Arab States System." *International Organization* 49 (03): 479–510; Barnett, M. (1998). *Dialogues in Arab Politics*. New York Chichester: Columbia University Press.

following the link between dependent and independent variables through hypotheses), I propose three expectations below that reflect how the Saudis saw three episode of crises. While the case study chapters offer more than answering the following hypotheses, I think they are useful as guidelines to see according to Saudi Arabia what the source of the crises were.

Hypothesis 1 – Legitimacy Problem

If actors (i.e.: the Saudi rulers) think that the cause of the crisis has to do with legitimacy problem regarding the regime, we should expect to see that they take precautions to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. This can occur a) through increasing the welfare of the citizens [or/and] b) through implementing policies in accordance with the ideals of the revolutionary wave.

Hypothesis 2 – Foreign-Domestic Distinction

If actors (i.e.: the Saudi rulers) think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the porous borders (i.e.: insufficient foreign-domestic distinction), we should expect to see that they take precautions to decrease the effects of the outside world in the kingdom. This can occur a) through limiting propaganda channels of the outside world in the kingdom, [and/or] b) through paying more attention to those who have more interaction with the outside world, and decreasing the interaction of their citizens with outside.

Hypothesis 3 – Normative Consensus Proposal

If actors (i.e.: the Saudi rulers) think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the normative consensus in the Middle East state-system (i.e.: proposal of

alternative ground rules), we should expect to see that their reactions should be directed to the normative challenge, instead of a military, economic or strategic one. This can occur through a number of ways:

- a) If this is a normative threat, the alliance choices should prioritize the normative challenger instead of a traditional balance of power rivalry;
- b) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should make a differentiation between normative proposal (and people/parties who represent these ideas in a certain country) and the military and economic power of that country.
- c) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should invest in normative and ideational instruments of foreign/domestic policy to represent their own version against the revisionist one.
- d) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should take more precautions against internal threats instead of a foreign military offensive.
- e) If this is a normative threat, the end of the threat should stem from elimination of the normative proposal, not a certain state.

1.4.5. The Outline of the Dissertation

In the second chapter, I tackle with some theoretical issues regarding state-systems, international orders, and norms. After examining certain terminological questions, I focus on theoretically proving why norms are an inevitable part of any understanding of formation of orders. I provide three causal mechanisms through which we can follow causal effects of norms on institution of order and disorder in a state-system. Moreover, I propose three modifications to the mainstream applications of

norms analysis, which, I believe, would improve our understanding of international politics.

Third, fourth and fifth chapters are three case chapters in which I analyze three episodes of regional turmoil and Saudi reaction to them: Arab nationalism under Nasser's Egypt, Iranian Revolution, and the Arab Spring. In each of these chapters, I begin with a brief account of events in the timespan under consideration. Then, I focus on Saudi domestic politics and foreign policy in the period, and through the policy preferences and discourses of Saudi decision-makers I reconstruct the events from the Saudi eyes to uncover how they perceived the regional challenges.

In the third chapter, I analyze the rise of Nasser as a challenge to the status quo in the Middle East. I specifically focus on the process through which Nasser came to be perceived as a threat to the Saudi elite. This same process corresponds with the recoding Hashemite monarchies of the region as allies from rivals. I, then, examine the process of reintegration of Egypt back into the state-system as a "normal" state. In the fifth chapter, I give an account of a similar process for Iran: I trace the process by which Iran turned into a threat from being a member of anti-Soviet alliance for the Saudis. By looking at the flow of events in the 1980s, I examine the Saudi perceptions of Iranian actions, and how an equilibrium was achieved again after the death of Khomeini. In the fifth chapter, I focus on the threat of Arab Spring for the Saudis. With a specific focus on Egypt, I discuss how and why a democratically elected government is perceived as a challenge to regional stability for the al-Saud family. At the conclusion sections of each case chapter, I go over the hypotheses stated above, and evaluate them under the date examined in the chapter.

The last chapter is a short conclusion where I discuss some implications of the findings.

Chapter 2

OF SYSTEMS, ORDERS, AND NORMS

“A world without identities is a world of chaos, a world of pervasive and irremediable uncertainty, a world much more dangerous than anarchy.”

Ted Hopf (1998, 175)

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss how order and disorder are produced in state-systems with reference to the normative consensus among the units in the system. I argue that for a stable order, relevant actors in a state-system (state and non-state) have to develop some kind of a consensus on the ground rules of conduct, which regulates basic principles concerning what constitutes normal and abnormal in inter-unit relations. I also argue that for a better understanding of the relation between order and norms, we need to avoid three biases: First, analyses of norms usually prioritize “good-norms” such as human rights and responsibility to protect, as opposed to “bad norms.” However, they are both equally relevant to understand how norms contribute to the production of order. Second, mainstream perspectives have a global-system bias which prioritizes the global state-system that came into being as a result of the expansion of the European international society, and its analytical categories, over the regional state-system. However, regional state-systems display different characteristics because of

their own local histories; so we need to have more region-sensitive lenses in understanding order in sub-systems. And third, we need to avoid the bias of state-centricism, which refers to treating states as the only significant actors in producing order in state-systems.

The organization of the paper is as follows: in the next section I discuss the concepts of system, state-system, and subsystem; and why definitional issues are important for conceptualizing order. In the third section, I discuss the concept of order and how it can be achieved from the perspectives of major IR theories. The fourth section is on the relation between norms and orders. I analyze how normative consensus affects order and disorder in a state-system. In the fifth section, I discuss three biases in understanding the relation between order and norms: good-norms bias, global-system bias, and the bias of state-centricism. In the sixth section, I analyze the interaction between state and non-state actors both at the global and the regional levels in their capacity to institute order and challenge it. The seventh section is conclusion.

2.2. Systems, State-Systems, Sub-systems:

In this section, I try to answer the following questions: What is a system? What is a state-system? What is a sub-system? What are the implications of the definition of system on order?

A system is usually defined as the working of some inter-related parts such that functioning of each part is important for the functioning of the rest.¹⁰³ Parts are connected to a larger structure in a way which makes one component a necessary

¹⁰³ For a detailed discussion, see Braumoeller, B. F. (2012). *The great powers and the international system: systemic theory in empirical perspective*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

determinant for the operation of the others that make up the larger body. An explanation of the function of a component with reference to the larger structure it is connected is called systemic explanation. The units that make up the system can be cells (biology), masses (physics), firms (economics), individuals (sociology) etc. In any field, if the researcher shows that the units of analyses in the research are affecting some other units, and in turn being affected by them, then he can assert that a systemic explanation is most useful to understand the interested component.

Scholars of international relations (IR) also find it useful to understand their subject matter with reference to a systemic explanation. Behaviors of the actors in IR, it is argued, can best be explained if we treat the international realm as a system. Since the decisions of units in IR affects other units, each actor take others' actions into consideration when designing its own course of action. As Bull and Watson famously define a group of independent political units form a system when "the behavior of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of others."¹⁰⁴ Waltz makes a more relaxed definition by emphasizing just co-action of units: "a system is composed of a structure and of interacting parts."¹⁰⁵ In a similar vein for Jervis "we are dealing with a system when there are (a) a set of units or elements interconnected so that changes in some elements or their relationships produce changes in other parts of the system, and (b) the entire system exhibits properties and behaviors that are different from those of the constituent parts."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Bull, H., & Watson, A. (1984). *The Expansion of international society*. Clarendon Press.p. 1

¹⁰⁵ Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of International Politics*. p. 80

¹⁰⁶ Taliaferro (2012) paraphrasing Robert Jervis, "Neoclassical realism and the study of regional order" in Paul, T. V., *International relations theory and regional transformation*. New York: Cambridge University Press. P. 74

Although the argument that international interactions constitute a system is important, what is more important and interesting is the implications of this assertion. The way the international system is defined by different theorists has both normative and descriptive implications for further IR analysis. First and foremost, accepting a system presupposes that some kind of basic components are making up the system. What are they and who should be considered as the basic unit of analysis? The predominant answer in the field is, of course, states. Hence, it is called states-system, or system-of-states for the English school variant. That kind of an understanding of the international system as state-system means other actors, such as IOs, MNCs, NGOs, and non-state actors such as terrorist organizations should not be given primary status in IR analysis. This does not mean that state-centrism is good or bad in itself (which will be discussed below), but that every conceptualization of IR as a system has its theoretical consequences which affect analysis. That is to say, the ontology of IR analysis is a function of the definition of the system.

A second implication of the definition of system is on agent-structure debate. What properties of actors increase their capacity for agency in the system? Does actors have free will in the system and to what extent? The answer will depend on if it is a system of states, of citizens, of civilizations, or of regions etc. Third, and related to the first two, discussions on systems are related to conceptualizing *order* in IR. Most generally order can be defined as a certain configuration of the components of the system. Hence a discussion on system almost always analyzes how order is/should be achieved in that system.

While IR as a system in the most general and frequently used sense refers to the global system of international politics, can there be international systems at the sub-global level, and what are their distinct features? Although major IR theories prioritize the global systemic level over the sub-global levels, regions can display features of a distinct system within themselves. As the definition of system mentioned above attributes importance to inter-unit interaction, a certain cluster of units can have a distinct place within a larger system thanks to their close interaction. Such cluster of units are labeled as a sub-system or a region.¹⁰⁷

Depending on one's theoretical perspective, different scholars attribute significance to different variables to call a set of units a region or a sub-system. According to Thompson, for example, there are three significant attributes of regional subsystems: "general geographic proximity, regularity and intensity of interactions, and shared perceptions of the regional subsystem as a distinctive theatre of operations"¹⁰⁸ In a similar vein, T.V. Paul writes that "from a systemic perspective, regions develop into subsystems because of the regularized interactions and interconnectedness among states that comprise them. The regularity and intensity of the interactions are such that a change at one point in the subsystem can affect other points"¹⁰⁹

Although there are slight differences, theorists of regionalism refer to a similar phenomenon when they discuss emergence of regions. Yet, cultural proximity is a more

¹⁰⁷ See for example: Thompson, William R., "The Regional Subsystem: A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory," *International Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (March 1973), 89–117.; and Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Acharya, A. (2012) "Ideas, norms, and regional orders" in T.V. Paul, *IR Theory and Regional Transformation* p.185

¹⁰⁹ Paul, T.V. (2012) "Regional transformation in international relations" in Paul, T.V. *IR Theory*, p. 4

widely referred concepts in discussions on region compared to the literature on sub-systems. For example Paul writes: “I define a region as a cluster of states that are proximate to each other and are interconnected in spatial, cultural and ideational terms in a significant and distinguishable manner.”¹¹⁰ Martin Wight states similar ideas: “in certain regions which are culturally united but politically divided, a subordinate international society comes into being, with a states-system reproducing in miniature the features of the general state system”¹¹¹

Compared to other theories, constructivism and English School have more interest regional state-systems and developed more region-sensitive lenses. While English School theorists prefer the language of regional international society, or regional society of states, constructivist prefer concepts like regionalism and regional community.¹¹² From an English School perspective what distinguishes regional sub-systems from global state systems is the degree of institutionalization and display of society-like characteristics. There is thin interstate societies in the global level and thick ones in the regional levels.¹¹³ For constructivists, regional state-systems are important categories because ideational and normative similarity is usually higher in the sub-global level.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Hurrell, A. (2007). “One world? Many worlds? The place of regions in the study of international society” *International Affairs*, 83(1), p. 127

¹¹² Checkel, Jeffrey (1999) “Social Construction and Integration,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6:4. 545-560.; Fawcett, Louise (2004) “Exploring Regional Domains: A Comparative History of Regionalism,” *International Affairs* 80:3, 429-446.

¹¹³ Buzan, Barry (2009) “The Middle East through English School Theory” in Buzan, B., & Gonzalez-Pelaez, A. (ed.s.) *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*. Springer. p.31

¹¹⁴ Adler, Emmanuel and Michael Barnett, eds. (1998) *Security Communities* (Cambridge University Press).

Among these different conceptualizations of system in IR, I think constructivist and English school theorists' insights are more helpful to analyze the question of the dissertation. These two perspectives are more sensitive to regional-level, and that they offer better analytical tools to discuss historical transformations. This is because the alternative approach of English school to "institutions" in a system and the emphasis on ideas and non-state actors in constructivism equip us with better tools to discuss regional norms, mass uprisings, and effects of revolutions.

As mentioned above, almost always, IR scholars discuss state-systems with reference to the question of order in that system whether at the global or sub-global level. So I now turn the question of order in the following section.

2.3. Order in State-Systems

In this section, I discuss what order is, and how it can be achieved from the perspectives of four main IR theories.

Order in a state system is most traditionally defined as the absence of systemic war in the international politics, or as the absence of inter-state conflict in a regional state-system.¹¹⁵ Goh's description captures its mainstream understanding: "Order - in the sense of stability, lack of major armed conflict, and relative predictability of interstate relationships..."¹¹⁶ The need for order arises from the perils disorder creates. That is to say a disorderly IR system produces threats for the survival of units, and creates a suboptimal environment for the units to achieve their goals. Aron's definition

¹¹⁵ For example see Copeland, Dale C. (2012) "*Realism and Neorealism in the study of regional conflict*" in T.V. Paul, pp. 49-73; and Goh, E. (2008). "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies" *International Security*, 32(3), 113-157

¹¹⁶ Goh (2008) p.156

of order as the “minimal condition for coexistence” reflects such an understanding.¹¹⁷ Either to increase chances of survival or to concentrate on activities other than maintaining their existence, states find ways to achieve order. As Bull writes international order is a “pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society.”¹¹⁸

Although variables we need to take into consideration in understanding order-production at the global and regional state-system levels may display certain differences (which is discussed in the fifth section below), as far as the function and aims of order is concerned, regional order is defined similarly to the global one: “Regional orders, broadly defined as “stable structures of regional intergovernmental relationships informed by common assumptions about the bases of interstate conduct.”¹¹⁹

How do states achieve such kind of an order in the system? Realist IR theorists propose two basic mechanisms for this: balance of power and hegemony. According to Waltz, for example, balancing which can be achieved through various mechanisms such as alliances, increasing military capabilities (deterrence) etc. against a possible aggressor create order in the system by changing cost-benefit calculation of states.¹²⁰ Thus, if components of the system (i.e.: states) can successfully balance each other, order is maintained because nobody sees it profitable to change the status quo. In this realist understanding, “the social order is an entirely unintended and institutionalized

¹¹⁷ Aron quoted in Hurrell, A. (2007). “One world? Many worlds? The place of regions in the study of international society” *International Affairs*, 83(1) p. 2

¹¹⁸ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

¹¹⁹ Leifer (1987) quoted in Rumelili, B. (2007). *Constructing Regional Community and Order in Europe and Southeast Asia*. Springer. p.1

¹²⁰ Waltz (1979)

recurrent pattern to which the actors and the system itself exhibit conformity but which serves none of the actors' goals or, at least, was not deliberately designed to do so.”¹²¹

Another realist mechanism for achieving order is hegemony. Gilpin's *Hegemonic Stability Theory*, among others, defend that contrary to balance of power assumptions, a system of roughly equal powers is prone to disorder.¹²² Rather, he argues that when a state achieves high preponderance in terms of material power in a system, order can best be achieved because nobody would be willing to challenge such a powerful actor in the system. If the preponderant power agrees to play the role of hegemon by establishing necessary mechanisms and paying necessary costs, the system will be orderly.

In contrast to realists' focus on military power (either in the form of balance or hegemony), liberal theorists of various strand argue that there are two other mechanisms that can create an orderly system at the international level. Defenders of democratic peace theory argue that the best source of order in a state system, understood as lack of war, is democratic regimes.¹²³ Liberal IR theorists focus on how democratic institutions and norms prevent war among democracies. Hence, the way to order is democratization.¹²⁴ Neo-liberal internationalists, on the other hand, such as Keohane, argue that what helps us to achieve order in the system is international institutions.¹²⁵ By performing various functions, such as providing information, decreasing transaction

¹²¹ Schweller paraphrasing Waltz: Schweller, R. L. (2001). “The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay” *International Security*, 26(1), p. 169

¹²² Gilpin, R. (1983). *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

¹²³ Brown, M. E. et al. (1996). *Debating the Democratic Peace*. MIT Press.

¹²⁴ The process of democratization may create wars, but once it is fully institutionalized, democracies do not fight.

¹²⁵ Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton University Press.

costs etc. international institutions provide states with alternative tools to deal with the sources of war, hence disorder. The regimes created by these international institutions are the source of order even without a hegemon.

The English School of IR has the most explicit discussion of order in the international system compared to other theorists. In his magnum opus *The Anarchical Society*, Hedley Bull states that the subject matter of the book is order in IR. English School theorists define order similar to other perspectives as the lack of great power war in the systemic level, and lack of inter-state conflict at the regional one. They adopt some of the insights of realists and liberals, and combine them in a unique way to understand order. What they basically argue is that states want to transform the dangerous and costly atmosphere of Hobbesian anarchy; and to this end they developed five basic institutions: war, balance of power, diplomacy, international law, and great powers.¹²⁶ Through these institutions they increase predictability in the inter-state relations. To put it differently, states devised these institutions to achieve order in the state system in an easier way.

As the last main theoretical perspective to IR, constructivism has somewhat different understanding of how order is achieved. Although it is not that clear if constructivism defines order as lack of inter-state war similar to other theories, mainstream constructivist theorists, such as Wendt, adopt state-centric approaches of their colleagues.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, since it is more a perspective than a specific theory, I think one can define order in different ways, and analyze it through constructivist

¹²⁶ Bull, H. (1977). *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹²⁷ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

lenses. Instead of mechanisms such as balance of power or international institutions, for constructivists the real causes of order can be found in the field of ideas and identities.¹²⁸

A brief version of constructivist argument is this: the reason of inter-state wars is seeing “other” in a particularly negative way, and defining interest in a zero-sum mentality. The reason for such kind of an interest conceptualization is our identities. If we transform our identities from exclusive to inclusive ones, we can arrange international system differently. As a result, we can transform Hobbesian anarchy to Lockean and Kantian ones. In this process norms have significant role. Since norms are defined as the expected type of behavior for a given identity, institutionalization of new norms for peaceful international conduct in the state system will produce order.

I think, for similar reasons discussed in the previous section, constructivist and English school approaches to order provide us with certain advantages to study the systemic crises at the regional level compared to other perspectives. For the Middle East state-system, we can neither benefit from the democratic peace as an analytical perspective nor stable international institutions in neo-liberal terms. Moreover, the focus on global system especially in the neo-realist understanding has limited explanatory power for regional dynamics. Besides, as the case analysis demonstrate in the next chapters, the objective hard power calculations of actors are not the main policy determinants of status quo bloc in the region. The significance of constructivist perspectives to understand the question of dissertation is that constructivism offers the possibility to delve into the process of constructing a situation as a threat in the minds

¹²⁸ Wendt, A. (1992) ‘Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics’, *International Organization*, 46(2), pp. 391–425

of international actors in a system. Similarly, constructivism offers analytical tools to analyze different forms of anarchies in a state-system (Hobbesian, Lockean, Kantian) with reference to the normative consensus in the system which corresponds to epochs of stability and crises in the Middle East.

2.4. Why Ideas and Norms are Important to Understand Order

As the brief summary of different perspectives of IR demonstrate, IR theories analyze order in a state system with respect to different characteristics. While rationalist theories' focus is on material capabilities and cost-benefit calculations of states, non-rationalist perspectives takes more ideational factors as their departure points. In this section I aim at showing two things: first, I will discuss briefly why taking norms and ideas into consideration in understanding order is necessary. I focus on three causal mechanisms that show norms and orders are interlinked: role of norms in increasing predictability, in the rise of revisionist actors, and in making sense of threat perception. Then, I discuss the concept of normative consensus, and its role in order production.

2.4.1 Links Between Ideas and Orders

Before going into a more detailed discussion on how and why norms and ideas are important in creating order in state-systems, I will briefly discuss three theoretical pathways that show how the factors emphasized in constructivist perspectives (identity, ideas and norms) are connected to creation of order, just to provide some causal mechanisms to skeptics of such a link. I discuss how they help increasing predictability (hence, order); how change of identity and ideas precedes rise of revisionist actors (hence, disorder); and how ideas and identities are necessary variables to categorize a certain act as a threat.

Predictability: Order and stability in a state-system is primarily about predictability concerning others' behavior. If every member of a system knows what to expect from others in their future interaction, they can arrange their own behavior and response to others accordingly. Such kind of an environment decreases surprises in inter-unit relations. What produces stability in expectations is identity-continuity, and corollary to that is performing behaviors in accordance to that identity (i.e. norm-abiding behavior). To put it differently, actor-identity (who I am) generates a set of standard behavior (how I should behave); and these sets of expected practices are accepted as "normal" behaviors of the actor, which makes that actor a predictable interlocutor for future conduct.

A counter argument for this analysis (most probably from a realist) can be that you do not need to have predictability or norms for order in a state-system. Even if you are totally ignorant of the identity or possible future actions of a state, the system would still produce order. However, this claim is inconsistent with basic premises of realism, let alone other perspectives. This is because basic assumptions in realist theory (like-unit, rational actor) are actually mechanisms that gives the analyst an idea about the possible actions of the actors in the system. In other words, like-unit assumption itself (which limits possible state action to a set of behavior) is necessary for order in realist thought. As far as the necessity of norms are concerned, the role realists assign to socialization is actually within the framework of norms. Through socialization states learn how to behave. That means, a set of behavioral principles are learned by states through interaction with others. They behave according to these principles, and expect other to do the same. This constitute normal (norm-abiding) behavior.

Revisionism: A second way to understand the link between ideas and orders is through the motivations and behaviors of revisionist actors in a state-system. Revisionist states are sources of disorder and instability in a system because they challenge the normal operation of things (status quo), and propose an alternative form of order. That means, revisionism is a challenge to the normative consensus in the system because the revisionist unit acts against the accepted forms of behavior (i.e.: the norm). The way we judge an action as a source of disorder (that is, revisionism) is by checking if it is against the normative consensus of the state-system or not. That shows the link between orders and norms, or that our understanding of order cannot be separated from norms.

Moreover, the link between ideas and norms can also be observable with reference to revisionist actors when we analyze the steps of transition of an actor from status quo player to the revisionist one. Before a state acts as a revisionist actor, it undergoes a transformation in its own state-identity. That transformation is mainly about the national role conception of that state in the system.¹²⁹ To answer the question “how should I act?” the actor first needs to answer “who am I?” question. Thus, a change in behavior is preceded by a change in state-identity. Only after the state’s ideas change with regard to the system, its norms, and standards of operation, it can become a revisionist actor. That means, a decision to create “disorder” in the system is possible only after a decision to change conceptualizations of the just order, interest, and norms.

Threat perception: A third link that shows why identity and norms are necessary to understand orders is about threat perception. States react to certain

¹²⁹ Holsti, K. J. (1970) “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 233-309

behaviors of other actors if they feel threatened by them. However, states do not always react to same action from two different actors in a similar way depending on their relation with the latter. Regime change, an increase in the military capability, or leaving an alliance mean different things to a state. For example,

“democratic nuclear powers do not feel threatened by each other's nuclear weapons; even when in 1965 France withdrew from the NATO integrated command and insisted on maintaining an independent nuclear force, other NATO allies did not interpret this as a military threat against their physical survival. But these same countries are quite concerned when Iraq or Iran are feared as developing a nuclear weapons program.”¹³⁰

The reason for this cannot be explained without taking identities and inter-subjective evaluations of concerning actors into consideration. A similar logic explains why Mearshimer's predictions that Europe would turn to power politics by the end of the Cold War failed.¹³¹ It is not possible to understand friend-enemy distinction, threat perception, evaluation of a foreign policy decision by a neighboring state without paying tribute to identities and norms in a state-system. Thus, an action that paves way to disorder (such as leaving an alliance) in one state-system can have no effect in another depending on the norms and ideas in these systems.

¹³⁰Adler, E. and Barnett, M. (1998) “A framework for the study of security communities” in Adler and Barnett ed.s. *Security Communities* Cambridge University Press p. 46

¹³¹ Waever, Ole. (1998) “Insecurity, security, and asecurty in the West European non-war community” in *Security Communities* pp. 69-118

2.4.2. Norms and Ideas on Order: Why is Normative Consensus Necessary?

For a collection of social agents, no orderly system is possible without a certain kind of normative consensus.¹³² The term *normative consensus* refers to a set of rules and principles that govern inter-unit interaction.¹³³ It can also be labeled as “ground rules”¹³⁴ of interaction, “fundamental organizing principles”¹³⁵ or as “basic rules of the game.”¹³⁶ This may include principles like sovereign non-intervention in early modern Europe, suzerainty of a central state in East Asia, or accepting colonial borders (*uti possidetis*) in the post-colonial era in Latin America.¹³⁷

Social units need to develop these basic general principles to regulate their interaction because without them they would have no clue regarding actions, intentions of other units, and the purpose of the system in general. This is similar to a social contract or a constitution at the individual level, with the difference that enforcement is not that strict, though it is not totally absent as some theorist who think IR system is a perfect replica of Hobbesian state of nature defend. In fact, IR system has always

¹³² This premise is defended by various constructivist and English school scholar. For example, Wight writes: “We must assume that a states-system will not come into being without a degree of cultural unity among its members.” Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester University Press, 1977), p. 33.

¹³³ Acharya also discusses this concept. See Acharya, A. (2014). *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*. Routledge; and also Hinnebusch, Raymond (2009) “Order and Change in the Middle East: A Neo-Gramscian Twist on the International Society Approach” in Buzan, B., & Gonzalez-Pelaez, A. *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*. Springer.

¹³⁴ Acharya, A. (2014). *Constructing a Security Community*

¹³⁵ Barnett M. and Gause III, F. G. (1998) “Caravans in opposite directions: society, state and the development of a community in the Gulf Cooperation Council” in *Security Communities*, Pp. 161-197

¹³⁶ Barnett, Michael N. 1995. “Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Regional Order in the Arab States System.” *International Organization* 49 (03): 479–510

¹³⁷ For *uti possidetis* see Acharya and Johnston (2007) “Comparing Regional Institutions: an Introduction” in Acharya and Johnston (ed.s.) *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press; and Acharya, A. (2011). “Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World”. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55(1), 95–123

contained hierarchical relations which is contrary to Hobbes' description of state of nature where everybody has roughly equal power or capabilities.¹³⁸

The necessity for a certain kind of normative consensus regarding proper type of behavior, the purpose of the system, and acceptable kind of conduct for the functioning of a social system is expressed by Kissinger as: "An international structure held together only by a balance of forces will sooner or later collapse in catastrophe."¹³⁹ This is because, as Bull emphasizes, by creating a common consent on certain rules and institutions clashes of interest and conflicting values can be mediated.¹⁴⁰ From a functional point of view, this explains how ground rules help actors in a system to create better conditions for living; an attempt to transcend the perfect Hobbesian state of nature. From a more normative point of view, an agreement on ground rules gives the system legitimacy, hence decreases the number of attempts to change it. For legitimacy means, as Kissinger writes, "no more than an international agreement about the nature of workable agreements and about the permissible aims and methods of foreign policy."¹⁴¹

Either through using functionalist reasoning, or more social/non-material reasoning, one can trace the creation of such ground rules in the state-system. From a functionalist point of view, just as humans in the state of nature disliked the situation they found themselves in, states found it more useful to develop certain ground rules to govern their behavior. This may include principles such as giving immunity to

¹³⁸ Clark, I., (1989). *The hierarchy of states: reform and resistance in the international order*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹³⁹ Kissinger, H. (1977). *American Foreign Policy* (3 edition). New York: W. W. Norton & Company. P. 395

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Hurrell 2008 p. 80

¹⁴¹ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957), 1. Quoted in Hurrell 2008 p. 80

diplomats or establishing norm of non-intervention to create order. In his attempt to bridge realism and English School, Buzan also shows how logic of realism can produce an international society. According to him, if realists do not fall the trap of “anarchophilia” it is possible to transcend the Hobbesian world for realist states.¹⁴² From a constructivist point of view, states develop these ground rules as a result of socialization and interaction which help transform their identities. In either way (rationalist or social), the normative consensus that is created as a result of agreeing on some ground rules is a natural building block of a system composed of social states.

As stated above, the ground rules states create regulate basic inter-unit interaction. That means, while they can be related to some details of hierarchy in diplomatic posts, they can also regulate certain interactions which we normally do not think as rule governed. For example, while state behaviors like war, balance of power, or deterrence are usually regarded as automatic or unintended consequences, they are also socially/politically constructed categories, and social institutions. That is to say, war making or balancing is not a totally natural type of behavior in IR. As Hurrell puts it, for example, states agreed to make a distinction between public war (war for political purpose) and private war (piracy).¹⁴³ As another example, Schroder traces the change in the meaning of war (ground rules concerning war) by comparing the number of casualties in battles in European state-system. He writes that the number of battlefield deaths decreased steadily from 18th to 19th centuries: “the ratio of 18th- to 19th-century battlefield deaths per year is somewhere between 7:1 and 8:1.”¹⁴⁴ In a similar vein, we

¹⁴² Buzan, B. (1993). “From international system to international society: structural realism and regime theory meet the English school.” *International Organization*, 47(3), 327–352

¹⁴³ Hurrell, A. (2007). *On global order*

¹⁴⁴ Schroeder, P. W. (1986) “The 19th-century International System: Changes in the Structure”, *World Politics* (October) p. 11

cannot make sense of the mechanisms of the balance of power without taking into consideration how it is constructed over centuries in a regional state-system, and how it is not accepted as a ground rule in others.¹⁴⁵

Different forms of anarchy in state-systems (Hobbesian, Lockean, Kantian) are about different types of normative consensus among members of a certain state-system. Hence, ideas about the *political* shape the structuring of the international space. An interesting example on how ideas and orders interact is the role of French Revolution and its ideals in construction of modern state-system. Albert and Brock write that the ordering principle of sovereignty is accompanied with the ideals of French Revolution in an interesting way. “Nation building was not necessary consequence of territorialization but nation building matched territorialization in a historically specific and successful way. (...) In this sense, the modern state system is not only the product of the Peace of Westphalia, but also of the French Revolution.”¹⁴⁶

The emphasis on states as social being is important in understanding the normative consensus. To put it bluntly, all IR theories accept in some way or another that states socialize. Although in constructivist writings that character of states is more emphasized, realist like Waltz had to accept states do experience socialization and its effects to explain IR. Socialization implies two things: first, states are aware that they are in a system. They are conscious units with willpower, and react to systemic effects. Second, states have learning capacity. They can learn from past experience, from other

¹⁴⁵ Kaufman, Stuart et al. (2007) *Balance of Power in World History*, Palgrave Macmillan; Tin-bor Hui, Victoria (2005) *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press

¹⁴⁶ Mathias Albert and Lothar Brock (2001) “What keeps Westphalia together?” in Albert, M., Jacobson, D., & Lapid, Y. *Identities, borders, orders: rethinking international relations theory*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. p.36

states' failures and successes (imitation in Waltz). These two features are important because they give states the capacity and stake in affecting the system to their advantage. Hence, create ground rules. What is more, socialization and imitation assumes actor-continuity (agent-stability). This is because, if an entity can socialize and can learn, that means its agency is maintained without interruption over time. These three features (ability to learn, to socialize, and maintain stable agency) mean, even in a Waltzian scheme, states have "identity": they know their past, learn from interaction, and communicate their motivations and preferences. To put it differently, states can answer "who am I" question: "I am a state in interaction with other states, and connected to them in a system. I communicate my preferences, and learn from these interactions what is useful and not." It is in these states capacity and interest to develop creating ground rules for regulating their behavior.

While the way units achieve order in a state-system seems like a descriptive question, it is hard to disentangle order as a pattern vs. order as a norm.¹⁴⁷ To understand why ordering principles of a state-system have normative implications we can look at the example of modern territorial state-system. The principle of territoriality as one of the ordering mechanisms of international politics is not only political but also a normative framework to solve certain international problems.¹⁴⁸ As Mansbach and Wilmer discuss, by assigning the privilege of an orderly space to territoriality, the current ground rules of IR implicitly states that the places where that rule is absent should be categorized as disorder.¹⁴⁹ And by labeling somewhere as a disorderly place,

¹⁴⁷ Hurrell, A. (2007). "One world? Many worlds?"

¹⁴⁸ Mansbach Richard and Franke Wilmer (2001) "War, violence, and the Westphalian system as a Moral Community" in *Identities, borders, orders*

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

the representatives of order (powerful states) have the legitimate excuse to use extra-legal measures to make it an orderly one. That is to say, obeying the ground rule of territoriality or sovereignty produces a *moral order*, and disobeying it means *immoral disorder*; and it demarcates the lines between insiders and outsiders (us vs. them).¹⁵⁰ Those who are part of order (in whatever way it is defined) have certain privileges in their dealings with other members of the community; and those who are considered as members of disorder are outside of the community. Hence, to accuse someone of being outside of the order is not just a descriptive statement. It has normative implications because it legitimizes treating the accused one with “uncivilized” measures including war. Mansbach and Wilmer write that “the ‘moral community of [European] states’ agreed on the norm of nonintervention in one another’s internal affairs. This reflects the assumption that states constituted boundaries of moral community internally”¹⁵¹ but those who are outside of the orderly space deserve mistreatment.

2.5. Three Biases to Avoid: “Good norm” bias, global-system bias, and the bias of state-centricism

This section discusses three ways to improve our understanding of the link between norms and orders in IR. I analyze why and how we should avoid three biases in discussing production of order and disorder in state-systems. First is about limiting norms analysis to “good” norms. Second and third are global-system bias and the bias of state-centricism which refers to treating all state-systems as homogenous, and non-state actors as unimportant in institution of order or creation of disorder, respectively.

¹⁵⁰ Mansbach Richard and Franke Wilmer “War, Violence, and the Westphalian State System as a Moral Community”

¹⁵¹ Ibid p. 63

2.5.1. “Good Norms” Bias

The terms ground rules and normative consensus in the system which I defined as the basic rules of the game or general principles of inter-state conduct are somewhat different from the mainstream constructivist use of the term “norm.” In the orthodox constructivist parlance, the terms “norm” and “normative” are used in a limited and I think biased way that limits the real meaning-world of the concepts and their potential explanatory power.

First and foremost, the constructivist focus is mainly on “good” norms as opposed to “bad” norms.¹⁵² That is to say, although the definition of norm is expected set of behavior for a given identity, which basically refers to what is regarded as “normal” (as opposed to abnormal) behavior in a given system, most of the constructivist research focuses on certain types of good norms, such as landmines, the protection of whales, the struggle against racism, intervention against genocide, and the promotion of human rights.¹⁵³ Such an understanding limits the norms analyses to the norms of a certain ideological viewpoint, which is liberalism.

Analytical and political liberalism that dominated much of the writing on global governance in the 1990s (...) tended to assume far too easily that the end of the Cold War had led to an underlying consensus on certain core liberal values and that the power of the liberal West could be harnessed, relatively unproblematically, to shared and common purposes.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Different versions of this argument can also be found at Hurrell (2007), Buzan (1993); Acharya (2012); and Paul (2012)

¹⁵³ Acharya, A. (2012). “Ideas, norms, and regional orders”

¹⁵⁴ Hurrell, A. (2007) *On global order*: p. 15

Although these liberal norms are important norms of the current state-system, this does not mean that before institutionalization and spread of these norms, there were no norms regarding their subject-matter. It is just that the opposite of these norms were governing norms (i.e.: standard normal behavior). Although this may seem as an obvious point, many analyses of IR norms explain the rise of new norms as if they are born out of a normative void. This is not correct. Since social systems always require norms, before the rise of these norms, action in opposition to them was regarded as normal. In other words “bad” norms, such as imperialism and colonialism, were as important as good norms in regulating state-system. States were making judgments about what constitutes a normal behavior by looking at them. Similarly, as Buzan argues, existence of common norms, or a society of states in the English school vocabulary, does not guarantee that they would produce only peaceful relations. That means, as some norms prevents conflict, there is the equal probability that some norms produce it. Conflict does not make a society less a society, just as common culture (norms) does not presupposes lack of conflict.¹⁵⁵ In a similar vein, T. V. Paul writes “norms can be both positive and negative, and often constructivist scholars (similar to liberals) focus on the positive aspects of norm creation and diffusion.”¹⁵⁶

An important result of this focus on good/universal norms is that regional norms and the capacities of regional actors to make norms do not attract sufficient attention:

This strong ethos of “moral cosmopolitanism” predisposes constructivist norm theorists, much like their sociological institutionalist predecessors, against the expansive appeal and feedback potential of regional or localized norms. Yet an

¹⁵⁵ Buzan (1993) “From international system to international society”

¹⁵⁶ Paul, T. V. (2012) “Regional transformation in international relations” in T.V. Paul, p. 15

understanding of this two-way process of the spread of ideas is important to understanding how ideas shape regional order throughout the world.¹⁵⁷

This is important to understand the Middle East state-system because the ground rules in the region (i.e.: the norms) usually retain a non-liberal character. As an example, the lack of the norm of sovereign non-intervention means its opposite is the main organizing principle in the region (a “bad norm”).

2.5.2. Global-system bias:

A second problem with regard to understanding norms and orders in IR is global-system bias which refers to assigning primacy and priority to global international state-system over regional state-systems (or subsystems) in understanding how norms and orders are created. The reason why this is problematic is that categories, concepts and analytical frameworks we use to understand global state-system display Euro-centric features. As English School scholars rightly illustrate, the basic contours of global state-system are created through a process which they call the “expansion of international society.” According to this narrative, a regional state-system (that of Europe) succeeded in expanding its own ground rules to the global level in the last few centuries. As a result, the whole world is restructured, in terms of its organizing principle of politics, after the European image. In other words, in the post-colonial era “the price of being accepted as equals by the West, was the adoption of western political forms and acceptance of the basic primary institutions of Westphalian

¹⁵⁷ Acharya, A. (2012) “Ideas, norms, and regional orders” p. 200

international society: sovereignty, nonintervention, diplomacy, international law, great power management, nationalism, and suchlike.”¹⁵⁸

One might ask if a global state-system is created at the end, what is problematic about global-system bias, that is evaluating orders and norms with reference to global state-system? The answer, I believe, is that while the European experience of transforming its own regional state-system into a global one seems successful in terms of creating institutions such as nation-states, sovereignty etc., it was not that successful in equally homogenizing every regional state-system in that process. To put it differently, although IR categories of European state-system, like sovereignty and territoriality are instilled in the global level, their adaptations in the different regional state-systems displayed idiosyncrasies stemming from local histories, regional norms, and native visions of these corners of the world. Thus, prioritizing global systemic level perspectives in understanding order and norms, and making generalizations about the role of certain norms or about how order can be instituted create both analytical and theoretical problems. As Buzan argues, taking the current global state system as the reference point for understanding order in IR led even students of IR who focus on different historical regional state systems to selectively engage with a number of historical subsystems that are most similar to the contemporary one:

The few historical times and places that resemble the international anarchy of modern Europe get a disproportionate amount of attention, most notably classical Greece, Renaissance Italy, the "warring states" period in China during

¹⁵⁸ Buzan, B. (2012) “How regions were made, and the legacies for world politics: an English School reconnaissance” in *International relations theory and regional transformation*. p.25

several hundred years of the first millennium BC, and to a lesser extent, "warring state" periods in South Asia.¹⁵⁹

Yet, state-systems took various forms of order throughout history; and as Watson claims anarchic system of sovereign states is rather an exceptional era of the last 5000 years of diplomatic history.¹⁶⁰

During the process of the expansion of the European international society to the global level, regions' reaction and adaptation to that process produced alternative types of orders at the regional level. This is because introduction of IR categories like territoriality, nation-state, and sovereignty interacted with local conditions; and these categories are transformed or gained new meanings. For example, sovereignty and territorially mean slightly different things for post-colonial states due to these states different state-formation processes. They dealt with different problems as states than European ones. That means, they are not exactly like-units:

IR theory has too often assumed that 'a state is a state is a state'; or else has adopted extreme and unhelpful dichotomies between 'strong' states and 'failed states'. States may not necessarily have failed but yet bear little resemblance to Weberian idealizations, with important repercussions for regional politics.¹⁶¹

However, as Waever also points out, IR theory is sovereignty based; so it is not able to deal with these alternative questions.¹⁶² And since regional anarchies are not same

¹⁵⁹ Buzan, B., & Little, R. (1994). The Idea of "International System": Theory Meets History. *International Political Science Review*, 15(3), p.234

¹⁶⁰ Watson, A. (1992). *The Evolution of International Society*. London: Routledge

¹⁶¹ Hurrell 2007 "One World? Many Worlds?" p. 133

¹⁶² Ole Weaver "Insecurity, security, and asecurty" p.100

everywhere, the logic of sovereignty works differently in different regions.¹⁶³ Hence, we need to take regional state-systems into consideration more seriously in discussing how order/disorder is produced.

The necessity of *bringing regional back in* is shared even by some realist scholars, the IR perspective which is in fact least sensitive to non-generalizable IR statements. For example, according to Merom, in realist theory there is a “regional void” because of not paying attention to region as a distinct political space.¹⁶⁴ “And a key weakness of realist theories is the relative inattention to change in regional orders.”¹⁶⁵ A similar point is made by Copeland: “realist theories have been formulated for situations of pure anarchy where no larger actors exist to enforce agreements and protect them from attack. In regional subsystems, however, there are indeed ‘higher’ actors with significant power – namely, the great powers external to the subsystem.”¹⁶⁶

Nevertheless, the effect of a global international phenomenon differs in different regional settings for the above mentioned reasons. Accusing perspectives with global-bias, Paul gives the example of the Cold War and how such a global-level phenomenon affected regions differently: “Often scholars of this vein neglect the sub-systemic and internal sources of order. A good example is the end of the Cold War and its differing impact on various key regions of the world”¹⁶⁷

How does focusing on regional state-systems contribute to our understanding of order and stability in IR? We can follow the connection between order and norms at the

¹⁶³ Hurrell, A. (1998) “An emerging security community in South America?” in *Security Communities*

¹⁶⁴ Merom, G. (2001) “Realist Hypotheses on Regional Peace,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26, no. 1

¹⁶⁵ Paul, T. V. (2012) “Regional transformation in international relations” p. 11

¹⁶⁶ Copeland, D. (2012) “Realism and Neorealism in the study of regional conflict” p. 51

¹⁶⁷ Paul, T. V. (2012) p. 11

regional level to answer this question. If, as I argued above, there is a link between norms and orders, then the existence of alternative norms at the regional level should result in alternative orders too. To put it differently, actors (states or not) in a state-system can agree on certain ground rules of the inter-unit conduct at the regional level which are different from the global ones. Similarly, they can uphold different norms to regulate interaction for regional state-system. Corollary to this, the kind of order or the source of disorder can be different for that system than others. Norms that produce order in Europe (such as decreasing level of sovereignty for European Union) can produce disorder somewhere else. So regional state-systems sometimes adopted the norms and categories of the global state-system with modification. Reus-Smith's analysis of the diffusion of human rights at the global level and how they are used in different contexts is illustrative in this respect. New ideas at the global level are

“imported” by colonial subjects, but they were also indigenized, melded with local knowledge to lend them new meanings. Because of this subject peoples' struggles for individual rights are evidence less of the linear unfolding of modernity than clashes between what Eisenstadt terms “multiple modernities.”¹⁶⁸

Amitav Acharya's theory of norm subsidiarity is one of the successful attempts to capture this phenomenon.¹⁶⁹ Acharya argues that regional actors' engagement with global norms is not a process of top-down diffusion of international hegemonic

¹⁶⁸ Reus-Smit, C. (2011). Struggles for Individual Rights and the Expansion of the International System. *International Organization*, 65(2) p. 219

¹⁶⁹ Acharya, A. (2011). “Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders”

norms.¹⁷⁰ Rather, regional actors actively engage in the process of norm-creation at the regional level. They sometimes reject a global norm, or transform it to apply in the local context, or propose an alternative one when they think it is appropriate for their own circumstances and as a reaction to, what he terms as, western hypocrisy. As an example, Acharya discusses the ground rules of ASEAN states: non-intervention, multilateralism, protection of sovereignty, no emphasis on human rights or democracy, against foreign intervention in the region, to increase collective bargaining power of member states vis a vis external trading partners, consensus, no military solution to disputes, not eager to admit every state in the region because it may damage cohesion.¹⁷¹

Similar examples of how regional ground rules produce different regional orders can be given from Latin American¹⁷², African,¹⁷³ and the Middle Eastern¹⁷⁴ state-systems. Herbst's analysis of the African state-system, for example, shows that despite weak states, a consensus on protecting existing post-colonial borders produces order in the continent. African states are failing within their borders while nominally alive due to this normative consensus.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, for Latin America Hurrell writes that, it was never a Hobbesian anarchy. Even in times of conflict, there were regulating

¹⁷⁰ Reus-Smith defends a similar point with reference to expansion of the norm of sovereignty in the last few centuries: Reus-Smith (2011)

¹⁷¹ Acharya, A. (1998) "Collective identity and conflict management in Southeast Asia"; see also Goh (2008)

¹⁷² Hurrell (1998)

¹⁷³ Herbst, Jeffrey (2007) "Crafting regional cooperation in Africa," in *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective*, Amitav Acharya and Alastir Iain Johnston (eds.), (New York: Cambridge University Press), 129-144.; Riggirozzi, Pia (2011) 'Regions, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America: Towards a New Synthesis,' *New Political Economy*.

¹⁷⁴ Barnett, Michael. 1993. "Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System." *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (3): 271-96

¹⁷⁵ Herbst, J. (2007)

norms: recurrent rivalry combined with thick social environment.¹⁷⁶ Regional state systems may produce alternative primary institutions of IR, to use the English School language. For example, in the Middle East, for Ana Gonzales these are Arab nationalism, and ruling elites.¹⁷⁷ For Halliday, the distinct feature of the region is low salience of sovereignty.¹⁷⁸ Avoiding “global system-bias” in understanding dynamics of order and disorder in the Middle East is important because norms regarding Arabism, Islamism, Palestinian question, role of states etc. display certain regional characteristics that requires region-sensitive lenses rather than global ones.

2.5.3. The Bias of State-centricism:

The third problem in discussing order and norms in state systems is the bias of state-centricism which refers to taking nation-states as the only significant actor in understanding international order. Schweller reflects this assumption when he writes “order in the form of recurrent formations of balances of power among the great powers emerges as an unintended consequence of the coaction of *states...*”¹⁷⁹ Although states are clearly the most powerful actors in the system, non-state actors can and do have the capacity to influence creation of order and disorder in a state-system. Even in an equilibrium situation where all states have stakes in defending the status quo, non-state organizations can play the role of the revisionist actor in the system and can cause turbulence. Activities of organizations like Al-Qaeda, for example, caused two big wars, one in Afghanistan and the other in Iraq, and resulted into disorder in the

¹⁷⁶ Hurrell (1998)

¹⁷⁷ Gonzalez-Pelaez, Ana (2009) “The Primary Institutions of the Middle Eastern Regional Interstate Society” in Buzan, B., & Gonzalez-Pelaez, A. *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*. Springer. pp. 92-116

¹⁷⁸ Halliday, Fred (2009) “The Middle East and Conceptions of ‘International Society’” in Buzan and Gonzales pp. 1-23; Ana Gonzales (2009) makes a similar argument.

¹⁷⁹ Schweller (2001) p. 170. Emphasis added

Middle East regional state-system, if not the global system. We can give similar examples from ISIS and Hezbollah.

Such a situation is especially the case for state-systems populated by weak states because they cannot perform basic tasks usually associated with a “normal” state discussed in IR literature. For example “many African states do not have the capacity to engage in realist-type state behavior or lack liberal mechanisms to generate a peaceful order.”¹⁸⁰ In a similar vein, in criticizing the mainstream analysis of order in IR, Acharya writes that “much of the writing on security communities defines the problem of regional and international order in terms of preventing inter-state conflict, without paying comparable attention to domestic or transnational conflict. Yet, such conflicts have become more salient in the past decades, partly due to the effects of globalisation.”¹⁸¹

The theoretical justification for avoiding the bias of state-centricism in understanding order in a state system is related to the very definition of system. As stated above, a system, by definition, is a special configuration of a number of units such that each unit affects, and is affected by other units. In other words, if actions of one actor is a necessary factor to be calculated by other units for their functioning, we conclude that there is a system. From that definition, we can infer that there is no logical necessity that excludes non-state actors from playing such a role. For example, in the last few years, all states in the Middle East regional state-system do take into

¹⁸⁰ Paul, T.V. (2012) p. 19

¹⁸¹ Acharya, A. (2014). *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*. Routledge. p. 40

consideration actions of ISIS in designing their own foreign policy. Besides, no order can be theorized without keeping ISIS, Al-Qaeda or Hezbollah in the calculation.

Another reason why non-state actors should be included in the analyses of order in state-systems is related to the capacity of these actors in norm-production. As discussed above, norms are closely connected to creation of order in state-systems. Normative consensus is a significant feature of orderly state-systems. However, the meaning of normative consensus is usually understood as a consensus among states. Yet, non-state actors can affect the normative consensus by challenging the inter-state agreements or by proposing alternative norms. If, for example, they can convince necessary number of people in a system, they can easily affect the degree of legitimacy of that system. As authority stems from legitimate use of power,¹⁸² a decrease in legitimacy means a decrease in authoritative structure of the system.

There are different examples in international history that illustrate how people (and other organized non-state actors) can challenge and even destroy ground rules of state systems when they do not share the hegemonic norms and do not see the system as legitimate. For example, Reus-Smith's analysis shows how demand for individual rights by subaltern peoples transformed the larger structures of international system such as mighty empires.¹⁸³ He writes that Protestants in the early modern Europe, Spanish Americans in the 19th century, and colonial peoples in the 20th century have challenged the existing ground rules of the state-system and effectively transformed it by demanding a new normative consensus (i.e.: spread of individual rights). A similar

¹⁸² "As Wight puts it: 'The fundamental problem of politics is the justification of power. . . . Power is not self-justifying; it must be justified by reference to some source outside or beyond itself, and thus be transformed into "authority" quoted in Hurrell, A. (2007). *On global order* p. 39

¹⁸³ Reus-Smith (2011)

example is the effect of nationalism and French Revolution in 19th century Europe. Uprisings in the first half of the 19th century were attempts to transform the existing normative consensus; and regimes tried hard to protect their preferred system.¹⁸⁴

The incongruity between norms of states (elites) and those of citizens (non-state agents), and its implications for orders in state-systems is an under-theorized area. Mainstream IR theories either ignore this altogether by treating states as black-boxes (like realism and neo-liberalism), or they assume an almost perfect match between elites and masses by taking democracy for granted (liberal inter-governemntalism, and democratic peace). Benjamin Miller's theory of "state-to-nation (im)balance",¹⁸⁵ Braumoller's theory of nested politics,¹⁸⁶ and neo-Gramscian theorists' focus on hegemony and consent¹⁸⁷ are some notable exceptions. But in general, while legitimacy is seen as an important feature of orderly state-systems, lack of legitimacy is evaluated from the eyes of elites, not of masses. Especially in the non-democratic state systems (which is most of the world other than Europe for most of the international history) this is an important phenomenon. I think, a common misunderstanding in determining relevant actors in order-creation is to include only politically (and officially) powerful actors in the calculation. Russett for example acknowledges that normative consensus is important for regional stability: "a compatibility of main values- held by politically relevant strata" is crucial.¹⁸⁸ However, what we need to emphasize is that "the

¹⁸⁴ Clark, Ian, (1989). *The hierarchy of states: reform and resistance in the international order*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; and Braumoller (2012)

¹⁸⁵ Miller, Benjamin (2005) 'When and How Regions Become Peaceful: Potential Theoretical Pathways to Peace,' *International Studies Review* 7, 229-267

¹⁸⁶ Braumoller (2012)

¹⁸⁷ Hinnebusch, Raymond (2009) "Order and Change in the Middle East"

¹⁸⁸ Acharya, A. (2012). "Ideas, norms, and regional orders"

politically relevant strata” can be non-elites, subalterns, politically disenfranchised masses:

Sometimes the national identity is consistent with the transnational community, but at other times it might be inconsistent. This presents one way of thinking about the relationship between identity and a stable order: that the domestic and international narratives that shape the state's identity are congruent. In other words, the more congruent are the norms and behavioral expectations generated by domestic and international actors, the more stable will be the system.¹⁸⁹

The incongruity between state-level normative consensus and nation-level norms may result into two things concerning order in state-system. One alternative is that the public discontent with the ground rules the state is following may lead to revolution and capturing of the state apparatus itself. Consequently, that state turns into a revisionist power in the system (such as the Egyptian revolution of 1952, or Iranian revolution of 1979). Another alternative is that, even if the elites of states in a system protect their privileges by using effective state mechanisms, and do not lose official power, a system-wide discontent on behalf of citizens makes that system a fragile one open to outside intervention, uprisings, civil strife etc. Through both mechanisms masses can affect regional order/disorder by challenging the inter-elite level normative consensus. The historical examples of such a situation can be found in the European state system between 1789 and 1848. The divide between elites and masses in terms of

¹⁸⁹ Adler, E. and Barnett, M. (1998) “A framework for the study of security communities” *Security Communities* p. 429

the ground rules of the system, such as preferred regime, type resulted into a series of uprisings the effects of which were not limited to states that experience them. Although post-1815 settlement re-established the inter-elite ground rules, exclusion of the demands of the masses resulted into systemic crises in the following decades.

Theorists who analyze the effects of globalization on IR discuss the consequences of such a situation, though not with the exact wording I used. The way they arrive to the conclusion that globalization may result into a problem of order in state-system because of a possible incongruity between elite and mass norms is related to the changing nature and role of states with the increase in interconnections at the societal level. The combination of processes we label globalization such as increase in communication, transportation, quick spread of problems and ideas, societal networks etc., created a fertile ground for counter-hegemonic norm production within a state system by non-state actors. This is because these transformations enable the peoples of a state system to connect more easily, and form associations more quickly. Since people living in a state systems in general, and in regional more homogenous subsystems in particular, share similar conditions in terms of regime type, socio-economic development etc. (think of EU, South East Asia, or Latin America, for example), an inter-connection among peoples of different countries in a region empowers citizens relatively more than the elites. This is because elites have always better resources and capabilities to interact with other elites and arrive at certain agreements and normative consensus. Yet, when the masses find this opportunity, they gain more power than before to coordinate action. Once the problem of only one nation-state, common grievances and demands in a state-system can turn into a challenging force of a region-wide population with the increase in inter-connection.

The potential of the masses to destabilize the order in a state-system, especially in relation to globalization, should also be discussed with reference to identity and its role in order production. As identities give subjects certain reference points with regard to political allegiance, a change in identities result into a change in individuals' relations with the political authority. Stability of identity produces stability of allegiance; hence order in the system. With regard to flux of alliance and identity especially in times of transformations, Adler and Barnett write:

following a major systemic change when loyalties and allegiances were in flux and states considered anew with whom they want to associate and according to what principles. Charles Tilly writes that the decline of empires, and we would add other systemic changes, cause populations to reconsider who they are and with whom they want to associate. The two great moments of regional experimentation in this second half century came after World War II and the Cold War, major systemic shifts that unleashed a reconsideration of state identities and parallel associations.¹⁹⁰

As the concept of “nation-state” implies, the order of modern world politics in terms of the legitimate identity is based on national identity.¹⁹¹ That means, the privileged identity for international order is accepted as nation, and other identities are deemed less significant for order. However, the assumption that national identity defined with reference to a territorially delimited space is the most significant identity is a historical construct. It can be challenged; and globalization is doing exactly this.

¹⁹⁰ Barnett and Adler (1998) “*Studying security communities in theory, comparison, and history*” in *Security Communities* p. 416

¹⁹¹ Albert and Brock (2001) “What keeps Westphalia together?” p. 46

This is because these alternative identities are not necessarily linked to (and in accordance with) territoriality which is the primary organizing principle of modern IR. With globalization, new identities create blurred boundaries. As Lapid and Kratochwil write, “territorial, semi-territorial, and non-territorial elements increasingly structure struggles in world politics.”¹⁹² Gause and Barnett’s analysis of the rise of Khaliji (Gulf) identity among the population of GCC countries can be cited as an example to this.¹⁹³

Another reason why with the transformation of identities, orders in state-systems can fail is about the role territoriality was designed to play in its inception. The territorial state was partly a solution to the problem of conflict stemming from overlapping allegiance for multiple identities. By fixing the allegiance of a group of people to territorial state, and by agreeing on the norms that allegiance is the sole important political identity when it comes to demarcating insiders and outsiders, states had the opportunity to be concerned only with the inter-state conflict.¹⁹⁴ The creation of an international order based on nation-states determined the number of relevant political actors (nation-states) and fixed the number of relevant identities in the international level (i.e.: national identity). Thus it played the function of “conflict management.”¹⁹⁵ Yet, as the “inter” is now thoroughly crisscrossed (and zonally yoked) by the “sub,” the “trans,” the “intra,” and the “supra”,¹⁹⁶ Westphalian states are less and less able to accomplish “the most basic task for which they were designed.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Lapid, Yosef, and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds. 1996. *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner. P. 123

¹⁹³ Barnett M. and Gause III, F. G. (1998) “Caravans in opposite directions: society, state and the development of a community in the Gulf Cooperation Council”

¹⁹⁴ Albert and Brock (2001) “What keeps Westphalia together?”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ong paraphrased by Yosef Lapid (2001) “Rethinking the “International”: IBO Clues for Post-Westphalian Mazes” in *IBO* p. 23

¹⁹⁷ Albert, M and Lothar Brock (2001)

As students of globalization rightly argue, blurred boundaries of moral communities as a result of transformations stemming from globalization is a source for challenge to order in state-systems. However, looking from the lenses of globalization, or arguing that it is globalization that created more fluid multiple identities is only one side of the story. Such a perspective takes the nation-state as given, and theorize creation of new identities through increased inter-connection. In other words, such an analysis presumes that national-states are valid and legitimate units of analysis in the first place, and attributes historical priority to the concept of nation as it is defined by state. New identities are formed later with globalization. However, such a description is useful only for these state-systems where nation state is created as a result to unification of some smaller units. Just as the technologies and material capacities of modern states allowed creation of larger political entities and homogenization of identity within them, technologies and material capacities of globalization allowed actors to create supra-state/trans-border identities. But what about state-systems where supra- and trans-national identities were already there before the advent of nation-state? In such cases porous boundaries, fluid and multiple identities are not a result of globalization per se (though it helped increasing communication). This is the situation in many parts of the post-colonial world, where nation-states are not created as a result of certain historical trajectories of unification (as in the examples of unification of United Kingdom, as the name implies, in 16-18th century, or Germany and Italy in the 19th), but more through division of local identities into different states, hence into different categories of political alliance (as in the example of the Middle East in early 20th century). As Mortern Valbjorn rightly captures, such distinct historical trajectories in these two state-systems (European and the Middle Eastern) result in differing levels

of inter-state and inter-societal connections: “While EU is “a rather weak ‘community’ in terms of identity, but a strong ‘society’ in terms of institutions, the reverse was the case for this Arab interstate society.”¹⁹⁸ Similarly, in discussing how inter-societal links are different than inter-state links in the Middle East context, Murden writes that “Islam’s greatest effect in the contemporary world was not at the level of the international system or international society, but at the level of inter-human society.”¹⁹⁹

2.6. Normative Dissensus as the Source of Systemic Crises

As argued above, norms and ideas are crucial in understanding order and disorder in a state-system. A normative consensus on behalf of the relevant actors is a necessary factor for a stable order, while normative dissensus is a source for disorder. That is to say, understanding change in international systems requires “looking carefully at the past, tracing the constitution of international society.”²⁰⁰ That does not mean that material factors are irrelevant to account for the rise of order or disorder. Rather, following the general constructivist wisdom, the meaning and interpretation of material bases is not possible without putting norms and identities into calculation. “Although material structures matter, they cannot be understood outside the shared knowledge and shared understandings held by the actors themselves.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Morten Valbjorn (2009) “Arab Nationalism(s) in Transformation: From Arab Interstate Societies to an Arab-Islamic World Society” in Buzan and Gonzales, p. 157; see also Valbjorn, M. and Andre Bank (2012) “The New Arab Cold War: rediscovering the Arab dimension of Middle East regional politics” *Review of International Studies*, 38 (1) pp. 3-24

¹⁹⁹ Murden. Simon W. (2009) “The Secondary Institutions of the Middle Eastern Regional Interstate Society” in Buzan and Gonzales—Pelaez, p. 136. A similar argument is made by Buzan (2009): “The need to look at the regional level is just as obvious if one turns to the interhuman and transnational domains.” “The Middle East through English School Theory” in Buzan and Gonzales—Pelaez p.29.

²⁰⁰ Hurrell (2007) *On global order* p. 17

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Hinnebusch's neo-Gramscian attempt to theorize the interaction between normative and material factors in understanding how normative dissensus can create change in state-systems is very useful in this respect.²⁰² He argues that while change in an order can be understood as a normative conflict, the conflict itself must be understood in relation to material bases. That is to say, when there is no legitimate hegemonic order, we see clash of norms of different *political projects*. The normative project which can mobilize most resources establishes an order. Applying this analysis to the Middle East, Hinnebusch writes that the competition in the Middle East state system was different from a conventional realist power struggle: "It was not chiefly over territory or other material assets but over the desired *normative order* of the Arab system, while the typical currency in this struggle was not military power but the legitimacy derived from being perceived to observe the norms."²⁰³

Although I am sympathetic to Hinnebusch's attempt to merge normative and material factors, and to his argument that the normative project that can mobilize most material resource establishes an order, I think we need to make two modifications to his theory. First, while materially powerful side of a normative contest has more chances to win the struggle, we do not need to understand material resources solely as financial superiority, or military might. Effective mobilization of masses, even if they do not have the economic and military power to balance the opposite normative proposal, is itself an important source of strength. In other words, materially powerful party can be challenged by powerless masses; and the latter have the potential to act as a powerful rival. Second, while it is correct that without accompanying material basis

²⁰² Hinnebusch (2009) "Order and Change in the Middle East"

²⁰³ Ibid p. 215

it is not possible to establish order in a system, actors with insufficient material powers can challenge the order established by powerful actors and create instability. To put it differently, in understanding the effects of material power in a system, it is not enough just to look at the sufficiency of power to establish order; but we should also consider how less powerful actors can disrupt the order. Through this we can better see the role of material power in the struggles of alternative normative orders.

In the history, we observe various examples of how transformations of ground rules in state-systems that is proposed by different actors resulted in alternative organizing principles and different forms of anarchies. Schroder shows how transformation of European politics is about the normative consensus among European powers.²⁰⁴ In a similar vein, Ole Waever argues that after the WWII European decision makers agreed on new ground rules and wanted to transform the normative bases of inter-state interaction in Europe.²⁰⁵ As Waever writes, Europeans decided to break with the traditional organizing principles of IR in Europe which is based on sovereignty, and felt the necessity to transcend it by the EU project. The “other” of Europe, then, was its own sovereignty-based, conflict-ridden past. Reus-Smith’s analysis of the spread of human rights at the global level also shows how decreasing legitimacy of ground rules of a state-system results into new norms proposals by subject peoples of empires.²⁰⁶ Both in the 19th century and in the 20th century, colonial people’s struggle, Reus-Smith argues, is a struggle to change the ground rules of the system because of decreased legitimacy of the existing norms. Revolutions and uprisings in the Middle East in the

²⁰⁴ Schroeder, Paul (1996) *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, Oxford University Press

²⁰⁵ Waever, Ole. (1998) “Insecurity, security, and asecurty

²⁰⁶ Reus-Smit, C. (2011). *Struggles for Individual Rights*

20th century are other examples of normative dissensus. Although they failed, Arabism and Islamism were proposals to change the ground rules of the regional state system. Acharya’s analysis of ASEAN and anti-SEATO coalition, on the other hand, demonstrates successful attempts by a peripheral regional state-system. All of these examples from different historical epochs and different regions of the world demonstrate that the ground rules around which actors have a normative consensus is necessary for a stable state-system, while a decrease in the legitimacy of the ground rules result into a normative dissensus which creates (successful or not) attempts for change.

Whose preferences of norms does shape the system? Who are the relevant actors? Following from Buzan’s analysis,²⁰⁷ we can conclude that we need to take at least four categories of actors into consideration to understand order in state-systems: global inter-state society, global inter-human society, regional inter-state society, and regional inter-human society.

	Global-level	Regional-Level
Elite-level	Global Inter-State Society	Regional Inter-State Society
Society-level	Global Transnational and Inter-Human Society (Global World Society)	Regional Trans-national and Inter-Human Society (Regional World Society)

Table 4: Different sources of norm production in the international system

²⁰⁷ Buzan, Barry (2009) “The Middle East through English School Theory”

Though answering the question of “whose norms matter?” requires a more detailed analysis of each state-system in question, all four categories of actors can and do affect normative consensus, hence order in a state systems, with differing degrees of influence. To understand major transformations in global and regional state-systems, both in the past and future, we need to trace the preferred norms and ground rules of actors. These transformations (or crises stemming from their failure) can be caused by the demands of each four boxes above (i.e.: global and regional inter-state, global and regional inter-human); and can display alliances between some of them for or against change. In other words, a challenge to the existing normative consensus can stem from global international society and can transform the whole system. Likewise, a regional inter-state society can question the global normative consensus and propose an alternative vision. Let me conclude by giving examples for each of these 4 occasions:

1. *Proposal of new ground rules by the global state system:* The narrative of the expansion of the European international society fits into this category. The elites of a state-system which later came to become the global international society agreed on new ground rules such as sovereignty and territoriality.
2. *Proposal of new ground rules by the global world society:* This category of norm proposal comes from the representatives of the global world society. Some of the “good” norms discussed above that come to spread and become a part of global ground rules are first proposed and defended by activists, NGOs, mass protestors etc.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ See Keck, M and Sikkink, K. (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Cornell University Press

3. *Proposal of new ground rules by regional state-system:* This category reflects the anti-hegemonic norm proposals of regional inter-state societies against the global ground rules. Acharya's theory of norm subsidiarity and his analysis of how post-colonial states rejected the norms of global inter-national society are attempts to theorize this type of normative dissensus. Norms such as non-intervention and non-alignment are proposals of alternative norms to the hegemonic global normative consensus.
4. *Proposal of new ground rules by regional inter-human and trans-national society:* Certain proposals of new norms can arise from the regional inter-human society. These may be directed against to the normative consensus of the regional state-system they are living in, or to the global system itself. Keck and Sikkink's analysis of how regional activists force their states to conform to certain global norms can be examples of this.²⁰⁹ Another example is Arab unification and democracy demands in the Middle East. During the Arab Spring, for example, the inter-human society in the region effectively challenged the existing normative consensus of authoritarianism in the region. Yet, due to the backlash from regimes, it failed.

2.7. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to discuss and demonstrate why normative consensus is important to understand orders in state systems. I have argued that normative consensus is causally linked to regional orders in state systems. After showing certain theoretical pathways about how ideational factors are related to orders

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

in systems, I proposed three suggestions to refine the constructivist understanding of “norms-orders” connection (i.e.: three biases).

The concept of normative consensus, as discussed above, refers to basic organizing principles and ground rules in a state-system. The normative consensus is a system functions as a reference point for actors in that system for their interpretations of events, and put limits to acceptable behavior. In this way, the normative consensus produce stable expectations and sets of behavior. Besides, it helps the actors in the system to have an understanding about what a “threat” is to the order in the system. As normative consensus is important to understand order, normative dissensus is significant to understand disorder. Normative dissensus refers to lack of consensus among actors in a system on the ground rules.

When a counter-norm (i.e.: a norm in opposition to the existing normative consensus) gains power, a clash between defenders of status quo and revision takes place. This creates disorder in a system. The prevalence of counter-norm can occur through a revolution in a state, which turns into a revisionist actor, and wants to transform the existing order (and ground rules). This may also occur without a state, if masses/non-state actors no longer believe in the status quo norms and fight for change. The result of this fight (i.e.: the period of systemic crisis) can be either in favor of status quo or revision. In either way, for an order to be instituted, the actors have to reach a normative consensus. The nature of this new consensus affects the longevity of the order. If it is inclusive, responsive to various demands and sensibilities, it can produce longer stable systems. This phenomenon needs to be studied at the regional level

because, first, regional state-systems have different norms; and second, some regions are more stable than others.

The French Revolution of 1789 was such kind of a new normative consensus proposal. First, the masses challenged the status quo order within France. Yet, since monarchy (regime type) was an important factor of normative consensus in the European state-system, its fall in one unit in the system was a challenge to all. When France became a revisionist actor after the revolution with the ideals of republicanism, the monarchical alliance wanted to protect the status quo order, and restored monarchy in France. Yet, it did not solve the source of crisis: normative dissensus between masses and elites.

Another example is the E.U. The construction of a supra-national entity was an alternative normative consensus proposal to the existing 300-year old Westphalian system. The normative consensus of Westphalia was not enough to prevent two great wars in Europe in 1914 and 1939 (systemic crises). The Europeans, then, wanted to change these ground rules. I have cited similar examples from ASEAN, South America, and Africa above. The crises in the Middle East state-system is also about challenges to normative consensus in the system. And now in the following three case chapters, I will analyze these in detail, and see if such an argument and theoretical framework are supported by them.

Chapter 3

SAUDI ARABIA AND THE NASSERIST CHALLENGE:

1957-1967

“While acting as unitary actors in the international arena, Arab states are endogenously fragmented between social actors and groups with an identity that is incompatible with state authority, causing a struggle of peculiar and non-convergent interests.”²¹⁰

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is about the Saudi perception of Nasserist years in the Middle East. I aim at reconstructing the events of 1950s and 1960s from the Saudi eyes. The main question I deal with in the chapter is how the Saudis saw the turbulent years of Arab Nationalism in the Middle East. What are the determinants of Saudi foreign and domestic politics during these years? Why did the Saudi elite perceive threat from Arab Nationalism? And how did they fight back? I trace the evolution of Saudi foreign policy from a pro-Nasser and anti-Hashemite stance to an anti-Nasser and pro-Hashemite stance by focusing on two realms: Saudi domestic politics, and Saudi foreign policy.

²¹⁰ Legrenzi, Matteo and Marina Calculli. (2013). “Middle East Security: Continuity amid Change” in Fawcett, L. *International Relations of the Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 207

I argue that Saudis saw Nasser as a threat to the normative consensus of the regional state-system in the Middle East. Relative absence of foreign-domestic distinction in the region (i.e.: porous borders), and legitimacy deficit of the regimes in particular and the system in general interacted with Nasser's proposal for the alternative order in the Middle East. I contend that the policies and discourse of the Saudi elite to deal with the Nasserist challenge during these years support these assertions. As will be discussed in detail below, Saudi policies and discourse during these challenging years aim at solving the legitimacy problem, and demonstrate how the Saudi elite perceived the effects of foreign realm on the domestic. Similarly, Saudi decision to ally with their traditional rivals, the Hashemites, and their reaction to Czechs arms deal of 1955 in particular, demonstrate how traditional balance of power relation with the Hashemites was replaced by an alliance in the wake of a normative challenge.

The organization of the chapter is as follows: in the next section I briefly summarize the major events of nationalist years in the Middle East, from Nasser's rise to his downfall after the 1967 war. In the third section, I analyze Saudi politics and Saudi perception of events during these years. I focus on two levels: first I look at the Nasser-effect in domestic Saudi politics; and second, I look at Nasser-effect in Saudi foreign policy to see how the Saudi state characterizes the threat they are facing and designs strategies to fight back. The fourth section is conclusion.

3.2. Nasserist Years in the Middle East

23 July 1952 marked the beginning of a new era in Middle East politics. The revolution of Free Officers that toppled down the monarchic rule in Egypt affected the social and political environment of the Middle East in a way the people who organized

the revolution could not have imagined. While the leaders of the coup were clear about their intentions to orchestrate a regime change from the traditional Khedive rule to a republic, neither General Naguib nor young Colonel Nasser had a well-defined ideology of revolution in mind, be it Arab nationalism, socialism, or regional unification.²¹¹ However, the course of events proceeded in a way that the revolutionary zeal had shaken up the very foundations of the Middle East state system for the next two decades. Military coups, counter-revolutions, popular unrest, demonstrations, media wars, fall of regimes and governments became the standard developments of politics in the region.

The regional order established after the WWI was the main target of the revolutionary zeal of 1950s and 1960s. A fierce fight erupted between the defenders of this status quo, and those who want to change it. Main allies of Nasser in this struggle against the status quo are the peoples of the Arab countries. This is because the political, social and economic conditions that produced the Egyptian revolution were shared (in different rates) by other Arab countries as well: the defeat of 1948 war with Israel, the monopoly of established notables over political channels, alliance with the West, the rise of lower classes through education (especially military) etc.²¹² Nasser effectively used this sociological background to realize his aims regarding regional politics.

What made Nasser a regional figure was the turbulent event of nationalization of Suez Canal in 1956 and its aftermaths. When the USA rejected to give Nasser the promised funding for the construction of Aswan Dam as an attempt to publicly ridicule

²¹¹ Dawisha, A. (2016). *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*. Princeton University Press p. 145-147

²¹² Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. (2008). *A History of the Modern Middle East, Fourth Edition* (4th edition). Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

him, Nasser responded with nationalization of Suez Canal Company which is owned by an international consortium, controlled mainly by the British, to fund the dam project.²¹³ The declaration of nationalization of the Canal created joy and enthusiasm not only in Egypt but also in the wider region. The act is seen by the masses as a successful reaction to the “imperialist West” that exploits the resources of the Middle East for decades. Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt in October 1956 to stop Nasser, but thanks to anti-occupation stance of the USA and Russia, they failed to secure their aims. Thus, Nasser emerged as a leader who protected the Egyptian interests, and succeeded in protecting it despite the attacks from powerful Western nations.

That event made Nasser a hero in the eyes of millions in the region, and gave him an immense leverage in regional politics. In other words, Suez victory “transformed Nasser from an Egyptian to an Arab political figure with almost irresistible appeal.”²¹⁴ He used this leverage very effectively in the next 12 years until the defeat of 1967 war, and tried to redesign the regional order according to his desires.

After the victory over Suez, Nasser became more assertive in foreign policy,²¹⁵ and turned his attention to regional politics. He wanted to decrease the Western influence on the Middle East, which was symbolized by the Baghdad pact which was signed in February 1955. The Pact included Turkey, Iraq, and Iran - main allies of the Western block during the Cold War in the Middle East. Nasser portrayed the pact as

²¹³ Barnett, M. (1998). *Dialogues in Arab Politics*. New York Chichester: Columbia University Press.

²¹⁴ Sluglett, P. (2013). “The Cold War in the Middle East” in Fawcett, L. *International Relations of the Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.70

²¹⁵ Kamrava, M. (2011). *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*. Berkeley Calif.: University of California Press.

the “tool of imperialism” in the region. His fight against the pact had started before Suez, and his criticism of Nuri al-Said of Iraq had continued after the Suez victory. Jordan was also invited to join it by Iraq, and encouraged by the British. Even before the Suez victory, Nasser was effectively using the public opinion in neighboring countries to reach his goals. For example, Nasser started a fierce media battle against King Hussein to stop him joining what he labelled as the “imperialist scheme.” Although Hussein was considering joining, and though it is in the best interest of Jordan according to his assessment, the mass demonstrations in Jordan ignited by Nasserist propaganda forced him to make a choice between the pact and his throne.²¹⁶ He chose the latter. “Nasser had won, and won big. He had imposed his will on a recalcitrant Arab leader not through military force, but through manipulating the sentiments of that leader’s own population.”²¹⁷ He showed that his vision of the Middle East is shared by millions living in the region, and he could affect foreign policies of neighboring states by talking to their citizens.

Another important event of mid-1950s was Nasser’s arms deal with Czechs in September 1955. After being rejected by the Western nations, Nasser bought arms from a Soviet satellite country. It showed that a former dependent country to the West could gain military hardware from a non-Western country. It also played well into Nasser’s political position as a non-aligned leader after the Bandung conference of 1955.²¹⁸

What peaked, however, Nasser’s popularity and electrified the streets in the Middle East was the announcement of the unification between Egypt and Syria. The

²¹⁶ Dawisha, A. (2016). *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton University Press p.172

²¹⁷ Ibid p.171

²¹⁸ Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. (2008). *A History of the Modern Middle East, Fourth Edition*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

United Arab Republic (1958-1961) epitomized in the minds of millions the changing order in the region. The Arabs who are divided into different territorial states against their will finally deconstructed the “imperialist borders.” Accordingly, the UAR was only the first step towards total unification of Arabs under one political entity. Other states were invited to join as well. Such a move, however, was not welcome by the defenders of the status quo, namely the monarchies in the region. Immediately after establishment of UAR, Jordan and Iraq, two Hashemite monarchies, announced that they established the Arab Federation of Iraq and Jordan (The Arab Union). What is important is that as a counter-move to a unification scheme, these two states felt that to fight back what they needed to do was to build an alternative union, rather than to emphasize uniqueness, or individual sovereignty of their countries. The reason for this is that the Nasser-effect in the region made it an imperative on rulers to play the unification game to stay in power.²¹⁹

The Nasserist wave in the region caused revolutions in other countries as well. Military officers who wanted to imitate the Egyptian experience orchestrated coup d'états in Iraq in July 1958 by Brigadier Abdel Kareem Qasim, in Yemen in 1962 by Abdallah Sallal, in Libya in 1969 by Gaddafi. Traditional monarchies fell to nationalist revolutionaries. There were also unsuccessful coup attempts in Jordan in 1956, and in Saudi Arabia in 1954, 1958, 63, and 69. This shows that the Nasserist vision was convincing both for the masses and (at least for some portion of the) educated classes.

By early 1960s, Nasser reformulated his vision for the region along two axes, probably as an attempt to re-boost his image after the failure of the UAR experience in

²¹⁹ Barnett, M. (1998). *Dialogues in Arab Politics*.

1961. First, domestically he moved to a more socialist position. The state took some precautions to transform the Egyptian economy into more socialist orientation, making state as the dominant actor in different sector of the economy.²²⁰ Second, internationally Nasser engaged in a more assertive campaign of exporting revolution to the region. Nasser's confidant Haykel formulized this in an *Al-Ahram* article as "Egypt as a state vs. Egypt as a revolution." While the former represents Egypt as an equal member of the regional state system, the latter symbolizes the responsibility it has to make the system in its own image; hence, intervention in domestic affairs of others is legitimized. In Haykel's words:

We should distinguish between two things: Egypt as a state and as a revolution. . . . If as a state, Egypt recognizes boundaries in its dealings with governments, Egypt as a revolution should never hesitate to halt before these boundaries, but should carry its message beyond the borders in order to initiate its revolutionary mission for a unitary Arab future. . . . We should do our best to cooperate with governments, but we should refrain from extending such cooperation if it were to affect the people's movements. This policy must be pursued whatever the consequences or the difficulties may be.²²¹

The first and probably most important event to realize this new projection took place in Yemen in 1962. The Yemeni army made a coup against the traditional Imamate rule of Yemen; and declared that they share the Nasserist vision. Nasser expressed

²²⁰ Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. (2008). *A History of the Modern Middle East* – for example, foreign own companies are nationalized, media is taken under state-control, 5-year development plans are introduced.

²²¹ Muhamed Hasaneen Haykal, *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), December 29, 1961. Quoted in Dawisha (2016). *Arab Nationalism*. p.153

solidarity with the new administration immediately, and sent military support to revolutionaries in their fight against the Imam Badr's forces. This led to a direct clash with Saudi Arabia, the ally and supporter of the Imamete in Yemen because Saudis perceived a threat to their national security from the new revolutionary administration. The Egyptian forces in Yemen reached to 70.000 soldiers during the prolonged civil war.

Nasser's personal charisma was damaged by the 1967 war with Israel. The defeat not only made him a vulnerable international actor but it also affected the Egyptian economy in a deeply negative way. The rivals of him did not miss that opportunity. The Khartoum conference of 1967 marked the end of Nasser's primacy in Arab politics. In return for financial aid, he agreed not to follow an expansionist policy or export revolution. The tangible indicator of this new deal was the withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen by late 1967.

This does not mean that the vision of regional order proposed by Nasser died with the decrease of power. The Arab public opinion did not immediately lose the belief in the legitimacy of his project. This is indicated in the Arab nationalist coups that took place after 1967: Iraq in 1968, and Libya in 1969. The legitimating ideology for these revolutions were again Arab nationalism. Their leaders used the Nasserist rhetoric in their speeches. This shows that this discourse still resonated in the minds of their constituency. Nevertheless, they never could reach to a level of influence Nasser had.

3.3. The Saudi View

What was the Saudi reaction to Nasserist challenge? How did Saudi decision makers evaluate Nasser's rise and influence? Why was he perceived as a threat to Saudi

national interests? How did Saudi authorities see the wave of Arab nationalism in the region? What was their take on it? We can reconstruct the Saudi perception of events by looking at the policies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2 areas: domestic politics and international relations.

The relations between Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Egypt were close during the early 1950s. The new revolutionary regime established in Cairo was welcomed positively by Riyadh. King Saud of Saudi Arabia was the first Arab head of state to visit Cairo after revolution. The main reason for this is that the Nasserist rhetoric directed against the Iraqi and Jordanian Hashemite monarchies was helping the Saudi administration in their rivalry against the Hashemites. The Saudis had a decades old competition with the Hashemite dynasty, and fearful of their power in the region.²²² Thus when Nasser attacked them verbally, they were happy about it. During Nasser's propaganda against Baghdad Pact, Saudi Arabia was on the same page with Egypt, and supported anti-Pact stance.

However, by 1957-1958, Saudi position started to change. As Nasser turned his attention to the wider region more, and crystallized his vision for the regional order, Saudi Arabia felt uneasy about it. Although still publicly they could not dare challenging him, in their policy decisions we can observe the dissatisfaction.²²³ By early 1960s, however, Riyadh no more concealed the threat perception and the

²²² While Hashemites have historical legitimacy based on lineage, Saudis had an alternative narrative for their legitimacy: they earned their state by their own struggle, rather than being assigned as kings of a certain region by the British. Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. (2008). *A History of the Modern Middle East*

²²³ Barnett, M. (1998). *Dialogues in Arab Politics*

annoyance Nasser is causing; so the confrontation between two powers both at the discourse-level and the policy level became obvious.

The divergence of interest turned into military conflict in Yemen in 1962 where Egypt and Saudi Arabia fought a proxy war (or more-than-a-proxy war). As mentioned above, by 1967, however, Nasserist challenge was tamed because Egypt needed the Saudi financial help to reconstruct its army and economy. This is famously described as the replacement of *thawra* (revolution) with *tharwa* (wealth).²²⁴

Why did Saudi Arabia change its position from a pro-Nasser stance to an anti-Nasser one? What was threatening about revolutionary Egypt? How did Saudis see events in the region?

3.3.1. Saudi Domestic Politics and Arab Nationalism

The rise of Arab nationalism and Nasser's popularity in the Middle East have implications for other countries not only for their foreign relations with Egypt, but also for their domestic politics. As argued in the previous chapter, the distinction between domestic and international is blurred (if not non-existent) in the Middle East state-system. That means an event that is normally considered as part of an affair of international relations has effects in the domestic political realm of a country. Saudi domestic politics was very much shaped by the Nasserist aura of the time. We can observe Nasser-effect in domestic politics by looking at the public demonstration, military officers' political demands, and the divide in the royal family. And we can

²²⁴ Dawisha, A. (2016). *Arab Nationalism*. p. 256

understand the Saudi perspective on these by looking at the decision makers' evaluation of these events through the precautions they take.

The Saudi political system is based on the single most important principle of the monopoly of al-Saud family over politics. Although there are other actors like powerful tribes or the ulama (religious scholars), the royal family is incomparably powerful when it comes to decision making.²²⁵ That means there are almost no channels for non-royals to express political preference or exert influence through formal decision making structure. This leads the masses to do mass demonstrations, and the military officers to plot political changes unlawfully. The first of such kind of public demonstrations took place in 1953 among the oil workers in eastern part of the peninsula. An estimated 13.000 oil field workers participated in the protest.²²⁶ The demands of the workers are very reflective of 1952 Egyptian revolution: anti-imperialist slogans and demands for nationalization of oil fields. As Kechichian argues "Arab nationalist ideologies played a role in influencing these workers to manifest xenophobic and anti-Western sentiments."²²⁷ Demonstration by oil workers are repeated in 1956 again. Not only oil workers but some soldiers also took part in some of the demonstrations. The demonstrators were sharing the Nasserist vision. The demands they proposed were similar to the ones realized in Egypt. Anti-western slogans were

²²⁵ Steinberg, G. (2006). "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to the Present" in Aarts, P., & Nonneman, G. (Eds.). *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. New York: NYU Press.

²²⁶ Kechichian, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Succession in Saudi Arabia*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. p.97
According to Vasiliev around 20.000: Vassiliev, A. (2000). *The History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: NYU Press p.687

²²⁷ Kechichian, J. (2001). p.98

directed against the Saudi Arabia's alliance with the West.²²⁸ This also meant the dissatisfaction with the regional order established by western powers after the WWI.

The positive reaction to the Nasserist vision increased in 1956 with Suez Crisis, and demonstrated itself among the Saudi society by collecting donations in Saudi Arabia to support the Nasser's fight against Britain, France and Israel.²²⁹ According to Vassiliev, oil workers in Dammam organized collection of money to be sent to Egypt for the fight against the "imperialist enemy." Rulers of the Kingdom observed the popularity of Nasser among their citizens in 1956 when Nasser visited Saudi Arabia. Crowds flooded into the streets to greet him. Such an outbreak of public enthusiasms, joy, and approval for a ruler of another nation disturbed Saudi royal family deeply.²³⁰ Yet, because of this very same reason, Saudi rulers did not prefer to challenge Nasser's popularity, hence his foreign policy objectives in mid-1950s. During the Suez crisis and proceeding months, Saudi Arabia declared solidarity with him. An important reason for this was that not supporting Nasser would have decreased the legitimacy of Saudi rule in the eyes of its citizens. During Egypt's war with tripartite alliance, petroleum pumps in Saudi Arabia, as well as Iraq and Syria, were sabotaged to stop oil shipment to the West.²³¹ This also shows the public perception of Nasserist vision in the region. People were willing and trying to force the ideals Nasser was representing on their governments which included anti-Westernism (non-alignment), solidarity with fellow Arabs, rejecting the standard order of things in favor of a new order.

²²⁸ Ibid p.98

²²⁹ Vassiliev, A. (2000). *The History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: NYU Press p. 689

²³⁰ al-Rasheed, M. (2010). *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 137. Such scenes were repeated in Syria as well upon the visit of Nasser in 1958. See Dawisha, A. (2016) *Arab Nationalism*

²³¹ Dawisha, A. (2016). *Arab Nationalism* p.181

The Nasserist vision is shared not only by some portions of the public but also by some (not possible to determine exact rate) military officers. As changing regime type from monarchy to republic became the trend in late 1950s and 1960s, officers who are affected by nationalist ideology in the Saudi army organized themselves in different groups to turn Saudi Arabia from a “reactionary” monarchy to a “progressive” republic. As stated above, in oil workers’ strikes in 1953 and 1956, some soldiers also took part in demonstrations. Starting with 1955, but especially after the influence of the positive atmosphere of the successful merger between Syria and Egypt, Saudi army officers organized some plots to topple down the regime. Saudi intelligence uncovered multiple coup attempts between 1954-62, and as late as 1969. During the Yemeni war, seven Saudi pilots flying with armed planes destined to Yemen defected to Egypt. Similarly, head of air force of the Jordanian army and two of his officers defected to Egypt during the same incident.²³² The plot in 1969 included the personal pilot of King Faisal. According to the plan, the plotters would kill the king in his first air trip.²³³ Kechichian explains the tragic situation as follows:

... amazingly, the Saudi military appeared to be far more loyal to Nasser than to the Al Saud. Between October 2 and 8, 1962, four Saudi aircraft crews defected to Egypt, carrying arms destined for rebel forces. In response, the ruling family grounded the entire air force, while Riyadh asked Washington to patrol Saudi airspace. A repeat of these events occurred a month later, although on a more serious note. In November 1962, palace guards discovered a conspiracy against the Saudi monarchy when Saudi air force pilots—all

²³² Ibid p.237

²³³ Vassiliev, A. (2000). *The History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: NYU Press

members of the ruling family—planned a coup in Riyadh. Before the conspirators could be arrested, however, the pilots defected to Egypt. Once again, King Saud grounded the entire air force fleet, and ordered storage batteries from royal guard tanks removed.²³⁴

There is an important sociological reason why demands for a change in regime type are more prevalent among the military offices than the ordinary public in Saudi Arabia. During the 1950s and 60s, the education level in the monarchy was very low. The only medium of political communication was radio transmissions both from Riyadh and Cairo. The army, on the other hand, provides a route for education and social mobilization in the country, similar to other post-colonial states. Non-royals can have upward social mobility through army. Besides, they have more interaction with the international world. Egypt was an important destination for education of Saudi military personnel. Likewise, during early 1950s, Saudi authorities demanded army instructors to the kingdom to teach their developing army. These interactions affected the Saudi military officers ideologically as well. Yet, despite education, interaction with the international world, and to a certain extent upward social mobility, almost all of the important political posts were reserved for the member of the royal family. This caused resentment among the officers.²³⁵ One should also remember that, reserving important political posts to royal families or notables was not limited to Saudi Arabia. Nasser himself in Egypt was derided by his elite critics as “*ibn al-bustagi*” (the son of a postman).²³⁶

²³⁴ Kechichian, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Succession in Saudi Arabia* p.103

²³⁵ al-Rasheed, M. (2010). *A History of Saudi Arabia*. p.135

²³⁶ Halliday, F. (2005). *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.112

The Nasser-effect in Saudi domestic policy was not limited to mass protests and discontent among military officers. Some members of the royal family were also sharing certain Nasserist ideals. As al-Rasheed writes, the al-Saud family were divided into three royal power blocks in nationalist years: King Saud and his sons, *amir* (crown-prince) Faisal and some of his uncles and half-brothers (known as Sudayri Seven), and Prince Talal and his 3 brothers.²³⁷ The latter group of princes are labelled as *al-umara al-ahrar* (Free Princes) after the Free Officers of Egyptian revolution. Prince Talal and his allies were demanding a change in Saudi political structure. Although they did not support full abolishment of monarchy, they favored a constitutional monarchy with limited king powers, and a consultative assembly. In addition, they shared with Nasser the anti-Western stance, and a more left-wing economic policy.²³⁸ The Free Princes movement caused internal contention within the royal family. They were relatively younger sons of Ibn Saud, the founder of the kingdom. Yet, they had a different vision for the future of the country and region than the king and the crown prince. When cordial relations with Nasser deteriorated in late 1950s, they had to leave the country to continue their opposition abroad, first in Lebanon, than in Egypt.

Their influence on Saudi domestic policy became more visible when King Saud recaptured his throne from Faisal in 1960. He invited the Free Princes, with whom he made an alliance during his forced absence from power, to the country. They all became ministers in the new cabinet: Talal became minister of finance, Prince Abd al-Muhsin was minister of interior, and Badr was minister of post, telegraph and telephone. This short experiment of Free Princes' rule (though limited since Saud's restricting role) in

²³⁷ al-Rasheed, M. (2010) p. 131

²³⁸ Ibid.

the country actually gives us an experiment-like situation in which one can observe what could have been the alternative path in the Middle East had the Nasserist vision shared by the Kingdom. Talal as the minister of finance aimed at reorganizing economy along with a mild-socialist-like program. The right of workers were increased (which is interestingly opposed by the ulama on sharia-grounds). In terms of foreign policy, despite the Saud's more moderating influence, the kingdom evolved into a more pro-Egypt and anti-Western position. "In March 1961, Saudi Arabia informed the U.S. that it would not extend the lease on the air-force base at Dhahran."²³⁹ Vasiliev writes that on 25 December 1960 Radio Makkah announced that the establishment of an assembly was approved by the cabinet; and a draft constitution for the kingdom was published in Lebanese newspaper *al-Jarida* which is written by Egyptian jurist per Talal's request.²⁴⁰ Such an experiment abruptly came to an end when the royal family decided to de-throne Saud in favor of Faisal. The new king and his team had a more hawkish position to the Nasser question. Nevertheless, the fact that an alternative vision for the regional order was shared by the top members of the Saudi royal family is in itself important.

One of the important aims of the actors in the conflict was to convince as many people as possible. Such an aim was directed not only to the people in one's country, but at least as important as this was to convince peoples of other neighboring nations. The dominant norm of the era – that Arabs form a single nation/people – was limiting the possibility of inter-state armed conflict between sovereign Arab states because an open military attack to a neighboring Arab state, for example, would delegitimize the

²³⁹ Vassiliev, A. (2000). *The History of Saudi Arabia*. p.734

²⁴⁰ Ibid p.734

government of the belligerent nation in the eyes of its own citizens, as well as wider Arab world.²⁴¹ As a result, the war between competing visions in the 1950s and 1960s was more of war of words, than of armies, which is famously captured by Kerr as the “Arab Cold War.”²⁴²

The discourse used by actors in the conflict shows the acceptable language of the era. That is to say, since convincing masses was an important aim of the governments, by looking at the discourse they use we can see what a legitimate argument is for their respective audience.

To observe how Saudi rulers evaluated the criticisms they face from their nationalist rivals, we may look at the dispute between the Free Princes headed by Talal and the ruling members of the royal family. As mentioned above, Talal’s demands were to build a constitutional monarchy in the kingdom and a parliament to restrict the powers of the king. As a response to that, in a statement very much instructive of the Saudi official discourse, Prince (later king) Abdullah stated:

Talal alleges that there is no constitution in Saudi Arabia which safeguards democratic freedoms. But Talal knows full well that Saudi Arabia has a constitution inspired by God and not drawn up by man. I do not believe there is any Arab who believes that the Koran contains a single loophole which would permit an injustice to be done. All laws and regulations in Saudi Arabia are inspired by the Koran, and Saudi Arabia is proud to have such a constitution. .

²⁴¹ That is why Barnett argues the first Kuwait war in 1991 epitomized the death of Arab state-system. An armed conflict between Arab states become imaginable.

²⁴² Kerr, M. H. (1971). *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (3rd edition). London: Oxford University Press.

. . As for his statement about socialism, there is no such thing as rightist or leftist socialism; true socialism is the Arab socialism laid down by the Koran. Talal talked at length about democracy. He knows that if there is any truly democratic system in the world, it is the one now existing in Saudi Arabia.²⁴³

The dialogue between free princes and the Saudi rulers reflects main contours of the official discourse and its relation with the nationalist challenge in the region: First, the demands from the opposition were not disregarded as redundant. The Saudi rulers did not say that a constitution, for example, is a useless thing; but that they have an alternative form of it. Second, the Saudi official discourse always included a reference to religion for legitimizing their position. In this case, Fahd's response entails the "God-made" nature of the Saudi constitution; meaning that the legitimacy of Saudi rule emanates from their strict observance of religion. Third, both Talal's and Fahd's arguments aimed at convincing the public. Saudi official discourse paid attention to that principle throughout the nationalist year. They did not feel that ignoring criticisms on the basis of nationalism or socialism is a right way to follow; or keeping silent is better. Rather, they actively followed the policy of counter-propaganda against the Nasserist vision.

As Saudi Arabia could not avoid an open confrontation with Nasser in early 1960s, the discourse against the Nasserist vision had undergone a transformation. As explained above, during the 1950s, Saudi Arabia opted for not challenging Nasser directly for certain reasons. During these years, the official discourse of Saudi elite was in parallel with Nasserist one. For example, after the Eisenhower doctrine, Saudi rulers

²⁴³ Kechichian, J. (2001) p. 1-2

expressed that they are still on the same page with Nasser in every single issue.²⁴⁴ They felt the need to conceal their alliance with the U.S. from public's eyes. Similarly, the concept of Arab nationalism is not used in a pejorative sense during these years. In other words, Saudi rulers did not challenge the nationalist discourse from an ideological point of view. However, as the clash between Nasserist vision and Saudi preferred regional order intensified, so did the Saudi discourse. To put it differently, as the Saudi threat perception was more shaped by the alternative ground rules proposed by Nasser for the regional order, Saudis became more explicit in the discourse they utilized to explain their vision, and to point out which parts of the Nasserism they were critical of.

We can highlight three significant features of the Saudi discourse during the challenge of nationalist years. First, by 1960s Saudi elites and scholars developed arguments against the ideology of Arab nationalism. Although they still did not claim that nationalism per se is an illegitimate ideology, Saudi elites criticized Nasserist version of nationalism especially on the grounds that it was against Islamic principles. That means, Saudi scholars and politicians depicted Arab nationalism as something alien to authentic Arab culture (i.e.: true nationalism) and to the Islamic teachings. King Faisal, for example, argued that Nasserist nationalism is founded on atheism; and true Arab nationalism has to be guided by Islam. Depriving Arab societies of their Islamic credentials means destroying true Arab nationalism. In a similar vein, Abdulaziz bin Baz, who became Saudi Grand Mufti, wrote that nationalism is *jahiliyya* (ignorance), one of the most pejorative words in the Muslim culture; meaning that nationalist are

²⁴⁴ Vasiliev (2000) p. 721

similar to the polytheist enemies of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).²⁴⁵ One should also note the connection that the term *jahiliyya* reminds Sayyid Qutb's description of Egyptian society.

Second feature of Saudi discourse focused on socialism. As explained above, Nasser declared Arab socialism as the official ideology of Egypt in 1961. Such a declaration in a way made it easy for the Saudis to criticize Nasser because socialism could be more easily linked to atheism than nationalism.²⁴⁶ Nasserist socialism meant closer relations with the USSR. Saudi elites' criticisms of Nasserist vision focused more on how an alliance with the USSR and its ideology means defending an atheistic doctrine. Against the students' demonstrations in 1956, King Saud stated that "the students were infected with communism."²⁴⁷ Saudi policy makers argued in the Islamic Charter, for example, that Nasser's nationalism is "fake nationalism" because "it is based on atheistic doctrine."²⁴⁸ In a similar vein, in 1961 Saudi ruling family "issued decrees prohibiting support of any contrary ideology such as socialism or communism."²⁴⁹

A third feature of the Saudi discourse during the years of Nasserist challenge was the emphasis on Islamic credentials of the monarchy. Saudi rulers was in need of an ideology to counter nationalism; and it should be convincing and exportable.

²⁴⁵ Al-Rasheed, M. (2006). "Circles of Power: Royals and Society in Saudi Arabia" in Aarts, P., & Nonneman, G. (Eds.). *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. New York: NYU Press.

See also Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz, Naqd Al-qawmiya Al-arabiya ala dhau al-Islam wa-l-aql (Critique of Arab Nationalism in the light of Islam and reality) in Al-Shuway'ir, Muhammad b. Sa'd (ed.), *Majmu fatawa wa-maqalat mutanawwi'a Al-juz Al-awwal* (Riyadh 1 997), pp. 280 - 323

²⁴⁶ Nasser, however, was keen on emphasizing the difference between atheism and socialism. Halliday, F. (2005). *The Middle East in International Relations* p. 128

²⁴⁷ Vasiliev (2000) p.695

²⁴⁸ Dawisha (2016) p. 233

²⁴⁹ Safran (1988)

Islamism in its Wahhabi form was the preferred ideological ground Saudi royal family based their anti-Nasserist propaganda on. Religion has been one of the most important sources of legitimacy for the Saudi rule in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi royal family capitalizes their role as the guardians of the two holiest places in the Muslim world. Besides, the basis of the legitimacy of the laws in the country is sharia according to official Saudi narrative. Hence, in their fight against Nasserism Saudi Arabia's ideological reference point was religion.

By early 1960s, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia became more explicit in its reference to Islam in international and domestic politics. In 1961, the Saudi state declared that their only ideology is Islam and sharia, and issued decrees prohibiting support of any contrary ideology.²⁵⁰ King Faisal came up with the idea of convening an Islamic conference, which was quickly read by nationalist as an anti-Nasserist convention. Faisal's aim was to bring other Muslim states into power struggle of Arab politics, especially with reference to Palestine; and as the organizer of the conference, Saudi Arabia would benefit from it domestically and internationally. Nasser immediately denounced such an organization stating that "the Islamic pact is created by imperialism and reactionaries' and, like the Baghdad Pact and the earlier political blocs, 'is spearheaded against the national liberation movements'."²⁵¹

Faisal in response attacked Nasser by stating that Nasser is not sincere in his struggle for Palestine and refrain from taking actions. In May 1962 Faisal convened a conference in Makkah: "declared that those who disavow Islam and distort its call under

²⁵⁰ Safran (1988) p.93

²⁵¹ Vasiliev (2000) p.794

the guise of nationalism are actually the most bitter enemies of Arabs, whose glories are entwined with the glories of Islam.”²⁵² Al-Rasheed writes:

While Faysal had been socialized into Islamic education from an early age under the influence of his Al-Shaykh maternal kin, his Islamic rhetoric came to the forefront mainly as a counter-discourse to current Arab political trends associated with Arab nationalism in both its Nasserite and Bathist versions. He perceived Gamal Abd al-Nasir’s pan-Arabism as a direct threat to the survival of the Saudi ruling group.²⁵³

Ulama (religious scholars) both of Egypt and Saudi Arabia had a special place in the war of words between Nasser and his opponents. Both states referred to religious scholars to legitimize their interpretation of events and their ideological positions. To do this, of course, they first needed to coopt the ulama under state authority. The important move came in 1961 in Egypt, when Nasser interfered with the administrative structure of the famous *al-Azhar* University. As Peter Mandaville writes: “In Egypt, the Nasserists brought the institutions of *Al-Azhar* University, for centuries the pre-eminent world center of Islamic knowledge production in the Sunni tradition, into the remit of governmental bureaucracy—ensuring that the religious scholars (*ulama*) and their mosques would not function as spaces of public critique.”²⁵⁴ Friday sermons were written by government-approved religious scholars, and were instrumental in legitimating domestic and foreign policy. The Egyptian ulama wrote articles and

²⁵² Quoted in al-Rasheed (2010) p. 127

²⁵³ Al-Rasheed (2010) p. 119

²⁵⁴ Mandaville, P. (2013) “Islam and International Relations in the Middle East: From Umma to Nation State” in Fawcett (2013) p. 175

sermons to argue that socialism and Islam are in fact compatible.²⁵⁵ Prince Talal of Saudi Arabia, as the head of Free Princes, similarly published a book arguing that socialism is a principle of the Islamic faith.²⁵⁶

Saudi ruling elite has a long history of alliance with the ulama, since the foundation of the monarchy. Nevertheless, the emphasis on religious legitimacy increased by 1960s. Under King Faisal, the ulama in the Kingdom are co-opted and largely became civil-servants, similar to Egypt.²⁵⁷ Saudi state justified establishment of organizations such as Muslim World League and Organization of Islamic Conference on religious grounds.

Similarly criticisms to Nasser bare religious tone outside of Saudi Arabia as well. As early as 1959, an Iraqi statesman called Nasser a “pharaoh,” reminding the bad image of pharaoh in the Muslim culture as the oppressor ruler of Egypt who fought with prophet Moses (pbuh): “*Nasir ya Ramsis, ya Khadim al-Ingilis.*” (Nasser O’ Ramses [or Ramesses], O’ servant of the English).²⁵⁸

Precautions:

The Saudi decision makers’ perception of Nasserist challenge and evaluation of domestic politics can be observed from the precautions they took against the domestic developments in the country. We can observe from the policies of Saudi ruling elite that they thought Nasser’s message was convincing for the people in the country. That is to say, the new ground rules he was proposing and the new regional order he was

²⁵⁵ Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. (2008)

²⁵⁶ Vasiliev (2000) p. 740

²⁵⁷ Al-Rasheed (2010) p. 119

²⁵⁸ Dawisha (2016) p. 217

aiming to establish sounded convincing and legitimate for the people in the monarchy. As many students of Saudi politics conclude, the Nasserist challenge to the kingdom was never seen as a military challenge in the sense that Egyptian army might occupy the country. Rather, the challenge was an internal one, from Saudi army officers, workers, students etc. It was about winning the hearts and minds of the people. This was possible because of the blurred distinction between domestic and foreign in the region, and the problem of legitimacy for the status quo rulers.

The precautions Saudi rulers took are indicative of these assertions. To begin with, the royal family did not dare to challenge Nasser directly until Nasser's moves obliged them to do so. This is because they were aware of the fact that the people in the country were sharing Nasser's ideals and vision, and challenging him openly would cause a legitimacy problem for the Saudi elites. Even though as early as 1956, during Nasser's visit to the Kingdom the royal family was uneasy about the popular support he received, the open hostility were not displayed until 1961 when Nasser openly called for demise of all "reactionary monarchies" in the region.²⁵⁹

As a counter strategy, one of the principle goals of Saudi elites in the second half of the 1950s was to engage in activities that are designed to increase their legitimacy and popularity in the eyes of their citizens. Curbing powers of an unpopular, extravagant Saud in 1958 and replacing him with Faisal was such a move.²⁶⁰ Similarly, during early 1960s King Faisal acted as an unusual king when he talked in mass rallies like a popularly elected president.²⁶¹ Another important policy they carried out was

²⁵⁹ Safran, N. (1988). *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

²⁶⁰ al-Rasheed, M. (2010). p.119

²⁶¹ Safran, N. (1988)

about the welfare policies. The social contract between the state and people in Saudi Arabia can be summarized as follows: the state provide everything; in return the people refrain from politics.²⁶² During the turbulent Nasserist years, the state increased the welfare spending. Not only were the salaries of public employees increased, the health and education system were also modernized under the rule of Faisal.

The sources of threat perception for nationalist challenge in the view of Saudi authorities were their own people as argued above. The way to prevent such a threat was to closely scrutinize their agents. To this end there were 3 groups of “usual suspects” all of which had international connections: the foreign employees working in the kingdom, the students who were sent abroad, and the military. As the nationalist challenge was more materialized, and Nasser’s vision for the regional order became clearer, Saudi authorities took step to contain them. The Arab foreign workers in the country (easy targets of propaganda) - including Egyptian advisors, Yemeni workers - were first closely scrutinized and then most of them were expelled.²⁶³ The most interesting fate was of the students studying abroad. The Saudi state called all students back (excluding those who study engineering, law and medicine) in April 1955. “Those who failed to return were threatened with being stripped of their Saudi citizenship.”²⁶⁴ As for the army, the solution was to divide the armed forces into several units: the standard army, the National Guard, and the armed personnel under interior ministry. All of them were thought as checks and balances against the other. Nevertheless, the National Guard had a distinct characteristic. The personnel in the Guard were only

²⁶² Quilliam, N. (2016). “Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Oil” in Partrick, N. *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation in Uncertain Times*. New York: I.B.Tauris. p. 47

²⁶³ Kechichian, J. (2001) p.94

²⁶⁴ Vassiliev, A. (2000). p.696

recruited from traditional loyal and relatively uneducated tribes in the kingdom. The state would use them in case of a coup attempt from the army.²⁶⁵

The regime used both carrots and sticks to contain the threat. While the increase in welfare spending, rise of a more popular king were the carrots, the sticks were the new laws that entailed severe punishments for actions against the national security. The king issued a law which specified that individuals who engage in actions to change the regime type or damage rule and order in the country would be sentenced to death penalty.²⁶⁶ That sentence was applied to several military personnel in 1960s. The legal changes are not limited to penal code, however. The state made repetitive promises for a basic law (kind of a constitution) during 1950s and 60s (as well as in later decades, whenever the state felt a legitimacy crisis). Slavery was abolished in 1962 as a requirement of modernization.

Last but not least, the Saudi decision makers thought that an effective way to protect the state from the crisis is to reach their public to convince their preferred order of things is better than alternative ones. To this end, by late 1950s, although relatively late compared to Nasser's plan, they invested in media. Broadcasting capacities of Radio Riyadh and Radio Makkah were increased in 1950s, and television was introduced to the Kingdom in 1964. Saudi rulers increased their broadcasting power by powerful transmitters.²⁶⁷ Rulers also obtained "the ulama's consent to introduce television broadcasts for propaganda purposes."²⁶⁸ One should also remember two

²⁶⁵ Quinlivan, J. T. (1999). "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East" *International Security*. Vol.24 No.2 pp.131-165

²⁶⁶ Ibid p.736

²⁶⁷ Nevertheless, as Dawisha argues, during the crucial years of 1950s and 1960s, other Arab states were not able to match Egypt's transmission power. Dawisha, A. (2016). *Arab Nationalism* p.149

²⁶⁸ Kechichian, J. (2001) p. 94

other important institutions established in early 1960s which were useful in countering Egyptian influence: Islamic University in Madinah was established in 1961, as a balance against *al-Azhar* in Cairo, and the Muslim World League (*Rabita al-Alem al-Islamiya*) in 1962.²⁶⁹

3.3.2. Saudi Foreign Policy and Arab Nationalism:

The foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the nationalist era was very much influenced (if not determined) by the challenge it faced from the proposal of alternative regional order by Nasser. As was the case in domestic politics, the realm of foreign policy carries the imprint of idiosyncrasies of the regional state system in the Middle East: the legitimacy deficit of regimes as well as regional system, the blurred difference between what constitutes domestic as opposed to foreign, and the effect of competing visions for the region. Important foreign policy decisions of Saudi rulers takes these features into account in determining their foreign policy position in a certain problem.

The Saudi elite had relatively cordial relations with Egypt after the Free Officers revolution of July 1952. As Nasser rose to power in Egypt, and prominence in the wider Arab world, the Saudi royal family did not feel any threat from their distant neighbor. During the Suez crisis of 1956, Saudi Arabia declared support for Egypt's move to nationalize the canal. This was cheered and applauded by the Saudi society. When France, Israel and Britain declared war on Egypt to punish their bold move, Saudis openly sided with Egypt, and cut diplomatic relations with Britain. Besides, they banned oil exports to Britain. This was also a demand from the Saudi public. As

²⁶⁹ King Faisal also established another Islamic University in 1974: Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University.

mentioned above, oil fields in Kuwait and Bahrain were sabotaged during the war; and Saudi's save themselves by cutting diplomatic ties.

Saudi Arabia stood on the same side with Egypt during the crises of Baghdad Pact as well. Nasser saw the Pact as an “imperialist scheme” and wanted to stop Arab countries being its member. Iraqi monarchy was among early members. Jordan was invited too. Egyptian propaganda aimed at stopping King Hussein from making a decision to join. During these turbulent days, Saudi rulers openly sided with Egypt in their anti-pact stance. Safran writes that they together organized and supported the upheavals in Jordan against the pro-West government and caused its fall.²⁷⁰ During the Baghdad Pact crisis Saudi Arabia “did not hesitate to emulate the tactics of revolutionary Egypt of appealing to the publics of Iraq, Syria, and Jordan over the heads of their governments, and inciting them disobedience and rebellion.”²⁷¹

During these years (1954-1956), there were three main reasons why Saudi decision makers were taking side with Nasser: first, the al-Saud family has a historical rivalry with the Hashemites, one time rulers of the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Saud expelled the Hashemite rulers from Hijaz in 1924. Yet, their historical claims to the land, their relative power as rulers of Iraq and Jordan, and the support they get from Britain made them a threat for Al-Saud rule. Nasser was a powerful ally against these traditional rivals.²⁷² Second, during the early years of the Egyptian revolution, Nasser and his comrades had no well-defined ideology. Yes, they were using nationalism and anti-imperialism as a rhetoric, but the revolutionaries had no plans for political unification,

²⁷⁰ Safran, N. (1988). *Saudi Arabia*. p.79; see also al-Rasheed.(2010). p.137

²⁷¹ Safran, N. (1988). *Saudi Arabia* p. 78

²⁷² Ibid

for example.²⁷³ Third, Saudi public was supporting the position of their rulers. As argued above, Nasserist discourse was convincing for the masses in different countries. Hence Saudi official position was in parallel with the people's position. This increased the legitimacy of the rulers.

The positive atmosphere in Saudi-Egyptian relations during early to mid-1950s started to deteriorate by 1957.²⁷⁴ What caused a change in Saudi perspective of Egypt was mostly about the new Egyptian vision for the regional order expressed itself in a more assertive foreign policy after the Suez war. As Nasser consolidated power in Egypt after the early years of revolution and was seen as a victorious commander after the tripartite attack on Egypt, he aimed at projecting his preferred version of regional order to the wider state-system. As Dawisha writes, Bandung conference of 1955 is important in this respect.²⁷⁵ Nasser more consciously formulated what needs to be changed in the ground rules of the regional system after encountering with the non-aligned states of the Cold War.²⁷⁶

Such a change, however, does not mean a military threat to Saudi Arabia. That is to say, the Saudi authorities did not fear from an Egyptian invasion of their countries or an increase in Egyptian military arsenal. Even during the peak of Saudi-Egyptian clashes in Yemen, Saudi rulers' threat perception was not about a direct military conflict with Egypt or occupation. What was threatening for Saudi Arabia was the new ground rules proposed by Egypt which include a change in traditional alliances with the West, regime types, role of religion in politics, relations with other members of the

²⁷³ Dawisha, A. (2016) p.145-7

²⁷⁴ By late 1956 according to Safran (1988).

²⁷⁵ Dawisha, (2016) p.166

²⁷⁶ Kamrava, M. (2011). *The Modern Middle East* p.113

state-system etc. This is evident in Saudi reaction to Egypt's arms deal with the Czechs known as the Czechs arms deal. In 1955 as the West rejected selling arms to Egypt, Nasser made a deal with the Czechs to increase the military hardware in the Egyptian arsenal. Such a capacity to increase military power without being dependent on the Western powers were regarded as a victory by the masses. The increase in military might of Egypt by the Czechs deal, however, was not regarded as military threat to Saudi Arabia by the royal family. Saudi Arabia remained silent also for the Egyptian-Soviet treaty of 1955 which brought the Soviets in the Arab world for the first time.²⁷⁷

The proposal to change the ground rules, on the other hand, was. We can observe this through the change in Saudi position towards Egypt and Hashemites. As Egypt was perceived more as a threat to the Saud's preferred regional order in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia moved away from Egypt (not publicly), and moved closer to the Hashemite monarchies. The transition is important to understand Saudi foreign policy preferences. Hashemites were representing a traditional rivalry not only in the sense that the rivalry was decades old, but also in the sense that, especially during 1950s, it was more a balance of power kind of rivalry. That is to say, the Saudi's clash of interest with the Hashemites did not stem from the fact that their preferred ground rules for the system was substantially different from Saudis (relations with the West, regime type, tribal structure, religious legitimacy, social contract etc.). Rather they were both competing to increase their power within the existing regional framework. The Egyptian challenge, however, was substantially distinct. It is a qualitative difference

²⁷⁷ Safran, (1988) p. 79

rather than quantitative. As a result, Egyptian challenge moved Saudis closer to their traditional rivals to protect their preferred order for the region.

The first signs of Saudi-Hashemite rapprochement occurred in early 1957 when King Saud made an official visit to the USA. During his visit, Saud met the Iraqi crown prince Abdel Ilah; and both leaders agreed on burying the hatches, with American encouragement.²⁷⁸ When he returned back to home, however, Saudi officials announced that Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is on the same page with Egypt in every issue.²⁷⁹ Saudis were unwilling to disclose their divergence of opinion publicly. Their private discussions and public announcements display distinct positions.²⁸⁰ In other words, what they preach was increasingly diverging from what they do. This became more obvious when in April 1957, Saudis gave military aid to King Hussein of Jordan when he faced internal challenges.²⁸¹ Another important development in this regard was King Saud's visit to Baghdad, first ever visit to Hashemite Iraq by a Saudi king in 1957.²⁸²

A greater challenge for the Saudis arose when Egypt and Syria declared United Arab Republic (UAR) in February 1958. The counter-move came from the Hashemite kingdoms when Jordan and Iraq declared Arab Federation of Iraq and Jordan just two weeks after UAR. Two unions were representing alternative orders and alternative normative consensus for the regional state-system. Both unions invited Saudi Arabia. The Saudis could not accept UAR offer because they did not share the new ground rules

²⁷⁸ Ibid p.83

²⁷⁹ Vasiliev quoted in al-Rasheed (2010) p.114

²⁸⁰ Safran (1988)

²⁸¹ Vasiliev (2000) p.722

²⁸² Al-Rasheed (2010). p. 112; Dawisha (2016) p. 189

it entailed. Yet, they could not accept UAM offer because they did not want to have an open hostility with Nasser for domestic considerations. So they preferred to be neutral to both.

The coup in Iraq in 1958 which toppled down the Hashemite monarchy in a bloody way sent shock waves to Saudi Arabia. One of the major actors against the Nasserist vision, the fell of monarchy in Iraq meant the advance of nationalist anti-Westernism in the Middle East. The new regime in Iraq expressed solidarity with Arab nationalist ideals; and one of the important names of the revolution Colonel Abd al-Salam Arif who was a known sympathizer of Nasser, declared that Iraq and Egypt should form a union. What relieved the pressured Saudis was an internal dispute between Iraqi revolutionaries. Abd al-Karim Qasim, the highest ranking official of revolution, dispensed with pro-Nasser Arif, and had an anti-unification stance with Egypt.²⁸³ The divide among nationalist republics in the region gave Saudis the opportunity to stay neutral. Faisal declared Saudi position based on “neutrality and Arab nationalism.”²⁸⁴

Although Saudi Arabia did not want to become openly hostile to the UAR between 1958 and 1961, when the Union collapsed in 1961 after a military intervention in Syria, Saudi state immediately recognized the new regime. The year 1961 can be cited as the beginning of the open hostility between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. As the project of UAR failed, Nasser lost some credibility about the feasibility of his projects. To retain popularity and charisma, he started to employ a more assertive rhetoric, and

²⁸³ Marsot, A. L. A.-S. (2007). *A History of Egypt: From the Arab Conquest to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.151

²⁸⁴ Safran (1988)

proposed new policies for the region. In 1961, Nasser publicly called for the fall of all “reactionary” regimes in the region. As a counter-balance to Egyptian assertiveness, Saudi elites preferred to invest more into their relation with King Hussein of Jordan. Two powers signed *Taif* treaty in August 1962. The main term of the agreement reflects the threat perception: in case of an upheaval, the armed forces of each country is authorized to enter the other to suppress the rebellion.²⁸⁵

Weeks after Taif treaty, the incident which gave headache for Saudis for the next couple of years, and which brought Saudi Arabia and Egypt into an armed conflict erupted. In September 1962, nationalist revolutionaries toppled the Imamate regime down in Yemen, and declared they share Nasserist vision for the Middle East. Saudi Arabia felt threatened by the presence of a revolutionary regime in the Arabian Peninsula, self-declared backyard of the monarchy. Nasser sent thousands of Egyptian soldiers to Yemen. The conflict continued in a stalemate for years. Only after the Egyptian defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Egyptian forces were withdrawn from Yemen.

In addition to Hashemite alliance, Saudi state used a number of other tools to deal with the Nasserist challenge. To begin with, Saudis engage with rivals of Nasser in the African continent to put pressure on Egypt. For example, “Saudi Arabia urged the Sudanese to continue to reject the ‘unity of the Nile Valley’ that would turn them into Egyptian nationals.”²⁸⁶ Saudis offered different African regimes financial assistance to make them more resistant to Nasser’s demands. Second, Saudi Arabia,

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Verhoeven, H. and Woertz, E. (2016) “Saudi Arabia and the Horn of Africa” in Partrick, N. *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation in Uncertain Times*. London New York: I.B.Tauris. p.96

during Faisal's reign in particular, tried to build an alternative power base around Islamic solidarity against the Arab nationalist solidarity. As Saudis themselves could not balance Egyptians in terms of military power or sheer population size, countries like Pakistan and Iran were seen as useful to counter-balance the Egyptian influence. As Vasiliev writes "in the mid-1960s Saudi Arabia and Iran grew closer. Both countries were monarchies with an interest in suppressing revolutionary movements in the Middle East as a whole, and in the Gulf in particular. They also had a common interest in confronting Egypt, which was then the leader of the anti-royalist and anti-Western camp in the region."²⁸⁷ To this end, Faisal wanted to build international organizations around the idea of a common Islamic international society. Muslim World League (and later Organization of Islamic Conference) were built by Saudis and used effectively to curb Nasserist rhetoric. Preuschaft writes:

Faisal's reign made Islam a more important factor in Saudi foreign relations. Among the most visible instruments of an Islamic foreign policy established under his leadership are the Organization of the Islamic Conference, renamed Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC; founded 1969), and the Muslim World League (Al-Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami; MWL), founded in 1962. Both bodies are an institutionalized expression of the Saudi self-conception of being guardians of Islam and leaders of the Muslim world.²⁸⁸

Third, in accordance with the general practice of the era, Saudis had links with certain segments of Egyptian civil society that had anti-Nasser sentiments, the most

²⁸⁷ Vasiliev (2000) p.783

²⁸⁸ Preuschaft, M. (2016). "Islam and Identity in Foreign Policy" in Partrick, N. *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation in Uncertain Times*. London New York: I.B.Tauris. p. 18-19

important which was Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Nassers' nationalism was in rivalry with the Islamist ideology of Muslim Brotherhood. Egyptian president used policy of repression for the members of the organization in different years throughout his rule. Saudi Arabia provided a safe haven for the members of the organization.²⁸⁹ For example, Muhammed Qutb, brother of the important theoretician of the Muslim Brotherhood Sayyid Qutb who was executed by Nasser in 1966, and Muhammed Mahdi Akif, future leader of the organization were hosted by Saudi Arabia in the reign of King Faisal.

3.4. Conclusion

The power of Nasser diminished as a result of the defeat of 1967 war with Israel. Egyptian army and economy suffered from the defeat deeply. Nasser had to turn to oil-rich nations, and Saudi Arabia in particular, to reconstruct the economy and army. Saudis were willing to help Nasser only in return to certain concessions. Egypt had to be reintegrated into the regional state system as a status quo actor, and had to give up proposing the alternative vision. The Khartoum summit of 1967 was convened by Arab leaders to discuss the terms of the “surrender” for Nasser. The hard power implication of the deal was the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from Yemen, which is completed by early-1968. As Korany describes: “In fact, the Khartoum Arab Summit in November 1967 codified this transformation when Egypt and Syria had to accept petro-dollar

²⁸⁹ Partrick, N. (2016) “Saudi Arabia’s Relations with Egypt” in Partrick, N. *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy* p.56

subsidies in order to survive the closure of the Suez Canal and resistance against Israel.”²⁹⁰

What was more interesting, however, was the demand of status quo powers from Egypt to shut down the Voice of Arab radio as a condition for financial assistance. Providing funding to build the army of a neighboring nation – a neighbor with whom they fought a fierce battle – was not seen as something problematic from the eyes of the Saudi elite, as long as that neighbor gives up the claim to represent an alternative normative consensus. Closing down the radio was the symbolic move to prove that. When asked to close down the Voice of Arab by the U.N. in 1958 because of allegedly destabilizing Lebanon, Nasser replied: “If you ask me for radio disarmament, you are asking for complete disarmament.”²⁹¹ Yet, in 1967, he had to accept this “complete disarmament.”

Saudi foreign and domestic policy, as well as the official discourse, reflect that Saudi policy makers were aware of the legitimacy problem in the region and in the country. The precautions they took aimed at boosting their legitimacy – the right to rule – such as dethroning King Saud, increasing welfare spending, promising to pass basic law, concealing their disagreement with Nasser from the public as much as they could etc. Similarly, they were thinking that the porous boundaries in the region was affecting the order in the regional state-system. Hence, they tried to decrease the influence of outside actors by calling students abroad back to the country, expelling some foreigners from the country, creating parallel armies by recruiting only loyal tribes etc.

²⁹⁰ Korany, B. (2013). “The Middle East since the Cold War: Initiating the Fifth Wave of Democratization?” in Fawcett, L. *International Relations of the Middle East* (3 edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.94

²⁹¹ Barnett, M. (1998) p. 43

The threat from Nasser was directed to the normative consensus of the system, and perceived by Saudis accordingly. Military hard-power of Egypt was not seen as a threat by the Saudi policy makers throughout these years. For example, the Czechs arms deal by Egypt did not increase the perception of threat from Egypt by the Saudis. Similarly, yet more interestingly, the royal family decided to fund Egypt after the 1967 war to re-build its army. The proposal for an alternative order based on alternative ground rules, on the other hand, alarmed Saudis. As I discussed above, the blocks in the “Arab Cold War” were divided according to the preferred normative consensus. The traditional balance of power politics between the Saudis and Hashemites was abandoned with the rise of an untraditional actor. What the Saudis and Hashemites shared in common to become allies and to fight Nasserism was their preferred ground rules for the regional state-system (i.e.: preferred modes of social contract, political regime, relations with the West, inter-Arab interaction, sovereignty etc.).

Lastly, as discussed in the previous chapter, when analyzing the normative consensus in the state-system, the divides between global, regional and societal levels are important. The norms of each level may be in parallel or in contradiction with others. And they are important to understand dynamics of order and disorder in that system. During the challenge of Nasserist years, we see how at the level of societies (peoples) there may emerge an alternative preferred normative consensus. The divide between the Saudi state and society illustrates this. The appeal of Nasserism convinced segments of Saudi society to engage in mass demonstrations, and even to plot coups. By 1967, however, after the Khartoum summit, the states achieved a normative consensus at the inter-state level. So the system turned to be a more orderly one. However, since that new order did not take the preferences of peoples into account, it

still did not solve the major contradictions that created turbulences in the years examined in the chapter. As Marx observed for the human history that each mode of production established by the powerful class contains the seeds of its own destruction, the order established by the powerful states in the system still contained the grievances of masses, who were to challenge the system again when find appropriate conditions, one of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

As for the hypotheses stated in the introduction chapter, we can make the following observations:

Hypothesis 1 – Legitimacy Problem

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with legitimacy problem regarding the regime, we should expect to see that they take precautions to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. This can occur a) through increasing the welfare of the citizens [or/and] b) through implementing policies in accordance with the ideals of the revolutionary wave.

Observations 1:

We observe that the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 1 in the Nasserist era:

- a. The regime increased the welfare spending. It also increased the salaries of the state employees.
- b. The regime replaced the unpopular king. The new king appeared in mass rallies in accordance with the populist atmosphere of the era. Moreover, the regime promised drafting a constitution; and it abolished slavery.

Hypothesis 2 – Foreign-Domestic Distinction

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the porous borders (i.e.: insufficient foreign-domestic distinction), we should expect to see that they take precautions to decrease the effects of the outside world in the kingdom. This can occur a) through limiting propaganda channels of the outside world in the kingdom, [and/or] b) through paying more attention to those who have more interaction with the outside world, and decreasing the interaction of their citizens with outside.

Observations 2:

We observe that the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 2:

- a. The regime wanted to limit the effects of the propaganda of the Nasserist radio channels primarily through investing in its own media broadcasts.
- b. The regime took precautions regarding the societal groups that have frequent interaction with the outside world. The regime expelled some of the foreign employees in the kingdom; called back students studying abroad; and divided the military into different units.

Hypothesis 3 – Normative Consensus Proposal

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the normative consensus in the Middle East state-system (i.e.: proposal of alternative ground rules), we should expect to see that their reactions should

be directed to the normative challenge, instead of a military, economic or strategic one. This can occur through a number of ways:

- a) If this is a normative threat, the alliance choices should prioritize the normative challenger instead of a traditional balance of power rivalry;*
- b) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should make a differentiation between normative proposal (and people/parties who represent these ideas in a certain country) and the military and economic power of that country.*
- c) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should invest in normative and ideational instruments of foreign/domestic policy to represent their own version against the revisionist one.*
- d) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should take more precautions against internal threats instead of a foreign military offensive.*
- e) If this is a normative threat, the end of the threat should stem from elimination of the normative proposal, not a certain state.*

Observations 3:

We observe that the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 3:

- a. Faced with the Nasserist threat, the Saudi regime made changes in its alliance choices. It allied with its former traditional rivals, the Hashemite kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan against a former ally, but the new normative rival Egypt.
- b. The Saudi regime provided financial assistance to the Egyptian military to build the Egyptian army again after the 1967 war in return of the

concessions on behalf of the Egyptian regime to lower its revolutionary claims.

- c. Faced with the Nasserist threat, the Saudi regime emphasized the Islamist nature of the regime as opposed to nationalist alternative by investing in the Islamic University in Madinah, and the Muslim World League. It also hosted Muslim Brotherhood exiles in the Kingdom.
- d. Faced with the Nasserist threat, the Saudi regime took precautions against the internal threats both in the kingdom and in the allied countries. The 1962 Taif treaty with Jordan entailed intervention of each country to the neighbors' soil militarily in case of an upheaval.
- e. The end of the Egyptian threat for the Saudis meant the end of the Nasserist ideology in the region. After the 1967 Khartoum summit, when Egypt agreed to turn into the system as a "normal" state, the kingdom no longer perceived threat from Egypt. Instead, it helped rebuilding of the Egyptian economy and army.

Chapter 4

SAUDI ARABIA AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION: 1979-1989

“We have declared time and again that we have no intention of interfering in other countries’ internal affairs, but what is shaking the Islamic world is a movement springing from this revolution among the Moslem [*sic*] masses of the world and, naturally, each people will shape their movement according to their own peculiar circumstances. They will force their governments to tread this path and, if not, naturally they will be confronted by the people’s moves.”²⁹²

Mir-Husayn Mussavi, Foreign Minister,
Islamic Republic of Iran

4.1. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the challenge of Nasser and the revolutionary effects of Arab nationalism lost effectiveness in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat. The new equilibrium is established between the defenders of the status quo and the proponents of revision. The collaboration of Arab powers in 1973 war, and the following oil-embargo were possible thanks to such a new consensus on the ground

²⁹² Quoted in Ramazani, R. K (1985) “Khomeini’s Islam in Iran’s Foreign Policy” in Dawisha, A. I. *Islam in Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. p.20

rules of the regional order. Thus, the years following 1973 war were relatively stable for the Middle East. However, another transformative event triggered a new episode of revolutionary upheaval in the region. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, which gave an end to monarchical rule in the country, started a new episode of regional turbulence manifested itself in civil unrest, terror attacks, rebellions, social clashes, coup plots, assassinations, and inter-state wars which affected almost all countries of the region directly or indirectly, such as Iraq, Kuwait, Bahraini Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Qatar. The decade of the Iranian Revolution in that sense showed many similarities with the Arab nationalist years of 1950s and 1960s with an important distinction: this time an “Islamist political challenge was shaking all Gulf regimes”²⁹³ instead of the nationalist ideology.

This chapter is about the Saudi perception of the Iranian Revolution, and its effects in the Middle East. I aim at reconstructing the events between 1979 and 1989 from the Saudi eyes. The main question I deal with in the chapter is how Saudis saw the turbulent years of Iranian Revolution and its aftermath in the Middle East. What are the determinants of Saudi foreign and domestic politics during these years? Why did the Saudi elite perceive threat from the Iranian Revolution? And how did they fight back? I trace the evolution of Saudi foreign policy from a pro-Iran and anti-Baathist Iraq stance of 1970s to an anti-Iranian and pro-Iraq stance in the 1980s by focusing on two areas: Saudi domestic politics, and Saudi foreign policy in the 1980s.

I argue that Saudis saw the Iranian Revolution as a threat to the normative consensus of the regional state-system in the Middle East. Relative absence of foreign-

²⁹³ Gause, III. F. G. (2009). *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 48

domestic distinction in the region (i.e.: porous borders), and legitimacy deficit of the regimes in particular and the system in general interacted with proposal of the Revolutionary Iranian leadership for an alternative order in the Middle East. I contend that the policies and discourse of the Saudi elite to deal with the Islamic revolutionary challenge during these years support these assertions. As will be discussed in detail below, Saudi policies and discourse during these challenging years aim at solving the legitimacy problem, and they demonstrate how Saudi elite perceived the effects of foreign realm on the domestic. Similarly, Saudi decision to support their traditional rivals, the Baathist Iraq, during the Iran-Iraq war and their reaction to the uprisings in the region demonstrate how traditional balance of power relation with the Iraqis was replaced with an alliance in the wake of a normative challenge.

The organization of the chapter is as follows: in the next section I briefly summarize the major events in the Middle East following the Iranian revolutionary turmoil, from the Revolution's early days in February 1979 until the death of Khomeini in 1989. In the third section, I analyze Saudi politics and Saudi perception of events during these years. I focus on two levels: first I look at the revolution's effect in the Saudi domestic politics; second, I look at revolution's effect in Saudi foreign policy especially with regard to the region. The fourth section is conclusion where I discuss the new equilibrium, and also the hypotheses stated in the first chapter.

4.2. Iranian Revolution and the Middle East

In this section, I will highlight major events of 1979-89, and effects of the Iranian Revolution on the Middle East. The revolution in Iran, which is considered as

important as Russian, Chinese and French revolutions by some scholars²⁹⁴ had implications not only for Iranian domestic politics, but also for the wider region. The Iranian revolution triggered or inspired a series of other revolutionary activities in different countries.²⁹⁵ “In terms of political violence, human losses and material destruction, the period between the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 and the end of the Iran–Iraq war in 1988 was the most devastating in the modern history of the Persian Gulf.”²⁹⁶

The turmoil revolution created gave the impression that it was the first of some other upcoming revolutions in the region.²⁹⁷ As Ramazani notes “it sent shudders down the spines of all Arab monarchies” in the Middle East because they were sharing many similarities with the pre-revolutionary Iranian state.²⁹⁸

1. February 1979 – Iranian Revolution
2. November 1979 – Grand Mosque in Macca seized by Islamist
3. November 1979 – Shia population clashed with security forces in Saudi Arabia
4. November 1979 – U.S. hostage crisis in Tehran
5. December 1979 – USSR invaded Afghanistan
6. September 1980 – Iraqi forces crossed the Iranian border for an 8-year war
7. April 1981- Shia Dawa party’s assassination attempt to Tariq Aziz, Iraqi vice president
8. October 1981 – Anwar Sadat assassinated.
9. December 1981 - Bahrain coup plot discovered

²⁹⁴ Gause, III. F. G. (2009). p. 45

²⁹⁵ Esposito emphasizes the inspirational aspect more, instead of the will to replicate it: Esposito, J. (2001). “Introduction: From Khomeini to Khatami” in Esposito, J. L., & Ramazani, R. K. (Eds.). *Iran at the Crossroads*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. p.2; Kostiner also makes a similar point: Kostiner, J. (2008). *Conflict and Cooperation in the Gulf Region*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. p. 54

²⁹⁶ Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2006). *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy*. Routledge. p.11

²⁹⁷ Marschall, D. C. (2003). *Iran’s Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami*. London: Routledge. p. 25

²⁹⁸ Ramazani, R. K. (1987). *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 32

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| <p>10. June 1982 - Israel's invasion of Lebanon</p> <p>11. December 6, 1984 – A Kuwaiti plane was hijacked to Tehran</p> <p>12. May 1985 – Assassination attempt on the Amir of Kuwait</p> <p>13. September 1987 - Shiites of a Da'wa cell attempted to assassinate Saddam Hussein</p> <p>14. July 1987 - Clashes at Hajj where 402 people died.</p> |
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Table 5: A selected list of events in 1979-89

4.2.1. Pre-Revolutionary Iran:

To understand what has changed with the revolution, let me briefly mention the international position of the shah regime. The Iranian regime was one of the most powerful status quo states in the Middle East under Shah. That is, Iran was one of the states of the region that resisted against the principles of the revolutionary Nasserist challenge. To this end, the Shah worked in alliance with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other traditional monarchies of the region. Similarly, pre-revolutionary Iran was an important U.S. ally along with Jordan, Morocco, and the small Gulf states (club of monarchies) against Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Libya (the revolutionary republics) in the Middle East; and had excellent relations with Israel.²⁹⁹ The U.S.' "twin pillar" policy was based on Iran and Saudi Arabia as the main pillars against the leftist revolutionary challenges. Such an international position resulted into a relative stability and reconciliation in the Gulf-Iranian relations. Although Iran has been historically interested in the Gulf region, made claims regarding certain state borders, and seemed to aspire being the gendarme of the Gulf by sending mixed messages to Arab Gulf states with its population size and military strength, the 1970s were stable. What makes this

²⁹⁹ Bakhash, S. (2004). "Iran's Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000" in Brown, L. C. (Ed.). *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*. London New York: I.B.Tauris. p.247; Hunter, S. (1989) "Gulf Security: An Iranian Perspective" in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.49

more interesting is that despite Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf which created a power vacuum for regional powers (hence, intensified rivalry) in early 1970s, the Gulf had not experienced an armed conflict.³⁰⁰ Another important reason for this is that Shah did not follow a "Shia" foreign policy.³⁰¹

4.2.2. Post-Revolutionary Iran:

The fall of Shah, however, caused important changes not only for domestic politics of Iran but also for the regional order. As far as the domestic politics is concerned, an era of revolutionary turmoil ensued the escape of Shah in 1978, and lasted until the first years of 1980s. The most important feature of these early months of the revolution, for the questions of this chapter, is that, there was a confusion regarding who and which office represented the official state policy of Iran. That is to say, during these months, on the one hand, there were officials who hold state positions such as the Prime Minister Mahdi Bazargan or the ministry of the foreign affairs who spoke on behalf of the Iranian Regime. On the other hand, there were a number of revolutionary committees and clerical figures close to Khomeini whose statements and declarations in many instances contradicted with the official discourse.

This division between the governmental and non-governmental offices and personnel during the early days of the revolution more or less corresponds to two foreign policy paradigms the new state could have followed: a more pragmatist line (Hojatis) vs. a more ideological line (Maktabis) of action.³⁰² While figures like Prime

³⁰⁰ Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2006). *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*. p.14

³⁰¹ Cole, J. (2002). *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam*. London: I.B.Tauris. p. 178

³⁰² Ramazani, R. K (1985) "Khomeini's Islam in Iran's Foreign Policy" in Dawisha, A. I. *Islam in Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 16

Minister Bazargan (February-November 1979) were advocating a more pragmatist vision based on neighborly coexistence with the Gulf countries, clerical figures and revolutionaries were advocating an active policy of exporting the revolution and supporting other revolutionary movements in the Gulf region and beyond.³⁰³ The most cited example for this divergence of policy proposals is Ayatollah Rouhani's claims on Bahrain. Rouhani declared that, either Bahrain adopts an Islamic style of governance or that Iran should annex it. Prime Minister Bazargan and the foreign minister criticized these comments, and tried to relieve Bahrainis about the well intentions of Iran to her neighbors, and that Rouhani does not represent the official position of the Iranian state. Yet, the damage could not be repaired in Iranian-Bahraini relations.

Another event which displays the idealist vs. pragmatist division was the storming of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, and the following hostage crisis between the U.S. and Iran. Bazargan, preferring to have better relations with the outside world resigned from his post because of the events in November 1979. His fall increased the power of more radical elements in the regime who defended the export of the revolution to neighboring countries.

4.2.3. Revolutionary Effects on the Region

While in the early months of the revolution Iran gave mixed messages to the region and the world, especially after the fall of Bazargan government and the short prime ministry of Bani Sadr (January-June 1980), more radical forces gained the upper

³⁰³ Hunter, S. (1989) "Gulf Security: An Iranian Perspective" in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 32-68.; Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. A. (2014). *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System*. Routledge. p 31

hand. Hence, Iran actively engaged in exporting the revolution and tried to construct a new regional order in the Middle East.

The states of the region initially welcomed the new revolutionary regime. Prince Abdullah stated that:

The new established regime in Iran has removed every obstacle and dropped all reservations regarding all kinds of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Islam is the governing reference of our relations.... The Holy Quran is the constitution of our two countries, and thus links between us are no longer determined by material interests or geopolitics.³⁰⁴

The optimism with regard to the new regime stemmed from certain expectations. First, contrary to the Shah regime, the new Iran government openly adopted an anti-Israeli posture. The Arab states, at least at the discursive level, welcomed such a development. Second, Arab regimes hoped that, since the new Iranian rulers rejected most of the Shah's foreign policy objectives, there could be a political solution to the 3 island disputes between Iran and the UAE in a favorable way to the Arab state.³⁰⁵ Third, despite stable relations in the 1970s, Iran was seen as a rival or potential hegemon in the Gulf thanks to its size and power. A revolution in the country, Arab leaders might assume, would lead to an internal crisis for Iran; hence relieve the Arab Gulf states.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Quoted in al-Badi, A. (2016) "Saudi-Iranian Relations: A Troubled Trajectory" in Ehteshami, A., Quilliam, N., & Bahgat, G. (Eds.). *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.193

³⁰⁵ Hunter, S. (1989) "Gulf Security"

³⁰⁶ Hunter, S. (2016) "Iran's Policy toward the Persian Gulf: Dynamics of Continuity and Change" in Ehteshami, A., Quilliam, N., & Bahgat, G. (Eds.). *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours*. Palgrave Macmillan. p. 114

Nevertheless, the initial optimism for revolution was replaced by suspicion and then opposition for the Arab Gulf states. The main reason for this is that, the revolution had led to (or inspired) similar uprisings in the Arab countries. The discontented segments of the Arab states showed affinity to revolutionary ideas and, (similar to the Nasserist wave) the Middle East experienced a series of uprisings and demonstrations to change the existing order of things.

In Bahrain and in Kuwait, predominantly Shia groups hold demonstrations in 1979 and 1980s supporting the revolution in Iran, and demanding similar changes in their countries. Demonstrators chanted anti-imperialist and anti-U.S. slogans. In Saudi Arabia, the Shia populations in the Eastern province defied the governmental ban on commemorating Ashura publicly in the end of 1979, and repeated the demonstrations in February 1980 in the first anniversary of Khomeini's return to Iran. A similar Islamist (but non-Shia) uprising occurred in July 1979. A group of Salafi Islamist led by Juhayman al-Otaibi seized the Grand Mosque (Ka'ba) in Makka, and tried to incite a rebellion against the Saudi regime.³⁰⁷ In Iraq, the Shia Da'wa party increased its political activity against Saddam's rule, and formed a paramilitary wing of the party to resist the Iraqi regime. The mass demonstrations, protests, and uprising could not achieve the desired goal of a revolution in 1979 and 1980. The resistance movements turned to more sabotage and assassination tactics to achieve their desired goals afterwards. In 1981, Bahrain authorities have discovered a coup attempt to the regime which sent shock waves to the states of the region. The dissident forces in Iraq made an unsuccessful assassination attempt to Iraqi vice-president Tariq Aziz in April 1980. The

³⁰⁷ Both incidents in Saudi Arabia will be discussed in detail below in the 3rd section of the chapter.

Amir of Kuwait survived a similar attack to his motorcade in 1985. A series of bombings occurred in 1982-84 in Bahrain and Kuwait.

Iran-Iraq War: Two other significant events of the post-revolutionary era are the Iran-Iraq war, and repeated incidents at Hajj (pilgrimage). As there are already numerous works on the details of the Iran-Iraq war, I will not describe the war here. What is more important for the questions of this chapter, however, is the relation between Iranian Revolution and eruption of the war; and the effects it had on the regional order in the Middle East. Saddam Hussain both saw an opportunity in the revolutionary chaos of Iran, and perceived a threat to himself as a result of the contagion effect revolution produced in the region, especially on Shia populations. Saddam attacked Iran in 1980 for a quick victory, but it took 8 years to reach a ceasefire after over 600.000 casualties. During the war, Saddam was supported by almost all states of the Arab Gulf especially by Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia. Iran, on the other hand, found support or alliance from the revolutionary regimes of the Nasserist era: Syria, Libya, South Yemen, and Algeria. Although Baathist Iraq was the arch enemy of the conservative regimes in the 1960s, against the perceived Iranian revolutionary threat, they sided with the Arab nationalist Iraq.

Hajj Incidents: Another important series of events characterizes the Iranian Revolution's effects in the Middle East in the 1980s are the Hajj incidents. While before the revolution Muslim congregations in Makkah for Hajj in every year were quiet and apolitical/religious events, after the revolution, Iranian pilgrims used Hajj as a platform for political demonstrations. Hajj of 1981, 82, 85, 87 are especially important because they caused clashes between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces. In 1987, more

than 400 people lost their lives. These incidents not only caused diplomatic tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but they also brought the revolutionary ideas to the agenda of Muslims of the region and the world in general.

Why and how could a revolution in Iran, a non-Arab and a non-Sunni state, produce such effects in the region? Why and how did such a revolution trigger or inspire mass demonstrations, coup attempts, uprisings, terror attacks, paramilitary activity in the Middle East regional state-system? It is correct that the Iranian revolutionary regime actively endeavored to export its revolution through various means. Yet, why they found some receptive audience in the region has to do with features intrinsic to the regional state-system in the Middle East, the most important which are the legitimacy defect of the regimes and the ground rules of the system, and the porous borders of the region. The proposal of alternative ground rules for the system, thus, interacted with these two features; and created instability in the region. Let me first look at the means through which Iran tried to export its revolution. And then I will discuss why and how these efforts found receptive audience in the region.

4.2.4. Exporting the Revolution

As mentioned above, while the desire to export the Islamic Revolution had been there for some revolutionaries since the early 1979, it is by 1980 that it became a state policy. It finds its most authoritative expression in the words of the leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini: “We must endeavor to export our Revolution to the world. We should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because

Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently.”³⁰⁸ To this end the revolutionary regime established official and semi-official institutions in Iran such as the Office of Liberation Movements and the Office for Coordination of Revolutionary Movements.³⁰⁹ There were also many revolutionary committees headed by different clerical figures. Whether the aim of exporting the revolution included an armed intervention in neighboring countries is a controversial question. On the one hand, Iranian leaders declared in many different instances that the export should be done in a peaceful way, and did not entail a military dimension. Khomeini declared many times that it is not through swords, but through words that Iran would export the revolution.³¹⁰ Similarly, by exporting revolution Iranian leaders did not mean to annex, militarily occupy, or unite with different independent states of the region. What they advocated, according to this line of thought, was the creation of similar like-minded Islamic governments in the region.

Those states that felt a threat by the export propaganda, on the other hand, did not seem to be convinced with these declarations. Various Arab Gulf states disclosed that proponents of revolution in their countries received military aid, weapons, and training from Iran. Even if one accepts these allegations are true, since a popular revolution could not take place just with a small number of people with little military training and light arms, the real threat of revolution was stemming from alternative

³⁰⁸ Quoted in Marschall, D. C. (2003). *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami*. London: Routledge. p. 26

³⁰⁹ Marschall, D. C. (2003). p.18

³¹⁰ For example he said with regard to export that “... it does not mean that we intend to export it by the bayonet.” Adib-Moghaddam (2006) p. 24. Hunter also writes that export activity “was done mostly by rhetoric and propaganda rather than by actual military action.” Hunter, S. (2016) “Iran's Policy Toward the Persian Gulf” p. 22

propaganda Iran made that talked more directly to the masses.³¹¹ One of such means was media broadcasting, as was the case during Nasser's time. Iran opened new radio station in January 1980 broadcasting in Arabic to incite rebellions against monarchical regimes. In a February 1980 program, the radio openly called for revolt.³¹² As voice of the Iranian revolution, the propaganda in radio urged uprisings. As Adib-Mughaddam writes, the opening state of the Radio Tehran was "In the Name of Almighty God crusher of tyrants and champion of the oppressed (...) [t]his is the voice of right, the voice of the oppressed, this is the voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran."³¹³ The meaning attributed to the media propaganda by the revolutionary leaders find expression in president Khamenei's words: "the new 800-kilowatt transmitter would perform a service for nations 'eagerly awaiting revolutions'."³¹⁴ Reaching Arab masses "indeed has been the main cause of Arab anxieties."³¹⁵

In addition to the mass communication strategies through media broadcasts, the Iranian regime invested in more personal levels of contact with the peoples of the region. To this end, Khomeini sent personal representatives to the Gulf countries as Friday prayer leaders.³¹⁶ Muderrisi and Abbas Muhri, for example were appointed to Bahrain and Kuwait, respectively, to work for the establishment of an Islamic government in these countries. They were giving Friday sermons in the name of Khomeini which, in the Islamic tradition, represents a political challenge. Both of them

³¹¹ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) "Khomeini's Iran and Threats to Gulf Security" in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond* (1st ed. 1989 edition). Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 11-31

³¹² Gause, III. F. G. (2009). *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* p. 48

³¹³ Adib-Moghaddam (2006) p.23; Quandt, W. B. (1981). *Saudi Arabia in the 1980's: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution p. 39

³¹⁴ Ramazani, R. K. (1987). *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. p.26

³¹⁵ Hunter, S. (1989) "Gulf Security" p. 48

³¹⁶ Kostiner, J. (2008). *Conflict and Cooperation in the Gulf Region* p. 47

were expelled from respective countries after causing political discontent. In a similar vein, students from Arab Gulf countries were invited to Qum, the religious education center of Iran, to receive education. In this way, Iran aimed at building a network of religious ulama obedient or sympathetic to the regime at the expense of their own countries of citizenship.

Besides, to export revolution, Iran provided sanctuary to political dissidents of the Arab countries, and provided them with discursive and material resources. The Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolutions in the World was established in September 1981 as an umbrella organization for supporting revolutions abroad. It has a Gulf office which was responsible for supporting revolutionary movements in the Arab Gulf. Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the Organization of Islamic Revolution of the Arabian Peninsula, and Hezbollah al-Hijaz are among the organizations supported or hosted by the Iranian regime. Iranian regime tried to build a network of like-minded Islamist non-state movements in the region. In 1982, for example, Iranian intervention in Lebanese crisis is one of the reasons for the establishment of Hezbollah of Lebanon.³¹⁷ Similarly, in 1987 when Hamas was established, Iran declared support for it.

The revolutionary leadership in Iran had two main drawbacks to export the revolution: it was a non-Arab and a non-Sunni state; and yet, it was talking to the masses who were predominantly Arab and Sunni. To transcend this gap, the new Iranian regime, and Khomeini in particular, deemphasized the Shia and Persian nature of the

³¹⁷ Gelvin writes the founders were inspired by the revolution. Gelvin, J. L. (2015). *The Modern Middle East: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.307

revolution.³¹⁸ Iran provided support to non-Shia revolutionaries around the globe such as Islamic Moro in the Philippines, and saluted the assassins of Egyptian president Sadat. In return, they accumulated “a great deal of support and sympathy from other Islamist movements, whether these happened to be in the Philippines, sub-Saharan Africa or nearer to home in Iraq and Lebanon.”³¹⁹ In 1987, Tunisian regime accused Iran of supporting Islamist in the country, and broke diplomatic relations with Iran.³²⁰ During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran sought good relations with Syria, Libya, and Algeria. The significance of these states for the war lay less in their material support than on the fact that their cordial relations with Iran showed the war was not a Persian-Arab struggle as Saddam was trying to portray with the phrase “Saddam’s Qadisiya.”³²¹

As mentioned above, the Iranian revolution either directly caused or inspired similar upheavals in the Arab world. Although the revolutionary regime tried to export the revolution through means discussed above, how and why were such efforts able to mobilize important segments of the population especially in the Arab Gulf countries? What was it in the revolutionary message that was so appealing to the peoples of the region? To begin with, the “structural illegitimacy” of the state-system in general and individual regimes in particular in the eyes of the peoples of the region created a favorable condition for rebellion. As was the case during the Nasserist era, and discussed more in detail in the previous chapter, the lack of representative governments, economically deprived, socially outcast situations of the Shia Arabs, the discontent of the peoples with the inability of their governments in dealing with the Palestinian

³¹⁸ Hunter, S. (1989) “Gulf Security” p.47

³¹⁹ Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. A. (2014). *Syria and Iran* p.30

³²⁰ Hunter, S. T. (1990). *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.129;

³²¹ Kostiner, J. (2008). *Conflict and Cooperation* p.70

question, and “too close” relations with the U.S.A. were some of the sources of the legitimacy problem in the region.

For the Shia Arabs, in particular, who were the main target of the revolutionary message from Iran, the situation was worse than their fellow Sunni citizens. Although representing a sizable minority, if not the majority, in Arab Gulf countries, the Shias were systematically discriminated against. They usually form the lowest strata of the work force in these countries, and have strict limitations in army posts. In Saudi Arabia, they were barred from entering into universities in the 1980s; and were not represented at any ministerial position. In Iraq, membership to the Shia Daw’*a* party was declared illegal by the regime in 1975.

4.2.5. Proposing Alternative Ground Rules

Certain characteristics of the Middle Eastern regional state-system provide ground for the easy spread and influence of trans-national ideas. As discussed above, the legitimacy deficit in the state-system, and the lack of a strict demarcation between foreign and domestic spheres are significant in this respect. However, these permissive conditions become operative when they find a catalyzer. What was the promise of the Iranian Revolution that made it a point of reference for the millions in the region in their upheavals against their governments? What was the alternative vision the Iranian Revolution was projecting? Understanding the components of this new vision can help us in analyzing the situation better.

The Iranian Revolution was proposing an alternative normative consensus to the Middle East state-system. It was proposing the transformation of the existing ground rules that organize the interactions within the system. As Adib-Moghaddam writes: “By

virtue of its Islamic-revolutionary message, the Iranian movement pushed forward norms and institutions that were in explicit opposition to established forms of governance and inter-state behavior in the region and beyond.”³²² Let me now turn to the components that make up this new vision. The most important feature of this vision was its emphasis on the place of the Islamic values in conducting politics. The revolution aimed at constructing a more “Islamic” polity not only in Iran but also in the regional state-system as a whole. Being Islamic or not was the single most important criteria according to the revolutionary leaders in Iran for being legitimate or not.³²³ Thus, the adjective “Islamic” (as in “Islamic foreign policy”, “Islamic governance” etc.) turned into a discursive tool through which Iran judged/evaluated the appropriateness of any political action or institution in the region for the new order it tried to establish.

In a similar vein, in their objective to spread the revolution in the region, Iranian leaders talked to the masses in the Middle East through the prism of Islamism. They tried to convince the peoples of the region by stating that the order in the region is not “Islamic” enough; and this is the root cause of all problems people were facing. Hence, to live better lives, to become more independent, to gain victories against the enemies of Islam etc., we need to institutionalize Islamic governance mechanisms everywhere. This is very similar to Nasser’s discourse of Arabism as the true solution to the grievances in the region. While the problems both vision tried to solve were similar (such as the Palestine question, economic hardships, weakness in front of the West, not

³²² Adib-Moghaddam (2006) p.10

³²³ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) “Khomeini’s Iran and Threats to Gulf Security” in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond* (1st ed. 1989 edition). Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 11-31

using oil as a weapon to gain politically etc.), the Iranian revolution replaced Arabism with Islamism as the true solution to be followed.

While the term “Islamic” was the umbrella phrase for the new normative consensus defended by the revolutionary Iran, it included a number of concrete policy proposals for the new order it aimed to construct. That is to say, though the word “Islamic” is an abstract and discursive tool utilized by the Iranian regime as the most important criteria for legitimacy of a political action or institution, it entailed practical and concrete preferences for regime types, international alliances, foreign policy options, and social contract types in individual states and the regional-system as a whole. To begin with, as for the regime type, monarchical rule was incompatible with a truly Islamic polity, according to the leaders of the Islamic Republic. Therefore, in the Islamic worldview on politics, the people should have a say on how they are governed; and the most Islamic regime type is republic. Ahrari writes “as a republic (...) Iran aspired to establish in the area an Islamic order in its own image.”³²⁴ Khomeini, for example, said that:

The Lord of the Martyrs [Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Mohammad] (peace be upon him) summoned the people to rise in revolt by means of sermon, preaching, and correspondence and caused them to rebel against a monarch. Imam Hasan (upon whom be peace) struggled against the king of his day This struggle and confrontation has continued without respite, and the great scholars of Islam have always fought against the tyrannical bandits who

³²⁴ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) “Prolegomenon” in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.3

enslaved their peoples for the sake of their passions and squandered their country's wealth on trivial amusements.³²⁵

A second component of the “Islamic” politics, according to the Islamic Republic, is anti-imperialism. While the first one is about the regime type in a country, this one is more about the foreign policy orientation the states in the region should follow. By the term “anti-imperialism” the Iranian leaders first and foremost meant an anti-U.S stance. U.S.A was seen as the main imperialist state that pillages the resources of the Muslim world (i.e. oil in the Middle East); and through its support of Israel, destroys lives of millions of Muslims in the region. In the new regional order Iran tries to establish, the states of the system have to avoid being unconditional allies of the U.S (or the West in general). Revolutionary Iran also warns against the Soviet imperialism. Though less influential in the region, for Iran, states in the Middle East have to avoid too close alliance with the USSR as well. This implies that an independent, non-aligned foreign policy should be followed by the regional states.³²⁶

A third component of the “Islamic” politics was the rejection of Westphalian understanding of international relations in general. The organization of international politics around the nation-state units was a notion challenged by the revolutionary Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini, in particular, disliked the idea of “national interest”, nation-state, and nationalism as an ideology.³²⁷ For him nationalism is not compatible with Islam;

³²⁵ Quoted in Adib-Moghaddam (2006) p. 29

³²⁶ The term “non-aligned” is a contested concept in understanding Iranian foreign policy after the revolution. Many authors of the time tried to differentiate revolutionary foreign policy from the traditional non-aligned movement of the time. While the distinction is important, I think the Iranian state failed to come up with a real alternative route than the discourse and practices of traditional NAM states. See for example Ahrari (1989) p.11

³²⁷ Cole, J. (2002) p.173; Ramazani, R. K. (2001) “Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy: Defining the ‘National Interest’” in Esposito, J. L., & Ramazani, R. K. (Eds.). *Iran at the Crossroads*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 214; Kostiner, J. (2008) p. 46

and the revolution in Iran and the ideals it represents were not peculiar to the Iranians alone. In his talks, instead of the Iranian nation he puts emphasis on the Muslim ummah at large; and instead of the national interest of the Iranian state, he emphasizes the interest of Muslim peoples everywhere. In Khomeini's words: "Nationalism that results in the creation of enmity between Muslims and splits the ranks of the believers, is against Islam and the interests of the Muslims."³²⁸

The challenge to the Westphalian ground rules of the international system was not limited to the idea of "nation" or "national interest". The supreme leader Khomeini was proposing his own understanding and analysis of international politics with concepts alien to the prevalent norms of the international world. The world, according to Khomeini, was divided into two main camps: the *mustazafin* (the oppressed) vs. the *mustakbirin* (the oppressors).³²⁹ This is the real division Muslims should pay attention to instead of nation-state borders or the first, second, third world distinctions of the Cold War.

The *mustazafin* (oppressed) peoples are high in number, and have to revolt against their oppressors to institute a just international system. By portraying the real division between the oppressors and the oppressed, Khomeini was achieving two goals. First, he was proposing a universal vision instead of one limited to the Muslim world. That means, corollary to the assertion of representing the Islamic alternative to the existing Westphalian world order, he was achieving an internal consistency in his

³²⁸ Quoted in Marschall, D. C. (2003). p. 12. "Article 152 of the Iranian constitution states that Iran's foreign policy is based on the 'defense of the rights of all Muslims'." writes Alshayji, A. (2002). "Mutual Realities, Perceptions, and Impediments between the GCC States and Iran" in Potter, L. G., & Sick, G. G. (Eds.). *Security in the Persian Gulf: Origins, Obstacles, and the Search for Consensus*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. p.220

³²⁹ Adib-Moghaddam (2006) p.24; Marschall, D. C. (2003). p. 11; Hunter, S. T. (1990). p. 37

theory of politics by not just limiting himself to the Muslim world, but was speaking to a global audience. Second, by drawing the demarcation line between the oppressor and the oppressed, he was delegitimizing the regimes in the region which were using religion as a source of legitimacy. That is to say, without necessarily engaging in a theological debate whether the rulers are Muslim or not,³³⁰ he categorizes them more with their actions (oppression) than with their conscience (belief).

The existing legitimate norms of international conduct were challenged by the revolutionary leadership not only on the theoretical level, but also by concrete actions taken by the Islamic Republic. One of such instances was the occupation of the U.S embassy in Tehran in November 1979 by Iranians. The personnel in the U.S embassy were taken hostages for 444 days, and this contributed to the isolation of new Iranian regime by the Western states. The hundreds years old principle of international relations “don’t shoot the messenger”, thus, was violated. Another important event how the new regime showed its disregard for the prevalent international norms was the Salman Rushdie affair. Ayatollah Khomeini gave a death fatwa against Rushdie who was living in the United Kingdom. Khomeini intentionally acted against the norm of sovereign jurisdiction of a country by ignoring the nation-state borders as the demarcation lines of sovereignty to judge and punish a “culprit criminal”. Instead, as the leader of Muslims, he judged the “culprit” with the Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and made a legal decision irrespective of modern international laws.³³¹

A third example of how Khomeini proposed alternative norms to the existing international norms is about the norm of “non-interference” in domestic affairs of

³³⁰ Khomeini does this separately.

³³¹ Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2006) p.26

another nation-state. Khomeini and other leaders of the revolutionary Iran, were not apologetic about the activities of official and semi-official Iranians in neighboring countries to incite rebellion. Khomeini declared that the interference of the Iranian state in neighboring countries to institute justice, to prevent oppression was legitimate. The legitimacy of violating existing international norms, according to Khomeini, stems from the fact that these norms and laws serve the purpose of sustaining the status quo, and they protect the powerful against the weak.³³² In other words, they create an unlevel playing field in international politics in favor of the already powerful states. Thus, the weak and the oppressed can and have to disregard them in order to gain power and dignity against the oppressor nations.

Such a stance is similar to Nasser's position two decades earlier: Iran as a state vs. Iran as a revolution.³³³ The criticism and disregard of the existing international norms and proposition of alternative ground rules share many other similarities with the Nasserist vision. Both were against monarchy as a regime type; both were against alliances with the West; both were using anti-imperialism as a discourse; both were keen on solving the Palestine problem in favor of the Muslims; both were acting against the norm of non-intervention; both were trying to be the leaders of their sub-systems; both were favoring a non-aligned position against the U.S and USSR; both were promising the peoples of the region re-gaining pride, dignity and honor. The most important difference between the two is that while Nasser was trying to achieve all

³³² Hunter, S. T. (1990) p. 39; Zonis, M. and Brumberg, D. (1987) "Shiism as Interpreted by Khomeini: An Ideology of Revolutionary Violence" in Kramer, M., et al. *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press. p. 53

³³³ Iran as a state had national interest, as a revolution, it transcends the borders. Ramazani, R. K. (2001).

these through the prism of Arabism, Khomeini was using Islamism instead.³³⁴ This can best be seen through the last will of Khomeini, in which, instead of Persians or Shias, he addresses “all the Muslim nations and the oppressed of the world.”³³⁵

4.3. The Saudi View

How did Saudis see the Iranian revolution and its influence in the region? Why did they perceive a threat from it? What implications of it have caused alarm for Saudi policy makers? We can reconstruct the Saudi view of the Iranian Revolution by focusing on Saudi politics at domestic and foreign policy levels.

As mentioned above, the relation between Saudis and the Iranian Shah was not bad in the pre-revolution era, especially in the 1970s. Although, as the most populous country of the Gulf region Iran caused some suspicion on behalf of the Gulf States, leaders in the Gulf had not experienced security related threat from Iran.³³⁶ They were on the same side in the Cold War, and cooperated against the leftist revolutionary threat in the region. After the fall of Shah, in the early days of the revolution, Saudis thought (and hoped for) a continuity in their relations with the new republic. Saudi leaders welcomed the new regime, and expressed expectations of cooperation with it. Particularly between February-November 1979, Iran was not perceived as a threat by Saudis. Iran signaled the intention of good relations with the neighboring countries, at least at the official level. The withdrawal of the Iranian troops from Oman in March 1979 where they were located since 1973 was a positive sign for the intentions of the

³³⁴ Bakhsh, S. (2004). “Iran’s Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000” in Brown, L. C. (Ed.), *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*. London New York: I.B.Tauris. pp. 247-258

³³⁵ Bakhsh, S. (2004). “Iran’s Foreign Policy Under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000” p.248

³³⁶ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) “Saudi Arabia, Iran, and OPEC: The Dynamics of a Balancing Act” in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan. p. 83

new regime concerning the regional state-system. The positive atmosphere of the time was reflected in the speeches of Saudi elite in 1979. “In April, King Khaled and the ICO sent cables congratulating Khomeini on the formation of the Islamic Republic. In June, Prince Nayif called for the close co-operation between the Gulf states and the Islamic Republic in their fight against Communism.”³³⁷

However by late 1979 and early 1980 Saudi-Iranian relations started to deteriorate. As will be discussed more in detail below, the change in Saudi perception stemmed from the normative challenge of the Iranian revolution to the existing order in the region. The appeal of the revolutionary ideals, coupled with the Iranian willingness to export them caused a challenge for the order in the regional state-system, as well as for the individual countries. Now, I will first look at the effects of the revolution in Saudi domestic politics, then I will turn to Saudi foreign policy in the 1980s.

4.3.1. Saudi Domestic Politics and the Iranian Revolution

Saudi Arabia had experienced turbulent events in the decade following 1979. As far as domestic politics is concerned, three sets of events largely determined Saudi politics: the occupation of *Haram* (the Grand Mosque) in Makkah, Shia revolts in the Eastern province, and the repetitive Hajj incidents. All of the three were directly or indirectly influenced by the Iranian Revolution.³³⁸ All three events either demanded a

³³⁷ Marschall, D. C. (2003). p. 64

³³⁸ The Haram occupation is contested in this regard, but I found arguments of scholars who think the event is either encouraged or influenced by the revolution more convincing. See for example: Kostiner, J. (2008). p. 54. Even if one thinks that it is totally unrelated, the Saudi policy makers perceived it as a similar threat to regime stability with other social upheavals in the country and the region. Also “the Saudi opposition press has attempted to link the two episodes in its propaganda” writes Dekmejian, R. (1995). *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World, Second Edition*. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press. p. 144

regime change towards a more “Islamic” polity or aimed to change the existing social contract in the country.

4.3.1.1 Occupation of Ka’ba

On November 20th, 1979 a Saudi named Juhayman al-Otaibi and his 225 followers took control of the Haram in Makkah. Declaring one of the rebels, Muhammad al-Qahtani, as the expected Mahdi, they demanded radical changes in the Saudi politics and society. They were motivated with an Islamic agenda, and accused the Saudi state of not being Islamic enough, and criticized the impiety of the royal family. They broadcasted their propaganda cassettes from the speakers of the mosque, and invited people to rebel against the illegitimate rule of the House of Saud over the Holy Lands of Muslims. Similar to the rhetoric in the Iranian Revolution, they contended that monarchy as a regime type is incompatible with Islamic principles of politics.³³⁹ The incident took two weeks to be crushed. Saudi security forces were unable to suppress the rebellion, and suffered heavy casualties. To deal with the challenge, French counter-terrorism units were invited; and finally by the early days of December, 1979, Saudi authorities gained control of the situation. More than 350 people died during the course of the event.

One of the interesting things about the Harem occupation is that the Salafi Islamist discourse rebels used to criticize the Saudi rule was very much result of the Islamic politics used by the Saudi regime against the Arab nationalist threat of Nasser two decades earlier. As discussed in the previous chapter, to neutralize the ideological influence of Arab nationalism, Saudi Arabia invested heavily in Islamist politics

³³⁹ Quandt, W. (1994).

through universities, media, education curricula etc. The rebels in the Haram incident should very much be seen as products of these official investment. What shows such a connection more concretely is that the influential Wahhabi scholar Abdulaziz bin Baz, who later become the grand mufti of the kingdom, personally intervened in the judicial process of the rebels a few years earlier to save them from prison who were again accused of political misconduct.³⁴⁰ Yet, same Bin Baz gave fatwa for the entrance of French troops into sacred mosque to kill them. Steinberg stresses the fact that while Bin Baz condemned the act of the rebels, he never questioned their faith.³⁴¹

Although the Saudi regime portrayed the Haram incident as the act of a group of marginal fanatics who did not have a societal base and whose demands are not shared by the Saudi population at large, one of the first reactions they gave during the incident actually reflects how the ruling family saw the events and what sources of threat to the regime were there in their eyes: As Quandt writes, as a result of the crisis, key military units rushed to the Eastern province of the country, and to the city of Madinah.³⁴² The Eastern province is where the vast majority of Shias of Saudi Arabia live, and where oil fields are located. Madinah is the second holiest city, after Makka, for Muslim and, thus, protecting the city is an important source of legitimacy for the Saudi regime both in the eyes of its citizens and the Muslim world at large. To put it differently, this shows that for the Saudi ruling family, an existential threat to regime survival can stem from Shia population of the country, the attacks on oil fields (most probably by the Shia

³⁴⁰ Dekmejian, R. (1995) p. 143 p. 143; Quandt, W. (1994).

³⁴¹ Steinberg, G. (2006) "The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to the Present" in Aarts, P., & Nonneman, G. (Eds.). *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. New York: NYU Press. p.27

³⁴² Quandt, W. B. (1981). *Saudi Arabia in the 1980's: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

inhabitants of the province), and from an attack on religious legitimacy source of the state. This anxiety characterizes Saudi politics in the decade following 1979.

4.3.1.2 Shia Rebellion

A second set of events that caused fear in the Saudi regime was the Shia unrest in the Eastern province of the country.³⁴³ Shias in Saudi Arabia mostly live in the oil rich Eastern Province, and make up approximately 1/3 of labor force in oil industry.³⁴⁴ Although their number is not known exactly, estimates are between 300.000 and 500.000.³⁴⁵ Saudi Shias in the 1980s were treated as second class citizens. The Wahhabi establishment saw them as heretics.³⁴⁶ They were accused of not following the true monotheism according to the Wahhabi ulama. They were not allowed to observe Shia religious rituals publicly. Moreover, they were restricted from entering universities; and allowed to serve only in the lowest ranks in the army and bureaucracy.

In the late 1979, the Shia population in the Eastern Province started a wave of protests and demonstrations against the government. Throughout 1979, leaflets and pamphlets were distributed in the country favoring an Iranian style revolution.³⁴⁷ In November 1979, Saudi Shias insisted on holding public Ashura commemoration (the Shia ritual of remembering martyrdom of Imam Hussein in Karbala in the 7th century). This was legally banned in Saudi Arabia. Defying the governmental ban, 90.000 Shias

³⁴³ We should note that the Shia population in the Gulf is not a monolithic homogenous block. See for example Peterson, J.E. (1989) "Security Concerns in the Arabian Peninsula" in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.103

³⁴⁴ Cole, J. (2002). p. 178

³⁴⁵ Kechichian writes 500.000: Kechichian, J. A. (Ed.). (2002). *Iran, Iraq and the Arab Gulf States*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Eilts writes around half a million: Eilts, H.F. (2004) "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy" in Brown, L. C. (Ed.). *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*. London New York: I.B.Tauris. Quandt (1981) states 200.000-300.000 in 1981; Ramazani (1987) writes estimates are between 115.000 and 350.000.

³⁴⁶ Eilts, H.F. (2004) "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy" p.232; Kostiner, J. (2008). p.54

³⁴⁷ Gause, III. F. G. (2009) p. 47

gathered for the ceremony.³⁴⁸ The event was not just a religious, cultural ceremony; and it easily turned into a political demonstration. For example, the demonstrators made demands from the government to stop relations with the United States. Demonstrations continued in December. The Saudi National Guard were sent to the province, and during the clashes with demonstrators many people were killed from both sides.³⁴⁹

Further unrest ensued in 1980. In February 1980, on the anniversary of Khomeini's return to Iran from exile, demonstrators carried pictures of Khomeini, both celebrating the anniversary of the revolution and demanding a similar one at home. The state, however, harshly suppressed the events causing casualties and injuries. In 1983, the press reported that the police arrested hundreds of suspects for organizing a coup against King Fahd. The events were seen by the Saudi policy makers as Iranian plot against the stability in the country. In 1994, the minister of interior prince Nayif said that the Saudi Shias confessed that they got military training in Iran.³⁵⁰ Although the exact Iranian involvement in the demonstrations and unrest in the country is not clear, the demands of the protestors, the slogans they chanted, Khomeini pictures carried in the events, and the timing of unrest make it obvious that the revolution in Iran had at least influenced and encouraged the demonstrators. As for the relation between Haram occupation and Shia unrest in the East, though no organic ties are apparent between the two, as Kostiner also defends, the Haram incident could embolden the Saudi Shias.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Ramazani, R. K. (1987). 40

³⁴⁹ For further detail: Kostiner, J. (1987) "Shii Unrest in the Gulf" in Kramer, M., Bakhash, S., Bailey, C., Fischer, M. M. J., & Norton, A. R. *Shi'ism, Resistance, And Revolution*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

³⁵⁰ Marschall, D. C. (2003). p.33

³⁵¹ Kostiner, J. (1987) "Shii Unrest in the Gulf" p. 179

4.3.1.3 Hajj Incidents

The third set of events that characterize the Saudi domestic political space in the 1980s was the Hajj incidents. The events at Hajj have the most direct relation with the Iranian revolution and the new regime because they were organized and put in place by the pilgrims coming from Iran. After the revolution, to export the Islamic revolution, and to increase awareness of Muslim masses for a revolution, yearly Hajj congregations were seen as optimal occasions by the revolutionary Iranian leadership. Each year, around one million Muslims gather in Makkah from all corners of the world to perform the Hajj rituals. Such an international Muslim audience was a good opportunity for the new regime to market its ideas, and to ignite revolutionary fervor among Muslims, especially in the Middle East. A second opportunity for Iran was to express concerns for the rule of al-Saud family over the Muslim holy places during the Hajj; and thus attack the legitimacy source of the Saudi regime.

To these ends, the Iranian regime encouraged and organized the Iranian pilgrims to hold public demonstrations in Makkah and Madinah during Hajj. Thousands of Iranian pilgrims were marching on the streets of two cities, chanting slogans and holding political posters to publicize the message of the Iranian revolution to the Saudis and international guests. The protestors hold posters of Khomeini and chanted anti-US and anti-Israel slogans like “death to the U.S.”, “Khomeini is the leader”, “death to Zionism.”³⁵² The revolutionary regime was appointing each year a cleric as the head of the Iranian envoy to Hajj. Especially during the early years of the revolution, clerics famous for their radical views were appointed as head of Iranian pilgrims.³⁵³

³⁵² Marschall, D. C. (2003). p. 50

³⁵³ Hunter, S. T. (1990). p. 118

The protests most often turned into violent clashes with Saudi security forces. As the Saudis would like to keep the Hajj as an apolitical religious event, the demonstrations of Iranians were negatively affecting the religious atmosphere of the Hajj for the Saudis. Though the Saudi King asked Khomeini to stop the protests, and defended that Hajj should be only a religious congregation, Khomeini responded that true Hajj is “an Islamic political movement” for the *ummah* to discuss problems of Muslims from all over the world.³⁵⁴ Almost in every year during 1980s, Saudi security forces clashed with the Iranian pilgrims. The worst one occurred in 1987. Though Iranian and Saudi sources offer conflicting narratives of the event, and accuse each other, 402 people died and 649 were injured in Makkah. One of the injured was Khomeini’s wife as well. The event was the bloodiest of all Hajj incidents, and caused irreparable damage between two countries. In the following days, the Saudi (and Kuwaiti) embassy in Tehran was stormed by angry Iranians; and “a Saudi diplomat died three weeks later allegedly from injuries received during the takeover.”³⁵⁵ The speaker of the Iranian parliament Rafsanjani declared that all Muslims should work to overthrow the Saudi regime. An explosion occurred in Saudi Aramco, and Saudi Hezbollah claimed responsibility. Iranians repeated their claim that the holy lands should be ruled by the consensus of all Muslims.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ al-Badi, A. (2016) “Saudi-Iranian Relations” p. 194

³⁵⁵ Peterson, J.E. (1989) “Security Concerns in the Arabian Peninsula” in Ahrari, M. E. (Ed.). *The Gulf and International Security: The 1980s and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan.p.107; Nonneman, G. (2004). “The Gulf States and the Iran–Iraq War: Pattern Shifts and Continuities” in Potter, L. G., & Sick, G. G. (Eds.). *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 182

³⁵⁶ Marschall, D. C. (2003). p.38. Libyan leader stated a similar opinion by the end of 1980; Saudis cut relations with Libya.

4.3.1.4 Precautions

To understand how al-Saud family saw the events following the Iranian revolution and how they perceived the social unrest in the country, we can look how they reacted to them. To put it differently, to understand the source of threat perception, we can check what kind of precautions were taken by the Saudi regime against the effects of the Iranian Revolution. In this part, I will analyse these precautions/reactions of the Saudi regime.

One of the important components of the Saudi precautions/reactions to the challenge of the Iranian Revolution is increasing the visibility of the Islamic credentials of the Saudi regime.³⁵⁷ As an important part of the criticism against the status quo from the revolutionary Iran was directed against the insufficient Islamic character of the regional state-system, the Saudi regime tried to counter such criticisms by investing in certain initiatives to prove how Islamic their rule was. Some of the developments to this end in the 1980s are the following: Saudi elites declared the Quran as the constitution of the kingdom. In 1984, the kingdom adopted a more Islamic national anthem. Moreover, after the Harem incident and Shia protests, the regime gave religious scholars (*ulama*) more power and influence in the society, both to guarantee their support, and to convince the masses of the legitimacy of their rule. A wave of more socially conservative policies were put into effect for this purpose: cinemas were closed, female news presenters were taken off the air, importing dolls became a punishable offence in 1984, and religious police became more visible in shaping the

³⁵⁷ As Quandt also observes, Islam became more important in Saudi Arabia after the Iranian Revolution: Quandt, W. B. (1981). p.10

public sphere in the kingdom.³⁵⁸ Similarly, the regime prohibited girls from studying abroad. Famous scholar Bin Baz wrote in 1984 an article on the dangers of traveling abroad. Last but not least, the state provided generous funding to the Islamic universities in Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh.

A second bulk of precautions against the effects of the revolutionary wave in the Saudi domestic politic concerns the social justice in the Kingdom, especially towards the Shia population. As the Iranian revolutionary ideals were advocating for the rights of the oppressed (*mutazafiin*) against the oppressors (*mustakbirin*), the Saudi regime felt the necessity to promise a more egalitarian social contract in the Kingdom. To this end, after the unrest in the Eastern province, the Saudi regime undertook some measures to make the living conditions of the Saudi Shia less miserable. The state provided financial incentives for the population, and made investments in previously ignored cities in the country. As Cole writes, monies were slated to the Eastern province for electrification, rood work and housing loans.³⁵⁹ In 1981 the crown prince Fahd was named as the head of a special committee to oversee the expenditure of some 1 billion riyals on development projects in the East.³⁶⁰ In November 1980, King Khaled visited the eastern Hasa province, and met with Shia leaders. The state promised better economic conditions for the population. Despite the drastic decrease in oil prices in 1980,³⁶¹ the government did not retreat from welfare spending. In February 1986, King Fahd visited the Eastern province. He appointed his son Muhammed as the new

³⁵⁸ Hegghammer, T. (2010). *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 24

³⁵⁹ Cole, J. (2002). p. 183; also Kostiner, J. (1987) p. 182

³⁶⁰ Quandt, W. B. (1981). p.97

³⁶¹ The oil revenue of the Kingdom declined from \$96 billion in 1981 to \$16 billion in 1987, see Kostiner, J. (2008). p. 74-75

governor to show his close interest in the conditions of the Saudi Shia.³⁶² The king also ordered the release of many prisoners most of whom were probably arrested after the unrest in early 1980s.

A third set of precautions taken by the Saudi regime against the effects of revolutionary Iran was to promise certain changes in the institutional structure of the regime. As the criticism against the status quo order include a certain emphasis on inappropriate and un-Islamic nature of the monarchical rule for good governance, the Saudi royal family thought that they need to take action to convince their population. An important aspect of this was the promise to institute a *Majlis al-Shura* (consultative assembly) after the Haram incident. Similarly, to show that the rule of the al-Saud family is not an arbitrary one, after the social upheavals in the country, the regime promised that a Basic Law of government (i.e.: a constitution) would be made to increase predictability, and to limit the arbitrary rule. The regime made this promise in the past as well, during the years of Nasserist challenge. Yet, it was not realized. A constitutional committee was established under the minister of interior Prince Nayif; but no Basic Law was enacted in the 1980s.³⁶³

The Saudi regime also undertook some measures with regard to “high-risk” groups in the society, i.e.: those who are susceptible to the revolutionary message of the Islamic Republic. These included the foreigners, the Shia in the kingdom, those who have contact with the outside world, and the military for their armed power to make a coup/revolution. As for the foreigners and Shia in the kingdom, the regime increased the scrutiny and surveillance for them, and those who were seen as a threat to the

³⁶² Cole, J. (2002). p. 183; Marschall, D. C. (2003). p.41

³⁶³ It was finally done in 1992 which was far from limiting the arbitrary rights of the ruling family.

stability were deported from the country. The second group included the students studying abroad. They were recalled back to the country in the middle of the academic year.³⁶⁴ The third group was the armed forces of the country. The regime apparently perceived a risk of attraction to the Islamic revolutionary ideas among the officers, so wanted to ensure their loyalty. To this end, salaries of the members of the National Guard and the army were doubled in the 1980s. Besides, regular troops were dispersed along the borders, armoured light units were withdrawn from towns, and issue of ammunition was reduced to minimum.³⁶⁵

What can we infer from the precautions the Saudi regime took in the wake of the revolutionary upheavals? What do they say about the Saudi perception of threat and the sources of social unrest in the country? I think the most important thing the precautions show is that the Saudi ruling family thought that the message of the Iranian revolution was appealing, and its promises were convincing for the masses in their country. The Saudi regime could not afford to ignore the propaganda of the Islamic revolution, and could not dare to remain indifferent. The vision Iran was projecting for the peoples in the region found receptive audience. All of the measures taken by the Saudi regime aimed at responding the normative challenge the revolution was posing. The Islamic Revolution gave 3 sets of messages to the peoples in the region: 1) the status quo is not Islamic enough; 2) the status quo favours the oppressors and reproduce injustice; 3) the institutional make-up of the status quo regimes are illegitimate. If we look how Saudis reacted, we can see that they took steps exactly on these very

³⁶⁴ Safran, N. (1988). *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (1 edition). Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Same measure was taken during the Nasserist years, discussed in the previous chapter.

³⁶⁵ Safran, N. (1988)

criticisms. They wanted to prove that they are real Muslims; that they care about social justice; and that they also prefer a more inclusive/participatory political structure.

Writing in 1981, William Quandt observes:

It is not the classical concern of military conquest by powerful neighbours that worries the Saudis (...) Rather, it is the danger that instability, conflict, and radical ideologies in the Middle East will adversely affect internal Saudi developments. The Saudi leadership enters the 1980s with as great a preoccupation with subversion, ideological warfare, terrorism, blackmail, and propaganda as with outright military threats.³⁶⁶

4.3.2. Saudi Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution

As the previous section discussed the Saudi domestic politics, in this section, I will discuss how the Saudi regime reacted to the threat of the Iranian revolution, and what kind of precautions they took in the field of Saudi foreign policy to see how the Saudi elite perceived the revolutionary threat. As I demonstrate below, the foreign policy actions and discourse of the Kingdom during the 1980s direct us to the conclusion that the main concern of the Saudi royal family with regard to the Iranian revolution was its challenge to the normative consensus in the state-system, rather than a concern for a material/hard power effects of the revolution.

The relation between Saudi Arabia and the pre-revolution Iran was stable, and based on certain shared understanding. Both were status quo powers and U.S. allies. After the revolution, the relation did not turn to hostile overnight. Saudi royal family sent warm messages to the new regime in Tehran. Yet, when Iran started to challenge

³⁶⁶ Quandt, W. B. (1981). p. 7

the status quo order in the region through attempts to export revolution, Saudis changed their position. The Saudi foreign policy during this era aimed at realizing two important goals: first, to protect and defend the existing order in the region by defending the ground rules that make up the state system; and second, to retain credibility as an Islamic state while doing all these, despite the Iranian discursive challenge for the Saudis' alleged role in protecting the imperialists' interests at the expense of Muslims in the region. To achieve the former goal, Saudis invested in certain means to bring the status quo powers together, and to limit Iran's capacity to export the revolutionary ideas in the region. To achieve the latter, they invested in certain measures to show their Islamic credentials internationally. Let me discuss both more in detail through significant foreign policy events during this period.

4.3.2.1. Iran-Iraq War

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1989) is important to understand the transformation of Saudi foreign policy towards the Iranian challenge in the region. Saudis saw the war as a crucial tool to "tame" the revolution. The Saudi regime sided with Iraq against the Islamic Republic during the war. The support for Saddam became more serious and effective especially after 1981 when the new regime in Tehran intensified its efforts to export the revolution. Such a threat perception is not unfounded. The Iranians were also seeing the war in such terms. President Khamenei said "any victory (...) brings us nearer to our goal, which is to export this revolution."³⁶⁷ Discontented with the revolutionary challenge, Saudi Arabia supported Saddam Hussein during the prolonged war. The Saudi regime gave financial support to Iraq through generous funds. An

³⁶⁷ Quoted in Marschall, D. C. (2003). p. 76

estimated \$30-50 billion were given to Saddam Hussein by the Gulf monarchies, the vast amount of which was provided by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.³⁶⁸ Beside the direct financial loans, Saudis helped Hussein by selling the Iraqi oil through their ports and pipelines. Moreover, the Saudi regime used its power and influence at OPEC to harm the new regime in Tehran. The prices collapsed in 1982, and the much needed funds for Iran from the oil revenue were blocked by the Saudi reluctance to take actions to increase them. The financial support to the Iraqi regime was allegedly formulized and expressed by Fahd to Hussein as: “you provide *rijal* (men), we provide *riyal* (money).”

What is ironic, and significant for the purpose of this chapter, is that Saddam’s Iraq was aiming to continue the mission of Nasser by propagating Arab nationalism in the Middle East, an ideology Saudis fought against some 10 years earlier. As discussed in the previous chapter, however, Arab nationalism lost its revolutionary fervor, and ceased to be perceived as a threat by the Saudis with the fall of Nasser. After that, although as an ideology Arab nationalism was still prevalent among many Arabs, it ceased to be a strong alternative to the status quo regional order in the Middle East. Thus, the relation between Iraq and Saudi Arabia turned into a more balance of power kind rivalry, rather than an effective normative threat by the end of the 1970s.

For the Saudis and other Gulf states, Iraq was a militarily powerful and demographically huge actor with hegemonic ambitions towards the Gulf. That means, Iraq for the Gulf States was a state that aspires to be a hegemon, and hence needs to be balanced. In this respect Shah’s Iran and Saddam’s Iraq were very similar states in terms of their regional role. However, when challenge to the normative consensus emerged

³⁶⁸ Kostiner, J. (2008). p. 58

with the revolution in Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies put their traditional rivalry aside, and allied with Iraq against the normative challenger. To put it differently, Gulf States which were in a relation of *power-balancing* with Iraq supported their traditional rival to engage in a *normative-balancing* against Iran. Such a decision was very similar to Saudis' alliance with their traditional Hashemite rivals in the wake of a Nasserist normative challenge in the 1950s, discussed in the previous chapter.

As Adib-Moghaddam argues, the war with Iran was an order-building institution in the English-school meaning of the term.³⁶⁹ The status quo powers wanted to preserve the existing normative consensus, and tame the revolutionary fervor through war. This was apparent in two things: first, during the war, the Saudi regime offered a negotiated settlement to the dispute, and proposed financial aid to Iran in return to dropping the objective of exporting the revolution.³⁷⁰ Second, the final aim of the war for the Saudis was not the total destruction of the Iranian regime, but rather they preferred a balanced end to war between Iran and Iraq to institute the regional order back to normal.

4.3.2.2. Gulf Cooperation Council

Another tool Saudi Arabia created and used to protect the status quo regional order against the revolutionary challenge was the Gulf Cooperation Council. Under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries except Iraq and Iran came together to form a union to advance inter-state cooperation in the region. The popular uprisings and terror attacks in the Gulf following the 1979 revolution led the Gulf monarchies come together to protect stability. The charter of the Council was signed in May 1981,

³⁶⁹ Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2006). p. 41

³⁷⁰ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) "Prolegomenon" p.19

and a secretariat was established in Riyadh, a sign of Saudi influence. The founders of the council stated Islam as the basis of their unity, an assertion which can best be understood in the light of the Iranian propaganda for the “un-Islamic” nature of the regimes and international organizations in the region.³⁷¹

The council was normally established for economic cooperation among member states according to the founding documents. But it quickly turned into a security oriented organization.³⁷² The Haram occupation, Bahraini coup plot, and social unrest at large led to such a transformation. As Gause writes, the motive behind the GCC was the fear from revolution and Iran-Iraq war.³⁷³ The most important agenda item for the council became the internal security of the regimes. Member states made agreements on intelligence sharing and criminal extradition with a specific focus on the “opponents of the regime.”³⁷⁴ In addition to the agreements under the umbrella of the GCC, all Gulf countries, except Kuwait, signed bilateral security agreements with Saudi Arabia in early 1982. For tiny Bahrain and Qatar, these were especially important. The council members agreed that “intervention in one means intervention in all.” This is again very similar to Saudi-Jordanian Taif treaty of 1962.

The GCC carries significant features of a normative balancing endeavor. First of all, the traditional foreign policy preferences of small Gulf states in their relation with the Saudi regime were based on a certain threat perception. As the most powerful state of the Arab Gulf, Saudi Arabia was seen as a potential hegemon in the region.

³⁷¹ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) “Khomeini’s Iran and Threats to Gulf Security” p. 17

³⁷² Kostiner, J. (2008). P.56

³⁷³ Ahrari also writes “As a direct response to the Khomeini revolution, the Gulf states have established a security-oriented Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).” Ahrari (1989) p. 1; see also Chubin, S. (1987). “The Islamic Republic’s Foreign Policy in the Gulf” in Kramer et al. p. 163

³⁷⁴ Ramazani, R. K. (1987). p.132

Hence, the Gulf states were aiming at balancing the Saudi influence, and were trying to limit Saudi initiatives. However, when they experienced the challenge of Iranian revolution, they immediately came together with Saudi Arabia, and forgot their traditional balancing motives. Moreover, it is not really effective for all Gulf states to come together to balance Iran militarily. All military power and population of the GCC countries combined were far smaller than Iran.³⁷⁵ That means, institution of GCC serves some other purpose than responding a military threat from Iran. The content of that purpose can be guessed by looking at the declared aim and emphasis of the member states. By forming the council, the GCC countries emphasized that they wanted to achieve “Gulfanisation of the Gulf.”³⁷⁶ Such a motive both gives a message to the Iranian challenge which advocates independent foreign policy (i.e.: neither East nor West) by making it clear that the council is a local initiative. It also gives a message to their local populations that it is not an imperialist scheme. The concern of the GCC countries was guaranteeing the non-interference of Iran in domestic GCC affairs.

Saudi Arabia reinforced the GCC umbrella with one-to-one security relations with the Gulf countries to preserve the status quo regional order in the Middle East. The Saudi leaders personally intervened in the internal security of Gulf counties to control the effects of revolutionary upheavals. Following the uprisings in Bahrain, for example, Saudis declared that they will construct a beltway that would physically connect the kingdom with Bahrain for a quick intervention in case of an internal or external security problem. After the coup plot against the Bahraini Amir, it is reported that the Saudi minister of interior Prince Nayif went to Bahrain with a squad of Saudi security

³⁷⁵ Peterson, J.E. (1989) “Security Concerns in the Arabian Peninsula” p.117

³⁷⁶ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) p.17

personnel to interrogate the dissidents.³⁷⁷ Similarly, the Saudi regime fought against the demands of republicanism in the Gulf countries inspired by the Iranian revolution. The Kuwaiti assembly was closed in 1986 allegedly under Saudi pressure.³⁷⁸ The Bahraini demonstrators in 1979-1982 were also demanding re-opening of their assembly, which was again closed by Saudi pressure.

4.3.2.3 Relations with Superpowers

The relations with the USA were also crucial for Saudi Arabia to institute its desired form of regional order in the Middle East. Against the revolutionary Islamic challenge, Saudis were keen on sustaining a delicate balance in their relations with the super power. On the one hand, the U.S. support was crucial for Saudi preferences in the region; on the other hand, too much engagements with the U.S. had its own drawbacks. After the fall of the Shah, the U.S.' twin pillar policy was dead. This created a window of opportunity for Saudi Arabia to become a real U.S. ally, replacing the traditional role of the Iranian monarchy.³⁷⁹ However, the Saudi rulers refrained from an open engagement with the U.S. The most important reason for this was the vulnerability of the Saudi regime to the Iranian propaganda. The "reactionary" regimes of the Gulf were accused of being lackeys of imperialism, agents of the U.S., and friend of Israel. Such a propaganda was convincing for masses in the region. We can see this from two kinds of events. First, the protests against the regimes in the region were occasionally taking place in front of the U.S. embassies in the Gulf. For example, demonstrators in Kuwait and Bahrain were gathering outside of the U.S. embassies in Kuwait City and Manama.

³⁷⁷ Ramazani, R. K. (1987). p. 131

³⁷⁸ Peterson, J.E. (1989) "Security Concerns in the Arabian Peninsula" p.116

³⁷⁹ Ahrari, M. E. (1989) pp. 10-31

Second, the Saudi foreign policy also proves this. While desperately in need of the U.S. help during the revolutionary waves, for domestic and regional considerations Saudi elite refrained from foreign policy choices that would make the accusations valid.³⁸⁰ For Saudi defense, Reagan approved selling AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia in September 1980s. Yet, the Saudis did not want to accept U.S. soldiers on their soil. Saudi regime rejected Reagan's strategic consensus initiative which would establish military presence in the Kingdom.³⁸¹ As Quandt writes, a possible presence of the U.S. troops in the kingdom would expose the Saudi regime to charges of cooperation with an ally of Israel.³⁸² Instead, the Saudi ruling family considered inviting Pakistani troops to the kingdom. In 1981, 1200 Pakistani combat force were in Saudi Arabia.³⁸³ The preference for Pakistani soldiers were very much in line with the challenges to the Middle East state-system: they were non-Arabs, and non-Shia. That means, they cannot be a party to inter-Arab rivalry; and they can be reliable against the Shia threat.

As was the case during the Nasserist years, the best form of relations with the U.S. was "over the horizon" for the Saudis during the challenging years of the Iranian revolution. Gause writes that many Saudis still think that the best time with the U.S. was during the oil embargo against the West in 1973 war.³⁸⁴ Fawcett also asserts that the Saudis want to hide their relations with the U.S. for domestic reasons. This was

³⁸⁰ The U.S. administration was also aware of the effects of the Iranian revolution on the Kingdom. Reagan's corollary to the Carter doctrine expressed that the U.S. would not "tolerate any threats to the stability of Gulf regimes either from within or without." Ahrari (1989) p.20. On October 1, 1981, Reagan stated that the USA would not permit Saudi Arabia "to be an Iran." See Quandt, W. B. (1981). p.5

³⁸¹ Gause, III. F. G. (2009). p. 69

³⁸² Similar considerations were made by Kuwait. Kuwaiti rulers declared that they would not allow U.S. troops on their soil.

³⁸³ Quandt, W. B. (1981). p. 41

³⁸⁴ Gause, III. F. G. (1994). p. 122

expressed by the long-time Saudi foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faysal: “An American base in the kingdom only jeopardizes the host nation’s interests.”

4.3.2.4 Islamism in 1980s

While Saudi Arabia used certain foreign policy tools - such as alliances, building new international organizations, buying weapons etc. - to institute its desired regional order, and to protect the status quo against the Iranian revolutionary challenge, the Saudi elite also engaged in certain foreign policy moves, and invested in a particular discursive framework to increase credibility, and boost legitimacy at home and abroad. These kind of Saudi actions can be analyzed under the general umbrella policy of “Islamism.” Against the Iranian Islamist threat, Saudis felt it necessary to prove their Islamic credentials. One of such precautions was about the Salman Rushdie affair. As mentioned above, Khomeini gave a death fatwa against Rushdie for his book the *Satanic Verses*. This put the Saudis in a difficult position. As the political authority of the holiest places of Islam, it was them who normally should have raised voice against an attack on the religious values of Muslims. Such an expectation on behalf of Muslims was actually documented by al-Rasheed’s field work in Britain. As she writes, British Muslims were asking the question why the Saudi regime did not raise voice before the Iranians.³⁸⁵ The Saudi rulers saw the event as an assertion of Iranian leadership for the Muslim world.³⁸⁶ To respond, Saudi ulama asserted that Rushdie had to be judged before one can give a ruling on the case. “Sheikh Bin Baz, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia

³⁸⁵ Al-Rasheed, M. (2005) “Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London” in Al-Rasheed, M. (Ed.). *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*. Routledge. pp. 149-167

³⁸⁶ Marschall, D. C. (2003). p. 55

urged that Rushdie be tried in absentia, under Islamic law in a Muslim country, on charges of heretical crimes against the House of Islam.”³⁸⁷

A second Saudi action in this regard was the change of the title of the Saudi king in 1984 from “his majesty” to the “custodian of the holy places.”³⁸⁸ The king wanted to appear more direct protector of the two sanctuaries in his daily official discourse. In other words, he wanted to be seen as the “guardian” of the Muslim interest in politics. Saudi regime increased its support for building mosques and Islamic centers worldwide in the 1980s, a trend that started with King Faisal.³⁸⁹ Against the Iranian version, the Saudi state aimed at exporting its own version of Islam in the world.³⁹⁰ The famous Madinah Islamic University has allocated 85% of its student admittance to foreigners who wish to study in the kingdom, with generous scholarships.³⁹¹

The Saudi support of the Afghan *jihad* is also another Saudi policy that serves a similar purpose.³⁹² Against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Saudi regime openly supported the resistance movement of the Afghan *muhajideen*, and encouraged participation in the anti-Soviet struggle. As Kostiner writes, the process galvanized the radical Sunni elements in the Gulf.³⁹³ Sheikh Bin Baz argued that it was a duty on every Muslim to support the Afghan resistance. According to estimates, around 30.000 Saudis went to Afghanistan in 1980s, and 10.000 turned back to the kingdom. The official support for the resistance against the communist enemy served the purpose of the Saudi regime to portray itself as the guardians of the Muslim interest worldwide. Such an

³⁸⁷ Al-Rasheed, M. (2005) “Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London” p.159

³⁸⁸ Eilts, H.F. (2004) p.231; Marschall, D. C. (2003). p.48

³⁸⁹ Al-Rasheed, M. (2005) “Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London”

³⁹⁰ Hunter, S. (2016). p. 28

³⁹¹ Al-Rasheed, M. (2005) “Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London”

³⁹² Al-Rasheed, M. (2005) “Saudi Religious Transnationalism in London”

³⁹³ Kostiner, J. (2008). p.54

endeavor becomes more meaningful if we remember how the revolutionary Iran proposed transcending the nation-state borders and the Westphalian international system. Saudis had to respond the challenge by showing that the concept of Muslim “ummah” was something they also believed in; and that they were willing to pay price to protect it.

Last but not least, the Saudi care for the transnational Muslim causes during the 1980s also manifested itself on the Palestine question. The Saudi regime criticized the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 1980. Piscatori notes that in addition to their own reasons, fear from the Arab states and revolutionary Iran was an important consideration for the Saudi decision.³⁹⁴

4.4. Conclusion

The revolutionary fervor that started with the Islamic Revolution in Iran affected the Middle East during the 1980s. Popular uprisings, mass demonstrations, demand for change, terror attacks etc. characterized the political atmosphere in the region. The revolutionary Iranian regime was proposing an alternative worldview, and an alternative regional order based on new ground rules for the regional state-system in the Middle East. Among other things, these included establishing republican form of governments, increasing the effects of Islamist ideology, transcending the “unnatural” nation-state borders, transforming the principles of the Westphalian system, disregarding the accepted international norms, instituting a more equitable distribution of wealth, fighting against “imperialist” interventions, and following an independent

³⁹⁴ Piscatori, J. (1985) “Islamic Values and National Interest: The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia” in Dawisha, A. I. *Islam in Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. p.44

foreign policy.³⁹⁵ The revolutionary leadership found a receptive audience in the region for these proposed changes. Hence, they engaged in communication strategies with the peoples of neighboring states.

However, the effects of the revolutionary wave, and the Iranian willingness to change the normative consensus in the region came to an end by the end of the 1980s.³⁹⁶ The devastating effects of the Iran-Iraq war on Iran, the catastrophic situation of the Iranian economy, unemployment, negative growth, loss of manpower in the war etc. forced Iranian leaders to find a way for peace and neighborly coexistence with the nations of the region.³⁹⁷ The death of Khomeini in 1989 made such a change in Iranian grand strategy practically possible.³⁹⁸ As Kamrava rightly points out, his death gave “greater maneuverability” to the Iranian leaders.³⁹⁹ Both the Iranian leaders and the heads of neighboring Arab states knew that a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war was not the really important thing to solve the dispute among them. What was important for the normalization of relations rather was transforming Iran into a “normal” actor in the regional state-system, which meant accepting the normative consensus of the status quo powers.

Aware of such a requirement, the Iranian leaders knew they had to express that the new foreign policy of Iran would be different, and that they would give up claims of internationalism, anti-sovereignty posture, and ideological foreign policy. The new president of the republic Rafsanjani was signaling this when he said “we do not

³⁹⁵ These new ground rules were very similar with what Nasser proposed in the 1950s and 1960s. The most important difference was that while Nasser used Arab nationalist ideology as the umbrella concept, it was Islamism for the Iranian Republic.

³⁹⁶ Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. A. (2014).

³⁹⁷ Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. A. (2014). p. 49

³⁹⁸ Bakhsh, S. (2004) “Iran’s Foreign Policy Under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000”

³⁹⁹ Kamrava, M. (2013). p. 156

squander our country's wealth for the sake of childish slogans."⁴⁰⁰ He also expressed that "in the revolutionary atmosphere we made constant enmities which was wrong. We need to change this." Such a rhetoric was accompanied with real change. The so-called "second republic" was established along these lines by Rafsanjani and the new supreme leader Khamenei.⁴⁰¹ Hinnebusch and Ehteshami characterize this new era of the Iranian revolution as the "reorientation phase" in which we observe deconstruction of internationalism in Iranian policy.⁴⁰² As Gause also observes, after the death of Khomeini, the aim of exporting the revolution to the outside world became a less important agenda item for the Iranian regime. Practically that meant that the Iranian regime started to appeal heads of states instead of directly talking to the masses in the region.⁴⁰³ The inter-governmental organizations became more important. For example, Iranian leaders expressed pride in being a member of the OIC.⁴⁰⁴ This new policy was labelled as "new pragmatism", "new-realism", "pragmatic peace" or "reorientation." For the state-identity of Iran, the new era symbolized more emphasis on Iranian nationalism, a concept which Khomeini disliked in the early years of the revolution.

The reaction of Arab states to these changes was positive. That means, both the Iranian leaders and the Arab heads of states knew what the most disruptive factor in Iran-Arab relations was: the challenge of the normative consensus. The Arab states took steps for normalization of relations and integration of the Islamic republic back to the regional state-system. In 1991, the persistent Hajj quota problem is solved. Riyadh

⁴⁰⁰ Quoted in Marschall, D. C. (2003). p.97

⁴⁰¹ Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2006). p. 73; Kamrava, M. (2013). p. 156

⁴⁰² Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. A. (2014). p. 44

⁴⁰³ This also meant that in the second republic of Rafsanjani and Khamenei, Iran refrained more from interfering in the domestic affairs of neighboring states.

⁴⁰⁴ Bakhash, S. (2004) "Iran's Foreign Policy Under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000"

accepted 115.000 Iranian pilgrims, which was above the preferred number of the Saudis. Probably to assure the Saudi leaders of good intentions of Iran, and to warn Iranian pilgrims, Rafsanjani said: “our eyes are not on Saudi Arabia’s internal system. (...) We cannot impose all our views on all countries.”⁴⁰⁵ In November 1991, the general secretary of the GCC Bishara and the Iranian foreign minister Valayati met in New York. Both declared “*non-interference* in the domestic affairs of others”⁴⁰⁶ as the basis of relations. These events and declarations show how the members of the state-system saw accepting the ground rules (non-interference, for example) as the condition to be a member in the system.⁴⁰⁷

The Iran-Iraq war was used as an “order-building institution” in the English school sense of the term. The rehabilitation of Iran and re-integration of it into regional state-system found its practical manifestation during the 1991 Kuwait war. When Saddam transgressed the rules of the system by invading Kuwait, all Arab Gulf states reacted to his move. The position of Iran was a litmus test to see whether it really turned into a “normal state.” Was Iran going to fight against the American-led coalition forces, or was it going to let the anti-imperialist rhetoric go? During the 1980s, Iranian accusation against Gulf monarchies was that they were allies and lackeys of the imperialist west. Some radical revolutionaries in Iran (the *maktabis*) wanted to cooperate with Iraq to resist the U.S. interference in the region.⁴⁰⁸ Yet, the new-pragmatism won the day, and Iran did not support the Saddam regime. To the contrary,

⁴⁰⁵ Quoted in Marschall, D. C. (2003). p. 57

⁴⁰⁶ Gause, III. F. G. (1994). p. 135. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰⁷ The pattern is almost identical in the case of Nasser.

⁴⁰⁸ Bakhsh, S. (2004) “Iran’s Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000” p.253; Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. A. (2014).

the Iranian leaders allowed U.S. planes to use their airspace in operations.⁴⁰⁹ Iran followed a similar non-interventionist policy in the spring of 1991 when Saddam Hussein crushed the Shia in southern Iraq. Iran provided very limited support.⁴¹⁰ As Adib-Moghaddam writes, “after the period of violence between 1980 and 1991, sovereignty was increasingly accepted as a ‘right’.”⁴¹¹

As for the hypotheses stated in the introduction chapter, we can make the following observations:

Hypothesis 1 – Legitimacy Problem

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with legitimacy problem regarding the regime, we should expect to see that they take precautions to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. This can occur a) through increasing the welfare of the citizens [or/and] b) through implementing policies in accordance with the ideals of the revolutionary wave.

Observations 1:

We observe that the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 1.

- a. The regime increased the welfare spending, housing, electrification, road construction. Despite the decrease in oil prices, it did not decrease these investments. Implemented policies to institute social justice, especially for the Eastern province.

⁴⁰⁹ al-Badi, A. (2016) p. 196

⁴¹⁰ Bakhash, S. (2004) p.255; Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. A. (2014) p. 47

⁴¹¹ Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2006). p. 10

- b. The regime decided to institute the *majlis al-shoura* (Consultative Assembly), which is in parallel with the republicanist propaganda of the revolution. Similarly, the regime promised implementation of the basic law of government (the constitution).

Hypothesis 2 – Foreign-Domestic Distinction

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the porous borders (i.e.: insufficient foreign-domestic distinction), we should expect to see that they take precautions to decrease the effects of the outside world in the kingdom. This can occur

- a) through limiting propaganda channels of the outside world in the kingdom, [and/or]*
- b) through paying more attention to those who have more interaction with the outside world, and decreasing the interaction of their citizens with outside.*

Observations 2:

We observe that the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 2:

- a. The regime wanted to limit the effects of the propaganda of the Islamic Revolution though investing in its own media broadcasts.
- b. The regime took precautions regarding the societal groups that have frequent interaction with the outside world. The regime expelled some of the foreign employees in the kingdom; called back students studying abroad in the middle of the academic year; doubled the salary of the army personnel; withdrew the armored units from the towns.

Hypothesis 3 – Normative Consensus Proposal

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the normative consensus in the Middle East state-system (i.e.: proposal of alternative ground rules), we should expect to see that their reactions should be directed to the normative challenge, instead of a military, economic or strategic one. This can occur through a number of ways:

- a) If this is a normative threat, the alliance choices should prioritize the normative challenger instead of a traditional balance of power rivalry;*
- b) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should make a differentiation between normative proposal (and people/parties who represent these ideas in a certain country) and the military and economic power of that country.*
- c) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should invest in normative and ideational instruments of foreign/domestic policy to represent their own version against the revisionist one.*
- d) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should take more precautions against internal threats instead of a foreign military offensive.*
- e) If this is a normative threat, the end of the threat should stem from elimination of the normative proposal, not a certain state.*

Observations 3:

We observe that in all of the cases, the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 3:

- a. Faced with the threat of the Iranian Revolution, the Saudi regime made changes in its alliance choices. It allied with its former traditional rival, the Baathist Iraq against the former ally, but the new normative rival Iran.

- b. The Saudi regime offered financial assistance to the Iranian regime to ease their economic hardships caused by the Iran-Iraq war and the declining oil prices in return of the concessions on behalf of the Iranian regime to lower its revolutionary claims.
- c. Faced with the threat of the Iranian Revolution, the Saudi regime emphasized the (salafi) Islamist nature of the regime as opposed to alternative of the Iranian Revolution by publicly supporting the Afghan resistance, building mosques and Islamic centers worldwide, adopting Quran as the constitution, adopting a religious national anthem, applying conservative domestic policies.
- d. Faced with the threat of the Iranian Revolution, the Saudi regime took precautions against the internal threats both in the kingdom and in the allied countries. The kingdom signed bilateral agreements and under the GCC umbrella declared a consensus on intelligence sharing and criminal extradition with a specific focus on the “opponents of the regime.” The council members agreed that “intervention in one means intervention in all.”
- e. The end of the Iranian Revolutionary threat for the Saudis meant the end of the Iranian efforts to export the revolution in the region. After the 1989, with the death of the Khomeini, and the “reorientation” phase of the Iranian foreign policy under Khamenei and Rafsanjani, the kingdom no longer perceived a normative threat from Iran. Instead, it helped reintegration of Iran into state-system as a “normal” state by solving the Hajj quote disputes and by mutual agreement on “non-interference” principle.

Chapter 5

SAUDI ARABIA AND THE CHALLENGE OF ARAB SPRING: 2010-2014

“Revolution is impossible until it is inevitable.”⁴¹²

Leon Trotsky

“The Egyptian Revolution had begun long before 2011, and [will] continue long after.”⁴¹³

Ziad el-Elaimy, Egyptian Revolutionary Leader

5.1. Introduction

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the turbulence that was caused by the Iranian Revolution of the 1979 lost its effectiveness by 1989 with the death of Khomeini. As the new regime in Tehran felt the necessity to come to good terms with neighboring Arab states due to its financial needs and the unsustainability of a foreign policy based on exporting the revolution, the littoral states to the Gulf built a new

⁴¹² Haas, M. L., & Lesch, D. W. (2013) “Introduction” in Haas, M. L., & Lesch, D. W. *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*. Westview Press. p. 3

⁴¹³ Esposito, J. L., Sonn, T., & Voll, J. O. (2016). *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press p. 4

consensus based on respect for sovereignty (at least nominally). Thus, Iran turned into a “normal” state in the system, compared to the decade following 1979.

However, in less than 25 years, the region entered into a new episode of revolutionary upheaval. The self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia ignited flames that later burned the whole Middle East from North Africa to the shores of the Persian Gulf. The region-wide transformation, which is later dubbed as the “Arab Spring”, led to demonstrations, riots, revolutions, civil war, inter-state conflict, and international military interventions in the region during the first half of the 2010s. While the manifestations of it were similar to the effects of Nasser and Khomeini in 1950s and 1980s, respectively, this time the main theme of the series of revolutions were not nationalism or Islamism, but democracy and human rights.

The uprisings in the region led to deposition of four autocrats in six months.⁴¹⁴ 42-year long dictatorship of Qaddafi in Libya, 33-year rule of Saleh in Yemen, 30-year rule of Mubarak in Egypt, and 24-year rule of Ben Ali in Tunisia came to an end with the revolutions. World’s longest serving prime minister Khalifa bin Salman of Bahrain (PM since 1971) also had to resign due to demonstrations.

Such a wave of demonstrations and uprisings caught everybody by surprise. Neither politicians in the region, nor the academics in the world predicted the popular and successful revolts. An academic writing from Tel Aviv around one month before the deposition of Mubarak asserted that “to be sure, Egypt is not in a pre-revolutionary

⁴¹⁴ Jones, T. (2013) “Saudi Arabia” in Amar, P. and V. P. (ed.) *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East*. University of Minnesota Press

situation.”⁴¹⁵ Similarly, Stephan Walt entitled his article in *Foreign Policy* published 2 days after the fall of Ben Ali of Tunisia “Why the Tunisian revolution won’t spread.”⁴¹⁶ Apart from academics, it seems that rulers of the region failed to see the upcoming of catastrophic events which would harm their national interests in the region. As Ulrichsen writes, this can best be observed with the “boom in Qatari investments in Syria; these totaled up to \$12 billion between 2006 and 2010.”⁴¹⁷

The year 2011 was the epitome of the wave of change in the region. The successive deposition of autocrats in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen created an atmosphere that gave the impression that anything was possible. Yet, those who had a vested interest in the preservation of the status quo in the regional state-system felt the necessity to stop the revolutionary wave. For the rulers of the Arab nations, the series of events were “their most serious crises since the Iranian revolution threw the region into chaos in the early 1980s.”⁴¹⁸ These ruling elites had to “respond to the new regional *zeitgeist*.”⁴¹⁹ The alliance against the spread of the democratization wave were spearheaded by the oil monarchies in the region. Ironically, while the so-called republics experienced revolutions, the monarchies were relatively stable. In that sense, as Yom and Gause observes, it was more an “Arab Republic’s Spring.”⁴²⁰ With the

⁴¹⁵ Maddy-Weitzman quoted in Hosseinioun, M. (2015) “Reconceptualizing Resistance and Reform in the Middle East” in Gerges, F. (ed.) *Contentious Politics in the Middle East*. Palgrave Macmillan p. 59

⁴¹⁶ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press p.107

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p.109

⁴¹⁸ Kamrava, M. (2012). “The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution.” *Orbis*, 56(1) p. 97

⁴¹⁹ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2015) “The Uprising in Bahrain: Regional Dimensions and International Consequences” in Sadiki, L. (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization*, Routledge. P. 141

⁴²⁰ Yom, S. and Gause III, G. (2012) “Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On” *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 23, Number 4, October 2012. P. 74

intervention of monarchies, however, the spring turned into winter.⁴²¹ As was the case in the years of Arab nationalist challenge of 1950s, and in the Islamist Revolution of 1980s, it was the monarchical alliance that fought against the ideals and normative proposals of the Arab Spring.

This chapter is about the Saudi perception of the events during the Arab Spring. I aim at constructing the contentious years of revolutionary upheavals from the Saudi eyes. The basic question I tackle with in the chapter is how the Saudi ruling elite saw the turbulent years of the Arab Spring in the Middle East. What were the considerations they had in mind in formulating domestic and foreign policy strategies during these years? Why did they perceive threat from the Arab Spring? How and why did they fight back? I analyze Saudi domestic and foreign policy, as well as their interconnection and interaction, with regard to the systemic crisis in the Middle East caused by popular revolutions.

I argue that for Saudi Arabia the challenge of Arab Spring was mainly towards to the normative consensus of the regional state-system in the Middle East. Saudis saw the developments in the region as a threat for the ground rules of the system. The easy spread of the events throughout the region (porous borders) and the legitimacy deficit of the regimes acted as catalyzers for the effectiveness of the proposed normative order in the region. The Saudi reaction to the Arab Spring, which is an indication for their perception of the events, support such an assertion. As will be discussed more in detail below, Saudi elite designed strategies in both domestic and foreign policy realm to

⁴²¹ Amar, P. and V. P. (2013) "Introduction Revolutionizing the Middle East" in Amar, P. and V. P. (ed.) *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East*. University of Minnesota Press.

increase their legitimacy and to prevent the natural diffusion of foreign developments into their domestic sphere. Likewise, the alliance choices of Saudi Arabia during the respective years indicate that they paid more attention to balancing the normative threats rather than physical ones.

The organization of the chapter is as follows: the second section summarizes the major events in the Middle East from the start of Tunisian revolution on December 17, 2010 until 2013. In the third section, I analyze Saudi politics and Saudi perception of events during these years. I focus on two levels: first, I look at the effects of the Arab Spring on the Saudi domestic politics and their reactions to them; second, I look at the effects of the Arab Spring on Saudi foreign policy. The fourth section is conclusion where I discuss my hypotheses in relation to the findings in the chapter.

5.2. Arab Spring and the Middle East

In this section, I briefly go over the main events that characterize the Arab Spring. After giving a historical background of the events, I also discuss the distinct normative challenge of the Arab uprisings compared to the previous episode of regional crises. Since there is a vast literature on the details of the events during the Arab Spring years, my aim here is not to give a historical account of the day-to-day politics, but rather to highlight the main turning points in the region.

5.2.1. Major Events

On 17th of December 2010, a street vendor in Tunisia, Muhammad Buazizi, set himself on fire after the confiscation of his handcart by local authorities as a protest to economic conditions in the country. Probably he was not aware then that his act of protest would start uprisings in the whole Middle East, and would cause deposition of

four autocrats including Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of his own country, Tunisia. Demonstrations and riots in Tunisia lasted 28 days. Ben Ali left the country on January 14, 2011 and went to exile in Saudi Arabia.

The next stop of popular uprisings were Egypt. The protests were scheduled for January 25, 2011 in Cairo and major cities. Thousands of protesters poured into the streets in Egypt; and *Tahrir* Square became the symbol of resistance to the dictatorial rule of Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak refused to give up his power, and used paid thugs to deter the protestors. Yet, he had to yield to the protestors on the 11th of February, after 18 days of protests and leaving 841 protestors dead.

While the success of the Tunisian revolution gave hopes to the masses in the Middle East, the revolution in Egypt, the most populous and in many respects the most powerful country of the region, created a euphoria in various parts of the Middle East for those who demand change. The possibility of changing a regime through popular protests entered into the political lexicon of the masses in the region. The Bahraini protestors scheduled their demonstrations to take place on February 14, just three days after the fall of Mubarak. The date has also another significance in the Bahraini contexts: ten years earlier, the Bahraini ruling family promised elections on that day.⁴²² The Bahraini protests were centered around the Pearl Roundabout in the capital city. Bahraini people showed an unprecedented turn out to the calls for demonstrations.

⁴²² Abdo, G. (2017). *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*. Oxford University Press

According to some observers, one-third of all Bahraini citizens were on the streets to protest the existing regime.⁴²³

Such an uprising in a Shia majority country sent threatening signals both to the ruling regime and to the neighboring Arab governments. As will be discussed more in detail below, the Gulf Cooperation Council's armed force Peninsula Shield Force entered to Bahrain, and stormed the Pearl Roundabout on the 17th of February. This was the first and most direct action of the status quo alliance in the region against the revolutionary fervor of anti-authoritarianism.

Even though the protestors in Bahrain were harshly cracked down, the travel of the revolutionary wave continued further. On the same day the Peninsula Shield Force, mostly consisting of Saudi troops, entered Bahrain, the demonstrations against the regime begun in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi population in the Eastern province mainly consists of Shia citizens of the Kingdom. Their resentments towards the regime once more became visible with the Arab Spring demonstrations. As was the case in Bahrain, Saudi security forces intervened in the situation, and gained control of the province through military force.

The next three steps of the Arab uprisings did not produce quick results either in favor of the protestors or the dictators. Rather they resulted in prolonged civil wars in the region. The Libyan people scheduled their protests against the Qaddafi rule on the 16th of February 2011. However, the fractions of the Libyan army loyal to the regime thanks to tribal ties responded with a harsh repression of the protestors. The situation

⁴²³ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2015) "The Uprising in Bahrain"; another observer wrote 1/5 of all population see: Guzansky, Y. (2015). *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East: Between Iran and the "Arab Spring"* Palgrave Macmillan

turned into a civil war between east and west Libya. The relentless Qaddafi forces announced that they would exterminate all the rebels which was possible for the regime with its air force. A coalition of outside actors including NATO and some Arab states like Qatar and the UAE decided to intervene in the situation to support the uprising and oust Qaddafi. On March 19th, the coalition forces attacked Qaddafi's strongholds.⁴²⁴ This gave the opportunity to the revolutionaries to advance their forces into the capital. In August, Tripoli fell to the revolutionary forces. On October 20th, Qaddafi was captured and killed.

Yemeni and Syrian uprisings have led to prolonged civil wars as well. The first demonstrations took place in Sana on January 16th. The fractured nature of the Yemeni society along tribal and sectarian lines caused power struggles both among the ruling elite and the revolutionaries. The rise of the Shia Houthis during the conflict transformed the Yemeni conflict to an international one due to Saudi and Iranian interests in the country. Hence it became one of the places where Saudis and Iranians fought a proxy war in the region. When a bomb blast occurred on the 3rd of June, 2011 in the presidential compound, the Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh was wounded, and transferred to Riyadh for treatment. After negotiations among the ruling coalition in the country, Saleh agreed to transfer his power to his aide Mansur Hadi on November 23rd.⁴²⁵ Nevertheless, this did not help to solve the conflict in the country. To this date,

⁴²⁴ Lilli, E. (2015) "Foreign Actors: A Double-Edged Sword Hanging over Contentious Politics in the Middle East" in Gerges, F. P. M. *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings*. Palgrave Macmillan

⁴²⁵ Jones, T. (2013) "Saudi Arabia" in Amar, P. and V. P. (ed.) *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East*. University of Minnesota Press

Yemeni civil war continues, and Yemeni civilians are experiencing one of the worst humanitarian crisis in the region.

The situation in Syria is not better than Yemen. Syria is a latecomer to the uprising series in the region. It was actually seen as a country where stability would ensue despite the surrounding chaos. Around four months after the Tunisian uprisings, in March 2011 first serious demonstrations took place in Syria. While the demonstrators were using non-violent methods, and were demanding reforms rather than a total revolution at the beginning, the harsh repression of the security forces, which included even using chemical weapons (for example in Ghouta in August 2013) led to militarization of the conflict.⁴²⁶ The clashes caused thousands of casualties and millions of displaced civilians; and a severe humanitarian crisis. The country is practically divided among the regime, YPG forces, Free Syrian Army and ISIS.

Similar but less intense demonstrations also took place in Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait. On January and February 2011, in the cities of Amman and Zarqa, Jordanians held demonstrations for reform.⁴²⁷ The king took precautions to prevent the demonstrations from spreading by shuffling the cabinet, and certain reform promises. In Kuwait, the protestors were on the streets during the summer of 2011.⁴²⁸ Although the demands were less radical than most of other countries in the region, they were similar in their content: fighting corruption, instituting more transparency, and more

⁴²⁶ Gani, J. (2015). "Contentious Politics and the Syrian Crisis: Internationalization and Militarization of the Conflict" in Gerges, F. P. M. *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴²⁷ Bank, A., et al. (2014) "Durable, Yet Different: Monarchies in the Arab Spring," *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 4:2, pp. 163-179

⁴²⁸ Gerges, F. (2015) "Introduction: Contextualizing the Arab Spring Uprisings: Different Regimes, Different Revolutions and Different Trajectories" in *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings*. Palgrave Macmillan.

representation. The demonstrations recurred from October to December 2012. According to Matthiesen, Kuwait saw its largest demonstrations in its history during this period.⁴²⁹

5.2.2. Material Causes

The background conditions that made these countries susceptible to the revolutionary upheavals are very similar. As discussed in the previous chapters, members of the regional state-system in the Middle East share various features in their historical experiences with regard to state building, state-society relations, foreign affairs etc. As for the Arab Spring, however, many authors emphasize the economic aspect of affairs. According to many observers, high rates of unemployment, low wages, and insufficient and expensive housing were some of the pressing issues the peoples of Middle Eastern countries struggle with.⁴³⁰ Similarly, lack of respect for the basic human rights, massive corruption and a general hopelessness for the possibility of a better future are things that were prevalent among millions in the region.⁴³¹ According to the figures, 40% of the population in the MENA region live below poverty line.⁴³² According to another statistics, 17% of the peoples in the region survive with an income of less than \$2 per day.⁴³³

⁴²⁹ Matthiesen, T. (2013) *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that wasn't*. Stanford University Press.

⁴³⁰ See for example Guzansky, Y. (2015). *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East*, and Haas, M. L., & Lesch, D. W. (2013) "Introduction"

⁴³¹ Haas, M. L., & Lesch, D. W. (2013) "Introduction"

⁴³² Rutherford, B. (2013) "Egypt: The Origins and Consequences of the January 25 Uprising" in Haas M and Lesch D. *The Arab Spring*.

⁴³³ Al-Sayyid, M. K. (2015) "The Arab Spring: Why in Some Arab Countries and Not in Others?" in Larbi, S. (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring*

Another important factor that has significant impact especially with regard to the last decades discussed in the relevant literature is the “youth bulge.”⁴³⁴ As Haas and Lesch writes, in the region, “roughly one out of every three people is between the ages of ten and twenty-four. Youth bulges are particularly pronounced in those countries that experienced the most widespread and powerful protests during the Arab Spring.”⁴³⁵ Needless to say, the youth bulge is also connected with the youth unemployment. According to a research, for example, in 2008, 25% of university were unemployed in the Middle East.⁴³⁶ Compared to the other developing regions of the world, the Middle East stands out with a very poor performance. The youth unemployment in the region is twice the global average.⁴³⁷ In the MENA region, it is “about 24 percent, whereas it is no more than 12 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 15 percent in South Asia”⁴³⁸

5.2.3. Diffusion and Demonstration Effect

Similar background conditions to a certain extent help us understanding the possible causes that made people susceptible to revolutionary ideas in the region. However, they do not give us explanations on the timing and spread of the uprisings from North Africa to the Gulf. The quick spread of the revolutionary fervor throughout the region indicates the interconnection of peoples, as well as ideas. In this sense, the Arab Spring provides a good example of the “demonstration effect” in international politics. What we observe is the “diffusion of repertoires” of contention and resistance

⁴³⁴ Haas, M. L., & Lesch, D. W. (2013) “Introduction”

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Rutherford, B. (2013) “Egypt: The Origins and Consequences”

⁴³⁷ Kamrava, M. (2014) “The Rise and Fall of Ruling Bargains in the Middle East” in Kamrava, M. (ed.) *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East*. Oxford University Press

⁴³⁸ Foran, J. (2014) “Global Affinities: The New Cultures of Resistance behind the Arab Spring” in Kamrava, M. (ed.) *Beyond the Arab Spring*. p.60

against the dictatorial rules from country to country.⁴³⁹ The peoples in the region closely follow the events in other countries, and they “update their probabilities of success” by looking at the course of events abroad.⁴⁴⁰ Experts and observers of the events in different countries opine that the successes happening in fellow Arab countries embolden neighboring nations. For example, it is argued that the Libyan revolution emboldened the Syrians;⁴⁴¹ Mubarak’s departure encouraged Yemenis⁴⁴² etc. Likewise, the regional aura triggered the Kuwaiti protests,⁴⁴³ and Bahraini revolutionaries.⁴⁴⁴ The most practical aspect of diffusion of repertoires in the Arab Uprisings is about the tactics and innovative strategies of demonstrations. From Tunisia all the way to Egypt and Yemen, activists used similar tactics to defend their cause. We can observe diffusion of tactics within the Arab world in a number of examples. For instance, the slogans the protestors chanted over and over again were identical in all revolutions: *Irhal!* (Go), *As-Shaab Yureed Isqat al-Nizam!* (the people want the fall of the regime). Likewise, occupying a central square in the capital was shared by activists from different countries. Although Tahrir square in Cairo is the most well-known example, both Yemeni and Bahraini protestors have their own squares. Another

⁴³⁹ Gerges, F. (2015) “Introduction: Contextualizing the Arab Spring”

⁴⁴⁰ Heydemann, S. and Leenders, R. (2014) “Authoritarian Learning and Counterrevolution” in Lynch, M. (ed.) *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, Columbia University Press. P. 77 For theoretical discussion of spread see Patel, D., Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wolchik (2014) “Diffusion and Demonstration” in Lynch, M. (ed.) *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, Columbia University Press pp. 57-74

⁴⁴¹ Fares, O. (2014) “Arab Spring Comes to Syria” in Sadiki, L. (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization*, Routledge pp.145-159 and Gani, J. (2015) “Contentious Politics and the Syrian Crisis”

⁴⁴² Al-Arian, A. (2014) “Islamist Movements and the Arab Spring” in Kamrava, M. (ed.) *Beyond the Arab Spring* pp. 99-130

⁴⁴³ Nasova, A. (2015) “Kuwaiti Arab Spring? The Role of Transnational Factors in Kuwait’s Contentious Politics” in Gerges, F. P. M. *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings*. Palgrave Macmillan pp. 75-96

⁴⁴⁴ Mecham, Q. (2014) “Bahrain’s Fractured Ruling Bargain: Political Mobilization, Regime Responses and the New Secternianism” in Kamrava, M. (ed.) *Beyond the Arab Spring* pp. 341-372

common tactic that diffused from early demonstrators from Tunisia to later ones to the eastern Arabs is re-focusing revolutionary energy every week on Fridays by giving a common name to the day: Day of Rage, Day of Steadfastness.⁴⁴⁵ Positive symbols, open messages, precise goals are other common demonstration tactics that are diffused from one country to the other.

The effects and easy spread of uprising in one country to the neighboring nations were facilitated by the new means of communication. While in the previous revolutionary waves it was only the traditional radio that was used for propaganda purposes, for the Arab Spring both satellite TVs and the internet created new and more effective channels for sharing day-to-day events in the course of the revolution. Under repressive regimes of the region which drastically limits public discussions on social and political affairs, social media functioned as an “alternative public sphere” for the peoples of the Middle East.⁴⁴⁶ Especially during the actual daily fights with the security forces of the regimes during the early months of 2011, both within a country and in the region as a whole, protestors shared their experiences, tactics, news etc. with fellow revolutionaries in the Middle East. In a region where means of communication are under governmental control, social media enabled the “rise of citizen journalism.”⁴⁴⁷ We can follow the significance of internet by looking at the rise in the number of social media users especially during the days of the Arab Spring. “According to the 2011 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey, in the five Arab countries surveyed, 15 percent of the respondents had acquired access to the Internet between the previous three to five

⁴⁴⁵ Lynch, M. (2012) *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*. Public Affairs, New York. p.69

⁴⁴⁶ Guzansky, Y. (2015). *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East*

⁴⁴⁷ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2015) “The Uprising in Bahrain” p. 142

years, 18 percent between the previous one to three years, and 27 percent in less than one year."⁴⁴⁸ We can also observe "the phenomenal increase in Twitter usage in all GCC states, with Saudi Arabia registering the world's fastest rate of growth in Twitter users throughout 2012, and by far the highest number of users being aged between eighteen and thirty-four."⁴⁴⁹

In addition to social media, an important medium of communication for the Arab Spring years that made a "unified Arab public sphere"⁴⁵⁰ possible was the *al-Jazeera* TV station based in Qatar. Similar to the *Voice of Arabs* radio of Nasser in the 1960s, and the Iranian radio broadcasts in the 1980s, al-Jazeera was the main platform through which the protestors present their vision and hopes. As Lynch observes "al-Jazeera became source of common knowledge; link region into single narrative."⁴⁵¹

Protests spread so quickly and powerfully from the margins of Tunis because they took place within a radically new Arab political space. A new generation of Arabs had come of age watching al-Jazeera, the Qatari satellite television station; connection with each other through social media; and internalizing a new kind of pan-Arabist identity. (...) The unified Arab world of which generations of pan-Arab ideologues had dreamed had never felt more real⁴⁵²

The Qatari TV station openly endorsed the Arab Spring revolutions in the region.⁴⁵³ Such a media support definitely encouraged the revisionist actors in the

⁴⁴⁸ Kamrava, M. (2014) "The Rise and Fall of Ruling Bargains in the Middle East" p.37

⁴⁴⁹ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press p. 5

⁴⁵⁰ Lilli, E. (2015) "Foreign Actors" p.170

⁴⁵¹ Lynch, M. (2011) "Media, Old and New" in Lynch, M (ed.) *Arab Uprisings Explained*. p. 94

⁴⁵² Lynch, M. (2012) *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*. Public Affairs, New York. p.8

⁴⁵³ With the exception of Bahrain.

region and contributed to the increasing participation in the protests. According to Lucas, "al-Jazeera's coverage has been identified as crucial in the "scaling-up" of protests in Tunisia and Egypt and in the contagion of the protest meme across the Arab world in early 2011."⁴⁵⁴ Ramadan notes al-Jazeera is followed by more than 40 million Arabs.⁴⁵⁵

5.2.4. The Normative Challenge

The fight between the defenders of the status quo and the proponents of revision was mainly about two clashing visions regarding the order in the Middle East. As was the case during the revolutionary waves of Arab Nationalism and the Iranian Revolution, the actors who demand change were trying to transform the ground rules of the regional state-system. They were challenging the existing state-society relations (i.e.: the social contract), general organization of the state, the management of the economy, distribution of wealth etc.

While in the previous rounds of revolutionary upheavals, Arab nationalism and a certain form of Islamism (with an emphasis on Shiism) were the main ideological currents that united people against the status quo order, in the Arab Spring, the main ideational proposal was based on democracy. More specifically, a combination of democracy and human rights with a certain form of political Islam (which is often labelled as moderate; such as Nahda, and Ikhwan as opposed to Taliban, ISIS or al-Qaeda) was the normative challenge of the Arab Spring. In a sense, the Arab Spring have benefitted from the emphasis on "popular rule" from the revolutions of 1950s

⁴⁵⁴ Lucas, R. (2014) "The Persian Gulf Monarchies and the Arab Spring" in Kamrava, M. (ed.) *Beyond the Arab Spring*. p. 316

⁴⁵⁵ Ramadan, T. (2012) *Islam and the Arab Awakening*. Oxford University Press p.46

(which later went to a different direction), and from the emphasis on an alternative role for religion from the revolution of 1979; and created its own proposal.

There are some features of the Arab Spring movements that make them novel in certain respects with regard to the normative proposal they represent; and hence a new form of challenge for the defenders of the status quo. To begin with, different from the previous challenges to the normative consensus in the region, democracy is the main ideal, the new “zeitgeist” in the Arab Spring. The protestors who flooded to the Arab streets did so not because of an ideological motive in the traditional understanding of the term (socialism, nationalism, communism, or Islamism etc.), but rather because they were demanding basic human rights and dignity which they believed can be fulfilled with a democratic transition.⁴⁵⁶ It is illustrative in this sense that an important term that united the slogans from North Africa to the Gulf was *karamah* (dignity).⁴⁵⁷ The belief in shared norms and expectations - a belief in human dignity - was the unifying factor during the Arab spring protests. As Jasmine Gani writes

Many Arabs did feel they were a part of a broader phenomenon that united Arabs in a post-pan-Arab identity—one based on calls for *justice and citizens’ rights*—rather than in a pan-Arab union or anticolonialism as had been the case in the past.⁴⁵⁸

A second feature of the last wave of revolutions, which is related to the first one, is that, the Arab Spring represent an attempt to go beyond the traditional ideological

⁴⁵⁶ Hosseinioun, M. (2015) “Reconceptualizing Resistance and Reform in the Middle East”

⁴⁵⁷ Tessler, M. and Robbins, M. (2014) “Political Systems Preference of Arab Publics” in Lynch, M. (ed.) *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, Columbia University Press pp. 249-272

⁴⁵⁸ Gani, J. (2015) “Contentious Politics and the Syrian Crisis” p.129 Emphasis added.

divisions. In Wehrey's study on the Arab uprisings, he writes that during his interviews with the protestors "these new youth activists described themselves as 'post-ideological' and nonsectarian in their demands."⁴⁵⁹ The selective appropriation of elements from Arab and Islamic identities is best captured by Ryan Curtis:

Today's calls for unity are calls for transnational cooperation, not national unification. Today's Pan-Arabism is not the ideology of largely secular and leftist military juntas but a more societal and cultural Pan-Arabism. If Arabist discourse dominated the 1950s and 1960s and Islamist discourse dominated the decades afterward, today we see more of an overlap between previously polarized ideas, with Arabism and Islamism overlapping at times.⁴⁶⁰

Such a new dialogue of Arabism and Islamism, and new post-ideological synthesis can be captured from the Islamist parties' relations with the symbols of official ideology and Arabism. As Arian notes, different from the past, Egyptian Islamist parties were comfortable with using Egyptian flags and chanting national anthem in their rallies which is "a far cry from the designation of such practices as a deviation from true Islam."⁴⁶¹

A third feature of the normative challenge of the Arab Spring revolutions that make them novel for the Middle East regional state-system in general, and for the defenders of the status quo in particular is that successful transitions to democracy

⁴⁵⁹ Wehrey, F. (2014) *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings*. Columbia University Press. P. 187

⁴⁶⁰ Ryan, C. (2014) "Inter-Arab Relations and the Regional System" in Lynch, M. (ed.) *Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*. Columbia University Press. p.120

⁴⁶¹ Al-Arian, A. (2014) "Islamist Movements and the Arab Spring" in Kamrava, M. (ed.) *Beyond the Arab Spring*. p. 108

meant electoral victories for the Islamist parties. The long-time opposition organizations of political Islamism, such as Nahda in Tunisia and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for the first time in the history of their countries became alternatives for governments. In Egypt, for example, 73% of the seats in the Egyptian parliament went to Islamists (Ikhwan and al-Nour combined).⁴⁶²

Such political gains were not just about practical changes in the politics of the country. Rather, as far as the challenge to the existing normative consensus is concerned, what they represent is a theoretical transformation in the Islamist political thought towards a more democracy-friendly position. Islamist actors especially in Tunisia and Egypt openly endorsed democracy in their public discourses. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt officially declared that they envision establishment of a “democratic civil state.”⁴⁶³ What is more interesting is the position of *Salafi* politicians who had not been active in politics before the uprisings, and who had been more rigid on their anti-democracy stance. As Rutherford observes, Salafis were against political participation before the revolutions.⁴⁶⁴ Yet, they also openly endorsed democracy after the successful transitions.⁴⁶⁵ Whether they truly believed in what they say, or what kind of democracy they get along well with is not our main concern here. The acceptance of democracy as an ideal form of government in the public discourse of the Islamist politicians is in itself an important thing for the political atmosphere of the region.

⁴⁶² Ibid. See also: Rutherford, B. (2013) “Egypt: The Origins and Consequences of the January 25 Uprising.”

⁴⁶³ Al-Arian, A. (2014) “Islamist Movements and the Arab Spring” p. 115

⁴⁶⁴ Rutherford, B. (2013) “Egypt: The Origins and Consequences of the January 25 Uprising.”

⁴⁶⁵ Al-Arian, A. (2014) “Islamist Movements and the Arab Spring”

In addition, although some form of republicanism have already been present in the Islamist lexicon of the region, this was more in connection with Shiism. As discussed in the previous chapter, after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, anti-monarchism in particular, and anti-authoritarianism in general were crucial points Iranians emphasized in their attempts to export their revolution. Despite their perception as a threat to be countered by the monarchs of the region, these attempts were classified as “Shia conspiracy” against the Sunni Muslims by the defenders of the status quo. To put it differently, while on the level of ideas, anti-authoritarianism was a challenge the Sunni authoritarian states had to face with during the 1980s, the fact that it was originating from a Shia state allowed the dictators of the region to frame it as a Shia offensive against Sunni Muslims. With the Arab Spring, however, the ideals of anti-authoritarianism started to occupy a more central position in the Sunni political landscape. The defenders of new ground rules for the region were now more one of “us” for the Arab Middle East. Besides, this new challenge was not just on the level of ideas. Rather, the proponents of these ideas started to hold highest offices in two important Arab countries, which make them more convincing for the masses about their feasibility.

Another important feature of the new normative challenge especially for the monarchies that are in some way or another base their legitimacy on religious values is that the new regimes were not just democracies, but also they were ruled by Islamists. That means, even though just a democratization wave was an already enough source of threat for authoritarian states, the fact that Islamist could govern such a democratic state doubles the challenge. To put it differently, since many of the monarchies in the region base their regime legitimacy on religion (such as Saudi Arabia as a sharia-state, or

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as a state ruled by the descendants of the prophet), an Islamic democracy pose a dual challenge for them. On the one hand, the universal positive normative standing of democracy as a regime type is already an attractive form of government for the peoples in the region. Hence, a series of revolutions that create democratic regimes in some countries that are members of the same state-system are already a challenge.

On the other hand, the combination of Islamic credentials with these democratic transitions increased the threatening effect of the new situation. That means, if the revolutions had brought seculars to power, they would have been a less threatening challenge compared to the Islamist governments. That is because, as they framed the Iranian Revolution as a Shia affair, they could have labeled the new democratic regimes as un-Islamic from the very beginning. Yet, those who came to power had unimpeachable Muslim credentials. As Wendt writes, the most threatening other to the self is the one closest to the self. On how the Arab Spring challenge was more serious than that of Iran, Preuschaft writes: “A democratically elected Islamist government in Egypt, the most populous Arab state, directly challenged the Saudi monarchical system and its attendant claim of religious legitimacy far more than the Islamic Republic of Iran ever could.”⁴⁶⁶

5.2.5. Defending Status Quo vs. Demanding Revision

The revolutionary turmoil naturally led to a division among political actors in the region with respect to their positions during the Arab Spring: those who prefer the existing order vs. those who demand change. The popular protests that aim at

⁴⁶⁶ Preuschaft, M. (2016) “Islam and Identity in Foreign Policy” in Patrick, N. (ed.) Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation. I.B. TAURIS p.23

transforming the region into a different political geography threatened the actors who had vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo. A region famous for its “robustness of authoritarianism”⁴⁶⁷ could not let the revolutions take place so easily without fighting back. As they survived the first shock of the revolutionary wave, the defenders of the status quo came together to stop, what they saw as, the chaos produced by unruly mobs. As will be discussed more in detail below with regard to Saudi Arabia, the defenders of status quo used similar tactics and put together their resources in order to create their preferred type of stability. As the revolutionaries do, “authoritarian states cooperate with one another, trading ‘best practices’ on surveillance and repression.”⁴⁶⁸

The authoritarian states deployed a number of tactics to contain the effects of the revolutionary ideas on their people. On the one hand, they used coercive means such as harsh repression of protests by security forces, surveillance of the internet use, imprisonment of protestors etc. On the other hand, to produce consent, they engaged in tactics of positive reinforcement such as generous financial packages, royal pardons for political prisoners, promises of reform etc. As an example, during demonstrations, Kuwait gave 1000 dinar (approximately \$3500) to each Kuwaiti citizen.⁴⁶⁹ Besides, the status quo powers coordinated their foreign policy strategies to stop the spread of the revolutionary wave. The military hand of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Peninsula Shield Force, which was formed in 1980, was first used in its history in Bahraini

⁴⁶⁷ Bellin, E. (2004) “The *Robustness of Authoritarianism* in the Middle East. Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jan., 2004), pp. 139-157

⁴⁶⁸ Lynch, M. (2014) “Media, Old and New” in Lynch, M (ed.) *The Arab Uprisings Explained*. p.100

⁴⁶⁹ For more detailed numbers of financial packages see: Guzansky, Y. (2015). *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East*. p.111

uprising. The Gulf soldiers entered Bahrain to protect the Khalifa regime from downfall.⁴⁷⁰

As discussed above, the challenge to the normative consensus of the Middle East state-system by the Arab Spring revolutions mainly centered on the ideals of democracy and human rights, and the resulting empowerment of Sunni Islamist actors in the region. Because of these, it was the monarchies that felt real threat to their preferred regional order. Hence, as was the case during the previous waves of upheavals, the regimes in the Gulf came together to construct a monarchical solidarity against the effects of the uprisings. The group was spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and followed by Kuwait, Bahrain, and Jordan.

What shows best the aversion the monarchies felt for the proposed new regional normative consensus is their attitude towards the most solid representative of it: the Muslim Brotherhood. The status quo powers did their best to ensure that the Brotherhood fails. One of the precautions they took was to pressure the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in their own countries. For example, the United Arab Emirates government arrested many members of the organization after the electoral victory of it in Egypt.⁴⁷¹ As Ulrichsen writes: "As the Brotherhood made electoral gains in Tunisia and Egypt that appeared to position the group as the major beneficiary of the Arab Spring, so the attitudes toward it in other GCC capitals hardened."⁴⁷² Besides, the status quo alliance, as will be discussed more detailed below, fully supported the military

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Matthiesen, T. (2013) *Sectarian Gulf*

⁴⁷² Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). *Qatar and the Arab Spring* p.156

intervention against the first elected president of the five thousand years of Egyptian history.

The perceived threat from the Brotherhood can be found in the statements of the foreign minister of the UAE, Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan who claimed that it is “an organization which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations.”⁴⁷³ Dubai police chief Khalfan also said that “We have evidence this group was planning to overthrow rulers in the Gulf region.”⁴⁷⁴ What is interesting is that these anti-Brotherhood sentiments are not accompanied with a radical transformation of Egyptian or Tunisian foreign policies after the electoral victories of Islamist parties. That is to say, neither Egypt nor Tunisia turned into revisionist states in the traditional understanding of the term, by any real actions such as signaling arms race, war preparation, escalation of border disputes etc. They also did not aim at exporting revolutions, as was the case for Nasser and Khomeini. Even regarding the usual suspect for Egyptian Islamist, the treaty with Israel is not questioned. To the contrary, “the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi al-Nur Party state that they will abide by all of Egypt’s existing international treaties, including Camp David.”⁴⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the Brotherhood continued to be a source of threat for the monarchies. An interesting statement showing how the Brotherhood government is accused of challenging the existing normative consensus can be found in the UAE foreign minister’s statement when he asserted that “the Muslim Brotherhood does not believe in the nation state.”⁴⁷⁶ In this regard, the normative challenger started to replace

⁴⁷³ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). *Qatar and the Arab Spring* p. 155

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Rutherford, B. (2013) “Egypt: The Origins and Consequences of the January 25 Uprising” p.54

⁴⁷⁶ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). *Qatar and the Arab Spring* p.119

traditional rivals as a threat to security for status quo powers. Thus, normative balancing had to be prioritized over power balancing. In other words, while the usual subject of balancing for the Arab monarchies was Iran, now the Islamist democratic actors who represent the ideals of the Arab Spring became a threat to be prioritized. This observation found its most concrete expression in the words of the Dubai chief of police Khaflan: “We warn the Gulf States of the Muslim Brotherhood because they are more of a threat to us than Iran.”⁴⁷⁷ Similarly, Ulrichsen writes, by 2012 “the Muslim Brotherhood replaced Iran as the *bête noir* of Gulf ruling elites.”⁴⁷⁸

As opposed to the actors who preferred to fight with change, there are those who support the revolutions and the ideals of the Arab Spring for the Middle East. These actors buttress the fall of dictatorships in the region, promote free elections, encourage more representation in governmental offices. The main pillar of this group is the peoples in the region themselves. In almost all countries of the Middle East, citizens support a regime transition towards democracy. Though they lack repressive power of official state apparatus, these masses represent main force of revisionism in the region. Notwithstanding the weaknesses of civil society in the region due to historical factors, NGOs, professional organizations, charity networks, student movements, religious groups etc. from different ideological leanings make up the organizational backbone of the revisionist actors.

Apart from the citizens of the region, two states endorsed the ideals of the Arab Spring in the countries that experienced unrests: Qatar and Turkey. As mentioned above, though a monarchy itself, Qatar supported the Arab uprisings from the very

⁴⁷⁷ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. p. 119

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 154

beginning. In addition to logistical supports, Qatar took part in the military operations in Libya against the Qaddafi regime. Similarly, Qatar gave military support to the Syrian revolutionaries. Yet, the most significant and effective Qatari foreign policy instrument in promoting the success of Arab uprising has been the al-Jazeera TV station. Qatari monarchy also became a place of refuge for the leaders of opposition movements in the Middle East. Khalid Mashal of Hamas, famous Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qardawi, and the Algerian Islamist leader Abbas Madani, to give some examples, found a secure place for their activities in Qatar.⁴⁷⁹

Similarly, Turkey openly supported the Arab uprisings in the Middle East and endorsed democratization in the region. Turkish authorities were especially supportive of the Egyptian revolutionaries, and publicly denounced the use of force against them by the security forces. A more direct engagement with the revolutionaries took place in the Syrian case. Having a land border increased the interest of Turkish foreign policy makers; hence, they wanted to influence the outcome of the Syrian uprising. Turkey provided logistical and humanitarian support for both the Free Syrian Army and Syrian civilians.

5.3. The Saudi View

How did the Saudis see the Arab Spring and its effects on the region? In this section, I aim at reconstructing the Saudi's view of the events during the last Arab uprisings in the region. What was the source of threat perception for Saudis regarding the uprisings and revolutions in the Middle East? Why did they feel it necessary to react and contain the effects of this transformation? I will first look at the domestic politics

⁴⁷⁹ Guzansky, Y. (2015). *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East*

in Saudi Arabia, and then the Saudi foreign policy during the events to uncover the Saudi perception of the revolutionary wave. I argue that the real challenge of the Arab Spring for Saudi regime stems from the alternative normative consensus proposal the Arab Spring represents, rather than a traditional source of threat in the regional state-system. We can observe the validity of this argument from domestic and foreign policy actions of the Saudi elite, and from their public statements.

5.3.1. Saudi Domestic Politics and the Arab Spring

The effects of the Arab Spring reached to Saudi Arabia after the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. As the wave of the uprisings moved to the east of the Arab world, similar to their counterparts in other Gulf countries, the Saudi people who are discontent with the existing status quo started to think about strategies to realize change in the Kingdom. Overall, the Saudi spring was less powerful and influential compared to other cases in the region. That being said, as far as the history of opposition in Saudi Arabia is concerned, the Arab Spring protests were one of the most widespread in the last decades judged by Saudi standards of political participation. As Matthisien observes, Saudi Arabia saw largest street protests of the last decades during 2011 and 2012.⁴⁸⁰ It is indicative in this regard that the observers compare the Arab Spring uprisings in the Kingdom with the protests that ensued the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in terms of their scope. As Guzansky writes, especially for the Eastern province where the Shia are majority, what we see is “discontent and demonstrations unseen in the province since the Islamic Revolution.”⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ Matthisien, T. (2013) *Sectarian Gulf*

⁴⁸¹ Guzansky, Y. (2015). *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East* p. 46

In Saudi Arabia we observe two waves of protests related to the Arab Spring. The first one was in the spring of 2011, and the second one was on the summer of 2012.⁴⁸² During the early 2011, Saudi opposition made calls for protests via social media. Since even slightest show of political dissidence is unlawful in the Kingdom, the invitations for a “Saudi spring” had to remain anonymous. On a facebook page, the Saudi people demanding change declared a “day of rage” imitating protestors using similar labeling for the days of protests in the neighboring countries. Yet, the Saudi “day of rage” did not turn out to be a successful event of opposition. Only *one* man showed up in the declared venue of protests in Riyadh, who was arrested by the security forces.⁴⁸³

The real demonstrations during the Arab Spring occurred in the Eastern province of the Kingdom. Inhabited mostly by Shia citizens of the country, the Saudi citizens demanding change organized demonstrations in February and March 2011. On March 3, 2011 largescale protests took place in Qatif, Awamiya and Ahsa.⁴⁸⁴ Protestors flooded to the streets in thousands and demanded first and foremost protection of basic human rights in the country, which reminds similar demands of protestors from other countries. The response of the Saudi regime was through security forces. The attempts of the police to control the streets led to violent clashes between protestors and the police, resulting in several casualties. The cycle of protests continued in October as well. On October 3, in al-Awamiya, observers reported violent protests.⁴⁸⁵ In the same month, the Saudi police arrested a filmmaker in Riyadh for his film on poverty in the

⁴⁸² Lucas, R. (2014) “The Persian Gulf Monarchies and the Arab Spring”

⁴⁸³ Jones, T. (2013) “Saudi Arabia”

⁴⁸⁴ Wehrey, F. (2014) *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

city.⁴⁸⁶ The funeral of these young protestors in turn, became new demonstrations in itself. For example, on November 23, thousands of people gathered for funeral of two young protestors to protest the regime.⁴⁸⁷

The second wave of protests took place in the Eastern province in the summer of 2012. Predominantly youth activists were on the streets protesting the regime's crackdown on the demonstrations in the previous months, and demanding release of the political prisoners. What increased the intensity of unrest in the province was the arrest of the Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. He was an activist figure, openly criticizing the policies of the regime against the Shia population. Despite the government warning throughout the country since the beginning of the Arab Spring to discourage protests by threats of imprisonment, al-Nimr was unequivocal in his public endorsement of the protestors in his sermons and talks.⁴⁸⁸ Many of the Shia youth saw him as a source of inspiration and a person of respect. Saudi security forces attempted to arrest him on July 9, 2012. After a short chase, he was shot and wounded. His imprisonment led to an increase in the level of street protests.⁴⁸⁹

This event indicates a distinct feature of Arab Spring protests. Not just in the Kingdom but in the region as a whole, with the Arab Spring the youth demonstrated willingness to break from the more traditional organizational structures of opposition, and challenge their elders for political participation. In Saudi Arabia for example, young Shias challenged the elders.⁴⁹⁰ This was also the case in the willingness of young

⁴⁸⁶ Jones, T. (2013) "Saudi Arabia"

⁴⁸⁷ Matthiesen, T. (2013) *Sectarian Gulf*

⁴⁸⁸ Wehrey, F. (2014) *Sectarian Politics*

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

members of Muslim Brotherhood to join protests in Egypt against Mubarak regime. Wehrey observes this in his interviews in the Kingdom: “‘where the shaykhs and the youth differ,’ noted one longtime youth activist in late 2012, ‘is their amount of patience [sabr]’.”⁴⁹¹

5.3.1.1. Regional Connection and Diffusion

The protests in Saudi Arabia during 2011 and 2012 were part of a more general wave of uprisings in the Middle East state-system. As Saudi Arabia is part of this regional sub-system, which in many ways have more porous borders than other regional systems, it is safe to assume that the demonstrations in the kingdom are both cause and effect of popular protests in the wider region. How can we substantiate such an assumption, apart from simultaneous occurrence? I think some observations can help us in this respect. To begin with, the first reception of initial beginnings of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and later in Egypt were positive in the Kingdom. That means the public in the Kingdom were both following the events in these countries, and feeling a sense of shared identity with them. Wehrey observes that “Tunisia and Egypt greeted with exuberance and elation in Eastern province.”⁴⁹²

In addition, the declarations of Saudi protestors themselves emphasize that they consider themselves as part of a larger flow of events in the region. They consciously associate themselves with the revolutionary movements in the wider Middle East; and they share the ideals of the Arab Uprisings. “Importantly, the planned demonstrations

⁴⁹¹ Wehrey, F. (2014) *Sectarian Politics* p. 187

⁴⁹² Ibid. p. 175

were billed as expressions of solidarity with the protestors in Tunis, Tahrir Square, and Benghazi."⁴⁹³

The interaction with the regional events has a deeper meaning for the Shia population of the Kingdom. The Eastern province demonstrators share not only the feeling of solidarity with the larger Arab world during the uprisings, but they also had a more specific shared understanding with the Shia Arab population in neighboring countries. The uprisings in Bahrain are important in this respect. Once the people in Bahrain flooded the streets of Manama, both the Saudi regime and the Saudi population of the Eastern province showed a deep interest in the events. On the one hand, "most Saudi Shia supported the uprisings in Bahrain and saw Arab Spring as an opportunity for change."⁴⁹⁴ As the Bahraini protests intensified, the unrest in the Eastern province increased as well.⁴⁹⁵ On the other hand, afraid of the possibility of spillover, the Saudi regime felt it necessary to intervene in the neighboring Kingdom to restore order and to protect al-Khalifa dynasty.⁴⁹⁶

The effects of Bahraini uprisings on the Saudi Shia population can best be observed by the consequences of the Saudi intervention in Bahrain. The Saudi forces entered Bahrain under the GCC's Peninsula Shield Force on February 14; only 3 days after this, on February 17 protests in the Eastern province erupted.⁴⁹⁷ Ulrichsen writes "the Eastern Province has been at the epicentre of 'the largest and longest protest

⁴⁹³ Ibid. p. 177

⁴⁹⁴ Matthiesen, T. (2015) "The domestic sources of Saudi foreign policy: Islamists and the state in the wake of the Arab Uprisings" *Rethinking Political Islam Series*, Working Paper. Brookings Institute. P. 10

⁴⁹⁵ Matthiesen, T. (2013) *Sectarian Gulf*:

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid. Saudi intervention in Bahrain will be discussed below in Saudi foreign policy section.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

movement in Saudi Arabia's modern history', replete with declarations of support by Shiite demonstrators for their Bahraini brethren across the water."⁴⁹⁸ On the effects of Saudi intervention in Bahrain, another observer writes:

Sporadic protests continued through the week but took a more dramatic turn with the intervention of Saudi forces in Bahrain (...). Rally slogans and chants increasingly focused on the withdrawal of Saudi forces and expressions of solidarity with Bahrain's protestors. "One people, not two," a placard in Qatif read, referring to the unity of Bahraini and Saudi Shi'a.⁴⁹⁹

Apart from the al-Jazeera TV station, the main medium of communication that connects the Saudi protestors with their brethren in the region as well as across the country was the internet. As argued above, in a country where criticizing the regime is not tolerated, the citizens' thoughts and opinions regarding the political problems of the administrative apparatus are directed to the virtual world under nicknames. Similar to other autocratic states in the region, the social media works as an alternative public sphere in Saudi Arabia.

The role and meaning of social media in the Kingdom can be inferred from the increase in the number of internet users among Saudi citizens, especially during the Arab Spring years. The number of internet users has increased 300 percent since 2012.⁵⁰⁰ Guzansky writes that "the number of Twitter and YouTube users in the kingdom is the highest per capita in the world, which indicates how 'connected' the

⁴⁹⁸ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2015) "The Uprising in Bahrain" p. 140

⁴⁹⁹ Wehrey, F. (2014) *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*. p.180. Guzansky also observes that the slogans included: "topple Saud family," "Qatif and Bahrain are one" see: Guzansky, Y. (2015). *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East*. p. 46

⁵⁰⁰ Guzansky, Y. (2015). P.114

kingdom's residents are."⁵⁰¹ In 2012, the fastest increase in the number of Twitter subscribers was among the Saudi citizens which was by far the highest in the world for the age group of 28-34.⁵⁰²

5.3.1.2. Reflection of New Norms

A significant question one needs to pay attention to is the reflection of the Arab Spring ideals on the political discourses of the Saudi domestic atmosphere. As discussed above, the normative challenge of the Arab Spring in the Middle East state-system is centered around democracy and representation of Islam in democratic politics. The Saudi experience is significant in that sense, both as a recipient of regional ideas, and as contributor to such discussions. This is primarily because one of the most important source of legitimacy for the Saudi regime is religion. As a self-declared sharia state, Saudi regime believes to represent the correct form of state-religion relation. The clerical establishment generally provides the theoretical legitimacy for the current form of governance with reference to religious sources. What makes the discussion more interesting, and what makes the Saudi experience significant is that the Salafi understanding of Islam, which is the official interpretation of religion in the country through an epistemic community of like-minded scholars, has historically been more distant to the idea of democracy compared to other strands in Islamic religious thought. In this regard, domestic reflection of normative proposal of the Arab Spring in Saudi Arabia is important, and have its own idiosyncratic features.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. p. 114

⁵⁰² Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). Not just the young opposition figures but also middle aged clerics has effective use of social media. The famous scholar Salman al-Odah, for example, has 13.5 million followers on twitter.

To begin with, the demands of the Saudi protestors during the Arab Spring are very much in parallel with their brethren in the rest of the region. The most important focus is on the regime type. The Saudi opposition demands a more representative form of politics in the country. Different from some other countries that experienced revolutionary upheavals, the majority of Saudi opposition were more minimalist and realistic in their demands. Instead of working for a total collapse of monarchy (which would probably decrease the chances of building more inclusive coalitions), they vie for some kind of an elected council. The Saudi opposition published two petitions in the winter of 2011 that called for an elected legislature.⁵⁰³ For example, the umbrella movement of youth groups the “Free Youth Coalition” issued a declaration on March 1, 2011 stating some of their demands as: an elected Consultative Council, and an independent judiciary.⁵⁰⁴ In a similar vein, the Shia Islahiyyin group cooperating with some liberal and Sunni figures issued a declaration demanding “an elected National Assembly, the protection of human rights, and, importantly, a federal system that would give greater authority to provincial governments.”⁵⁰⁵

The Arab Spring also generated a new discussion on democracy among more traditional religious figures. While the salafi scholars of the establishment discouraged participation in protests on the religious grounds, more independent traditional scholars had different opinions. The scholars associated with the *Sahwa* (awakening) movement expressed more positive thoughts about the Arab Spring, and openly endorsed the protests in the region.⁵⁰⁶ The famous scholar Salman al-Odah for example signed the

⁵⁰³ Gause III, F. G. (2011) “Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East” *Council Special Report*, Council on Foreign Relations Press

⁵⁰⁴ Wehrey, F. (2014)

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 176

⁵⁰⁶ Matthiesen, T. (2015)

petition in March 2011 for constitutional monarchy.⁵⁰⁷ In February 2011, he published an article in which he declared that it is necessary for the Arab rulers to “‘pause and think’ , warning that they were mistaken to assume that revolt could not happen in their countries and that therefore they did not need to undertake reforms.”⁵⁰⁸

The thoughts of al-Odah represents neither a marginal position among “unofficial” Saudi religious figures nor an exceptional practical case. That means, religious scholars other than al-Odah supported the Arab Spring ideals on theoretical grounds. People like Muhammad Abd al-Karim, Mohsen al-Awaji, and Muhammad al-Ahmari, among others, were supportive of the inclusion of democracy in Islamic polity. In the words of Mathiesen such scholars “re-invigorated the discourse of the Sahwa and incorporated theories of democracy after 2011.”⁵⁰⁹ They even expressed more radical views for the Sahwa standards. Mathiesen writes that this group of relatively younger Islamist intellectuals not only embraced democracy, but they also asserted that “sharia should not be implemented immediately after a revolutionary situation but rather *only once the people chose to do so through democratic means.*”⁵¹⁰

The veteran scholar of Saudi politics Gregory Gause observes similar change of ideas among the Saudi salafi scholars with regard to their thoughts on the relation between Islam and democracy. Reflective of the normative challenge of the Arab Spring, Gause writes that:

⁵⁰⁷ Matthiesen, T. (2013)

⁵⁰⁸ Preuschaft, M. (2016) “Islam and Identity in Foreign Policy” in Patrick, N. (ed.) Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation. I.B. TAURIS p. 24

⁵⁰⁹ Matthiesen, T. (2015) p. 12

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p.12 Emphasis added.

In the current Arab upheavals, the Saudi rulers cannot be comforted by the interesting development among some salafis in their thinking about democracy. Support for an elected legislature in Saudi Arabia by some notable salafi activists marks an important turn in domestic salafi political thought, away from their previous rejection of electoral democracy as un-Islamic. The growth of salafi democratic activism in Egypt is a mixed blessing for the Saudi rulers.⁵¹¹

5.3.1.3. Precautions

To understand how the Saudi regime saw the events during the Arab Spring, we can look at their reactions to these events. To put it differently, to see Saudi policymakers' perception of the developments in the region, analyzing their actions regarding these developments can be useful. In this part, I will focus on the precautions the Saudi elite took to uncover what kind of a threat they perceived from the Arab Spring.

We can categorize the Saudi reaction to the challenge of Arab Spring into five groups: first, reforming the political system to include elements of more representation and human rights; second, taking measures to control the spread of the Arab Spring ideas; third, attempts to convince masses for the profitability of status quo through financial means; fourth, using religious arguments to discredit calls for reform; five, repressive means.

To begin with, the Saudi regime felt it necessary and rational to make or to promise certain reforms in the political system in the country towards the direction of more participation, representation and respect for human rights. As the most important

⁵¹¹ Gause III, F. G. (2011) "Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East" p. 20

normative proposal of the Arab Spring was democracy, the Saudi policy makers seems to think that this regional zeitgeist is convincing for their citizens, and that they are obliged to respond positively to these demands. To this end, in March 2011, the state announced that the local elections would take place in September same year.⁵¹² These local elections were actually scheduled for October 2009, but they were postponed since then. “The sudden acceleration of the timeline was seen as a preemptive concession by the regime to the burgeoning demands for reform.”⁵¹³

In addition to the elections, the regime made certain promises of reform for women’s rights. Women were not allowed to vote in local elections in the Kingdom. For the local elections of September 2011, they were still excluded from the electorate. Yet, as a radical change for Saudi standards, the state made the promise for women to vote in the 2015 elections.⁵¹⁴ Besides they are also given the promise to run for office in the 2015 elections as well. As for the central state apparatus, King Abdullah made promises for women to be appointed to the advisory *Shura Council* in the county.⁵¹⁵ The state reserved 30 seats to women out of 150 seats. The government also announced “transitioning certain stores to female-only employees.”⁵¹⁶

The second set of precautions the Saudi regime took to protect the existing status quo in the country is about the financial benefits. As discussed in the previous chapters, the main pillar of the social contract in the Kingdom is political quietism in return for generous social welfare. The regime, however, uses extra financial “carrots” besides

⁵¹² Jones, T. (2013) “Saudi Arabia”

⁵¹³ Wehrey, F. (2014) p. 184

⁵¹⁴ Jones, T. (2013) “Saudi Arabia”

⁵¹⁵ Hosseinioun, M. (2015)

⁵¹⁶ Guzansky, Y. (2015) p.113

the already existing welfare spending. During the Arab Spring protests, the Saudi elite used such means to quench the unease in the society. In other words, they felt the necessity to increase the legitimacy of the status quo by undertaking additional initiatives. To this end, the regime announced various financial packages the sum of which equals to \$130 billion.⁵¹⁷ The package included raising the minimum wage, and provision of almost half a million new housing units, especially in the poor neighborhoods.⁵¹⁸ Besides, to solve the unemployment problem particularly among the youth, the regime promised to create 60,000 new positions within the Ministry of Interior.⁵¹⁹ Another component of the financial package that specifically aims at the youth satisfaction is state scholarships for the Saudi students studying abroad.⁵²⁰ The government approved two months stipends to students funded by the state.⁵²¹ Last, but not least, the domestic “riyal diplomacy”⁵²² included inflation allowance for state employees.⁵²³

The third set of precautions the Saudi regime took is related to control of the spread of the ideas and opposition organizations in the country. The Saudi state enacted certain laws, formed new commissions etc. to stop (or at least slow down) dissemination of what they deemed to be “dangerous” ideas. To put it differently, the threat perception of the regime stems from the ideas of the Arab Spring according to the Saudi elite. To

⁵¹⁷ Jones, T. (2013)

⁵¹⁸ Lucas, R. (2014)

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Wehrey, F. (2014)

⁵²¹ Patel, D., Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wolchik (2014) “Diffusion and Demonstration” in Lynch, M. (ed.) *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, Columbia University Press pp. 57-74

⁵²² Yetiv, S. “Oil, Saudi Arabia, and the Spring That Has Not Come” in Haas, M. L., & Lesch, D. W. (ed.s) *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*. Westview Press p. 102

⁵²³ Wehrey, F. (2014) For financial packages of other countries see Guzansky, Y. (2015) p. 111

begin with, for this purpose the state enacted a law that “requires online newspapers to be licensed by the ministry of interior” which is a very vague statement that may include any political news posted online.⁵²⁴ Moreover, the regime formed a new special police team to monitor the social media use in the region.⁵²⁵ The Kingdom also contacted with foreign companies that provide internet or communication services in the country to grant access to the security apparatus the content of communication of their citizens. The Saudi regime demanded from Blackberry “to allow its messenger service to be screened by the state security officials.”⁵²⁶ As Mabon writes, by controlling the internet service providers through a state server, the regime “bars access to nearly 400,000 sites with the aim of protecting citizens from content that is deemed morally or politically inappropriate.”⁵²⁷

The fourth set of precautions undertaken by the Saudi regime against the political opposition was to employ official religious figures. These clerics played dual role during the process: on the one hand, they discouraged the people to attend the Arab Spring protests; and on the other, they used their credentials as authorities in religious sciences to counter the arguments of independent religious scholars who support Arab Spring protests discussed above. As a “sharia-state” Saudi Arabia legitimizes its existence through strict application of religious orders. Religious scholars have an important role in this because through their fatwas they can contribute to the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of the citizens. This symbiotic relation between religious figures and the state has been in operation since the foundation of the Kingdom in the

⁵²⁴ Ibid. p. 183

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Lynch, M. (2014) p. 101.

⁵²⁷ Mabon, S. (2012) “Kingdom in Crisis? The Arab Spring and Instability in Saudi Arabia,” *Contemporary Security Policy*, 33:3, p. 544

beginning of the 20th century. Especially in times of crises, the support of religious figures of the establishment is employed. During the Arab Spring protests, state-employed Islamic scholars made different attempts to discredit the demands of change, and discourage political participation of citizens. Even prior to the actual protests in the Kingdom, the grand mufti of the country, Abd al-Aziz al-Sheikh criticizes the protests in the region.⁵²⁸ He argued that the Arab Spring protests are un-Islamic.⁵²⁹ “The mufti also endorsed the crackdown on dissent and public protests, particularly from the Shiite, inside Saudi Arabia.”⁵³⁰ Later, the Higher Council of Ulama also ruled that the planned demonstrations in the country are against Islam.⁵³¹ The fatwa of the Council is published, and hard copies are distributed in thousands.⁵³²

The support of the ulama comes with a price for the regime. As the regime wanted to show its religious credentials more in the time of crisis, and as it needed the backing of the religious establishment, Saudi political authorities had to yield to the requests of the religious class. That is to say, similar to previous rounds of crises which resulted into an increase in the power of the ulama in the country, during the Arab Spring the regime gave certain privileges to that class. King Abdullah had taken certain initiatives in the previous years to weaken the power of the ulama in the country. Yet by early 2011, as a result of the protests, the king had to stop these policies.⁵³³ The regime gave a renewed support for the religious police controlled by the ulama.⁵³⁴ And

⁵²⁸ Gause III, F. G. (2011)

⁵²⁹ Preuschaft, M. (2016) p. 25

⁵³⁰ Matthiesen, T. (2015) p. 2

⁵³¹ Jones, T. (2013), and Matthiesen, T. (2013)

⁵³² Al-Rasheed, M. (2011) “Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Vol. 11, No. 3 pp. 513-526

⁵³³ Jones, T. (2013) “Saudi Arabia”

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

importantly, a portion of the financial package created by the regime to ensure order in the country in the wake of the protests went to the religious establishment.⁵³⁵

The fifth set of precautions are more about the repressive means the regime uses to suppress protests. These are more predictable policies one can expect from an authoritarian state under domestic pressure. Even before the start of the protests in the Kingdom, the regime declared that political demonstrations would not be tolerated, and the protestors are threatened by imprisonment.⁵³⁶ The only protestor who showed up in the first day of rage in Riyadh was immediately arrested by the police. The regime employed the repressive means especially more in the Shia majority Eastern province of the county where more persistent and crowded demonstrations took place. The security forces flooded to the major cities in the Eastern province, and took control of the almost every street by large numbers to make protests practically impossible.⁵³⁷ The protestors had occasionally violent clashes with the police which resulted into casualties. Moreover, to make the population devoid of leaders, the regime targeted individual Shia leaders who have influence on the youth.⁵³⁸ The police arrested these figures, which for example included al-Nimr mentioned above.

Apart from these repressive means directed against the Saudi Shia, to prevent the spread of the protests the regime framed these protests in a sectarian language.⁵³⁹ The official portrayal of these protests was that these are part of a wider Shia conspiracy supported by Iran against the Sunni world, and most notably against its staunch

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

⁵³⁹ Al-Rasheed, M. (2011), and Abdo, G. (2017)

defender, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. By depicting it as a sectarian plot, the regime decreases its legitimacy, prevents formation of larger cross-sectarian coalitions, and convinces undecided people not to partake in protests. In other words, the regime used “sectarianism as a counter revolutionary strategy.”⁵⁴⁰

What do these various sets of precautionary policies tell us about the Saudi perception of the Arab Spring? What can we infer from them about the source of threat for the Saudi elite? I think the most important one is that the Saudi ruling family thought that normative proposal of the Arab Spring was appealing for at least certain portions of the Saudi population. In other words, they believed that the revolutionary waves in the region that aimed at increasing the representativeness of political systems in the region and the care for basic human rights of the citizens have influence on the opinions of the Saudi people. These ideas are convincing for the Saudi citizens so much so that the regime felt it necessary to take them seriously.

It is illustrative that many components of the precautions the Saudi ruling family undertook aim at increasing the legitimacy of the regime by actually focusing on the exact points of the normative challenge of the Arab Spring. The regime promised some democratization by scheduling elections, some human rights by allowing women to participate more in the public sphere, some economic welfare by financial initiatives; some responsiveness to popular grievances by changing the governor of the Eastern province. The domestic policies of the regime very much indicate that it is the ideals of the Arab Spring that the regime fights with. Prolific expert on Saudi politics, Madawi al-Rasheed writes: “The regime’s overreaction to the virtual call for demonstrations

⁵⁴⁰ Al-Rasheed, M. (2011)

may have been an expression of a deep fear of the spread of the euphoria of the Arab Spring to this oil rich kingdom.”⁵⁴¹ In a similar vein Hosseinioun states that these policies stem from “the pressures of the movements in neighboring countries and from within the kingdom, which called for fundamental reforms, equal rights, and representative government.”⁵⁴²

What makes this more interesting is that compared to some other countries in the region Saudi Arabia did not have the objective preconditions for a revolution.⁵⁴³ In criticizing those who expect a revolution in Saudi Arabia or who underestimate the level of legitimacy of the Saudi regime, Saudi scholar Saud al-Tamamy asserts that “Saudi regime’s sources of legitimacy are deeper than is usually conceived abroad” and that is why we do not see disruption in the country.⁵⁴⁴ What he does not answer, however, is that if there is no legitimacy problem of the regime, and if the Arab Spring revolutions are stemming from a totally unrelated political atmosphere that the kingdom does not belong to why did the Saudi ruling elite bother this much to design and implement so many new initiatives which incidentally coincided with the Arab uprisings?

5.3.2. Saudi Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring

In this section, I discuss the Saudi foreign policy towards the Middle East during the Arab Spring. By looking at the decisions of the Saudi elite, and the foreign policy initiatives they undertook, I aim at uncovering how they saw the regional turmoil

⁵⁴¹ Al-Rasheed, M. (2011) p. 519

⁵⁴² Hosseinioun, M. (2015) p. 63

⁵⁴³ Al-Rasheed, M. (2011)

⁵⁴⁴ Tamamy, S. (2012) “Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring: Opportunities and Challenges of Security” *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 2:2, p. 143

surrounding them, and the source of threat perception according to their analyses. My findings support the argument that the main source of threat during the Arab Uprisings for the Saudi family was the challenge directed at the normative consensus of the state-system in the region more than an economic, strategic or military threat. This is especially the case after the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolutions brought Islamists to the power through democratic means. The Saudi foreign policy during this era had two main objectives: first is to protect the order in the region defined by the existing ground rules in the state-system. We can see this from a set of policies Saudis designed to protect the monarchical alliance, for example. Second is to achieve this objective through means that would not create legitimacy problem for their own standing.

5.3.2.1. The New Saudi Assertiveness

Observers of the Kingdom agree that with the Arab Spring we see an increased dynamism in Saudi foreign policy.⁵⁴⁵ Saudi policy makers opted for a more assertive foreign policy posture during these years, abandoning the traditional style of cautionary moves. The Kingdom became more confrontational. This meant Saudi foreign interventions in the region. What is the reason for this? First of all, the U.S. foreign policy towards the Arab Spring was not satisfactory for the Saudi rulers; and they thought that the U.S. has abandoned its traditional allies in the region.⁵⁴⁶ When Obama asked Mubarak to step down during the protests in Egypt, Saudi ruling family interpreted this as the unreliability of U.S. alliance under domestic stress.⁵⁴⁷ The belief

⁵⁴⁵ See for example Tamamy, S. (2012) and Colombo, S. (2017) "Foreign Policy Activism in Saudi Arabia and Oman: Diverging Narratives and Stances towards the Syrian and Yemeni Conflicts" in *The International Spectator*, 52:2, pp. 54-70

⁵⁴⁶ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

⁵⁴⁷ Helfont, S. and Helfont, T. (2012) "Jordan: Between the Arab Spring and the Gulf Cooperation Council" *Orbis*, (Winter 2012), pp. 82-95

that the U.S. would protect the Saudi regime if necessary is replaced with the idea that “we need to protect ourselves.”⁵⁴⁸

In addition, Tamamy asserts that this is accompanied with the belief in the Kingdoms own capabilities in dealing with the crisis. Saudi rulers had more trust in the effectiveness of their foreign policy tools during the Arab Spring.⁵⁴⁹ The active foreign policy style also stemmed from the urgency of the threat. Iranian advances during the period and the presence of a Muslim Brotherhood government in the most populous Arab country forced the Saudis to take the matter in their own hands.⁵⁵⁰ This urgency of course cannot be fully grasped without taking the effects of the uprising in the Saudi domestic sphere into consideration.⁵⁵¹ It seems the Saudi elite were well aware of the foreign-domestic interaction in the region.

Before going into a more detailed analysis of specific foreign policy initiatives during the period, let me first briefly discuss a more general question that divided analysts of Saudi politics. Is Saudi Arabia a counter-revolutionary force in the region? On the one hand, the Kingdom fought against the revolutionary forces in some countries like Egypt and Tunisia. On the other hand, they supported regime change in some others, like Syria and Libya. Gause argues that Saudi Arabia is not a counter-revolutionary force; but it is only truly counter-revolutionary in the GCC.⁵⁵² Similarly, Ehteshami argues that Riyadh even became revisionist in its own terms.⁵⁵³ More interestingly, Guzansky writes Saudi Arabia is sometimes a revolutionary and

⁵⁴⁸ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

⁵⁴⁹ Tamamy, S. (2012)

⁵⁵⁰ Colombo, S. (2017)

⁵⁵¹ Gause III, F. G. (2011)

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ehteshami, A. (2018) “Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power” *The International Spectator*

sometimes a counter-revolutionary force.⁵⁵⁴ Tobias Jones defends a countering opinion. According to him, Saudi Arabia worked as a counter-revolutionary actor in the Arab Spring.⁵⁵⁵ I think one needs to differentiate between policies with regard to their motives. That is to say, supporting the fall of a dictator does not mean that the supporter is a revolutionary force. A change in the office of the president or a change in governing party does not make the transition a revolution. What makes the revolutionary forces of the Arab Spring revolutionary is the idea of democratic transition. It is the stance towards this democratization motive that should determine the differentiation between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces as far as the Arab Spring is considered. That means, supporting the fall of Asad or Qaddafi is not equal with supporting the Arab Spring.⁵⁵⁶ It is just the case that Saudi Arabia's certain policy preferences happened to coincide with the Arab Spring revolutionaries, such as getting rid of long-time rivals in Libya and Syria.

We can see the difference between being revolutionary or not by looking at the positions of actors towards the dictators: whether they are making a difference between “good dictators” and “bad dictators.” For Arab Spring revolutionaries all are same. As far as Saudi Arabia is considered, on the other hand, what we see is that the Kingdom became the safe sanctuary for some dictators who fled the revolutionary forces. Ben Ali of Tunisia left his country on January 14, 2011 for the Kingdom. Similarly, Abdullah Saleh found safe haven in Riyadh. “Saudi Arabia played host to what Simon Henderson has termed the ‘house guests from hell’.”⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

⁵⁵⁵ Jones, T. (2013)

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Mabon, S. (2012) p. 546

5.3.2.2. Defending the Monarchies

One of the foreign policy strategies the Saudi regime used to contain the effect of the Arab Uprisings is to build a network of alliance among the monarchies in the region. The Saudi ruling elite thought that a good way to protect the regional order is to rely on the presence of fellow monarchical types of government in the regional state-system. As the preferred regime type is an important component of the normative consensus in the system, defending them meant defending a certain form of regional order. The focus on a “club of monarchies” very much reminds the counter-revolutionary policies during the challenges of 1950s and 1980s.

The only exclusive club of monarchies in the wider Middle East is the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Saudi policy makers made attempts to consolidate intra-GCC cooperation which I discuss below. But what is more interesting from the viewpoint of this chapter is that Saudi Arabia wanted to enlarge the GCC to include non-Gulf monarchies. Saudi king Abdullah made an invitation in May 2011 to Jordan and Morocco to become members of the GCC.⁵⁵⁸ The invitation was a surprise not only for the kings of Jordan and Morocco, but also for other GCC member countries. Although the membership of these newly invited states are not actualized, the attempt shows for the Saudis the centrality of the regime type for the preferred normative order against the challenges of the Arab Spring protests. Why would a possible change of regime type from monarchy to democracy in a country that is thousands of miles away and located in a different continent be deemed as a matter of national security for another

⁵⁵⁸ Richter, T. (2014) “Saudi Arabia: A Conservative P(l)ayer on the Retreat?” in Fürtig, H. (ed.) *Regional Powers in the Middle East : New constellations after the Arab Revolts*. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 177-190

nation? For Saudi policymakers continuity of monarchy in Morocco is crucial because the actualization of the Arab Spring ideals in one more country reinforces the demonstration effect of the change for the rest of the region. This means a challenge to the ground rules of the regional state-system.

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia also wanted to speed up the integration process of the GCC.⁵⁵⁹ To this end, in December 2011 he announced his will to turn the GCC into a Gulf Union. In the Riyadh Declaration he said “I ask today that we move from a phase of cooperation to a phase of union within a single entity.”⁵⁶⁰ Nevertheless, only Bahrain supported the initiative, and the proposal is shelved. What would be the possible consequences of a Gulf Union that the Saudis preferred? Mathiesen convincingly argues that such a union means there is no Shia-majority country in the region, no constitutional monarchies, and no democracy.⁵⁶¹

Despite the lack of support for a union, the GCC states with the leadership of Saudi Arabia made some agreements to deepen the cooperation amongst them in the wake of the regional turmoil. The GCC leaders signed a security agreement with a specific focus on stifling domestic dissent.⁵⁶² Moreover, in the GCC’s Kuwait summit of December 2013, the member states made a proposal to increase the number of the Peninsula Shield Force personnel to 100,000; in the light of the recent event this indicates a measure again directed to domestic order in the member countries.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 92

⁵⁶¹ Mathiesen, T. (2013) *Sectarian Gulf*

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Isaac, S. K. (2015) “A Resurgence in Arab Regional Institutions? The Cases of the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council Post-2011” in Monier, E. (ed.) *Regional Insecurity after the Arab Uprisings: Narratives of Security and Threat*. Palgrave Macmillan. pp 151-167

Through such policies, Saudi Arabia in particular and other member states in general tried to guarantee that the GCC stays as a “pocket of stability within a given sub-complex.”⁵⁶⁴

Such changes in the role attributed to the GCC and the investments member states make in it to turn the Council into a trench in the warfare against the uprisings led even some observers to argue that the GCC is becoming an alternative to the Arab League in the minds of the Gulf leaders. I think, this is a significant observation because it shows how the ground rules define the existence of a state-system. Once the ground rules of the system are challenged (i.e.: the Arab League), those who prefer to stick to them see themselves as a new system. Thus, the Council which normally signifies a geographical location could turn into an alliance based on the normative consensus; and hence, can now include units that do not share the geographical common denominator.

The objective of protecting the club of monarchies manifested itself through financial assistance to those in need as well. Saudi Arabia made generous contributions to the economies of monarchies that experience difficulty in their struggle with the Arab Uprisings. In March 2011, the GCC created a \$20 billion fund for Bahrain and Oman.⁵⁶⁵ In December same year, another \$10 billion fund is created for Jordan and Morocco; and \$7.9 billion to Yemen. Kuwait pledged \$250 million to Bahrain in September 2012.⁵⁶⁶ The Gulf “Marshall Plan” was vital especially for some of the recipients.⁵⁶⁷ “Had Saudi Arabia not delivered its first \$1.4 billion to Jordan in August 2011, the latter

⁵⁶⁴ Colombo, S. (2017) p. 66

⁵⁶⁵ Richter, T. (2014)

⁵⁶⁶ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

⁵⁶⁷ Yom, S. and Gause III, G. (2012), and Lucas, R. (2014)

would have had to declare a record budget deficit.”⁵⁶⁸ “This is also a clear indication that Gulf generosity post-2011 was not merely determined by the economic conditions of the countries in transition. Rather, it is more addressed to stabilization.”⁵⁶⁹

5.3.2.3. Intervention in Bahrain

The most direct involvement of Saudi Arabia (and the GCC) to prevent the success of an Arab Spring revolution took place in Bahrain. The uprisings in Bahrain attracted a vast portion of the Bahraini population; and it seemed not far away from success. By mid-March, Saudi Arabia, with the support of the other GCC states decided to intervene in Bahrain to protect the ruling royal family from the downfall. The 2000 strong Peninsula Shield Force of the GCC, which had 1200 Saudi and 800 UAE troops, crossed the causeway that links Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The causeway was built in 1986 for a possible scenario of popular protests in Bahrain.⁵⁷⁰ With the help of the GCC, the Bahraini regime took control of the country. Yet, it became a “vassal state” of Saudi Arabia in the process.⁵⁷¹

The intervention in Bahrain is important for the Saudi monarch not only for preserving the regional order in the Middle East, but also for Saudi domestic stability. As Mabon asserts “the presence of Saudi troops was also an attempt to prevent the Shia of Bahrain from gaining more democratic power, which could have serious implications for the internal stability of Saudi Arabia.”⁵⁷² The interaction between citizens of two countries are prevented with additional measures. The Saudi regime banned the Saudi

⁵⁶⁸ Yom, S. and Gause III, G. (2012) p. 84

⁵⁶⁹ Isaac, S. K. (2015) p. 161

⁵⁷⁰ Matthiesen, T. (2013)

⁵⁷¹ Jones, T. (2013)

⁵⁷² Mabon, S. (2012) “The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry” in *Middle East Policy*, Vol.19, No:2 p.90

Shia from entering Bahrain during the process.⁵⁷³ The threat from Bahraini uprising is not limited to Saudi Arabia. Other members of the GCC who had a stake in the existing order felt threatened as well. In the words of Quin Mecham “Gulf monarchies remain wary of political change in Bahrain because of Bahrain’s similarities to their own systems and fear that change in Bahrain would complicate their own domestic politics.”⁵⁷⁴

Saudi Arabia withdrew its troops from Bahrain by late 2011 after making sure that the opposition poses no credible threat to the stability of the country. Before the withdrawal however, Saudi king made a symbolic move to show that any possible attempts to change the regional dynamics in Bahrain would not be tolerated: Saudi king’s daughter married the son of the Bahraini king on June 16, 2011.⁵⁷⁵

5.3.2.4. Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood

Another important theater of operation of Saudi foreign policy during the Arab Uprisings was Egypt. As mentioned above, as the most populous and in many respects most powerful Arab country, the revolution in Egypt was a turning point in the course of the Arab Spring events. The electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the first elections after the fall of the Mubarak regime has brought together democracy with Islamism, the combination of which was perceived as a threat in Riyadh. What was threatening for Saudi Arabia?

The Brotherhood posed no strategic threat to the kingdom. Despite the success in elections, the new government had to deal with the problems of a post-revolutionary

⁵⁷³ Matthiesen, T. (2013)

⁵⁷⁴ Mecham, Q. (2014) p.370

⁵⁷⁵ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

state. As far as their foreign policy is concerned they declared that they would honor international agreements of the regime. They did not give any signals to follow a radical foreign policy.⁵⁷⁶ What is more, president Morsi made his first visit to Saudi Arabia to meet King Abdullah in July 2012 which has significant symbolic meaning. The new government did not want to have bad relations with the Kingdom.⁵⁷⁷ So what was the Brotherhood government stand for in Saudi eyes? The answer to this question can be found in the normative challenge the Brotherhood represents. A democratically elected Islamist government in Egypt means an alternative “to claims of Saudi Arabia being the protector of Islam, and offered a potentially dangerous exemplar in the region.”⁵⁷⁸ To put it differently, the Muslim Brotherhood government represented an alternative political structure with a different view on the relation between politics and religion, which is perceived by Saudi policymakers as a threat to regional order and Saudi domestic stability.⁵⁷⁹ In that sense, “Arab Awakening represents an ideological challenge to legitimacy in Saudi Arabia, arguable *stronger than was felt previously in the rise of pan- Arabism and pan-Islamism.*”⁵⁸⁰

Against such a perceived threat, Saudi elite designed foreign policy strategies to contain its effects, and if possible to negate it. To this end, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia supported actors who can rival the Muslim Brotherhood. That meant salafi groups in

⁵⁷⁶ Rutherford, B. (2013)

⁵⁷⁷ Tamamy, S. (2012). Some argue that his second international trip to Iran arose suspicion. See: Hassan, O. (2015) “Undermining the transatlantic democracy agenda? The Arab Spring and Saudi Arabia’s Counteracting Democracy Strategy,” *Democratization*, 22:3, pp. 479-495. Yet, in his trip to Tehran, Mursi publicly criticized Iranian foreign policy in Syria. This means he showed he would not be a blind follower of Iran against Arab interests. See Matthiesen, T. (2013).

⁵⁷⁸ Hassan, O. (2015) p. 486

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Ennis, C. and Bessma Momani (2013) “Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies,” *Third World Quarterly*, 34:6, p.1141. Emphasis added.

the civil realm, and the military in the official realm.⁵⁸¹ The Salafi al-Nour Party succeeded to become the second largest party in the parliament in the first post-Mubarak elections. It is accused of dividing Islamist votes with the support of Saudi Arabia, possibly with Saudi financial help.⁵⁸² What makes such an inducement probable is that before the revolution, salafis were theoretically against political participation, which has changed radically in a short span of time.⁵⁸³ The attempts to discredit the organization also included discursive tactics as well. The Saudi crown prince declared the Brotherhood as part of the “triangle of evil” in the region, the other two are jihadists in al-Qaeda and ISIS, and Iran.⁵⁸⁴

The perceived threat from the new Egyptian government led Saudis to take more concrete and radical measures. The Saudi ruling family opined that the mere presence of the Muslim Brotherhood government in Cairo is a matter of national security and regional stability. To achieve their goal, remnants of the old regime, most notably the armed forces, were seen as main allies. To oust the Brotherhood presidency, Riyadh engaged with the Egyptian military.⁵⁸⁵ According to Mathiesen, the then head of Saudi intelligence Prince Bandar bin Sultan met with Egyptian army officers, and asked support of Western countries for a military takeover in Cairo.⁵⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that the defense minister in Morsi’s government who later orchestrated the coup against

⁵⁸¹ Heydemann, S. and Leenders, R. (2014) “Authoritarian Learning and Counterrevolution” in Lynch, M. (ed.) *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, Columbia University Press. pp. 75-92

⁵⁸² Patrick, N. (2016) “Saudi Arabia’s Relations with Egypt” in Patrick, N. (ed.) *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation*. I.B. TAURIS. pp. 55-74

⁵⁸³ Rutherford, B. (2013)

⁵⁸⁴ Ehteshami, A. (2018)

⁵⁸⁵ Matthiesen, T. (2015)

⁵⁸⁶ Matthiesen, T. (2015)

the president, General Abd al-Fattah Sisi, had worked in Riyadh as the Egyptian military attaché during Mubarak era.

On July 3rd, 2013 Egyptian army under the command of General Sisi made a coup against the Brotherhood government which is followed by a bloody crackdown of the demonstrators who were protesting the military intervention. In what is later called the Rabaa massacre the Egyptian security forces attacked the protestors that resulted into 638 casualties according to the Egyptian ministry of health.⁵⁸⁷ The supporters of the status quo alliance welcomed the coup. Within 24 hours of the military intervention, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia expressed his supports for the coup, and declared that they would be with the new government if the West hesitate to help Egypt.⁵⁸⁸ The King congratulated army for its success to “remove Egypt from the dark tunnel.”⁵⁸⁹ What is even more interesting is that the salafi al-Nour party, which declared commitment to democracy before the elections, and competed in the democratic elections with some success, endorsed the coup as well.⁵⁹⁰ Such a position supports the assertion that the party has ties with Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi regime did not leave its support for the military regime at the level of verbal gestures. Together with the other states of status quo, they wanted to financially support the poor performance of the Egyptian economy for the success of the new government. As Hassan writes “just days after the coup, Saudi Arabia announced a \$5 billion aid package, along with an additional \$3 billion from the United Arab Emirates

⁵⁸⁷ Al-Ahram Online, “Death toll from Egypt violence rises to 638: Health ministry” August 15th, 2013. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/79160/Egypt/Politics-/Death-toll-from-Egypt-violence-rises-to--Health-mi.aspx> Retrieved in 1.14.2018

⁵⁸⁸ Patrick, N. (2016) “Saudi Arabia’s Relations with Egypt”; and Hassan, O. (2015)

⁵⁸⁹ Guzansky, Y. (2015) p. 16

⁵⁹⁰ Matthiesen, T. (2015)

(UAE) and \$4 billion from Kuwait.”⁵⁹¹ Two years after the coup, in March 2015 at the Egypt Economic Development Conference, same three states pledged a total of \$12 billion for Egypt again.⁵⁹² Though it is not economically rational to invest in an economy with such a poor performance, for these states the material losses are not that important if the ground rules of the system are at stake.

5.3.2.5. Qatar

The Saudi foreign policy during the Arab Spring has not only focused on fighting with the forces of popular protests, but it has also dealt with the more conventional actors of international relations who supported the quests of the masses. In this regard, Qatar stands out as the only powerful actor in the Arab world. The tiny Gulf emirate declared support for the Arab uprisings from the very beginning. Except in Bahrain, the Qatari foreign policy aimed at successful transitions to post-authoritarian regimes in the region, from Tunisia to Syria. Discussing Qatari foreign policy during the Arab Spring in detail is out of the scope of this chapter. Suffices it to say that Qatar provided logistical, financial and military support to revolutionaries in Libya, Egypt, Syria etc. The Qatari TV station al-Jazeera broadcasted the uprising in a very positive and favorable way. Moreover, after the electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Qatar pledged \$8 billion to president Morsi.⁵⁹³

This independent foreign policy of Qatar was not something Saudi Arabia and other forces of the status quo could tolerate. First, they criticized al-Jazeera’s coverage of the events; and later they took certain measure against al-Jazeera offices and

⁵⁹¹ Hassan, O. (2015) p. 486 and Richter, T. (2014)

⁵⁹² Matthiesen, T. (2015)

⁵⁹³ Guzansky, Y. (2015)

broadcasts in their countries.⁵⁹⁴ Even when Qatar and Saudi Arabia shared common objectives in Syria and Libya (that of toppling down Asad and Qaddafi), they disagreed on whom to support on the ground.⁵⁹⁵ For example in Syria while Qatar supported actors close to Muslim Brotherhood, Saudis supported more Salafi oriented actors. A similar division occurred in Libya. While Saudis supports Hefter's forces, Qatar was in good terms with Islamist actors. The status quo states used different foreign policy instruments to convince Qatar not to follow a foreign policy that challenges the ground rules in the system. The pressures to the Gulf emirate was concentrated on the personality of the country's *amir* Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. He was the brain behind both al-Jazeera and the foreign policy in general. In a fashion the observers of the Middle East politics are not accustomed to, on June 25, 2013 Amir Hamad bin Khalifa decided to transfer his post to his son Amir Tamim. This can be read as a move to relieve the pressure on the country by its GCC allies.

The transfer of power to the new amir is followed by two significant developments as far as the course of the Arab Uprisings is concerned. First, few days after the succession, Qatar's influence on Syrian revolutionaries decreased considerably. In the words of Ulrichsen what we saw is a "transfer" of responsibility for the "Syria file" from Doha to Riyadh in July 2013."⁵⁹⁶ This probably has occurred as a result of Saudi pressures. A second development that occurred within the 10 days of succession is the fall of Morsi government in Egypt.⁵⁹⁷ The advances of the status quo power seems to be part of an integrated strategy to protect the ground rules of the

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014)

⁵⁹⁶ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014)

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

system, rather than individual unrelated policies. Despite these setbacks in the Qatari position, Saudi Arabia and other GCC states were not satisfied with the intended foreign policy style of the new *amir* as well. Though different than his father Amir Tamim refused to submit to the will of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in his foreign policy. As a reaction, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in March 2014.⁵⁹⁸

5.3.2.6. Syria and Yemen

The last two theater of operations for the Saudi foreign policymaking elite during the Arab Spring crisis are Syria and Yemen. In these two countries, the Saudi policy was a factor of its relations with Iran because of historical and ethnic reasons. While in Yemen the objective of Saudi Arabia has been checking the advances of Shia militia, in Syria until 2014 it was supporting the anti-Asad movement, an objective that becomes meaningful only if one takes the decades old Syrian-Iranian alliance into consideration. The Syrian uprising started in March 2011 as a peaceful series of protests, but turned into an armed struggle as a result of the violent repression of the regime's armed forces. Syrian revolutionaries organized themselves in different independent units, and most of them later united under the umbrella of Free Syrian Army. As the uprising grew, Saudi Arabia seized the opportunity to weaken the Assad regime. The Syrian regime has historically been an ally of the Islamic Republic, an exceptional foreign policy choice among the Arab states. For Saudi foreign policymakers it would be a gain if the wave of revolutions reach to Damascus. During the summer of 2011, when the state violence of the regime intensified, Saudi Arabia

⁵⁹⁸ Richter, T. (2014)

warned Asad to “stop the killing machine.”⁵⁹⁹ By the August of 2011, Saudi Arabia decided to withdraw its ambassador from Damascus in protest to the Syrian violence towards civilians. This move is followed by other members of the GCC.⁶⁰⁰

Apart from the diplomatic pressure, Saudi Arabia supported certain groups in the opposition in their fight against the regime. What is important as far as the argument of this chapter is concerned, even in such a situation, Saudi rulers were keen on supporting groups that are not affiliated with the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, arguably the most organized force of opposition. Whom to support in the opposition camp became a factor of division between Saudi and Qatari elite.

Saudi policymakers used their financial capabilities and other foreign policy instruments to dominate the civilian wings of the opposition camp, and exclude the Brotherhood-affiliates.⁶⁰¹ As Ulrichsen narrates, in 2013, in the Istanbul meeting of the Syrian National Council, the 63-seat council was expanded to include 43 new names mostly from the liberal block of Michel Kilo supported by Arab governments. “This was widely seen as a Saudi-led attempt to dilute the influence of the (Qatar-backed) Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Council by broadening its membership and composition.”⁶⁰² In a different occasion in May 2013 when a delegate of Syrian Muslim Brotherhood met with Saud al-Faisal, Saudi Foreign Minister, the latter promised more support to the council “if it expanded to include ‘moderate,’ minority, and Salafi groups as a counterweight to the influence of the Brotherhood and radical

⁵⁹⁹ Guzansky, Y. (2015) p. 51

⁶⁰⁰ Isaac, S. K. (2015)

⁶⁰¹ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014).

⁶⁰² Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014). P. 142

jihadi groups in opposition political and military bodies."⁶⁰³ The Saudi success in dominating the Syrian National Council is mostly complete by the July 2013.

“(...) a transition of power also occurred among the SNC as it replaced Mustafa Al-Sabbagh and Ghassan Hitto with Ahmad Jarba on 6 July. A tribal figure from the powerful Shammar tribe—which extended from Syria into Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq (with Saudi king Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud himself descended from the Shammar through his mother)—Jarba enjoyed close connections with Saudi Arabia, and his victory was seen as reinforcing Saudi influence over the fractious opposition coalition.”⁶⁰⁴

5.4. Conclusion

The Arab Spring produced turmoil in the Middle East state-system through a series of uprisings, revolutions, popular protests etc. The peoples in the region revolted against the decades-old dictatorships in their countries. Despite being dispersed in a vast geography from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, millions filling the streets in the Arab world were connected not only with shared demands but also with shared feelings towards their fellow brethren’s struggle in neighboring countries. The common theme in the uprisings were *karama* (human dignity), the realization of which could be possible through democracy according to these protestors. Hence, the demand for democratization became a unifying motive for the people.

One of the interesting features of the wave of revolutions compared to previous waves is about the relation of local norms with the global norms. In the previous waves,

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 143

the proposed normative consensus was not only in contradistinction with the existing regional ground rules, but they were also alternative to the global norms (Arab nationalism and Islamism). In the Arab Spring, on the other hand, the proposed normative consensus in the system was in parallel with the global norms of democracy and human rights. Yet, the distinctness came from a unique combination of democracy with political Islam. This was a new normative consensus proposal, realization of which would mean transformation of existing ground rules in the system. More precisely, as the package of “normative consensus” in a given state-system contains the preferred regime type, state-society relations, role of religion in politics, and its correct interpretation, and sources of legitimacy for authority etc., the challenge of the Arab Spring was a threat to the existing normative consensus. This was perceived to be so by the defenders of the status quo regional order. They perceived an existential threat from the successful revolutions even though the revolutionary governments in no way directed a conventional threat to them. Mere presence of a successful Arab democracy ruled by Islamist actors was enough for status quo actors to come together and fight for their annihilation.

“The monarchic bloc seems to be a relatively coherent group, considering that they are addressing the twin challenges of the Arab Spring and political Islam, while deflecting responses to societal demands via varying strategies of authoritarian rule.”⁶⁰⁵ As an example of these actors, Saudi domestic and foreign policy sheds light on their perception of events, and the strategies they applied to stop the threat. By looking at the end result –the fall of Muslim Brotherhood government, continuation of Khalifa

⁶⁰⁵ Aras, B. & Richard Falk (2015) “Authoritarian ‘Geopolitics’ of Survival in the Arab Spring,” *Third World Quarterly*, 36:2, p. 325

dynasty in Bahrain, prolonged civil war in Syria, a divided Libya etc. – one can argue that this wave of revolution came to an end; and the status quo powers won. As Ulrichsen writes, the fall of Morsi signifies the end of the Arab Spring.⁶⁰⁶

From this perspective, one can claim that what we see is the end of another wave of uprisings in the Middle East. With the integration of Egypt in the state-system again, by turning it into a “normal” state, the region attained a new era of stability. This occurred through the preservation of old ground rules in the system; so we are back to the “normal.” However, such a conclusion, I think, would not depict the whole picture correctly to us. While the status quo powers seems to win the day, every post-revolutionary consensus bears its own seeds of change inherited from the revolutionary epoch. In the fight with the Arab Nationalism, Saudi Arabia promoted Islamism as a counterweight. Yet, the next wave of uprisings occurred in the name of religion. To fight with this challenge (i.e.: the Islamic Revolution of 1979), Saudi Arabia promoted a certain understanding of Islam which is uncompromising to Shiism. The support of this salafi understanding of Islam in the country produced scholars independent of the state who gained influence over millions. The last wave of uprisings occurred in the name of democracy. What we observe, ironically for the Saudi elite, is that these influential salafi scholars, who are actually the product of Saudi official ideology and institutional education, came to terms with (at least a certain version of) the ideals of democracy. They were amongst the ones who criticized Saudi foreign policy during the Arab Spring,⁶⁰⁷ called for petitions for the deposed Morsi,⁶⁰⁸ and declared solidarity

⁶⁰⁶ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2014).

⁶⁰⁷ Matthiesen, T. (2015)

⁶⁰⁸ Patrick, N. (2016) “Domestic Factors and Foreign Policy” in Patrick, N. (ed.) *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation*. I.B. TAURIS. p.7

with the elected Egyptian government with loudest voices.⁶⁰⁹ While in practice Saudi Arabia defeated the forces of Arab Spring ideals, in theory democracy is now inserted into salafi interpretation of Islam. And this will be the real challenge.

As for the hypotheses stated in the introduction chapter, we can make the following observations:

Hypothesis 1 – Legitimacy Problem

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with legitimacy problem regarding the regime, we should expect to see that they take precautions to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. This can occur a) through increasing the welfare of the citizens [or/and] b) through implementing policies in accordance with the ideals of the revolutionary wave.

Observations 1:

We observe that in all of the cases, the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 1:

- a. The regime increased the welfare spending. A \$130 billion package of financial benefits is announced, focusing on employment, housing, education etc.
- b. In parallel with the ideals of the Arab Spring, the regime implemented certain reforms in the state apparatus. The regime announced holding of the local elections; promised women to vote and run for office in

⁶⁰⁹ Preuschaft, M. (2016)

the next elections; appointed 30 women to Shoura Council; promised more space for women in the economy.

Hypothesis 2 – Foreign-Domestic Distinction

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the porous borders (i.e.: insufficient foreign-domestic distinction), we should expect to see that they take precautions to decrease the effects of the outside world in the kingdom. This can occur a) through limiting propaganda channels of the outside world in the kingdom, [and/or] b) through paying more attention to those who have more interaction with the outside world, and decreasing the interaction of their citizens with outside.

Observations 2:

We observe that in all of the cases, the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 2:

- a. The regime wanted to limit the effects of the ideals of the Arab Spring from outside by limiting the activities of the al-Jazeera channel in the kingdom; as well as by using its own media resources. Moreover, the regime enacted new laws to limit online newspapers, to monitor social media and internet in general.
- b. The regime banned its Shia citizens from entering Bahrain.

Hypothesis 3 – Normative Consensus Proposal

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the normative consensus in the Middle East state-system (i.e.: proposal of alternative ground rules), we should expect to see that their reactions should be directed to the normative

challenge, instead of a military, economic or strategic one. This can occur through a number of ways:

- a) If this is a normative threat, the alliance choices should prioritize the normative challenger instead of a traditional balance of power rivalry;*
- b) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should make a differentiation between normative proposal (and people/parties who represent these ideas in a certain country) and the military and economic power of that country.*
- c) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should invest in normative and ideational instruments of foreign/domestic policy to represent their own version against the revisionist one.*
- d) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should take more precautions against internal threats instead of a foreign military offensive.*
- e) If this is a normative threat, the end of the threat should stem from elimination of the normative proposal, not a certain state.*

Observations from the Cases:

We observe that in all of the cases, the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 3:

- a. Faced with the threat of the Arab Spring, the Saudi regime made changes in its alliance choices. It broke up its former traditional ally in the GCC, Qatar that supports the Arab Spring revolutions. Likewise, the kingdom invited Morocco and Jordan to the GCC as new institutional allies.

- b. The Saudi regime provided financial assistance to the Egyptian military to ease their economic hardships after the revolutionary turmoil when the latter ousted the Brotherhood regime in Cairo.
- c. Faced with the threat of the Arab Spring, the Saudi regime resorted to official ulama to provide normative legitimacy to its own preferred ground rules. This included emphasis on anti-Islamic nature of the protests, compatibility of the regime with the requirements of the Islamic law etc.
- d. Faced with the threat of the Arab Spring, the kingdom made or renewed agreements with its allies to contain domestic dissent. The increase in the number of the Peninsula Shield Force was also a precaution against internal threats within the region.
- e. The end of the Arab Spring threat for the Saudis meant the end of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt. After the military coup in Egypt against Morsi in 2013, the kingdom no longer perceived threat from Egypt. Instead, it helped rebuilding of the Egyptian economy and army through generous financial assistance.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

“The central problem of government in the Arab world [...] is political legitimacy.”⁶¹⁰

Michael Hudson

“He can do whatever he wants now. All the checks and balances are gone.”⁶¹¹

Jamal Khashoggi

In this work, I analyzed systemic crises in the Middle East regional state-system from a constructivist perspective. I focused on the sources of successive regional turmoil in the region. I asked to which category of cases these events belong to. My answer was these episodes of regional crises are about the normative consensus/dissensus in the Middle East. I argued that the legitimacy deficit and porous borders in the Middle East make the region susceptible to systemic crises. When an alternative regional normative consensus proposal interacts with these conditions and gains prominence in the region, we observe systemic crisis. This can happen in two

⁶¹⁰ Hudson, M.C. (1977) *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.2

⁶¹¹ Jamal Khashoggi commenting on Muhammad bin Salman’s rise. Khashoggi disappeared, brutally murdered according to many sources, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018. Quoted in Ehteshami, A. (2018) “Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power” *The International Spectator* p.6

ways: first, the alternative normative consensus proposal achieves a revolution in a state; and this state becomes a revisionist actor in the system. It can attract followers in other countries as well. Thus, a revisionist state interacting with discontent masses in the region leads to crisis. Another way is that, even if the new normative proposal lacks a revisionist state, if it becomes convincing for the peoples in the region, this may also lead to unrest and instability through mass uprisings and revolts. In other words, even if the masses cannot achieve a revolution in a state, attempts for revolution can create crisis.

To see if categorizing these episodes of crises primarily as “normative challenges” is correct, I analyzed how an important actor itself (i.e.: Saudi Arabia) saw these crises. What is the source of instability according to the status quo actors? Does their perception of events support my argument? The reactions of status quo actors and the precautions they took against the crises give us clues about their analyses and their evaluations about the causes of the turmoil. To this end, I focused on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Let me re-state the hypotheses and observations from the case chapters and discuss their implications.

6.1 Hypotheses and Findings

Hypothesis 1 – Legitimacy Problem

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with legitimacy problem regarding the regime, we should expect to see that they take precautions to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. This can occur a) through increasing the welfare of the citizens [or/and] b) through implementing policies in accordance with the ideals of the revolutionary wave.

Observations from the Cases:

We observe that in all of the cases, the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 1.

Case 1: Nasserist Era:

- a. The regime increased the welfare spending. It also increased the salaries of the state employees.
- b. The regime replaced the unpopular king. The new king appeared in mass rallies in accordance with the populist atmosphere of the era. Moreover, the regime promised drafting a constitution; and it abolished slavery.

Case 2: Iranian Revolution:

- a. The regime increased the welfare spending, housing, electrification, road construction. Despite the decrease in oil prices, it did not decrease these investments. Implemented policies to institute social justice, especially for the Eastern province.
- b. The regime decided to institute the majlis al-shoura (Consultative Assembly), which is in parallel with the republicanist propaganda of the revolution. Similarly, the regime promised implementation of the basic law of government (the constitution).

Case 3: The Arab Spring:

- a. The regime increased the welfare spending. A \$130 billion package of financial benefits is announced, focusing on employment, housing, education etc.
- b. In parallel with the ideals of the Arab Spring, the regime implemented certain reforms in the state apparatus. The regime announced holding of the local elections; promised women to vote and run for office in the next elections; appointed 30 women to Shoura Council; promised more space for women in the economy.

Hypothesis 2 – Foreign-Domestic Distinction

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the porous borders (i.e.: insufficient foreign-domestic distinction), we should expect to see that they take precautions to decrease the effects of the outside world in the kingdom. This can occur a) through limiting propaganda channels of the outside world in the kingdom, [and/or] b) through paying more attention to those who have more interaction with the outside world, and decreasing the interaction of their citizens with outside.

Observations from the Cases:

We observe that in all of the cases, the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 2.

Case 1: Nasserist Era:

- a. The regime wanted to limit the effects of the propaganda of the Nasserist radio channels primarily through investing in its own media broadcasts.
- b. The regime took precautions regarding the societal groups that have frequent interaction with the outside world. The regime expelled some of the foreign employees in the kingdom; called back students studying abroad; and divided the military into different units.

Case 2: Iranian Revolution:

- a. The regime wanted to limit the effects of the propaganda of the Islamic Revolution through investing in its own media broadcasts.
- b. The regime took precautions regarding the societal groups that have frequent interaction with the outside world. The regime expelled some of the foreign employees in the kingdom; called back students studying abroad in the middle of the academic year; doubled the salary of the army personnel; withdrew the armored units from the towns.

Case 3: The Arab Spring:

- a. The regime wanted to limit the effects of the ideals of the Arab Spring from outside by limiting the activities of the al-Jazeera channel in the kingdom; as well as by using its own media resources. Moreover, the regime enacted new laws to limit online newspapers, to monitor social media and internet in general.
- b. The regime banned its Shia citizens from entering Bahrain.

Hypothesis 3 – Normative Consensus Proposal

If the Saudi rulers think that the cause of the crisis has to do with the normative consensus in the Middle East state-system (i.e.: proposal of alternative ground rules), we should expect to see that their reactions should be directed to the normative challenge, instead of a military, economic or strategic one. This can occur through a number of ways:

- a) If this is a normative threat, the alliance choices should prioritize the normative challenger instead of a traditional balance of power rivalry;
- b) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should make a differentiation between normative proposal (and people/parties who represent these ideas in a certain country) and the military and economic power of that country.
- c) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should invest in normative and ideational instruments of foreign/domestic policy to represent their own version against the revisionist one.
- d) If this is a normative threat, Saudis should take more precautions against internal threats instead of a foreign military offensive.
- e) If this is a normative threat, the end of the threat should stem from elimination of the normative proposal, not a certain state.

Observations from the Cases:

We observe that in all of the cases, the Saudi regime acted in accordance with the expectations of the hypothesis 3.

Case 1: Nasserist Era:

- a. Faced with the Nasserist threat, the Saudi regime made changes in its alliance choices. It allied with its former traditional rivals, the Hashemite kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan against a former ally, but the new normative rival Egypt.
- b. The Saudi regime provided financial assistance to the Egyptian military to build the Egyptian army again after the 1967 war in return of the concessions on behalf of the Egyptian regime to lower its revolutionary claims.
- c. Faced with the Nasserist threat, the Saudi regime emphasized the Islamist nature of the regime as opposed to nationalist alternative by investing in the Islamic University in Madinah, and the Muslim World League. It also hosted Muslim Brotherhood exiles in the Kingdom.
- d. Faced with the Nasserist threat, the Saudi regime took precautions against the internal threats both in the kingdom and in the allied countries. The 1962 Taif treaty with Jordan entailed intervention of each country to the neighbors' soil militarily in case of an upheaval.
- e. The end of the Egyptian threat for the Saudis meant the end of the Nasserist ideology in the region. After the 1967 Khartoum summit, when Egypt agreed to turn into the system as a "normal" state, the kingdom no longer perceived threat from Egypt. Instead, it helped rebuilding of the Egyptian economy and army.

Case 2: Iranian Revolution:

- a. Faced with the threat of the Iranian Revolution, the Saudi regime made changes in its alliance choices. It allied with its former traditional rival, the Baathist Iraq against the former ally, but the new normative rival Iran.
- b. The Saudi regime offered financial assistance to the Iranian regime to ease their economic hardships caused by the Iran-Iraq war and the declining oil prices in return of the concessions on behalf of the Iranian regime to lower its revolutionary claims.
- c. Faced with the threat of the Iranian Revolution, the Saudi regime emphasized the (salafi) Islamist nature of the regime as opposed to alternative of the Iranian Revolution by publicly supporting the Afghan resistance, building mosques and Islamic centers worldwide, adopting Quran as the constitution, adopting a religious national anthem, applying conservative domestic policies.
- d. Faced with the threat of the Iranian Revolution, the Saudi regime took precautions against the internal threats both in the kingdom and in the allied countries. The kingdom signed bilateral agreements and under the GCC umbrella declared a consensus on intelligence sharing and criminal extradition with a specific focus on the “opponents of the regime.” The council members agreed that “intervention in one means intervention in all.”
- e. The end of the Iranian Revolutionary threat for the Saudis meant the end of the Iranian efforts to export the revolution in the region. After the 1989, with the death of the Khomeini, and the “reorientation” phase of the Iranian foreign policy under Khamenei and Rafsanjani, the kingdom no longer perceived a normative threat from Iran. Instead, it helped reintegration of

Iran into state-system as a “normal” state by solving the Hajj quote disputes and by mutual agreement on “non-interference” principle.

Case 3: The Arab Spring:

- a. Faced with the threat of the Arab Spring, the Saudi regime made changes in its alliance choices. It broke up its former traditional ally in the GCC, Qatar that supports the Arab Spring revolutions. Likewise, the kingdom invited Morocco and Jordan to the GCC as new institutional allies.
- b. The Saudi regime provided financial assistance to the Egyptian military to ease their economic hardships after the revolutionary turmoil when the latter ousted the Brotherhood regime in Cairo.
- c. Faced with the threat of the Arab Spring, the Saudi regime resorted to official ulama to provide normative legitimacy to its own preferred ground rules. This included emphasis on anti-Islamic nature of the protests, compatibility of the regime with the requirements of the Islamic law etc.
- d. Faced with the threat of the Arab Spring, the kingdom made or renewed agreements with its allies to contain domestic dissent. The increase in the number of the Peninsula Shield Force was also a precaution against internal threats within the region.
- e. The end of the Arab Spring threat for the Saudis meant the end of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt. After the military coup in Egypt against Morsi in 2013, the kingdom no longer perceived threat from Egypt. Instead, it helped rebuilding of the Egyptian economy and army through generous financial assistance.

6.2 Implications and Predictions

The analyses on the future of the Middle East state-system and individual states in it go between extreme fragility and extreme robustness/durability. While some observers predict a quick fall of regimes in almost all crises, others stress lack of a real challenge to the state power in the region. Commenting on this problem with reference to Saudi Arabia, Gause writes that:

Western observers and diplomats have been forecasting the collapse of the Saudi regime for more than sixty years. The death of the founding king, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, in 1953 was supposed to lead to the unraveling of the realm. The Arab nationalist challenge of Gamal Abdul Nasser in the late 1950s and early 1960s was then going to sweep it away. The fall of the shah of Iran in 1979 led to a spate of speculation that monarchy's days were numbered in Arabia as well. So those questioning the regime's staying power these days are in good company.⁶¹²

Obviously, the collapse of the system and states in it is not an easy phenomenon. However, such an observation of stability should not lead us to conclude that it is totally out of question. The fall of Shah in 1979, or Mubarak in 2011 were equally surprising for many analysts as well. What do the findings of this dissertation tell us about this dynamic? I think there are four significant implications. *First, we will see more cycles of contention.* If the argument and conclusions of this study are correct, we should expect to see new systemic crises in the region. Since the final episode of crisis ended

⁶¹² Gause III, F Gregory (2011) "Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East" *Council Special Report*, Council on Foreign Relations Press. p. 3. See also Gause III, F. G. (1994) *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, Council on Foreign Relations Press.

without solving the real reasons that caused it (i.e.: the normative dissensus), the accumulation of revolutionary energy beneath the surface of stability will manifest itself again. It is hard to predict the timing but the cycle of contention in the last century tells us that most probably it will be in the next two decades. Fawaz Gerges shares such a view and predicts that “social turmoil, collective action, and politically driven violence will be a dominant feature of Arab and Middle Eastern societies in the next decade.”⁶¹³ As for the reason, he comments that “a psychological and epistemological rupture has occurred in the Arab world in which the mood and temperament of the public have radically changed. The old social contract that governed relations between the rulers and those whom they ruled lies in tatters.”⁶¹⁴ Although my central argument does not privilege the last episode of crises as Gerges does, I agree that the Arab Spring has a transformative influence on the future of the state-society relation in the Middle East.

Second, we will see more frequent systemic crises. The increasing speed of communication and transportation allows the spread of revolutionary message in a faster way compared to 1950s or 1980s. The “internet revolution”, the effects of which can be observed during the Arab Spring, makes the Arab world a more connected political community. As the printing press constructed imagined communities through ideas published on book pages, the new media constructs imagined communities through videos published on facebook pages. Having said that, I do not argue it was the internet who made revolutions in the Arab Spring. Traditional organizations like

⁶¹³ Gerges, F. (2015) “Contextualizing the Arab Spring Uprisings: Different Regimes, Different Revolutions and Different Trajectories” in *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings*. Palgrave Macmillan. p. 20

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. P.19

Muslim Brotherhood or *Kifayah* movements were crucial actors. However, the new media intensified the messages, increased communication, facilitated organization, and connected the daily events in the minds of millions. Through globalization, the peoples living in the Middle East have not only found new channels of communication within the region, they also became more integrated with the trends in world politics as a whole. As the aphorism aptly captures “Twitter does not cause revolutions, but *revolutions are tweeted.*”⁶¹⁵

This brings us to another reason why I think we will see *more frequent systemic crises*: the congruity between local societal norms and global norms. In the previous episodes of crises, the dominant discourse of demands for change in the region were against the dominant global discourse. Both Arab Nationalism and Islamism were ideologies appealing to the local people, which have limited persuasiveness and resonance in the discourse of global civil society. With the Arab Spring, however, the ideals revolutionaries fought for corresponds to the hegemonic global norms: the ideas of democracy and human rights. Such a congruence can produce more support from the global civil society for the change of normative consensus in the Middle East.⁶¹⁶ We can recall similar examples during the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, or slavery.

Third, economic power will be crucial for the outcome of future crises. During the struggle between defenders of the status quo and those who demand change, one of the effective weapons in the hands of the status quo actors is the budget spent on

⁶¹⁵ Lynch, M. (2011) “Media, Old and New” in Lynch, M (ed.) *Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*. Columbia University Press.

⁶¹⁶ Nevertheless, this does not mean more support from the hegemonic state-level actors.

welfare. The social contract in the region, especially for the oil-rich states, is that the regime expects political acquiescence in return of generous welfare spending. In the three episodes of crises analyzed in the previous chapters, it was a tool regimes used to fight against the revolutionary waves in the region. And most probably it will continue to be so. Commenting on this, Madawi al-Rasheed writes “for the moment most Saudis prefer security and the promise of economic prosperity at the expense of political liberty.”⁶¹⁷ This raises certain questions regarding the sustainability of these policies. Welfare spending depends on the petro-dollars for the Gulf states. This income is important not only for the domestic stability of oil-rich countries, but it is also significant for the status quo order in oil-poor states. This is because Gulf states provide financial assistance to other countries in the region when they faced a revolutionary wave. However, the trend to decrease carbon emissions worldwide, and to use more sustainable energy resources lead to speculations about the future of oil revenues. Another more serious threat emanates from the population increase in the Gulf. According to some estimates, the Saudi oil will be sufficient only for the domestic consumption by 2050, if the current trends continue. Dependence on oil prices means the status quo order is very much vulnerable economically; this also makes it vulnerable to the decisions of outside actors.⁶¹⁸ “Looking at the current development of the Saudi state, it is questionable whether the trade-off between welfare and patronage, and political acquiescence will be sustainable in the long run.”⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Al-Rasheed, M. (2011) “Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Vol. 11, No. 3 p.520

⁶¹⁸ Yom, S. and Gause III, G. (2012) “Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On” in *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 23, Number 4, October 2012, pp. 74-88

⁶¹⁹ Colombo, S. (2017) “Foreign Policy Activism in Saudi Arabia and Oman: Diverging Narratives and Stances towards the Syrian and Yemeni Conflicts” in *The International Spectator*, 52:2, pp. 54-70

Fourth, the status quo actors have to provide more liberties. After each episode of crisis, the status quo actors had to give certain concessions to the forces of revision. Although in successive epochs of crises the alliance of monarchies seems to win the fight, they had to change their pre-crisis positions in certain areas, in accordance with the demands of revisionists. For example, in Saudi Arabia, they had to institute a consultative assembly, provide certain rights to women, write a constitution etc. In other words, the trend of the last century moves toward more rights for the people. It would not be wrong to predict the continuation of the same trend in the next decades. Some may think that these reforms are window-dressing. While this is not an invalid criticism, I think over time, accumulation of tiny reform packages can have an effect. To put it differently, while their influence is limited, it is not that they are totally ineffective. Nobody in Saudi Arabia thinks about re-instituting slavery in the Kingdom, for example, which was abolished in accordance with the general aura of the time in 1962. This means the threshold of satisfactory reform for the people is raised after each equilibrium. From a different perspective, this means each equilibrium carries its own seed of destruction in itself. The next one has to give more compared to the last one. This is also related to the previous point about welfare spending. The economic welfare may not be a sufficient criterion for political acquiescence at a certain point just as the political concessions given do not guarantee future docility.

Raymond Hinnebusch described the Middle East region as the “epicenter of world crisis.”⁶²⁰ In an attempt to analyze these crises, Michael Hudson’s contention

⁶²⁰ Quoted in Ehteshami, A. (2018) “Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power” in *The International Spectator* p.2

expressed in 1977 that the central problem in Arab politics is political legitimacy still holds true after more than forty years. The most pressing question, then, is “is there a way out?” Is there a solution to the almost cyclical pattern of rise and fall of alternative order proposals that cause war, clashes and uprisings? If the argument of this study is correct, the findings imply that the only solution to the problem is domestic reform. Unless the normative consensus at the level of states corresponds with the normative consensus at the level of societies, the main source of tension will continue to be there. Commenting on the precautions Saudis took to protect the regime, Mabon makes a similar argument. He writes that “Saudi monarchy has avoided short-term instability, but longer-term pressures facing the Al Saud family necessitate domestic reform.”⁶²¹

Yet, this brings us to a more difficult question: is there a way for regimes to carry out these domestic reforms without endangering their privileged positions as rulers? On the one hand, in all of the rounds of crises, the demands of peoples have many common points: political representation, rule of law, transparency in governance, equitable share of wealth etc. On the other hand, it is not realistic to expect that the ruling families would relinquish power just to construct more convenient state-society relations. This dilemma is expressed by the US Secretary of State in early Cold War Dean Acheson as the following: “the national purpose of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like that of any other country, is to survive, perchance to prosper, but with the added proviso under the Al Saud dynasty.”⁶²²

⁶²¹ Mabon, S. (2012) Kingdom in Crisis? The Arab Spring and Instability in Saudi Arabia, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 33:3, 530-553

⁶²² Quoted in Karim, U. (2017) “The Evolution of Saudi Foreign Policy and the Role of Decision-making Processes and Actors” *The International Spectator*, 52:2, p. 72

We can discuss this question with reference to the recent developments in Saudi Arabia under the crown prince Muhammad bin Salman. The crown prince announced a series of reforms regarding economy, society and religion in the kingdom. The arrest of senior members of the royal family under the allegations of corruption, promises of rights for women, reinterpretation of official understanding of Islam, decreasing the reliance on oil for the economy etc. are some of the seemingly radical reforms announced by the crown prince. Ehteshami comments that “When the Crown Prince declares in a public meeting that ‘I have twenty years to reorient my country and launch it into the future’, one realizes that the old rules of the game have been torn up and new ones are being written.”⁶²³ Yet, these new rules are again not built on more transparency and inclusion, the demands people fought for in the last century. Most probably, the factor that will force the ruling elite for genuine reform will be the necessity to pass to the “post-rentier state phase.”⁶²⁴ This, in return, requires a radical change in social contract that would require a new definition of citizenship based on rights and responsibilities.⁶²⁵

The Middle East seems to remain a region where the struggle between status quo and revision takes place. “At best, states can but ‘delay’ the natural trend toward freedom and dignity. When rights demands reach a critical mass, states are forced to respond.”⁶²⁶

⁶²³ Ehteshami (2018) p.18

⁶²⁴ Colombo (2017) p. 59

⁶²⁵ Gause, (1994) *Oil Monarchies*.

⁶²⁶ Hosseinioun, M. (2015) “Reconceptualizing Resistance and Reform in the Middle East” in Gerges, F. (ed.) *Contentious Politics in the Middle East*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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