

QATAR UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

GCC PERCEPTION of THREATS from IRAQ AND IRAN:
EXPLAINING THE ENDURING ALLIANCE WITH THE UNITED STATES

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: GCC Perception of Threats from Iraq and Iran: Explaining the Enduring Alliance with the United States

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Threat perception in international relations plays a major role in forming international alliances. Previously Iraq and nowadays Iran, has an essential role in impacting the security concerns of the GCC. Therefore, this thesis will provide an adequate answer to the question: to what extent do Iraq and Iran threaten the stability of Gulf Cooperation Council states, and how have these states reacted in pursuit of their protection.

This study aims to test the accuracy of GCC governments' perceptions regarding Iraq and Iran via the four elements of threats state possess highlighted in Stephen Walt's *The Origins of Alliance*. By refereeing to several literatures across several time frames in the 20th century, this thesis argues that the behavior of Iran and Iraq in the Gulf have been destabilizing to the security of the GCC states. Hence, Iraq and Iran represents a danger to regional stability which means that GCC states, in a simple Neorealist logic, cannot rely on them for their security, and hence requesting support from the United States (an extra-regional power).

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my inspired hero my father “Majid” who has always encouraged me to follow the road of success and work hard to achieve my ambitions.

Also, I thank my mother for dedicating part of her prayers to me.

“Success is a state of mind. If you want success, start thinking of yourself as a success”

Joyce Brothers

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

This chapter will present a general overview of the topic of the research, and consists of three sections. The first section identifies the problem statement that clarifies the case study, dividing it into what is the problem, when and why it occurred in addition to its implications on contemporary Gulf politics. Then, it examines the literature review, which begins by exploring theories of alliances. The literature then examines the period of 1979, after the overthrow of the Shah's regime following the two regional events of Iraq-Iran war in 1980 and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Further, it illustrates the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its regional implications with a focus on Iraq, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Finally, it concludes with Iran's intervention in the Arab Spring with a special examination of the Middle East Civil Wars in Syria and Yemen.

The second section demonstrates the research objective followed by the research question. Moreover, it discusses the research design which describes how the researcher will conduct research and obtain the data, including a discussion of some of the challenges facing data collection. The last section clarifies the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Research problem

This research is important to understand the sources of GCC states' enduring alliance with the United States, as well as the nature of political relations between three regional axes Iraq, Iran and the GCC. The study attempts to provide an answer to the

following question: how have GCC states perceived of Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979; and how have then perceived of Iraq since its invasion of Kuwait in 1990? What sorts of threats do GCC states see in Iran and Iraq to the Gulf region? GCC states perceived Iran and Iraq as major threats to the stability and security of the region. The political behavior of these two countries (especially in the late 1970s and in the 1990s – and since) led to a breach of trust which caused concern in the Gulf region. As a result, the Gulf States were compelled to deepen an existing alliance with the United States (an extra-regional power) to obtain protection. In the two regional wars, Iraq was the primary aggressor. It began by attacking Iran in 1980 and then by invading its supporter against Iran, Kuwait in 1990. Accordingly, Iraq was regarded as the source of danger due to the regime's aggressive political behavior.

However, the fall of Saddam Hussain, Iraq's leader, in 2003 by the United States, succeeded in changing the balance of threat in the region. Therefore, Iraq then barely observed as a threat, whereas Iran arrived as a serious regional major threat. The involvement of Iran as a proxy in the Syrian and Yemeni civil war formed a security gap for the Gulf States, in which an Arab-Gulf coalition was formed to fight the Houthi rebels and their ally "Iran" in Yemen. Further, the involvement of GCC, particularly Saudi Arabia in Syria intersected with Iran acting in Syria as part of its regional ambitions.

All of these regional threats affected the stability of the Gulf region. The two axes of threat Iran and Iraq possess a strategic geographical location to the Arabian Gulf, making them actual enemies for the long term. As a consequence, the GCC states are obliged to

seek solutions that enable them to deter and contain threats themselves, rather than depending on external powers for protection. Hence, these issues must be solved in the short term to avoid future unexpected consequences because once the danger reaches its peak, it will not be easy to cope with. This is clearly accruing in the region where Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies are incapable of dealing with Iran.

1.2 Literature review

The following section briefly reviews the alliance literature to understand its main weaknesses and strengths; this will help provide a backdrop to explaining the choices of allies for GCC states, which they sought in order to protect them. Moreover, it also reviews critical events that shaped regional relations in the Gulf. The aim of this review is to provide a coherent understanding of the nature of threat and its transformation through time, in addition to understand the alliances formation in the region.

1.3 Theoretical approaches explaining alliance choices

Alliances mean different levels of state commitments; yet they remain a vital tie between states aiming to maintain and enhance their survival and security. Several theorists provided definitions for alliance; from a realist perspective, Morgenthau (1959) defines alliance as a function of balancing power which operates in multiple states' system (p.185). According to Morgenthau, three requirements must be considered in establishing alliance. First, alliance could enhance power of the allied states by adding the power of other states

to the alliance. Second, states could boost their power through arming each other and third, allied states are capable of revoking opponent's power by pulling the power of other states (Shekri, 1978.p.12). Stephan Walt (1987) identified alliance as security cooperation among two or more states in the shape of formal or informal cooperation (p.1). Since alliances targeted wars, their aim is to avoid waging wars, or later, to defeat opponents.

The literature sees alliances to take different forms. The regional alliance is the fastest type of alliance where regional states form regional alliance with each other to accelerate the aim of security and stability. Kostiner (1998) argued the GCC founded the Gulf Cooperation Council as an Arab coalition to defend their nations against regional external threats during the Iraq-Iran war (p.55). Salim (2015, 74) explained international alliance by examining the US initiative of the international coalition in 1990 to provide support to its GCC allies to deter the Iraqi's threat and to pull the forces out of Kuwait to liberate Kuwait because of an existing military alliance.

However, the most powerful form of alliance is the military alliance. Singer and Small (1969) classified three types of military alliance. First is entente in which states seek permission of one another in terms of military intervention. Second, neutrality or non-aggression means states pledge not to perform military actions against any member of the alliance. Lastly, the defense pact where a state is capable of interfering on behalf of other allied state (p.270-271). The best example to illustrate this convention is the Saudi coalition in Yemen with the participation of several GCC, Arabs and Western States. A military alliance must be enhanced in order to deter threats. In a seminar by the Department

of International affairs at Qatar University in March 2018, Major General Mohammed Al-Marri discussed the benefits of alliance. For small states, military alliance maintains its security and stability in addition to promoting trust relations with the powerful states. In turn, the alliances with small states enhance the influence of the external ally (such as the United States) in the region.

1.4 Evaluating the study of alliances

Most of the literature on alliances derives from an understanding that distribution of capabilities influence alliance decisions. Moreover, the literature largely agrees that small states have limited options, given their relative capabilities, and are constantly in search of allies to help secure them. The reason for choosing a coalition is often survival; however, the coalition drains resources of weaker state via using these resources by strong state.

1.5 Main events which shaped contemporary Gulf politics

Iraq and Iran were perceived by GCC states as major regional powers that threaten the security of the Arabian Gulf. GCC security concerns are based on regional events that occurred in the period between 1980 and 2015. Each event was associated with either Iran or Iraq; in the case of Iraq, the aggressive regime of Saddam Hussain and his Ba'th party was a nightmare for Iran and the Gulf region whereas the outbreak of the Iranian revolution

alarmed the Gulf monarchs. Further, the crisis of Yemen in 2015 forced Saudi Arabia and its Gulf neighbors to form a coalition against the Houthi rebels, the Iranian proxy.

During the reign of the Iranian Shah, securing Iran from several external threats including Iraq and the Soviet Union was the top priority. Maqsd Nuri (1986) argues that the factor of oil played a significant role in the Iranian economy due to three concerns. First, Iran occupied the fourth place in oil reserves behind Federal Russia, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Second, Iran was positioned as the fourth biggest producer of oil in addition to being the only country that imported and exported oil simultaneously. Moreover, the Strait of Hormuz was the only source to ship the Iranian oil tankers. However, Nuri (1986) argues that the political factor had a profound impact on the Shah because of his perception of Iraq as a threat due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1973. Furthermore, Iraq and the Soviet Union were super powers and shared solid ties which could lead, if they desired, to the demolition of Iran.

1.6 Iran and Iraq literature 1971-1988

Iran was viewed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a source of threat that destabilizes the internal security of the seven federations. In a foreign policy analysis study by Rugh (1996), he argued that the issue of UAE islands caused tension in the bilateral relations between Iran and UAE. Rugh examined the claims by both states regarding the possession of the islands in which both states related their claims to historical facts. Moreover, the study discussed that the Iranian behavior regarding the islands is a threat to

GCC neighbors because Iran had regional ambitions. He concluded in the idea that the occupation of the islands served Iran's political aims related to imposing its regional hegemony and expansion Rugh(1996).

The danger and the aggressiveness of the Iraqi regime was a nightmare for both the Gulf States and Iran. The first Gulf war among Iraq and Iran was initiated by the former Iraqi president Saddam Hussain, the main actor that destabilized regional peace. According to Ramazani (1985), he assumed that “the major regional conflict in the Gulf region was Iraq-Iran war” (p.96). Likewise, Ramazani acknowledged that Iran and Iraq always have a presence in the Gulf affairs due to their geographical proximity, and their war resulted in reinforcing the competition between the major powers alongside security concerns. As a result, Kundi (1989) explains the Iraqi-Iranian war “obliged the Gulf states to engage in security integration” (p.94). Hence, the creation of a regional association, the Gulf Cooperation Council, happened during the war in 1980 with the inclusion of the six permanent countries of the GCC: Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia plus United Arab Emirates. However, Iraq was excluded as the adequate solution to secure the region through a joint defense (Kundi, 1989.p.93).

Iraq was willing to regain its lost regional position after its struggle in its war with Iran. Hence, its invasion of Kuwait was justified via political and economic excuses despite Kuwaiti support provided to Saddam Hussain during the eight year war. Politically, Schaeffer (2005) examined that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was connected with Saddam's intention to restore his hegemony after his war with Iran. He stated that the invasion would

permit Saddam to occupy a specific percentage of world oil revenue, estimated around 25%, in addition to increasing his sovereignty (20%) of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, which would assist Saddam to achieve the objective of becoming a major power in the Gulf (p.266). In terms of economics, Dijk (2008) argued the economic status of Iraq after the war led to the escalation of tension with the Gulf, particularly with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as both countries rejected financial assistance for Iraq. Iraq requested Kuwait and Saudi to forgive the \$50 billion USD that was given as a debt during the war, alongside the Iraqi claims that Kuwait was accountable for the decline of oil prices in late of 1980 (Dijk, 2008).

1.7 Literature on Iran after 2003 until the aftermath of Arab Spring

The hegemony of Iran began to rise soon after the fall of Baghdad, it attempted to maintain its control on the Gulf and the Arab region. As a result, numerous consequences took effect immediately after the removal of the previous Iraqi regime. Iran's intention of intervention in the domestic affairs of Iraq is to attain political objectives. Milani (2012), a foreign policy analyst and political scientist in his speech in a conference titled "Iran, Iraq and the Gulf Cooperation Council: New Realities in Persian Gulf Security," confirmed the Iranian aim in Iraq is the desire to set up a new government governed by the Shia to impose a powerful cohesion with the lack of power to form a threat. Further, Milani (2012) believed that Iran has managed to accomplish its target to extend its hegemony by filling the security gap in Iraq after the war.

Yafee and Hisbani asserted that the United States is the main element in preserving the security and stability of the Gulf region. According to Yafee (2004) the U.S is interested in the possibility of forming a dual cooperative alliance in order to overcome the challenges that threaten the Gulf monarchs. Additionally, Yafee states that this cooperation is essential for their bilateral ties with the United States (p.124). Thus, Hisbani (2005) mentioned that the intention of United States through its bases in certain Gulf countries and its deployment of a large number of rotational troops is to block any attempt of any country to become regionally dominant.

Both Shanahan and Kazemi agree on the concept of the animosity between Iran and the US, and vice versa. Shanahan in his study (2009) clarifies the Iranian anxiety concerning the U.S bases in the Gulf, describing the nervousness of Iran as an “anathema” due to the Iranian perception of these bases as a threat to its national stability in addition to the fact that the U.S might impose limitation on Tehran’s military (p.8). Moreover Shanahan assumes the former Iranian president Ahmadinejad demanded a regional alliance between Iran and the Gulf States under a certain condition that eliminated the U.S involvement. Yet, the Gulf States were not willing to accept this alliance (Shanahan, 2009. p.8). In contrast, Kazemi (2014) concludes that prior to 2003; the only sources of threats in the Middle East were the Iraqi and the Iranian regimes. However, the equation changed after the U.S invasion on Iraq in 2003 which led Iran to be the only country in the chess game that defies the U.S existence in the Gulf (p.7).

Piven's article in Al-Jazeera online (2012) used specific statistical data regarding Iran's military capabilities. Iran has around 523,000 personnel in active services that involves 350,000 soldiers and includes 220,000 conscripts among the soldiers. Despite this, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps represented the major important army in comparison to the rest of the Iranian military. For instance, its soldiers are estimated to be 125,000 soldiers in addition to its huge potentials of naval and defense forces compromised of 18,000 and 12,000 respectively (Piven, 2012).

In contrast, the military aspect of the Gulf States is incomparable in terms of its size with the Iranian and Iraqi military. Kundi (1989) described the size of Gulf military as small, yet, it endeavored to advance and progress its military capabilities to be able to defeat any conceivable threats. For instance, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia managed to develop its armed forces such as the Royal Saudi Army in addition to King Fahad Military City, located near Kuwait; this is defined as the most substantial base in the Gulf to put off Iranian's threats (p.98).

The overthrow of the Sunni regime in Baghdad contributed to the increase of Iran's threat to Iraq and the GCC. In a report by Ayub (2013), the American invasion on Iraq resulted in facilitating the space for Shiite groups in Iraq to reach power. In addition, it led to an increase in Iranian-Saudi tensions in what has been called a cold war, which resulted in fighting each other through proxies in Syria and Yemen according to Ayub (2013).

Iran supported the project of Arab Spring that began in 2010 under the pretext of Islamic Awakening, a theory similar to that of its Islamic Revolution. Iran's direct intervention in Syrian civil war started in 2013; Kozak (2017) examined the Iranian military intervention. Kozak provided a statistical data regarding the estimated number of fighters in Syria, concluding that around 30,000 Iranian fighters divided between the IRGC, Shiite militia and Lebanese Hezbollah fought in support of the regime (2017). He also, explained the role played by Iran in establishing military operations to maintain Al-Assad regime in several Syrian cities such as Aleppo, Latakia and Dera. Kozak, finally stated that Iran inserted itself heavily in the Syrian conflict so much so that even the Syrian regime cannot separate itself away from Iran because the latter is not willing to put an end to the conflict. Similarly, Zweiri (2011) discussed in his article, "Iranian-Syrian relations and the Syrian popular mobility", the motives of Iran's adherence and loyalty to Al-Assad regime and its attempt to maintain his power. Zweiri argued that Iran considered the events in Syria as plot targeting both states. Moreover, he provided Iran's point of view of the Syrian regime where it is not despotic, yet it requires a reform.

The rivalry among Saudi Arabia and Iran plays an essential role in their intervention in Yemen. Juneau (2016) argued that Iran demands to obtain entrée to certain states where their geographical location is important to Iran in order to oppose its rivalry in the region, Saudi Arabia. In addition he stated that the Houthi rebels are a proxy of Iran from the perspective of Saudi and thus, the Kingdom decided to initiate a coalition to restore the legitimacy of the Yemeni government and roll back the Houthis. Furthermore, Zweiri (2016) examined the ancient intervention of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen's domestic

affairs in his study “Iran and political dynamics in the Arab world: the case of Yemen”. Zweiri stated that Iran perceived Saudi’s military involvement in Yemen as destabilizing the security of the region, while Saudi observed Iran’s technique of filling the region state’s power vacuum is ended (p.15-16).

1.8 Evaluation of the literature

The presented literatures illustrate the threat observed by the GCC from four consecutive decades since 1979. The literature demonstrated that Iran was, and is still, a major concern for the Gulf region and it’s the initial factor in creating permanent regional tension since the emergence of the Islamic Republic. The recent studies of Arab Spring confirmed Iran’s long term intentions and its successful attempts in dominating neighboring state e.g. Iraq and other Arab State e.g. Syria. Indeed, it demanded to implement the same strategy in Yemen via its confrontation with Saudi Arabia. However, Iran has not always been a source of threat to smaller Gulf States. To the contrary, smaller states with lesser capabilities, such as Saudi Arabia, have allied with Iran during the 1970s in the so-called “twin pillar” arrangement brokered by the United States at the time. At the time, as well, the United Arab Emirates was threatened by Iran after the latter’s occupation of three islands in 1971. Therefore, states perceive the need to act against others when they see them as threatening; this also means that states do not see threat uniformly. A lack of threat comparison studies focusing on the period of the Shah Mohammad Pahlavi, and Iran’s modern history impacted the researcher’s study plan. The researcher elected to investigate which period presented a greater threat to the Gulf region using comparison

studies. Lastly, the available literature on Arab Spring, the case of Syria emphasized on the role played by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The researcher tried to seek a detailed study concerning the amount of financial aids provided by Saudi to Syria, yet, the studies were very broad and mainly discussed GCC Humanitarian aid. In terms of Iran's occupation to the three Emiratis Islands, the majority of the literature analyzed Iran's threat to UAE in the economic field. However, there were unexposed studies focusing on Iran's political threat to UAE.

1.9 Research objective

This study aims to assess the historical events that shaped and transformed Iraq and Iran into sources of regional threats perceived by the GCC States. It will explore how the political factors contributed to increase GCC concern during the phase of the three Gulf wars that resulted in changing the dynamics of balancing alliance followed by the decisions of Balancing and Bandwagon initiated by the GCC. The study will explore the historical roots of the Iranian occupation of the three Emirati islands and its economic consequences on the Strait of Hormuz. Furthermore, it will examine the role of United States to defend its GCC allies against Iraq's invasion in 1990, and how the GCC reshaped its assumptions regarding Iraq in addition to the involvement of Iran in Iraq in terms of its internal politics. Lastly, it will present the role played by Iran in the Arab conflicts with a focus on Syria and Yemen as Iran has a direct political and military intervention role, and will analyze whether or not Iran and Saudi Arabia intervention serves a political agenda.

1.10 Research question

The researcher aims to answer the following question:

Q: How the dangers of Iraq and Iran threaten the stability of the Gulf countries and in what ways the Gulf perceives both states as the main threats to the regional stability?

In addition, the thesis aims to provide clear answer to the following sub-question:

Q: why does Saudi Arabia have intentions which “conflict” with Iran, in contrast to other Gulf countries? Does this Saudi Arabian political position vis-à-vis Iran serve Riyadh’s political agenda to become the dominate power in the region?

1.11 Research design

The researcher adapted a qualitative design “case study” in order to provide coherence and an appropriate answer for the research question because the question of the study opens by “how,” which enables the researcher to gain sufficient results as one would consider the theme of cause and effect in analyzing the data. The researcher studied certain Gulf countries focusing on Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates, to understand the different dimensions of the issue.

The data was collected through two techniques. First, the major data was obtained via primary sources consisting of online published interviews .These included interviews with several decision makers of the Gulf States, in particular from Qatar. The decision makers were the Minister of State of Qatar for Defense Khalid Al-Attia by the news agency Sputnik news in addition to the Former Prime Minister of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani interview published by a YouTube channel Brkaq8. Further, statements declaration by Arab decision makers e.g. Tarek Aziz in a book were used in the next chapters. Lastly, the statistical data and percentages were selected from economic reports and certain Academia articles.

The second technique is the secondary data which often is collected via printed books, academic journal articles ,previous studies published by researchers in the same field, articles of newspaper and magazines, online resources e.g. online libraries, Google scholar , in addition to online news channels and video documentary. These were used to support the main data. The researcher mainly depended on Arabic and English resources; however few Iranian and Turkish articles were used to present alternative perspectives. Moreover, the researcher used several online books in addition to databases to gather the literature. Most used resources were J Store database and Qatar University Library.

Finally, analyzing the data was implemented via the technique of thematic approach since the study of the researcher is divided into various themes and time framework. The researcher faced several limitations working on this study. The inability of the researcher to conduct interviews with scholars from the GCC countries that the study examined was

due to the recent crisis between Qatar and several GCC States which are: United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In addition, there was a lack of direct resources regarding the statistical data of the Saudi's funding to the rebels in Yemen and Syria; the literature is largely thematic or generalized and not detailed. Lastly, the lack of research papers applying Walt's (1987) Threat Perception Theory on the GCC and the Middle East.

In terms of future research, it's recommended to employ mixed methods, "Quantitative and Qualitative," to provide a coherent comparison since Quantitative methods would seek to understand individual's observation in the GCC societies via questionnaires. Moreover, interviews with scholars from UAE and Saudi Arabia to strengthen the research should be conducted. Due to the recent crisis in the GCC, it was challenging to access the decision makers in UAE and Saudi Arabia. Thus, the study depended on the literature to support the thesis's argument. Lastly, it is suggested that a translation of the important Iranian studies on the Gulf issues should be used to tolerate future researchers to understand the opponent point of view.

1.12 Structure of the Research

This study is consisted of a total of six chapters. Chapter one provides an overview of the literature, research objectives, research question, and methodology of the research. Chapter two illustrates the main theoretical approach of the study, terms definitions in addition to examine the criticism of the theoretical framework by other scholars. Then,

Chapter three is divided into two sections. The first section clarifies the issue of Iran's occupation to the three Emirati islands and its consequences on the GCC stability. The second section discusses the surrounded danger facing the Gulf during Iraq-Iran war. The fourth chapter demonstrates the Iraqi's threat towards Kuwait in particular and the Gulf States in 1990 and the intentions led to the outbreak of invasion. Moreover, the chapter examines the emergence of Iran in Iraq after the US invasion on Iraq in 2003 that resulted in the removal of Saddam's Hussain regime. Chapter five looks at Iran's intervention in the case of Arab Spring, beginning with Bahrain uprising in 2011 and concluding chaos took place between Iran and Saudi Arabia after the execution of the Saudi Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr. Finally, the chapter ends by examining the role of Iran in Syria and Yemen. The last chapter elucidates the conclusion remarks.

Chapter 2: THEORITICAL FRAMEOWRK FOR UNDERSTANDING THREAT PERCEPTION

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the theory of how threat perceptions influence alliance decisions proposed by Stephen Walt in his book “Origins of Alliances”. In this chapter, certain concepts associated with the theory will be examined. Before analyzing the theory, the terms of power and threat will be identified. Then the researcher will define and explain the differences between balancing and bandwagoning among states with great powers and regional states. Second, the researcher will clarify upon what conditions and circumstances a state decides to either balance or bandwagon and to what extent a state perceives a particular regional state as a source of danger. The third question to be examined is what is the most accurate choice for regional states to choose in order to maintain their domestic and regional security alongside with the presence of a regional force that threatens their peace? Further, the chapter will examine the subjected criticism of Walt’s theory by academic scholars in the field of International politics.

This theory is important to understand the nature of threats and the choice of alliance in the Middle East and to what extent the factor of geographical proximity contributes to increase threat. In addition, it examines the state's utilization of its capabilities and intentions to achieve its current and future ambitions. The theory clarifies the intentions of a state's decision to participate in alliance to preserve its security, the fateful decision that forces states to provide support to the powerful and threatening states despite their unwillingness and to what extent the intentions may change to the disadvantage of the supported states e.g. the changing status of Iraq towards its Gulf neighbors after the war with Iran.

2.2 Threat Perception as an explanation of alliance decisions

Before discussing Walt's theory, the following part will be a brief discussion of the nature of power in political spheres. In international relations, power and threat are the main components of conflicts which occur between states or groups. These components determine the extent of danger; wither it's a direct threat e.g. economic threat, military threat, wars...etc? or an indirect threat such as identity and cultural threat? According to Gelb, power is described as the Platinum coin in which the potential of achieving goals remains imaginable either with low power or when no power exists (Gelb, 2009.p. 26). In politics, power is described as a country or a government that is under a certain political domain (Longman, 2004.p.701). As an example, the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is governed by a theocratic¹ system after the revolution of 1979. Moreover, the power of the theocratic system in Iran plays a significant role because Iran

is the only state in the world that implements theocracy in governing the state.

Power is an essential tool in global politics because with power a state can fulfill a strategic position that could create terror for other neighboring states. Moreover, through exercising power it can enhance its global image among the world powerful states even if the power has been used in a destructive manner. Yet, if a state lacks of power, it would lead to its transformation into a marginalized and weak state that has no right for a political participation due to the unwillingness of the strong states to establish ties with a weaker partner. Therefore, weaker states become servants to stronger and threatening states that enable them to exhaust the state's resources in order to gain protection. However, this contradicts the assumptions of Walt which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The definition of threat in the following two definitions shared one common concept that is "harm" According to Dwivedi, threat is a result of perceptual thought instead of thematic phenomena. Two elements determine the level of threat which are the intentions of the state and its abilities (Dwivedi, 2012. P.225). The abilities consisted of the state available resources to pose a threat e.g. military and political capability, while the intention reflects the reasons and the objectives of the threat source towards the targeted state.

Longman defined threat as an individual or an object that is eligible to pose damage and hurt to other people, or something that threatens domestic security of a state (longman, 2004.p.953). The more the power increase, the more threat results. The issue of threat is

common in the political sphere, in most cases the level of threat is associated with power the threatening state possess. However, in a few cases the idea of threat is far from power. Indeed, certain states or groups are classified as threats to other states or groups, despite their weak power. The reason is attached with the capabilities of the state or group and its internal resources.

Coalition is defined by Edwin Fedder as “a set of members acting in concert at X time regarding one to N issue.” Moreover, Fedder stated the formation of alliance is restricted to specific objectives of a state that is in need for alliance against the external threats where these alliances usually form for a short temporary period (Fedder, 1968.p.80). To sum up, the factor of power explains what drives states relations with other.

2.3 Balancing behavior

In international politics, the idea of balancing occurs more often among states than bandwagon; at least that is the expectation of Neorealism or Structural Realism – the most prominent theory in the Realist paradigm. The most significant theory synonymous with Neorealism is Balance of Power (BOP). BOP starts from the assumption that the distribution of capabilities is a significant determinant of relations among states; since states seek to maintain their sovereignty, they prefer to counter more powerful states alone (Miller, 2006.p.12), but since this might be a daunting task, they choose from available alliance options. States also chose alliance since they might face a threat which demands an immediate reaction, the resources for which are not available. Since a simple BOP

emphasizes the distribution of capabilities as the factor which determines outcomes, Walt explored the proposition that states respond to *threats* – not simply to concentrations of capabilities; moreover, states do that via two strategies, either by balancing or by bandwagoning (Walt, 1987).

In terms of balancing, *balance of threat* is an interpretation of Neorealism which emphasizes on the creation of alliances against sources of threat (Scheerder, 2012.p.8). Balancing is an alliance established between two or several states for the purpose of preventing being dominated by powerful states (Walt, 1987.p.18). In other words, State A joins an alliance with state B (stronger state) to secure and preserve its stability against state C that poses a threat due to its superior resources.

States are forced to choose the option of balancing for two serious calculations. One is that states choose to ally with dominant powers, or a “stronger state,” where the intentions of these states are not to dominate them. In other words, if weak states failed to deter threats alone, they opt to ally with powerful states that do not intend to dominate them (Walt, 1985.p.5). Hence it’s the best decision for these states to prevent being dominated by threatening states. Calculation two: allying with weaker states increases strong states’ influence as the weaker side is in a great demand for support (Walt, 1985.p.6). By achieving this, its influence in the alliance would expand, whereas joining the strong states lessens this opportunity because it adds less influence to the alliance or coalition, which, on the other hand, would not serve nor impact the alliance (Walt, 1987.p.18).

According to Walt, balancing is established as a result of perceived threats (Walt, 2010.p.10) rather than the power alone. In other words, a state's decision to enter a balancing alliance is due to the concern of threat posed by regional powers, and not because of the power of the regional state's poses. To deter and contain threat, states usually prefer to increase their power through balancing with the stronger side, mainly with greater power that does not pose a threat nor intent to dominate weaker states. This in return would deter any potential domination by threatening states over those states via the military bases (Walt, 1987.p.149). As an example, certain military bases are present in the Gulf region such as the American military bases; "Al-Udied Air base" in Qatar (Brimelow,2018) in addition to the recent Turkish base " Tarqi bin Ziyad" (Daily Sabah Politics, 2017) . These military bases are an indirect form of balancing against particular threats. Further, during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 the United States was able to counter Iraq because to its presence in the region after the withdrawal of Britain. In addition, the form of military alliance is more effective in contrast to the political alliance. The power of military will strengthen the role of foreign power, especially if the regional power e.g. Iran is in a conflict with the existence of the foreign power e.g. US in the region. Since Iran is anti-US, it believes the US presence in the Gulf is a serious threat to Iran's stability.

Furthermore, commitments play an important role in the formation of alliances. The longer the alliance lasts, the more commitment it requires. As a result, three levels of commitment are available to support this claim (Walt, 1987.p.152). The most important level of commitment is the highest level in which states victimize its supreme resources in order to fulfill the alliance's obligations. In this level, states face the severe fate to fulfill

the commitments even if it's at the expense of its territory and people. States could sacrifice money and people to gain political protection because of its requirement of security alliance in addition to military intervention. This level of commitment often requires balancing rather than bandwagoning, and presents the longest duration estimated at three years or more (Walt, 1987.p.152). The moderate level involves a great risk of military intervention where states suffer the loss of their resources in addition to forming unwilling political cooperation to provide support for their allies. The least important commitment is the low level; no action is required, neither political nor military. It's considered as a symbolic commitment due to the absence of sacrifices (Walt, 1987.p.152).

In some scenarios, regional threatening states are worrisome to their neighbors. The level of threat is determined by the geographical factor. The more the threat is geographically close, the more threat it poses (Walt, 1987.p.23). By contrast, the level of threat declines with distance. Therefore, the Gulf States favored to balance with the United States instead of bandwagon with Iran. Yet, this balancing is a double-edged sword in which the US became a GCC ally. This consequently provoked Iran because of Iran's assumption that the GCC should ally with Iran and that Iran does not constitute a source of regional instability. After the Saudi-Iraqi alliance in 1979, as a response to the Islamic Revolution, Saudi-Iran bilateral relation worsened (Poole, 2016).

The intent of Saudi Arabia was to prevent the export of Iran's revolution to the Gulf as it demands to overthrow the Gulf's regimes, so this intention made Iran a real threat to the region. More recently, the Saudi led a coalition in Yemen consisted of the Gulf States,

with the exception of Oman, along with several Arab states against Iranian operations in Yemen (Reuters). This alliance is an indirect war with Iran via its proxy in Yemen because Iran supplies weapons to the rebels while the coalition fights these rebels. Observers believe this coalition is unsuccessful for one reason which is the inability of Saudi and its coalition to end the war and reform the domestic situation in Yemen. Rather it worsened the situation through the effects the war brought to Yemenis, e.g. famine and spread of disease. Iran is unwilling to end the war and in case Iran achieved a victory, this victory would pave the way for it to become the dominant regional power, as Iraq was previously.

2.4 Bandwagoning, as state behavior

In contrast to balancing, bandwagoning occurs when states establish an alliance with source of danger or threatening state instead of balancing against it (Walt, 2000.p.102). Despite the fact that bandwagon is less common than balancing, States opt to choose this option when the factor of strong support ally is absent. There are two motives that force weak states to bandwagon with the threatening powers. First, the decision to bandwagon might be a result of appeasement (Walt, 1985.p.7).

Bandwagoning is formed for defense purposes as weak states' main objective is to secure themselves and prevent being attacked by threatening states. Conversely, this type of alliance is more dangerous because the state risks all its resources despite its weakness. In this case, it will become a state that relies on the threatening side. Second, the state desires the taste of victory through the victorious of its ally during the periods of wars

(Walt, 1985.p.8). Weak small states have no impact or influence to deliver the powerful side. Therefore, weak states select to establish bandwagon to obtain benefits.

Moreover, weak states must consider the future perceptions and intentions of their allies because these intentions are capable to change through time, which might not be in the favor of these states. For example, during peace time, strong states might have better relation with weaker states; however, it is able to turn its intentions by initiating war against small states to pose control. Consequently, small states must be aware while bandwagoning and this option should be made at a least because the strongest side might take advantage of the weak states in terms of territory, military, etc. to preserve their security.

The geographic proximity of the threatening states influences the alliance decisions. The more weak states are close to the threatening state, the more vulnerable they become to avoid balancing and form bandwagon alliance due to the fact that the powerful states are capable to force small states into obedience and use their resources to accomplish its domination objectives (Walt, 1987).

2.5 Factors of Threat

Based on Walt's theory, the motives behind states decision to ally with others is driven by fear and threat, not solely power. As a result, the level of threat is measured by the superiority of states resources which include: aggregate power, geographic proximity, aggregate intentions and offensive capabilities.

2.5.1 Aggregate power

First, the aggregate level of a state's capabilities is the main element that alarms less-powerful states. These resources comprise: the total population of the state, its industrial possessions and their diversity, and its military potential which impose danger on others (Walt, 1987.p.22). The aggregate power has a significant role in preserving the national security of a state besides supporting the increasing level of threat. Iran, unlike the Gulf countries, has the largest population in comparison with the Gulf. Its total population was an estimated 80.9 million in 2017, according to a statistics published by Trading Economics (tradingeconomics.com). As a result, Iran's population is triple the population of the Gulf, which causes a serious threat to the region due to the fact that Iran has the ability to sweep the region in case of outbreak of war in the Gulf caused by Iran. Consequently, the greater the state owns resources, the greater threat it possess (Walt, 1985.p.9). Although the factor of power may be a threat, it may be prized. States that posse superior power are able to reward allies or punish enemies; hence, a new state's aggregate power is a motivation for bandwagon or balancing (Walt, 1985 .p.10).

Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is considered the largest country in the Gulf, this did not prevent Saudi from requesting American support and increasing bilateral relations among the two states for the purpose of securing the Gulf. Furthermore, during the seventies the hegemony of Iran in the Gulf was clear in terms of the strength of its military. In contrast to the second regional power Iraq, Iran's military spending was greater, and in fact, reached six times higher than that of Iraq; consequently it enabled Iran to conquer the

three Emirati islands (Gause, 2003.p.285).

However, the situation in Iran was in Iraq's favor. The chaos in Iran after the revolution permitted Iraq to progress its power, leading to it initiating a war against its neighbor. During the period of the war 1980-1988, the military power swung between the two states. In certain phases of war, Iraq dominated, this was especially during the beginning of the conflict from 1981-1982 and in 1988 because of the Iraqi missile attacks against Iran (Tyler, 1988).

Although Iraq was the responsible state for launching the war, it attempted several times for a cease-fire, nonetheless Iran rejected the cease fire until 1988. Regardless of these attempts, Iraq was regarded as the victorious state despite the fact that no state was a clear military winner. Therefore Iraq emerged, not only as a serious military threat to Iran and the Gulf States, but also with the ability to invade Kuwait in 1990.

2.5.2 Geographic proximity

Geographic proximity and proximate power play an essential role in evaluating the seriousness of threat. The closer the threat, the more danger it arises. Consequently, a state's priority is to create alliances based on the threats that are posed by nearby powers rather than distant threats. The danger of geographic proximity increases the degree of conflict and tension among Iran, Iraq and the Gulf. The reason goes back to the period of

the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Similar to Iran, the geographical location of Iraq is very close to the Gulf especially as it borders Kuwait. Both Iraq and Kuwait share joint borders which permit Iraq to enter Kuwait in a short period of time.

Hence, this was illustrated in 1990 after the Iraqi troops occupied Kuwait in less than a half day through their common border. As a consequence of Iraq-Iran war and Kuwaiti invasion, Iraq became a weak state, henceforth, it contributed to strengthen Iran's role in the region. In addition, Iran's occupation of the three islands is another example that reflects the importance of the geographical proximity. Geographic proximity leads to either balancing or bandwagon. In terms of balancing, GCC States (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar with the exception of Oman) formed a balancing alliance against Iran's proxy intervention in Yemen. A Bandwagoning alliance on the other hand is established among weak states that share common borders with strong states, and therefore might be vulnerable and forced to ally to prevent being under the domination of them. This is accurate if the powerful neighboring state is capable of enforcing obedience (Walt, 1987.p.24).

2.5.3 Aggressive intentions “Offensive intentions”

States that are perceived as aggressor permit other states to provoke balancing against them. Moreover, balancing is triggered by states with moderate capabilities in case of being perceived as aggressors (Walt, 1985 .p.13). Walt argued that states are barely opting for bandwagon if a state is confirmed as aggressive. In addition, if the aggressive states'

intentions are unlikely to alter, the sole way to prevent falling under the aggressor is by balancing with others (Walt, 1985 .p.13).

Iraq was a nightmare for the Gulf region, thus it led Saudi Arabia and its neighbors to balance against it due to the fact that Iraq had dangerous ambitions in the region such as its invasion of Kuwait. The intentions of Iran were derived by action, in contrast to Iraq, which was behaving by declaration and actions. After the Iranian revolution, Iran was the major threat to Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf. Therefore, the Gulf had alliance with Iraq in the war against Iran (Mahmoud, 2017) to counter the Iranian threat.

However, the situation changed in 1990 in which Iraq desired to show that its war with Iran was not detrimental to the strength of Iraq; instead it strengthened its power and decided to invade Kuwait which caused the Gulf countries to balance with U.S to minimize the threat. Through the two wars, Saddam was willing to impose his sovereignty and confirm his aggressiveness while also attempting to takeover oil in the joint fields with Kuwait and Iran. Likewise, the changing perceptions were malleable through history; most recently, the Iranian threat is higher as it seeks to control the region through its intervention in the recent Yemeni crisis.

The intention, not power, is crucial and if the intentions of the aggressiveness are impossible to change, the state that bandwagon with it would become a victim (Walt, 1987.p.26). Accordingly, the Gulf would not oppose Iran and Iraq if they have peaceful intentions, yet it was the opposite where both demanded to be the dominant regional power.

2.5.4 Offensive capabilities “offensive power”

The capability of the state to threaten the sovereignty of another state or territory is due to the possession of offensive power (Walt, 1987.p.165). Otherwise, states with greater offensive resources provoke others to ally with than states that lack military power (Walt, 1985 .p.11). However, Walt stated that balancing is an unfortunate decision because the ally may not be capable of providing immediate support (Walt, 1985 .p.11).

Whenever a state is located close to a state that has huge offensive capabilities, the sole solution for state is a bandwagon alliance as the decision to balance would not be in its favor. Consequently, this is applied significantly in the case of Iraq and Iran.

The offensive capabilities of Iran are incomparable with the Gulf. The Iranian armed forces are greater since the Pahlavi era, despite the dispensing of the Shah’s military after the revolution. The objective from focusing on improving the defense is related to the national interest. Iran learnt a lesson from its long war with Iraq and decided to protect its national security by establishing an outstanding military defense. Additionally, the production of WMD including the nuclear program is a new way used by Iran to threaten its neighbors, and specifically US, as Iran is anti-west and anti U.S in particular. During the Iraq-Iran war, Iran suffered from the Iraqi chemical attacks, which neglected the 1925 convention in Geneva which stipulated the prohibition usage of chemical weapons (Jones, 2008.p. 41). All of these elements affected the offensive intentions perceived by the GCC because it forced them to perform an alliance with Iran instead of bandwagon with the source of threat

due to the GCC assumption that this threat may eventually turn against them. Walt assumed that despite the importance of these sources, it's hard to prioritize one over the other since each element is effective in assessing the threat perception.

2.6 Evaluation of Walt's theoretical approach by other scholars

Walt's approach received diverse reactions from International Relations (IR) scholars. Robert Keohane in his piece "Alliances, Threats and the uses of neorealism" commented on Walt's notion of states. Walt believed that states responded toward threats instead of power, and the other four capabilities states possess impose a greater threat than solely power. Yet, Keohane contradicts Walt. He considered Walt's views in terms of critique of Neorealism theory. Keohane stated "Balance of Threat theory" requires so much information about perceptions as well as objective facts that it has relatively little theoretical power of its own (Keohane, 1988.p.172).

Therefore, the factor of power is greater in terms of threat. Numerous states e.g. Iraq were known as a powerful and aggressive state not due to its capabilities, but rather due to its aggressive and violent leadership. This can also be applied to North Korea. Accordingly, the balance of the GCC with US during the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 resulted from Saddam's power. In addition, Keohane critiqued the examples presented by Walt, especially the Egyptian case². From Keohane perspective, Walt cannot examine the Middle East cases because his analysis was based on secondary English data. Moreover, it lacked the value of in depth research besides understanding the nature of Middle East

region where he accused Walt of not being an expert to discuss the matter (Keohane, 1988.p.172). Another criticism was given by John Vasquez. His criticism was shaped by Imre Lakatos' model of "Scientific progress."³ Vasquez assumed Walt's assessments as falsification of Kenneth Waltz theory of Balance of power⁴. He stated that states pursue the balancing behavior against the power of the state, rather than threats. Hence, if threats and power are independent variables according to Walt, an obstacle in the realist world will take effect.

The criticism of Schweller was also mentioned by Vasquez to justify his argument. Schweller claimed the states desire to gain more strength is to achieve its interests and expansion, and not for security matters. The behavior of Bandwagon is more common than balancing as the weaker states will choose to ally with the powerful state because the powerful side does not pose a threat contrary to Walt (Vasquez, 1997.p.904-905). In contrast, Walt responded to Vasquez's argument regarding the concept of power and threat. From the perspective of Walt, power and threat are not independent (Walt, 1997.p.933). Theory of balance of power emphasizes on the alliance of several states against the strongest states while balance of threat predicts that states form alliance against the source of threat. Hence, even though there are common features in both theories, they are diverse (Walt, 1997.p.933).

Moreover, Sorokin assumed Walt's concept of balancing against threats instead of power to be deficient. He argued that states endeavor security through its military capabilities solely without the support of others. He even reviewed the alliance definition

of Walt and reformulated it to “formal agreement between sovereign states for the purpose of coordinating their behavior in the event of specified contingency of a military nature”. Finally, Sorokin stated that alliances in some cases are established to strengthen the self-governance of a state (Sorokin, 1994.p. 422-423).

To sum up, the above scholars’ assumptions on threat perception contradict with Walt’s belief that threat, and not power, determine the formation and the type of alliances. The scholars agreed that power is the primary factor in forming alliance because with power, states could achieve and obtain their ambitions in addition power is determine the level of threat not the vice-versa.

Walt’s emphasis on the political level of threats and how they constitute a danger helps us understand one of the most important elements of threat which is social threat. Social threat is an essential tool to understand the nature of conflicts, such as in the conflict-ridden Middle East; in the Middle East, sources of domestic and regional war, rivalry, and conflict have included ethnic, religious or identity differences. Moreover, political and social threats are intimately tied, which adds credibility to the use of Walt’s approach to understanding source of alliances. Considering Iraq as an example, Iraq was considered as a Sunni state despite the Shiite majority. However, after Iran’s intervention in Iraq’s affairs, the society was governed by Shiite president and Shiites obtained freedom to practice their sects in public.

2.7 Conclusion

Threat perception theory is an essential framework to understand the political behavior of states. The state's decision to perform either a balancing behavior or bandwagon is determined based on the surrounding fear and its interests. If the interest is in gaining advantages, Bandwagon is preference and vice versa. In a globe fully loaded with threats and power, states must seek an alternative solution rather than the available selections. If the state relies upon itself in terms of capabilities and strengthen its political status, it will not be forced to side with undesirable state because it has the potential to preserve its security despite the greater capabilities of the others. Despite the criticism of Walt's theory, the theory plays an important role in understanding the nature of Middle East alliances.

Chapter 3: Iran, UAE and the case of the three islands and the Bandwagon Behavior by the Three Gulf States from 1980-1988.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to illustrate three themes. First, it will address the issue of the three Emirati islands that were, and still are, under the occupation of Iran. Then, it evaluates Iran's threat in the event of enhancing its occupation position on the islands. Second, it will analyze the motives that led to the outbreak of Iraq-Iran war, and the extent of escalation of the Iranian and Iraqi threat, in addition to the position of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait regarding the war. Third, the theory of balance of Threat will be applied to the studied cases in order to validate the threat in the region.

3.2 The territorial dispute of the three islands between United Arab Emirates and Iran

Prior to the actual occupation of Iran over the islands of Abu-Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs in 1971, the islands were under the sovereignty of the Qawasim tribe who were located in the Emirates Sharjah and Ras-alKhaima (Almezzaah) on the Southern coast. The recognition of the Qawasim sovereignty over the islands was acknowledged by Britain as the Qawasim⁵ ruled the islands since the 18th century (Roken, 2001.p.180). However, Iran pursued aggressive decision where it raised the Iranian flag on the three islands and removed the Arab flags (Abed &Vine, 2001.p.182) .Since then, Iran attempted

for several times to verify its islands property; nonetheless, all the attempts were unsuccessful. Iran-UAE dispute intensified after Britain announced its withdrawal from UAE by the end of 1971 (Almezmaah). Accordingly, two days before the declaration of UAE independence, Iran was able to fill Britain's vacuum through a military invasion on the islands (Cecily, 2012).

In terms of geography, the island's location is estimated to be a distance of 22- 38 sea miles off the Iranian coast in contrast to 32 miles of Ras-AlKhaima Emirate (Al-Nahyan, 2014.p.36). Further, Abu-Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs are located between UAE from the western side and Iran from the Northern side (Al-Nahyan, 2014.p.32), in particular, near the Strait of Hormuz. As such, Hormuz is a strategic point for trade, around 40% of the international oil passes through the Strait (Thomas, 2012).

In detailed analysis, moreover, The Greater Tunb is located between Abu-Musa and the Lesser, it is 27 km southwest of the island of Qashem. Further, it's situated around 50 kilometers from Bander Abbas plus 70Km away from the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaima (Arayee &Jalinusi, 2007.p.2). The smallest island among the three "the Lesser Tunb", is 45 Km distance from Bander Abbas and 80 Km from Ras Al-Khaima (Arayee &Jalinusi, 2007.p.2). By contrast, Abu-Musa is the largest among the three, its located 67 Km from the Bandar Abbas (Arayee &Jalinusi, 2007.p. 2) whereas 60Km far of north of emirate of Sharjah (Hrana.org). Therefore, geographically speaking, Abu-Musa is closer to UAE rather than Iran.

Considering Abu-Musa is situated overlooking the Strait of Hurmuz (Muḡtahidzāda, 2013.p.163) this permits Abu-Musa to control and manage the passage of oil tankers, in addition to imposing the limitation of export and import. Ever since British mandate over the Gulf, Iran justifies its title and sovereignty over the three islands via certain claims.

Iran had always supported its claim via its clarifications that the islands were part of Iran's territory, however, Britain handed them to Sharjah and Ras Al-Khaima. According to the Shah's declaration, "the islands were originally Iranian; nevertheless Britain intervened over our sovereignty and managed to steal the islands. Then it offered them to Sharjah and Ras Al-Khaima which are under its protection" (Al-Nhayan, 2014.p.47). In addition, Iran based its claims on a British map that was presented to the Qajar Shah "Nasir Al-Din Shah Qajar 1848-1897" in 1886 which illustrated the islands were part of Iran (Muḡtahidzād, 2006.p.358) because of its geographical proximity. Likewise, the map illustrated the three islands as Iranian territories for the fact that it had the same color of Iran in the map. Thus, it indicated the islands were Iranian owned territory despite Britain's claim of a map error (Roken, 2001.p.188-189).

3.3 Memorandum of Understanding

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Sharjah and Iran in 1971. The memorandum clarified the rights of both states concerning the disputed islands. The agreements consisted of several articles (Muğtahidzāda, 1999.p.211). The most important conditions were; Iran has the right to occupy the north side of Abu-Musa, while the rest of Abu-Musa Island is governed by the emirate of Sharjah. Second, Iran would have a full control on its North side and has the right to raise the flag on the Iranian military headquarter, whereas, the flag of Sharjah would be raised in the police station as well as maintaining the right of jurisdiction and sovereignty over the rest of Abu- Musa (Mattir, 2005.p.159). Lastly, the recognition of islands territory breadth by Sharjah and Iran, with the breadth being proximately 12 maritime miles⁶ The ruler of Sharjah Shaikh Khalid Al-Qasimi approved the terms upon being threatened by Iran and compulsorily accepted the divisions of the islands. However, Iran claimed that Al-Qasimi accepted the agreement voluntarily without coercion or pressure (Arayee, Jalinusi, 2007.p.5.).

3.4 Iran occupation of the three islands and its implications on UAE stability

The Iranian occupation over the three Emirati islands poses a great threat to the United Arab Emirates via certain aspects. Iran's aggregate power is great in contrast to UAE. Since the beginning of the occupation, Iran sought to transform the islands into a small military base in the Gulf. Ever after the emergence of the Islamic Republic, Iran's military forces continued to arrive and settle in Abu-Musa and Greater Tunb (cia.gov).

Further, during Iraq-Iran war, Abu-Musa, the Greater and the Lesser Tunbs were used as military bases by the Iranian Naval and Armed forces. Accordingly, Iran launched an attack via helicopters and small boats against the Gulf oil tankers as well as to certain UAE oil stations (Mattir, 2005.p.176).

In terms of military, Iran's military is superior in contrast to the UAE military. During the Iraq-Iran war, the size of Iran's spending on military amounted 5.5 Billion US Dollars, reaching to 19 billion between 1980-1984. Therefore, it illustrated the danger UAE could face regarding Iran's usage of the occupied islands to launch an attack against UAE. In return, the minimum share of spending was for UAE, estimated around 1.5 to 2.2 billion (Khalaf, 1987.p.20-21)⁷. The lack of spending was associated with the lack of military expertise. The region had not been subjected to a heavy war before the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Moreover, UAE did not perceive Iran during Shah's regime as a source of threat because the region was not an interest for the Shah in contrast to his relations with the West, especially US. On the contrary, Mohammed Raza Shah characterized Iran as the "Guardian of the Gulf" (Aslan, 2017). The Gulf States were never recognized as separate self-governing states according to Iran's perspective (Al-Qasimi, 2015). As a consequence, Bahrain was assumed by the Shah as a part of Iran. Further, the Shah's policy toward the Gulf, regardless of being the police of the region, was severe because the occupation of the three islands took place during his reign (Mana, 2015). In comparison with Iran's policy towards US after the Shah, the United States enjoyed warm relations with Iran. Indeed, US considered the Shah as the guarantor of American interests in the region along with Saudi Arabia (Molavi, 2010). However, this perception has changed after the arrival of the US,

following British departure.

The Iranian actions at the island of Abu-Musa presented a concern to UAE. Iran began to manage flights to Abu-Musa from Bander Abbas. According to a thesis by Alkabbi, UAE perceived that Iran had the intention to bring military soldiers to the island and to store the war supplies (Al-Kaabi, 1994.p.12). These intentions have negative impact on UAE due to the possibility to exposure attacks from Iran. Furthermore, Iran managed to establish an airstrip to permit its emergency response in case of a sudden external attack. Consequently, the military troops expanded to reach 4,000 troops compared to 700 (Foley, 1999.p.7). Meanwhile, Iran demanded to control UAE via the occupation. It maintained Iranian military presence in the islands in order to impose its compulsory presence in which it conducted military maneuvers around the three islands via its air and naval forces (Al-Nhayan, 2014. p.68).

Per contra, UAE status under the Gulf Cooperation Council is diverse. With GCC, UAE supported the claims and resolutions of its neighboring states regarding the islands. According to an online article, UAE and its regional GCC allies were determined to held a meeting in 2012 with regard to visit of Ahmadinejad to the one of the occupied islands “ Abu-Musa”. Indeed, this visit outraged the Emirates, hereafter, the Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed acknowledged Ahmadinejad’s visit as a violation against the state (The Jerusalem Post, 2012). Bilaterally however, UAE has another dimension. As a result, both UAE and Iran share commercial ties, the concern of the islands is minor in the economic field. For Iran, UAE is the major partner in exporting and

importing and vice versa. As such, the total cost of UAE exported goods to Iran estimated \$8.7 billion (Reuters).

Hence, Iran's export increased to reach 53% in 2011 whereas it dramatically decreased in 2014 to reach 11.2% after the compulsory sanctions against Iran (Sumaya, 2015)⁸. Despite the sanctions, UAE maintained its commercial ties with Iran. All the exports and imports between the two countries pass via the Strait of Hormuz (Tabarani, 2009,p.64). Conversely, Iran demanded to expand its regional aspirations capabilities in order to dominate UAE and the regional economy to be in its advantage. The security of the Hormuz is Iran's primary aim to facilitate its exports and to secure the oil shipments.

For that reason, Iran threatened to close Hormuz in the face of US (Johnson, 2016). Iran is capable of initiating attacks against potential external threat via the utilization of the small islands (Al-Jazeera Centre, 2012). In addition, Iran has the capability to plant mines around Hormuz to prevent the entrance of un-wanted ships e.g. US Ships. Iran preserves around 200 patrols besides several combatants on its coastal to begin the laying of mines. The Iranian equipment is unique as they are rapid and unable to detect via radar (Talmadge, 2008,p.89)⁹. Therefore, the Strait would face the danger of inserting four minefields at its gate among the Island of Tunb Island from the east.

The Organization of petroleum Exporting Countries is the major source of Gulf revenues. The Gulf States supply one-third of oil production worldwide and produce around a quarter of world's total production which make them the world top oil producing

countries (Alcaro, 2013.p.36) Additionally, UAE is among the larger producers of natural gas, around 84% in the whole region (EIA, 2017). Closing Hurmuz is Iran's sole choice to counter the US role in the Gulf. Yet, it intended to terrify the Gulf through considering the US-GCC alliance as a threat "If the Americans and their regional allies want to pass through the Strait of Hormuz and threaten us, we will not allow any entry" (Al-Jazeera.com).

Iran's threat to US is to achieve a specific motive regarding UAE and the Gulf. Indirectly, Iran demands to put the Gulf under its control via the prohibition of the US ships. Thus, the regional tension increases and forces the Gulf States to restrict their US relations to prevent Iran from applying its Hurmuz threats. If the Strait was blocked, UAE exports outside the Gulf would decrease and results in economic imbalance, limiting US imports of regional oil. Further, during the rule of the Shah, Hurmuz was a big concern for Iran's economy. The Iranian oil tankers had no alternative other than passing through Hurmuz. In case of launching attack against the Strait, Iran's economy will collapse and the oil will be at an excess because it will not be shipped to importing countries. For US, the Iranian menace was always verbal because Iran lacked the naval capabilities. Its ships are undeveloped and small in comparison with the US ships, which explain Iranian inability to launch an attack and block Hurmuz. This further explains that Iran's aim is to escalate the instability in the region. In case Iran attacked the US ships or forces, US Navy and its Gulf allies would resist this attempt (Singh, 2012.p.1). Blocking Hurmuz is Iran's strategic technique to warn US and its GCC allies without performing action because it lacked of audacity to commit it.

Blocking the Strait of Hormuz is merely a tool used by Iran to threaten the GCC states and the oil exporting states. Iran's budget and revenue derived from exporting oil estimated 70% (Singh, 2012.p.2); therefore, the percentage will impact Iran's economy if a blockade is implemented. Second, it will pave the way for US to reinforce its administration on the Gulf region (Singh, 2012.p.2). However, this is against the policy of Iran concerning the region because Iran is against the presence of foreign powers in the Arab World. Also, the oil prices will boost pushing China to find a new source of exportation. In addition, Iran is incapable of imposing a full domination on the Strait because its national economy would collapse; besides it will cause a destabilization on the Gulf economy.

Similarly, Dr. Shuja assured the majority of Iran's profits derived from oil, around 60%. Through blocking Hormuz, Iran's trade will be affected through the countries that used to import the Iranian oil and paused importing (Shuja, 2013.p.2) will penalize Iran. Henceforth, Iran would be exposed to US and United Nations pressure. Indeed, Iranian intentions from its threatening behavior to blockade the Strait are associated with its demands to examine the international responses towards its threatening claims. The Gulf region from Iran's perspective is classified as Iranian geo-political sphere. Therefore, it identified the region as "Persian Gulf". In other words, Iran's occupation of the islands is connected to a geo-political reason towards the GCC. Recognizing the region as a Persian territory was an Iranian sign to intimidate the GCC and enhance its regional domination. Accordingly, Iran's behaviors resulted from its political intentions of obtaining hegemony

and domain over UAE and the Gulf. Therefore, it justified its presence on the islands as attached to the Iranian national security that lies in the regional stability. Iran's security is comprised of maintaining its occupation on the islands. Indeed, the rejection of Iran to UAE negotiations efforts is based on the fear of US influence over UAE decision since US is a powerful ally. "If Abu-Musa, Lesser and Greater Tunbs fell under a wrong authority, it would cause a serious harm to Iran" (Heard-Bey, 1981.p.124)¹⁰. Thus, the intent was to expel US out the region, because for Iran, US is perceived as an external power that impedes its political ambitions in certain aspects. First, US is the major ally to the Gulf besides it's the guardian of the region from Iran's greed's. Second, Iran believes the US is distorting its image to prevent GCC from rapprochement with Iran.

Based on this, Iranian presence around UAE facilitates its hegemony, it unlocks the portal to intensely penetrate the Gulf because if UAE became under the Iranian domination, its consequence on the region would be significant as the Gulf States would weaken. Further, it demands to transform the Gulf into a territory belongs to Iran; similar to the previous assumption by the Shah "The Persian Gulf"¹¹. By emerging as a hegemonic power, it permits Iran to behave in ways that is not in the region's favor. The scenario of attacking the oil tankers during the war with Iraq is possible to take place again in case Iran became in a serious danger despite the Iranian statement of excluding military actions against the region (Irish, 2017).

At the political level, to escalate the dispute, Abu Musa was used as a capital of a new Iranian province titled “the Persian Gulf” (Al-Dulaimi et al, 2017 .p.95). Moreover, the claims of Iran’s exporting of its revolution to UAE is prosaic. UAE hosted a huge Iranian community; therefore, Iran is unwilling to sacrifice its citizens via humiliation treatments. Conversely, UAE is conscious regarding Iran’s terrorist attacks that might be performed by Iranian residents (Al-Dulaimi et al, 2017 .p.95).

In conclusion, since the occupation of the three islands, UAE initiated several attempts with Iran to seek a solution to stop the escalation of dispute. Meanwhile, Iran was not eager to participate in negotiations due to the belief that the islands were originally part of Iran and were taken by Britain. Likewise, Iran confirmed its sovereignty over the islands based on their geographical proximity to Iran, and was willing to wage a war in order to not abandon the islands, claiming “the Gulf States should pass a sea of blood if they demanded to return the islands” (New York Times, 1992). The unwillingness of Iran to participate in negotiations resulted from its concept of “Persian Gulf,” because the departure of the islands does not serve Iran’s geo-political ambitions in the region.

3.5 Historical background of the first Gulf war “Iraq-Iran war” 1980-1988

After the Islamic revolution in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the region was threatened with two internal threats, Iraq and Iran. Meanwhile, Iraq assumed the new regime in Iran as threat to Iraq and its Gulf neighbors. As a result, Iraq waged a war against Iran in 1980. The outbreak of the war was associated with certain

justifications. First, the dispute over the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway, Saddam believed Shatt-Al-Arab must be under his sovereignty and declared “This Shatt shall again be, as it has been through history, Iraqi and Arab in name and reality” (Ateş, 2013.p.108). Thus, during the war, Iraq and Iran demanded to gain a full control of Shatt Al-Arab to take advantage of the oil fields in the Khuzestan province despite the Algerian treaty in 1975 that stipulated both states to share supremacy over the waterway (Amirahamdi, 1990.p.43).

Indeed, the fear of the Iranian revolution was another major factor. Iraq was terrified that Iran might launch attacks against Iraq and establishes a second revolution. Because the regime of Iraq was secular and the sect of its president was Sunni, the issue of Shiite was a major concern. Khomeini’s interest was to transform Iraq into an Iranian fellow, especially because Iraq contains two of Shiite holy cities, Najaf and Karbala. Iraq intended to take advantage of the vacuum that occurred in Iran after the revolution. The Khomeini regime was new, fragile and lacked experience. It failed to establish an alternative system to replace the Shah’s former regime (Sabti, 1987.p.17)¹². To make Iran preoccupied, Iraq planned to invade Iran and believed it was a golden opportunity that must not be wasted. If Iraq attained a triumph over its opponent “Iran”, it facilitated Iraq’s hegemony; however, Saddam miscalculated his project. Further, the war had political and sectarian aims. Both Khomeini and Saddam Hussain demanded to overthrow the other’s regime to attain their political intentions. For Saddam, he sought to expand his regional influence. Through defeating Iran, he would increase his status among the Arab leaders which would enable him to act in a more aggressive behavior, whereas, Khomeini demanded to overthrow Saddam’s regime to open the path for the Iraqi Shiite to attain

sovereignty over Iraq and transform Iraq under the sovereignty of Shiite.

3.6 Factors escalated the Iranian threat during the Iraq-Iran war

The war among the two regional powers began to destabilize the region's security in which the Gulf region faced the greatest threat. As a consequence, UAE, in addition to the rest of the Gulf States, realized the sole solution to deter the Iranian threat was to bandwagon with Iraq. Bandwagon with Iraq was an inevitable decision. The concept of overthrowing the Iraqi regime was a huge matter for the Gulf due to the Iranian intentions of emerging as the only power to spread its domination on the region. Thus, the Gulf States were fearful concerning an Iranian victory over Iraq because of its military strength in terms of its capabilities (Directorate of Intelligence, 1982). In addition, the number of Khomeini's militaries diminished to 150,000 in comparison to the Shah's military 285,000 (Karsh, 2002.p.18-19). Accordingly, to ally with Iraq was the most accurate decision as the alliance will strengthen Iraq's position against Iran. Further, the region was weak and lacked the ability to secure itself. Therefore, Iraq was the guardian of the Gulf from the Gulf perspective to contain the Iranian danger.

In 1983, as a form of financial support, Kuwait and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) sold Al-Khafji oil production, which is located between the two countries. Both countries decided to provide Iraq all the oil revenues. Likewise, Kuwait and KSA lent Iraq financial aid estimated in a range between \$20-\$27 billion to support Iraq and revive it against Iran (Kaim, 2008.p.126). This indicated the GCC demanded to show their

commitment to avoid animosity with Iraq via financial aid. Besides, Saudi Arabia and its neighbors were willing to support Iraq politically and financially in order to protect them from Iran.

Despite this bandwagon, UAE maintained its indirect neutrality (Davidson, 2008,p.227). Iran is UAE major oil and non-oil importer besides it's the most important trading partner. Between1980 and 1982, UAE was the major importer of Iran during the war. Per se, around 154% was the total of UAE importation alone in 1981 in contrast to 28% to the rest of the Gulf States (Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman, Qatar and KSA) whereas, in 1983 UAE was at the peak with 219%. (Jahani, 2011).

In terms of exports, UAE was the leading country during the last three years of war, in 1986 total exports to Iran estimated \$448 , it suffered a decline in 1987 and 1988 to reach \$251, yet it remained high (Jahani, 2011). Consequently, although UAE feared exposure to an attack from Iran, it had no intentions to damage the bilateral economic relations. These bilateral relations are classified as “ideal”, according to Abdu-Khalq Abdullah. He stated that trade relations between Iran and UAE are cordial and can be identified as ideal because both countries are willing to provide much convergence rather than divergence (Gulf news, 2002).

Iran's political intention was to export the Islamic revolution to the region, beginning with Iraq then to the Gulf States. The issue of exporting the revolution according to Khomeini concluded in the belief that Iran's territorial borders extended to reach the

whole Islamic world and the concept of “theocracy” based on teachings of Islam must be implemented (Sabti, 1987.p.20). In one of Khomeini’s speeches, he warned the Iranian revolution would be exported to the world in order to be taught its objectives (assakina.com). The threat to extend the revolution to Iraq was Iran’s major aim to facilitate its dissemination of revolution because Iraq is the passage to the Gulf. Iran’s accusations that Shiite is loyal to their sect despite their origins were a false perception. Since Iraq has certain Shiite cities such as Najaf, the sect escalation would influence Iraqis to conspire against their regime and accept the revolution to take place in Iraq. Nonetheless, the Iraqi Shiites were loyal to their Iraqi and Arab decent (Habeeb et al, 2012.p.52) In addition, the Dujail Shiite supported Saddam, he described them as brave (Raman, 2005). Hence, Iraqi Shiite demanded to unite and deny the ethnicity. However, a group of Dujail Shiite attempted to assassinate Saddam during his visit to give a speech in 1982 to thank the soldiers who were on their duty (Tapper, 2006). This action therefore, reflects Iran’s social threat to Iraq’s internal stability because Iran desired to create sectarian divisions among Sunnis and Shiites.

Unsuccessfully, Iran assumed the Iraqi population would provide support because of Iraq’s aggressive regime .Khomeini in 1982 called Iraqi citizens to welcome the Iranian forces and assist them in its invasion that he defined it as “the conqueror” (Sabti, 1987. p.59). Nevertheless, it was a failure attempt, to revive it; the attempt was connected with the concept of defending Islam rather than Iran’s ideology (Sabti, 1987.p.59) as the regime in Iraq was secular and did not abide by teachings of Islam. From the researcher’s point of view, the aim of exporting the revolution to the Gulf, mainly to Saudi Arabia, was to

awaken the Shiite populations of GCC. Iran assumed the GCC societies suffered from savagery and oppression from their leaders, considering the monarchy system was not following the true teachings of Islam. Saudi Arabia and its monarch's neighbors GCC were concerned regarding Khomeini's revolution, because it was perceived as a threat to their regimes' survival and legitimacy (Kundi, 1989.p.95). Replacing the monarchy regime by a theocratic regime that is based on the Velayet Al-Fagih would facilitate the region to be an ally and fellow of Iran, in particular the states with Shiite majority e.g. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Thus, the commitment of Khomeini's ideological conviction was seen as a tool to incite Shiite against their governments (Kundi, 1989.p.95).

Meanwhile, both Iraq and Iran were threats to the GCC. However, it was impossible for the GCC to support Iran especially after the revolution of 1979. This is in fact associated with the fear of the new regime's intentions. As a result, GCC decided to Bandwagon and support Iraq which was an option that can be characterized as the better of two bad choices. During the war, Iraq had one main aim which was to demolish Iran's propaganda regarding its revolution (Al-Kaabi, 2011.p.15) as Iran was willing to extend the revolution to the GCC regimes. Further, the war was observed as a war filled of religious aims. Iran desired to replace the GCC regimes with more friendly regimes based on its interest and on Shiite Islam. In addition, the issues of identity and sectarianism played an important role in exacerbating the tension. Indeed, the identity of "Iraqi Sunni versus Iranian Shiite" and "Arabs versus Persian" created fear amongst the allied states "Iraq and GCC". The GCC grew concerned about a Shiite revolution in their societies against their regimes, especially since the ruling elites are Sunnis; the scenario is similar with Iraq. Despite the fact that the

region was surrounded with two threats, GCC was not cautious regarding Iraq. This is related with Iraq's initiative to wage a war against Iran to convince the Gulf that Iraq was willing to sacrifice itself to protect its neighbors and the Arab region.

On the other hand, Iran believed Shiite population in the Gulf were not accepting the principle of exporting the revolution, regardless Iran endeavored to expand its influence to Mecca through creating chaotic incidents during the rituals of Haj. Accordingly, in 1987, more than a thousand Iranian pilgrims (Washington Post, 1987) caused chaos while performing Haj after Friday prayer. The demonstration began between the Iranians and Saudi riot police in which Iranian shouted political statements calling for the fall of America and Israel along with praising Khomeini (Kifner, 1987). Likewise, the riots continued through burning cars and caused injuries to pilgrims, in addition to prohibiting the circulation around the Ka'ba (Washington Post, 1987). The incident was managed by the police; however, it caused the death of 402 pilgrims in which 85 were Saudis, 42 innocent pilgrims of different nationalities, a security man and 275 Iranians (Kifner, 1987). As a reaction, Saudi Arabia regarded this tragedy as a source of Iranian threat to the internal stability of the Kingdom and the pilgrims.

By the same token, Saudi endorsed to reduce the number of Iranian pilgrims in the following year, capping it to 45,000 compared to 150,000. Thus, Tehran boycotted the duty of Haji until 1990 (Kramer, 2008. p.167). The political hostility continued to ebb, reaching a peak in 2016 after attacking the Saudi embassy in Tehran which resulted from the execution of the Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr by the Saudi regime. Iran's aim resulted from

its behavior was to alarm Saudi and spread terror among its nations that Iran is capable of extending its revolution and ideology influence. This incident could cause sectarian conflicts between Shiite and Sunni and escalate hatred and hostility. Moreover, it would encourage Saudi's Shia to perform acts against their government and contribute to brain washing so loyalty would be ranked first to Iran and the sect of Shi'ism and last to regime if it was based on Islam though Shias assume it is not. The failure to extend the revolution would delay Iran's regional hegemony.

To counter the threat, the GCC managed to contain Iran via two techniques, first collectively through the creation of Gulf Cooperation Council and second via balancing with a foreign power "US" (Shanhan,2009.p. 4). Thus, in 1981 the Gulf Cooperation Council was founded to preserve security and peace (Ramazani & Kechichian, 1988. p.1). Its establishment was to achieve one main objective which is connected to the regional stability (Ramazani & Kechichian, 1988. p.1). The duty of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was to deter internal threats e.g. Iran and Iraq along with any external threats. The GCC is classified as an original alliance organization, where it consists of several charters divided between social and economic integration as well as security (Kundi, 1989. p.93-94). However, the council concentrated in advancing commercial relations while ignoring the important aspect "military". Meanwhile, the absence of a potent military factor impacted the region. Therefore, the creation of Peninsula Shield Force took place the following year 1982 to enhance regional security (Kuffel, 2000. p.1). A contribution of nearly 10,000 forces was provided by the members of the GCC in 1984 for the event of a peninsula Force in Saudi Arabia. The air forces of Iraq and Iran targeted the oil tanker ships

of Kuwait and Saudi in which Iraq aggressively fired bombs at the tankers, Saudi destroyed Iranian air plane type F-4 (Kuffel, 2000.p.4).

The more the strength of the state, the more it's capable of dominating the weaker side. On the other hand, by creating an alliance with Iraq, the GCC realized Iraq was incapable of countering Iran; hence, the states initiated a new alliance with external power "US". In the last century of the year 1930, Saudi Arabia and US engaged in diplomatic ties in terms of political and military understanding (Blanchard,2010 .p.3). However, both states attempted to peruse mutual security aims in 1950 after the periodic perceptions of both states concerning the Arab region's dilemma e.g. Arab-Israeli conflict (Blanchard,2010 .p.4). Consequently, the alliance of US-GCC was due to the Gulf failure to contain Iran besides the realization that Iraq solely was incapable of confronting Iran. In terms of offensive capabilities, neither Iraq with its advanced forces nor the GCC managed to deter a quarter of the threat. Contrasting Iran, which was a new established Republic lacked experience, but was powerful because of its determination for victory to ease its invasion to the Islamic world.

To fill the security vacuum, US successfully took advantage of the war to strengthen its military presence and maintain its position in the region. The American strategic intention from involving itself in the war despite its neutral position was to prevent Iraq and Iran from gaining victory over the other, because any victory achieved by one of the warring states, would create regional instability (Sabti, 1987.p.90). However, US had another plan. To restrain a victory over Iraq, U.S took an unprecedented decision in its

entire history. Since the legislations of U.S forbid donating financial assistance including loans, Iraq was removed from the list of terrorism (Tarock, 1998. p.84) in order to legalize the financial support due to the concern that Iraq might lose the war. Moreover, US declared the prohibition of Iranian victory; it was fully prepared to deploy a military force in Iraq to preserve its domestic security and prevent destabilization (Tarock, 1998. p.83) which would create chaos in the region. Additionally, Washington confirmed that if Saudi Arabia or Iraq requested any form of assistance, the demand would be met via air force (Tarock, 1998.p.84). The purpose of these proclamations was to cause menace and create a lack of confidence within its forces since it was solely verbal statement without initiating actions.

Further, Iraq received economic aid as a shape of indirect political support. It received \$300 million from the US administration due to the great demand of hard currency to purchase goods (Tarock, 1998.p.84) to aid Iraqi. In addition, Iraq was supported via exporting the Iraqi oil. Since Iran blocked Hurmuz, the oil would be exported via land routes. US decided to build a pipeline to compensate the loss as Iraq relay only on Hurmuz for its exports. In spite of that, establishing the pipeline cost US large amounts of money, and hence, the request was rejected several times, until finally, George Bush¹³ succeeded to receive approval on a loan of \$484 million (Tarock, 1998, p.85). Iran has hindered US interests in the region; therefore, its potential triumph over Iraq hardened the US mission. Nevertheless, US altered its assumption of Iraq and identified it as “aggressor” and requested a cease-fire.Iran’s political behavior after the Islamic revolution and the Iraq-Iran war coerced the Gulf States to approve and accept United States as a factor of

preserving the domestic security in the region (Mansour, 2016 .p.18). The researcher assumes that if the political vacuum in the region was not filled by US after Britain, the Gulf States would be in a tragic position because by themselves they would fail to maintain their stability.

3.7 Conclusion

The region of the GCC was surrounded via two regional powers. These powers for two consecutive decades succeeded in creating a security gap in the region. During the Iraq-Iran war, the GCC considered Iran is the sole danger. This is associated with the arrival of Islamic Republic and Khomeini's theory of exporting revolution. Therefore the failure of the GCC to realize that Iraq is also a threat resulted in being in a difficult situation after the war with Iran. On the other hand, the status of Iran during Kuwait invasion in 1990 managed to temper the conflict among Iran and the GCC. Despite the interest of UAE in the islands case, UAE is not willing to create hostility with Iran because both states share common economic interests in terms of exporting and importing.

Chapter 4: THE DUAL THREATS: THE CASE OF KUWAIT AND THE EMERGENCE OF IRAN IN IRAQ

4.1 Introduction

This chapter evaluates the threat perception observed by the Gulf States through two decades. The chapter will begin by addressing the balancing alliance of the GCC with US to counter the threat from Iraq 1990. Afterward, it will examine the development of Iran-GCC relations during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatami. To conclude, the researcher will debate the newcomer threat to the region after 2003 and its implications on Iraq's domestic affairs.

4.1 The balancing behavior by US-GCC

As explained by Balance of Threat theory, states choose to forge alliance against the source of threat rather than power when the factor of reliable ally exists. Kuwait in addition to the Gulf States realized their lack of offensive capabilities to defend their nations and they were in desperate demand for an external military force. Thus, the balancing behavior by GCC states with United States has strengthened the regional defense factor, especially after Saudi Arabia was also threatened by Iraq through a deployment of military forces on the borders of Saudi. In order to attack Iraq, KSA approved to build a US base equipped with military capability with tanks and weapons to launch military operations installed from its territory. Besides the base, about 200,000 troops stationed in Saudi Arabia to perform defense operations to defend both Kuwait and Saudi (Allison,

2012, p.50-51). The total of US troops in the region were 500,000 (Elshtain, 1995.p.266). Indeed, the deployment of this large number of troops was to defeat the Iraqi forces. Even more, the balance with US compromised of another form of assistance provided to the GCC. An international coalition was organized by US with the participation of 50 states for the purpose of liberating Kuwait. This assistance was divided between 200,000 international troops, 750 aircrafts and 60 warships. In addition, these forces supported US coalition and delivered financial assistance to US estimated of \$54 billion ¹⁴(globalsecurity.org).

Moreover, UN Security Council enforced several resolutions against Iraq condemning its urgent withdrawal. Some of these resolutions were: Resolution 660 demanded both Kuwait and Iraq to negotiate to find a suitable solution for their disputes immediately after the invasion. Further, Resolution 670 emphasized on the continuation progress of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and refused the Iraqi's historical claims of Kuwait annexation (UN.org)¹⁵.

4.3 Threat Perception theory and the case of Iraq

In order to apply Walt's theory in the case of Kuwaiti, it's important to consider the sources of threat that were discussed previously in chapter two. These sources are geographic proximity, aggregate power, aggressive intentions in addition to offensive capabilities, where all posed a direct threat in creating regional instability, in particular for Kuwait.

In terms of geographical proximity, Kuwait is the only Gulf state that is located very close to Iraq. It shares borders with Iraq from the north which facilitates the mission of Iraqi forces to occupy Kuwait. It is estimated that the borders distance among the two states is around 254km. Moreover, the size of the state constitutes the level of danger, the great the size of a state, the more risk it poses. Hence, the land area of Iraq is 437,367 sq km, whereas in contrast, Kuwait's land area is 17,818 sq km. Therefore, Iraq is much greater than the size of Kuwait (Central Intelligence Agency). Meanwhile, Kuwait's small land area permits the enemy to penetrate easily contrasting with other Gulf States. The joint borders with Iraq authorized an entrance for the latter to the Gulf region. Since Kuwait is the passageway, Saudi Arabia would be the next victim because Iraq aims to seize Kuwait.

The lack of strong military forces besides Kuwait's wealth in oil reserves and production were primary factors contributing to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The intentions of Iraq were to rob the Kuwaiti oil and control OPEC quotas. The factor of Oil was an important in developing Iraq's economy. After the Iraq-Iran war, the production of oil dropped to less than 1 million barrel per day (Clayton, 2014.p.121). Further, the invasion caused an increase of oil prices; nevertheless, Iraq managed to increase the production size to 3mb/d¹⁶ (Mabro, 1990.p.42-43). Iraq requested Kuwait \$2.4 million as a substitute for the theft of Iraqi oil, however Kuwait rejected this demand (Rice, 2009, .p.9). Moreover, OPEC quotas were a serious matter for Iraq, it sought to impose its control to serve its interest since it was the sole plan to rebuild the economy of Iraq. The progress of Kuwait's economy after the destabilization of oil prices boosted from \$15 during the

Iraq-Iran war to reach \$17 to \$18 (Kostiner, 2009.p.85) before the invasion, managed to anger Iraq. Likewise, the expansion of Kuwait's quotas at OPEC 20% (Taylor & Mansbach, 2016) succeeded in producing more barrels. A year before the invasion, Kuwait managed to produce 500,000 barrels of oil, therefore, the state's wealth rose to \$9.3 billion which ranked the highest in its history (Kostiner, 2009.p.85). Hence, seizing the quota of Kuwait, Iraq would obtain a superior control of Kuwait production. Importantly, a dominance of oil production and barrel exports would take place. The original quantity of barrels would be sold to the global markets. The additional barrels would either be sold in higher prices to compensate the rejected loans by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia or shipped to Iraq in order to gain straight profits. Both scenarios aim to improve the economic crisis in Iraq because a decline in oil prices determines the rate of profits. Thus, the plan of Iraq was to expand production. Hence, it would not be achieved without stealing Kuwait's quotas of 20%, since Iraq was incapable of investing domestically and externally (Mabro, 1994.p. 242).

As the embargo imposed on Iraq and Kuwait during the invasion that resulted in the prevention of both states in exporting their oil, the production of Saudi increased. It managed to produce 1 mb/d despite the region's instability. In addition, the production reached its peak to 9 mb/d to compensate the loss of Kuwait because of the invasion which was reflected in Saudi's rejection to cut its production (Mabro, 1994.p.248-250). For that reason, Iraq redirected its attention to Saudi through the deployment of a military force on Saudi's borders; given it has the leadership of OPEC (Learsy, 2007.p.152) besides the 25% of Saudi's OPEC quota (Taylor & Mansbach, 2016). Therefore, Iraq acquired 42% of OPEC production in case of a success in invading KSA. Indeed, this would have allowed

Iraq to control around half of all OPEC quotas of oil production and caused quotas of other OPEC members to suffer limitations in production.

In a report by Marbo, he examined the economic situation of Kuwait and Iraq if the relations between both states were in good terms. The absence of tensions enhances oil production status. Iraq solely would expand the rate of its oil production to reach 3.1 million barrels per day (Marbo, 1994.p.245). Subsequently, it recompensed its financial loss in its war with Iran after Kuwait and KSA refused to provide monetary support to improve the economic situation of Iraq. Moreover, it enabled Iraq to repay its debts and promote its relations with the Gulf States especially on the political sphere. Iraq would gain support and immunity of the Gulf to accomplish his intention of being the dominant power of the Middle East region. Such actions, would obtain him the trust of the Gulf leaders. However, invading Kuwait faded that ambition. In contrast to Iraq, Kuwait would precede 2.2 mb/d estimated with the neutral zone (Marbo, 1994.p.245).

Further, the concern of oil is associated with the Kuwaiti regime. Saddam was willing to fulfill his desire of being the leader of the Arabs; however, to achieve the objective, the regime of Al-Subah must be overthrown. According to the Iraqi foreign minister Tarek Aziz, the intention of invading Kuwait was to implement a military coup against the Royal family and replace the regime with a domestic regime (Musallem, 1995.p.133). Establishing a new regime would lead to a convenient solution to resolve the conflict, because the new regime would avoid confrontation from Iraq's perspective (Musallem, 1995.p.133). However, by overthrowing the Kuwaiti regime, Iraq had two

intentions. First, the fall of Kuwait would bring the fall of the Gulf region. Thus, the fragility of the GCC states would reveal the entrance of Iraq to consolidate Saddam's authority of the region. Second, the concept of Arab regional power, "the guardian of the Gulf," similar to the Shah Mohammed Pahlavi¹⁷ had a significant influence on the emergence of Iraq's hostile decisions. Saddam claimed to recapture Kuwait and annex it to Iraq. During the Ottoman Empire era, Kuwait was not an independent state; instead it was part of Iraq, particularly a part of the Iraqi city Al-Basra (Wilkenfeld & Brecher, 1997,p.313) and this fostered Iraq's demands.

On the contrary, Iraq believed Kuwait must be protected against Iran because Kuwait has a large number of Shiite within its population which enables Iran to take advantage to export its revolution (Hassan, 1999.p. 75). Yet, these were excuses to justify the annexation of Kuwait and its association with Saddam's aim of the dominant power. Taking into consideration the offensive capabilities, Iraq was superior. The Iraqi army was the strongest army and ranked the fourth place globally (Cordesman, 1994.p.187). Henceforth, the army successfully managed to impose a full occupation of Kuwait within two days. Also, Iraq endeavored to expand its army from 180,000 soldiers from Iraq-Iran war to 800,000 (Cordesman, 1994.p.187) in the several months preceding the 1990 invasion. However, this number increased dramatically after the invasion to reach 955,000 in addition to 480,000 of reserves soldiers (Cordesman, 1994.p.187). The aim from expanding the army size was not to repeat the previous mistake. During the war with Iran, although the power of Iraqi military was superior in number, Iraq failed to counter Iran. Accordingly, Iraq prepared a huge army with several categories. A total of 450,000 troops

were present in Kuwait Theater of operation which consisted of Republican Guards 140,000, equipped with 2,880 armored personnel besides missiles and anti-weapons according to Department of defense report (1992.p. 93-95-104-113).

Yet, Kuwait lacked all sorts of military equipment. The Kuwaiti army was small in comparison to Iraq. According to Musallem, the number of Kuwait's army compromised of 16,000 soldiers (Musallem, 1995.p.180), another report indicated the number was 12,000 (Terrill, 2007.p.35). Hence, Kuwait was unable to defend itself against Iraq; it was compelled to request external support. Saudi Arabia took the responsibility to protect Kuwait through Saudi's land. The Gulf States were powerless to support the Kuwaiti military because of one major fact. The GCC army lacked the trainings and skills to perform military operations. Even if they had, they would fail to confront with Iraqi army in terms of weapons and skills. Likewise, the lack of military experience affected the military since the region was not previously exposed to wars and this was a factor in weakening the GCC army. During the war with Iran, the GCC military assistance of providing army to Iraq was missing because the region was dependent on Iraq for protection, and therefore the army lacked the potential of development in defense and offensive force. Furthermore, military coups in the Arab states have contributed to the weakening of Kuwaiti army. The ousting of the Egyptian King Farouk in 1952 by a military coup and the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958 in Iraq were incidents which affected the Kuwaiti royal family Al-Subah in being reluctant to the formation of a strong army (Terill, 2007.p.34).

The fear of being exposed to the same fate persuaded Kuwait to sustain a fragile military force rather than filling the vacuum of national defense with non-Kuwaiti citizens. In spite of the size and the strength of the Iraqi military forces, the forces were incapable of resisting the forces of the international coalition. James and Pardew argued Iraq miscalculated the ability of US coalition which led to the weakness of its military. The assumption of fragility of the coalition determined Iraq's attitude. Iraq deeply assumed its small well equipped military was advanced enough, and therefore, capable of overcoming the coalition forces. As a result, this convinced Saddam that US would not intervene in the conflict. Moreover, the division of army forces was a second cause for failure of Iraq's military. The Republican Guards were the adequate army for Saddam authority. It was provided with high quality of equipment, received excellent trainings besides it symbolized the strength of Iraq. Despite their position in the defense in which they provided permission for the command of Iraq, the Republican Guard was never been used to bolster deterioration in Kuwait and was unable to defend Iraq from the operations of the coalition (James &Pardew, 1991.p. 21-22).

In contrast, the regular army was poorly trained to perform any defense. Several members of its units were members in the infantry division which were shaped by veterans and Iraqi civilians to build up an intense unit. This army depended on the units of artillery and infantry to overcome the barrier system regarding the lack of adequate quality of trainings and equipment to deal with operations (James &Pardew, 1991.p.21). Therefore, if the Iraqi army consisted of one huge division, including the Republican Guard with the regular army, it would strengthen the role of the army to compete with the coalition forces.

To sum up, Iraq's military force has failed to defend its occupation of Kuwait. Recapturing Kuwait as Iraq's 19th province would have been the road to Arab hegemony. Further, concentration on the political path succeeded to transform Saddam to an offensive leader. This was clear in two incidents, in 1980 the Iraq-Iran war and the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. In both wars, Iraq was the aggressor because it was the culprit in the outbreak of the two regional conflicts.

4.5 Iran-GCC relations

Iran's position regarding the invasion of Kuwait was neutral. Nevertheless, it sided with Kuwait and supported UN sanctions against Iraq. Iran demanded immediate withdrawal of the Iraqi troops under no conditions or demands. As a consequence, Iran-GCC relations reached a new phase after the liberation of Kuwait. Moreover, to boost Iran's political image with its neighboring states that are not allies, Hashemi Rafsanjani articulated three major factors in Iran's policy with the Gulf States. Foremost, Iran's intention was not to implement changes regarding the political map of the region; rather it sought to sustain the present geography. Moreover, Iran identified the US presence in the region as a source of balance of power. Eventually, Iran endeavored to restore its relations with the Gulf region in particular, Saudi Arabia as it is the leading regional country (Askari, 2013).

To implement Iran's policy, Kuwait was the first country to resume relations. Since Kuwait was the most affected state of the Iraqi invasion, Iran sought to humiliate Iraq indirectly through admitting Kuwait as a victim of Iraq. Further, Iranian efforts to Kuwaiti citizens during the crisis helped to develop better relations. It supplied Kuwaitis with several forged Iranian passports including members of Al-Subah family to prevent the Iraqi forces from recognizing them while reaching exile in Saudi. Iran's behavior resulted in Kuwait regression of opposing Iran in 1980-98 war (Lee, 2008.p.48) due to the realization of Kuwait that Iran was not the real threat, but rather Iraq. On the other hand, Iran's main priority was to maintain a stable relation with Saudi Arabia. A local Iranian newspaper described Rafsanjani's visit to Saudi in 1998 as an intention to establish a joint commission. Economically, both states agreed to settle the prices of oil after the prices declined to \$12 besides to set the concern of OPEC increased quota of 10% (Tehran Times, 1998). Politically speaking, Saudi Arabia guaranteed Rafsanjani that the presence of US bases in Saudi did not constitute a threat to Iran's security. Therefore, to confirm the situation the bases shifted their location to Qatar (Al-Jazeera.com) to reflect Saudi's peaceful aims.

The theory of exporting the revolution was neglected in the presidency of Rafsanjani and Khatemi, as both focused on improving ties with the GCC. Since Khatami was calling for establishing mutual confidence and avoided hostility, Saudi announced in 1998 at UN General Assembly that Iran was not a regional threat; yet it was a positive influence in promoting peace and preventing regional instability (Keynoush, 2016.p.147).

Saudi realized Iran's efforts in enhancing relations as new approach full of

optimism and free of tension. The invasion of Kuwait made Saudi and the GCC states suspicious regarding the real threat. The outbreak of Iraq-Iran war had led the whole region to favor and assist Iraq due to the fear of exporting Iran's revolution and overthrow the GCC regimes. Thereby, after realizing the Iraq's regional intentions, Saudi sought to justify its counter-stance. According to a journal of Law and Politics, it indicated that Saudi and its GCC neighbors had no alternative, the GCC states were compelled to support Iraq as an Arab state fighting in order to secure the regional peace. However, the Gulf was not intended to provide financial support to Iraq and the aid provided was for defense purpose (Amiri &Soltani, 2011.p.192).

Regardless of Iran-GCC relations, Iran expressed reservation on the issue of UAE islands. It rejected negotiations, yet attempted to form agreement with UAE. A declaration of Iran published in 1999, issued the UAE islands did not constitute a matter of concern in UAE-Iran relations and both states were not willing to ruin their relations. (Keynoush, 2016.p.147). Additionally, the islands were not a concern for Saudi. The Kingdom was not pleased to ruin the reconciliation with Iran because this was a turning point in the interest of both states. Otherwise, Saudi warned UAE not to bother Iran and encouraged it to accept the Iranian claims.

Saudi and Iran rose as the major powers in the region, thus, both are factors in strengthening the regional stability or igniting it. Yet, each state demands to emerge as the solely regional hegemony. In the two regional wars 1980-1990, Saudi failed to play the role of hegemony. The fear of the Iranian revolution and Saddam's aggression led Saudi to

abandon the concept of hegemony and sought to secure its national security. After the arrival of US in the region, the role of Saudi Arabia was boosted. Despite restoring relations, Saudi-Iranian interests contradict. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran sought to impose its power on the Gulf region and the Arab world. By implementing this, Saudi would fall under the hegemony of Iran. Hence, Saudi believed being dominated by Iran project transformation of the region would result in Shiite government by Iran and therefore, it influences the holy places of Mecca and Medina especially since the majority of GCC populations are Sunni. Regardless of the intimate and stable Iran-GCC relations for a brief period, the relations worsened with the victory of Mahmood Ahmadinejad in the 2003 election (Al-Dulaimi et al, 2017,p.92).

4.6 Arrival of Iran as a serious sectarian threat to the region

The US invasion of Iraq “Second Gulf War” in 2003 under the concept of “War on Terrorism” was a major cause for the escalation of tension in Iraq and the Gulf region. The allegations of US against Iraq regarding the possession of weapons of mass destruction and links with Al-Qaeda were adequate accusations to overthrow the regime and establish a new government which would serve US interests. However, the failure of US to form that regime facilitated the gate for Iran to penetrate in Iraq’s domestic affairs and hence, Iran’s behavior in Iraq increased GCC threats assumptions.

4.6.1 The case of Iraq

The invasion of Iraq has shifted the balance of power and threat in the favor of Iran and hardly Iraq became the threat it was before. Indeed, US fulfilled a limited role after the fall of Baghdad in Iran's governance. US facilitated Iran's intervention in the domestic affairs of Iraq. Hence, it was a golden opportunity for Iran to take advantage of the new Iraq and to assure that Iraq does not pose a threat to Iran. Moreover, it was argued that Iran supported the US invasion to limit Iraq's threat to Iran.

The percentage of Shiite in Iraq increased after 2003, Shiite total percentage estimated 60% (Zweiri, 2009), In addition, Sunnis of Basra declined to 10% in contrast to 35% before 2003, and were 85% of Sunnis located near Dyali province (Alrawi,2016). This indicates Iran's major aim to make Iraq a follower of Iran. The Iraqi political vacuum was filled by Iran; from its viewpoint, Shiites have the greatest right to run Iraq's affairs because their right was taken away by Sunni minority. Since 2003, Iran intervened in the politics of Iraq and succeeded to establish a government governed by Shiite. Politically, the winner participants were supported by Iran to win the elections, in addition most of Iraqi elites returned to Iraq from exile, according to Zweiri's article.

As a result, Iran established political ties with its Iraqi Shiite allies. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) founded in 1982 (Eisenstaedt et al, 2011.p.5) in Tehran, is the major ally of Iran. Its militia forces Badr organization received trainings from the Iranian IRGC and fought alongside Iran in 1980-8. The second major party is the Dawa party. It was established in 1950, this party was supported by Iran before taking place in

Iraq. Thirdly, the Sadary party is the most popular party in Iraq, it is anti-America; however, the party is against the concept of Velayet-Alfagih. (Eisenstaedt & Ali, 2011.p.60). Lastly, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) has a close ties with Iran and provided support during the war with Iraq¹⁸.

Despite the removal of Saddam and the emergence of new regime, the GCC perceived the Shiite and their presence in politics a threat. The assumption of Shiite as a source of danger was changed after 2003 and Shiite became an ally to US (Zweiri & Ehteshami, 2011.p.120). This created a fear among the GCC because the shift of US perspective of Shiite will lead to empowering the role of Shiite in Baghdad and in the Gulf States. Furthermore, Iran's intervention in Iraq is to achieve a certain objective. Weakening Iraq permits Iran to install friendly regime in Iraq. It leads to reliance on Iran in terms of politics. Thus, a Shiite dominated government and inserting Shiite politicians increases the level of sectarianism. Iran enviable to implement domination over the Iraqi's militia¹⁹ to prevent the establishment of a Sunni power. The presence of Iran in Iraq creates opportunities for instability in the Gulf region. The escalation of sectarianism which Iraq transformed into a Shiite governed state, has awakened the sectarian sense of the Shiite community in the GCC, especially the Shiite in the GCC are restricted by the Gulf governments, they're not allowed to occupy sensitive political positions.

Thus, Iran hoped to grow the role of Shiite through encouraging them to overthrow their regimes. Second, Iraq's proximity to Kuwait led the region to be surrounded by two powers. In case of war outbreak, Kuwait and the GCC will be obliged to engage in a civil

war to secure the Sunnis. In addition, religious influence in Iraq is a matter of concern. Iraqi Shiite cities became a place of worship Karbala, Najaf and Samarra, which promotes the values of these cities instead of Mecca. These Iraqi's cities received Iranian pilgrims estimated to be around 1.2 million visitors to perform Haj (Eisenstaedt, 2015.p.6).

Its looks like Iran's intentions became obvious in Iraq. According to a report by examined the Iraqi's responses regarding elections of Ahmadinejad. The report stated that 17% of Iraqi Shiite assumed the Iranian president a positive leader while 43% believed that Iran's interfering in Iraq's domestic affairs is a negative sign (Guzansky, 2011.p.92).

4.7 Conclusion

Iraq was seeking to reshape its global political status after the war with Iran. Hence, the invasion of Kuwait was to compensate its massive loss through seizing the Kuwaiti oil to improve the status of Iraq's economy by annexing Kuwait to Iraq. As a result of this aggression, Iraq transformed from a GCC ally into a GCC enemy. In contrast, dimensions concerning Iran have changed for better where the Gulf commenced to progress relations with the latter. However, after Iraq became a fragile state in 2003 due to the US invasion, Iran successfully managed to fill the power vacuum in Iraq. Since then, Iraq became a client of Iran in terms of political and religious aspects.

Chapter 5: IRAN AND ARAB SPRING

5.1 Introduction

The chapter will seek to examine the case of Iran and Arab Spring. In the first section, the chapter will pursue to investigate the issue of Bahrain's uprising in 2011 and its consequences on Iran's relations with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Then, it will discuss the execution of the Saudi Shiite cleric and the responses of the Iranian and Saudi Shiite community. Finally, the second section aims to question the status of Iran's involvement in the case Syria and Yemen.

5.2 The case of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia

The policy of GCC ally "US" after the events of Arab Spring in 2011 concentrated in assuring the Gulf States the continuation of US support to deter the threat of Iran (Nasur, 2016,p.113). However, Saudi Arabia as the leader of the GCC was determined to control the situation alone.

The Iranian-Saudi strife took place after the arrival of the new regime in Iran. The relation worsened in the aftermath of the revolution. Replacing the GCC monarchic regime with Velayet-Alfagih that is based on clerics performing politics escalated the tension because Saudi and Bahrain contains a large number of Shiite populations. After 2003, the Iranian-Saudi dispute was driven by the Shiite uprising in Bahrain in 2011 and the execution of a Saudi Shiite cleric.

5.2.1 Bahrain

Bahrain is the smallest state in the Gulf; it has always been affected by the Saudi-Iranian hostility. The purpose is associated with the fact that the majority of Bahrain's populations are Shiite, approximately 63%, (Zweiri, 2013.p.21) contrary to the rest of the Gulf. Based on Iran's assumptions, Bahrain is a part of Iran and if annexed to Iran, Shiite in Bahrain would be pleased.

Similar to Arab states e.g. Tunisia and Egypt, Bahrain was influenced by the so called Arab Spring. In February 14, 2011 uprising took place in Bahrain titled "Day of Rage" (Gengler, 2016) led by Shiite majority. The revolt was organized by youth protests requesting an immediate reform in Bahrain. The opponents were divided among Al-wefaq²⁰ Shiite organization and Al-HaQ movements. Dissimilar with the youth protests that called to topple Al-Khalifa regime in order to implement new alternative political system to improve Shiite status politically and socially. However, Al-Wefaq commands a constitutional reform. It initiated the concept of Bahrain's political future under "Manama document," that emphasizes on giving Shiite the right to participate in politics. (Kinninmont, 2012.p.3-7). Likewise, the Saudi Shiite backed Bahraini's Shiite and claimed they must not be separated from the Sunnis and demanded equal rights (Jerges, 2016.p.318). Indeed, Saudi perceived Bahrain's incidents as a sectarian revolution sponsored by Iran (Bulter, 2011). The perception was resulted on the belief that Shiites are devoted to Iran and not to their countries, whereas Shiite in Bahrain follows Al-Sistani in Najaf (Mishal & Goldberg, 2015 .p.62) instead of velayet-Alfaqih.

To take control in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia deployed military forces from the peninsula Shield force upon the request of Bahrain (Ersoy, 2013.p.52). Because Saudi shares close relations with Al-Khalifa ruling family in Bahrain, the intervention was to safeguard the regime. Bahrain's leadership conceives Iran as a threat even before the Islamic Revolution. Iran considered Bahrain belonged to Iran (Belfer, 2014). Further, Iran was blamed of 1981 coup in Bahrain. The Bahraini regime accused the Islamic Front of Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) of attempting to overthrow the government under the support of Iran (Ivanhoe, 2012.p.125) .Therefore, the deployment of military forces was to ensure the continuation and the survival of Al-Khalifa regime (Mabron, 2012). In addition, the factor of sectarianism creates instability for both states, in particular to Saudi. The Kingdom is concerned the Shiite political unrest in Bahrain will foster its Shiite minority to pursue similar actions against Al-Saud regime. In contrast to Bahrain, the authorities of Saudi imposed restrictions over Shiites in which Shiites are not permitted to establish a Shiite mosque (IBP, Inc, 2009.p.54) nor celebrate Shiite feasts in public, while in Bahrain Shiite enjoy full right to perform religious obligations. Similarly, the expansion of Iran's influence in the region is a major obstacle. The fear of establishing a second Iraq in the Gulf increases Saudi-Iranian hostility. Consequently, Bahrain and Saudi suspect Iran of backing the uprising.

Bahrain and Saudi Arabia charged Iran for intervening in the domestic affairs of other states. Iranian representatives, "media channels," officials and clerics expressed their sympathy with the people in Bahrain. Iran views this case as a major Iranian case because

it belongs to oppressed Shiites (Kinninmont, 2012.p.20). As noted by Ali Baker, the Iranian media was responsible of increasing the confrontation between Iran and Bahrain. It supported the protestors via covering internal chaos of Bahrain. Baker also noted, the Iranian media commenced illusion campaign after the outbreak of the Arab Spring aiming to convince Iranian nationals that the Arab World is at the stage of “Islamic revolution” (Baker, 2012.p.94). However, Iran rejected the claims of supporting Bahraini protestors. The GCC states have always blamed Iran of creating regional instability. For the GCC, Iran is an anti-security state and it’s perceived as a source of meddling in the regional affairs and security, as clarified by Ersoy’s (Ersoy: 2013.p.53). No evidence was found to condemn Iran’s interference in Bahrain. Nonetheless, the GCC believed the evidence was the coverage of Iranian media of the uprising (Kinninmont, 2012.p.21).

The Iranian-American writer Mahdi Khalji expressed that Iran was cautious in dealing with the issue despite criticizing Saudi Arabia of murdering Shiite protestors. The Iranian government sent two ships to Bahrain to support the dissident Shiite, yet it was forced to return based on Tehran’s orders. Thus, Iran’s behavior led the Shiite to question the degree of trust with Iran and whether Iran will provide support in the event of confrontation with the government (Khalji, 2011).

Indeed, Shiites in Bahrain were subjected to penalties upon the Uprising. Abolition of nationality was first implemented; around 260 Shiite became non Bahraini citizens after the revocation of their citizenship including Shiek Essa Qasem, the major Shiite religious figure in Bahrain (Ashto, 2016). This decision outraged Iran and considered it as a catalyst

for escalating sectarianism whereas Bahrain recognized it as the right punishment for instigators of Iran (Ashto, 2016).

Bahrain is the battlefield of cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia and classified as a proxy war as both sides has different agenda's to achieve. For Saudi, securing the Sunni based regime will strengthen the Sunni power over the Shiite. Bahrain receives political and financial support from Saudi in order to ensure the stability of its regime (Nuruzzaman, 2013.p.10), whereas Iran's main intention is to defend the suppressed Shiite in the Gulf to obtain equal rights with Sunnis.

5.2.3 Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, Shiite constitutes a minority and estimated 2,460,000 of the total population 26,939,584 in 2013 (Zweiri, 2013.p.20). Most of Saudi's Shiite are located in specific areas in the Eastern province; Alqateef and Al-Ehsa. The majority of the Shiite follow the twelfth Imam doctrine (Al-Mezmah Studies and Research Center, 2017), similar to Iran. Eventually, Saudi-Iranian relation was unbalanced, however, it was based on friendship and understanding during Rafsanjani and Khatami presidency from 1990-2005. Ever after Ahmadinejad took over; the relationship has been hostile and worsened to its peak after the events of 9/11 and the US occupation of Iraq.

The Saudi-Iranian insecurity dilemma increased the rivalry among the two powers. Both Iran and Saudi are concerned regarding their internal security besides the issue of external threats play an important role in the states foreign policy. The case of Nimr Al-Nimr is connected with Saudi's domestic security. Al-Nimr was a Saudi Shiite cleric who became a well-known political and religious activist after his execution in January 2016. The authority of Saudi Arabia executed Al-Nimr upon several charges. The main charge was correlated with Saudi's fear of potentials attempt of Shiite unrest in the Eastern province. Al-Nimr was known of being against the regime of Al-Suad. His political activity was a result of the discrimination treatment Saudi's Shiite faced in a country based on Sunni majority²¹. Demonstrations of Shiite took place in 2011 calling for Shiite rights as Saudi's citizens. According to Amnesty International (2016), these rights compromised of the right to establish Shiite mosques to perform religious obligations; the right to exercise religious occasions and Shiite schools to educate children about their sect.

Second, Al-Nimr characterized himself as an ally of Iran. The Saudi cleric was receiving financial support and guidance from Iran. He declared his full support to Iran to intervene in Saudi Arabia to secure the Shiite. For Shiite, Al-Nimr was the savior of persecution (Fisher, 2016) and the Shiite voice that represent them. On the other hand, Saudi was concerned on Al-Nimr's connection with Iran might increase Iran's threat to the region; since protest of 2011 raised the fear of toppling the regime of Al-Saud (Townsend, 2016).

From the Amnesty International perspective, Al-Nimr execution was an unacceptable behavior by the Saudi's judiciary. The Amnesty argued the freedom of expression is a right for every individual and Al-Nimr must not be executed for practicing his right. The accusation of insurgent behavior against the ruler must not be considered a crime against the regime. In addition, the Amnesty blamed the authorities of categorizing the right of expression as a crime (Amnesty, 2016).

Further, Al-Nimr case resulted in escalating the sectarian tension between Iran and Saudi where both states provoked serious responses. The day following the execution, riots and demonstrations broke out in Iran condemning the action of Saudi Arabia. As stated by Iran primer, Iranian protesters gathered in front of Saudi embassy in Tehran. Protestors broke inside the embassy and destroyed the building through smashing windows and setting fire (the Iran Primer, 2016). To vexed Saudi Arabia, Iranian authorities decided to rename the street located near the embassy of Saudi Arabia to 'Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr' street as an honor to Saudi's Shiite and to undermine Al-Saud (ISNA, 2016). Nevertheless, President Rouhani expressed regrets for demonstrations and described the incident as negative image of Iran and that Iranians must not respond in that way (the Iran Primer, 2016). Accordingly, Saudi's response was similar to its previous behavior in similar cases, it cut-off ties with Iran and ordered Iranian officials to leave Riyadh in two days. Saudi's assumed the Iranian protests as an attack against its internal affairs. The Guardian newspaper stated that Iran is incapable of transferring the Sunni state to a Shiite because the Kingdom will not pave the way for Iran (Chulov, 2016).

5.3 Iran and its political intervention in Syria

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil war, Iran and Saudi Arabia positioned themselves in depth in the Syrian crisis. The incident of Arab Spring in the Middle East and the weakness of several states, including Syria, encouraged Iran to penetrate intensely in the region's politics. Moreover, Iran's military intervention in Syria was a consequence of bilateral military agreement between both states in early 1980s (Zweiri, 2016). Hence, Iran successfully intervened via proxies e.g. Hezbollah and Militias groups in Syria²² to provide adequate support to preserve the continuation of Assad's regime.

Iran proxy in Syria is divided in two categories: the involvement of Hezbollah²³ and the foreign Shiite militias that have connections with Iran. These parties are paramount of the continuation of the Syrian crisis, especially the involvement the Lebanese militia of Hezbollah, founded in 1980 in Lebanon (Tokmajyan, 2014.p.105). Hezbollah's seeks to protect Lebanon against Israel; accordingly the objective was achieved in 2006 when Israel launched a war against Lebanon. The intervention of Hezbollah in Syria in 2013 was due to maintain certain motives: first, the demand to protect the holy shrines of Shiite e.g. Saida Zaynab in addition to defend the Shiite cities and villages in Syria from the rebels (Tokmajyan, 2014.p.108). In the matter of religion sectarian duties, Hezbollah and Iran confirmed their support to the Syrian government (Al-Rabih, 2017). However, Hezbollah's major objective was the survival of the Assad regime; as a result, the deployment of Hezbollah's troop's number in Syria is unspecified. Based on The New York Times newspaper, around 8,000 of Hezbollah fighters were sent to Syria (Hubbard, 2017)

conversely, Washington Institute reported the total number of fighters are 10,000 (White,2014).

The alliance between the three axes, Iran, Syria and Hezbollah is classified under the concept of “Axis of Resistance”. Besides Hezbollah, Iran supplied the Syrian regime with foreign fighters “militias”, a large number of Lebanese and Iraqi militia fighters were involved in Syria under Iran’s appeal²⁴. In addition, a year after the outbreak of the war, Iran boosted its support via the creation of a local Syrian militia called “National Defense Force” (NDF). The NDF received financial assistance from IRGC, trainings, military arms and weapons from Iran to fight along Hezbollah and other militias. Its members increased in 2015 to reach 40,000 (Orhan, 2015.p.7). Likewise, Iran managed to provide military trainings to around 150,000 soldiers of the Syrian regime in Iran ²⁵(Hesse, 2015.p.5).This however, reflects Iranian military capabilities in protecting its interests. It is believed that Iran promoted the role of Jihad to the Shiite in Iraq, Lebanon and Iran under the aim of securing the holy shrines in Syria. Indeed, Iranian fighters involved in the battlefield as 48 Iranians fighting in Syria captured by the Syrian rebels (Orhan,2015 .p.11).

The factor of geographic proximity causes a concern to Iran. Since Syria is the sole Arab ally, the fall of Assad outcomes in the emergence of a hostile regime dominated by Sunni. Iran assumed the new regime in Syria is a threat to its interests in the region because the domination of Sunnis will not only lead to weaken Iran’s hegemony in Syria, but also weaken Iran’s proxy “Hezbollah” in Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, this contradicts the Iranian intentions. For Iran, Syria is the only gate to the Levant; so, the intention was not

to maintain the survival of Assad, but rather securing its influence, interests and expansion in Syria. This expansion paves Iran's way to extend its hegemony to the Levant as the fall of Assad results in the fall of Syria under Iran's occupation and transfer Syria into a Shiite fellow state similar to Iraq. Thus, Iran deployed its proxies to fulfill its interests under well-prepared plans that even with the continuation or removal of Assad, these proxies will seek Iran's assistance to prevent Sunnis reaching power (Rydell, 2017.p.21). Furthermore, gaining victory in Syria permits Iran to turn to Lebanon and enhance its support to Hezbollah regardless of its great influence in Lebanon.

Coming to Saudi Arabia, for the first time it planned to contain and balance Iran with its GCC neighbors rather than relying on US despite US participation. Saudi Arabia managed to forge a coalition consisting of Arab States e.g. Jordan to deter Iran. The coalition members, particularly the Gulf States, adopted severe decision concluded in financing Sunni rebels to fight against Assad regime (Hokaym, 2011:2). However, this contradicts the known behavior of Saudi, it demanded to remove Assad regime in Syria as a means to reduce Iran's influence in Syria and weaken its extension of influence in the Gulf and Levant regions. (Berti &Guzansky, 2012.p.2).

Additionally, since the alliance of Assad with Iran created a concern for Saudi Arabia, it sought to support the Syrian rebels against the regime of Assad (Murad, 2017). The militia of Jaysh al-Islam²⁶ is one of the funded rebellions by Saudi Kingdom. Further examples of Saudi's intervention in Syria were mentioned in recent interviews by the previous Qatar prime minister, Sheik Hamad bin Jassim. He clarified and confirmed that

Saudi Arabia has asked Qatar to intervene and support Syrian rebellions against Assad regime, and that is a vital fact that shows Saudi indirect intervention in Syrian crisis (Hamad bin Jassim, 2017). In addition to financing rebels, Saudi Arabia used the death row- inmates through decreasing their sentences to fight alongside rebels. A research study entitled “Syria: Iran’s and Saudi Arabia’s new playground?,” provided a data concerning the number of inmates. An estimated of 1239 inmates were involved in negotiations with Saudi regarding their participation in Syria. The negotiations compromised of delivering monthly financial aids to inmates’ families besides providing amnesty in exchange for receiving training and perform proxy fighting in Syria on behalf of the Kingdom (Rydell, 2017,p.29).

Another form of backing rebels is the hosting of international conferences titled “Friends of Syria” in Turkey, Tunisia and Morocco sponsored by Saudi Arabia. The aim of these initiatives is to strengthen the role of rebels to prevent their weakness in front of Iran and Hezbollah. The tyranny of Iran’s role in Syria impacted Saudi Arabia image in front of Arab and foreign allies. It causes increased in regional instability and demolishes GCC objective that erodes in limiting the Iranian expansion in the Arab region. However, even if Iran’s role in Syria is completed, a new ally will fill Iran’s vacuum “Russia”. Saudi, otherwise, is incapable of engaging in a war with Russia. First, without the assistance of US, Saudi will not be able to compete with the Russian military strength because unlike Saudi, Russia is considered as a weapons made state. Second, Saudi lacks the war experience and therefore, its role is confined with aiding rebels.

Lastly, Saudi depends on support of US despite the absence of a direct involvement in Syria because US is involved in a cold war with Russia since the Soviet Union. Although the defeat of the Assad regime permits Saudi to emerge as the solely Sunni Arab power, it creates future concern. Supporting the Syrian rebels could threaten Saudi's stability in the future with the rise of Muslim Brotherhood to power (Berti &Guzansky, 2012.p.3). Omer Kosh, a Syrian researcher argued that the events in the Arab region have increased the confrontation and the rivalry among Saudi Arabia and its opponent, Iran. For Saudi Arabia, it demands to preserve its internal stability and prohibits Iran from destabilizing the region, while Iran is concerned about its political status and influence in the Levant and Arab regions following the fall of Assad (Kosh, 2013).

5.4 Iran's involvement in Yemen "the closer the threat, the more direct it becomes"

The regional security from the Gulf States' viewpoint is Iran's centric (Mansour, 2016 .p.18). Houthis in Yemen were not a threat to Saudi Arabia despite the clash with Saudis in 2009 after attacking the Kingdom's borders. However, this changed after the Houthis allied with Iran that led to deepening Iran's influence in Yemen (Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, 2015). To be specific; Iran's support to Houthis persuaded Saudi Arabia to adopt immediate war to prevent the expansion of Houthis. Moreover, Saudi reformed its political path and therefore the Saudi war on Yemen was projected against Iran with the intention to compete over the hegemony of Yemen.

Iran-Saudi rivalry affected several Arab and GCC states²⁷ to intervene in their proxy. The creation of a coalition titled “Decisive Storm” led by Saudi in 25 March 2015, where the GCC states besides the Arab countries are involved in the coalition except Oman. In addition, to stop Iran’s potential expansion in the region through the coalition with the allied states to contain Iran, Saudi deployed numerous military forces, ranged between of 150, 000 fighters and 100 fighters jets (Dolgove, 2015), to fight the Houthi²⁸ rebels. Nevertheless, the coalition was ineffective as Houthis successfully imposed a larger domination in Yemen (Popp, 2015:3). Hence, the GCC provided the Yemeni resistance with military trainings to prepare them to become involved in the fights while the militias positioned in the south of Yemen against the Houthis (Schmtiz,2017). Then again, Saudi’s effort was not enough to prevent the Houthis’ expansion, and it rather offered the Houthis more control over Yemen. In general Yemeni citizens are the only people who get affected by the war negatively; it didn’t rid them from the Houthis’ domination but instead helped the spread of poverty and diseases. The Yemeni crisis illustrates the success of Iran in backing Houthis to prevent a local resistance from establishing a new government. Further, it assumed a new government supported by a foreign power, limits Iran’s access to the region.

In addition, Iran-Saudi proxy has a religious aspect; yet, the political factor overshadows since both states desire to perform political ambitions (Cote, 2017). Dominating a state close to its rivalry permits Iran to be close enough to the region specially its assumption on the Gulf as a part of Iran. Yemen is vital strategic interest for both rivalries because of the shared borders with Saudi Arabia. For Iran, similar to Syria, Yemen

is the key to extend its influence in the Gulf. Houthis are being used as a tool by Iran to promote its regional hegemony while for Saudi Arabia it's attempting to expand its influence before the unification of north and south Yemen under one state. Saudi assumed its alliance via coalition states will facilitate Houthis defeat and therefore, Yemen will fall under its control. In addition, Saudi is taking advantage of the GCC states to extend its hegemonic role and participation in Yemen. In an online article published by Sputnik news, the former minister of foreign affairs Khalid Al-Atia declared that Qatar was forced to join the coalition (Al-Tufaili, 2017).

In this regard, Iran's operation in Yemen is to achieve a victory over regional strife and the rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Limiting the influence of Iran's regional rivalry "Saudi Arabia" is permitting Iran to expand its influence and hegemony in Yemen. For that reason, Iran attempts to strengthen the role of its Yemeni ally "Houthis" in order to weaken GCC connections with Yemen and prevent Saudi's and its regional allies from extending influence in Yemen (Al-Qadhi, 2017 .p.33). Furthermore, Al-Qadhi also argued that Iran's failure to achieve its objectives results in causing domestic Yemeni strife full of chaos and dispersion which on the other hand empowers Iran for more influence (p.33).

Proximity to Yemen impacted the political behavior of Saudi Arabia (mepc.org). Locating near a state plagued by ongoing political turmoil threatens Saudi Arabia's stability. The main threat revolves on the Iranian ideology of velayet Al-Fagih that might influence the Shiite minority, lead to overthrow Al-Saud regime and replace it with a client government to Iran. Likewise Saudi fears of a new hostile regime in Yemen, in other words,

a Shiite dominated government affiliated to Iran, similar to Iraq. This however, encourages the Shiite minority in Saudi to threaten Al-Saud legitimacy Sunni regime. Shiite government in Yemen will cause immediate concern to Saudi that the Yemeni revolution will expand into its borders predominantly after the uncertainty of Saudi's strategy in Yemen that causes suspicious (Popp, 2015.p.3). The Kingdom desires to be encompassed by a cordial regime that endorses a foreign involvement (Kinninmont, 2016). Establishing friendly regimes allows the Saudis indirectly to control Yemen domestic affairs and transform Yemen into a follower state of Saudi.

Using the literature Aldulaimi et al used in their paper, in this regard, Saudi acknowledged Iran's attempt in extending its influence in both Iraq and Syria in addition to its influence over Yemen through its Houthis allies has convinced Saudi that Iran could be considered as a source of regional instability (Al-Dulaimi et al, 2017 .p.98) due to its political behavior with its ally states. Therefore, Saudi is willing to minimize the Iranian influence, this would be achieved via bringing down Iran's allies in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. By this, the balance of power will be later in the favor of Saudi Arabia (p.98).

The Middle East expert analyst Sigurd Neubauer, argued that the GCC states overstated the role of Iran in Yemen and its support to the Houthis. He advised the regional state to diminish their exaggeration and seek solutions to avoid Yemen from emerging as a geopolitical battleground between Iran and Saudi (Neubauer, 2015.p.2). In addition, Iran's indirect intervention via Houthi proxy provides an opportunity to Iran to victory a new ally in the Gulf in order to promote its hegemony. Achieving this will set fire in the

region because it will facilitate Iran to implement its concept of extending revolution to the GCC through encouraging Shiite population to follow liberation revolutions. The decision to be involved in Yemen's internal affairs was made by Saudi (Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, 2015) aimed to restore the legitimate government of the Yemeni president Abed Rabbou Mansour Hadi (Fozia & Shazia, 2017, p.193).

5.6 Conclusion

The subject of Arab Spring among Saudi Arabia and Iran does not stem of settling disputes and bringing peace to the Arab world, however, it's a case associated with regional rivalry. Saudi Arabia accused Iran of destabilizing Bahrain's security via its indirect intervention despite Iran's rejection of these claims. Indeed, Saudi Arabia's action against Shiite minority regarding Al-Nimr led to increased sectarian tension and this is what Iran considered a challenge.

Involving in Syria and Yemen, Iran attempts to take control of the most strategic states in the Gulf and Levant regions. With or without Al-Assad regime, Iran desires to transform Syria into a second version of Iraq whereas in Yemen, Iran's intention from backing the Houthis is a kind of challenging Saudi Arabia through a victory in Yemen

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

This study is based on the presumption of the GCC that both Iran and Iraq are threats to regional instability. The researcher used Stephen Walt's Threat Perception Theory to support the argument which emphasizes on the idea that states balance against threats and not state's possession of power in addition to sources of threat consisting of: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities and offensive intentions. In this chapter, the research demonstrates the outcomes of the previous chapters for the purpose of providing conclusive findings.

BOT theory is one of the most modern theories of the contemporary history. Walt's theory is crucial to comprehend and to be examined in the political sphere of the Middle East region. BOT is a unique among other theories, in particular BOP because Walt emphasized on states perception of threats rather than state's capabilities where the decision to provoke alliance is driven by the level of threat perceived by others. Walt permits us to understand the motives that led the Gulf Cooperation Council States to classify several regional states as a factor of regional threat. In addition, the four sources of threat are significantly applicable to Iran and thus, the GCC alliances have been always against Iran. In contrast, Walt neglected the ideological aspect as unimportant element in the formation of alliance; yet, Iran-GCC strife does not reflect the concept of Walt.

Analyzing the findings related to the threat surrounding the Gulf region has been proved that the nature and the sources of threat have never been stabled, but rather were changeable based on the political environment surrounded the region through history. Indeed, the GCC sought uncalculated decision via their alliance with Iraq during the Iraq-Iran war in 1980-88 without considering the alliance future outcomes which costed them un-predictable consequence in 1990.

Moreover, Iran's political behavior resulted from the animosity between the latter and the Gulf States. Since the advent of the external foreign power "US" to the Gulf, it was regarded as the major element in preserving the regional peace and security whereas Iran was excluded from the concept of regional security and was accused of destabilizing the Gulf States especially in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and Khomeini's statements against the GCC monarchs.

Indeed, the geographical factor plays an essential role in influencing the nature of relation between Iran, Iraq and the GCC. The three Gulf wars, Iraq-Iran 1980-88, Kuwait invasion 1990, US invasion 2003 in addition to the incident of Arab Spring created a matter of concern that the geographical map is subjected to change due to the rise of Iran's hegemony in the Arab world . This, in contrast, resulted in a rivalry competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia where both states desire to seek hegemony and influence over states that experience internal strife e.g. Yemen and Syria. Meanwhile, without the anti-Iran alliance (GCC and US), the states of the region would not be safeguard nor defend themselves against Iran. This alliance is a vital factor in the survival of the Gulf region

which also prohibits Iran from interfering directly due to the presence of the US bases.

Saudi Arabia and the small weak states are incapable of achieving victory over the Houthis in Yemen. The reason is mainly associated with the lack of military experience. The Kingdom recently invests heavily in the arms and weapons from US. However, these attempts do not reflect any positive results and Iran is still superior in the battlefield against the Arab coalition which made Iran to gain leverage in its proxy involvement in the Arab Spring.

On that premise, not all the Gulf Cooperation Council States agreed on the assumption that Iran is the main threat to the region. Oman, for instance, maintained its neutrality regardless of its other GCC neighboring states' status against Iran in the war of 1980. Even more, Oman did not participate in the Arab coalition initiated by Saudi Arabia against Iran's proxy in Yemen "Houthi". Moreover, recently, Qatar is following the exact path. After the political and economic blockade against Qatar by three of the GCC States (Bahrain, UAE and Saudi Arabia) last year of the month of June, Qatar sought to strengthen its relation with Iran at the political level. This however made Qatar, from the point of view of its neighbors, responsible for Iran's political support in the region and that Qatar has accepted Iran's influence in the Gulf. Taking all the above into account, this presents despite being one organization, few members do not accept the same claim.

What is more, Qatar might search for a new ally as a substitute of America. It's expected that this ally might heavily be Turkey due to the arrival of Turkish military forces to Qatar in addition to the Turkish political support provided to Qatar after the blockade. Turkey is the preferable candidate in terms of security concerns. As such, Turkey preferred Qatar over UAE and Saudi recently in the case of Muslim Brotherhood who assumed the Arab Spring as an opportunity to reemerge.

This leads us to question whether Iran in the future run will form a military alliance with Qatar after its successful attempt in offering political support to Qatar against the blockade states? In case this took place, the Gulf would be two divisions, division one Iran, Qatar and Oman whereas the second is UAE, KSA and Bahrain and Kuwait would be neutral.

Based on the contemporary events, it's obvious that Iran-GCC strife will not be solved in the near future. All the parties are not willing to sit around the table to seek a mutual acceptance solution which on the other hand escalates tension and animosity. Despite that, even if a solution has been reached Iran will always be a source of suspicion and uncertainty.

Eventually, since the thesis's arguments and assumptions were based on the availability of the literature, the researcher suggested several future research recommendations. Besides the other limitations mentioned earlier, the study requires a further and extended examination of the studied cases as some issues are still ongoing while

others are still pending e.g. occupied islands. Likewise, the recent Gulf crisis must be taken into consideration because it reflects a divergence in several GCC states (Qatar and Oman) assumptions towards Iran.

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APPENDIX

¹ Theocracy is a form in which the country or the government is governed by an individual who relishing the religious prerogative to rule the country (gotquestions.org). The position of this individual is higher and important than the president of the country and he has the right to issue decisions related to the state.

² See, Stephen Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* p177-178.

³ For details on his model see, *Philosophical Papers, Volume 1: The Methodology of Scientific Research Programs* <http://strangebeautiful.com/other-texts/lakatos-meth-sci-research-phil-papers-1.pdf>

⁴ See, Haq et al. *Alliances in International politics: a comparative study of Kenneth Walt's and Stephen Walt's theories on Alliances*.

⁵ Al-Qawasim is a tribe ruled Sharjah and Ras-Alkhaima before the Federation of the Emirates.

⁶ For full articles, see Priouz Mojtahedzadeh "Security and territoriality in the Persian Gulf: A maritime political geography", p211.

⁷ This statistics is approximation, calculated by the researcher, based on a report titled "The Elusive Quest for Gulf Security" by Khalaf Abdulhadi.

⁸ For details statistical data, see *GCC economics: UAE-Iran's trade relations report*. 30th July, 2015. SICO Research.

⁹ See, *Closing Time. Assessing the Iranian threat to Strait of Hormuz*, 2008 for specific details on the Iranian equipments.

¹⁰ A statement said by the Shah of Iran Mehmet Reza Pahlavi in 1971 for the Guardian newspaper. For the full quotation , see Frauke, Heard-Bey” from Trucial States to United Arab Emirates.

¹¹ Persian Gulf is a term referred to the Arabian Gulf region, the term was used since the Persian Empire due to the Shahs believed that the Gulf region is considered a part of Persia’s territory.

¹² Sabti’s book was written during the Iraq-Iran war and published in few days after the decision of Security Council to end the war

¹³ The Vice president of U.S 1980-1989

¹⁴ See, Pursuant to Title V of the Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and Personnel Benefits Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-25).

¹⁵ For details See, UN security council resolutions -1990.

¹⁶ Million barrels per day.

¹⁷ The last Shah of Iran before the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran that took place after the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

¹⁸ For more information, see Eisendstadt, Iran and Iraq, and Eisendstadt and Ali, Iran’s influence in Iraq.

¹⁹ The militia of Iran’s local parties e.g. Dawa party, Sadari and etc.

²⁰ See Zweiri and Zahid, the victory of Al-Wefaq: the rise of Shiite politics in Bahrain.

²¹ See, urgent action Shiekh Nimr Al-Nimr executed, Amnesty International, January 2016.

²² Iran and Syria share bilateral relation since 1979. Syria has supported Iran in the Iraq-Iran war in 1980.

²³ Hezbollah or the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon is a Shiite political and military group. Hezbollah is anti-Israel and US and is categorized as a terrorist group according to US. Similar to Iran, Hezbollah believes in Velayet Alfagih.

²⁴ See, Aaron Hesse, Shiite foreign militias in Syria and Oytun Orhan the Shiite militias in Syria and political solutions p 8,9 and Aaron Hesse, Shiite foreign militias in Syria.

²⁵ See, Naame Shaam, Iran in Syria – From an Ally of the Regime to an Occupying Force, for provision of military assistance to the regime’s army.

²⁶ Coalition of Salafi and Islamists militia groups which are involved in the Syrian war. See , <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/533>

²⁷ The countries are: Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, and Morocco in addition to KSA. However, Qatar severs from the coalition in June 2017 after Bahrain, UAE and KSA broke diplomatic ties and accused Qatar for financing terrorism.

²⁸ Houthis is the common name for the movement of “ Ansar Allah”, founded in 1992. It’s a political, religious and armed movement. The name attributed by its founder Hussain Baderddin Al-Houthi. See, Roland Popp, War in Yemen: Revolution and Saudi intervention.