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THE EFFECTS OF THE SAUDI-IRANIAN RIVALRY ON POLITICS IN LEBANON

BETWEEN 2005 AND 2016

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: The Effects of the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry on Politics in Lebanon between 2005 and 2016

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Saudi-Arabia and Iran have been engaged in a rivalry for control of regional power since 1979. Whereas much of the published literature has focused on the effects of this rivalry in principals, less attention has been paid to the effect of this rivalry on domestic politics in third states. Here I examine the effects of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on domestic politics in Lebanon between 2005 and 2016 by analyzing three political events. The results of these events were interpreted and three effects of the dyadic rivalry were mapped out. First, rivalry encourages challenging the central government in the third state. Second, rivalry can lead to a military conflict in the third state. Finally, dyadic rivalry hinders the political decision in the third state.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Problem Statement	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Research Question.....	3
Thesis Outline	3
Methodology	4
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	5
Introduction	5
Enduring Rivalry	6
Strategic Rivalry	7
Proposition	11
Chapter 2: Cooperation and Hostility in the Saudi-Iranian Relations	12
Origins of the Rivalry.....	12
The Saudi-Iranian Relations between 1941-1979	14
The Saudi-Iranian Relations after 1979	21
Conclusion.....	24
Chapter 3: The Internal Dynamics of Lebanon.....	26
The Formation of a Multi-Polar System in Lebanon	26
The Transformation from Multi-Polarity to Bi-Polarity	30
External Intervention in Lebanon.....	33
The Crisis of 1958	34
The Palestinian Presence in Lebanon	36
The Syrian Intervention.....	38
Chapter 4: Contextualizing the Effects of the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry on Politics in Lebanon.....	41
Introduction	41
July 2006 War	41
May 2008 Conflict	45
Presidential Elections 2016.....	49

Conclusion.....	52
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	54
Concluding Remarks	54
Limitations	57
Future Research.....	58

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

The study of rivalry has been evolving since World War I with different contributions, these studies focused mainly on identifying rivalries. However, these contributions understudy the effects of rivalries on other countries or third parties. Different scholars such as Diehl & Goertz (1993) have analyzed rivalries in world politics and tried to categorize them by introducing new concepts such as enduring rivalries, strategic rivalries, interstate rivalries etc. which may help in identifying rivals and analyzing the reason behind it. Thompson (2001) defined rivals by saying: “Rivalries thus represent a distinctive class of conflict in the sense that rivals deal with each other in a psychologically charged context of path-dependent hostility in ways that are not necessarily observed in conflicts that occur in more neutral contexts.” (Page 558).

When it comes to the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iran are two main regional powers that have experienced abnormal relationship since the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979; this relationship has been classified as a rivalry (Tzemprin, Jozić, & Lambaré, 2015). The disagreement between these two regional powers was not limited to their countries; it affected the entire region which already had an existing problem or a potential problem such as Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain, etc. The nature of the conflict in each of the listed countries was different and the effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on it was not similar as well.

One of the unique political cases in the Middle East is the Lebanese case as it contains a heterogeneous society that is highly responsive to external influence unlike the

other states in the region; which allows us to examine the effects of rivalry more easily. This weak creation made it hard for Lebanon to face the Saudi-Iranian rivalry repercussions. The idea that the confessional groups in Lebanon needs to be protected by external powers is it-self an internal disagreement within the country. Given this confessional division of the Lebanese society, Saudi Arabia and Iran as two regional powers managed to create agents or allies for them in Lebanon.

The shift in the Lebanese political scene in 2005 after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the expulsion of the Syrian army gave another dimension for the effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on Lebanon. With this turning point in the Lebanese politics, alliances changed by which Syria lost its direct power in Lebanon and therefore, the Iranian role started to increase. Before 2005, all political decisions needed a Syrian-Saudi consent but after 2005 an Iranian-Saudi agreement appeared to be indispensable to proceed with any political decision which showed a direct relation between the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and decision making in Lebanon.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my research is to contribute to the rivalry literature by studying the effect of dyadic rivalries on third parties considering the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and its effects on Lebanon as a case. This study will be conducted by examining several observations in Lebanon. The Lebanese case was chosen since heterogeneous societies allow us to see how external intervention gets amplified; Lebanon in this case is regarded as a theater for foreign powers influences. Other contributing factors will be observed such as the nature of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and the weak composition of the Lebanese society which made it highly responsive to rivalry effects. The time limit of this study

will be from 2005 till 2016, taking into consideration the importance of this period of time in supporting the research question.

Research Question

This research will investigate the effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on the political decision in Lebanon. There are some supporting topics that will be included in the research such as the nature and types of rivalries. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry, its dynamics and trends will be discussed briefly. The research will focus on the effect of this rivalry on Lebanon. The main research question is: “How do existing rivalries affect the domestic politics of other states?” The study will focus in particular on the effects of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on domestic politics in Lebanon. Heterogeneous societies such as Lebanon allow us more insight given how internal competitors look to external allies which will facilitate mapping out the effects of rivalries on other states.

Thesis Outline

This study will focus on the effects of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on domestic politics in Lebanon; however, the proposed hypothesis will be tested using rivalry theory. The theory of rivalry will be discussed in the literature review; the two schools of rivalry will be examined and the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in particular will be classified. Chapter 2 of this thesis will deal with the roots of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry; particularly, how did the relation transform from competition before 1979 to rivalry post-1979 revolution in Iran. Chapter 3 will focus on the hospitability of the Lebanese system to this rivalry in light of the shift in the political system caused by the assassination of PM Hariri in 2005. The effects of rivalry will be studied in chapter 4 by observing three different political

events between 2005 and 2016; by interpreting the results of these events three effects will be mapped out and a conclusion will be reached.

Methodology

To conduct this research, a qualitative method will be used to study the effects of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on politics in Lebanon. An inductive approach will be followed as the focus will shift from specific to general; examining the Saudi-Iranian rivalry will lead into a conclusion related to its effects on Lebanon. The research design that will be used is an instrumental case study that will depend on three observations each related to a different political event.

Different sources will be used to conduct this research which includes primary and secondary sources such as peer reviewed academic articles and books to examine the different types of rivalries, to study the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and the politics in Lebanon. Moreover, primary and secondary data sources will be used such as audio-visual sources and newspaper articles; speeches and statement of politicians and related policy makers will be analyzed. Newspaper articles will be considered as a source for these statements as well. The selection of the news sources will be based on the most prominent and influential ones taking into consideration which political parties these sources belong to. International newspapers will be mostly examined to try to avoid biased information as the local Lebanese newspapers might be owned by certain politicians which will break its neutrality.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The main concept in this research is rivalry which is creating the effect on the case studied which is Lebanon. In this part of the research, the aim is to set a framework which we can study through the concept of rivalry. Not all states have equal chances of being rivals, knowing that rivalry is not a fixed term with one definition. Different schools had studied the rivalry and defined it in a different way. Gochman & Maoz (1984) discussed the concept interstate dispute as a form of rivalry; they argued that in newly formed regional subsystems such as the Middle East and Africa, minor-minor disputes are more likely to exist. On the other hand, most of the disputes in the long-established regional subsystems such as in Europe involved the participation of a major power.

Conflict in general is a broad category that includes rivalry and other similar types of interaction. Klein, Goertz, & Diehl (2006) differentiated between isolated conflicts and rivalry by defining isolated conflict as: “single instance military confrontations between two states embedded in multilateral wars and lesser disputes” (p. 334). They defined rivals as states with conflicting goals over scarce goods, the competition might not be a zero-sum conflict, it can be over intangible goods such as spreading political influence (Klein et al., 2006). Among the different definitions and theories of rivalry, this framework aims to analyze two main schools that have studied rivalry, the first deals with enduring rivalry and the second with strategic rivalry.

Enduring Rivalry

Enduring rivalry is one of the main concepts in identifying rival states. Diehl & Goertz (1993) define enduring rivalry as: “a repeated conflict among the same set of states” (p. 147). If a conflict is placed in the context of enduring rivalry, this means that the dispute can be influenced by a previous conflict or by the expectations for the dispute’s future; in other words, previous conflicts influence the future relationship between the same set of states. The concept of enduring rivalry can help in understanding the history and expecting the future of a conflict.

Most enduring rivalry competitions are perceived to be zero-sum where the issues of rivalry are not static, competing goods might vary over time between the same set of states. Diehl & Goertz (1993) had classified three components of enduring rivalries; first, most competitions end up in a militarized conflict. Second, enduring rivalry should be a long term conflict, not a short term one. Third, the conflicting set of states should be consistent. The components of enduring rivalry included competition, time and consistency but not power; in enduring rivalry, a major-minor rivalry exists. There is no connection between state power and rivalry since power is not a constant factor, it may change throughout the rivalry (Diehl & Goertz, 1993).

A study conducted by Diehl (1985) showed that a minimum number of disputes should occur before an enduring rivalry is formed, between 1816 and 1980 different disputes led to enduring rivalries where the minimum number of disputes that preceded an enduring rivalry in that period was three clashes. This implies that enduring rivalry has a starting and an ending date. According to the same study, enduring rivalry is terminated after ten years without a dispute between the same set of states. A different study

conducted by Goertz & Diehl (1995) considers that an enduring rivalry ends when fifteen years pass without disputes occurring between the two parties.

Goertz & Diehl (1995) studied the impact of political shock attributing the initiation or termination of a rivalry to it. “A political shock is the dramatic change in the international system or its subsystems that fundamentally alters the processes, relationships, and expectations that drive nation-state interactions” (Goertz & Diehl, 1995, p. 31). The beginning or end of a particular rivalry should be associated with a dramatic change, it might be a war or a regime change or any other considerable change.

The research conducted by Goertz & Diehl (1995) concluded that over 87% of enduring rivalries start during or within ten years of a political shock and 92.3% experienced their last dispute during or within ten years of the political shock. In reference to the criteria of ending rivalries, the beginning of a rivalry is related to the date of the first dispute and the end date of rivalry can be calculated by adding ten years to the date of the last dispute (Gochman & Maoz, 1984). This study shows the importance of political shock in determining the start or end date of an enduring rivalry.

Strategic Rivalry

The second main theory of rivalry that will be studied in this framework is strategic rivalry theory. Thompson (2001) classified rivalries as a distinctive class of conflict that deal with each other by taking the past into consideration and calculating for the future. He identified the concept of strategic rivalries which are threatening competitors that are categorized as enemies with a minimal number of direct military conflicts. Thompson (2001) discussed how different scholars measure rivalry by calculating the number of disputes in relation to the number of years of these disputes to

prove that a rivalry exists. However, although this might be applicable to some cases but will not identify rivalries in general since not all the rivals experienced direct dense disputes.

The concept of strategic rivalry is associated with conflict where it can be defined as: “relative scarcity and overlapping interests and goals” (Thompson, 2001, p. 559). The intensity of these conflicts can vary between intense conflict and intense cooperation; this stand can be identified by the goals that states want to achieve. The idea of conflict is directly related to achieving material and nonmaterial goals. Since the desired goods or objects are scarce, then someone’s gain is someone else’s loss (Colaesi, Rasler, & Thompson, 2008). An important point raised by Thompson (2001) is that some states highly cooperate and the relation between them is classified as a special one; that usually happens if they share common goals or they share common race, culture and language.

This classification of special relations can help in analyzing the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. The two countries do not share any common culture, language or race and their goals at odds with each other in the region. Although Saudi Arabia and Iran share a common religion which is Islam but they belong to different sects of Islam which made the difference more dominant than the commonalities. According to the theory of strategic rivals, states with intense conflict realize each other as a threat for goal attainment. Strategic rivals are determined by policy makers belonging to those countries, they do not only express explicitly in identifying their rival, but rather they bias activities related to that rival (Colaesi et al., 2008).

There are two sets of rivals, one between states with equal powers and the other between states with unequal powers. The former tends towards having more intense

conflict since they cannot impose their will on each other because of their equal or balanced power. The second set of states usually faces a short term rivalry as one dyad will be able to coerce the other. States with unequal powers are less likely regarded as rivals because of this asymmetry of power. However, some exceptions exist; the American-Cuban rivalry existed for a long period knowing that they have unequal powers.

According to the theory of strategic rivalry, not all states with intense conflicts are strategic rivals; strategic rivals should meet the following criteria: first, they should be competitors. Second, the threat that exists between them should pose a possibility of a militarized conflict. Third, the two states should be classified as enemies (Colaresi et al., 2008). Threatening enemies that are competitors are rivals but when there is a possibility of military attack between these rivals then this can be considered a strategic rivalry (Thompson, 2001). These types of rivalries can last for generations and they are not usually announced in an official way. An important factor is that strategic rivals should be independent states and this is important in studying rivalries in the middle east as a lot of non-state actors exist but they cannot be considered strategic rivals. A crucial factor pointed out by the theory of strategic rivalry is that interrupted period of rivalry are considered separated ones. One strategic rivalry is a continuous one without any interruptions.

The literature review included the two main schools or theories of rivalry which are the enduring and strategic rivalry. According to the theory of the enduring rivalry, the short term rivalries are excluded unlike the strategic rivalry which sets no minimum duration; militarized conflict is a must and it emphasizes on the consistency of conflict

between the dyads. On the other hand, the strategic rivalry school conceptualization is based on perception rather than action where the severe forms of competition are regarded unlike that of the enduring rivalry that identifies rivalries regardless of the severity of competition.

The definition of enduring rivalry and strategic rivalry has a common element which is the competition and the threat perception. However, the difference between the two schools is the absence of enemy identification (Thompson, 2001). The enduring rivalry theory measures rivalry by its density which contradicts with the strategic rivalry school that does not believe in the necessity of a militarized conflict for a rivalry to be formed. We can conclude out of this framework that the Saudi-Iranian relationship is not regarded as rivalry according to the enduring theory simply because not direct militarized conflict occurred between the two states. However, according to the characteristics of strategic rivalry, Saudi Arabia and Iran had been in a state of rivalry since the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979.

The effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry have been discussed by regional analysts; Zweiri (2016) considered the Saudi-Iranian rivalry the best framework to understand domestic political struggles in the region where each country is trying to widen its influence in the region. Grumet (2015) argued that the Saudi-Iranian rivalry is a new cold war that redresses the strategic imbalance of regional politics in Middle Eastern countries. Saouli (2014) had linked geopolitical rivalries to political stability in regional states by claiming that more polarized regional politics lead to more instability in regional states.

The studies conducted on rivalry mainly focus on conceptualizing rivalry and identifying world rivals. The comparison of the two theories helped us in identifying the Iranian-Saudi rivalry as a strategic rivalry; however, the effects of these rivalries were not mapped out. The literature of rivalry understudies its effects on other countries; this research will cover this gap. The commonalities shown between the two theories of rivalry will allow us to generalize the results of this study on both types of rivalries.

Proposition

Although different scholars have discussed the effects of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on regional order, regional allies, stability of neighboring states, etc.; however, the multi-faceted effects of rivalry on domestic politics in third states was under-studied. This paper seeks to demonstrate three effects of rivalry. The hypothesis that is intended to be tested in this study is that rivalry has destabilizing effects on domestic politics in regional states.

Chapter 2: Cooperation and Hostility in the Saudi-Iranian Relations

Origins of the Rivalry

The literature review in the first chapter of the thesis had categorized two main types of rivalries and identified their elements. By examining the historical relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia we find that they fall into the category of strategic rivals over dominating power in the region. On one hand, Iran is developing its nuclear technology, working extensively on developing missiles and increasing its arms expenditure. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is increasing its military expenditures drastically especially in the last five years (Tharoor, 2016). This arms race between Saudi-Arabia and Iran is a result of the threat that each country poses over the other which represents an important pillar of rivalry between the two states.

The onset of the modern rivalry between Saudi-Arabia and Iran was in 1979 which was triggered by the eruption of the Islamic revolution in Iran; however, the historic roots of the modern rivalry between the two countries trace back to the establishment of the third Saudi State by Abdulaziz Al Saud known as Ibn Saud in 1902 AD. The placement of the two holy places of Islam, Mecca and Medina under the guardianship of Al Saud family alarmed other Islamic countries such as Egypt and Iran. At that time, Iran was rising as a regional power with Reza Shah supported by the British with a mission to prevent the communists from taking over Persia (Ghods, 1991). While Iran became an important player in international politics, Saudi Arabia had managed to get unified by gaining religious legitimacy for Al Saud as the leaders of the country (Ayoob & Kosebalaban, 2009). In contrast to the Saudi governance approach, Reza Shah

believed that religious traditions kept Iran backward and aimed for a secular country imitating Ataturk's Modernization movement.

The rise of the Saudi State had terrified Reza Shah especially that the former emerged as a regional competitor which turned out to be in the future a regional rival not only a competitor. Moreover, territorial concerns existed especially that Iran had claimed historically several territories in Arabia (Zahlan, 1989). These territorial disputes between Saudi-Arabia and Iran were complicated by religious distinctions which created a strong base for the dyadic rivalry especially after the rise of Wahhabism in the Peninsula. One of the main results of this competition is the territorial disagreement on Bahrain in which Iran considers a part of Persia; the conflict was not resolved until late 1970s.

Despite the competition between the Shah and the King, a friendship treaty between Saudi Arabia and Iran was signed on August 24, 1929 in Tehran which highlighted basic diplomatic, commercial and political ties between the two countries. Although this treaty marked up the bilateral relations of the two countries, but the rivalry was never terminated (Altoraifi, 2012). Multi-dimensional differences had always existed between Persia and Arabia that dates back to the 7th century when Arabs conquered Persia and spread Islam, at that time the Sunni faith was dominant. However, in the 16th century the Safavid dynasty ruled Persia and converted it to a Shiite state which created differences after between Ottomans which were ruling the Arabian countries and Safavid Persians (Tzemprin, Jozić, & Lambaré, 2015).

During Reza Shah's reign, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry was limited to regional competition, the reason behind that is the fact that Reza Shah focused on what so called modernization of Iran, giving domestic politics a priority. The two countries were at the

early stages of exporting oil and the sectarian differences did not contribute to trigger a rivalry as Reza Shah was not a religious person and was leading a secular reform transformation in Iran. At the beginning of the Second World War, both Saudi Arabia and Iran took a neutral stand; however, Saudi Arabia supported the allies in 1941. The Allies requested Reza Shah to allow transit routes for military supplies and to expel the German expatriates, the former refused and insisted on his neutrality which led to the latter's invasion of Iran and forced Reza Shah to step down in favor of his son Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Altoraifi, 2012).

The Saudi-Iranian Relations between 1941-1979

The British presence in the region was linked to protecting its interests in India and not related to a direct interest in the Gulf. The minor benefit for the British presence was that the Gulf countries created a market for some British goods. It is important to note that at that time these countries were poor, relying on pearling as a main source of income (Hurewitz, 1972). This situation changed in the 1930s with the discovery of oil in the Gulf. Britain had improved its relations with Muhammad Reza Shah to have access to Iran's oil while Saudi Arabia reduced the British power over its economy by granting oil concessions to Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) in 1933 which increased the American power in the country (Gasiorowski, 1987).

The competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia was degraded during Muhammad Reza Shah until 1943 when Saudi Arabia executed an Iranian pilgrim that was accused of throwing excrement at the Ka'ba in Mecca. This incident led to the cut of the diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 1944 and the withdrawal of the representatives of the two countries. In 1947 the relations were restored after a letter from

King Abdulaziz to the Shah and a positive response from the latter (Altoraifi, 2012). This incident shows the fragility of the Saudi-Iranian relations, a single case lead to the termination of the diplomatic relations between the two neighboring countries. The Diplomatic crisis of the 1943 Hajj season between Iran and Saudi Arabia reflects the complexity of the relationship by which rivalry escalates in certain periods and diminishes in others but never fades away proving the statement that the two countries are: “neither natural allies nor natural enemies but natural rivals.”(Tadjbakhsh, 2013, p: 15).

The relationship between Saudi-Arabia and Iran at that time can be classified as a competition that was based on multi-dimensional differences that were enhanced by other factors such as creating a threat to each other by leading an arms race in the region. Throughout the history of Saudi-Iranian relations, we can examine periods of friendship and high cooperation that was interrupted by small incidents and transformed into periods of intense competition that was always shaped by regional dynamics. This nature in the relationship between the two countries proves that they had a strong base ready for being strategic rivals; the missing part was the onset of rivalry.

One of the incidents that interrupted the Saudi-Iranian friendship was the Baghdad Pact of 1955 which was initiated by the American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that aimed to form a collective defense alliance against the Soviets. Iran signed the pact while Saudi Arabia opposed it as it undermined its power as a regional player as the Kingdom was not given any special position (Altoraifi, 2012). This might indicate that the presence of multiple pro-West regional powers, USA had not given

priority to Saudi Arabia in terms of alliance. Americans might have seen more potential in other allies such as Iran.

Regardless of the Saudi-Iranian disagreement about the Baghdad Pact of 1955 which was meant to create a regional alliance to contain the Soviet expansion, a new challenge rose in the Middle East and united the two countries against their common threat which was Nasserism. Saudi-Arabia had great concerns regarding the rise of Arab nationalism that was embedded in the ideas of President Gamal Abdul Nasser. He was known for his pan-Arab nationalistic ideas which he managed to gain through a huge support among the Arab public. This continuous rise of Nasserism divided the Middle East into two groups, one supporting Nasser and the other supporting the monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and Iran (Altoraifi, 2012).

Competition between the two countries had reached a high level caused by the ambitions to control the region. After Britain had announced its withdrawal from the Persian Gulf or what was called East of Suez in 1968, the equilibrium of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia was threatened and a vacuum of power started to be visible. The British knew about the Shah ambitions to have primacy in the Gulf and they had recognized that Iran has the capabilities to dominate in the region as a main power over Saudi Arabia (Alvandi, 2012). The fear from such ambitions was to spark the Arab-Iranian hostility and thus threaten the British economic interests in the region. Between the British withdrawal in 1968 and President Nixon's ascendance to power in the US in 1969, President Johnson did not establish a clear policy towards the Gulf which increased the Saudi-Iranian competition over the domination of the Gulf. Alvandi (2012) reported

that: “Although the Americans wanted to stay out of the middle of this rivalry, the shah worried that Johnson had conspired with the British against Iran” (p. 344).

In light of the American Presidential elections, a new policy was followed known as the ‘Nixon Doctrine’ which is based on containing the Soviet influence by providing material and military assistance to the regional allies of the US without direct military intervention. The Middle East became a synonym for oil by producing more than 30% of the total international oil production by 1971 (Hurewitz, 1972). American policy makers poured their attention on the region to protect their interests in its oil fields. At the same time, the Iranian and Saudi rulers were in good harmony with the American administration aiming to get a greater support and thus dominate the region. Muhammad Reza Shah had strong relations with Nixon; he had convinced him that with the military support of US, Iran will be capable of handling the power vacuum in the region after the British withdrawal. Nixon’s strategy had improved the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran and brought up areas of high cooperation between the two countries. Since both regional powers are allied with US, they had to cooperate on economic, diplomatic and military matters.

Nixon’s aim to achieve strategic advantage was implemented by supporting Iran and Saudi Arabia as main powers in the Middle East. For the Americans, Saudi Arabia was able to play a leading role in the region but not a dominant one, which urged the cooperation with Iran; this strategy was known as the twin pillar policy (Altorai, 2012). This high cooperation period lasted until 1979 when the Islamic revolution occurred in Iran. It is expected from two regional powers that are supported by the same global power to cooperate; however, their relation was not stable in terms of cooperation. One can say

that Iran and Saudi Arabia have enough similarities to be long lasting allies; nevertheless rivalry was always interrupting this cooperation. Economically, the two countries are oil producing countries that ally with the same power which is providing military support to both countries. The two countries are monarchies with an anti-Soviet regime that united them against many local threats such as Nasser but still hostility was peeking out every now and then. The twin pillar policy that was implemented by President Nixon did not succeed in ending the rivalry between Saudi-Arabia and Iran on being the leading power in the region.

Regardless of the existing status-quo in the region, the Shah believed that Iran should have primacy in the Gulf and for this aim he visited Washington twice hoping to establish a 'special relationship' between Iran and the US but he failed in both his visits in 1968 and 1969. The American administration was trying to receive the Shah and please him in many ways to compensate the rejection of his request but the Shah was leaving Washington disappointed (Alvandi, 2012). However, the American policy started to tilt towards Iran in 1970 as the Nixon administration believed that Iran is the most stable and powerful state in the region. Nevertheless, this decision was not implemented easily as the Americans had to be careful not to threaten their relationship with the Saudi's. The options that the American policy makers had in terms of their relations and alliances with the Gulf countries were discussed in a meeting for the National Security Council. The National advisors argued: "The logical strategy lies in marrying what is already in fact extensive support for Iran as the unquestioned power in the area with the logic of cooperation between a strong Iran and a weak Saudi Arabia. We are not likely to

diminish our relationship with Iran; we do not want to have to choose between Iran and Saudi Arabia; Saudi-Iranian cooperation is the optimum.” (NSC Memorandum, 1970).

The American strategy of promoting a twin pillar policy in the region led to high cooperation periods between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Shah and King Faisal met at the Islamic summit conference in Rabat in 1969 and the former promised the latter that regardless of the inability to reach a security agreement between the two countries, Iran will always support Saudi Arabia in its crises. This promise was materialized few months after the Rabat meeting when South Yemeni forces tried to invade Saudi Arabia, Iran responded positively to the Saudi Request to provide military support by sending the needed military equipment to push the Yemeni forces back (Telegram 34, 1970). The cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iran reached its peak in 1973 when the Shah was discussing with Henry Kissinger the willingness of Iran to protect Saudi Arabia against any Soviet-backed or Arab Nationalist-backed coup (NSC Archive, 2009). The United States succeeded in suppressing the Saudi-Iranian rivalry for a certain period; however it was triggered again by the 1979 revolution.

This meeting might have proved that the Americans regarded Iran as the powerful state in the region and not Saudi-Arabia, they promoted the cooperation but they tilted towards depending on Iran more than Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the Saudi's had limitations that prevented them from playing a regional role such as the rise of Arab nationalism; where extraordinary support for Saudi Arabia will open the floor towards the accusations of imperialism by Arab Nationalist which were socialists at that time. Saudi-Arabia was concerned about the domestic mobilization of Arab politics which impacted their position towards rivalry. In contrast, Iran did not have any concerns related to the

Arab Nationalist wave; therefore, it had the chance to play the primary regional role more than Saudi Arabia.

An important milestone in the Saudi-Iranian relations goes back to the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. Iran sympathized with the Arab states and extended material support by sending medical aid equipment, pilots and planes to Saudi Arabia to help logistically in supporting the Arabs against Israel. It banned the transfer of Jews from different parts of the world to Israel via Tehran and allowed the civilian Soviet planes carrying military equipment to overflight (Ramazani, 1978). Although Iran have had a different attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict before 1973 war, this change in its foreign policy might be considered a reward to the friendly regime of Anwar Al-Sadat in Egypt. Iran and Saudi Arabia were the main pillars of the oil embargo decision and their cooperation made a shift in the history of OPEC, the prices of oil increased drastically which benefitted both countries. The agreement and cooperation over the Arab-Israeli conflict reduced the intensity of rivalry between Saudi-Arabia and Iran which sparked again in 1979. Despite the fact that the Saudi-Iranian competition had multi-dimensional roots that were causing periods of hostility between the two countries; however, cooperation existed and reached a high level in the pre-revolution period. Iran and Saudi Arabia were both supported by the US, the two leaders were anti-Soviet and both countries were anti-Arab nationalism, the Baathist regime in Iraq created a threat to both countries, etc. all these common issues lead to high cooperation between the two countries.

The Saudi-Iranian Relations after 1979

The existing competition between Saudi-Arabia and Iran remained on the same tune until 1979 and the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran which is considered the onset moment of rivalry between the two countries. The Islamists in Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini managed to put an end to the Pahlavi rule and establish an Islamic regime based on the Twelver Shiite Doctrine. One of the main world views of the new regime is being anti-American and anti-imperialist which changed the political scene in the Middle East and transformed 1979 into a remarkable year in the history of the region.

The rise of Khomeini's regime broke the balance of power that was maintained by the US between Iran and Saudi Arabia and introduced a new dimension of the rivalry between the two countries. Although the Saudi-Iranian relationship was not stable before the Islamic revolution; however, the change in the regime gave this relationship a new shape that never existed before. One of the main points of disputes between Saudi Arabia and Iran is the willingness of the latter to export its revolution which threatened the monarchial regimes in the Gulf. "The aftermath of revolution saw Iran pursue an aggressive foreign policy that claimed to export the ideological beliefs of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini." (Mabon, 2013: 49).

The Iranian revolution broke the previous alliances in the region and altered the source of threat which can be considered the onset of the modern dyadic rivalry. In the pre-revolutionary era, the rise of Arab nationalism in Iraq was perceived by Iran and Saudi Arabia as a danger. In the post-revolutionary era, Saudi Arabia supported the same nationalistic regime in Iraq in its war against Iran. Saudi Arabia fought Iran indirectly by

allowing the Iraqi air forces to operate from the Saudi bases (Fürtig, 2007). Rivalry was increasing between the two countries until it reached an advanced level in 1987 with the crisis that happened in Mecca. During the Hajj season of 1987, over 150,000 Iranian pilgrims came to Mecca to perform the fifth pillar of Islam which over 400 of them was killed in clashes with the Saudi armed forces.

As a response to these deaths, the Saudi embassy in Tehran was attacked and a diplomat was killed. The Iranians decided to boycott the Hajj but this decision lasted for three years only and the diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia were cut (Mabon, 2013). This remained the case until the Second Gulf war when Iraq invaded Kuwait. The Iraqi former President Saddam Hussein wanted to restore what he called the '19th Iraqi Province' which is Kuwait and news were circulated that he might continue to reach the oil wells of Al-Hasa. Saddam's leadership ambition threatened the Saudis and altered their position to end up with Iran sharing the same position against Iraq but this time in a more serious situation than that of the 60s and 70s. The diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were restored on March 19, 1991 and the Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani urged the Iranians to restore the pilgrimage trips to Mecca (Fürtig, 2007). These periods of boycott and restoring relations mark up the track of rivalry between the two countries in the post-revolution era.

President Rafsanjani intended to stabilize the relations between Iran and the GCC by increasing the communication in the post-war period and thus minimize the role of the US in the region. The bilateral relations improved with President Mohammad Khatami coming to power which visited Saudi Arabia in 1999 (Terrill, 2011). This visit was the first presidential one in the post-revolution history. However, the efforts of Rafsanjani

and Khatami were not enough to discard the rivalry between the two countries as the Supreme leader of the revolution had his own power especially that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The authority of the Supreme leader and the succession of President Ahmedinejad to power in 2005 who was not interested in improving the ties with Saudi Arabia deteriorated the relations and therefore increased the tension of rivalry between the two countries.

Being more hostile than his predecessor, the presidency term of Ahmedinejad intensified the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and this was caused by the political situation in the region after the American invasion of Iraq and the Iranian nuclear ambitions. The war on Taliban and the invasion of Iraq by the United States removed two Iranian foes from the political scene. Iran was prompt in exploiting the situation and spreading its power in Iraq which was supported by the demographics of the latter. By supporting the Shia of Iraq, Iran was portrayed itself as the supported of the Shia groups which were oppressed by Saddam Hussein (Barzegar, 2010). The military and ideological support of Iran to Shiite groups in Iraq strengthened the former's role in the region which itself intensified the rivalry with Saudi-Arabia.

The threat perception between Saudi Arabia and Iran increased after the Iranian negotiations with the p5+1¹ regarding developing its nuclear technology. As a response,

¹ The P5+1 refers to the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council; Russia, United States, United Kingdom, France and China plus Germany. The P5=1 group was negotiating with Iran the nuclear deal agreement which is considered a framework deal to limit Iran's sensitive nuclear activity. The deal was finalized in 2015, for more information please refer to the following link: <https://www.armscontrol.org/pressroom/press-release/2015-07-14/P5-Plus-1-Nations-and-Iran-Reach-Historic-Nuclear-Deal>

Saudi Arabia tried to immunize itself by increasing its military expenditures to encounter the Iranian threat by which it was classified as the 2nd largest importer of weapons in the world after India (Norton-Taylor, 2016). Rivalry remained in its high range and was reinforced in the so-called “Arab Spring” where Saudi-Arabia and Iran had different views on these uprisings. The two countries supported opposing groups where this support reached an extent of fighting proxy wars. Both Saudi-Arabia and Iran saw the opportunity in the Arab Spring uprisings to evolve as the regional power which raised the level of rivalry between them.

Conclusion

Although Saudi Arabia and Iran are competing on being the dominating power in the Middle East; nevertheless, there was no direct confrontation between them which supports the arguments that the two states are strategic rivals. The two countries had fought indirectly through proxy wars in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, etc. but no war had erupted directly between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Since the change of the Pahlavi regime in Iran and the rivalry between the two countries had taken different dimensions such as a sectarian conflict, disagreement over the nuclear deal, support of non-state actors in the region, etc. However, this chapter had showed that rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran had existed for a long time.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran had affected directly different countries in the Middle East. As we move with time, the perception of threat was increased between the two countries and this is one of the main characteristics that differentiate strategic rivals from other types of rivalry by considering the perception. The two countries had fought proxy wars in some countries by supporting different

armed groups in these countries. Lebanon is one of the countries that got affected by this rivalry primarily in the political decision given the fact that some Lebanese factions support Iran and others support Saudi Arabia. The effect of this rivalry will be studied later in chapter four; however, the coming chapter will study the history of external interventions in Lebanon and the structure of the Lebanese political system.

Chapter 3: The Internal Dynamics of Lebanon

The Formation of a Multi-Polar System in Lebanon

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry had largely affected domestic politics in Lebanon because of the hospitable system in the latter state. The confessional nature of the Lebanese system was defined by multi-polarity where each sect had independent governance over its community. This sectarian balance of power made the country highly responsive to external influences, especially regional ones. However, the assassination of PM Rafik Hariri in 2005 changed the status quo and transformed the political system into a bipolar one. This shift in the political system was a result of the change of alliances which invited further intervention of foreign powers. In this chapter, I will focus on the change in the political system with regards to different external interventions in Lebanon which will help in understanding why rivalry highly impacted domestic politics in Lebanon.

The results of the First World War and the implementation of the mandate system in the Levant shaped its countries by transforming polities into formal states with new borders. The creation of the Lebanese State known as 'Grand Liban' was one of the transformations of the region where different cities were added to Mount Lebanon and the result was Greater Lebanon. On September 1, 1920 the formation of the Lebanese state was announced under the French mandate as a new order after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, France had religious and political influence on Lebanon and Syria before the announcement of Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 by which the two countries became under the French mandate (Shorrock, 1970). This influence started by

establishing clerical schools and spreading the culture through education and was intensified by the fact that Christian communities exist in these cities.

Lebanon historically was part of what is known as 'Natural Syria' or 'Greater Syria' which was divided after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire to four countries: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Since France had religious ties with Mount Lebanon and claimed the protection of the Christian communities in the region, the borders of the Lebanese state were drawn on confessional basis and later the political system was built similarly based on the sectarian groups in the country. Cities such as Tyre, Sidon, Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley were added to Mount Lebanon to form the Lebanese state in its current borders. The newly added cities were dominated by a Muslim majority that rejected the French mandate, while the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon were by majority Christians that fully supported building an extended country of Mount Lebanon under the French control which they saw salvation in.

A commission initiated by the American government known as King-Crane commission visited the region in 1919 to investigate the public opinion regarding the mandate system of the League of Nations. The report concluded that the Sunnis preferred to be part of Syria, the Christians supported a French mandate and a full separation from Syria, the Druze strongly rejected a French-dominated Lebanon and the Shiites of Jabal Amil were afraid of both solutions. They wanted to be independent of both the Sunnis and the Christians (Fildis, 2011). This divided confessional scene represents a summary of the Lebanese political system from the formation of the Lebanese state until the start of the civil war in 1975.

The geographical construction of Lebanon yielded a country of slight Christian majority which pushed the French to design the system on a sectarian basis not religious. In other words they did not consider two groups: Muslims and Christians; they considered sects such as Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Sunni, Shia, Druze, etc. Given the fact that the Maronite's were the majority, they got more privilege which was embedded in the system (Maktabi, 1999). This Christian dominance was institutionalized by a ratio six to five Muslims in the government and parliamentary seats. According to the results of the census, the first presidency (President of the state) was given to the Maronite sect, the second presidency (Speaker of the Parliament) was given to the Shiites and the third presidency (Prime Minister) was given to the Sunnis which maintained the balance of power by conserving the multi-polarity of the system which was represented by the rule of different sects.

The first Lebanese constitution came to existence in May 1926, which was extensively influenced by the French constitution adding the sectarian factor to it which is in fact a Lebanese characteristic. The constitution kept on the right of religious communities to manage the personal affairs of those affiliated with them. The personal status law includes marriage, divorce, heritage, children guardianship, endowments, etc. given this fact each Lebanese citizen is obliged to belong to a religious community as the country lacks a unified civil law for all its citizens, each should abide to the laws of the sect (Crow, 1962). Sectarianism was not only regulating political posts (the three presidencies) and the parliament seats; it was extended to the non-elective aspects of the government. All administrative, judiciary, diplomatic and military positions holders were assigned taking into consideration their sects. Since sectarianism was highly

institutionalized by the state, then it is expected to have this characteristic spread over the non-governmental organizations including the charitable ones, the political parties and even the lives of individuals.

One of the main channels that assisted in transforming the community into a sectarian one is the educational system. Since the 18th and 19th century, foreign missionaries came to Lebanon and they started establishing schools. Those religious schools are still present till now and they operate under the administration of religious institutions (Crow, 1962). A big proportion of the Lebanese students attend religious schools not governmental or secular private schools which allow the sectarian ideas to get embedded in their minds since childhood. Although the idea of religious schools started with Christians in Lebanon as Catholic missionaries were coming from France and Protestant coming from America, Muslims started having their own schools as well. Education acted as a tool of facilitating external intervention in Lebanon, by growing the sectarian mentality different Lebanese factions started having loyalty to foreign countries believing that these powers will protect them and guarantee their rights in Lebanon and this is still the case as we speak. The fact of different groups having loyalty to other countries is still governing the political decision in Lebanon and this one of the core ideas of this study.

The balance of power in Lebanon was maintained by external powers especially Syria which was ruling the country politically and militarily. One of the main allies of Syria internally was Hizbullah which was financed mostly by Iran; this alliance created an axis known as the axis of resistance consisting of Syria, Iran, Hizbullah and Hamas. However, there is an important political component that shared the power with Hizbullah

and Syria, PM Rafik Hariri that became the Prime Minister in 1992. Having close ties with the Saudi royal family, PM Hariri enjoyed a large network of powerful connections not only among the Arab region but internationally (Postmaa, 2014). The mission of PM Hariri was to rebuild the country after the destruction of the civil war and establish a new economic system.

The pro-western PM Hariri managed to achieve a substantial progress in his mission and succeeded to become the Sunni leader. He established the future movement which gained supporters in all the country especially among the Sunnis. Since its establishment, the future movement represented the Saudi influence in Lebanon. Similar to the Iranian influence represented by Hizbullah, the presence of the future movement represented the Saudi influence by its entire means (members of the parliament, ministers, newspaper, television channel, etc.). Lebanon was ruled by a Syrian-Hizbullah-Hariri cooperation until the escalation of the Sunni-Shiite conflict in the region after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Conflicts between the Syrians and PM Hariri started to appear in public ending by the assassination of PM Hariri in 2005.

The Transformation from Multi-Polarity to Bi-Polarity

The assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri marked a new era in the Lebanese political scene and changed the political dynamics of the country by changing the system from multi-polar to bi-polar. On February 14, 2005 a massive bomb exploded in central Beirut targeting the former PM Rafik Hariri, his close associate minister Basel Fleihan and 20 of his bodyguards. This political earthquake had the biggest repercussions on the country; although the history of the Lebanese state is filled

with political assassinations but this event altered the balance of power in the country (Knio, 2008).

Despite the Syrian intervention in Lebanese politics in the pre-2005 era, the political system was adaptive of the external influence. However, the assassination of Hariri changed the playing field and pushed Lebanon into political uncertainty. Two regional arch-rivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran, found a platform to exert their influence and widen their support base. The weak political system of Lebanon was at the stake in the renewed regional rivalry.

This assassination resulted in the eruption of the ‘cedar revolution’ which as a consequence led to the withdrawal of the Syrian army that have been present in Lebanon since 1976 and the replacement of its influence with a direct Iranian one. At the same time, the Saudi influence which existed for a long time was increasing due to the political transformations. The two powers treated Lebanon as a theatre where their rivalry was demonstrated in all the political crises the country was facing.

The ‘Cedar Revolution’ divided the Lebanese political parties into two alliances. The first alliance known as ‘March 8’ which is the date when a huge protest was held in Beirut, it represents political parties that are pro-Syria such as Hizbullah, Amal party and others. The second alliance known as ‘March 14’ which also refers to the date of the protest later called ‘Cedar Revolution’ consists of political parties that are in the opposition and are calling for expelling Syrians from the country (Haddad, 2009).

This assassination transformed the political system in Lebanon into a bipolar one where the Saudi-Iranian rivalry was clearly reflected. The increased popular demand succeeded in expelling the Syrians out of the county where almost 14,000 Syrian armed

troops withdrew completely in April 2005. A new parliamentary election was held in May 2005 where March 14 alliance managed to gain most of the seats in the parliament and form the government accordingly (Knudsen, 2010). This political advancement has increased the Saudi influence in the country as its local allies managed to form a government that is free of any Iranian influence.

The end of the 29-years military occupation by the Syrian army marked an end for the Syrian direct intervention in the Lebanese political scheme. The public opposition against the Syrian presence had forced the intervention of Iran instead of Syria and the two regional powers that influence the political decision making in Lebanon after 2005 became Iran and Saudi Arabia. Hizbullah decided to join the executive branch of the power for the first time in 2005 after the withdrawal of the Syrians from Lebanon (Zisser, 2011). This might indicate that the Saudi-Iranian rivalry started to show its reflection in the Lebanese political scene through the allies of both countries. On a domestic level, rivalry was increasing between the Saudi supported Future Movement and the Iranian backed Hizbullah. The events of 2005 had triggered the Sunni-Shiite conflict in the country which opened the scene for more repercussions of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. This volatility in the political situation related to the sectarian conflict in the country which sparked in 2005 and was intensified by the rivalry of the regional powers Saudi Arabia and Iran. "Sunnis in Lebanon feel increasingly marginalized and humiliated by an all-powerful Hezbollah." (Salem, 2015, p: 5).

External Intervention in Lebanon

The Lebanese system before 2005 was defined by multi-polarity and after 2005 became defined by bi-polarity; however, the common factor is that foreign intervention was periodically invited by both systems. Foreign intervention existed before the creation of the Lebanese state. Different groups in this area were receiving support from external countries long time back in history. Among those we mention the special relation between the Shiite population of Jabal Amil and the Safavid state in Iran when the former were under the Mamluk and Ottoman occupation. The Safavids were not able to protect the Shiite population; rather they encouraged them to immigrate to Iran. Another notable example is the French intervention in the civil war of 1860 in Mount Lebanon; French corps were stationed in Mount Lebanon which was under the Ottoman occupation to protect the Christian community. The French managed to finalize a deal with the Ottomans to transform Mount Lebanon into a 'Mutassarifiyah' and assign a Christian governor to rule it.

The modern Lebanese state consists of eighteen communities, thus it does not regard individuals but rather considers sectarian groups; the system did not impose a civil law that would recognize the citizens as equal individuals but rather they should abide by their sect law. These characteristics led to a country that is not a 'model state' or a 'Westphalian state' and therefore the government failed to have a legitimate monopoly over power or to be sovereign and block any external intervention in its internal affairs (Mansour, 2017). Considering that a 'state' definition does not necessarily apply to Lebanon will help us in understanding why the history of Lebanon is full of foreign interventions and why armed groups exist in Lebanon in the presence of a legitimate

government. Three major interventions in the Lebanese domestic politics will be highlighted below.

The Crisis of 1958

After the independence from France, nationalism started to rise rapidly in Lebanon especially among the educated class of the society which had a long history in criticizing colonialism. Nationalists emphasized on the importance of technical modernization along with nationalist education to create a high stage of civilization and compete with the West (Schumann, 2001). In 1958, Egypt and Syria formed together what was known as United Arab Republic (UAR) and the nationalists in the Levant were all looking towards this unification. On the contrary, the government in Lebanon headed by President Camille Chamoun was pro-Western insisting on the importance of ties between Lebanon and the West especially US and France. President Chamoun's tilt towards favoring the West was intensified after the 1956 Suez Crisis and that was one of the reasons of 1958 Crisis in Lebanon (Baroudi, 2006).

The public in Lebanon was divided among two groups, the first loyal to the President Chamoun and is constituted by a majority of Christians. The second group is pro nationalism and is constituted of Muslim majority and some Christians. President Chamoun refused to cut the ties with France and Britain during the 1956 Suez war in Egypt and by this Lebanon was the only Arab country to keep on the relations with these countries which exaggerated the public opposition to him (Labelle, 2013). Chamoun's acceptance of Eisenhower Doctrine which is emphasizes the importance of "preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of the Middle East" (Wright, 1959, 113).

As per this doctrine, US have the right to intervene militarily to defend the sovereignty and independence of Middle Eastern States.

The sectarian identity played a role in the crisis by which the President had to confront not only the Muslim opposition but the Christian one headed by the Maronite Patriarch Paul Meouchi. The integration of politics and religion in the country give the clergy a remarkable political power. The Patriarch at that time was anti-American and did not favor the West. He preferred to support the Arab causes to gain the loyalty of Lebanese Muslims to the republic and consequently he refused the Baghdad pact which aimed to put the region militarily under the American control (Baroudi, 2006). The Patriarch's efforts could not restrain the Lebanese government from accepting the Eisenhower doctrine in early 1957 and requesting the American President to send troops to protect the elected government in Lebanon. President Chamoun accused the UAR of interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs and this was one of the justifications raised to accept the Eisenhower doctrine.

In a message to the American Congress, President Eisenhower wrote that a revolt was supported by the Egypt, Syria and the Soviet Union to overthrow the Lebanese government and the UN did not take enough actions to prevent this aggression; therefore, US has to play its role as a superpower and intervene militarily "when Lebanon may not be able to preserve internal order and to defend itself against indirect aggression" (Wright, 1959, 113). McAlexander (2011) considered that media had an influence on shaping Eisenhower's policy towards Lebanon by spreading the idea that a non-intervention from US would lead to a disaster similar to that of WWII.

The rejection of President Chamoun to recognize the newly formed UAR in 1958 and the endorsement of the Eisenhower Doctrine, pro-Nasser started to protest in Beirut which led to Eisenhower's authorization of deployment of US troops in Beirut to restore order. Protests increased after the death of a Christian member of the opposition called Nasib al-Matni who was an editor at the same time. These demonstrations took an aggressive anti-American tone and chaos started to spread all over the country. US government accused Syria and Egypt of supporting the 'rebels' and encouraging them to overthrow the government. The opposition started to condemn Chamoun's pro-American policy and an intensive campaign started on all media channels, radios and newspapers against the American intervention.

The chaotic situation in the country was caused by two groups in which the first is loyal to the West and the second is loyal to Nasser. This is similar to the case studied in chapter 4 where two political groups were formed, the first loyal to Saudi Arabia and the second to Iran. On July 14, 1958, US government sent 14,000 marine personnel to Beirut to protect the lives of American citizens in Lebanon and restore order by defending the Lebanese sovereignty and integrity (Labelle, 2013). By end of July of the same year, General Fouad Chehab succeeded Chamoun to presidency which signaled an end of the crisis. On October 8, 1958, US announced an agreement with the Lebanese government to withdraw all its troops from the country (Wright, 1959).

The Palestinian Presence in Lebanon

Lebanon became involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948 by participating in the first war against Israel. Since then, Palestinian refugees started to reside in neighboring countries such as Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The Arab defeat in 1967 war

changed the dynamics of politics in the region; one of its main outcomes was the emergence of armed Palestinian nationalism. The leaders of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) refused the defeat and started calling for struggle against Israel. Since then, Lebanon had become the de facto theatre for Palestinian operations against Israel (El Khazen, 1997).

The two Arab countries that were affected the most by these military operations were Jordan and Lebanon; however, Jordan had expelled the leaders of PLO in September 1970 and thus all the operations were moved to Lebanon. The transformation of Lebanon as a battlefield by the PLO attracted Arab and Israeli intervention in the Lebanese political affairs. The Lebanese army tried to suppress the movement of the Palestinian militias but they couldn't control the refugee camps in the country. Syria and Egypt were exercising external pressure to keep on the Palestinian operations on the Lebanese land and the result was the Cairo agreement of 1969. This agreement gave the right to PLO to be present militarily in the country and to be responsible for the security of the refugee camps. In return, PLO has to respect the Lebanese sovereignty and security (Sorby, 2012). It is not clear what sovereignty the Palestinians have to respect in Lebanon knowing that they had the autonomous right of performing military operations.

The Lebanese army had tried to suppress the PLO in a second attempt in 1973; however, the result was that internal and external pressure was exercised and the attempt failed. The situation returned back to its previous status as interpreted by what was called the "Milkart Protocols". These protocols refer to a non-formal agreement between the PLO and the Lebanese army by which the former kept on its recognition as an armed group on the Lebanese territories (Brynen, 1989). The situation remained the same

between 1973 and 1975 with the Lebanese public divided into two groups, one group supporting the Palestinian presence in Lebanon and the other group opposing it. On April 13, 1975 the civil war erupted and the security situation deteriorated.

The common factor between the various external interventions in Lebanon is that it leads to the division of the society into two groups where each is loyal to a different foreign power. The Lebanese political system became highly hospitable to external influences and that was embedded in the constitution and the National Pact. The idea that there should always be an external power dominating the political scene in Lebanon justifies how the Saudi-Iranian rivalry had a strong effect on political decision in Lebanon.

The Syrian Intervention

On April 13, 1975 the Lebanese civil war erupted and lasted for almost 15 year. The conflict started with the Phalangist a Christian Party headed by Bachir Gemayel and the Palestinian Resistance Movement. The conflict was expanded to include the participation of the right-wing Christian parties which formed the Lebanese Front against the nationalist leftist parties along with the Palestinian groups that formed the National Movement. The first wanted to keep of the confessional political system and was fighting against the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon. The second wanted to change the system and defend the rights of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon to resist the Israeli occupation of their country (Rasler, 1983).

The situation deteriorated in the country after the bombardment of the Palestinian refugee camps and the division of the Lebanese army where its soldiers joined the fighting each supporting a different party. In June 1976, a full-scale Syrian intervention

began in Lebanon to fight with the Lebanese Front against the Leftist-Palestinian alliance. The conflict of 1976 ended in October with the Riyadh Conference which resulted in a cease-fire and the Arab recognition of Syria's peace-keeping role in Lebanon by establishing a Deterrent Force composed mainly of Syrian troops (Rasler, 1983). Riyadh conference managed to end the conflict but not the civil war. However, these events can be considered the beginning of the Saudi-Syrian intervention in Lebanon.

The roots of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry studied in chapter 4 of this thesis originate from these events where Syria and Saudi-Arabia played the role of the political godfather of particular political parties. The Syrian military presence remained till 2005 and then was replaced by Iranian direct influence. The Syrian military presence in Lebanon was brokered by the United States by which the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was aiming to improve the relations with Syria and thus end the hostility between Israel and its neighbors (Salloukh, 2005). The Syrian position towards the Arab-Israeli issue did not change and it affected its relations with the Lebanese Christian parties that were trying to seek closer ties with Israel.

The shift in the Syrian foreign policy towards Lebanon was reflected in its alliances, after 1978 Syria started to strengthen its relations with the Shiite population in the country. The Syrian regime was facing sectarian tensions in Syria since the Alawites were not recognized as orthodox Muslims. However, President Hafiz Al-Asad gained religious and political legitimacy when Imam Musa Al-Sadr, a prominent Shiite cleric and the leader of the Amal Movement, issued a fatwa recognizing Alawis as Shiites (Abukhalil, 1990). In the same period, Hizbullah was rising and was regarded as an

extremist party that has common interests with Syria. These interests included expelling the Israelis out of Lebanon and ending the presence of the multi-national troops. In addition, Syria and the Islamic regime in Iran were allies which facilitated the establishment of good relations between Syria and Hizbullah which was regarded as an extension of the Iranian regime at that time.

The civil war ended by signing the Taif agreement in Saudi Arabia in 1989 by which all the militias were disarmed except for Hizbullah that was classified as a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation. Syria managed to stay in Lebanon although if Taif agreement was fully implemented then Syria would have been forced to leave. All the anti-Syrian leaders were removed from power or sent to jail or exile. Syrian intelligence officers played an important role in shaping inter and intra-confessional electoral alliances to guarantee that pro-Syrian candidates will remain in power (Salloukh, 2005). The Syrian order was maintained in Lebanon by establishing a mutual security apparatus to control the country. Technically, the Syrian intelligence was controlling the country.

Chapter 4: Contextualizing the Effects of the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry on Politics in Lebanon

Introduction

Lebanon after 2005 had demonstrated a proxy war theatre to Saudi Arabia and Iran which is not related to a direct armed battle; the two countries confronted each other by supporting opposing factions in Lebanon (Fisher, 2016). The two regional powers supported their allies financially and logistically which weakened the independent political decision in the country. This chapter will examine the effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on three of the main political events in Lebanon which will allow us to determine how this rivalry impacts the domestic politics. Though many events can be analyzed to assess the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in Lebanon, the below listed three are selected as they allow us more insight of the effects of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry; as it prevails clearly in the selected events.

July 2006 War

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry has had implications on governance in Lebanon by which it led to the challenge of the central government. The support of local proxies by the two regional powers resulted in exploiting the sovereignty gaps existing in the system and challenging the state by waging a war without involving the government in the decision. On July 12, 2006 Hizbullah forces abducted two Israeli soldiers and killed three others, the Israeli response was waging a large scale war that resulted in huge losses for both parties. Israeli warplanes fired at the runways of the Rafik Hariri International Airport shutting it down believing that Hizbullah receives weapons through the airport

and the war started by sending armed forces to Southern Lebanon (Erlanger & Myre, 2006). This was the first military confrontation after the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Lebanon in May 2000. During the 34 days war, Israel mainly targeted areas in South Lebanon, Eastern Lebanon and the Southern suburb of Beirut where Hizbullah supporters live. On the other hand, Hizbullah fired around 3,970 missiles on military and civilian targets in Israel (Kalb & Saivetz, 2007).

Casualties and losses of the war on the Lebanese side were bigger than that of the Israeli by which 1,200 were killed (including children and women), 4,000 wounded, 80 bridges destroyed, 130,000 housing units bombed and 300 factories (Salem, 2006). Hizbullah kidnapped the two soldiers aiming for exchange of prisoners which was the case prior to July 2006; nevertheless the Israeli response was a full-scale attack on Lebanon (El Husseini, 2010). When it comes to the result of the war, opinions varied between on specifying which side had won. As the war started, Hizbullah announced one objective which is “to survive the war” and this objective was achieved. However, the Israeli objective announced by the Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz to destroy Hizbullah was not achieved (Tur, 2007). Hizbullah leaders until our present day do not miss a chance to reiterate their ‘divine victory’ and Israel’s failure in defeating them, most of these statements are issued by Hizbullah’s Secretary General Sayed Hassan Nasrallah in his speeches.²

The war ended on August 14, 2006 when the United Nations Security Council issued resolution 1701 calling for cease of fire and requesting both parties to respect the

² See Sayed Hassan Nasrallah’s Speech on August 13 2017 available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXfP_Ikohcg

Blue Line which represents the border line between Lebanon and Israel (UNSC Resolution 1701). Based on the mentioned resolution, the number of UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Forces In Lebanon) forces was increased and given the mission to protect the Southern borders of the country along with the Lebanese army for the first time since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 (before the resolution protecting the borders was the responsibility of Hizbullah) (Mansour, 2017). On a public level, a majority of the Lebanese population supported Hizbullah's response to the Israeli war and did not blame for the destruction that happened or the humanitarian and economic losses. El Husseini (2010) reported that this majority sums up to 80 % of the citizens including 89 % of the Sunni's which is very significant especially that the war occurred after a short period of the assassination of the Sunni Leader PM Rafik Hariri; in which Hizbullah's ally was accused of the crime at that time. These results indicate that the public opinion was not affected by the political divisions in the country between the allies of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The official response was not similar to the public one, at the beginning of the war, the government headed by PM Fouad Sanioura a close associate of the Hariri family blamed Hizbullah for triggering the Israeli response. This political response was not mentioned individually by one of the ministers rather it was issued as an official statement by the government and was echoed in Riyadh, Amman and Cairo (Salem, 2008). Leaders from March 14 coalition were accusing Hizbullah of implementing an Iranian and a Syrian agenda that would dump the Lebanese state in huge losses (Geukjian, 2008). However, the political tone of the government officials changed during the war especially after the massive destruction caused by Israel in which they started

condemning the actions taken by Israel. Hizbullah leaders accused the March 14 members of implementing a Saudi agenda by passing information to Israel and providing political cover to the Israeli violation against Lebanon to weaken Hizbullah.

Although this war lasted for 34 days only; however, it had a great significance on Lebanon, Israel and the region. It is considered the first Iranian proxy war against Israel where the latter failed to succeed unlike its previous wars with the Arabs. The economic and humanitarian repercussions on Israel were not great but the significant impact was politically and militarily. The Israelis were not satisfied with the result of the war especially that Hizbullah managed to score some victories such as dumping fire into the Israeli battleship, firing rockets on Israel and simply surviving the war (Salem, 2008a). When it comes to Lebanon, Hizbullah proved that regardless of the official position of the government, it is a de-facto on the ground that can launch wars, achieve victories and take actions regardless of the internal support or opposition.

The July 2006 war deepened the gap between the two political factions in Lebanon and this was reflected in different political events that were occurring at that time such as agreeing on forming an international tribunal to investigate the assassination of PM Hariri. Hizbullah managed to withstand the political opposition with the support of the external allies. Sayed Hassan Nasrallah announced several times that the Syrian and Iranian support played a big role in surviving the war and its internal repercussions. The support was not only political but militarily also, beside the logistical and training support Syria provided a large number of the missiles used during the war.³ On the other hand,

³ See Sayed Hassan Nasrallah's Speech on September 22, 2016 available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KurXHcmjsOc>

Saudi Arabia was supporting its allies of March 14 politically and economically but this did not help in changing the situation. Hizbullah managed to wage a war, announce victory and most importantly show the failure of the US policy in Lebanon.

The observation discussed above yields to a conclusion that regional rivalries might encourage certain parties to challenge their central government. A dyadic rivalry is usually accompanied with regional alliances as a trial to spread influence. In the case of Lebanon, Saudi-Arabia and Iran had extended massive financial and political support to their proxies which gave power to these proxies over the central government. In 2006, Hizbullah's decision to wage a war is a challenge to the government regardless if this decision was made at the right time or not; nevertheless, this wouldn't have been applicable without the Iranian support. This was not the only event where the central government was challenged, other events such as the involvement of both parties in the Syrian crisis is another challenge to the government policy of dissociation; however, this event was not discussed in this study. The race to support opposing local factions in a country like Lebanon, where sovereignty gaps exist in the system, would definitely lead to challenging the central government.

May 2008 Conflict

The effects of regional rivalries is not restricted to challenging the central government, it might lead to a militarized conflict in certain periods. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry had led to an armed conflict in Lebanon in 2008. The period between 2005 and 2008 was crucial in the Lebanese political scene where different events caused security and political instability. After the assassination of PM Hariri different political figures were assassinated including ministers, members of the parliament and journalists which

increased the rivalry between the two political groups in the country that started accusing each other of being responsible for these crimes. The international tribunal in 2005 accused four Lebanese officers of arranging the assassination of PM Hariri (Fisk, 2009). Being close to the March 8 coalition, the decision of the court increased the political instability where protests took place all over the capital. A sit-in civil disobedience by March 8 coalition lasted for 18 months in downtown Beirut weakening the economic and commercial life in the country. In 2007 a confrontation between the Lebanese army and an Islamic fundamental group known as Fateh al Islam occurred in one of the Palestinian refugee camps which also carried blaming of different political parties of supporting this group.

This was the case until May 5, 2008 where the Lebanese government headed by PM Fouad Sanioura decided to transfer the airport security chief from his position since he was close to Hizbullah and investigate its private telecommunication network. The result of these decisions was that Hizbullah forces took over Western Beirut and moved towards Mount Lebanon and Bekaa on May 7, 2008 resulting in the death of over 50 people and the injury of more than 200 (Salem, 2008b). Hizbullah forces were assisted by members of the Shiite Amal movement and Syrian social Nationalist Party (SSNP). This incident was the first time Hizbullah used its arms internally although its leader Sayed Hassan Nasrallah promised repeatedly that these weapons are focusing on Israel and will never be used domestically. This changed the public stand towards Hizbullah being a resistance power to a sectarian militia operating internally to gain power.

These confrontations are considered the most violent and the bloodiest within the Lebanese state since the end of the civil war. The armed conflict came at the expense of

the Sunni group mostly which were repressed by Hizbullah forces in Beirut (Haddad, 2009). “Opposition gunmen took over an office of the Future political group led by Saad al-Hariri, leader of the governing coalition, Lebanon's most influential Sunni politician and a close ally of Saudi Arabia.” (Perry, 2008). The Sunni Mufti Sheikh Muhammad Rachid Kabbani who was known to be a supporter of Hariri family and Saudi Arabia commented on the events by saying the Sunni’s in Lebanon are fed up and that Hizbullah should withdraw its forces immediately from Beirut.

On May 8, Sayed Nasrallah gave a speech commenting on what was happening and he announced that “Hizbullah will cut off the hand that will touch the resistance”.⁴ He considered that these decisions were taken by an illegal government and in alignment with the interests of US and Israel, the allies of the government. Nasrallah totally rejected the idea of investigating the telecommunication network as it is the most important part of the Hizbullah resistance which gives them the right to defend the resistance and its arms. In the same speech, Nasrallah requested Saudi Arabia not to repeat the mistake they did in July 2006 by taking part in this conflict or supporting any party.

These sectarian clashed portrayed Lebanon as a battlefield where the United State and its Arab allies mainly Saudi Arabia compete against Iran by supporting their local allies against the Iranian allies (Saab, 2008). The US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice along with other American officials called their allies in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon to send a message to Iran and Syria requesting them to stop interfering in Lebanon (Worth & Bakri, 2008a). Regarding the reason for starting these violent crises, Salem

⁴ See Sayed Hassan Nasrallah’s Speech on May 8, 2008 available at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hRwn3kJ_xE

(2008b) mentioned that Hizbullah and Iran might have been concerned “if Syria goes down the road of peace with Israel over the Golan Heights, as it has tried to do by enlisting Turkish mediation, Hizbollah could be weakened; thus Hizbollah needed to unseat the current pro-Western government and regain access to the airport and sea ports of the Lebanese state in order to avoid being strangled if Syria made peace with Israel” (p: 3).

Saudi Arabia and Iran could not reach a consensus to end the violence in Lebanon; therefore a solution was sought by another broker with the consent of the two regional rivals that are controlling internal politics within the country. At that time, Qatar was following a foreign policy of mediation and managed to reach an agreement to end the chaotic situation. Pro-government and opposition leaders moved to Doha and agreed to end the 18 month sit-in protest in Downtown Beirut, to end the armed conflict, to form a government of national unity in which all political factions are represented and to elect the Chief of the Army General Michel Suleiman as a President (UNSC, 2008). The agreement was initiated by the Qatari state under the patronage of the Arab League were the Qatari foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani and Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa witnessed signing the agreement.

Although political statements were issued after signing the agreement from both sides indicating that there was no losers under the deal and that this agreement opened a new page for Lebanon (“Lebanon rivals agree,” 2008); however, several government officials reported that they had to accept the deal regardless of the American and Saudi support (Worth & Bakri, 2008b). Examining the situation after the crisis and the Doha agreement shows that Hizbullah did not abide by the government decisions of May 5 and

that its requests were implemented in the Doha agreement. The Chief of security at the airport was not dismissed and the private telecommunication network of Hizbullah is still operating till our current days. Saudi Arabia did not succeed in encountering Iran through its proxies in Lebanon regardless of the financial and political support to the March 14 coalition, although the latter had international support led by the US. The Iranian influence proved to be more powerful another time and able to face international opposition on the Lebanese theatre.

A prominent effect of dyadic rivalry that was interpreted in this case is causing a militarized conflict in the third state. This effect can take place in two forms, the first is encouraging proxy wars where warring parties are supported by the rival states; this is applicable to other cases in the Arab world but not in Lebanon. The second form is an extension of challenging the government where a certain proxy is supported to an extent that it would implement its decisions militarily. In 2008, Hizbullah challenged the government decision and defended its telecommunication network by using its weapons internally. Hizbullah wouldn't have been able to keep the private network operating without the Iranian military, logistical and political support. Other examples can be applied to the Saudi allies in Lebanon which were not discussed in this thesis as they are not part of the three chosen events.

Presidential Elections 2016

In addition to challenging the central government and causing an armed conflict, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry had hindered the political decision in Lebanon. The continuous and successful Iranian support to Hizbullah alarmed the Sunni community in Lebanon which pushed Saudi Arabia to increase its support to encounter Iran and limit its power in

Lebanon. In December 2013, Saudi Arabia provided a USD 3 billion as a military aid to the Lebanese army which was meant to limit the power of Hizbullah (“Saudi Arabia to give Lebanon,” 2013).

The Saudi offer came to rival the Iranian one that proposed to provide any kind of support needed in Lebanon (Naylor, 2014). Another USD one billion was provided to the army in summer 2014 which came after a military operation against ISIS on the Eastern borders of the country. However, this grant was halted after the failure of Lebanon to condemn the attacks on the Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran. “The moves underlined the deep sensitivities in a region riven by the rivalry between Sunni Muslim power Saudi Arabia and the leading Shi'ite power Iran.” (“Saudi Arabia halts \$3 billion”, 2016). The Lebanese-Saudi relations were negatively affected after these events especially that Hizbullah managed to intervene militarily in Syria and announce this decision disregarding the government’s policy of dissociation.

Criticism towards Saudi Arabia increased from Iran allies in Lebanon and reached an extent of accusing it of transforming Lebanon to an arena for its rivalry with Iran by directing car bombings in Lebanon; the statements were issued by Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah (Perry & Bassam, 2016b). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia accused Hizbullah of intervening in other Arab countries such as Bahrain and Yemen which causes a direct threat to its national security. The official spokesman of the Arab Coalition Ahmad Al-Asiri had requested the Lebanese government to stop Hizbullah from sending fighters to Syria and Yemen (Picali & Ezahi, 2016).

In the mid of internal wars Middle Eastern countries were facing, Lebanon was experiencing a presidential vacuum since May 2014 after the end of the term of President

Michel Suleiman. More than 40 parliamentary meetings were held to elect a President without any result because the majority of the members were not attending these meetings. Both the executive and legislative branches were not functioning in the country. The government was not convening and thus no progress was made; as a reaction, the members of the Parliament were not attending any of the meetings. The political parties were trying to agree on candidate for more than 2 years with no luck. March 14 coalition nominated Samir Geagea, the head of the Lebanese Forces Party for Presidency while March 8 coalition nominated General Michel Aoun the head of the Free Patriotic Movement.

In his speech, Sayyed Nasrallah announced the President cannot be from March 14 and that is due to the political situation we reached after finalizing the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1.⁵ He announced that as a result of the negotiations among the party, they reached a decision to support General Michel Aoun for presidency which they considered is qualified enough for this position. This statement shows the effect of the regional political situation on decision making in Lebanon. The struggle to finalize the nuclear deal gave hope for the pro-Saudi parties in Lebanon that more sanctions will be imposed on Iran and therefore its support for Hizbullah will decrease which might give them power to choose the President. However, Iran managed to finalize the deal which gave Hizbullah a stronger position in the political scene.

After Nasrallah's assurance that the President will definitely be from March 8 alliance, Hariri did negotiations with MP Sleiman Franjeh, which belong to March 8

⁵ See Sayed Hassan Nasrallah's Speech on October 23, 2017 available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC11xFD5DPs>

alliance, and nominated him as a candidate for presidency (Naharnet Newsdesk, 2016). Hariri might have followed this strategy to divide the opponents by having two candidates from the same coalition since he couldn't face them directly by a candidate from March 14. Hariri's second plan had failed and the result of the elections was that General Michel Aoun supported by Hizbullah became the President. Analysts considered these elections as a direct defeat for the Saudi influence in Lebanon. "A veteran Christian leader is set to fill Lebanon's long-vacant presidency in a deal that underlines the ascendancy of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement and the diminished role of Saudi Arabia in the country." (Perry & Bassam, 2016a).

Hindering the political decision in the country is a continuous effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry which reached its peak after the assassination of PM Hariri when the government formed by PM Sanioura isolated the President politically and therefore the executive branch of the state was banned from operating normally. In almost all the events this effect can be marked however, it prevails more critical in certain periods depending on the incident. In the presidency elections of 2016, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry hindered the political decision for more than two years; this vacuum in power was a result of the Saudi-Iranian disagreement over the future President.

Conclusion

The results of the above three events show that the Saudi influence is decreasing over time. In 2005, the Saudi's support to March 14 coalition allowed them to take over the government and win the parliamentary elections of 2005. Most importantly the Saudi allies managed to expel the Syrian army which had total control of the country before the

assassination of PM Hariri. However, this power started to diminish until it reached a new stage in 2016 when Saudi officials announced that they should re-assess their relations with Lebanon.

On the other hand, the Iranians managed to conserve their influence and their relations with different political parties in Lebanon along with their stable relation with Hizbullah. The progression of the above observations shows that the Iranian influence is growing in Lebanon unlike the Saudi one. In 2005, the Iranian allies in Lebanon managed to survive the wave of the assassination which was followed by a war with Israel in 2006; nevertheless, in 2016 they managed to choose the President of the country. Between 2005 and 2016 political conflicts were regularly happening indicating the rise of Iranian influence at the expense of Saudi influence. The last chapter of this thesis will analyze the reasons behind the decline in the Saudi power in Lebanon while the Iranian influence is increasing.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

The main aim of this thesis is to study the effect of dyadic rivalries on third parties considering the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and its effect on Lebanon. The previous chapters on rivalry showed that although Iran and Saudi Arabia did not fight each other militarily; nevertheless, they are considered rivals that challenged each other using different tools such as media, religion and regional allies. The Saudi-Iranian relations fit perfectly in the category of strategic rivals; however, available literature on strategic rivals indicated their characteristics only but did not map out how these rivals can affect third parties. Therefore, Lebanon was considered as a case in which three main political events were analyzed knowing that both Saudi Arabia and Iran are influential powers in Lebanon.

If we examine the statements of Iranian and Saudi officials during different remarkable political events that occurred in Lebanon between 2005 and 2016 including the three events studied in this thesis; one can realize that these statements are mostly neutral calling for mediation and balancing powers in the country. This restraint or reserved strategy in media made the job of studying the effects harder; however, the events studied had clear outcomes. The results of these political events had proved the tested hypothesis that rivalry has destabilizing effects on domestic politics of regional states. Three main effects were mapped out by studying three different political events in Lebanon between 2005 and 2016 which are: first, dyadic rivalry leads to challenging the

central government in regional states. Second, rivalry can lead to an armed conflict in the third state. Finally, rivalry hinders the political decision in the regional states.

Previous chapters showed that rivalry between Saudi-Arabia and Iran backed their generous support of local allies in Lebanon. However, the outcome of the events discussed in Chapter 4 show that the Iranian influence was increasing with time while the Saudi influence was decreasing. What are the reasons behind the superiority of Iranian influence over the Saudi influence? Two elements can be concluded from the case studied, internal and external. Internally, regardless of the capabilities of the rivals, smart tools are needed to operate internally. The financial and political support that both parties Hizbullah and the future party received are crucial to survive however, they are not the only elements required. Gaining the support of the local population is important in increasing the influence in the country. The Saudi allies got a golden chance after the assassination of their leader in 2005 to increase their zone of influence as they managed to gain the public support. The strong coalition that was formed and managed to expel the Syrian army from Lebanon exist today only by name (Young, 2016). This coalition was not organized and did not have a strong long-term political plan although they managed to win the majority of the parliamentary seats twice in 2005 and 2009 elections.

At certain periods, March 14 coalition had both public support and governmental power; nonetheless, its leaders did not succeed in taking advantage of this power and establish a strong governance strategy. On the other hand, March 8 leaders and specifically Hizbullah officials managed to survive all the political instability in the country and the region especially the Syrian crisis. Hizbullah was regarded in the 80s of the 21st century a pure ideological extremist party that aims to transform the system into

an Islamic system. However, this image was changed due to the soft diplomacy Hizbullah used internally such as signing an agreement with the Christian party FPM headed by the current President Michel Aoun. Hizbullah's strategy includes also their efforts of convincing people of the necessity of keeping its weapons to resist Israel, fight 'Takfiri' groups⁶ such as ISIS and protect religious diversity in Lebanon.

The external element is related to the quality of intervention. Saudi-Arabia and Iran are interfering in the domestic politics of Lebanon by supporting certain parties; however, the quality of this support differs between Saudi-Arabia and Iran. Quality of support may include different factors that range between material and non-material support. Material support includes financial aid and military aid while non-material support includes personnel training and political support. Hizbullah started receiving Iranian support since its formation; its leaders never denied receiving material and non-material aid from Iran. This support was never interrupted under any of the circumstances; it remained in peace and war times. Iran supported Hizbullah in its struggle against Israel until the liberation of Southern Lebanon in 2000; in the war against Israel in 2006; in the fight in Syria in support of the Assad regime; and in peace periods. The statements of the Iranian officials and Hizbullah leaders show a trust relationship between the two groups. The reason behind this strong relation might be that Iran and

⁶ The term 'takfiri' was used extensively in the political discourse of Hizbullah leaders. It refers to fundamental Islamic groups especially those that rose in the region after the 'Arab Spring' such as ISIS. The term 'takfiri' means literally that these groups consider the others as infidels. Hizbullah leaders use this word in particular to refer to the threat the existence of these groups poses on myriad societies as rejecters of other beliefs.

Hizbullah are not only linked by politics but also by ideology. Both are Twelver Shia that believes in 'Wilayat Al Fakih' concept.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia had provided generous financial support to its allies in Lebanon and in particular PM Hariri; however, it failed in competing with Iran in Lebanon. The reason might be related to the new foreign policy Saudi Arabia is following under King Salman's rule. Nevertheless, it became clear to the public that Saudi-Arabia extensively reduced its financial support to its support to its allies in Lebanon. Announcing the withdrawal of a USD 4 billion military aid by Saudi-Arabia shows that the relation between Saudi Arabia and its Lebanese allies is not strong enough to handle the Hizbullah-Iran axis. Another indicator on the reduced Saudi support is that the giant construction company owned by PM Hariri Saudi Oger had to shut down on July 31, 2017 after a huge financial crisis ("Struggling construction firm Saudi Oger", 2017). The significant drop in the Saudi support to its allies in Lebanon might be caused by their dissatisfaction of the internal performance of these allies in failing to contain the power of Hizbullah. However, Lebanon was never ruled by one power which ensures the replacement of the Saudi influence with a new one.

Limitations

There are several limitations that could threat the results or the conclusions made in this study which should be considered while reading this thesis, these limitations include: First, the lack of information collected from interviews and polls which might have reflected the public opinion regarding the Saudi and the Iranian influence. Such interviews might have helped us understand if the citizens realize the effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on politics in daily life. The second limitation is the shortage of peer-

reviewed articles that discussed the events analyzed in this study. Most of the information related to the political events was collected from newspaper articles and political speeches which might be biased. A third limitation is that considering more political events might have yielded different results; however, the author selected three out of many important events that reflect the effect of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry on the political decision in Lebanon. It is not possible to study the entire important events due to the lack of time. The fourth limitation is that the political statements of Saudi and Iranian officials and ambassadors were most of the time neutral; the author had to conclude the external intervention from the statements of the Lebanese politicians only.

Future Research

Further research can be conducted on studying regional rivalries and their effects on third parties. Extensive literature is available on rival states but their impact on regional states needs to be studied. Mapping out the effects of dyadic rivalry on different regional states will help in generalizing the results and thus contributing to the literature on this topic.

Beside the future studies that can be conducted on the effect of dyadic rivalry on third states in general, further research can be done on the effect of rivalry on Lebanon in particular in light of the diminished Saudi role, three hypotheses can be tested. First, enhancing the Saudi role in Lebanon again. How to rebuild a trust relationship between Saudi-Arabia and its allies in Lebanon? Second option would be a possible replacement of the Saudi influence in the country taking into consideration the situation in Syria. The study can test whether one power might be able to end the war in Syria and dominate the two countries. The third possibility is not to replace the Saudi power by any other

country; the implications on the Lebanese myriad can be studied. Would this shift cause a sectarian war?

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