

The Smart System in Regional Order Rivalry: The Pursuit to Securitize the Rival's Ideology

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Amidst the dynamic changes following the Arab Uprisings, this paper investigates Saudi Arabia's and Iran's speech acts towards the Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen crisis as revelatory cases in the securitization of the 'Wahhabism and Khomeinism' ideologies to domestic audiences in their countries and their non-state affiliated actors' in the region in the post-2011 order. Although most securitization approaches attempt to do so within the territory of one state or more, the novelty claimed by this article within this process is the involvement of trans-border non-state actors as referent objects. The emphasis is given to facilitating conditions as necessary preconditions to the process of securitization. This will be conducted by building on the Copenhagen School's literature. The fragility of Middle Eastern states, the retreat of traditional sovereignty, instead of the circulation of ideas as the result of trans-state societal interconnectedness with a religiously inspired politics and its regional overflow, indicate the supremacy of 'inter-mestics' nature of regional politics and, ultimately, the struggle to set up their desired regional order.

Keywords: smart system, securitization of ideology, regional order and sectarianism, Arab uprisings

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past five decades, Saudi-Iranian relations were marked by a geopolitical and ideological rivalry. Most of the regional geopolitical instability and divergence is related to the main role of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the structure of the Middle East regional order. With the Arab Uprisings and the political unrest in some Middle Eastern states such as Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, and Lebanon, the ground was set for regional actors' active participation. The region has witnessed domestic, regional, and international events that have caused the Saudi-Iranian relationship to accelerate in actions and reactions. Thus, the unrest, clashes, fluctuations, and interactions dragged the two countries, to take Malcolm Kerr terminology, a new undeclared cold war that current proxy wars in the region are only one form.

The fruitfulness of adopting securitization theory to the study of sectarianism in the Middle East has been illustrated by an emerging trend in securitization theory [1]. This study elaborates on this approach and scrutinizes how sectarian identities, namely, the 'Wahhabism and Khomeinism' identities have emerged as security threats in the Arab Uprisings. This paper contributes to the debate about securitization of identity guided by opposing or even mirror-opposed identities that reflect the state's ideals and normative prescriptions to what is its desired regional order should be. To differentiate itself from the

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other and manifest its principles and prescription, the state is viewed here as a collective agent engaged in the international system's cognitive processes of distinction. Thus, this article's main objective is to investigate Saudi Arabia and Iran's securitization of identity by both countries during the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. By examining the securitization of identity, the aim is to perceive whether the rivalry's narrative shifted after the Arab Uprisings. In this context, the theoretical theses identified by the Copenhagen School can provide a more accurate analysis compared to other theories in regards to Iran and Saudi Arabia's recent intensification of rivalry. The issue of defending Shias and Sunnis by both states can be dealt with from securitization theory and national security, which are the Copenhagen School's two main pillars. The applicability to adopt the theory of securitization is that differences between the two countries, primarily security and geopolitical influences, go beyond the traditional notions of security and power politics. In addition, the 'inter-mestic' nature of the Middle East, which is so intertwined that issues are inseparable. Therefore, it would not be correct to think that Iran and Saudi Arabia are not concerned with the security policies applied in neighbouring countries in the region. On the contrary, some issues, such as protecting the Shiites or Sunnis and their sanctities, which are considered to Tehran and Riyadh as a threat to their regime's survival. For this reason, the intensification of rivalry is dealt with in terms of securitization theory and identity. Additionally, Wahhabism and Khomeinism ideologies have also played an essential part in the Saudi Arabia and Iran's 'role' and 'identities' that has defined for themselves in different geopolitical, political, and religious levels of the Islamic and the Arab world. We claim that the criteria of identity, power, security, and regional structure causes to Saudi-Iranian rivalry not to capture the complexities of 'Inter-mestic' nature of politics in Middle East. Instead, we draw on securitization of identity theory to examine the narratives and speech acts leading to the construction of state identity as a security issue in the Middle East. We analyze Saudi Arabia's and Iran's speech acts towards Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Yemen crisis as revelatory cases in the securitization of the 'Wahhabism and Khomeinism' ideologies to domestic audiences in their countries and their non-state affiliated actors' in the region in the post-2011 order. On that account, the next section bears down on the chosen theoretical approach. The following part discusses the securitization of identity each country exercises. The last section is the case studies in which the Iranian and Saudi reactions to the uprisings are framed through the lens of securitization of identity.

2. THEORETICAL RSSI MODEL

This paper uses the Copenhagen school's securitization approach that stresses the interplay between 'security' and 'identity'. The view is that these two components are central to political activism. The Copenhagen school implicitly emphasizes norms, identity, and social security. With a kind of structural ontology, salient the stress put on states as the main actors. It theoretically leaves room for other players. It's a combination of materialist and constructivist approaches. Influenced by the traditional military-political conception of security, the Copenhagen school views the concept of 'survival' as the key to understanding security issues. In this context, 'security' refers to survival, [2] an issue becomes a matter of security when it poses a fundamental threat to an entity that is traditionally, but

not necessarily, a state. As [3] suggests, justifying security is the key to legitimizing the use of force. More generally, it opens the way for the state to deal with underlying threats or mobilize special powers. State officials have long proclaimed the term 'security', declaring a state of emergency and claiming the right to use all means necessary to prevent a threatening change. The three concepts of 'existential threat', 'emergency situation' and 'extraordinary measure' [4], are the Copenhagen school's key concepts. Indeed, they have used Carl Schmitt's basic ideas of politics to explain the logic of threat and to elucidate security. Their emphasizing on existential 'threats' as the basis of security, conversely, reflects Schmidt's view of defining policy by resorting to hostility and deprivation. As noted, the idea that the issue is politicized or depoliticized is not due to its essence, but rather to the politicians' old political game, alike as security is related to the strong 'friendship-antagonism' relationship that the actors' feel [5].

For [6] the existential threat to the reference object can be anything that endangers the survival of traditionally but not necessarily the State. It is not very specific and is understood only to the Referent Object, which its survival is assumed to be necessary to be necessary and should be preserved. While recognizing that there may be differences in the identification of referent objects, the Copenhagen school has attempted to set referent objects for each of these sectors in light of the idea of broadening the security dimensions.

They have gone beyond the state-centered perspective and extended the logic of security to other referent objects [7]. If a problem is presented as an existential threat to the referent object, then the question arises as to what the security agents will do next. Here one aspect of Schmidt's 'influence' on the Copenhagen school theory is revealed. Considering the idea of 'exceptional status' and 'authoritative decision-making as the essence of sovereignty', they argue, at this point, that the issue is clearly presented as a point of no return indicating 'emergencies situations' [2]. Therefore, it cannot be managed within the existing rules and procedures.

So far, it has been found that security agents, by labelling an issue as 'security', seek to present it first as an existential threat to the reference object; Secondly, to declare that there is an urgent situation that requires the suspension of ordinary laws and the acquisition of extra-legal powers in order to take extraordinary measures to counter the alleged threat. This is the logic of the Copenhagen school in the field of security. However, the acceptance of the frame by audiences does not mean that they will also accept the implications for securitization. This makes it necessary to investigate the facilitation conditions in the securitization process.

3. THE ESSENCE OF SECURITIZATION AND RHETORICAL LABELS

Securitization is a process in which three types of the actor are involved: a Securitizing Actor is a person or a group who securitized an issue by declaring that the target entity is threatened meaning it constitutes a 'threat'; a Functional Actor, although not playing a direct role in securitizing issues, does have a significant impact on the decisions made in the field of security, thereby speeding up or delaying the process of securitization [8]. The Audience Actor or Actors have a central role to play in securitization; those who must be persuaded to make the securitization move successful. Although often assumed to be equating audience with 'citizens' and the 'masses', [8] it can be different depending on the

political system and the nature of the securitized issue.

The 'facilitating conditions', is referring to certain variables, innovations, and structural frameworks that make it possible to succeed in securitizing steps. Here, repeating the discussion in [2] and [5] has described the significance of the form of the speech act, the role of the securitizing actor; and the 'conditions associated historically with that danger.' The acknowledgement of the latter two of these conditions definitely move towards addressing the position of meaning, most notably the third. More specifically, the issue here is that this potentially valuable perspective, which takes us beyond a set of strict requirements to be met in terms of the act of securitization, is not part of the securitization process itself, which focuses mainly on the performative function of the act of speech rather than the circumstances under which it is possible to securitize itself [2]. It is not an accident that this component of the securitization system remains under-theorized and little-applied. Analyzing past 'experiences' with threat classification calls for a looser and highly interpretative research methodology that theoretically clashes with the Copenhagen School's desire to create a tidy and concise collection of 'requirements' to be met for securitization. Thus, the 'facilitating conditions' are crucial as [4] properly states, the conditions within which the context is created are included of the levels of domestic and international and our study will focus on what we called 'trans-border audiences' between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and their non-state affiliated actors' audiences.

The securitization debate is not without problems, as [6] admitted the location of the threat and the level of analysis in which the process of securitization occurs must be questioned. Most recent work has highlighted the regional level. It is clear what happened in the region of the securitization of an agent or ideology also has domestic consequences. This is the result of the 'inter-mestic' nature of the political organization in the Middle East, as mentioned at the beginning of this study. Moreover, taking the regional security complex as a level of concentration, realism, and the notion that states are the main actors in the region are brought back into the analysis. Those problems are not insoluble and are highlighted in this article.

Furthermore, the problem is to apply this framework to the non-Western world. As [9] argues, the dynamics of securitization are westernized. Hence this framework is problematic when applied to the societies where identities or the securitized identities as a threat can cross state borders. For [7], the securitizing actor and the target of the securitizing speech action are involved in the securitization process so that the success or failure of 'verbal action' depends on the characteristics and conditions of the two actors. Inspired by Austin's efficacy for success in speech, Wæver argues conditions that make speech action 'fruitful' he calls this 'facilitative conditions', which refer to two internal and external dimensions. Internal conditions related to the linguistic aspect and external conditions correspond to the social facet.

According to [4], the audience must first be directly related to the issue and, second, empower the securitizing actor to overcome the threat. Besides the audience, the securitizing actor must also have conditions. [4] argues that the securitizing actor must identify with the audience and bring them closer to their feelings, needs, and interests. The language of the securitizing actor must be consistent with the audience's experience. Thus, by itself, the process of securitization and constructivism remains integral.

For securitization theory applied across levels of analysis, additional audiences can be created deliberately or not deliberately through such an act. By itself, given the 'inter-

mestic' nature of normative environments and shared political across the region, there could be regional consequences from such speech acts. To enlarge knowledge of this, it is crucial to discuss more thoroughly the facilitating conditions. This article aims to highlight this process and clarifies some of the outcomes of this form of securitization.

4. THE DESIGNATION OF THE SECURITIZATION

The 'threat' to the survival and legitimacy of Iran and Saudi Arabia are designated in the process of securitization. In this process, it is essential to highlight how both states perceive the other as a 'threat' and follow a strategy of securitization. A short mention of their relationship is significant to this end. Although relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran began in 1928, the chapters of this relationship were not always at their best. The establishment of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 created a new reality in the regional political scene, especially regarding the Arab Gulf region. This new reality has left its shadows on Iran's relations with the Arabs in general and Saudi Arabia in particular [10]. Relations between Riyadh and Tehran developed during the period following the establishment of the Islamic Republic in light of the 'influence' of two types of Iranian political forces that left their impact. The religious establishment affected seemingly by the dispute with the Wahhabi movement, whereas the Iranian religious establishment considers that the Saudi regime is only the face of Wahhabi movement [11]. The second force that appears to be more present in pursuing the relationship with Saudi Arabia at the level of military and security forces, is the evaluation of which to US alliances in the region.

By mid-1979, the Iranian regime pursued the policy of exporting the revolution and protecting Muslim rights and for their intention to create a single global 'ummah' focusing on various Islamic groups in the Middle East to secure the Islamic world in all. Political, economic, and cultural aspects were emphasized. Iran's idealistic aims to unite Shiite and Sunni Muslims led to Sunni Muslims' suspicion of Shiites. Despite Iran's rejection of Shiite and Sunni divisions, Iran's continued support for Shiite groups in the region has led Sunni Islamists to point out Iranian revolutionary leaders' idealism as a Shiite conspiracy.

Hereafter, dark clouds gradually overshadowed Saudi-Iranian relations and diverged rather than consolidated their relations. Saudi Arabia did not consider Iran a worthy leader of the Islamic world because of its revolutionary policy of exporting to other countries in the region, a destabilizing *de facto* force in the eyes of Riyadh and its allies. Corresponding, these conflicts, Iran's revolutionary ideology, which included anti-monarchical elements, the rule of Shiite clergy in politics, and the support of the masses, directly or intentionally targeted Saudi domestic politics and the structure of Saudi power [12]. For Riyadh, however, the policy of exporting the Iranian revolution to gain power and 'influence' in the Middle East is greater than Iran's regional weight and role.

In the wake of tensions between rivals, there were also efforts to highlight the sectarian divide between Shiites and Sunnis. Despite increasing the military and economic capability of the two countries, neither of them is willing to engage through the powerful means of military power. Hence the only way the two countries can achieve regional 'influence' is through the proliferation of proxy wars with the ideological and political dimension in the Middle East [13].

Sectarianism as the ideological dimension of the Iran-Saudi competition is not the only factor of their competition. The weakness of central states, in other words, the exis-

tence of politically weak states in countries where Iran and Saudi Arabia have been able to penetrate played an effective role. This latter, coupled with unrest in the form of ethnic and religious groupings, drives the people of these countries to seek sectarian identities and protection from outside. Meanwhile, Iran is backing Shiites, and Saudi Arabia is supporting Sunni groups.

On the next pages, we outline the securitization of identity exercised by Saudi Arabia and Iran. Methodologically, official statements and discourses of political leaders are analyzed. Furthermore, we also explain Iran and Saudi Arabia's reactions to the Arab Uprisings. The objective is to define how much of the securitization of state identity narratives influenced Iranian and Saudi foreign political activity in the selected cases, the uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, and whether after 2011, the rivalry rhetoric was escalated or reduced.

5. SECURITIZED IDENTITY AND THREAT ENGINEERING IN IRANIAN POLICE

Given the nature of the actors involved in the decision-making process in Iran, it is possible to look at Iran's policy in relation to Saudi Arabia according to the three levels of dimensions. 'National-Regional-International levels of Iranian strategy'. 'Shias' issues are one of the dimensions and foundations of national security because it represents one of the highest priorities of Iranian foreign policy. Thus, the issue of defending Shias is not related to specific sub-regions, and the talk here is not about Iran itself. Nevertheless, Tehran wants to send a clear message that it is responsible for defending the Shiite around the world, and this is what gives this topic a broader regional dimension.

With the wave of Arab revolutions in 2011, Iranian policy has moved more towards tying its sectarian political struggle under the banner of holy Jihad. The recruitment and mobilization campaigns of the jihadist brigades under the Revolutionary Guard umbrella have flourished in some of the countries engulfed in the revolution, especially in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen [14]. These trends in Iranian policy may also constitute a prelude to a greater and comprehensive 'strategic' doctrinal, political 'polarization in the region'. So that the so-called 'Shiite Crescent' based on regional leadership surrounded by four Arab countries located in the Iranian sphere of influence, is against a Sunni axis by the leadership of Saudi Arabia. This is established in a scene that reflects the major sectarian rift in the region in its history.

Iran exploits the Arab Uprising by adopting the notion that the 'threat' the forces of the anti-Shia pose against Iran internally and externally. Thus, the Wahhabism ideology is interpreted as supporting Saudi Arabia in its aim at undermining the security of Iran and the Iranian citizens and dismantling the axis of 'Islamic resistance'. There is no doubt that this approach has paid off somewhat inside Iran, as the Iranian media are employed in their service and marketing among the Iranian peoples through the media that are managed by the Iranian regime and the Revolutionary Guards [15].

In the case of Wahhabism-Salafism ideology, as there was an Iranian security measure at the two levels of national and regional because Iranian leaders' conception of Wahhabism ideology threatens Shia identity, which led to the view that this poses a threat to Muslims in Iran and around the world. For example, The New York Times published an

article by Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif entitled “Let us rid the world of Wahhabism” in which he claimed that “devastating” repercussions on Muslim societies” [16]. Zarif also said, Zarif also said, however, that: “The world has today woken up to the fact that the danger of Wahhabism is the real threat. Wahhabism is an extreme ideological strand openly preached by Saudi Arabian clerics, who have the blessing of ruling Saudi authorities. It is the main ideological feature of Takfiri terrorist groups – particularly Daesh – which declare people of other faiths and beliefs as ‘infidels’ and, based on ‘decrees’ from clerics, the rule that they should be killed” [16]. The ‘speech acts’ are seen in the Iranian leaders’ statements, as well as for the Iranian public and Shias in the region, as means for insuring the legitimization of the policies of the regime inside or outside of its territories. This is narrative Tehran created a perception of the security threat.

Iran found an urgent necessity to sustain its strategic ‘influence’ in the areas where Shi’a inhabitants exist in the Middle East region, especially after the Arab Uprisings, to give significant impetus to the thesis of defending the Shiites against Salafist-Wahabist. It tried to save the status quo, such as in Syria and Iraq. The security decision-makers in Iran found that Shiite identity is closely related to the Iranian desired regional order. In contrast to Saudi Arabia, the Iranian security decision-makers established the ‘Shia defenders’ formula, whose mission is to protect the Shia community in the Middle East.

What’s more, Iran sought to employ identity and religious beliefs within its political approaches in its relations with the societies of the countries of the region, so that it succeeded in converting many Shiites into armed militias linked to Iran. For instance, Khomeini said: “Some people today and in various parts of the world, under the nominations of the Takfiri, Wahhabi, and Salafi groups, work against Iran, the Shiites and against Shiism, but these are not the original enemies, because the enemy is the one who raises, recruits and funds these groups” [17] in reference to Saudi Arabia funding to those groups. Here, the Shia societies are securitized, and Shia militias groups are used to take extra measures. The Iranian regime seeks to exploit its religious soft power to expand multifaceted spiritual, cultural, economic, religious, and political ties with Shia movements and populations throughout the region, and pushing the Shiite communities in the region to look at Iran in a way that transcends the sectarian relationship.

6. SAUDI ARABIA’S QUEST TO SECURITIZE THE IRANIAN THREAT

The contexts and motivations or factors that led Saudi Arabia to play a functional role in the securitization of Iran’s regional role require the consideration of different conditions and components at three levels of domestic, regional, and international. Although foremost changes in Saudi regional policy, and in particular, the expansion of rivalry and tensions between Tehran and Riyadh, have gradually taken place over the past fifteen years, the approach of King Salman has heightened the focus of the new political elite [18]. It has mostly abandoned the conservative and relatively balanced tendencies of the past and re-inforced proactive and aggressive approaches to its foreign policy.

Despite the different aspects of the new Saudi regional policy, the focus of this policy has been considered to counter Iran’s regional ‘influence’ and role. Saudi Arabia’s discourse and efforts against Iran in the era of King Salman have been designed and directed in a collaborative format rather than solitary. In particularly, Saudi Arabia’s policies and

efforts against Iran, despite national resources and incentives, have been mostly in line with the intensified US pressure on Iran, especially after the US presidential election in 2016.

At the domestic level, the requirements for third-generation power transfers in the Saudi family and Saudi's efforts to assert monarchy, along with various uncertainties and challenges, are the key components of Riyadh's efforts to assist securitization of Iran and its regional policy, which created a favourable situation for the regime to picture it as a 'threat'. As the Saudi crown prince considered that "the guardianship of the jurist regime is the supporter of terrorist groups and militias in the region, considering that understanding with the Iranian regime constitutes a strategic mistake" [19], he also said in the interview with the MBC television station and also broadcast by Saudi TV: "How do I come to terms with a regime that has a firm conviction on an extremist ideology, stipulated in its constitution and predetermined in Khomeini's will, that they must control the Muslims of the Islamic world and spread their twelve Ja'fari doctrines throughout the Islamic world until the awaited Mahdi appears" [19]. Adding: "We know that it is a major goal of the Iranian regime to reach the heart of Muslims (Mecca), we are not waiting until there becomes a battle in Saudi Arabia, so we will work so that it becomes a battle for them in Iran and not in Saudi Arabia" [19]. Zooming in on Iran, especially after the Arab Uprisings and portraying it as a widespread and immediate 'threat' to Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, is not only a way to ignore or marginalize Saudi internal affairs, but it can also enhance bin Salman's position in the power hierarchy.

At the regional level, the paramount factor is the gradual change in the regional power balance in favour of Iran in the years after 2003. The lack of capacity of the Saudi state to compete with Iran in the traditional forms of regional competition and balance pushed Saudis to securitize identity 'Wahhabism-Salafism' against Iranian 'Shia-Khomeinism' ideology. Given that the Saudis for their security rely on foreign actors, mainly the US. For example, Crown Prince Salman said that: "Iran, through proxy militias and regional allies, will establish an overland supply route that leads from Beirut through Syria and Iraq to Tehran, Bin Salman said. The so-called 'Shiite Crescent' would give Iran a greater foothold in a tumultuous region through a string of allies" [20].

Saudi Arabia has sought to mobilize and synchronize its capacity for presenting Iran's regional policy as a serious 'threat' to Middle East stability and security. Also, Bin Salman claimed: "The Iranian regime created Hezbollah in Lebanon to be a dagger behind the Arabs; it uses its sectarian wars to destroy the Arabs in Iraq and Syria and tear their countries apart"[21]. Thus, understanding the fundamental changes taking place in the balance of power in the region after the Arab Uprising to the US election in 2016 is therefore seen as essential to Riyadh's move to securitize Iran's regional security role.

In sum, the critical point is that Saudi Arabia's discourse and counter-efforts against Iran have been designed and guided in a collaborative format, particularly lately with the help, if not partly initiated, by the US and its allies, rather than solitary. In particular, Saudi Arabia's policies and efforts against Iran, despite national resources and incentives, have been primarily dictated by the intensifying US pressure (threats, blockades, sanctions, interferences in domestic affairs) on Iran. Thus, the Kingdom portrayed the Iranian regime and Shia ideology as an existential threat that gathered Shias under the flag of Iran in the region. Through that, Riyadh is in a position to legitimize the employ of extraordinary measures to address this issue.

Case Studies of Conflict Zones: Speech Acts and the Audience

The audience that needs to be persuaded cannot be the same as the targeted audience, and the audience can be interpreted and construed differently by the narrative the securitizing actor uses. Saudi Arabia and Iran have used sectarian expressions such as the threat of ‘Wahhabism’ and ‘Khomeinism’ ideologies, which denote ‘Wahhabism’ in Saudi Arabia and ‘Welayt Al-faqih’ in Iran, as labels to denounce external actors. They construed these labels as targeting domestic actors. At this point, it can be seen as interconnectivity between the domestic situation and the trans-nationality of sectarian labelling by different securitizing actors.

The US occupation of Iraq and regime change can be seen as one of the most important events that have given a new image of the region and broke down the balance of power that was existence since the end of the Iraq-Iran war to a new era of interactions between the two rivals. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia wanted to cover their rivalry with a sectarian face, which is an idea that has its roots in the internal political dynamics of both states. The acquisition of any margin of ‘influence’ by one of the rival states can provide as a way to advancing political ambitions in a region where the political climate is frequently uncertain. In the Iraqi case within the context of this proxy conflict, officials in Riyadh and Tehran sought to frame the other’s threat to audiences of their affiliated Sunni minority opposition parties or groups and Shia ruler groups in Iraq. For instance, what the leader of the Islamic revolution Khomeini, wished for, “Iraq has a distinguished place in the hearts of the Iranians, and this place is what pushed the Iranians to sacrifice their lives when the Wahhabi ‘ISIS’ gangs threatened the security of the country” [22]. While looking at Saudi Arabia official’s statements, the same rhetoric is in place, for instance, Al-Sabhan, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador in Baghdad, said that “Iran’s involvement in Iraq is leading to sectarian discrimination against Sunnis and acting against them by the Al-Hashd Al-Sha’bi in Sunni cities that have been liberated from ISIS control” [23]. Hence, it is interesting to see the both of Iran and Saudi Arabia are utilizing similar stratagems to amplify their ‘benevolence’ policy in Iraq to their affiliated parties in contrast to the ‘malevolence’ policy of the other.

Within the context of The Yemeni war, officials in Riyadh and Tehran sought to frame the other’s threat to audiences of their affiliated parties; Houthi to Iran and the Yemeni recognized government to Saudi Arabia. To this end, Khamenei stated that “Saudi Arabia committed genocide in Yemen and oppressed its people, that Iran will support all those who are oppressed (Ibid). When it comes to the Saudi rhetoric, Prince Muhammad bin Salman stressed that “Iran through its affiliated militias, Iran has disrupted the political path in Yemen, started occupying Yemeni cities and seizing the capabilities of the Yemeni state” [24], adding “unfortunately the international community did not address Iran’s expansionist and sectarian approach” (Ibid, Para. 8), “Their actions (the Houthis) reflect Tehran’s priorities and needs, not Sanaa” [24]. Official discourses of them are based on stark dichotomies between benevolent/malevolent, wise/unwise, responsible/irresponsible, produces a nefarious, believer/unbeliever, the image of the other, which allows Tehran and Riyadh to reinforce their identity in Yemen through this opposition.

Iran’s relationship with the Lebanese Hezbollah has raised the concerns of Saudi Arabia, which has strived to seek an ally inside by supporting Sunni political currents, in order to be able to stand in the face of Iranian ‘influence’ in Lebanon. Bin Salman claimed: “The Iranian regime created Hezbollah in Lebanon to be a dagger behind the Arabs” [21]. In the

Iranian discourse referring to what he called Saudi Arabia's involvement in Lebanese affairs and government, Hassan Rouhani emphasized: "Historically, we have not had a case where a country has forced the officials of the other country in its soil to resign in order to interfere in the affairs of that country, as it seems, this is unprecedented in history" [21]. Thus, official discourses in both states are picturing the opposite as their antithesis, through this opposition shaping their identity. Hence, these speech acts tools will be comprehended as a pessimistic stratagem to gather their affiliated parties' supporters around their policies against the opponent.

The ongoing Syrian crisis is undoubtedly one of the most severe crises in the region that is blocking any effort to improve Iranian-Saudi relations. When addressing the Iranian public, Tehran has, from the beginning of the Syrian intervention, accentuated the need to protect shrines of Shia saints against 'Wahhabi terrorists', a sectarian discourse designed to appeal to the religious nationalism of Iranians. As such, "Wahhabism is the cause of discord, division and bloodshed in the region" [25], said Soleimani, adding that "Wahhabism destroyed in the name of ISIS two Arab countries (Iraq and Syria) and brought them losses, but Iran rushed to protect these two countries and eliminated this poisonous storm before it reached the borders of Iran" [25]. From Saudis side discourses, Bin Salman claimed: "Iran runs a proxy war in Syria through its militias and regional allies, which allows it to establish an overland supply route that leads from Beirut through Syria and Iraq to Tehran" [26]. It is appealing to observe that the identity constructed is overstated by highlighting the consequences of the negative actions of others.

We should not forget the importance of identity in Bahrain, which means that Bahrain is at the heart of the sectarian conflict, wedged between the two dominant powers of the Persian Gulf, whose rivalries have shaped events in Bahrain. Khamenei concerning to Bahraini Uprising said that "the majority of the people are being oppressed by the minority who has the power" [27]. In a sense, this is a dividing rhetoric about identity. However, in June 2016, the head of the Qods Force, Qassem Soleimani, in an unparalleled statement threatened Manama that "soon the [Shiites] of Bahrain will have no recourse but armed resistance" [28], without doubt, such statements by Iranian state actors are fuelling the sectarian tensions between the Sunni and Shiite segments of the Bahraini population. What is more, Saudi Arabia's state-agent traces the demonstrations back to the Iranian revolution in 1979, claiming that "Khomeini created Hezbollah in Bahrain still exists, along with claims that Iranian propaganda is being broadcasted towards Bahrain and that Iranian officials have issued statements that Bahrain is a province of Iran leads to the statement" [29]. Adding: "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will never accept Iran's taking power in Bahrain. This is a fantasy if anyone, including in the West, believes that such an eventuality can happen on Saudi Arabia's watch" [29]. As the consequence of their provocative prose, the enemy is reduced, reified as being ugly and evil.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in the Middle East through the lens of securitization theory. We have investigated the discourses and speech acts underpinning Iran's and Saudi Arabia's interfere in the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. These discourses become inextricably connected to a dichotomized

demarcation between the Self and the Other as political actors purposely create sectarian identities as securitized issues. Then such a demarcation becomes implicitly linked to a specific conflict. More importantly, a serious adherence to the theory of securitization illuminates how identity plays out in conflicts. In the post-2011 order in the Middle East, securitization might assist in unraveling the processes leading to the entrenchment and dissemination of identity as a meta-narrative. Engaging with the securitization of theory allows one to understand why actors pursue identities to securitize.

Thus, this article has attempted to contribute to the contentious debates concerning the character of the 'audience' in the securitization process, given that it was carried out for an external non-state actor audience. Saudi Arabia and Iran's attempts to securitize the threat coming from their respective rival ideologies (Wahhabism and Khomeinism) to their domestic audiences and their non-state affiliated actors' audiences in the region have been multifaceted. Since both Tehran and Riyadh are facing domestic and regional challenges and they are in a struggle to shape the remaining margin of regional order. Thus, it is clear enough to concede that they might influence the discourses of the ruling elites, and hence the foreign policy of both regimes. No doubt, as a powerful tool, discourse gives rulers to legitimize their actions, inside and abroad. Therefore, through their statements discourses of constructing a threatening 'other', both regimes are capable of employ an assertive foreign policy, which thus will affect their first, redirect their citizens' concentration away from the internal problem such as ruling legitimacy. Second, on word indecisively employing a hostile rhetoric, equally, regimes are able to produce an atmosphere of regional crisis by giving domestic and regional affiliated parties' legitimacy to take necessary measures to fight a foreign enemy beyond their borders. Iran and Saudi Arabia's continuing indirect conflicts in the Middle East is to enhance their popular support by relying on ideological rhetoric, as they know that their citizens and affiliated parties' supporters are often prone to rally around their identity against opponents and securitizing the threat posed by the other. Consequently, Iran and Saudi Arabia's securitization policy towards each other, rather than stemming from Iran's threatening to Saudi Arabia and vice versa, refers to their struggle to expand 'influence' in the region and divert internal problems.

Such complexities added to securitization efforts created more problems which made it necessary to go beyond the notion of a Westernized type of securitization that overlooks the nature of society beyond the Western world, where identities and certainly the securitized threat can go beyond state borders, and eventually bring back Realist analysis in the study of the region. Therefore, considering the European emphasis of the theory, some scholars have argued that ideas from the Copenhagen School could be extended by idea travel to non-democratic contexts, which involves applying concepts without distorting their original meaning [9, 30-34]. It is not misleading to see the conflict in terms of power-politic and national interests, and how religion has been and continues to be used by both regimes as an instrument to pursue further their interests, political power and expanding their influences in the region. In the context of the underlying factors, semantics should emphasize trans-national identity inter-national identities that include sectarian identities such as Sunni and Shi'i identities. Furthermore, the construction of facilitating conditions in that way can lead the securitization process to have an impact on state and non-state actors and their audiences across the region. To weight over different states in the region, they have divided and created two armed camps in the Middle East based on the political ideology to form regional allies. Long-standing structural tensions have divided them. In

their quest, each tried to take the Islamic leadership. With possessing different visions, each has its desired regional order within the margin, left by extra-regional actors. Furthermore, it would be interesting to scrutinize how potentially Saudi-Israel relationship with a reshaping of the US policies and Trump's new approach in the region would influence the un-balance of power and the development of this rivalry that is anything but inevitable.

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