



Article Type: Research paper

## Iran-Saudi Arabia Competition and the Developments of the Middle East Security Complex

\*Reza Khalili<sup>1</sup>, Qadir Nasri<sup>2</sup>, Mohammad Askari Armandi<sup>3</sup>

1. Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Khwarazmi University, Tehran, Iran

2. Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Khwarazmi University, Tehran, Iran

3. Master of Political Science, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

### Article Info.

Received: 24/05/2023

Accepted: 13/09/2023

Available Online: 16/12/2023

### Abstract

Security issues in the Middle East entered a new environment with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, one of the manifestations of which can be seen in the prominence of the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia for regional leadership. This competition itself led to the greater complexity of security issues and the occurrence of new security crises, which is important for the security of the region, as well as international peace and security. In this article we will examine the effect of the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two countries claiming leadership in the Middle East on the security of this region after the September 11 in the framework of the regional security complex theory. The main question is, what effect has the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia had on the developments of the Middle East security complex? In response to this question, the

Reza Khalili, Ph.D.

**Address:** Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Khwarazmi University, Tehran, Iran

**E-mail:** Rezakhalili1@khu.ac.ir

### How to Site:

Khalili Reza, Nasri, Qadeer, Askari Armandi, Mohammad (2023). The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the evolution of the Middle East security group. *Fundamental and applied studies of the Islamic world*, 5(3), 9-12.

hypothesis is emphasized that the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia has increased insecurity in the Middle East and grew the intervention of world powers in the region, which resulted in the formation of domain security crises, and instability. In collecting research data, we use first- and second-hand library sources. In data analysis, using the historical and comparative methods, we describe and analyze the impact of the competition between these two countries on the developments in the security complex of the Middle East after the September 11.

The theory of regional security complex was proposed for the first time by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver in *Regions and Powers* book. They believe that while the national and international levels of analysis do not provide a complete guide for the analysis of issues related to regions, therefore, the existence of an intermediate level of analysis will be suitable for this purpose. This intermediate level of analysis tries filling the gap between the national and the international system levels. Based on the definition, a security complex is a group of states whose main security concerns are so interdependent that their national security cannot reasonably be separated from each other. In other words, the regional security complex is mainly formed by patterns of friendship and enmity. These patterns are socially based on historical factors and common cultures of the region. Based on this, the security of any country does not rely only on itself, and one cannot rely only on the national level in security analysis. On the other hand, the global level is also very general and is not sufficient for understanding of national security of countries. Therefore, the regional level is introduced as the appropriate level of analysis in which global and national security influence each other, and the security of individual units and the intervention process of global powers can only be understood through the understanding of regional security developments.

Based on the principles of the regional security complex theory, in the Middle East region, various factors have shaped the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia at different levels, the most important of which are: oil and energy supply, conflict over regional supremacy, identity subnational and transnational factors such as Shia and Sunni identities and ethnic identities such as Persian, Arab, etc., foreign powers that have influenced or covered security developments in the Middle East, various ideologies such as Revolutionary Shiite Islam in Iran and Sunni Wahhabi Islam in Saudi Arabia. The sum of these factors has made Iran known as a country in favor of creating a stable and local security system suited to the needs of the region, while Saudi Arabia, accepting the presence of foreign powers including the United States, has always considered the

security of the region dependent on their support.

To examine the impact of the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia on the developments of the Middle East security complex, we first examined the existing theories and perspectives on the security of the Middle East, and after examining and criticizing those, we developed and applied the theory of the regional security complex to explain the developments in the region. This theory deals with the analysis of security at four different levels: internal, regional, interregional and global, and for this reason, it has more importance and explanatory power for the systematic review and analysis of security issues in the Middle East. Examining the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia based on the components and variables of this theory clearly shows that since 2001, competition and even hostility between the two countries has increased and the balance of power in the Middle East has undergone fundamental changes. These changes have caused an increase in the intervention of world powers, including the United States, the European Union, China, and Russia, in the development of the region. The examination of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia at the four internal, regional, interregional, and global levels shows that not only the security of the Middle East is not ensured, but also under the influence of the competition between these two countries, the competition between the effective world powers have increased in the region.

In such a situation, to control and manage crises and reduce insecurity in the region, above all, a collective will and mutual understanding must be formed between the leaders and decision-makers of the Middle East countries, especially Iran and Saudi Arabia. The leaders of Iran and Saudi Arabia, as the main players, should put aside their differences and take steps toward convergence and synergy. These actors must, first of all, understand that they have a common destiny. They should reduce their differences through comprehensive dialogue and diplomacy at all micro and macro levels, to achieve mutual understanding of common interests and greater awareness of the benefits of common security. To change the situation, it seems that the countries of the region should focus more on mutual economic interests and collective security than on differences or even shared identities, and they should accept that all actors should have their roles and place in the power and security equations of the region. Naturally, emphasizing on establishing and strengthening economic and commercial relations, along with paying attention to cultural and identity commonalities, can become the basis for strengthening political and even security relations. If such conditions are fulfilled, it is obvious that

there is no need for the presence and direct intervention of foreign powers in the affairs of the region, and this also helps to solve more issues and changes the security complex of the Middle East from a divergent, insecure and unstable state to a convergent, safe and stable region, not only for the countries of the region but also for the whole world.

**Key words:** Iran, Saudi Arabia, Middle East, September 11, regional security complex.