

Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation

Balance of Power and Deterrence between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Era of Post-Arab Uprisings

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The political situation in the Middle East is still one of the main concerns for the rest of the world because of the vital interests of the global economy, world energy stability, and the state of international peace. Dramatic, ongoing developments in the past few years—specifically the period that followed the Arab uprisings—have changed the dynamics of politics, alliances, and disputes in the region. Other important factors have contributed to those changes as well, such as US withdrawing from the region as “Gulf Police” to counterbalance Iran’s influence due to the revolution of shale oil and gas in the United States, the emergence of the concept of the Asian pivot, and the P5+1–Iran nuclear agreement. These factors combined have reduced the United States’ desire to remain responsible for Gulf security. Thus, the shape of policies in the Middle East will be defined mainly by the balance of power and deterrence between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as it has been for decades. I try to analyze the balance of power in the Gulf region in the era of post-Arab uprisings and US withdrawal. In particular, the rapid occurrence of events has increased the demand for research that addresses and understands those alterations. I find that recent developments in the Middle East have forced Saudi Arabia, mainly, and some members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to shift their policy to be more independent and to adopt an assertive neorealist doctrine to keep the status quo in the region. Saudi Arabia has started taking major steps to develop its military capabilities and has also tried to change the map of alliances in the Middle East by forming a pan-Arab force and creating a new Arab coalition, including some of the GCC (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar) plus Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan, which played an important role in Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen to confront Iranian expansion in the Arab world. On the

other hand, Iran will have a greater budget after removing the UN sanctions related to its nuclear file and unfreezing assets, thus giving Iran the capabilities to finance its proxy wars in the region, which may thus augment the intensity of the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran.