The Saudi reaction to the Arab revolts: the paradoxical Saudi policy towards the Arab Spring

Youssef Tarek Bastaoros

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School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Political Science

Master’s Thesis

The Saudi reaction to the Arab Revolts:

The Paradoxical Saudi Policy towards the Arab Spring

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Political Science
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

By
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**The Saudi reaction to the Arab Revolts:**

**The Paradoxical Saudi Policy towards the Arab Spring**

A Thesis Submitted by
Youssef Tarek Bastaoros
Submitted to the department of Political Science
Spring 2015

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts
in International Relations

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring that erupted in early 2011 in several Arab countries, and how Saudi Arabia dealt with these events. The reactions of Saudi Arabia towards the events of the Arab Spring seem contradictory in the sense of effectively supporting the regimes in Bahrain and Egypt whilst supporting the opposition in Libya and Syria. Several research questions are raised in this thesis, therefore this study attempts to provide answers on how a conservative status quo like the Kingdom serves its objectives in a revolutionary environment, and why Saudi Arabia applies these apparent contradictory measures in dealing with the Arab Spring. This study uses Neoclassical Realist approach to study the foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring, and how Saudi Arabia dealt with the threats unleashed by the Arab Spring. Lastly, the conclusion of this thesis tests the hypotheses and offers a comprehensive understating of the Saudi reaction towards the Arab Spring from a Neoclassical Realist perspective.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

The thesis “The Saudi reaction to the Arab Revolts: The Paradoxical Saudi Policy towards the Arab Spring” aims at studying how the Saudi foreign policy dealt with Arab Spring and why the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reacted differently to these events. The Kingdom developed diverse responses to the events of the Arab Spring in countries like Egypt and Bahrain in one hand and in Syria and Libya on the other hand, where Saudi reactions towards the countries that experienced mass protests seems contradictory. In some cases, Saudi Arabia supported incumbent regimes against public demands of change; while in other cases it took the side of the opposition against the ruling regime. The Saudi reactions towards the Arab Spring included a broad range of policies from active military defense of the incumbent regime in Bahrain to the active support of the anti-regime forces and the opposition in Syria. Explaining these seeming contradictions is the subject matter of this thesis with the aim to provide an integrated interpretation of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia.

Variant Saudi policies raise questions about the objectives of Saudi Arabia in the region and how Saudi Arabia pursues these objectives in such a revolutionary environment. In order to understand these dissimilarities, the threats that Saudi Arabia faces as a result of the Arab Spring must be analyzed, and the capabilities and resources that Saudi Arabia mobilized to formulate its foreign policy have to be examined and assessed.
The Research Problem

Since early 2011, Saudi Arabia has been confronted with increasing challenges as a result of the Arab Spring, which has dramatically changed the political composition and the balance of power in the region as many autocratic regimes were deposed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Internally, Saudi Arabia have remained largely free of significant trouble,¹ when compared to other countries in the region where the waves of the Arab Spring toppled ruling regimes, caused civil strife or achieved considerable successes of democratic progress. The Saudi reaction towards domestic dissent resulting from the Arab Spring within the Kingdom, in addition to its stance towards the events of the Arab Spring in other countries seems contradictory. As Saudi Arabia has suppressed and resisted revolts arising from the Arab Spring within the Kingdom and in other friendly countries like Egypt and Bahrain, while it was in favor of supporting the opposition in countries like Syria and Libya. Domestically, Saudi Arabia was affected by these developments, on a low scale though, where it had to address possible popular discontent through a combination of limited reforms, massive economic distribution, and the use of regular repressive measures. The ruling regime in Saudi Arabia, like most authoritarian rentier Arab regimes, maintains power through repression of opposition on one hand, while offering security and economic prosperity to its citizens on the other hand. The spill-over effects of the Arab Spring made its way to Saudi Arabia in the early months of 2011. Calls for protests were made through social network platforms such as the Facebook page known as “A Saudi Day of Rage”, which had around 36,000

members, and minor protests were organized in Riyadh, Eastern Province and other Saudi cities. In response, Saudi King Abdullah has offered billions of dollars to discourage dissent among the Saudi citizens, with the aim that this policy would preserve the status quo, protect the stability and security of the Al Saud’s regime. The policy that Saudi Arabia is using internally is simple yet it has proved effective; where the power is consolidated in the hands of the ruling family, while the Saudi citizens enjoy ample economic dividends, limited political rights, and have little influence on the decision making process within a constrained political sphere. The politics of state patronage and rentierism are mainly based on the redistribution of oil wealth, which is one of the Saudi regime’s main effective instruments to contain potential dissent. Such policy has helped the Saudi regime to enhance its legitimacy, which is also derived from many other internal and external aspects such as religious significance and Western support.

Externally, Saudi Arabia responded to the Arab Spring with some sort of contradictory standards. Saudi Arabia actively intervened in support of the opposition, especially in Syria, and facilitated an Arab League’s resolution to impose a no-fly zone in Libya which eventually led to the fall of the Qaddafi’s regime. On contrast, Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Bahrain in support for the ruling regime against protesters demanding political reform. As for the Egyptian revolution of 2011, Saudi Arabia avoided taking an explicit strong position against the Egyptian revolution. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that Saudi Arabia was on the regime’s side to the extent that the ouster of the former president Hosni Mubarak has caused a political strife in the relationship between

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2 Ibid, 532.

Saudi Arabia and the United States, as the Kingdom thought that the United States “should have done more to bolster Mubarak’s regime”.

Later in 2013, Saudi Arabia explicitly supported the protests that led to the removal of the elected Muslim Brotherhood former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi from power. In addition, Saudi Arabia strongly supported the military-backed regime that came to power following the removal of Mohamed Morsi’s regime. As for the developments in Tunisia, Oman, Jordan and Morocco, Saudi Arabia was on the regime's side, but only through less intense measures. Receiving the fleeing former president of Tunisia Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Saudi Arabia was a sign of the sympathy which the government of Saudi Arabia had towards the deposed president. These contradictory responses to the developments of the Arab Spring raise questions about the objectives of Saudi Arabia, and why it reacted in such contradictory manner in countries that similarly experienced mass revolts.

The goal here is to address the broad question about the strategies through which a conservative status quo power like Saudi Arabia served its objectives in such a revolutionary environment. In order to understand how Saudi Arabia served its objectives in the revolutionary environment, it is essential to analyze the threats unleashed by the Arab Spring and the capabilities that Saudi Arabia had at its disposal and its ability to mobilize these capabilities and resources to deal with these perceived threats. The nature of the responses of Saudi Arabia to these events could be examined through taking into considerations the objectives and interests of Saudi Arabia, particularly regime survival,

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preservation of the status quo, and preserving the Saudi regional hegemony.\(^5\) Despite the fact that these responses may seem at odd with each other and inconsistent, this thesis try to place Saudi policy vis-à-vis the Arab Spring in perspective so that such seeming contradictions can be explained.

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis to the policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring, the thesis will examine the perceived threats to the Saudi national interests as a result of the Arab Spring. The thesis will also examine the capabilities and resources as elements of the intervening variable, which were instrumental in both the formulation and implementation of the Saudi policy. These aspects will be studied from a Neoclassical Realist approach which offers a conceptualization of foreign policy by analyzing both the system-level and unit-level without annulling any of them. The approach puts more emphasis on the domestic aspects as an intervening variable in the relation between the external environment and the foreign policy decisions.

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Research Questions and Hypotheses

In order to examine the policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring, the thesis raises the following questions:

1. How a conservative status quo power like Saudi Arabia served its objectives in a revolutionary environment?

2. What makes Saudi Arabia apply the observed contradictory standards in dealing with the Arab Spring?

In order to answer the first research question about how a conservative status quo served its objectives in a revolutionary environment, it is essential to analyze the Kingdom’s capabilities which have been deployed to formulate the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and how it used these capabilities to deal with the perceived threats. Analyzing the capabilities of Saudi Arabia that contributed to the formulation and implementation of policies, this should help understanding the way in which Saudi Arabia served its objectives, or how it is trying to achieve them in a revolutionary environment. The capabilities will be assessed vis-à-vis the threats as perceived by the Saudi leaders as a part of the intervening variable of Neoclassical Realist approach, in order to eventually offer an explanation of the foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring.

In order to tackle the second research question concerned with the contradictory standards that Saudi Arabia applied towards the Arab Spring, it is necessary to define and analyze some of the threats that Saudi Arabia is facing as a result of the Arab Spring and how Saudi leaders perceived and confronted these threats to name a few: calls for domestic protests in Saudi Arabia, the Iranian influence in the region, the rise of the role
Muslim Brotherhood, the emerging regional competition with Qatar and terrorism. Through analyzing and studying the threats that Saudi Arabia is facing as a result of the Arab Spring, it will be possible to answer the research question about the reasons of the contradictory standards of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring.

The thesis hypothesizes several statements that will be qualitatively tested but essentially used to guide the research process. These include the following:

1. Saudi policy towards Arab Spring is highly consistent regardless of the apparent inconsistency

2. Foreign policy of Saudi Arabia experiences a pivotal shift as a result of the Arab Spring, where Saudi policy is showing more assertiveness and risk prone tendencies.

3. The foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is formed by hard core security and political interests rather than religious motives
Literature Review

The literature published before the Arab Spring was mainly concerned with analyzing the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and the determinants that the Saudi foreign policy is based upon. The chapter by Bahgat Korany and Moataz A. Fatah offers a quality overview of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia, the domestic environment of the Kingdom, and how the changes in domestic and international levels influence the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. The authors present the domestic environment of Saudi Arabia through discussing several determinants as a general framework in formulating the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia such as “geography and geopolitics, social structure of population, economic and military capabilities, political structure, the legitimizing function of Islam, and pressures for political reform”.

Some of the determinants presented in this chapter will be analyzed in this thesis to determine their impact in formulating the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring. In addition, the authors offer an emphasis on the varying interest groups in the Kingdom and the pressures for reform and change to the political structure. This can be used for the analysis used from Neoclassical Realist approach as one of the intervening variables to study the relationship between systemic level and the foreign policy behavior.

Korany and A. Fattah offer an explanation of the Saudi foreign policy orientation and behavior at both the regional and global levels. The authors argue that the foreign policy orientation of Saudi Arabia is based on religious and economic factors, particularly being the world largest exporter of oil. The authors offer examples of the significance of

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religion in legitimizing the Kingdom’s foreign policy. For instance, the Saudi peace initiative of 2002, in which a full Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 was demanded in exchange for normal peace relations between Israel and Arab countries. This Saudi initiative was based on an “Islamic fatwa (jurisprudence) to put Israel in the category of dar al-'ahd (‘territory of covenant’) rather than dar al-harb (‘territory of war’)”. As for the economic factors, the authors assert the significance of Saudi Arabia being the largest exporter of oil, which gives the state valuable resources important to implement its foreign policy. The authors argue that “Islam and Oil are two bases of the country’s foreign policy”, and together they provide Saudi Arabia with both soft and material powers to achieve its goals.

Alternatively, other scholars focus on what they describe as pillars of Saudi foreign policy. Alan Munro argues that the Saudi foreign policy has been depending on the “balancing of two distinct pillars”. Firstly, Saudi Arabia tries to guarantee its national security and to provide stable oil exports through having a close alliance with Western countries especially the United States. Secondly, the other pillar is to preserve the leading role of Saudi Arabia within the Islamic world as the custodian of the two holiest shrines in Islam; this pillar requires Saudi Arabia to expand its foreign policy influence into a larger regional and international presence to include the whole Muslim world. Within this two pillars design, the author addresses issues that are of high concern to the Saudi foreign policy such as regional rivalries and threats as well as the issue of Palestine, claiming that the policy of Saudi Arabia towards these issues are mostly influenced by

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7 Ibid 363.
8 Ibid, 365.
the two aforementioned strategic pillars.\textsuperscript{10} However, the author argues that the impact of important developments such as the Iranian Revolution and the end of Cold War stimulated Saudi Arabia to give a greater “attention to regional and Islamic sentiment in the conduct of Saudi overseas relations”,\textsuperscript{11} where Saudi Arabia cannot highly count on its western dependence with the increasing political sentiments against the West in the Islamic world. Neil Partrick adopts different two pillars argument about the Saudi position of “a defense alignment with the United States, and the assertion of Arab and Islamic norms.”\textsuperscript{12} The author argues that Saudi Arabia is trying to maintain the balance between these two pillars. Although the United States and Saudi Arabia have a common interest in containing Iran, nevertheless Saudi Arabia is aware that the American agenda might conflict with Saudi ideological standards on issues such as its relation with Israel and the American policy in Iraq. Furthermore, Mai Yamani demonstrates in her work that Saudi Arabia, assisted by its oil wealth and its religious significance as the custodian of the two holiest Islamic places, is a major active player in the Middle East. The author asserts that Saudi Arabia’s main concern is to contain the Iranian influence and the Shiite threat, which the Saudi government considers as the greatest threat to the Middle East stability.\textsuperscript{13} Additionally, according to Yamani, Saudi Arabia presents itself as a more moderate example in contrast to Iran which is aggressively challenging the United States and labeling it as “the Great Satan” and aims to wipe Israel off the map. However, the author claims that Saudi possession of oil and its status as the custodian of Islam’s holy sites would not guarantee long term security for Saudi Arabia, especially domestically,

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 46.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 47.
and that the continued reliance on these resources to evade addressing domestic demands will make Saudi Arabia vulnerable to further threats. Instead, Yamani argues that Saudi Arabia should discontinue its repression of the Shiite minority and improve their social and political status within the Kingdom in order to rally the Saudi population at the regime’s side.\textsuperscript{14} However, such action could undermine one of the two pillars of Al-Saud rule and could result in a confrontation with the hardliner Wahhabi clergy. 

The views presented in the previous paragraph mainly emphasize the significance of oil and Islam as two factors in determining the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. However, the importance of these factors that they are mainly employed to serve the interests of Saudi Arabia to ensure its survival and regional stability, which will be analyzed along with other factors throughout this thesis. These factors have given Saudi Arabia an important role in the international system and equipped the Kingdom with tools to confront external pressures and threats.

While Mai Yamani emphasizes the sectarian, i.e., Sunni versus Shiite, dimension of Saudi foreign policy, F. Gregory Gause III offers another perspective. He argues that Saudi Arabia is dealing with the Iranian influence in the region from the perception of balance of power politics and not sectarianism. Gause further demonstrates that Saudi Arabia deals with the issue as an increasing Iranian power and not Shiite power; he supports his claim through the fact the Saudis invited Sunni and Shiite clerics to a meeting in Mecca, where they issued a statement condemning sectarian violence. In addition, King Abdullah allowed Shiites to elect representatives for Municipal council

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 154-155.
elections in 2005 and they were also allowed to publicly celebrate their feast of Ashura.\textsuperscript{15} Gause’s analysis of the Saudi foreign policy asserts that Saudi Arabia is concerned with balancing the Iranian power rather than fighting Shiite presence. From a realist perspective, Gause argues that failure to balance Iranian power could undermine the survival and stability of Saudi Arabia. From a Neoclassical Realist perspective, such attempt to balance the influence of Iran in the region requires the mobilization of Saudi resources and formation of alliances to counter such threat. Changing patterns of resource mobilization and alliance formation in the wake of the Arab Spring is addressed in this thesis.

On the other hand, the literature on Saudi foreign policy following the Arab Spring is mainly focusing on two trends. Firstly, how Saudi Arabia has maintained stability and regional status quo through the deployment of Saudi capabilities. Secondly, the factors and threats that made Saudi Arabia react to the Arab Spring in a manner that is seemingly characterized by contradictions, counterrevolutionary, and multiple standards. Nonetheless, few have attempted to take into considerations the two trends altogether. Moreover, the literature reviewed generally did not offer an assessment of the significance of the Arab Spring to Saudi Arabia from a theoretical approach rooted in International Relations theory, a shortcoming that will be addressed in this thesis.

One of the obvious trends in the literature on Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring was highly characterized by pointing out the capabilities of Saudi Arabia that helped the Kingdom to remain trouble free in the course of the Arab Spring, as well as allowing

Saudi Arabia to maintain a certain level of stability and regional status quo. Steve A. Yetiv argues that Saudi Arabia remained “springless”; as being a rentier state the Kingdom used oil wealth to strengthen the regime against threats to its survival.\(^\text{16}\) Rentier resources allowed Saudi Arabia to navigate through the trouble of the Arab Spring, along with other important factors. These factors include the popularity of King Abdullah when compared to other Arab autocrats, the tight control the Al Saud family has over the different political and national institutions, and that the Kingdom generally is not under international pressures from Western countries especially the United States to reform and democratize due to the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Tobey Craig Jones demonstrates the method of counterrevolution implemented by Saudi Arabia domestically and regionally through the usage of oil revenues, the forces of Islamic radicalism, and sectarianism to ensure the survival of the Kingdom and its regional hegemony.\(^\text{17}\) Jones also discusses the methods of counterrevolution used by Saudi Arabia, notably the special relationship between the ruling family and the clergy where religion is used to support the regime’s legitimacy. Furthermore, Crystal A. Ennis and Bessma Momani demonstrate the foreign policy strategy of Saudi Arabia towards the events of the Arab Spring, arguing that since early 2011, Saudi Arabia redesigned its strategy mainly to contain the revolutionary influence of the Arab Spring and to maintain regional balance of power. This has been achieved by Saudi Arabia through using oil rent and the religious significance it posses, which give the regime sharp legitimacy.\(^\text{18}\) Such


\(^{18}\) Crystal A. Ennis and Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies." *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 6, 1127-1144.
capabilities and strategies as presented by Yetiv, Jones, Ennis and Momani are not
different nor fresh since the literature before the Arab Spring used oil and religious
significance as the two factors in formulating the Saudi policy. Yet how Saudi Arabia
used such tools have evolved in dealing with the Arab Spring and will be put under
analysis through this thesis.

Another trend in the analysis of the post Arab Spring’s literature, Saudi foreign policy is
mainly characterized by emphasizing the threats that shape the policy of Saudi Arabia
and its reactions to the Arab Spring. Areal Jahner argues that the Arab Spring intensified
the competition for leadership between Saudi Arabia and Iran; the two countries that
better represent the sectarian division between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims, in addition
to other factors, especially competition in oil production and ambitions for Gulf
hegemony between the two powers. Mohamed Ayoub in his work demonstrates
somehow a combination of the two trends. He argues that oil wealth gives Saudi Arabia
the means to face the internal and external threats and to direct its foreign policy to
control the Iranian influence; in addition to, its respectable demographic base, modern
weaponry, its role in multilateral organizations such as the GCC, and its position as the
protector of Sunni Islam against Shiite Islam sponsored by Iran. Yet Ayoob warns that
Saudi Arabia is vulnerable, lacks political institutions, and heavily dependent on wealth
generated from oil. He argues that the seemingly contradictions in Saudi foreign policy
“in dealing with the Arab spring are likely to limit its regional appeal and affect its

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19 Ariel Jahner, "SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN: The Struggle for Power and Influence in the
diplomacy”, especially towards Arab countries that experienced mass revolts. Prince Turki Al Faisal, former head of the Saudi General Intelligence, in his address to the 22nd annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference in Washington, D.C., on October 22, 2013 offered a Saudi view of the Saudi foreign policy. He briefly explains the reasons for Saudi Arabia’s self-confidence in the world affairs which is mainly due to that it is the cradle of Islam and its economic growth. Subsequently, Al Faisal demonstrates Saudi Arabia overall goals in the region which he defines as “to strengthen their allies in the region and to assist their neighbors to maintain stability”. Al Faisal also points out in his address the threat of Iran who portrays itself as not only the leader of the Shiite minority but as the leader of all Muslim revolutionaries and the concerns of Saudi Arabia towards the Iranian nuclear program, in addition to Iranian destabilizing efforts in Arab countries with Shiite majority and significant Shiite minority. Prince Turki Al Faisal asserted that Saudi Arabia intends to oppose Iranian interference in the domestic affairs of other Arab countries.

Guido Steinberg focuses on the counterrevolutionary strategy applied by Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring. The author argues that Saudi Arabia has emerged as a leader of the Gulf monarchies and wealthy oil producing countries by using its oil revenues, historical significance and religious legitimacy. Steinberg offers an inclusive analysis on the domestic challenges resulting from the Arab Spring and how the Al Saud’s regime dealt with the protests that occurred in Saudi Arabia whether carried by the Islamist or liberal opposition in addition to the Shiite protests movement. Afterward, Steinberg


21 Turki Al Faisal, ”Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Policy.” Middle East Policy XX, no. 4 (20123): 37-44.
discusses Saudi Arabia’s “new offensive regional policy” towards Iran that was apparent through three fundamental actions. Firstly, through strengthening the Saudi allied regimes in the region and limiting the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood like in the case of Egypt. Secondly, the Saudi military intervention in Bahrain against the Shiite protests that threatened the stability of the friendly Al Khalifa’s regime; and finally, the support of Saudi Arabia to the rebels in Syria against the regime of Bashar Al Assad, which is described as a proxy war between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Such new offensive strategy shows the Saudi firm position towards threats that emerged as a result of the Arab Spring. According to Steinberg, this offensive strategy is seen as a change in formulating Saudi foreign policy from trying to influence the events mostly through its economic capability and religious influence before the Arab Spring to more aggressive actions to the extent of military intervention during the Arab Spring.

The literature shows, as mentioned previously, two obvious trends in analyzing the policy of Saudi Arabia, particularly in the context of the Arab Spring. Most of the works have been concerned with either explaining the means used by Saudi Arabia and its capabilities to maintain regional stability and to preserve the status quo to ultimately ensure its survival and regional hegemony. The other trend focuses on the threats facing Saudi Arabia which increased in the wake of the Arab Spring and the measures Saudi Arabia are taken to confront such threats.

This thesis will build on the literature reviewed in an attempt to combine the mentioned trends and to offer a more comprehensive view of the policy of Saudi Arabia towards the

Arab Spring. Obviously, the literature reviewed demonstrates the prevalence of the realist approach in the explanation of Saudi policy vis-á-vis the Arab Spring, that is while some of the literature is concerned in analyzing the state’ capabilities and the other focuses on the threats facing Saudi Arabia and politics of balancing such threats. Both trends deal with the state as the main actor that matters regardless of the revolutionary developments that swiped the region. In order to effectively analyze and study the aforementioned research questions that this thesis seeks to examine, the thesis will be combining and assessing both the threats facing Saudi Arabia and the capabilities of Saudi Arabia that help in formulating the Saudi policy.
**Conceptual Framework**

Realism is characterized by being an evolving approach that tries to provide an acceptable explanation to what is happening in international relations. Realism is known as an approach with an evolutionary path which led to the emergence of many trends within the realist perspective from Classical Realism to Neoclassical Realism. In order to have a better understanding of Neoclassical Realism, it is necessary to understand how it relates to other approaches within the Realist theory. All three approaches: Classical Realism, Neo-Realism and Neoclassical Realism share some basic assumptions concerning the nature of international relations. Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, three prominent scholars who have contributed to the articulation of Neoclassical Realism, argue that all realist approaches agree that human beings are unable to survive individually and must be members of larger groups to guarantee their security against external enemies. Secondly, politics is a struggle between self-interested groups due to scarcity and uncertainty in the world. Thirdly, the element of power is an essential factor for any group in order to secure its goals.  

Neoclassical Realist approach agrees with Neo-Realism that systemic factors determine the broad direction of the policy. Neoclassical Realism also concurs with Classical Realism that foreign policy is made at the state level by political leaders, where it adds that domestic factors intervene in formulating the policies undertaken by leaders. According to Gidon Rose, “the world leaders are constrained with both international and domestic politics”, Neoclassical Realism demonstrates the importance of linking both  

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23 Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffery W. Taliaferro (eds.), "Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy " In Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy, 14-15. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

24 Ibid, 152.
domestic factors and the effects of systemic factors to provide an explanation for foreign policy decisions.

Classical Realism defines the foreign policy of states as a struggle for power in the absence of a greater authority in the international system. It holds that states are rational and that they are the most important actors in international arena who seek security and power maximization to protect their national interests. However, Neo-Realists criticize Classical Realism for focusing too much on the behavior of states while ignoring the structure of the international system. Neo-Realism agrees with Classical Realism that the state is the main actor in the anarchic international system, and claims that rationality is what defines the behavior of the states.25 However, Neo-Realism asserts that there is no relationship between domestic and foreign politics, and denies internal factors any explanatory power towards the understanding of the foreign policy behavior of states. Neo-Realism proponents assert that only the structure of the international system is what determines the foreign policy behavior of states.

Neoclassical Realism as a variant of realist theory finds significance in the role of internal factors in defining the traditional power politics. This is definitely different from Neo-Realism as outlined by Kenneth Waltz which asserts that all states are equal within the international structure and adopt similar adaptive strategies.26 Nevertheless, Neoclassical Realism claims that domestic factors work as an intervening variable in the formulation of foreign policy behavior. Neoclassical Realism approaches foreign policy from within

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the state through putting emphasis on the role of domestic factors in determining the formation of the foreign policy. Neoclassical Realism proponents assert the role of domestic factors in framing the limit of traditional power politics, which is affected by key features in internal politics such as the perceptions of the leaders and the ruling system of government.27

Since the work of Rose in 1998 naming the approach of Neoclassical Realism, many scholars have worked to develop the concept of intervening variable in the making of foreign policy of states. The intervening variable according to Neoclassical Realist analysis is particularly identified with the domestic factors that affect the behavior of the state towards the external environment, which mediate the relationship between the independent variable (structural/systemic) and the dependent variable (foreign policy outcomes/behavior).

![Chart 1- Neoclassical Realism (function of the intervening variable)](chart.png)

This intervening variable is defined to include factors such as the leaders’ perceptions of threats, the ability to mobilize the capabilities and domestic resources to deal with challenges. Neoclassical Realist approach tries to create an understandable model to analyze the foreign policy through not relying only on external factors or internal factors alone, which proponents of Neoclassical Realism consider that taking any of these factors alone will be insufficient and shortsighted. Rather, the approach makes a connection between internal and external factors which makes Neoclassical Realism more comprehensive in analyzing foreign policy. Neoclassical Realism proponents argue that the foreign policy of a specific state is the result of complex relations between international structure and domestic factors. Accordingly, a state may have a different set of policies available to it that are determined by systemic factors, but the option it selects is based on its domestic factors such as the ability to mobilize its resources and capabilities to deal with a specific challenge or threat. Therefore, according to Neoclassical Realist approach that two states may face the same systemic challenges, yet they may adopt different policies to deal with these challenges based on their different domestic factors.

This thesis will use the framework of Neoclassical Realism to explain the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring. The foreign policy of Saudi Arabia could be studied by looking into it from a Neoclassical Realist perspective which integrates both external and domestic factors to provide meaningful explanation of the foreign policy of states. Since the domestic policies of Saudi Arabia and the internal factors within the

state contribute to the framing of its foreign policy, thus Neoclassical Realism is best to analyze such subject. Since Neo-Realists are concerned “with the international structure and relative capabilities of the great powers and neglected the impact of domestic political forces such as public opinion, legislature, and privileged interest groups”,\(^{29}\) while Neoclassical Realists take into considerations the effect of domestic political considerations as well as systemic explanation. Moreover, Neoclassical Realism holds that both the structure of the international system and leaders’ ideology and perceptions have impacts in determining the country’s foreign policy. Generally, in order to understand the foreign policy from Neoclassical Realist approach it is necessary to acknowledge the relative power of the state and its exposure to imperatives generated by the anarchic international system,\(^{30}\) in addition to the domestic factors like the perceptions of specific events and the ability of the state to use resources to pursue a particular policy.

The broad applicability of Neoclassical Realism as a standpoint to explain the foreign policy makes it a good fit for the research topic at hand. Neoclassical Realist approach agrees with Neo-Realism that systemic factors determine the broad direction of foreign policy,\(^{31}\) this is for Saudi Arabia could be translated in the regional and international threats that the country faces as a result of the Arab Spring. However, Neoclassical Realism asserts that the state's foreign policy in response to threats is a function of

\(^{29}\) Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffery W. Taliaferro (eds.), "Neoclassical Realism and Domestic Interest Groups." In Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy, 170. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.


domestic factors such as the government capabilities, political structure, and interest groups.

Neoclassical Realist approach concurs with Classical Realism that foreign policy is shaped at the state level by political leaders, which is very obvious in the case of Saudi Arabia, where the foreign policy towards the Arab Spring is largely formulated by the political leaders and the domestic factors that intervene in forming the political judgments of the leaders. In addition, Neoclassical Realism emphasizes that the goal of states is to increase their relative power to ultimately ensure their security, which is implemented through the use of physical and ideological tools. Thus, the usage of physical power such as oil and military force along with the religious significance of Saudi Arabia could be effectively understood if analyzed from Neoclassical Realist perspective. Neoclassical Realists take into considerations the role of government and decision makers in dealing with external threats and challenges. In brief, Neoclassical Realist approach deals with the systemic level as an independent variable and the foreign policy of a specific country as a dependent variable; while the capabilities of the country, the agents of foreign policy and the internal factors work as an intermediate/intervening variable between the independent and the dependent variables. The difference between Neoclassical Realism and other branches in the school of Realism is mainly based on their emphasis on the internal factors of countries which influence their foreign policy.

Neoclassical Realism is a relatively new approach in international relations, yet it has highly promising ability to build on preceding Realist approaches through trying to develop a general explanation of international politics and insights on the analysis of foreign policy. Neoclassical Realism succeeded to open the black box of the state,
which was imposed by Neo-Realist approach, through including internal factors within the state in their analysis of international politics. Finally with an effective conceptual framework in place, it becomes possible to start examining the impact of the Arab Spring on the foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia; through analyzing the perceptions of the threats arising from the Arab Spring and the capabilities that Saudi Arabia has at its disposal in dealing with these threats.

**Research Significance**

Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in early 2011 which took everyone by surprise, Saudi Arabia was faced by many security challenges such as threats of domestic dissent, spillover effect of revolts in other countries, increasing Iranian influence in the region, regional competition with Qatar, and rise of political Islam especially the Muslim Brotherhood. All these challenges as well as the changes in the regional balance of power in the Middle East with the fall of strong regimes due to developments especially in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen has placed Saudi Arabia in a confrontation with these threats, and with the tools that Saudi Arabia posses gave it the ability to have a more strategic role in the region.

The answer on how Saudi Arabia is dealing with the events of the Arab Spring has been pressing and the attempts to understand the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring were not few as presented in the literature. However, they missed offering a comprehensive analysis of the policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring that combines the threats that the Kingdom faces in the wake of the Arab Spring and the capabilities of Saudi Arabia that helps it to formulate its pragmatic policy. The thesis aims to pursue such comprehensive analysis taking into
consideration an approach from the field of International Relations to tackle the research questions of this study. Aforementioned, Neoclassical Realism was chosen as an approach to offer an explanation to the foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring. This is essentially due to emphasis of Neoclassical Realism on internal factors in formulating the foreign policy behavior of states and not only focusing on the structure of the international system.

Moreover, the main objective of this thesis is to have a comprehensive understanding of the policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring with a greater focus on how a conservative status quo like Saudi Arabia served its objectives in a revolutionary environment through the assessment of the capabilities that the Kingdom had at its disposal in dealing with the threats resulting from the Arab Spring. The thesis aims also to identify why Saudi Arabia reacted differently with some sort of contradictory standards to the events of the Arab Spring in countries that experienced mass protests, regime change and civil unrest within the Arab world.
The Outline

The thesis contains five chapters. The first chapter explains the topic, presents the research problem, the research questions and the hypotheses. This chapter includes also the literature review and the conceptual framework chosen to analyze the topic at hand.

The second chapter presents the threats that Saudi Arabia is facing and how it perceived them as result of the Arab Spring -to name a few- Iranian influence in the region, the Muslim Brotherhood, the rising regional role of Qatar, domestic dissent in Saudi Arabia and terrorism. The chapter analyzes the challenges threatening Saudi Arabia and how it dealt with them since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, in order to offer an explanation of the Saudi foreign policy towards the Arab Spring. In addition, the chapter offers an overview of the role of domestic groups in Saudi Arabia during the events of Arab Spring.

The third chapter explains the capabilities of Saudi Arabia and the ability to mobilize them which contributes in shaping and formulating the Saudi foreign policy towards the Arab Spring; such as economic capability, religious capability, military capability, and geographic capability.

The fourth chapter offers an analysis and explains the policy outcome of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring. This chapter offers three main outcomes of the Saudi foreign policy towards the Arab Spring such as preservation of the status quo, balance of power, power and opportunity aspects.

The last chapter is the conclusion of the study which offers answers to the research questions and discusses the hypotheses. The chapter concludes the study and provides a
summarized understanding of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring.

**Method and Data**

In order to answer the research questions, this thesis depends on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources which will be used are statements by Saudi officials mostly the King and the Saudi minister of foreign affairs, which will be analyzed through applying a content analysis of statements and speeches from 2008 to 2014, four years before the outbreak of the Arab Spring and four years after. Despite that the content analysis might not be of great addition to this study, however, it was mainly applied to support claims raised throughout this thesis and provide originality to this study. The content analysis applied aims to understand and analyze the official stance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and determines the Saudi responses to important political issues, the content analysis will used to support and offer evidence to claims used in this thesis. Secondary sources such as books, academic journal, newspapers and articles will be used to study other works and researches done by scholars trying to assess and explain the Saudi foreign policy in general and towards the Arab Spring specifically, as well as in order to offer supporting evidence to the arguments of this thesis.
CHAPTER II

The Saudi perception to the threats of the Arab Spring and the role of domestic groups

Saudi Arabia faced several threats as a result of the Arab Spring. From a Neoclassical Realist approach, the perception of the threats by the leaders and decision makers cultivated from a specific event works as an intermediate variable in forming the foreign policy behavior of a state. In addition, the internal factors in the country contribute in the evaluation of the international challenges and affect the foreign policy behavior. The Saudi perceptions of the threats resulting from the Arab Spring will be discussed throughout this chapter such as: the increasing Iranian influence in the region, the rise of Muslim Brotherhood, regional competition with Qatar, terrorism and domestic dissent in the Kingdom. These threats were essentially sparked by the Tunisian revolution which brought an end to the regime of president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Later in Egypt, the revolts developed and eventually led to the overthrow of the Mubarak’s regime that was closely allied to Saudi Arabia, since this development Saudi Arabia was alerted to the effect of Arab Spring and feared a spillover effect in other Arab countries or even in Saudi Arabia. As a result, Saudi Arabia perceived several threats to its national interests as direct effect of the Arab Spring with developments emerging in other countries especially in Egypt, Bahrain and Yemen where a regime change will compromise the security and stability of the Kingdom.

The perception of these threats along with other internal factors of the country contributes in the formation of the Saudi foreign policy behavior towards the Arab Spring. This chapter offers an explanation of the contradictory standards of Saudi Arabia towards the
Arab Spring through analyzing the threats and how they are perceived by Saudi leaders. In order to effectively assess the reason behind the contradictory standards of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring, it is necessary to analyze how Saudi leaders perceived and dealt with these threats unleashed by the Arab Spring. Since the perception of these threats and the Saudi position towards them will eventually offer an explanation to the reactions of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring.

**Iranian Influence in the Region**

Since the Iranian Revolution and the overthrow of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979, and the Saudi-Iranian relations have been disintegrated, leading to a break of diplomatic ties in 1988.³² Saudi leaders have viewed the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat to the Kingdom’s stability and a destabilizing force with the Iranian attempts to export its revolution to other states especially in the Gulf region. The relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia kept worsening in the following years especially during the First Gulf War between Iraq and Iran, where Saudi Arabia was supporting Saddam Hussein politically and economically during his campaign against Iran. Saudi Arabia, fearing the ideological influence of Iran and victory over Iraq, has provided billions of dollars to Saddam Hussein to guarantee his victory over Iran.³³ Additionally, in response to the Iranian Revolution and Iran-Iraq war, Saudi Arabia along with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates established the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981.

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mainly as a security organization that maintains an anti-Iranian political agenda to guarantee the survival of the Arab monarchies in the Gulf region. With the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Saudi-Iranian relations further deteriorated. This deterioration post the invasion of Iraq is due to Iranian growing quest for power and influence in Iraq and the region, which widened the gap and caused a sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites not only in Iraq but also in other countries with significant Shiite population. In addition, the Iranian nuclear program poses a threat to Saudi Arabia since if Iran successfully developed nuclear weapons; this will definitely change the balance of power in the whole region and will comprise the security of Saudi Arabia.

With the change in the regional balance due to the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has feared from the growing Iranian influence in the region as both countries have an opportunity for regional predominance. Saudi Arabia which already has a historical experience with revolutions that toppled the regimes such as that of Iran in 1979 and fears about growing Iranian influence in countries where the wave of the Arab Spring hit. The Saudi perception of increasing Iranian influence is based on the change of regional balance of power resulting from the Arab Spring. Saudi Arabia has lost several Arab allies most notably in Egypt and Tunisia yet this does not mean necessarily it lost them to Iran. However, regime changes in these countries have brought new regimes that are not yet trustworthy to Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom was unable to predict their stance within the Saudi-Iranian regional rivalry. Additionally, the region has been divided for decades

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into an Iranian led block and a Saudi led block, and with the developments of the Arab Spring this has suddenly introduced the possibility of several other blocks like a Muslim Brotherhood led block or a democratic block that might seek closer ties with Iran. The introduction of these possible new blocks at the expense of former strong allies to Saudi Arabia such as in Egypt and Tunisia, were alarming to Saudi leaders. Accordingly, Saudi leaders realized that it is necessary to restore the regional balance of power regardless such balancing policy will place Saudi Arabia as supporter of revolutionary movements in some cases or anti-revolutionary in other cases. Therefore Saudi Arabia has decided to take part in toppling the Assad’s regime in Syria out of the concept of balancing the power of Iran, and that Iran should lose regional allies as Saudi Arabia had.

When the Arab Spring reached Syria, an Arab cold war erupted between Iran and Saudi Arabia, where Iran supported the regime of Bashar Al Assad and Saudi Arabia supported the opposition. Such struggle has introduced a sectarian conflict once again between Sunnis and Shiites throughout the region. Iran support to the Assad’s regime is based on being Iran’s primary Arab ally and an essential tool for Iranian military and financial support to Hezbollah in Lebanon. In contrast Saudi Arabia is supporting the Sunni dominated opposition due to the relationship of the Assad’s regime with Iran and the deteriorated Saudi-Syrian relations under the Assad’s regime.\textsuperscript{35} Saudi Arabia is highly concerned with the conflict in Syria and took a strong position against the Assad’s regime. Syria became a central issue in the Saudi foreign policy; this is evident in the content analysis conducted for documents from the Saudi ministry of foreign affairs. The

results show a significant increase in mentioning Syria in documents post the Arab Spring, chart 2 shows 0% occurrence of mentioning Syria before the Arab Spring to 32.7% after the Arab Spring within a list of several other countries.

![Countries Mentioned](chart.png)

**Chart 2- Countries Mentioned (before and after the Arab Spring)**

With the development of the conflict, Saudi Arabia has taken more severe position towards Syria to the extent of calling for military intervention from the international community and asking for sanctions on Syria to put an end to the Assad’s regime that has lost legitimacy according to Saudi claims. Generally, Iran has viewed the Arab Spring as an opportunity to gain influence in the Arab World, especially in Egypt where the relations under the Mubarak’s regime were not in good terms. Iran’s Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called the Arab uprisings in the region as an “Islamic awakening” in reference to Iran’s Islamic Revolution,\(^{36}\) in a move to gain grounds in

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countries, especially among the public, that experienced regime changes in the Arab region. For Iran, Syria is an important card to serve its interests in the Levant region and a pathway to Hezbollah to protect Iran against potential threats especially from Israel. As the conflict in Syria developed, Iran intervened militarily through Hezbollah and members of the Iranian Revolutionary guards that are fighting on the side of the Syrian regime to ensure the survival of the Assad’s regime against increased threats from armed groups supported by other countries, most notably Saudi Arabia.37 Such developments have turned the conflict in Syria into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The reaction of Saudi Arabia towards the uprisings in Bahrain is yet another example of the perception of the Iranian threat by the Saudi leaders that increased with the waves of the Arab Spring. Soon after revolts erupted in Bahrain that essentially were calling for greater political freedom, equality for the majority Shiite population and later developed to calls demanding to oust the monarchial regime of Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. In response to the developments in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia within the frame of the GCC Peninsula Shield Force sent troops in March 2011 to protect the Al Khalifa’s regime against the protests calling for a regime change. Saudi Arabia militarily intervention in Bahrain is due to several factors that are associated mainly with the fear of increased Iranian influence in the Arabian Gulf. Bahrain that is geographically close to Saudi Arabia, a Sunni Arab monarchy with a majority of Shiite population, is a key ally to Saudi Arabia and thus any potential of an overthrow of the Al Khalifa’s ruling regime would challenge the stability to the Saudi regime itself and might bring a new regime

loyal to Iran. Saudi Arabia’s reaction to these uprisings in Bahrain is out of fear that Iran would gain more influence with the potential fall of the Bahraini regime in favor of the majority Shiite population in Bahrain and consequently in the Gulf region. Additionally, the Saudi military intervention within the GCC Peninsula Shield Force in Bahrain was to protect the Al Khalifa’s regime against protests and any attempts to compromise the survival and stability of the Bahraini ruling regime. Saudi Arabia has strongly provided financial support to Bahrain to enable the Al Khalifa’s regime to pursue same policy of rentierism that Saudi Arabia implements to reduce domestic pressures for reforms. In March, the GCC offered to Bahrain and Oman $20 billion financial package to provide more jobs, enhance their infrastructure and housing; as an attempt to provide these two Gulf monarchies with the tool to soothe protestors from revolting against the government.  

Such policies sponsored by Saudi Arabia have succeeded in neutralizing threats of protests against the Al Khalifa’s regime and protecting the regime in Bahrain from collapsing which may bring a new regime loyal to Iran.

Saudi Arabia took a similar position yet less intense when the protests reached Yemen calling for the step down of the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saudi Arabia, also through the frame of the GCC, has offered Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign in exchange for immunity and to transfer the presidential power to the vice president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi who was formally elected as a president later in February 2012. The deal was labeled as the “GCC initiative” and in earlier stages of the Syrian conflict; Saudi Arabia has offered to make such similar deal to solve the Syrian crisis through a peaceful transition of power plan. The main concern for Saudi Arabia is to maintain its influence in Yemen, preserves

stability and status quo through a loyal figure of the Yemeni regime. Such policy was out of fear that the conflict might turn into the favor to Iran, which has strong influence in Yemen especially through the armed Shiite group the Houthis who became the de facto ruling faction in Yemen in September 2014. Similar to the situation in Syria and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia has blamed external forces and publicly accused Iran for destabilizing these countries to increase its influence in the region and affect political outcomes. Saudi Arabia justified its military intervention in Bahrain, its support to the opposition in Syria and sponsoring the peaceful transfer of power in Yemen as a response to counter the Iranian intervention and influence in these countries.

Saudi Arabia views Iran as a threat as it presents an alternative to the Saudi existence and having conflicting views over the interpretations of Islam between Wahhabi Sunni and Shiite, ambitions for leadership over the Islamic world, different oil production policy, the relations with the West and the system of government between monarchial regimes and revolutionary republics. The Iranian threat and how Saudi Arabia perceived it along with other threats’ perception and the internal factors during the events of the Arab Spring acted as an intermediate variable that has formulated the Saudi foreign policy toward the systemic pressure of the Arab Spring. Therefore, leaders in Saudi Arabia have adopted different policies to deal with these changes at the international level. For instance, when the revolts reached Bahrain and Yemen, which their regimes are allied to Saudi Arabia and guarantee its stability, there was a strong opposition from Saudi Arabia to the demands of the protestors though with some varying degrees from the Saudi

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position in Bahrain and Yemen. In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia saw it is necessary to intervene militarily to protect its interests through the protection of the monarchial regime of Al Khalifa. While in Yemen, Saudi Arabia offered an initiative to transfer the power of Ali Abdullah Saleh to his vice president, in order to avoid the fall of Yemen into chaos which will undermine the stability and security of Saudi Arabia. In Syria, where the Assad’s regime is loyal to Iran, Saudi Arabia extensively supported the opposition which it saw as an opportunity to gain grounds in Syria and topple an unfriendly regime affiliated with Iran on one hand; and to keep Iran preoccupied with what is happening in the Syrian conflict which will prevent Iran from having an active stance in the Gulf region that is more critical to the interests of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia realized that it is necessary for to protect its stability, preserve the status quo and its hegemony in the region over the threat of Iran that increased with the events of the Arab Spring. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia has formulated its foreign policy to check the power of Iran and to limit its ability to change the regional balance of power to ensure the survival of the Kingdom. Such different positions directed mainly to serve the Saudi national interests against the Iranian threat during the events of the Arab Spring is one of the reasons behind the apparent contradictions in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia

**Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to Saudi Arabia’s stability**

Another perceived by Saudi Arabia as the result of the Arab Spring is the rise Muslim Brotherhood to power especially in Egypt. Saudi Arabia was not in favor to the protests that occurred in Egypt in January 2011 and was a major supporter to the Mubarak’s regime until it was overthrown. Saudi Arabia considers Egypt as a strong ally that has “a special place in Saudi security interests” and it was against abandoning Mubarak during
the protests against his rule. The reasons of the Saudi support to the Mubarak’s regime are firstly due to the Saudi concern of spill over of the wave of protests in the region and especially in the GCC countries. Secondly because Egypt under the Mubarak’s regime was a close ally to Saudi Arabia that shared its close alliance with the West and cooperated with Saudi Arabia in facing the Iranian threat through their shared stabilizing regional policy. With the fall of the Mubarak’s regime, Saudi Arabia feared that a change in the Egyptian policy will negatively affect the regional balance of power. Rapidly, the Kingdom offered financial support of $4 billion to the new government under the Supreme Council of Armed Forces in Egypt in an attempt to influence the political developments in the post Mubarak’s Egypt. However, within the following few months the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has achieved significant political successes in the parliamentary elections and later their candidate Mohamed Morsi became the first Egyptian president in June 2012 post the 25th of January revolution.

The Saudi leaders’ perception of the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat is out of ideological rivalry with the group. The Muslim Brotherhood also derives its legitimacy from Sunni interpretation of Islam which is regarded by the Al Saud as an alternative of the Saudi Wahhabi ideology with more revolutionary/republican aspects. The difference in interpretation of Islam between the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia lies in that the Saudi Wahhabi ideology is more religious and cultural in nature. Saudi Arabia is influencing the Muslim world as the country having a religious preference through

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42 Ibid.

holding Islam holiest shrines. Alternatively, the interpretation of Islam according to the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology is more religious and political in nature with expansionist ambitions across the Muslim world to have central rule for Islamic countries and reviving an international project for the Islamic Caliphate.⁴⁴

Saudi Arabia feared that Muslim Brotherhood’s control of Egypt will affect the Egyptian foreign policy through one or all of the following scenarios. Firstly, Saudi Arabia feared that the Muslim Brotherhood will shift Egyptian foreign policy into rapprochement to Iran which will strengthen Iranian influence in the region. Whereas under the Mubarak’s regime, the relations between Egypt and Iran were deteriorated and such increase in Iranian relative power post the Arab Spring in the Middle East will be threatening to the interests of Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian-Iranian relations have slightly improved under the regime of Mohamed Morsi, as the leaders of both countries exchanged visits and there were talks about restoring full diplomatic representation between the two countries.⁴⁵ Secondly, Saudi Arabia also feared that the Muslim Brotherhood’s regime in Egypt “might start a propaganda war against Israel and disseminate an anti-Israeli and anti-US policy” through supporting their sister group Hamas in Palestine,⁴⁶ or supporting Iranian sponsored Hezbollah group in Lebanon which has witnessed close ties between

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the two groups since the Muslim Brotherhood won the presidential elections in Egypt.\textsuperscript{47} Such change in the Egyptian foreign policy will compromise the Saudi stability, since it will likely impress the Arab population and even the Saudi population. Such possible development may results in pressures on the Saudi regime for its close ties with the United States and it might be forced to shift its foreign policy to accommodate such new pressure, especially if the Muslim Brotherhood’s policy made a new escalation in the Arab-Israeli conflict which will force Saudi Arabia to take a position in such conflict. For Saudi Arabia, a renewed Arab-Israeli conflict will have severe impacts on its domestic policy, stability and economic security.\textsuperscript{48} Furthermore due to the regional presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in several Arab countries, Saudi Arabia also fears that the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt will gain popularity in the Arab World and within the Saudi population. Saudi citizens may perceive the Muslim Brotherhood and their ideology as an alternative to the Saudi Wahhabi ideology, since the Muslim Brotherhood also draw their political legitimacy as protectors of Islam from a conservative Sunni perspective and a substitute for the Al Saud’s monarchial system with their expansionist nature of political structure.

Due to the perception of the leaders in Saudi Arabia of the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to the Saudi national interests and the inability in seeing the Muslim Brotherhood in power especially in Egypt. In this context, Saudi Arabia has adopted a policy against the Muslim Brotherhood soon after the overthrow of the Mubarak’s regime through supporting another political faction in Egypt to balance the power of the Muslim


\textsuperscript{48} René Rieger, "In Search of Stability: Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring." \textit{GRC Research Papers}, 2013, 10.
Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia supported the Salafist movement and Al Nour political party that share the Saudi Wahhabi ideology during the parliamentary elections in Egypt in order to strengthen the rival of Muslim Brotherhood and gain grounds among conservatives in Egypt. Moreover, after the Egyptian military unseated Mohamed Morsi following massive protests in July 2013, Saudi Arabia has strongly supported the interim government and the military through offering billion of dollars as financial packages to Egypt’s new administration and declared the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization in March 2014. This apparent contradiction in the reaction of Saudi Arabia towards the protests that occurred in Egypt in 2011 and 2013 is clear evidence that Saudi Arabia is pursuing its own interests regardless of being adhering to specific values or principles on whether to support public demonstrations for reforms or not even in the same country.

Obviously, Saudi leaders perceived the Muslim Brotherhood as threat to the Saudi interests both domestically and regionally. This perception has affected the foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia to the extent of causing a political conflict with another GCC country Qatar that is a strong supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. Such political conflict reached its peak with the withdrawal of the Saudi, Bahraini and Emirati ambassadors from Qatar over its stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere. As a result of the removal of Mohamed Morsi’s regime, the United States

49 Ibid.

has suspended its economic/military aid to Egypt, and Qatar asked Egypt to return billion of dollars given as financial aid to Egypt under the rule of Mohamed Morsi. However, Saudi Arabia vowed to provide financial support to Egypt to reimburse any losses from the suspended American aid or the withdrawal of Qatari financial packages. Such actions by Saudi Arabia post the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood government has benefited Saudi Arabia as they eliminated the risks of an Egyptian rapprochement to Iran and increasing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood inside Saudi Arabia and in other Arab countries. From a Neoclassical Realist perspective, such foreign policy behavior pursued by Saudi Arabia towards the Muslim Brotherhood falls within two types of balance of power. Firstly foreign balance, where the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power in Egypt has to be restrained regionally, in order for Saudi Arabia to maximize its influence and guarantee its security through increasing its relative power which is necessary to pursue the Saudi national interests. Secondly internal balance, where the Saudi regime viewed that change in the elements of power in a neighboring country like Egypt will result in strengthening the power of other groups in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. Therefore it was necessary to balance such change in power indicators in Egypt in order to protect Saudi interests and maintain stability within the Kingdom and across the region.

**Regional competition with Qatar**

As a result of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia faced an increased threat of a regional competition with Qatar. Qatar has always been looking for an influential regional role since the 1990s and tried to achieve that through cultivating media propaganda through the government owned satellite channel Al Jazeera. Qatar has tried to mediate regional
political conflicts, and acted as a broker between the West and different Islamist groups, most notably its support to the Muslim Brotherhood where several of its leaders took refuge in Qatar.\textsuperscript{52} When the waves of the Arab Spring hit the region, Qatar saw an opportunity to increase its influence through supporting the protests in other countries such in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya. Such Qatari positions towards the Arab Spring, through attempting to label itself as a proponent of revolutions against oppression and its deployment of diplomatic, financial and media resources to achieve such objective, has placed Qatar in a confrontation with Saudi Arabia that favors stability and status quo. Despite that both Saudi Arabia and Qatar share the same position of keeping the effect of the Arab Spring out of the Gulf region, and the fact that Qatar supported the GCC Peninsula Shield forces in Bahrain to bolster the regime of Al Khalifa from collapsing along with other GCC states. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia was angered from the position of Qatar during the events of the Arab Spring in other countries particularly in Egypt. Qatar position to the Arab Spring is backed by several factors; unlike Saudi Arabia, domestically Qatar is not threatened by protests since it has a relatively small population enjoying economic stability and low unemployment rate. Qatar also maintains long standing relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and thus the group does not possess a threat to the Qatari regime and give the regime political support; since August 2012 Qatar has provided financial assistance to the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt amounting to $1 billion in grants and $4 billion in Egyptian Central Bank deposits.\textsuperscript{53} In

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 8.
addition, the Shiite population in Qatar is relatively small around 5% to 15% and they are well integrated in the Qatari society when compared to Saudi Arabia.  

The Qatari aspirations for a regional role have affected the foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia since an increase in the role of Qatar will change the regional balance of power and affect the position of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi fear of a change in regional balance of power in the wake of the Arab Spring is mainly due to the Qatari led support to Islamist movements, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood that came to power and replaced old autocratic regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia employed its foreign policy and used the frame of the GCC again to counter the Qatari agenda through offering support to other GCC member countries and maintaining good relations with them to form a pro-Saudi front inside the organization. Saudi Arabia attempted also to lead a “Gulf Union” post the Arab Spring and to present itself as the leader of the Arab states in the Gulf with ambitions to move from the state of cooperation within the GCC to the state of union. In regards to the developments in Egypt in summer 2013, Saudi Arabia highly supported the military backed government that overthrew the pro-Qatar Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt. With the Muslim Brotherhood losing power in Egypt, this has subsequently decreased the influence of Qatar in the region in favor of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the Saudi regime exported the idea to other GCC states that Qatar is intervening in their internal affairs and compromising their stability and security which is against the GCC non-interference agreement. As a result in March 2014 Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in a striking

dispute within the Arab Gulf countries over the Qatari interference in the internal affairs of other member states and its support to the Muslim Brotherhood.\textsuperscript{55} Saudi Arabia has successfully mobilized its resources to balance the power of Qatar during the events of the Arab Spring and preserved its regional leadership over the Gulf region through consolidation of its position in the rapidly changing region. Saudi Arabia was able to take a leading position inside the Gulf Cooperation Council leaving no space for Qatar to dominate the organization as well as the Saudi positions towards Egypt and other regional conflicts has given Saudi Arabia an upper hand in suppressing the Qatari competition for a regional role post the Arab Spring.

**Terrorism and the increasing influence of extremist groups**

With the fall of strong autocratic Arab regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen due to the Arab Spring, radical Islamist movements and terrorist organizations found it an opportunity to increase their power and achieve political gains in the region. Such development was perceived by the leaders in Saudi Arabia as threat in some cases while it was used to achieve some Saudi political gains in other cases. There is an apparent duality in the Saudi perceptions towards the rise of radical Islamist movements in the wake of the Arab Spring. Saudi leaders have perceived terrorism in the wake of the Arab Spring from several levels with different threatening degrees. Saudi leaders perceived rise of terrorism and extremist groups within the Kingdom as a threat like any groups that might undermine the survival of the ruling regime. Saudi leaders also perceive terrorist organizations like the Islamic State as a threat on the long run to Saudi Arabia with its

radical ideology that may challenge the Saudi Wahhabi ideology, compromise the Saudi-American relations, and undermine the rule of the Al Saud. Saudi leaders have historical conflicts with radical groups like the Islamic State. In the late 1920s, the Al Saud ruling family was threatened by a radical group of the Wahhabist Ikhwan that revolted against the rule of King Abul Al-Aziz ibn Saud. The Ikhwan revolt in Saudi Arabia was later suppressed and the Al Saud maintained control over the territory of Saudi Arabia backed by the Saudi Wahhabi ideology that gives legitimacy to the Al Saud’s regime. Saudi Arabia fears that the rise of radical terrorist groups may undermine the rule to the Al Saud’s regime. Al Qaeda, the Islamic State and other terrorist groups view the Al Saud rule to be against Islam and that the relations of Saudi Arabia with the West are against the interests of the Muslim nation. Obviously, the Saudi-American relation was one of the reasons behind calling for *jihad* (holy war) against the United States by radical terrorist groups due to the US military presence in Saudi Arabia since the 1991 Gulf war.56

In the context of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has adopted a policy to combat the rise of radical terrorist groups like the Islamic State to confront their increasing influence within the Kingdom. In addition, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State, has called for attacks in Saudi Arabia and described Saudi Arabia as the “head of the snake and stronghold of disease”,57 which shows that the Islamic State became a direct threat to the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and accordingly must be confronted. In 2014, King

Abdullah issued a royal decree criminalizing terrorism and included other actions to be described as terrorist acts like “atheism, opposing the rulers in the country, shaking the social fabric or national cohesion”.\textsuperscript{58} Saudi leaders found it an opportunity to issue a royal decree that outlaw terrorism as well as any other movements that may pose threats to the Al Saud’s regime and the stability of the Kingdom. Saudi leaders are also concerned with some Saudi nationals fighting within some terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. The Saudi government is officially discouraging Saudi nationals from joining rebels in other countries fearing these Saudi citizens will return to incite radicalized threats to the Kingdom’s domestic security, as most of the Saudi terrorist cells in the last two decades within the Kingdom were fighting in the Soviet–Afghan War.\textsuperscript{59}

Regionally, some Saudi leaders perceive the rise of terrorist group such the Islamic State (IS) as a powerful tool to fight pro-Iran Shiite groups in Iraq and Syria, and they find that some of these radical groups share a strict Salafist ideology similar to the Saudi Wahhabi ideology.\textsuperscript{60} This is reason that regionally we find Saudi Arabia not very enthusiastic in combating terrorism, especially in Syria and Iraq where these extremist groups cause troubles to the Iranian interests there. Saudi Arabia is satisfied with the fact that these extremist groups could be a tool to achieve policy goals against the increasing influence of pro-Iranian Shiite groups. Saudi Arabia is not necessarily supporting all these groups in the region but at the same time it is not very concerned with fighting the presence of

\textsuperscript{59} René Rieger, "In Search of Stability: Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring." GRC Research Papers, 2013, 18.
\textsuperscript{60} Alastair Crooke, "You Can't Understand ISIS If You Don't Know the History of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia." New Perspectives Quarterly 32, no. 1 (2015): 56.
these groups in other countries. In Syria, groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham that share Salafist ideologies like that of Saudi Arabia take part in fighting the Assad’s regime and claim pursuing an Islamic rule based on Salafist principles. There are strong evidences that Saudi Arabia supported and armed extremist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra to fight against the Syrian regime through using the sectarian card as a tool to present the conflict as a Sunni versus Shiite war.61 Saudi leaders perceive these extremist groups as an instrumental tool to achieve policy goals and effective in fighting pro-Iranian Shiite regimes like that of Assad in Syria.

On the international level, Saudi Arabia offers an image to the west as a country fighting terrorism. Post the September 2001 terrorist attacks where fifteen out of the nineteen hijackers were Saudi nationals; Saudi Arabia was placed under international pressures to confront terrorism as it may affect the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the West. Following the Riyadh compound bombings in 2003, the Saudi government has started a crackdown on radical groups and extremists in Saudi Arabia through mass arrests and detentions.62 With the rise of the power of Islamic State in the region post the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia was one of the Arab countries that joined the US-led coalition conducting airstrikes against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Saudi Arabia has also initiated a crackdown on IS affiliated groups within the Kingdom after separate incidents across the Kingdom. These moves by Saudi Arabia are out of two reasons, firstly to preserve the Saudi-American relations and secondly to calm voices accusing Saudi

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Arabia for supporting extremist groups in countries such as in Syria and Iraq. Saudi Arabia has made rhetorical initiatives to combat terrorism and to enhance its image to the West. In September 2011, Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with the United Nations and largely funded to create the United Nations Centre for Counter Terrorism (UNCCT) later in 2014 King Abdullah donated to the center with $100 million to enhance the effectiveness of the centre in combating terrorism. All these efforts by Saudi Arabia to combat terrorism are mainly to preserve the relations with the West and improve the image of the Kingdom from accusations of supporting terrorist groups in other countries.

To sum up, the Saudi positions towards terrorism in the wake of the Arab Spring have been characterized of duality. Where Saudi Arabia have aggressively combated terrorism within the kingdom and issued a royal decree on counterterrorism, in addition trying to preserve the Saudi relations with the west through enhancing the image of the Kingdom in fighting terrorism through joining the coalition against the IS and creating the UNCCT. On the contrary, there are apparent evidences that Saudi Arabia along with Qatar is supporting extremist groups to fight the regime of Bashar Al Assad through arming and funding extremist Sunni groups. Yet with the growing influence and power of extremist groups especially the Islamic State, we find rapid alterations in the Saudi positions towards these groups which became a threat to the stability and security of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has decided to join the US-led coalition airstrikes against the Islamic State.

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and agreed with the United States to support, fund and arm the moderate opposition in Syria, so that the Saudi fight against extremist groups in the region would not compromise the Saudi interests in taking down the regime of Bashar Al Assad through supporting other factions in the Syrian opposition. The threat of terrorism in the wake of the Arab Spring signals the importance of the perceptions of the leaders, in which the different perception of the same issue could lead to different policy decisions.

**Domestic dissent in Saudi Arabia and the role of domestic groups**

Saudi Arabia has avoided large scale protests in the wake of the Arab Spring despite tensions from different domestic groups that are mostly marginalized by the Al Saud’s regime. The Al Saud ruling family has succeeded in avoiding threats of internal turbulence amid the events of the Arab Spring. Obviously, the ruling regime in Saudi Arabia is equipped with effective mechanisms that can be mobilized and used to reduce threats from internal unrest and opposition groups, unlike other Arab countries such in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria which experienced prolonged unrest causing regime change and civil strife. Saudi Arabia did not experience similar turmoil despite the high rate of unemployment back in 2011 among Saudi nationals amounting to 10%, minimal political participation and uncertainty about succession of the King. Some calls of an Arab Spring themed Facebook page “Day of Rage” was present in Saudi Arabia on social media platforms which attracted more than 36,000 people, yet that day set on the 11\textsuperscript{th} of March 2011 went quietly and minor protests were crushed by the police. The regime made this Day of Rage to look like as attempts by Shiites in the Eastern Province to serve

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Iran’s interests in the region and disturb the stability of the Kingdom. One of the reasons that the Saudi youth did not succeed like in Egypt or Tunisia because they have almost no influence in the patriarchal Saudi society as well as they are lacking the organizational and mobilization means to achieve striking goals.

The Arab Spring has raised the expectations of several domestic groups in Saudi Arabia to demand some rights and reforms like the youth, women and Shiites; moreover it created concerns to other groups particularly the clergy who have interest in preserving the rule of Al Saud in the Kingdom. However, an authoritarian conservative monarchy as Saudi Arabia gives no opportunity for domestic groups to develop clear positions on policy issues, since domestic groups in the Kingdom are denied organizational platforms that would allow them to propagate policy decisions. Domestic groups within the Kingdom are denied as well the necessary level of autonomy to pursue their interests in the policy making in an effective way. The Al Saud’s regime has been dealing with domestic groups in the country with different actions from repression to appeasement to make the concerns from some groups and the demands on the state relevant to the particular policy that is on the agenda by the Saudi leaders. The next couple of paragraphs present the demands and concerns of some of these domestic groups and how the ruling regime dealt with such difference

In order to comprehend the role of other different influential domestic groups in Saudi Arabia and their role during the Arab Spring, it is necessary to understand the state formation of Saudi Arabia. The modern or the third Saudi state was formed in 1932 by

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Abul Al-Aziz ibn Saud who successfully conquered Riyadh and united the country. The formation of such a state required the unification of different tribes present at that time in the Arabian Peninsula; such unification was established mainly with the Al Saud’s alliance with the Wahhabi clerics who provided religious backing and legitimacy to the House of Al Saud to this day.\footnote{James Wynbrandt, "The Mamluks the Ottomans and the Wahhabi - Al Saud Alliance." In A Brief History of Saudi Arabia, 115-116. New York: Facts On File, 2004.} Another way pursued by King Abul Al-Aziz to remove tribal differences was through inter-tribal marriages and that Abul Al-Aziz married around 30 tribal marriages to consolidate power into his family.\footnote{Simon Mabon, "Kingdom in Crisis? The Arab Spring and Instability in Saudi Arabia." Contemporary Security Policy, 2012, 533.} In addition to the use of force by the Al Saud family to conquest and defeat their main rivals, the Rashidis who were fighting against each other over control of the country. As illustrated the Al Saud family has successfully included with them in the state formation the most influential groups at the time of formation of the third Saudi state which are powerful tribes and religious Wahhabi clerics “ulama”. This state formation is still present until today especially the relationship between the House of Al Saud and the ulama while the presence of tribes slightly decreased overtime.

Several domestic groups had increased presence and demands over time in the Kingdom, yet the Al Saud’s regime has always attempted to create state-owned political groups including journalists, lawyers’ association and human rights organizations to guarantee their loyalty to the ruling regime. King Abduallah has initiated in 2003 the King Abdulaziz Center For National Dialogue with selected representatives from several
domestic groups mostly intellectuals, clergy, women and youth.\textsuperscript{69} Such initiative was to include some groups and to present the Al Saud’s regime as accepting the views of different domestic groups, yet these selected representatives pose no challenge to the regime and are loyal to the House of Al Saud. Furthermore, the Saudi consultative council “\textit{Shura}” enjoys some decision making authority, yet all its members are appointed by the King and it does not represent an actual opposition to the regime. However with the development of Arab Spring, King Abduallah has announced that women can join the \textit{Shura} Council and in 2013 women were appointed and joined the council for the first time holding 30 seats including two of them from the royal family, in an attempt to soothe the increasing demands for women equality. All these were initially as attempts to counter dissatisfaction with the regime following calls for protests that swept the Kingdom as a result of the Arab Spring in 2011. Yet none of these reforms has any direct fundamental contribution to the distribution of power or decision making in Saudi Arabia. Generally, women have always enjoyed no political rights since the formation of Saudi Arabia. A country that it is established based on extreme Islamic foundations that does not allow women the right to vote, to go out alone or even to drive; therefore any decisions by the ruling regime to grant women more rights will be countered and opposed by the hardliner Wahhabi clergy, who provide legitimacy to the House of Al Saud. Over the history of Saudi Arabia, some significant incidents occurred where women decided to take the streets and demand their rights. One of these was in November 1991, when approximately 47 Saudi Women demonstrated for the right to drive and drove their cars in the streets of Riyadh, yet they were arrested by religious

police and the Al Saud’s regime has reasserted the ban on women driving.\textsuperscript{70} In 2007, around 1100 women petitioned to King Abdullah for their right to drive and the government has not replied\textsuperscript{71}. With the emergence of the Arab Spring, calls for the right of women to drive increased and campaigns were initiated, in May 2011 a campaign called “Women2Drive” challenged the ban on driving and authorities later detained Manal al-Sherif who launched the campaign on Facebook.\textsuperscript{72} Several other campaigns calling for the right of women to drive appeared in the following years and the last infamous was in October 2013 where several Saudi women challenged the ban and posted videos of them driving on YouTube and later the campaign Facebook page was blocked by the government.\textsuperscript{73} King Abdullah introduced some changes to the status of women in the Kingdom with increasing calls for freedom, in addition to the King’s decision to include women in the \textit{Shura} Council. King Abdullah issued a decree in September 2011, soon after the wave of protests that swiped the region, to allow women to vote and run as candidates for the municipal elections for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{74} Despite that both the \textit{Shura} council and the municipal elections have no real influential power in the decision making process in Saudi Arabia, yet as a result of


the Arab Spring and increased calls for more women’ rights, the King has included several improvements to confront increased challenges brought by the Arab Spring.

Moreover, the Wahhabi clergy or ulama in Saudi Arabia is another domestic group that have a strong relationship with the House of Al Saud since the formation of the country, when the House of Al Saud had an agreement with the clergy to give the ruling family religious legitimacy in return for spreading the Wahhabi belief in the Arabian Peninsula. Due to the relationship of mutual interests mainly in maintaining the status quo between the royal family and the Wahhabi clergy, both entities have guaranteed the presence of each other. In March 2011, Wahhabi clerics have officially denounced public protests and “described them as un-Islamic and will result in chaos and threaten the unity of the Muslim community”\textsuperscript{75}. Despite historically, the relationship between the religious establishment and the ruling royal family was inconstant. When King Abdullah came to power, he restructured the religious establishment, fired famous religious figures, limited the power of the religious police and banned clerics from issuing fatwas without referring to the central authority.\textsuperscript{76} However, this relationship has improved when the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt fell down in early 2011 and the wave of protests reached several neighboring countries. The Saudi regime reached for the support of the religious establishment who responded positively by declaring public dissent as un-Islamic. The regime later repaid the clergy for their support with large amount of money and issued a


\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 53.
law that criminalize “harming the reputation or dignity of religious officials”. The role of the religious police reemerged and religious scholars began to dominate the media pushing aside other voices especially liberal movements demanding freedom and democracy. The ruling regime realized the same conclusion that the Wahhabi religious establishments give legitimacy to their rule, their presence is tied with the fate of the ruling regime and they are only way to keep other calls for change and Shiite movements demanding freedom and equality from emerging.

Shiites are another domestic group in Saudi Arabia, they consists around 10 to 15 percent of the Muslim population in the Kingdom. Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Saudi Arabia has feared the Iranian influence and the rise of political Shiism in the Gulf region. Shiites in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to practice their religious rituals publicly, to build their own mosques, to hold prominent positions in the government and they face oppression from the regime. Shiites in Saudi Arabia have caused some troubles and riots especially in the 1980s and 1990s with increased Iranian influence after the Islamic Revolution, most notably were the 1979 Qatif uprising and the 1987 Mecca incident which ended up with violent crackdown on the Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia. Despite that the Shiite radicalism in the Gulf region ended in the 1990s yet Saudi leaders along with Wahhabi clerics still portray Shiites in the country as a fifth column for Iran in the region who work to achieve Iran’s agenda. The regime in Saudi Arabia has used the sectarian Shiism card mainly as a justification to several Saudi policy to name a few:


deflect attention of the public from the performance of the government, to counter protests within the Kingdom and to give justification to the Saudi foreign policy decisions in other countries through describing the Shiites as tool for Iran in the region. For instance, as the regime did with the protests in the Eastern Province and claimed that Iran is directly responsible for such protests or blaming the situation in Bahrain and Yemen as an Iranian mobilization of Shiite communities in these countries.\(^7\) However, the threat to Saudi Arabia is in fact concerned with the influence of Iran and not the Shiites. Historically, the positions of Saudi Arabia towards the Shiites were not that aggressive and the Shiism card was used only after the Iranian Revolution to balance the power of Iran in the region. In fact, Saudi Arabia maintained good relations with the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s monarchical regime in Iran who was also Shiite. In addition Saudi Arabia has supported the Shiite monarchical regime in Yemen against the supporters of the Yemen Arab Republic which were supported by the Nasser’s regime in Egypt. Such positions asserts that Saudi Arabia has used the card of Shiism in protect the status quo in the region towards increased Iranian influence and not out of fear of Shiism as a religious sect.

As for intellectuals in Saudi Arabia, there are neither political parties nor unions allowed in the country, and even formal associations require the approval of the government and obtaining a license to operate. In 2004, an association for Saudi journalists was established as well as other groups announced that they will form similar associations. However, all these attempts are controlled by the state and do not possess an actual opposition to the government and the intentions for establishing independent entities will

be eventually suppressed and criminalized since freedom of political assembly in banned by law in the country. Businessmen, on the other hand, have more to say in country due to the fact that they are more relatively organized, their opinions are taken into consideration by the royal family, and they are consulted on some important issues like tax issues, regulation of foreign investment and labor law in recent years.

Nevertheless the existing different domestic groups in Saudi Arabia that have different agendas, not all of these groups have an effect on the decision makers that formulate foreign policy in Saudi Arabia. Depending on their domestic weight in the country each group either have significant or minor role in the foreign policy behavior of the state. Most of the demands of the youth, women and Shiite minority were oppressed by force; in addition, the government applied the usual policy of rentierism and appeasing them through minor changes. While other domestic groups such as the Wahhabi clergy or businessmen and technocrats were somehow employed by the regime to benefit the country in pursuing a particular foreign policy. The Al Saud’s regime has always used the available resources to increase the legitimacy of the regime and reduce the legitimacy of other groups through the use of state patronage and rentierism through buying protestors, religious authority and use of force. These mechanisms have been used since the establishment of Saudi Arabia to prevent the emergence of strong opposition groups. Demands raised by youth, women and Shiites during the course of the Arab Spring were characterized as being against Islam and the clergy issued fatwas to support such claims,

81 Ibid.
in other situations such demands by the aforementioned domestic groups were met with repressive use of force from the government. Rentierism is a mechanism applied by the ruling regime to either to buy protestors from revolting or to buy the loyalty of other domestic groups such as the clergy, the businessmen and technocrats whom their existence and relationship with the regime is characterized by being of common interests and mutual benefits. King Abdullah offered in March 2011 a financial package of $36 billion and to be followed by another $94 billion in the following year, this welfare plan was intended to soothe the effect of the Arab Spring in the Kingdom through combining economic with political aspirations. Also such rentier policy has proved effective in maintaining “ties with the Wahhabi ulama, powerful tribes, and prominent businessmen that remain important in ensuring stability within Saudi Arabia”.  

According to Neoclassical Realism, systemic pressures affect the internal composition of different domestic groups. For instance; youth, women and Shiite minority saw in the Arab Spring an opportunity to demand their rights and alternatively the government perceived the effect of the Arab Spring on these groups as a threat which made the regime to adopt specific policies to accommodate such threat with using money to buy off these groups on one hand and oppress protests on the other hand. On the foreign policy level, the regime maintained a policy to protect its interests where it did not support and even condemned similar calls in other Arab countries for the youth, women and Shiites. Moreover, Saudi Arabia supported the opposition in Syria against the Assad’s regime that is supported by pro-Shiite Iran, while intervening militarily through the GCC Peninsula Shield Force against the Shiite dominated protests in Bahrain.

83 Ibid, 540.
Since the Al Saud, Wahhabi clergy and businessmen have a relationship of mutual interests; the regime slightly depends on them to formulate its foreign policy. Saudi Wahhabi clergy, businessmen and technocrats along with the Al Saud’s regime perceived the Arab Spring as a threat to their existence. In fact, the clergy share actual power with the regime and have influential role in policymaking throughout the history of Saudi Arabia most notably their role in approving the government decision for the 1973 oil embargo, legitimizing through a fatwa the 2002 peace initiative with Israel and prohibiting revolt ing against the rulers in 2011. Businessmen and technocrats have increased influence the Saudi policymaking in the recent years especially with the rise of Saudi Arabia as an economic power and joining the World Trade Organization in 2005, where negotiations were carried out by Saudi businessmen and technocrats rather than government officials. Obviously, Saudi Arabia has the ability to mobilize the resources of effective domestic groups like the clergy, businessmen, and technocrats to serve its own interests which is one of the important characteristics of a state and when these interests collide between different domestic groups thus conflict is inevitable. Moreover, a systemic pressure, in this case is the Arab Spring, shape domestic processes within Saudi Arabia which limit the state’s ability to respond to systemic imperatives. For instance, the Arab Spring has affected all different interests groups in Saudi Arabia and each acted in a different way to serve their own interests evolving generally around

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survival; by turn such changes have limited the options available to Saudi Arabia and obliged the state to pursue a specific foreign policy that helps to protect the state’s interests in the most effective way.
CHAPTER III

The Capabilities of Saudi Arabia that help in formulating its Policy

Neoclassical Realism argues that the foreign policy of a country is affected by the different resources allocated to it and the ability to mobilize these resources is what determines the foreign policy behavior of states. The foreign policy choices depend on the perceptions of relative power and the allocation of national resources to foreign policy to ultimately pursue state’s national interests. Neoclassical Realism claims that when a country is faced with an external threat, it employs its capabilities whether military, geographic, economic and religious to protect its national interests especially its security. The effective usage of these capabilities depends on the realization of the leaders in a specific country of the different threats which confirms the importance of internal factors within a country in explaining its foreign policy behavior. Saudi Arabia has at its disposal several capabilities that it can be effectively mobilized to pursue a foreign policy serving the Saudi objectives. These resources were extensively used throughout the history of Saudi Arabia and especially to balance the threats that appeared with the emergence of the Arab Spring. For Neoclassical Realists, a powerful government should not only have enough resources but also the ability to extract these resources and to use them to deal with external threats. In addition, when there are no threats imposed from the systemic level to the state, these resources are used to ensure long term security for that country. Saudi Arabia has several capabilities that are used to achieve its interests and to face threats including economic capability, military capability, geographic capability, and religious capability. Lastly, through analyzing the capabilities of Saudi

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Arabia will be able to understand how a conservative status quo power like Saudi Arabia served its objectives in a revolutionary environment. In the previous chapter, the thesis has offered an explanation on how Saudi Arabia perceived the threats stemming from the Arab Spring. Through offering an analysis of the capabilities of Saudi Arabia in this chapter and whether the Kingdom succeeded or not in mobilizing these domestic factors to serve its national interests and help in formulating in foreign policy, it will be easy to understand how Saudi Arabia was able to achieve its objectives in such a revolutionary environment.

**Economic Capability**

The economy of Saudi Arabia is one of the strongest economies in the world that is based mainly on natural resources where Saudi Arabia possesses 18% of the world’s oil reserves. The economic capability of Saudi Arabia is mainly based of being the largest crude oil exporter in the world,\(^88\) which gave the Saudi regime the ability to use such valuable resource in directing its foreign policy and the usage of this capability is clearly noticeable in the Saudi reactions toward the Arab Spring. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is one of the major fastest growing economies and a member of the G-20, the Saudi revenue rose dramatically in short time span from $39 billion in 1998 to $153 billion in 2005.\(^89\) Economic capability is one of the two pillars of the Saudi foreign policy, the other being its religious significance,\(^90\) which both were used to bolster the position of Saudi Arabia in the international system and to ensure its security. Oil based economy of Saudi Arabia

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\(^90\)Alan Munro, "The Dilemma for Saudi Foreign Policy." The RUSI Journal, 2008, 46.
has formed that rentier state that bought legitimacy to the Al Saud’s regime domestically and helped Saudi Arabia to influence events and enhance its position in other countries through economic aid given to them, where Saudi Arabia uses a substantial percentage of its national revenues generated mainly from oil income to implement its policies. However, the regime is facing some economic challenges including a high unemployment rate especially between youth, who first lit the spark of the Arab Spring revolts in the region, in addition being one of the fastest growing populations which need strong governmental strategies to meet the increasing demand of the people. Saudi Arabia recognizes that its economic capability is highly based on its oil wealth and due to the scarcity of such resource that if depleted will affect the position of Saudi Arabia in the international system. The foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia reflects an understanding of the need to expand and diversify the sources of national income, so that it does not remain completely dependent on oil income. Saudi Arabia has successfully restructured its economic policies to diversify its production in other sectors and decrease its dependence on oil through encouraging the private sector and attempts to diversify its foreign investments which materialized in Saudi Arabia joining World Trade Organization in 2005 among other world’s great economies.

Saudi Arabia has been successfully capable to extract and mobilize its economic resources to deal with internal and external threats that emerged with the Arab Spring. As previously mentioned the Arab Spring imposed the threat of turmoil in Saudi Arabia like other Arab countries, accordingly the Al Saud’s regime used the policy of rentierism and offered billion of dollars to reduce the probability of dissent and to prevent economic

91 Ibid, 351.
discontent within the country from triggering protests. Since the oil production is owned by the government and controlled by members of the ruling family, this means that the Al Saud’s regime has access to large sums of money at their disposal which can be used to placate the citizens. The Al Saud’s regime has also maintained a strong and steady relationship with the Saudi businessmen who further enhance the legitimacy of the Al Saud’s regime as they are benefiting from the Al Saud’s economic policy of encouragement of the private sector and free market mechanisms, as they will not be in favor and will resist any changes in the Al Saud’s regime or threats to its existence since they maintain a relationship of mutual benefits. This economic structure of Saudi Arabia has given the government the ability to mobilize domestic groups like Saudi businessmen to resist any challenges from the Arab Spring that may threat the regime of the Al Saud.

A similar policy has been implemented by Saudi Arabia on the regional level in countries that experienced revolts and regime change as a consequence of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has offered billions in financial aid to countries to bolster the Saudi influence in these countries that experienced a regime change such as in Egypt, where Saudi Arabia has offered a financial aid amounting $4 billion to the Egyptian government under the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and $3.25 billion to prop up Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi’s regime in Yemen post GCC the transition of power initiative sponsored by Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia also pumped financial packages to strengthen allied regimes against potential protests to avoid their collapse from public dissents such


in Bahrain and Oman where the Saudi Arabia through the frame of the GCC has pledged $20 billion in 2011.\(^\text{94}\) Saudi Arabia has also used its economic capability to fund and train the opposition against the rival regime of Bashar Al Assad in Syria\(^\text{95}\) to gain advantages in taking down an unfriendly regime and to increase the Saudi influence in post Assad’s Syria.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has always used oil as a weapon to influence events and affect international conflicts historically and towards the Arab Spring. Most notably was the 1973 oil embargo that Saudi Arabia imposed through the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) against Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States for their involvement in the 1973 October War in support of Israel, such foreign policy decision implemented by Saudi Arabia has caused an energy crisis and increased oil prices worldwide.\(^\text{96}\) Subsequently, Saudi Arabia used the oil tool in further conflicts and against rival countries; for instance, between 1985 and 1986 as a response to an Iranian attack on Al-Faw Iraqi port, Saudi Arabia has flooded the international market with increased oil production causing the oil prices to dramatically fall which highly damaged the Iranian economy as its decreased the Iranian revenues in a time of extensive military expenditure for Iran during the time of war.\(^\text{97}\)


\(^{97}\) Ariel Jahner, "SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN: The Struggle for Power and Influence in the Gulf." INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW XX, no. 3 (2012): 41.
Saudi Arabia applied this policy again during the Syrian civil war that erupted in 2011, as a repercussion of the Arab Spring, to punish Iran and Russia for their support to the Assad’s regime, as the Saudi regime has refused to cut its production of oil to drive the prices up which negatively affected the economies of Iran and Russia who are already facing economic sanctions from the West and oil is considered a vital source to stabilize their economy.98 These examples show broad usage of the economic capability of the Kingdom in implementing its foreign policy. The foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia throughout its history and towards the Arab Spring has witnessed a strong ability to mobilize the country’s economic capabilities in favor for implementing a foreign policy that serves its national interests and most importantly its security whether domestically or regionally against systemic threats. Saudi Arabia is also restructuring its economic capability in order not to be highly dependent on oil income to protect its regional presence in the future and guarantee the state’s ability to protect its national interests against current and potential threats.

**Religious Capability**

Since Saudi Arabia has been established on religious basis, King Abdul Al Aziz has established Saudi Arabia depending on religious support and legitimacy from the clergy. Saudi Arabia was established as an Islamic country with no constitution available since the Qur’an is considered the Kingdom’s constitution and the sole source of laws and

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regulations is Sharia Islamic law. The King of Saudi Arabia is referred to as the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and Islam in considered more as a way of life in the Kingdom and not only a religion, thus the influence of the religious establishment and the ulama is significant in several aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. The ulama in Saudi Arabia are the clergy following the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam which traces its origin to Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab who initiated a religious reform movement that was endorsed by the House of Al Saud who gave Wahhabi clergy political support and the clergy on their part gave the Al Saud religious support and legitimacy to their rule of the Arabian Peninsula. The ulama in Saudi Arabia have also a vital role in shaping the social values, judging legal issues and decide political priorities. The ulama have also strong presence over important government institutions other than the religious establishment such as the ministries of education, justice, pilgrimage affairs and the religious police where they have strong influence in the decision making in these institutions. The Saudi regime was able to win the loyalty of religious institutions throughout the ages and limit their influence in the domestic and foreign politics for the favor of the regime. Due to the relationship of mutual benefits between the House of Al Saud and the ulama both have ensured the survival of each other as the ulama and religious clerics relied of the Al Saud for protection and funding, in return the House of

101 Bahgat Korany and Moataz A. Fattah, "Irreconcilable Role-Partners? Saudi Foreign Policy between the Ulama and the US." In The Foreign Policies of Arab States The Challenge of Globalization, 358. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008..
102 Ibid, 359.
Al Saud depends on the religious clergy to transcend threats that compromise their legitimacy.

In context of the Arab Spring, the regime in Saudi Arabia succeeded in manipulating the religious institutions and utilizing religion to justify its actions and pursue its goals; for instance, the Al Saud’s regime has pressured the ulama to issue an Islamic jurisprudence “fatwa” prohibiting revolts against the ruler in order to protect the regime survival, in contrast the royal decree issued in March 2011 that promised financial welfare programs, has also ordered the media organizations in the Kingdom to refrain from criticizing the religious leaders to reciprocate the position taken by the clergy towards the Arab Spring. Moreover, the position of Saudi Arabia in the Islamic world as the birthplace of Islam and the guardian of the two holiest cities in Islam has given the Kingdom an advantage and respect among other Muslim and Arab countries and it is perceived as the protector of Sunni Islam, the birthplace of Islam, and a counter to Shiite Islam that is sponsored by Iran. Saudi Arabia since its establishment has been fighting Shiite Islam through the ultra conservative Wahhabi ideology; the Al Saud’s regime banned Shiites from practicing the religious creed and demolished their mosques when the Shiite populated town of Al Hasa was conquered by the Al Saud in 1913.103 This oppression against Shiites increased post the 1979 Iranian Revolution with its leader Ayatollah Khomeini describing the Al Saud’s regime as a corrupt dictatorship and that the holy sites in Saudi cities of Medina and Mecca should not be under the control of a single country.104


Subsequent to the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has used the propaganda of its position as protector of the Sunni doctrine to counter Iranian influence in the region, through portraying Iran as a state seeking to spread Shiism in Muslim countries. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has portrayed the protests within the Kingdom and in other Arab countries such as Bahrain and Yemen as attempts to provoke dissent from the Shiite population to increase the Iranian influence. The importance of religion in the politics of Saudi Arabia is also obvious in the context of the Arab Spring, is that when the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt following the 25th of January Revolution, which posed a threat to the Saudi regime since such political-religious organization could be seen in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim World as an alternative to the Saudi Wahhabi doctrine that has given legitimacy to the Al Saud’s regime throughout history, as well as due to that Saudi Arabia fears of the Muslim Brotherhood rapprochement policy towards Iran.\footnote{Mustafa El-Labbad, "Egypt: A "Regional Reference" in the Middle East.” In Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations After the Arab Revolts, 85. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.} Saudi Arabia has also used religion to guarantee its supremacy over the Muslim world and to counter any rising ideology from expanding in the region through establishing and funding pan-Islamic organizations like the Muslim World League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation, where their headquarters are in Saudi Arabia, to lobby the Saudi interests against historical threats like Nasserism and Baathism\footnote{Bahgat Korany and Moataz A. Fattah, "Irreconcilable Role-Partners? Saudi Foreign Policy between the Ulama and the US." In The Foreign Policies of Arab States The Challenge of Globalization, 363. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008.} or current threats resulting from the Arab Spring.

Saudi Arabia clearly benefits from combining religion with politics which has given the Saudi regime legitimacy in pursuing its foreign policy and its ability to mobilize the
country’s religious institutions to serve its national interests. This is yet another example of how the Kingdom used religious clergy to justify the measures and policies taken by the state towards the Arab Spring. In Syria, Saudi Arabia was able to mobilize its religious capability against the Assad’s regime in Syria where some Saudi clerics issued fatwas calling for jihad (a holy war) against the Syrian regime and even justifying killing Bashar Al Assad.107 Lastly, Religion gives Saudi Arabia a leading role and strong voice between the Islamic and Arab countries towards systemic events and the ability to enhance the regime legitimacy, lessening domestic discontent, countering ideologies and movements threatening the regime’s stability, in addition to enhancing the position of Saudi Arabia internationally.

**Military Capability**

The armed forces of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are one of the strongest and well equipped militaries in the region.108 Saudi Arabia has been able to create modern and effective military forces dependent mainly of western weaponry. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the defense budget of Saudi Arabia in 2014 comes in the third place with $80.8 billion just after the United States and China, while Russia’s defense budget has fallen below that of Saudi Arabia when compared to the 2013 top 15 official defense budgets around the world.109


The military of Saudi Arabia is offering security and stability not only to Saudi Arabia but also to smaller Gulf states making it significant to the security of “some 60% of the world’s oil reserves and over 35% of its gas”. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has been highly dependent on military assistance from the United States based on the special relationship of mutual benefits of oil for security that the US-Saudi relations have been built upon for decades. This was evident when Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait in 1990; Saudi Arabia has immediately called for the deployment of US troops to deter any aggression from Iraq towards the Kingdom. However, with the threats that faced Saudi Arabia as a result of the Arab Spring asking for American assistance was not feasible as such action by the United States will be against the American values since the United States have already made its position in supporting peaceful demonstrations calling for regime change and reforms in the Arab World. Thus, when Bahrain was threatened by revolts calling for the step down of Al Khalifa’s regime, Saudi Arabia intervened militarily through the GCC Peninsula Shield Force without waiting for American assistance; worth mentioning that the United States turned its back to the action taken by Saudi Arabia in Bahrain due to two main reasons. Firstly to respect the US-Saudi agreement of oil for security since if criticized this will affect the relationship between the two countries, and secondly due to the presence of the command of the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and a regime change especially in favor of pro-Iranian Shiite Bahraini


112 Paul Mutter, "Saudi Arabia: Rolling Back the Arab Spring." Foreign Policy in Focus, 2011, 2.
population will threaten the presence of the United States in the Arabian Gulf. Furthermore, as the situation in Syria developed with extended civil war between the Syrian regime and the opposition, Saudi Arabia has employed its military capability and has pledged to arm and train the Syrian rebels in order to be able defeat the Assad’s regime. The ability of Saudi Arabia in utilizing its military capability towards the Syrian conflict is an obvious action of employing internal factors within the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia has successfully mobilized its military capability to bring desired outcomes in favor of the Saudi interests through bringing an end to a pro-Iranian regime in the region; and keeping Iran pre-occupied with the situation in Syria while deflecting its attentions from the Gulf region.

Saudi Arabia has always been able to mobilize its military capability to serve its foreign policy due to that fact the army is controlled by members from the Al Saud family not only in top military ranks but also in lower ranks to ensure that any action involving the military will not be met with rejection and to avoid military coups against the regime especially in a region that has a history of military coups in other Arab countries. The political position of the Saudi Minister of Defense has been always held by one of the sons or grandsons of King Abdul Al Aziz, the founder to Saudi Arabia, in order to ensure the loyalty of the military to the Al Saud ruling family. Another strategy implemented by the Al Saud’s regime to avoid the occurrence of military coups and to ensure the loyalty of the military to any decisions taken by the ruling family, is that the government


maintains other military forces that are autonomous from the armed forces such the National Guard, Frontier Guard and the Coast Guard such approach has been labeled as coup-proofing strategy that ensures the legitimacy of the regime through force. Saudi Arabia ability and control over the army has provided the country with the capacity to pursue its foreign policy freely without the fear of division in the military over specific decisions or coup attempts within its armed forces during the events of the Arab Spring. Notably, when Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Bahrain, its role to the Shiite insurgency in Yemen, and any other decisions taken by the ruling family, there were no signs of dissatisfaction or opposition within the Saudi armed forces about these decisions, but a complete support to the regime.

**Geographic Capability**

The geographic location of the Kingdom plays a vital role in the formation of the Saudi foreign policy, it was used to achieve and serve the national interests of Saudi Arabia in general and towards the Arab Spring in particular. Saudi Arabia is one of the largest Arab countries in the Arab World and the largest in the Arabian Peninsula with an area size around 2 million km\(^2\) and occupying most of the Arabian Peninsula, access to two important coastlines on the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf,\(^1\) and it is at the crossroads between Asia and Africa. Saudi Arabia is surrounded by several Arab countries including Oman, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan each with differing degrees of stability, capabilities and different ruling systems.\(^2\) Saudi Arabia is

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the only Arab country to have so many borders which gives Saudi Arabia influence and access to these countries, as well as more vulnerability to be affected by political developments in its border countries. Such argument is apparent in the position of Saudi Arabia and its interference towards developments in these countries in the wake of the Arab Spring. Developments in Yemen and the Saudi-led initiative to transfer powers of Ali Abdullah Saleh to his vice president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi to avoid such border country to fall into chaos, in addition the position of Saudi Arabia towards Qatar for their support to the Muslim Brotherhood are obvious examples of the effect of developments in these border countries to the security and stability of Saudi Arabia.

Being at the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia is surrounded mostly by Arab rich monarchies where the Kingdom stands as a regional leader of monarchial regimes not only in the Gulf region but throughout the Arab World. Since the security of the Gulf region is vital to the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia is trying to protect the existence of the Arab monarchial regimes. Amid the turmoil brought by the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia extended an invitation to Morocco and Jordan to join the GCC to form a strategic regional realignment where if they joined the organization, the organization will be including all Arab monarchial regimes. Saudi Arabia has used the framework of the GCC to achieve its interests by confronting the Iranian influence which is the reason of creating the GCC in 1981 as a regional entity of the oil rich Gulf countries. As a result of the threats emanating from the Arab Spring, GCC countries under the sponsorship of Saudi Arabia were examining including the only two monarchies outside the

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organization, despite not considered as Gulf countries, in order to preserve the stability of the Arab monarchial regimes with the growing turmoil in the region.

Saudi Arabia is a part of several concurrent geographic spheres between the Gulf region, Arab World, Islamic countries and the rest of the world. Saudi Arabia uses its access to these different geographic spheres to achieve certain policy goals. One geographic sphere is the Gulf which Saudi Arabia considers it an important component of Saudi foreign policy, Saudi Arabia regards the Gulf security as part of its own and the Gulf states have the right to defend their security and independence, which was obvious in the course of the Arab Spring when the GCC intervened militarily in Bahrain to confront threats and protect the stability of the monarchial regime of Al Khalifa. Another geographic sphere of influence to Saudi Arabia is the Arab world where the Kingdom is considered to be the homeland of all Arabs and claims directing its foreign policy towards Arab solidarity, despite the Saudi position shows that its foreign policy is not highly committed to this claim. Saudi Arabia has been calling for Arab unified stance towards different issues and Arab solidarity among the Arab League member states. Saudi Arabia has been taken a leading role to some pressing Arab issues, for instance Saudi Arabia is a strong backer to Palestine which through different Saudi initiatives to resolve the Palestinian issue such as the Fahd Plan in 1981 and the peace initiative in 2002. The Palestinian issue remains at the core of the Saudi foreign policy to guarantee its leadership in the Arab World, since it is the main regional issue that the foreign policy of most Arab countries pursuing a leading role are concerned with.

Saudi Arabia has used its position in the Arab World to achieve its interests during the events of the Arab Spring, most notably in the Arab League, where Saudi Arabia has a
vital role in forming “regional political support for external intervention against the Al Qaddafi’s regime.” Saudi Arabia has been a supporter for imposing a no fly zone in Libya which led to the fall of the Al Qaddafi’s regime, an advocate for suspending the membership of Syria under Assad, and the recognition of the Arab League of the Syrian National Council as the official representative of the Syrian people. Third geographic sphere is the Islamic world, which contributes to the foreign policy of the Saudi Arabia through achieving an Islamic unity and solidarity under belonging to one faith, being a country that holds most important cities in Islam, this requires the Kingdom to “expand its foreign policy reach into a larger presence to include all the Muslim umma”. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia is key player in the Islamic governmental and non-governmental organizations most notably are the Muslims World League, the Organization of Islamic Conference where Saudi Arabia is the headquarters of both of them. Saudi Arabia has always been a provider for moral and material support to Islamic countries. Saudi Arabia uses pure religious rhetoric through its pro-Al Saud religious clergy to denounce Arab revolts and forbid to revolt against the rulers in an attempt to influence the Muslim populations in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries and to hold back the spread of Arab Spring in other countries. Final sphere of influence is the international sphere where Saudi Arabia is implementing its foreign policy through establishing relations with major powers that share interests with the Kingdom. In addition to the Saudi role in international organizations such as the United Nations, as the Kingdom uses its international weight to defend its policy interests and endorse the Arab

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and Islamic issues in the international arena. Saudi Arabia’s importance in the international arena is due to its regional and economic importance; Saudi Arabia used its position in the international arena in supporting the United Nations Security Council resolution and NATO to intervene in Libya in 2011 to overthrow the Al Qaddafi’s regime, and pressured the international community to intervene against the Assad’s regime in Syria. Saudi Arabia also signaled a shift that it is obvious in the documents used for the content analysis in its position to the conflict in Syria from condemning the regime in early phases of the conflict to asking for an international intervention against Syria and accusing the Syrian regime for using chemical weapons against the Syrian people. Another Saudi position in the international circle is its reaction to the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi’s regime in Egypt and backing the new government in Egypt economically and politically and blaming the West especially the United States for “their ignorance towards the crisis in Egypt” and not supporting the post Morsi’s regime in Egypt.¹²⁰

Ultimately, Saudi Arabia was able to mobilize its geographic capability and has employed its position as part of the Gulf region, the Arab, Muslim worlds and the international community to serve its national interests during the unrest caused by Arab Spring. Obviously, Saudi Arabia used its position in the Gulf to ensure the stability of Bahraini regime of Al Khalifa against increasing protests to his rule, as well as providing support to the monarchial regimes across the Arab World as a whole through extending an invitation to Jordan and Morocco, the only two monarchies outside of the GCC. In

addition to the utilization of its status as home of Arabs and the origin of Islam to roll back the Iranian influence through portraying it as a threat to the Arabs’ existence and as an increase of political Shiism in the region; and using its position in the international community to achieve its objectives through condemning regimes in Libya and Syria, while supporting post-Morsi’s regime in Egypt in the international arena.
CHAPTER IV

Policy outcome of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring

Historically Saudi Arabia as a status quo power, has largely avoided having an explicit role towards conflicts in the region as long as these conflicts are addressed by other countries. However, this position has begun to slightly change with the suspension of the membership of Egypt from the Arab League over its peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Saudi Arabia appears to have a leading role to restore the balance in the region and address conflicts in the region. After Egypt was ousted from the Arab League over its peace treaty with Israel, Saudi Arabia in order to fill the balance vacuum in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, offered in 1981 what is known as the Fahd Plan and later pushed for a similar initiative in the Arab League summit in Fez in 1982 to give Palestinians an independent state in return for an implicit recognition of Israel.\textsuperscript{121} With the outbreak of the Arab Spring, there were doubts in Saudi Arabia about whether the United States is still committed to defend their allies in the region against domestic dissent. Saudi leaders were angered from the position of the United States towards Egypt and believed that it should have supported the Mubarak’s regime. The reason behind the American position towards the events of the Arab Spring was mainly due to the concept of values versus interests; despite the American interests in the region were to maintain alliance with strong regional countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia yet the American values were concerned with supporting the people demands for freedom and democracy. Additionally, the American security commitment to its allies in the region, especially Saudi Arabia, is mainly over protecting these allies from external threats, while the events of the Arab

Spring were characterized by domestic dissent and no direct signs of aggression from other countries. These developments have constrained the United States from delivering its security commitment to their allies in the region, consequently Saudi Arabia began to have doubts about the long security assurance that the American-Saudi relations have been based upon for decades. However, since the events of the Arab Spring undermine the security of Saudi Arabia; accordingly Saudi Arabia has tried to play by the American rules of the game through supporting the people’s demands in Libya and Syria in an attempt to engage the United States in the conflict in Syria. However, such attempt failed in engaging the United Sates in having a direct intervening role against the Assad’s regime in Syria, which has placed Saudi Arabia to pursue its objectives and protect its security by its own without depending on the American security commitment.

Subsequently, the threats that Saudi Arabia faced as a result of the Arab Spring has forced the Kingdom to have a central role in the region. With the collapse of strong Arab regimes, the breakup of the Sunni Axis with the overthrow of the Mubarak’s regime in Egypt, and the inability of the United States to maintain its security commitment to Saudi Arabia; these developments have forced Saudi Arabia to made adjustments to its foreign policy to confront the increasing threats from the Arab Spring. The first adjustment included investing more in their foreign policy, where Saudi Arabia has applied rentierism policy to avoid domestic dissent and offered billion of dollars in aid to other countries to bolster pro Saudi regimes and to maintain influence with newly formed regimes post revolts. The second adjustment in Saudi foreign policy is the increased change in the position of Saudi Arabia from low to high profile in regional controversies. Such change in Saudi position is apparent in the documents used in the content analysis.
where the reaction of Saudi Arabia towards regional controversies shows more assertiveness. On one hand, the documents published in the four years before the Arab Spring discuss issues like working towards Arab solidarity, countering terrorism, fighting poverty, establishing an Arab trade zone, calling for reconsidering amending the constitution of Iraq and condemning intervention in Iraq internal affairs without referring to a specific country. On the other hand, documents published since the outbreak of the Arab Spring shows increased assertiveness towards regional controversies to name a few: calling to move from the state of cooperation to state of union in the GCC, accusing the Syrian regime of war crimes and asking for external intervention on the side of the opposition, examining including Jordan and Morocco in the GCC, having an explicit position towards domestic changes in countries like Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain and Libya. The Saudi reactions towards threats cultivated from the Arab Spring show higher assertiveness in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia post the Arab Spring.

The data analyzed in the content analysis shows this change in the Saudi foreign policy, the documents used were divided into two time frames before and after the Arab Spring. The documents published by the Saudi ministry of foreign affairs post the Arab Spring shows more assertiveness in terms of the speaker’s tone, where this tone is more assertive when compared to documents published before the Arab Spring. The results in chart 3 show a considerable increase in the level of assertiveness in the speaker’s tone in the documents amounting from 42% before the Arab Spring to 84.2% after the Arab Spring. As for the friendly tone of the speaker, it was 29% before the Arab Spring and 15.8% after the Arab Spring. This data indicates that there is an obvious change in the Saudi foreign policy as a result of the Arab Spring, whether there is more assertiveness in
conducting its foreign policy when compared to the documents before the Arab Spring. The data has shown also that there is some sort of association between the speaker’s tone ranging from friendly to assertive and the period selected which is visible in the Chi-Square measuring the dependence between the two variables as presented in table 2. This analysis of assertiveness of Saudi foreign policy shows some ordinal patterns where there is an increase from friendly to assertive policies over the period from 2008 to 2014; this is visible in the Gamma measurement of ordinal data as stated in table 3 with a value of .625 which is very strong.

![Chart 3- Speaker’s tone (before and after the Arab Spring)](chart3.png)
### Speaker's tone * before or after Arab Spring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008-2010</th>
<th>2011-2014</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaker's tone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Before or after Arab Spring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Before or after Arab Spring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Before or after Arab Spring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Speaker’s tone (before and after the Arab Spring)

### Chi-Square Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>47.311</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>58.858</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>22.195</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.43.

Table 2 - Chi-Square measurement for speaker’s tone

### Symmetric Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Asymp. Std. Error*</th>
<th>Approx. Th</th>
<th>Approx. Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinal by Ordinal</td>
<td>.625</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>5.730</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 3 - Gamma ordinal measurement for speaker’s tone
Saudi Arabia has implemented its foreign policy in the region to serve its national interests and most importantly to ensure its security whether internally or internationally. The foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring despite it seems contradictory in dealing with the Arab revolts in different countries, but it was marked by some obvious characteristics like preservation of the status quo, balance of power in the region and containment, and power and opportunity. These three characteristics outline the structure of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia in general and towards the Arab Spring particularly based on how Saudi Arabia perceived the threats emerging from the Arab Spring and how the Kingdom used the capabilities it had at its disposal to formulate its foreign policy.

**Preservation of the status quo**

The foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring has been characterized by the attempts to maintain the status quo especially internally against probability of protests within the Kingdom or externally in Bahrain, Yemen and Egypt. The term status quo refers to the existing state of affairs; the status quo to Saudi Arabia is defined as the preservation of the current Saudi security and stability in addition to confronting any threats challenging the status quo of monarchial rule in other countries in the region or the existence of regimes allied to the Kingdom. Maintaining the status quo is one of the most important pillars of the Saudi foreign policy since its creation, as whenever the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is faced with a new systemic development that might upset the already established order, Saudi Arabia appears fighting fiercely such development through formulating its foreign policy in order to protect its national interests represented in its stability and security. Saudi Arabia has always adopted a pro-status quo foreign
policy with the aim to preserve the state’s current position and prevent changes that could lead to the collapse of its political system.\textsuperscript{122} Saudi Arabia employs a pro-status quo policy to protect the Al Saud family control over the country that its ruling system is an absolute monarchy supported by religious Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, Saudi Arabia applies pro-status quo policy to face threats challenges either the security of the ruling regime or the Wahhabi ideology internally and externally. Such policy is achieved through the consolidation of power in the hands of the rulers and that the citizens largely are in harmony with this prevailing political identity, with the exception to some small groups like the Shiite minority in the Eastern Province who have no effective influence in the country and are repressed by the regime out of fear that they would work as proponents of Iran in the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{123} Externally, Saudi Arabia has used its pro-status quo policy also to ensure its security, when Saudi Arabia was faced with the threat of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Kingdom has pursued a foreign policy strategy to preserve the status quo in the region through the formation of the GCC to bring all oil-rich Gulf monarchies together to face such threat that undermines the stability of the Arabian Gulf. Additionally with the spread of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has endorsed its pro-status quo policy by using its oil wealth to protect the security of Saudi Arabia from challenges threatening the pre-established order in the region. Saudi Arabia applied such policy towards the Arab Spring to protect security and stability of Arab monarchial regimes from collapsing through pumping billion of dollars in aid to other


\textsuperscript{123} Ibid, 95.
monarchies outside the GCC like Jordan and Morocco\textsuperscript{124}, and supporting the regime in Bahrain financially and militarily against protests challenging Al Khalifa’s monarchial regime. In Egypt and Yemen, Saudi Arabia also offered financial aid and supported specific entities to shape the political outcome in these countries post the regime changes due to the Arab Spring. In Egypt after the step down of Mubarak’s regime, Saudi Arabia financially supported the interim SCAF rule and the new militarily backed government after the removal of Mohamed Morsi with billions of dollars in aid. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia pursued its pro status quo policy, where it offered financial aid and sponsored a transition plan to hand the power of Ali Abdullah Saleh to his vice president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi to ensure the security and stability in the region and avoid the fall of Yemen into the hands of other factions especially the Houthis who are considered pro Iran.

Despite the interest of Saudi Arabia to maintain the status quo in the region, the Saudi position to the Arab Spring revolutions in both Libya and Syria in favor of the opposition reflects a contrary position concerning the Saudi policy in maintaining the status quo. Accordingly, it can be seen from these Saudi stances toward Libya and Syria that the policy of maintaining the status quo applies only to friendly countries where the ruling regimes are in support of the interests of Saudi Arabia as is the case of Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain. While in rival countries such as Libya and Syria, where the Qaddafi’s regime was publicly criticizing the Al Saud’s regime\textsuperscript{125}, and in Syria that has long history of

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
tension with Al Saud’s regime, Saudi Arabia was not in support of maintaining the status quo in these countries when the waves of the Arab Spring hit them, but in fact the Saudi regime backed the opposition in the hope that fall of those regimes will be in Saudi Arabia’s interests and will bring new pro-Saudi regimes. Obviously since the Arab Spring uprisings reached the region, Saudi Arabia employed its resources to maintain the status quo. Saudi Arabia moved its support to its allies, financially bribed its citizens through its rentierism policy, and banned revolting against the government. In addition, it has brutally repressed any calls for revolt in the Kingdom especially from Shiite minority in the Eastern Province and expanded its influence in the region to stop the progress of what it defines as an increasing Iranian influence in the region. Saudi Arabia tries to achieve these objectives through exerting its political, religious, financial, militarily and geographic tools to preserve the status quo internally and most importantly externally.

**Balance of power in the region and Containment as a Saudi Foreign Policy**

Another outcome of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring is balancing the power of contending forces. Initially with the decline in the regional role of Egypt in the recent years and Iraq after the 2003 American invasion, Saudi Arabia was placed in the position of a major regional power in the region especially in the Gulf region that has to confront regional controversies. With the internal strife in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime has caused an increasing struggle for leadership in the region between Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as a heated extremist sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites that increased in the wake of the Arab Spring. Furthermore, the overthrow of strong Arab regimes especially in Egypt and the increased probability of spillover effect in other Arab countries have further changed the balance of power in the
region and has placed Saudi Arabia in a confrontation with more threats that it has to balance in order to survive. In addition to the existing competition for regional hegemony with Iran, and an increasing regional role of Qatar especially during the Arab Spring was another threat to deal with. Furthermore, Neoclassical Realism holds that claim that changes in the power indicators in a country have effect on the political, economic and ideological interests in another country. With the developments of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia realizes that the internal changes in some countries affected by the Arab Spring such as the rise of political Islam particularly the Muslim Brotherhood is causing a threat and must be contained in order to maintain Saudi Arabia's national interests. With the Muslim Brotherhood at power in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak’s regime, Saudi Arabian influence declined in Egypt due to the alliance of the Muslim Brotherhood with Qatar who is seeking a regional role and stood as a financial backer to Egypt under Morsi’s regime; which limited the influence of Saudi Arabia in shaping events in Egypt through financial support. Foreign balance of power pursued by Saudi Arabia is to guarantee its hegemonic presence in the region through containing the influence of other actors that might compromise the Saudi position; this could be achieved through increasing the Saudi relative power after evaluating the threats as much as possible to secure their security. With the fall of strong regimes in Arab countries that were not maintaining friendly relations with Iran; Saudi Arabia realized that Iran perceived such development as an opportunity to establish relations with the newly formed governments.

126 “Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist mode” In Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy, edited by Steven E. Lobell, by Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffery W. Taliaferro. 61-63. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

especially in Egypt under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia has pushed for the fall of the Assad’s regime in Syria with aiming to balance the power of Iran, on the basis that Iran should lose a powerful ally in the region after Saudi Arabia has lost a powerful ally in Egypt which compromised the Sunni axis to confront Iranian influence.

The balancing policy of Saudi Arabia has been labeled as a policy of containment like that of the United States applied to prevent the spread of communism outside the Soviet Union back then during the Cold War. Similarly, the Saudi policy of containment was employed to prevent the spread of the Iranian influence especially in the Gulf region since the 1979 Islamic Revolution as well as containing other threats like the Muslim Brotherhood and increasing regional role of Qatar in the region. The balance of power represented in the containment policy in Saudi Arabia is characterized by rolling back threats instead of appeasement especially towards the threats arising from the Arab Spring. The containment policy of Saudi Arabia towards Iran is strongly observed after the Kingdom lost its presence and influence in favor of Iran in Syria since the Iraq-Iran war, in Iraq since the 2003 invasion and in Gaza under the rule of Hamas. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia has developed its foreign policy in response to the perception of the Iranian role as an attempt to achieve regional balance of power, through forming a form of alliances with friendly countries like Egypt and Jordan which was referred to as the “Sunni axis” to confront the “Shiite arc” sponsored by Iran. Soon after the outbreak of the Arab Spring, this alliance led by Saudi Arabia has collapsed with the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt. Such development has caused an increase in the role of Iran

the region, especially with the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in the parliamentary and the presidential elections in Egypt, in addition to the appearance of some rapprochement between Egypt and Iran. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has changed the containment from being based on the Sunni axis with Jordan and Egypt amid the Arab Spring by relying extensively on the Gulf Cooperation Council to counter the threat of Iran. This new alliance has been led by Saudi Arabia to intervene in Bahrain through the GCC Peninsula Shield Force to protect the Al Khalifa’s regime and has sponsored the GCC initiative to resolve the political crisis in Yemen to transfer power of Abdullah Saleh to his vice president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi which Saudi Arabia supported with billions of dollars, fearing the fall of Bahrain and Yemen under the Iranian influence sphere. Saudi concerns about the security and stability of its border-country Yemen has obliged Saudi Arabia to support a transition of power plan that would not cause a change in the balance of power especially with presence of Pro-Iranian militia the Houthis in Yemen. Another strategy pursued by Saudi Arabia to its containment policy in balancing the power post the Arab Spring was concerned with forming an alliance with all the Arab monarchies and attempts to include Jordan and Morocco as members in the GCC, despite Morocco and Jordan joining the GCC did not materialize, Saudi Arabia has called for unity between GCC countries to face regional pressures and threats derived from the Arab Spring.

Another foreign balance pursued by Saudi Arabia was with the growing role of Qatar in the region amid the Arab Spring, as Qatar role increased especially due to its position is

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siding with the revolutionary movements in countries outside of the Gulf region, such action posed a threat to Saudi Arabia as it will change the balance of power of the region. Since Saudi Arabia is mainly pro-status quo which limited the Saudi influence in countries that experienced regime changes especially in Egypt and was viewed among the Arab population as a counter-revolutionary force. While on the other hand Qatar was viewed along with its Al Jazeera channel as a supporter for revolutions which placed Qatar at odds with Saudi Arabia who favored the status quo. Qatari support to revolutionary waves especially to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has posed a challenge to Saudi Arabia, since Saudi leaders realize that changes in the internal politics of a country like Egypt could lead to a change in the political balance in Saudi Arabia or other countries, which will be weakening the Saudi position regionally and might threaten the existence of the Al Saud’s regime internally. For Saudi Arabia, the Muslim Brotherhood offer an alternative to the Saudi Wahhabi monarchy as an opposing revolutionary Sunni doctrine which is also witnessed a rapprochement with Iran when were in power. In addition, the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood differs in strategy from the Wahhabi ideology as the Muslim Brotherhood has shown ability to penetrate and transform foreign and western values for their favor and modifying their rhetoric to suit their addressees to achieve fundamental ultimate goals. Thus, Saudi Arabia found it necessary to balance the power of Qatar on the regional level and contain the rising power of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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130 Crystal A. Ennis and Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies." *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 6, 1140.

regime occurred in July 2013, Saudi Arabia was the first to support the military backed government in Egypt and offered billion of dollars in financial support. Saudi Arabia further contained the presence of Qatar, which is clearly evident in the case of the Saudi alignment inside the GCC especially with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain who withdrew their ambassadors as the conflict between them and Qatar developed over the Qatari position towards the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Saudi Arabia has managed to formulate its foreign policy amid the threats posed by the Arab Spring based on balancing the powers through the use of containment policy towards perceived threats of increasing Iranian influence, rising regional role of Qatar and containing the rise of Muslim Brotherhood. This policy has proved effective in countries like Egypt, Bahrain and in the shorter term in Yemen despite that it has currently collapsed, where the pro-Iranian group of Houthis took control of the country and forced the pro-Saudi government of Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi to step down in January 2015.132

**Power and opportunity**

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is also characterized by the concept of power and opportunity towards the Arab Spring, the concept refers simply to attempts taken by countries to seize the opportunities arising from the changes in the systemic level to increase their relative power. Power and opportunity in the case of Saudi Arabia refers to the attempts by Saudi Arabia to gain grounds in countries that was not in good relations with Saudi Arabia and that the Arab Spring offered an opportunity to change this relation most notably in Syria and Libya. Starting with the conflict in Libya in early 2011, Saudi

Arabia was still shocked by the removal of its strong ally Hosni Mubarak from power in Egypt, yet Saudi leaders have seen the wave of protests in Libya as an opportunity to increase their presence in a period fraught with turmoil in countries that were not on good relations with the Kingdom. The Qaddafi’s regime was a strong antagonist to the Al Saud’s regime and has criticized Saudi Arabia to the extent of saying that Saudi Arabia should be divided into small republics,133 so when the protests were calling for the overthrow of Qaddafi’s regime, Saudi Arabia did not pursue its policy of maintaining the status quo and protecting the stability of current regime in Libya. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia initiated and backed the Arab League resolution to impose a no fly zone in Libya and the NATO intervention that led to the fall of Qaddafi’s regime. Saudi Arabia saw in the uprisings a challenge to regional stability but also an opportunity to increase its power and take down its enemies. Soon after the fall of Qaddafi’s regime, Saudi Arabia has taken initiatives to strengthen ties with Libya as a step to gain support in a country was far from having good relationship with Saudi Arabia under the Qaddafi’s regime through encouraging Saudi investors to invest in Libya.134 However, Saudi Arabia is currently being cautious in giving strong support or taking an explicit side in Libya to a specific faction, as the unstable situation continues in the country due to the civil war and the emergence of many forces with varying degrees of power makes. Such unstable circumstances make the situation unpredictable about ending the conflict in favor of which faction in controlling the country, in addition that Libya in not strategically


important to Saudi Arabia when compared to other countries that experienced regime change such as Egypt, which explains the Saudi position in not strongly promoting the Saudi influence in post-Qaddafi Libya.

In Syria, Saudi Arabia saw it also an opportunity in the Syrian Arab Spring to increase its power in the region and to eliminate an old rival like Syria Assad’s regime, where Saudi leaders consider Syria as the only Arab ally to Iran since the Iran-Iraq war and the Syrian role in the assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri. Saudi Arabia realized that Syria under Assad’s regime is moving away from the Arabs and in moving more towards the Iranian sphere of influence.135 Saudi Arabia recognizes that if the Assad’s regime falls and is replaced by a friendly regime this will give Saudi Arabia more influence especially in Iraq and Lebanon and reinstate a better “regional balance of power”.136 With the increased calls from the Syrian opposition to the step down of Assad’s regime, Saudi Arabia immediately supported the opposition and as the clash developed into an armed conflict; Saudi Arabia financially, militarily and diplomatically supported the opposition, while on the other hand Iran supported the Syrian regime which turned the situation in Syria into a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has called for arming the Syrian opposition, pushed for sanctions and asked for international military intervention several times to oust Assad’s regime and accused the Syrian regime for using chemical weapons against the Syrian people.137 Saudi Arabia

took advantage that Hezbollah took side with Assad’s regime and considered it an opportunity to undermine Hezbollah’s legitimacy that increased in the Arab World after the 2006 Israeli invasion of South Lebanon, where Hezbollah was seen as a true resisting power against Israel. Therefore, Saudi Arabia’s clerics has called for *jihad* against Hezbollah militias in Syria and accusing them of killing their fellow Sunni Syrians.\footnote{138 “Saudi’s Grand Mufti Calls for Jihad against Hezbollah.” Al Bawaba News. June 7, 2013. Accessed June 10, 2015. http://www.albawaba.com/news/saudis-grand-mufti-calls-jihad-against-hezbollah-497558.}

Generally, Saudi Arabia saw the Arab Spring in Libya and Syria as an opportunity to increase its power and influence in the region rather than a challenge to regional stability, and thus has disregarded their policy of preservation of status quo. The Saudi leaders are trying to capitalize on the opportunities made available by the Arab Spring in ousting rival regimes of Qaddafi and Assad, which their presence has not only comprised the Saudi role in the region but also enhanced the influence of Iran at the expense of the Saudi presence.
CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The Arab Spring that erupted in early 2011 represents a milestone to the security of the region. Saudi Arabia among many other countries was faced with many threats and has formulated a set of policies towards the events of the Arab Spring. The thesis “The Saudi reaction to the Arab Revolts: The Paradoxical Saudi Policy towards the Arab Spring” offered an explanation of the reactions of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring which seems contradictory, due to the different positions taken by the Kingdom from supporting the regimes in countries like Egypt and Bahrain; while supporting and in some cases funding the opposition against the regime most notably in Libya and Syria.

The discussion showed that some of the prevailing theories of international relations to be inadequate in analyzing the topic at hand. For Classical Realism, the theory focuses the nature of human kind in the anarchic international system, while Neo-realism as a system level theory focuses only the foreign policy of a specific state is based on structural factors external to the state and ignores the role of internal factors in the formation of foreign policy behavior. Liberalism on the other hand, as a unit level theory emphasizes on the role of domestic variables and discounts the role of external power balance in the international arena. The thesis introduces Neoclassical Realism as a framework to explain the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring through its focus on the effect of internal factors within the state as intervening variables that contribute to the formation of foreign policy behavior. The thesis presents the intervening variables as the Saudi perception of the threats imposed by the Arab Spring and the internal capabilities that
Saudi Arabia has at its disposal that help in formulating the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring.

The perception of the threats resulting from the Arab Spring and how Saudi Arabia dealt with these threats using its capabilities proves that the Kingdom pursues a foreign policy centered on national interests and particularly security. Saudi foreign policy has been evolving around regime and state security, preservation of Saudi regional hegemony especially in the Gulf, and the protection of regional stability. Neoclassical Realists believe that systemic pressures force the state to increase its power to eventually guarantee its security. This is clear in the foreign policy behavior of Saudi Arabia that has three main characteristics. Firstly the preservation of the status quo in the region which will ensure the hegemonic position of Saudi Arabia over other countries and ensure the stability of regimes that maintains friendly relations with the Kingdom, since any change in the existing regional balance will comprise the stability and survival of the Kingdom. Secondly, the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is characterized by balancing the power of contending states, most importantly Iran and containing its influence throughout the region, in addition to balancing other rising powers, such as Qatar, that might affect the existing regional balance of power. Finally, the power and opportunity aspects where Saudi Arabia saw in the Arab Spring a chance to increase its relative power and seize opportunities in countries where the Kingdom had no or minimal influence and maintains poor relations with them such as in Syria and Libya.

Back to the research questions raised in this study, the first research question about how a conservative status quo power like Saudi Arabia served its objectives in a revolutionary environment. This research question is examined mainly through discussing the
capabilities that Saudi Arabia has at its disposal and how it mobilized these resources to serve its objectives. Saudi Arabia uses a combination of military, religious, economic and geographic capabilities to formulate its foreign policy towards the Arab Spring which proved effective. To sum up, Saudi Arabia has used the rentierism strategy internally, offered financial support to other countries to influence events there and used its religious significance to protect its national interests through the Islamic *fatwa* banning revolting against the rulers and describing protests as un-Islamic. Saudi Arabia was also able to mobilize its geographic importance to lead the Gulf countries and attempting to create a union with all Arab monarchies. The military capability of Saudi Arabia also witnessed effective mobilization and no signs disagreement between the ruling family and different military institutions since the military are highly controlled by members of the ruling family. In short, Saudi Arabia successfully achieved its objectives in the revolutionary environment imposed by the Arab Spring. Saudi Arabia was able to protect its interests and guarantee its security through the diverse capabilities that the Kingdom has and was effectively able to mobilize them for favor of its national interests.

The second research question speculates the contradictory standards that Saudi Arabia has towards the Arab Spring. This question is answered in this thesis through explaining the threats resulting from the Arab Spring and how they were perceived by Saudi Arabia. The positions taken by Saudi Arabia towards these threats whether they are concerned with the increase in Iranian influence in the region, the rise of Muslim Brotherhood especially in Egypt, the regional competition with Qatar or domestic unrest in Saudi Arabia indicate the Saudi pursue for national interests including their security, stability, survival and regional balance of power. Saudi Arabia is perceiving these changes
resulting from the Arab Spring as threats mainly as they negatively affect; and compromise the regional role and hegemonic power of Saudi Arabia and threaten the survival of the Al Saud’s regime that draw legitimacy mainly from religious and economic factors. Therefore, the contradictory reactions towards the Arab Spring either in supporting the ruling regimes in Egypt, Bahrain and Yemen or supporting the opposition in Libya and Syria is based on the Saudi national interests in maintaining the rule of Al Saud and to eliminate any threat that challenge the legitimacy of the Al Saud’s regime and the security of Saudi Arabia, regardless this will place the Kingdom in the pro-revolutions or anti-revolutions positions. Saudi Arabia applies a foreign policy of balancing the power of Iran, Qatar and Egypt under the rule of Muslim Brotherhood. For Iran, Saudi Arabia perceived the Arab Spring as in increase in the Iranian Influence in countries like Yemen and Bahrain and that any regime change in these countries will compromise the security of Saudi Arabia and fall in the Iranian sphere of influence. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Bahrain and sponsored a plan to transfer power in Yemen to avoid increased Iranian influence or a regime change that will end up in favor of Iran. In Syria, Saudi Arabia saw in the revolts against the Assad’s regime as an opportunity to get rid of a regime loyal to Iran which is embodied in the Saudi support to the opposition against the Assad’s regime. Saudi Arabia saw also in the increasing role of Qatar during the Arab Spring and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a threat to its security since Muslim Brotherhood ideology is seen as a more accommodating Sunni ideology that could replace the Saudi Wahhabi ideology from which the Al Saud monarchial regime derives its legitimacy. Furthermore, the ambitions of Qatar for a regional role and presenting itself as the supporter to Arab revolutions and
their support to the Muslim Brotherhood is threatening the security of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia strongly backed the overthrew of Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt and backed the new regimes post Morsi, and due to the continues Qatari support to the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia along with other GCC countries withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar as an objection for the Qatari support to the Muslim Brotherhood and interference in the internal affairs of other GCC member countries.

The different positions taken by Saudi Arabia towards the events Arab Spring is what makes the Saudi foreign policy seem inconsistent. This leads us to the first hypothesis presented in this study that the Saudi policy towards Arab Spring is highly consistent regardless of the apparent inconsistency which is accepted. Since the contradictions in the Saudi actions towards the Arab Spring is different from the consistency of the Saudi foreign policy. The foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is consistent focusing on national interests that are unchanged even before the Arab Spring, since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and Saudi Arabia perceive the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat to its security and has formulated its foreign policy since then to balance the power of Iran and contain its influence in the region. The position towards the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or regional competition with Qatar is also unchanged in terms of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia as whenever the Kingdom is challenged by a state or a contending actor that might compromise the legitimacy, stability and security of Saudi Arabia; historically, Saudi Arabia has opposed any rising power or ideology like Nasserism and Baathism. Generally, the Kingdom formulates its foreign policy to secure its national interests regardless whether this pursue of national interests is translated in consistent or inconsistent actions toward different issues.
Second hypothesis about that the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia experiences a pivotal shift as a result of the Arab Spring, where Saudi policy is showing more assertiveness and a risk prone tendency is accepted. Despite that historically Saudi Arabia has taken some positions that are characterized as having a risk prone tendency for instance, the decision that Saudi Arabia took within the OAPEC to impose an oil embargo in 1973 on several countries including a superpower such as the United States as a response to their support to Israel in the October War of 1973 shows a risk prone decision at the time of international congestion. However, the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring has more risk prone tendency. Generally, the Arab Spring has limited the capacity of major western global powers, especially the United States, to intervene on the regime in countries experiencing revolts, since such intervention would be seen against the western values of supporting democratic values and peaceful calls of reform especially in the Gulf where there is a glaring gap between American values and interests. Such development has given Saudi Arabia as a regional power greater maneuverability conducting their foreign policy through intervening militarily in Bahrain to protect Al Khalifa’s regime against Shiite uprisings that might turn into the favor of Iran, orchestrating a transition plan in Yemen to transfer powers, taking strong position against the Syrian regime and launching containment policy against Iran throughout the region. The risk prone tendency has been obvious also in the documents used for the content analysis where there are tangible changes in the post Arab Spring documents including clear keywords like confirmation on the Gulf stability as a part of the Saudi stability, protection of Arab security and stability against foreign intervention, asking for union instead of cooperation between GCC countries, asking for international intervention in
Syria, commenting on the domestic affairs of other countries and proposed transition of
d power initiatives to Yemen and Syria. While documents before the Arab Spring focused
on Arab solidarity, counter terrorism, fighting poverty and asking national unity in Iraq
and Iran. Such risk prone tendency in conducting the Saudi foreign policy post the Arab
Spring is high correlated with such systemic event like the Arab Spring that has forced
the Kingdom to take an explicit leading role in regional controversies especially with the
fall of strong Arab regimes such as in Egypt and Tunisia. The content analysis shows
significance increase in actions taken when compared with the time frame chosen. The
results in chart 4 show that the documents published before the Arab Spring (from 2008
to 2010) were more rhetorical in nature with a percentage of 58.4 % and action oriented
of 41.6%, while after the Arab Spring (from 2011 to 2014) documents including
rhetorical content were 9.9% and action oriented content were 90.1%. This results shows
that foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring is more action oriented with
a strong dependence between the variables according to Chi-Square with a value of
52.850 as shown in table 5. These results further prove the hypothesis that the Saudi
policy is showing more assertiveness and a risk prone tendency as a result of the Arab
Spring.
Chart 4- Mood (before and after the Arab Spring)

Table 4- Mood (before and after the Arab Spring)
The final hypothesis raised in this thesis claiming that the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is formed by hard core security and political interests rather than religious motives is accepted. It is obvious that the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia as aforementioned is mainly concerned with the struggle to protect national interests and most importantly its security interest in the preservation of status quo particularly in the Arabian Gulf and in countries where the regimes are loyal to Saudi Arabia. Saudi national interests are also concerned with its own regime survival and stability within the Kingdom so whenever a threat emerge either internally or externally, Saudi Arabia backed by its capabilities formulate set of policies to ensure the achievement and the protection of its national interests. The foreign policy despite supporting the Sunni Muslims in countries experiencing sectarian conflict with Shiite communities such in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen; yet the conflict in the first place is with the Iranian influence in the region rather than a sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shiite Islam which asserts that the motives of Saudi foreign policy are driven by pure security and political interest rather than religious. However, the sectarian card has been used heavily by Saudi Arabia to justify their actions either towards internal problems in the Kingdom like oppressing the Shiite protests in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>52.857</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity Correction</td>
<td>50.711</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>57.034</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>52.588</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>202</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 34.50
- Computed only for a 2x2 table

**Table 5- Chi-Square measurement for mood (before and after the Arab Spring)**
Eastern Province or externally in other countries like justifying the military intervention in Bahrain on the regime’s side.

Finally, the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia towards the Arab Spring has several factors contributing to its formulation. This thesis tried to include all possible aspects available to examine and offer a comprehensive analysis of the Saudi foreign policy towards the Arab Spring through using Neoclassical Realism as an approach to break down and explain the topic at hand. Since the theory is considered to be the most suitable approach to analyze the phenomena of the Arab Spring away from other approaches that might ignore important aspects, like for instance the role of internal factors in determining the foreign policy behavior of states.
Annex-Content Analysis

Introduction:

The content analysis applied in this thesis aims to offer a systematic and objective measurement to identify trends over a period of time. Content analysis is applied to statements, speeches and declarations by Saudi officials over the period from 2008 to 2014. The time period chose is a span of 8 years to study and compare changes in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia 4 years before the events of the Arab Spring and 4 years after, this part offers the study design, method the major findings.

Population:

The population of the content analysis is concerned with two dimensions which are the topic area and the time period. The population of the content analysis applied for this thesis is the official statements by the King and other senior officials in the Saudi ministry of foreign affairs since the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is hierarchical and formulated at the top levels of the ruling elites. Thus, the most reliable and credible materials that could be used to interpret the changes in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia should be concerned with the statements, speeches and press conferences made either the King or other Saudi officials within the body of the Saudi ministry of foreign affairs.

Sample:

Based on the defined population, the sample was selected of statements, speeches, press conferences, and other documents published on the online website of the ministry of foreign affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that were largely made by the King, Saudi foreign minister and other Saudi officials within a specific period of time which is
from 2008 to 2014, or four years before the eruption of the events of the Arab Spring and four years after. The data was derived from the materials published of the official website of the ministry of foreign of affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, since it is the most reliable and trusted source to get such data and is not influenced by opinions and political backgrounds whether in favor or against the regime and Saudi Arabia and it contains the official position of Saudi Arabia towards different events. After implementing the content analysis on the selected sample with validating and removing some materials that does not fit the study; for instance, one document was about a lecture by a professor at the ministry of foreign affairs. The sample includes 53 materials that were examined and studied to come up with the results of the study. Essentially the sample included 57 documents however after eliminating irrelevant documents, the actual numbers of documents included in the content analysis were 53 documents that the data was derived and interpreted from. The documents were ranging from press releases, speeches and statements issued in different events like meetings, summit and conferences by several Saudi officials.

Method:

Since this thesis will not be solely dependent on the data derived from the content analysis, the content analysis was designed to offer investigation to some factors that are important to this thesis and will be enough to produce the required results. The categories used for the content analysis were as follows: date, countries mentioned, speaker, place, speaker’s tone, does it offer an explanation or just a position, mood whether it is action oriented or rhetorical and the size of document. The categories selected are not all with the same significance and might not be all useful to examine the topic at hand yet they
offer the reader a better understanding on the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia about different issues. This study recorded and categorized themes either some simple categories to measure and interpret data qualitatively to be used in this thesis or to be used as references to support a specific claim in the thesis.

The study examined the documents on the Ministry of foreign affairs in Arabic language to have a better conceptualization of the documents put under analysis. The content analysis was conducted by two different coders, the author of this study and another independent coder in order to increase the credibility of this study. In the end when each coder came up with the results individually to avoid being affected by each other and were ultimately matched against each other. In addition, disagreement between the coders was presented to each category with conflicting views. In reaching intercoder agreement and reliability, comparison were made between myself and the other coder to reach a decision on any conflicting decision concerned with the creating the categories or with filling the data. Generally, the data generated in the study were all agreed upon by the coders with exception to speaker’s tone and the status of the document (if it offers an explanation or just a political position) categories, in addition to some minor disagreement in actions category. The below table offers the percentage of agreement for each category used for the content analysis.
### Content Analysis- Intercoder Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percent Agreement</th>
<th>Scott's Pi</th>
<th>Cohen's Kappa</th>
<th>Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)</th>
<th>N Agreements</th>
<th>N Disagreements</th>
<th>N Cases</th>
<th>N Decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Mentioned</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker's tone</td>
<td>81.1%</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stems</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>0.456</td>
<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.471</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
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<td>undefined*</td>
<td>undefined*</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Material Size</td>
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<td>undefined*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha are undefined for this variable due to invariant values.

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**Table 6- Intercoder Agreement**
Abbreviations

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council
UAE: United Arab Emirates
G-20: The Group of Twenty of major economies
OAPEC: Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
SCAF: The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
IS: Islamic State
UNCCT: United Nations Centre for Counter Terrorism
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