Iran’s Perception of Saudi Arabia’s Regional Policies and its Intervention in Syria

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It is clear that the Saudi’s response to the Arab spring was determined by the need to preserve the regional status quo, or alter it towards a more favorable direction. From Iran’s perspective Saudi Arabia’s post-Arab spring policies have clearly been to weaken Iran’s regional power due to the obvious expansion of Iran's influence in the region in the last several years. In the meantime, Syria as one of the three pillars of Axis of resistance against Israel has always had a specific place in foreign policy of Iran. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia attempted to abuse its power by involving in Syria’s conflict to challenge Iran’s regional power.

This article examines Saudi’s policies and analyze the complexity in its exploitation of regional opportunities, challenges, and threats in the context of Syria’s conflict that emerged after the Arab spring. The analysis will be made based on Iran’s foreign policy office documents and other Persian sources. Based on the fact that Saudi Arabia is the country which has become much confrontational against Iran since the time of the 1979 revolution, this study is significant in the sense that it pays attention to Iran’s perception of Saudi Arabia’s particularly since Syria’s conflict in 2011. By so doing, this article will shed light on the reasons Iran and Saudi Arabia have become so conflictual after the Arab spring, and will address the nature of the instability in the contemporary Middle East.

The article argues that Saudi Arabia exploited the Sunni radical groups in Iraq in the post-Saddam era and enjoyed much opportunity to challenge Iran’s expansion of power in the region, but that the subsequent Arab spring, in particular the oppositional groups’ challenges against the Assad regime impacted directly and indirectly Saudi Arabia’s legitimacy of power domestically and regionally. Moreover, the author discusses how to military progress of ISIS in Syria has gradually become a threat to Saudi Arabia despite the fact that the ISIS originally supported Saudi Arabia in the beginning of the Arab spring. Some prospect for the future of Syria and its implication for Saudi Arabia’s position in the region are also discussed.

Key words; Saudi Arabia, Iran, ISIS, Syria, Arab Spring, the US