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# The decisive kingdom from soft to hard power

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**THE DECISIVE KINGDOM  
FROM SOFT TO HARD POWER**

A thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University  
In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Political Science  
by  
Abdullah Ali Asiri  
Approved by  
Dr. George Davis, Committee Chairperson  
Dr. Jason Morrissette  
Dr. Shawn Schulenberg


Marshall University  
May 2016

## APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of Abdullah Ali Asiri, affirm that the thesis, *The Decisive Kingdom: From Soft to Hard Power*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the political science and the College of Liberal Arts. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This is a political science thesis that traces a transition in the foreign policy of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia from reliance on soft power to reliance on hard power in cases where the Saudi state is in confrontation with Iran. In theory, the research contextualizes this transition based on Joseph Nye's concepts of soft and hard power. The thesis uses case analysis approach to manifest the transition in reading and analyzing six cases based on one major hypothesis that measures Iran threat as prominent in those cases. It concludes that since 2010, Saudi Arabia foreign policy began to shift toward using hard power to confront Iran at different states using two different forms of hard power.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, the founder of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, said one day, deriving from a proverb, “decisiveness is the precursor of tenacity and precursor of victory, yet indecision is the precursor of escape and the precursor of regret” (Al Riyadh 2015a). More than fifty years after his death, Saudi Arabia engaged in a military operation against the Houthi militia in Yemen called *The Decisive Storm*. It is a military operation devoted toward restoring the Yemeni state from a militia backed by Iran (Al Arabiya 2015a). Between decisiveness called upon by Abdul-Aziz and *The Decisive Storm*, the meaning and the context of power in Saudi foreign policy has changed significantly in correspondence with the context of conflict in the region. In the years between the founding of the kingdom and the Arab revolutions, Saudi foreign policy has been anything but decisive, at least with respect to the use of overt power. Even during periods where the region’s conflicts have made it unstable, Saudi Arabia’s use of overt force declined significantly. Since the establishment of the state, Saudi Arabia turned to diplomacy and international relations implementing its assets to influence, mediate, and solve regional disputes. Increasingly, as the rivals of Saudi Arabia resorted to the use of physical force and “hard” behaviors, Saudi Arabia relied heavily on diplomacy and avoidance of conflict—especially in regard to military conflicts. In short, it has become the norm for Saudi policy to react softly toward regional conflicts. For instance, when Abdul Nasir intervened with military force in Yemen to enforce a political change for Pan-Arabism, Saudi Arabia restricted its support to the Yemeni Imam to financial engagement (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz 2005). Even when Saddam Hussein incited a regional conflict by invading Kuwait, the Saudi foreign policy resorted first to



organizational engagement to deter his use of physical force before resorting to war as a last resort in 1990 (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). In other cases in the region, Saudi foreign policy defines its behavior in relation to diplomacy more than confrontation—a norm that has been expressed even when confronted by force.

This tendency toward diplomacy or what scholars define, in general, as “soft power” changed following the Arab revolutions of 2010. Since that date, a new pattern developed in the Saudi behavior involving the use of force. Saudi Arabia has engaged in two major military conflicts and has been much more hard approach in its interactions with other states in the region. In Bahrain, for example, the kingdom responded to the sectarian-based protests with the use of physical force (CNN 2011). In Yemen, as mentioned above, Saudi Arabia resorted to *The Decisive Storm* to restore the Yemeni state from the control of the Houthi militia that took over the capital city and ruled by force (Al Arabiya 2015a). The kingdom has also taken a much more overt role in other states, including Syria, where the kingdom supported the revolution against the Syrian regime and in Lebanon where it took a new, “hard” approach toward both the Lebanese government and Hezbollah. The behavior of Saudi foreign policy moved toward the realm where it is defined more in terms of what scholars refer to as “hard power.” At the same time, however, the Saudi approach has remained the same in other parts of the region, consistent with the norm of soft power that defined that policy prior to 2010. Although the Arab revolutions occurred in several Arab states, the change in Saudi behavior—particularly its willingness to use force—appears to be directed at only a few states in the region. Saudi Arabia did not engage in a military intervention to prevent the change in Tunisia, Libya, and even in Egypt. It did not change its behavior toward other Arab states in the way it did toward some of them.

Understanding current Saudi policy, then, means understanding what connects those states where Saudi policy has shifted most dramatically. The common aspect that provokes the Saudi use of hard power in those states is, quite simply, what it sees as the threat of an expansionist Iran in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings.

The perceived threat of Iran, of course, is not new to Saudi Arabia. The latent conflict between the two states can be traced to 1979 when Iran came into power and influence in the region after its so-called Islamic revolution. Unlike the kingdom's older rivals, Iran came with an ideological and political project that imposes militant political change in the region based on sectarian interests. Iran's behavior acted in accordance with the revolutionary nature of the new regime of Al-Khomeini whose foreign policy project wanted to export Iran's revolutionary ideology to other parts of the Islamic world. For example, Al-Khomeini's Iran continued old political maneuvering with the Gulf through claiming historical rights in Bahrain beginning in the 1970s before it moved to occupy the UEA islands in 1971 (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Furthermore, Iran adopted a policy meant to capitalize on sectarian conflict, for example, exacerbating Sunni-Shia conflict through appeals to Shia minorities and supporting and funding Shia militias in the region, as in the case of Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982, Hezbollah in AL Hejaz in 1987, and the Houthis in Yemen in 1992. While that was taking place regionally, Iran resorted to propagandize and attack Saudi Arabia through a series of Hajj accidents, the Khobar bombing in 1996 by Hezbollah Al-Hejaz and attacks at the Saudi embassies inside Iran. During all of this, however, the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran never escalated into open conflict, nor even for that matter into proxy wars like those that defined the US/USSR conflict during the Cold War.

From the Saudi perspective, however, the recent regional disorder engendered by the Arab revolution presented Iran with an opportunity to infiltrate the uprising with sectarian agendas. Iran was found in Bahrain, in Yemen, in Syria, in Lebanon, and at other parts when it found a way to export its expansionist ideology. The new equation of conflict that came with the Arab revolutions especially with the breakout of revolution in Bahrain and Syria shows a tendency toward a sectarian-based conflict. It is a conflict that would end up changing the socio-politics of the Gulf and other Arab states and shattering the national states into sectarian parts—not only Iran is the beneficiary of this type of conflict but also terrorism. In response, the new behavior of Saudi Arabia came through a foreign policy that relies on hard power—a norm that is adopted to deter Iran and its regional militias through decisiveness of hard power.

### **Argument and Methodology**

Is it true, however, that the apparent shift in Saudi policy in the region represents its response, in the post-2010 environment, to its ongoing conflict with Iran? To explore this theory further, this thesis looks closely at how Saudi policy is changing with respect to its neighbors in the Arab world. Using Joseph Nye's related concepts of soft and hard power (Nye 2004), this thesis argues that since 2010, Saudi Arabia has become much more willing to use the latter than any time in recent history, specifically in those place where it sees a threat from Iran. In what follows, the thesis presents a case study outlining both shifts and continuities in Saudi foreign policy before and after 2010. In doing so, it divides the Arab states into two broad categories. The first category includes states where Iranian threat is prominent; the second category includes cases where Iranian threat is marginal. Based on the two broad categories, the argument is tested through a universal hypothesis proposed and defined as follows:

Hypothesis: Where Iran's threat is prominent, Saudi Arabia engages using hard power.

Where Iran's threat is prominent  $\longrightarrow$  Saudi Arabia engages using  
Hard power.

This is a universal hypothesis for all cases where hard power is implemented by Saudi Arabia. It proposes a causal relation between two variables including Iran's prominent threat as an independent variable and Saudi use of hard power as a dependent variable. Since hard power is defined by literature in two forms, the Saudi use of hard power is manifested in consistence with this division between the two forms—physical force and hard behavior. As mentioned before, there are cases where Saudi Arabia engaged with physical force of military against Iran-backed agents, and there are also cases where Saudi Arabia only resorted to hard behavior—a division that hard power scholars made between physical force and hard behavior. Thus, the definition of prominence of the Iranian threat differs accordingly. In cases where Saudi Arabia uses physical force, it is defined as Shia-based threat to the regime in the wake of the Arab revolution. It is a threat to a regime bordering Saudi Arabia in which Shia minority is involved in opposition to that regime. In cases where hard power is manifested in the form of behavior, it is a threat defined in the form of Shia-based political entities in affiliation with Iran in the wake of the Arab revolution. It is a threat to non-bordering states with Saudi Arabia—a factor seen to distinguish between use of physical and hard behavior in line with different manifestations of Iran's prominent threat. There are four cases to test this: Bahrain and Yemen for physical force, and Syria and Lebanon for hard behavior. All cases are subjected to Iranian prominent threat and all have been in consistent relations with Saudi Arabia since its establishment.

Beyond the analysis of these four cases that correspond to the universal hypothesis of hard power, two other cases are chosen randomly to support restricting the argument to Iran's involvement as a threat. Besides this, these cases show persistence of Saudi soft power toward other states in the absence of what defines Iran's threat. In these two cases, Iranian involvement is defined at the level of normal diplomatic ties and trade relations as it is the case with other Arab states. Under the absence of what defines Iran threat in the wake of the Arab revolutions as in states included in the first hypothesis, Saudi Arabia relations with these states is expected to remain consistent with its norm of soft power. It is a persistence of soft power within established relations that have been consistent since the establishment of the Saudi state. For this part, Oman and Jordan are chosen as random cases to test the Saudi consistency with soft power as a result of the absence of what makes an Iranian threat prominent in other cases.

The first hypothesis and the two cases that follow categorize the cases post 2010 into two broad categories: those in which Saudi policy transitions to hard power and those where Saudi policy remains consistent with soft power. The case analysis shows how those cases become targets of physical force where Iran's threat is prominent at a bordering state and hard behavior when it is a case of non-bordering states. On the other hand, the cases of soft power's persistence justify the assumption that hard power was directed against Iran in states where Iran poses a prominent threat. The cases are samples from the whole population of Arab world cases chosen to manifest the main argument and to test its hypothesis. For the cases of hard power of a physical nature, the case of Yemen and the case of Bahrain are representative of prominence of the Iranian threat to the regime. The cases of Syria and Lebanon are cases where Iran's

prominent threat is manifested through political entities in affiliation with Iran. The Omani and Jordanian cases are representative of the persistence of soft power in the absence of what defines Iranian prominent threat. As the argument unfolds, the shift of the Saudi foreign policy toward hard power against Iran corresponds to Nye's concepts of power along with decisiveness that Saudi Arabia recalls from its past as a choice to confront and deter Iran.

Certainly, what defined Saudi Arabia prior to 2010 in terms of assets of its foreign policy are the same that define it today, yet there is a change that cannot be disregarded in terms of the context of regional conflict and the expression of power. Saudi Arabia prior to 2010 has been reluctant to engage using force—particularly physical force. Nevertheless, this norm has begun to change dramatically since 2010. Within a time frame of five years, Saudi Arabia engaged in two military operations and relied on hard power more overtly against Syria and recently Lebanon. This dramatic change in these particular states provokes questions both about changes of power expression in Saudi foreign policy and about those states. It might be assumed that this change is defined in relation to counter-revolution policies pursued by the kingdom. It might also be assumed that this shift toward hard power politics as a new norm of Saudi foreign policy in general. Yet the first assumption fails to consider the states targeted by the change and the second relies on an early assumption at least within this time frame. Failure to consider both context of conflict and nature of targets leaves the questions about the new Saudi behavior unanswered. This gap is to be filled through considering both: the context of Arab revolutions and the nature of the cases. Considering both factors provides an alternative reading of the Saudi behavior since 2010. However, it goes beyond that to reflect an overt regional conflict perpetrated by an expansionist Iran. The Saudi move to confront Iran does not only define the

use of hard power in the Saudi policy, but it defines Iran's behavior through tracing its attempts to impose sectarian-based conflict in the region. This understanding reflects on the change of context of conflict in the region into more blatant confrontation of Iran proposed by other Arab states in line with Saudi Arabia. It is a critical change that anticipates new equations of regional conflict based on Saudi-Iran confrontation.

In the course of defining and testing this argument, the thesis unfolds in a sequence of interrelated chapters. In chapter two, it offers literature on Nye's concepts of soft and hard power considering what defines both. In the same chapter, it also offers literature on hard power considering its relation to realist politics and its contemporary definitions. In chapter three, it moves toward literature on soft power—Saudi form in particular. It defines the Saudi soft power according to assets and practices proposed by different scholarly perspectives. In chapter four, the thesis presents the argument by defining the regional context of conflict within a historical context. Then, it focuses on the context of Iran and hard power manifestation through testing a universal hypothesis and analysis of four cases. Two cases are also offered to show persistence of Saudi soft power beyond this Saudi-Iranian conflict. Finally, chapter five comes with the conclusion of the argument focusing on what came out of the testing of the hypotheses and how Saudi Arabia has taken a much different approach post-2010 toward those states where there is real potential of an Iranian threat.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SOFT AND HARD POWER

#### **Nye's Concepts of Power**

Joseph Nye, an American political Scientist, states that “Power is like the weather” (Nye 2004, 1). Power, for Nye, tempts predication; however it remains resistible to determination or measurement. The understanding of power as a concept does not necessarily entail an understanding of its experience; on the contrary, power is to be experienced rather than determined. Nye’s philosophy of power led him to define it as “the ability to influence the behaviors of others to get the outcomes one wants” (2004, 2). Yet the ability to influence is conditioned by the possession and availability of power resources. Soft power is defined as the ability to influence the preferences of others using and implementing assets of attraction. In international politics, soft power controls through influence rather than enforcement. Thus, Nye presents soft power as the other face of the power coin that also involves what he refers to as hard power. For soft power to influence, it requires what Nye refers to as assets of attraction. These assets structure the state uniquely to be a model in its practices and relations. According to Nye, the assets of soft power involves three resources: culture, political values, and foreign policies. Each source is defined in relation to its context; however, they all make the state’s ability to influence others. These three resources are of an integrated relationship. In other words, they enhance each other as culture forms political values, which are expressed through value-based foreign policies. For Nye, culture consists of values and practices that control the behavior of a society. Political values and foreign policies come later to fulfil commitment to those values and practices. Through expressing cooperative and collectivist-based policies, the state presents



itself as a model that influences other states for its outcomes. Nye also assumes that soft power is somewhere between “carrots” and the “sticks” (2004, 5). Through soft power, the state pursues its desires without need of threats or inducements. Soft power also reflects on the state’s foreign policy in a way “seen as legitimate and having moral authority” (2004, 5). Although Nye does not assume absolute reliance on soft power, he affirms that it is essential for states’ power and survival. Nye’s affirmation on soft power springs from his view that reliance on hard power causes soft power to decay. On the other hand, reliance on soft power without concern of the defense capability is also a cause of decay. Nye’s balance between the two still assumes that soft power is essential to efficient foreign policy.

When it comes to hard power, Nye states that “everyone is familiar with hard power” as the other face of the same coin of power (2004, 5). Hard Power is contrary to the ability of influence that Nye defines as soft power. It is more associated with the ability to coerce and force toward a desired destination. Thus, Nye calls it hard power. He, of course, focuses on the importance of soft power to foreign policy in the contemporary world. Yet, power in the foreign policy field is often reliant on more than a soft approach. In fact, soft power was nothing even for Nye but the other face of the same coin of power (Nye 2004). Beyond power of attraction, hard power is different from the use of culture power, political power, values’ power, or even power of diplomacy in foreign policy. Still, hard power may be based on one or all these assets of soft power. Nye’s definition of hard power revolves around “sticks” and “carrots” when they are used for coercion. Thus, hard power is defined as the use of military force or hard behavior against an adversary. It goes beyond that to the use of “carrots” which would be, for instance, the economic sanctions. Nye believes that achieving peace is harder than winning war, yet he assumes that hard

power and soft power are “aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behavior of others” (2004). The difference between hard power and soft power remains associated with the way of expressing that power. While hard power is simply based on coercing others against their will, soft power is based on influencing others even against their will. Nye adds to this distinction by assuming that they differ “in the nature of the behavior and the tangibility of the resources” (2004, 7). As it was said before, Nye advocates for soft power, yet hard power comes to transcend the limitations of soft power. In this regard, Nye conditions soft power by “the existence of willing interpreters and receivers” (2004, 10). Upon absence of that condition, hard power prevails as the preferred mode of engagement. Generally, hard and soft power remain related as they enforce the other.

### **Hard Power and Realism**

According to Nye, the difference between soft and hard power is the difference between influence and coercion. While soft power is defined as the ability to influence, hard power expresses its influence in the form of coercion. So, any outline of the literature on hard power should begin by considering the role of coercion in foreign policy making. Coercion does not only trace back to Nye’s concept of hard power versus soft power. Nevertheless, it goes back to the original division between liberal and realist politics. It is the case where even “neorealist approaches ... tend to emphasize hard power ... while liberal institutionalist scholars emphasize soft power as an essential resource of statecraft” (Wilson 2008, 114). Prior to the concept of hard power, the notion of coercion appears in the early writings of realists including Thucydides and Hobbes. Thucydides’s logic of the human interaction, for instance, affirms that “the strong should rule the weak, as they have the power to do so” (Thucydides 1972). This subordination

happens because, as Thucydides assumes, “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept” (1972). In both assumptions, coercive force is used to compel the weak to follow the will of the powerful. Thucydides’s reflection on hard power is important in the case of states’ interaction as variation of strength results from coercing the weak party. Conforming to coercion lies in the human nature that submits to “the opportunities of aggrandizement offered by superior strength”—an assumption that does not only reflect on hard power in its physical form but also in the form of inducements as means of coercion (Thucydides 1972). Under these conditions, states are conquered by “fear, the desire for glory, and the pursuit of self-interest” (1972). A similar view is given by Thomas Hobbes where coercion lies in his view of the world in a state of war. Hobbes bases the dynamics of interaction on coercion in a world of “war of every man against every man” (Hobbes 1994). This war does not only result from anarchy, but it is also rooted in human nature and their desires. Hobbes goes beyond that to assign equal access to power as he assumes that “the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others” (1994). Hobbes’s view of the coercive nature of power springs from both human nature and the state of continuous struggle of each against each. The desire of control or what Thucydides refers to as glory prompts this struggle. For Thucydides and Hobbes, coercive power springs from the need of survival of continuously confronted entities.

Coercion comes also in other realists’ views as in that well-known work of Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*. Although Machiavelli paints a more complex picture of what counts as effective foreign policy-making, he tends to rely more on coercion rather than soft influence. This reliance comes from his reflection on fear and love where he states that it “is much safer to

be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with” (Machiavelli 2003, 79). Machiavelli’s endorsement of fear springs from the same view of human nature that he shares with Thucydides and Hobbes. Soft power, for Machiavelli, does not attract humans as much as hard power because he views humans as “ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers, they shun danger and are greedy for profit” (2003, 79). Human nature makes their obedience conditioned by fear of the more powerful who coerce them more than appealing to them. Even in international relations, Machiavelli prioritizes imposing fear as a state must “maintain friendship with kings and princes in such a way that they must help him with zeal and offend with caution” (2003, 35). Furthermore, Machiavelli assumes that states are willing to destroy and subdue other states for the sake of preservation. So, coercive power is to deter those attempts and assures states’ security. The struggle of power among states entails an equation of power where increase of one state’s power causes decreases of others’ power. Thus, Machiavelli claims that a state or a prince “who is the cause of another becoming powerful is ruined.” (2003, 15). As this notion motivates struggle over power, it also enforces a need to deter and prevent other states from gaining more power. Here, hard power comes, for Machiavelli, to be the base of states’ policies. He also urges engagement in conflicts when avoiding war becomes in the advantage of the other party. Furthermore, coercion is to weaken the most powerful states and contain others. In conclusion, Machiavelli states those “who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation” (2003, 71).

Hard power continues to be the focus even with later realists who adopted a softer version of Machiavelli’s realism. Hans Morgenthau, for instance, refers to power as the core of interaction between states. He claims that “the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest

defined in terms of power” (Morgenthau 2013, 41). As a concept, Morgenthau perceives power as a universally valid concept, however it differs in relation to different contexts. Power “covers all social relationships which serve [the control of man over man]” (2013, 43). In addition to that, power varies “from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another” (2013, 43). Here, Morgenthau reflects on hard power defined in terms of control imposed by a man over another man and against his will. It is a power of coercive nature that is similar in forms and nature to Nye’s sticks. Moreover, Morgenthau shares the same realist view of human nature assuming that “politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature” (2013, 40). In his theory of balance of power, Morgenthau’s understanding of power conforms to the pattern of struggle over it. Balance of power, in his view, starts between two or more entities where power A balances against power B or vice versa. This balance comes in the form of physical force or even soft power; however, Morgenthau still assumes that power is essential in both cases. While this balance might be the case, hard power dominates in the struggle that entails a control of a man over another man. Morgenthau’s balance of power appears to be a more developed version of Hobbes’s state of war. Although it may take the soft form, coercive force is the essential mover in such context.

Realists continue to advocate for coercion as an inevitable nature of power—hard power as Nye calls it. Besides human nature, coercion is conditioned by other factors including the current world system. Realists view the need of hard power in association with defining the world system as anarchy. In a world of anarchy, states cannot guarantee the efficiency of influence to achieve its goals. Therefore, the reliance shifts into the use of coercive power. This view shares what Nye refers to as the limitations of hard power. In this regard, he asserts the world has

reached anarchism after Imperialism and feudalism (Nye 2013, 7). The absence of the common sovereign turns the world into a system “composed of states that are relatively cohesive but with no higher government above them” (Nye 2013, 7). Consequently, realists rely on anarchy to assume that states are “searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony” (Mearsheimer 2013, 51). It is a struggle governed by distrust and striving for survival led by the great power toward possession of more offensive military capabilities (Mearsheimer 2013, 51). Anarchy has contributed to the struggle over power in a way that appeals to their need of it. In fulfillment of that need, hard power prevails as a choice that may survive anarchy and effectively control humans and states behavior.

Furthermore, the struggle over power is subjected to a system known as self-help (Nye 2013). Under the world anarchy, states act according to their self-interest. Self-interest does mean that states “do not subordinate their interests to the other states, or to the interests of the so-called international community” (Mearsheimer 2013, 54). States rely on self-help “because if a state loses in the short run, it might not be around for the long haul” (Mearsheimer 2013, 54). As Machiavelli assumes before, the self-help system entails what is known as security dilemma. It means that struggle over power increases power for states at the expense of others. In this dilemma, states struggle to prevent increase of hostile states’ power. Yet this notion is not restricted to modern realism. Thucydides reflects on the consequences of decrease in power as “the weak accept what they have to accept” (1972). Hobbes also refers to the security dilemma not only in the state of war, but when he affirms the accessibility to power for all (1994). Machiavelli refers to the security dilemma when he states that the one who “is the cause of another becoming powerful is ruined” (2003). In Morgenthau’s realism, the balance of power

causes the security dilemma as one state increases its power at the expense of its rivals (2013). While that increase takes place, other states balance back to restore lost power at the first place. Simply, realism develops in a way that makes hard power a resort that cannot be disregarded under most conditions.

### **Contemporary Views on Hard Power**

Building on the foundations laid down by Nye and realism, other scholars discuss hard power much more explicitly. Beyond the notion of coercion, the literature on hard power addresses it in relation with soft power and its forms that can manifest a coercive nature. As hard power is associated with coercion, the expression of this coercion varies accordingly. Scholars like John Troxell define hard power in accordance to different forms that it may take. Those forms are defined in terms of objectives achieved by hard power. Power, for Troxell, is “used to protect a nation's interests by influencing potential competitors or partners” (Troxell 2006, 187). Yet this protection is defined in relation to hard power that has remained active since the end of the cold war. For instance, Troxell exemplifies the use of hard power in situations like Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and even in counter-terrorism wars. Prior to defining hard power, Troxell acknowledges, quoting Robert Art, that hard power “put[s] a great burden on these other instruments and could make it impossible for a state to achieve its goals” (2006, 187). So, he conditions the consideration of using hard power by conditions of success- a point that answers how and when that force is employed. Taking the US example, Troxell defines hard power in terms of three objectives: deterrence, compellence, and defense. These three objectives entail conversion that “causes a nation to acquiesce to a coercer's demands” (2006, 190). But Troxell states that “successful coercion is not warfighting, but is the use of threatened force, including

the limited use of actual force.” (2006, 189). Hard power, for Troxell, can be used within different contexts based on the situation. It can be in form of reassurance which entails deterrence and dissuasion. Mainly, hard power is used to “avert deleterious actions on the part of an adversary.” (2006, 189). However, hard power may go beyond that to compellence where it forces toward a desired action. Whatever forms hard power takes, Troxell considers it a choice that cannot be disregarded—especially because “human interests, values, and commitments are often irreconcilable” (2006, 204).

Other scholars broaden the context and definition of hard power beyond Troxell’s forms of military force. Smith-Windsor, for instance, takes Canada as a case where hard power is defined in terms of behavior rather than concrete physical force. He assumes that soft power comes “as a counter to those who foresaw the decline of the United States as a great power resulting from rising costs and the apparent diminishing utility of military force” (Smith-Windsor 2000, 51). Smith-Windsor refers to Nye’s concepts of soft and hard power, but he divides the latter into tangibility and behavior. He recognizes a distinction between behavior which is how a state expresses its power and assets that make up that expression (2000). In other words, Smith-Windsor assumes that behavior is what entails either influential or coercive nature. His definition of coercion is not necessarily associated with tangible forces; instead, Smith-Windsor prefers to define hard power in relation to states’ behavior regardless of the assets used to empower that behavior. Taking the Canadian case, Smith-Windsor assumes that the US hard power is firmly linked with military—a tendency which ends up disregarding soft power and assuming that “foreign policy [is] for wimps” (2000, 54). On the contrary, hard power, for him, is symbolic rather than concrete manifestation of military force. Thus, it is behavior that decides whether a



power is soft or hard. Even diplomacy is considered by Smith-Windsor as hard power if it is expressed by highly skilled diplomats. Although Smith-Windsor broadens the definition of hard power to involve a behavioral continuum, he still defines it in relation to coercion as an essential nature of that power. Besides this, Smith-Windsor's broad definition of hard power considers cultural and geographical conditions when power is enforced. In other words, hard power linked to physical force in the American case is linked to behavior in the Canadian case due to different conditions of power.

The integration between soft and hard power tempts some scholars like Nye; however others advocate for reliance on hard power mostly. Colin Gray refutes the assumption that hard power declined in terms of both presence and efficiency. First, Gray defines hard power in association with military force; however he makes a distinction between violence and legitimate hard power. Hard power, for Gray, is "functioning under the authority of law to advance or protect the political interests of a security community" (Gray 2012, 1). In regard of the assumption of decline, Gray refers this assumption to failure to recognize the contexts of power. For that failure to be avoided, history is to be approached as episodes instead of a continuous trend. Gray attempts to make every case of hard power studied in isolation to show that it is a problem of context not power. So, decline of hard power "might have merit only as a judgment on particular discretionary choices at particular times and places" (Gray 2012, 6). Gray defines the problem of context in relation to the strategy or instruments used to manifest hard power. Therefore, he advocates for hard power as a more efficient choice in foreign policy. Soft power, on the other hand, is described as a power that is "more likely to mislead than to enlighten" (Gray 2012, 28). Although he assumes that soft power is as old as human interaction, he affirms that it lacks

regulation, adjustment, and calibration. He continues that Soft power does not “constitute a policy instrument ... seriously comparable to military force” (2012, 34). Moreover, he recalls Nye’s assumption that soft power is based on willingness of the other part to cooperate—a situation that is not the case always. Nevertheless, Gray does not advocate an absolute reliance on hard power, but he allows for a combination of both forms. In general, Gray assumes that “military force is more costly to threaten and employ than it used to be, but it is not necessarily always less useful or usable” (2012, 44).

The combination of both forms of power was also the focus of some other scholars who refer to what they call smart power. For instance, Ernest Wilson assumes that division between soft and hard power affects national security. He justifies that advocates of soft power paint it with weakness and that “their positions are often politically naïve and institutionally weak” (Wilson 2008, 110). On the other hand, hard power advocates are seen to be politically and institutionally powerful. Wilson’s offer of the combination of the two does not necessarily require “sophisticated nations [which] have everything from smart bombs to smart phones to smart blogs” (2008, 113). Need for combination springs from the sophisticated nature of political struggles that require use of both forms. In Wilson’s view, the consideration of power form should be conditioned by the context. Thus, he states that power is defined as “the ability to influence another to act in ways in which that entity would not have acted otherwise” (2008, 114). Both forms of power express their influence to make others act in a desired way. Hard power, for Wilson, defines this influence in terms of coercion imposed on others. Like Smith-Windsor, Wilson defines hard power in a behavioral form including “coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions” (2008, 114). Although Wilson advocates combining both forms of power,

he states that hard power is more effective than soft power. It is the case as “the allies of hard power are much more numerous, visible, and powerful than their soft power counterparts” (2008, 119). It is also the case as hard power is rooted in the structure of state institutions while soft power remains poorly manifested. This structure does not make it impossible for soft power to be used, yet it remains challenged not only institutionally but also in terms of definition. Upon that, Wilson’s solution is smart power that assimilates both forms and solves those problems.

The debate on defining hard power and its relation to soft power continues with others like Robert Cooper. Cooper uses the US model as a case focused mainly on hard power. He assumes that it is an approach “set out clearly in its National Security Strategy [where] alliances are important but the central objective is the maintenance of US military superiority” (Cooper 2004, 167). Hard power is defined as “coercive force” in contrast with soft power that “can be just about anything else” (Cooper 2004, 168). Although Cooper recognizes the challenges of both forms, he assumes that hard power is dominant throughout history. It is what Bismarck defines as the opposite of speech and songs diplomacy. Cooper recalls Bismarck saying that problems “can be carried out only through blood and iron” (2004, 168). He also recalls Lyndon B. Johnson saying “when you’ve got them by the balls the hearts and minds will follow” (2004, 170). Cooper assumes that “both Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong-il are said to have a passion for Hollywood movies...”, but he affirms that this influence has not been useful in both cases: Iraq and North Korea (2004, 170). Moreover, soft power suffers from its weak presentation in theory while real power is manifested in behavior. Nevertheless, Cooper affirms that reliance on hard power only did not succeed in cases like Vietnam and Germany. He also assumes that a “society based solely on hard power never existed: if it did it would not deserve the name of society”

(2004, 169). Although this assumption shows Cooper's tendency to support a combination of the two forms of power, he prioritizes hard power in a way that makes soft power function in the background. An example for this view is NATO that "looks like a soft organization; but in practice there was quite a lot of hard power involved too" (2004, 174). Generally, Cooper concludes that "hard power begets soft power" (2004, 176).

At the end, literature on hard power defines it generally in consistence with the simple definition presented by Cooper. It is simply about "coercive force" while soft power "can be just about anything else" (Cooper 2004, 168). However, that coercive power takes different forms according to each scholar. Mainly, scholars define coercion in relation to the classical form of physical force of a military. The physical force is what Troxell and others define as tangible manifestation of hard power in wars, military operations, and any form of militant combats. It is coercion devoted toward deterrence, compellence, and defense. On the other hand, other scholars like Smith-Windsor define hard power in a broad form of behavioral manifestation. Coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions are forms of that behavior. Upon this division, hard power is defined in relation to the means expressing that power. Context is also an important factor for the consideration of one form or another. Besides Nye's definition of hard power in the form of coercion, hard power divides into two sub forms: physical force and behavioral hard power. First, the physical force is defined in relation with military use and militant engagement. Second, the behavioral form is defined in the form of coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions. The combination of both forms make up what Nye defines as the other face of the power coin, hard power. And thus, any analysis of hard power should consider both forms in relation to contexts and conditions.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SAUDI SOFT POWER**

#### **Soft Power and Saudi Foreign Policy**

When Nye defines soft power, he subjects its manifestation to the assets of influence and attraction. He states three resources for those assets: culture, political values, and foreign policies. The definition and structure of each is subjected to the case where they are found. In the Saudi case, the assets of soft power are distinct because of religious and historical aspects. First, Saudi Arabia possesses a geopolitical power as it is located at the crossroads of three continents. The kingdom also shares borders with eight Arab states, and it is bordered by both the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. Besides this, Saudi power derives from its religious position as the Head of the Islamic world. It is a power derived from its guardianship of the Two Holiest Mosques at the birth of Islam. The Saudi religious power expands once it is known that it is a Sunni state that makes up the dominant majority of 1.6 billion Muslims. Culturally, Saudi Arabia occupies the Arabian Peninsula that represents the Arab culture and identity. The Saudi power is also distinct because of economy as the state is the largest exporter of oil in the world. These assets combined make up the basis on which Saudi soft power have relied over years. Furthermore, these assets are defined and expressed through Saudi Arabia foreign policy and its role in the region. Besides Nye's assets, the Saudi distinction springs mainly from religion and economy.

#### **Saudi Soft Power: Circles of Influence**

Before exploring literature and history of Saudi soft power, it might be helpful to outline how Saudi Arabia foreign policy defines and expresses its objectives of foreign policy. Saudi foreign policy is seen to function within four circles: GCC circle, Arab circle, Islamic circle, and

world circle. Toward each circle, Saudi foreign policy defines its policy in relation to a set of objectives that reflect on the nature and form of commitment toward the circle's states.

Historically, the evolvement of the focus of Saudi policy traces back to the Saudi institutionalization of foreign diplomacy. In 1930, the Saudi state established the ministry of the foreign affairs and appointed King Faisal as a foreign minister, a crown prince at that time. That was the point when Saudi Arabia shifted toward diplomacy after establishing the national state. However, Saudi Arabia was obligated to consider historical and ideological context in the expression of its foreign policy. All assets of soft power that have been mentioned began to function in foreign policy at this point. Saudi Arabia was established on the basis of religion represented by its linkage to Islam and the state alliance with the religious power. Besides this, Saudi Arabia is a major Arab state with all historical implication and identity entailed by this position. Saudi Arabia also shares at the level of GCC states similar cultures and close relations defined in the form of this narrow circle. Ultimately, considering these assets defines Saudi foreign policy in relation to circles surrounding the kingdom. Saudi foreign policy is defined in terms of cooperation offered toward other states. Yet, it is a policy that involves no intervention in other states' affairs. Thus, the context of each group of states defines the Saudi foreign policy within that particular circle (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

The beginning is with the GCC circle which defines Saudi foreign policy toward the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (The Gulf Cooperation Council 2015). The council consists of six states including Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. These states border Saudi Arabia from north and south east. Toward these states, Saudi Arabia defines its foreign policy in terms of maintaining stability through solving any form

of disputes between these states. Saudi policy also involves cooperation toward maintaining strategic security and self-defense against any threat or intervention within the frame of the international law (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

Then Saudi foreign policy moves toward the Arab scale. It is what is known as LAS circle which includes the 22 Arab states which are members of the League of Arab states (LAS). This unity aims at political coordination and cooperation due to history, culture, and identity shared by all Arab states. Yet, this comes with respect to defense obligation against threats to sovereignty of these states (League of Arab States 2010). Toward this circle, Saudi Arabia defines its policy in terms of cooperation that exploits all sources and resources toward serving the collective Arab interest. It involves maintenance of stability and relationships through collectivist effort toward regional and internal crises (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

On a larger scale, the Islamic dimension comes in the Islamic circle that involves all Islamic states represented by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. These states work toward contributing to world stability and coexistence between religions and civilizations (Organization of Islamic Cooperation n.d.). In line with that, Saudi foreign policy defines its objectives toward the Islamic body in terms of substantial and incorporeal assistance—a role that desires maintaining solidarity (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

Finally, Saudi focus shifts to the world circle which involves all other world states with whom Saudi Arabia has established diplomatic relations, alliance, and friendship. Here, Saudi foreign policy is defined in relation to commitment to world treaties and agreements. It also involves engagement and contribution to stability and peacekeeping efforts. Moreover, Saudi

Arabia defines its policy in relation to an economic context where it considers a commitment to stabilizing the oil market through a balanced policy (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

### **Religion and Political Values**

Building on Nye's understanding of soft power and its components, researchers have examined Saudi soft power from different perspectives. Musfer Al-Kahtani, in a study on confronting terrorism, categorizes the assets of soft power under nine categories. As it was mentioned, his categories include: culture, values, geopolitics and politics, media, economy, population, technology and finally military (Al-Kahtani 2010). For Al-Kahtani, the power of Saudi Arabia springs first from its strategic location in terms of geopolitics. Al-Kahtani refers to culture as an important asset as the kingdom enjoys an aspect of homogenous unity that involves culture, religion, and language. This homogeneity is significant, according to Al-Kahtani, because it contributes to the national identity and security. Values or what can be described as religious ideology are also an asset in the Saudi soft power. These values affect Saudi foreign policy because of its political dimension as it contributed to both the establishment and support to the state. Al-Kahtani assumes that the more commitment the state expresses toward those values, the more soft power it gains and expresses. In line with those values, Saudi foreign policy expresses its objectives through cooperative support to states in need. Along with that, Al-Kahtani also refers to media as an asset of soft power—especially once it is known that Saudi investors own the main media networks in the Arab world. At a local level, Saudi media conforms to its soft power through commitment expressed toward the values and conservative nature of the Saudi society. Al-Kahtani also affirms that economy becomes an asset through influence it imposes on oil markets and the world economy. Although these assets make a



distinct version of soft power, Al-Kahtani includes military to enforce these assets and protect them (2010).

Other scholars define the assets of Saudi soft power in relation to one distinct asset: the religious power. For instance, Jeffrey Haynes assumes that religion dominates Saudi foreign policy. He assumes first that the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and its influence is subjected to religious considerations. The soft power of religion springs from the Saudi commitment to religious principles; however he relates this power to the victory of Saudi soft power over its rivals. Based on this, Haynes examines the religious asset in the case of conflict with Pan-Arabism. Saudi soft power is seen through reliance on Pan-Islamism which called for Muslim unity (Haynes 2007). That unity was manifested through the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation which Saudi Arabia initiated. Haynes exemplifies the Saudi attitude toward Israel and the Soviet Union as a manifestation of the same religious consideration. Even with Iraq, while Saddam appealed to the religious cause, he failed because of the religious power of Saudi Arabia. Beyond these examples, Haynes assumes that the consideration of religion prompted the Saudi financial support extended to Islamic organizations and states in need. However, Haynes assumes that this power of religion has been challenged increasingly since 1990. The challenge was of security concerns that started with the conflict between what he refers to as “Moderates” and “Hardliners.” It is a challenge that was aggravated since 2001. Besides this, Haynes also refers to Iran as a part of this challenge threatening the cohesiveness of the Islamic body (2007). Although Haynes assumes that this aggravation “necessitated a balancing of both secular security concerns and religious considerations,” he believes that the

Saudi soft power remained committed to religion (2007, 270). Beyond this historical context, Haynes refers to religious consideration as a mover of Saudi power (2007).

The consideration of religion in Saudi policy is also significant to Joseph Kechichian's view of Saudi power. Kechichian relates religion to the state's will to power that he traces back to the first state in 1744. The Saudi will to power is defined in "the family adherence to Islamic values [let alone] ... oil wealth [that] transformed the desert into a modern country" (Kechichian 2000, 47). Kechichian also describes Saudi foreign policy in association with will to power that "built an ever-stronger base of support, and moved toward consolidation of its regional power base" (2000, 47). He affirms what Haynes said before about the role of religion as an asset for the Saudi foreign policy. Yet, he claims that religious consideration has developed into a doctrine held by the royal family about social and political life. This religion-based doctrine has remained the master of Saudi rule over years. Furthermore, Kechichian defines the effect of this combination of religion and will to power in terms of foreign policy. For instance, he exemplifies the relations with both Iran and Iraq where the Saudi power balances between both. At the gulf level, Kechichian describes the Saudi power as stable regardless of border disputes with both Qatar and Abu Dhabi. Assertive behavior of that will to power is seen, by Kechichian, as the exception in the Saudi politics. He justifies this assumption through examples of Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Syria. Toward those cases, will to power in the Saudi state expressed a supportive attitude that Kechichian describes as unyielding and not limited to words. Although these examples express what he refers to as will to power, they are consistent with the religious consideration. In addition, these examples express the combination of both, or what Kechichian refers to the family's doctrine of political and social life (2000).

As an asset of power, religion continues with others who explore Saudi foreign policy and its assets. Yet, religion here is defined in relation to an institutionalized structure called the Ulema—a term used in Saudi Arabia to refer to the community of religious scholars. Nawaf Obaid explores this structure as a major aspect of religious consideration in Saudi power. Obaid assumes that the Ulema have had a significant role since the oil embargo and onwards (Obaid 1999, 51). Regardless of the economic dimension in that case, Obaid reads the Saudi behavior through the religious aspect represented by the Ulema. Obaid also reaffirms what Kechichian explains as the will to power in the form of religious power. He states that “the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula have shared power with their religious contemporaries” (Obaid, 1999, 51). While this relationship is seen as cooperative, Obaid views it as the power that provided the kingdom with the most stable society. In regard to the oil embargo, he argues that King Faisal’s decision is defined in relation to the religious consideration as he “shared the Ulema's devotion to the Palestinian cause” (1999, 54). Besides this, the case of supporting the Taliban is another example of the religious consideration. That support consolidated both the religious attitude toward the Soviets and the spread of the religious ideology. Besides these two examples, Obaid defines the power of Saudi Arabia in relation to the religious consideration represented by this unity of Ulema.

Although Musfer Al-Kahtani defines the assets of Saudi soft power in terms of different categories including those of Nye, the majority of scholars resorted to religion as the dominant asset. The commitment of Saudi foreign policy to religion is presented as an asset of its soft power. The religious asset is defined by Haynes as religious considerations, by Kechichian as will to power, and by Obaid as Ulema authority. Regardless of these different forms, religion

remains the frame of these practices. Thus, culture and political values in the Saudi case cannot be read in isolation of that dominant asset.

### **Saudi Diplomacy**

Beyond the assets of soft power, the manifestation of that power comes mainly in the form of diplomacy or soft involvement in a more general sense. Some scholars define diplomacy in the Saudi case according to specific roles. Giulio M. Gallarotti and Isam Yahia Al-Filali, for instance, describe Saudi diplomacy as the role of big-brother (Gallarotti 2013). Gallarotti first draws on what others before him explore in terms of assets of Saudi power—especially the religious and economic position. The Saudi diplomacy implemented those assets to pursue a collectivist interest for Arabs and Muslims in general. Gallarotti defines the Saudi big-brother role in the form of “initiatives [that came] to raise and maintain its standing and image among its networks of nations” (2013, 8). Besides this, Saudi diplomacy also pursued “a hands-off posture to preserve its role as an honest broker in mediating conflicts” (2013, 18). Gallarotti states that Saudi diplomacy has worked to maintain neutrality and stability in the region. He exemplifies GCC where Saudi Arabia “resisted taking too strong a hand in guiding the many multilateral initiatives of the members of this circle” (2013, 10). On the Arab level, Saudi diplomacy pursued objectives of prosperity and security through mediation in Arab disputes. The Muslim World League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation show desire for solidarity on the Islamic level—a desire that is motivated by “a normative imperative to help other Muslims in time of crisis and to work toward a sort of unity between Muslims” (Gallarotti 2013, 11). As a result, these practices of soft power have helped the kingdom in overcoming conflicts even with anti-western states in the region. Moreover, it has helped to overcome Nasir’s efforts “to undermine

Saudi Arabia's religious influence through a countervailing invocation of pan-Arab nationalism” (2013, 19).

Besides mediation, another form of diplomacy is defined by Robert Mason as constrictive balancing (Mason 2015). He views this balance to take place between soft and hard power. Unlike others before him, Mason defines this form of diplomacy in relation to the Saudi economic asset of oil and wealth. However, he emphasizes both religion and identity or culture as assets for this power. These assets are assumed to have controlled and shaped Saudi foreign policy, but oil and wealth have exerted control even on the expression of that policy. For Mason, this form of constructive balance began when Saudi Arabia committed itself to a leadership in the region since the 1967 war. He states that the kingdom “was no longer in a position to be passive actor” (2015, 12). Nevertheless, he affirms that this leadership is defined in relation to oil and economic context even in the case of the oil embargo. The case of the oil embargo, for Mason, is a diplomatic move against the US economy that is affected by the oil market. Thus, the Saudi leadership and diplomacy began to influence the oil market which in turn influences the global system and states relations. Mason assumes that “oil policy, including oil production, pricing and security of supply and demand, is the paramount economic factor which drives diplomacy” even in the case of Saudi-Iran relations (2015). In relation to oil and economy, Mason defines Saudi balancing in the form of financial aid where Saudi Arabia extended its support to more than 70 states in Asia and Africa—most of which are Muslims. The combination of oil diplomacy and financial support defines, for Mason, Saudi foreign policy. Yet, that is also defined within a broad frame of Saudi leadership and influence in the region—a role that made Saudi Arabia an attractive ally to other states, including western states.

Focusing specifically on Saudi foreign policy after 9/11, Gred Nonneman defines Saudi diplomacy in what he refers to as omnibalancing (Nonneman 2005). Nonneman begins, like others, by affirming that Saudi soft power is supported by assets possessed by the Saudi state. In the aftermath of 9/11, Nonneman assumes that those assets drove Saudi foreign policy toward more security and stability. The omnibalancing is defined in relation to what he describes as survival imperative of the regime and the state. It is an imperative derived from the Saudi domestic environment including ideology and identity. Yet, Nonneman assumes that this environment is affected by the regional and international changes. The diplomacy of omnibalancing is defined as a mode “trying to maintain consensus in the region even to the extent of a willingness to cooperate with the Arab radicals...” (Nonneman 2005, 346). Toward the end, he assumes that Saudi Arabia relies on the use of “its wealth to smooth relations and attempting to maintain reasonable relations even with the revolutionary Iran” (2005, 347). Nonneman reflects on soft power through describing Saudi foreign policy in terms of cooperation. Beyond this, he follows other researchers in terms of emphasizing the role of religion—especially the alliance between the Saudi family and Ulema. Other assets, like oil and wealth, are considered also essential to this form of diplomacy, omnibalancing. Nonneman’s focus on Saudi foreign policy post 9/11 is prompted by challenges that face that policy and its assets. He states that the threats to Saudi policy are aggravating, including ideological states and asymmetrical policies. Nevertheless, Saudi diplomacy and its omnibalancing remain defined in relation to history, culture, security concern, and mainly linkage to Islam.

## **Avoidance of Conflict and Mediation**

While scholars throughout the literature have projected over soft power-based practices in the Saudi policy, the Saudi history expands on some of those practices and adds some others. One of the major expressions of Saudi soft power is avoidance of conflicts. Saudi Arabia engages diplomatically in regional political issues in a way that serves its leadership and reflects on its obligations. However, this engagement comes in its soft form throughout history. Since the establishment of the state, it has been noticed that Saudi Arabia avoids involvement in regional conflicts—especially those of military engagement. It is a major trend that began with the establishment of the kingdom. For instance, King Abdul-Aziz adopted a neutral policy toward the First World War (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Even in the Second World War, the Saudi attitude supporting the alliance came at a later stage in the war (2000). During the cold war, Saudi Arabia avoided any involvement with the Soviet Union while other states, like Iran and Iraq, formed an anti-communism alliance known as Central Treaty Organization (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz 2005). Saudi Arabia considered that alliance as a means to break the Arab body (2005).

Even on the Arab level, Saudi Arabia avoided military conflicts with other Arab states even when threat was prominent. Any involvement in conflicts came restricted either to financial engagement or engagement within a collective Arab effort. It was the case of the oil embargo and wars against Israel where Saudi Arabia relied heavily on its financial support. Even engagement in the wars against Israel came within an Arab collective alliance. In other examples, softest involvement was the resort of Saudi foreign policy. For instance, Saudi Arabia supported the Imam of Yemen financially in the revolution of 1962 (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz

2005). Although Egypt intervened in Yemen with military and attacked Saudi Arabia, avoidance of conflict was the Saudi reaction. Again, Saudi Arabia restricted its engagement to financial support in regard of the Soviet-Afghan war in 1979. Regardless of the fact that Saudi individuals joined the Mujahedeen army in Afghanistan, the state avoided engagement at the state level (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). In 1990, Saudi Arabia resorted to the Arab league and the UN to sort out diplomatic solution before it was forced to use of force. In that case, Saudi Arabia engaged under a wide international alliance. The same norm was expressed toward Iraq invasion in 2003 where Saudi Arabia avoided involvement or even support of the invasion (BBC 2002). Thus, Saudi foreign policy is defined in association with this norm of avoiding conflicts. Even in cases where Saudi Arabia is engaged, diplomacy preceded that engagement. In other cases, engagement was restricted to its softest forms of economic and diplomatic support.

Another practice of the Saudi soft power is mediation which relies on engagement through a collective effort of GCC, Arab, and Islamic states. This form of Saudi involvement came in many different cases. It began, for instance, when Saudi support was devoted to the unity and dependence of Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion. Saudi's financial support came also to protect Islamic states from foreign control (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Again, the same happens toward Algeria where Saudi policy supported Algeria's revolution against France in 1954 diplomatically and financially (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz 2005). Saudi Arabia supported other cases of independence and unity—including Syria and Lebanon. Besides this, the case of the Egypt-Israeli conflict was also another example of Saudi support to Arab states' independence. The mediation that was manifested at state to state level developed into Saudi leadership of an intuitive nature. Over years, Saudi Arabia offered a series of initiatives that were



devoted toward maintaining Arab and Islamic unity. For instance, King Saud expressed such attitude when Saudi Arabia played a major role in the Arab Solidarity Agreement in 1957 to support coordinating within the Arab body (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz 2005). Saudi Arabia used the soft power of initiatives to counter Abdul Nasir's Pan-Arabism with an Islamic solidarity initiative presented by King Faisal. It was the case in 1964 when that Saudi attitude came to seek coordination among the Islamic nations in regard of mutual interests and mainly the Palestinian issue (A Soldier from the Desert 2000).

In regard to the Palestinian issue, Saudi mediation expressed willingness towards solving the conflict with Israel under conditions that preserve the right of the Palestinians in Jerusalem and their dependent state. In two major examples, Saudi Arabia foreign policy was manifested through initiatives to end that conflict. The first was with the King Fahad initiative in 1982 that developed into the Arab peace initiative in 1991. Saudi Arabia proposed peace for the second time with the King Abdullah initiative in 2002. Again, this was also adopted by the Arab states to be known as the Arab initiative (Embassy of State of Palestine n.d.). Besides the Palestinian case, Lebanon's case is phenomenal to the Saudi mediatory role as the Taif Agreement of 1989 came to end 15 years of civil war (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Although challenges began to confront the Saudi mediatory role since the fall of Iraq, Saudi Arabia continued to offer soft engagement through mediation. It was the case in 2005 where Saudi Arabia proposed an International counter-terrorism conference. Again, the Palestinian case came to focus in 2007 as internal conflicts broke between Hamas and Fatah. In this regard, Saudi Arabia mediated through the Makkah Agreement in 2007 that was devoted to solve the conflict (Al Sharq-Alawssat 2002). Saudi Arabia also called in the Iraqi parties early in 2010 to gather in Riyadh in an effort to solve

the sectarian conflict (Al Arabiya 2010). Beyond these examples, Saudi preference of mediation springs from both its foreign policy objectives and its commitment to organizational engagement—in the Arab league since 1945, in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation since 1969, and in the GCC since 1981. Furthermore, Saudi initiatives are seen to follow a pattern where they react toward ongoing struggles—a role that confirms both reliance on soft power and the practice of big-brother role.

### **Economic and Humanitarian Assistance**

Finally, one of the major trends of Saudi soft power is financial support that came to serve both humanitarian and development need. Over decades, the Saudi foreign policy can be also defined in association with its financial support extended to needs and humanitarian crisis. It is a practice that has been recorded internationally as Saudi Arabia was ranked the third among the international donors in 2010 (Aljazeera Newspaper 2011). Statistics have also shown that Saudi Arabia donated an amount of more than 466 Billion Riyals given within the time frame of 1973-2000 to 73 states. As an asset of its soft power, Saudi foreign policy has devoted a great deal of the state's wealth to fulfil its moral obligation toward Arab and Islamic states. As a prominent example, it is recorded that Saudi Arabia, for instance, supported the Palestinian government with more than 600 million dollars that came as support to the state's budget and national institutions (Embassy of State of Palestine n.d.). That support was also organizational as Saudi Arabia resorted to supporting UN programs and UNRWA. In this specific example, Saudi Arabia extended financial support of 1.2 million dollars paid annually to the UN programs (n.d.). During occasional conferences, the Saudi state extended its financial support to Palestine at international and Islamic and Arab League conferences. Saudi Arabia also expressed that support at a local

level through a series of donation campaigns open for public. It was the case in line with the First Intifada 1987 and Second Intifada 2000. It is a form of support that began with the Palestinian issues and continued over years in cases of Lebanon 2006, Pakistan 2010, and Syria 2012. These are just main examples of those popular campaigns that reflect the state's commitment toward soft power.

Furthermore, the Saudi humanitarian support came in the form of helping minorities and spread the message of Islam. One of the forms of this support came through financial support to academic institutions including Islamic universities. For instance, Saudi Arabia hosts Muslim students from across the world at the Islamic university in Madinah. Eighty-five percent of the university students are coming from Islamic countries (Assakina 2013). Besides this, Saudi Arabia offers scholarships for students who are willing to learn Arabic and Islamic sciences (Al Turki 1995). Saudi Arabia also supported establishment of Islamic centers and universities in Africa and other parts of the world (Assakina 2013). It was only restricted to financial support but Saudi Arabia built Islamic centers and educational institutions in Europe and other parts of the world (Al Turki 1995). In the same regard, Saudi Arabia funds the Muslim World League programs annually with approximately 6 million dollars (Assakina 2013). Saudi Arabia support to Islamic states is ten times more than any other supporter in the Islamic world. In times of crisis, cases of Chechnya and Kosovo show that kind of support at an amount of 1 billion dollars (2013). Saudi support was extended to different parts of the world regardless of any political considerations. For instance, it responded to the Iran earthquake in 2003 with a campaign of donations and medical supply. Again, a similar support came in the case of the 2005 Tsunami,

2005 Hurricane Katrina and 2010 Haiti Earthquake with an amount of 400 million dollars approximately (Al Riyadh 2005).

Besides minorities and crisis support, Saudi foreign policy has gained its soft power from enhancing its reactions with other states. That came through Saudi support devoted infrastructure and development projects. In line with humanitarian assistance, Saudi support was institutionalized through an institution called Saudi Fund for Development. Through this channel, Saudi Arabia funds and contributes to developing projects in developing states. From 1990 to 2013, the Saudi support covered projects with an amount that approximates 200 billion Riyals. While some of these funds came in the form of mutual agreements between the Saudi state and others, others came in the form of occasional donations given to the Arab states and their institutions. Affected and Arab developing states were the most beneficiary of the Saudi economic engagement. States like Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain, Gaza Strip, and Lebanon receive constant support from Saudi Arabia (Al Riyadh 2013a). Moreover, Saudi support came in the form of re-construction projects in war affected states. For instance, Saudi Arabia supported re-construction projects including Afghanistan, Iraq and Gaza Strip. Beyond re-construction, the Saudi support came in the form of service projects in cases including the Jordanian residential city in 2007 and the Moroccan railways in 2010. In general, Saudi financial support came to the big-brother role beyond political contexts. The humanitarian form of engagement was and still is an essential practice of the Saudi soft power.

Overall, these different practices mentioned by literature and history of Saudi foreign policy shows and defines the state policy according to soft power. It is a norm that is defined at the level of assets where religion, culture, economy and politics conform to attraction proposed by Nye.

Those assets were then translated into a variety of different practices. Mainly, those practices fall under the use of diplomacy. Yet, the distinct assets in the Saudi soft power made them unfold through other forms including avoidance of conflict, mediation, and humanitarian support. Since the establishment of the state, these practices continue to define Saudi foreign policy in regard to regional and international issues. As Saudi Arabia did not remain a passive actor, it also resorted to engagement using soft-power based policies. Influence was manifested through initiatives of a collective interest or even containment of disputes at a state-to-state level. Any engagement of the kingdom was first restricted to the implementation of its assets including oil and wealth. This engagement was also expressed in the form that influences rather than coerces other parties. Over years, Saudi Arabia defined its soft power according to those practices. Hard power, on the other hand, was an exception to that norm until a change in the conflict enforced a change in the norm.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **HARD POWER AND IRAN**

#### **Regional Context of Conflict**

Throughout the literature, it has been seen that Saudi foreign policy has been historically characterized by practices associated with soft power rather than those of hard power. Avoidance of conflicts, mediation, and economic support defined the norm of the Saudi foreign policy over 78 years. It has been seen how the Saudi foreign policy resorted to diplomatic involvement through initiatives of collective nature or meditations to solve regional conflicts. It has been also noticed that the use of soft power involved a tendency to offer humanitarian assistance—an imperative that Saudi Arabia adheres to in regard to Arab and Islamic states. What defines these practices in general is maintenance of stability and influence without involvement in conflicts. Moreover, the assets of soft power were implemented through those practices including religious, cultural and political values. While soft power is the dominant norm of the Saudi foreign policy, it is difficult here to assume an absolute absence or exclusion of hard power from the Saudi foreign policy prior to 2010. The difficulty of such assumption springs not only from the fact that Saudi Arabia rarely used it but also because it was an active element of the conflicts in the region. However, what can be assumed here is that hard power was the exception to the Saudi norm over that period. Over 78 years, the traces of hard power in its physical or even behavioral form are found in cases including the oil embargo in 1967, the second gulf war in 1990, and the minor military operations at the border with Yemen. Besides these cases, soft power was the Saudi preferred mode of engagement deriving from the assets of the state.

Considering the context of hard power exceptions, the three cases are restricted to a particular context of a particular time. In other words, the influence of such cases on the Saudi norm of soft power was limited to their time and context—a point that makes them exceptions to the persistent norm of soft power. Furthermore, the use of hard power in these cases came in the form of defensive reaction to a regional or direct threat unlike the proactive moves post 2010. Besides this, Saudi Arabia resorted to diplomatic engagement first before the use of hard power. For instance in 1990, Saudi Arabia resorted to the UN Security Council and the Arab league to avoid military confrontation with Iraq. Iraq was given a way out if it withdraws its military from Kuwait by 15 January 1990, yet failure of diplomacy led to the use of military to deter Saddam Hussein. In the case of the oil embargo, the Saudi behavior came to react to the ongoing conflict between Arabs and Israel in 1967. Even the Saudi engagement in that war came as a part of a collective effort to deter Israel. Toward Yemen, the case of 2009 was also defensive as Saudi Arabia used force to deter the Houthi militia from its territories. In general, the cases where Saudi Arabia broke the norm and resorted to the use of physical force or hard behavior came to be the exceptions to the norm of soft power. Over that period, it can be said that Saudi Arabia managed to disregard or at least minimize its use of hard power in its two forms. On the other hand, it relied heavily on soft power even in cases where it was confronted by hard power-based policies. For instance, the policies of Nasir's Pan-Arabism and Saddam's Ba'ath Party come to show how Saudi Arabia reacted to regional threats and conflicts. In most cases, influence through diplomacy and other soft power practices dominated the Saudi role in the region. Yet, the change in the context of conflict has made it difficult for the Saudi soft power to sustain its efficiency. It came to be the case when that power was confronted with the overwhelming Iranian threat.

Before examining hard power in the Saudi policy today, it is necessary to understand how the Iranian involvement developed in relation to the regional conflicts. The beginning of the regional conflict is associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab-Israeli conflict was the first to break in the region including the example of the oil embargo in 1967 (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). During the eighties and nineties, the regional conflicts were defined at three different scales: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iraq-Iran conflict, and the Iraq-gulf conflict. The Arab camp, which was unified against Israel in 1967, was divided into two different camps. In the second gulf war, Arabs were either those pro-Arabism who supported Saddam or those pro-Saudi who fought against him in 1990. After the 2001 attacks, Arabs were divided into so-called radicals including Iran allies and so-called moderates including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and others. Iraq's invasion of 2003 began the regional sectarian-based conflict especially with the Iranian involvement in the rule of Iraq. As these conflicts unfolded, the challenge to the Saudi soft power increased steadily. Besides this, the parties of conflicts tended to behave in a militant way rather than relying on diplomacy and mediation. The Saudi soft power was challenged by parties who relied on Iranian support more than the Saudi side. For instance, the Saudi soft power that led to the Makkah Agreement between Hamas and Fatah in 2007 did not last before the two parties broke into militant conflict. It was the conflict that resulted in a complete political dissolution of Palestinian territories. Even when Saudi Arabia called the Iraqi parties to gather in Riyadh in 2010 to end the Iraqi sectarian conflict, the parties were reluctant to participate causing more aggravation in the political conflict in Iraq. In both cases, Iran's involvement challenged the Saudi soft power as Hamas and the Iraqi government were allies of Iran. Because of these implications, the regional conflict developed to involve players beyond the Arab region



including Turkey that appeals to its past. However, Iran remained the threat that devoted hard power in service of its revolutionary project since the 1980s and onwards.

The challenges to Saudi soft power were also of an ideological nature. Pan-Arabism, the Ba'ath party, and mainly Iran's ideology threaten the ideology on which the Saudi state was established religiously and politically. In the case of Pan-Arabism, Abdul-Nasir based his moves on the unity of the Arab body—a cause that Saudi Arabia has been desiring but through an Islamic dimension. While Saudi Arabia sought Islamic solidarity through initiatives, Pan-Arabism manifested itself through a series of military coups in states including Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. This also came through the Arab Unification Project in 1958 between Egypt and Syria (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Saddam's party has also based its ideology on bases conflicting with the Saudi role in the region. Even within Saudi Arabia, terrorism came to base on hard power and ideology that pertained a threat to the Saudi state unity. Since 2003, Saudi Arabia has been attacked by a series of planned terrorism acts. The Iranian threat emerged with a similar reliance on hard power and ideology. Iran's threat was different as it entails an enmity not only the Saudi state but to the Sunni sector for historical implications. The Iranian involvement in the region came through aggressive behavior that relied on hard power. At a regional level, it is a behavior defined in relation to implantation and support of Shia militias and minorities at different parts of the Arab world. In 1982, Iran implanted Hezbollah militia in Lebanon which later declared its loyalty to Al-Khomeini or what is known as Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists. A similar case was that of Hezbollah in Al Hejaz that was established in 1987 as a branch of the headquarters in Lebanon before it worked independently in the nineties. In Yemen, Iran supported the establishment of the Houthi militia under the name of Ansar Allah in 1992 which

attacked Saudi Arabia in 2009. Even at a state-to-state level, Iran confronted Saudi Arabia through aggressive behavior that dominated the relations of the two states. For instance, Iran first used the religious ceremony of Hajj through protests at Makkah in 1981 and 1987 that resulted in hundreds of casualties (Al Riyadh 2015b). That accident was followed by a case where the Saudi Ministry of Interior declared that Iranians were detained for transferring 95 explosive bags to use them at the pilgrimage in Makkah (2015b). Iran was caught involved in state-sponsored terrorism as Hezbollah Al-Hejaz claimed responsibility for the Khobar bombing in 1996 in Saudi Arabia. Last but not least, Iran has had a history of attacking embassies including the Saudi embassy on different occasions (2015b).

Besides this behavior that grew to be a prominent regional threat, the threat of the Arab revolutions came in 2010 to top both ideological and political threats. Beginning from that date, Saudi Arabia witnessed the fall of its allies in a way that changed the context of regional conflict. The new regimes were different in terms of both ideology and political structure as is the case in Brotherhood regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. Yet the problem with the Brotherhood was not only with its ideology but also with similarities of its projects with Iran's revolution. The disorder in the region prompted more Iranian involvement. Thus, Iran engaged in exporting its revolution through regime change based on sectarian agendas. That engagement came as Iran backed the militia of the Houthi in Yemen, the protests in Bahrain, the protests in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, and the regime of Syria. Even in Egypt, Iran seized the Saudi difference with Brotherhood to extend its influence to Egypt through improving its relations. While Iran was enforcing changes in different states, it was involved again in state-sponsored terrorism as it was accused by the United States in an assassination attempt against the Saudi Ambassador in 2011.

The intersection between the Arab revolution and Iran's involvement made 2010 a turning point in Saudi foreign policy. By that point, the Iran threat was not only in the form of exporting revolutionary ideology through media propaganda and appeal to minorities, but it was a threat of internal disorder based on sectarian agendas. Iran came in Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon to impose a context of conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims—a threat that breaks the national state into sectarian territories. However, Saudi Arabia resorted to hard power to prevent the enforcement of that context.

### **Hard Power against Iran**

Since 2010, the Saudi behavior began to shift toward reliance on hard power in both physical and behavioral forms. A new pattern is noticed beginning from that date in relation to the Saudi behavior in the region. It is a pattern defined in relation to hard power implemented toward a set of states and within specific contexts. Yet, the states were not targets in themselves but states where Iran's threat is prominent. So, the Saudi reliance on hard power came directed toward confronting and deterring Iran. In different cases, Saudi Arabia intervened to confront Iran using hard power. It came in the cases of Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon considering the two different forms of hard power: physical and behavioral. The change in the Saudi behavior entails a potential for fundamental change in the Saudi foreign policy as a whole, yet it is restricted to confronting Iran at least within this time frame since 2010. Within this context, the prevalence of hard power in Saudi foreign policy is defined in relation to conflict with Iran. Beyond this, Saudi Arabia remained committed to soft power toward other states again, at least, within this time frame.

As mentioned in the methodology, the argument bases on comparison between soft and hard power in the Saudi case. Thus, it shows how Saudi Arabia's behavior was defined in terms of soft power before 2010. The shift toward hard power began since 2010 to be defined in terms of the two forms of hard power. In this argument, Saudi hard power is prompted by Iran's involvement as a threat. Thus, this thesis argues that since 2010, Saudi foreign policy began to shift from soft to hard power in cases where Iran's involvement poses a prominent threat. The pattern that developed since that date shows reliance on hard power toward Iranian involvement in specific contexts. In other words, where Iran is involved as a prominent threat, Saudi Arabia engages with hard power. To test this argument, the Arab world is considered as the population of cases. Among twenty two Arab states, Iran's involvement is seen either as a prominent threat or a marginal threat. Each is defined differently, but this division serves the assumption that Saudi Arabia implemented hard power in confrontation with Iran. Furthermore, it serves backing that restriction of the argument by other cases where Saudi foreign policy remained committed to soft power. Based on this, the thesis proposes a universal hypothesis to be tested in four cases. Four cases are used to test hard power and two other cases follow to reflect on consistency of soft power as follows:

Hypothesis: Where Iran's threat is prominent, Saudi Arabia engages using hard power.

Where Iran's threat is prominent  $\longrightarrow$  Saudi Arabia engages using  
hard power

## **Cases where Iran Threat is Prominent**

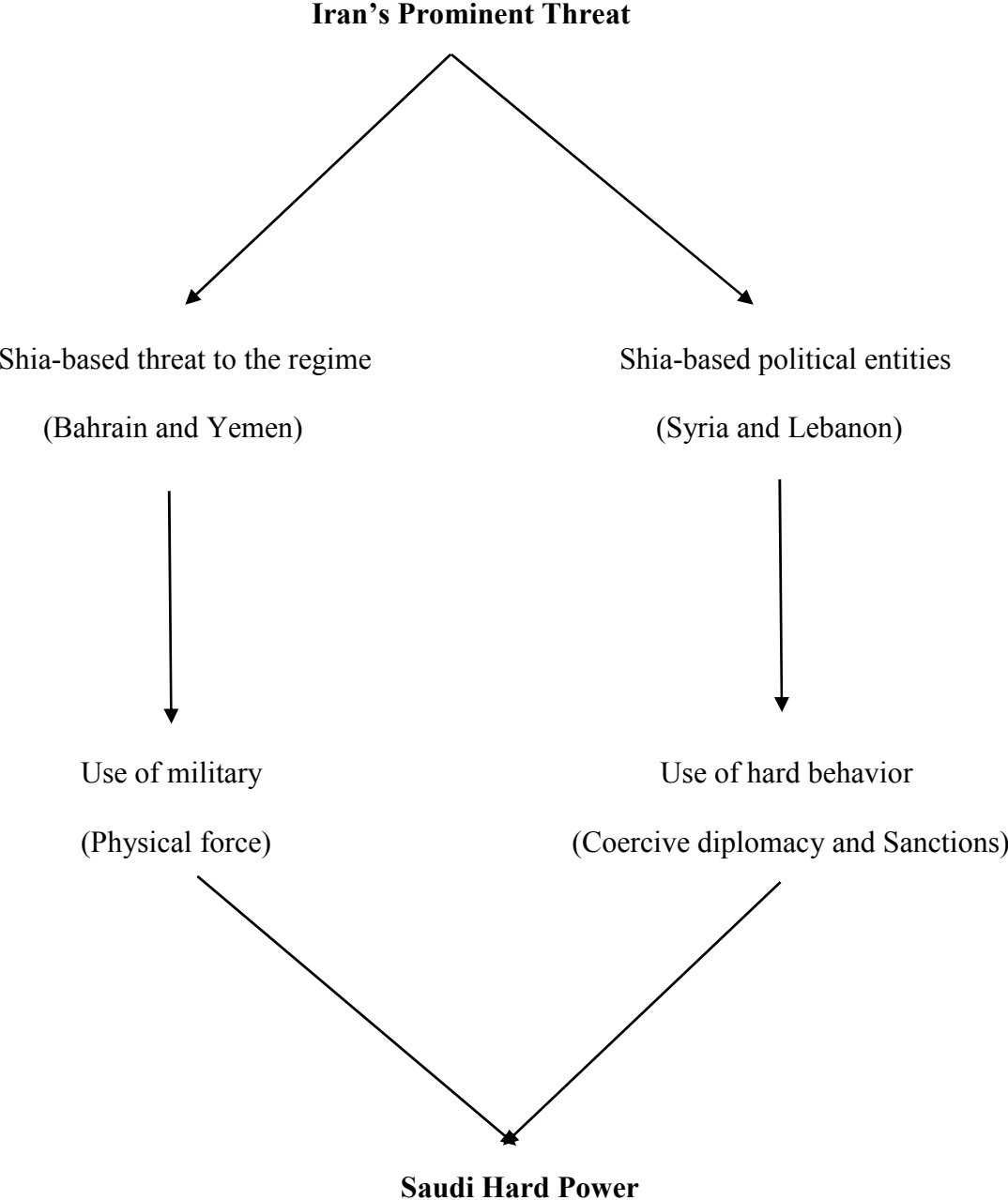
Where Iran's threat is prominent  $\longrightarrow$  Saudi Arabia engages using hard power.

This is a universal hypothesis for all cases where hard power is implemented by Saudi Arabia. It proposes a causal relation between two variables including Iran's prominent threat as an independent variable and Saudi use of hard power as a dependent variable. However, since hard power is defined by literature in two forms, the Saudi use of hard power is manifested in consistence with this division between the two forms—physical force and hard behavior. As mentioned before, there are cases where Saudi Arabia engaged with physical force of military against Iran-backed agents, and there are also cases where Saudi Arabia only resorted to hard behavior. However, the consideration of one form or another was not as random as it may seem. Quite the contrary, the consideration of the form conforms to the pattern of either using physical force or using hard behavior. This hypothesis proposes a universal relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia to all cases. Nevertheless, this hypothesis also goes into division when hard power divides into two forms. For this hypothesis to be tested, it addresses Saudi use of hard power in its general sense in four cases: Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon. All these cases were cases where Iran poses a threat defined as prominent and all were targets of Saudi use of hard power. Besides this, the Saudi use of hard power came at cases that have been in consistent relationship with Saudi Arabia since the establishment of the kingdom—a factor that shows the shift toward hard power in a historical context.

Using these four cases, it is seen that Saudi use of hard power in Yemen and Bahrain is different than its use of the same power in Syria and Lebanon. In the first two cases, Saudi resorts to the first and classical form of hard power manifested in physical force which entails use of military engagement in a targeted state. The use of physical force is measured by the independent variable which is prominence of Iran's threat. Yet in these two cases, the prominence of Iranian threat is defined as Shia-based threat to the regime in the wake of the Arab revolution. It is a threat to a regime bordering Saudi Arabia in which Shia minority is involved in opposition to that regime. The operationalization of the independent variable in these two cases comes through this involvement of Shia minority with affiliation to Iran against the regime. In terms of the operationalization of the universal concept of hard power, these two cases are targets of Saudi use of hard power through a military alliance engaged to deter Iran through its allies.

Besides this, there are the two other cases that are distinguished by being non-bordering states to Saudi Arabia, so Saudi use of hard power takes the other form—hard behavior. Again, the use of hard behavior is measured by the universal independent variable which is prominence of Iran's threat. The definition of prominence of Iranian threat in these two is defined as Shia-based political entities that have affiliation with Iran in the wake of the Arab revolution. It is a threat to non-bordering states with Saudi Arabia—a factor seen to distinguish between use of physical and hard behavior in consistency with difference in definition of Iran's prominent threat. In all four cases, Iran's prominent threat remains the key and the universal independent variable. Here, the operationalization of hard power in its

behavioral form comes in the form of coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions. It is again an engagement of hard power against Iran through its allies.



When it comes to case analysis, the cases of Yemen and Bahrain show the prominence of Iran's threat in the form of Shia-based threat to a regime bordering Saudi Arabia. Then, the dependent variable came implemented in the form of military alliance engagement to neutralize that threat of Iran. In both cases, the border factor has a strategic dimension in both states not only to Saudi security but to the strategic security of the gulf. Besides this, the Shia is of a demographic aspect defined as Shia existence with affiliation to Iran—the Shia in Bahrain and the Houthis in Yemen. Both minorities have shown political and ideological affiliation with Iran as both derives from the same Shia ideology of Iran. Besides this, Iran's involvement in both states has been manifested through political support to both minorities. In the wake of the Arab revolution, the Shia minorities engaged in the uprising as they both share opposition to the existing regime. The presence of this condition makes up the prominence of Iran's threat which, in turn, pertains to the occurrence of the dependent variable—Saudi use of hard power. Saudi Arabia, then, engaged using hard power in the form of military alliance in both states—*Peninsula Shield Force* alliance in Bahrain and *The Decisive Storm* alliance in Yemen. Toward this end, the context of conflict developed in both cases as follows:

#### **First Case: Bahrain**

The context of the Bahrain case is defined in relation to the condition of both cases of this hypothesis. Bahrain borders Saudi Arabia from the eastern shore of the Arab gulf. Bahrain is also located within a hundred miles from the Iranian shore. In addition to that, Bahrain has a demographic factor as its sectarian demographic distribution consists of 51% of Sunni in contrast with 49% of Shias. However, this factor becomes more critical once it is known that 49% of



Bahraini Shia neighbors 24% of Saudi Shias in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia (Alaan 2011). Both factors made Bahrain an interest for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. This factor is more critical to Saudi Arabia because of the close relations with Al Khalifa. It is also critical because of its geopolitical power as an access to the Arabian Peninsula. Bahrain has had a history of being under Saudi control at the reign of the first and second Saudi state. Yet since its independence, it has remained a close ally to Saudi Arabia (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). For Iran, the struggle over Bahrain cannot be seen only as political maneuvering. It is a struggle that involves Iranian historical claims. Furthermore, the two factors make Bahrain a perfect station for Iran's project of exporting revolution. The Iranian interest in Bahrain can be easily traced through its hostile behavior toward Bahrain. Historically, Iran has been consistently using the cause of historical claims in Bahrain to justify its intervention. Even before the Iranian revolution, Iran's Shah resorted to claiming rights in Bahrain—a conflict that was taken to the Security Council before it decided for Bahrain independence in 1970 (Aljazeera 2007). Yet Al Khomeini escalated the hostile behavior against Bahrain attempting to topple the regime of Al Khalifa in 1981 and 1996 (2007). Beyond that, Iran's councilor of Khamenei stated in 2009 that Bahrain is an Iranian Governorate (Al Arabiya 2010). When 2011 protests came, Bahraini Shia protested in the name of a political movement for change, yet those protests were dominated with a sectarian aspect. As the protests turned into militant behavior that caused internal disorder, the threat of the regime became prominent. The domination of the Shia protests along with affiliation to Iran posed a threat to the regime which, if toppled, would end up taken over by the Shia protesters—more particularly by Iran.

As Bahrain became vulnerable to Iranian take over, the prominence of the threat went beyond Bahrain to Saudi Arabia. It was not just a matter of strategic security but it was a threat to Saudi national security. That threat came with the concurrence of protests of Shia in eastern Saudi Arabia. The threat was also a precursor of the first Shia-based state in the gulf. Upon that, it became difficult for Saudi Arabia to offer any soft power-based policy to deter Iran's involvement through the Shia protestors in the course of the Arab revolutions, although Saudi Arabia attempted to continue relying on soft power through economic engagement. For instance, Saudi Arabia and GCC states supported both Bahrain and Oman with 20 billion Dollars in 2011 (*Al Riyadh* 2011). The Saudi state realized that soft power-based policy would be useless to defend the regime of Bahrain. Upon the presence of conditions for this hypothesis, the Saudi behavior shifted toward hard power in the form of physical force. Saudi Arabia resorted to the use of physical force in the form of military alliance to restore stability in Bahrain. The expression of the Saudi hard power policy toward Bahrain came framed within the GCC. Saudi Arabia mobilized the Gulf States and led a military intervention in Bahrain. That intervention came through the use of what is called the *Peninsula Shield Force* as a military alliance of the GCC, yet Saudi Arabia dominated the intervention with more than a thousand of its soldiers (CNN 2011). The Saudi hard power did not consider the protest as a revolution but as a strategic threat. Prior to enforcing hard power, the Saudi Council of Ministers states on the 14th of March 2011 that:

The States and the peoples of GCC denies any foreign attempt to intervene with its affairs, and will face with a decisive determination any attempts that aim at inciting sectarian agitation or causing division between the GCC peoples, or threatening its states, its interests, and its security, yet any attempt to threaten one state is considered as a direct threat to all GCC states (CNN 2011).

The manifestation of “decisive determination” came as the *Peninsula Shield Force* that rolled into Bahrain the following day. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia legitimized its use of hard power as a move that came “in deterrence for destabilization of this security and causing division between its citizens” (CNN, 2011). The Saudi reliance on force came after a meeting of the Saudi National Security Council that met before engagement—a meeting that is an exception since the last meeting was held upon the Gulf war. The Saudi use of force provoked Iran to respond with an attack on the Saudi embassy in Mashhad on 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2011. Iran also warned Saudi Arabia against what the Iranian Islamic Consultative Assembly described as “fire play” (RT 2011). Yet the Saudi hard power had an advantage of timing and nature of power that had already controlled the scene in Bahrain. Before the Saudi use of power, Iran restricted its moves to mobilization against Saudi Arabia. Besides this, it also resorted to media propaganda that failed to affect the Saudi foreign policy in Bahrain. Using hard power, Saudi Arabia did not only confront Iran but it forced a change in the context of conflict. It is seen that Iran was forced to take a reactive role rather than a proactive one. The new Saudi policy came also to prevent Iran from controlling a neighboring state. As that took place, Saudi Arabia’s new policy had also maintained strategic security over the gulf. Moreover, confronting Iran in Bahrain deterred its allies both in Bahrain and in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. As Iran’s threat became prominent as a threat to the regime, the Saudi use of hard power came to prevent the change and to neutralize the threat. Besides this, the Saudi intervention was supported by wide popular opposition to the Iranian behavior in the region. The Saudi use of hard power in this case came to introduce the new approach of the Saudi policy against Iran.

## **Second Case: Yemen**

Similar to the case of Bahrain, Yemen possesses a geopolitical power that affects strategic security for Saudi Arabia. First, Yemen borders Saudi Arabia from the south western side of the Arabian Peninsula. The geopolitical power of Yemen springs from its control over Mandeb Strait that connects the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. Moreover, Yemen's case has the same demographic aspect as Shia forms 30 to 35% percent of the population of the Zaidi and Isma'ili sectors. Again, the demographic factor is shared on the Saudi side as Shia is popular in the region of Najran (Al-Bayinah n.d). Both factors are essential to the context of conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, yet they are more critical to Iran. Iran's interest in Yemen springs from the geopolitical power, especially control over the Mandeb Strait. Iran has had a history of relying on Straits control as it threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz on different occasions. Political maneuvering at the south border of Saudi Arabia is also important to what is known as the Shia Crescent project—a project that came to be known in 2004 where Iran circulates the Sunni states with its influence. Prior to the Saudi hard power in Yemen, the context of Saudi relation with Yemen showed a reliance on soft power in the past. The Saudi relations with Yemen traced back to the Mutawakkilite Kingdom. It began with border disputes upon unification of the kingdom. Yemen resorted to historical claims over three regions of the Saudi kingdom: Asir, Jazan, and Najran. Although these regions joined the Saudi state upon unification, Yemen resorted to war in 1934 before the two sides arrived at Taif Treaty (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Disputes over borders continued because the treaty was restricted to twenty years renewal (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz, 2005). When the Yemeni kingdom fell in 1962, the new political regime recalled the same claims and attacked the Al-Wadiah zone in

1969 before Saudi Arabia restored its control over that zone (2005). The dispute over the border continued to characterize the Saudi-Yemeni relations until 2000 when the two states signed the Treaty of Jeddah—ending 60 years of dispute.

Although the Jeddah Treaty ended the border dispute, the problem with Yemen remained critical to the security and stability of the Gulf States. The civil conflicts in Yemen before its unification along with its sociopolitical structure made it vulnerable to foreign intervention. This conflict also made the Gulf States involved in the Yemeni state. Although the Yemeni republic was established in 1990, the behavior of Yemen remained challenging to the gulf. For instance, Yemen joined the Arab Cooperation Council and opposed the liberation of Kuwait in alliance with Saddam Hussein (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). It did not take a long time before Yemen turned into a divisive threat in the region when the Yemen civil war broke in 1994. Yemen was divided into two states of north and south Yemen. The division involved many regional and international players including Saudi Arabia and the USA. The GCC first recognized the south Yemeni state in 1994 before international efforts led back to the unification of Yemen (2000). Yemen remained after the end of civil war a standing threat to security. That threat came because of the threat of terrorism as Al-Qaeda established its branch in Yemen in 2003. The threat was also because of the conflict that broke with the Houthis in 2004 that followed with six wars with the Yemeni government. The early sign of turning in the Yemeni case and the Iranian threat came when the militia rolled into the Saudi border causing the conflict of 2009. In 2011, the break of the Arab revolution in Yemen turned Yemen into another Bahrain in the gulf. Although the gulf contained the crisis through an initiative signed by the deposed President Saleh in 2011 (BBC 2011a), the Houthi militia seized the opportunity to move toward

toppling the new regime. The weak government that followed Saleh presented Iran with a similar involvement in Bahrain through the Houthis militia.

Prior to this turn, the Saudi old behavior showed the state's reliance on soft power before it shifted upon Iran's involvement post 2010. All militant conflicts that took place with Yemen were either a part of the kingdom unification or minor defensive operations. Beyond these conflicts, the Saudi policy toward Yemen was characterized by reliance on diplomacy to solve the Yemeni problem. For instance, Saudi Arabia committed to the agreements on the border while Yemen violated them as in the case of 1934 and Al-Wadiah in 1969. Saudi Arabia also led the effort in the Security Council to solve the issues of civil conflicts (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Moreover, the Saudi policy toward Yemen was characterized by economic engagement. The Saudi support to Yemen reached in recent records to 50 billion Dollars over the last four decades (*Al Sharq-Alawssat* 2009). The manifestation of the Saudi soft power toward Yemen can be seen clearly in the case of the 1969 revolution. The fall of the Yemeni kingdom in that year came in line with the Pan-Arabism project of Abdul Nasir. During that revolution, Egypt resorted to hard power using the physical force of approximately 70 thousand soldiers to impose a military change in Yemen (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz 2005). Egypt also escalated against Saudi Arabia through strikes at three cities inside the kingdom in 1937 (2005). Yet, Saudi Arabia reacted with soft power and restricted its support of the Imam of Yemen to financial support in line with its norm. The avoidance of conflict expressed the Saudi norm of soft power through relying only on economic engagement. The Egyptian involvement did not provoke Saudi Arabia to use force in confrontation with Abdul Nasir as the Houthis did. Even when the Imam of

Yemen requested Riyadh to intervene in enforcement of the Taif treaty that involves a defensive part, Saudi Arabia fulfilled that only through soft power (2005).

At the eve of the regional conflict of Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Houthi militia was established in 1992. The basis of the militia was relying on a religious affiliation to the Shia sector in Iran and opposition to the Yemeni regime. When the militia failed to establish political representation, it resorted to war against the Yemeni government that started in 2004 and continued in six tentative wars. Although Saudi Arabia defended its border against the Houthi militia in 2009, its reluctance to use hard power limited its operation to the defense of the border. Saudi Arabia did not move to neutralize the threat inside Yemen as the 2009 case as it was relying on soft power while hard power was the defensive exception. Like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia attempted to pursue its soft power policies, yet the Iranian involvement that began in Bahrain entailed the same threat in Yemen. The Houthi assault to the Saudi border in 2009 came to be the first indicator of Iran's involvement in Yemen. The Iranian support of the militia came at different occasions. For instance, the representative of Khamenei Ali Shirazi stated that "The Houthi group is a similar copy to Lebanon's Hezbollah, and this group will come into action against enemies of Islam" (Al Arabiya 2015b). Moreover, Iran was involved in cases of arms transfer to support the Houthi militia since 2009 (Al Hurrah 2015). Beyond the assault, Iran continued its support to the Houthis post the Yemeni revolution—a situation that aggravated a political vacuum following the revolution. The Houthi militia, from its side, continued its militant behavior against the Yemeni state until it conquered the capital city of Sana'a in September 2014 (Al Wafd 2014). The Yemeni president and government was forced to leave after a week of militant siege. Iran celebrated the fall of Sana'a as the Parliament's representative

of Tehran stated that “three Arab capital cities have become under control of Iran, and Sana’a is the fourth one.” He also stated publicly that “Yemen’s revolution ... would extend its success inside the Saudi territory, while long Saudi-Yemeni borders would facilitate its reach inside the Saudi state” (Arabic 21 2014).

As the Yemeni president was forced to leave for another city, the Houthi militias began to move toward controlling other parts of the state by force. By this point, it became clear that the regime of Yemen was at stake and threat of Iran is prominent at another bordering state. The potential fall of the Yemeni state came to define the prominence of Iran’s threat. The fall of Sana’a came to be the inevitable precursor of Yemen’s fall at the hands of Iran’s militia. Therefore, the Saudi behavior shifted immediately into hard power. Unlike the Saudi behavior toward the fall of Yemeni kingdom in 1962, the Saudi foreign policy came to behave in 2015 based on its new approach of hard power. The manifestation of that hard power came in its physical form. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, Saudi Arabia declared a military alliance operating under the name of “*The Decisive Storm*” (Al Arabiya 2015a). Coordinating with its allies in the region, Saudi Arabia led a military alliance dominated by its hard power to restore the Yemeni state and neutralize the Iranian threat through targeting the Houthis. The Saudi intervention was declared by a statement that states the following:

Based on our responsibility toward the Yemeni people and based on what the message of his excellence President Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi that entails a request of immediate support including all means and precautions to protect the Yemeni people against the assaults of the Houthi militia backed up by regional powers that aims at extending its hegemony over Yemen and turn it into a base of its interventions in the region, which aggravates the threat beyond the Yemen security and sovereignty to become an overwhelming threat to the regional and international peace..., and since those assaults have threatened the territories of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia..., hence our states have decided to accept the request of his excellence President Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi ... to protect Yemen and its people against the assaults of the Houthi militias that have been and remained a means at the hands of foreign



powers that did not cease yet its disturbance of Yemen's security and stability (*Al Riyadh* 2015c).

The fall of Sana'a changed the equation radically in favor of Iran that considered it a victory of controlling the fourth Sunni capital in the region. Along with Bahrain, Iran's celebration of the fall of Sana'a showed how it seized the Arab revolution to export its revolution and establish sectarian-based conflicts in the region. Moreover, the threat that the occupation of the Yemeni capital posed to the gulf and especially to Saudi Arabia was more critical and overwhelming than Bahrain. This threat was critical not only because it reached the capital city but because of historical and sociopolitical implication in Yemen. The threat of Iran in Yemen became prominent through the militia that invaded the capital city and posed a threat to its regime. It was a threat that had its history of confrontation with Saudi Arabia at its border. Upon that threat, the Saudi use of physical force was devoted to deter Iran and its militia. The use of physical force came to stabilize Yemen and restore its legitimate state. Along with Bahrain, the case of Yemen came to show how Saudi Arabia shifted toward hard power confronting Iran at a bordering state.

Beyond the cases of Bahrain and Yemen where hard power is manifested through physical force, there comes the other two cases that involves Syria and Lebanon as targets of Saudi hard behavior. These cases show the prominence of Iran's threat in the form of Shia-based political entities in affiliation with Iran at non-bordering states to Saudi Arabia. Upon the presence of this condition, the dependent variable of hard power came implemented in the form of hard behavior including practices of coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions. Both cases have Shia-based political entities with affiliation to Iran. In the Syrian case, the political established entity is the Syrian regime that is based on Shia Alawis—a Shia sector that derives its principles from the same sector of Iran. In the case of Lebanon, the political entity is the militia of Hezbollah that is

based on Shia affiliation to Iran and has a political dominance in Lebanon. This affiliation has a demographic dimension as Alawi-Shia makes up to 10% of the Syrian population and up to 29% of the Lebanese population (Aljazeera 2010, and Fanack Chronicle 2013). The existence and persistence of both established entities in power correlates with persistence of Iran's threat in both states. The presence of this condition makes up the prominence of Iran's threat which, in turn, pertains to the use of hard power. Thus, Saudi Arabia engaged using hard behavior against both entities to deter Iran through its allies. Toward this end, the analysis of hard power in its behavioral form continues in the two following cases:

### **Third Case: Syria**

Syria was a major part in the project of pan-Arabism besides its being the twin of Iraq's Ba'ath Party with all of its ideological and political differences with Saudi Arabia. However, at some points of history, Syria played as an essential power in regard to balance of power along with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The geopolitical power of Syria besides its ideological influence made it an inevitable actor to deal with in the region. Therefore, this fact dominated the Saudi foreign policy toward Syria over years. Diplomatic involvement and cooperation defined the Saudi attitude more than opposition and conflict. In its history, Syria's political affiliation can be defined in line with Abdul Nasir's pan-Arabism that resulted in change into military-based states. It is change that came in the form of establishing the United Arab Republic with Egypt. Syria's political affiliation with Pan-Arabism involved a religious affiliation to Shia Alawi sector—a Shia sector that derives its principles from Shia of Iran. These political and ideological differences evolved gradually to affect the Saudi- Syrian relations and the regional context of conflict. However, there were cases where the two states shared a similar attitude toward

regional issues. For instance, the two states had the same attitude toward Kuwait in 1990 and toward Lebanon in 1989 (*Al-Hayat* 2011). Syria was entitled with peacekeeping force in Lebanon after its civil conflicts. Yet Syrian behavior began to change as it became closer to Iran. After 9/11, Syria's alliance with Iran was part of regional division into moderate and radical camps. The Syrian political attitudes were moving against the Saudi role in the region. For instance, Syria's alliance with Hezbollah was challenging to Saudi Arabia. In the case of Lebanon, in particular, the Syrian behavior became more critical especially after accusations of involvement in the assassination of Al Hariri in 2005—the Lebanese prime minister who was an ally of Saudi Arabia. Besides this, the Arab role in forcing Syria out of Lebanon provoked the Syrian regime in general.

The Saudi behavior, on the other hand, was defined within the norm of soft power that entailed diplomatic involvement and containment of disputes. One of the major dimensions of that soft power-based policy was the Saudi support to Syria independence. Regardless of political differences, Saudi Arabia supported the first Syrian president Shukri al-Quwatli who fought against the French mandate in 1925 (*Al-Hayat* 2011). Saudi Arabia also supported Syrian liberation of Golan Heights in the war of October 1973. Although tension prevailed during the reign of Hashim Al Atasi, relations continued with Hafez Al-Assad (2011). The Saudi diplomatic support came to be essential to the two states' relations. Saudi Arabia also resorted to economic support in the case of the American embargo over Syria in 1980s (2011). After Bashar Al-Assad came to power, the change in the context of regional conflict tensioned the relation with Syria. However, Saudi Arabia restricted its behavior to reliance on soft power practices—especially with King Abdullah being a major contributor to the persistence of this norm. Saudi soft power

of diplomacy was implemented to contain the tension. Even when Syria's support for Hezbollah and Hamas contributed to division both in Lebanon and Palestine, Saudi Arabia resorted to visits and coordination through the Arab League. The major example of Saudi soft power is King Abdullah initiative in 2009 that called for Arab solidarity—an initiative that came to appropriate relations between so-called moderates and radicals. The Saudi policy pursued reliance on soft power with the King visit to Syria the same year (Aljazeera 2009). Overall, the Saudi behavior toward Syria was defined in terms of soft power even at times where the two states' relations were at stake.

Yet, Syria's alliance with Iran developed from the Arab camps of radicals to the regional context of conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. As mentioned before, Syria behaved in a way that supports Iran and its allies in the region. Its history of conflict with Saudi Arabia resumed just as Bashar Al-Assad came to power. The Saudi tension with Syria escalated in line with changes in the context of regional conflict—especially in Palestine and Lebanon. Furthermore, Syria resorted to aggressive discourse against Saudi Arabia even at the Arab League conferences. For instance, Al-Assad described anti-militias or so-called anti resistant camp including Hezbollah as “half men” (Aljazeera 2006). Syria's support of Hezbollah prompted this discourse and aligned the Syrian regime with Iran. Besides this, the Saudi King visit in 2009 did not impose a fundamental change in the relations. When the Arab revolutions came in 2011, Iran's alliance with Syria and Hezbollah became threatened by the potential regime change in Syria. Thus, Iran enforced its involvement through support to Al-Assad and Hezbollah involvement. By that time, Saudi foreign policy was confronting Iran in Bahrain where it engaged with physical force. The first move in the Saudi reliance on hard power toward Iran was manifested in Bahrain.

However, the Syrian case was different and complex in the use of physical force at least during the break of the revolution. Moreover, Syria did not border Saudi Arabia—a factor that did not qualify its threat to prominent status. Yet, alliance of the Syrian regime as an established entity with Iran and enmity toward Saudi Arabia made Saudi foreign policy shift to hard behavior. Along with that, aggressive suppression of Syrian protests can be seen as prompting the change toward hard behavior. The use of hard behavior came to deter both the Syrian regime and Iran through that regime.

The major turn in the Saudi policy came in August 2011 through the Saudi King's speech on Syria as he referred to the Syrian regime as "a killing machine" (*Al Madinah* 2011). Saudi Arabia followed with withdrawal of its ambassador (2011). Then, Saudi Arabia expressed more coercive behavior when it adopted arming the free army overtly as Prince Saud Al Feisal stated that arming the rebels in Syria was "a duty" (BBC 2012). Unlike the Saudi policy that was restricted to economic engagement toward political conflicts, the new behavior toward Syria involved public arming and organizing the Syrian opposition—a phenomenal move in the history of Saudi policy to engage publicly in toppling a regime. The Saudi hard behavior resorted to mobilization of collective effort against the Syrian regime. It was the case in 2012 when Saudi Arabia led the GCC toward recognition of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as a representative of the Syrian people (France 24 2012). The GCC move paved the way for the coalition to be recognized by 114 states (2012). The Saudi escalation against the Syrian regime came in confrontation with Iranian involvement. Iran's involvement in Syria turned the revolution into sectarian-based conflict where Hezbollah began to fight along with Alawis (Jacob 2014). A major instance was the battle of Al-Qusayr in May 2013 where

Hezbollah celebrated victory in a sectarian context—signs of sectarian affiliation appeared over Sunni mosques (2014). Also, Iran approved the Syrian regime presentation of revolution as a foreign conspiracy. Iran also expressed support at high levels as Iranian president Najad stated that Iran supports Syria against the current war (Middle East Panorama 2013). As this was the case, it became clear that the persistence of status quo of the Syrian regime was in service of Iranian involvement against Saudi Arabia. The availability of conditions of the second hypothesis in terms of established entity with affiliation to Iran turned Syria into another station where Iran proposed for its sectarian conflict against Sunni Arabs. Thus, the Saudi hard behavior came to deter Iran and its allies in Syria: the established regime and Hezbollah.

#### **Fourth Case: Lebanon**

When speaking about Saudi Arabia and Iran, Lebanon came to be the first and earliest instances where the two states clashed—especially after Iran implanted its militia of Hezbollah in 1982. Hezbollah was established in the name of resistance against Israel, yet the militia revealed its political affiliation to Iran and loyalty to the “Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists” (Abdulati 2004). Hezbollah was not the only Shia party in Lebanon, yet it came along with others including other Shia-based parties Free Shia Movement and Amal movement. In this regard, Lebanon’s case has the demographic aspect and the existence of Shia that makes up to 29% of the Lebanese population—a Shia that derives its principles from Shia of Iran (Fanack Chronicle 2013). Hezbollah was not only a minority but a political established entity that has engaged in Lebanon government since 1992 (Abdulati 2004). Besides this, Hezbollah has a military arsenal that is not subjected to the rule of the state. In regard to Lebanese relations with Saudi Arabia, history defined the two states’ relations in consistence with Saudi soft behavior

toward all Arab states. The beginning was in 1952 when the Lebanese president Camille Chamoun visited Saudi Arabia in the course of diplomatic interaction between the two states (Al Sayad 2008). Yet, Lebanon came closer to Saudi Arabia as the internal stability deteriorated in line with regional conflict beginning from 1976. As conflict broke between the Lebanese National Movement and the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia mediated in Riyadh summit in 1976 to enforce a fire-cessation between the parties through an Arab peacekeeping force—a mission that Syria was entitled with its enforcement (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). However, the division caused by the war among the Lebanese along with difference in political affiliation developed into a fifteen year civil war. Toward this, Saudi Arabia major example of initiative soft power came to end the war through the Taif agreement in 1991 (2000). Although Hezbollah's role in Lebanon began to expand gradually, Saudi Arabia remained committed to soft power—especially with Rafeeq Al-Hariri becoming the prime minister in Lebanon after a long time of working as a teacher and a businessman at Saudi Arabia (BBC Arabic 2005). Al-Hariri's reign was dominated by Saudi reliance on soft power toward Lebanon—economic engagement in particular.

Yet Iran's involvement through Hezbollah along with the Syrian existence in Lebanon affected the political scene in service of Iran's interests. In this regard, the role of Syria and its alliance with Iran came through dominance that it exerted on Lebanese politics. Although Syria's forces were forced to withdraw in 2005, involvement remained expressed through alliance with Hezbollah. Besides this, the assassination of Al-Hariri in 2005 with accusation pointed toward the Syrian regime and Iran contributed to escalation in Lebanon. The assassination of Al-Hariri affected the Saudi presence in Lebanon, and expanded the role of Hezbollah. Iran's involvement

in the assassination was a critical indicator of more influence in the region—especially when Iran’s fear of exposure was expressed in its attitude toward the Special Tribunal for Lebanon which Khamenei described as “null and void” (Gulf News 2010). The behavior of Hezbollah militia became more challenging to the Lebanese state. It was the case of 2008 when the militia invaded Biuret in 2008 as a reaction to the Lebanese government decision that threatened its military arsenal (*Al Yaum* 2008). Post 2010, the Iranian involvement in backing up Al-Assad came in the form of Hezbollah engagement in the conflict in Syria. In line with the revolution in Syria, Iran engaged through Hezbollah to save Al-Assad. The Battle of al-Qusayr was the major example that revealed that engagement to the public. Hezbollah occupied the city and paraded with sectarian slogans over a Sunni major mosque (Jacob 2014). Iran celebrated that victory officially through its minister of foreign affairs who congratulated Syria and Hezbollah in the name of the Iranian government (*Al Riyadh* 2013b). Iranian involvement through Hezbollah shattered the Lebanese government in regard to the Syrian case. Regardless of opposition to Hezbollah engagement in Syria, the militia continued to behave in adherence to Iran agendas and not to the Lebanese state.

Upon this Iranian involvement, the solution in Syria became conditioned by a deterrence of Hezbollah in both Syria and Lebanon. In addition to that, the case of Lebanon becomes a case of hard behavior where an established political entity exists with affiliation to Iran. The political and ideological affiliation of Hezbollah with Iran made Lebanon another station of the Iranian involvement let alone Hezbollah behavior toward Saudi Arabia. Although this involvement began with the establishment of Hezbollah, yet the expansions of the militia role in Lebanon and in Syria entailed an expansion of the Iranian involvement in the wake of the Arab revolutions.



Besides that, Hezbollah has had a history of involvement in terrorism against Saudi Arabia as mentioned before. Furthermore, Hezbollah also engaged in warfare against Saudi Arabia as Lebanese Shia trainers from the militia were detained among the Houthis in Yemen. Cases of arming and training by Lebanese were revealed by the Yemeni government (Al Arabiya 2016). As that was the case, Lebanon became the next instance where Saudi Arabia engaged using hard behavior. It began first with Hezbollah as Saudi Arabia considered Hezbollah, along with Brotherhood and other groups including Al-Qaeda, as terrorist organizations (Al Arabiya 2014). Then, Saudi Arabia moved toward criminalizing Hezbollah at the regional and international level. Recently, Saudi Arabia led the GCC to declare Hezbollah as a terrorist organization that “incite[s] conflict and violence in violation of the GCC states’ laws, security, and stability” (Aljazeera 2016). Along with that, the GCC states considered Hezbollah involvement in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen criminal and subject to counter terrorism laws. On the level of Arabs, the Saudi behavior led the Arab league to take a similar position due to the militia’s role in inciting conflicts and terrorist actions including incitation of sectarian tensions, arming, and establishment of terrorist organization (CNN 2016). At first, the Saudi hard behavior was directed toward Hezbollah militia; however Hezbollah involvement in Lebanese politics and its dominance made the government a target of the same behavior. Upon attacking the Saudi embassy in Iran, the Lebanese government did not take a position condemning the attacks like other Arab states. Thus, Saudi Arabia expressed its hard behavior through suspension and withdrawal of Saudi financial support. It came to withdraw four billion dollars that Saudi Arabia had extended to both the Lebanese army and the internal security forces—a move that is also phenomenal in the Saudi foreign policy (Al Hayat 2016). Saudi foreign policy justified its

behavior as a result of the Lebanese attitudes that did not correspond to the nature of relations between the two states. The Saudi attitude precisely refers to “political and media attitudes that the so-called Hezbollah is proposing against the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and terrorism that it commits against the Arab and Islamic nation” (2016). Lebanon came to be the second case that showed the Saudi shift toward hard power in its behavioral form at a non-bordering state. It was a behavior that came in its widest form to include both Hezbollah and the Lebanese government. Besides this, the nature of the Saudi move against Lebanon had a huge impact as Saudi soft power toward Lebanon was expressed mostly through economic engagement.

## **Cases of Persistence of Saudi Soft Power**

When the literature defines soft power, it is defined in relation to influence where states resort to softly-oriented means of foreign policies. Saudi Arabia foreign policy has been defined throughout history in consistence with influence of soft power. It has been seen committed to various forms of soft power including diplomacy and economic enjoyments. Mediation and financial support have been major trends since the establishment of the state in 1932 until today. However, reliance on hard power was introduced beginning from 2010 to confront Iran. This shift to hard power does not necessarily mean an absence of soft power practices in Saudi foreign policy because hard power was introduced in relation to confronting Iran. Yet, soft power is expected to continue as the norm where Iran's threat is at what can be described as marginal or absent status. Besides this, since it is too early to generalize the shift toward hard power over Saudi foreign policy toward all states, it is necessary to examine other cases where Saudi behavior remains the same. As was seen in the hypothesis, the Saudi behavior targeted states where Iran posed a prominent threat either through a Shia-based threat to the regime or through Shia-based political entities with affiliation to Iran. Beyond these cases, Saudi Arabia remains consistent with soft power toward other Arab states. Simply, where Iran's threat is marginal or absent, Saudi Arabia pursues politics of soft power. Iran's marginal threat in these cases is defined as normal diplomatic ties and trade relations as it is the case with other Arab states. Thus, persistence and continuity of soft power continues to express itself through economic support and various forms of diplomacy. In this regard, Oman and Jordan are chosen to show persistence of Saudi soft power post 2010.

### **First Case: Jordan**

The Saudi relations with Jordan is of historical and geographic dimensions because both are neighbors and both share historical implications of establishment. Early in the twentieth century, the royal family of Jordan had a history of ruling part of the Arabian Peninsula. So, the early interaction came during the unification project of Saudi Arabia that extended its rule over Al-Hejaz and expelled Al-Hussein family to Jordan in 1924 (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). Yet beyond that stage, the emirate of Jordan and the Saudi state managed to exchange visits beginning from 1933. Then, they established their diplomatic relations officially in 1948 (Darakah 2013). The diplomatic relations between the two states developed steadily toward cooperation at the regional scale—especially in regard to the Israeli-Arab conflict in 1948. Besides this, the Saudi behavior toward Jordan is still defined in terms of financial support that traces back to 1957. The first instance of this support came in the Arabic Agreement that began to extend 12 million Riyals to Jordan annually (King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz 2005). That was followed in 1989 with 20 billion dollars upon the economic crisis that affected Jordan's currency (Al Darawi n.d). In terms of politics, the Saudi-Jordan relations are defined in the form of cooperation at a regional scale. Both states have had a history of sharing similar attitudes toward different issues including Pan-Arabism where Jordan expressed its interest in King Faisal project of Islamic solidarity (Darakah 2013). Jordan also supported King Abdullah Peace Initiative for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 2002 (Darakah 2013). Although Jordan's behavior differed during the second gulf war joining the Arab Cooperation Council in 1991 and supporting Saddam Hussein, the two states restored their normal relations after the war (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). This resorting of

relations was seen especially as Saudi Arabia and Jordan conformed in regard to Iraq 2003—especially when both states refused the use of their territories to attack Iraq.

While the Saudi-Jordanian relations have been developing, the relations between Jordan and Iran, on the other hand, were subjected to the regional circumstances as is the case with other Arab states. Yet, the diplomatic ties began to develop between the two during the nineties. Jordan began the relation by closing the office of People's Mujahedin of Iran—a militant opposition to the Iranian regime (Al Zoabi 2007). Jordan, like other Arab states, shared the same attitude toward Iranian politics after the revolution especially in regard to the occupation of the UEA islands and the Iraqi-Iranian war; however both states maintained their diplomatic ties fluctuating from close to cold relations. As the context of conflict with Iran developed in the region after the war of Iraq, the Jordanian behavior was closer to Saudi Arabia than to Iran regardless of the diplomatic ties. Jordan also became an ally with Saudi Arabia as it was part of the so called moderates in the region. In this context, Jordan was aligned with Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the camp of moderates. The alliance with Saudi Arabia caused the presence of Iran to decline in Jordan especially in 2004 when the King of Jordan warned of Iranian involvement in the region (Al Zoabi 2007). Nevertheless, Jordan's ties with Iran continued involving diplomatic relations and trade. Regardless of security concerns upon the fall of Iraq, Jordan's relation with Iran remained stable. In 2010, Jordan witnessed a series of occasional protests that stimulated revolutions in other Arab states (Al Sharq-Alawssat 2011). Yet, Iranian involvement in Jordan did not escalate to a threat regardless of the persistence of the same norm of diplomatic ties and trade exchange.

Since 2010, the Saudi foreign policy toward Jordan has remained consistent with its past of soft power. In the wake of the Arab revolution, Saudi Arabia proposed to include Jordan along with Morocco in the membership of the GCC in 2013 (BBC 2011b). Besides this, the Saudi behavior has remained consistent with economic support and engagement as Jordan came to be third among states which received Saudi support. Between 2011 and 2014, Jordan was granted an amount of 11 billion dollars that form up 8.1 % of its GDP. Jordan also received one of the major Saudi developmental projects—the project of King Abdullah residential city (*Al Riyadh* 2015d). The Saudi behavior toward Jordan did not change into hard power beyond 2010, but it moved toward more cooperation. For instance, Jordan joined the Saudi alliance in Yemen and later the Islamic alliance against terrorism. Even though Jordan did not cease its relations with Iran upon the attack against the Saudi embassy and termination of relations in 2015, the Saudi behavior remained consistent with soft power manifested through economic support and exchange of visits between the two states. As the threat of Iran appeared to be marginal in Jordan, the norm of the Saudi behavior did not change into hard power. This persistence of soft power does not result from the alliance with Jordan as was the case with the Lebanese government; however it is conditioned by the context of conflict with Iran—a context that developed in the Lebanese case toward serving Iranian interests beyond diplomatic ties. Thus, Jordan shows marginal Iranian threat resulting in persistence of Saudi soft power.

### **Second Case: Oman**

The Saudi-Omani relations can be understood within both the Arab context and the GCC. Oman is a member of the gulf council and a state that borders Saudi Arabia by the east side

of the Arabian Peninsula. In relation to Iran, Oman comes to be at the closest geopolitical position to Iran among the Gulf States. The Omani relations with Saudi Arabia trace back to the Buraimi Dispute—a border dispute that happened in 1949 between Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, and Britain during its presence at the gulf region (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). When Britain withdrew from the gulf, the dispute characterized the relation between Oman and Saudi Arabia until they solved it in mutual cooperation in 1971 (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). After that, the relations developed significantly as Oman joined the GC in 1981. Then, interaction between the two states moved toward organizational engagement at the GCC (Fanack Chronicle 2014). Within the GCC, Oman shared some Saudi attitudes toward regional issues including those toward the second gulf war in 1991 and the Iraq war in 2003 (A Soldier from the Desert 2000). However, Oman’s foreign policy can be described as it tends to act independently or in isolation from the regional conflicts. The Omani mode is seen in most cases beginning from the Second Gulf War until the Decisive Storm in Yemen which Oman did not join. Even in the case of Israel, Oman started a limited form of trade and political communications in 1993 (Fanack Chronicle 2014). Furthermore, Oman’s attitude toward the Saudi initiative of confederate unification of the GCC was denial. However, it stated that it would not oppose the establishment of such unity among other GCC states. Oman’s foreign policy did not impact negatively on the Saudi-Omani relations due to their strategic and historical dimensions. In fact, Saudi Arabia maintained stable relations through visits of high officials including King Abdullah in 2006 which was returned by the Sultan of Oman in 2010 (*Al Riyadh* 2006). When the Arab revolutions broke, the Saudi behavior toward Oman continued to be consistent with soft power. Saudi Arabia extended support to

Oman through 20 billion dollars declared by the GCC for developmental projects for both Bahrain and Oman (BBC 2011c). Upon the Saudi embassy attack in Iran, Oman did not terminate its relations with Iran as other states did, but its official attitude came to oppose the attack and affirm protection of states' missions. Nevertheless, Saudi foreign policy did not change against Oman and remained consistent with soft power. In general, the Saudi relations with Oman are defined in terms of appropriation and cooperation within the GCC and at state to state level.

When it comes to Iran, Oman has maintained stable diplomatic relations with Iran throughout history regardless of the regional tension. Oman's relation with Iran followed the same mode of Oman's foreign policy that is based on independence. The early interaction with Iran traced back to Dhofar Rebellion. During that time, Iran's Shah supported the Omani government to suppress the rebellion (Fanack Chronicle 2014). Following the Iranian revolution, Oman maintained its diplomatic ties with Iran as the two states exchanged visits of the Sultan to Iran in 2013 and the Iranian president to Oman in 2014 (Fanack Chronicle 2014). Besides this, the two states have had trade relations along with a series of mutual interest agreements. Although this relation of Oman to Iran came to be different than other gulf states' relations with Iran, the dimension of this relation did not develop to the level of threatening Saudi Arabia. It was not only because Oman is a member of the GCC and committed to its defense and security agreements, but it was also because Oman's relations with Iran corresponded to the Omani mode of foreign policy toward all regional issues. Omani relations with Iran did not qualify to the level where they were making up a prominent threat to Saudi Arabia in the other cases. Therefore, Oman's case comes to show



that the Saudi hard behavior is not concerned with diplomatic ties with Iran but with making up a prominent Iranian threat in the wake of the Arab revolutions. Thus, Oman shows a persistence of Saudi reliance on soft power even after 2010 where the kingdom still maintains its relations with Oman.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

When Nye approaches power, he compares it to the weather—a reference that connotes resistance to determination or measurement (Nye 2004). However, his theory develops into defining power in relation to its nature and form of expression. Then, power was divided into power of influence—soft power, and power of coercion—hard power. Each form divides into practices that express that form of power within a particular context. Scholars on hard power divide it into sub-forms of physical and behavior. They expand the notion of classical power that has been associated with military into behavioral coercion that takes various forms of practices—mainly coercive diplomacy. Scholars on soft power, in the Saudi case in particular, define it in relation to assets of religion, political values, oil and wealth, and others. Then, those assets are manifested in diplomacy and other forms of soft involvement. Within this body of literature, the argument of this thesis defines Saudi foreign policy according to both concepts of power. However, soft power defines Saudi foreign policy throughout its past—an assumption that assumes heavy reliance on soft power as a norm for Saudi Arabia. When it comes to hard power, this form appears as the exception to the norm yet it existed. Saudi Arabia rarely used its hard power over its history except in some cases. However, the Saudi behavior since 2010 shows reliance on hard power at different cases and within a short time frame. The Saudi Kingdom has engaged, within five years, in two major cases of using physical force. Besides this, Saudi Arabia has relied on hard behavior toward some states in the Arab world.

Upon this change, different assumptions might be made about the Saudi foreign policy. It might be described as a counter-revolution policy that was set to confront the Arab revolutions. It

might be assumed that it is a shift toward realist and hard power politics as a new norm of Saudi foreign policy. While both assumptions may rely on some sort of justification, the behavior of Saudi foreign policy should be understood within a regional context of conflict. It is a context that takes into consideration both: context of conflict and nature of targeted states by Saudi new behavior. Saudi Arabia did not engage in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt the way it did in Bahrain and Yemen while all had regime change. Saudi Arabia did not resort to hard behavior against Morocco, Jordan, and Sudan while all had an uprising. So, the assumption of counter-revolution fails to consider the nature of cases targeted by the Saudi new behavior. In consideration of those states, all of them share one common factor—Iranian involvement. Iran's interest in exporting its ideology and political revolution has seized the Arab revolution to exert influence militantly in a set of Arab states—relying on the demographic dimension of Shia minority and their engagement in politics. Iran's threat has targeted Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon as a prominent threat to those states. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, has shifted to hard power in those states to confront and deter Iran. Thus, the Saudi shift toward hard power that began from 2010 is devoted toward confronting Iran. Iran's hostile behavior throughout history has prompted this use of hard power. Although the change in Saudi foreign policy has a potential of being normalized in the state's future policies, the assumption that is testable at this point is conditioned by the context of conflict with Iran.

So, the thesis argues that, since 2010, Saudi foreign policy began to shift toward using hard power in both forms in confrontation with Iran. It is as simple as assuming that where Iran's threat is prominent, Saudi Arabia engaged with hard power. However, the complexity of hard power concept and division into two sub-forms necessitates to define how Saudi Arabia prefers

one form or another. Furthermore, the restriction of the argument to Iran's context requires examining other cases to reflect on this restriction. Thus, the methodology divides the Arab world, the population of cases, into two categories in relation to Saudi use of hard and soft power. Besides this, the Saudi use of hard power is seen to manifest through both forms of hard power—physical and behavior forms. To approach this, the thesis proposes a universal hypothesis to include all cases of hard power. It is assumed that hard power as a dependent variable is conditioned with prominence of Iranian threat in general. In details, Saudi Arabia has engaged with military in cases of Shia-based threat to regimes in both Bahrain and Yemen. Both cases were found to border Saudi Arabia and to have a Shia-threat in the wake of the Arab revolution. On the other hand, Saudi use of hard power has manifest through hard behavior in cases of Shia-based political entities in affiliation with Iran in both Syria and Lebanon. Both cases are found not to border Saudi Arabia and cases where the persistence of status quo correlates with persistence, if not aggravation, of Iran's prominent threat. To balance the argument, Saudi foreign policy is also tested through two other cases to reflect on persistence of soft power where Iran's threat is not prominent. Those cases are considered as cases with marginal Iranian threat as in Oman and Jordan. Although both have relations with Iran, both states do not meet the factors that qualify them to be states with Iran's prominent threat. Therefore, Saudi foreign policy is found in consistence with its norm of soft power.

In conclusion, the phenomenal change in the Saudi foreign policy comes after a long time of reliance on soft power. That reliance comes to enforce the use of hard power through alliance and mobilization to confront an expansionist Iran. It is a context that neither causes an absolute absence of soft power nor develops to be an absolute norm of hard power, however it is seen

considerate to deter Iran and its agents in the region. Yet, this change toward hard power against Iran would also provoke other questions to be pursued by future research. For instance, would Saudi use of hard power against Iran impact the international interaction with Iran—considering its critical international record and Saudi influence as a regional major player? Also, would this change in Saudi foreign policy entail a potential reliance of hard power against other players that poses a threat to the Saudi influence? These questions become more compelling as consequences of the Saudi use of hard power unfold in its targets—especially if Saudi Arabia moves beyond behavioral hard power to physical force in Syria. This intervention, if it happens, would propose another pattern that indicates more wide reliance on hard power in Saudi foreign policy. Yet until these questions become more compelling, the argument remains that Saudi Arabia has begun to shift toward hard power to confront Iran wherever it poses a prominent threat of sectarian-based politics—a change that pertains decisiveness as assumed to be “the precursor of tenacity and precursor of victory” (*Al Riyadh* 2015a).

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## APPENDIX



Office of Research Integrity

March 23, 2016

George Davis, PhD  
Political Science Department  
Marshall University  
One John Marshall Drive  
Huntington, WV 25755

Dear Dr. Davis:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract for Abdullah Asiri entitled "*The Decisive Kingdom: Saudi Foreign Policy from Soft to Hard Power*". After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP  
Director

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