UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE PRESS
Carlisle Barracks, PA
STRENGTH and WISDOM

MANEUVERING THE SAUDI-IRANIAN RIVALRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: HOW THE UNITED STATES CAN PRESERVE AND PROTECT ITS LONG-TERM INTERESTS IN THE REGION

Gregory Aftandilian

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE
SSI
STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

The United States Army War College

The United States Army War College educates and develops leaders for service at the strategic level while advancing knowledge in the global application of Landpower.

The purpose of the United States Army War College is to produce graduates who are skilled critical thinkers and complex problem solvers. Concurrently, it is our duty to the U.S. Army to also act as a "think factory" for commanders and civilian leaders at the strategic level worldwide and routinely engage in discourse and debate concerning the role of ground forces in achieving national security objectives.

The Strategic Studies Institute publishes national security and strategic research and analysis to influence policy debate and bridge the gap between military and academia.

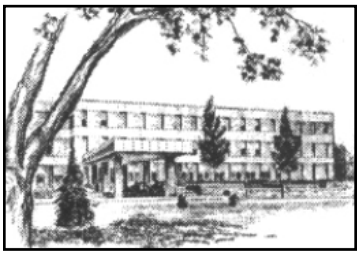
The Center for Strategic Leadership contributes to the education of world class senior leaders, develops expert knowledge, and provides solutions to strategic Army issues affecting the national security community.

The Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute provides subject matter expertise, technical review, and writing expertise to agencies that develop stability operations concepts and doctrines.

The School of Strategic Landpower develops strategic leaders by providing a strong foundation of wisdom grounded in mastery of the profession of arms, and by serving as a crucible for educating future leaders in the analysis, evaluation, and refinement of professional expertise in war, strategy, operations, national security, resource management, and responsible command.

The U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center acquires, conserves, and exhibits historical materials for use to support the U.S. Army, educate an international audience, and honor Soldiers—past and present.

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE



The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) is part of the U.S. Army War College and is the strategic-level study agent for issues related to national security and military strategy with emphasis on geostrategic analysis.

The mission of SSI is to use independent analysis to conduct strategic studies that develop policy recommendations on:

- Strategy, planning, and policy for joint and combined employment of military forces;
- Regional strategic appraisals;
- The nature of land warfare;
- Matters affecting the Army's future;
- The concepts, philosophy, and theory of strategy; and,
- Other issues of importance to the leadership of the Army.

Studies produced by civilian and military analysts concern topics having strategic implications for the Army, the Department of Defense, and the larger national security community.

In addition to its studies, SSI publishes special reports on topics of special or immediate interest. These include edited proceedings of conferences and topically oriented roundtables, expanded trip reports, and quick-reaction responses to senior Army leaders.

The Institute provides a valuable analytical capability within the Army to address strategic and other issues in support of Army participation in national security policy formulation.

Strategic Studies Institute
and
U.S. Army War College Press

MANEUVERING THE SAUDI-IRANIAN RIVALRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: HOW THE UNITED STATES CAN PRESERVE AND PROTECT ITS LONG-TERM INTERESTS IN THE REGION

Gregory Aftandilian

November 2018

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. Authors of Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) and U.S. Army War College (USAWC) Press publications enjoy full academic freedom, provided they do not disclose classified information, jeopardize operations security, or misrepresent official U.S. policy. Such academic freedom empowers them to offer new and sometimes controversial perspectives in the interest of furthering debate on key issues. This report is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

*****

This publication is subject to Title 17, United States Code, Sections 101 and 105. It is in the public domain and may not be copyrighted.

*****

Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College, 47 Ashburn Drive, Carlisle, PA 17013-5238.

*****

This manuscript was funded by the U.S. Army War College External Research Associates Program. Information on this program is available on our website, *http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/*, at the Opportunities tab.

*****

All Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) and U.S. Army War College (USAWC) Press publications may be downloaded free of charge from the SSI website. Hard copies of certain reports may also be obtained free of charge while supplies last by placing an order on the SSI website. Check the website for availability. SSI publications may be quoted or reprinted in part or in full with permission and appropriate credit given to the U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA. Contact SSI by visiting our website at the following address: *http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/*.

*****

The Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press publishes a quarterly email newsletter to update the national security community on the research of our analysts, recent and forthcoming publications, and upcoming conferences sponsored by the Institute. Each newsletter also provides a strategic commentary by one of our research analysts. If you are interested in receiving this newsletter, please subscribe on the SSI website at the following address: *http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/newsletter/*.

ISBN 1-58487-796-0

FOREWORD

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two important regional powers, have hit a low point. The two countries have not only broken diplomatic relations but have been engaged in so-called proxy wars in the region, most notably in Syria and Yemen. They have also engaged in sectarian diatribes that have exacerbated Sunni-Shia tensions in the area and have accused each other of subversion in each other's countries. The Iran nuclear deal that was finalized in 2015 was supposed to ease regional tensions in addition to precluding Tehran from developing nuclear weapons, but the aspirational goal of the former has not transpired for a variety of reasons.

Although the United States has been involved in the Gulf region for many decades, understanding the complex relations between countries in the area has long been a challenge. The mix of histories, religions, and nationalisms has at times been combustible, and there are often unintended consequences of certain policy decisions.

Gregory Aftandilian, a Middle East expert with long-standing government and academic experience, in writing this monograph, helps us understand the current conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. He also presents cogent recommendations for U.S. policymakers to ease tensions between the two antagonists, helps to dispel the perception in the region that the United States is taking part in a sectarian war, and avoids policies that could alienate the young generation of Iranians who are favorably disposed to the United States and who want better relations with Washington, DC. At the same time, the monograph also recommends U.S. policies that would ease Saudi anxieties about Iran.

It is hoped that this monograph will be of use to U.S. policymakers and U.S. Army officers as they deal with long-term security challenges and opportunities in the important Gulf region.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute and
U.S. Army War College Press

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GREGORY AFTANDILIAN is an independent consultant, writer, and lecturer, having spent over 21 years in U.S. Government service, most recently on Capitol Hill. He was a foreign policy adviser to Congressman Chris Van Hollen from 2007 to 2008, a professional staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and foreign policy adviser to Senator Paul Sarbanes from 2000 to 2004, and a foreign policy fellow to Senator Edward Kennedy in 1999. Prior to holding these positions, Mr. Aftandilian worked for 13 years as a Middle East analyst at the U.S. Department of State where he was a recipient of the Department's Superior Honor Award for his analyses on Egypt. His other government experiences include analytical work for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Library of Congress. He was also a research fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University from 2006 to 2007 and an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York from 1991 to 1992. In addition, Mr. Aftandilian has worked as a consultant on Egyptian affairs for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and is an adjunct faculty member at Boston University and George Mason University, as well as a non-resident fellow at the Arab Center in Washington, DC. Mr. Aftandilian is the author of *Egypt's Bid for Arab Leadership: Implications for U.S. Policy* (1993); *Looking Forward: An Integrated Strategy for Supporting Democracy and Human Rights in Egypt* (2009), and several monographs published by the Strategic Studies Institute. Mr. Aftandilian holds a B.A. in history from Dartmouth College, an M.A. in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Chicago, and an M.S. in international relations from the London School of Economics.

SUMMARY

This monograph examines how the United States should preserve and protect its long-term interests in the Middle East region by maneuvering carefully and strategically in the Saudi-Iranian conflict. The monograph first analyzes the history of the conflict between these two countries and shows that, while these two regional powers were rivals, they were not necessarily enemies and cooperated at times. It then traces their recent conflict back to the Iranian revolution and brings it up-to-date with their support for opposing sides in proxy wars in the region, taking part in sectarian diatribes, and the breaking of diplomatic relations. It also discusses how the former Barack Obama administration hoped for better U.S.-Iranian relations in the wake of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that it negotiated with the other P5+1 countries (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—plus Germany), and how that did not transpire because of the attitudes of the hardliners in Iran who are wary of any rapprochement with the United States. In addition, the Saudis were distrustful of Iran, believed the nuclear deal had significant shortcomings, and were not pleased that President Obama called on both countries to learn to coexist with each other in the neighborhood. To assuage Saudi concerns and to help protect the important sea lanes between the Arabian and Red Seas, the Obama administration allowed the Saudis and other Gulf Arab states to purchase sophisticated military hardware and assisted the Saudis in their campaign against the Houthi rebels in Yemen (who follow a Shia sect of Islam) by providing air fueling, logistics, and intelligence. Now, under the

current Donald Trump administration, nuance in the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been set aside in favor of wholeheartedly backing Riyadh and isolating Iran.

Although in the short run it may make sense for the United States to side with Saudi Arabia in its conflict with Iran, U.S. policymakers need to think about the long-term consequences of such a policy. First, the high number of civilian casualties caused by errant Saudi air strikes in Yemen has tarnished the U.S. image in that country because of Washington's military assistance to Riyadh. Second, with the United States giving uncritical support to Saudi Arabia at a time when its high-ranking officials are denigrating the Shia faith gives the impression that the United States is taking sides in a religious dispute. Not only does this fly in the face of traditional U.S. foreign policy—which has avoided taking part in religious wars—it has the potential to jeopardize U.S. relations with friendly leaders of Shia background, like Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who has been a key ally in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Moreover, by siding with Sunni states like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, (both of which have a history of problematic treatment of their Shia citizens) while only focusing on Iran's ill-treatment of its citizens, the United States runs the risk of alienating the Shia in the region and making a mockery of its human rights policy. Finally, the perception of the United States siding with Sunnis over Shia also runs the risk of alienating the younger generation of Iranians who not only want better relations with the United States but who are also prideful of their Persian culture and Shia identity. Keeping these young Iranians favorably disposed to the United States should be a long-term goal of U.S. policymakers.

The monograph recommends that U.S. policymakers should try to end the proxy wars in the region, like those in Syria and Yemen, as a first step in easing the Saudi-Iranian conflict and find areas where the United States and Iran can find common ground. It also recommends the fostering of a dialogue between Saudi Arabia (with other Gulf Cooperation Council states) and Iran where objectionable behavior on both sides could be aired and dealt with in a meaningful way. Although it is highly unlikely that Iran would give up its ballistic missile program, it could be persuaded to cease its subversive activities if the Gulf Arab states provided that the Shia in these states are treated better. The fact that the 2017 hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca occurred without any major incident between Iran and Saudi Arabia suggests that cooperation is possible. To reassure the Saudis that an easing of U.S. tensions with Iran would not make it vulnerable to a possible resurgence of Iranian aggression, the monograph recommends more joint military exercises between the United States and Saudi Arabia militaries as well as the deployment of U.S. Army's Stability Force Assistance Brigades to the Saudi kingdom for training and defensive purposes. In this way, the United States can preserve its equities in Saudi Arabia while developing some links to Iran that could be used to bolster relations with Tehran if the regime were to moderate in the future. In the long term, having friendly relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran and having both countries play a responsible role in the Gulf, similar to that which they did in the 1970s prior to the Iranian revolution of 1979, would be in the security interests of the United States.

MANEUVERING THE SAUDI-IRANIAN RIVALRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: HOW THE UNITED STATES CAN PRESERVE AND PROTECT ITS LONG-TERM INTERESTS IN THE REGION

INTRODUCTION

Iran and Saudi Arabia are going through one of their worst periods since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Both countries have not only traded diatribes about trying to destabilize the other but are engaged in costly and deadly proxy wars in various parts of the Middle East. The situation between them is unlikely to improve over the immediate short term, as conflicts in which the proxy wars are taking place, such as Syria and Yemen, are continuing to rage, but engaging both countries in possible negotiations over regional issues may be a way forward.

Because U.S. relations with Iran have been very problematic since 1979, with still no formal diplomatic ties and U.S. opposition to many Iranian policies, Washington has sided with Saudi Arabia in this conflict. Moreover, U.S.-Saudi relations, while going through occasional strains, have been generally strong since the late 1930s when U.S. companies discovered oil in the kingdom and U.S. strategic planners in subsequent years saw the defense of Saudi Arabia as important for U.S. national security interests.

President Barack Obama, during the time of the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, hoped that the nuclear deal of 2015 would bring Iran out of isolation and back into the family of nations, thereby leading to a moderation of Iran's behavior in the region. He even stated in an interview that Iran and Saudi Arabia

needed to learn to "share the neighborhood,"[1] a comment that did not go down well in Riyadh. But this moderation did not take place, in large part because of the power structure of Iran, in which the hardline Supreme Leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have predominated. They want to keep Iran, for ideological, political, and economic reasons, as a "revolutionary" state and oppose any opening to the United States.

President Donald Trump, by contrast, has avoided the use of nuance, has openly sided with Saudi Arabia in its conflict with Iran, and has suggested a tougher policy toward Tehran despite having certified twice to Congress (since the writing of this monograph in September 2017) that Iran has been in compliance with the terms of the nuclear deal signed in 2015. During his May 2017 trip to Riyadh, he singled out Iran for special criticism in a major public speech.[2] Some analysts have suggested that U.S. policy under the Trump administration is geared toward embracing Sunni Muslim Arab states not only to check Iran's ambitions in the region, but also to weaken Shia elements in the Arab world that have sided with Iran.

While this approach may make sense strategically because it is working to isolate an anti-U.S. regime (Iran), it potentially has downsides in that it has tended to support a more aggressive Saudi foreign and security policy in a region that may have long-term consequences that are not in U.S. national security interests.

Moreover, there is a sectarian dimension to this Saudi-Iran conflict that may also rebound against the United States. As many observers have noted, current Sunni-Shia rivalries and conflicts have been the most severe in decades, if not centuries. For the United States to side with the Sunnis against the Shias not only goes

against the traditions of U.S. foreign policy that have avoided religious wars, but it also places the United States in a dubious position because some Shia, like the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, are U.S. allies, and in other places, like in Bahrain, the Shia are a repressed group that are looking to the United States to support a non-sectarian human rights policy. How the United States maneuvers this Iranian-Saudi rivalry while it protects its long-term interests in the region is the subject of this monograph.

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF CURRENT IRANIAN-SAUDI RELATIONS

Prior to the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, Iran and Saudi Arabia were rivals in the Persian Gulf region but occasionally cooperated with each other and were certainly not enemies. Both were pro-Western monarchies that saw communism as their chief enemy, and sought and received protection from the United States during the Cold War. Both were also major oil-producing states, and its production and unhindered flow out of the Persian Gulf was a key strategic objective of the United States and the Western alliance.

The United States deepened its relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia during and after World War II. After American oil companies discovered oil in the Saudi kingdom in 1938, the protection of this resource became a strategic imperative, and the United States built the Dhahran air base close to the Saudi oil fields for this very purpose during the war. Because substantial oil revenues were not realized by Saudi Arabia until the late 1940s, the United States even extended lend-lease aid to that country during the war. The alliance was solidified during a meeting between U.S.

President Franklin Roosevelt and Saudi King Ibn Saud Abdul Aziz aboard a U.S. naval ship in the Suez Canal in February 1945.[3]

As for Iran, the United States sent 30,000 troops to that country during World War II, joining the British and the Soviets in a massive transportation operation to provide the Soviet Union with armaments, vehicles, food, clothing, and other material to help it fight Nazi Germany. After the war, the United States withdrew its troops per an Allied agreement with the Iranian Government but the Iranians looked to, and received support from, the United States to pressure the Soviets to withdraw from northern Iran (they had initially refused to leave as required) and support the Iranian Government's efforts to put down separatist republics in the northwestern part of the country that were established with some Soviet help. Nationalist-minded Iranians thus saw the United States as a protector of their country's independence and sovereignty.[4]

As is well known, U.S. involvement in Iran further deepened to the point of intervening directly in Iranian politics on the side of the Shah against his prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, in 1953 through a clandestine operation run by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and British intelligence that helped to overthrow Mossadeq. From that point onward, the Shah was indebted to the United States and squarely placed Iran on the side of the United States during the Cold War (though this intervention came back to haunt the United States from 1978 to 1979 when Iranian revolutionaries opposed Tehran's close relations with Washington). After the U.S.-planned coup against Mossadeq succeeded, the United States provided Iran with nearly US$1 billion in military and economic aid between 1953 and 1963.[5]

The United States established training missions with the Iranian and Saudi Arabian militaries during this period. The United States also sold both countries arms, and Iranian and Saudi Arabian officers came to the United States for advanced training at operational bases, as well as in professional military educational schools.

The Shah also developed a relationship with Israel, allowing an Israeli interest section office to be opened in Tehran and Iranian oil to be sold to Israel as well as an intelligence liaison relationship to be established between Iran's SAVAK (Organization of National Security and Information) and Israel's Mossad.[6] Although the Shah tried to keep these relations low-key because of Muslim sensibilities, they were known to Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia, who saw them as strengthening Israel against the Arab states, and was a source of friction between Tehran and Riyadh.

Another point of friction was the security vacuum in the Persian Gulf when the British announced in 1968 that they would be leaving the region militarily by 1971. Up until that point, the British were the dominant power in the Gulf, with protectorates over Bahrain, the Trucial States (which later became the United Arab Emirates), and Qatar, as well as naval and air bases in these states. From the U.S. perspective, this British military role helped to protect the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to the West.

While the United States initially worried about this withdrawal, in large part because it was heavily committed in Vietnam at this time and could not spare extra troops and sailors to replace the British role there, the Shah of Iran saw this withdrawal as an opportunity to extend Iranian influence in the Gulf. He first resurrected the Iranian claim to Bahrain, which was once

part of the Persian Empire and had many inhabitants of Iranian descent. This claim caused a crisis not only with Al Khalifa, the Arab tribal rulers of Bahrain, but with the Saudis next door, who saw the Shah's claim as an encroachment on Arab sovereignty. The Shah eventually relented on this claim in early 1970 when the United Nations (UN) ascertained that the majority of Bahrainis were opposed to union with Iran.[7] Bahrain became independent in August 1971.

However, the day before the British withdrawal from the Trucial States, the Shah sent forces to take over three small islands belonging to two of these states, Ras Al-Khaimah and Sharjah, on November 30, 1971. This event caused widespread anger, first at the British for letting this happen, and then at Iran for this land grab. Not only did the Shah not give these islands back to the successor state, the United Arab Emirates, but also, the islands have stayed in Iranian hands under the Islamic Republic of Iran and remain one of many irritants that the United Arab Emirates has with Iran.[8]

Despite Saudi misgivings about Iran's role in the Gulf, the United States decided to have the security vacuum in the Gulf filled by both Iran and Saudi Arabia as part of its "twin pillar" strategy in 1971. Of the two countries, Iran was always the bigger pillar because of its larger population and more competent military. Iran showed its usefulness to the West by sending troops to Oman in the mid-1970s to help put down the Marxist-led Dhofar rebellion in the southwestern part of that country in conjunction with British Special Air Service troops.[9]

The rise in the price of oil from 1971 to 1974 further fed the Shah's appetite for regional power, helped by the fact that the Richard Nixon administration allowed the Shah to purchase highly advanced military

hardware short of nuclear weapons. The Shah even proclaimed he wanted Iran to be the world's fifth largest military power. He was the one who began Iran's nuclear program, and there were suspicions that his aim was to develop nuclear weapons, not just nuclear power for energy needs.[10] Although the Shah did not pursue an anti-Saudi policy during this period, Arab states like Saudi Arabia were worried that he wanted to create a new Persian Empire at their expense.

The fall of the Shah, however, led the Saudis to worry much more about Iran. Iran's new ruler, Ayatollah Khomeini, criticized the Saudi ruling family and proclaimed that monarchy was "incompatible with Islam."[11] He also questioned their legitimacy to be the custodians of Islam's two holiest places, Mecca and Medina. This radical, pan-Islamic message was coupled by Iran's additional interest in the plight of the Shia in Sunni Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The Shia in Saudi Arabia account for about 10 percent of the population but are concentrated in the strategic oil-rich Eastern Province. They have long been treated as second-class citizens, and some Wahhabi clerics (Wahhabism is the doctrine practiced by the Sunni majority in Saudi Arabia, though the Saudis themselves prefer the term Salafis) have even declared the Shia as heretics. The success of the Iranian revolution, Khomeini's charisma, and the yearning for more equal rights led some Shia of the Eastern Province to see Khomeini as their hero and agitate on his behalf. Clashes between the Shia and the Saudi security forces occurred in this province from 1979 to 1980, with Riyadh blaming Iran for stoking tensions and sending agents to stir up the Shia.[12] For the first time in generations, the sectarian issue—Sunni versus Shia—became a major source of division in the region.

The advent of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980 also proved to be a source of friction between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Although the Saudis had no love for Iraq's Baathist leader, Saddam Hussein, whose past revolutionary Arab socialist rhetoric was a threat to the Saudi kingdom, the Saudis saw him as the lesser of two evils and helped to bankroll Iraq's war effort, especially as Iraq's oil revenues became depleted because of high war costs. However, as the war dragged on, it became apparent that Iraqi hopes for a victory were illusionary. Much of the war, in fact, became a defensive one for Iraq, as the Khomeini regime was able to rally the Iranian people by tapping nationalist sentiment against Iraq in addition to portraying the war as a fight to "protect Islam" against Saddam Hussein who was "fighting to destroy Islam."[13] For the Saudis and many other Gulf Arab states that aided Iraq, the idea of Iran capturing southern Iraq and then turning southward into their own countries was a terrifying prospect.

The Gulf Arab states, under Saudi leadership, created the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1980 partly for this reason.[14] Although the GCC was also designed to facilitate political, economic, and military cooperation among its member states (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman), it has had a checkered history. The recent controversy over Qatar and its policies, which has led Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates to cut diplomatic relations with it, has underscored its fragility.

The last years of the Iran-Iraq war also proved difficult for Saudi-Iranian relations, as the so-called tanker war in which both Iran and Iraq tried to hit oil ships aiding the other, took place. The fact that the United

States came to the aid of the Saudis and the other GCC members during this phase became another sore point in relations between Tehran and Riyadh.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which led to the introduction of about 500,000 U.S. troops into Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region to protect the Saudi kingdom and eventually remove Iraqi troops from Kuwait in early 1991, had profound consequences for Saudi Arabia and Iran. First, it showed that the Saudis, despite the billions spent on their defense, could not protect themselves from a possible Iraqi invasion of their own territory without help from the United States, and after Iraqi forces were expelled from Kuwait, it led to Iraq being weakened and under strict UN sanctions. After a costly 8-year war with Iraq, the Iranians were pleased that its nemesis next door (Iraq) was boxed in, but were concerned that the U.S. presence in the Gulf was enhanced. For example, after Operation DESERT STORM, there were at least 5,000 U.S. troops stationed in Kuwait throughout the 1990s, the U.S. naval base in Bahrain was expanded, and the U.S. Navy's presence in the Gulf was elevated to Fleet status in 1995. Qatar allowed for the prepositioning of U.S. military equipment and the building of a U.S. military base in Al Udeid near Doha, and the United Arab Emirates allowed the U.S. military access to its army bases and naval ports. Although Saudi Arabia did not sign a formal security agreement with the United States after the Gulf war, it allowed thousands of U.S. military personnel to be stationed at Saudi air bases to enforce the no-fly zone over southern Iraq.[15]

In the 1990s, under Iranian Presidents Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, Iran pursued a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. It refrained from using revolutionary discourse, stopped its

propaganda attacks on Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab monarchies, reportedly ended covert support for violent opposition groups in the Gulf region as well as overseas assassination teams, and pursued fewer challenges to maritime traffic in the Gulf. For its part, Saudi Arabia saw Iran as less of a threat because Saddam was still in power in Iraq, and was impressed with Iran's desire to ease tensions with the Gulf Arab states. Then-Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah even attended an Islamic Organization Conference summit in Tehran in 1997 where he used the opportunity to meet with Khatami and Supreme Leader Khamenei. On the negative side, there was the Khobar Towers (a housing complex that was populated by U.S. military personnel) attack during this period that was later attributed to an Iran-supported group. On the economic side, when oil prices fell significantly at the end of the 1990s, Saudi Arabia was upset that Iran was not sticking to its Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries quota on production, which helped to keep the oil market oversupplied and prices low.[16]

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2003

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, however, led to a situation of the Saudis becoming alarmed again by Iranian ambitions. The removal of Saddam and his regime from power allowed the Iraqi Shia to come to power, some of which, like those connected to the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, had very close ties to Iran. In the insecurity that ensued after the fall of the Baathist regime, Iran took advantage of the situation by working closely with, and providing military assistance to, various Shia groups not only to help them defend against Sunni insurgents

who targeted the Shia, but to battle against U.S. and allied forces.[17]

In Saudi eyes, Iraq was turning into an Iranian vassal state. Thus for many years, Riyadh refused to send an ambassador to Baghdad, believing that the new Iraqi regime was not representative of the Iraqi people because it failed to reach an accommodation with the Sunnis and was under strong Iranian influence. Moreover, Iran's new President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005 to 2013), backed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, seemed to put Iran back on the radical path of the Khomeini era, even though Ahmadinejad paid a visit to Saudi Arabia during his presidency. Ahmadinejad seemed determined to press ahead with Iran's nuclear program that the Saudis saw as a direct threat.[18]

The advent of the so-called Arab Spring uprising also increased tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Concerning Bahrain, which is ruled by an Arab Sunni royal family but whose majority of inhabitants are Shia and have long been repressed, the demonstrations in February 2011 for more political rights increasingly came to be seen by the Bahraini royals and the Sunni minority on the island as a Shia uprising. The Saudis and Emiratis sent troops into Bahrain in mid-March 2011 to guard the financial district of the island to enable the Bahraini authorities to put down these demonstrations by force.[19] The Bahraini authorities, plus the Saudis and Emiratis, saw an Iranian hand in these protests, even though the Shia of Bahrain had (and still have) legitimate grievances about discrimination and gerrymandering of electoral districts for parliament that favor the Sunnis without any need for Iran to provoke them. Predictably, though, Iran denounced the use of force against the Bahraini Shia protestors, as well as

the arrests of Shia demonstrators and activists in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. As repression continued in Bahrain against Shia political parties and activists, some radical elements of Bahrain's Shia community have indeed sought some clandestine assistance from Iran (which the Bahraini authorities are only too eager to publicize),[20] and so the Bahraini and Saudi charge of Iranian collusion with the Shia has become a partial self-fulfilling prophecy.

Although some scholars and analysts see the Iran-Saudi antagonisms in the Gulf as well as the broader Middle East as more of a traditional power rivalry between two large states for regional hegemony (for example, former acting director of the CIA Mike Morell has claimed that Iran wants to recreate the former Persian Empire),[21] it would be wrong to diminish the sectarian aspect of this struggle. For example, sectarianism allows Iran to extend its influence in Iraq. Without this connection between Iran (a mostly Shia state) and the Shia of Iraq (now in the seat of power), it would be very difficult to have a close relationship between Iran and Iraq, as previous regimes in both countries usually played on historic animosities between Arabs and Persians.

Second, without the importance of sectarianism, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait would not be as worried about Iran as they are now. True, Iranian attempts at hegemony in the Gulf region would be seen as dangerous by these countries regardless of sectarianism, but sectarianism exacerbates these tensions by playing into fears of internal strife and subversion within these countries. Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have significant Shia minorities, while Bahrain has a Shia majority. All of these countries are fearful about their Shia communities being inflamed by Iran even

though they do not want to admit their own policy failures of not fully integrating the Shia into their societies. (Kuwait, however, has a better track record on this issue than the other two countries.)[22]

Third, the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Iran have also used sectarianism to explain why they have such problems with the other. For example, in early May 2017, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman gave an extensive interview within which he denigrated the Shia belief of the Mahdi returning one day that purportedly necessitated Iran's need to "take over the entire Islamic world." The Crown Prince then asked rhetorically, "Where are the common points that we might be able to reach an understanding?"[23]

For their part, Iranian leaders have denounced the Wahhabi doctrine and claimed it is the root of the extremism Muslims are witnessing in the Middle East and Europe. In an opinion piece in *The New York Times* in September 2016, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Sharif charged that, over the past 3 decades, Riyadh has spent billions of dollars "exporting Wahhabism through thousands of mosques and madrasas across the world" and underscoring that this "theological perversion has wrought havoc" throughout the globe. This Wahhabi "doctrine of hate," in his view, has not only targeted minority groups and Shiites but "has inspired virtually every terrorist group abusing the name of Islam."[24]

In the wake of the terrorist attack on the London bridge near the British Parliament in early June 2017, the Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement that Europe needed to go after the "main financial and ideological sources" of such violence, "which are clear to everyone," a thinly-veiled reference to Saudi Arabia. Part of Iran's focus on Wahhabism and its alleged links

to terrorism is to deflect Western charges that Tehran supports terrorist groups, but the sectarian motive cannot be underestimated.[25]

On Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia have played opposite roles in comparison to the Bahrain conflict. Iran has come to the aid of the minority Assad regime because of sectarian and strategic ties (the Syrian regime is ruled chiefly by Alawites—a sectarian group that is an offshoot of Shia Islam, and Syria has long facilitated Iran's entry into the Levant region, particularly its assistance to Hezbollah of Lebanon). Iran and Saudi Arabia have provided Syria with arms and IRGC operatives and fighters, while the Saudis have backed and continue to back some Sunni rebel groups seeking Assad's ouster.[26] Like the situation in Iraq, the Saudis see Iran playing a prominent and dangerous role in Syria, a country in the Arab heartland. From Iran's perspective, Saudi Arabia has enabled the "covert flow of petrodollars to extremist groups in Syria" under the false guise that such groups are "moderate." Many observers see Syria, therefore, as a battleground for Iranian and Saudi proxies.

On Yemen, the Saudis and the Iranians are also engaged in a proxy war. The Houthi movement from the north of Yemen is made up of followers of the Zaydi branch of Shia Islam. They have occasionally battled the central government of Yemen for more rights over many years. However, in the chaos that resulted from Yemen's Arab Spring uprising in 2011 to 2012, the Houthis were unhappy with the new Sunni regime of Abdrabbu Mansour Hadi, and in the autumn of 2014 moved south to take over the capital of Sana'a, aided by forces loyal to the deposed Yemeni President, Ali Abdallah Saleh. The extent of Iranian military support for the Houthis is the subject of some debate. The

Houthis were probably able to obtain substantial arms from Yemen's military stocks while purchasing others on the black market, but it appears that since 2011 they have also received some arms from Iran.[27] From the Saudi perspective, Iran's relations with the Houthis are a way for Tehran to cause havoc and instability in their backyard. Hence, in 2015, the Saudis, under the leadership of Defense Minister (and now Crown Prince) Mohammad bin Salman, came to the aid of the beleaguered Yemeni Government (which had escaped to the southern Yemeni port city of Aden), and began a military campaign against the Houthis, dubbed Operation DECISIVE STORM.[28]

The Saudis were able to persuade a number of Sunni Arab governments to join their military coalition against the Houthis, though it appears that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the primary belligerents in this war on the side of the Hadi government and have done so mostly from the air (though the United Arab Emirates has sent some ground forces to Yemen, and there have been some clashes between the Saudi Army and the Houthis along Yemen's northern border). Saudi actions in the Yemen conflict seem to be part of a more aggressive Saudi regional stance over the past few years under King Salman (who ascended to the throne in early 2015) and his son, Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman.[29]

In the midst of these proxy wars has been the controversy over the Iran nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed between Tehran and the P5+1 countries (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—the five permanent members of the UN Security Council—plus Germany) in July 2015. Although Saudi Arabia officially endorsed the deal, it was quite unhappy with

its outcome, believing that Iran would still try to hide some of its nuclear programs, be in a position 10 years later to restart the entire program, and, with a windfall of cash from the lifting of international sanctions, be more inclined to engage in destabilizing activities in the Arab world.[30] Ironically, Saudi Arabia and Israel, despite their long-standing differences over the Arab-Israeli conflict, were on the same page with regard to the opposition to the Iran nuclear deal. The joke in Washington in 2015 was that the Saudis did not believe they needed to lobby hard against this deal knowing that the Israelis would be doing the job for them.[31] In the end, however, the U.S. Congress did not have enough votes to block the deal that the Obama administration helped to negotiate, and it went into effect.

What caused a break in Saudi-Iranian relations was not the nuclear deal per se (though that certainly contributed to the tensions), but the ramifications of the Saudi execution in early January 2016 of prominent Saudi Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr, who hailed from the troubled Eastern Province and who had called for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy. Although the Saudi Government considered him a terrorist, and he was executed along with many Sunni terrorists that same day, Iran and many Shia communities in the Arab world reacted angrily and, in some cases, violently to his execution. Iran emphasized that Nimr had studied theology in the Iranian holy city of Qom and was a learned cleric of stature who was unfairly charged and executed by the Saudi regime. A mob in Tehran burned down the Saudi Embassy, and the Iranian police did not do anything to stop them.[32] This incident caused Saudi Arabia, along with Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar (out of solidarity), to break

off diplomatic relations with Tehran, a break that continues to this day (except for Qatar which restored them in August 2017 after encountering its own problems with the Saudi-led group).[33] This entire episode involving the execution of Nimr and its fallout was symptomatic of the sharp Sunni-Shia divisions that have plagued the region in recent years. Although the reaction to the execution was the most violent in Iran, there were also demonstrations against Saudi Arabia among the Shia of Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon.

This conflict also had a spillover effect on the hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, and which has also been a contentious point between Saudi Arabia and Iran over the years. In 2016, Iran "suspended" participation in the hajj because it could not reach an agreement with Saudi Arabia on the pilgrimage,[34] a rather dramatic development because participating in the hajj is one of five pillars of Islam—a solemn requirement for a Muslim (regardless of sect) to perform at least once in one's lifetime if one is physically and financially able to do so. There were recriminations on both sides. The Saudis said they wanted assurances of non-violence by Iran. In 1987, Iranian pilgrims used the hajj, at the encouragement of Ayatollah Khomeini, to chant anti-U.S. slogans that the Saudis interpreted as an implicit attack on them because of their close ties to Washington. Clashes ensued with Saudi security forces, leading to 400 deaths and a break in Iranian-Saudi diplomatic relations from 1987 to 1991. There have also been cases in other years where many Iranian pilgrims have died in stampedes during the hajj. In 2017, both countries, despite being in diplomatic limbo because of the break in relations mentioned earlier, sought to ease tensions somewhat over the hajj. The Iranians have toned down their anti-Saudi rhetoric somewhat, and the Saudis

allowed visas for 86,000 Iranian citizens to perform the hajj, perhaps because they did not want to be perceived as preventing Muslims from performing their religious duties. Helping matters was that aides to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei called on Iranian pilgrims to avoid provocations.[35]

BALANCING DIFFERENT INTERESTS UNDER THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

In 2009, the Obama administration initially hoped for a new beginning with Iran but this effort was thwarted by Iran's efforts to ramp up its nuclear program. It then decided to enhance sanctions on Iran with the support of the international community. After several years being under these new sanctions and seeing the determination of the international community on this issue, Iran returned to the negotiating table. Although the deal that was ultimately reached did allow Iran to maintain a nuclear program, albeit on a much smaller scale, Iran's ability to enrich uranium would be set at a limit far below the level necessary for the production of a nuclear bomb. Moreover, Iran agreed to intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ensure that it was adhering to the deal and its limits on nuclear fuel production.[36] Despite these restrictions, which the Obama administration and the other P5+1 countries hailed as a success, Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf Arab countries still viewed the deal with grave concern. For this reason, the Obama administration, in an effort to assuage these concerns, promised the countries that they would be able to purchase even more sophisticated military weapons from the United States, as a

hedge against what they saw was an aggressive and untamed Iran.[37]

In addition, when Saudi Arabia decided to intervene in the Yemen crisis in a major way in March of 2015 (a time when the parameters of the Iran nuclear deal were becoming known), the United States felt obliged to assist Riyadh in its air campaign with intelligence, logistics, and refueling capabilities.[38] The United States did not like the fact that Iran was giving some assistance to the Houthis—and Secretary of State John Kerry even took time out during the nuclear negotiations to criticize Iran's attempt to send arms to the Houthis.[39] Washington's primary concern in Yemen was the ongoing chaos in that country which allowed terrorist groups like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (the most active of the al-Qaeda affiliates in planning and carrying out anti-U.S. operations) and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to take control of more Yemeni territory.

While aiding the Saudis in their Yemen campaign, the United States also tried to bring about a peace settlement between the Houthis and the Hadi government with the aid of the Omanis. Despite such efforts, which included direct involvement by Secretary of State John Kerry, no agreement was reached.[40]

More ominous from the Obama administration's perspective was that the Yemeni campaign, especially the air war launched primarily by Saudi Arabia, resulted in thousands of civilian casualties. There have been many instances when Saudi military planes have bombed hospitals, schools, and funerals.[41] Although the Saudis were initially in denial about causing such large numbers of civilian casualties, they have recently been more forthcoming about errant strikes. For example, on August 27, 2017, a spokesman for the

Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis stated that an airstrike that killed 14 civilians earlier that month was the result of a "technical mistake," and emphasized it was accidental and unintentional. The spokesman expressed "sincere sympathy" for the deaths and said the intended target was a legitimate Houthi military installation in Sana'a.[42]

Despite such regrets, there is no hiding the fact that such errant air strikes have been all too common in the Yemeni campaign. Not only have human rights organizations issued sharp criticisms of these strikes, but the UN has denounced them as well, noting that between March 2015 and January 2017, about 10,000 civilians have been killed and 40,000 have been injured.[43] Although the Houthis have also been responsible for some civilian casualties, much of the attention has focused on the Saudi-led air war. The UN also has warned about famine conditions in Yemen and in 2017 reported that hundreds of Yemenis have died from the outbreak of cholera.[44]

Hence, U.S. officials came to see that their association with the air war, even if indirect, was becoming a liability because the United States was increasingly seen in Yemen as aiding the Saudi campaign. Criticism of this U.S. role was voiced among some members of the U.S. Congress as well.[45] Consequently, the administration began to distance itself from the Saudi war effort. In the summer of 2016, the United States reduced the number of U.S. personnel at a Joint Combined Planning Cell in Saudi Arabia that was helping the Saudis coordinate the air campaign, and in October 2016, after a Saudi accidental bombing of a funeral in Yemen, the spokesman for the White House's National Security Council said the United States was not giving the Saudis a "blank check."[46] In late 2016, the United

States also held up the delivery of precision-guided munitions to the Saudis over concerns that the Royal Saudi Air Force would not be able use them properly and would lead to even more civilian casualties.[47] Prominent American newspapers also questioned the efficacy of the United States taking the side of the Saudis in the Yemen campaign.[48]

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S ONE-SIDED POLICIES ON THE IRAN-SAUDI CONFLICT

The Trump administration initially seemed to show that it was not going to be hesitant about helping the Saudis in their fight against so-called Iranian proxies like in Yemen. In the spring of 2017, it lifted the hold on the precision-guided weapons systems and promised a tougher stand against Iran. During a visit to Saudi Arabia in the spring of 2017, Defense Secretary James Mattis stated "Everywhere you look, if there is trouble in the region, you find Iran."[49] This comment was not just meant to please his Saudi hosts but was something that Mattis genuinely believed, according to press reports.

President Trump purposely made Saudi Arabia the first country he visited overseas as President, a trip he took in May 2017. He made a special point of meeting not only with the Saudi king and other high-level Saudi officials but also with an assembled group of leaders from other Sunni Arab countries, including from all of the GCC states. In a public address to this assembly, he singled out Iran for special criticism. He said the Iranian regime has given safe haven, financial backing, and social standing to terrorists and was "responsible for so much instability in the region." This regime, he went on, also funds arms and trains terrorists and

militias "from Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen." He emphasized to the assembled Sunni leaders that Iran for decades had "fueled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror," and urged his audience in Riyadh and the international community as a whole to "isolate Iran, deny it funding for terrorism, and pray for the day when the Iranian people have the just and righteous government they deserve."[50]

Heading further into the sectarian divide in the Middle East, without saying so explicitly, Trump also met separately with the Bahraini King Sheikh Hamid bin Issa al-Khalifa and acknowledged there had been "a little strain" in the bilateral relationship, "but there won't be strain with this administration."[51] Trump was referring not only to criticism of Bahrain by the Obama administration over human rights issues, such as the crackdown on Shia political activists and clerics, but the hold up of F-16 aircraft to Bahrain over these issues.

On the Iranian nuclear issue, as of August 2017, Trump has twice certified to Congress that Iran was in compliance with the nuclear deal, but he has done so reluctantly and only after his top foreign policy and security aides, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Mattis, told him that to not do so when Iran was indeed fulfilling the terms of the deal would lose the United States support in the international community, according to press reports.[52] Nonetheless, Trump and some of his other aides, such as his U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, have stated that Iran was in violation of the "spirit" of the nuclear deal, citing in particular its testing of missiles.[53] As of August 2017, Trump has suggested that the next time he sends a report on the nuclear deal to Congress, meaning in mid-October 2017, he might not certify that Iran is in compliance.[54] This comment prompted some

Iranian officials to denounce the president's intentions and add, if the United States formally pulls out of the agreement, Iran would pull out of it as well and vigorously restart its nuclear program.[55]

Trump's views on Iran seem to conform to those of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. The foreign minister of Bahrain told the press in April 2017 that Trump understood the threats to the U.S. Gulf Arab allies better than his predecessor.[56] Meanwhile, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, in an extensive television interview with MBC (an Arabic language station) in early May 2017, said dialogue with Iran was "impossible" for theological reasons, claiming that Iran was planning for the "return of the Imam Mahdi" whom the Shiites believe went into hiding a thousand years ago and would return to establish global Islamic rule before the end of the world. He asked rhetorically, "How do you have a dialogue with a regime built on an extremist ideology?" He charged that the Iranians believe they must control the "land of the Muslims and spread their Twelver Jaafari [Shiite] sect in the Muslim world." He also claimed that the Iranians want to take over Mecca and warned, "We will not wait until the fight is inside Saudi Arabia, and we will work so that the battle is on their side, inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia." Finally, he boasted that the Saudi Army could easily defeat the Houthis "in a matter of days" but had desisted from such a land campaign because it would cause many casualties.[57]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY POLICYMAKERS IN DEALING WITH SUNNI-SHIA DIVISIONS

Desist from Anti-Shia Policies and Shore Up Support for Iraqi Leader Haider al-Abadi

President Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia gave the impression in the region that the United States was pursuing a strong anti-Iran policy not just for strategic reasons, but also because of Iran's Shia identity. While a good argument can be made for trying to keep Iran isolated because of its support for some terrorists in the region, like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hezbollah, and its support for proxies in several Arab countries (and the hope for Iranian moderation that former President Obama had been banking on, which did not materialize), there is a long-term danger for the United States to be seen as taking sides in a sectarian conflict.

First, the United States, as a mostly secular country (at least one that has separated church from state), has never entered into the fray of a religious war or dispute. It has taken part in an ideological war or at least framed it that way (World War I—a fight to make the world safe for democracy; World War II—a fight against fascism; the Cold War and the Vietnam war—a fight against communism), but never a religious one. Hence, it is not in the U.S. tradition to be part of a religious or sectarian conflict.

Second, as a practical matter, not all Shia are U.S. enemies and not all Sunnis are U.S. friends. The United States has close ties with the Shia-dominated Government of Iraq led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi,

a key ally in the fight against ISIS. It does not make sense to alienate him or his coalition partners, especially if the United States wants Iraq to stabilize, prosper, and be not so dependent on Iran in the coming years. If the United States alienates a moderate Shia leader like Abadi, Iran would be more than happy to fill the vacuum and pursue an even more intrusive role in Iraq by cultivating more Shia leaders.

To shore up Abadi's position, the United States should continue to train Iraq's Army as that would strengthen Abadi's position in Iraq, help him reach out to the Sunnis because the army also contains Sunni elements, and eventually weaken the Popular Mobilization Forces, some of which are tied to Iran. The United States should also support his position against Iraqi Kurdish desires for independence (as it is doing now)[58] but should counsel him not to take military action against the Kurds because not only would this pit two U.S. allies against one another, but it could also be an embarrassment for Abadi if the national army does not perform well against the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces, which are loyal to the Kurdish Regional Government.

Another way the United States can shore up Abadi is to galvanize the international community (European countries, Japan, the Gulf Arab states, and international financial institutions) to come up with a realistic and solvent plan to help the Iraqi Government rebuild the heavily damaged cities, which could cost tens of billions of dollars. Since the United States lost at least US$8 billion in Iraqi reconstruction funding because of fraud, waste, and abuse in the 2003 to 2012 period, according to U.S. auditors,[59] it would not be realistic politically for Washington to again commit billions of dollars to a new Iraqi reconstruction program. Instead,

the United States should take the lead in bringing the international community together to help fund this endeavor, which would spread the burden among different countries and institutions. The Iraqi Government, because of relatively low oil revenues and high governmental war costs against ISIS as well as large expenditures for civil service salaries and social welfare benefits, has been running budget deficits in the US$20 billion range annually over the past several years.[60] Hence, it cannot fund the reconstruction of the damaged cities by itself. Unless these damaged cities (which are mostly in the Sunni areas of Iraq) are rebuilt, Abadi will have a difficult time reaching out and accommodating the Sunnis, and he could face another ISIS-like group taking advantage of Sunni dissatisfaction in the near future. Thus, by taking the lead in organizing a major donor group to help rebuild Iraq, the United States not only can demonstrate its support for a moderate Shia leader like Abadi, but it can also possibly preclude another Sunni extremist group from forming in Iraq.

Speak Out More Forcefully on Repression of Shiites in Bahrain

U.S. human rights policy should not be based on sectarian criteria. If the Shia in Bahrain are being repressed, turning a blind eye to their plight simply because they are Shia and not Sunni makes a mockery of U.S. human rights policy. To be effective, the United States needs to be neutral on religious issues and needs to condemn regimes that are putting down any group regardless of religion or sect. It could be the Sunnis 1 day in one country and the Shia in another. What counts is for the United States to stand up for the rights of any

group, religious, secular, or otherwise, being repressed simply for airing their grievances. President Trump's embrace of the Bahraini king and his public message that there will not be tensions in the bilateral relationship under his administration unfortunately sent the message to the Bahraini authorities that repression of the Shia is not going to be opposed by Washington.[61] This has likely caused other Shia in the region to take notice about the United States taking a one-sided view of human rights policy.

The United States Should Speak Out against Religious Intolerance

The United States should speak out more forcefully against religious intolerance and emphasize that all countries (not just Iran) must do a better job in having their religious authorities preach tolerance and to be careful about funding groups in the region that espouse an extremist interpretation of Islam. Trump did attempt to do this in his May 2017 speech in Riyadh, but this message was overshadowed by his own specific criticism of Iran. In other words, by signaling out Iran and not taking other countries, especially Sunni countries like Saudi Arabia, to task about intolerance and support for extremist groups, the message becomes a sectarian one regardless of the original intent. For example, Saudi Arabia's own religious ideology, Wahhabism, has helped to radicalize many Muslim youth. Some Saudi clerics who espouse this ideology have been known to preach intolerance of other religions, including those of the "Peoples of the Book" (i.e., Christians and Jews). They also believe that Islamic texts should be protected against Muslim minority sects like Shiaism. Many Saudi youth, inculcated in

Wahhabi ideology, went to Iraq during the 2003 to 2008 period to fight for al-Qaeda in Iraq against the Shia and U.S. forces, and a later group went to fight for ISIS in both Syria and Iraq.[62] Although it is unlikely that the young Saudis who went to fight in these conflicts on the side of the terrorists did so with the approval of the Saudi political authorities, some radical clerics in the Saudi kingdom may have influenced them to join such groups. Hence, Saudi Arabia is not innocent in realm of espousing an extremist religious ideology. If U.S. policymakers are going to make a major speech on religious tolerance, they should either refrain from signaling out Iran or make sure that if Iran is mentioned, Sunni countries are also mentioned. However, since mentioning the latter would cause strains with U.S. allies, a speech without mentioning any specific country would be preferable.

The United States Should Be Sensitive to Views of Iran's Younger Generation, Likely the Next Leaders of Their Country

The United States should be more sensitive to the views of Iran's younger generation who are likely to be leaders of their country in the coming years. While there are good reasons for the United States to oppose certain Iranian activities in the region, the United States must be careful to not be perceived as siding with Sunnis against Shia or to be seen as taking an anti-Shia attitude because to do so would likely alienate this important demographic. Most Iranians are very proud of their identity that includes a mix of being part of an ancient Persian civilization and followers of Shia Islam. Even for young middle class Iranians, who may not be very religious, they would see an attack on Shiaism

as an attack on their own culture, and when Shia in the other parts of the world are being repressed—be it in the Arab countries, Afghanistan, or Pakistan—they take notice. It is not in the long-term interests, then, of the United States to alienate Iran's future generation that, from all accounts, wants better relations with the United States and the West in general. Scenes of young Iranians celebrating and dancing in the streets of Tehran when the nuclear deal with the P5+1 countries was signed in 2015 is indicative of this yearning.[63] Although Trump, in his speech in Riyadh in May 2017, mentioned the fact that Iran has "a rich history and culture," he also stated that Iran has "fueled sectarian conflict,"[64] implying this was a one-way street. Although it would not have been politically prudent for Trump in Riyadh to say publicly that this sectarian conflict is the result of both Iran and Saudi Arabia pursuing it, the omission of any mention of the Saudis in this conflict was undoubtedly interpreted in Iran as the United States taking sides in a sectarian dispute. Trump's warm meeting with Bahraini king during this same visit was also probably taken that way.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICYMAKERS ON DEALING WITH IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

Separating the Nuclear Deal from Iran's Regional Activities

It behooves U.S. policymakers to parse out the nuclear deal from other aspects of Iranian behavior. As long as Iran is adhering to the nuclear deal and not violating any of its components (such as limiting uranium enrichment to a low level and allowing IAEA inspectors

to monitor Iranian facilities), the U.S. administration should continue to certify to Congress (a process required by law) that Iran is complying with the agreement. To do otherwise might set in motion a series of events that could result in a major military conflict. For example, if the United States decides to pull out of the nuclear agreement, Iran might feel compelled to pull out of it as well and restart a major nuclear program. If that happens, Israel might decide to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, prompting Iran to retaliate by using groups under its influence like Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Even Hamas, which has distanced itself from Iran in recent years because of Tehran's support for the Assad government in the Syrian civil war but has now been seeking a rapprochement with Iran,[65] might join the fight as well. Having the Arab-Israeli situation erupt into a major violent conflagration would destabilize the Middle East even more than it is now. If the U.S. administration believes U.S. strikes on Iran (a result of Iran restarting its nuclear program in a major way) were going to lead to an upheaval in Iran that would cause a change of regime, they are likely to be disappointed. Under that scenario, Iranians of most political persuasions would likely rally around the flag and support the regime against "the aggressor" as they would term it.

Moreover, for the United States to pull out of the nuclear agreement when Iran is technically in compliance would not be supported by U.S. allies in Europe. These allies do not want a war scenario to become a reality and are interested in doing business with Iran. They would see the United States as both contributing to a war and hurting their own economies by creating conditions in which their own companies would not be safe investing or doing business with Iran.

Furthermore, pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal when Iran remains in compliance would set a very bad precedent for any other country that develops a nuclear program and comes to an agreement with the international community to limit it. Such countries might not trust the United States to stick to its part of the bargain if the United States uses the excuse of a particular country not adhering to the "spirit" of the agreement, whatever that might mean.

Finally, U.S. officials need to understand that, even though Supreme Leader Khamenei gave President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif the green light to negotiate with the P5+1 countries, the deal would not have been concluded if there were a different Iranian negotiating team in place. Rouhani and Zarif, while part of the regime, are much more willing to deal with the West than the regime hardliners. Although it is true that Khamenei is the ultimate decision-maker, when it became apparent that the Iranian public overwhelmingly supported the deal and to renege on it would likely cause political problems at home for the regime, Khamenei put aside his own misgivings about it,[66] and the hardline IRGC had to fall in line. For the United States to pull out of the deal would likely deal a blow to the moderates and give the hardliners even more power than they have now, and that would not be in the U.S. interest.

Some U.S. officials and think tank analysts, past and present, have argued that there is no real difference between the so-called moderates and the hardliners in Iran,[67] and note that, in any case, the IRGC, especially its elite intelligence Quds force, which aids terrorist groups in the region and supports Shia militias in Iraq and Syria, is only answerable to the Supreme Leader and not the President. While the latter part of

this argument is true, for the United States to pursue policies that would weaken the moderates eliminates potential and reasonable interlocutors that the United States would have with Iran not just on the nuclear issue, but on other issues that may arise in the future. It should be remembered that, although the United States and Iran have had bad relations since 1979, historically, the two countries have had good relations that went beyond U.S. support for the last Shah. Tens of thousands of Iranians studied in the United States and, as mentioned earlier, the young generation, which has only known the present regime, yearns for better relations with the United States and the West. Keeping a line open to Iran, even at a time when the United States has strong differences with the regime over its regional policies, will serve as an insurance policy for the future in the event that Iran does indeed have a truly moderate regime one day, not just a moderate presidency and foreign ministry.

Tone Down the Rhetoric over the Iranian Missile Threat

There has been much U.S. attention on Iran's development and testing of missiles, and the Trump administration and many members of Congress have strongly objected to this type of activity.[68] Trump himself might use Iran's ongoing missile program, even though it was not explicitly part of the nuclear deal, to argue that Iran is not in compliance with the "spirit" of the deal. However, U.S. anxieties about these missiles should be placed in context. As long as these missiles are not equipped with a nuclear warhead (which would be a violation of the nuclear deal in any case), they are not a real threat to Iran's neighbors. If Iran would ever fire a

missile toward Israel or Saudi Arabia, these two countries, backed by the United States, could easily retaliate against Iran with their own conventional weapons, although the Israelis would probably be able to do much more damage to Iran than the Saudis despite the fact that the latter is closer geographically to Iran than the former. If the United States has not done so already, it should quietly inform the Iranians that any missile strike against a U.S. ally in the region would invite not only counterstrikes by these two countries but a possible strike by the United States as well. The situation would change dramatically if Iran were to ever to develop and put a nuclear warhead on one of these missiles—and certainly Israel would see such a development as an existential threat and act accordingly—but the Iranians are not so foolish as to go down this road knowing the potential of Israel's capabilities.

U.S. efforts to compel Iran to dismantle its missiles are not likely to work. It should be remembered that Iran was subjected to many missile strikes from Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, including attacks on Tehran.[69] Iran believes that missiles are vital for its defense and are a source of national pride. Such missile tests look impressive on Iranian television sets and are a warning to its adversaries, but without a nuclearized capability, Iran's missile program is largely for deterrence purposes. Hence, the United States should lower the political temperature about the Iranian "missile threat" and learn to live with it while pressing countries not to sell Iran any components that could help it take this program to a more advanced stage.

Focus Attention on, and Bring Iran into Negotiations Over, Regional Conflicts

The Israel and Palestine Conflict

While keeping the nuclear deal intact, Washington should focus on Iran's regional activities that it and its allies consider to be a threat. The real and immediate problems that the United States faces with Iran is its support for terrorist groups as well as radical Shia groups that have emerged as a result of conflicts in the region. As mentioned earlier, Iran continues to support groups like Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and has long-standing relationships with both. Although Hezbollah is busy these days supporting the Assad government in fighting Syrian Sunni rebels as well as ISIS units on or near the Lebanese border with Syria, its receipt of Iranian arms and financial assistance over the years has helped to fuel several mini-wars with Israel in the past and could do so again in the future.[70] Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza has been known to fire rockets into Israel even at times when Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, has entered into a truce with Israel, as a way of fomenting tensions.[71]

Although Iran is unlikely to be persuaded to desist from supporting some Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, considering them to be resistance groups against Israel, bringing Iran into negotiations over the future of Syria can be a way to address its support for Hezbollah that is deeply involved in the Syrian crisis. If a compromise settlement can be reached on Syria, one that would leave the Assad government in charge of Damascus and some other areas of Syria, Iran might be mollified because it would still be able to retain a degree of influence in that country. U.S. and European

officials, possibly with the backing of Russia, could then try to persuade Iran to lessen its support for Hezbollah or at least counsel Hezbollah not to start a new conflict with Israel that would again throw the region into chaos. Iran already knows that Israel has hit Hezbollah targets in Syria over the past few years, and, while Hezbollah could inflict pain on Israel through a barrage of rocket attacks as it did in 2006, Israel still remains the dominant military power in that region. Hence, bringing Iran into discussions on the future of Syria, while not a formula for ending the Iran-Hezbollah relationship, could possibly preclude another Israeli-Hezbollah military confrontation.

As for the Palestinians, the recent rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah, if successful, could isolate Palestinian Islamic Jihad further. Iran would have to think long and hard if it would want to use the Palestinian Islamic Jihad as a spoiler, which runs the risk of alienating the majority of Palestinians. U.S. officials could raise the issue of Iran's support for Palestinian Islamic Jihad on the sidelines of a conference on Syria, and urge Tehran to lessen its support for this group.

Sectarian conflicts persist in the Gulf. U.S. policymakers should try to facilitate talks between Iran and the Gulf Arab states over Iran's support for some militant Shia groups in the Gulf as well as the repression of Shia communities in these states. This would ease Saudi concerns about internal subversive activities in their own country as well as those of its neighbors, but in order for such talks to succeed, the situation of the Shia in these countries would have to be addressed. Although most Shia in Bahrain have remained peaceful, even during this current phase of repression, there is a small radical fringe that believes in violence. The Bahraini authorities have arrested and killed some of

these violent operatives, some of whom have allegedly received training in Iran.[72] Other Gulf countries have also alleged being the object of Iranian intelligence operations. On August 12, 2017, Kuwait, for example, announced that it had recaptured 12 people, all Shiites, who had been convicted in a 2015 case and who were allegedly involving an Iranian intelligence operation after a safe house was discovered containing guns and explosives.[73] As for the Saudis, they tend to see any Shia protest or disturbance as having an Iranian hand behind it, regardless of the actual circumstances. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether claims of Iranian subversion in the kingdom are true or not. As mentioned earlier, the Shia in the Gulf have legitimate grievances without being stoked by Iran, but Iran often capitalizes on these grievances to try to extend its influence in these communities. Because Iran and Saudi Arabia were able to come to an understanding in 2017 over the hajj, which took place without incident, it is not inconceivable that they could come to some type of understanding or even an agreement on the Shia issue in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Ultimately, this would involve an Iranian pledge not to engage in covert activities among the Shia of the area while Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab states commit to improving the political and economic status of their Shia communities. Admittedly, reaching such an understanding would be a long shot given the present environment, but, as mentioned earlier, an Iranian-Saudi rapprochement did take place in the 1990s and could possibly take place in the near future if all of the parties, including the United States, come to the realization that easing of tensions is better than confrontation.

On Iraq, the United States can work more closely with Saudi Arabia to lessen the Iraqi Government's dependence on Iran, which would help reduce Riyadh's concerns about Iranian influence there. Iran has been heavily involved through its Quds force (the intelligence arm of the IRGC) in training and equipping the so-called Population Mobilization Forces made up of mostly Iraqi Shia volunteers.[74] These units played a key role in defending Baghdad in the summer of 2014 when ISIS was on the march, and have played important roles in fighting ISIS in the northern and western part of Iraq over the past 3 years. Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi has a delicate role to play with regard to these militias, some of which are tied to various pro-Iranian Shia political groups in Iraq. He wants to build up and make more competent the regular Iraqi Army with U.S. support (which has been ongoing since 2014) and probably does not like the fact that the Popular Mobilization Forces, while part of the anti-ISIS campaign, answer more to the Iranians in some cases than to the Iraqi Government. Indeed, a number of Shia groups and leaders in Iraq, including Ayatollah al-Sistani, want to lessen Iran's role in Iraq.[75] Over the last year, Saudi Arabia has recognized this trend and has tried to cultivate a friendship not only with Abadi but also with radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who was once an ally of Iran. Both were invited to Riyadh in 2017.[76] The United States should continue to encourage this Saudi policy. Although U.S. policymakers would like the Popular Mobilization Forces disbanded or melded into the regular army, they seem to understand that Abadi is in a tight spot because some of these forces have prominent backers in the Iraqi Shia community. The United States should be patient with Abadi and allow him time to deal with the Popular Mobilization

Forces at his own pace, and should counsel the Saudis not to put unrealistic pressure on him over the same issue. U.S. policymakers and Saudi officials should also understand that it is unrealistic for Abadi or any Shia politician to try to completely eliminate Iranian influence in Iraq, given Iran's ties to several of Iraqi Shia groups and its economic and religious links to the country. For example, thousands of Iranians travel to southern Iraq every year to visit the Shiite holy sites in the country. Moreover, a policy to break Iraq's ties to Iran would almost certainly elicit a strong Iranian response that could be carried out through its proxies inside Iraq.

On Syria, as mentioned earlier, U.S. policymakers should seek a political solution to the crisis that would involve Iran. Iran has played a role in shoring up the military capabilities of the Assad government not only by sending IRGC operatives to Syria but in coordinating the logistics and training of Shia elements from various countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, into militias fighting on behalf of Assad. The United States has prudently acted cautiously toward these Shia militias, and the few clashes that have taken place between U.S. forces and these militias have only occurred when the former have felt threatened, but these few clashes have not escalated into a conflagration.[77] However, some U.S. policymakers hold out the hope that the Syrian crisis can be solved by excluding Iran altogether, which is not realistic. As long as the Assad government remains in power, Iran is going to have some influence in Syria, but the longer the conflict drags on, the more Iran's influence grows because the Assad government needs the pro-Iran militias, including Hezbollah, to fight on its side.

Syria is a complicated puzzle, with some groups fighting against common enemies while others are fighting among themselves. Once ISIS is defeated in Syria, there will still be various militia and rebel forces in the country pursuing different objectives, including pro-Iranian and pro-Saudi groups. Iran would like the Assad government to last and take back more Syrian territory while the Saudis would like Assad to step down from power and have a Sunni group take over the government. These are seemingly irreconcilable positions, but Syria is such a divided country that the current situation of pockets of territory under the control of particular groups could last for some time. U.S. policymakers should convince the Saudis that bringing the Iranians into negotiations for a political solution to the Syrian crisis would be preferable to keeping them out where they would have more of an incentive to cause mischief.

Placating Saudi Arabia

As for Saudi Arabia, the United States needs to play the role of a big brother who is protective of his sibling and advises him not to get into trouble. The way this could be done is for U.S. policymakers to underscore to the Saudis that U.S. forces will remain in the region as the ultimate protector of the Saudi kingdom, and will continue to have a robust naval presence in the Gulf to keep Iran in check and to keep the Straits of Hormuz as well as the Bab el-Mandab (connecting the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea) open to international traffic. The United States should also pledge to the Saudis that it will do all it can to compel the IAEA to continue its robust monitoring of the Iran nuclear deal to make sure Tehran is complying with all of its provisions and

limitations on its nuclear program. The United States can also offer the Saudis more joint military training exercises as a way of reassuring the U.S. commitment to Saudi Arabia's security. At the same time, the United States should counsel the Saudis not to embark on any more military ventures that have become disasters like the Yemen conflict. Saudi and Emirati military intervention in Yemen has not led to any significant military breakthroughs except for the capture of some slivers of territory by forces loyal to the Hadi government. Although there are now tensions between the Houthis and Saleh's forces,[78] these two groups are unlikely to split apart to allow Hadi, backed by the Saudis and Emiratis, to come back into power. This military stalemate apparently led Defense Secretary Mattis to conclude, and say so publicly in Riyadh, that the Yemeni conflict "needs a political solution."[79] In addition, the United States should advise the Saudis in private to end discriminatory policies toward its own Shia community not only because it would work toward ending internal strife in the kingdom, but also because it would deny Iran a role in exploiting Shia grievances for their own purposes. As mentioned earlier, if Saudi-Iranian tensions ease, the United States could perhaps play a role in facilitating an understanding between the Saudis and the other Gulf Arab countries and Iran whereby Iran pledges to cease covert support for Shia militants in the Gulf while these Gulf Arab countries pledge to ease the repression and improve the lot of their own Shia communities.

The Yemen problem remains a serious problem in the region over which Saudi-Iranian relations are particularly tense. The Saudis are insisting that Iran not play any role in a Yemeni settlement, but this stance is shortsighted.[80] If the reason for Saudi intervention in

Yemen was Iran's assistance to the Houthi rebels, then the Saudis cannot then say Iran should have no role in the negotiations if the Saudis themselves are serious about a negotiated settlement. The U.S. position should be that a settlement should involve all parties to the conflict. The same should be said for the case for Syria, as mentioned earlier. Without buy-in from the regional players, plus the Yemeni and Syrian groups on the ground, neither the Yemen nor the Syrian conflict will be settled via a political settlement.

Continued violence in both Yemen and Syria not only will cause more humanitarian crises but could also spill over into other areas, creating even more instability in the region. U.S. policymakers should use their influence with the Saudis to come to the negotiating table and persuade them not to veto an Iranian role. U.S. policymakers should understand that, however undesirable it is for them to countenance an Iranian role in negotiations, it is better to have the Iranians play a constructive role than a destructive one in regional affairs. In this vein, U.S. policymakers should desist from criticizing the Iran nuclear deal and desist from saying that they will pull out of it. Quietly allowing the nuclear deal to remain as is would have the effect of toning down the rather harsh rhetoric that has emerged in both Washington and Tehran as of late.[81] This would then allow U.S. officials to talk with the Iranians about a settlement to both the Yemen and Syrian conflicts and to be supportive of each other's presence, not necessarily of their policies, at the negotiating table. If U.S. and Iranian diplomats could hammer out a complicated nuclear deal, they can certainly try their best to figure out a political roadmap and an ultimate settlement for these two conflicts. Under the Obama administration, Iran was included in some international meetings on the Syrian crisis, and so it

would not be a stretch to include Iran in a new round of negotiations.

If these negotiations go well, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf Arab states, plus the United States, could also address the issue of Iranian subversive activities in some of the GCC states. But for such talks to succeed, the Gulf Arab states would also have to listen to Iran's concern about the situation of the Shia communities in these states. Although this is a tall order, it could be tackled if there first is progress on Syria and Yemen.

Critics of this approach will undoubtedly say that bringing Iranians in, as opposed to keeping them out, will merely solidify their gains in the Arab world where they will carry on with their nefarious activities, but the Iranians are already involved in these areas anyway. It is better to know their intentions and find ways to modify them than to treat them as perpetual enemies and always be reacting to their moves. If negotiations succeed in both the Yemen and Syrian cases involving the Saudis and the Iranians, then there could also be opportunities to lessen tensions between these two counties in the Gulf region where they can find some accommodation.

The recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to allow Iranian pilgrims to participate in this year's hajj, despite the two countries lack of formal diplomatic relations, gives hope that they could possibly find common ground on other issues. As the history of Saudi-Iranian relations have shown in the first part of this monograph, the two countries may be rivals, but they do not have to be enemies. U.S. policymakers should encourage such cooperation and support more of it instead of blindly following hardline Saudi policies (like the recent Saudi-led effort to isolate Qatar) and military ventures that have caused state-to-state

conflicts and sectarian tensions to rise in the region. A more stable region would be in the U.S. national security interest by lessening the chances of war and interventions, and keeping the vital sea lanes—not just in the Gulf but also in the Red Sea—open.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY

The recommendations for U.S. policymakers in this monograph are bound to make Saudi Arabia nervous that the United States would be distancing itself from the kingdom while seeking a major accommodation with Iran. Although such an interpretation of these recommendations is exaggerated, especially as a significant U.S. accommodation with Iran is not likely in the near future for a variety of reasons, U.S. policymakers need to assure the Saudis that they would still have their back as they seek to bring Iran into negotiations on regional conflicts.

Here a role for the U.S. Army comes into play. Although an Iranian invasion of Saudi Arabia is unlikely, U.S. Army trainers can work with their Saudi counterparts to train for such a contingency. This can be done via exercises within the kingdom—preferably in remote areas so as not to spur opposition in the country from elements who oppose U.S. troops (the U.S. troop presence in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s became a contentious issue)[82] or by bringing Saudi military units to the United States and train them at U.S. Army bases.

Employing the U.S. Army's Stability Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB) created in 2017 to assist Saudi Arabia's ground forces may also be a way to reassure the Saudis of the U.S. commitment to their security. SFABs are to be permanent units designed to conduct security cooperation activities with friendly nations to train, advise, and assist their army components.

By training for contingency operations, they can be quickly deployed overseas to aid partners in various operations, including counterinsurgency operations. Having dedicated units that can respond quickly in case of threats to Saudi Arabia would undoubtedly ease Saudi concerns about Iran and Iranian-supported forces.

Concerning immediate threats, U.S. Army Special Forces can work with the Saudi Army on ways to protect its border with Yemen better, especially areas along the northern Yemeni border that are adjacent to the Houthi heartland in Yemen. Having this border area strengthened would not only reassure the Saudis that the Houthis would not be able to stage attacks against Saudi Arabia from this region, but would underscore the U.S. commitment to safeguarding Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity.

In working closely with Saudi military units, U.S. Army officers should avoid getting into discussions with their Saudi counterparts about the Houthis as a dangerous "Shia" group. Although many Saudis will likely make disparaging remarks about the Shia, U.S. officers should try to avoid such discussions and instead steer their talks with the Saudi counterparts to effective ways to protect the Saudi kingdom geostrategically, not theologically, for the reasons outlined in this monograph.

ENDNOTES

1. This quote was in the article (an extensive interview with President Obama) in Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

2. "President Trump's Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit," The White House, May 21, 2017, available from

https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/21/president-trumps-speech-arab-islamic-american-summit.

3. Adam Taylor, "The First Time a U.S. President Met a Saudi King," *The Washington Post*, January 27, 2015, available from *https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/01/27/the-first-time-a-u-s-president-met-a-saudi-king/?utm_term=.a441ad455c2b*, accessed November 1, 2018.

4. The history of this episode is well documented in Richard Pfau, "Containment in Iran, 1946. The Shift to an Active Policy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall 1977, pp. 359-372.

5. Mark Gasiorowski, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Iran During the Mussadiq Era," in David Lesch, ed., *The Middle East and the United States*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003, p. 62.

6. Adam Tarock, *The Superpowers' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 1998, pp. 102-103.

7. James Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Sheikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009, pp. 22-23.

8. Ibid., p. 23. For current tensions between the United Arab Emirates and Iran outside of the dispute over the islands, see "UAE: Iranian interference cause of tension in region," *Gulf News*, April 22, 2017, available from *http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/governmentuae-iranian-interference-cause-of-tension-in-region-1.2015589*.

9. Geraint Hughes, "Oman—On the Ground in Dhofar," London, UK: Defense Studies Department, Kings College, 2015, available from *https://defenceindepth.co/2015/02/04/oman-on-the-ground-in-dhofar/*.

10. Ali Vaez and Karim Sadjadpour, *Iran's Nuclear Odyssey, Costs and Risks*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 5.

11. Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 147. For an informative comparison between the political systems of Iran and Saudi

Arabia, see Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011, pp. 42-63.

12. Frederick Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 31-34.

13. F. Gregory Gause, *International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 65.

14. Ibid., p. 7.

15. Ibid., pp. 75-86, 127-128.

16. Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy. From Khomeini to Khatami*, London, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp. 101-104, 143-145. See also Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, pp. 130-131.

17. Michael Knights, "The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 3, Iss. 11, November 1, 2010, available from *https://ctc.usma.edu/november-2010/*.

18. F. Gregory Gause, "Why the Iran Deal Scares Saudi Arabia," *The New Yorker*, November 26, 2013.

19. Wehrey, pp. 81-83. For an interesting and thoughtful analysis of Saudi Arabia's and Iran's approach to the Arab Spring, see W. Andrew Terrill, *The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and the Future of the Middle East*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 2011, pp. 9-14.

20. Souad Mekhennet and Joby Warrick, "In Bahrain's militant cells, U.S. sees Iran," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2017.

21. Michael Morell, "Iran's grand strategy is to become a regional powerhouse," *The Washington Post*, April 3, 2015, available from *https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/irans-grand-strategy/2015/04/03/415ec8a8-d8a3-11e4-ba28-f2a685dc7f89_story.html?utm_term=.632ef6e97805*.

22. "Shia Minority Makes Gains in Kuwait Election," Al Jazeera, December 2, 2012, available from *http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212252435988688.html*.

23. Ben Hubbard, "Dialogue with Iran Is Impossible, Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister Says," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2017, available from *https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/02/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-iran-defense-minister.html*.

24. Mohammad Javad Zarif, "Let Us Rid the World of Wahhabism," *The New York Times*, September 13, 2016, available from *https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/14/opinion/mohammad-javad-zarif-let-us-rid-the-world-of-wahhabism.html?_r=0*.

25. "Iran Calls London Terror Attacks 'a Wake-Up Call' Urging West to Pursue Extremism's Root Causes," *The Independent*, June 5, 2017, available from *http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/ira-london-terror-attack-wake-up-call-west-islam-extremism-root-causes-muslim-jihadis-violence-saud-a7772856.html*.

26. Hugh Naylor, "Iran-Loyal Shiite Militias Are on Aleppo's Front Line," *The Washington Post*, November 21, 2016; Conor Gaffey, "War in Syria: Russia and Saudi Arabia Disagree on what to do about Assad," *Newsweek*, April 17, 2017.

27. W. Andrew Terrill, "Iranian Involvement in Yemen," *Orbis*, Vol. 58, No. 3, Summer 2014, pp. 435-436. See also Mareike Transfeld, "Iran's Small Hand in Yemen," Carnegie Papers, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 14, 2017, available from *http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/67988*.

28. Ibrahim Fraihat, "Will Saudi Arabia's 'Operation Decisive Storm' Restore Order in Yemen?" Brookings Papers, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, March 28, 2015, available from *https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/will-saudi-arabias-operation-decisive-storm-restore-order-in-yemen/*.

29. Perry Cammack and Richard Sokolsky, "Careful of What You Wish For," Beirut, Lebanon: Carnegie Endowment for Middle East Peace, July 25, 2017, available from *http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/72612*.

30. "Why Saudi Arabia and Israel oppose Iran nuclear deal," Al Jazeera, April 14, 2015, available from *http://www.*

aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/saudi-arabia-israel-oppose-iran-nuclear-deal-150401061906177.html.

31. The author heard such comments at think tanks in Washington, DC in 2015.

32. Liz Sly, "Saudi Arabia's execution of cleric ignites fury in Iran," *The Washington Post,* January 2, 2016, available from: *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/saudi-arabia-executes-47-people-including-prominent-shiite-cleric/2016/01/02/01bfee06-198e-4eb6-ab5e-a5bcc8fb85c6_story.html?utm_term=.ff0bcecca5d9*, accessed November 1, 2018.

33. "Qatar Restores Diplomatic Ties with Iran Amid Gulf Crisis," BBC News, August 24, 2017, available from *http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41035672*.

34. "Saudi Arabia and Iran Fail to Reach Deal on Hajj," Al Jazeera, May 27, 2016, available from *http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/saudi-arabia-iran-hajj-160527210605054.html*.

35. Mehdi Khalaji, "Ideology Outweighs Diplomacy in Iran's Hajj Decision," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch, August 28, 2017, available from *http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/ideology-outweighs-diplomacy-in-irans-hajj-decision*.

36. "Iran nuclear deal: Key details," BBC News, May 8, 2018, available from *http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33521655*.

37. Awad Mustafa and Aaron Mehta, "State: $33 Billion in GCC Weapons Sales in 11 Months," Defense News, March 25, 2016, available from *https://www.defensenews.com/2016/03/25/state-33-billion-in-gcc-weapon-sales-in-11-months/*.

38. Mark Hosenball, Phil Stewart, and Warren Strobel, "Exclusive: U.S. Expands Intelligence Sharing with Saudis in Yemen Operation," Reuters, April 10, 2015, available from *http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-yemen-exclusive-idUSKBN0N129W20150410*.

39. "John Kerry warns Iran over support for Houthis in Yemen," *The Guardian*, April 9, 2015, available from *https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/08/us-arms-deliveries-saudi-coalition-yemen-aden*.

40. "Nov. 18: Hopes of a Cease-Fire Are Quickly Dashed," *Stratfor Worldview*, November 18, 2016, available from *https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/nov-18-hopes-cease-fire-are-quickly-dashed*.

41. "Airstrikes on Yemen funeral kill at least 140 people, UN official says," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2016, available from *https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/08/saudi-led-coalition-airstrike-hit-yemen-funeral-officials-say*.

42. "Saudi Coalition Cites 'Technical Mistake' in Yemen Strike," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2017.

43. Ahmed al-Haj, "Yemen Civil War: 10,000 Civilians Killed and 40,000 Injured in Conflict, UN Reveals," *The Independent*, January 17, 2017, available from *http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yemen-civil-war-civilian-death-toll-10000-killed-40000-injured-conflcit-un-reveals-a7530836.html*.

44. Sudarsan Raghavan,"Yemenis Battle a Cholera Epidemic," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2017.

45. Ben Norton, "A Congressman Campaigns to 'Stop the Madness' of U.S. Support for Saudi Bombing in Yemen," *The Intercept*, August 22, 2016, available from *https://theintercept.com/2016/08/22/a-congressman-campaigns-to-stop-the-madness-of-u-s-support-for-saudi-bombing-in-yemen/*.

46. Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: U.S. withdraws staff from Saudi Arabia dedicated to Yemen planning," Reuters, August 19, 2016, available from *http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-usa-saudiarabia-idUSKCN10U1TL*; and Jessica Schulberg, "White House: U.S. Support for Saudi Air War not a 'Blank Check'," *Huffington Post*, October 9, 2016, available from *http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-house-saudi-arabia-yemen_us_57f99921e4b068ecb5df3c37*.

47. Editorial, "The U.S. Ally that Bombed a Funeral," *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2017, available from *https://www.*

washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-us-ally-that-bombed-a-funeral/2016/10/12/cddff03c-8fe9-11e6-a6a3-d50061aa9fae_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.228e01f1307c.

48. "U.S. Defense Chief Mattis: Wherever There's Trouble in the Middle East, You Find Iran," *Haaretz*, April 19, 2017, available from *http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/iran/1.784394*.

49. On the background of the hold-up precision guided munitions to Saudi Arabia, see Missy Ryan and Anne Gearan, "U.S. Moves to Resume Sales of Weapons to Saudi Arabia," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 2017. On critical comments on the efficacy of the U.S. support for the Saudi campaign in Yemen, see Editorial, "The U.S. Ally that Bombed a Funeral."

50. All quotes found in "President Trump's Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit."

51. "Trump tells Bahrain King: 'Our Countries Have a Wonderful Relationship Together'," Al Arabiya, May 21, 2017, available from *http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2017/05/21/Trump-tells-Bahrain-king-Our-diplomatic-relationship-will-get-stronger-.html*.

52. Karen DeYoung, "U.S. to Certify Iran as Compliant with Nuclear Agreement," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 2017.

53. Pamela Falk, "Haley Takes U.S. 'Concerns' on Iran to the Nuclear Police," CBS News, August 23, 2017, available from *https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nikki-haley-us-donald-trump-concerns-on-iran-nuclear-deal-iaea-yukiya-amano/*.

54. Fred Kaplan, "Brace Yourself for Iran Deal Repeal," *Slate*, July 27, 2017, available from *http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2017/07/trump_may_soon_try_to_kill_the_iran_deal.html*.

55. "Iran Touts Its Nuclear Readiness: Five Days," Associated Press, August 23, 2017.

56. "Trump 'Understands Iran Better than Obama': Bahrain," *Alaraby*, April 5, 2017, available from *https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/4/5/trump-understands-iran-better-than-obama-bahrain*.

57. All quotes found in Hubbard; See also Sami Aboudi and Omar Fahmy, "Powerful Saudi Prince Sees No Chance for Dialogue with Iran," Reuters, May 2, 2017, available from *http://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-prince-iran-idUSKBN17Y1FK*.

58. Mustafa Salim, Karen DeYoung, and Tamar El-Ghobashy, "Tillerson Says Kurdish Independence Vote Is Illegitimate," *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2017.

59. David Francis, "How the U.S. Lost Billions Over 9 Years in Iraq," *The Fiscal Times*, June 19, 2014, available from *http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2014/06/19/How-US-Lost-Billions-Over-9-Years-Iraq*.

60. Wassim Bassem, "Iraq Wrangling with $26.6 Billion Budget Deficit," *Al Monitor*, November 30, 2016, available from *http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/iraq-budget-financial-deficit-corruption.html*.

61. Alison Meuse, "Human Rights Activists Warn of Worsening Situation in Bahrain," NPR, June 6, 2017, available from *http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/06/06/531216993/human-rights-activists-warn-of-worsening-situation-in-bahrain*.

62. Cameron Glenn, "Iran v Saudi Arabia: Islam's Arch Rivals," *The Iran Primer*, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, January 4, 2016, available from *http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2016/jan/04/iran-v-saudi-arabia-islam's-arch-rivals*. In this article, Glenn notes that Saudi Arabia since the 1980s spent US$100 billion promoting Wahhabism. See also Saud Al Sarhan, "The Struggle for Authority: The Shaykhs of Jihadi-Salafism in Saudi Arabia, 1997-2003," in Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stephanie Lacroix, eds., *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 181-206; and Thomas Hegghammer, "'Classical' and 'Global' Jihadism in Saudi Arabia," in Haykel, Hegghammer, and Lacroix, eds., *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, pp. 207-228.

63. Saeed Kamali Deghan and Ian Black, "Thousands Take to Iran Streets to Celebrate the Historic Nuclear Deal," *The Guardian*, July 14, 2015, available from *https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/14/*

joy-in-tehran-at-end-to-isolation-but-hardliner-reaction-to-nuclear-deal-feared.

64. "President Trump's Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit."

65. Nidal al-Mughrabi, "After Syria Fall-Out, Hamas Ties to Iran Restored: Hamas Chief," Reuters, August 28, 2017, available from *https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-hamas-iran-idUSKCN1B81KC*.

66. Kay Armin Serjoie, "The Divide Over the Nuclear Deal in Iran," *Time*, August 2, 2016, available from *http://time.com/4436121/iran-nuclear-deal-khamenei-rouhani/*.

67. Ray Takeyh, "Iran's President Isn't a Reformer. He's an Enabler," *Politico*, May 22, 2017, available from *http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/05/22/irans-president-isnt-a-reformer-hes-an-enabler-215171*.

68. Julian Pecquet, "Congress Takes Aim at Iran's Ballistic Missiles," *Al Monitor*, March 23, 2017, available from *http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/congress-aim-iran-ballistic-missiles-aipac-conference.html*.

69. Gause, *International Relations in the Persian Gulf*, p. 75.

70. "Syrian Army, Hezbollah Allies Attack ISIS near Lebanon Border," *The Boston Globe*, August 18, 2017.

71. "Hamas: We Want Truce, Despite Rocket Attacks," CNN, June 24, 2008, available from *http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/06/24/gaza.truce/index.html*.

72. Souad Mekhennet and Joby Warrick, "In Bahrain's Militant Cells, U.S. Sees Iran," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2017.

73. Naser Al Wasmi, "Kuwait Recaptures 12 Members of Iran-Backed Cell," *The National*, August 12, 2017, available from *https://www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/kuwait-recaptures-12-members-of-iran-backed-cell-1.618911*.

74. For a comprehensive analysis of the Popular Mobilization Forces, see Renad Mansour and Faleh Jabar, "The Popular

MobilizationForcesandIraq'sFuture,"CarnegieMiddleEastCenter, April 28, 2017, available from *http://carnegie-mec.org/2017/04/28/popular-mobilization-forces-and-iraq-s-future-pub-68810*.

75. Hanin Ghaddar, "Are Shia Dynamics in Iraq and Lebanon Turning Against Iran?" Policywatch 2865, Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 5, 2017, available from *http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/are-shia-dynamics-in-iraq-and-lebanon-turning-against-iran*.

76. Taimur Khan, "Iraqi PM Makes First Visit to Saudi Arabia," *The National*, June 19, 2017, available from *https://www.thenational.ae/world/iraqi-pm-makes-first-visit-to-saudi-arabia-1.3515*. See also "Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr Makes Rare Saudi Visit," Al Jazeera, July 31, 2017, available from *http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/iraq-muqtada-al-sadr-rare-saudi-visit-170731073908238.html*.

77. Louisa Loveluck, "U.S. Airstrike in Syria Targeted Force Backed by Iran," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2017. See also the quote by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, who said "The only actions we have taken against pro-regime forces in Syria . . . have been in self defense." Karen DeYoung and Greg Jaffe, "U.S. on Collision Course with Syria and Iran Once de facto Islamic State Capital Falls," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2017, available from *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-on-collision-course-with-syria-and-iran-after-fall-of-de-facto-islamic-state-capital/2017/06/21/b03d9620-55cc-11e7-ba90-f5875b7d1876_story.html?utm_term=.d042226414f9*.

78. "Tensions Rise between Houthis and Saleh Loyalists in Yemen," *Al-Arabiya*, August 27, 2017, available from *http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2017/08/27/Houthi-political-council-sacks-29-Saleh-loyalists-in-deepening-rift.html*.

79. Helene Cooper, "Jim Mattis, in Saudi Visit, Calls for Political Solution in Yemen," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2017, available from *https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/19/world/middleeast/jim-mattis-yemen-saudi-arabia.html*.

80. "Saudi Arabia and Yemen: Iran Is Part of Yemeni Crisis," *Arab News*, August 23, 2017, available from *http://www.arabnews.com/node/1149236/saudi-arabia*.

81. Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran's President Threatens to Restart Nuclear Program," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2017, available from *https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-hassan-rouhani-us.html*.

82. Gause, *International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 128.

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

Major General John S. Kem
Commandant

*****

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
AND
U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE PRESS

Director
Professor Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr.

Director of Research
Dr. Steven K. Metz

Author
Gregory Aftandilian

Editor for Production
Dr. James G. Pierce

Publications Assistant
Ms. Denise J. Kersting

*****

Composition
Mr. Ryan A. Hoffman

U.S.ARMY

THE
UNITED STATES
ARMY WAR COLLEGE

STRENGTH and WISDOM

FOR THIS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS, VISIT US AT
https://www.armywarcollege.edu/

ISBN 1-58487-796-0

9 781584 877967 90000 >

This Publication

SSI Website

USAWC Website