# Iranian and Saudi Mutual (Mis)Representations: A Study of the Relationship between Discourses of *Othering*, Political Confrontation and Sectarian Strife




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# Declaration

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*'Remember that the citizens of the state are of two categories. They are either your brethren in religion or your brethren in kind'- Imam Ali ibn Abi Taleb.*

*To My Mother, Thank You for Everything.*

# Abstract

The objective of this dissertation is to study the concept of the 'representation of the Other' in the context of Saudi-Iranian confrontation and Shi'i-Wahhabi strife. The aim of this study is to incorporate discourse analysis, to study mutual Iranian-Saudi representation of each other in political, religious and media genres. Therefore, taking on a relatively new approach to the study of these two states.

By conducting a diachronic approach from 1979 to 2009, this dissertation discusses the employment of tropes and narratives to explore the concept of the 'representation of the Other' in the context of Saudi-Iranian confrontation. Since the constructivist approach allows for a better understanding to the representation of *Othering* in socio-historical and International Relations settings, Foucault's power-knowledge relations; Edward Said's concept of *Othering* and dichotomies in his Orientalism thesis; and image theory based on Hermann and Fischerkeller's image of the enemy are employed. Finally, by investigating three main Iranian and Saudi spheres/discourses, namely the political (speeches of the elite), religious (Friday prayer sermons) and media (newspaper editorials) discourses, this study will try to explain how *Othering* is understood and functions in the Iranian-Saudi discourse, its relationship to political rivalry and religious conflict and how they are understood as cases of political propaganda or religious polemics.

The study findings identify a paradigm shift in analysis of the Saudi-Iranian relationship, moving away from conventional geopolitical and sectarian paradigms, which have been dominant. I conclude that religious and sectarian identities remained a propaganda tool, whereas, the nature of the agenda promoted by both sides was political in nature. The Othering framework employed marks a shift in the longstanding understanding of 'rivalry' in the Saudi-Iranian setting, where the relations between these two sides were dependent on the perceptions of each other, rather than embodying any innate or deeply grounded ideological fervour.

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## Note on Translation and Transliteration

Where possible, I have used the translation and transliteration style the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES).*[2] Definitions for Arabic and Persian terms have been provided with reference to the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Esposito 2003)* and *Dictionary of Islam (Hughes and Hughes 1995).* Any translated material within the text was translated by the author unless otherwise noted.

## Glossary

**Ahl al-Bayt:** People of the House, or family. It refers to the household of Prophet Mohammad

**Ajam:** (singular ajamī) Arabic phrase meaning non-Arab; is also utilised in the Arabian Peninsula to refer to those of Iranian origin.

**Alawite:** An offshoot of Shi'i Islam and a syncretic sect of Twelver Shi'ism who revere Imam Ali, the Prophet Mohammad's cousin. They are mainly centred in Syria.

**Alwaʿd al-Sādiq (Fulfilled Promise):** A Hezbollah operation launched in July 2006 to kidnap two Israeli soldiers in northern Israel.

**Ashura:** *A* day of mourning the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, in 680 AD at Karbala in modern-day Iraq.

**Ayatollah:** Translated as a 'Sign of God', is a high-ranking title given to Twelver Shī'i clerics. Shi'i clerics attain this title after completing the *bahth al-kharij (external research),* the final stage of their seminary education, and attain the level of *'mujtahid'.*

**Basīj:** Translated as 'The Mobilisation', are a voluntary paramilitary force established in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini. They are one of the five forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. They were instrumental in fighting during the Iran-Iraq war.

**Difāʿ-i Muqadas:** The Iranian title referring to the Iran-Iraq war. It is translated to *Holy Defence* or *Sacred Defence*.

**Hajj:** Is an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. It is compulsory for all physically and financially able Muslims to perform this pilgrimage once in their lifetime.

**Hamas:** Is an acronym of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (*Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-ʾIslāmiyyah).* It was founded in 1987 after the first intifadah and since 2007 the *de facto* governing authority of the Gaza Strip.

***Imam:*** A cleric that leads prayers in a mosque. In Shi'i thought, an Imam is a divinely selected, infallible Islamic leader of the line of Imam Ali and Prophet Mohammad. The term can also be employed to mean an Islamic leader that claims descent from the Prophet Mohammad, such as Imam Khomeini in Iran or Imam Musa al-Sadr in Iraq.

**Intifadah:** Palestinian uprisings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1987 and 2000. They aimed at ending Israel's occupation of both Palestinian territories and create an independent Palestinian state.

**Islām-i Nāb-i Muhamadī:** Pure or Pristine Mohammadian Islam

**Istikbār/Istikbār-i Jahānī:** A term that referred to Imperialism, Global Oppression and Arrogance.

**Jāhiliyah:** The 'age of ignorance' signifying the era prior to the advent of Islam. It is an Islamic concept of the period of the time before Islam that is defined by 'ignorance'.

**Karbala:** A city in Iraq and the place of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his mausoleum.

**Kharijites/Khawārij (sing. Kharijī):** Translated as 'The Revolters'. An Islamic sect with a belief that any man can be Caliph regardless of belonging to the tribe of Quraish and through election (shūrah), provided he is pious. The first group revolted and assassinated Imam Ali after they fought under his command in the Battle of Sifīn.

**Khat-i Imām:** Translated as 'The Imam Khomeini's line'. Students and clerics who followed, supported, and advocated the political thoughts of Imam Khomeini on the establishment of the Islamic Republic after the revolution of 1979.

**Mahdi:** Translated literally as 'The Directed One', 'Guide' or 'Leader' and one that is 'fit to direct other'. According to Shi'i thought, the Mahdi is the twelfth infallible Imam. The Mahdi is in a period of occultation and will appear again at the end of the world. The Sunnis believe that he has not appeared.

**Majlis-i Khubrigān:** Translated as the 'Assembly of Experts'. It was first established in 1983 and is empowered to appoint, dismiss, and question the Supreme Leader.

**Majūsī (pl. Majūs):** A term meaning 'Magi' or 'Zoroastrians'. During the Iran-Iraq war, the term was employed with pejorative intentions to refer to Iranians in general. Iraqi propaganda employed the term to frame Iranians as non-sincere Muslims and still hold pre-Islamic beliefs.

**Maktabī:** A person that follows Islam comprehensively.

**Miḥrāb:** An area or niche in the mosque which marks the direction of Mecca (Qiblah). It is the position which the Imam takes in leading prayer.

**Muftī:** An cleric that expounds the law, by issuing edicts (fatwā).

**Muharram:** Is the first month of the Islamic calendar, and literally means 'that which is forbidden'. The first ten days of the month is observed as a period of commemoration by the Shi'a for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain.

**Munāfiq (pl. Munafiqīn):** Hypocrites

**Mustazʿaf (pl. Mustazʿafān (farsi)/Mustazʿafīn):** The oppressed.

**Mustakbir (pl. Mustakbirīn):** The oppressor.

**Nasibī (pl. Nawāsib):** Is a Shi'i term that literally means 'to propose' or 'to have' (nasaba) hatred for the Ahl al-lbayt. Contemporarily, it has been employed to refer to Salafis and Wahhabis.

**Rafiḍī (pl. Rawāfiḍ/Rāfiḍah):** Translated as ‘rejecters’ or ‘rejectionists’. Utilised in contemporary times by Sunnis to refer to the Shi’a since they ‘reject’ the caliph succession of the first three caliphs as Prophet Mohammad’s successors.

**Safawī:** Literally meaning ‘Safavid’ and used by Wahhabi and Salafi clerics to refer to Iranians and their desires to resurrect a Persian Saffavid empire and convert the region to Shi’ism.

**Taqiya:** Literally meaning to ‘guard oneself’. It is a Shi’i principle that allows for ‘pious fraud’. To protect and save oneself from persecution, the Shi’i may conceal his identity and pass himself as a Sunni to escape death or imprisonment. In contemporary times, it the term has been employed to negatively refer to Shi’a as liars and hypocrites.

**Tawhīd:** Literally means ‘oneness’. It is the central part of the monotheistic principle of Islam.

**ʿālim (pl. ulama):** A cleric of the Islamic faith.

**Ummah:** An Islamic community.

**Umayyads:** Are the second of the four major caliphates after the Rashidun caliphate following the death of the Prophet Mohammad. The dynasty began with Mu’awiya I**.**

**Valī-yi Faqīh:** Translated as ‘Guardian of the Faith’ and is an Islamic Jurist. In Iran the title is held by the Supreme Leader of the Revolution.

**Wahhābī:** A member of the Wahhabi group of the Sunni sect founded by Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab (1703-1792). They are known for their strict and puritanical observance of Islamic teachings, known as Salafi teachings. Wahhabism strongly condemn and the Shi’i practices of visiting shrines and revering the saints as heresy. Contemporarily, the term has been employed to refer to Saudi clerics and those that adhere and follow the Saudi Islamic seminaries in Mecca and Medina.

**Yazīd:** The second caliph of the Ummayad dynasty. He was known to order the killing the Imam Hussain at the battle of Karbala in 680AD.

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ***AWACS*** | Airborne Warning and Control System |
| ***CDLR*** | Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights |
| ***EU*** | European Union |
| ***GCC*** | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| ***FPA*** | Foreign Policy Analysis |
| ***IRGC*** | Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps |
| ***IRP*** | Islamic Republic Party |
| ***MEK/MKO*** | Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization |
| ***OIC*** | Organisation of Islamic Cooperation |
| ***OPEC*** | Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries |
| ***PLO*** | Palestinian Liberation Organisation |
| ***SANG*** | Saudi Arabian National Guard |
| ***UIA*** | United Iraqi Alliance |
| ***UK*** | United Kingdom |
| ***UN*** | United Nations |
| ***US*** | United States |
| ***USSR*** | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| ***WMD*** | Weapons of Mass Destruction |

# 1. Introduction

This thesis explores the factors which have shaped the image which Saudi elites have of the Iranian state, and conversely the image which Iranian elites have of the Saudi state. Attention is given to the ways in which these images have been projected in the relationship between the two countries, and the part which this has played in shaping their relations. An understanding of how the images are constructed requires, for each side, an understanding of the elites' conception of themselves and their state respectively. More specifically, the thesis explores the concept of the 'representation of the Other' in the context of Saudi-Iranian confrontation and Shi'i-Wahhabi strife. It adopts a diachronic approach, taking into account Iranian Saudi relations from 1979 to 2009. The analysis focuses on three watershed episodes, which took place during the course of four Iranian presidential terms, the tenure of two Supreme Leaders and the reign of two Saudi kings.

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia has undergone shifts ranging from: 1) intense hostility during the Iran-Iraq War when Saudi Arabia supported Saddam Hussein; 2) reduction in tension during Rafsanjani's period of economic rebuilding; 3) rapprochement as a result of Khatami's Dialogue of Civilizations; 4) resumption of intense rivalry and tensions during the Ahmadinejad period, which witnessed a return to revolutionary rhetoric in Iran and which coincided with heightened Sunni-Shi'i tensions in post-Saddam Iraq and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring throughout the region.

The thesis will investigate Othering in three periods encompassing key watershed episodes, that occurred during successive Iranian presidencies, as follows:

1) Khamenei: From the Revolution to the first two years of the Iran-Iraq war 1979-1983.

2) Rafsanjani-Khatami: The initiation of the 'Dialogue of Civilizations' and convening of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Summit meeting in Iran 1996-1999.

3) Ahmadinejad: The bombing of the al-Askari Shrine in Samara (Iraq) and the consequent sectarian war 2005-2009.

## 1.1 Research Questions and Central Contentions

### 1.1.1 Research Questions

In order to study the Saudi-Iranian mutual representation of the Other, this work pursues the following central questions:

1) How can the phenomenon of Othering be understood in the Iranian-Saudi discourse, and how is it related to political rivalry and religious conflict?

    a. Are the discourses primarily political or religious in character? That is to say are they better understood as cases of political propaganda or religious polemics?
    b. Are the political, religious and media discourses independent of one another or closely inter-related, and how is their inter-relationship articulated?

2) How do the discourses of Othering function in practice?

    a. What themes / attributes are ascribed to the Other?

b. What are the political and religious repertoires that are drawn on in the two discourses?
c. Which actors generate the discourses for which audiences and for what purpose?

3) Are the Iranian and Saudi discourses similar to each other in their character and genealogy?
4) How important is the Othering of Them in affirming the distinctive character and image of Us in Saudi and Iranian state or propaganda discourse?

5) How did these discourses of Othering change in the course of the three periods and watershed episodes, and what does this tell us about the responsiveness of Iranian-Saudi discourses of Othering to changes in bilateral relations?

### 1.1.2 Central Contentions

In this thesis and as outlined in the opening statement, I contend that the Saudi-Iranian discourses of Othering are overwhelmingly responsive to changes in political relations between the two states. That is to say, in this thesis I recognise that the images each side had of the other during the period studied were drawing on different historical backgrounds, cultures, religious structures and beliefs, thereby forming a vocabulary which each state mobilised in different ways in different national, regional and international contexts. In addition, I argue that given responses to political, economic, and international events are evident in changes in the discourses used, thereby reflecting the vicissitudes of the two states' relationship. However, differences in religious and political stances and opinions may not inhibit a positive image construction and discourse of the Other while simultaneously allowing the possibility of negative representations. Moreover, I also propose that these discourses illustrate a close

relationship between the political, religious and media discourses, an intertextual relationship managed through direct and indirect control by political elites. In addition, the discourses of the mutual representation of the Other in this dissertation are understood as drawing on long-standing and deep-rooted religious and political symbolic repertoires, which were assimilated to given state agendas. These discourses exist on multiple in each country, that is to say, the discourses employed to construct the Other exist at cultural, religious, and social levels, allowing certain actors, such as the *ulama* or political elites, to mobilise these discourses at different points and in reaction to given events and circumstances and for both internal and external consumption. Finally, in this study I argue that the discourses of Othering operate within the domestic environment to bolster regime legitimacy and public loyalty to the ruling system through the creation of 'the necessary enemy', while from an international standpoint I contend that they operate in a similar way to enlist support for the strategic claims of the Saudi and Iranian states.

### 1.1.3 Thesis Structure

**Chapter 1:** *Introduction*

This opening chapter sets out the significance of the subject, the research aims, hypotheses, research questions, develops a literature review, and theoretical framework.

Chapters three to five constitute the main body of the thesis and analyse the Iranian-Saudi mutual representation of the Other through their respective discourses around watershed events, which will provide the opportunity to test the hypotheses and research questions.

**Chapter 2:** *Methodology.*

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is adopted as a methodological approach in order to engage issues of power and to identify the dominant discourses shaping the image of states, the historical aspects of the examined discourses, and how they have changed over time. FDA is used to analyse political, religious, and media discourse in order to explain how they create discursive subjects and objects which may give rise to different subject positions.

**Chapter 3:** *Revolution, War, and the Formation of Iranian and Saudi Discourses of Self and Other, 1979-1983.*

This chapter investigates mutual Othering during the foundational period of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, including the Bani-Sadr and Khamenei presidencies. This first core chapter analyses Iranian and Saudi identities from the Islamic revolution and the siege of Mecca. The period covers the death of Khaled al-Saud and the succession of Fahd as head of the al-Saud dynasty, including the rise of a new crown prince, Abdullah al-Saud.

**Chapter 4:** *Detente and Rapprochement: Dialogue of Civilizations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference Summit, 1996-1999*

This chapter discusses mutual Othering mainly during the Khatami presidency and Abdullah's role as de facto ruler after Fahd's illness. The chapter argues that Iranian Othering was not only external but also internal. Iranian-Saudi relations and representation of each other are discussed through five main cases: the rise of the Taliban, the OIC conference, the visits by Rafsanjani and Khatami in 1998 and 1999 respectively, GCC security and OPEC.

**Chapter 5:** *An End to Rapprochement: Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Iraqi civil war, 2006-2009*

This chapter will discuss the discursive construction of the Other through three different events. These include the Hezbollah-Israel 34 day war, the sectarian civil war in post-Saddam Iraq, and the Gaza war of 2009. During this period a downturn in Iranian-Saudi relations is evident.

The destruction of the al-Askari shrine brought about a wave of sectarian killings that were understood as a civil war by the international community, and a sectarian war by the Sunnis and Shi'a in the Islamic and Arab world. This episode will be studied in the context of a traditionalist and conservative figure assuming Iran's presidency, namely Ahmadinejad. The era recalls the ultra-conservative rhetoric of the 1980s and the discourse response of the Saudi state**.**

**Chapter 6:** *Discussion and Conclusion*

This chapter aims to answer the questions set out in 1.1.1 above by bringing together the findings presented in each chapter. The chapter will also discuss the overall contribution this dissertation has made to the field.

## 1.2 Literature Review

The literature on Iranian and Saudi Arabia is vast and has increased in recent years. The studies focusing on the state-to-state relations of these two countries fall mainly into two predominant areas: realist and neo-realist studies, and scholarly works applying constructivism. This section discusses the main literature on Iranian-Saudi relations, but does not pretend to be exhaustive. I discuss the subset of the literature which I think most relevant to this thesis, demonstrating how this study builds on and differs from them. In this literature review, I argue that while realist and institutionalist works are useful at studying Iran and Saudi Arabia, they do not give sufficient weight to identity, ideology and discourse. Also, I argue that the few constructivist and discourse based studies conducted on Iranian-Saudi relations are not based on research into primary sources, or just focus on one state, whereas this thesis applies in-depth research into primary sources and covers both states.

### 1.2.1 Realist and Neo-Realist Approaches

Realism and its variants, such as neo-realism, examines the state-to-state relations of countries by taking into account balance of power through rivalry/competition or through cooperation. Aarts and Van Duijne (2009) and Downs (2012) opine that Saudi-Iranian relations are characterised by a rivalry that spanned several decades, shifting from a lack of ideological component in the pre-1979 period to an ideological based rivalry after the Iranian Revolution (Aarts and van Duijne 2009; Downs 2012). That is to say that their rivalry in the Pahlavi era was not over Islamic leadership, but rather was based on 'status quo powers whose rivalry extended primarily to power politics as opposed to a greater ideological struggle' (Downs, 2012: 204). Therefore, most of the studies discussing the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia in this period are discussed under a framework of realism and neorealism. Ehteshami (2002) suggests that Iran's political competitiveness has stemmed from regional supremacy

attributed to a long history and has been a distinct feature of Iranian foreign policy; while Gause (2002) also argues that Saudi Arabia's attempt to claim regional leadership exhibits an element of Islamic identity intertwined with regional leadership since Saudi Arabia views itself as the 'cradle of Islam' and caretaker of Islam's two holiest sites (Ehteshami 2002; Gause III 2002). However, earlier literature also shows that Iranian-Saudi relations began much earlier and were affected by the Cold War, British withdrawal from the region, and the US filling the void in the Middle East.

Badeeb (1993) has analysed Saudi-Iranian relations from the period of Reza Pahlavi up to 1982, i.e. early in the Iran-Iraq war. Badeeb examines the main actors that later influenced the relations between the two states, and the historical narrative involved in shaping both states and their relations with one another. The author also discusses Iraq, thus covering what is known as the 'three pillars' of the Persian Gulf (Badeeb 1993). However, the book lacks depth and is limited when it comes to discussing the monarchies in both states, their relations and dynamics, especially in the 1950s and 1960s when relations strengthened between the two states.

Al-Saud's book (2003) on Iranian and Saudi relations in the period of British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf draws on a realist framework and focuses on the role of power politics. The book lacks in archival sources, is compensated by many interviews with individuals involved in foreign policy decision-making during the period, arguing that the Gulf states were capable of making independent decisions without the aid or interference of superpowers such as the US. Therefore, al-Saud's perspective is that local powers took their own initiative in an intra-regional foreign policy that ended British colonialism. Furthermore, the author considers the rising status of Iran and its bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf littoral

states, especially with regards to the contested sovereignty of Bahrain, and the Tunb and Abu Musa Islands (al-Saud 2003). The author also conveys a message that there were likenesses between Mohammad Reza Shah of Iran and Faisal of Saudi Arabia in that the two monarchs had an image of regional leadership and international respect.

However, it is important to note that the publication lacks any discussion of ideational factors that affected Iranian-Saudi relations, such as their collaboration against the rise of Soviet influence and the threat of Nasserism. Al-Saud argues that Saudi Arabia and Iran seized the opportunity in 1969 and finalised the Iran-Saudi Arabia Continental Shelf Agreement, thus recognising Iran's control over Farsi Island in exchange for Saudi sovereignty over Arabi Island, paving the way for further collaboration without superpower interference. As a result, al-Saud suggests that Bahrain's independence was not an issue of contention or legal dispute between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but rather a domestic Iranian issue (al-Saud 2003: 55).

Safran (1988) puts forward a neorealist argument based on balance of power, national interests and the monarchies' regional leadership as the main explanation behind Iranian-Saudi relations, rivalry and collaboration. Whilst al-Saud (2003) argues that Iran and Saudi bilaterally agreed on regional territorial issues, Safran underlines that Faisal was caught in a dilemma after the British evacuation of the Persian Gulf: either Saudi Arabia would become a dominant regional power or avoid entanglement in the dispute over the sovereignty of Bahrain. The author argues that Saudi pragmatism led to an agreement with Pahlavi Iran on the implicit sharing of spheres of influence in the region allowing for Saudi Arabia to control the Gulf Emirates and for Iran to take over the Emirati Islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs (Safran 1988: 126). Safran (1988: 135) argues that this arrangement allowed for Saudi Arabia to recognize

Iran's guardianship over the Persian Gulf waters and was confirmed in a declaration by Saudi Arabia, Iran and Kuwait in 1970.

As discussed earlier, Saudi-Iranian rivalry can be traced back to the departure of British troops from the region—where most GCC states were under protectorate status—and during the Cold War. Ehteshami (2002: vii) argues that the main contenders in the balance of power configuration in the Persian Gulf were Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. They 'have played an instrumental role in the drawing of its current political and strategic map'. The author further opines that in order to preserve their national interests, these states engaged sub-regionally with 'vigour and commitment, sometimes with dangerous overzealousness' (Ehteshami, 2002: vii). This approach highlights three 'major forces' that shape the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and Iran towards each other. These include border disputes whether maritime or territorial, exemplified by claims over Bahrain, offshore oilfield disputes with Kuwait, and those with UAE over the three islands; economic competition mainly over oil prices in OPEC; and since the 1979 revolution, competition over regional order, which includes the opposition to US bases in the Persian Gulf region since the 1991 first Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm).

As discussed earlier, structural differences existed between Iran and Saudi Arabia before the 1979 revolution. However, both states had collaborated in matters of mutual interests and threats. These include the rise of Baathism in Iraq and the Soviet influence in the Middle East (Nuruzzaman 2012). The Iranian revolution in 1978-79 gave rise to an Islamic government in Iran, Khomeini's call for an export of the revolution, which exacerbated rivalry especially with regards to the regional order. Chubin and Tripp (1996) argue that the revolution intensified the pre-existing structural factors that inhibited Iranian-Saudi cooperation, leading to Iran being recognised as a regional threat. In addition, Gause (2010: 2) argues that Saudi-Iranian relations

were shaped along competition over regional order, that is to say, an Iranian objection to foreign bases in the Persian Gulf, and how this constitutes a threat towards Iranian security, in light of Saudi-US cooperation and alliance. Economic rivalry, mainly over oil prices was a cornerstone in the power politics approach between both states (Gause III 2010). Competition over OPEC control and production quotas was important to both states, since they were both heavily dependent on oil (Gause III 2010: 2). Gause (2010: 33) further argues that an atmosphere of fear and mutual apprehension was created with an arms race by both states, coupled with Iranian nuclear ambitions. Chubin (2006: vii) argues that Iran's nuclear ambitions may have exacerbated fears of Iranian supremacy and possible regional blackmail (Chubin 2006).

Furthermore, the period of the 1980s witnessed an eight-year war between Iran and Iraq that gave rise to Arab support for Iraq in general and Arab Gulf support in particular against Iran. Scholars have defined more than one explanation for Saudi support for Iraq. In an edited publication focussing on defence policies of the Persian Gulf states as a result of the Iran-Iraq war, Naff (1985) discussed Iranian threats and the war with Iraq mainly from a security and balance of power perspective. While religious ideology, i.e. Shi'ism and Wahhabism, was taken into consideration in chapters by Saunders (1985) and Sterner (1985), the discussion highlighted the security dimensions and shift in the Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, but did not investigate ideology and the perception of one sect of the other, either domestically or regionally (Naff 1985; Sterner 1985; Saunders 1985).

Ramazani (1985) defines Khomeini's export of the revolution as a 'cardinal principle' of Iranian post-revolutionary foreign policy. He was one of the first authors to discuss the religious element of Shi'ism in Iranian post-revolutionary policy (Ramazani 1985; Ramazani

1986; Ramazani 1988). Ramazani (1985) argues that Iran's export of the revolution idea is directly derived from major tenets of twelver Shi'i traditions, which view the existing world order as imperfect, and look forward to its salvation with the coming of the 'Mahdi', an 'expected Messiah'. The author intertwines religious ideology with foreign policy and power threats. In order for the Mahdi to return from his occultation, the world has to be readied through the preparation of 'true Islamic' countries, Iran being a prime example. Therefore, to be truly Islamic, the Gulf States must meet three main conditions: 1) establish 'true Islamic governments' by shunning monarchical rule and adopting an Islamic government; 2) be non-aligned with East or West, i.e. 'attain true independence' through the adoption of an 'Islamic foreign policy'; and 3) most importantly and alarming to all the Arab Gulf States, acknowledge Khomeini's Pax Islamica, Iran's security leadership in the Persian Gulf region. In order to fulfil all three conditions, an export of the revolution is crucial.

Ramazani (1985) argues that Iran employed 'coercive policy instruments to export revolution' represented by three main cases: (1) the call for the annexation of Bahrain in 1979 and the accusation of a coup plot in Bahrain in 1981 to export the revolution to other Gulf states; (2) allegations of involvement in Kuwaiti bombings in December 1983; and (3) the use of the Hajj in Mecca such as the 1981 demonstrations. Hunter (1990: 117-119) also shared the same argument that Iran utilised the hajj to its advantage. In addition to a means to discuss Muslim initiatives and mobilise resources to defend Islam from its enemies, the author argues that the Hajj demonstrations were an effective form of export of the revolution that gained momentum and were stressful for the Saudis in later years (Hunter 1990).

Whilst Hunter's hypothesis denotes a foreign policy based on revolutionary Islamic ideology and historical experiences, the author does not explore the critical role of political institutions such as the parliament, Friday prayer sermons, and various political organisations.

Furthermore, the author depends largely on secondary sources and a 'diplomatic, historical and foreign policy-making analysis' (Hunter 1990: 5) methodology.

Chubin and Tripp (1996) examined Iranian-Saudi relations in the first five years after the death of Khomeini. Through a neorealist framework, the study focussed on the balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region. Chubin and Tripp (1996: 11) argue that Saudi Arabia took advantage of the Iran-Iraq War and deteriorating relations with Iran to enforce its control over the smaller Arab Gulf states, particularly through the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Furthermore, while Iran and Iraq were neutralising each other in a resource-depleting war, Saudi Arabia seized the chance to upgrade its military through arms acquisitions, while forging closer relations with the US through sustaining low oil prices (Chubin and Tripp 1996). Although balance of power, security and power politics can affect and illuminate Saudi-Iranian relations, the authors do not explore thoroughly aspects of religious and sectarian ideology in their relationship. These include the export of the revolution, represented mainly by the Hajj demonstrations, and the attempted coup in Bahrain in 1981.

The authors argue that the states' relations are 'constrained by a number of structural factors' that limit security cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. These factors include demographic and geographic differences, leadership of Gulf affairs, oil and foreign forces that shape the 'traditional national interest agenda' (Chubin and Tripp, 1996: 4). They recognize that factors that highlight Iranian and Saudi identity are at the centre of their relations. Similar to Amirahmadi (1993), Chubin and Tripp (1996) argue that these factors include dichotomies that stem from national, cultural, ethnic and sectarian divisions in the region, such as Persian/Arab and Shi'i/Sunni divisions (Amirahmadi 1993; Chubin and Tripp 1996). Chubin and Tripp (1996) attempt to address the nature of these dichotomies, arguing that there is a

mirror-image in the comparison made by both states, for example the Iranian leadership comparing its 'striving, activist, self-reliant' brand of Islam with the 'conservative, selfish and dependent' Saudi Islam that is controlled by a foreign power (Chubin and Tripp, 1996: 48). Despite the fact that the authors give a fine description of these factors, their emphasis on power politics and balance of power does not explain how these same factors allowed for the post-Khomeini rapprochement. It is fair to say that Chubin and Tripp adopted a causal link in interpreting the factors they highlight rather than a correlative link. As AlToraifi (2012: 14) argues, 'a better explanation for the events examined by Chubin and Tripp would be that each state was redefining its identity during the relevant time periods. That is to say, the identities of each state affected their regional balance of power and relations with each other, making identities the centrepiece for an understanding of the evolution in Saudi Iranian relations (AlToraifi 2012).

Wehrey et al. (2009) demonstrate concisely that Iranian-Saudi relations are dominated by a geopolitical rather than an ideological rivalry. In a study that focuses on Iranian-Saudi relations since 2003, Wehrey et al. have analysed a large survey of secondary sources and interviews in the Persian Gulf that allowed for a conflict resolution framework. The study argued that Iranian gains in Lebanon and Iraq that witnessed immense Shi'i and Arab public support were a shift in the balance of power. Furthermore, like the sectarian narrative, the authors argue that the proxies both states support in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq are tools of rivalry to counter each other's influence. Therefore, the difference in sectarian identity is not a driving force for rivalry, the study argues, but rather tools that are utilised to pressure and take advantage of actors.

The authors propose that Iranian-Saudi relations are not always based on rivalry, highlighting cases of pragmatism such as the invitation to Ahmadenejad to attend the Hajj in 2008. However, the analysis discusses this pragmatism and rivalry as a 'case by case' issue. In the Levant, a rollback was sought, containment in Iraq, and engagement in the Persian Gulf region to ensure stability and limit tensions. Finally, the study highlights that the dynamics of Saudi rivalry with Iran has a domestic dimension. The Saudi actors are not unified in their view of Iran. One particular example was how three senior royals took actions towards Iran. The authors argue that Bandar bin Sultan, for example, was coordinating with the US to lead an anti-Iran campaign while his cousin Turki bin Faysal was protesting against such actions, which led to his resignation as US ambassador. As a result, this study sheds light on Saudi-Iranian rivalry, its proxies, and narratives as tools that also include a domestic dynamic on behalf of its senior actors. Although Wehrey et al. (2009) study the role of actors and the dynamics of Iranian-Saudi rivalry, with the exception of some interviews with scholars and technocrats, the study does not analyse primary sources. In comparison, this thesis takes on a wider range of sources, longer time period, and a more detailed analysis of Iranian and Saudi discourses. For example, Wehrey et al., do not analyse religious discourse, but rely on excerpts and translations in the mainstream press. The timeframe analysed is also limited, focussing on the period between 2003 and 2009. This thesis, on the other hand, studies Iranian-Saudi relations over a 30-year period.

### 1.2.2 Constructivist Approaches

Studies employing a constructivist framework give significant weight to ideational, domestic and external factors that shape the relations between states. Identities and interests are the main factors that govern international relations. That is to say, constructivists utilise ideational factors to interpret international structure and the relationship between states, as opposed to realist and neo-realists that contend that material factors govern the international structure and foreign policy.

Amirahmadi (1993) argues that Iranian-Saudi relations since the revolution were traumatic and were shaped by diverse factors that include ideological differences, religious rivalry that highlight legitimacy of the state, historical and cultural sources of tension between Arabs and Persians, competition over OPEC leadership, rivalry over regional leadership that mainly involves the Persian Gulf, and US involvement in Iranian-Arab affairs. The study argues that in Rafsanjani's post-Khomeini period, OPEC rivalry and religious legitimacy were suspended with other factors being discussed between Iran and Saudi Arabia, thus highlighting a willingness to be pragmatic on the part of both states. Furthermore, although the study undertakes a mixed approach, I contend that it mainly undertakes a constructivist approach, especially since the author takes into account three major forces that shaped Iranian-Saudi relations. These include the 'ideological and cultural differences, struggle for OPEC leadership, and quest for supremacy in the Persian Gulf' (Amirahmadi 1993: 140). The author also takes into account an amalgam of other forces such as the These include the Iran-Iraq war and the US presence in the region.

It is interesting that Amirahmadi (1993) discusses religious, ideological, historical and cultural rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While the author believes that Iranian-Saudi religious

rivalry is due to a sectarian divide, that is to say a Shi'i Iran and Sunni-Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, the author has a simplistic view of this rivalry. The author defines the Iranian perception of Saudi Arabia as a Wahhabi 'American brand of Islam'. Furthermore, Amirahmadi argues that Iranian-Saudi historical and cultural differences are 'closely identified with Iranian nationalism, while Vahhabi *(sic.)* Sunnism provides legitimacy to the Saudis'. Iran, according to the author, is defined as a mixture of pre-Islamic Zoroastrianism intertwined with Islamic culture, while the Arabic culture that defines Saudi Arabia is primarily Islamic. Amirahmadi (1993) goes as far as highlighting language, calendar years, and the fact that they celebrate different holidays, have different music and cuisine as nationalistic and identity factors that add to the underlying rivalry between the two states. Nevertheless, the author argues that it is 'no wonder' that Iraq justified its attacks on Iran citing Persian expansionism and colonialism, a fact that he states is similarly echoed by Saudi Arabia and 'remains unchanged' even after Iran's pragmatic support for Kuwait against Iraq's invasion in 1990.

Furtig's (2002) study on Saudi-Iranian relations focussed on the states' rivalry from an ideological standpoint between the early days of the Islamic Revolution until the aftermath of the second Gulf War in the 1990s. Furtig suggests that although the Cold War strengthened Iranian-Saudi collaboration, there was still an element of rivalry to their relationship. This rivalry, however, was not based on religious ideology or leadership (Furtig 2002). The Islamic Revolution shifted Iranian-Saudi competition, especially since Saudi Arabia viewed itself as an undisputed leader of the Islamic world. Based mainly on English and German secondary sources, with some references to Persian and Arabic secondary literature and newspaper accounts, Furtig (2002) discusses two main areas of rivalry: geographic and issue-oriented. The study focuses on regional competition in the Middle East, South and Central Asia, particularly 'religious and economic leadership' where the author discusses Iranian revolutionary rivalry

and Saudi leadership in the Islamic world in addition to rivalry within OPEC. Furtig also considers the domestic factors affecting Iranian-Saudi rivalry. One significant factor is Shi'i-Wahhabi rivalry, where the author opines that this form of rivalry has remained constant since 1979, even though, according to Furtig (2002), both states' foreign policy decisions have been variable. Hence, the study fails to explain Saudi-Iranian relations outside the context of ideology and offers no explanation for the evolution of relations from radicalism to pragmatism, or from rivalry to rapprochement. Also, this study, although published in 2002, does not consider Khatami's presidency and the thaw in relations between both states. The late 1990s tests Furtig's rivalry thesis, especially with regards to their rivalry in OPEC, where their cooperation on lowering quotas and raising prices tested the notion of ideology as the determining factor.

Focussing on the historical evolution of the balance of power in Iranian-Saudi relations in general and their rivalry in particular, a more recent extensive study published by Keynoush (2016) poses a central question: 'Is the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran the cause of regional instability, or is it a *consequence* of that instability?' The author argues that the core of Iranian-Saudi rivalry is due to regional foreign interventions, first and foremost by the US, that give rise to instability in the Persian Gulf. This, according to Keynoush, is the main reason for the agitation in the Iranian-Saudi balance of power. The author further argues that unlike other studies that imply that Iranian-Saudi rivalry is based on hegemonic ambitions and realist views, what might illuminate the nature of their relationship is that 'the two states compete for influence based on narrowly defined ideological and/or nationalistic world views' (Keynoush 2016: 2). Therefore, the author argues that by applying a historical methodology, namely a neorealist theoretical framework, focussing on the balance of power, and exploring both the contentions and common interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia, a better understanding of their rivalry may be achieved.

Keynoush (2016) employs primary sources in the form of interviews with Saudi and Iranian politicians and decision makers, in addition to a vast amount of secondary sources mainly in Persian with minor references to Arabic secondary literature. While the author analyses the relations between the two states, their perception of one another and the shift in their relations, Keynoush does not examine the nature and dynamics of these perceptions and the discourse of the states towards each other. For instance, when the author attempts to discuss Saudi-Iranian rivalry in the Iran-Iraq war, Keynoush depends mainly on interviews and quotes found in secondary sources. A clear example is the stereotypical views of the Saudi preachers towards Iran, where the author quotes al-Saud '"cultural pollution" that Persia represented to the Arab heartland' (Keynoush, 2016: 115) from a secondary source, namely Fandy (1999: 196-199) rather than the original sermon. Overall, while the study is extensive in its historical accounts and analysis of Iranian-Saudi relations and the main events that shaped their relations before the revolution and through different epochs, this research is lacking a characterisation of the dynamics of identity, ideology, norms and values that shape Iran and Saudi as states and their relations and rivalry.

Adib-Moghaddam's *International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A cultural genealogy* (2006) attempts to adopt a constructivist approach in analysing Persian Gulf politics. The study analyses the region between 1980 and 2003 by taking into account ideational underpinnings that form the foreign policy decision-making of Iran and the major Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia. By applying a 'critical cultural genealogy' framework, the author analyses the 'impact of norms, identities, ideologies and other cultural artefacts' on the dynamics of regional international politics (Adib-Moghaddam 2006: 5). Through this framework, Adib-Moghaddam (2006: 6) asserts that the 'important epistemological and normative ambition of this book' is to highlight that events such as 'wars and anarchy in the Persian Gulf are not facts of nature but ongoing human productions'.

Adib-Moghaddam's undertaking of this study aimed at answering three main questions vis a vis conflict in the Persian Gulf. The first question aims at determining the dominant political norms, values, institutions and identities between 1980 and 2003. Second, the study attempts to address how these norms, values, identities and cultural artefacts were invented, or transformed and reflected by main political actors and the state. Finally, the author addresses the concept of power and interests (of actors and states), and how 'they manifest themselves in strategic preferences' (Adib-Moghaddam, 2006: 9). Taking the abovementioned questions into consideration, Adib-Moghaddam answers these over three main empirical chapters: 1) Comparing relations in the Persian Gulf before and after the Iranian Revolution; 2) the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; and 3) an in-depth discussion of cultural 'genealogy' of anarchy in the Persian Gulf in the Khatami presidency, the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the period leading up to the removal of Saddam in March 2003.

Adib-Moghaddam's constructivist approach to assessing Persian Gulf conflict and regional international politics is original, but the study concentrates more on secondary sources rather primary data. That is to say, the author does not focus on a multidimensional approach examining the discourse of the primary actors, such as the political leadership in Iran and the Persian Gulf States, their clerics and the main newspapers. Moreover, while the author argues that the central theme of his study is a Self-Other delineation with an emphasis on 'notions of Iranian superiority' (Adib-Moghaddam, 2006: 132) within its nationalist discourse, the study does not analyse alterity in terms of Iran as the Arab's significant Other, particularly Saudi-Iranian Othering.

Constructivist based approaches to studying Iranian-Saudi relations also took into account the sectarian and ideological differences which emerged after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Keddie and Matthee 2002; Mabon 2013; Wehrey et al. 2009; Wehrey 2013, 2018). Keddie and Mathee (2002) and Mabon (2013) contend that the cornerstone of Iranian-Saudi rivalry is their ideological and religious differences. Furthermore, studies of this nature gained prominence as a result of two episodes, the 1979 revolution and the fall of Saddam in 2003. The result of both watershed events saw the creation of a Shi'i theocracy in Iran and later a Shi'a revival in Iraq. Vali Nasr (2007) argues that the Iranian revolution did not attain its desired effect since neighbouring states did not revolt against their regimes. As a result, 'Tehran began spreading money and organizational help to create Shi'a militants and revolutionary groups that would call for Islamic revolutions' (Nasr 2007: 143). The Saudi response to their new rivals was twofold: a strategic backing of Saddam for eight years; and a Saudi propaganda machine that 'underscored Khomeini's Shi'a identity on the one hand and the divide between Shi'ism and Sunnism on the other'. This metamorphosed the conflict between the two states into an ideological one (Nasr 2007: 156). AlToraifi (2012) proposes that this religious-ideological approach and the underlying cause of their rivalry, pivot on two main hypotheses. One assumption is the fact that the Iranian revolution gave rise to a rivalry for world Islamic leadership, exemplified by the Hajj demonstrations, the second being the fall of Saddam and the subsequent rise of the Shi'a that has generated a domestic challenge to the Saudi state thus transforming the rivalry into a cold war of sorts between the two states.

Mabon (2013) undertakes a study that adopts a theoretical framework based on Hinnebusch's modified realism and constructivism, which the author refers to as 'The Incongruence Dilemma', a combination of classical realist positions while applying constructivism to highlight the importance of identity (Mabon, 2013: 18). Mabon discusses Iranian-Saudi rivalry

by taking into account the implications and importance of identity on state security, that is to say that 'incongruence of identity' in a given country can lead to internal security ramifications. The author argues that the adopted framework is applied on three levels : 1) political structure and state formation which shapes the norms and identities of a particular regime; 2) the role of agency and identity groups in the form of religion and nationalism that impact the internal security dilemma which in turn affects the territorial sovereignty of the state and how it responds to threats; and 3) an approach that 'explains how internal security dilemma manifest themselves at the external level' (Mabon, 2013: 36) mainly driven by soft power. This allows external actors to undermine legitimacy and stability thus affecting regional security (Mabon, 2013).

The author discusses Iranian-Saudi relations by detailing the conflict between the two states and highlighting the ideological and geopolitical rivalry that includes 'Arab-Persian tensions', sectarian differences, and the different incidents that reflected their rivalry after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Mabon underlines the doctrinal and ideological differences between the two states and their sects. Regional security is also discussed, including Bahrain, the UAE islands, proxy groups in the Levant and Iraq, and the effect of this rivalry on the Arab street. Also, the author argues for the importance of historical and religious narratives in the state formation of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Therefore, the argument focuses on the significance of religion as a tool of legitimacy for regimes 'to resolve internal security dilemmas and to demonstrate external legitimacy and vitality' this in turn gives rise to 'a soft power security dilemma guiding the [Iranian-Saudi] rivalry' (Mabon, 2013: 106). Further discussions are focussed on the role of religion in Iran and Saudi Arabia and the tensions between the internal identity groups such as the Shi'a and Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, and the Sunni sect in Iran (Mabon, 2013: 111-112). Therefore, the study highlights the suspicion of the state towards its

minorities, Saudi attitudes towards the Shi'a and their suspected links and loyalty to Iran, thus demonstrating 'how the ideological [and internal] sphere feeds into the geopolitical sphere' (Mabon, 2013: 139).

The publication, however, has limitations and shortcomings. First, the study is based on secondary sources, predominantly not in the original language (Arabic or Persian). Second, the author does not discuss the dynamics of the incidents that shape the rivalry in great depth, especially since Iranian-Saudi relations are complex, with a rivalry based on an interwoven web of ideological and geopolitical competitions. Finally, where the theoretical framework adequately discusses Saudi-Iranian rivalry, it unfortunately does not take into account any periods of detente and rapprochement in the 1990s. While the 'Incongruence Dilemma' put forward by Mabon may explain the ideological rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, it can also be argued that Rafsanjani and Khatami's pragmatism and the sectarian tools utilised by both states, are due to geopolitical 'games' and not ideological issues that govern Iranian-Saudi relations.

Two further publications by Wehrey (2013 and 2018) discuss the tension and instability in the Persian Gulf from a sectarian angle. In the first study (Wehrey, 2013), the author employs discourse analysis to discuss the relationship between sectarian tensions and domestic and regional policies (Wehrey 2013). The study analyses sectarianism in the post-2003 Iraq war period up to the period after the 2011 Arab uprisings in the Middle East. The author makes use of three case studies to discuss sectarianism dynamics: Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Wehrey (2013) examines this phenomenon by utilising primary sources. Indeed, the study bears similarity to this thesis in that it adopts a multi-dimensional approach to sources, using political, clerical and media sources. However, in contrast to this thesis, the author

mainly employs interviews with policymakers and primarily Shi'i opposition figures in the Persian Gulf region. This dissertation probes deeper into the discourses, offering more thorough and comprehensive coverage in terms of timeframe and detailed discourse analysis.

Furthermore, the study concentrates mainly on domestic institutions that include 'parliaments, consultative councils, local assemblies, clerical establishments, and the media' (Wehrey 2013: 13) that construct and shape sectarian discourse. The scholarly work asks crucial questions to discuss the recurrence of sectarianism as a fact of political life in the Persian Gulf. Wehrey (2013: 12-13) questions if sectarianism is a 'nefarious foreign-policy tool of Iran, the United States, or Saudi Arabia?' or if it is an 'artificial construct employed by the Western academics to make sense of the region's complex politics?', and is this phenomenon an 'inescapable historical and cultural reality of the region or the product of manipulation by political elites and the media?'

It is imperative to mention that while Wehrey (2013) employs discourse analysis, enquires into identity and its relation to the state and society, the author bases discourse analysis on a relatively short timeframe. This limits the study of the origin of sectarianism in the Persian Gulf region in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. This dissertation employs a wider timeframe, i.e. since the initiation of the Islamic regime in Iran in 1979 up to 2009, and looks at different episodes and events that help examine the sectarian phenomenon in Iran and Saudi Arabia since its primordial stages. Wehrey (2013) studies the sectarian dynamics of the Shi'a as the Other in three states and the corresponding threat perception of the Shi'a by their rulers. However, the author does not examine the repertoires and discursive constructions that shape the Shi'a and their rulers. This thesis on the other hand takes into account the phenomenon of

sectarianism and studies its repertoires and discursive constructions in the two states that represent the leaderships of the Sunni and Shi'i sects.

In a second publication further discussing sectarian dynamics in the Persian Gulf, Wehrey (2018) aims to discuss sectarian identity and conflict. Through the use of a framework of 'constructive realism', Wehrey's (2018) study raises three main questions: 'why have sectarian identities surfaced, and with such force? Why do they become toxic and even violent, to the exclusion of affiliations? What has made them so political? Why, in other words, are there Sunni and Shia parties?' (p. 2). In this edited book, Wehrey (2018) attributes this sectarian conflict to three waves. First, the Iranian revolution 1978/79. Second, the end of détente and rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran during the Ahmadinejad period, in 2005/06 to be exact. This period saw the rise of non-state actors that fuelled sectarian tensions, such as the Shi'a-Sunni tensions in Iraq and the rise of Hezbollah after the 2006 war with Israel. The third wave Wehrey attributes to the Arab uprisings in 2011, which led to a sectarian component to the geopolitical rivalries, primarily in Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. Two main chapters are dedicated to Iran (Ostovar 2018) and Saudi Arabia (Bunzel 2018) respectively.

Ostovar (2018) discusses the role of sectarianism in Iranian foreign policy and Iran's pragmatism at promoting its self-interest through championing a discourse of Islamic unity and softening sectarian tones of Shi'ism, especially through the focus of themes of Islamic resistance and Pan-Islamism. Discourse analysis is applied to speeches of the elite, namely the *valī-yi faqih,* president, and the foreign minister. Furthermore, an Iranian editorial is also discourse analysed to exemplify the role of the press in Iranian foreign policy and Iran's sectarian role in the Middle East. It is important to mention that utilisation of discourse, such as the speeches of Khomeini in the early post-revolutionary period, or the more recent

narratives by the elite and editorial were aimed at explaining 'Iran's decision-making as closer to realpolitik' (Ostovar 2018: 88). In contrast, while this thesis also aims to demonstrate the relationship between foreign policy and discourse, the aim of the thesis is to examine the representation of the Other, precisely Saudi Arabia. Ostavar's examination of Iranian discourse aims at a more general discussion of Iran's sectarian role in the Middle East.

In the same edited book, Bunzel (2018) discusses Saudi Arabia's sectarian struggle as one rooted in Wahhabism. The study focuses on the root of Saudi religious ideology in Wahhabism and how it gave rise to the Islamic State (IS or Daesh). Through discourse analysis of religious statements, sermons of the ulama and their texts, the author argues that Saudi sectarianism is not directed exclusively towards the Shia. Brunzel also analyses the role of Saudi newspapers and writers in criticising Wahhabism. The discourse of the ulama was discussed to highlight the main themes employed in representing IS and AQAP. Themes such as Kharijites and Takfiris are discussed by the author to demonstrate the magnitude of the threat the aforementioned groups posed to the Saudi state. In addition, the discourse analysis attempts to show that the 'struggle between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State is also a contest for the soul of Wahhabism' (Bunzel 2018: 264). Although the study clearly examined religious discourse to discuss Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi Self and its Other, in this instance IS and AQAP, the analysis focussed on inner threats to Saudi Arabia and its internal schism. The study did not take into account official sermons, such as the Friday prayer sermons in Mecca and Medina and their role in Saudi representation of the Self and its Other. Also, Bunzel (2018) focusses on a more recent period, i.e. post Khobar bombings of 1996 to discuss Saudi discourse. This thesis on the other hand takes into account a more extended time period, ranging from the siege of Mecca in 1979 up to the period following the fall of Saddam in 2003. In comparison to Wehrey's 2018 edited volume, this thesis takes an in-depth look at three main discourse spheres

(religious, political and media) in both states, examining the relationship between discourse construction and mutual representations of the Self and the Other.

While these approaches have shed light on Iranian-Saudi relations discussing the underlying causes of the Saudi-Iranian contention and rivalry, they have not engaged in a detailed discussion of the discourses of Othering that thesis covers. Also, although previous studies have discussed religious and national identity and ideology, they have not discussed the formation of this identity and its propagation through the states' religious, media and political discourses. Although previous studies such as Mabon (2013) and Adib-Moghaddam (2006) employ a constructivist approach to studying Iranian-Saudi relations and Iranian-Arab relations respectively, they fail to characterise how the states' discourses were employed in the representation of the Self and the Other.

Until now, this literature review has concentrated on works that deal with Iranian-Saudi relations, but there is one work, dealing with Iranian-US relations which calls for discussion, given that in many ways it is closer in its aims, methods and approached to the present thesis than most of the studies that deal with Iranian-Saudi relations. Beeman (2005) is one of the first studies to engage in the perceptions of Iran and the construction of the Iranian Other. The author utilises the images and constructions of the 'Mad Mullah and Great Satan' to highlight the mutual Othering of Iran and the US towards each other. The study discusses the political rhetoric in Iranian-US relations and its relationship to the context of Iranian National Character[1]. That is to say, an interpretation of systems of regularised and patterned communication, both linguistic and non-linguistic that exist within societies. Therefore, the study utilises linguistic anthropology to study the 'official pronouncements between

[1] For a discussion on the Iranian National Character see Beeman, William O. 1976. 'What is (Iranian) national character? A sociolinguistic approach', *Iranian Studies*, 9: 22-48.

governments of Iran and the United States and their representatives…regarding the other nation' (Beeman 2005: 5). Through the analysis of 'symbolic communication…between officials who lay claim to representing the policies of their nations' the author discusses the 'cultural underpinnings of the long-standing feud between the United States and Iran' (Beeman, 2005: vi-vii). The analysis of 'mutual demonization' constitutes the bulk of this work with a central argument that the conflict between Iran and the US is primarily based on a postmodern cultural conflict rather than fundamental differences between the two states. Therefore, leading each country to construct an image of the Other to sustain the image of that country's enemy, in this case the 'Mad Mullah' and the 'Great Satan'.

It should be noted that although the author discussed religious, media, and political discourse in the US and Iran, the bulk of the analysis was done on secondary sources. Furthermore, the study employs events and issues that exemplify the source of Iranian-US animosity. These include the US hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war, the Khobar bombings, the Axis of Evil, the Iranian support for Hezbollah and Hamas, and more recently the Iran nuclear programme. It is interesting to note that while this study employs similar episodes and grievances on Iranian-Saudi representations of the Other, the discourses analysed differ. In the case of Beeman, the use of secondary sources sufficed to argue US-Iranian Othering. This thesis on the other hand focuses mainly on primary discourses in both Iran and Saudi Arabia to discuss mutual representation of the Self and Other, thus determining the tropes, repertoires, and the discursive constructions of the Self and Other. Beeman (2005) discusses the role of the Iranian media in constructing the US as its Other in a historic manner, that is giving an anthology and an evolution of the discourse of the Iranian newspapers in the period before and after the revolution. In contrast to this study, the author does not dissect and analyse the discourse within the newspaper headlines, articles, and editorials, but focuses on the general tone. This is equally true for the discourse of the ulama. To exemplify, Beeman (2005: 66) utilises

Khomeini's writings to argue that the Other, in this case Western powers, are 'opposed to Islam' and that the ulama are 'facing this force'. However, the author does not quote or discuss other clerical discourse, such as Friday prayer sermons to support such an argument. Islamic tropes such as Imam Hussein and Yazid were used to describe the construction of the Self and the Other, and the struggle for virtue against corruption. Nevertheless, the author does not employ primary sources, such as ulama sermons to discuss these representations and constructions, or to contextualizaton the specific discourse of Khomeini. The dissertation at hand, by contrast, analyses an array of sermons, editorials and speeches to exemplify the narratives and tropes of martyrdom in defining the Iranian Self and its Other.

Since the 'Arab Spring', a few studies have surfaced dealing with representations of the Self and the Other with regards to Iran and Saudi Arabia. These studies have focussed on two main aspects, Shi'a-Sunni sectarianism (Ghobadzdeh and Akbarzadeh 2015) and US and Arab views of the Iranian Other (de Buitrago 2015; de Buitrago 2016). Ghobadzadeh and Akbarzadeh discuss the roots of the current sectarian conflicts in the Middle East through the concept of 'othering theology'. The authors argue that sectarianism and religious Othering in the Middle East is 'rooted in a solid theological articulation proposed by classic Islamic political theology'. By examining texts from leading theologians, Ghobadzadeh and Akbarzadeh (2015: 692) contextualise the politico-historical narrative and theological polemics, thus exploring how Othering is utilised 'to justify violence against the Shia sect in the Muslim world'. The study concluded that Shi'i Othering has become part of the politico-religious discourse and has diffused into all the strata of society, therefore allowing Othering rhetoric to expand beyond theology to become an intricate part of how people view the Shi'i Other. In the Saudi context, the study suggests that 'Othering discourse has become deeply entrenched in Saudi Arabia's educational curriculum, which denigrates all except those who subscribe to Wahhabism' (Ghobadzadeh and Akbarzadeh 2015: 700). Although the

research examines Othering discourse towards the Shi'a, the authors also acknowledge the fact that their study is incomplete as they do not analyse the Othering discourse in revolutionary Iran and how it depicted the Sunni governments in the region.

Perceptions of Iran and the construction of the Iranian Other are exemplified by two main studies by de Buitrago on US and Arab 'Othering' of Iran (2015); and 'constructions of the USA self vis-à-vis the Iranian Other' (2016). De Buitrago (2015) discusses the Self-Other constructions by the Arab States, mainly Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Syria, and the US towards Iran, through the analysis of the discourse of the decision makers. The study discusses the main narratives and threat perceptions conveyed by the aforementioned states and their construction of the Self and the Iranian Other, mainly through 'contemporary and recent relations' rather than historical ones (de Buitrago 2015: 86). In the specific case of Saudi Arabia, the author only dedicates a minimal section to (de Buitrago 2015: 94-97), discussing the Self and the Iranian Other mainly through the analysis of UN General Assembly speeches. The study briefly highlights the construction of the Saudi Arabian Self as 'fostering regional stability, dialogue and cooperation' (de Buitrago 2015: 95), while painting an image of a corrupt and aggressive Iranian Other, that gives reason for imperative foreign intervention in the region (2015: 97), the Iranian nuclear programme and its possible WMDs are taken into account as threats, hegemony in the GCC such as the UAE islands and the intervention in Syria as part of the Arab Spring (2015: 96).

By examining the role of emotions in US discourse on Iran, de Buitrago (2016: 155) engages with 'the constructions of the USA self vis-à-vis the Iranian other, to articulations of threat and processes of othering'. The study examines the role of emotions on US policy towards Iran taking into account the revolution of 1979, the hostage crisis and the US security policy discourse that has constructed the Iranian 'Other as a threat, trauma and mistrust' (de Buitrago, 2016: 158). Significantly, the author discusses the utilisation of metaphors such as

the use of 'axis of evil' in the Bush era leading to the creation of 'a discourse–policy trap' (de Buitrago, 2016: 158-159), thus making a clear distinction between US allies and enemies. Furthermore, the study focuses on the US decision makers' narrative vis a vis Iran and how that constructs the Iranian leadership as a threat to American national, global, and regional interests and stability. De Buitrago argues that constructing Iran as a 'negative' and 'evil' Other 'dichotomously contrasts to the construction of a good US Self' (2016: 157). Both studies by de Buitrago (2015, 2016) examine the construction of an Iranian Other by analysing US and Arab decision makers' discourse towards Iran. However, the studies do not take into account the public and media discourse, nor do they analyse the construction of the Iranian Self and therefore Iranian Othering of Arab States or the US, particularly Saudi Arabia.

This dissertation, through the macro-lens of constructivism, examines the mutual representation of the Other from a multidimensional approach. This takes into account the concept of Othering and its dichotomies, the image of enmity between rivals, how discursive formations are framed and spun within narratives, and how 'regimes of truths' are disseminated. Based on my review of the literature and approaches to the existing scholarly sources on Iranian-Saudi relations, I can say that my study offers three main additions. Firstly, it is the first study to analyse primary Saudi and Iranian discourse simultaneously in the original language. Although previous studies such as Ram (1994) offers an in-depth analysis of Iranian Friday sermons, the study does not focus on Saudi Arabia. Also, previous discourse analysis studies of Iranian and Saudi editorials, such as Mirzaee and Gharibeh (2015), or Khosravinik (2015) that discuss the discourses of the (national) Self and Other, do not analyse Iranian or Saudi newspapers extensively, or focus on Saudi-Iranian representation of the Other in a broad chronological timeframe or through the analysis of multiple events (Khosravinik 2015; Mirzaee and Gharibeh 2015). Therefore, this study will apply for the

first time the concept of Othering and representation of the Other to both halves of the Iranian-Saudi relationship since the 1979 revolution. Secondly, this dissertation will relate the Iranian and Saudi discourses of Othering to the changing pattern of events and relations, to questions of power, and to acts carried out by the states towards one another across different episodes. Finally, the study will analyse how Iran and Saudi Arabia frame each other in a three dimensional context of media editorials, sermons and decision makers' speeches.

## 1.3 Theoretical Framework

This thesis will employ a constructivist approach to the representation of Othering in socio-historical and International Relations settings. Through the macro-lens of constructivism, three main theories will be applied to the study of Othering in this instance; these are Foucault's depiction of power-knowledge relations; Said's concept of Othering and dichotomies in his Orientalism thesis; and image theory based on the image of the enemy in Hermann and Fischerkeller.

### 1.3.1 Foucault and Power-Knowledge

This dissertation understands the clash between Saudi Arabia and Iran as one based on constructed 'regimes of truth' and discursive formations comparable to nationalisms, imperialisms, or religious fundamentalisms, which this thesis will assume to be systemic, and to articulate, produce and make things happen:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general polities' of truth—that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. *(Foucault 2002b: 131)*.

This ‘truth’ that Foucault refers to flows throughout all the layers of society as he understands it to be ‘a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution and circulation of statements’ i.e. discourse (Foucault 2002b: 132). This thesis aims at investigating discourses of religion, politics and media (explained further in the methodology section). Discourse according to Foucault produces knowledge which is observed as the truth, affecting social practices such as political decision making. This knowledge becomes ‘true’ as a result of how power operates within society, especially since this truth is bound up in systems of power. This is accomplished in two ways: firstly, systems of power produce and sustain the truth; and secondly, they are also bound up ‘to effects of power which it induces and which extend it [truth]’ (Foucault 2002b: 132). Although Foucault highlights the truth as an interaction of power-knowledge and the production of the truth in a social context, this thesis deals with this ‘social regime of truth’ as a ‘state-propaganda-produced regime of truth’. It is through this that I will analyse Saudi-Iranian Othering and the implications it has on their relations.

Foucault’s ‘regime of truth’ concept will be applied to the discourse analysis of Othering coupled with exclusionary governing discourses that include sectarianism and Pan Arabism, as well as binary constellations and dichotomies such as ‘infidel versus Muslim’, ‘Arab versus *ajam*’, ‘civilized versus barbarian’ that operate to create juxtapositions, and sometimes in isolation. Moreover, this dissertation takes on Foucault’s notion that without a particular discourse about a subject (or issue) no knowledge could exist. To further highlight this point, it is fair to say that without narratives spun by Islamic radicals for example, or neo-colonial discourses of the far right in the West, the clash between Islam and the West in the form of racism or Islamic fundamentalism would not exist. Therefore, this thesis takes on the premise that the cultural artefacts that have given rise to Us and Them are a construction that is

disseminated and made concrete through discourses such as media, books, political speech and dialogue.

### 1.3.2 Foucault, Said and Orientalism

The aforementioned Foucauldian concepts are also represented within Edward Said's idea of Orientalism (1978) which this thesis also employs as a theoretical lens. One stark contribution of that work was Said's rejection of the notion that the humanities were free of bias and generated pure knowledge as held in traditional liberal understandings. Consequently, by borrowing Foucault's notion of the relationship between power and knowledge, Said views the production of knowledge as deeply rooted in the operations and applications of power through constellations of institutionalized scholars and artists that are governed by the dominant ideology and the political requirements of the society that they belong to. Although such constellations may exist in Iran and Saudi Arabia, this view may not be totally applicable to the Iranian-Saudi constructivist mechanism that is the focus of this research (see below). However, Said's Orientalism is applicable to Saudi-Iranian relations in that they 'cannot seriously be studied without their force, or more precisely their configuration, of power also being studied' (Said 1978: 5).

This thesis also employs Said's interpretation of Foucauldian knowledge construction, where power is observed as an impersonal force operating through multiple sites and channels, thereby constructing a 'pastoral regime' that controls its subjects by reforming and subduing them into objects of power within the social system. This understanding of Foucault was the first cornerstone of Said's thought concerning the control of knowledge and the linking of all the forms of 'will to knowledge' and all the modes of cultural representations of the other to the exercise of power (Moore-Gilbert 1997: 36). The second cornerstone that illustrates Said's

adaption of Foucault that I will also be employing is that discourse 'constructs' the objects of its knowledge, as discourse 'produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault 2012: 10). Said therefore argues that the 'regime of truth' i.e. the disciplinary power inscribed in Orientalism, transforms the 'real' East into a 'discursive' Orient or, as Moore-Gilbert (1997: 37) argues, it 'substitutes one for the Other'; hence constructing and representing an image of the Other. This thesis aims to investigate the similar process by which Saudi and Iranian 'regimes of truth' seek to transform the Other (Iran, Saudi Arabia) into the discursive Other (Iran and Saudi Arabia as sources of threat and danger to national and regional stability and to the 'approved' political, religious and social order).

One such argument of the representation of the Other discussed by Said is the European ideology that depicted Europeans as superior in comparison to the Orient arguing that this superior identity is rooted in their ideology and maintained through the discourse. This is accomplished by creating the construct of the Other as different from the Self, which can be both negatively represented and, in some instances, positively represented while maintaining the view that everything about the Self is positive. This binary representation and dichotomies of the Self and Other, Us and Them, and Inferior and Superior is adopted here to investigate dichotomies used in Iranian-Saudi discourses, such as *rāfidī* and *nasibī*, *ʿajam* and Arab. Similarly, just as Said observed that the relationship between Orient and Occident is based on binary oppositions, this notion will also be adopted and adapted to investigate the 'regimes of truth' in different Iranian and Saudi discourses that demonstrate the discursive practise of Othering.

Said's 'manifest Orientalism' concept argues that the post-colonial West constructed, stereotyped and manifested Orientalism in numerous discourses such as essays, media, images and movies. This thesis employs this concept in order to investigate the connection between the imaginative assumptions of Iranian-Saudi Othering towards each other and its material

effects. Furthermore, Said argues that Orientalism arose from the construction of the Other from western colonialism, and views that discourse as innately governed by the ruling power. The idea that discourse is disseminated, narrated and documented by the ruling elite is applied in this thesis to the mullahs in Iran and Saudi Arabia, and to the Supreme Leader in Iran, and the King of Saudi Arabia, and to the main newspapers in both countries.

#### *1.3.2.1 Binary Representation and Othering*

According to Said, Othering employs binary representations or dichotomies between the self, in his case Western identity, and the Other, oriental identity. In this thesis, dichotomies will also be employed as techniques in the Othering between Saudi Arabia and Iran. These techniques will include the Saudi Othering which consists of Arab superiority, based on Mecca being viewed as the cradle of Islam, giving the Arabs a sense of primacy, purity and uncorrupted nature as opposed to the Persian Other that is inferior, corrupted by historic heresy as they were converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam by the Arabs. On the other hand, Iranian representation of a Saudi Other would include Persian civilization that spans thousands of years as opposed to Arab cultural inferiority and desert lifestyle. Finally, religious Othering as a technique will also be investigated where the Saudi self would represent his identity as a Wahhabi puritan as opposed to an Iranian Shi'i infidel; and conversely the Iranian self, which would represent Shi'i martyrdom versus Yazid's tyranny and Godlessness encompassed in a Saudi Other.

### 1.3.3 Departure from Foucault and Said

There are two main characteristics shared by Foucault and Said. Firstly, both are mainly interested in discourses that are present throughout a society and in which numerous actors participate in the discourse construction. Secondly, to a greater extent Said, discusses discourses of Othering in the context of unequal power conditions in which a more powerful dominant group (e.g. White majority, Occident, etc.) distinguishes itself as superior to a weaker subordinate or subaltern group (e.g. the Orient, the Black minority, etc.). The case of Iran and Saudi Arabia is different. The power conditions are not unequal and one cannot speak of a dominant and weak side, or of a powerful and powerless side. Both may be regarded as 'rough equals' or equal antagonists that are competing for domination of the region in a Middle East Cold War. These differences necessitate the use of other approaches and concepts in addition to those of Foucault and Said.

#### *1.3.3.1 Cold War Propaganda, Containment, Image Theory and the 'Other'*

I employ the image theory developed by Hermann and Fischerkeller (1995) in the course of their work on the Cold War (and the Iran-Iraq War), and the notion of the 'necessary enemy', found in their work and in that of Stein (1985) and Hermann (1985). Image theory proposes the hypothesis that humans are innately limited cognitively, thus constantly sorting, analysing and interpreting information they intend to process. Through this process, developing images to humans, such as an image of an enemy or a friend, becomes both a common occurrence and a 'necessary' one. The development of the image of the Other according to this includes three main variables of distinguishing the Other as: 1) a threat or an opportunity; 2) culturally similar or inferior; and 3) more, less or similarly powerful (Herrmann 1985; Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995; Schaffer 2011: 135). Consequently, these three variables form 'ideal types

of images' of the Other such as the enemy that is either threatening with a similar culture and an equal in power; or an ally that is inferior in culture with less power and is an opportunity to be taken advantage of.

To expand further on Herrmann and Fischerkeller's (1995) notion of how image theory can explain the representation of the Other, the main characteristics of this theory have to be described. Furthermore, the most researched images include those of the enemy, ally, barbarian and imperialist (Alexander, Brewer, and Hermann 1999). Herrmann and Fischerkeller (1995) see mirror imaging occurring only when the Other is compatible in terms of their goals, equality in power, trustworthiness, cooperativeness and cultural equality. Furthermore, the representations of both the 'Barbarian' and the 'Imperialist' arise from negative interdependence where both groups compete and the failure of one results in the achievement of the Other's goals and ambitions (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995; Trifiletti et al. 2012).

*The Construction of the Other as an Enemy*

Within Cold War propaganda, the propaganda mechanism revolved around the constructed image of the enemy, i.e. the US, which became a dominant and characteristic theme within the stereotypical representation and identity construction of the Other as an enemy. This representation was based on a 'binary paradigm' including opposing but also complementary policies known as 'the symbiosis of American anti-communism and Soviet anti-capitalism' (Stein 1985), that can be compared to Saudi pro-Sunni and Iranian pro-Shi'i labels, when referring to the construction of the Other. This cultivated an 'imaginary war' where both sides complimentarily designed specific internal cultures and reaction systems, in addition to developing on the cultural, ideological, psychological and imaginary levels through the image

of the Other as a ‘necessary enemy, whose political outcomes contributed to internal aims and priorities’ (Kaldor 1990).

According to Finlay et al. (1967: 7) people have always needed an enemy or scapegoat and if one is not present, then the Other as an enemy and scapegoat shall be created. This is the ‘necessary enemy’ (Finlay, Holsti, and Fagen 1967: 7), where its role is more fixed than those taking up the role (Murray and Meyers 1999) i.e. regardless who is the enemy, an enemy has to always be present. These serve two main purposes, a psychological one where the need for an enemy arises from the need for targets for externalising frustration, fears and hostilities; and a political purpose where leaders create enemies to mobilise their nation around common aims (Murray and Meyers 1999). These two purposes, through propaganda discourses, shape an image of enemy that mirror each other where ‘each side attributes the same virtues to itself and the same vices to the enemy. We are trustworthy, peace-loving, honourable and humanitarian; they are treacherous, warlike and cruel’ (Stein 1985).

This thesis examines whether this concept of a necessary enemy can be found in an Iran-Saudi context, whether regionally or internationally for both political and psychological purposes and through propaganda discourses and enemy construction. Also, this study investigates how the image of the Other as an enemy was constructed through recurrent simplified, familiar and predictable symbols of stereotyping and the construction of the image of the Enemy, such as the export of the Revolution in Iran’s case or the demise of ‘real Islam’ in the case of Saudi Arabia. This pattern, most notably observed in US-Soviet Othering, becomes continuously refined through propaganda discourse, stereotyping or ‘ritualised rhetoric’ (Herrmann 1985) that entails fixed expressions, exaggeration, distortion of truth (up to the point of lying) (Witkowska 2008).

As outlined in the opening statement and for the purposes of this thesis, in the construction of the necessary enemy, there are specific images which have extremely powerful historical, cultural and religious connotations and resonances such as Karbala, Yazid and Hussain, the Prophet Mohammad and infidels of Mecca. An essential feature of such images is that their significance and power as metaphors and analogies is recognised by their respective audiences. In turn these images can be mobilised by each respective side and around which a set of discourses can orbit or rotate, discourses which are more specific to the prevailing local, regional or international context but which draw on the images' power as metaphors or analogies. The Karbala narrative and the martyrdom of Hussain, for example, was employed in different situations by the Iranian revolutionary leadership, thereby facilitating additional elite discourses regarding the oppressed versus the oppressor, the struggle for justice, and the need for revolutionary and religious perseverance.

In addition, political and religious actors mobilise these images within their discourses and narratives, which change according to the context as well as political agendas. These images as such have a power of resonance which sticks in the mind of the audience and are easily mobilised and deployed, in particular as they naturally relate to notions such as good versus evil, Shi'a versus Sunni etc. Furthermore, these images also allow us the opportunity to gain insight into the construction of each country's elite's *self-image*, thereby revealing something of the latter's religious, cultural and ideological basis. Drawing on the imagery of the Prophet Mohammad's companion Umar for instance, facilitated a discourse emphasising the prestige to the Saudi ruler, encompassing his fairness, chivalry, and piety. In the Iranian discourse, for example, the use of Imam Ali's images allows the construction of an elite discourse that the Iranian revolutionary regime recalls or marks a continuation of Imam Ali's chivalry, leadership, knowledge, wisdom, and resistance to oppression and worldly desires. Therefore, the images themselves are not necessarily innately political in character or nature, rather they

are mobilised at selected moments in order to allow the construction and communication of additional and related elite discourses in a variety of contexts and in order to meet a range of strategic needs and purposes. The introductions of each of the three core chapters will thereby identify the images specific to each respective timeframe and highlight the principal discourses associated with them in those specific contexts.

# 2. Methodology

As outlined in Chapter 1, this thesis employs the discursive constructivist approach that focuses on the broader role discourses plays in constructing meaning. Othering is treated as one major discursive construction and the discourses analysed here are are understood as constituting one major supra-discourse that encompasses political, religious, and media elements. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is used to examine how language and presentation produce meaning, and how knowledge within a particular discourse produces and connects/relates to power. In the following sections I explain which texts and discourses featured in my analysis; and provide an explanation of FDA methodology and its concepts employed in this thesis.

## 2.1 Text and Discourse Selection

In this project, the epistemology of *Othering* and *Otherness* is investigated through the analysis of three main spheres/discourses, namely the political, religious and media. The first of these, the political discourse, consists mainly of the speeches of the political elite in Iran and Saudi Arabia. The second, religious discourse, comprises the Friday prayer sermons delivered in both Saudi Arabia and Iran. The third category, i.e. the media, comprises newspaper editorials from four main newspapers representative of each country.

### 2.1.1 Political Speeches

A selection was made of speeches on political themes made by members of the political elite in Iran and Saudi Arabia. Politics speeches are viewed as ideological constructs that satisfy the elite's political objectives and which also serve to link language with political actions that either come before or after the discourse of speech (al-Rasheed 1996). The discourse analysis of political speech is most successful when it relates to both linguistic and political behaviour. This can be achieved on a macro-level by investigating the 'communicative situation', i.e. the

status of the elite, time (episode) and location (audience) of the speech coupled with text function to determine which linguistic structures and techniques have been utilized to transmit a particular construction by the elite. This macro-level analysis investigates aspects of power, dominance, and groupings (for example Shi'a/Wahhabi, Arab/Ajam, Conservative/Reformist) which are utilised in this thesis to study the representation of the Other. Moreover, these speeches are also employed by members of the political establishment to reinforce their position, the position of the state, or the political institution they belong to. This is achieved by utilising political discourse to affirm the position of authority and status of the Self and to undermine the Other.

In order to select the appropriate discourse for investigation, it is imperative to satisfy four main criteria: member of the elite, subject, period and audience. When taking the audience into account, the dissertation will focus on both the domestic and international public. This affords a snapshot of how the elite in Iran and Saudi Arabia refer to the Other when speaking to a crowd of Iranians or Saudis, for example on the religious occasions of the al-Adha, Ramadan festivals and Muharram; national celebrations such as the National Day in Saudi Arabia and the Anniversary of the Revolution in Iran. On a more international scale, speeches by elites at the UN General Assembly and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) are also investigated. These reflect the identity of the state, elite membership/status and the representation of the Other on an international level.

When selecting the members representative of the elite in both states, care was taken to choose members that belonged to the centres of powers, i.e. formal actors. These included the Supreme Leader (Iran), king of Saudi Arabia, the foreign ministers of both states, the President of Iran, the Crown Prince and Minister of Defence in Saudi Arabia, and the Speakers of the Majles and

the Shura Council (Majlis Ashūrā) in Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively. It is important to take into consideration that language as part of political discourse is concerned with who has the permission to say what and to whom, which is intertwined with power and social status (Wareing 2004: 9). That is to say that how an elite member, such as the crown prince or Majles speaker for example uses the language depends on how they perceive themselves and what identity they want to reflect of themselves, the group they belong to, or their state; and to whom the speech is addressed and where. Accordingly, invaluable inferences can be made about political elites from the way they talk (Meyerhoff 2006).

### 2.1.2 Friday Prayer Sermons

To explain the rationale behind the selection of the Friday prayer sermons *(khutbah)* to investigate the representation of the Other in Saudi Arabia and Iran, an explanation of the background to the *khutbah* and its relevance in Iran and Saudi Arabia is necessary. Also, the role of the ulama and their relationship with the state has to be examined.

The *khutbah* or sermon in Islam is a speech given by a religious scholar and has a static position in Islamic ritual, i.e. it is a compulsory event that all muslims have to attend as part of Friday prayers. It precedes the prayer and consists of two segments. A 'warning sermon' or the 'sermon of exhortation' takes place which is a longer *khutbah* and then a shorter, descriptive *khutbah* known as a 'qualifying sermon' is given. Besides serving a religious function, the *khutbah* has always served an important political function since the days of the Prophet Mohammad (Ram 1994: 19). This importance still applies to the contemporary nation state. Whilst the *khutbah* is a significant part of the ritualistic and religious framework of Islam, in this thesis I analyse the Friday sermons for their political and socio-political dimensions.

The (socio)political significance of the *khutbah* began with the establishment of the first mosque in 620AD when Mohammad controlled the religious and political community of Islam (Ram, 1994, Fathi 1984: 89) giving it a political nature, adherence to which at that time showed allegiance to the newly formed *Ummah* (Ram 1994: 9). This procedure continued throughout the tenure of four Caliphs as they created a pulpit *(minbar)* emphasising their roles as spokesmen of the community or employed governors or generals to do so on their behalf. These representatives consequently issued orders, pronounced policy decisions or expressed the view of the Caliph on certain issues (Pedersen 2012).

**Saudi Arabia**

In Saudi Arabia, the ulama constitute the second branch of a bifurcated system that is comprised of a religious group and tribes that shape the dynamics of Saudi political life. Whilst the monarchy is the principal actor within the political system through the identity of the king, he is also viewed as the tribal chief and Imam. The king is also named the 'Custodian of the Two Holy Sites' and amongst other titles and responsibilities he appoints the ulama that regulate life in the kingdom. The ulama also fall into two categories: official ulama that act as actors at an institutional level and nonconformist ones that perform the traditional activities of a cleric with no link to the authorities. Korany (1991: 33) argues that the ulama at the institutional level also take part in decision making, albeit in consensus with the king through the *'Board of Senior Ulama' (Hayʾat Kibār al-Ulamāʾ)* that propagate the Wahhabi doctrine domestically and internationally, train preachers and reaffirm the state's identity with Wahhabism (al-Yassini 1985: 71; Korany 1991: 33).

Through the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, the ulama train and appoint Friday sermon preachers with special selection of those preaching in the two holy sites, Mecca and Medina

since they occupy a special status as the capitals of the Islamic World. The ministry also regulates the topics and content of the sermons. This regulation arose as result of policies implemented by the king in response to international, regional and domestic events that led to shifts in the relationship between the ulama and the monarchy. Moreover, the roles attributed to the ulama also include their participation in Saudi foreign policy, particularly since al-Saud took control of Mecca and Medina, a status in the Islamic world that cannot be underestimated, since millions of Muslims pray in the direction of Mecca five times a day. Piscatori (1983:51) argues Saudi foreign policy has been formulated with an ideological dimension of Islam, but most importantly allowed for strategic, economic and pragmatic considerations.

The use of Islam in Saudi foreign policy has mainly been implemented by stressing its identity and image as a pious and religious leader of the Islamic world. While this allows for the mobilisation of external support for the Saudi kingdom, it also creates a competition for the Islamic leadership by other states such as Iran. The participation of the ulama in enhancing the image and identity of the kingdom and the king has been limited, but influential. Therefore, the Friday prayer sermons from the pulpits of Mecca and Medina have served as enhancers as they are broadcasted to the whole world, enforcing the identity of the state and its king as a custodian and defender of the holy sites and Islamic world in its entirety.

**Iran**

In contrast to the Sunni sect of Islam, where the Sunni caliphs reinforced their sovereignty through preaching sermons, in the Shi'a sect the 12 Imams presided over the Friday prayers therefore highlighting their role as the rightful caliphs of Islam (Ram 1994: 22). Another stark difference is that the political leaders in the Sunni sect appoint a representative preacher, the Shi'a view is that the Friday prayer cleric is the representative of the hidden Imam (in occultation), and that since 1979 through the 'general vice regency' *(niyāba ʿāma)* of the Shi'a

jurist or Governance of the Jurist (*Vilāyat-i Faqīh*), the Faqīh or Supreme Leader fulfils this role. Since 1979, Friday prayer Imams in Iran have been appointed by the *Faqīh* / Supreme Leader and according to Kamrava and Hassan-Yari (2004), they are among the most trusted cadres of clerics. The country's executive branch has no control over these representatives of the Supreme Leader, as they are thought of as being more powerful than the provincial governors in the areas they preach in (Kamrava and Hassan-Yari 2004).

Moreover, the Islamic Republic attached political significance to the Friday sermon in four main respects. First is the ability to propagate political messages to the audience. Second, through the Friday Prayer Council guidelines were established for all the Friday sermon leaders to adhere to. Third, the Tehran sermon is broadcasted nationally on television and radio and published the next day in the newspapers *(Kayhan and Ettela'at)*. Fourth, is to create a bond and relationship between the clergy and the nation by raising awareness and serving as role models and examples to the public (Kamrava and Hassan-Yari 2004).

Like Saudi Arabia, internal and external factors also had an effect on Iranian Friday sermons. In the first eight years after the revolution, Iran faced a long war against Iraq. With that war in mind, the sermon preacher was most often a member of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) delegated as a representative of Khomeini (Ram 1994: 29). As a result, the bulk of the war saw the Tehran sermon being presided by either Khamenei in his capacity as president or Rafsanjani as Majles speaker. Moreover, the pulpit was used as a forum to establish Iran's identity as a righteous, pious state that shows bravery. It also identified itself with major Islamic themes such as Hussein's Karbala or the wars the Prophet Mohammad undertook in the early days of his Islamic mission. To be exact, Iran aimed at reflecting an image of the Self as the oppressed Mohammad or Hussein, against the Other of the infidels of Quraish or Yazid. However, the main pillar of Iran's revolutionary ideology in the 1980s was the export of the revolution. In

1980 for example, Khamenei's sermon spoke of the export of the revolution not by means of the sword, but by the message and elucidation because Iran has no offensive weapons, it prefers not to use them also because technology is used like 'other states' in the East and West in an against other countries (Sermon on 29/02/1980 in Ram 1994: 180).

### 2.1.3 Newspapers

Newspaper editorials act as the mouthpiece of a particular newspaper and reflect its ideology. Lagonikos (2005) observes that editorials have become known as the mouthpiece because people utilise them to follow up on the main arguments when discussing political, religious and national issues within a state. Furthermore, since the media is filled with overwhelming information, people turn to expert opinions to sieve the information for them. Both of these reasons have allowed newspapers to shape the socio-political environment through the eyes of an ideological group that share similar beliefs and values that are defined in the newspapers they read (Lagonikos 2005; Reah 2002). It is through the editorials that the shared beliefs and values are argued in an effective and persuasive manner to defend positions against the 'Other'. News is commented on and discussed in a multidimensional fashion, providing recommendations, warnings or predictions by employing various strategies. These include the use of rhetoric, stereotypes and polarized vocabulary to describe the 'Other', whether they be states or other actors. These employed strategies will propagate a positive image of 'us' and the opposite about 'them' (van Dijk 2005: 17-33). This opens the door to elaborate on the conditions and reasons behind my selection of particular Saudi and Iranian newspapers.

To cover the views representative of Iran and Saudi Arabia in newspaper editorials, newspapers were selected on the basis of four main conditions. The first two conditions included a high reader base and archives that cover all the episodes from (1980 to 2009). The third condition

is the coverage of international events in their editorials. The fourth condition is representation of the main official views within Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that when investigating the role of the press in Saudi Arabia and Iran, it is apparent that Saudi Arabia has no form of reformist-led press. However, while the Iranian press includes a reformist press, these newspapers have been subject to frequent temporary and permanent bans. Although this makes the analysis of the comparison between Iranian newspapers difficult and asymmetrical, it is not an impossible task and can shed significant light on Iranian discourse of Othering on two sides of the Iranian political spectrum.

The collection of data focuses on seven Iranian and four Saudi newspapers that cover a range of political orientations and target audiences during every one of the watershed episodes. The Iranian newspapers are divided into two groups, conservative newspapers which include *Kayhan*, *Jomhouri Eslami, Ettela'at* and *Resalat;* and reformist newspapers which include *Salam, Aftab-e Yazd* and *Etemad*[1]. The Saudi newspapers are *Asharq al-Awsat, al-Riyadh, al-Hayat* and *al-Madina*[2]. The reason for this approach is not only to investigate the representation of the Other within an inter Saudi-Iranian context, but also to study it in an intra-Iranian milieu exemplified by the aforementioned newspapers. Editorials rather than articles were chosen for analysis because they reflect a wider range of ideological positions (at least in the case of Iran) and set out deliberately to form opinions, whereas articles are often more concerned with conveying information. The selection was restricted to textual content, ignoring photographs, pictures, and their accompanying captions. Editorials are not normally illustrated and dealing with images would extend the scope and scale of the thesis beyond what is feasible.

[1] Circulation of the Iranian newspapers: *Kayhan*:100,000 *Ettela'at*:90,000, Resalat: 50,000 *Salam*: 100,000 *Aftab-e Yazd*: 100,000 *Etemaad*: 100,000 (Mahtafar et al, 2009; IMP & Monroe, 2012)

[2] Circulation of the Saudi newspapers: *ASharq al-Awsat*: 237,000, *al-Riyadh*: 150,000, *al-Hayat*: 100,000, *al-Madina*: 60,000 (WAN-IFRA, 2008)

### *2.1.3.1 Iranian Newspapers*

*Conservative Newspapers*

These demonstrate a voice of conservatism, and with the exception of *Resalat*, are controlled, if only at an arm's length, by the office of the supreme leader. This is mainly accomplished in two ways, firstly by appointing a representative of the supreme leader in the newspaper and through state subsidies. The representative of the supreme leader normally acts as the editor-in-chief or the managing director, such as *Kayhan's* Hossein Shariatmadari, Hojatoleslam Mahmoud Doaie in *Ettela'at* and *Jomhouri Eslami's* Masih Mohajeri. Moreover, state owned newspapers are also controlled through major subsidies. Shahidi (2008:78) argues that the state-owned press had received 77% of the total allocated subsidies between 1989 and 2003, of which *Ettela'at* had received $2.24 million per year, *Kayhan* $1.99 million and *Jomhouri Eslami* $504 thousand. Despite the fact that the four selected newspapers represent an official Iranian line; these newspapers differ in their political orientation and their criticism towards the government. Also, although criticism of the supreme leader is a red line that newspapers do not cross, governmental and senior figures within the Iranian hierarchy are criticised. As a result, the editor-in-chief and management of the newspapers have been known to criticise the government and its actions based on where they position themselves within the Iranian political spectrum. This is especially evident in what Shahidi (2007) and Khiabany (2009) argue to be an evolution of the Iranian press from mouthpieces reporting on the Iran-Iraq war to press competition, increase in governmental criticism and voices of reform that started after 1989.

*Kayhan's* Hossein Shariatmadari has always been a voice piece of the state, especially during the Iran-Iraq war, where the wartime papers did not characterize any opposition or ideas different from those held by the state (Shahidi 2007). However, due to the increase in the

number of newspapers after the war, *Kayhan* not only represented the official state stance on politics but also represented the views of the conservatives; and since the mid-1990s the ultra-conservatives such as the *Union for the Defense of the Values of the Islamic Revolution (Jamiʿ-i difāʿ az Arzishha-yi Inqilāb-i Islāmī)*, that gave rise to the Hezbollah factional group and its subgroups such as *Ansār-i Hizbullāh* (Rakel 2004: 241). *Kayhan* editorials have clearly demonstrated their political views towards world order for instance, Shariatmadari, Kayhan's editor-in-chief has been known to emphasize 'the [Shi'i] Islamic version of world order', especially revolutionary Islam and the denunciation of the West (Samar and Mahdavy 2009). The newspaper has also been critical of the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement of 1997 and has argued that Saudi Arabia acts as a US proxy in the Middle East and that 'Iran should not risk its reputation among Muslims by getting close to Riyadh' (*AFP* 1993).

On the other hand, a historic rival of *Kayhan*, *Ettela'at* tends to be less controversial and more 'moderate to public issues' (Khiabany 2009: 85). Its editor Hojatoleslam Mahmoud Doaie a cleric from the leftist Assembly of Militant Clerics *(Majmaʿ-i Rawhāniyūn-i Mubāriz)* and a six time member of the Majles (Parliament) acted as the newspaper's Managing Director and editor-in chief from 1980 up to 2009 (Tazmini 2009: 45). Samar and Mahdavy (2009) argue that *Ettela'at* equates nationality with Islam, where both are equally valuable, leaning more towards an image of traditional Islam rather than revolutionary rhetoric against the West.

Established in 1979 by the Islamic Republic Party, *Jomhouri Eslami* has been unique in its administration since its first managing director was Khamenei until the start of his tenure as President in 1981; and Mir Hossein Mousavi as editor-in-chief between 1979 and 1981 until he undertook his post as Prime Minister (1981). From then until the end of the period covered by this thesis, the editor-in-chief has been Masih Mohajeri a former member of the Islamic

Republican Party (until its dissolution in 1987) with pragmatic views and a conservative centre-right position (Rafizadeh and Alimardani 2013). However, Bastani (2007) makes the case that until 1987 the newspaper reflected the views of the party and since then had 'its own line of thought and perspectives'. It can be characterised as loyal to the leadership following the line and vision of Ayatollah Khomeini, supporting the regime's agencies and organization, and key members of the governmental apparatus, particularly Khamenei and Hashemi Rafsanjani (Bastani 2007).

*Resalat* on the other hand, is not state owned and does not receive state subsidies to cover its expenses. The newspaper is one of the most important conservative outlets that represents the traditional right *(Rāst-i Sunatī)* and mainly the Islamic Coalitionary Society (*Muʾtalifa*) which is controlled principally by the Bazaaris, tending to hold 'extreme religious, cultural and business views' (Khiabany 2009: 39). Even though members of the Islamic Coalitionary Society, such as Morteza Nabavi, also a member of the Expediency Council, and Mohammed-Kazem Anbarlu'i have held management and editorial positions in *Resalat*, the direction of the editorials towards government policies has on the whole been geared towards the economy. However, on matters of foreign policy, the newspaper has reflected the views of the Supreme Leader (Rakel 2004: 239).

*Reformist Newspapers*

The end of the Iran-Iraq war and the two-term eight-year presidency of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-1997) paved the way towards an economic policy of investment in infrastructure and a relaxation of the red tape, which affected culture and the arts also. This relaxation was accelerated during the two-term presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-

2005), the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Rafsanjani's administration. The first reformist led newspaper published in 1991 was *Salam*, established and backed by members of the traditional left (*chap-i sunatī*) Assembly of Militant Clerics after their exclusion from election to the Assembly of Experts (Rakel 2004: 240). Managed by a cleric, Hojjatoleslam Seyyed-Mohammad Mousavi-Khoeiniha, *Salam* maintained a stance of anti-Americanism (Takeyh 2009: 121) but also quickly gained pace amongst the public as a vocal and outspoken critic of the system and its policies that reached Rafsanjani during his tenure as president (Shahidi 2007: 47-48). This not only led to its permanent ban in 1999 but also to the detention of its editor-in-chief Abbas Abdi, once a revolutionary known for his role in the US Embassy hostage crisis (Slackman 2006).

Khatami's election as President allowed for a cultural revolution in Iran that increased the number of newspaper licences. *Aftab-e Yazd* was founded in 2000 and is also affiliated with the League of Combatant Clergy and Khatami supporters. Led until 2010 by Seyed Mojtaba Vahedi, a reformist politician and political advisor, he gave the newspaper a critical tone towards the state (Mahtafar 2010), with editorials calling for rapprochement and closer ties with the region and the West (*Aftab-e-Yazd 2013;* Shayegan 2013). Like *Salam*, *Aftab-e Yazd* is more attentive to the internal politics of Iran especially through criticism of governmental performance. However, its criticism of Iran's foreign policy comes as part of its criticism of the government in general and relates it to party politics. One evidence of such criticism and its relationship to reformist politics is the newspaper's criticism of the actions of Iran's government during the 'radical Iranian governments led by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005-2013' that may have further deteriorated the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, thus calling for Rafsanjani's pragmatism to remedy any setbacks in Saudi-Iranian relations (*Aftab-e-Yazd* 2013; Shayegan 2013).

Whilst both the aforementioned newspapers are known for their reformist positions, they are mainly characterised as sympathetic or affiliated to reformists. *Etemad* on the other hand is labelled as Iran's main reformist newspaper since its establishment in 2002 (*BBC Monitoring* 2009). It is owned by the former deputy leader of the *Etemad-e Melli* reformist party (National Trust Party), Elias Hazrati (Peterson 2010: 344). The newspaper is known to criticise the conservative government on a range of issues including foreign policy and Iran's relations on a regional and global level whilst supporting Iran's international rapprochement. Like other Iranian reformist press, Etemaad and its editors did not escape threats. Their vocal criticisms, during Ahmedinejad's tenure resulted in threats and bans for criticising senior figures such as Ahmedinejad and his behaviour that led to Iran's isolation (IMP and Price 2012).

*2.1.3.2 Saudi Newspapers*

Saudi newspapers, with the exception of *al-Hayat*, are explicitly conservative. They are all also either owned by supporters of the religious police, for instance the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Salman al-Saud, or major supporters of Islamic fundamentalists. Also, the Saudi newspapers are under state control by the Saudi monarchy, either through ownership of the newspapers or governmental subsidies. This enhances a red line on any criticism of Saudi Arabia, since no editorial can criticise the king, members of the monarchy, especially those in senior positions or the kingdom's foreign policy. In the rare circumstances where criticism is made, it is very limited and brief. An evolution of Saudi press has also been observed. Campagna (2006) argues that in Saudi Arabia, an evolution occurred following the events in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 and the suicide bombings in Riyadh in 2003. This gave rise to slight press freedoms where editorials started to discuss new issues, such as religious extremists' indoctrination of the youth and women's rights. But overall, since

the early existence of the modern Saudi state, the media apparatus has been known to support the views and visions of the King and the monarchy, even when the head offices of media companies were based abroad.

Both *Asharq al-Awsat* and its main rival *al-Hayat* have their head offices based outside the Kingdom. Established in 1978 by the Saudi Media Research Group, *Asharq al-Awsat*'s head office is based in London making it the first Saudi newspaper to have a foreign publication base. The newspaper is financially supported and controlled by Faisal Bin Salman al-Saud the governor of Madinah province and the son of Crown Prince Salman al-Saud, the main backer of the religious police in Riyadh (Hammond 2008: 345). This gives it qualities of being highly conservative on political affairs with extreme cautiousness when writing on the affairs of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, in addition to maintaining a Pan-Arab image. The financial subsidy has also led the editorials to be extremely vigilant when criticising the Monarchy or the Islamic establishment in Saudi Arabia (Hammond 2008: 344). This view has been acknowledged by its editor-in-chief (until 2012) Tariq al-Homayed, noting that the '[newspaper] distribution in the Arab world necessitates respecting the local laws in those countries, and consequently there are limitations on what it can say' (Rugh 2004: 175). On the other hand, in terms of foreign policy, the editor-in-chief has given the newspaper its vocal and harsh tone on Iran and its allies. For instance, *Asharq al-Awsat's* editorials have displayed staunch criticism of Iran, especially during the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel and the 2009 Israeli war strikes with Hamas.

Similarly, *al-Hayat's* headquarters is in London and it is one of the leading and most widely read Pan-Arab newspapers in the Middle East. Although, since its reopening in 1998 it has been owned and financially supported by the Saudi Prince Khalid bin Sultan al-Saud, it has

been known to be more critical of the Saudi government than its main rivals such as *Asharq al-Awsat* (Fattah 2005). This criticism, although subtle and not aimed at the king or the monarchy, resulted in two very short bans in 2002 and 2007. Since then the 'paper treads softly when it comes to disquieting news about Saudi Arabia, a notable exception to its independent stand' (Ibrahim 1997). Nevertheless, *al-Hayat* is favoured among intellectuals in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East in general. This is attributed to its multi-perspective editorials and views that range from Islamic fundamentalists to anti-religious liberals, Arab nationalist views (Ibrahim 1997; Rugh 2004). This in itself is a rarity for a Saudi newspaper. Furthermore, while highlighting Iran's role in Arab affairs, including the wars in 2006 and 2009, *al-Hayat* did not resort to the harsh tone adopted by *Asharq al-Awsat* for example.

Also controlled by Crown Prince Salman al-Saud, the former governor of Riyadh (Hammond 2008: 339; WAN-IFRA 2008), *al-Riyadh* operates under the banner of the *Al Yamamah Press Establishment*. *al-Riyadh* is also the main newspaper of the Saudi capital since its establishment in 1965. Like the aforementioned newspapers, it has a conservative approach, and has been labelled a semi-official newspaper. Moreover, the monarchical influence and semi-official stance is further highlighted through the views of the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Turki al-Sudairi, a close relative of the al-Saud monarchy, chairman of the *Saudi Journalists Association* and a pro-government editor (Campagna 2006). This is observed in his defence of Saudi interests and in him being a propagator of its views, especially with regards to Iran. For instance, in response to an analyst that criticised the role of Bander al-Saud towards Iran's nuclear programme in *al-Jazeera TV*, a full editorial was dedicated to defend Bandar's stance. Editorials have also been written in support of the Wahhabi view that Iran is the number one enemy, even greater than Israel, to Saudi Arabia and the Arabs in general (al-Sudairi 2011).

Finally, though not owned by the Saudi monarchy, *al-Madina* is Saudi Arabia's oldest newspaper, founded in 1937 (Nagraj 2013), is also branded as a pro-government and very conservative newspaper. Despite the fact that its conservative line has been argued to give it a more religious image than other Saudi newspapers (Ochsenwald 1981), *al-Madina* has been known to have employed critical writers that have written pro-reform columns subtly criticising the state. An editorial in March 2002 crossed the red line by criticising Islamic judges but led to the dismissal of the editor –in-chief by the Saudi government rather than a temporary ban of the newspaper (Abu-Nasr 2002). However, overall, like other Saudi newspapers, *al-Madina* supports and propagates the official views of the Saudi administration; especially with regards to foreign policy.

There are differences between the Saudi and Iranian newspapers in terms of style, content and level of criticism. Saudi editorials, are short and brief, particularly *al-Madina* and *al-Riyadh*, and tend to be very confrontational and explicit with their vocabulary use when referring to states or actors which the state may have animosity towards. On the other hand, Iranian editorials are comprehensive, sometimes exceeding a column and continuing on a second page of the newspaper. As for the style, Iranian newspapers are mainly implicit when referring to Arab and Muslim states and actors, but explicit when criticising the West. On the national level, as discussed earlier, Iranian newspapers are very critical in relation to the administrations of various presidents as opposed to Saudi Newspapers that include very limited and brief criticism. Iranian newspapers have been known to thoroughly criticise members within different branches of the establishment, such as the President, ministers and different branches of the armed forces. However, Saudi newspapers have been known to tread very carefully when criticising the religious or sensitive branches of the country (for example the police, intelligence, the army), especially those held by members of the monarchy. This may result in

a decrease in variation which may be a cause for some concern, since it may limit the usefulness of the sources to explore the different mainstream views within the Saudi system. However, this may also reflect the lack of diversity of the mainstream views within the Saudi system. Overall, although there are differences between Iranian and Saudi newspapers, they are still viable sources to act as datasets to explore the epistemology of Saudi-Iranian Othering.

## 2.2 Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)

This study employs Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to engage in issues of power, to identify the dominant discourses shaping the image of states, the historical aspects of the discourses and how they may have changed over time as discussed above. FDA is applied to examine political, religious, and media discourse to explain how they create discursive subjects and objects which may give rise to different subject positions.

### 2.2.1 Strategies/Stages of FDA

Foucault argues that there is no model or concise method for conducting discourse analysis (Foucault et al. 1991: 73-86; Foucault 2002b). However, this thesis employs Willig's (2008) six stages of FDA to analyse discourse according to a Foucauldian power-knowledge and genealogical paradigm (Willig 2008). This allows me to study Saudi-Iranian representation of the Other across a 30 year time period through the three watershed episodes selected. Also, FDA is a suitable technique since it 'can be carried out wherever there is meaning' (Parker and Bolton Discourse 1999: 1; Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2007), therefore making it applicable to my choice of sources. However, before undergoing FDA, the most important part of the process is text and discourse selection. This pre-analysis step will involve the selection of texts which highlight a language that represents Othering within each watershed episode. For example,

editorials from both Saudi Arabia and Iran will be selected from the first two years of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1982), as a historical moment here, that either implicitly or explicitly uses texts to identify the different discursive formations in the mutual representation of the Other.

FDA will also be used to identify 'objects' and how they are referred to in the discourse. Given that discourse is defined as a set of meanings which contain objects, it makes the discourse a representational practice that gives rise to an 'object of reality' when using words such as nouns in reference to the object (Parker, 1992: 8-9). This thesis investigates the description of the different religious and political repertoires and who they refer to by making two enquiries: 1) what do the objects refer to? and 2) how are these objects described? Especially since this dissertation observes that the discourse of Othering is an object in itself and can be described in terms of stereotypes or racism, such as the Shi'a being heretics and fire-worshippers or Saudis portrayed as lizard-eating desert barbarians.

I have argued previously that this thesis views the discourses under investigation as state propaganda rather than a regime of truth constructed by society. However, this thesis utilizes FDA to deconstruct these propaganda texts in a critical manner, to determine what discursive tools and constructions of mutual Othering are disseminated into the Saudi and Iranian societies though the political, religious and media discourses. Furthermore, these discursive constructions give rise to 'certain ways-of-seeing the world and certain ways-of-being in the world. Discourses offer *subject positions*, which, when taken up, have implications for subjectivity and experience' (Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2007: 172; her emphasis). It is through the analysis of subjective positions that we can approach the question of which actors generate the discourse of Othering, for what purpose and for which target audience; and from

there, of how the representation of the Other affirms the identity and character of the Self in Saudi and Iranian discourse. Finally, Foucault's concept of intertextuality (Foucault 2002a: 25-26) is applied through the analysis of a multiple array of texts and discourses. This permits the analysis of multiple texts across a historical time frame to identify any overlap in the discourses since FDA scans texts at a macro-level. Here, the representation of the Other is studied across the three watershed episodes and highlights any overlapping and reoccurrence.

In order to employ FDA to analyse discourse in the selected texts, Willig's six stages (Willig 2008) are adopted. The first stage considers discursive constructions, that is, the ways in which the discursive objects are constructed, in keeping with the research questions set out in Chapter 1. In this thesis, I am interested in how the Other is represented in Saudi-Iranian relations, therefore, the main discursive object will be the 'Other'. This stage also includes the isolation of the different ways in which Othering is constructed in the text. This is accomplished by underlining and illustrating the number of ways the discursive object, the Other, is mentioned both implicitly and explicitly. Explicit stereotypes include denigrations such as Nasibī/Rafidī, sons of Mutʿah, sons of Misyār, Kāfir (Heretics), Majūsī (fire worshiper). On the other hand, implicit references would generally be referenced to using metaphors, especially since the texts that do not contain a direct reference to the discursive object may shed more light on the way in which the object is constructed. For instance, Saudi Arabia is labelled as a 'protector of the Zionists', the Saudi clergy as 'hired agents' of the monarchy. And Iran is characterised as a Persian Empire with hegemonic ambitions, or a sedition-sponsoring state.

Secondly, following the identification of the sections of the texts that have constructed the discursive object we analyse the similarities and difference between those discursive constructions, since the object may be constructed in different ways. Here, I compare how the

discursive construction of the Other (in the first stage) is carried out across an array of spheres of discourse i.e. speeches, sermons, editorials. The third stage investigates action orientation. Here, FDA analyses the context in which the different discursive objects are being deployed. This step allows for a comprehensive understanding of what the different discursive objects (of Othering) constructed achieve within the different chosen texts. This gives rise to three fundamental questions within the analysis; firstly it asks what are the implications for the discourse author i.e. what is gained from constructing the discursive object in a particular way and a particular point (time period) within the text?; secondly, how do they serve the author's discursive goals, i.e. through positioning or blaming the Other; and finally, what is the function of the constructed object and how it relates to other constructions produced in surrounding texts analysed (Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2007; Willig 2008). For instance, through the discourse of 'hegemony', where Iran is placed as a hegemonic power that aspires to expand as an empire and control the Middle East, reflecting back to the Sassanid Empire and its invasion by the Muslims and subsequent conversion to Islam. Another illustration of action orientation may include Saudi Arabia as a 'supporter of Zionists'. Here, Iran places Saudi Arabia as the main target to blame for the existence of the state of Israel and for any oppression against the Palestinians and the Muslim World.

Fourth, positioning will be considered. This part of the analysis investigates how the various discursive object constructions in wider discourses offer and give rise to subject positions. A subject position is made available through discourses that groups or individuals can take up or place others in, with the positions being relational to the subject positions (Harre and van Langenhove 1999). Willig (2008) further describes the positioning as 'discourses construct *subjects* as well as objects and, as a result, make available positions within networks of meaning that speakers can take up (as well as place others within)'. This can be illustrated through

dichotomies where one group may position itself in a powerful position in relation to the 'Other' less powerful or even powerless group. For example, when the Iranian religious scholars talk about giving 'Israel a crushing defeat in a 34-day war' in South Lebanon (2006), the Other, i.e. the Arabs including Saudi Arabia, are placed in a less powerful or powerless position. As a result, within discourse analysis, the concept of subject positioning is taken into account as different discourses may position groups or individuals in different ways and according to differing degrees of power that may have repercussions on subjectivity and experience (Harre and van Langenhove 1999; Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2007). To further illustrate this concept, by positioning the Wahhabi version of Islam as 'pure' and as 'the righteous path', it can be implied that the Other, such as the Shi'a sect, is 'impure' and 'heretical'.

The fifth stage takes into consideration the relationship between discourse and practice. That is to say, subject positions encompassed within the discursive constructions can affect how people – groups or individuals – take action (Willig 2008). These constructions would therefore constrain and affect what is said and done, thus legitimising practices and behaviours. If the first elections in post-Saddam Iraq are taken as an example, the non-participation of the majority of Sunni Arabs in the 'Triangle' could be viewed as a reaction to the 'Othering' they were subjected to as Baathist supporters, thus their non-participation legitimises and mimics their 'Othering' by the Shi'a majority, and their 'Othering' also explains and legitimises their non-participation.

Finally, subjectivity will be examined. From a Foucauldian viewpoint there is a direct relationship between the production of subject positions and identities by discourses and the implication they have on subjectivity and experience. This stage explores this relationship

between discourse and subjectivity where discourses that are produced institutionally, for example by governments, produce knowledge that places people in a certain position or particular category that would affect their views and opinions. Therefore, through the construction of discursive objects, discourses have 'real effects' that legitimise particular actions composed of particular 'truths' about 'reality' that position groups and individuals in certain categories within a society such as the Other as an 'infidel' if Shi'a, a fire worshiper if Iranian; 'Arab nomad lizard eater' if Saudi Arabian, or 'terrorist' if Wahhabi.

# 3. 1979-1983: Revolution, War, and the Formation of Iranian and Saudi Discourses of Self and Other

## 3.1 Introduction

The end of the 1970s saw great changes in the Middle East, which included the first peace agreement between a major Arab state, Egypt, and Israel; the revolutionary creation of the first Shi'i theocracy led by a jurist and the ousting of a 2,500-year-old monarchical system in Iran, establishing a new regime that would endure eight years of an 'imposed war' that sent tremors throughout the Middle East for years to follow. This chapter discusses the Iranian and Saudi representation of the Other during the period between 1979 and 1983 in order to analyse the different discursive strategies employed by each states in a period of tension and war. The main rationale behind this chapter is to examine the different discourses deployed during this period and to discuss what they reveal about the different discursive strategies employed. Shifts in the two states' respective representation of the Self and the Other as a result of domestic, regional and international events are identified. In order to answer the questions outlined at the start of this thesis, I have structured this chapter into three main sections, namely a description of the discourses deployed, an examination of the identity and definition of the Self and the themes and predications employed in the representation of the Other.

It is also necessary to underline the foundational character of the period, both in terms of Iran's transformation from being a US/western ally in the region to a revolutionary vanguard state. This new revolutionary state in turn reshaped the local and regional agenda of its reactionary Other, namely Saudi Arabia. As a result, during the period 1979-1983 a set of Self and Othering discourses and tropes emerged, reflecting the political and ideological pressures both states were experiencing. Indeed, the early years of the defence and survival of the revolutionary state witnessed the development of innovative and powerful politico-religious

languages which would reappear during later periods in accordance with changing regional and international contexts.

In the course of this chapter, I make three main arguments. First, that religion – or more precisely sect – was not an area of contention between both states at the beginning of the post-revolutionary period. This was especially the case since the overall narrative between both states in the post-revolutionary period up to the start of the war was one of acceptance and mutual respect. I argue that the issue of sectarianism was employed as a tool and discursive strategy for two main reasons. From the Iranian side it was framed on the Saudi assistance to Saddam and the growing Saudi fear of Iranian calls to export the revolution. I argue that events such as the hajj incidents, weapons procurement, and the Fahd peace plan (for the Arab-Israeli conflict) were all tools utilised by these states.

Moreover, the shift in narrative and therefore the representation of the Other was directly proportional to the events that took place in both states. I argue that although Saudi Arabia reacted to Iran's actions as a result of its realpolitik, thereby thus protecting its Arab and Islamic identity both internationally and regionally, Iran's representation of the Saudi Other was a form of 'organised aggressiveness'. That is to say, Iran's demonising construction of the Saudi state, clerics and its monarchy was achieved without consideration of foreign policy outcomes, thus signifying the naivety of a newly-founded revolutionary state. I also argue that the representation of the Saudi Other had an internal agenda based on two main motives: the sustainability of clerical consolidation, mainly by the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) members; and the *levée en masse* of youth to the war front to further consolidate power and to win the war by the construction of the demonised enemy, the Other.

I also contend that the success of the Iranian revolution not only had an effect on Iranian identity, but also on the Saudi one. The Saudi affirmation of the Self was highlighted after the

siege of the Mecca and the Qatif (Muharram) uprisings in November and December 1979 respectively. I discuss how different events, particularly the siege and Shi'i uprisings allowed the monarchy to reaffirm the image of the Imam of the Ummah, the development of the state and the prestige of the kingdom as the cradle of Islam. Also, the US embassy hostage crisis undertaken by Iranian students, the subsequent failures of rescue attempts, the clerical consolidation of the different state power organs, alongside the regaining of territory and advances in the war, allowed the Iranians to emphasise their identity and therefore shape their view and construction of the Saudi Other. I contend that these discourses of divinity and prestige relating to the 'hidden hand of God' not only deemed their revolution holy and successful, but also viewed it as exporting God's will, since the newly formed Islamic Republic was not only holy, but also divine in that it was an extension of Imam Ali's caliphate and government in waiting for the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi. Holy in that it applies God's laws on earth, and divine as it fulfils the Islamic prophecies of the Mahdi coming to prepare to spread 'peace on earth' after an age of 'tyranny and evil'.

It is interesting to note that Khomeini's revolution led to a similar transformation in Iran that had ramifications on Saudi Arabia. In Iran, the revolution reshaped the state from a monarchy into a secular-Islamic structure, and finally witnessed the full clerical consolidation of control over the state. On the other hand, in Saudi Arabia, the ramifications of the Iranian revolution saw Shi'i uprisings in the Eastern Province and – albeit as an indirect result – the siege of Mecca. Ironically, it can be argued that both states share this moment of transformation as they both experienced ideological, religious and military dangers. As a result, the two states experienced clerical consolidation of their respective governments and societies, one intended to instil a revolutionary interpretation of a modern Islamic state, the other adopting a more reactionary approach to shoring up its religious and ideological position.

In the years following the Khomeini-led revolution in Iran and the siege of Mecca by Juhayman al-Otaibi, both Iran and Saudi Arabia underwent evolutions in their respective identities and images. The two subsequent sections will discuss how this occurred. In the first, discussion will focus on Iran, and on Khomeini, the position of *valī-yi faqīh* (Guardian of the Jurist) and examines how his position of authority reflected the internal and external image of the state. In addition, the formation of the Islamic state will be taken into consideration. This will include the identity and image of the Iranian state as it moved from being based on a coalition government to becoming an absolute Islamic regime through the clerical consolidation of power and domestic political rivalries that gave rise to a state governed by different clerically-controlled branches such as the executive and legislature.

The subsequent section will consider Saudi (state) identity. It will take into account the political weakness of King Khaled as a result of his ill health up until his death in 1982 which allowed Fahd, the crown prince, to act as de facto ruler, hence facilitating the rise of the Sudairis. The consequences that followed the siege of Mecca will also be discussed illustrating subsequent changes in the Saudi image. In addition, the image of the al-Saud as the Imams of the Ummah will also be examined as well as assessing the effect this had on the internal and external image and identity of Saudi Arabia. Finally, the external image of the Saudi state – especially with regards to the Middle East, Islamic World and the West – will be contextualised.

In this chapter, I follow the contention that the discourses are political in nature and character. I argue that the discourses relate to ongoing political events, such as the domestic political rivalry in Iran and the consolidation of the clergy, the siege of Mecca and the Qatif uprisings and Saudi Arabia, and the Iran-Iraq war. In this chapter I argue that the shift from positive to negative construction was connected to events relating to both states. For instance, in Iran, the construction of the Saudi Other changed from a positive brotherly narrative in Khomeini's discourse, to a polarised depiction as the war began, particularly when Saudi support for Iraq increased and the *ulama* consolidated power. Furthermore,

since both states are multi-layered, I demonstrate how the different actors draw on either the Khomeini or Fahd narrative, allowing different newspapers, the *ulama* and political elites to utilise certain discourses for internal and external consumption. To exemplify, Islamic imagery such as *fitna*, or Persian expansionism, were employed to mobilise discourses on sectarianism, sedition, expansion and hegemony.

## 3.2 Identity and the Image of the State: Defining the Self and the Other in the Islamic Republic of Iran

### 3.2.1 The 'Den of Spies' and Operation Eagle Claw

Over the course of the 444 days of the hostage crisis (4 November 1979 – 20 January 1981), the newly-created Islamic government used the episode to shape its image and identity both domestically and internationally, that is to say, how divine intervention and Islamic steadfastness resulted in the underdog defeating arrogance, namely the US. The latter's seizure of the embassy, which Khomeini termed a 'den of spies', by the students of the *Khat-i Imām* (Line of the *Imam*) set a precedent in breaking international laws and norms. Khomeini's response and representation of the Iranian Self highlighted an image of fearlessness, strength and asceticism, and martyrdom, as expressed in the following passage:

> We do not fear anything. We do not fear the weapons that are in the possession of the illogical, because we do not want to be very attached to this world... Our nation has been drastically transformed: young people come to me and ask me to ask God for their martyrdom. The same thing happens for some mothers who ask me to ask God for their only child's martyrdom... Could one ever defeat a vigilant nation? (Khomeini 1979b)[1]

[1] Translated by the author.

Khomeini's slogans, particularly 'America can do no wrong [to us]!' were repeated by the newspapers, clerics and especially IRP members such as Beheshti, Khamenei, Rafsanjani and Raja'i in their sermons and speeches. This narrative of defiance and resistance against an 'arrogant oppressor' was a platform on which to create an image of the Iranian Self based on Islamic supremacy and intertwined in the discourse of a victorious oppressor with 'revolutionary spirit' (*rūḥ hā-yi inqilābī the spirit of revolution*) that had pulled Iran from the 'swamps' (*lajanzār*) thereby sending 'shivers into the White House, fear into the Kremlin' and forcing Britain into a 'spiral' (*usturlāba*). Moreover, it established a dichotomy between the good Iranian Self versus an evil Other: 'Like those that followed Moses and destroyed the Pharaoh, so will they destroy the oppressor, namely the US' (Khamenei 1980e).

Operation Eagle Claw that Carter launched on 24 April 1980 was one of the principal episodes related to the US hostage crisis that was utilised to paint a post-revolutionary Iran with the brush of divinity and – according to Khomeini – making an analogy with the Islamic conquests where God's 'invisible hand was at work' (Khomeini 1980d). The discourses propagated, newspaper editorials and sermons, followed Khomeini's Islamic parallel, discursively constructing the Iranian Self as at the centre of Islam, namely Mecca, with Carter as the infidel Himyarite king, Abraha, with his elephants (helicopters) attempting to destroy the *Kaʿba*[2], in other words Iran. Khomeini's 'invisible hand', the sandstorm in the Tabas desert, was equated with the *Abābīl* birds that destroyed his helicopters and resulted in his demise (*Ettela'at* 1980; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1980e). In turn Khomeini recited: 'Have you not considered [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the *elephant*?' (Khomeini 1980e*; Ettela'at* 1980*; Jomhouri Eslami* 1980e; Rafsanjani 1981a).

[2] This relates to an attack by Abraha, a Christian king of Yemen marching to Mecca with a large army of elephants. The narrative relays that the war elephants were intended to be used to demolish the Ka'aba. However, God sent birds (Ababil) with stones of fire that destroyed the army.

The failure of Operation Eagle Claw was mobilised by the different Iranian discourse genres to highlight different aspects. As contended in the Introduction, the images employed strengthen the construction of the Self and the Other while the discourse is primarily political intended ease the mobilisation, and bolster and embolden the discourse. In this case, the utilisation of Islamic and historical references such as Abhraha, the Ahl-al-bayt narrative and Imam Ali function to borrow from the images' associated power, allowing them to be mobilised and communicated to the audience in the process stressing dichotomies such as the oppressed versus the oppressor. This was framed on the one hand as Iran as a nation and state resisting an aggressor, while on the other hand the country was blessed with divine protection, thus making it God's chosen nation and government. Most importantly, Iran's leadership of the Islamic world was emphasised by drawing parallels to Mecca and an attack on the cradle of Islam. The representation of the Iranian Self was constructed discursively as a message to the Mohammad of the contemporary era, namely Khomeini, while an attack on Iran was juxtaposed to an attack on Mecca, by a powerful aggressor, the present-day Abraha, that is the US. The implication of divine intervention served a specific purpose; an image that Iran was not just a contemporary Islamic government, while Khomeini reaffirmed his notion of Iran as exemplifying the continuation of prophetic governance and true Islamic revival. Consequently, Iranian discourse had the effect of emphasising the Self in the position of Islamic leadership, in turn challenging Saudi Arabia's decades old position as the pre-eminent leader of the Islamic world.

Moreover, the crisis was utilised even when its repercussions would result in serious consequences for Iran, such as sanctions and an oil embargo. Iranian discourse prepared and mobilised its masses for any economic downturn by once again drawing parallels between the *Ahl al-bayt* (Family of the House of the Prophet Mohammad) and notions of jihad, and independence and self-sacrifice. Imam Ali was one such figure juxtaposed with Iranian society, and the discourses of Iranians concentrated on the definition of jihad in Imam Ali's context.

Khamenei held that the latter's jihad was 'one of the gates of paradise' and thus Iranian jihad against US sanctions must take the form of self-reliance alongside Muslim unity against the enemies of Islam (Khamenei 1980f). In an attempt to raise morale, Khamenei asserted that Iranians should not be like 'rabbits eaten whilst they are asleep', quoting Imam Ali's saying that 'By God, I shall not be eaten like a (weak) animal in my sleep' (Khamenei 1980d). This juxtaposition with the Ahl al-bayt defines the Iranian Self as the contemporary Imam Ali engaged in a struggle against the Other, the modern day enemy of true and pious Islam.

This clerical discourse underlined the reaction of the newly founded revolutionary state to sanctions based on a relationship between the *mustazʿafīn* (oppressed) and *mustakbirīn* (oppressors), whereas in Iran the oppressed were 'true Muslims' and always victorious. Khamenei represented this Islamic victory as one that could only be accomplished through 'Islamic conviction' making it a glorified duty 'to sever all relations with aggressive powers' (Khamenei 1980h). Thus, the Iranian Self was represented as an oppressed 'true Muslim', fighting oppression by cutting relations with the US, thereby enforcing self-dependence while if Islamic countries were truly abiding by Islam, they would cease their dependence on 'world devouring' powers (Khamenei 1980h). The discourse of Iran fighting oppression and resisting sanctions imposed by an aggressor was employed to enhance the country's position relative to regional states such as Saudi Arabia. This stress on the narrative of the Islamic duty to fight the aggressor thus highlighted the Self as a true believer, recalling Ali and his strength and piety, and the Other – be it Saudi Arabia or other Arab states – as less Islamic, collaborating with and being subservient to the enemies of Islam.

### 3.2.2 Islamic Consolidation and Constitution: The creation of an absolute Islamic state identity

The compelling identity metamorphosis of the Iranian state into an entirely Islamic one was extended by the Iranian constitution and the creation of an Assembly of Experts with an overwhelming IRP and clerical majority, thus creating an Islamic constitution with the *valī-yi faqīh* as its cornerstone and representative of the infallibles, the Ahl al-bayt. Furthermore, it is important to mention that the establishment of an Iran based on an Islamic identity involved constitutional revisions, such as the mandatory article that deems it imperative for the Iranian president to be male and Shi'a whilst retaining an article on Islamic *fiqh* in the Sunni regions. The significance of this is twofold. First, Iran's identity was therefore not only Islamic but also based on a Shi'i-led state, i.e. a transnational Shi'i leadership. Second, the Iranian leadership also attempted to reflect a sense of fairness and equality towards the Sunni sect by allowing them to practise Islam according to their own jurisprudence. These revisions (March 1979) marked a move away from Khomeini's silence over the absence of the *valī-yi faqīh* rule, 'or the power which was given to the people's voice and vote as the basis of the new Islamic Republic, or the absence of the role of Islamic jurists as the guardians of the people' (Adib-Moghaddam, 2014: 100) to a full implementation of the *valī-yi faqīh*. Whilst one group argued for civil and state sovereignty within the constitution, the clerical group contended that the constitution should be an Islamic one with clear power ascribed to clerics and the *valī-yi faqīh* (*Ettela'at* 1979a).

The election of the 'Assembly of Experts for Constitution' *(Majlis-i Khubrigān-i Qanūn-i ʾasāsī)* in June 1979 accurately reflected the Islamic image of the newly-founded post-revolutionary state. Numerous sermons by Khomeini, his protégés and the clerics allied with him, helped them to gain an overwhelming majority of the Assembly, 79 per cent of whom

were allied with the clergy (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1979a; *Ettela'at* 1979b). This substantial majority embedded the notion of an Islamic identity through the preparation of an Islamic constitution that saw the clergy and the *valī-yi faqīh*, assume power positions with Islam at the heart and soul of the government.

Following the adoption of the new constitution the official identity of Iran was now Islamic of the Shi'i sect and with a Shi'i leadership. Not only was the religion and sect of the state officially 'Islamic twelver Shi'ism', both the president and prime minister had to be 'practising' Shi'a. They were overseen by a *faqīh*, the central authority of the state, with clerics exercising clear dominance over the institutions of the state given that the legal system now adhered to Islamic – and specifically Shi'a twelver – jurisprudence. A Guardian Council of the Constitution was created to veto any law or legal article that did not adhere to Islamic principles and oversee the legislative branch i.e. the Majles. Accordingly, an Islamic revolutionary state, with a clearly defined Shi'i identity and an exclusively Shi'i clerical and political leadership constructed an image of an Iranian challenge to the Saudi Other, particularly since the Self was constructed as anti-monarchical and that an export of the revolution was crucial in order to purify and Islamise the region. This construction of the Self during this period therefore led to an inherent definition of the Other. Given this, it can be argued that the construction of the Iranian Self naturally resulted in the construction of the Saudi Other, rather than Iranian animosity towards Saudi Arabia being the trigger to a distinctive definition of the Iranian Self.

### 3.2.3 Rivalry, the Majles, Imposed War and Full Islamic Governance

The establishment of a 'jurist-accommodating' constitution with an approval rate of 99.5 per cent (Nohlen, Grotz, and Hartmann 2001: 72) did not mark the end of Iranian political rivalries and the shaping of the identity and image of the Islamic state. Khomeini and his protégés,

especially the members of the IRP, had fulfilled their goal of enshrining Islamic law and jurisprudence within the system, thereby assuming a firm grip on the system's organs. By virtue of a 'miracle of fulfilling the goal of an Islamic revolution in less than a year' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980d), the left-leaning Bani-Sadr won the presidential elections, receiving over 75 per cent of the votes cast, sparking a strong rivalry with the IRP led by Beheshti.

It was clear that whilst the IRP respected and understood the warm relationship between Khomeini and Bani-Sadr, the IRP also emphasised the notion that they were guardians of the faith, thus upholding the tenets of Islam. The IRP chairman also attempted to meld together the image of the party with that of the state, in other words one of divinity, piety and servitude to Islam. One instance that typifies this notion was the IRP's affirmation of 'the Imam's dictum that a cleric should not stand in presidential elections'. Therefore, by once again drawing parallels with Imam Ali's views on governance and the Caliphate, Beheshti stated that the 'presidency, state posts and positions are not worth a mosquito's wing (to us) [since] the party to us does not equate to God' (Beheshti 1980*; Jomhouri Eslami 1980k*), echoing closely the 'goat's sneeze' (*ʿafṭat ʿanz*) proverb by Imam Ali.

The IRP's emphasis on Iran's Islamic Self as a revolutionary Islamic (Shi'i) identity (*huwiyat-i Islāmī-yi inqilābī*) was also evident in domestic political rivalry through the relentless discourses criticising Bani-Sadr, as evidenced by the speeches, sermons, and editorials featured in newspapers allied with the IRP. The editorials in *Jomhouri Eslami* echoed the clerical narrative that the president should adhere to the governance of the Prophet Mohammad and Imam Ali. The new revolutionary Iran's president should eradicate anti- or counter-revolutionaries and maintain the international dimension of the revolution by aiding the *mustazʿafīn* against the *mustakbir* in line with the identity and image of the 'red line of Alavi Shi'ism' (*khat-i surkh-i tashayuʿ-i ʿalawī*) (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980f). The emphasis on the path

of red Alavi Shi'ism reflects an image of the state's Shi'i identity. Consequently, when combining this identity with Khomeini's discourse of exporting the revolution and allegations of supporting uprisings in predominantly Shi'a regions, this mirrors an aggressive and threatening image of the Iranian Self in relation to the Other, namely the regional Arab states.

Since the IRP controlled most of the major organs of the state and gradually consolidated power in its different branches, including the legislature (the Majles), the legal realm (the courts) and among the clerics (the Guardian Council), they felt confident enough to nominate a clerical IRP candidate, Rafsanjani, for the position of Majles speaker. Moreover, their majority also allowed them to shape the image of the cabinet as representative of the Iranian Self. These candidates were defined as 'saviours of the oppressed' and the 'fruits of the martyrs of the revolution' in relation to their revolutionary history and service to the people (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980j). The editorial discourses in *Jomhouri Eslami* (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980j), *Kayhān* (*Kayhan* 1980) and *Ettelaat* (*Ettelaat* 1980), adopted a line focussing on the Islamic identity of the Iranian state, which reflected that all three newspapers were either under the control of an Islamic party or run by a cleric. There was also advice offered that Islamic parliamentarians should 'visit the martyrs of the revolution' at Behesht-i Zahra cemetery once a week, and visit the '*mustazʿafīn*' in the deprived areas of the state (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980j), thereby cultivating a cabinet that would reflect an image of resistance and Islamic sacrifice. Khomeini reinforced this image by arguing that 'even if the whole world was against us, we should do as the prophets did; like Moses opposing the Pharaoh, we should stand and defend Islam' (Khomeini 1980d). Consequently, Iran's identity was juxtaposed and aligned with that of the prophets. Friday prayer sermons also stressed the Islamic identity of the state which was deemed to have a 'divine mandate' (Khamenei 1980b). Khamenei propagated Khomeini's narrative of prophetic imagery by assigning a divine and sacred duty to the clergy in the protection of the state, arguing that 'God only knows how much responsibility and effort the clergy has accepted and

applied from the beginning of this divine revolution… We asked for nothing in return... and one can see that when gazing at the infallible face of the Imam (Khomeini)' (Khamenei 1980b). The Majles, its members, and the cabinet would be pious, *Maktabi* (*Maktabī*) (one who follows Islam in its totality; Hiro 2013: 162), of a modest background, understanding of the nature of poverty and hunger and therefore representative of *Islām-i Nāb-i Muḥamadī* (pure Mohammadian Islam) and serving as the protector and preserver of the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence. This led to a leftist president (Bani-Sadr) with a cabinet controlled by the IRP.

Milani (1994: 176) argues that the rivalry between the IRP and Bani-Sadr was based on the difference in their 'socioeconomic, educational, and ideological backgrounds' that in turn made them 'bitter rivals, not partners' (Milani 1994). However, whilst class and background clearly may have had an effect on the relationship between Bani-Sadr and his IRP counterpart, I observe that Raja'i was only an IRP tool who allowed Beheshti (a cleric) and the IRP central committee (mostly clerics) to take control of the executive branch of the state. In addition, the IRP worked as an Islamic collective, meeting and taking group decisions before placing them before the Majles and voting for them. Editorials in the IRP-owned *Jomhouri Eslami* (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980l) criticised Bani Sadr's character, deeming him arrogant. The editorial characterised him as a man of 'show', equating him with the secular Mosadegh, 'a dweller of palaces … belittling the oppressed and modest figures' such as the Raja'i, thus defining the elected secular president as having a weak and distorted personality with classist tendencies (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980l). Clerical voices criticising Bani-Sadr came from senior figures in the religious hierarchy; Rafsanjani underlined his secular tendencies and class (Rafsanjani 1981f). These accusations also became common currency in IRP publications. Bani-Sadr was accused of working against the wishes of the Rahbar and the Islamic constitution by intending to appoint '*munāfiqīn*' (hypocrites), western and eastern accommodating 'liberals' and 'Marxists' instead

of Muslims who could establish 'unity amongst the people of Iran' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980l, 1980h).

Accordingly, what occurred was an internal othering as both groups demonised each other, a trend that was developed by the clerical axis in order to Other their enemy, whether internally or externally. Such manoeuvres were clearly aimed at cornering Bani-Sadr and parading him as a secular figure working against the Islamic character of the revolution (Raja'i 1980). He was being 'Othered' since insulting clerics and the Majles was also an insult to the constitution which places the jurist at the top of its pyramid, consequently it was being alluded that Bani-Sadr was insulting Khomeini himself. The end result was calls for his impeachment, Bani-Sadr's resulting flight and exile from Iran in 1980, and the rise of the IRP to the presidency and total clerical control over Iran's branches of power, thus underlining that the clerical axis were developing a tendency to Other their enemy.

### 3.2.4 IRP Consolidation, Assassinations and the Iranian Self

The '*Haft-i Tīr* bombing (7th Tir or 28 June) resulted in the deaths of over seventy members of the IRP, including Beheshti, 27 Majles members and four cabinet ministers. This was followed weeks later by a second bomb that targeted the Supreme Defence Council, assassinating the newly-elected president Muhammad Ali Rajai'i (Bani-Sadr's replacement), and his new premier Muhammad Javad Bahonar (a former education minister). Within a short space of time, the newly formed Islamic Republic had suffered a series of disconcerting blows, with the clerical apparatus losing its main cadres and protégés. However, one can also argue that the path was now clear for clerics to take matters into their own hands, to consolidate power, build on the ruins of the assassinations and work towards fulfilling the grand goal, a fully Islamic state. This would be a state with a 'Supreme Jurist' at its helm, a clerical establishment

overseeing the legislative and executive branches with Islamic networks and foundations managing society. The identity of the state was now Islamic, a continuation of the government of the Prophet and Imam Ali and preparation for the Mahdi (Khomeini 1981d), built on the blood of martyrs either during the revolution or the early post-revolutionary phase of creating an Islamic state. Symbolism was crucial in consolidating power and reaffirming the identity of the state. Key dates in the Islamic calendar came to symbolise different occasions such as Imam Ali's birthday, which became Father's Day; the birthday of the Prophet's daughter (Fatema) became Mother's Day and an Iranian 'Women's Day'. In addition, key dates in the Iranian calendar were celebrated to remind people of the journey undertaken by Khomaini from exile to revolution, the assassinations of notable revolutionaries such as Motahari, Taleqani and later the 'Martyrs of *Haft-i Tīr*' and Bahonar and Raja'i.

The assassination of key Iranian figures – especially clerics and IRP members, i.e. the 'Martyrs of *Haft-i Tīr*' – were juxtaposed with Islamic (and especially Shi'i) events. Iranian Friday sermons, newspapers and speeches utilised the Karbala narrative, martyrdom and zeal for Imam Hussein to highlight these assassinations, and to attract and motivate the masses to continue the struggle against an internal and external enemy. The number of martyrs was rounded up to 72, and thus became 'Beheshti and the 72 companions (martyrs)' in order to echo 'Imam Hussein and the 72 martyrs' (Rafsanjani 1981a, 1982a; Mousavi 1983). The number was utilised by Rafsanjani in an approximating and ambiguous manner where the words used were '*haftād wa chand*' i.e. 'seventy something' and 'more than 72 persons […] 'that is 74 persons because two joined them later' in reference to the assassination of Bahonar and Raja'i. Furthermore, the editorials also repeated the trope of martyrdom. This imagery and symbolism was repeated where the atrocity was contrasted with the discourse of divinity and prophetic personas. The 'enemies of righteousness, and the paths of prophecy, Imam's and jurists at the end of time' who thought that by assassinating 'men with characteristics of

divinity, they can (also) end humanity' (Khomeini 1981e; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1981h). The resilience of the Iranian nation was highlighted by the continuation of its struggle, since the death of Beheshti would not end Iran's path just as the 'the throwing of Ibrahim in the fire by Nimrod, or Cane had killed Abel' or the 'martyrdom of Ali as he prayed on the *miḥrāb* (pulpit), Imam Hassan's poisoning or Imam Hussein and his 72 companions' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981h) had failed to prevent the rise of the true Islamic Mohammadian path. The message highlighted here was that 'Iran is full of Beheshtis' and the internal struggle to rid the state of 'liberals, imperialists and Marxists' who aimed to destabilise an Islamic Iran would continue while the externally-imposed war of 'Islam versus infidelity', the export of the revolution and the creation of the 'real Islam' would also rage on (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981h; Ram 1994: 90).

The juxtaposition of the IRP assassinations with the Karbala narrative and the discourse of martyrdom served more than one purpose. First, it mobilised the Karbala narrative to project an image of holy and prophetic legitimacy to an Iranian domestic audience. In addition, the discourse of true Islam and the elimination of secular groups may have served as a raison d'être to project an image of defiance in relation to Western and Eastern powers and borrow a prestige based on resisting the Yazids of the era – namely the US and the Soviet Union – in order to inspire support among the regional masses. As a result, the image of the Iranian Self as embodying a state on an inevitable righteous historical path was created, inevitably defining a Saudi Other as the opposite, the Nimrod, Cane and Yazid of the contemporary epoch. This supports the argument made in the dissertation's central contentions and theoretical framework that although the above discourses stress the true Islam, its strength and resilience, the historical images of Nimrod and the Karbala paradigm were intended to mobilise the masses, while the associated discourses enhance the images by comparing the states, leaderships, and events to the historical images employed, thereby serving both states' political agendas.

## 3.3 The Definition of Iran's Other

The crucible of the Iranian revolution and the formation of an Islamic state led to the manufacturing of a discourse that concentrated on a well-defined image of the Self and the Other. The Iranian Self, since the victory of the revolution, was defined by certain significant clerical actors, principally Khomeini, as a defender of Islam, the saviour of the oppressed from the oppressors, and an extension of a prophetic heritage and line. That is to say, the newly formed Islamic republic was a continuation of the fourth caliphate of Imam Ali, and a state in waiting for the coming of the Mahdi. Moreover, the Iranian Self began with a clear definition of its Other through Khomeini's slogan 'neither East nor West'. This in turn helped to identify Iran's external enemies, chiefly the United States (including its supposed Zionist and imperialistic leadership alongside its support for Israel), and the Soviet Union.

The formation of a new system of governance and constitution alongside the democratic process that the state was undergoing also gave rise to political rivalries that can be defined as an internal Other, or an internal enemy. To the clerically-led IRP, the internal enemy and Other was obvious, namely all those who opposed a theocracy led by a jurist and government overseen by a cleric. The internal Other was one of three, either a monarchist or secular American, western, imperialist and Zionist-backed group, or a communist of the Tudeh party supported by the Soviet Union. Moreover, it can also be argued that Iran had a 'supra-Other' namely the US and the labels attached to it such as imperialist and Zionist, helped to create an 'inner Other' as discussed above and from this an outer-Other was derived. That is to say, there was an 'inner-enemy' that emerged after the revolution and dominated Iranian discourse until clerical consolidation in June 1981 and an 'outer-enemy' that was accused of aiding the internal enemy at first, but then gradually began to have a share in Iranian discourse since the beginning

of the imposed war, a trope that later dominated Iranian discourse after the consolidation of IRP on control over the major power organs of the state.

Before discussing the creation and representation of an Iranian Other, it is necessary to mention that while Iran 'Othered' Saudi Arabia, Iran was not affected by Saudi domestic events or incidents. That is to say, the siege of Mecca or the Qatif demonstrations did not have a direct effect on discourse production in Iran. This can be attributed to the Iranian domestic political environment and status quo which was dominated mainly by internal rivalries and the construction of an Islamic state. However, Saudi domestic incidents and events were utilised by Iran in propagation of a regional or Saudi Other and the resultant discourse production. Nevertheless, the Iranian revolution, the imposed war, and Iranian discourse in general affected Saudi Arabia and influenced their own discourse directed towards Iran. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that while the discourse genres constructed and promulgated the discourse on Saudi Arabia, they employed historical and religious metaphors and imagery. The discourses relating to these images shifted with political events occurring in both states. The images – denigrative and pejorative as they may be – were utilised to embolden the elite narrative while allowing the more contemporary and political discourse to be associated with the images being used, especially since the latter have a can be readily mobilised and employed in a variety of settings.

The newspaper editorials on the first day of the Iran-Iraq war framed the invasion as a war between the US and Iran (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980a), with Iraq represented by Khomeini as a tool, a 'tail of the US' (Khomeini 1980a). The speeches by Khomeini as well as the Friday sermons by Khamenei and Rafsanjani were two tiered. The first tier emphasised the narrative of a war between imperialism and Zionism on the one hand, with the US and its 'tails' at its helm, versus Islam and its revolution. The narrative was that the Islamic revolution should be

maintained and thus any internal enemies should be caught and handed over to the authorities, and any attempts to divide the Iranian nation should be averted. As a result, the war defined Iran's enemies as an internal Other that collaborated with the US and Zionism to spread dissent within the Iranian nation, and an external enemy – namely Iraq and its associates – who were aiming to destroy Iran from the outside and thus hinder its Islamic revolution. Finally, Khomeini's discourse incorporated his views on the war and its relation to imperialism, Zionism and hegemony. During the war Khomeini's narrative constructed and represented the Saudi 'Other'. This discourse witnessed a shift from cordial Islamic relations and unity, to implicit allusions and references, and transited to explicit references and denigration of the Saudi state, its clerics and monarchy as the war progressed and relations worsened.

The formation of the Saudi Other was gradual. Examining the different discourses by different members of the elite allows us to examine how they represented and constructed the Saudi Other, particularly since the Iranian regime during this phase was a 'top down' – or pyramid-like – hierarchical discourse-generating structure where the top set the direction and narrative of the state to be implemented at all lower levels. Therefore, while Khomeini 'set the stage' for Iran's foreign policy, his position was based on his Islamic leadership which might denote that he took on a more reserved and less confrontational discourse in relation to the Saudi Other. The main focus in the discourse of the elite (namely the main state discourse manufacturers: the Supreme Leader, President, Parliamentary Speaker) in Khomeini's pronouncements was on regional states that were assisting Saddam, such as Gulf sheikhdoms (*shaykh nishīnhā-yi Khalīj*), Jordan and Egypt (Khomeini 1980a, 1980b, 1981a, 1981b, 1984) with an implicit referral to the Saudi Other. Although Khomeini's continuous call for an export of the revolution (Khomeini 1979a; *Jomhouri Eslami 1979b* for example) was emphasised in Iran's immediate post-revolutionary discourse, where his rhetoric towards Saudi Arabia and its monarchy was one of brotherly peace and Islamic unity, especially in the immediate aftermath of the

revolution and up to first month of the Iran-Iraq war. This can be exemplified by his telegrams and letters to the Saudi monarchy, Khaled and Fahd, thanking them for their messages after his leaving hospital (Khomeini 1980g, 1980f). However, while Khomeini's discourse was built on 'brotherly relations', it also propagated a tone of advice or custodianship of the Islamic world hoping for an end to colonialism, especially in terms of relations with the United States:

> My greatest pleasure would be when all the Eastern and Western colonial powers, especially the hegemonic America, end their domination of Muslims and holy Islam so they may live in brotherly love, independence and regain their lost glory (telegram to King Khaled 27/12/1358).
>
> It is hoped that all Muslims of the world learn from the superior teachings of Islam, end their dependence on the imperialist powers of the world, especially hegemonic America, and regain their independence (telegram to Fahd 27/12/1358).

On the other hand, the shift in narrative and the explicit representation of the Saudi Other began with the advent of the imposed war on Iran. Through his position as Friday prayer Imam, Khamenei defined Iran's external threats and enemies as all those who aided Iraq. Less than two weeks into the war, Khamenei characterized the role of Saudi Arabia and its monarchy as a 'corrupt royal family with all their [Islamic] claims are cheering [Saddam] on...' while he also did not shy away from asking rhetorically 'We have to distinguish, who we are exactly at war with?' (Khamenei 1980a). It is therefore apparent that the first figure to explicitly represent the Saudi Other as an enemy and morally corrupt was Khamenei. Initially, this discourse was only maintained by Khamenei, who was an IRP member, the editor-in-chief of the *Jomhouri Eslami* newspaper that was owned and operated by the IRP. This marks the beginning of Saudi denigration and explicit representation of the Other, and it was carried out by a cleric who was a discourse promulgator and a close confidant of Khomeini.

Iranian editorials, mainly in *Jomhouri Eslami*, frequently criticised and attacked Saudi Arabia, with additional published editorials that concentrated mainly on corruption in the Arab leadership in general and Gulf monarchies in particular. The difference between these articles

and the front or last page editorials was that they reflected the tabloid nature of the articles, especially since many were translations from leftist newspapers. The extended articles in *Jomhouri Eslami* focussed on three main tropes: the debauchery and corruption of monarchs like that in Saudi Arabia; Arab aid to Saddam during the war; and Arab and Saudi subservience to Israel and Zionism. Moreover, these articles emphasised criticism of the Saudi monarchy and connecting the latter to different domestic, regional and international events (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980c, 1980b). This included Saudi aid for Iraq in its border skirmishes and hostilities with Iran, oil production quotas and OPEC pricing, as well as earlier events such as the siege of Mecca and the Ashura uprising in Qatif, which were blamed on the monarchy and the National Guard. With the exception of *Jomhouri Eslami* (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1979a, 1980i), the outspoken response, mainly from editorials on the incidents in Mecca and Qatif, came after a silence lasting approximately ten months. Editorials, for instance, went as far as framing the siege as an act of Islamic heroism with Juhayman al-Otaibi represented as a 'martyr' (*shahīd*) (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981p, 1981c). Also, the editorials depicted the incident as a response to social and economic discrimination in Saudi Arabia (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981c). The delay in discussing this incident could be attributable to the fact that the Iranian newspapers, *Ettelaat* and *Kayhan* in particular, were focussed more on domestic post-revolutionary political dynamics, and as the dust settled the criticism and propaganda directed at Saudi Arabia was intended to retaliate to the latter's military aid to Iraq. It is clear that it was the IRP-owned *Jomhouri Eslami* which mainly utilised the incident.

It was not until the OIC conference in January 1981 that the representation of Saudi Arabia in all three Iranian discourse genres (media, political and religious) was explicit. *Ettelaat*'s editorials explicitly mentioned Saudi Arabia, its leadership and clerics in the advent of the Taif Islamic Conference. Whilst *Ettelaat*'s main editorial (*Ettelaat* 1981a) usually made brief mention of Saudi Arabia, normally in the context of discussing GCC states, its additional

editorial, *Tafsīr-i Siyāsī-yi Rūz*, engaged with Saudi Arabia, especially during the period of Saudi weapons procurement and US support for the establishment of the GCC from February 1981 onwards. *Ettelaat* attempted to answer the question 'Why does Saudi Arabia want all these weapons?' and thus framed Saudi Arabia in terms of the main trope of subservience to the West, replacing the Shah as the West's ally while 'aiding the benefits of the West' by procuring weapons from the US, France and West Germany (*Ettelaat* 1981b). The Iranian newspapers and their editorial discourse underlines that the latter were highly organised propaganda machines with a multifaceted agenda aimed at 'educating' and directing Iranian society through different purposely-written editorials, focussing on internal dynamics, religion, Iran's revolutionary foreign policy, and the 'imposed war'. Furthermore, the newspapers reflect their closeness to the political dynamics of the state.

This coincided with certain shifts in stance and context as the state moved towards a holistic Islamic government. In the early days of post-revolution Iran, the editorials of *Ettelaat* were focussed mainly on the internal dynamics of the state and covering Khomeini's speeches defining the identity of the Iranian state and the main events that were affecting the nation. However, as the war began, the coverage became more diverse, ranging from the war, state identity, and covering speeches. In addition, as the state underwent clerical consolidation, so their control over newspapers such as *Ettelaat* was extended. That is to say, *Ettela'at*'s editorials became more aligned with the IRP-controlled *Jomhouri Eslami*, especially in their rhetoric and representation of the Iranian Other. *Kayhan*, which previously discussed Iranian dynamics using a rational non-rhetorical and neutral tone, also shifted with the departure of Bani-Sadr and the IRP's strengthened position. The paper's editorial strategy in representing the Iranian Other, namely Saudi Arabia, shifting it from being a 'centrist' newspaper to a radical leaning one, reflecting the clerical consolidation that was gathering pace. By October 1981 the editorials of all three newspapers were somewhat homogenous. They projected set

notions towards Saudi Arabia, an export of the revolution, and retaliation for Saudi assistance to Saddam, which shaped a polarised editorial representation of the Saudi Other (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981o; *Kayhan* 1981).

Iran's path towards clerical consolidation also witnessed Rafsanjani's election as the majles speaker in July 1980. Rafsanjani was very explicit in his narrativising[3] of Saudi Arabia and the GCC. The way Saudi Arabia is framed in Rafsanjani's discourse, whether domestically or in the international arena, was similar to that of Khomeini and Khamenei. This explicit representation was now a 'common currency', mainly reflecting Saudi Arabia's subservience to the US and Israel, and support for Iraq. Nevertheless, Rafsanjani's representation of Saudi Arabia evolved into an aggressive criticism of the morality of the Saudi and Arab Gulf rulers as corrupt debauchers who looted the wealth of the Muslim nations:

> .... whilst reactionary states associated with imperialism like Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt do nothing but drink their nation's blood and plunder people's wealth, and a long history of [plundering] oil and bread … but, instead there is a long record of brothels, houses of debauchery and dancing... (Rafsanjani 1981e)

This narrative was the first of its kind in Iranian discourse and one that would resonate into the future in the tropes of immorality and licentiousness, especially in editorials. Iranian representation of Saudi Arabia gained prominence in the discourse after Bani-Sadr's exile and the election of Khamenei as president **(**October 1981) and the appointment of Rafsanjani as Friday prayer Imam (July 1981) as well as his role as majles speaker. Discourse manufacture and dissemination was now in the care of two main clerics, Khamenei and Rafsanjani, both of whom were manufacturing discourse as members of the political elite, both close confidants of Khomeini who regularly advised him, and both personally disseminated their discourse to the

[3] I follow the definition of the word 'narrativise' from the Oxford English Dictionary: To 'Present or interpret (experience, events, etc.) in the form of a narrative: *it* demystifies *and narrativises any reader's sense of the* threat *presented'.*

masses through Friday prayer sermons or to newspapers they controlled, predominantly *Jomhouri Eslami*. Furthermore, after the 7th of Tir bombings and subsequent assassination of the IRP elite, including Beheshti and Bahonar, there was a vacuum in the main senior clerical cadres and Khomeini's close confidants. This gave Khamenei and Rafsanjani a favourable environment to advise Khomeini on foreign policy issues, mainly vis-a-vis the war and regional relations.

It can also be argued that recovering territory and military victories in the war with Iraq were also a turning point in Iranian discourse. The beginning of Iraqi withdrawal from Iran and the recapture of Iranian cities between March and May 1982 signalled a more polarised and confidant discourse towards the Other. The editorial discourse towards the war shifted from a defensive position where Iran was at war with Zionism and imperialism, to a discussion of the revolutionary state's victories (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982c), Iran's leadership of the Persian Gulf as a 'father and protector from the greed of Great Satan' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982b), and advice offered to the GCC states to 'sever ties with Iraq and align with Iran' (Moussavi 1982), the latter a discourse also propagated and manufactured by Khamenei where his argument was that Iran was a protector and custodian of the region while no one had 'the right to interfere in Persian Gulf affairs' (Khamenei 1983).

The injury of Khamenei, and later his election as president increased his duties and therefore paved the way for other temporary Friday prayer imams to give sermons, predominantly Rafsanjani (Algar 2011). Moreover, while other appointed imams were distinguished scholars such as Ayatollah Ardabili, the Chief Justice, or Ayatollah Emami-Kashani, it can be argued that they were discourse propagators and not producers. As a result, the Iranian rhetorical discourse towards Saudi Arabia was amplified rather than diversified. As Iran made gains on the war front, the narrative of a superior Self and a weak or inferior Saudi Other gained

prominence from the pulpit and in the newspapers. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states were represented as weak and in fear of being 'defeated by Iran' and afraid 'of its masters' (*Jomhouri Eslami 1982h;* Emami-Kashani 1982). Editorials also began to respond to denigrating Saudi narratives as evidenced by their editorials (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982e). Metaphors such as '*majūs*' and *'wathaniya'* (Zoroastrian Pagans) that had featured in Saudi editorials (*al-Madina* 1982a; *al-Riyadh* 1982a) were employed in their Iranian equivalents and were regurgitated to the Iranian masses in an attempt to highlight the historic hatred the Arabs, as represented by Saudi Arabia, had for Iran, therefore underling the historic Arab-Ajam cleavage.

## 3.4 Identity and the Image of the State: Defining the Self and the Other in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from Khaled to Fahd

Religion and royalty have been known to go hand-in-hand in the Saudi kingdom. This interweaving of religion and rule, a form of 'theo-monarchical' rule was put to the test on more than one occasion[4], internally in relation to the 1979 siege of Mecca and externally after the fall of the Shah and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran. This section will discuss Saudi identity on a domestic and international front respectively. This will include shifts in the nature of the clergy and the position of the monarchy, while I will also examine the effect of the siege of Mecca on the Saudi self-image and monarchical identity as well as discussing changes in the Saudi discourse following the 1979 Iranian revolution.

[4] Saudi Arabia did not submit to the different ideologies – including Nasserism and Ba'thism – that championed the Arab cause; neither did it manufacture its own ideology

### 3.4.1 Khaled and Fahd

According to Niblock (2006: 47), the main development and economic transformation period in Saudi Arabia lasted from 1962 to 1979 approximately, during which time its monarchy and leadership consolidated their position. This change was characterised by steadier tribal and religious relations, stable oil revenue, especially during the late 1960s and early 1970s, extensive economic and social development, as well as legal and institutional reform that Faisal had established during his tenure as crown prince and king. Furthermore, the al-Saud's relationship with the Bedouin tribes of Najd and merchant families of Hejaz were also key, reflected in exceptional subsidies from the government, mainly to the tribes. However, religion was the primary basis of the legitimacy the monarchy used to buttress their leadership. This was employed both domestically and externally as the basis from which they developed and sustained their image and foreign policy. Although the ascension of Khaled did not alter the dynamics of the Saudi state, two main elements changed: the background of the ulama and the rise of a faction of the monarchy, the 'Sudairi Seven'[5]. In addition, on the economic front, Faisal paved the way for the transformation of the kingdom via the introduction of five-year development plans, the second of which ran from 1975 to 1980 and which allowed the state to further depend on oil revenues.

[5] They are the seven sons of King AbdulAziz al-Saud from his wife Hussa bint Ahmad Al Sudairi. The so-called Sudairi Seven include King Fahd along with princes Sultan, Abdel-Rahman, Nayef, Turki, Salman and Ahmed, who are full brothers. They all held positions of significance, except for Abdel-Rahman and Turki.

### 3.4.2 The Siege of Mecca and Identity

Between 1975 and 1982, Saudi Arabia was ruled by King Khaled, with Fahd as crown prince and de facto ruler until ascending the throne in (1982 to 2005). Khaled was ill-equipped to run a state mainly due to lack of interest, illness, his lack of sophistication compared to Faisal or Fahd, and because he was 'home schooled' in the palace, (Cordesman, 2003: 17). Consequently, in his capacity as crown prince, Fahd, who studied at the Prince's school and served under his brother Faisal in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, acted as both caretaker and main decision maker in the kingdom, thereby continuing Faisal's plans of developing Saudi Arabia's economy and maintaining its influence in the regional and international political arenas. The image and identity that lay behind the Al Saud political leadership – particularly their constituting the 'Imam' of the Ummah – was called into question during the siege of Mecca in 1979. The siege of the Masjid al-Harām took place in November and December 1979 by Juhayman al-Otaiabi and the (Saudi) Ikhwan with an aim of overthrowing the Saudi monarchy**.** Accusing the monarchy and especially Fahd (Cordesman, 2003:173) of 'spreading corruption' (*ʾintishhār al-fasād*), Juhayman al-Otaiabi called on the people to rise up against the Saudi state, to cut all ties with the West, its governments and specifically Christians (al-Nasārā), and to eliminate all sources of social corruption and deviation (from the Islamic path) while insisting on the application of strict sharia (al-Hazimi 2011). The latter demand appealed to the legitimacy of the clergy, however, it would be the monarchy that would go on high alert and bear the brunt of the ulama's anxiety.

The immediate press release from Ministry of the Interior described Juhayman, his group and Mohammad al-Qahtani ('the Mahdi') as 'a coterie that has gone astray from the Islamic religion' (*zumrah khārija ʿalā-l-dīn al-ʾIslāmī*), 'an aggressive group' (*fiʾatun bāghiya*), or 'Kharijites' (*khawārij*) as a measure to distance the state-sponsored religion and clergy from

the group. This was echoed by press editorials that echoed a similar 'internal othering' that aimed at segregating 'true from false Islam'. They were represented as an 'apostate group, the enemies of Islam' (*al-Riyadh* 1979d), and 'filth of Satan' (*al-Riyadh* 1979b*; Asharq al-Awsat* 1979c) that aimed at 'undermining the great edifice from the inside after trying to destroy it from the outside'. Their actions were compared to the Arabs' contemporary enemy, Israel, thus legitimising the use of force and sheltering the Saudi elite from any public criticism in case of deaths due to the actions of the state within the Grand Mosque. The use of force was justified by representing the militant group as having 'committed a 'heinous crime', which Islamic history has still not yet witnessed', with the exception of the 'Israeli crime that aspired to burn down the al-Aqsa mosque, rather unsuccessfully, a few years ago' (*al-Riyadh* 1979c; *Asharq al-Awsat* 1979c).

In addition, another aim was to withdraw any source of legitimacy, identity and image of jihad and martyrdom cultivated by the militants. The monarchical narrative would uphold their legitimacy and image as Imams of the Ummah serving Islam and its clerics. Khalid made it clear that his orders to 'liberate' the Grand Mosque only came after the total approval of the ulama. A fatwa signed by over 30 clerics, most notably Abdulaziz bin Baz, Juhayman's former mentor, allowed the Saudi government to 'arrest and fight the group'. An interesting issue is the difference in the representation of the militants. Where the state had constructed them as 'straying' from Islam or as Nayef finally labelled them, a 'corrupt junta that dissented from the Islamic religion' **(***al-tughmah al-fāsida al-khārija ʿan-l-dīn al-ʾIslamī*) (al-Saud 1979d), the ulama were more reserved in their representation of Juhayman and his followers, titling them as a 'group' (*al-jamāʿa*) (*Assakina.com* 2010). Also, the monarchy endeavoured to stop the incident from taking on an international scope, in particular by preventing the incident from being described as a consequence of the Iranian revolution, since that could affect the image of the monarchy and the state, by quickly denying any link between Iran and the incident. Nayef,

the Minister of the Interior, was clear that 'there was no relation between the US and this incident... there was no proof of any link between this group and Iran or any other nationality' (Assakina.com 2010), especially since Khomeini had accused the 'US imperialism and International Zionism' of conspiring with the group to carry out the siege' (Khomeini 1979c).

What later ensued was a quick revamping of the Saudi image that worked in three distinct ways: internally through speeches and policies that were recast as conservative; externally through media interviews and appearances, and internally via newspaper editorials that highlighted the role of the monarchy and the state. On the domestic level, the monarchy reiterated and reaffirmed its position within society. Firstly, the role of the monarchy was characterised as the guardians and servants of the holy shrines, namely 'the most munificent and cherished [task that] we are honoured with', expressing the monarch's gratitude to 'our dear nation for its spirit of steadfastness and understanding' whilst reminding the people of the position of the king as the Imam of the ummah and to support and be at the service of '*walī al-ʾamr'* (the one vested with authority) in times of 'joy and sorrow' (*fī -l-sarāʾī wal-darāʾ*) (al-Saud 1979a; *Asharq al-Awsat 1979b*). Additionally, the identity of the monarchy was juxtaposed with that of the Prophet and his followers, who were 'martyred for the sake of the banner of monotheism (*tawhīd*) to remain elevated and supreme for eternity', hence the monarchs' position as the Imams was legitimised and represented as 'willing to sacrifice their blood and become martyrs to uphold the word of righteousness and eliminate falsehood, never intimated by swords, conspiracies or wars' (*al-Riyadh* 1979c). Alongside this, Nayef in his capacity as Minister of the Interior reiterated the same narrative of the monarchy being at the service of Islam, the holy shrines, and the king and crown prince. He emphasised that he as well as the other royal family members, such as the 'Sultan, and Fawaz bin Abdulaziz were at the scene to remedy the situation... Prince Sultan personally took charge and we were all striving to implement the instructions of the king and crown prince' (al-Saud 1979c).

Shifting towards a more conservative state, the Islamists, i.e. the ulama of Najd were given power by Fahd to enforce a stricter Islamic regimen on the education system and social practices as a whole, a development that resulted in a freezing of the modernization ethos that Faisal had envisioned. The al-Saud consolidated their stronghold, legitimacy and image by reinforcing a radical and conservative Islamic education system. This was achieved by standardising the Islamic curricula in schools, resulting in Saudi society's indoctrination and Wahhabisation from the bottom up. Also, gender segregation was established in higher education and an enlarged budget was put at the disposal of the religious institutions. These in turn gave rise to committees of virtue, similar to those set up in Iran after the revolution, known as the '*Hayʾat al-ʾamr Bil-maʿrūf wa al-Nahī ʿan al-Munkar*' that gave the *Mutawaʿīn*, the 'police of public virtue', control over civil liberties and freedoms such as limited mobility for women unless accompanied with a *mahram*, an unmarriageable kin. Overall, these steps ensured that the monarchy had a legitimate monopoly over the state and ensured that the partnership between the Wahhabi ulama and the al-Saud continued. As such, the monarchy made sure that in any future crisis, such as 'deviation from the path', the Wahhabi ulama would innately protect and legitimise the state's rulers in social and religious spheres, whilst also strengthening the clerical presence throughout the state (Shahi 2013: 109-110; Trofimov 2008).

Externally, the principal monarchical figures such as Fahd and the foreign minister Saud al-Faisal gave interviews to local and international media over the course of 12 months with the aim of restoring the image of both the monarchy and the state, underlining their respective stability, legitimacy and strength. The royals, once again, raced to polish up the image, identity and legitimacy of the House of Saud. Fahd's representation of the Saudi state reflected an image of alertness and security with claims of awareness of the existence of 'this group and its level and competence since six years'. On the other hand, Fahd constructed an image of Saudi society as one of naivety combined with religious zeal (*al-Riyadh* 1980b).

The militant group, Fahd opined, only targeted 'simple people with a weak understanding of the Islamic faith' and therefore, the kingdom was filled with 'naive people while religious fervour and piety is deeper [in Saudi Arabia] than in any other country'. The identity of the monarchy was constructed as clever, worldly, and vigilant with a responsibility to 'shepherd', rule over and guide a naive and religiously humble 'flock'. The image Fahd wanted to cultivate in the international community was of a strong state unshaken by an 'ordinary naive individual that one cannot comprehend or understand if he was spoken to... with no further dimensions and depth to the incident' (*al-Riyadh* 1980b).

As for the identity of the state, it was defined as religious and pious with a populace that was in the service of, and revolved around, the monarchy. The legitimacy of the ulama and their strength was also highlighted as an 'independent [group] that we have no authority over' and were instrumental in ending the incident by 'issuing a fatwa'. Fahd and Saud al-Faisal also highlighted the winners and losers after the siege of the Grand Mosque and how it served a certain enemy of the Arab world and Islam in general, in relation to the Western and non-Islamic world. Whilst downplaying the situation, they also saw it as an 'occurrence [that] is one of the most gruesome of incidents, it has been taken advantage of in the worst ways' by the West. Fahd stated that the US and Europe utilised and exaggerated the situation because 'they do not want to see a safe, developed and stable Saudi Arabia... sustaining its aid to the Arab countries and especially the Palestinian people'. Similar to the newly Islamic Iran, the al-Saud was visualising the US, and 'Western imperialism' as the demons that 'wants 'us' [Saudi Arabia] to fall and suffer setbacks' because it 'benefits Israel [and] the global Zionist movement and those who adhere to it' (*al-Riyadh* 1980b), all based on the intention to 'divide the Arab and Islamic ummah' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1980a).

### 3.4.3 The Iranian Revolution and Saudi Identity

Whilst the siege of Mecca had an immense impact on Saudi state identity, the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the war imposed on Iran by Saddam was its ultimate challenge. As Wilson and Graham (1994: 104) argue, an Islamic Iran not only threatened Saudi Arabia's regional status, but also its very existence. The consequences that followed the revolution led the kingdom to undertake measures that attempted to consolidate its position as a regional leader whilst also balancing the power of both Iran and Iraq. Saudi Arabia would employ religion, oil and regional alliances to give itself the legitimacy and image it required to uphold its existence (Nevo 1998: 34; Wilson and Graham 1994: 104).

Although some commentators have observed that the Islamic revolution in Iran was received with caution in Saudi Arabia (Niblock 2004: 80; Safran 1985: 357; Keynoush 2016: 105), the initial signals were of positive optimism. The overtures from the Saudi state were loud and clear. The king congratulated Khomeini after the March 1979 referendum and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The message was one of 'positive repercussions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', and even though Wahhabism views the Shi'i sect as heretical, the official communiqué recognised Iran as a nation 'that abides by the Islamic sharia through doctrine, approach and application' with Khomeini at the 'forefront of those that aspire towards the victory of Islam and Muslims everywhere' (al-Saud 1979b). This was followed shortly by prince Abdullah praising Iran in the Saudi press and extending an olive branch based on potential collaboration: 'The new regime in Iran has removed all the obstacles and restrictions in the face of cooperation... since Islam governs our relationship', and a future collaboration would have an 'Islamic dynamism'. Iran was given not only Islamic legitimacy as a flag bearer but the Saudi position also adopted 'relief that the Islamic Republic of Iran has chosen the path

of peace and rather than heavy militarization' as the basis of their newly-found relationship (*Gulf News Agency* 1979).

Moreover, although Saudi Arabia had now lost a regional competitor, the 'policeman of the Gulf'[6], the rivalry was more of a security concern rather than an ideological conflict. That is to say, Saudi Arabia until the revolution was at the helm of the Islamic world, as it had no ideological competitor. With Khomeini's call for an export of the revolution and the rhetoric that followed, the honeymoon period ended quickly. Iran now posed a threat to the Saudi state. This threat, as Niblock (2004: 79) clearly demonstrates, came in two forms: external security and 'ideological legitimacy with domestic stability'. Nothing exemplifies this dual threat more than the situation in the Eastern Province, where the local Shi'a had suffered years of discrimination. The domestic challenge for the Saudi state came as a result of the Iranian revolution motivating the Shi'a and inspiring them to demonstrate, with the most notable protest the Qatif uprising during Ashura in December 1979, days after the siege of Mecca.

### 3.4.4 Shi'i instability: The Eastern Province

At the same time as the Mecca siege, in the Eastern Province of Saudi, the Shi'a had also been affected by Khomeini's Islamic revolution. While many observe that it was 'Khomeini's incessant call for uprisings in the name of (Shiite) Islam' (Quandt 1981: 96) that led to two uprisings in the space of a few months, these disturbances were not new to the region given its history of social and religious discrimination since the creation of the Saudi state (Helms 1981: 92-94, 95-102)**.** However, what was different this time was the rise in morale due to the nearby presence of a Shi'a state. The state reaction was harsh and relatively swift. It included the

[6] It was viewed by many throughout the late 1960s and 1970s that the *Shah* acted as the *'policeman' of the Persian Gulf,* and in return obtained overwhelming US support (Rosemary Said Zahlan, 2016: 144).

deployment of 20,000 members of the National Guard, which saw the deaths of tens and the injury of hundreds of Shi'i protestors, possibly the harshest response since the uprising of 1958 (Jones 2010: 201-202).

The rebellion came to be known as the Muharram Uprising, '*ʾintifāḍat Muharam*' by the Shi'i population and clergy, and referred to as the 'Qatif Uprising' (*ʾintifādat al-Qaṭīf*) by the secular, communist and Nasserite-leaning groups in the Eastern Province. The uprising was a wave that allowed all those that wanted to end any form of discrimination to ride it. As al-Rasheed (1998: 122-125) argues, the protests were largely made up of ARAMCO employees and students from the University of Minerals and Technology in Dhahran (al-Rasheed 1998). These groups threatened the al-Saud since they had an effect on the economic lifeline of the state, i.e. oil, and they could penetrate and permeate the local society with their speeches and narratives. This argument supports Niblock's (2004: 80) view that the 'threat was intensified by the revolution's ability to reach inside the Saudi domestic environment and affect the attitudes of Saudi citizens'.

The animosity that Khomeini and the Iranian revolution had for the US had now crossed borders into Saudi Arabia. The Shi'a workforce in ARAMCO had allegedly 'chased' US employees from a sensitive refinery according to a US consulate cable, which also mentioned that the Saudi Shi'a employees have been expressing 'anti-Americanism' as a result of broadcasts of Khomeini's and in reaction to the Shah's presence in the US. Indeed, there is evidence that this anti-Americanism was spreading to other regions such as Qatif and Saihat (Lindstrom 1979b, 1979a). On the 10$^{th}$ of Muharram, the commemoration of Ashura witnessed the airing of a plethora of grievances. The demonstrations were anti-al-Saud and not anti-Sunni. The Shi'a were protesting against al-Saud's social and religious discrimination, invoking anti-Americanism in their calls to stop selling oil to the US, and acknowledging Khomeini's call

for an Islamic revolution in their slogans 'Not Sunni, nor Shi'i, an Islamic Revolution' (*lā suniyya lā shīʿiyya … thawra thawra islāmiyya*) and 'death to al-Saud' (*al-mawt li-āl Suʿūd*) (Matthiesen 2010: 106).

With the Iranian revolution casting doubt on the legitimacy of the al-Saud – including their relationship with the US – and the transformation of their Shi'a nationals from Arab Shi'a into oppressed Shi'a Saudis, the latter now echoed Khomeini's animosity towards the arrogant, '*istikbār*' powers, the grip of the al-Saud over the Kingdom and their leadership prestige was questioned further. Not only were Juhayman's Wahhabi Ikhwan group questioning the al-Saud and its relationship with the infidel America in Mecca, the Shi'a in the Eastern Province also questioned this relationship with the US. However, whilst the Iranians were cleared of any involvement in the Mecca siege, the signs of their involvement as a part of their '*sudūr-i inqilāb*' (export of the revolution) foreign policy was clearly present in the slogans used and the posters of Khomeini on display during the protests. As Khomeini declared his vision that 'we must at any expense export our revolution to all the Islamic countries and entire world' (Khomeini 1980c), al-Saud understood this as an ideological struggle with Iran, one that questioned its legitimacy and image and which had national and international implications. Two main concerns arose for the monarchy: their leadership status from an Islamic and regional standpoint in addition to their status as a trusted partner of the US after the fall of the Shah. Also, the early stages of this period testifies to a regime that acted implicitly, versus one that showed explicit animosity represented by Khomeini's export of the revolution. Moreover, while the Saudi Shi'a may have been affected by Khomeini's call and their morale may have risen, there was no explicit sectarian dimension and animosity towards Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the Saudi state feared that Khomeini's calls would consequently lead to the Shi'a revolting against a Sunni state in a Shi'a majority region of the kingdom. Consequently, the al-Saud had to prove their image, presence and legitimacy as

strong rulers domestically, including steering the main regional power in the Gulf, acting as an Islamic leader controlling the capital of the Islamic world and safeguarding pilgrims under its 'protection and service', while also acting as a trusted international partner to the US.

### 3.4.5 Consolidating Saudi Arabia's Islamic and Arab credentials

Before the consolidation of its identity and image, and reinforcing the legitimacy of its leadership, the al-Saud first collaborated with their strongest ally, the US. As Trofimov (2008) explains, initially the CIA provided intelligence to Fahd on the possible Shi'a sabotaging of the major Ras Tanura refinery. Second, the monarchy, represented by Bandar bin Sultan, assured the US that the Shi'a uprisings would be suppressed on the condition that the US provide the Saudi monarchy with intelligence and that any human rights abuses would not be drawn attention to (Trofimov 2008: 199). What later followed was a clear strategy by the al-Saud to renovate their image and legitimacy. Firstly, the Minister of the Interior, Nayef bin Abdulaziz, trivialised the uprising as an act of 'temporary enthusiasm [in a] sentimental congregation' that would end immediately. In addition, Nayef's speech at the University of Oil and Minerals in the Eastern Province offered a narrative that gave legitimacy to the state, the monarchy and the norm of Islam as the state's guide and compass. He affirmed that the security of Saudi is guaranteed because 'everyone's application of Islam in every matter and the adherence to the ways of the pious predecessors' (Salaf), that in itself is like holding on to this 'precious gem', and keeping the peace is like the 'successors' (Khalaf). The identity of the kingdom was defined as making up part of 'one Arab Muslim nation', with the prestige 'of being a nation honoured by God that chose his Prophet from, and bestowed upon it and its language the Quran' (al-Saud 1980b). The Saudi leadership was therefore attempting to define the Saudi Self and affirm its regional role regionally and globally. Nayef's narrative was clear;

Saudi Arabia was a ‘blessed’ Arab nation and Islamic leader in general, one that had a specific Sunni ‘Salafi’ identity.

The monarchy also played down any regional ramifications that might have affected Saudi Arabia. Domestically it was described as a normal occurrence, especially at a time where all ‘the world is living in a state of turmoil and how one hears and notices what occurs every day in other countries’ in a clear allusion to the revolution in Iran (al-Saud 1980b). A similar argument was made by Fahd to bolster the stable image of Saudi Arabia whilst downplaying the revolution in Iran as an event that symbolises ‘rocks thrown into lakes causing ripples that reach all its shores’, and thus the Iranian revolution is ‘bound to leave direct or indirect ramifications’. Additionally, the identity of Islam and respect of other nations was underlined in the ‘respect of the Iranian people from the early days’, the attempt to show the position of an important regional power that other states would not challenge. Fahd stated with cautious positivity, that the Saudi state’s approach is to maintain the ‘best of relations with the new regime in Iran’, even though there were ‘abusive statements’, and the Iranian ministers and officials were quick to condemn these (abusive) statements as they ‘do not represent the official state narrative and that of the Imam’ (*al-Riyadh* 1980b).

However, the main bid to re-assert the monarchy’s Islamic credentials was based on the commitment to at least partially democratise the ruling system. Less than two months after the incidents at Mecca and Qatif, Fahd announced his plans to establish a Consultative Assembly (al-Saud 1980a), yet it would be another twelve years before a Consultative Assembly would be established in Saudi Arabia.

What would be the epicentre of Al Saud identity and Islamic credentials restoration was the financial expenditure on infrastructure and support for religious activities. By early 1980, the state allocated funding for major infrastructure projects such as the sewage systems, three of

which were in the Eastern Province costing a total of SR1.13 billion and concentrating on the deprived and underdeveloped villages that witnessed the main uprisings. This came after visits were conducted by the King and members of the royal family over the six months immediately after the protests (al-Nadwa 1982). However, the bulk of the funding went to the clergy. The budget for the Third Development Plan (1980-1985) rose from SR 1.26 billion (1975-80) to SR 9.04 billion, a staggering eight-fold increase. Along with the appointment of Najdi ulama such as al-Sheikh and Bin Baz, the ulama now had funding to strengthen their presence through the building of mosques, Islamic educational centres, and bursaries and scholarships designed to increase the number of graduates in Islamic education in addition to attracting foreign students from other countries to spread the Wahhabi doctrine (Niblock 2004: 80).

The press also had a role in defining the role of clerics and the state. The argument centred on the role of the 'Imam' as a 'revivalist that rose to see the country living in a state of neo-ignorance *jāhiliyah*' (*al-Riyadh* 1979e). Abdulwahab was exemplified as a 'man of political and military leadership with a duty that allowed him to look forward, and through his teachings achieve unity of the Arabian Peninsula under the banner of Islam' and that 'for the first time... gave birth to an Arabian Islamic state' (*al-Riyadh* 1979e). The position of the clerics was legitimised through their continuation of Abdulwahab's role, and their support for the leaders of al-Saud. The local editorials legitimised the role of the ulama by defining their contribution to the formation of a strong union in the Arabian Peninsula. They were highlighted as the supporters and partners of the al-Saud given their 'responsibility in consolidating this state, building and expanding its borders to create the primordial nucleus for the first Arab union, the sanctuary and rescuer that the Islamic masses had been looking for' (*al-Riyadh* 1979e). In terms of the role of the 'ulama as being silent on westernisation and supportive of the collaboration of the al-Saud with the 'Christians and the West' as Juhayman had alleged, the editorials refuted this claim by demonstrating that the clerics and religion were the precursors of development.

In other words, the ‘cohesion between the two leaderships is enough to guarantee that religion and its clerics were never a reason for being backwards or an obstacle against development’ (*al-Riyadh* 1979e) with the Holy Mosque being the model for social development. The ulama were now partners alongside the leadership, holding a clear social role that would ‘protect the honour and unity of Muslims’ as well as being entrusted with the state’s property that would be used for future development since ‘religion supports the construction of life in a way permissible to God’ (*al-Riyadh* 1979e). The efforts at securing a partnership now meant that – like Iran – the Saudi state was also experiencing a shift towards clerical consolidation. The hierarchy already matched that of post-revolutionary Iran. A king and crown prince that set the broad contours of the discourse, with elite ministers that propagated and tweaked the narrative depending on the context.

### 3.4.6 Propaganda, the US and Zionism: Keeping up appearances

Saudi editorials accused the ‘enemies of Arabs and Islam’ of implementing a campaign initiated by ‘foreign news sources’ that were intended to discredit the state. Western media commentaries were described as seeking to ‘weaken the people’s morale’, and therefore accusing them of attempting to diminish the legitimacy of the state through ‘poisonous channels that serve their states’ military and political goals’, thereby giving rise to ‘disputes between religious and ethnic minorities’ (*al-Riyadh* 1979a). Other daily editorials, such as those featured in *Asharq al-Awsat*, sought to ‘reply to the spreading of rumours and propaganda’ by quoting and referencing Nayef, the Minister of the Interior. However, the government intentionally asked Saudi media outlets to allow western news agencies to continue writing because they have ‘no basis and we have the truth and facts’ and that ‘later the lies and propaganda will blow up in their face’ (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1979a). Consequently, and using the

pretext of the threat of western media campaigns as a delegitimizing and destabilising force in the Kingdom in particular and the Gulf in general, the monarchy moved to control the media in the Gulf by centralising and unifying the regional media. Under the guise of a conference, a meeting of Arab Gulf Ministers of Information was set up within a month of the Mecca siege.

Saudi concerns over their image were mainly focussed on western critics. Mainly since the image of Saudi Arabia as a stable, regional and Islamic leader was put into question. In this instance, Saudi representation of the Other focussed primarily on the West rather than Iran, especially since Iran was not the main attacker at this stage. However, it can also be proposed that the Saudi discourse towards the West served two main purposes. First, it can be described as an attempt by the Saudi state to refute allegations made by the Saudi Shi'a and Juhayman, of subservience to the US. In addition, it can be seen as a Saudi strategy of mimicking Iranian anti-imperialistic discourse against the US, thus preventing any future regional political isolation among the masses.

The results of the press conference, as observed through the statements of the Saudi Minister of Information, portrayed turbulent recent events as an issue affecting the whole Gulf region (*al-Riyadh* 1979). That is to say, any sedition in Saudi Arabia would spread to all the Gulf states, and the potential fall of the al-Saud would be followed by the collapse of all the other Arab Gulf monarchies. As a result, the Kingdom decided to take charge and employ the news agencies to 'repel the propaganda and deception campaigns from the hostile media apparatuses that particularly of late that targeted and undermined the countries of the region through careful monitoring of the regional media agencies'. This, as the Saudi media described, would also ensure that the Gulf media agencies would serve 'the development and urban development issues between the people of the region' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1979c; *al-Riyadh* 1979d, 1979b). Saudi Arabia now had a firm grip on the information that its nationals – and more importantly

the entire Gulf region population – consumed, easing its task of restoring its leadership in both the domestic and regional arena.

Moreover, in its endeavour to consolidate its identity as a legitimate monarchy, as the Imam of the ummah, and as an Islamic and Arab leader, Saudi Arabia – and Fahd in particular – was attempting to achieve a rather delicate balance. Echoing Khomeini's anti-US and anti-Israeli rhetoric**,** Fahd fomented a state narrative that attempted to complement the Iranian discourse of 'Zionist evil', the 'Great Satan' and 'communist infidels', whilst refuting Iranian allegations of Saudi subservience to the US. Fahd also endeavoured to allay the negative discourse by the Ikhwan in Mecca and the Shi'a in Qatif, whilst simultaneously avoiding direct confrontation with Iranian rhetoric, in the hope of calming relations with the neo-revolutionary state.

Firstly, like Khomeini, Fahd found an enemy in the 'Zionist state'. He blamed the latter for a propaganda campaign aimed at 'corrupting our image in the minds of the Arab and international public opinion'. This also gave the monarchy a further excuse to extend its control and regulate the media. A similar move to that of the IRP and Khomeini, the Saudis now accused the media of spreading fabrications and propaganda against the Saudi regime to tarnish its image on the domestic and international arena. The Saudi aim was to 'help all those that seek the truth, for Saudi has nothing to hide', especially since they were now 'convinced that we have to change our understanding'. Fahd's new contention was to 'unveil the truth', and face the challenges they bring 'no matter how bitter' in order to 'ease' the task of journalism in its 'quest for the truth instead of neglecting it' (al-Saud 1979d). Fahd's statements may have been an attempt to alleviate international criticism of Saudi Arabia as a closed state with no freedoms. However, more importantly, Fahd's main aim may possibly have been to fill the media vacuum that Khomeini and Iran filled with their anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian narrative of the oppressed and oppressor.

One main 'truth' was that of the plight of the Palestinian people, and the propaganda attempts to 'discredit the Saudi political stance in relation to Arab and Palestinian affairs' (al-Saud 1979d). Without mentioning or alluding to Iranian rhetoric, the Saudi narrative accused a particular 'group' of seeking to 'tarnish the image of every Arab leader or state' who had a positive role in Arab affairs (al-Saud 1979d). However, while suggesting that Fahd may have been attempting to dispel Khomeini's anti-Arab narrative by mimicking his stance against 'Global Zionism', Fahd also identified Saudi Arabia as victim of a defamation campaign that could only be cleared through 'entering the media arena,' thereby highlighting the role of the Kingdom and its domestic and international politics. As he continued, 'However, when we fall subject to rumours and inventions and mistakes we did not commit, we shall not stay silent, we shall defend'. Saudi Arabia was clearly signalling its shift from a passive to an active player in the regulation of state, regional and international media (al-Saud 1979d). Moreover, Fahd's narrative was a mirror image of the Iranian discourse, aiming to represent the Saudi state, much like Iran, as a victim of hegemonic propaganda. Like Iran, Fahd's narrative of disclosing the truth, aimed to propagate a narrative of resistance to the enemies of Saudi Arabia, defined by the Zionist state, which were also represented by Fahd as the enemies of Islam. Consequently, the Saudi discourse primarily aimed at matching if not complimenting the Iranian discourse towards Israel and the enemies of Islam, signalling an air of regional and Islamic rivalry and competition in their discourse.

Saudi Arabia's leadership role in the Islamic and Arab worlds was highlighted further by again echoing a Khomeini-like narrative of 'Neither East nor West', however in a rather less antagonistic fashion. It can be argued that Saudi Arabia's discourse was a reflection of the efficacy of Khomeini's rhetorical statements and it also suggest that the Saudi image of Islamic leadership was at risk of being overshadowed by Khomeini's hard line. Consequently, the representation of the Saudi Self as a mirror image of the Iranian Other, that is to say opposed

to US hegemony, or for instance the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, was crucial in preserving Saudi legitimacy and their image of Islamic and Arab leadership.

Iran was not attacking the legitimacy of al-Saud or Saudi Arabia during this period (March 1979 to June 1981) and the former's rhetoric was focussed on the US and Zionism, the oppressed and the oppressor. Iranian discourse was also engaged with the 'US hostage crisis', and domestic rivalries such as the Bani-Sadr and MKO rivalry with the IRP that was represented as an internal enemy serving the interests of an outer enemy, namely the US, imperialism and Zionism. Saudi Arabia's rhetoric, however, was focussed more on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Yemen war and Arab-Israeli affairs. While the Saudi monarchy criticised Israel and its stance towards the Arabs, Fahd's rhetoric on Islam's enemies and Israel's supposed attempts to undermine Saudi Arabia was first observed in his speeches after the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

Soviet advancements in Afghanistan were acknowledged as a threat by Saudi, especially since the Democratic Republic of Yemen had established close ties to the Soviet Union and had signed the Aden Treaty Tripartite Alliance, known as the 'Aden Pact'[7] (Malik 1990: 246). Fahd's narrative which was set out from the perspective of an 'Arab leader' approved of 'an Arab regime benefitting from the aid supplied by a super power', however -- and mimicking Khomeini's dismay – there was a need to consolidate an identity of self-reliance and independence such that 'one should not give commitments (to superpowers) since they are not in favour of their [i.e. the Saudi] regime or their neighbours'. The notion of colonialism and its impact on Arab states and the Orient was emphasised, resonating with revolutionary Iran's discourse on the fight against post-colonialism and 'not allowing it the opportunity to return'

[7] Libya, South Yemen and Ethiopia formed the Aden Treaty Tripartite Alliance in 1981; it included a joint defence commitment (Military Balance 1986). For a more extensive discussion on Soviet-Yemen relations see Malik (1990).

(al-Saud 1979d; al-Saud 1980a). The narrative of the self-reliance and independence of Arab states was propagated to include education, development and knowledge. Similar to the Iranian discourse of educational independence and the development of an Islamic nation with Iran at its forefront, Fahd's narrative echoed a similar message but one based on an Arab identity, unity and self-reliance, a similar argument made by Saddam Hussein in his speeches (Esposito and Voll 1996: 56-58). Fahd argued that '(we) as Arabs have scientists and specialists whether in Arab countries or abroad that we could benefit from their expertise' (al-Saud 1979d). Addressing a similar narrative to Saddam, Saudi Arabia was reflecting a multifaceted definition of the Saudi Self. First, it was defining its Arab Self, where it sought to project an image as the unifier of Arabs. Second, an image of superpower independence was highlighted similar to Khomeini's 'neither East nor West' policy. Finally – and again like Khomeini – Fahd sought to highlight the Saudi Self as being at the forefront of Islam and the fight against 'Global Zionism'.

## 3.5 Defining Saudi Arabia's Other

Comparable to Khomeini, the king and crown prince of Saudi Arabia set the parameters of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and other states. Unlike the Iranian elite, it is possible to split the Saudi higher orders into two layers, namely the king and crown prince on the one hand, and the leading ministers on the other[8], as all the positions under the crown prince complemented each other. Therefore, both layers' discourse production is similar if not at times identical to one another.

[8] The leading ministers include the two deputy prime ministers: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Although the king of Saudi Arabia, Khalid was in power until 1982, the main tasks of governing the state were handed over to the crown prince, Fahd. Like Iran, Saudi Arabia also applied a 'top-down' pyramid-like hierarchy of governance that also reflected its discourse construction. While the king and crown prince sketched out that main direction of the state and its identity, the main ministers 'filled in' and 'coloured' the sketch. The king and crown prince took a more implicit tone in their discourse leaving the ministers to take an explicit narrative. Moreover, the discourse production in Saudi Arabia was based on three main approaches: First, setting out and sketching the main foreign policy guidelines of the state; Second, highlighting the Saudi identity as an Islamic and Arab leader; Finally, the emphasis of a benign and neutral stance towards intra and inter Arab and Islamic affairs, and a staunch position on Western affairs towards the Islamic and Arab world, predominantly Israeli-Arab affairs.

At the start of Iran's post-revolution period, the public narrative and tone towards Iran was positive in overall terms, with narratives based on themes of Islamic brotherhood, neighbourliness and potential future cooperation. This position was reflected by Fahd in his speeches, press conferences and interviews. One such position was framed on Fahd's 'respect for Khomeini's convictions and we will not change our outlook towards him' (Lawzi 1980). However, it can be argued that private telegrams and memos presented a different image. Fahd's position was that 'what is happening in Iran is dangerous for Islam and Muslims; it is a chauvinistic revolution that threatens the region... what is happening in Iran is not Islamic...'. Furthermore, his stance on the Shah's rule was that 'We support every regime that exhibits legitimacy in its country, and this legitimacy applies to the Shah's regime' (al-Kawaz 2014: 23-24).

Similarly, with the advent of the war, the Saudi monarch and crown prince also observed distinctly different public and private positions. The public narrative was that the 'Iran-Iraq

war should end immediately' and that it is a 'great loss for both the region and the Islamic Ummah'. The second was that the Saudi position was not a personalised one against Iran, but 'part of a collective Arab standpoint'. However, in private calls and memos released by the royal court, for example in September 1981, in telephone calls to Saddam the king maintained that 'We are with you in the past and present, and we are with you in your just war to retrieve your stolen land and right to enforce your legal and total sovereignty over [the territory]' (al-Ahram 1980; al-Jazira 1980).

The notable discourse promulgators within the Saudi ministerial elite at the time included three princes: the minister of the interior, Nayef, the defence minister, Sultan and the chief of the National Guard, Abdullah. As Khaled and Fahd sketched out the discourse, in Saudi discourse production, each minister was in charge of tackling a certain file as requested by the king or crown prince. Nayef, the interior minister, was in charge of the daily activities vis-a-vis the kingdom, such as any terrorist attempts including the Mecca siege. Sultan, the defence minister would comment and oversee the Saudi army and its involvement in any regional defences such as the Iran-Iraq war. Abdullah, the head of the National Guard was involved mainly in domestic incidents such as the siege of Mecca and the al-Qatif demonstrations in the Eastern province. As a result, each minister interacted with the media and disseminated their discourse which was then transmitted and reflected towards the masses through newspapers or the media organisations.

The Saudi editorials printed between 1979 and 1983 reflected three main themes. The first included coverage and analysis of national and international accomplishments, visits and speeches by the royal elite, including the king, crown prince and ministers of the interior, defence and foreign affairs. Second, the editorials covered regional, Arab and Islamic affairs, including the Palestinian/Israeli issues, the Lebanese civil war, the Afghan-Soviet war and

Saudi Arabia's stance on these questions. Finally, the newspapers covered Iran, and from more than one angle. The topics covered mainly included the Iran-Iraq war, the Hajj, the export of the revolution and Iranian expansionist aspirations in the Persian Gulf. In the discussion of the images used construct to Iran as the Saudi Other, it is important to highlight that the images were used to demonise the newly formed Islamic Republic. That is to say, the employment of dehumanising strategies, denigrating nicknames, and victimisation of the people by the Iranian state was a discourse based on utilising easily mobilised images in order to sway Saudi and Arab audiences.

The format of Saudi editorials in the period between 1979 and 1983 followed a broadly similar pattern in all three newspapers where they – apart from *Asharq al-Awsat* – published one daily editorial which concentrated on a single theme, while the difference was in the given article's length. In addition, excluding *al-Riyadh*, the newspaper editorials were short, unless the editorial covered an event or topic related to the king or crown prince. Furthermore, the difference between the newspapers was their individual target audience and the explicit or implicit tone used to discuss a theme, especially with regards to Iran.

*Asharq al-Awsat* and *al-Riyadh's* editorials discussed Iran from the onset of the war (*al-Riyadh* 1980a; *Asharq al-Awsat* 1980b). *Asharq al-Awsat's* discourse and therefore the representation of Iran was less rhetorical and polarised than *al-Riyadh* and *al-Madina*, mainly due to its international focus. Nevertheless, the *Asharq al-Awsat* articles saw a shift in Saudi representation of Iran. Although the articles were to some extent skewed in favour of Iraq, the overall message at the beginning of the war was the anticipation of 'peace between two Islamic neighbours'. However, as Iran made battlefront gains, the depiction of the Iranian Other shifted to a polarised discourse, which intensified from March 1982, coinciding with the liberation of Khoramshahr and the beginning of the Iraqi retreat (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1982). The *al-Madina*

and *al-Riyadh* editorials on the other hand were aimed at a more locally-orientated audience. Covering the events from the beginning of the war, *al-Madina*, reacted to both the Iranian advances and governmental press releases relating to the military front and Rafsanjani and Khamenei's rhetoric towards Saudi Arabia and its monarchy. On the other hand, *al-Riyadh* discussed Iran in its editorials from November 1981, after Iran began to make significant gains on the battlefront, such as retaking the city of Abadan.

The Saudi editorial discourse witnessed two main strategies, or 'supra-strategies' when representing the Iranian state. These included delegitimizing and dehumanising (supra) strategies. Each would encompass different techniques to identify the Iranian Other or the Saudi Self within the discourse. The editorials attempted mainly to delegitimize the Iranian Other by criticising the Iranian state and revolution. That is to say, the first approach taken by the Saudis was divide the people from the state by arguing for the victimisation of the former by the latter, a similar strategy to that undertaken in Iranian discourse (Khamenei 1981b). The second and more significant approach was the employment of descriptive nominations and referential strategies, i.e. denigrating 'nicknames' such as the 'Government of the Signs (of God)' *(Hukūmat al-ʾāyāt)* (*al-Riyadh* 1981b). which belittles the status of the *'ʾĀyatu ʾAlāh'* (the sign of Allah) to nickname 'the signs' *(al-ʾāyāt)*. *al-Madina* and *al-Riyadh* also aimed to highlight the illegitimacy of the Iranian regime and its revolution. The Saudi discourse focused on the Iranian revolution as 'fake' with 'fake slogans', in other words developing a narrative aimed at denigrating Khomeini. Saudi editorials framed Khomeini as inept in terms of his Islamic scholarship and the Iranians as a naive nation deceived by 'Khoemini's brand of Islam' that did not adhere to the principles and teachings of the Sunnah while using 'narrow-minded slogans'. Therefore, Saudi editorials resonated with a discourse based on weak Iranian governance and the victimisation of the 'Iranian Muslim nation' (*al-Riyadh* 1981b*; al-Madina* 1982b). The Saudi editorials also called on the Saudi and Arab reader to incorporate into the

distinction between the state and the people that 'the Iranian people are not Khomeini or the Revolutionary Guard. Iran is a nation of 35 million Muslim males and females' one editorial argued (*al-Madina* 1982). The strategy was to highlight the falsehood of Khoemini's Islamic narrative and simultaneously show the Islamic nature of the people and their victimisation under a tyranny of the 'fake Islam'. The Saudi discourse, therefore, aimed to communicate a clear message; the Saudi Self identifies with the Iranian nation, but not its non-Islamic leadership.

The delegitimization strategies employed by the Saudi editorial discourse also reacted to Iranian rhetoric directed towards Saudi Arabia, such as supposed Saudi collaboration and subservience to imperialism and Zionism. This was particularly visible in a novel editorial in *al-Madina* (*al-Madina* 1981e) that was aimed specifically at fending off Khomeini's harsh criticism (Khomeini 1981h) and Rafsanjani's Friday prayer sermon (Rafsanjani 1981c) as well as responding to the Iranian clerical discourse aimed at Fahd's peace plan for Arab relations with Israel. The Iranian Other was clearly defined. The clergy summed up as 'foul examples of frivolity and stupidity... following the path of Satan, the path of insults, on a blessed Friday'. Their manners were defined as un-Islamic and 'polluting people's ears and desecrating a great Halal Muslim festival' (*al-Madina* 1981e). Furthermore, the un-Islamic nature of the Saudi Other also defined Khomeini as an enemy to Islam and Saudi Arabia especially since 'the Supreme leader and his followers apply barbaric manners that are as distant to Islam as could be… but more than that... it is the manner in which the ruling regime in Iran treat our Muslim brethren around Iran that does not relate to Islam or to the tenets of brotherhood, or national dignity'.

On the other hand, the Saudi Self was simultaneously defined through a strategy that rhetorically asked 'Why does the Iranian regime resent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? And the

King of Saudi Arabia? And the Saudi Peace Plan?' By employing a question and answer strategy, the Saudi Self was defined by describing the Saudi Other. The Saudi discourse defined Iranian resentfulness in one phrase, 'spiteful or malevolent' (*ḥāqidūn*) and asked 'Why are they spiteful?' The answers highlighted Saudi international prestige and Islamic leadership and relations since 'no one listens to or respects them (Iran) [but] all the Islamic world... respects and appreciates Saudi Arabia and its rational voice'. The Saudi prerogative and motivation behind the Peace Plan was therefore defined as an 'Islamic goal... to attain dignity for the Palestinian people... in a logical and rational manner', whereas an un-Islamic Iran aspired to hinder Fahd's plan out of spitefulness and hypocrisy 'especially since their war efforts could have been spent on liberating Palestine rather than insulting Saudi Arabia and its initiatives' (*al-Madina* 1981e). Therefore, the discourse represents a narrative of Iranian hypocrisy symbolised by Khomeini's 'fake slogans' of Palestinian support, anger and frustration at Saudi Arabia's prestige of Islamic and Arab leadership.

## 3.6 Saudi-Iranian Themes: Predications of the Self and the Other

After the advent of the revolution in Iran, it had become a truism that the revolutionary state was a major threat to the Gulf monarchies. This made the latter enter into what Adib-Moghaddam (2006: 43) argues constituted a balance of power calculation in relation to Saudi support for Saddam. In addition, the main source of GCC states' anxiety was the domination of Iraq or Iran over the Persian Gulf. However, it was the Saudi view that it should seize the opportunity to project and position the Saudi Self as a defender of Islam and the Arab world, against a newly minted revolutionary Iran. In hindsight, the Saudi view of Iran was always one based on caution. However, the shift in the Saudi stance occurred as Iran made military gains and given Khomeini's calls for an export of the revolution as exemplified by the Hajj incidents.

The voices in Saudi Arabia responding to Iran were composed of two layers, namely a narrative by Khalid and Fahd that was implicit and diplomatic towards Iran, and a ministerial narrative that represented Iran in a negative light, starting with the Hajj and the alleged Iranian sponsorship of the Bahraini coup d'état. The Saudi position vis a vis Iran was mainly achieved through, support for Iraq during its war with Iran, the GCC's creation and Saudi leadership of the new body, and Saudi Arabia acting as the principle custodian of the Israeli-Arab peace plan. Consequently, since the fall of the Shah in 1979, different tropes and meta-narratives emerged between Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, only two main themes are prevalent and reoccurring between 1979 and 1983. These include subservience to and being an agent of imperialism and Zionism; and issues around Arab-Islamic hegemony and sedition.

Furthermore, although these themes highlight that the images utilised by both states were intended to strengthen their associated narratives and discourses. Khomeini's comparisons of, respectively, the Iran-Iraq war to the war between Islam and infidels, Saudi monarchy as the 'infidels of Mecca', or Saudi Arabia serving 'American masters', was an attempt to underline Saudi Arabian subservience and the anti-Islamic nature of the Kingdom in the minds of the Iranian audience. Similarly, Saudi editorial discourse depicted Iranian pilgrims at the Hajj as 'criminals' or underlined the naivety of the Iranian people influenced by a 'divine demagogue' and a 'Kharijite' state, an effort to mobilise and enrich the negative image of a revolutionary Iran in Saudi Arabia in particular and the Arab world in general.

### 3.6.1 Subservience and acting as an agent of imperialism and Zionism

The rivalry between post-revolutionary Iran and Saudi Arabia over the leadership of the Islamic world was made manifest by ideological rhetoric channelled through the media, speeches and sermons from one end, and through the export of the revolution via demonstrations mainly

during the Hajj pilgrimage on the other. Whilst the first signs of such a rivalry would occur in November 1979, that is when clerics began to participate in the Iranian government after the resignation of the Bazargan government, Khomeini's rhetoric peaked as the Iran-Iraq war began to unfold. Furthermore, the Soviet relationship with South Yemen and its invasion of Afghanistan raised Saudi fears of communism arriving at its doorstep and therefore the state strengthened its relationship with the US, a development that was viewed by Iran as a form of 'subservience' to the US. This was portrayed in Iranian discourses as a 'Zionist agenda' propagated mainly by Fahd during his tenure as Crown Prince and later as King.

The Iran-Iraq war sustained an explicitly negative Iranian representation of the Saudi Arabian leadership, and followed Khomeini's implicit framing of Saudi Arabia as subservient to imperialism and Zionism discourse. The first member of the newly formed revolutionary state to explicitly characterise the Saudi Other as a subordinate or 'agent' of the US was Khamenei. Less than two weeks into the war, Khamenei explicitly defined his role and that of Iran's enemies:

> As a servant and an individual who has no association with any political cadre, and speaking on behalf of the people from people's tongues, we will not forgive the governments of Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Jordan, Egypt, and the Kings of Saudi Arabia... Death to all the hypocrites that claim to be Muslim and have Arab prejudice and lie. Bahrain allows Iraqi aircrafts to take off from its airport. Kuwait fuels Iraqi planes so they can bomb Abadan and Khorramshahr. Jordan gives tanks and armoured vehicles so they can attack our borders. Saudi Arabia and their corrupt royal family with all their claims are cheering on... We have to distinguish, who we are exactly at war with? We are at war with the US, and with every one of those states I just mentioned. The moment any of them aid Iraq, which they have, they should not be safe from the severity of our blows (Khamenei 1980a).

As hostility between Iraq and Iran grew, Khomeini's narrative demonstrated increasing animosity towards the Arab states, possibly due to their support for Iraq. His narrative started from implicit reference to the regional Gulf sheikhdoms (*Shaykh Nishīnhā-yi Khalīj*) and the implicit mention of 'some of the larger Islamic states' (*baʿzī dawlathā-yi kishwarhā-yi ʾIslāmī*),

‘reactionary states allied with imperialism’ (*dawlathā-yi ʾirtijāʿī wābastih bih impīriālism*) that opted to side with Saddam against Iran, namely Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Jordan. His aggressive narrative progressed to a discourse on the ‘war between Islam and infidelity’ where those in Saddam’s camp were denigrated as fighting ‘against Islam, rise against the holy Quran, and open fire on innocent Muslims’ (Khomeini 1980c).

The Iranian narrative towards the Iran-Iraq war continued to be one based mainly on infidelity versus Islam, as Saddam’s Baath party was termed ‘Aflaqist’ and in the ‘service of imperialism and Zionism’, supported by the US and its allies in the war against the Iranian. As a result, with the exception of opinion pieces on Saudi Arabia (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980c, 1980g) and other Arab states (*Ettelaat* 1981a) alongside their role in the war, the narrative towards Saudi Arabia was implicit.

The OIC-Taif conference held between 25-29 January 1981 prompted a shift in Iranian discourse towards Saudi Arabia *and* specifically a further transformation in the Khomeini narrative on Saudi. The shift in his narrative, although at first implicit, included the identification of the Arab leaders supporting Saddam with the deposed Shah, as well as questioning the ‘Islamicness’ of Arab leaders in relation to the oppression of Iran, Palestinians and Lebanese, in the land of ‘the birth of Islam...and its Prophet’ (Khomeini 1981c). In a sermon on 23 January 1981 (Khamenei 1981a), Khamenei represented the Saudi state’s proposal to hold the OIC conference in Taif and the invitation of Saddam, as a gathering of ‘mercenaries of the US and imperialism’ that Iran could not attend. Therefore, the Saudi government was represented as a flagship of western subservience against Islam, and its monarchy as the leaders of these ‘mercenaries’, putting into question the legitimacy of those in power within the Saudi state.

It is crucial to point out that the OIC conference was criticised through newspaper editorials prior to the mainstream government channels or even the Friday prayer sermon. In an editorial by *Jomhouri Eslami* (1981o), the Saudi state was criticised explicitly for hosting the Islamic conference. Framing Saudi Arabia as a country fearing for its survival, thus projecting an image of a weak Saudi kingdom, the editorial alleged the Saudi aim revolved around bringing all parties including the 'Resistance Front' and the 'reactionary states' to bridge their differences in Saudi Arabia's favour. This, as the editorial further represented, was all in obedience to the orders of Saudi Arabia's 'American masters' (*ʾarbābān*) that wish to bring all the region into 'submission' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981o).

As the war against Iraq intensified, Khomeini's exporting the revolution narrative was also underlined strongly. Iran's anti-Saudi rhetoric followed and was a response to Saudi support for Iraq, of which financial assistance, according to Karsh (2009: 67), from the start of the war until the close of 1981 totalled over $10 billion (Karsh 2009). The creation of the GCC also generated disquiet in Iranian editorials, with a particular emphasis on the GCC acting as 'slaves and colonies of the US and Zionism' (Khamenei 1980c). The al-Taif conference, which saw the birth of the GCC, was ridiculed as recalling 'Henry Kissinger and his experience in planning an imperialistic agenda of sedition (*fitna*) in the Middle East, principally along sectarian lines' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981j). The Iranian editorial discourse constructed the Islamic conference as a conspiracy against Islam, with Saudi Arabia leading this sponsorship and dominating the *fitna* conspiracy. Furthermore, to give the narrative more legitimacy, the Iranian editorial ascribed the conference an imperialistic agenda, positioning the Saudi leadership as subservient to Kissinger. Between July 1981 and May 1982, Iranian rhetoric vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia and Fahd's involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process and Lebanese civil war peaked in conjunction with related episodes, including clashes during the Hajj season of 1981, Fahd's

announcement of his peace plan (which in turn coincided with OPEC price cuts) and the US sale of AWACs to Saudi Arabia.

#### *3.6.1.1 Fahd's Peace Plan and the Fez Initiative*

Fahd's peace plan was first discussed by *Jomhouri Eslami* (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981r) and later there was an official state response released first by the foreign ministry (1981). The plan depicted as 'an official recognition of Zionism in the region, a new conspiracy on behalf of the leaders affiliated with America', clearly signifying a narrative of treachery and conspiracy against Palestine in particular and the Arab and Islamic worlds in general (*Iranian Foreign Ministry* 1981). Explicit representation of Saudi Arabia was made initially in the editorials of the same newspaper (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981k) and later through Friday prayer sermons led mainly by Rafsanjani (Rafsanjani 1981d).

The Iranian narrative of Saudi subservience to Zionism became more potent when Fahd's seven-point plan was announced on 7 August 1981. The Kingdom was equated with Egypt and Fahd with Sadat. However, the difference in the rhetoric was that the Iranian editorials grouped Israel and Saudi Arabia as being in Saddam's camp, creating a 'second Camp David' with the peace plan as a destructive tool aimed at destroying Iran and the Islamic world, giving Israel 'greater access to Arab lands, and Lebanon acting as its bridge towards the Mediterranean' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981k). Iranian narratives on all levels of the hierarchy not only complimented one another, and concentrated on constructing the most negative image of the Saudi Other they could achieve. Moreover, both the state and the press argued that Fahd's plan was indeed a second Camp David Accord, with editorials going as far as claiming that Fahd aimed at the 'demise of Islam'. However, the state contended that the Palestinian issue was being 'Arabised' by Fahd, alluding to discrimination between the nations of the Middle East,

and recalling the 'Israeli and US narrative that advocates the continuation and longevity of Zionism and Imperialism in the region… that is victorious for the US and *Israel'* (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981k).

By contrast, the Saudi narrative dealing with Fahd's plans was multifaceted. Firstly, the press aimed to clearly describe the plan by summarising its main points and disseminating them to the public through blocks of editorials. One of the main intentions of this was to distance Fahd from Sadat and the Camp David Accords, highlighting Fahd's plan as one that established 'comprehensive peace' whilst stressing its preservation of Palestinian and Islamic rights. Secondly, Saudi discourse focussed on providing legitimacy to the plan by drawing attention to Islamic and Arab support. Local editorials described the international and Islamic backing for the plan as an 'inspiration in the service of mankind by the Kingdom [and monarchy]' (*al-Madina* 1981f), while underlining Saudi legitimacy and leadership as the 'strong Arab and Islamic voice that is needed today' to interact with 'Western politicians and politics' such as Britain and France, thereby warning off the US from engaging in 'any mistakes resulting from collaborating with the Zionists against Fahd's plans' (*al-Madina* 1981f). Furthermore, state declarations and Fahd's speeches in general also distanced the peace proposal from Sadat's legacy: 'A ceasefire does not mean that the Palestinian nation ceases its struggle and the path towards its justified goals and ambitions' (al-Saud 1981b) further underlining that his plan was 'not a resuscitation of the Camp David Accords' (*al-Madina* 1981b).

#### *3.6.1.2 Saudi Arabia and al-Saud Subservience to Zionism, the US and Enmity with Islam*

Juxtaposed with the Shah of Iran, the al-Saud were characterised as agents of Israel, serving Western and imperialistic interests against Islam and the Arabs. Living in fear of an Islamic

awakening and revolution, the al-Saud were depicted as acting in subservience to Western demands of being pro-Israel in return for a guarantee of western protection and immunity against an 'awakening' in the kingdom. The incident of the siege of Mecca in November-December 1979 was one example of such a threat that gave rise to the al-Saud's increased subservience and reliance on Western regimes. One such example is West Germany, an 'imperialistic American state [employed] to train Saudi guards to fight so called terrorists' in a contract that was organised and agreed to with the 'great master that is the imperialistic American and the Hollywood clown [i.e. Reagan]' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981e).

A further predication by Iranian discourse was the discursive construction of Saudi Arabia and the al-Saud as acting against the interests of Arabs. This discourse became predominant after the announcement of the Fahd peace plan for a comprehensive Arab agreement with Israel. The Iranian representation of the Saudi Other was predicated on four main levels: Saudi Arabia as a state; al-Saud as a ruling monarchy; Fahd in his position as crown prince and later monarch; and finally Saudi Arabia as leader of the GCC.

In the case of the Saudi royals, the al-Saud family was depicted as plundering people's wealth in order to buy support for their plans. The Iranian representation aimed to construct a corrupt image of the al-Saud Other spending the nation's wealth to 'bribe the greedy and threaten to cut off aid from the destitute' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981a). Furthermore, the al-Saud are represented as medieval feudal lords, 'holding a bag [of money] visiting everywhere, and spending millions and millions, billions and billions of their deprived and downtrodden nation's wealth, and pour it into the pockets of this and that, so that those that might oppose them are silenced, and welcome those dependent on them as they dance, clap and cheer their masters' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981a). This bribery in the service of the west was portrayed in Iranian discourse as fulfilling an Israeli agenda, where the al-Saud were constructed as

propagators of treachery against the Arabs through a conspiracy with Israel to invade Arab lands.

The Iranian strategy of characterising Fahd as a conspirer and treacherous individual was also a major theme in Iranian editorial discourse. Fahd's initiative in proposing a peace plan was depicted as a 'second Camp David', however with more concessions and extensions to its articles. By juxtaposing and comparing Fahd with Sadat, although the Other was defined as a continuation of a Western agenda that became Sadat's path in 'compromising with the occupiers of Jerusalem'; Fahd was also represented as a greater conspirator against the Arabs and 'in haste to betray the Palestinian goals' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981a). In addition, Fahd's royal court (*darbār*) was also represented as spearheading treachery and bribery against the Palestinian cause. In relation to the Israeli attacks against Lebanon, Fahd's royal court was depicted as fulfilling an Israeli agenda by carrying out 'Israeli orders' (*dastūr va maʾmūriyat*) similar to the previous loss of the Golan Heights. The Iranian discourse therefore represented the Saudi monarchy and its royal court as the 'old friends of Zionism in Riyadh' that were contacted and ordered to 'take the lead in the treachery against the ambitions of Palestinians' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982e), which in turn hastened Fahd's announcement of a peace proposal. Through denigration of Fahd, Iranian editorial discourse constructed Fahd as an innate conspirator and saboteur of Palestinian interests, an opportunist 'fishing in murky waters', pushing for a plan like 'a cow of the Middle East giving birth to octuplets', i.e. his eight-point peace plan (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982e).

The Lebanese war also saw the Saudi royal court characterised as a main actor behind the 'conspiracy against the Islamic world and Muslims', especially with regards to the GCC meetings and conference sessions. Held in Riyadh under the auspices of the Saudi royal court, the GCC was represented as a sinister congregation with the sole aim of conspiring against

the ambitions and cause of the Palestinians. Iranian discourse represented one such meeting of GCC defence ministers on 10 October 1982 as pursuing a conspiracy based on three main strategies. First, was to 'suppress Arab and Islamic nations that aim for an Islamic awakening against authoritarian regimes'. Second, the GCC meeting was a 'service to Israel and its hegemony in Islamic lands' in addition to propping up the rule of al-Jumayil in Lebanon, thereby collaborating with Israel and its allies to 'eradicate Palestinian presence in Arab states as planned in the Fez conference' (September 1982). The final element was that the GCC was formed to 'find new markets for European and American made weapons, in addition to creating a fertile environment for their military advisors...' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982a).

The Saudi Other was also framed in the discourse of enmity with Islam, with the Saudis tarnishing Islam's holiest site of Mecca, thus tainting the Mohammedan heritage and the Abrahamic religious tradition. Furthermore, this discursive strategy also represented Mecca as both under siege and having been illegally seized by the al-Saud. The latter were represented as 'appropriating the house of God and nominating themselves as the leaders of the Islamic world', a clear allusion to the al-Saud's hypocrisy, enmity towards Islam and false leadership (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981b). The Iranian discourse, therefore, framed the Saudi monarchy not only as destroyers of Islam, but of all monotheistic religions starting with Abraham. Therefore, the Saudi Other was implicitly characterised as made up of 'infidels' seeking to destroy the cradle of Islam, Mecca, while the Iranian Self, naturally, was the saviour of not only Islam, but all the monotheistic religions. Iran was implicitly divine with a mandate from God, the custodian of Mohammedan heritage and the Abrahamic religious tradition. Iran was therefore 'the embodiment of all faith' versus 'the embodiment of all Unbelief' (Razwy 2014: 171), namely the al-Saud.

The al-Saud were juxtaposed with the 'infidels of Mecca' during the time of the Prophet Mohammed, however in a much more negative and polarised manner. Iranian discourse represented the al-Saud as passing the point of repentance: 'even the well of Zamzam with all its holiness could not deter these Arab leaders from their deviant ways...'. Furthermore, the al-Saud were represented as hindering the sole purpose of the Ka'ba as 'the centre of unity, friendship for all those that genuinely worship God and struggle against infidelity, apostasy, and oppression...' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981g). This discourse of corrupting Islam was paralleled with baptism and cleansing, where the Ka'ba in particular and Mecca in general were constructed as 'houses of idols' *(but khānah)* that 'even the well of Zamzam could not cleanse from the tarnish'. This representation of the Saudi Other as morally and religiously tarnished and compromised suggested a further dimension of being subservient to foreigners and treacherous to Islam. During Mohammed's time, Mecca had not been subject to 'the powers of arrogance, hegemony and atheism', a clear reference to Western control over Saudi Arabia and the al-Saud's relationship with the West (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981g).

On the Iraq front, Iran's military advances took place in particular after the advent of the human wave tactic in November 1981. This coincided with the Fez Summit, which ended without agreement on the part of the Arab League members[9]. The declaration made by the host, King Hassan of Morocco, attributed the non-agreement and postponement of the summit to the 'vast number of topics that were of high importance and would have major ramifications... thus it was imperative to reach a proper opinion and appropriate routes of application' to the different items on the agenda, including Fahd's peace plan. From an Iranian standpoint, the discourse on the peace plan was utilised once again with Khomeini rhetorically demonising and branding

[9] The first session of the Arab League Summit was held in Fez on 25 November 1981. However, it only lasted approximately five hours due to arguments between Syria, Libya and the PLO on one end and Saudi Arabia along with the GCC States, Morocco and Jordan on the other. The summit was postponed until 6 September 1982.

'all those that do not oppose Fahd's plan (as) traitors to Islam', an assertion that was simultaneously echoed by Khamenei who stated that the Al Saud wanted to 'give all of the Middle East to Israel and not just the Palestinian territories'. Furthermore, the press characterised Fahd's plans as more than a matter of subservience but also an intention to eradicate Islam by 'erasing the words *La Illah Ila Allah* from Mecca and Medina' (*Jomhouri* Eslami 1981f).

By November 1981, there were accusations of an Iranian collaboration with Israel in the war with Iraq *(Operation Opera)* in order to destroy Iraq's nuclear reactor. This gave the Saudis an argument that was used against the Iranians in their press and subsequent speeches. However, the Iranians used the Fez Summit to deflect such accusations. Accordingly, the lack of agreement at the Fez Summit was characterised as Fahd's agenda of destruction that ended with a 'failure to destroy the Middle East and the Islamic world' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982e). Khomeini attributed Fahd's failure and any Iranian-Israeli collaboration to 'Israel's attempts at discrediting Iran' because Iranian victories had hindered Israel's plans along with Fahd's peace proposal. That is to say, the anti-Iranian propaganda was proportional to Fahd's failures in Fez which was also stressed by the Iranian Prime Minister as part of an 'imperialistic and Zionist agenda' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982g).

Whilst the Saudi discourse aimed at asserting the 'necessity of reclaiming all of the Palestinian rights out of divine duty', editorials were split between confirmation of the failure of the Fez summit (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1981c) on the one hand and the need for Arab cooperation and consensus on the other, i.e. a regurgitation of the Fez final declaration. Nevertheless, all the Saudi editorials agreed on two main points, namely that Fahd's plan was the best option for the Arabs and Islamic world, and that there was a 'conspiracy' being carried out to sabotage Fahd's peace efforts. These editorials continued a line of support and praised Fahd's 'miracle' plan

(*al-Riyadh* 1981d) as one that resurrects the 'pride of Arabs', whilst challenging opposing Arab leaders – such as Libya and Syria – to present a better solution, promising that if a superior proposal was presented then Fahd's plans would be withdrawn (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1981e). Finally, further criticism was directed at countries opposed to the plans, the '*Steadfastness and Confrontation Front' (Jabhat al-Sumūd wa-l-Tahadī),*[10] that branded the non-agreement as 'an environment of war' that the Arabs were experiencing (*al-Madina* 1981c). Consequently, with just an allusion to Iran, criticism was made as to how it 'should provide peace for their own people that are being killed through the onslaughts of terrorism and adventurism' instead of 'turning its [i.e. Iran's] back against Israel' and the latter's atrocities against the Islamic world (*al-Madina* 1981c).

#### *3.6.1.3 The Hajj and AWACs*

The Hajj season was also utilised by Iran to export its revolution and extend its 'public relations' to other pilgrims from around the globe. The demonstrations of 1981 were the first occasion that witnessed a direct confrontation between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces. The confrontations may have been linked to the developments in the Iran-Iraq war, especially after Saudi support for Iraq increased, mainly as a response to fears of Khomeini's increased emphasis on exporting the revolution (Marschall 2003: 50). The demonstrations of 1981 began at the Prophet's mosque in Medina with conflicting reports emerging about the incident. The Iranian narrative linked the demonstrations to a retaliation against the arrest of two Iranians for embracing and reading supplications at the shrine, which the Saudis denied

[10] The 'Steadfastness and Confrontation Front' was formed in 1977. It included the PLO, and the governments of Libya, Algeria, Syria and South Yemen. Its function was to oppose the Camp David Accords by Sadat and Begin and the trip of the former to Tel Aviv.

through a response issued by Nayef, the Minister of the Interior, who attributed the incident to an attack on Saudi police (al-Saud 1981e).

The Saudi press compared the Iranian pilgrims to 'saboteurs and criminals' and equivalent to those that 'King Abdulaziz put an end to in an era of looting and chaos that ended with his reign' (*al-Madina* 1981d). In addition, the editorials refuted the Iranian narrative as false and propagating claims aimed at stirring up a media war between Islamic states (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1981a). However, the Saudi line, as an immediate reaction to the incident, sought to differentiate between the Iranian people and Khomeini. This was an attempt to represent the Iranian people as religiously-naive, oppressed, and misled by Khomeini. The Saudi discourse showed sympathy with and offered compromise to Iranians, yet was harshly critical of the regime and the 'divine demagogue-like figure' i.e. Khomeini. The Saudi discourse was the first editorial instance where blame was directed at Khomeini for 'encouraging his people to disturb the peace at God's holiest sites by praising him as they do prophets and messengers' and labelling the Iranian state as 'Khawarij' who were not spreading Islam but rather 'exporting chaos and political crises outside its borders' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1981d). This was invoked whilst quoting Nayef's statements that 'the Hajj season is a season of worship which cannot be exploited for any acts of religious, political and ideological calling' (al-Saud 1981e; *al-Riyadh* 1981e).

The demonstrations of 1981 continued in Mecca where more pilgrims were arrested. An exchange of letters between Khaled and Khomeini followed, with the former expressing his dismay at the Iranian pilgrims' demonstrations as constituting actions 'that are incompatible with the status of the Iranian people' (al-Saud 1981c). The reply from Khomeini was a clear denial of any un-Islamic intentions, but emphasised that both holy sites at Mecca and Medina were political Islamic centres. Khomeini's remarks were a clear affirmation of the notions of

‘liberation from infidels’ (*barāʾat az mushrikīn*) and the ‘unity of Muslim society’ (*wahdat-i Muslimīn*) that he argued were upheld as the Islamic duties of the Hajj in Mecca and Medina respectively. Khomeini’s reply also took aim at the role of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and its acquisition of US weaponry, principally the AWACs systems. Khomeini charged that the role of every Muslim was to demonstrate against ‘the enemies of Islam, US and Israel and Imperialism’, underlining that the ‘US has put the AWACs at Saudi’s disposal to serve its interests and those of Israel’ (Khomeini 1981e). With the assassination of Sadat coinciding with the Hajj, Khomeini did not miss out on juxtaposing Fahd with Sadat. Khomeini contended that, like Sadat, the Saudi claims that the demonstrations were un-Islamic were intended to ‘silence Islam and only serve Israel’ just as Sadat did. The Majles also adhered to Khomeini’s narrative, but with a sharper rhetoric that the Hajj demonstrations were a ‘casus bellum’ to use Iran as a threat to acquire sophisticated weapons ‘to be deployed in the service of the US and against the revolution in the region’ (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981q).

The Saudi position on the AWACs in particular and weapons deals in general was reflected and depicted as a manifestation of the struggle and competition between Arabs and Zionism and not as the Iranians had proclaimed, in service to Israel, Iraq or under the control of the US. The US Congress’ reluctance and initial refusal to sell the AWACs to Saudi Arabia was represented as a conspiracy by the ‘Zionist lobby’. The Saudi monarchy and its press went so far as to represent this opposition as a war with Islam and the Arabs, which was being played out in the US congress. Like Khomeini’s pronouncements and the Iranian editorials, the Saudi narrative appealed to the trope of the Zionist conspiracy. Their discourse asserted that the deal’s potential failure would reflect the weakness of the US vis-a-vis Israel and its lobbying influence in Washington. On the other hand, eventual Congressional approval of the sale was predicated as a win for all Arabs, thereby an affirmation of the discourse of Arab leadership. The approval was constructed as the US ‘keeping a promise and pledge made to the kingdom’ and therefore

preserving a friendship with the Saudis that was equitable to a 'friendship with the Arabs' (*al-Madina* 1980). Thus, the nature of the Saudi discourse was also a response to Iranian claims and its narrative of subservience to US and Israel. Saudi Arabia was reflected not as a servant of the US but as a regional leader friendly to the latter who – like Iran – was under attack from Israel. However, a more direct response ensued after the Hajj of 1981, equating Iran to Israel and clearly accusing Iran of collaborating against Saudi Arabia. Prince Sultan, the Minister of Defence, attacked Iran harshly, labelling it a 'bloodthirsty nation that supported the Jewish regime in its rabid attacks against Saudi Arabia in the name of Islam' (*al-Madina* 1981g). Sultan's argument started a wave of criticisms and accusations of 'Iranian hypocrisy under the guise of supporting the *mustazʿafīn*' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1981b), i.e. the Palestinians, and jealousy because of the 'amazing results Saudi diplomacy and politics delivered with the AWACs purchase and the international praise it received' (*al-Madina* 1981a). Consequently, the Saudi reaction developed as a result of Iranian state and clerical narratives coupled with Khomeini's calls to export the revolution that led in turn to the Hajj demonstrations which challenged Saudi legitimacy. On the Iranian side, its anti-Saudi narrative was based on Saudi Arabia's support for Saddam, the lowering the price of oil, and Iran's claim to leadership of the Islamic world.

Three months into the war, Arab support and aid to Iraq became obvious. Although this aid was heavily criticised and discussed in the Iranian political and clerical discourse, the Iranian editorials (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980b; *Ettelaat* 1981b) – especially *Jomhouri Eslami* – initially focused on the details of US weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and its aid to Iraq. Saudi collaboration with Iraq against Iran was represented by the loan and later procurement of four AWACS planes. The editorial emphasised the role of Saudi Arabia as a vanguard of Saddam's interests in the war against Iran and its revolution through sharing sensitive information collected by US AWACS planes in the Persian Gulf region. The editorials framed Saudi Arabia

in three ways. These included the subservience to US imperialism and its hegemonic aspirations; aid to Saddam in his war against Iran; and taking over the Shah's role in procurement of weapons from western states out of fear that the Saudi monarchy might fall just as the Shah had, through a populist revolution (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1980b; *Ettelaat* 1981b).

One of the very rare occasions that Khomeini explicitly referred to the Saudi leadership was during the Hajj incident of 1981. In a letter responding to King Khalid (Khomeini 1981e), Khomeini made three main referential constructions. First, he depicted the Saudi government as corrupt, asserting the illegitimacy of the Saudi ulama, and indicated the weakness of the king by dint of his being unaware of domestic affairs. Second, Khomeini explicitly referenced Saudi officials as agents of deceit who were hiding facts from the king. Finally, Khomeini conceded to the fact that Saudi Arabia was at the centre of the Islamic world and its cooperation was a necessity. Khomeini's response was not published in the Saudi media and therefore the exact retaliation to the letter cannot be evaluated. However, it can be argued that the repercussions of the letter were an extension of the Saudi representation of the Iranians as saboteurs and Kharijites on one hand, and chaos-causing troublemakers intend on disrupting the spiritual journey of other pilgrims on the other**.**

Khomeini cast doubt on the honesty and professionalism of Saudi officials and the ulama. In turn, his characterisation of the Saudi monarch was of a figure who had appointed corrupt officials and might be deceived into believing that the Iranian Self was corrupt and the slogans chanted by the Iranian pilgrims were 'distorted' *(tahrīf shudih).* Khomeini also impugned the legitimacy of the Saudi ulama, by questioning their Islamic teachings and knowledge of the Prophetic traditions. According to Khomeini, the Iranian slogans against Israel and the US conformed to the teachings of Islam, and the hajj was a political occasion that ensured the lifting of the Muslim people's oppression and an occasion to denounce the looters of their

wealth. Therefore, the actions by the Saudi state and the ulama were constructed by Khomeini as contradicting and acting against the path of 'all the prophets, especially the Prophet Mohammad', questioning the knowledge and legitimacy of Mohammad's teachings (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981l).

Khomeini's second explicit construction was of the Saudi officials as agents of deception and suppressors of facts, with Khalid's strength as a ruler also called into question. Khomeini explicitly asked the Saudi monarch if he knew of the 'atrocities occurring in the two holy mosques', predicating the notion of naivety, ignorance and assault on Muslims in a place of divine sanctity that was 'next to the Prophet's grave'. The Other was constructed as a naive king who had 'matters demonstrated to you in a wrong and misguided manner'. Consequently, the Iranian Self was constructed by Khomeini as the exact opposite to the Saudi Other, constructing the Self as a liberator of the Islamic states from superpower subservience, thereby 'bringing the Muslims of the world under the flag of unity, totally committed to progressive Islamic laws... reintroducing the glory of Muslims in early Islam' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 198l). Moreover, Khomeini's narrative also implicitly represented the Saudi Other as being influenced by a corrupt clergy that sought, and had achieved, control over the Saudi leadership, as represented by the king. That in itself highlights another implicit narrative, Khomeini questioning al-Saud's suitability and leadership of Mecca and the two Holy Mosques.

### 3.6.2 Arab-Islamic Hegemony and Sedition

As Menashri (2012: 239) has argued, the revolution in Iran was supposed by its proponents to forge closer ties between Iran and the Arab and Islamic world. However, the war and 'aspects of the revolutionary regime or the regional politics of the Islamic Republic pitted Iran against most of its Arab neighbours' (Menashri 2012: 239). This was due mainly to three main factors:

the propagation of Islamic thought that the Iranian clerical regime thought of as the *'Isām-i Nāb-i' Muhamadī'*; regional and Islamic leadership; and the rhetoric Iran used towards the west and Arab leaders. It is these factors that instilled fear within the Saudi monarchy and gave rise to mutual accusations of sedition and aspirations to hegemony over the Islamic world and the wider region. Moreover, in this section I discuss the predication strategies in Iranian and Saudi discourses relating to hegemony by focussing on three main issues, namely: the Shi'i-Sunni divide; accusations of Iranian involvement in Shi'i populated states such as Bahrain and Kuwait; and the relationship between the GCC and the West and Iraq. These political discourses mobilised narratives revolving around sectarianism and sedition, expansion and hegemony, in order to denigrate and negatively construct an image of each other. Islamic imagery such as *fitna* causing sedition in Islam, or Persian expansionism in an attempt to recover its empire lost to Islam in the seventh century, aimed at reinforcing the discourse of the Other in the mind of prospective Arab, Saudi, and Iranian audiences.

#### *3.6.2.1 Shi'i-Sunni Strife*

Following Khomeini's call for the export of the revolution and his harsh criticism of Arab leaders in general and Arab Gulf leaders in particular, Fahd took charge of the formation of the GCC. The Taif conference in January 1981 that created the consensus for the establishment of the GCC in May of the same year was viewed as a meeting to conspire and stir up sedition (*fitna*) between Muslims, while causing 'Shi'i-Sunni strife in line with collaboration between imperialistic and regional states to administer an anti-Islamic agenda' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981j; *Ettela'at* 1981c). Furthermore, the formation of the GCC and the financial pledge that the Arab Gulf states made to Saddam were also taken as demonstrating collaboration between the GCC and the US against an Islamic Iran, part of a plan to control the Islamic world and subdue the

Arabs by achieving hegemony and imposing neo-colonialism (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981i; *Ettela'at* 1981a, 1981b). However, the Saudi premise for creating the council came after Iranian retaliations such as the air attacks on Kuwait in November 1980 and the export of the Iranian revolution during the Hajj season.

The formation of the GCC added a sharply sectarian edge to the Iranian-Arab narrative. Formed of six Arab Sunni states, the GCC supported Saddam on the basis of what the Saudis saw as an 'Arab duty'. This raised a sectarian discourse, one that was exemplified in Khomeini's speech accusing those that 'cause sedition between Sunni's and Shi'a are neither Sunni nor Shi'a' an allusion that the GCC leaders were not Muslim as such (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981n). Furthermore, the formation of the GCC also saw a claim by the UAE regarding the disputed sovereignty over the Emirati islands[11], an argument with Iran that had been ongoing since 1971. In response to the GCC inauguration speech by the President of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed al-Nihayan, in Abu Dhabi on 25 May 1981, which called on Iran to return the Islands to the UAE, the Iranians were quick to blame Saudi Arabia. The Iranian press accused King Khalid of charging Iran with pursuing regional hegemony by 'pressuring the UAE to accuse Iran of taking the three Islands' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981t).

Following the announcement of the formation of the GCC during the proceedings of the Taif conference, Iranian discourse focussed on the narrative of sectarian strife. This was first discussed in a speech by Khomeini under the guise of fomenting 'sedition in Iran', the jurist represented the OIC conference as a gathering that implanted a 'satanic nature' by sewing discord and 'confrontation and bloodshed among Sunni and Shi'i brothers' rather than 'think[ing] of Islamic countries, Palestine and the perseverance of Islam' (Khomeini 1981g).

[11] The ownership and sovereignty of the Islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa has been under dispute since the British evacuated the Islands in 1971. Whilst the UAE claims that the Islands are Emerati, the Iranians claim they are of Iranian sovereignty but only occupied by the British Empire in June 1921. For a more extensive discussion see Ahmadi (2008).

This sectarian agenda was propagated in Friday prayer sermons by Khamenei as an attempt to cause sedition amongst Muslims as in the Islamic case of sedition amongst the 'Prophet Mohammad's followers in Yathrib' in their war against the 'infidels of Mecca' (Khamenei 1980g). Furthermore, the narrative of sectarian strife was promoted domestically as a 'tool' in the Prime Minister's speech that would only 'serve the advantages of colonisers' (Raja'i 1981). Moreover, the sectarian and ethnic strife was a sustained narrative in Iranian discourse, labelling it a conspiracy against Islam and the perseverance of a strong Islamic Revolution. Editorials labelled it a 'US conspiracy and plot' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981s) through the Taif conference that aimed at 'sewing discord among Muslims' (*Ettela'at* 1981c; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1981j) in line with Khomeini's sermons that labelled Saddam's assertions of an Arab-Ajam war and fighting for the right of Arabs and retaking their land from Iran as a conspiracy to stifle an Islamic awakening through the Iranian revolution (Khomeini 1981f).

The allegations relating to the UAE's claims over the Islands was also employed by the Saudi editorials and intertwined Iran's agenda of historical, Islamic and regional ambition with religious sedition, especially after the coup attempt in Bahrain in December 1981 and Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti oil installations (October 1981). The Saudi narrative defined the attacks on Kuwait as a 'collaboration between Iran and Tel Aviv... to execute and continue its [i.e. Israel's] expansionist agenda' in the region (*al-Riyadh* 1981c), while the alleged coup attempt in Bahrain was related to Persian 'historic ambitions and grievances towards the Arabs' with 'attempts to cause destruction in neighbouring countries and fomenting sedition' and leading to the 'revival of the Persian Empire' (*al-Riyadh* 1981b, 1981a). In addition, to cement their grip on GCC leadership, Nayef's declaration was quick to define Iran as the 'Gulf's terrorist' and to identify the security of the GCC as a Saudi responsibility: 'The security of Bahrain and the Gulf states is a part of the security of the Kingdom... we are also targeted by this action by the Iranian government' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981d).

The state reaction in Saudi Arabia over the suspected Iranian involvement in the Bahraini coup attempt was best defined by Fahd as an Iranian norm centred on killing, bloodshed 'as a daily bread' but based mainly on 'an agenda filled with hatred and enmity against the populations of the region and their own [i.e. the Iranian] population' (al-Saud 1981a). The GCC states with Saudi Arabia at the helm argued that the Iranians trained local Shi'i 'agents' to destroy the infrastructure of the GCC states, but mainly Bahrain and the Eastern province of the Saudi kingdom (*al-Riyadh* 1982d). Furthermore, the narrative disseminated to the public opined that the Iranian threat in the Middle East was as (or even more) dangerous than Israel, since it aimed to stir up *fitna* within Islam and not just between Arabs, thus dividing the *ummah* and spreading chaos across the region (*al-Riyadh* 1982c). The Saudi solution was straightforward; to immunise themselves against a reprisal and a 'repeat of the plot', a rapid drafting and signature of a defence pact between the six GCC states was called for, guaranteeing Saudi authority and leadership over the newly formed council (al-Saud 1981d).

#### *3.6.2.2 The GCC and the Iran-Iraq War*

The liberation of Khoramshahr was a turning point in the Iran-Iraq war, and resulted in more serious Arab ceasefire overtures. As the Iraqi army withdrew on 25 May 1982, the GCC foreign ministers held an emergency meeting that declared that a decisive solution should now be arrived at, with Iran accepting a ceasefire and holding negotiations with Iraq (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1982). The Saudi press was split in its reactions between a continuation of anti-Iran rhetoric, mainly in *al-Riyadh*, and a discourse of peace and Islamic unity propagated by *Asharq al-Awsat*. Nevertheless, all the editorials that discussed the GCC position from the warring parties showed Iran as the belligerent state that would not accept a ceasefire and Iraq as a pragmatic state that was looking for peace in a tumultuous region. Moreover, as Iran pushed Iraq beyond

its borders, the discourse of a hegemonic Persian empire on the rise was repeated, but this time citing Iran's success as being due to the 'aid of Israel' (*al-Riyadh* 1982a), a development which deemed a joint GCC defence force, Desert Shield, a necessity (*al-Riyadh* 1982b). However, it was Iranian statements from the pulpits, ministries and the Majles that firmly declared that 'the war will end when Saddam's regime falls', which pushed Saudi and GCC support firmly towards Saddam due to fears of a domino effect.

The Iranian response tackled the Saudi and Gulf narratives from three main directions. Firstly, the attacks on Kuwait and Bahrain were argued to be a conspiracy against the revolution and the new Islamic republic. Second, Saudi Arabia was striving to cause sedition among Muslims, furthering sectarian conflict. Finally, Saudi Arabia was conspiring against Iran and interfering in the country's affairs.

Categorically denying any involvement in the bombing of the Kuwaiti refineries, the state narrative, whether from the Majles speaker or the Iranian ministerial declaration, emphasised the role of conspiracy against the revolution and the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, the Iranian declaration saw the attack as a staged and premeditated incident by Saudi Arabia and the US to 'allow for the presence of the AWACs on Saudi (soil) and to strengthen its (US) spying capabilities in the region', thereby furthering Western hegemony in the Middle East (Velayati 1981; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1981q). The coup attempt in Bahrain was also denied and treated as a Saudi-fabricated episode intended to sow the seeds of religious sedition between sects, hindering an Islamic awakening in Bahrain and turning the GCC populations against an Islamic Iran. Iranian editorials were directly aimed at the incident, asking rhetorically 'What took place in Bahrain?' and linking the 'Saudi untruth' to 'the losses of Saddam's army, the failure of the Fez conference and Fahd's plans [and] the creation of a joint security agreement with an aim

to repress any Islamic awakening that may arise in the region, especially since these states have become propaganda tools accusing Iran of hegemonic activities' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981d).

The second Iranian strategy that aimed at negating Saudi claims of hegemony and sedition was to blame the Saudi state and clergy for weakening the Islamic world. Khomeini's speech tackled Saudi accusations of Islamic sedition by criticising a fatwa issued by the head of the Saudi clergy, Bin Baz, that deemed the celebration of the Prophet Mohammad's birth as an act of heresy (*bidʿah*) and therefore alluding to the 'un-Islamic nature' of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Khomeini claimed that Saudi Arabia was a 'servant of the 'Big States' that do not allow unity between Shi'a and Sunnis', and that the only way to prosper against imperialism was through unity (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981m). Khomeini's speech was the spark behind a set of discourses intended to confront the Saudi narrative and to present an image of an Iran calling for unity between Islamic states and sects. Presidential speeches and press conferences affirmed Iran's image as the only Islamic state, and therefore the only protector of Islamic rights and interests, whilst preaching 'unity among Islamic states to solve all the region's problems' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981m; *Ettela'at* 1982b; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1982f). Friday sermons and editorials echoed the presidential and Khomeini narrative that the Saudi fabrications were not only baseless, but also spawned out of fear of a 'true Islamic revolution' that posed a 'threat to weak regional states that collaborate with Zionism', identifying Saudi Arabia as 'the only obstacle to Islamic awakening and Arab and Islamic victory against Zionism' (Rafsanjani 1981b, 1982b; *Ettela'at* 1981a).

In a mirror image of Saudi accusations, Iran accused Saudi Arabia of interfering in its internal affairs and causing sedition. Following the alleged confession of Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, in relation to a military coup attempt in Iran, Ghotbzadeh accused Ayatollah Shariatmadari of collaborating in the plot (Ettelaat 20/04/1982). Press conferences

were held by the Majles speaker, explaining the nature of the collaboration between a jurist and the underground group. What started out as a simple 'thought and idea' that Shariatmadari may have had, had been 'funded from Saudi, Iraq, Paris and the US', i.e. all those supporting Saddam in the war (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982d) and within days this had spread to naming the foreign actors participating in the supposed plot. Newspaper editorials honed in on Saudi Arabia as the major culprit and named the head of the National Guard, Prince Abdullah, as having been involved in financing the coup attempt. Consequently, similar to accusations of Iranian government involvement in a Bahraini coup, the Saudi monarchy was now blamed for a conspiracy to overthrow the government in Iran: 'In the confessions of Abbassi, the in-law of Shariatmadari, we have learnt that Prince Abdullah, Khaled's brother, had hosted a few members of the network in Riyadh... including Shariatmadari' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1982i; *Ettela'at* 1982a).

The exchange of mutual allegations of domestic meddling raises a crucial point. First, that the Iranian-Saudi responses to the Other constituted a mirror image reaction, an Othering technique inflected with accusations of sectarian sedition. Where the Saudis named Iran as training Shi'i elements in Bahrain, therefore giving the allegations a religious dimension, the Iranians responded in a similar fashion, accusing a senior prince, Abdullah, and an Iranian clerical element Ayatollah Shariatmadari. However, where Saudi Arabia accused Iran of sectarian agendas, Iran on the other hand represented Saudi Arabia as seeking the demise of Islam by destroying an Islamic state, i.e. Iran. The 'tit for tat' allegations may have been a response to Saudi claims that Iran funded and assisted the attempted overthrow of the Bahraini monarchy to implement a sectarian agenda, while the Iranian representation of the Saudi Other accused the latter of destroying Islam. The Iranian narrative was explicit in that the Iranian Self was meant to represent Islam in its entirety.

### 3.6.3 Deception and a Hidden Agenda

The Iranian characterisation of the Saudi Other as conspiring against the revolutionary state was demonstrated in terms of a Saudi-led plan to coerce Iran into submission to Iraqi demands during the war, tarnishing Iran's image regionally and internationally through allegations framing Iran as responsible for the attacks on Kuwaiti oil installations. Furthermore, the predication of the Saudi Other as leading an agenda against Iran is also visible in the Iranian discourse surrounding the formation of the GCC. Accusations of Saudi Arabian efforts to interfere in Iran's domestic affairs were also highlighted in Iranian discourse.

The third Islamic Summit Conference held in January 1981 was one instance when Iranian editorials reflected the summit as constituting a plan by the Saudi Other to coerce and deceive Iran into agreeing to a ceasefire with Iraq on the latter's terms (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981o). The 'conspiracy' as the editorial described it, was intended to force a ceasefire on Iran that was favourable to Iraq, and any Iranian rejection would mean that 'Iran will then be condemned and it will be announced that it is Iran that does not want to end the war', thus suggesting that, through Saudi leadership, the summit's sole aim was to discredit Iran through the negative formation of public opinion (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1981o).

Another Iranian predication of an international conspiracy against Iran led by Saudi Arabia was through the bombings in Kuwait. Whilst Saudi discourse, especially the statements by Prince Nayef and the Saudi editorials, blamed Iran for the abovementioned incident, while the Iranian narrative – especially sermons and editorials – imputed it to conspiracies by Western and Arab Gulf states. Iranian discourse blamed three leading international figures for the plot against it: Francois Mitterrand, Prince Abdullah al-Saud and Margaret Thatcher. The plans were supposedly prepared by Britain and France, led by Israel, with Saudi Arabia as the messenger and financier, and the Iraqis would execute the plan; all in a bid to blame Iran (*Jomhouri Eslami*

1981g). The Iranian narrative was therefore highlighting the central theme; the world is at war with Iran. The Iranian Other was collaborating with foreign aggressors, thereby serving Zionist and imperialist agendas. In this case, the Iranian Self is framed as the leader of the oppressed against international aggressors led not only by Western states but also by regional states that, according to Iran, claim to be Islamic, but are at war with the 'real Islam', i.e. Iran.

## 3.7 Conclusion

The 1979 revolution saw Iran shift from a vanguard of US Middle Eastern interests and a primary power in the Persian Gulf to one that altered its regional position, from friend to foe. What was once a partner in the US 'Twin Pillar' policy in the 1960s and 1970s, the Islamic revolution led by Khomeini called for an export of the revolution and thus an enmity with pro-American governments, monarchies and sheikhdoms began. The 1979 revolution also gave birth to a rivalry of Islamic leadership between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Since the birth of Saudi Arabia, the kingdom had identified itself as the capital of the Islamic world and by default its leader. Moreover, through the leadership of a Shi'i Guardian Jurist and the newly drafted Iranian constitution, Iran was formally Shi'i state which called for an Islamic outlook on governance, a 'neither East nor West' policy, and the support of the oppressed against the oppressor, a recipe that caused great alarm for Saudi Arabia. This fear was amplified principally after the fall of the Bani-Sadr presidency which saw Iran shift towards full clerical consolidation and leadership of the IRP.

Although the departure of the Shah may have partially been a relief for Saudi Arabia, especially since the Shah was also a rival and dubbed the 'Policeman of the Gulf', the Saudi fear of Khomeini's export of the revolution also weighed into their paranoia. The Shi'i uprising in the

Eastern Province of the kingdom, along with the siege of Mecca questioned both the legitimacy of the state and tested its stability. Furthermore, whilst the Shah was a regional rival, they shared a common enemy and ally, the Soviet Union and US respectively. However, with the rise of an Islamic Iran, the kingdom had two ideologies to compete and be anxious about, communism and the rise of Islamic Shi'ism. The fall of the Shah also gave Saudi Arabia an opportunity to take advantage of the vacuum. The US lost an ally and a 'policeman', as a result Saudi Arabia shifted closer to the US and took over the Shah's role in the GCC and helped 'police' the Gulf region and forged a stronger collaboration with the US. This included aid to Saddam during the imposed war, which also saw most of the region aid Saddam during the brutal conflict.

The examination of this discussed three main arguments. First, religion and sect in particular were not areas of contention in this period. Nevertheless, a sectarian narrative was utilised as a tool and discursive strategy used by both Iran and Saudi Arabia, framed on Saudi aid to Saddam and fears of the Iranian export of the revolution. Second, Iranian Saudi Othering was directly proportional to the events that took place in both states. It could be argued that the Saudi reaction to Iranian rhetoric was to preserve its image of Islamic and regional leadership, whilst Iran's Othering of Saudi Arabia was naive and demonstrated an inexperienced newly founded state that did not factor in foreign policy ramifications. Finally, the analysis showed that the Iranian revolution affected both the Iranian and Saudi identity and allowed for both states to construct their Other. The siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Qatif Shi'i demonstrations led the Saudi leadership to reemphasise its image of the Imamate and leadership of the Islamic world. While the US hostage crisis, clerical consolidation and advances in the war have permitted the Iranians to highlight the identity of a divine revolution that blossomed into an extension of Imam Ali's caliphate and government in waiting for the Mahdi.

From the previous examination of Saudi and Iranian discourses between 1979 and 1983, it can be observed that these discourses were political in nature and their religious characters were based on tools and devices aimed at emboldening the Iranian and Saudi representation of the Self and the Other. The religious polemics each country developed were tools of denigration and negative construction and representation of the Other, although they simultaneously acted as discursive strategies of positive Self-construction through the use of self-glorification techniques. These included the religiously-orientated juxtaposition of the Self with Ahl al-bayt and Abdulwahab or the Prophet Mohammad's companions in Iranian and Saudi discourses respectively. Furthermore, the examination of the discourses of both states reveals a shift. Iranian discourse towards Saudi Arabia moved towards a negative representation, mainly after the advent of the Iran-Iraq war, a pattern of representation that gained momentum after clerical consolidation via the IRP. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's negative representation of the Iranian Other gradually gained pace in reaction to Iranian calls for an export of the revolution and after the latter's battlefield successes.

Moreover, an interesting issue is that different discourse genres reveal a relationship between the discourse within both states and towards each other. These include the broad themes of the relationship set by the Saudi king and crown prince or Khomeini towards the Other. These themes and narratives were then developed in elite discourses, and were finally disseminated to the different layers of society through the production of state propaganda in the form of religious sermons or editorials in Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively.

In both Iran and Saudi Arabia, the upper-level elite set the broad tone of inter-state relations and constructions of the Other. This is represented in Iran by Khomeini, and in Saudi Arabia by the king and crown prince. On the whole, Khomeini's discourse implicitly represented the Saudi Other. However, it was more explicit and blunt in nature in comparison to other genres,

particularly in the Friday sermons, editorials and political speeches aimed at the domestic audience. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, the discourse by Khalid as king and Fahd as crown prince propagated an Islamic brotherly community and unity. In a mirror image of Iran, Saudi editorials and the ministerial domestic discourse – especially the Ministry of the Interior – was explicit and connected to incidents that arose between the two states. These negative discourses and representations became visible, especially in the Hajj incidents, allegations of bombing the Kuwaiti refineries, and the alleged attempt of an Iranian supported coup d'état in Bahrain.

Additionally, the analysis of the discourses of Othering show that they functioned in two distinct ways, that is mainly through attributes of the Self and highlighting attributes of the Other, via 'building blocks' or 'interpretative repertoires' (Wetherell and Potter 1988: 171). The analysis of this timeframe witnessed four main 'supra-themes' that were regularly highlighted in the discourse of the Other by both states. These include subservience to imperialism and Zionism; expansionism through hegemony and sedition; deception and hidden agenda; and domestic and social inequality. In each of the aforementioned themes, different techniques and repertoires were employed such as the metaphors, stereotypes and predication strategies that discursively construct the Iranian or Saudi Other (Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

The examination of Iranian Saudi discourse has shown that the Iranian representation of the Saudi Other was more predominant, with a larger number of tropes, themes and discursive techniques overall. While the Iranian discourse targeted different aspects when representing the Saudi Other, ranging from subservience to the West to sectarian, Saudi discourse of an Iranian Other was basic, lacked detail and 'artistic imagination' in their representation and tended to mainly focus on the moral and Islamic credentials of the Iranian regime. The Iranian representation of the Other began weeks after the start of the imposed war with the mention of two main supra-themes questioning the morality of the monarchy and accusing them of Zionist

subservience. The tropes focused on the corruption of the al-Saud, their moral and Islamic credentials, plundering people's wealth on debauchery and pleasures. Furthermore, subservience to Zionism and the US was represented mainly by and comparing them to the Shah's regime in their submission to the US and Israel. Furthermore, both states questioned each other's moral and Islamic credentials. Whilst Iran first constructed the Saudi Other as immoral and un-Islamic, Saudi discourse represented Iran after the clerical consolidation by the IRP, by questioning Khomeini's persona as a demagogue misleading his people and brandishing fake Islamic slogans.

To further exemplify these political and religious repertoires, the following predicational strategies and themes included a set of tools applied to the discursive construction and demonization of the Other. The Iranian utilisation of the Fahd peace proposal was key in highlighting the Saudi Other as subservient to Zionism, with its AWACs weapons procurement used by the Iranians to illustrate Saudi subservience and spying on behalf of the US. Mirroring this trope, the Saudi discourse utilised religious repertoires of *fitna* as a result of the Hajj incident, thus implicating the Iranian Other as a source of sedition and dividing the Islamic *ummah*. In addition, the seized shipments of Israeli weapons to Iran were items of political propaganda, pushing the narrative of a covert collaboration and treachery against the Arabs. Iranian battlefield victories, especially their advancement into Iraq, resulted in the mixing of religious and political repertoires focussed on Iran, and typically followed the line that the Khomeini-led state was attempting to resurrect the Persian Empire and was also pursuing a programme of Shi'i expansion.

The Iranian and Saudi discourses utilised discursive strategies of representing the Other utilised historical and Islamic tropes. Iranian discourse employed the Prophetic narrative and the Prophet Mohammad's quest to spread Islam to represent the Saudi Other. The Saudi monarchy

in general and Fahd in particular, were identified with the infidels and Iran with the Prophet and his companions. Revolutionary Iran and Khomeini are the Prophet Mohammad of our time, and Saudi Arabia and Fahd are the infidels, Abu-Lahab and Yazid of our time, infamous for their enmity to 'real Islam'. In contrast, Saudi representation of Iran also took into account historical events. Saudi utilisation of a revival of the Persian Empire by Khomeini and an export of the revolution juxtaposed Iran with hegemonic ambitions and a grudge held since the Islamic conquest into Iran in the second caliph's era, Omar. Similar to Iran, Saudi Arabia identified itself with the Islam of the predecessors, during the caliphate, and a revolutionary Iran as pagan empire of our time, seeking revenge for an Islamic conquest 14 centuries old.

In conclusion, this chapter attempted to set the scene and the nature of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the early days of the revolution and the imposed war on Iran. The analysis of the discourse endeavoured to set the stage for the relationship of these states from the creation of the Islamic Republic and the shifts in the way they viewed and represented each other since. This chapter illustrated that Saudi and Iranian representations of the Other witnessed a shift from neutral and positive stances to discourses based on denigration and demonization in correlation with and clearly exacerbated by shifting political dynamics, Iranian military advances, and Saudi Arabia's support for Saddam. The techniques used were overall similar, mainly due to a parallel control over discourse dissemination that gave rise to a 'mirror image' response through the use of shared Othering techniques.

| Supra Theme/Trope | Themes and Tropes | Date First Applied |
|---|---|---|
| ***US Puppet and Zionist Collusion*** | al-Saud Neo-Shah regime | 23/12/1980 |
| | Submission to 'American Masters' | 04/01/1981 |
| | mercenaries of US and imperialism | 23/01/1981 |
| | US/Zionist slaves and colonies | 25/01/1981 |
| | Weapons in the service of Zionism and US | 26/02/1981 |
| | Bribery to serve Zionism | 10/11/1981 |
| | Royal Court Under Israeli Orders | 10/06/1982 |
| | Fahd -conspirator and saboteur of Palestinian interests | 10/06/1982 |
| ***Ahl al-bayt Paradigm*** | Saudi Arabia Infidels of Mecca & Iran is the Prophet and followers of Yathrib | 06/02/1981 |
| | Fahd is modern day and descendent of Yazid | 12/11/1981 |
| | Fahd is Abu-Lahab against Prophet Mohammad and Islam (Iran) | 22/11/1981 |
| ***Moral/Islamic Credentials*** | Corrupt Royal Family | 04/10/1980 |
| | Plunder people's wealth | 02/02/1981 |
| | Debauchery & Immorality/licentiousness | 02/02/1981 |
| | Illegitimacy and Corruption of Saudi ulama/Clerics | 10/10/1981 |
| | al-Saud-Infidels of Mecca | 28/10/1981 |
| | Bribery of Officials | 10/11/1981 |
| | Enemy of Islam | 11/11/1981 |
| | Mecca Under Siege by al-Saud | 11/11/1981 |
| ***Sectarian Sedition*** | OIC Conference Satanic and conspiracy for Shi'i-Sunni Bloodshed | 04/02/1981 |
| | GCC conspiracy for Shi'i-Sunni strife | 18/04/1981 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Saudi Arabia obstacle to Islamic awakening & victory against Zionism | 18/12/1981 |
| | Bahrain Coup Saudi Episode to start religious sedition | 20/12/1981 |
| | Saudi Arabia against Shia-Sunni Unity | 30/12/1981 |
| | al-Saud, ulama and US conspiracy for Shi'i-Sunni Sedition | 13/06/1983 |

***Table 3.1 Summary of Main Iranian Tropes of the (Saudi) Other***

*Table 3.2 Summary of Main Saudi Tropes of the (Iranian) Other*

| **Supra Theme/Trope** | **Themes and Tropes** | **Date First Applied** |
|---|---|---|
| ***US Puppet and Zionist Collusion*** | Iran collaborator of Israel Expansionism | 02/10/1981 |
| | Support Israel Against Saudi Arabia | 04/11/1981 |
| ***Fake Revolution*** | Khomeini Fake Palestinian Support and Slogans | 23/11/1981 |
| | Fake Slogans | 15/12/1981 |
| | Un-Islamic Revolution | 01/01/1982 |
| ***Moral/Islamic Credentials*** | Khomeini misled People | 28/09/1981 |
| | Khomeini Divine demagogue-like figure | 28/09/1981 |
| | Hajj-Saboteurs and criminals | 29/09/1981 |
| | Iranian state Khawarij | 29/09/1981 |
| | Hypocrite and chaotic Iran | 23/11/1981 |
| | Khomeini and Clerics are Barbaric | 23/11/1981 |
| | Iranian Clerics Satanic | 23/11/1981 |
| | Iranian Clerics frivolous | 23/11/1981 |
| | Domestic Terrorism and Adventurism | 27/11/1981 |
| | Iranian Government Bloodthirsty | 15/12/1981 |
| ***Sedition*** | Iranian sedition between Arab states | 28/09/1981 |
| | Gulf's Terrorist | 27/12/1981 |
| | Iranian sedition more dangerous than Israel | 24/01/1982 |
| ***Persian Expansionism and Hegemony*** | Revival of the Persian Empire | 15/12/1981 |
| ***Envy and Resentment*** | Iranian Government Spiteful and Malevolent | 23/11/1981 |

# 4. 1996-1999: Rafsanjani's Détente, Khatami's Rapprochement, and the Formation of Iranian and Saudi Discourses of Self and Other

## 4.1 Introduction

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini brought a new Supreme Leader and President, Khamenei and Rafsanjani respectively. Rafsanjani's eight-year presidency witnessed a host of drastic shifts, mainly moving Iran away from its ultra-radical stance to a détente-leaning foreign policy. This policy aimed at ending Iran's international isolation, especially with its neighbours and giving the state an opportunity to rebuild its impoverished economy, especially with the advent of the low oil prices of the 1990s. However, for Rafsanjani, this proved to be a challenge. Furthermore, Hunter (2010: 185) argues that relations between Arabs states and Iran were 'uneven'. That is to say, they were good and neutral with some, such as Kuwait and Oman, and tense or negative with others, such as Bahrain and the UAE (Hunter 2010). In addition, the sectarian turbulence in Bahrain led to accusations of Iranian involvement and meddling in Bahrain's domestic affairs.

In June 1993, Bahraini authorities accused the Iran's IRGC of setting up *Hizbollah-i Bahrain* with the intention to carry out terrorist activities. This led to Bahrain recalling its ambassador from Iran (Hiro 2001: 217). The dispute over the Islands with the UAE led to a shift in position by the Emiratis, demanding that any Iranian détente with the GCC be linked to settling the issue of the islands. The UAE took the case to the UN in April and August 1992 in order to

protest against two incidents where Iran expelled foreign workers working for the UAE on charges of espionage and requesting that they have Iranian working visas.

Iranian-US relations were equally strained. Iran had adopted a position of ‘active neutrality’ during Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent war that liberated Kuwait. The US under George H. Bush’s tenure declared that ‘goodwill begets goodwill’ (Gheissari 2009: 355), authorising US energy companies to import Iranian oil, releasing $250 million to Iran for an undelivered shipment of weapons procured during the Shah’s time. More importantly, the US did not block a much needed a World Bank loan to rebuild the Iranian economy, and went so far as to announce that Iran would play a role in regional security (Gheissari 2009). The thaw in US-Iranian relations was short lived. The end of the 1990-91 Gulf war saw an increase in the US presence in the Persian Gulf, which coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition, the US adopted a policy of 'dual containment' towards Iraq and Iran in 1993, labelling them ‘rogue states’ with the US Congress passing a bill on ‘Covert Action Against Iran’ to establish regime change in 1995 (Herzig 2004; Hiro 2001).

The 1990s were marked by the end of two major regional wars in the Middle East, resulting in weak economies coupled with low oil prices. Iran came out of an enemy-imposed eight-year war with Iraq with heavy losses both to its economy and its international relations. In addition, the landslide victory of Khatami in 1997 provided a launch pad for Iran to alleviate its domestic pressures and end its era of international and regional isolation. Khatami’s agenda attempted to reform not only the state, but also Iran’s international image through more press freedom. However, and most significantly, this marked a move away from attempts to achieve détente to seeking rapprochement. The task was a tumultuous one; Khatami had inherited a marred Iranian foreign relations history, including the Salman Rushdie fatwa, the Mykonos bombings

in Germany, while in the region the UAE Islands was a distraction while the Islamic state still retained an image that it was seeking to export the revolution.

Similar to Iran, Saudi Arabia also ended a war with Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait, one which posed a grave threat to the GCC states. Consequently, both states had internal issues to confront. Domestically, Iranians suffered the effects of a weak economy and an infrastructure in need of immediate reconstruction along with an increasingly disgruntled youth. Saudi Arabia's participation in the liberation of Kuwait witnessed the construction of bases housing foreign troops on Saudi soil. The presence of the US military shifted the character of the US-Saudi relationship from between equal partners to a relationship that allowed the US to utilise Saudi territory and resources, thereby gaining an upper hand in political and strategic developments in the Persian Gulf region (Niblock 2006). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia carried the financial burden of maintaining the US presence on Saudi soil and a large portion of financing the 1991 Gulf War, contributing USD 60 billion (Niblock 2006) .

Niblock (2006: 153) argues that the US presence and high expenditure allowed for 'radical Islamists to mobilise domestic and international Islamic opinion against' the Kingdom. Saudi links with the US had a negative effect on the monarchy's legitimacy and credibility among Sunni Islamic circles. The 1990s gave rise to radical Islamism, mainly Bin Laden and the Saudi *Sahwa* (awakening) of the *ulama*. The former had heavy repercussions in terms of Saudi domestic stability and on the kingdom's relations with the US. Furthermore, Bergen (2001: 87-90) argues that bin Laden sought to create an international Islamic army that would fight against US military involvement in the Islamic world such as Somalia. In turn, the creation of Al-Qaeda saw the rise of international terrorism in the 1990s, signified by the bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993, the bombing of a US installation in Riyadh in November 1995, possibly in retaliation for the execution of the Sunni opposition activist Abdallah al-Hudhaif in

August 1995, followed by the Khobar bombings in June 1996 when 19 US servicemen were killed. Although Niblock (2006: 154) contends that it is not clear that bin Laden had direct links to the aforementioned attacks, however, his ideological mind set and speeches may have encouraged the attacks.

On the domestic front, the *Sahwa* imams also gained momentum and popularity as they criticised the Saudi government's increasing alliance with the West. These, along with low oil prices, also led to a rise in discontent and the formation of an internal opposition, principally marked by the *Sahwa ulama*. These voices of opposition included young aspiring imams such as Sefr Al-Hawalli and Salman Al-Ouda, along with an exile-based opposition that led to establishment of the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) in addition to the later emergence of Osama bin Laden as an opposition figure.

The Saudi leadership witnessed the rise of the pan-Arab and Islamic Crown Prince Abdullah as *de facto* ruler of Saudi Arabia following Fahd's debilitating stroke in November 1995. Furthermore, the 1990s proved to be a troublesome period for the Saudi state. In addition to the financial instability that eclipsed the Saudi economy after the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the Islamist opposition steered the country toward a cycle of violence. From a foreign affairs outlook, Clinton's election in 1993 and the Netanyahu government in Israel complicated the Saudi role as an Arab and Islamic leader. Clinton had opted to relegate Saudi Arabia from its role as a regional ally in the Arab peace process to a secondary power consulted when needed. Israel's settlement expansion and derailing of the peace process also strained relations with Saudi Arabia, particularly since Fahd had championed the process of Arab peace since the Fahd Peace Plan of 1981, leading up to the Oslo and Madrid accords.

This chapter discusses Iranian-Saudi representations of the Self and the Other between 1996 and 1999. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the nature of the discourse and the construction of

the images of the Self and Other were directly related to the events, pressured, and environment related to each state. Therefore, both Saudi and Iranian actors constructed and mobilised discourses that suited the current state of affairs, domestically as well as internationally. As a result of depressed economies, mainly due to low oil prices, a security threat emanating from Iraq, terrorism, and more importantly the threat of the Taliban to Iran, both states' actors mobilised discourses for internal and external consumption. This discourse construction, and the utilisation of certain images, away from rhetoric and negative themes of treachery and Zionist subservience, to language leaning towards confidence building and trust, cooperation, in addition to underlining the geopolitical, cultural, and historical prestige of both states. Images such as the 'Ominous Triangle' gave rise to discourses of a collaboration between the US, Pakistan and the Taliban, to bolster the Iranian narrative towards the US and its allies, without jeopardising any attempts at a rapprochement with Saudi. Similarly, images such as Persian culture and prestige, Saudi Arabia housing the cradle of Islam, were utilised by both states to strengthen their discourses on regional and Islamic cooperation and leadership. This, as I have discussed in the central contention outlined in the Introduction, demonstrates that the differences in religious and political stances and opinions do not inhibit a positive image construction and discourse of the Other.

Central to this chapter, I argue that domestic and external forces were decisive to Saudi-Iranian détente and rapprochement as well as Saudi-Iranian Othering. Furthermore, I make four main arguments. First, the Iranian establishment was united over rapprochement with Saudi Arabia but divided on Western détente. Second, I argue that neutrality was central to Iranian-Saudi representation of the Other. This represented a maturing of the Iranian regime compared to the aggressive rhetoric of the 1980s. Furthermore, I argue that Othering and discursive constructions in both states evolved between Rafsanjani's tenure and Khatami's presidency. These resulted in narratives of Islamic unity, economic collaboration and, later on, security

cooperation. On a final note, I argue that Saudi-Iranian Othering in this period was directly related to the identity of the Iranian leadership and how it in turn was perceived by Saudi Arabia. That is to say, as Khatami ascended the presidency, Saudi discursive constructions of the Iranian Other also changed, leading to narratives emphasising geopolitical significance as well as historical and cultural prestige.

This chapter will be divided into three main sections. First, I discuss the Iranian Self and the definition of the Iranian Other between 1997 and 1999. I argue that Othering was external as well and internal, highlighting the split personality between conservatives and reformists at the OIC summit. Second, I discuss the Saudi representation of the Self and the Other. The period 1997 to 1999 has scarcely reflected a shift in the Saudi image of the Self. The period under examination reflects a Saudi image that continues to concentrate on the image of Islamic leadership and custodianship over the Arab peace process with Israel. I argue that the Saudi Other was ill-defined, and this was deliberate due to the Kingdom's economic woes. Iranian-Saudi relations and the representation of each other will also be discussed via their representation of each other through five main cases: the OIC Tehran Summit, the Taliban, the visits by Rafsanjani and Khatami in 1998 and 1999 respectively, GCC security and OPEC.

## 4.2 Iranian Representation of the Self and Other

Iranian foreign policy in the 1997-99 period was in many ways an extension of Rafsanjani's foreign policy of détente in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war. Khatami's presidency attempted to create the conditions for rapprochement and to break Iran's isolation by mending its relations on both a global and Middle East level. With the exception of Pakistan and Turkey, Iranian discourse and narrative was overall neutral, if not positive, towards external states. It was Pakistan's support for the Taliban and Turkey's strategic alliance with Israel that gave rise to

the Iranian Othering of both states, especially in its editorials. With regards to the Arab states of the Middle East, there was a clear split in Iranian discourse. While Iranian elite discourse was overall neutral towards the Arab states, its editorials were critical, especially with regards to Saudi recognition of the Taliban, the Iranian-UAE dispute over the three islands, and Israeli plans to announce Jerusalem as its capital. In the case of Saudi Arabia, Iranian alterity was mainly illustrated in the press, and it was isolated to incidents related mainly to the Taliban and US presence in the Persian Gulf. This section examines the difference in narrative between the official state discourse and the press, as well as the narrative of each of the main discourses under discussion.

### 4.2.1 The 1997 OIC Summit and the Iranian Self's 'Split Personality'

As part of his 'Dialogue among civilisations' Khatami's mandate was to establish a mechanism that would lead to melting the ice cold relations between Iran and the international community that had prevailed since 1979. Khatami suggested that the Iranian government could employ this dialogue 'to avoid any action or behaviour causing tensions,' thereby presenting a rebranded image of Iran, namely a peaceful Iranian Self, but also one that would resist 'any power wishing to exercise dominance over us' while supporting any oppressed states or people, including 'Palestinians oppressed by Israel' (Khatami 1997a, 1997f, 1998b).

The OIC was a forum utilised by Iran to showcase its new peaceful image and bridge building as promulgated by détente and rapprochement. Khatami's discourse at the OIC summit demonstrated how inter-religious dialogue, formulated by his premise of a 'Dialogue among civilisations', could be employed to consolidate Iran's image and position in the Islamic world and international affairs. However, and in contrast to Khatami's speech, Khamenei demonstrated a rather different approach and image of Iran, one that reaffirmed Iran's

revolutionary principles adopted since the revolution and maintained throughout an eight-year war. This difference in image representation, I argue, reflects a form of 'split personality' in the discourse of the 'rebranded' Iranian Self. That is to say, a reformist and pragmatist approach by Khatami was intended to improve relations with the West, whereas the radical approach of Khamenei highlighted the Iranian revolutionary narrative proclaimed since 1979.

This clash between the two poles of the Iranian Self is evident, namely pragmatism versus radicalism is evident in the opening speeches of the OIC summit. Khatami's standpoint vis-a-vis relations between Iran and the Islamic Ummah and the West was an attempt at a 'deep rooted understanding' of an 'era of preponderance of Western culture' by going beyond its 'superficialities to reach its theoretical basis and the fundamentals of its value' (Khatami 1997d). On the other hand, Khamenei's fiery speech reflected a sustained hostility and contempt towards the West, representing the Western Other as a 'camp of arrogance' employing 'political, military, scientific and military capabilities... to interfere in the affairs of other nations and governments, plunder their wealth, oppress nations and stigmatise cultures and traditions' (Khamenei 1997a). Khamenei's image of the West was of 'bullying domination' (Khamenei 1997a), a trope deeply rooted in Iran's revolutionary discourse and Khomeini's rhetoric of the 1980s.

While Khatami argued that one of the main priorities of the OIC was the need to 'address and find a solution' to US hegemony by creating a 'new and just world order...and resisting all kinds of expansion', (Khatami 1997d) Khamenei's rhetoric adopted a polarised narrative towards détente and rapprochement with the West, especially the US. Presenting Iran's revolutionary image as a holistic image of Islam, Khamenei framed the 'Zionists, especially the US' as attempting to taint the 'image of Islam,' including 'negative propaganda... broadcasted against Islamic Iran after the rise of an Islamic government' which turned to

‘slander and rumours as the best method to render ineffective the influential message of this great revolution’ (Khamenei 1997a). For Khamenei, the Iranian Self was as revolutionary as ever, the US was still the ‘Great Satan’, and the West was under the influence of ‘Zionism’. Khamenei echoed the post-revolutionary rhetoric defined by Khomeini, whilst Khatami attempted to start a chapter of relations that would end Iranian international isolation through accepting the Western Other as ‘Western Civilisation’ that needed to be understood despite the prevalence of American expansionism. According to Khatami, Iran was open to relations with everyone and the revolution, according to him, was committed to ‘perseverance in the face of difficulties’ by deploying dynamic change and dialogue, thereby casting aside an ‘actual or imagined external enemy’ (Khatami 1997d). Above all, while Khatami aspired to look ‘both ways’ to enhance Iran’s foreign relations and image, Khamenei turned mainly towards the Islamic world. Regarding this Islamic world in general, and the region in particular, they both agreed, notwithstanding their underlying differences of opinion about the Iranian self and its Other. The importance here lies in the fact that Iran’s isolation was not only caused by Western states, but also with their immediate neighbours that were influenced by Saudi Arabia and the oil rich GCC states. Therefore, it can be argued that to the conservative camp, an end to regional isolation would ease Iran out of its economic woes, while maintaining Khomeini’s revolutionary ‘neither East nor West’ policy, thus sustaining his ideals and pursuing Iran’s ambitions for Islamic leadership.

The representation of Iran’s position in the Islamic world and its leadership was especially emphasised in Iranian editorial discourse. Discursively constructing the image of Iran as the ‘flag bearer of Islam’, editorials defined Iran’s position at the OIC by emphasising Islamic unity and cooperation, with Khamenei as the ‘reviver of Islamic unity,’ a narrative that would be employed to fulfil Iran’s goal of regional rapprochement, especially with Saudi Arabia. However, the editorials also reflected the personality split and desires between the two camps.

Although Khatami's discourse embraced Western civilisation and a dialogue that was seen as imperative, Iranian editorial discourse mainly promulgated the conservative narrative of the 1980s, that is to say the Iranian Self was the true leader of the Islamic world, with a revolutionary Iran the only model for building on the 'efforts of the revolution' which had established a true 'Islamic government' (*Kayhan* 1997c). The Iranian Self was discursively constructed as a 'pulpit of emulation' (*Kayhan* 1997c), with the OIC and the Islamic states returning to the 'origins of Islam' (*ʾasālatḥā-yi Islāmī*), that is Tehran solving the problems of the Islamic world (*Resalat* 1997c).

The significance of the aforementioned representation is twofold. First it highlighted Iran's internal divisions regarding the definition of détente and the Other. For Khatami, détente could be achieved internationally, whereas Khamenei's view of détente was framed on an Islamic and regional level. The Other defined by Khamenei was a continuation of the revolutionary 1980s narrative, but to Khatami, the Other was based on successful dialogue and confidence building. Second, the overall narrative and notion of détente and rapprochement on the regional and Islamic level attempt to project an image of a mature post-war Iran. Although, the 1980s rhetoric of Islamic leadership and Western denigration existed, the relinquishing of the polarising criticism of the GCC and Arab states reflected a desire to break Iran's isolation and achieve its domestic goals of economic and infrastructure reconstruction.

### 4.2.2 Afghanistan and the 'Ominous Triangle'

The Rafsanjani and Khatami eras were marked by significant developments in Afghanistan. By 1992, the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party (PDP) had been ousted and a civil war erupted that saw Pakistani, Saudi Arabian as well as Iranian involvement. By 1995, the different factional supporters were clear: Iran supported the Northern Alliance that included the Hazaras,

Ismaili Shi'a, Tajiks and Uzbeks; whilst Pakistan and Saudi Arabia supported the Pakistan-trained Taliban who took control of Kabul in 1996. Keynoush (2016: 146) argues that 'even tensions in Afghanistan failed to disrupt the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement,' while the first three years of the Khatami presidency coincided with several major incidents in Afghanistan that directly affected Iran: the Taliban attack and capture of Mazar-i Sharif and the accompanying execution of nine Iranian diplomats, and the fall of Kabul to the Taliban. Furthermore, while the discourse discussed Iran's Other in relation to the Taliban, it has to be highlighted that images such as the *Musalas-i shūm* or 'Ominous Triangle' were employed to highlight and embolden the sectarian narrative promulgated by Iran towards the Taliban and the US, without infringing on their attempts at détente with Saudi Arabia.

The argument can be made that the official silence regarding Saudi and Pakistani support for the Taliban was for two reasons. Firstly, Iran's main focus was on breaking its regional isolation and achieving rapprochement with both its neighbours, chiefly Saudi Arabia. Secondly, and as Clawson (1998) contends, the rise of the Taliban could 'stir unrest among the two million Afghans in Iran' while also being a contributing factor to Sunni-Shi'i tensions in eastern Iran where the Sunnis made up a third of the population (Clawson 1998: 77). However, the overall Iranian editorial press discourse was much more vocal and agitated. At the start of the Khatami presidency, the official recognition of the Taliban by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Pakistan generated a mixed response.

On the day Mazar-i Sharif fell, the Pakistani government was quick to announce that it would recognise the Taliban government, thereby ending their isolation (Burns 1997). This was followed by UAE and Saudi Arabia. The reaction of Iranian officials was neutral, responding to the events was an internal matter. Newspaper headlines focussed mainly on Khatami's inauguration with editorials commenting and criticising the American, Saudi and Pakistani

involvement in Afghanistan. As will be discussed below, it is clear that the newspapers took over the role of criticism from the state, which was not ready to risk a much-needed détente with the leading GCC state. Therefore, the main pillars of the state, that is the government, ulama and supreme leader, adopted a mainly silent or neutral stance towards Saudi Arabia and the UAE, reflecting a state developing a more mature diplomatic agenda compared to the immediate post-revolutionary period, while allocating certain tasks to different organs of the state. Like Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, elite voices were mainly neutral and the role of criticism was devolved to what could be defined as independent non-state actors, in this case newspaper editorials.

On the eve of the official election results, Rafsanjani made it clear that 'it has always been our policy not to interfere in the internal affairs of other states, however, we believe that the path of war as a way of solving Afghanistan's problems to be an erroneous one' (Rafsanjani 1997c). Rafsanjani's neutral reaction to the fall of Mazar-i Sharif to the Taliban and the exile of General Dostum stressed that Iran's policy had always been 'to be on good terms with all states that are recognised by the UN, while until now, the previous government of Afghanistan has been formally recognised by the UN and we are waiting for the future'. Whilst Rafsanjani stopped short of recognising the Taliban government, he did not denigrate or condemn the rise of the Taliban or its sponsoring states (Rafsanjani 1997c). Similarly, the spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs echoed Rafsanjani's narrative of Afghan self-determination, adding that 'external interference will not solve Afghanistan's problems and those who believe that through their interference they can overcome the Afghan people's will are repeating a historic mistake' while promoting dialogue between the 'different ethnicities is the best solution to solving Afghanistan's problems' (Iranian Foreign Ministry 1997). Like Rafsanjani's neutrality, the response stopped short of naming Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for their support of the Taliban. The Friday prayer sermons also followed this official line. According to the clergy,

the events taking place in Afghanistan were a 'domestic matter' and 'unclear', shifting from the rhetoric of the previous decade and adopting a conciliatory tone by advising jihadi groups 'to set aside their differences and commit to dialogue' (Yazdi 1997).

On the other hand, the editorial discourse gave rise to two main themes: A sectarian narrative that viewed the Shi'a of Afghanistan in danger as a result of the rise of the Taliban (*Resalat* 1997a; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1997b), and a narrative that identified a conspiracy and collaboration between 'America, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan which are clearly tilting the international balance in support of the terrorist Taliban' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997b). It is this aid and conspiracy that the Iranian editorials referred to as '*Musalas-i shūm*', the 'Ominous Triangle' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997g; *Kayhan* 1997e). This allegory served to embolden the discourse concerning the Iranian Other, demonising Pakistan and the Wahhabi ideology, yet stopping short of directly targetting the Saudi state. As contended in the thesis Introduction, regardless of the religious ideology and views towards the Other, if the political agendas are served – in this case attempts at détente and rapprochement – then a more, implicit, neutral, and/or positive discourse can be constructed to serve those agendas. That is to say, during this period the agenda of Iran was to break out of its international isolation, strengthen its economy, and sustain regional security amidst a rise in the US regional presence, an Iraqi threat, and the Taliban on its borders.

The execution of the Iranian diplomats was followed by an immediate response from the Iranian state in the form of the president and later the Supreme Leader, with the Friday sermons propagating Khamenei's narrative. He defined the atrocity as one fomented by 'global arrogance' and executed by the state of Pakistan who had utilised the Taliban as a tool of US hegemonic expansion. This, according to Khamenei, underlined that Pakistani control over Afghanistan gave the US full control over transnational oil pipelines in the service of US energy companies (Khamenei 1998). Maintaining dialogue and good neighbourly relations,

Khatami's response was to condemn the Taliban, criticise Pakistan slightly, but stopping short of implicating the Pakistani state in the takeover of Mazar-i Sharif or the execution of the Iranian diplomats (Khatami 1998a). However, the state's criticism of Pakistan was shouldered to the foreign ministry, namely Kamal Kharrazi, who was more explicit in his condemnation of Pakistani support for the Taliban, holding Pakistan accountable for the Taliban's successes and the 'barbaric hostilities' in Mazar-i Sharif (Kharrazi 1998). The Iranian elite's construction of the Other was directed at Iran's historic enemy, the US, rather than at regional states that officially recognised the Taliban government. Elite discourse towards Saudi Arabia was silent, thereby underlining Iran's political calculation as it put the long term goals of détente and rapprochement ahead of vociferous reaction. This signified a shift of position, with Saudi Arabia no longer featuring on Iran's list of enemies.

A more polarised response was evident in the Friday sermon clerics and editorials. However, it is essential to point out that the response in both discourse genres was strategic and calculated. Similar to the government, there was no representation of Saudi Arabia in the Friday sermons, especially since Friday prayer Imam's were representatives of the *valī-yi faqīh*, and therefore any mention of Saudi Arabia would be seen as an official response. Nevertheless, the role of the imams shaped the potency of the rhetoric and narrative employed towards Iran's Other. Clerics who held cabinet or state positions employed a more balanced tone when criticising Pakistan, that is to say, less denigration was utilised in their narrative. On the other hand, clerics such as Jannati and Emami-Kashani promulgated an abrasive narrative when criticising Pakistan, indirectly alluding to Saudi Arabia, while attributing the Taliban's 'barbarism' to the teaching of Wahhabism, a narrative employed rather frequently in the editorials (Jannati 1998b).

The editorials, on the other hand, were the main discourse to severely criticise Pakistan as the executor of American regional agendas, and together with Saudi Arabia was constructed as a trio, the 'ominous triangle' funded by Saudi Arabia. The US role was highlighted in a geopolitical sense as one that aimed to cause chaos on Iran's western borders, while Saudi Arabia assumed a lesser role, namely funding and propagating Wahabbism.

While the editorials shared similar tropes, their respective political alignment and the audiences they addressed resulted in arguments that were particular to certain newspapers. *Jomhouri Eslami*, once managed by the IRP, was a major critic of the Iranian state, assigning partial blame for the Taliban's rise and subsequent atrocities to the state's complacency and weakness. It is possible that this narrative was utilised due to their support for Khatami's right-wing principalist opposition, where editorials attributed Iran's losses to Khatami's preference for diplomacy and dialogue. The articles rhetorically argued that it is 'not yet fathomable as to why the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is silent towards this major change in the political geography of the region' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1998e), whilst another criticised the Ministry's 'silence... entrusting the lives of the Iranian diplomats to Pakistan [which] is part of the 'Ominous Triangle of America, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan creating this crisis on [Iran's] western borders' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1998c). Therefore, blaming the political and diplomatic route chosen by Khatami's government went as far as constructing a notion of 'negligence' on the part of the Iranian political apparatus, which in turn 'was exploited by the Ominous Triangle' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1998d). This criticism and blame was then related back to the construction of the Iranian Other, where Pakistan was an executor of American plans via Saudi funding that 'utilised a golden opportunity and swallowed Afghanistan' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1998d).

A major shared trope in Iranian discourse towards Saudi Arabia and the 'Ominous Triangle' utilised a narrative of a murderous and savage Taliban, which was a direct consequence of Wahhabism. Therefore, the editorials discursively constructed Saudi Arabia as a country that adopted a specific ideology while spreading Wahhabi-inspired barbarism. The potency of this representation is first witnessed in *Resalat* (*Resalat* 1998b), which defined the Taliban as reflecting a version of Islam characterised by US 'terror and savagery', funded by Saudi Arabia, and executed by Pakistan. This discursive representation of Saudi Arabia's role was based on its funding capacity that also attempted to hinder the progress of 'real Islam', that is in Iran, by 'creating an aggressive and intolerant version of Islam' (*Resalat* 1998c). This barbaric behaviour was further related to Wahhabism, and therefore Saudi Arabia as the main protector of Wahhabi groups (*Resalat* 1998c). This trope is a continuation of an Iranian perception of Saudi Arabia that initially began during the Iran-Iraq war. Consequently, the editorials promulgated an image of a barbaric Saudi Arabia to the public, seeking to harm Iran once again through Wahhabism and collaboration with the US.

The editorial arguments took on ideological and financial aspects, opining that 'Saudi Arabia's protection of Wahhabism and this Wahhabi group goes beyond political consideration. No doubt the Taliban's Islam is most similar to Saudi Arabia's version' of Islam *(Resalat 1998c).* Iranian editorials went as far as drawing a parallel to the Serbian massacres, thus adding a sectarian element to the discursive representation of Saudi Arabia through its teaching of Wahhabism and association with savagery *(Jomhouri Eslami 1998e).* Juxtaposing this with 'the era of Karadžić and Mladić', the editorials underscored the Saudi funding and mentoring of the Taliban: '[the] proud Taliban [who] admitted to the bloodshed and massacre of 700 people at Mazar-i Sharif' and funded the 'public massacre... and kidnap of hundreds of Shi'i women and girls by the Taliban' *(Jomhouri Eslami 1998e).* Although rare, the narrative reflects a direct representation of Saudi Arabia as a propagator of terror and barbarism against

the Shi'a. Therefore, the Saudi's are discursively constructed as sectarian with an anti-Shi'i agenda through the 'petrodollars of some puppet Arab states... that attacked the lives, livelihoods and honour of the Afghan people' *(Kayhan 1998b)*.

The editorials also characterised the upheaval in Afghanistan and Taliban advances as a conspiracy against Iran in particular and Islam in general (*Kayhan* 1998b; *Resalat 1998b*, 1998c). Similar to the narrative employed during the 1980s where Saddam's imposed war against Iran was represented as a conspiracy against Iran's revolution and the 'true' representation of 'global Islam' (*Islām-i jahānī*), Iranian editorials represented a conspiratorial Taliban along its western borders attempting to create an alternative to the 'real Mohammedan Islam' derived from the Iranian revolution (*Resalat* 1998c). This gave rise to the implicit construction of Saudi Arabia as a US funding benefactor trying to hinder the 'true Islam' and the 'spread of the revolution', given its attempt to restrain Iran by funding the Taliban (*Kayhan* 1998d), thereby 'besieging Iran' from all corners (*Kayhan* 1998c). Comparable to the narrative of the 1980s when there was a conspiracy identified that was hindering Iran's true global Islam, the discourse had shifted to a more implicit reference to Saudi Arabia rather than assigning it direct blame. Consequently, it could be said that even the editorials were cautious when directly criticising Saudi Arabia. The difference between the discourses of the editorials and the political elites could be explained in terms of organised discourse construction and minor signs of editorial independence. That is to say, where the political elites aimed at establishing rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, shying away from explicit negative framing of Saudi Arabia, the editorials tacitly framed Saudi Arabia by shedding light on the Islamic teachings of the Taliban, yet following the state line of not to harm the state's attempts at rapprochement with Saudi Arabia.

The representation of Saudi Arabia and the Other was also constructed using geopolitical tropes. Expanding on Khamenei's sermon following the attack on Mazar-i Sharif (Khamenei 1998), the articles echoed his argument that there was an aspect of greed and energy hegemony making victims of Afghan and Pakistani people, arguing that Saudi Arabia was directly related to these ambitions as they funded the Taliban who posed a transnational threat (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1998f; *Kayhan* 1998a; *Resalat* 1998a). Regurgitating the argument that Saudi funding was intended to restrict the continuation of the 'true Islam and political Islam', the editorials discursively constructed the Saudi as an Other in terms of funding US interests in Central Asia and creating a route from Afghanistan through Pakistan, towards the Persian Gulf where the US has established bases. The geopolitical trope and historical grievances were also discussed regarding to the disputed islands with the United Arab Emirates, where 'the Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates, and also Saudi Arabia have come in aid of the Taliban... due to lost dreams of "Abu Musa," they have propagated acts of harassment against Iran' (*Resalat* 1998c). This line of argument represented the two Persian Gulf Arab states as funding the Taliban as a form of revenge against Iran, and advanced a narrative of historical animosity of Arabs towards Persians and Iran, recalling the Iraqi-imposed war of the 1980s.

The silence and neutrality of the Iranian elite alongside the active role of the editorials signify the state's calculated political priorities compared to the defensiveness and counter-reaction of the 1980s. Building on the speeches and statements of the elite and the ulama's sermons, the Iranian press discourse took on the explicit role of constructing Iran's Other. In the era of détente and rapprochement, Iranian editorials may have attributed Taliban atrocities and funding to Saudi Arabia, but they avoided the previous pattern of systematic denigration, which can be attributed to the holistic vision of regional rapprochement, especially with Saudi Arabia the GCC states, in an attempt to alleviate Iran's isolation and economic woes.

## 4.3 Saudi Representation of the Self and Other

The context for this section is Saudi Arabia economic downturn, the rise of the Sahwa, and Crown Prince Abdullah becoming *de facto* ruler following Fahd's debilitating stroke in November 1995. I argue that the representation of the Saudi Self and the Other was defined by US foreign policy towards the Middle East, the withering of Saudi finances and the personal characteristics of Abdullah as a Pan-Arabist, conforming to his tribal background and Islamist-leaning persona. Finally, I also engage with the shift in the representation of the Saudi Self, especially the 'low profile', and at times silence, of the editorials when discussing the kingdom's domestic affairs.

Saudi Arabia's internal and external Other can be said to be intertwined, in the sense that the domestic opposition, mainly composed of Islamists, spun narratives revolving around wealth and expenditure at one end and subservience to Western powers from the other. As such, combining the regional events of the 1990s with the domestic circumstances of the Saudi state, the external Other can be defined as the US and Israel. I also argue that Saudi Arabia's relations with the US under the Clinton presidency, including US foreign policy, the deterioration of the 'Arab Peace Process' under the Netanyahu government, and Saudi financial difficulties, played a role in the representation of the Saudi Self and its external Other. With regards to Iran, I suggest that Saudi fears of any implication of Iran in the Khobar bombings led to discounting the latter as a Saudi Other. This was mainly due to Saudi fears of a military attack against Iran which would have led to a regional war with detrimental domestic, economic and geopolitical repercussions.

### 4.3.1 Khobar Bombings: Clerical Opposition, Economic Downturn and Social Instability

With Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Saudi Arabia's financial resources were seriously depleted, after a $60 billion expenditure and the defence contracts it committed to before and after the war (Bronson 2006: 206). Furthermore, the presence of US bases gave rise to opposition within the clerical establishment, represented by young clerics known as the 'Sahwa', and led by Safer al-Hawali and Salman al-Auda who, as Bronson (2006: 207) argues, operated 'on the fringe of the official establishment'. Similar to Juhayman in 1979, the young clerics again questioned the legitimacy of the state. This time, questions revolved around the dependence of the state on foreign troops to defend the holy lands, especially given the mammoth arms expenditure of these years.

The Khobar bombings in June 1996 and the state's reactions best demonstrate the representation of the Saudi Self and its internal Other. Unlike the siege of Mecca in 1979 that witnessed continuous press conferences on the part of the Minister of the Interior, Nayef, or Fahd's interviews with the international media, the Saudi reaction to the Khobar bombings was a cautious one. In this author's opinion, the response to the attacks was tactful, with different discourse genres dealing with an incident in a coherent and structured manner so as not to give the opposition a sense of victory or project an image of a weak state. In an attempt to downplay the attacks, the state took decisive steps to disseminate information and calculate its responses. These included short statements in the days following the bombings by the Saudi elite, namely Fahd and Abdullah. However, issues of terrorism and response to the narratives spun by the Islamic opposition were later highlighted in speeches such as at the Shura Council, Hajj, and international conferences including the GCC summits. Furthermore, there was a general silence on behalf of Nayef and the Ministry of the Interior so as not to lay blame on the wrong group or derail the investigations. The response from the Foreign Ministry was at ambassadorial level

in the first instance rather than ministerial, constituting another move to downplay the value of the attack and deflect from those responsible. As for the press, short editorials spanning two days, and published two days after the bombings were released, also in a clear sign that the press was also under security directions. The ulama also took three days to condemn the bombings. The clerical response, when it came, took three forms: Friday sermons condemning the attack, a statement released by the Board of Senior Ulama, and a religious edict by Sheikh Bin Baz.

The royal response came as replies to foreign leaders' expressions of solidarity, primarily the Arab Gulf states and the US. Crown Prince Abdullah was the first to release a statement via a solidarity call with the Sheikh of Bahrain, restricting press statements to 'condemnation of the bombing' and declaring that 'such terrorist acts will not diminish or get the better of the [Kingdom's] security and stability' (al-Saud 1996a). Fahd echoed a similar message, while also clearly labelling the bombing as a terrorist act that not only Islam, but also 'all monotheistic religions condemn and do not recognise it as an appropriate manner in dealing with matters, no matter the reasons or justifications' (al-Saud 1996c)**,** a clear reaffirmation of the general stance of Saudi Arabia's moderate Islam.

In turn, a supra-narrative of 'moderate Islam' was projected through its ambassador in the UK, Ghazi Algosaibi (Saudi Foreign Ministry 1996). This externally directed narrative attempted to frame the kingdom using four main messages. First, that Saudi Arabia was on a path of Islamic moderation and the Khobar bombings would not 'change its moderate course'. Second, the general Saudi public was moderate and 'outraged', signifying that the Saudi populace rejected such an ideology and 'such wanton acts of mayhem.' Third, that terrorism was not isolated to Islam and Saudi Arabia, but a 'worldwide epidemic … and Saudi Arabia is no exception'. The final projection was of a friendly Saudi Arabia that bore no animosity to the

West or its allies. The ambassador's statement argued that the US was an ally and friend, representing US personnel as 'guests... engaged in helping the Saudi armed forces [to] defend the country' (Saudi Foreign Ministry 1996). Therefore, the narrative was clear, discursively representing Saudi Arabia as Islamically moderate and safe, accepting of foreigners and non-Muslims, and a victim of global terrorism.

The editorial response to the Khobar bombings shifted from the total silence observed by *al-Madina*, to an echo of the state narrative in *Asharq al-Awsat* and *al-Riyadh*, with *al-Hayat* commenting on the lack of information disseminated by the Saudi state. The editorials, mainly *Asharq al-Awsat* and *al-Riyadh*, echoed the state narrative through three main tropes. First, the incident in Khobar, that is to say terrorism, was a foreign phenomenon imported to Saudi Arabia, and the 'Khobar perpetrators may have been professionally trained in Arab and Islamic capitals' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1996*; al-Riyadh* 1997o). *Asharq al-Awsat* highlighted the 'culture and principles of Saudi Arabia' that would not condone such an act, thereby stressing the notion of moderation within Saudi's Islamic culture (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1996)**.** The notion of moderation in Saudi Islamic culture was intertwined with the state's supposed leniency and toleration. *Al-Riyadh* argued that 'Saudi Arabia is not a country that is based on parties and divisions' and no matter the 'difference of opinion, no party will ever resort to violence and revenge', hinting at the Islamic opposition in Saudi Arabia since 1991, which included opposition to the state 'that has always respected these practices and nurtured them' (*al-Riyadh* 1997o)**.** On a similar note, *al-Hayat* emphasised the 'trust the people have in the security services' in apprehending the perpetrators as they had in the past, referring to other incidents in Saudi Arabia such as the Riyadh bombings in November 1995 (*al-Hayat* 1996). The second trope observed in the editorials was the representation of Saudi stability, strength, and longevity. The editorials suggested that 'Saudi Arabia's domestic and foreign policies... are the result of years of experience and productive work, while it will not be an easy task to eradicate'

these efforts (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1996). The third trope put Saudi at war with international terrorism. Propagated mainly in *al-Riyadh,* which aimed its editorials at a more domestic audience, the narrative attempted to highlight the strength of the Saudi state by downplaying the attack and any Saudi negligence, principally by equating Saudi with other states: 'Other Arab cities with high security standards as good as the kingdom's, as well as large countries that possess technologies and capabilities more than all the third world combined... have fallen victim to terrorism'. Therefore, to the domestic audience, the message was clear: Saudi Arabia was dealing with 'a criminal' while blaming 'foreign powers and organisations' and therefore an international war against terrorism (*al-Riyadh* 1997o).

In the aftermath of the Khobar bombings, the Saudi state was attacked by the Islamist opposition – mainly by Bin Laden – as deceiving the 'ordinary man… suffering from taxes and bad services' in a country that was the largest oil producer in the world. This critique held that the attacks were justified and legitimate, and underlined the fact that Saudi society was at one with the Sahwa speeches in the mosques, the latter emphasising that Saudi Arabia had 'become an American colony... and what happened [in Riyadh and Khobar] in two bombings... is evidence of the anger of Saudi people against America... their real enemy is America' (Fisk 1996). It is therefore clear that the internal Other for the Saudi state was the religious opposition, that is the Sahwa and Bin Laden. However, it is noteworthy that the state did little to define the internal Other in the Saudi discourse, especially in light of the Khobar bombings. Instead, the elite discourse, especially that of Fahd and Abdullah, underlined the economic recovery, the drive towards democracy through the Shura Council, and solidarity with the Palestinians, all of which were founded on Islamic and Arab principles, thus highlighting their legitimacy without mentioning the internal Other.

When juxtaposing the events in Saudi Arabia, its economic downturn and the narrative of clerical opposition within mainstream Saudi discourse, it is evident that the state attempted to legitimise its role in representing the Self . The speeches aimed at legitimising the al-Sauds and indirectly fending off the opposition's narrative through three main messages. First, a representation of Islamic service was promulgated, cementing the al-Saud's Islamic credentials and their servitude to Islam by affirming the kingdom' Islamic identity. In a speech to the Shura Council Fahd stated that the council was 'adopted according to a fixed Islamic approach that was bestowed in Allah's holy book and his Prophet's Sunna... Our country, thanks to Allah, is at the zenith of its strength. Firstly. [Saudi Arabia] is solid in its Islamic doctrine, and in the many gifts and abundant natural resources which Allah has bestowed on it. From these gifts, God has granted us success in expanding the holy sites and mosques... and this is our duty' (al-Saud 1997g).

Second, the opposition's accusations of lavish spending, along with a dwindling economy dependent on the US, was countered with a representation of Saudi as a country rooted in development values and perseverance, with its citizens as the state's utmost priority. Arguing that 'the region has gone through [a lot] in the past few years from serious incidents that have exhausted our economy and development', Fahd promulgated an image of a self-sufficient manufacturing state with an economy that was 'much stronger that others may envisage' with factories and capabilities that 'evolve day by day... manufacturing has advanced and our factories are in the thousands, manufacturing different necessary products and accessories.' Indirectly responding to Bin Laden's criticism of the negligent nature of the state towards the 'suffering ordinary man', Fahd reinforced the image of the responsibility of the al-Saud towards their people with the state working 'with resoluteness and determination to achieve all that guarantees citizens' happiness and prosperity' (al-Saud 1997g).

During the 1997 Hajj season, Fahd defined Saudi Arabia's support for a 'comprehensive and fair peace that alleviates the oppressed and returns invaded Arab lands to its owners in Palestine and Syria and Lebanon,' condemning the 'building of settlements [and] any action in the Holy City that goes against its status quo and the rights of its legitimate people' (al-Saud 1997e). Fahd's aim was clear; the role of Saudi Islamic and Arab leadership was emphasised as a state that cared for the plight of Arabs, their lands, and religious sites. Therefore, Fahd implicitly countered the opposition's representation of a weak and subservient Saudi state.

### 4.3.2 Israel and US-Saudi Relations

The shift in Saudi-US relations can be explained by a combination of events, outcomes and policies, as well the persona of the Saudi elite, therefore allowing for a shift in the representation of the US as the Other. First, the persona of Abdullah as a Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamist should be considered. Okruhlik (2003) argues that Abdullah's persona cannot be extracted from his foreign policy. That is to say, Abdullah was a patriotic Arab with tribal roots that adhered to strong Islamic teachings. Authors have argued that, contrary to Fahd and his Sudairi siblings, Abdullah did not lean towards supporting strong relations with the US. Instead, he opted for independence in his foreign policy, based on domestic voices within Saudi Arabia (Okruhlik 2003).

Second, since 1994, under the Clinton administration's policy towards the Middle East shifted, especially with regards to the Arab Peace Plan. As opposed to the Bush administration, where the Saudis were viewed as regional partners, Clinton relegated Saudi Arabia to a so-called 'secondary' regional ally. With regards to the Palestinian peace process that had been derailed due to a more hardline Israeli government, Clinton depended on bilateral negotiations involving Palestinians and Israelis rather than multilateral meetings that involved other Arab

states, including Saudi Arabia. Bronson (2006: 229) argues that 'the [Clinton] administration did call upon Saudi Arabia, but only when specific problems arose'. Saudi Arabia had been relegated from a key partner in the Arab Peace Process in the Reagan era, to 'trouble-shooters'.

Oil was a third domain that soured relations between the US and Saudi Arabia. In 1997, the US took advantage of low oil prices which hovered at under $12 per barrel. When taking all the aforementioned matters into account, and comparing them to the criticisms aimed at Saudi Arabia by figures such as Bin Laden as well as a declining regional role due to a shift in US policy, it is not surprising that Saudi Arabia began criticising the US to regain its regional Arab and Islamic leadership, mending its economic woes by raising oil prices through OPEC, and improving its relations with its regional counterparts, namely Iran. In the period covered in this chapter, the Saudi narrative towards Israel, Palestine and the US was not far from the Iranian narrative.

The Arab peace process is a fairly wide topic to cover in its entirety, however, a 'snapshot' of the events of the first three months of 1997 can illuminate the Saudi representation of the Other, mainly concerning Israel and the US. In January 1997, amidst widespread international condemnation, the Israeli government led by Netanyahu approved the building of an Israeli settlement in the Har Homa / Jabal Abu Ghneim area of East Jerusalem. The overall Saudi response towards Israel was in full accordance with its Arab and Islamic peers. However, speeches in domestic and international arenas stopped short of laying the blame on the US, and the Saudi elite strategised their two-tiered response; silence towards the US and calculated condemnation of Israel, with a harsher discourse in newspaper editorials. In all the aforementioned domains, and within the different genres deployed, the discourse employed specific images to construct the image of the Self and the Saudi Other. This is highlighted in the Introduction's central contentions and the dissertation's theoretical framework, and

discussed below in the discourse constructions of the monarchy and the editorials. The employment of the images was intended to embolden the discourse of Islamic-Arab leadership, domestic stability, and US treachery towards the Arabs and Islam as part of their support for Israel in the Arab Peace Process.

As argued above, the stance of Abdullah during his tenure as Crown Prince was closely aligned with Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic voices. In a speech at the annual GCC meeting in December 1996, Abdullah argued for Palestinian demands with a minimum threshold. By employing a clear Islamic and Arab tone, possibly sending a message to the US and Israel, Saudi Arabia represented itself as a major and not a secondary player:

> .... peace cannot be accomplished without the return of occupied lands, and the creation of a Palestinian state with the Holy Jerusalem as its capital. Therefore, any peace that lacks this minimum requirement of just demands a temporary truce that will end sooner or later with an explosion that exceeds preceding explosions... we say it clearly: any talk of normalisation before peace is talk of results without introductions and harvesting without planting. (al-Saud 1996b)

The Saudi state also promulgated a two tiered narrative intended to sustain its image as an Arab and Islamic leader. First, there was a domestic narrative, criticising Israeli attempts that harmed Arab and Islamic identity and which violated treaties. Second was a narrative directed at the international community, affirming the kingdom's stance concerning a comprehensive peace between Arabs and Israel. These were exemplified in a speech by Fahd and a cabinet statement. The latter accused Israel of 'illegal and illegitimate... violations of international treaties and accords.... with plans aimed at the Judaisation of Jerusalem and obliterating its Islamic identity and Arab character' (Saudi Cabinet 1997). The former narrative discursively constructed an image of a pan-Arab protector, while representing Israel's hatred of Arabs by its building of settlements violating treaties that preserved 'Jerusalem's demographic and geographic features, in terms of its Islamic and Arab identity' (al-Saud 1997f).

The extraordinary OIC session in Islamabad in response to Israeli settlement building was also a vehicle for internal legitimising and cementing external Arab and Islamic leadership. Abdullah's remarks highlighted a 'brave, fair and unified' Islamic position in opposition to '[Israeli] arrogance and looting people rights,' implicitly referring to the US, and constructing a narrative regarding support of Israel that was 'puzzling', questioning 'what is the secret to this Israeli arrogance that all the world ignores, yet condemns for attacks on legitimate rights and holy sites?' (al-Saud 1997c). His Pan-Islamic identity was emphasised as he constructed an image of the fearless and sensible Islamic Self. Abdullah argued that the Islamic world is 'not afraid of this world, but it will be dealt with, with maturity and political awareness according to our interests', highlighting Islamic resilience based on the observation that 'no power on earth can deny our civilised Ummah its humanitarian role [towards Palestine],' implicitly referring to Israel and the US (al-Saud 1997c). Saudi Arabia's representation of the Other was twofold: its explicit Other was Israel, since it considered 'the problem of Palestine as at the core of Islamic and Arab issues' (al-Saud 1997f), and an implicit Other, namely the US, that 'puzzled' Abdullah due to its profound support for Israeli 'arrogance and looting'.

*Saudi Editorials and the Saudi Other*

It is intriguing that all Saudi newspapers promulgated a narrative of US subservience towards Israel, as well as US treachery towards the Arab and Islamic world following its two vetoes in the UNSC[1]. On the other hand, *al-Madina* and *al-Riyadh*, although different in their political alignments, since the former was Islamist and the latter Pan-Arab, also represented US treachery in the context of a fake peace process, where all Israel wanted to achieve was to take Arab lands under cover of US protection via the peace process. Similarly, both newspapers

[1] On 7 March 1997 The US vetoed the Resolution (S/1997/165) calling on Israel to refrain from any settlement activity at the Jabal Abu Ghneim area of East Jerusalem. A second resolution (S/1997/241) was vetoed by the US once again on 21 March 1997 calling on Israel to immediately cease construction of the Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement, as well as all other Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories.

also highlighted Saudi Arabia's role in the comprehensive peace process. Saudi Arabia was constructed as the designer and initiator of peace, keeping Jerusalem and Islamic rights at the forefront of its mission, possibly in a bid to appease their domestic audience after the derailment of the peace process.

As argued earlier in the Introduction, the use of images and discourse construction can shift with changes in political agendas as well as in the political environment. Saudi discourse, such as the editorials, constructed an image of a war of Israel against Islam with the US in aid of the former, highlighting tropes of US-Israeli treachery, Arab weakness, and the leadership role of Saudi Arabia in the Arab and Islamic world. Images were readily available and mobilised to enhance the image of the Saudi Self in domestic and external audience. These included the utilisation of images of a biased US stance towards Israel in the Arab Peace Process and the Oslo treaty as 'acquiescence contracts', Saudi Arabia as the protector of the Arab and Islamic world, the Kingdom's support and sacrifice to the Arab world in general and the Palestinians in particular, and the image of a powerful Saudi monarchy that extensively travelled the world in aid and support of the Palestinians.

Similar to Iranian discourse, the Saudi discourses framed the US as an ally and subservient to Israel and Zionism. Arguing that the draft resolutions were unanimously supported by all the international community, including the European members – namely the UK, France, Sweden and Portugal – Saudi editorials discursively constructed the US as heavily swayed and pressured by Israel, labelling it 'a puzzling position... an excuse that does not convince anyone' with the US a 'biased mediator' neglecting its role as an intermediary (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997c). Even before the veto, the pan-Arab *al-Riyadh* and Islamist leaning *al-Madina* editorials constructed an image of Israeli-US collaboration as 'a judge and criminal sharing a bed, thinking and articulating a verdict in an identical fashion that benefits their goals and liking'

(*al-Riyadh* 1997a), going as far as describing the Israel position towards the peace agreements as 'acquiescence contracts' (*ʿuqūd ʾithʿān*) (*al-Madina* 1997c), metaphorically constructing Israel as the sole actor ordering around all other parties, including the US and the Arabs. According to *al-Madina* (1997c) 'Benyamin Netanyahu attempted to…convert the Arab-Israeli negotiations into a system that produces Arab acquiescence to Israeli will in the Middle East'.

The second trope constructed US support for Israel as a war against Islam and the Arab world. Pan-Arab leaning newspapers, such as *Asharq al-Awsat* and *al-Riyadh* also advanced the argument that the US and Israel were in a state of war with the Muslim and Arab worlds. Following the second US veto on 22 March 1997, *Asharq al-Awsat* opined that the construction of settlements by the Netanyahu government was purposely done as a means to 'defy the nationalist and religious emotions of the Arabs and Muslims' framing Israel as instigator of violence by building the settlement in Eastern Jerusalem while covered by US vetoes. Therefore, the US was implicitly represented as a collaborator in a war against Muslims and Arabs. Moreover, the conspiracy promulgated by the Saudi editorial also characterised the Israeli-US agenda as a bid to 'complete the hegemony over Jerusalem and isolate it completely' before the prospects of further peace negotiations (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997g).

Furthermore, the US-Israeli treachery was also a main trope argued by Islamist editorials, while echoing a more polarised narrative branding the peace process as a form of deception and 'red herring'. In a further attempt to implicitly construct the US as a 'treacherous collaborator', *al-Madina* argued that the Oslo and Madrid accords, which were sponsored by the US, were a diversion. The editorials argued that consecutive Israeli administrations planned for a complete takeover of Jerusalem by delaying any discussions over the holy city in an attempt to 'expand Israeli control over Jerusalem at the expense of the West Bank' (*al-Madina* 1997a). *Al-Madina* also observed that 'what differentiates [the Israeli Labour Party] is the age and experience' of

its leaders involved, where both have similar hegemonic ambitions, since they demand that 'all of Jerusalem be the eternal capital of Israel... both want to keep the lands in the West Bank, Gaza and Golan.' According to *al-Madina*, the 'strategic aim' of Israel, supported by a US veto, was 'total hegemony over the Middle East region... the aim is one, only the tactics differ' (*al-Madina* 1997a). The newspaper further argued that although the 'US asserts it is against building settlements in the occupied Arab lands... claiming that it does not help the peace process,' the main purpose behind such a slogan was to appease the Arabs 'every time the Israelis attempted to confiscate Arab lands or build new settlements on them' (*al-Madina* 1997a), at a time where the Palestinians have only 'received less than three per cent of their occupied lands... since the Oslo accords' (*al-Madina* 1997e).

The Saudi editorials did not limit their criticism to Israel and US, but also targeted the Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general. Through the utilisation of a trope of Arab weakness, the editorials built a discursive image of Saudi strength. The Arab states were weak entities that accepted 'pre-planned US decisions' during their Washington visits, because 'matters have already been settled and agreed with Israel' (*al-Riyadh* 1997i). Arab weakness was also constructed as an aspect of Palestinian naivety where they 'lacked knowledge of their [Israeli] counterparts' during the peace talks, therefore prompting them to rely on Arab and foreign specialists which made them subject to exploitation by the US and Israel (*al-Riyadh* 1997i).

Saudi editorials also used the Islamic summit in Pakistan (23-24 March 1997) to highlight Saudi Arabia's part in the Arab peace process. Fahd's initial spearheading of the peace process during the Reagan and Bush administrations was under threat as Jerusalem was subject to the building of settlements. The aforementioned, in addition to an Islamic opposition that branded Saudi Arabia as weak and subservient to the US, gave Saudi Arabia all the more reason to

highlight its position as a leader of the Islamic and Arab world, in addition to underlining the 'sacrifices' made by the Kingdom for the Arab world. Aimed at a domestic audience, both *al-Riyadh* and *al-Madina* published exclusive editorials covering Saudi Arabia's role.

These articles relayed three main messages. First, the Saudi commitment towards a comprehensive and just Arab peace process, one that preceded the Madrid and Oslo conferences, namely the 1982 Fahd Peace Plan; second, the sacrifices Saudi Arabia had made under Fahd and his battle to garner support for the Palestinian cause in the international arena. The editorials constructed the Saudi endeavours and negotiations in relation to Jerusalem as the 'essence of the struggle' for a just peace, affirming the message that 'this comes from the fact that Saudi Arabia is a model of an Islamic state in a modern era... with Jerusalem stemming from its Islamic conscience and beliefs that are held dearly by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' (*al-Madina* 1997d). Third, they underlined the role Saudi Arabia played in the international arena, with the editorials covering the visits of the Emirs and the Sultan on his tour of Europe and the US. *Al-Riyadh*, for example, attempted to represent the Saudi role as one that spanned more than arms procurement and business contracts. The editorial asserted that 'Prince Sultan managed to convey with full clarity the steady position of the kingdom regarding the peace process on his political tour to the US, France and Britain.' Furthermore, *al-Riyadh* promoted the prestige of Saudi leadership and its role in the Islamic and Arab world by stressing the Sultan's 'defence of the Palestinian cause and the importance of maintaining Jerusalem's Islamic identity... and the kingdom's lack of support for Israel's settlement expansions' (*al-Riyadh* 1997c).

By constructing Israel as Saudi Arabia's Other and projecting that through Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic voices, the Saudi Self was reaffirmed as an Islamic and Arab leader, contrary to the opposition's criticisms of the state. The discursive constructions highlighting Saudi Arabia's

leadership and its Arab and Islamic roles could be said to be aimed mainly at a domestic audience at a time where opposition voices such as Bin Laden and the CDLR were rising against the backdrop of a series of terrorist bombings. Therefore, Saudi domestic stability and its sustainability as a leader in the international arena were behind the aforementioned constructions and definitions of the Self and Other in this period.

### 4.3.3 Iran, the Khobar Bombings, and US-Saudi Relations

The Arab-Israeli Peace Process, including its predicaments and pressures interacted with other tensions between Saudi Arabia and the US during the Clinton era. These tensions included further US deployments and military strikes against Iraq, such as Operation Desert Fox (1998) (Potter and Sick 2002: 265). Furthermore, the Khobar bombings in June 1996 also weighed on US-Saudi relations, especially regarding the limited cooperation and access given to US officials in the Khobar investigations. This Saudi government's reluctance led to widespread speculations regarding the reasons behind these moves (Benjamin and Simon 2002; Alsultan and Saeid 2016: 98-100). On the one hand it can be explained in terms of Saudi fears that any implications of Iranian involvement could result in a US attack on Iran. This would have naturally resulted in an Iranian reaction against Saudi Arabia domestically through local Iranian-supported Shi'i groups, and externally through Iranian attacks on Saudi oil fields. The former would provoke further Islamist opposition and the latter would increase Saudi Arabia's economic woes by disrupting its oil production. On the other hand, the Saudi lack of cooperation with the US risked jeopardising arms sales to Saudi Arabia while challenging the US security alliance, defined mainly by dual containment of Iran and Iraq.

As noted above, Saudi newspaper coverage of the Khobar bombings was limited to editorials; discussion of the incident was the preserve of two elites, Nayef in his capacity as Minister of

the Interior and the Sultan as Defence Minister. However, it is important to mention that their comments and statements were limited to answering questions during press conferences and to rebuttals of US media or government discourses aimed at Saudi Arabia and the bombings, possibly in a bid to contain the damage to Saudi Arabia's image domestically and regionally, in addition to limiting information leaks as the investigations progressed.

Freeh (2007) argues that initial Saudi-led investigations found that an unknown Iranian-affiliated Shi'i group, *Hizbollāh al-Hijāz* (Hezbollah in the Hijaz), was responsible for the bombings. This took the Saudi leadership by surprise since the government had mended its relations with the Shi'a by pardoning Shi'a leaders and announcing an amnesty that saw many return from exile, as well as providing the Shi'a with jobs in both the government and private sectors (Bradley 2015: 82-83; Alsultan and Saeid 2016: 98-100; Freeh 2007). However, the findings of this investigation were not shared with their US counterparts. From July 1996, US aggravation, especially that of the FBI, was apparent. The frustration at Saudi non-cooperation and silence led the Americans to release their own statements, with the US Defence Secretary anticipating 'that it will be an international connection,' suggesting that Iran was the leading suspect and also indirectly pressuring the Saudis to release their findings to their US counterparts (NPR 1996).

The Saudi response came after a threat by the FBI to end US involvement in the investigation amidst the director's claims of a lack of Saudi cooperation (Johnston 1996), in addition to a response to leaked media reports, such as the Guardian article (*Guardian* 1996) that implicated the Saudi Minister of the Interior in the secret arrest and detention of 40 Saudis in relation to the bombings. The responses reflected the strained relationship with the US, and highlighted the clear intent of Saudi Arabia not to disclose any information to the US for fear of damaging détente and rapprochement with Iran. In an interview with Reuters, Nayef explicitly remarked

that the leaks published by the media could not be accepted as fact and questioned the reliability of US intelligence since 'nothing can be said (about the case) unless it is by the Saudi security sources. And that will be the truth' (*al-Saud* 1996e). Clearly alluding to and denying any allegations of Iranian or Shi'i involvement, Nayef made no mention of Iran, while stressing that the aim of the investigation was the 'whole truth... we do not want to deal with half-truths or with accusations of others, or provocations or using incidents to settle accounts', thereby hinting at Iran (*al-Saud* 1996d). Nevertheless, the Saudis never explicitly denied Iranian involvement.

Through the Sultan's visit to the US and Europe, Saudi Arabia attempted a balancing act, by assuring the Americans that Saudi Arabia would cooperate and that they had 'not finished the investigation'. Second, they continued with plans for regional détente and rapprochement with Iran but not at the expense of US intelligence cooperation, by arguing that Saudi Arabia was 'not pointing fingers yet at anybody' (*al-Saud* 197l). Consequently, Sultan's 'balancing act' alleviated tensions with the US, sustaining détente with Iran at a time of dire oil prices and economic downturn by adopting a neutral tone regarding any Iranian involvement, simultaneously maintaining leverage over Iran while appeasing the US, in turn allowing for modernisation and regional supremacy in military technology.

It is important to note that even after the arrest of a suspect with alleged links to Iran, the Saudi state and media discourse did not react towards Iran. In March 1997, the Canadian authorities claimed to have apprehended a Saudi citizen for his alleged involvement of the Khobar bombings, Hani al-Sayegh, suspected of being a member of *Hizbollāh al-Hijāz*. Although the US investigation linked him to Iran, the Saudi reaction – although seeking his extradition for questioning – opted to remain silent as 'it was not in the interest of the investigation' to discuss the matter, according to Nayef. Subsequent US attempts to link the bombings to Iran through

al-Sayegh and his alleged links to the IRGC and time spent in the seminaries in Qom, resulted in a similar response. The official Saudi line was maintained; facts had to 'come from an official Saudi source on the record of the *SPA* [Saudi Press Agency]... no official conclusions would be announced until the investigations are complete,' importantly adding that 'We do not acquit nor accuse anyone' (al-Saud 1997i; *Asharq-Al-Awsat* 1997e). The absence of any reaction to Iran could be attributed to fears of a US attack on Iran which would draw Saudi Arabia into a regional war. War was not an option for Saudi Arabia, or Iran for that matter, since both states were experiencing a heavy economic downturn as a result of wars, low oil prices, in addition to a growing domestic opposition in both countries.

Newspaper editorials focussed on regional and international affairs with the exception of *al-Riyadh* (*al-Riyadh* 1997m, 1997b) which addressed a domestic audience. *al-Riyadh* undertook three main strategies. First, it promulgated and defended the state's narrative in general and Nayef's in particular (*al-Riyadh 19*97m, 1997b). Second, it represented the kingdom as resilient and independent (*al-Riyadh* 1997n), relentless in its task even under US pressure adopting clear policies and agendas when interacting with US counterparts *(al-Riyadh* 1997e). Third, the newspaper constructed a nuanced narrative that echoed the kingdom's 'balancing act'. Although the editorial refrained from naming Iran in its discourse, it implicitly criticised it. The article defended Nayef's investigations and supported his narrative of a kingdom which deals with internal incidents using a 'perspective of responsibility, not jumping to conclusions, or accusing a given person or party' (*al-Riyadh* 1997b). Furthermore, the article juxtaposed the kingdom's investigations with US motives. *al-Riyadh* accused the US of 'lay[ing] the blame on external parties... accusing third world states, therefore shifting their (US) responsibility towards these crimes... leading to accusations or acquittal of parties or states' (*al-Riyadh* 1997m, 1997b). Also, the newspaper stressed the state's line of argument, representing the kingdom as an independent state unswayed by 'any party regardless of their powerful leverage

or size', with its governance and security based on the 'principle of trust... and ethics' (*al-Riyadh* 1997b). Finally, Saudi Arabia was represented as a regional peacemaker that 'declined to be a party in any crime or conspiracy... it does not believe in solving matters through bloodshed' while also being a victim by implicitly invoking Iran as a state that 'exploits seasons like the hajj, … exporting their crises and the failures of their administrations to other countries, [and that] attempted to 'infiltrate [the Kingdom's] security' (*al-Riyadh* 1997b). Therefore, like Sultan and Nayef, *al-Riyadh* also balanced the US and Iran, whilst framing a Saudi image of strength, independence and maturity. Consequently, it can be argued that the significance of the aforementioned framing was to discursively construct an image of a strong and independent Saudi Self domestically whilst not risking rapprochement with Iran or aggravating the US. Furthermore, the discourse on Iran illustrates the relationship between political, economic, and international events and the Saudi discourses. The Saudi stance towards Iran with regards to the Khobar bombings, exemplified by Nayef, supports the Introduction's central contention that differences in religious and political stances and opinions may not inhibit the construction of a neutral or positive construction of the Other. In this instance, the Saudi construction of Iran is demonstrated by silence coupled with a reluctance to blame Iran.

## 4.4 Iranian and Saudi Representation of Each Other

The efforts of Rafsanjani since the OIC meeting in Senegal in 1991 managed to improve relations between the GCC states and Iran. Building on the encounter Rafsanjani and Abdullah had in Dakar, Rafsanjani argued in a much more recent interview (2011) that 'it was contrary to Abdullah's expectations that the president of Iran in that current [political] climate would behave in that manner... and that allowed for some of the ice in our relations to break' (*Iran Diplomacy* 2011), which in turn paved the way for Iran to host the OIC summit in Tehran in

1997. However, according to Rafsanjani, Saudi Arabia had been assessing Iran's foreign policy and intentions for nearly six years (*Iran Diplomacy* 2011), before the confidential meetings held in 1996 improved relations (Mousavian and Shahidsaless 2014: 245-246).

The election of Khatami in May 1997 transformed good faith gestures and confidence building measures from ice-breaking détente to warm rapprochement. This section will discuss how Iranian-Saudi relations shifted during Rafsanjani's tenure to a discourse of cooperation by examining different events during this era, such as the OIC summit in Tehran and the historic visits of Rafsanjani and Khatami to Saudi Arabia in 1998 and 1999 respectively. The following section will discuss Iranian and Saudi mutual representation of each other in their different discourse genres. Furthermore, this section follows the Introduction's central contentions which argue that the international and domestic environments are related to the image construction and representation of Iran and Saudi of each other. In addition, the difference in religious views and political agendas did not obstruct the positive construction of imagery and the employment of positive images when constructing each other.

### 4.4.1 Confidence Building Overtures Before the OIC Tehran Summit

The efforts led by Rafsanjani in the post-Iran-Iraq war period gave rise to improved relations, marked by a series of speeches calling for renewed relations, confidence building measures and regional cooperation. The first significant indication of this improvement in relations was during Khatam's tenure and was exemplified by the visit of his foreign minister, Kamal Kharazi to Saudi Arabia (the way having been paved by Ali Akbar Velayati's[2] visit in March 1997); this was the first visit of an Iranian foreign minister in four years (Cordesman 2003a: 45). The

[2] President Rafsanjani's long-serving foreign minister became a foreign policy advisor to the Supreme Leader after standing down from his ministerial position.

famous encounter between Rafsanjani and Abdullah bin Abdulaziz in Islamabad two weeks later gave a further indication of the upturn in relations. Both states' narratives focussed mainly on confidence building, with Iran arguing for a strengthening of trust and expansion of cooperation between the two states (Velayati 1997a).

These shifts in positions towards each other and the image construction demonstrate a shift supporting the contentions made in the Introduction and theoretical framework. The domestic and international environment coupled with the political agendas in both states led to a change in image construction. As will be extensively discussed below, although Saudi discourse was mainly silent and implicit in comparison to Iran's explicit discourse, Saudi Arabia constructed a representation of neighbourly and fraternal relations with Iran. Khatami's election further emboldened the Saudi positive representation of Iran, drawing on Iran's historic, cultural and geopolitical significance. Iranian construction of Saudi Arabia utilised the narratives of Islamic brotherhood, and joint leadership, admitting to Saudi Arabia's leading role and Mecca being the 'cradle of Islam'. Consequently, and as discussed below, differences in religious and political opinions did not inhibit the construction of a positive image of each other, given that they served both states' political agendas.

#### 4.4.1.1 Velayati's Historic Visit to Saudi Arabia

With a diplomatic mandate that spanned ten countries including all the GCC states, Velayati's historic visit communicated two main messages. First, trust and confidence building was imperative for détente and rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Second, regional security was the responsibility of regional states and not external powers, such as the US. Therefore, Iran's roadmap to accomplishing the aforementioned messages was based in fulfilling two main objectives, the invitation of King Fahd to the OIC summit in Tehran and

setting up a cooperation committee to overcome any mistrust, thereby beginning a new chapter of cooperation on the Arab and Islamic fronts.

The Iranian domestic reaction towards Veleyati's overture was positive. The state media narrative represented the visit as 'highly significant... and likely to ease tension' (*IRNA* 1997a). Editorials were overall silent, dedicating their columns to domestic affairs such as Khamenei's speeches to the IRGC (*Kayhan* 1997b) and the first anniversary of the death of Khomeini's son, Ahmad (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997f). The state response was mainly reflected in the foreign minister's interviews and statements, projecting a shift from the rhetoric of the 1980s to a discursive construction of peaceful cooperation with its neighbour, Saudi Arabia. On his visit to Riyadh, Velayati emphasised 'expansion of cooperation and the creation of mutual trust' such as respecting international norms and treaties. Velayati framed Saudi Arabia as a leader that Iran could share Islamic and regional leadership with; the latter by respecting borders and regional security. On the subject of Israel, for instance, Saudi cooperation was a 'determining factor in preserving stability and security in the region and in resolving the problems of the Islamic world' (*Velayati* 1997b). On the matter of GCC security, Iran was represented as respectful of territorial boundaries, where 'doors were open with the UAE for bilateral talks... to resolve misunderstandings' on the issue of the Islands for example, while 'close cooperation strengthens the maintaining of security in the region' in relation to regional threats (*Velayati* 1997b).

Abdullah's statement and response to the Iranian foreign minister's visit was published by Iranian state media and not disseminated by the Saudi press. The statement released by the *Iranian News Agency* (*IRNA*) depicted Iranian-Saudi relations as fraternal, quoting Abdullah as announcing that Iran's 'brothers in Saudi Arabia wish Iranians prosperity' in addition to 'strengthening the friendly relations and historical amity' of both states (*IRNA* 1997a). In a

response, Saudi Arabia stopped short of confirming the Iranian narrative. In an interview with *Asharq al-Awsat*, Sultan framed Iran both as a 'Muslim neighbouring country' yet one which was viewed with caution and suspicion since it had to take 'practical steps to strengthen its relations' in the Persian Gulf and base these relations on 'not interfering in the internal affairs of other countries' (al-Saud 1997j). Furthermore, Sultan's avoidance of any confirmation of Velayati's comments that both states had 'began a new chapter' in their relations (*IRNA* 1997a) went alongside Saudi acceptance of any state that wished to have 'good relations... love and harmony' with the kingdom (*SPA* 1997b).

Although the Saudi state was silent, its overall aspirations were reflected in a single editorial published in the domestically-focussed *al-Riyadh* (*al-Riyadh* 1997f). The article focussed on the 'kingdom and Iran and the drafting of a distant future', highlighting a new chapter in cooperation between both states. Echoing Abdullah's statements in the Iranian state media, *al-Riyadh*'s editorial highlighted the fraternal Islamic nature of relations with Iran, and the sharing of 'one of the most dangerous waterways... dangerous sources of wealth... and common factors that allow for security interests' (*al-Riyadh* 1997f). Furthermore, the notion of a 'common Islamic belief' aimed at diminishing any sectarian influence on the turbulent relationship, instead shifting the argument to a common security threat in 'current national and international circumstances' in 'one of the most dangerous and volatile hotspots,' i.e. the Persian Gulf (*al-Riyadh* 1997f). Contrary to the Sultan's cautious statements to the media, the *al-Riyadh* article depicted both states as threatened by similar 'internal or external forces that are too narrow minded to see the horizon', framing Iran as 'brothers sharing the same future, and friends that share extraordinary interests' (*al-Riyadh* 1997f). *Al-Riyadh* initiated a pragmatic narrative. It represented Iran as a 'great culture', highlighting the 'brotherly visit' as a chance to 'build a new platform of trust and an environment of tolerance' basing any future dialogue and cooperation on the 'ethics of Islam and the chivalry of men' (*al-Riyadh* 1997f). It can be argued

that the positive representation of Iran at this time in *al-Riyadh* could be attributed to two main reasons. First, the influence the Emir of Riyadh, Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud has on the newspaper, which naturally supports the vision of the state and monarchy. Second, the political position of the editor, Yousef al-Kuwailit, that argues for united Islamic and Arab cooperation.

Iranian enthusiasm and the mostly cautious Saudi response could have three explanations. First, Iranian foreign policy objectives, outlined in Khatami's in his first UN speech, made a clear intention to work co-operatively on the international and regional level, to resolve past differences, and establish 'Security, development and prosperity in the third world' (Khatami 1998b). Second, that the Iranians were in difficult circumstances economically and diplomatically, facing years of regional isolation and high unemployment levels in the midst of an economic downturn and low oil prices. Second, the mixed Saudi response, between a welcoming Abdullah and a cautious Sultan, could either mean that there were conflicting views and opinions in the Saudi royal family, or a cautious balancing between potential détente with Iran and maintaining Saudi relations with the US.

#### 4.4.1.2 The Rafsanjani-Abdullah meeting in Islamabad

Although the Rafsanjani-Abdullah encounter during the extraordinary OIC summit in Islamabad is thought to have begun a rapprochement in relations, it was covered much less than the Velayati visit that preceded the summit. Mousavian (2015) and al-Sultan (2016: 110) argue that the overture by Rafsanjani had such a positive effect that Abdullah's reactions moved rapidly. Over two decades later, Rafsanjani (*Iran Diplomacy* 2011) opined that the change in Iranian-Saudi relations occurred during the extraordinary OIC summit in Islamabad which coincided with Pakistan's National Day. According to Rafsanjani, Abdullah responded so positively towards Iran during the summit that he ordered that a previous statement by Saud

al-Faisal be ‘disregarded’ and that the Saudi crown prince, Abdullah, would be heading a delegation to the OIC summit in Tehran. However, the encounter was not covered by any Saudi or Iranian editorial. This could be attributed to two reasons. First, that both leaders requested that their overtures be kept quiet until concrete developments could be made, a view which is held by Moussavian and Shahidsaless (2014: 246-247). The second reason is that during that period, the editorial discourse around foreign affairs in both states focused mainly on Israeli settlement building and the Netanyahu government impeding of the Arab peace process.

The state narrative was reflected mainly in Rafsanjani’s press conference held immediately after the summit, which focussed on the general aspects of bilateral relations while not revealing any details, that is to say representing Saudi Arabia as a positive counterpart engaged in fruitful dialogue. It can be argued that Rafanjani’s reservation in discussing his private discussions with Abdullah confirms Moussavian’s argument that both statesmen decided to keep certain discussions informal in a bid to negotiate a ‘grand agreement’ (Mousavian and Shahidsaless 2014: 246-247). In response to new developments between Tehran and Riyadh, Rafsanjani argued that relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were ‘expanding,’ highlighting that there was ‘full understanding between the two countries... and all areas of interest (to both states) were discussed in the meeting with the Saudi crown prince,’ (Rafsanjani 1997b) thereby stressing discussions that ‘to a certain extent, cleared the ambiguities regarding our relations with the Southern Persian Gulf States, allowing us to become closer’ (Rafsanjani 1997b, 1997a). Furthermore, Rafsanjani represented the ‘good relations’ between ‘two Islamic neighbours’ as being problematic for certain ‘forces’, implicitly alluding to the US, that latter aiming to ‘ruin the mutual understanding and expansion (of ties) through disinformation,’ underling that the only way to move forward was to ‘remove any misunderstandings’ is by the ‘exchange of high-ranking officials’ (*IRNA* 1997c).

The Saudi response to the Rafsanjani-Abdullah encounter was similarly taciturn, with little reference in the Saudi press, and overall silence on the part of Saudi statesmen. The state press branded the event as a 'closed meeting', and echoed Rafsanjani's previous statements of 'discussing the relations between the two states... reviewing the main issues in the Islamic arena' (*SPA/WAS* 1997). The Saudi reticence was so complete that Saudi media quoted Iranian News Agency press releases rather than a statement from the Saudi authorities or their official news agency as their source for the announcement of Abdullah attending the OIC summit in Tehran *(Asharq al-Awsat* 1997b). Furthermore, Saudi reporting of the status of the relations with Iran was narrated through interviews with Iranian officials rather than Saudi ones. An interview with the Iranian ambassador to Riyadh days after the summit, framed the Iranian position as 'a serious political orientation' towards rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, as both states were 'the largest Muslim neighbours in the region'. The Iranian shift now framed the relationship as they 'need each other in different areas of cooperation, consultation in diverse arenas and mutual coordination,' further promulgating the Iranian state discourse of 'preservation of regional security and cooperation' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997e). The reactions of both states were a near mirror image. In Iran – with the exception of Rafsanjani and his foreign minister Velayati – the Iranian leadership was cloaked in silence. No reactions were made by Khamenei, the clergy or the editorials, an echo of the silent Saudi leadership, clergy and editorial voices.

The Saudi silence and utilisation of Iranian discourse to project rapprochement and the representation of the Other can be attributed to two main reasons. First, by utilising Iranian discourse to highlight the process and the rapprochement between both states, the Saudi silence could communicate that it was Iran that desired improved relations and Saudi was acceding to this request from a position of power, that is to say, Saudi silence had the chance to construct the Saudi Self as forgiving, thus abiding by Islamic principles of forgiveness and charity.

Hence, the image communicated to the Saudi audience is that the Saudi monarch was forgiving years of Iranian threats and trespasses from a position of Islamic leadership and strength. Second, Saudi silence and the employment of Iranian discourse implicitly constructed an image of the weakness of Saudi Arabia's Other, namely Iran, which was placed in the role of petitioner towards Saudi Arabia. When the Saudi public consumed the Iranian narrative highlighted in Saudi discourse, it imbibed a projection of Saudi prestige, and of Iranian deference towards Saudi Arabia, which was implicitly constructed as a retreat from its previous position of revolutionary zeal and threatening power.

### 4.4.2 The Khatami Presidency and the OIC: From Confidence Building to Islamic Unity and Cooperation

Confidence building measures initiated during Rafsanjani's tenure came to fruition at the end of his presidency, peaking with the election of Khatami in May 1997, possibly giving the Saudi leadership assurance that the road towards rapprochement initiated by Rafsanjani would be sustained and developed under Khatami's leadership. It can be argued that the rapid improvement in relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran was informed by a trust in Rafsanjani that stemmed not only from his consistent attempts at confidence-building measures, but also as an experienced and reliable statesman, whose protégé had been elected president, very much against the odds, further illustrating Rafsanjani's political acumen. Furthermore, Khatami's persona and his message to the world, later exemplified by his calls for a Dialogue of Civilisations, rang loud and clear during early during his political campaign, as president-elect and from his first day in office. The results were immediate. Fahd's recognition of the elections was framed in his representation of Iran as a 'brotherly country' and a personalised tint was given to the telegram that stressed congratulating Khatami on behalf of 'myself [the king]

personally in the trust placed in you by the Iranian nation'. Furthermore, the Saudi overture was explicit, representing Iran not only as a country with whom it endeavoured to 'strengthen good relations', but a king's recognition of Iran as a possible partner in 'the service of our Islamic cause' (al-Saud 1997h). Khatami's electoral victory had aligned Saudi Arabia with Iran's narrative, with 'Islamic unity' leading to 'regional cooperation'. Saudi Arabia's positive narrative was reciprocated by Khatami, who stressed the 'expansion and development of all aspects of relations with the Arab and Islamic countries' and expressing Iran's ambitions for 'cooperation in regional and international security, which is highly important to us' al-

The period between Khatami acting as president-elect to his swearing in demonstrated a preparation for transfer of duties with a sustained agenda of positive Iranian-Saudi relations. However, what was noticeable in the Iranian discourse towards Saudi Arabia was a shift from confidence building to cooperation and unity on matters of Islamic leadership and regional security respectively. The shift within Saudi discourse on the other hand was gradual and two tiered. Overall, Fahd and Abdullah promulgated a very positive representation of Iran. In the period leading from elections to inauguration, princes such as Sultan and the editorials framed Iran in a positive light but also reflected a confidence building narrative calling on Iran to match its shift in foreign policy with actions. The aforementioned constructions and narratives are evident in the outlined section below.

#### 4.4.2.1 Khatami's election and a shift from détente to rapprochement

The telegrams exchanged on Khatami's election and subsequent press editorials ushered in a period characterised mainly by a shift from improved Iranian relations with the GCC in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, to regional security and economic cooperation, shaped by about US presence in the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia's relationship with the US, and influence on

OPEC respectively. Furthermore, Saudi editorials promulgated a 'trust but verify' narrative: *Asharq al-Awsat*, for example, explicitly stated that 'when it comes to matters of international politics, actions are always more important than statements' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997d) in reaction to Khatami's calls for closer regional relations. In an interview with the Iranian newspaper *Jomhouri Eslami*, Rafsanjani cast a similar doubt on the sustainability of Arab rapprochement. The Iranian argument for a delay in any rapprochement was attributed to external influence and colonialism, implying that although the Arab states of the Persian Gulf desired rapprochement, they were still under colonial rule and limited in their choices. Rafsanjani's argument framed the rapprochement as not 'in their (US and Britain's) favour... that these neighbouring and Islamic countries be strong', a situation where pressure or 'factors' 'aid in the destruction of negotiations with our Arab brothers.... They (Arabs) view that it is in their best interest and is imperative that we become friends and cooperate'. The GCC Rafsajani was sketching was one administered by 'colonialists that have bridgeheads *(sarpulhā)* where their colonies were once rooted.... weighing heavily on the extent to which they (colonialists) would allow these relations to be sustained and successful. It is questionable and doubtful…' (Rafsanjani 1997d).

However, the Saudi rulers' narrative lacked any doubt. Saudi Arabia sent the Minister of State Abdulaziz Khoweiter to convey that the kingdom would send 'the highest-level delegation to the OIC summit' in Tehran (*IRNA* 1997b). Khoweiter was quoted in the Iranian press as saying that the main purpose of the visit was to 'expand relations between two Muslim countries', a clear sign that the Saudi narrative was beginning to shift towards cooperation (*IRNA* 1997b). Rafsanjani argued that the visit conveyed messages of support for Iran's OIC summit, framing the summit as 'important for the Islamic World' and therefore amplifying Iran's important position in the region and Islamic world. The need for Saudi-Iranian collaboration on Islamic matters was posed in terms of Saudi 'worries regarding the situation in the Middle East and the

conference in Qatar'; the kingdom wished 'to talk a little bit more with Iran and cooperate and consult' (Rafsanjani 1997d). Rafsanjani represented the visit as reflecting the Saudi need for Iran, signalling Iran's geopolitical significance and weight, as well as progress in rapprochement with Saudi Arabia.

Of as much symbolic as economic significance, cooperation began directly after the Rafsanjani-Abdullah encounter in Islamabad. This was marked by resumption of direct flights between Tehran and Riyadh. Also, days after the Khoweiter visit major trade agreements were signed. The difference in the event's reporting was evident, with Tehran elaborating and Saudi Arabia using a more neutral tone. The Saudi press hailed the trade agreements but discussed them in general terms, highlighting the nature of the economic cooperation as including different sectors such as agriculture, transportation, food and beverages (*SPA* 1997a). The Iranian state discourse, on the other hand, discussed details. It bolstered the role of semi-state institutions, framing the Iranian-Saudi cooperation as edging on full normalisation. Iranian state media and an interview with the Iranian ambassador to Saudi Arabia discussed the cooperation as being a collaboration between the Foundation for the Deprived and War Disabled (*Bunyād-i Mustazafān va Jānbāzān*) and the Imam Reza Foundation (*Āstān-i Quds-i Razavī*), while through 'negotiations with three main Saudi trade centres a joint venture was established under the name *al-Fāʾizīn'* (The Winners)' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997e; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1997c). The Iranian discourse aimed to construct a stronger image of a new dawn in Iranian ties with the kingdom, possibly counteracting the Saudi 'actions should speak louder than words' theme promulgated by Saudi editorials (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997d, 1997j, 1997f; *al-Riyadh* 1997d; *al-Madina* 1997b) and royals such as Sultan (al-Saud 1997k).

Furthermore, there were two sides to the 'double narrative' promulgated by Sultan and the editorials. The first praised Iran's history and geopolitical importance. The second demanded

Iran prove itself to the region in general and the kingdom in particular via actions and intentions that backed up official statements. Sultan's speech towards Iran mentioned four conditions for full rapprochement with the GCC and Saudi Arabia, namely 'mutual respect... trust between both parties... and clarity in Iran's intentions and discussing differences' (al-Saud 1997k). These conditions were directly promulgated in Saudi editorials, which also added that responsibility lay with Khatami since the president 'has an unprecedented chance to return Iran to the position it rightly deserves in the international community... he has to understand that good intentions beget good intentions... good intentions have to be accompanied with direct and positive actions'. Similarly, other editorials focussed on Khatami, linking him with the formulation of a new Iranian foreign policy and Iran's global position and image, omitting any mention of Khamenei, the clergy, or even Rafsanjani. Possibly because Khamenei, and to a lesser extent Rafsanjani, especially since 1989, shared a turbulent history with the Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and GCC.

The Saudi discourse identified Khatami with a new Iran, recognising its historical and geopolitical position. The frame shifted from a mere regional neighbour to 'a neighbouring country... that has its weight in the Asian geographical region' (*al-Riyadh* 1997d), and a 'country with such a culture and history... a plurality... overlapping with other regions and peoples with different dimensions and antiquities, making Iran a centre of historical attraction' (*al-Riyadh* 1997j). The representation of Iran as a Saudi Other also shifted to include the recognition of Iran's Shi'i sect as Islamic kin, thereby underlining Islamic unity. Iran was projected as a country 'with an Islamic identity and foundation', making it of 'great importance to neighbouring states... who share mutual interests and goals with Iran'. The narrative was clear; while Iran had to prove its intentions, the Saud editorials explicitly articulated the view that the 'Arabs and Iranians are in the same boat' and any developments in Iran 'would reflect on many countries, especially those linked with Iran in many sensitive areas', a reference to

Saudi Arabia and the GCC states (*al-Riyadh* 1997j). Khatami was ubiquitous in mentions of a new era in relations, with the potential to be a 'regional power that can play a leading role in the region… [a country] where civilisation and culture is a power that allows it to have an effective presence in the Islamic world' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997f).

As *Asharq al-Awsat* clearly stated, Iran's 'only viable exit is to take notice of the benefits it could reap from sowing the seeds of good neighbourliness and trust in the Arab world where it could find an ally and friend at a time when friends and allies are rare' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997f). Consequently, the Saudi discourse discursively constructed the image of Iran as a Saudi Other through the positive framing of Khatami. That is to say, Khamenei and Rafsanjani's Iran was viewed with an air of mistrust and suspicion, whilst Khatami's Iran was accepted as a model for peace, historical and cultural prestige. The Saudi discourse went as far as implicitly defining Shi'ism through Khatami. That is to say, Khatami's representation of Shi'ism was acceptable, in contrast to that of the other pillars of the Iranian state.

#### 4.4.2.2 Iranian-Saudi Relations, Islamic Unity and the OIC Tehran Summit

The Saudi narrative of Iranian significance and geopolitical value echoed throughout the GCC. Jamil al-Hujailan, a Saudi official and also the Secretary General of the GCC promulgated the narrative of Iranian prestige, highlighting Iran as a 'big and strong neighbour...a major factor in regional stability' (Hujailan 1997b, 1997a). The newly appointed Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, began a rapprochement tour conveying Khatami's foreign policy towards the region in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. Kharrazi's discourse mirrored Saudi discursive constructions of Saudi geopolitical significance, while representing the Iranian Self through Khatami's priorities of 'expansion of relations with neighbours and regional countries' (Kharrazi 1997*)* through 'Islamic unity, understanding and friendship'. The extolling of Saudi Arabia's regional importance paved the way to a discussion of 'economic cooperation with

Saudi Arabia... that [will] lead to economic prosperity, preserving the interests of the region and the Islamic world' (Kharrazi 1997). It can therefore be argued that since Iran's economy and inflation were a cause for concern after a lengthy war and low oil prices, the aforementioned Iranian discursive construction of Saudi Arabia was being utilised to alleviate economic pressures. The Saudi response was welcoming, supporting Iran's narrative of cooperation and Islamic solidarity. However, it stopped short of explicitly announcing the nature of the cooperation. Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, explicitly highlighted that any cooperation with Iran would have a 'positive impact on the region' (al-Faisal 1997), supporting the monarch and crown prince's rapprochement with Iran, and also dispelling previous doubts by Saudi ministers and editorials regarding Iranian statements of a 'new chapter' in their relations with the kingdom.

Conservative and hard-line Iranian editorials were generally silent on the Kharrazi GCC tour. However, an editorial published by *Jomhour Eslami* criticised the GCC and Saudi demands for 'good intentions' and actions (*husn-i niyat*) (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997e). The editorial argued that 'one sided good intentions without reciprocation can hurt the regional position of the Islamic Republic', implicitly constructing an image of regional and Saudi treachery. The editorial supported this framing by reminding the audience that it was the 'GCC that amassed the largest funding for Baghdad's war machine over the eight-year war... reaching $80 billion... the ramifications are still experienced to this day' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997e). The Iranian editorial narrative constructed the GCC as 'not showing any good intentions towards the Islamic Republic after the war,' requesting Iran to 'experience political vigilance and tactfulness' in their new foreign policy (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997e). Therefore, it could be said that whilst the state narrative constructed a narrative of unity and cooperation in its discourse, the editorial press, i.e. the message disseminated against the mirror image of the Saudi press, cast doubts on future relations and intentions of the Other.

*4.4.2.2.1 Saudi-Iranian Representation of Each Other at the OIC*

There is no doubt that in the mid-1990s Iran, led by Rafsanjani, worked tirelessly to ensure that the OIC summit would take place in Iran. The former president suggested that 'the role played by Crown Prince Abdullah led to the success of the conference' (Rafsanjani 1998a). It can therefore be argued that it was the role the Saudi government and Abdullah played that allowed for him to be the centre of attention among thirty heads of state. Al-Sultan (2016) and Keynoush (2016) argue that the Iranian leadership went as far as to break protocol. Both Iranian and Saudi state press emphasised how Khatami received Abdullah at the airport rather than his vice president, including ensuring that the Green Palace, once the home of the Shah's mother was offered as the crown prince's residence. His first statement was a narrative of Islamic unity and settling differences: 'fulfilling Islamic unity creates a presence for Islamic countries and nations, [while] absorbing the clear differences and disputes in our Islamic home' (al-Saud 1997b). A clear echo of previous statements made by Rafsanjani (Rafsanjani 1997e) and Khamenei (Khamenei 1997c) were exemplified in Islamic Unity Week, where the former constructed Islamic unity as a basis for 'greater control over oil' and the creation of 'a strong Islamic economy', with the latter representing unity as between 'Sunni and Shia', whereas a definition of unity included 'the prevention of struggles, fights and also insulting one another's sacred symbols by different sects'.

The Iranian elite's representation of Saudi Arabia at the OIC summit was reflected only in the meetings between Abdullah, his Iranian counterparts, and through press conferences. Furthermore, the Saudi Iranian narrative focussed on Islamic unity and cooperation. However, the difference in the representation lay not in the positive overture and statements that both states made towards each other, but in the detail of the cooperation. Abdullah's meeting with

Khamenei exhibited a shift in the supreme leader's representation of Saudi Arabia. According to Khamenei, Saudi Arabia was framed in a fraternal light, where both states should make 'serious attempts to strengthen the brotherly ties... ultimately resulting in the benefit and felicity of Islam and Muslims', with 'most of the problems in the Islamic world' – i.e. issues with Saudi Arabia and the GCC – 'fabricated and produced by enemies'. Khamenei's shift in tone towards Saudi Arabia highlighted his willingness to begin a new phase of cooperation, a partnership and 'understanding between influential countries', recognising Saudi Arabia as an equal, and therefore a co-leader would see 'the problems of the Islamic Ummah... solved [through the] expansion of communication and cooperation', while pledging that 'Iran is committed to the expansion of its ties with Saudi Arabia in various fields' (Khamenei 1997b), yet stopping short of clarifying these fields of cooperation.

Building on his statement of 'friendship... increasing the spirit of concord and cooperation' and the importance of expanding relations with Saudi Arabia, the Saudi-Iranian partnership would include 'a common understanding of the political, economic, technical and cultural resources and potentials of Islamic countries'. The Iranian narrative now framed Saudi Arabia as a potential partner in Islamic leadership, helping 'Muslim countries to overcome their problems' (Rafsanjani 1997f).

The third tier of Iranian representation of Saudi Arabia was apparent in Khatami's statements at a meeting with Abdullah. Khatami's discourse represented cooperation and unity as one between 'two great countries,' stressing its necessity since an 'understanding between the two countries would aid the Islamic world'. Similarly, in a subsequent press conference, Khatami's discourse explicitly argued that 'good relations with Saudi Arabia is in our interest as well as that of other regional states' (Khatami 1997b). Khatami projected a discourse that fitted with his notion of a 'Dialogue among Civilisations,' representing rapprochement as a determining

factor that ‘would guarantee the glory of our two countries’. Furthermore – and contrary to Rafsanjani and Khamenei – Khatami also suggested a recipe for such cooperation: ‘The secret to the success of the Islamic world lies in two fundamental criteria, thought and opinion on the one hand, and understanding and solidarity on the other’ (Khatami 1997e). Consequently, it could be deduced from the discourse of the three main elites that while Khamenei expressed the broad lines of cooperation in this rapprochement, Rafsanjani filled in the details in his statements, and Khatami executed the new relationship through political philosophy, understanding and solidarity.

The Saudi utilisation of Islamic unity was framed by their grievances and terrorist attacks on the kingdom, especially after the Khobar bombings. Abdullah’s utilisation of the Islamic unity mantra, gave rise to two main tropes, the use of terrorism as a means to form an Islamic state, and accepting the other’s beliefs, a clear reference to Sunni-Shi’i differences. Referring to the ‘heinous crimes being committed in the name of Islam... in the Kingdom’ (al-Saud 1997d), Abdullah represented Saudi Arabia as a victim of ‘killers, who slit throats... mutilate dead bodies,’ thus uniting the Islamic world around Saudi Arabia in condemning ‘any savage, barbaric and immoral act... harming the ideals of Islam’ (al-Saud 1997d). In sectarian unity and accepting the Shi’a as their Other, Abdullah mirrored and promulgated Khamenei’s previous statements on ‘Islamic Unity Week’, underlining that ‘a common approach and single interpretation to jurisprudence is not natural’ in Islam while contending that ‘differences are not to be employed as a pretext for hegemony’ (al-Saud 1997d). It can therefore be argued that through his statements, Abdullah’s request of accepting the differences between Islamic schools, he implicitly asked the world to also accept the Shi’a as an Islamic schools of though and therefore tacitly requesting that Iran be accepted as an equal in the Arab and Islamic world.

It can also be contended that Abdullah's statements, requests for cooperation and unity and manoeuvres were aimed at serving more than one purpose. First, they were intended to rescue the dwindling economies of both states. Second, there was the issue of 'keeping Iraq in check' (Cordesman, 2003: 45) due to fears of a hegemonic Saddam. Third, this was an attempt at mediating between Iran and the US to deter any American attack on Iran that could spill over to the GCC and Saudi Arabia in particular. Abdullah's statements clearly constructed how the Saudi Self characterised its Other, with Saudi Arabia as the Self, the 'brother to the Iranian nation and leadership... and friends to the US, a great and friendly country' (al-Saud 1997a). It can be argued that these statements attempted to balance Iran the US, which can be supported by Cordesman's (2003:46) observation that Abdullah 'was careful to qualify his remarks [which] aimed to deter any US attack on Iran if the latter was implicated in the Khobar bombings'. Furthermore, the Saudi discourse attempted to construct an image of power to be communicated to the Clinton administration. By offering to mediate with Iran, and labelling Saudi Arabia as a significant player, the kingdom would be a partner in 'this sensitive part of the world... contributing to the region's security and stability' (al-Saud 1997a).

Both Saudi and Iranian editorials covered the OIC Tehran summit. Whilst there were similarities in the themes covered, the difference lay in the overall message communicated to the audience. The main themes promulgated in the Saudi and Iranian editorial discourse focussed on Islamic unity, cooperation and economic trade, highlighting the importance of the summit amid regional tensions such as Palestine and the Arab peace process with Israel, terrorism, and unified Islamic trade mechanisms for OIC member states. Furthermore, whilst the Saudi editorials praised Iran and its leadership, the Iranian editorials in general made no explicit mention of Saudi Arabia, but referred to the Islamic world in general. This may be explained in light of the sober feelings of the Iranian public towards Saudi and GCC support for Saddam during the eight-year war, and the Iranian apparatus risking a backlash from the

public at a time where the state was experiencing economic and domestic challenges. Another factor is that for Saudi Arabia, the OIC Tehran summit was all about Iran, which was hosting the OIC for the first time in a very long time, whereas for Iran, which was the host, it was imperative to emphasise the summit's significance for relations with all the Islamic states that took part and were guests in Tehran.

It is also necessary to underline that another noticeable difference between both states' editorial discourse included their reference to the success of the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement and the OIC summit. The Saudi editorials attributed Iran's fresh start in the foreign policy arena and the success of the summit to Khatami, while conservative and hard-line Iranian editorials focussed on Khamenei and his role as supreme leader. A rational explanation would be that the Saudi state viewed Khatami as a more moderate figure, following in the footsteps of Rafsanjani, whereas Khamenei was viewed as a hardliner, known for his rhetoric and stance towards Saudi Arabia and the GCC states since his tenure as Friday prayer Imam and president in the early days of the revolution.

Focussing on Khamenei's speech at the OIC summit, the editorials constructed a trope of Islamic unity and cooperation through three main frames. First, that the flag bearer of Islamic unity had always been Iran since the advent of the Islamic revolution in 1979, attributing the leadership of such a unity to Khomeini, with Khamenei following in his path (*Kayhan* 1997c; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1997d; *Resalat* 1997b). No mention of Saudi Arabia was made when referring to the notion of Islamic unity and cooperation, but to a general Islamic world in general. Second, discussion of Islamic unity was represented through the Iranian notion of '*Islām-i nāb*' (Pure Islam) (*Kayhan* 1997a; *Resalat* 1997b), that Iranian discourse had been promulgated since 1979, and it reflected the prestige of the Iranian revolution and system as the real path undertaken by Khomeini. Therefore, the Iranian editorials built on this and

labelled Iran a 'model for the Islamic world to emulate' (*Kayhan* 1997a, 1997d) and as the 'flagship for the revival of Islam' (*parchamdār-i ʾiḥyā-yi Islām*) and Islamic unity (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997d). The third frame represented an image of forgiveness and good Islamic conduct. An Iranian editorial (*Jomhouri Eslami* 1997a) argued that Iran had 'forgiven the past and demonstrated brotherly relations' with all states, implicitly referring to the GCC and Saudi Arabia for their support for Saddam in the Iran-Iraq war. Consequently, where Saudi editorial discourse discussed their monarch's views of Iran, the notion of Islamic unity and cooperation, as well as the success of the OIC summit and rapprochement given Khatami's statements, Iran's editorial discourse did the opposite. Islamic unity and cooperation were represented as a fundamental Iranian ideal, with the Iranian system the 'pure Islam,' implying that Saudi Arabia had just woken up to this and was following in Iran's footsteps.

The Saudi editorials were overall supportive of the OIC summit, promulgating tropes of Islamic unity and cooperation. Furthermore, the OIC summit was referred to as the 'Tehran Summit' (*Qimat Tahrān*), initially questioning the success of the summit and its outcomes but later praising it as a success for Iran. Prior to the conference's start, *al-Riyadh* and *Asharq al-Awsat* questioned the achievements of previous summits since the OIC's establishment in 1969, marking them as failing to address major goals while only fulfilling minor ones (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997i). The doubt cast on the 'Tehran Summit' constructed an image of Iran that undertook a very complex task with 'negative realities, first of which is trade... the second is that the 55 members of the OIC are involved in disputes with each other... in addition to not having a common Islamic stance on any major issue in the international arena' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997i), including the question of 'terrorism and the distortion of the image of Islam' (*al-Riyadh* 1997l).

It is important to mention that the editorial discourse representing the OIC summit emphasised rapprochement in Saudi-Iranian relations, discursively constructing the Iranian Other as having moved away from its hegemonic ambitions. *Al-Riyadh,* for example, explicitly argued that Khatami's Iran appreciated its 'responsibility... and greater balance between its personal ambitions and its wide vision of the Islamic world' (*al-Riyadh* 1997k). Implicit constructions of accepting sectarian differences were also a major trope in Saudi editorial discourse. In defining the Saudi Self through Abdullah's narrative of mutual respect and understanding, the Other was discursively constructed as a 'partner' by virtue of 'humanity, belief and geography', therefore praising the Saudi Self that would consequentially praise Iran. The Self was constructed discursively as tolerant and accepting of the Other, whilst Iran was implicitly constructed as a regional and fraternal partner on the basis of mutual respect and Islamic unity and cooperation (*al-Riyadh* 1997h). Similarly, Abdullah's offer of mediation between Iran and the US was also deployed in Saudi newspapers. Khatami's opinion of the West as representing 'achievements present in civilised Western society' was praised in *Asharq al-Awsat* (1997a). This praise constructing the Iranian Other as oppressed by a US that failed to recognise Iran's 'right... to choose its system according to its culture and traditions' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997a). This is clearly in line with Abdullah's idea of an 'Iranian brother' and 'American friend', and more importantly marks a clear shift from the previous Saudi narrative that the Iranians were forced to accept a fanatical regime.

As the summit ended, the Saudi newspapers shifted their narrative from doubt to complete affirmation of its success. The term 'Tehran Summit' was therefore synonymous with success. The articles argued that it could be labelled 'as an important success for the Islamic world,' representing it as unique event where for the first time 'all opinions voiced focussed on the main topics... succeeding contrary to the expectations of all those betting on the summit's failure' (*al-Riyadh* 1997g), implicitly referring to Israel and the US. Furthermore, Iran was

framed as tactful and diplomatically experienced and able to breach the differences between 55 states, 'reaching total consensus on 142 resolutions in a wording agreed by every state' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997h). This gave rise to two more constructions attributed to the term 'Tehran Summit'. First, that Iran was a responsible Islamic nation calling for cooperation while managing to unify Islamic states' stance towards Middle East peace efforts, 'regardless of the different regimes... and difference in opinion'. Second, by stressing the summit's success in raising issues of 'Gulf security or terrorism', Iran was represented as a part of the Persian Gulf's security network, an issue it continuously raised with Saudi Arabia and other GCC states.

These discursive constructions consequently allowed Iran to be viewed as a unifier of the Islamic states, which were in transformation from being weak third world countries to becoming a power respected by the first world: 'the Islamic world is ready to adopt a unified language towards its shared problems... to convert to being a major player in any international equation... and to develop into an effective international mass capable of exceeding the western understanding of it as third world with a fate, to a great extent, dependent on the decisions of the first world' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1997h). The Saudi discourse therefore mirrored Iran's narrative, promulgated since 1979 by Khomeini, Rafsanjani and Khamenei, where united Islamic states could be an independent force to be recognised, respected and reckoned with. Saudi editorials' discourse echoed the Iranian revolutionary vision of independence from the West, while the Islamic world could be a market for energy and vital resources with leverage over the first world. By echoing Iranian discourse of independence and Islamic strength, the Saudi Self was equal to the Iranian Other, sharing similar phrases, narrative and rhetoric.

#### 4.4.2.3 Elite Visits and Mutual Cooperation

The period after the OIC summit witnessed a range of bridge building visits that led to regular ministerial exchanges between the two states. However, two primary visits from Iran, and two

from Saudi Arabia allowed for enhanced cooperation on the one hand and the cementing of the relationships on another. Rafsanjani's historic visit to Saudi Arabia in February 1998 witnessed negotiations with different pillars of the Saudi state, focussing on economic cooperation and security, especially at a time when oil prices were at their lowest and there was an increased US military build-up in the region in preparation for an attack on Saddam. Furthermore, Rafsanjani's visit was ushered in with the signing of an agreement in May 1998 in Tehran, which the Saudi foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, attended. On the parliamentary level, the speakers of the Saudi Shura Council and the Iranian Majles exchanged visits in November 1998 and October 1999 respectively. However, the second set of historic visits were in May 1999 by the Saudi defence minister Sultan bin Abdul Aziz followed shortly by Khatami. These exchanges were followed by further agreements regarding energy production, the expansion of investment, cultural and sports relations, and the establishment of military ties through the exchange of military attachés. This section will discuss how Saudi and Iranian discourse represented each other, with a focus on a shift from a narrative of Islamic unity, and confidence building, to one of cooperation and expansion of relations.

*4.4.2.3.1 Rafsanjani's landmark visit to Saudi Arabia, OPEC and Economic Agreements*

The Iranian visit aimed at building bridges with every dimension of the Saudi establishment. One such area of vital interest and necessity to both states was the matter of OPEC and the low and steadily falling oil prices that affected the economies of both states. Iran's majles held the Khatami government accountable for not being able to stabilise oil prices. This resulted in further pressure on Khatami's government, his economic agenda, and in essence on the reconstruction path paved by Rafsanjani since 1989. The Majles gave Iran's oil minister an ultimatum; either increase oil prices or 'consider a withdrawal from OPEC' (Zanganeh 1998).

Iran was more negatively affected by low oil prices than Saudi Arabia, especially in the light of its difficulties in raising production to fulfil its OPEC quota, and therefore in greater need of Saudi cooperation than was Saudi Arabia in need of Iran. Furthermore, due to 'current circumstances in the region' (*IRNA* 1998a), the meetings were also of benefit to Saudi Arabia. In addition to oil prices, Saudi interests towards Iran also included a balance of power to deter any Iranian collaboration with Iraq, especially as the US was threatening to strike Iraq on the one hand, while the Saudis did not wish to risk isolation or diminished power if Iranian-US détente was achieved thanks to Khatami's moderate government and foreign policy of détente and rapprochement.

The Iranian and Saudi discourses also represented the visit, that is to say, the expansion of ties and cooperation, differently. The various news outlets in each country also differed from one another in their narratives and constructions of the details of the visit. Where Iranian discourse went to great lengths to describe all the details, the Saudi narrative maintained a general line, releasing sporadic details. One such example is with the way the visit was framed. In preparation for Rafsanjani's visit, the Iranian state narrative framed the visit as 'serving a turning point in relations' between the two states (*IRNA* 1998a). On his meeting with the Saudi monarch and crown prince, Iran's attempt at rapprochement followed its previous mantra that 'improved relations that would benefit the Islamic world', blaming any previous hostilities as a Western conspiracy as 'enemies have long aimed at constantly setting Iran against Saudi Arabia'. Rafsanjani's remarks further alluded to two additional lines of cooperation that Iran desired, namely regarding security and oil. The former was implicitly alluded to by attributing Middle Eastern crises such as the Iran-Iraq war, the invasion of Kuwait, and foreign military bases to severed ties between the two states, and the latter achievable by 'cooperation in OPEC... leading to more efficient use' of oil revenue, signalling increased leverage in the international oil market and joint leadership of the Islamic world (Rafsanjani 1998b).

Iranian state media cited Saudi sources that highlight Fahd's welcoming of the Rafsanjani. The Iranian media resonated the Saudi narrative, positively echoing the air of solidarity at Rafsanjani's request. Iranian state media, framed the relationship between the two states by citing Saudi sources. Fahd, for example, was quoted as instructing the oil ministry to cooperate with Iran (al-Saud 1998), in an attempt to frame a Saudi desire to strengthen relations with Iran. The difference in the construction of the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia is also evident in Rafsanjani's interviews with the newspapers. In an interview with the liberal leaning Saudi Newspaper *Okaz*, Rafsanjani discursively constructed the Other as an equal in terms of fate, economic gains, and mutual benefits. Saudi Arabia as an Other was an equal to the Self, where if one sows, both reap. This is exemplified in Rafsanjani's argument that Iran could act as a 'bridge with Central Asia...for exporting Saudi products', in addition to a common 'market for industrial and non-industrial goods' (*Okaz* 1998).

The desire for an expansion of relations with Saudi Arabia was also exemplified in Rafsanjani's speech at the Saudi Shura Council. Elaborating on Iran's historical identity and prestige and juxtaposing it to the role of Saudi Arabia in Islam, Rafsanjani's speech framed Iran and Saudi Arabia as equals. By employing a historical and Islamic narrative, Rafsanjani highlighted the historical prestige of the Iranian Self as a 'powerful country with an ancient civilization'. Saudi Arabia as Iran's Other was represented as an equal, referring to it as a 'source of divine gifts, birthplace of the Prophet, and the land of divine revelation and the Quran'. This construction went as far as explicitly representing Saudi Islamic prestige and source of divinity as eternal, one that would 'continue until the day of resurrection' (Rafsanjani 1998b). It can be argued that this speech to the Saudi Shura Council was to propagate the image of a revolutionary Iran entering a new phase, communicating the wishes of Khatami and the Islamic Republic to the Saudi elite, and admitting that the kingdom was a powerful state and that Iran needed its cooperation.

Rafsanjani also aimed at bridge-building with the clerical establishment, meeting with Abdelaziz ibn Baz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia. However, there were no details of their discussions published in either Saudi or Iranian discourses. Furthermore, an overall silence by the Saudi clergy eclipsed the historic visit, except for a single incident that explicitly criticised Iran, Shi'ism and Western conspiracies against Islam and Saudi Arabia. The sectarian narrative by Sheikh Ali ibn Abdurrahman al-Huthaify, the imam of the Great Mosque of Medina, was the first sign of explicit denigration of Iran since the two states aimed at rapprochement. It is this author's opinion that, similar to Iran, there was a 'split personality' in the Saudi establishment, one which was also aimed at US and Western imperialism. However, what differed was that although the Saudi religious establishment was silent, al-Huthaify's vociferous opinion characterised Iran as Saudi Arabia's Other. As I discuss below, the response from Iran was a complete *volte face* compared to the norms of the 1980s. This could be characterised as a sign of maturity on the part of the Iranian clerical establishment, which was now capable of a composed neutrality and silence, and in this case positive opinions of Saudi Arabia and its ulama.

While the sermon denigrated and insulted Iran and the Shi'a sect, it also criticised the efforts of the Saudi state in general and the crown prince, Abdullah, in particular. Utilising sectarian and historic tropes, the Iranians and Shi'i as were characterised as 'followers of Ibn Saba[3], the Jew, and of Abu Lu'lu-ah, the *majūsī* (Zoroastrian or Fire-Worshiper)' (Huthayfi 1998). In a set of rhetorical questions asking 'How can there be reconciliation the Sunnis and the *rāfiḍah* (Shi'a)?' the cleric propagated a sectarian Wahhabi narrative intertwining Shi'i beliefs with Khomeini's role as *valī-yi faqīh*, accusing the Shi'a of 'swearing and abusing the three

[3] Abdullah ibn Sabaʾ was a Jewish convert to Islam of Yemenite origin. Ibn Sabaʾs origins and political role are controversial and contested in early sources. The general view is that his he attributed extremist ideas of Ali's divinity and divine appointment known as *ghuluw*, advocating that Ali's relationship to Mohammad was as close as Aron's relationship to Moses. Also, he propagated the belief that Ali was not dead and would be resurrected to bring righteousness and justice on earth (Oxford Dictionary of Islam).

Caliphs', and creating a narrative of heresy, claiming the Shi'a 'believe Khomeini, the Imam of deviation, to be infallible... and [to be] the deputy of their (Shi'a) concocted Mahdi' (Huthayfi 1998). To Huthayfi, Shi'ism was a heresy, while Iran and its government were therefore leading a world heresy antagonistic to Islam.

Furthermore, in criticising calls for Islamic unity, al-Huthayfi explicitly shunned the thought, claiming that 'we (the Sunnis) will not draw closer to them by a length of a breath,' going so far as to label them as constituting 'greater harm to Islam then even Jews and Christians'. It is here where the 'split personality' between the monarchy and a member of the religious establishment is evident. In addition, the sermon also censured the US and Western powers as aligned with the Shi'a, while 'enemies of Islam have united in their false beliefs to fight against Islam'. Depicting Saudi Arabia as the 'only representative, model Islamic government', the senior cleric claimed on live television that the US and world powers were the sworn enemies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the greatest centre of Islam. Recalling a sermon from Tehran, the Saudi cleric mirrored Iranian clerical discourse preaching that 'America and Britain are... threatening the kingdom's survival and safety... their blatant enmity, evil intentions, destructive intentions in Saudi Arabia have now become clear, are now common knowledge' (Huthayfi 1998).

The Saudi discourse did not comment or criticise the actions of the cleric. However, Iranian media reported that crown prince Abdullah apologised to Rafsanjani, and dismissed al-Huthayfi from the position he had held since 1979 (*al-Madina* 1998; *Jomhouri Eslami* 1998b). al-Sultan and Saeed (2016: 102) argue that the dismissal of Huthayfi was to appease Rafsanjani. However, it is important to mention that the sermon did not only criticise Iran and Shi'ism, it called into question the overtures of the Saudi state and its moves to establish rapprochement. The rise in fundamentalism preached by Bin Laden and the al-Sahwa clerics against the

monarchy and the US in terms of foreign presence in the kingdom was also an issue that the sermon might have exacerbated. Iranian silence could also be seen in the light of the severe challenges facing Tehran at that time, especially regarding OPEC oil prices, a rise in US military presence in the region, and the need for Saudi cooperation in resuming relations with other regional states, especially the GCC.

As discussed previously, the Iranian clerical response to the Huthayfi incident marked a complete shift from Iran's Khomeini-era polarising rhetoric. Iran's construction of Saudi Arabia no longer emphasised its 'Otherness', but rather used tropes of Islamic unity and a promulgation of the state narrative. Two Friday sermons in Iran displayed a positive response to the incident in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia as an Other was constructed in light of Iran's 'neighbours across the Persian Gulf', explicitly calling for rapprochement and efforts 'to overcome their differences'. Even the ultra-conservative Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati argued for 'stronger ties between the region's two economic and political powers' (Jannati 1998a). It can be argued that, similar to Saudi Arabia, the Iranian positive representation of its Other reflected an attempt to change its image as projected to regional and Islamic states.

The Iranian ulama also took on a softer narrative in response to the Saudi Friday prayer incident. Following the state line, the cleric praised the trip as 'good... except for the incident at the Friday prayers', relating the incident to 'differences with Saudi Arabia in the past that cannot remain' ongoing, whereas a state that was once constructed as an enemy of the revolution, were now 'Muslim brothers' with the two states' need to rise from 'slumber and unite' (Jannati 1998a). The second sermon, led by Emami-Kashani, a conservative cleric that has often stood in opposition to reform, represented the Saudi ulama in a positive light, isolating the incident as a deviant cleric who did not represent the mainstream Saudi clerical institution. Emami-Kashani observed that the 'Saudi ulama have said that we should unite as

brothers, especially since the Islamic world is increasing its awakeness and awareness day by day', explicitly referring to the Huthayfi denigration of the Shi'a and Iran as an action by 'ignorant and hired people' while the Islamic world as well as the Saudi ulama's position in the Islamic world would 'achieve more homogeneity... due to the lashes suffered... at the hands of global arrogance' (Emami-Kashani 1998).

It is my contention here, therefore, that the shift in Iran's narrative towards Saudi Arabia was due to a holistic line adopted by all the pillars of the state. Iran, with Khamenei at the helm, the executive and legislative branches, as well as the clerical establishment, were in total synchrony, understanding that rapprochement and constructive bridge-building with Saudi Arabia could lead to a very much needed positive outcome.

*4.4.2.3.2 Sultan and Khatami Visits: Iranian Requests of Security and Defence Cooperation*

In November 1998, the head of the Saudi Shura Council, Sheikh Mohammed bin Jubair, visited Iran with the aim of establishing an 'Inter-Parliamentary Union, intended to strengthen cooperation among Muslims and enhance unity among them' (*IRNA* 1998b; *SPA* 1998). It is interesting to note once again that there was a difference between the Saudi and Iranian dissemination of details of the visit. The Iranian state media published detailed statements and quotes from both the Iranian and Saudi speakers, however, the Saudi state media discussed them briefly. One such example includes the remarks of both speakers on the arrival of the Saudi official and how they respectively represented their relationship. Propagating a narrative of Islamic unity and the expansion of cooperation and relations between the two states, Iranian discourse constructed the relationship as a 'historical and cultural bond', with the Saudi speaker mimicking the Iranian discourse, stressing the 'historical record of relations' and censuring the 'enemies of Islam [aiming to] weaken the Islamic world by seeking sedition... and discord

between Sunnis and Shi'is' (*IRNA* 1998b). However, Saudi discourse pushed the state narrative of 'cooperation in all sectors... keeping contact between the two councils... in the best interest of Iran and the kingdom' (*SPA* 1998). Whereas the Iranians attempted to frame their rapprochement with the Saudis as prestigious and built on historic ties, the Saudis displayed a cool and cautious response. This can be analysed in light of the Saudi domestic Wahhabi narrative that viewed the Shi'a as heretics, although the state had called for Islamic unity and recognising Iran as a Muslim neighbour. In addition, no Saudi editorials discussed the momentous visit by the Saudi Shura Council speaker. Consequently, it is possible that the Saudi state acknowledged that while a rapprochement with Iran was critical, the Saudi populace need not be privy to the details, particularly since a narrative of Shi'i acceptance after the explicit public denigration of the Shi'a by a leading Friday Imam in Medina might underline tensions between the monarchy and the religious establishment.

In May 1999, the Saudi defence minister, Sultan bin Adbulaziz visited Tehran in what was thought to be talks regarding a 'mutual non-aggression pact' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 1999). Similar to the aforementioned visit by the Saudi Shura Council speaker, disparities in the statements were evident on two fronts. First, whereas the Iranians shed light on details and statements of their elites and officials, the Saudis did not. Second, the Saudi state narrative and media constructed the visit as based on Iranian aspirations and desire for rapprochement, reflecting an image of Saudi strength and power, with Iran petitioning for Saudi assistance. Following the mantra of 'brotherly Muslim relations' between the two states, Sultan would not elaborate as to the precise reason for, or topics to be discussed during, his visit, arguing that he was 'leaving the agenda to the president and other Iranian officials... everything will be discussed in faithfulness and honesty' (al-Saud 1999a). Sultan's Iranian counterpart, the vice president, explicitly mentioned that the visit was to 'promote bilateral economic, cultural, defence-related and technical relations' (*SPA* 1999).

Furthermore, the Iranian elite discourse was uniform in its positive constructions. In Sultan's meetings with Khamenei, Khatami, and Rafsanjani, discussions revolved around a security pact, where both 'strong regional powers could have a decisive role in regional security' (Khatami 1999a). Khamenei and Rafsanjani constructed an image of regional unity and a common threat. On the other hand, Khatami constructed an image of Saudi Arabian prestige when making a case for the pact. It can also be argued that the narratives were layered, and this may be related to the relationship each of the Iranian pillars had with the Saudi state. That is to say, Khamenei employed an implicit appeal, Rafsanjani made a more explicit argument through energy and the economy, while Khatami utilised culture and prestige to satisfy his Saudi counterpart.

Khamenei did not explicitly request a security pact, but framed the issue in terms of a 'strengthening of ties... serving the interests of both nations... the two sides should concentrate their bilateral cooperation issues of the Persian Gulf' regardless of 'foreign forces... which create insecurity' (Khamenei 1999). Rafsanjani, on the other hand, interweaved the success of Iranian-Saudi collaboration in OPEC with a need for further expansion of relations. The former president employed a demonising narrative, representing foreign troops in the Persian Gulf as 'demons with many tricks' whose aim was to 'undermine Islamic unity and expand their illegitimate presence in the region' (Rafsanjani 1999). A construction of mutual fate was also made. The Self and Other were intertwined while setbacks in the relations of both states were due to US troops in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the Self and Other had a mutual enemy, or a mutual Other, the US. Khatami, on the other hand, employed a narrative of prestige and Islamic leadership of Saudi Arabia in his argument for a bilateral security agreement. The president emphasised the significant position of Saudi Arabia as it housed the 'Holy Shrine, the heart of the Islamic world; and therefore the source of Islam with Iran as one of the 'locations of the development and expansion of Islam' (Khatami 1999c). Khatami's argument was that since the

‘Persian Gulf region is one of the most important strategic areas in the world... it contains many talents that are worth developing... security is a condition for growth... and cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia can accomplish sustainable regional security’ (Khatami 1999c).

The Saudi response was cautious and an example of a protocol response of thanks and gratitude for hospitality. Sultan’s message to the Iranians underlined Saudi desire to ‘expand relations in various fields [thereby] serving the interests of the Islamic world’. By stressing the importance of a ‘unified position... to save oil prices’ from declining and signing a memorandum of understanding concerning aviation links and logistics, the Saudis put forward their vision of collaboration. In public, when pressed on the question of regional security cooperation and the US, Sultan’s argument was that ‘America... is a friend to everyone’ and that ‘no problems exist between Iran, Saudi Arabia and the US’ (al-Saud 1999b).

This may confirm statements Ali Shamkhani, the Iranian defence minister, made, namely arguing that Sultan had assured him at a private meeting that the ‘kingdom is not linked to a military alliance with the US,’ reminding Iran that the US is present on Saudi soil ‘under a UN Security Council agreement’. Shamkhani opined that Sultan confirmed that Iranian requests for ‘military, regional and Islamic cooperation were possible if matters progressed as they have’ since their rapprochement (Shamkhani 1999). However, his public statement on any potential defence pact with Iran was an explicit negation, emphasising that ‘discussions were fraternal’ based on ‘rapprochement and transparency’, alluding to the building of trust requiring ‘long periods in order to build sound foundations’. Consequently, the Saudi public position at this stage was clear: trust and time were major factors, the US was a friend, therefore there were no regional threats, and Iran would have to build on that trust to allow for such sensitive agreements. In public, Sultan represented the Iranian Other as a new-found friend, one that Saudi could do business with, but not form a strategic partnership with as yet. This may have

been to assure the GCC and Western allies that the kingdom was not shifting camps to Iran any time soon.

Shortly after Sultan's visit, Khatami made a landmark trip to Saudi Arabia, honouring an invitation extended to him by crown prince Abdullah after the OIC summit in Tehran. On 15 May 1999, Khatami visited Saudi Arabia for ten days, making it the first time an Iranian head of state had visited the kingdom since 1979. Akhavan-Kazemi, (2000: 134-135) argues that Khatami's visit was auspicious in that an ailing Fahd greeted the president on his arrival at the airport. Extensive talks were held with Fahd, Abdullah and Saud al-Faisal, once again promulgating the narrative of collaboration and expansion of ties, the call for more cooperation in OPEC to stabilise oil prices and, most importantly, a proposal for a regional security agreement. Citing the rapprochement and positive relations since 1997, Khatami framed a security agreement as the 'most important factor for the countries of the region' and that the only way this collaboration could be achieved and respected, was 'through the spirit of mutual respect and shared interests' (Khatami 1999d). The Iranian representation of Saudi Arabia was on the basis of a collaboration guaranteeing the 'security of the region, which includes the world's largest vital route' while this route's safety 'depends on the security of our brothers and our neighbours in the region' and consequently a security pact in this regard could 'benefit the two countries... and the Islamic world' (Khatami 1999b).

The Saudi response was based on a gesture and explicit responses, all alluding to Iran removing the final hurdle in its rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. Fahd decorated Khatami with the 'Chain of Badr' of the 'Order of King Abdulaziz', the highest Saudi Arabian honour to be awarded to a Muslim world leader. Furthermore, Khatami's argument was accepted by Fahd and his overtures deemed the 'doors now open to both countries and open to us and you'. Fahd, defined the relationship between the two states as a personal one. Khatami was now Iran, as

Saudi Arabia was the al-Saud family. That is to say, the Saudis represented Iran in the personality of Khatami. Crown Prince Abdullah expressed the view that the 'security of Saudi Arabia was the security of Iran, as the security of Iran was Saudi Arabia's' while Khatami's presence was a source of 'joy to King Fahd, the country and the people' (Khatami 1999b). Even the cautious and guarded Saudi foreign minister shared his elders' view. President Khatami represented 'a bright face of Iran in the world and I fully support this policy' (al-Faisal 1999; Khatami 1999e) while the issue of regional security was also raised. al-Faisal stated that the 'two countries, after the discussions between the two leaderships, have built the confidence required for all sensitive issues'. Consequently, Khatami was framed as the bridge of trust required by Saudi Arabia in terms of its relationship with Iran and, since the Saudi administration confirmed that no outstanding sensitive issues remained, that meant that a regional security agreement was possible.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The chapter proposed a central argument, namely that domestic and external forces were essential to Saudi-Iranian détente and rapprochement. These included Iran's vulnerable economy, domestic turbulence, regional security threats such as Saddam, and an increased US military presence. In turn, these influenced Saudi-Iranian representations of the Self and Other. This marked a significant shift from the 1980s, when the export of the revolution and competition over Islamic and regional leadership were the main factors influencing Saudi-Iranian relations. Similarly, Iranian-Saudi representation of the Self and Other during the Ahmadinejad period would signify a return to denigrating rhetoric that recalled the early post-revolutionary period, mainly due to the return of Saudi fears of Iranian regional expansion as

a result of the fall of Saddam in 2003 alongside the rise of Hezbollah and Hamas in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories respectively.

The chapter puts forward four main arguments. First, the Iranian establishment was divided in terms of Western rapprochement, especially with the US, but united in its stance towards the region in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. This gave rise to a 'split personality', defined by Khamenei's views of détente versus Khatami's 'Dialogue of civilisations', or a revolutionary image versus a diplomatic one. Second, Iranian-Saudi representations of the Other was shrouded by neutrality and silence. An Iranian shift in the representation of the Other signified a move away from the early revolutionary upheaval of the Islamic Republic, to the considered stances of the Rafsanjani-Khatami era. Conversely, Saudi's tactful representation of the Iranian Other was a consequence of domestic and external threats, such as a rise in terrorism, a weak economy, and a belligerent Iraq. Third, the analysis has shown that Iranian-Saudi Othering evolved as the states' relations shifted from détente during the Rafsanjani presidency to rapprochement during the Khatami tenure. This allowed for narratives and Othering to shift from confidence building and trust to cooperation and finally partnership. These are exemplified through respect for territorial integrity, economic cooperation, to the signing of a security pact in 2001. Finally, the chapter argues that Saudi-Iranian representations of the Other were directly related to the identity of the respective leaderships. The Saudis' representation of Iran shifted with Khatami's electoral victory, and their construction of the Islamic Republic was shaped by its opinion of Khatami. That is to say, the representation of Iranian geopolitical, historical and cultural prestige was reflected through the positive narratives Saudi discourse developed around the person of Khatami.

Iranian-Saudi representations of the Self and the Other mainly revolved around discursive acts of confidence building, Islamic unity and inter-state cooperation. In addition, the most

noticeable aspect of this period was the ‘silent Othering’ that overshadowed the discourse of both states. It can be argued that while both states exhibited very sophisticated discourses drawing from well-honed antagonistic rhetorics and languages, both states deliberately chose not to mobilise them in negative constructions of the Other. In Iranian discourse this was exemplified in the Taliban incident involving the Islamic Republic diplomats where, overall, Iranian discourse, including newspaper editorials, stopped short of employing the denigrating discursive constructions of Saudi Arabia so prevalent in the 1980s. The Saudi discourse on the other hand, utilised its own silence and responded to Iranian overtures to manifest a Saudi Self of Islamic leadership, forgiveness and charity. Whilst also constructing an image of Iran as a weak Other that has relinquished its revolutionary image and surrendered to Saudi leadership and strength. Finally, it can be argued that the ‘silent Othering’ was also a forced strategy on the part of two states intent on rapprochement, thereby alleviating their respective economic woes, balancing regional threats from a common enemy (i.e. Saddam), and averting a regional war.

# 5. 2005-2009: End of Rapprochement, Ahmadinejad's Presidency, and the Evolution of Iranian and Saudi Discourses of Self and Other

## 5.1 Introduction

The 2000s witnessed major shifts on both international and regional levels. In the US, the World Trade Centre attacks by al-Qaeda in 2001 led to the international war on terror. This led to the US invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of the Taliban government. In the Middle East, the and the US invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 affected the Middle East's political and regional landscape. Iranian-backed groups entered the Iraqi government, and for the first time a Twelver Shi'a-led government in the Arab Middle East came into existence. Furthermore, Iranian supported groups in Lebanon and Palestine, along with Syria, gave Iran a central and dynamic role in the region. This posed a challenge to the Arab states in general and Saudi Arabia in particular.

The attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in September 2011 was planned and executed by al-Qaeda to inflict as much damage on the US as possible. This damage was aimed at demoralising the American public, thereby pressuring the US administration to end their military presence in Saudi Arabia, abandon sanctions against Iraq, withdraw support from Saudi Arabia and other Arab regimes such as Egypt, and stop US support for Israel (Fishel 2002). Out of the 19 hijackers that carried out the attacks, 15 were of Saudi nationality. In addition, the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia shifted. American policies towards Saudi Arabia were affected by the perception that Saudi Arabia bore some responsibility, albeit

indirectly, for the attacks while US public opinion perceived Saudi Arabia in a negative light. The attacks resulted in the invasion of Afghanistan, the displacing of the Taliban, and the search for bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Saudi Arabia non-participation in Afghanistan (and later in Iraq in 2003), was a clear sign of the change in US-Saudi relations (Niblock 2006: 164).

US hostility towards Iraq altered its policy to a military position towards Iraq. Saudi Arabia, however, maintained its policy of conservative and defensive containment as a means of conventional deterrence. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia did not confirm US accusations against Iraq sponsoring al-Qaeda and concealment of a secret WMD programme (Zeino-Mahmalat 2012). The diverging perceptions of an Iraqi threat after 9/11 led to a straining of US-Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia did not consider Iraq a direct threat, therefore it aimed to maintain the pre-war balance of power in the Persian Gulf between Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq (Zeino-Mahmalat 2012) . Saudi Arabia feared that regime change in Iraq would disturb the balance of power, as Iran and Iraq counterbalanced each other. Therefore, US-led regime change would destabilise the Middle East as a whole, and give rise to innumerable security threats (Zeino-Mahmalat 2012).

The period following the World Trade Centre bombings were difficult for Saudi Arabia. The kingdom had suffered from a wave of terrorist attacks since the mid-1990s. However, since the fall of Saddam in 2003, attacks had increased proportionally, including the targeting Saudi governmental and diplomatic compounds such as the US consulate in 2004 and 2006 respectively. US criticism of Saudi Arabia grew, with calls for more democracy as President Bush launched his grand plan for reform in the Middle East. Saudi-led initiatives such as the conference on terrorism in February 2005, democratic reform through municipality elections, calls for more female participation in the political process, and suggestions for women to be allowed to drive were all part of a campaign to revamp Saudi Arabia's international image.

The post-September 2001 context also had an effect on Iranian foreign policy. The Iranian government underwent foreign policy adjustments with a view to maximise its gains regionally and internationally. Khatami's tenure witnessed a more flexible approach to the US and strengthened relations with the EU and Russia. Regionally, Iran established détente with the Arab world and the Persian Gulf in particular. The Iranian government sought to improve its role and image in the international community while Khatami's 'Dialogue of Civilizations' ensured that Iran would be well on its way in its attempting to break out of international isolation.

The move towards a more flexible foreign policy in relation to the US was due to a more aggressive American presence, and Iran's complete encirclement by 2003. US bases were compared to a 'security belt' that included Kuwait, Turkey, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and, by 2003, Iraq (Afrasiabi and Maleki 2003) . As a result, Iran's foreign policy shifted to 'active neutrality', starting with the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, to the war in Afghanistan, and the US invasion of Iraq. Consequently, Iran had a greater regional role, attempting to demonstrate an image of a responsible regional partner while deflecting the US label of the country acting as a 'rogue state' since the revolution in 1979.

The events of 9/11 shaped Iranian-US discussions on Afghanistan. Iran had maintained during the 1990s that the Taliban were a regional menace and the attacks on the World Trade Centre naturally convinced the US of the Iranian view of the Taliban (Afrasiabi and Maleki 2003) . Discussions could be described as fruitful with Iran agreeing to rescue any US army personnel, and apprehend fleeing Al-Qaeda fighters attempting to escape Afghanistan by crossing Iranian borders. In addition, Afrasiabi and Maleki (2003) argues that the Iranian role was more prominent in inter-Afghani factional talks. The US asked Iran to intervene and unite certain

Afghani factions in an attempt to avert another civil war and bloodbath, while putting the pro-Iranian Northern Alliance in control of Kabul.

The US invasion of Iraq led to the overthrow of Saddam and the Baath party, thereby eliminating Iran's most immediate threat. Furthermore, the rise of Shi'i political parties in Iraq – many of whom were in exile in Iran – led a rise in Iran's regional prominence. The dismay in the Middle East was explicit, with Jordan's King Abdullah labelling the Iranian influence in the Middle East as constituting a 'Shi'a Crescent'. This period coincided with Iranian-EU nuclear talks that were strained, resulting in the EU troika of Britain, German, and France to declare that Iran was enriching and producing nuclear fuel covertly in violation of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Although Iran agreed in November 2003 to suspend uranium enrichment while negotiations continued, the threat of US and Israeli military strikes loomed in the background.

In 2004, Iranian progress in constructing a heavy-water nuclear reactor in Arak led to the suspension of nuclear talks with the EU troika, due to the risk of possible production of plutonium that could be used in nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the *majles* elections in February 2004 gave rise to a majority 'principlist' ultra-hard-line faction in parliament. Khamenei's support of the principlists, the constant criticism of the reformist factions with regards to the nuclear negotiations, and the rise of the IRGC's influence on state policies, led to a hardline shift in Iran's foreign policy. In addition, the election of Ahmadinejad, a candidate supported by the IRGC and ultra-conservatives, moved Iranian foreign policy away from détente and rapprochement towards confrontation and post-revolutionary rhetoric (Keynoush 2016).

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad signalled a change from the Khatami era of rapprochement with Saudi Arabia to a gradual rivalry. Ahmadinejad's promises of a return to revolutionary ideological dynamism enhanced Iran's regional role in the Middle East.

Strengthened relations with Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine indicated Iran's regional ambitions. In addition, the Israeli-Hezbollah war in 2006 and the Gaza War of 2008-09 underscored Iran's dynamic role in the Middle East and the effect it had on Saudi regional and Islamic leadership. The Iranian nuclear programme, and Iranian rhetoric towards Israel and the Holocaust, further agitated the region and gave rise to a populist narrative that appealed to the Arab street.

This chapter discusses Iranian-Saudi representations of the Self and the Other between 2005 and 2009. I make three main arguments. First, the discourse of the Iranian Self was represented as an Islamic leader, championing Arab and Islamic causes. Second, I argue that the Saudi Self emanated mainly from a supra-discourse on terrorism. The Saudi Self was constructed to project an image of moderation, modernity, and Arab and Islamic legitimacy and leadership. Finally, I argue that Iranian-Saudi representations of each other divide into two main phases. In 2005-06 the representation of the Other by the political elite was implicit and ranged from neutral to positive, confining negative representations of the Other to media (editorial) and clerical discourse; from 2008-09 explicit negative representations manifested themselves across all discourse genres.

In this chapter, I build on the contentions I made in the Introduction with regards to the relationship between state dynamics and how the discourse relates to political events. That is to say, the War on Terror, the fall of Saddam, and to some extent the state of the two respective economies and the rise in oil prices had an effect on the change in the discourse and the relationship between both states in general. That, coupled with the rise of the principlists and the IRGC, shifted the discourse away from rapprochement to the use of negative discourse constructions and images. Consequently, the Khatami period demonstrated the contention I made earlier, namely that differences such as sectarian and religious views did not inhibit a

more positive discourse (and image) developing, given that the political circumstances were moving in a positive direction. In this chapter, I argue that the political circumstances were not moving in the right direction for both states, especially with the increasing Iranian presence in Arab affairs such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. Consequently, in this chapter I demonstrate that the construction of the image of the Other allowed for the mobilisation of images that have a diverse use, including certain religious and historical comparisons such as the narratives and metaphors discussing the Prophet Mohammad and the Karbala paradigm. These images which have an innate multiplicity resonate in all Arab and Islamic cultures, thereby facilitating a wider target audience on both a domestic and external level. Therefore, the political and religious actors in both states mobilise the images to satisfy different political agendas. Images with Islamic metaphors such as Saudi Arabia being the 'cradle of Islam', verses and scriptures shedding light on the importance of the Hajj, and the utilisation of comparisons to the Prophet's companions, allowed for discourses of Saudi legitimacy, significance, and Islamic and Arab leadership. Iranian use of the image of the 'Ominous Triangle', Karbala, Imam Hussain, were employed to construct a discourse of Arab meandering, targeting democracy and the Shi'a in Iraq. The targeting of the Askari shrine and the Islamic image of attacking an infallibles as with Yazid, gave rise to a discourse of Saudi collaboration with US-Zionism against Islam. Similarly, Islamic and historic images, such as Karbala, Imam Ali, and the Kharijites, were utilised in the 34-day war and the Gaza-Israel war, to construct the discourse on Iranian and Hezbollah's leadership in the Arab world, Saudi subservience to the US and Zionism, Hezbollah's adventurism, and Persian interference and expansionism in the Arab world.

There are three main sections to this chapter. First, I discuss the Iranian Self and the definition of the Iranian Other during the course of the 2005 elections and the nuclear crisis, where I discern a return to early post-revolutionary discourse in Iran. Second, I discuss the Saudi representation of the Self and the Other against the backdrop of the attacks on the World Trade

Centre in 2001, the fall of Saddam in 2003, and the rise in terrorism in the kingdom, whereby the elite projection of an Islamically-moderate Saudi Arabia, propagating democracy and reform, as well as sustaining the image of Islamic leadership both internationally and domestically. Iranian-Saudi relations and the presentations of each other will also be discussed through four main case studies: Ahmadinejad's victory and challenge to Islamic leadership; the Askari Shrine bombing as part of the war in Iraq; and Israel's wars with Hezbollah and Hamas in 2006 and 2008/9 respectively.

## 5.2 The Iranian Self and its Other

The victory of Ahmadinejad was characterised by a return of the revolutionary narrative employed by Khomeini and the clerical elite in the early post-revolutionary years. The rise of Ahmadinejad has also been termed as reflecting the emergence of a recognisable conservative faction (Rakel 2008), also known as the 'neo-Conservatives' (Ehteshami and Zweiri 2007) or 'military traditionalists' (Rakel 2008: 76), one that was aligned closely to the Basij and IRGC and which promulgated a revolutionary discourse. Meanwhile, the 2005 elections ushered in a shift in the framing and image of the Iranian Self, moving away from pursuing rapprochement and normalisation vis-a-vis the international community, as articulated in Khatami's 'Dialogue of Civilisations'. Instead, the new revolutionary rhetoric would lead to isolation. In line with this dissertation's central contentions , I argue that the images each side invoked during the period 2005-2009 drew on different national, regional and international contexts. These discourses utilised images of Mahdism, Karbala and martyrdom, and the Ahl-al-bayt narrative in order to construct the Self and the Other. In order to define and characterise the Iranian Self during this period, it is imperative to analyse the Iranian discourse shift that emerged during and after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, namely the discourse of the Revolutionary Guard and

Khamenei, which was characterised by Islamic narratives of Mahdism, the Ahl al-bayt, and the oppressed versus the oppressor. It is this shift in discourse that highlights Ahmadinjejad's populist rhetoric, which was intended to appeal to the 'deprived masses' and veterans of the Iran-Iraq war, and which would later come to define the Iranian Self and an Iran that was on the path to nuclear energy and regional expansion. In this section I will also argue that the discourse of the Iranian Self, promulgated mainly by Ahmadinejad, also sought to appease the broader Arab and Islamic masses. By analysing different events from the 2005 election, the nuclear energy dossier, and relations with Israel and Iraq, I will examine the different discursive constructions and repertoires of the Iranian Self in relation to the Other.

### 5.2.1 Ahmadinejad Presidential Candidacy: A Return to Post-Revolution Iran

Although Ahmadinejad was not ranked as the favourite candidate to win the elections, his slogans communicated his alignment with the impoverished while his campaign motto 'it is possible and we can' *(mīshavad wa mītavānīm)* reflected the 'miracle' he sought when he announced his intention to apply for the presidential candidacy. It can be argued that by employing a multifaceted discourse highlighting religious symbolism, the extremes of rich and poor, and a return to true revolutionary ideals, the Iranian Self was on course to move away from a democratic 'Dialogue of Civilisations' that sought international rapprochement to one that identified the Iranian Self with a post-revolutionary rhetoric intent on exporting revolutionary ideals.

Ahmadinejad's campaign speeches focussed on taking over 'Pasteur Avenue', namely that they, the conservatives, 'must take...and God willing we will take it', i.e. the Presidential office. The discourse of martyrdom clearly defined the direction the Iranian state would follow if he was victorious. Ahmadinejad echoed to his base that either the conservatives would be

'victorious...or we will become martyrs, injured or missing in action... a new miracle is on its way' (Ahmadinejad 2005a). This was clearly an allusion to the 1980s discourse where being 'martyrs, injured or missing in action' were the only options for the Ahmadinejad's supporters to ensure victory. Furthermore, and in contrast to his two predecessors, the rallies attended by Ahmadinejad concentrated on the impoverished working class regions he identified with due to his economic and social background, as well as areas with a high concentration of war veterans and Basijis. It was during these rallies that the discourse of martyrdom, Ahl al-bayt and, more importantly the Mahdi, were promulgated. Religious narrations of Karbala and the Shi'i Imams were the prequel to his speeches while the 'oppressed masses' that once identified with Khomeini would chant Ahmadinejad's brotherhood and allegiance to Khamenei, and through reciting poetry and narratives of martyrdom, the masses would detect implicit allusions to the end of their misery by constructing a relationship between the twelve imams, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. Moreover, Ahmadinejad identified the Iranian Self with Khomeini's '*Islam wa hukūmat-i jahānī*', in other words preparing the ground for a world Islamic movement by establishing a model Islamic government in Iran, continuing the revolutionary momentum of Khomeini, which aimed at 'becoming a world government'.

Moreover, as Naji (2008: 70) argues, Ahmadinejad's 'political ideology trod a fine line between leftist empowerment and hard-line Islamism'. Similar to Khomeini, he emphasised the difference in social and economic class between the leadership and common people, highlighting the former's life of palaces and luxury while the people lived a life of poverty, implicitly blaming the presidencies of Khatami and Rafsanjani for the emergence of this gulf between rich and poor. Khomeini's notion of '*kūkh nishīnī va kākh nishīnī*' (palace dwelling and slum dwelling) (Khomeini 1983:12) was once again woven into the definition of the revolutionary Iranian Self, emphasising the struggle of Iranian society against corruption and immorality. In his candidacy speeches Ahmadinejad argued that the Iranian revolution was

built on social justice and equality. This gave rise to two significant messages. The first that a revolutionary Iran was built on 'justice, whose aim is human progress' (Ahmadinejad 2005e), highlighting that democracy was a western construct that did not exist in 'Khomeini's revolutionary statements or the message of the martyrs, nor in the words of the real pillars of the Islamic government has any such idea been considered' (Ahmadinejad 2005e). The second was that oil revenue would be brought to the people, rather than benefitting the elite who aimed to 'line their pockets'. As a result, Ahmadinejad's speeches were a clear indication of the reversal of the Iran Self, moving away from rapprochement with the international world order to one to an Islamic government.

Naji (2008: 75) contends that the IRGC had no alternative but to support Ahmadinejad. The other candidates were either moderates or reformists critical of the military establishment and the ultra-conservative line, or they had fallen out of favour with the IRGC and Basij due to their electoral message. Speeches by the IRGC and Basij leadership permitted their cadres to campaign for their favourite candidate as evidenced in two speeches, one by Hejazi, the Basij commander, before the elections, and another by Zolghadr, then deputy commander of the IRGC, after the elections. Hejazi argued that Basijis involved in any campaigning did not necessarily 'mean that the Basij was organisationally involved' in the elections. Speaking at a gathering of the Basij and IRGC on the anniversary of the martyrdom of the daughter of the Prophet Mohammad, Zolghadr asserted that it was the 'vigilance of the Basij cadres... that stood up to the conspiracy of foreign powers and avaricious domestic forces' (Zolghadr 2005), thus bringing Ahmadinejad victory in the elections. In addition, the Basij and IRGC cadres were given explicit instruction by the *valī-yi faqīh*'s representative to the IRGC and Basij, Ayatollah Movahedi-Kermani (Movahedi-Kermani 2005). Movahedi-Kermani not only characterised the military forces' support, it indirectly communicated Khamenei's choice and

support for Ahmadinejad. That is to say, it flagged Iran's return to its revolutionary roots with full support from the IRGC and Basij, thereby demonstrating Khamenei's aspiration and desire.

### 5.2.2 The Consolidation of the Neoconservatives and the Construction of the Iranian Other

Ahmadinejad's victory brought with it a reversal of détente and a tilting towards the discourse of the 1980s. Promulgating the narrative of the post-revolutionary period, Ahmadinejad's victory speech promised the building of an 'exemplary, developed and powerful Islamic society' (Ahmadinejad 2005b). The victory speech defined an Iranian Self that was already 'westoxifed', with freedoms that were 'already beyond what could be imagined' (Ahmadinejad 2005b), hinting at the leaning towards Western freedoms in Iran during Khatami's tenure, especially foreign investments and the overall rapprochement adopted over the previous eight years. The issues covered during the candidacy period touched on two main issues that would shape the identity of the Iranian Self during this period. These included Iran's nuclear energy production that was characterised during the campaign as an 'inalienable right' (*haqq-i musallam*), and the oil revenue that Ahmadinejad claimed was under the control of a 'mafia' (Ahmadinejad 2005i). The discourse on nuclear energy would play a key role in shaping the image of the Iranian Self and the Other. Where Rafsanjani's campaign pledged a continued détente in Iran's negotiations with the EU, Ahmadinejad's camp urged a tougher and more confrontational approach.

#### *5.2.2.1 The Iranian Nuclear Crisis and the Construction of the Self and Other*

Ahmadinejad's discourse, such as his victory speech, intertwined Iran's identity and its quest for nuclear power. Emphasising the identity of the 'spirit of the Iranian revolution' as being holy and a 'God's gift to the Iranian nation', Ahmadinejad related the notion of freedom to the

will of the Iranian people (Ahmadinejad 2005b). According to Ahmadinejad, Iran would negotiate in a 'rational manner' and cooperation with the EU would only occur if Iran's 'legitimate right' to enrich uranium was accepted. Therefore, Iran was on a course to confrontation, since 'nothing will force the Iranians to comply with their demands...[we] should impose conditions on them not them onto us' (Ahmadinejad 2005b). According to Ahmadinejad, 'other nations that are against' the Islamic Republic will 'acknowledge our right to it' (Ahmadinejad 2005b). The Iranian Self was defined by the newly elected president as being free to choose its own destiny, even at the expense of its foreign relations, illustrating an explicit reversal of policy and redefining an Iranian Self that was more confrontational and revolutionary.

As discussed earlier in the introduction the discourses illustrate an intertextual relationship managed through the elites' direct and indirect control. In this period, the discourses demonstrate the close relationship between the different genres. These genres constructed the Iranian Self and its Other drawing on deep-rooted historical, religious and political repertoires. In this section, I demonstrate how the Iranian genres drew on Khomeini's mantra of the oppressed versus the oppressor in terms of how the West was bullying Iran in its quest for scientific advancement. Also, the Ahl-al-Bayt narrative was utilised to bolster the image of a resilient and strong Iran in the face of sanctions. The Iranian discourse of nuclear energy gave rise to a plethora of subordinate discourses that included leadership, legitimacy, and Western scientific oppression, all of which harboured historical and Islamic narratives. These discourses framed Iran's role as a leader of the Islamic world, heralding the prestige of the first country in the region to establish a full nuclear fuel cycle. The three Iranian discourse genres, namely the political, religious and press reflected a similar supra discourse of Iranian nuclear rights. The difference, however, was in the different narratives employed to represent the Self. Ahmadinejad framed the nuclear crisis as an 'excuse' by the 'bullying powers [to] prevent the

transfer of science and technology… in addition to preventing the progress of countries' in the Middle East. According to Ahmadinejad, Iranian 'advancement' was referred to collectively as 'indigenous technologies of the Islamic world', thus posing a 'threat to the Zionist regime' (Ahmadinejad 2006a). This implicitly framed Iran's role in regional Islamic leadership, thus appealing to the Islamic and regional masses.

Similarly, the Iranian press editorials wove together a similar discourse on Iran's nuclear programme, while also extending the discourse construction to include the Arab and Islamic worlds, submissiveness to Western powers, and Islamic awakening and hindrances. *Jomhouri Eslami* (2005) defined the Self as equal to the Arab Other by framing the Iranian nuclear programme as one that was constrained by Western powers (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2005). Similarly, *Kayhan* (2006) promulgated an inclusive Self construction that incorporated the Muslim world as an in-group where the west is mentioned as 'bullying' Iran (*Kayhan* 2006c), therefore Iran should 'start challenging the West' and 'take the threat [by the West] as an opportunity for Iran, Muslims, and oppressed nations, for development and creation' (*Kayhan* 2006d). This call was an explicit construction of Iranian leadership, with requests for an Islamic awakening and unity, with Iran at its helm. Furthermore, Iran's Friday sermons contributed to the discursive construction of leadership and technological independence. Rafsanjani (2005) argued that Iran's nuclear programme and any international pressure was the 'price paid for independence', framing Iran's leadership, domestic stability and military strength. Rafsanjani opined that the 'US knows that Iran is not Libya, or Iraq, or Afghanistan' (Rafsanjani 2005a).

The reformist newspaper, *Aftab-e Yazd*, took a more critical approach to the nuclear negotiations and Iran's decision to enrich uranium. Where the government, represented mainly by Ahmadinejad's discourse of Iranian right to enrichment with western opposition framed as a 'Zionist'-led agenda, *Aftab-e Yazd* (2005a) framed the Iranian government as lacking

knowledge**,** transparency, and experience. That is to say, the reformist discourse constructed an image of the Ahmadinejad administration as characterized by naivety and inexperience in international relations on the one hand, while disseminating erroneous information to the Iranian public on the other.

As Iranian officials, especially the president, postured that enrichment was an inalienable Iranian right, Friday prayers, principally those led by Khamenei, promulgated two associated narratives. The first revolved around the preparedness of the Iranian public for a tough period of pressure (Khamenei 2005), arguing that sanctions were 'beneficial' for Iran as they promoted self-reliance and independence (Khamenei 2005), a post-revolutionary narrative that recalled Khomeini during the 1980s when Iran was experiencing sanctions during the Iran-Iraq war. The reformist response depicted the state as naive, criticising the Friday sermons that called sanctions beneficial (*Aftab-e Yazd 2005b;* Emami-Kashani 2005). A reformist editorial argued that 'if sanctions were beneficial to Iran…then why aspire to return [the file] to the IAEA' from the UN Security Council. Furthermore, while the Friday Imam, Emami-Kashani, constructed the Iranian Self as resilient and struggling for its rights, juxtaposing Iran with Arabs who were not 'as sophisticated and devout as the Iranian people' (Emami-Kashani 2005), *Aftab-e Yazd* argued that Arab states 'kidnap (snatch) economic ventures' while Iran loses out on 'petrochemical projects that go to Saudi Arabia' (*Aftab-e Yazd* 2005a). Therefore, while the conservatives constructed the Self as independent, righteous, and resilient, reformists characterised the Ahmadinejad administration as naïve, arrogant towards its neighbours, and lacking in pragmatism.

Discourses of war and martyrdom were also employed in the construction of the Self once again, similar to the years of the Iran-Iraq war, with Iran's nuclear crisis being contrasted to a war imposed by Saddam and supported by the West. Friday sermons were one example. On

the resumption of uranium enrichment on 14 February 2006, threats were made by EU members of the IAEA to send Iran's nuclear file to the UN Security Council. The Iranian officials ignored the overtures and threats, once again promulgating a discourse of resistance and scientific independence. The religious genre presented two main discourses, resistance to pressure, via the narrative of war, and perseverance, characterised by the Ahl al-bayt narrative and the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. This signified a clear return back to the post-revolutionary Khomeini era's revolutionary rhetoric.

The Friday Imam, Ayatollah Jannati, argued that 'no matter how much the [EU and US] threatens, you cannot stop the nuclear activities…You continuously threaten to no avail… you bombed these people for eight years, what did you gain… Iranian people do not fear threats' (Jannati 2006). A discourse of struggle and preparation for tough times was constructed and communicated to the Iranian people, alongside the employment of Hussaini slogans: 'You (Iranian people) revolted and you wanted Islam, independence, power and dignity' (Jannati 2006). By weaving the calls to resistance against Western pressure with the war of Karbala against Yazid, 'woe unto the wretched' (*hayhāt mina-l-dhilah*), the sermon's discourse discursively represented Iran as Imam Hussein, the West as Yazid, and Iran's nuclear programme as the 'continuation of the path to Karbala' (Jannati 2006). Therefore, during the Ahmadinejad regime, Iran had returned to revolutionary-era rhetoric, employing Mahdist chants of the occultation of the twelfth Imam.

## 5.3 The Saudi Self and its Other

The period following the 9/11 attacks was a tumultuous period for Saudi Arabia, especially since fifteen of the terrorists involved were Saudi nationals. Furthermore, since the Khobar bombings in 1996, Saudi Arabia had been a victim of terrorist activities at the hands of al-Qaeda, directed by Osama bin Laden. It can be argued that the war on Iraq in 2003 also had a direct impact on Saudi Arabia. From 2003 onwards, a wave of terrorist incidents plagued the kingdom, most notably in May 2003 with three residential compounds attacked, suicide bombings targeting the Ministry of the Interior in Riyadh in April 2004, and attacks on the US consulate in Jeddah in December 2004 and January 2006. Kechichian (2003: 102) argues that since the bombings in 2003 that killed 34 people and injured more than 194, Saudi officials confessed to having a terrorist problem, after which 'They displayed [an] openness and determination to confront extremism'.

In this section I argue that the Saudi discourse of the Self emanated mainly from a supra-discourse of combatting terrorism. Similar to Iran in this period, this discourse gave rise to sub-discourses, namely democracy and reform, national reconciliation, and Islamic leadership. I argue that the Saudi Self was constructed with a view to reflecting a moderate image of the kingdom, along communicating modernity, respect for human rights and democracy, that is to say, in contrast to Iran. In this section, I will utilise the Saudi municipality elections of 2005, the conference on terrorism in Riyadh in February 2005, the National Solidarity Campaign (also launched in February 2005), along with the main conferences and speeches given by the Saudi elite and ulama, subsequently commented on in Saudi editorials. The discourses employed during the aforementioned events aimed at constructing the Self and the Other for domestic and external consumption while the supra-discourse on terrorism gave rise to external and domestic discourses. In the former, an image of combatting terrorism, democracy and

reform, a stable kingdom, and a strong Islamic and regional leadership was constructed. Domestically, the discourse aimed at bolstering regime legitimacy and public loyalty to the ruling system.

### 5.3.1 Construction of the Saudi Self

In context of Saudi national's involvement in 911 attacks, a Rand Corporation study described Saudi Arabia as a 'kernel of evil, the prime mover, the most dangerous opponent' in the Middle East (Ricks 2002). The attacks on the foreign residents' compound in May 2003, increased White House criticism of Saudi Arabia. The statement issued argued that 'Saudi Arabia must deal with the fact that it has terrorists inside its own country' (Fleischer 2003). The US consulate in Jeddah was attacked on 6 December 2004, further tainting Saudi Arabia's image in the international community, especially since al-Qaeda penetrated the US consulate's grounds and took diplomats hostage. Doubts surfaced with regards to the al-Sauds' legitimacy and the kingdom's stability. This, along with the war on Iraq – including Saudi support for the war – and the future of the Palestinian Peace Process added to the negative impact on the Saudi image. To the international community, Saudi Arabia was seen as losing grip on its stability and its role as regional leader. Domestically, it cast a shadow and doubts on its image as legitimate monarch and Islamic leader.

The plight of the Iraqis and Palestinians were argued in al-Qaeda's discourse on the al-Saud. Bin Laden represented the Saudi leadership as collaborating with Israel and the West against Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, the Western media argued that Saudi Arabia's brand of Islam, Wahhabism, bred terror and hindered democracy, at the same time that Iraq, with a majority Shi'i population, was entering the democratic process by virtue of its first free elections. The Saudi response to the criticism and pressure balanced discourses aimed at

domestic and foreign audiences respectively. Externally, Saudi discourses focussed on combatting terrorism, democracy and reform, the kingdom's stability, and its regional and Islamic leadership. Domestically, the main discourses promulgated also included combatting terrorism and promoting reform whilst ensuring that these measures were led by the ulama and overseen by the security services, principally Nayef bin Abdulaziz. As a result, the construction of the Saudi image and related discourses were two tiered, externally as directed by the Saudi Foreign Minister, and internally by Nayef, the Minister of the Interior, with Abdullah acting as prince regent and later king, constructing the general discourse and not the details.

### 5.3.2 Discourses of the Saudi Self and its Other

Following the attacks on the US consulate in Jeddah on 6 December 2004, Bin Laden issued statements urging the Saudi nation to topple the monarchy through a non-violent uprising. Bin Laden's narrative included criticism of the al-Sauds' legitimacy, identifying the 'responsibility of the [Saudi] regime…and violating God's laws' in addition to criticising the close relationship with the US (Bin Laden 2004). In addition, the squandering of wealth and human rights abuses were underlined by Bin Laden, since 'the regime's sins are great…they [the al-Saud] practice injustice against people and violate their human rights…humiliating their pride…while millions suffer from poverty' (Bin Laden 2004). Saudi promises of reform and municipal elections were defined as *harām* and a 'game that has not changed anything' with the council framed as non-Islamic, an 'infidel legislative council' (Bin Laden 2004).

Consequently, the attacks on the US consulate resulted in external pressure on the monarchy, with Bin Laden's speeches calling into question the legitimacy and stability of the monarchy and kingdom. Responses came in the form of speeches, the first in January 2005, during the Hajj season. Abdullah's speeches to the Hajj pilgrims were aimed at both the domestic audience and the Islamic world. The speech set the trend for the discourses that represented and

constructed the image of the Saudi Self. These included discourses of Islamic leadership, the stability of the state, combatting terrorism, Islamic unity and the true image of Islam that Saudi Arabia represented. The discourse genres that followed this speech expanded Abdullah's narrative and oeuvre. Consequently, and as previously argued in the thesis Introduction, the discourses constructed by the elite and employed to construct the Self and the Other were mobilised to bolster regime legitimacy and communicate modernity, piety, and stability. Historical and religious juxtapositions were drawn upon to embolden these constructions, including the utilisation of Quranic verses, references to prophetic hadith, and the prophetic companions.

*5.3.2.1 Discourse on True Islam and Saudi Arabian Islamic Identity*

The Hajj speech of January 2005 witnessed an affirmation of Saudi identity. The discourse of the Saudi Self was constructed as part of a larger supra-discourse on the nature of Islam. Narratives such as peace, unity and respect were intertwined with the construction and framing of the Self and its legitimacy. Saudi Arabia was defined as the 'cradle of Islam…God has mentioned that it shall always be protected and kept safe' (al-Saud 2005d). The image of a safe and stable kingdom was given legitimacy through Islamic narratives employing Quranic verses and references to scriptures. One example is Mohammad's final speech, which was used to emphasise the peaceful nature of Saudi Arabia, specifically the scripture that marked the 'blood, possessions, honour of Muslims as sacred as the day of this month on this land'. Furthermore, an image of divinity, serenity, prestige, and reverence of the kingdom was framed by asserting that 'God is proud' of the Muslims congregating in Mecca. According to Abdullah, Allah also 'takes pride in front of his angels' because they 'congregate for Hajj in his kingdom'. Abdullah argued that God's pride was due to 'Islamic unity that fulfils equality between mankind', consequently Saudi Arabia was framed as promoting unity and equality, implicitly

fending off accusations of sectarianism and discrimination against minority sects and non-Muslims (al-Saud 2005b).

The construction of a non-sectarian image was given credibility by presenting it as an innate and organic part of the kingdom since its inception by Abdulaziz bin Saud and given its relationship with 'true Islam'. Saudi elite discourse opined that 'since its establishment, Saudi Arabia has upheld the laws of Allah and applied its foundations and promises in all aspects' (al-Saud 2005d; al-Saud 2005i). Saudi Arabia's sect was represented as 'based on righteousness' and presented 'in the Quran and scriptures' while continuing the path of role models that were the 'Salaf pious predecessors', thereby ensuring that 'we (al-Saud) have no sect except this…in forming the basis of our governance' (al-Saud 2005d).

It is this image and narrative of piety and pious predecessors (the Salaf) as role models that also reaffirmed and defined Saudi foreign policy in that period. Saudi foreign policy was explicitly defined as an 'approach based on fruitful communication and positive interaction with the world' (al-Saud 2005d), a mantra similar to Khatami's Dialogue of Civilisations. It appears as though the Saudi Arabia was adopting the languages and slogans of Khatami to represent the Saudi Self. The de facto ruler emphasised that the foreign policy was based on 'constructive building in local, regional, international and Islamic contexts', but while also highlighting the Islamic identity of the kingdom that respected all countries and cultures, stressing that the 'kingdom's position emanates from…living on the same planet' (al-Saud 2005d). Therefore, Saudi Arabia attempted to refurbish its global image. The Saudi Self was framed as peaceful, respectful of other cultures, believing in coexistence, at a time where the world perceived it as radical, sectarian, and unstable, with terrorist activity on its soil.

5.3.2.2 *Discourses on Terrorism, Stability, and Leadership of Saudi Arabia*

Saudi construction of the Self also utilised a narrative that defined what a terrorist was and the position of Saudi Arabia and Islam with regards to terrorism. This formed an attempt to construct terrorists and their activity as an 'Other' that did not represent the Saudi Self as exemplified by mainstream Saudi teachings and the state. To the Islamic world, terrorist activity was described as 'extremism and over-zealousness' (*ghuluw wa taṭaruf*), that contradicted a peaceful religion that 'forbids and warns against terrorism and corruption on earth' (al-Saud 2005d). Furthermore, the discourse on terrorism defined the terrorist Other as harbouring 'sick thought' that emanated from a 'deviant approach' unrelated to the 'fundamentals of sharia' and commuted and 'supported by a corrupt conscience stemming and encouraged by Satan'. It was this satanic act committed in the holy lands that defined the Self as a victim of a 'war against God, his prophets, and Muslims' (al-Saud 2005d). This discourse of victimisation allowed for the definition of the Saudi Self as a kingdom with a true Islamic identity, and for the voicing of the contrast between a terrorist minority and the Saudi state and its religious institutions. Abdullah communicated clearly to the Islamic world that the '[Saudi Arabia] is an extension of religion and its state principles' (al-Saud 2005d). The Saudi monarch emphasised the stability of the kingdom and its institutions, arguing that terrorist 'circumstances would not deviate' the kingdom from its path nor will the state 'change due to any situations' (al-Saud 2005d). The image of the Saudi Self was stable, which reflected the 'true characteristics of the Kingdom's policies' (al-Saud 2005d).

The utilisation of the discourse on terrorism in the construction of the Saudi Self also led to a discourse on the global war on terror. The attacks on Saudi soil that breached the US consulate's compound, as well as the Ministry of the Interior in Riyadh projected an image of weakness on the part of the Saudi state. Therefore, an image of strength and resistance was constructed, arguing that 'terrorists would be fought for ten, twenty, thirty years if need be,

whether they are Muslim or not' (al-Saud 2005c). Saudi discourse framed the kingdom as always at the forefront of addressing and supporting 'peace-loving countries in their fight, and eliminating and extracting terrorism by its roots' (al-Saud 2005d). Thereby, this framed Saudi Arabia as a member of the international community, committed to the international war on terror while highlighting its pre-eminence as a leader in the war against terrorism. This construction of the Saudi leadership was also evident in the conference on international terrorism held in Riyadh in February 2005. Whilst the elite discourse explicitly represented Saudi Arabia as having a 'leading position in counter-terrorism' (al-Saud 2005d), thus attempting to improve the image of Saudi Arabia at an international level, the narrative promulgated to the international community by Saud al-Faisal, the foreign minister, proved otherwise. He argued that the kingdom's 'goal of holding a conference is not to improve the image' of the kingdom, but to 'aid and cooperate in the war on terror' (al-Saud 2005j). Consequently, it can be argued that the framing was a sign of image improvement aimed at fostering international public relations, while the discourse promulgated reflected active participation and being a responsible member of the international community.

The main discursive construction in Abdullah's speech featured the stability of the Saudi state and monarchy, Saudi Arabia's standing in the international community as both a victim of terrorism and a leader in combatting global terror. Furthermore, distancing itself from its radical Wahhabi version of Islam, by constructing a Khatami-like discourse of civilisations and Islam's role in the international community. Saudi Arabia now was in a similar position to Iran, that is identified as a radical state supporting US-listed terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah. However, unlike the Shi'i radicals such Hezbollah, Sunni terrorist groups like al-Qaeda led a campaign of suicide bombings and attacks on US and British soil. Therefore, Saudi discourses aimed at distancing the Self from terrorism by promulgating a narrative of true versus false Islam, civilisation versus terrorism, and love and peace versus hatred and crime.

Abdullah's discourse portrayed the conference as 'historic', reflecting a 'divine invitation that represents the true spirit of Islam' in contrast to 'fake slogans' (al-Saud 2005a). Utilising an Islamic narrative from the *Jāhiliya* era, the terrorist Other was framed as a 'deviant from Islam and Muslims' belonging to 'caves of darkness', that is to say they represented 'the Kharijites of the modern era' (al-Saud 2005a). Moreover, attaching the Kharijite label to the modern terrorist, who then became Saudi Arabia's Other, was juxtaposed with Saudi Arabia itself and its conference guests. The guests were described as 'belonging to different civilisations', therefore framing the host, Saudi Arabia, as a member of an in-group with other states, thereby distancing the Saudi Self from association with terrorism. This distancing strategy was further sustained by framing the Self as a victim of 'uncivilised behaviour', reflecting a sense of victimisation as 'one of the first countries to suffer terrorism', thereby giving rise to the discourse of legitimisation in joining and leading the war on terror.

Meanwhile, Nayef, the Minister of the Interior, focussed on the domestic audience, promulgating a discourse of state stability. According to Nayef, the international conference was intended to 'liberate the land and mankind from the dangers of terror, thus achieving happiness and contentment' (al-Saud 2005i). Furthermore, the domestic narrative framed the Saudi state as respecting human rights. Nayef opined that Saudi Arabia's war on terror stemmed 'from Islamic principles, real notions of humanity that aim to protect mankind', thus underscoring the protection of human rights in Saudi Arabia since humans are 'honoured by God and were favoured among of God's creations' (al-Saud 2005i). Therefore, arguing that reflecting a Saudi Self that was innately respectful of the principles of human rights since it adopts and applies true 'Islamic principles'.

*5.3.2.3 Combatting Terrorism and Saudi Reform*

The Saudi discourse on combatting terrorism was intertwined with discourses on democracy and reform. Calls for the Saudi kingdom to 'open up' and reform itself were not limited to a post-Saddam Iraq. Such calls had been forthcoming since 1991, and had since evolved as a result of domestic pressures due to the presence of foreign bases, the Khobar bombings in 1996, and most importantly the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the fall of Saddam. It can be argued that due to external Western pressure, the establishment of democracy in Iraq, as well as fear of instability in Saudi Arabia, the kingdom moved towards political reform. However, democracy and reform had different definitions according to the Saudi elite. To Abdullah and his foreign minister, reform was a holistic process that included women's rights along with political reconciliation between all strata of society. Nayef, the head of the security apparatus and an ally of the ulama, argued that reform and democracy had their limitations, with women's rights being of minor relevance with the concept of 'intellectual security' taking priority and precedence. Consequently, it can be argued that two constructions of the Self were made, an external image for the international community by Abdullah and Saud al-Faisal, and a domestic image by Nayef and the ulama.

US calls for democracy in the Middle East and respect for human rights were a major area of concern for Saudi Arabia. That, coupled with the attack on the US consulate in Jeddah gave rise to criticism of the Saudi state. The response to US critics allowed for constructing the relationship with the US on the basis of a 'friend that acts on giving friendly advice that does not infringe on relations' between the two states (al-Saud 2005j). Furthermore, criticism of the pace of Saudi democratic reforms gave rise to two main discourses. First, that Saudi Arabia was naturally democratic by virtue that it adhered to the teachings of true Islam. Second, that democracy and reform were evolutionary and required time to progress and materialise in

stages. These discourses were exemplified in two speeches by Abdullah and his foreign minister on their visits to Europe and the US.

The discourses on democracy promulgated a Saudi narrative that represented Islam as a source of democracy, which was an 'aspect of our Islamic faith' (al-Saud 2005c). Therefore, it can be argued that the Saudi self was represented as innately democratic, since it had come into existence 1,400 years previously. Therefore, Abdullah was implying that religion 'based on justice, equality, and human rights…as in the Quran, bible and torah' was an imperative, while underlining that the West's modern democratic culture took many hundreds of years to fulfil. This representation of fake versus 'real democracy', one enshrined in divinity and the other man-made and secular was manifested in Abdullah's discourse. The kingdom was 'striving to apply real democracy…that we wish for' i.e. not imposed by the West. In other words, 'reform and democracy cannot be implemented from the outside. Did anyone force democracy on you?' (al-Saud 2005c).

Similarly, Saudi discourse highlighted the inaccurate perception characterised in the west, that views Saudi Arabia as a 'retarded political system based on a religion that breeds international terrorism [and] spreads this frivolously' (al-Saud 2005k). The elite discourse directed at the foreign audience constructed an image of Western naivety in contrast to a country that aspired to implement 'political reform gradually' taking into account 'population demands and protecting Saudi society's fabric' (al-Saud 2005k), implicitly referring to the political turmoil in the Middle East in the aftermath of Saddam's ousting, such as sectarian killings and civil war.

*5.3.2.4 Combatting Terrorism, the Ulama and Intellectual Security*

Like Iran, Saudi construction of the Self also employed narratives that highlighted its sect. An example of such an application can be observed in two meetings with the ulama and *hayʾah*[1], where Nayef defined the Saudi identity. Where Iran utilised the Ahl al-bayt narrative in the construction of the Self, Nayef employed the Salafi identity in the role of the kingdom in 'defending the religion and the state', and that the 'kingdom has to remain Salafi' (al-Saud 2006b). In similarity to the Iranian narrative, of the defence of Islam and Western conspiracy against Islam, the Saudi Self is discursively constructed as a victim of the 'enemy of Islam that employed Muslims and Arabs to corrupt Islam and the Arabs'. Therefore, the Saudi state was represented as being at war with against Western conspiracies against Islam and the Arab world, a terrorist Other, 'Bin laden, as an agent to foreign intelligence agencies' (al-Saud 2006b), implicitly referring to the US.

Similarly, the ulama utilised the Sunni Islamic narrative to define the role of the monarchy and its Islamic legitimacy. The role of the monarchy and Nayef specifically was constructed as a protector of the faith. Nayef's encouragement of the role of the ulama was reciprocated by highlighting his role as 'upholding the foundations the kingdom…created based on the Quran and Sunnah, and the dependence on the pious predecessors of the Ummah, the Salaf' (al-Saud 2006b). The al-Saud were also juxtaposed with the prophet and the caliphs. Employing the trope of Kharijites against Islam, the monarchy was compared to the caliphs that 'fought the Kharijites…that appeared during the tenure of Othman and Ali, as they were fighting them (Khawarij) and resisting them' (al-Saud 2006b). The ulama's Islamic narrative sought to repel

[1] *Hayʾah* is the short version for *hayʾat al-ʾamr bil-maʿrūf wal-nahyi ʿan al-munkar*, that is the Saudi Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

al-Qaeda's discourse of monarchical illegitimacy by contrasting the al-Sauds as the caliphs of our time at war with the Kharijites of our time, Bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

Nayef's war on terrorism in Saudi Arabia complimented the monarch's call for reconciliation and dialogue by incorporating the ulama in what he labelled 'Intellectual Security' *(al-ʾamn al-thaqāfī).* Describing the terrorists as a 'virus in the body of the Ummah', Nayef highlighted the role of the clerics in a war against a thought that lingers on. 'The security forces amputate a decayed organ in this body, but who will fight and resist this thought but the ulamas and sheikhs…especially the prayer Imams' (al-Saud 2007). This discourse of clerical prominence highlighted the identity of the Saudi Self as a 'proof to the world' that Saudi Arabia's Islamic message 'works towards purifying the minds of the deviants'. This discourse of purifying the minds of terrorists represented the Saudi religious institutions and their collaboration with the security services as an 'intellectual security that is stronger than human security (al-Saud 2007).

## 5.4 Saudi-Iranian Representation of Each Other

The discourse of Othering between Iran and Saudi Arabia can be divided into two main phases. The first characterised by an implicit, neutral to positive elite representation in 2005 to 2007, left any explicit and negative representation to the editorial and clerical discourse. The second phase, 2008 to 2009, witnessed a shift in the representation of the Other. This included the promulgation of Othering to include negative representations across all discourse genres. In order to illuminate these discourses' characterisation and shifts, it is necessary to analyse 'snapshots' of the period between 2005 and 2009. These will include the period between Ahmadinejad's victory and Abdullah's ascension to the throne, and between the 2003 war in Iraq and Israel's wars with Hezbollah and Hamas in 2006 and 2008/9 respectively. This section recalls the central contention that changes in the discourse are related to political, economic,

and international events. Ahmadinejad's election gradually shifted the representation from neutral and positive constructions gradually to drawing on a negative image of the Other, [uc] whereby the mobilisation of historical, nationalistic, and Islamic imagery by different elites emboldened the discursive construction of the Other.

### 5.4.1 Ahmadinejad's Victory, Islamic Leadership and Cooperation

The initial Saudi representation of Iran under Ahmadinejad was positive, as witnessed in the telegrams congratulating the new Iranian president, which 'looked forward to strengthening the existing relations [with a] brotherly Iran' (al-Saud 2005g; al-Saud 2005h). The positive discourse of cooperation and fraternal relations was reciprocated in the first instance by Ahmadinejad as part of his victory press conference, praising the Persian Gulf Arab states as 'brothers' in the pursuit of 'trust and cooperation [and the] expansion of ties with regional countries' (Ahmadinejad 2005c; Asefi 2005) It was not long, however, before relations and mutual representations took a turn for the worse.

A visit by the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, two days after the formal inauguration of the Iranian president, was an alarming sign for Saudi officials, especially since Saudi Arabia had attempted to sway Syria away from Iran for a number of years (Wehrey et al. 2009). While emphasising the long collaboration and strengthening of relations between the two states, Ahmadinejad's populist rhetoric constructed this as a 'new beginning', a battle 'to defend the Islamic Ummah', in a bid to 'play an effective role in the region and the world of Islam [thereby] protecting the region and the world of Islam from possible invasions' (Ahmadinejad 2005h). In addition to relations with Syria, Iran's expansion in the Middle East – highlighted by its role in Iraq through its alliance with Shi' factions, and its support for Hezbollah and Hamas – was tilting the balance of power in its favour. While these were not entirely new,

Iran's scope for involvement in Iraq expanded significantly in the years after 2003, while its support for Hezbollah and Hamas was boosted following Ahmadinejad's election. On the Iranian side, international pressure on its nuclear programme, the presence of US bases on its doorstep, and a turbulent Iraq embroiled in sectarian violence that could spill across its borders, gave grounds to continue the rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. Consequently, and as will be discussed below, Iranian relations with Saudi Arabia were bifurcated, one strand represented by Ahmadinejad and his cabinet, and another by Rafsanjani in his capacity as the chairman of the Expediency Council.

Iraq witnessed significant events in 2005. These included Iraqi parliamentary elections, the drafting of Iraq's constitution and increased sectarian violence. In January, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the Iraqi Shi'i party, won a majority of the seats in the interim parliament. As a result, the Shi'a had control over the drafting of the constitution. Felter and Fishman (2008) argue that Iranian-supported UIA members played an instrumental role in drafting the new Iraqi constitution, which was boycotted by the Sunni parties, thus Saudi-Iranian cooperation was imperative, especially given the threat of sectarian violence reaching Iraq's neighbours, i.e. the Arab Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and to a lesser extent Kuwait (Felter and Fishman 2008). This, amalgamated with Ahmadinejad's populist revolutionary rhetoric, may have led the Iranians to accept a Saudi invitation to Rafsanjani in September 2005, a move aimed at ensuring a continuation of rapprochement and détente.

Rafsanjani's visit demonstrated a clear Iranian intent to expand their relations with Saudi Arabia. Over a course of approximately a week, Rafsanjani's speeches, sermons and press interviews reflected four main discourses leading to a positive representation of each state. First, was a discourse of cooperation and sharing of the leadership of the Middle East and Islamic world. Second, an Islamic unity, co-existence and anti-sectarianism discourse was

constructed as both countries' objective. Third, a discourse of cooperation was emphasised with regard to Arab-Israeli affairs. Fourth, was a discourse on the Saudi and Iranian right to develop nuclear energy as promulgated by both leaderships.

The discourse on cooperation and shared regional leadership was reflected in Rafsanjani's characterisation of Saudi Arabia's 'valuable role in the issues of the Islamic world', a discursive construction of shared values, historic relations and cooperation whereby if both states 'unite and take on a joint position they can…solve the problems of the region' (Rafsanjani 2005c). Furthermore, implicitly dismissing Iranian domination of Iraq, Saudi Arabia was depicted as a country that could 'cooperate on the fate and future of Iraq [by involving] regional countries, including Jordan and Turkey'. Consequently, Rafsanjani's discourse attempted to represent Saudi Arabia as a regional leader that could 'play a useful and constructive role' as opposed to the media reports that framed the Saudis as abetting the terrorist violence in Iraq since 2003 (Rafsanjani 2005c). The Iranian narrative of Saudi leadership and collaboration went so far as to represent the monarch as a leader with 'characteristics that can guide the two countries'. This reference to leadership implicitly framed the king's status with the *valī-yi faqīh*, the only position in Iran that could guide the country and the Ummah. In an interview with the Saudi newspaper *Okaz*, Rafsanjani attributed to the Saudi king the characteristics of 'moderation', 'unity of the Islamic world', and 'rationality' (Rafsanjani 2005b), qualities that would normally be attributed to the *valī-yi faqīh*, Khomeini and Khamenei.

Sectarianism was represented discursively as an infidel conspiracy that 'causes division among the Muslims in the world'. The solution and remedy proposed by Rafsanjani was Iranian-Saudi Sunni-Shi'i 'collaboration and cooperation…to stand against this great conspiracy'. In addition, the Iranian Self and the Saudi Other were constructed as peaceful with 'problems… resolved through holding discussions and conducting research', rather than through violence.

Turning a blind eye to any Saudi role in the sectarian violence in Iraq and Afghanistan, the issue of sectarianism was characterised as a 'real problem in the Islamic world', emphasising that 'killing Shi'is and attacking mosques' (Rafsanjani 2005d) is not part of Islam. The sectarian narrative was also intertwined with the discourse on Israel and Zionism. Relating the plight of 'Palestinians that has lasted…fifty years' to sectarian strife, the Arab-Israeli issue caused 'irreparable harm to the Islamic world' (Rafsanjani 2005d). Rafsanjani therefore attempted to represent a shared role with Saudi Arabia in relations to regional and Islamic matters, sustaining the path of détente and rapprochement since 1996.

Iranian discussion of Saudi human rights and treatment of the Shi'a did not go unnoticed. Highlighting the difference in the eight years since he had last visited the kingdom, Rafsanjani characterized the status of the Saudi Shi'a as improving. Explicitly referring to the possibility of 'holding religious programmes and celebrations' was a clear indication of 'peaceful coexistence' between the two sects. Amidst the sectarian violence in Iraq, the rise in Wahhabi anti-Shi'i rhetoric, and US calls for democracy in the Middle East, Rafsanjani's representation of a monarch who implemented human rights and was making the 'situation of the Shi'a…better day by day' painted a positive picture at odds with the negative discourse on Saudi human rights and sectarianism, while representing Iran too as desiring coexistence and mutual respect, and accepting of Sunni communities. Furthermore, Rafsanjani's position was represented as expressing a 'shared belief by king Abdullah…coexistence…would be strengthened day by day… with no reason for discrimination between the two strata' (Rafsanjani 2005e).

On matters relating to the recognition and establishment of relations with Israel, Rafsanjani represented Saudi Arabia as having a similar position to Iran, that is to say, the Saudi Other positively reflected the Iranian Self in its stance towards Israel. Previous speeches by al-Qaeda

(Bin Laden 2004) had accused the Saudi monarchy of collusion with Israel against the Palestinians in particular and the Islamic world as a whole. Similarly, Iranian conservative narratives also implicitly accused Saudi Arabia of the same allegations. Consequently, Rafsanjani's narrative was a positive representation of Saudi Arabia, framing Abdullah as both holding 'positions…similar to…Iran', and expressing a comparable tone towards any country that formally recognised Israel. According to Rafsanjani, the Saudi king 'was furious about the fact that some countries… establish ties with Israel' and 'rebuked' those leaders that did recognise Israel. Therefore, like the Iranian leadership, Abdullah was represented as having a moral stance towards the Islamic world, alluding to his support for the oppressed against a 'Zionist oppressor' (Rafsanjani 2005e).

Although Rafsanjani's visit was in response to an invitation by king Abdullah, there was no extensive coverage of the visit by the Saudi press, except for a speech by Abdullah, and an interview with the *Okaz* newspaper. Abdullah's discourse on Iran reflected three crucial issues. First, that Iran was equal to the Saudi Arabian Self, having a 'special Islamic and political status [that is] very important for us' (al-Saud 2005f). Second, Iranian-Saudi relations were framed as 'strategic' while it was a 'responsibility' of a monarch to 'work with Iran [thereby] strengthening cooperation and strategic relations'. Implicitly referring to US-Iranian enmity, and in light of US threats against Iran, Saudi Arabia framed relations as 'important and necessary [while] noting not to allow any disruptions or weakening of these relations' (al-Saud 2005f). The Saudi discourse of cooperation, sustained rapprochement and support was explicit in terms of its positive comments on Iran's nuclear dossier. Arguing against the West's approach to Iran's nuclear programme, it echoed the Iranian mantra of regional nuclear rights. Abdullah opined that 'peaceful nuclear power is the right of all countries, including the Islamic countries' (al-Saud 2005f), an argument made in the Iranian discourse of a Western conspiracy to deny Islamic countries the right to develop nuclear energy.

However, the Saudi elite representation of Iran during this period was not always so positive. This can be illustrated in a think-tank session held in New York after the UN General Assembly sessions. Responding to questions on a 'peaceful resolution' and 'troop withdrawal' from Iraq (al-Saud 2005l), Saudi al-Faisal did not hesitate to interweave a discourse on sectarianism, Arab losses, and Iranian expansionism. The Saudi discourse conflicted with the Iranian narrative of democracy and an inclusive constitution. It can be argued that Saud al-Faisal's criticism of Iran was due to frustration at Iranian expansion in the Middle East. Saudi criticism of Iran was two-tiered, implicit by criticising Iraqi practices and the domestic situation, and explicit by denigrating Iran's direct role in Iraq. The democratic processes of elections and constitution drafting were criticised and argued as 'not…going to solve the problem of Iraq', relating Iraq's troubles to a country 'jarred apart', with Sunnis 'a separate entity from the Shi'a' while stressing their joint identity as Arabs (al-Saud 2005l).

Although Rafsanjani and Abdullah aspired to reduce the level of sectarian tension through a discourse of unity and cooperation, Saudi discourse in the international arena focussed on civil war and regional expansionism. Iraq's burdens were related to sectarian and ethnic fragmentation that had led to conflict and civil war as well as deeper Iranian involvement. Saudi worries concerning Iranian expansionism were framed as part of a discourse of hegemony. Iranian control of a 'pacified' southern Iraq was due to the establishment of 'police forces… armed groups and militias'. Saudi al-Faisal also depicted Iran as employing corrupt methods, installing rogue elements, 'paying money, installing their own people…establishing police forces…and reinforcing their presence' (al-Saud 2005l). Consequently, the Saudi discourse was implicitly describing the Self as fearful of a pro-Iran Shi'i presence on its own doorstep, yet explicitly defining the Iranian Other by highlighting the nature of the governmental administration in southern Iraq, that is to say, Iraqi corruption, sectarianism, and chaos, were due to Iranian influence that employed 'their own people'. Moreover, the establishment of a

'corrupt' Shi'i presence was also represented as a result of 'protection by British and American forces in the area', implicitly alluding to Western naivety or collusion with Iran. However, in al-Faisal's criticism of Iran and the Western powers in Iraq, the most striking confession that emphasised Saudi fears was the belief that Iraq was being offered to Iran.

> …to us it seems out of this world that you do this. We fought a war together to keep Iran from occupying Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait. Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason. (al-Saud 2005l)

The Iranian response was calm and measured, reflecting a discourse of surprise, cooperation and friendship. Initially, there was no response from the elite, ulama or editorials. However, Keynoush. (2016) argues that the Iranian foreign minister, Mottaki, cancelled a trip to Riyadh to signal his opposition to his counterpart's statements. In their daily briefing, the spokesman for the foreign ministry, Hamid Asefi, responded to Saudi al-Faisal's remarks (Asefi 2005). Although Iran had been chastised for interference in Iraq and sowing discord, Saudi Arabia was represented positively and characterised as a 'friend' (Asefi 2005). The response was also two-tiered. First, there was a particular representation of the image of Saudi Arabia. Second, al-Faisal's claims were refuted through a definition of the Iranian Self. In the former, al-Faisal's statements were deemed 'unrealistic', 'surprising and unreasonable', and unexpected from 'friends in the region' (Asefi 2005). The criticisms were depicted as un-Islamic, and therefore open to exploitation by the 'enemies of Islam', thereby drawing an implicit image of Saudi naivety. By promulgating a non-sectarian discourse, Iran assured Saudi Arabia that it respected 'the unity of Iraqi groups and tribes' while desiring the 'establishment of peace and stability' (Asefi 2005). Accordingly, Iranian discourse aimed at identifying the Iranian Self with Saudi Arabia. That is to say, it aimed to assure Saudi Arabia that it had no expansionist and hegemonic ambitions, it shared the Saudi view on Iraqi unity, and rejected foreign interference in Iraq. Therefore, while al-Faisal's discourse was in tune with the monarch's – especially

during the Rafsanjani visit – the Iranian representation of Saudi Arabia was in line with the ruling elite.

### 5.4.2 Israel and the Holocaust: Iranian-Saudi Implicit Representations of Each Other

It was not long after the inauguration that Ahmadinejad discussed his foreign policy outlook with the international community. In a speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2005, the Iranian president promulgated a discourse of equality, justice, respect and peace among members of the international community (Ahmadinejad 2005g). In the case of Palestine and peace in the Middle East, he argued that 'durable peace…through justice' and the 'establishment of a democratic Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital' would be the only solution to the Arab-Israeli crisis (Ahmadinejad 2005g). A hostile discourse towards Israel would later be communicated to a domestic audience. In a speech at the 'World Without Zionism' conference, Ahmadinejad's populist discourse emphasised the obliteration of Israel, with the country being 'wiped from the pages of history [3] (*az safha-yi tārīkh mahv shavad*) . The speech also defined the position of the new Iranian administration in terms of the Israeli-Arab peace process. The president argued that 'anyone who recognizes Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic Ummah' (Ahmadinejad 2005j), an implicit referral to Arab states such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, which was the whole purpose of the speech. Furthermore, a discourse identifying Arab naivety was constructed. Referring to the acceptance of a 'Zionist regime' as being due to pressure from other 'dominating regimes', reflecting a 'misunderstanding' of the situation, or 'selfishness' in terms of the attempt to achieve regional ambitions. This discourse on Arab naivety allowed for the implicit representation of Saudi

[3] The translation was adapted from Naji (2008: 140).

Arabia as ‘one of the foremost countries [that] made a mistake a few years ago [in] formalizing the existence of an illegitimate Zionist regime’ (Ahmadinejad 2005j).

The peak of Ahmadinejad’s populist discourse on Israel was the extraordinary OIC meeting in Mecca in December 2005. Organised by the Saudi king, the conference was his first international debut after his ascension to the throne in August 2005. Molavi (2005: 1) argues that it was a ‘chance for him to shine on a world stage’. The conference was intended to discuss Islamic extremism, and was an ambitious plan to introduce an image of an Islamic renaissance (Molavi 2006). However, Ahmadinejad’s stance on the authenticity of the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict eclipsed and overshadowed the aims of the conference and implicitly criticised Saudi Arabia’s leadership of the Islamic world. In his formal speech at the conference, Ahmadinejad argued that the main obstacle of the Islamic world was the ‘usurious regime in Occupied Palestine’, stressing that it was not ‘logical and rational [to] recognise this fake government’. Therefore, Saudi Arabia’s aims at a holistic Arab-Israeli peace initiative were implausible while any country formalising its relationship with ‘oppression, arrogance, and domination…is a disappointment to humanity’. This led to Ahmadinejad’s argument further defining the position of ‘some Islamic countries’ as being ‘threatened by great powers’ (Ahmadinejad 2005f), implicitly representing Saudi Arabia as a weak state. Consequently, the president’s discourse constructed an image of Saudi subservience to the West and Zionism.

However, the main comment that stole the limelight from the king’s goals and moment was Ahmadinejad’s remarks on Holocaust denial and calling on Western countries to give the Jews in Israel land in Europe. In a press conference with Saudi news agencies, Ahmadinejad’s populist discourse on Holocaust denial and confrontation with the West alongside championing Palestinian rights illuminated Saudi Arabia’s role and its position in the Islamic and Arab world. This implicit discursive construction of Iranian Islamic leadership came at a time when

Bin Laden's speeches advocated a similar argument, alleging that Saudi Arabia was complicit and subservient to Western powers and Israel, to the detriment of Islam and the Palestinian people. Ahmadinejad's statements represented a clear shift in discourse from the softening position held by the Khatami government which allowed Saudi Arabia to lead the Arab-Israeli peace process with no overt Iranian opposition. Consequently, the return to a Khomeini-era revolutionary discourse proved to be a dilemma in the Saudi representation of Iran:

> Although we do not accept this claim (the Holocaust), if we assume that it is true, our question to the Europeans is whether the murder of the innocent Jews by Hitler is the reason for the support of the occupiers of Jerusalem?... If the Europeans are right they should offer part of their territory, from Germany, Austria, or elsewhere, so that the Jews can install their state there. (Ahmadinejad 2005d)

As for the Saudi response, it was tactical silence reflecting their quietist diplomacy. An illustration of this is Turki al-Faisal's speech at Washington's Middle East Institute:

> As far as the condemnation of Iran's statements on Israel, we prefer to deal directly with the Iranians and tell them face to face what we think of their statements rather than making a public issue of it and gaining some cookies, if you like, from those who might want to disperse that to other countries (al-Saud 2005).

Saudi Arabia's discourse did not discuss Ahmadinejad's statements on Israel, his refutation of the Holocaust, and moving the Israeli state to Europe. Instead the discourse focussed on terrorism, Islamic unity and cooperation, and a dialogue of civilizations, an adoption of the language promulgated by Khatami during his presidency. Saudi Arabia's religious discourse promulgated the monarch's narrative of a peaceful Islam and the acceptance of the Other, highlighting 'Arab and Islamic civilisation' and what actually constituted this civilisation (Bin Humaid 2005). The Islamic world was defined as 'suffering from weakness, disintegration and the spirit of defeat…waste and loss…a gloomy image', implicitly referring to the rise in terrorism in the kingdom and the turmoil in Iraq. Resonating with Abdullah's OIC speech, 'sedition, injustices and abuses' had to be reviewed, representing a new image of Islam (Bin Humaid 2005). This image and representation of Islam was defined in implicit opposition to

Ahmadinejad's depiction of the scientific dimension of Islam as based on nuclear rights. In turn, the Saudi ulama represented Islam as a 'civilisation built on religion, namely principles and values, not just materialism, inventions and discoveries' (Bin Humaid 2005). A 'balance in thinking' between the 'spiritual and material' was defined as the main tenet of an Islamic civilisation (Bin Humaid 2005). This clearly exemplifies an implicit response to the Iranian discourse on scientific prestige and the scientific advancements made during the Islamic empire that gave western civilisation its contemporary scientific status, as well as the narrative of the West seeking to create a nuclear apartheid and keep the Islamic world in the dark ages. (Ahmadinejad 2005g; Jannati 2005).

Furthermore, the Saudi editorial discourse focussed on the main theme of the OIC, terrorism. *al-Riyadh*, for example, argued that the OIC summit was at a crossroads, defining the image of Islam as one that had 'internal contradictions' more intense than their 'clash with the outside world', i.e. the West (*al-Riyadh* 2005). The Saudi discourse was framing an image of Islam that was ailing from within. Contrary to the Iranian discourse that related the cause of regional problems to the West and 'Zionism', Saudi discourse argued that the problems in the Islamic world were due to internal 'disputes' that gave rise to three afflictions: 'political Islam', sectarianism and terrorism. They were implicitly referring to Iran, secondly to Iraq and Iranian dominance there, and third, to terrorism in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The Saudi editorial discourse further promulgated the monarch's discourse on a 'dialogue with all other forces and in harmony with civilizations' (al-Saud 2005e; *al-Riyadh* 2005b, 2005a).

### 5.4.3 Askari Shrine Bombings, Sectarian Violence and Iranian-Saudi Othering 2006

The Iraqi elections in 2005 saw the dominance of the Shi'a in Iraq, especially since the Sunnis initially boycotted the elections. The elections were a clear illustration of voters' ethnic and

sectarian attitudes (Henderson 2007: 38). It can be argued that this isolation and social fragmentation played a role in the Sunni insurgency, the latter representing an amalgamation of jihadist and Baathist elements who targeted the Shi'a, in turn caused a retaliation that led to a vicious cycle of violence. The most significant of these episodes was the attack on the Askari Shrine in Samarra on 22 February 2006. Henderson (2007: 38) argues that these attacks were significant in that both Saudi Arabia and Iran saw Iraq as a major element of their respective spheres of influence, and therefore both were 'not prepared to concede to the other'.

Iranian and Saudi official responses propagated a discourse of cooperation, tolerance, and Islamic unity with their respective Friday sermons arguing that sedition and external conspiracies were the main cause of the bombings and sectarian violence. The elite discourse discussed a spillover narrative amidst calls for unity and the combatting of terrorism. Iranian editorials pushed a discourse of Western and 'Zionist' conspiracies, on occasion alluding to terrorism and sectarian conflict as the work of Wahhabism. The Saudi press, on the other hand, discussed the weakness of politicians and the role of government as well as calling for dialogue between all Iraqi groups. This section will analyse Saudi-Iranian representation of each other using the Askari shrine bombings and the upsurge of sectarian violence that ensued. I will argue that Iranian-Saudi representation regressed from positive representation to neutrality and implicit negative constructions of the Other. Furthermore, through the constructions of different discourse genres, the representation of the Other utilised historical, sectarian, and pejorative tropes. In the case of Iran, a return to the 'Ominous Triangle' trope was predominant in the press discourse. Historic-religious images of the Prophet Mohammad, Karbala, and Imam Hussain were promulgated by the political and religious elite to construct the Other while sectarian tropes constructing Iran as meandering in Arab affairs and emboldened by the depiction of an outcast Sunni Arab minority through representations of foreign occupation and Iranian meddling.

The period immediately after the bombings witnessed a wide range of international condemnation. However, Iranian discourse covered the terrorist incident more than its Saudi Arabian counterpart. Elite discourse in both states condemned the attacks while they differed in how they ascribed blame and responsibility for the attacks. Also, while all the Iranian elite press discussed the terrorist attack in Samarra, the Saudi elite provided brief press statements, leaving the discussions to secondary-level state actors such as ambassadors and the press. Immediate condemnation came from the Saudi foreign minister and a discourse distancing Saudi Arabia from the attacks in addition to relating the incident to the Shi'i led Iraqi government's discriminatory practices. In turn, al-Faisal's condemnation discursively constructed the Askari shrine atrocity as a consequence of an Iraqi government that should 'achieve security and stability, consolidation of its national unity, securing equality among all factions' (al-Saud 2006c). While not accusing Iran, it can be argued that the discourse was implicitly blaming the Shi'i-led government that enjoyed significant Iranian support, therefore giving Iran some responsibility for Iraq's insecurity. Iran was represented as an 'important and large country…with its responsibilities for stability and security' while Saudi Arabia hoped that Iran would 'work towards carrying those responsibilities…playing the role of stabilizing country…not a country that would add to the …volatile situation' in the region (al-Saud 2006c). The Saudi monarch's condemnation followed a few days later during an Arab League meeting in Kuwait. Abdullah's condemnation was a template-based response calling for 'all parties to respect all holy and religious sites in Iraq', alluding to the sectarian violence that took place against Sunni and Shi'i mosques and sites (al-Saud 2006a).

Contrary to Saudi elite discourse, the main pillars of the Iranian elite addressed the Askari bombings in statements. The baseline discourse was that of a 'Zionist and Western conspiracy' against the Islamic world, clearly referencing the US and Israel. Khamenei was quick to represent the attack as a 'political crime that can be attributed to the Zionist intelligence

services and the occupation forces in Iraq' (Khamenei 2006b). While the other elite promulgated a similar narrative, their discourses also emphasised Islamic unity, awakening and resistance. Ahmadinejad argued that 'Zionism…has been plagued by [the] awakening, vigilance, and resistance of the Islamic world' (Ahmadinejad 2006c), citing the 'unification of the Islamic nation' through the 'wave of love of the Prophet and his family in the Muslim world' (Ahmadinejad 2006c). Furthermore, the discourse on the Prophet was intertwined with that on the shrine attacks. Echoing the mantra of the 'occupation forces [disrupt and] prevent peace and stability [due to] successive failures', the speaker argued that it was the 'establishment of a new parliament and government' that the US and Zionists found troubling and that had ended any chance of stability. That argument was sustained by claiming that 'another goal…was to divert attention…from the insulting caricatures' of the Prophet and 'immediately turn their attention to disagreements between Shi'a and Sunnis' (Hadad-Adel 2006). This discourse on division through sedition and sectarian strife was also propagated by Rafsanjani. The US conspiracy aimed at creating a 'Greater Middle East' was being pursued through 'weakening the solidarity of Islam and seeking division…by creating problems for Muslims' thereby resulting in a rift in the Islamic world (Rafsanjani 2006a).

Iranian editorials followed similar narratives and discourses. As was the case in elite discourse, no explicit mention of Saudi Arabia was made. However, Wahhabism and Salafism were represented as the main culprits behind the bombings, pointing to an implicit representation of Saudi Arabia. The utilization of the phrase '*musalas-i shūm*' (Ominous Triangle) from the Taliban period, was employed once again to define the perpetrators of the attacks. However, in this instance the denigrated actors were 'Wahhabis, Baathists, and the Hypocrites' in one instance and 'occupying forces, Wahhabis and Baathists' in another (*Resalat* 2006c, 2006d). This trope implicitly represented all Baathists as Sunnis, and as a consequence supporters of Wahhabism, which is the official sect of Islam in Saudi Arabia. Iranian editorial discourses

mainly included Islamic unity and Western and Zionist conspiracies against Iraq and the Islamic world. Furthermore, they framed the bombings according to their political alignments. That is to say, where the conservative leaning press – such as *Kayhan* and *Resalat* – employed narratives of martyrdom and denigration of Western states, editorials in *Aftab-e Yazd* and *Etemad* employed a softer tone, discussing foreign intervention as a cause of the bombing but stopping short of denigration.

It can be argued that Saudi representation was constructed as a by-product of Iranian criticism of the US occupation of Iraq. Editorials in *Resalat* (*Resalat* 2006c, 2006d) and *Ettelaat* (*Ettela'at* 2006c) illustrate this. The Askari shrine bombing was attributed to 'Washington' and the 'Ominous Triangle' including 'Wahhabis' (*Resalat* 2006d) and 'Salafists' (in *Ettela'at*) in collaboration with the occupying forces and Baathist remnants. Consequently, since Saudi Arabia was traditionally known to be at the heart of Wahhabi-Salafist thought, then it was implicitly framed as having a role in the incident. In the case of the Iraq, the 'Ominous Triangle' intended to disturb the 'positive image of the Iraqi elections and cabinet formation' in a Shi'i-led government. The bombings were also described as a distraction from the caricatures that were offensive to the Prophet Mohammad. *Aftab-e Yazd* (2006) argued that 'we cannot deny that Western states benefit from the bombings…diverting the attention of Sunni-Shi'i Muslims from the Prophet Mohammad's caricatures' (*Aftab-e Yazd* 2006). Therefore, this implicated the Salafist school of thought, mainly practised in Saudi Arabia, in a conspiracy against Islam and Muslims.

Sectarian discourse and the Karbala narratives were also employed when discussing the Samarra bombings. The modern day 'Ominous Triangle', i.e. the Baathists, Wahhabis, and the US, were discursively constructed as the Yazid and Yazidis in Iraq, while the 'Shi'a in Karbala, Najaf, Samarra, and Basra… [as] modern day Imam Hussein and his companions'. These

'hypocrites', defined as 'Wahhabis and Baathists' were framed as being enemies of the Iraqi people, and as such the enemies of peace and a democratic process in Iraq. This argument was also propagated by the moderate leaning *Etemad* that discussed the role of the '*iftrātiyūn*' (radical fundamentalists) in 'collaboration with the US…because they were not pleased with the current political atmosphere in Iraq' (*Etemad* 2006). Therefore, by criticising the role of Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia was implicitly framed as having a role in the bombings as well as collaborating with 'foreign occupiers' against the Iraqi people and the Islamic world. According to *Aftab-e Yazd*, the occupiers 'seek to …create sedition among Sunnis and Shi'a…for future gains and advantage' (*Aftab-e Yazd* 2006). It is these gains that the Iranian editorials used to implicitly frame Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism.

Similar discourses of Islamic unity and the influence of foreign occupation on Iraq were also echoed in the Saudi newspapers. Furthermore, like the Iranian editorials, the construction of an Iranian Other in Saudi editorials was also done implicitly, as part of a greater narrative. The presence of a foreign occupier was argued to have inflamed 'destruction of holy sites' and murder not evident 'during the dictatorships' (*al-Riyadh* 2006a). Also, it was this foreign occupier that had given rise to 'tribal and sectarian strife' (*al-Riyadh* 2006a). However, contrary to Iranian discourse, the presence of a foreign occupier gave rise to a government that has excluded the minority, arguing that 'dialogue…without interference from anyone' (*al-Riyadh* 2006a) would fix Iraq's ailments. It can be argued that this interference is an implicit reference to Iran's support of a Shi'i-led party, the latter's coming to power and dominance of Iraqi politics and its constitution.

*Al-Hayat* followed a similar implicit representation of Iranian interference and hegemony by utilising three strategies. This was achieved, first, by defining Iraq's identity and rhetorically asking who was seeking to gain from a divided and shattered Iraq. Stressing Iraq's Arab

identity which lay at the 'heart of the Arab world' while its political environment impacted on the Arab world since Iraq was 'connected to the Arab arteries and pains' (*al-Hayat* 2006), hinting at a spill-over and expansion of violence across borders, potentially reaching the Arab states such as the GCC. Second, the violence that followed the bombings was deemed to be the 'responsibility of the Iraqi security…and political forces' led by the Shi'i majority. Third, attributing the extended presence of the occupation to 'Iraqi political forces and sectarian affiliations…that were victorious by overthrowing Saddam', Saudi editorials calling for the Shia majority to 'sacrifice a part of the victor's share…to the losers' (*al-Hayat* 2006). Where the victorious were the Shi'a parties supported by an Iran seeking to dominate Iraq, by not sharing power with the Arab Sunnis they were prolonging the foreign occupation of Iraq and 'delaying the rebuilding of the state and its institutions' (*al-Hayat* 2006). Furthermore, *al-Hayat* framed the Iraqi constitution and government as illegitimate. The Shi'a-led parties were discursively constructed as greedy and sectarian, 'engaged in the race to share the wreckage of the state' and neglecting the fact that the 'sinking ship can only be saved through national unity…that accommodates all its members' (*al-Hayat* 2006). That is to say, the 'grip of the majority [over the] rights of the victims' who were Sunni had given rise to violence and Iraq's destruction. Therefore, by discursively constructing the Shi'a as the force behind the sectarianism, fragmentation and extended occupation of Iraq, the Saudi editorial discourse also implicitly represented Iran as a malevolent force in the country, since it supported the Shi'a and Iraq's constitution.

Following the Iranian government's line, Iranian clerical discourse blamed the US and Zionism for the Askari shrine bombings, whilst highlighting a discourse of Islamic unity as a bulwark against sedition. Saudi prayer discourse took a similar line regarding sectarian violence, calling for calm and resistance to sedition. However, taking a closer look at the Saudi sermon that immediately followed the incident, it can be argued that it framed the Iraqi Sunnis as victims

of the Shi'a. That is to say, a discourse of victimisation was constructed, representing the Sunnis as victims and the Shi'a as retaliatory aggressors. The Imam equated the 'unknown…aggressor' with the Shi'a that retaliated against Sunni places of worship, arguing that 'assaults on the graves' were met by 'by attacking the houses of God… the burning of the Quran…killing Muslims and preventing prayers' (*al-Taleb* 2006b). Consequently, the Mecca Friday sermon supported the Iraqi Sunnis, portraying them as victims of Shi'a retribution, while strongly condemning the Shi'a as attackers of the innocent. Although the occupier, i.e. the US, was viewed as causing sedition, the discourse also identifying 'poisonous' foreign interference as resulting in sectarian violence, implicitly representing Iran as a culprit in the attacks on Iraqi Sunnis.

In comparison, Iranian sermon discourse discussed the bombings in two stages. First, a sermon by Emami-Kashani after the incident focused on defining the perpetrators and advocating Islamic unity (Emami-Kashani 2006). Second, Rafsanjani's Friday sermon concentrated on the role of Wahhabism, foreign interference and Islamic unity. Similar to the elite and press, Iranian religious discourse clearly defined the perpetrators. The 'brutal hands of… the arrogant West, and the leaders of the US and CIA, the Mossad and the Zionists' were behind the explosions (Rafsanjani 2006d). Furthermore, following the discourse of Islamic unity and the prevention of sedition, the Friday sermons expressed the 'sanctity [and] love of the Ahl al-bayt' to both sects. This discourse of unity went as far as discursively constructing the role of Ahl al-bayt in Islamic unity and their service to the Abbasid Caliphs, even though the Shi'a were persecuted by the Abbasids. In the spirit of 'coherence and unity', Emami-Kashani opined that the 'Imams… were also among the army and the military power of the Abbasid caliph' (Emami-Kashani 2006). The Iranian discourse aimed at showing that regardless of sect, Islamic unity precedes religious convictions.

Shi'i narratives were also employed by Rafsanjani. The bombing of Samara was juxtaposed with the attacks by the Wahhabis on the shrines in Iraq and the al-Baqi cemetery in Medina in the 19th century. Rafsanjani argued that 'once again in the era of freedom and human rationality… insane things are occurring', while the 'Wahhabi Salafists came to Karbala, Najaf and Samarra, and went to Baqi, looted and destroyed everything, committing crimes' (Rafsanjani 2006b). This narrative was also utilised to construct an image of collaboration with 'global arrogance' in a conspiracy to create a 'Greater Middle East' that intended to 'divide and distance Muslims from Islam' (Rafsanjani 2006b). By weaving the aforementioned discourses into a discourse of Iranian leadership and Islamic unity, highlighting the role of 'Sunni and Shi'a in Iran and Iraq…gathered in joint unity prayers', and not mentioning Saudi Arabia, an implicit representation was made of Saudi Arabia having a role in 'hidden hands… creating religious and sectarian sedition' in the Islamic world (Rafsanjani 2006b). Therefore, it can be contended that linking Wahhabi Salafists to the incident, interweaving it with an 18th century historical context, and highlighting the role of Iran and Iraq in Islamic unity, Saudi Arabia involvement and collaboration was implicitly represented in the atrocities taking place in the Islamic world.

### 5.4.4 Saudi-Iranian Representations of Each Other and the Conflicts in Lebanon and Palestine

The Levantine region proved to be a major arena for Iranian-Saudi rivalry and competition. Wehrey et al. (2009: xv) argue that this 'stems from Saudi perception of the Iranian threat'. That is to say, Iran's activities in the Levant – mainly Lebanon and Palestine – cast a shadow on the legitimacy of the monarchy domestically, regionally and in the wider Islamic world. This section examines Iranian-Saudi representations of each other by analysing both countries'

discourses vis-a-vis events in Lebanon in 2006. In this section I will show how Saudi-Iranian discourses began to shift from the start of the Hezbollah-Israel 34-day war, with initially more neutral and implicit discursive constructions of each other gradually transforming into more explicit and denigrating representations. The discourses of the elite constructed the Other through the employment of historical, political, and nationalistic tropes. In addition, these tropes utilised images of historical and religious significance, such as the infidels versus Islam, Hussain against Yazid, Imam Ali, as well as historicised images of the Israel-Arab wars that saw the loss of the Arab armies. As discussed in the theoretical framework, these images held great significance for both domestic and regional audiences. The religious, historic, and political analogies, were easily mobilised and linked to discourses such as treachery and adventurism, leadership and subservience, thereby emboldening the discourse construction of the Self and Other.

#### *5.4.4.1 The 34-day Hezbollah-Israel War* [4]

On 12 July 2006, Hezbollah attacked an Israeli border patrol, killing three soldiers and imprisoning another two. The response was a 34-day war that resulted in the destruction of Lebanese infrastructure and its economy. Arkin (2011: 5) argues that Israel's aim was to 'turn Lebanon's clock back 20 years', after which it was presumed that the Lebanese population would revolt against the Iranian-supported group (Arkin 2011). Hezbollah's *'True Promise Operation' (al-Waʿd al-Sādiq)* was the first Arab-Israeli war in the post-cold war era (Arkin 2011: 2). It fomented both US support for Israel, along with large scale Arab and Islamic condemnation of Israel. This condemnation involved the regional and Islamic pillars, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The former were in full support of Hezbollah, with the latter exhibiting its

[4] Also referred to as the 33-Day War

support for the Lebanese Sunni-led government of Fouad Seniora while on a regional and international level attempting to end the war.

Taking a closer look at the Iranian and Saudi discourse manufacturers and strategies employed by both states during this incident, it can be said that the manufacture and promulgation of the discourses was highly organised, tactical and tacit. In Iran, the immediate response to the incident was made by the president and foreign ministry spokesman. Khamenei would criticise the silence of the Arab leaders and Islamic clerics without mentioning names, implicitly characterising their silence as a form of subservience to the West and Zionism. This argument would be continued by Ahmadinejad in his speeches, but through the use of harsher rhetoric, as will be discussed below. The clerical discourse, as exemplified by the Friday sermons, took on a similar tone to the state narrative, criticising Israel and the Arab states for their silence without mentioning Saudi Arabia.

It was the newspaper editorials that mainly employed the revolutionary rhetoric and tropes of the Khomeini period. It is interesting to note that the editorials in both states followed the lines of their elite while employing explicit representations of the Other. Iranian editorials, like the elite discourses, refrained from naming Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the war. However, as the war continued with no sign of a resolution, including great material losses for the Lebanese community and Hezbollah's resistance, the editorials shifted from criticizing 'Arab leaders' to naming and shaming specific Arab leaderships, but overall refraining from mentioning Saudi Arabia. It can be argued that this was due to the Iranian nuclear programme and the Saudi assistance with regards to the threats posed by the US against Iran. The Saudi elite had been overall neutral and at times positive in supporting Iran's rights to peaceful nuclear energy.

*Kayhan* and *Jouhmouri Eslami* utilised denigrating labels to indirectly represent Saudi Arabia. Phrases reminiscent of the post-revolutionary Khomeinist era such as '*sarān-i irtijaʿ-i Arab*'

(reactionary Arab leaders) '*shiyyūkh-i ʿāj nishīn*' (ivory-throned sheikhs), and '*sarān-i sazeshkar-i Arab'* (colluding Arab leaders), were employed to construct an image of US-Zionist subservience and treachery against the Arab and Islamic worlds. Furthermore, conservative-leaning Iranian newspapers employed an in-group strategy to frame Saudi collusion in the Israeli attacks on Hezbollah. To illustrate this strategy, the juxtaposition of Mubarak with the Qur'anic Pharaoh (*Firʿawn*) (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006a) was mentioned in the context of Israeli collaboration with Saudi Arabia with the intention of group both leaderships and states together, framing them as complicit in the attacks against Lebanon with the latter in the service of Israel.

Furthermore, pejorative and sectarian tropes were applied to make manifest the image of Saudi Arabian silence and its supposed acquiescence with Israeli attacks and Zionist-US leadership respectively. Although these discourses and tropes will be discussed at length below, they include the 'Ominous Triangle' trope. This trope was previously adopted during the Taliban era when *musalas-i shūm* was employed to define the collaboration between the US, Pakistan and Wahhabism, and their involvement in the killing of the Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i Sharif. During the last incident, the trope was deployed mainly by *Ettela'at* and *Kayhan* to highlight Arab silence and subservience. However, where *Ettela'at* defined the 'Ominous Triangle' as composed of the US, Britain, and Israel (*Ettela'at* 2006b), *Kayhan* (*Kayhan* 2006e) identified it with 'American, Israel, and reactionary Arabs', making a more direct link with Saudi Arabia in its discourse of Saudi subservience and betrayal of Hezbollah, Lebanon, and the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Similar to Iran, Saudi discourse during the 34-day war was also structured and organised. The discourse of the elite was mainly promulgated by the foreign minister, with the king remaining silent, disseminating his views of the war through royal court statements and Saudi al-Faisal.

The Friday prayer sermons aimed at bolstering Saudi leadership and legitimacy, while remaining implicit in terms of any direct mention of Hezbollah and Iran. Furthermore, while the Grand Mufti remained silent overall during the war, leading clerics from the Council of Ulama issued a fatwa prohibiting Sunnis from supporting Hezbollah. Saudi editorial discourse in general refrained from explicitly denigrating Iran, largely following the trend set by the discourse promulgated by the king and his foreign minister. Furthermore, the Saudi editorials took three main positions. *Al-Riyadh* adopted a Pan-Arab stance, representing the Arab right to resist occupation. Similarly, *al-Hayat's* editorials had an analytical line that was critical of Hezbollah and Iran. *Asharq al-Awsat* on the other hand, spun a discourse representing Iran and Hezbollah in a negative context, casting doubt on their regional roles while stopping short of employing the 1980s rhetoric utilised during Iran-Iraq war. The difference in stance can be attributed to the audience the newspapers target. *al-Riyadh* targeted a more domestic audience while *Asharq al-Awsat* had a wider Arab audience since it published its articles from the UK.

The Iranian response to the Israeli attacks on 14 July 2006 initially came from Ahmadinejad and the foreign ministry spokesman. In addition to a condemnation of Israel, with warning to 'the Zionist regime…not to extend the attacks to Syria', he framed the attack on Lebanon as an 'attack on the Islamic world' (Ahmadinejad 2006b). Furthermore, a discourse of Islamic unity against Israeli attacks called in particular for 'the regional states to show more unity and integrity'. This was an implicit response to the Saudi royal court line that stopped short of naming Hezbollah, while its capture of the two soldiers was an 'uncalculated adventure that would extend [its implications] to the entire Middle East'. The Saudi statement blamed these elements, asking them 'to alone take responsibility for their irresponsible behaviour' while arguing for them to carry the 'burden of ending the crisis' and for the international community to make a 'distinction between legitimate resistance and uncalculated adventures'. This condemnation was also aimed at 'elements inside (Lebanon) and those behind them that did

not coordinate with Arab nations' (*SPA* 2006). It can be assumed that the Saudi statement was aimed at Iranian adventurism in Lebanon as the backers of Hezbollah, who were 'exposing Arab nations and their gains to grave dangers'. That is to say, the Saudis may have been referring to Abdullah's attempt to revive the 2002 peace initiative. It is this author's view that this Saudi statement and Ahmadinejad's response began the implicit representation of each Other, where Iran was viewed as interfering in Arab affairs and questioning Saudi legitimacy and leadership of the Arab and Islamic world.

#### 5.4.4.1.1 Themes and Tropes

By discussing the Israeli-Hezbollah war in Saudi and Iranian discourses, both states discursively constructed the Self and the Other. Iranian praise for Hezbollah and framing them as continuing '*khatt-i Imam*', or embodying the prestige of facing a powerful traditional army for over a month while comparing them with the major Arab-Israeli wars that saw Arab states defeated within days, was an indirect way of constructing the image of the Iranian Self as an Islamic and regional leader, which innately constructed Saudi Arabia as weak and subservient to the West and Zionism. This section will discuss four main themes in Saudi and Iranian discourses and the discursive construction of associated tropes. They include: Arab silence and subservience versus Hezbollah-Iranian adventurism; Hezbollah's victory over Israel versus Lebanon's destruction and hindering of Arab-Israeli peace; Hezbollah-Iranian Islamic and Arab leadership versus Iranian-Shi'i hegemony; and Islamic unity and awakening versus sectarianism and Shi'i expansion. These discourses were reinforced by virtue of historical and religious comparisons, that held great significance for the domestic and external regional audience, including images involving Karbala, Prophet Mohammad, Zionism, and Khomeini. As will be illustrated below, the discourses genres constructed the Other through the

aforementioned images were used to enhance the state's leadership, public loyalty, legitimacy, and status, both domestically and externally.

### *A. Arab Silence and Western-Zionist Subservience Versus Hezbollah-Iranian Adventurism and Legitimacy*

#### 1. Arab Silence and Western Subservience

The theme of Arab silence constructed by Iran versus Hezbollah's adventurism and irresponsibility as represented by Saudi Arabia was made in the early days of the 34-day war. It can be argued that the official statement from the Saudi royal court along with Saud al-Faisal's remarks on Hezbollah's 'uncalculated adventures' alongside questioning the legitimacy of Hezbollah as a resistance force and 'those behind them' gave rise to the Iranian response and implicit representations of Saudi silence and subservience to the West/Zionism. While the Saudi statements condemned Israel, its criticism of Hezbollah were interwoven into a discourse that questioned implicitly Iran's role in the Arab world and hinted at its meddling in Arab affairs. This can be exemplified by highlighting Saudi accusations that certain 'elements', i.e. Hezbollah and Iran, were 'exposing Arab nations…and gains to grave dangers', referring to the Arab-Israeli peace process, an initiative of Abdullah since 2002, which he sought to resurrect during the George W. Bush administration.

The Iranian response to the war – which was also possibly a response to the Saudi statements – was an explicit condemnation of the 'silence of some Arab and Islamic governments' (Khamenei 2006f). This response was immediately promulgated by the Chief Commander of the IRGC, Yahya Rahim Safavi, who adding a discourse identifying the subservience and cowardice of 'many leaders of Islamic and Arab countries' (Safavi 2006), thus questioning the

legitimacy and role of the Saudi monarchy and their leadership of the Arab and Islamic worlds. Reminiscent of the Khomeini era, both Khamenei and Safavi drew a distinct contrast between Arab and Islamic leaders and their people. However, the trope of US-Israeli subservience was revived. The Iranian elite, represented mainly by Khamenei and Safavi, framed Arab silence and US-Zionist subservience in two main tropes. The first, was a silence that was complicit and which gave way to the formation of a 'New American Middle East', and the continuation of Israeli 'crimes, oppression and violation of human values [intended] to sustain the existence of the Zionist regime…the satanic and cancerous tumour in the Muslim World'. The second, was a silence that represented a weakness of Arab and Islamic leaderships 'fear of American and Israeli leaders' and therefore 'indifference' to Israel's attacks on Hezbollah. Although Saudi Arabia was not mentioned by either Khamenei or Safavi, the implicit representation challenged Saudi leadership and legitimacy in the Islamic and Arab worlds. These discourses were similar to Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's accusations of Saudi silence towards the plight of Muslims in general and Palestinians in particular, which also framed Saudi Arabia as a US-Zionist lackey (Bin Laden 2004).

Friday sermons followed a similar argument with an implicit representation of Saudi Arabian silence and subservience to the Israeli attacks on Lebanon. When analysing the Friday sermons, it is interesting to observe that, contrary to the post-revolutionary Khomeini era, Friday Imams refrained from mentioning Saudi Arabia or its leaders, thus demonstrating a shift to a more pragmatic position. However, referential strategies were employed to refer to Arab leaders, such as 'some Arab states' or 'some Islamic countries' an implicit criticism of Saudi Arabia.

Friday sermons wove the silence of Arab states and subservience to US-Israeli agendas into a narrative of collaboration that harmed Islam, Palestine and the Arabs. A discourse of victimisation was employed by utilising historical narratives. To illustrate this, a sermon by

Ahmad Khatami characterised Arab silence as a Zionist collaboration that aimed to fulfil the ambitions of a 'greater Israel' with 'borders from the Nile to the Euphrates' (Khatami 2006). Khatami wove the discourse of 'shameful' Arab silence with a rhetoric based on conspiratorial collaboration with US-Israeli agendas in the Middle East. Hezbollah was represented as a modern-day Saladin, 'the protector of the Islamic world… fighting enemies… against the crusades'. This modern crusade was the Israeli agenda to expand its borders, with Hezbollah the only force protecting Arab and Islamic lands. Even the pragmatic Rafsanjani framed the 34-day war as a 'scandal [and a] moment of shame and historical disgrace [on the part of] Arab and Islamic countries'. A discourse of 'real Islam' protecting the Muslim world was also promulgated by Rafsanjani, thereby questioning Saudi legitimacy:

> How can people be Muslims, their government Muslim, and see these Muslims being crushed by infidels and sacrificed at the altar while they sit comfortably… (Rafsanjani 2006c)

The first discourse promulgated by editorials was that of silence and subservience to the US and Zionism. However – and as was the case in the Friday sermons – the difference was in the representation and the directness of the references to the Other. It can be argued that editorials followed the Supreme Leader's line at the beginning, referring to both an 'international' (*Ettela'at* 2006a) and 'Arab countries'' silence (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006b). This reference shifted as the war continued. For example, *Ettelaat* (2006e) used an in-group/out-group reference, where Saudi Arabia was indirectly referred to by grouping it with the 'silence of important Arab states'. *Kayhan* (2006a), on the other hand, was more explicit, calling out 'Arab states such as Saudi Arabia' as silent and complicit in the Israeli aggression.

Similar to the discourse on the Askari shrine bombings, tropes such as the '*musalas-i shūm*' were employed. This time, to discuss Saudi subservience and collaboration against Hezbollah. *Kayhan*, on the other hand, took a more explicit approach to framing Saudi Arabia with the

conspiracies against Hezbollah, arguing that the 'm*usalas-i shūm*' was formed of 'America, Israel, and Reactionary Arabs' (*Kayhan* 2006e), clearly associated Saudi Arabia with the attacks on Hezbollah. Similar to the 1980s, the phrase 'reactionary Arabs' was employed to highlight the complicity and subservience of Arab Gulf states while questioning their legitimacy and leadership, especially Saudi Arabia.

As discussed previously, editorials followed Khamenei's line and argument as a platform for discourse construction and promulgation. These included Islamic discourses and tropes. Khamenei's (Khamenei 2006c) sermon on Imam Ali's birthday, three weeks into the war, illustrates this argument, when he opined that on this 'day of Eid, our hearts are not happy because of the bloody state of the Islamic Ummah' (Khamenei 2006c). This 'bloody state' was intertwined with the state of affairs in Lebanon and Palestine, questioning the silence of Islamic countries and 'division of the Islamic governments'**,** particularly the Arab states, who were 'exhibiting damaging behaviour' (Khamenei 2006c), with 'Arab governments' arms folded and staring idly [at the] action of American and arrogant powers' (Khamenei 2006c).

Khamenei's speech was built into editorials such as those published in *Resalat* (*Resalat* 2006b), which defined this silence as subservience to the 'White House and Tel Aviv'. The discourse of Zionist-US subservience was constructed by drawing parallels with the Iran-Iraq war: 'Hosni Mubarak, Saddam Hussein, King Hussain and other Arab leaders were silent and unmoved such that the White House and Tel-Aviv viewed them as an extension of themselves' (*Resalat* 2006b). That is to say, just as had occurred during the collaboration against Iran in the 1980s, Arab leaders and Saudi Arabia served the interests of Israel and the US in attacking Shi'i Hezbollah which was 'reliant on divine power' (*Resalat* 2006b). *Resalat*'s representation of Saudi Arabia was therefore based on subservience but framed as a sectarian discursive

construction of a war against Shi'i pro-Iranian groups, similar to Saudi aid to Saddam during the 1980s.

The theme of silence and subservience was also attributed to Saudi ulama. Within a week of the war, Abdullah bin Jabreen, a prominent member of the Saudi Senior Clerics Association, issued a fatwa deeming the 'support, joining, or praying' for Hezbollah to be 'impermissible' (Bin Jabreen 2006). The senior cleric described Hezbollah as '*rāfidah*' (rejecters) and advised the Sunnis to 'denounce anyone supporting' Hezbollah, because the '*rāfidah* have always harboured enmity to the Sunnis [and] aspired to show the weakness of the Sunnis, betray them and deceive them' (Bin Jabreen 2006). The Iranian response was twofold. First, Khamenei implicitly responded to the Saudi fatwa by highlighting that sectarianism was an 'important tool of the enemies to subjugate the Islamic Ummah…they are tools and strengthen the enemy' (Khamenei 2006c). This implicitly characterised the Saudi ulama as a device utilised by the West and Zionism, thus deepening the discourse of subservience and silence. Second, the editorial discourse repeated similar lines, however, the representation was more explicit and employed Islamic narratives to highlight the discourse of treachery, subservience and enmity towards Islam.

Similar to Khamenei, editorials defined sectarian discourse promulgators as 'instruments dividing Shi'a and Sunnis…sought by the US and Zionist regime'. Furthermore, these 'instruments' were also described as collaborators against Hezbollah and as a group of conspirators that included 'Arab leaders, the UN, famous religious centres, reactionary Arab Fatwa centres, groups claiming to fight the United States such as al-Qaeda and the Takfiris' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006c). The Iranian editorial defined the above out-group as a list of members 'in secret agreement…with the Zionist regime', thus representing Hezbollah and its supporters – specifically Iran – as undertaking a global war to defend Islam. The editorial

emboldened its representation of sectarian conspiracies against Hezbollah and the Islamic world by utilising the post-revolutionary rhetoric, specifying the 'muftis of Saudi and Egyptian courts [such as] Sheikh Abdullah bin Jabreen…the largest Wahhabi mufti in the Saudi [royal] court', along with his Egyptian peer, Tantawi of Egypt, who 'blindly followed the Egyptian pharaoh', an allusion to Hosni Mubarak (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006c). The narrative of royal court subservience was also adopted, framing both muftis as 'servants' (*jīrahkhur*), releasing 'anti-Islamic fatwas for the US [and] worse than the Sultans' preachers of the dark ages' (*vuʿāz-i asalāṭīn*) (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006c). Iranian editorials juxtaposed muftis with other Sunni ulama. By labelling Sheikh Yousef Qaradawi as a 'world famous scholar…proud of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah', the Saudi cleric was depicted as an anti-Islamic pariah cleric conspiring in the service of the US and Zionism (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006c). Also, the comparison made between the two of the most renounced Sunni ulama, Qaradawi and Jabreen, in Iranian discourse aimed to stress that 'true' Sunni ulama are supporters of Hezbollah, while the Saudi and Egyptian Imams were framed as deviants of the Islamic faith putting forward their leaderships' subservience to the US and Zionism before Islam.

Islamic narratives were also utilised to demonstrate Saudi subservience and silence in the face of 'US-Zionist' attacks against Hezbollah. One such example was the representation of Hassan Nasrallah as the Imam Ali of our time, leading Muslims against the infidels of our time, juxtaposed with the 'War of the Trenches or Parties' (*Jang-i ahzāb* or *khandaq*)[5], that is to say, Hezbollah versus 'Israel, the US, their European allies, and some conspiring Arab leaders' (*Kayhan* 2006g). Just like the war fought by Imam Ali, the 'Muslims defeated the huge army

[5] The Battle of the Trench *(Harb al-Khandaq)* or Battle of the Confederates *(Harb al-ʾahzāb)*, was a 30-day siege of Yathrib (modern day Medina). Prophet Mohammad and the people of Yathrib were held under siege by a confederation of Arab and Jewish tribes, outnumbering the Muslims by 10,000 to 3000. The battle was won by Mohammad and his followers following the advice of Salman Farsi, a Persian companion of the Prophet, to dig a trench around the city, thus weakening the confederates and lowering their morale (see Watt, 1974).

of idol-worshippers'. *Kayhan* implicitly defined Saudi collaboration with the US and Israel as a conspiracy against the Islamic world and Iranian support for Hezbollah as a victory for the Islamic world. Where, like the War of the Trenches, infidels aimed to wipe out Islam within days, while the modern-day infidels were intent on 'dismantling Islam in the region' (*Kayhan* 2006g). That is to say, Iranian discourse discursively constructed the Iranian Self as the true Islamic and regional leader by defining Hezbollah as a legitimate Islamic army, led by a contemporary Imam Ali, and supported by Iran as modern day Salman Farsi, the devout Persian companion of the Prophet Mohammad and ally to the Ahl al-Bayt. Consequently, the same discourse questioned the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia as an Iranian Other and its role in Islamic leadership in defence of the Islamic Ummah.

## 2. Hezbollah-Iranian Adventurism and Legitimacy

Saudi discourse, on the other hand, constructed a supra-discourse of adventurism. The state discourse as disseminated by the Saudi foreign minister and the Saudi ambassador to the US, explicitly referred to Hezbollah while implicitly criticising Iran. The Friday sermon Imams, did not mention any group or country, while it was the editorial discourse that utilised the official Saudi narrative, explicitly representing Hezbollah and its Iranian backers as adventurists. The supra-discourse of Hezbollah-Iranian adventurism spun out four main state sub-discourses: a discourse of Lebanese and Arab sovereignty and legitimacy; Saudi legitimacy and leadership of the Arab and Islamic worlds; closely related to a discourse of the Saudi Self and its regional role; and Hezbollah-Iranian regional adventurism. The editorial discourses related the discourse of adventurism to representations of Iranian proxy wars and the destruction of the Arab world.

*a. Discourse of Israeli Hegemony and Condemnation*

It could be argued that one of the main discourses that led to Iranian accusations of Arab silence and subservience were the calls on the international community by Saud al-Faisal to 'support the Lebanese government's legitimate efforts to preserve Lebanon, preserve its sovereignty' and, most importantly, 'extend its authority over all its national territory' (al-Saud 2006e). A particular discursive construction suggested that Hezbollah was an illegitimate group and was harming the sovereign Lebanese state. Furthermore, Saudi responses to Iranian criticism of Saudi silence and subservience followed two specific strategies. The first was a direct criticism of the international community in elite discourse and Friday prayer sermons. Second, was an implicit response embedded within elite discourse, mainly as part of international speeches and press conferences by the Saudi foreign minister.

Similar to Iran, Saudi discourse condemned international silence, mirroring the Iranian narrative. In a press conference by the Saudi foreign minister (al-Saud 2006e), the discourse framed the response of the international community as a 'failure' (*takhādhul*), and suggested a UN and EU bias in the discourse, that do not take a 'serious position to stop the fighting', representing international silence as a 'real disaster for the Lebanese people'. Saudi mirroring of Iranian rhetoric towards Israel was also a feature. Saudi elite discourse highlighted 'violations of human and national rights…targeting of innocents with assassination, arrest and torture' and Israeli disregard for 'international treaties and conventions' (al-Saud 2006e). The Saudi Friday sermons (Sudais 2006b, 2006a) echoed the elite's narrative, further mirroring Iranian ulama and elite discourse. The sermons framed the international organisations as having double standards, criticising the 'loud voices that call against genocide [but regularly] chant slogans of freedom', arguing that international silence was a 'propaganda campaign, or a propaganda campaign that seeks the blood of Muslims'. Like Iranian post-revolutionary

discourse, its Saudi ulama counterpart framed the attacks on Lebanon and Palestine as a conspiracy against the world of Islam, seeking 'Muslim rivers of blood' (Sudais 2006b).

Saudi responses to Iranian criticism of Saudi silence and subservience were tackled without reference to Iran. The Saudi foreign minister responded both by directly criticising Israel and implicitly refuting Iranian notions of Saudi subservience and collaboration. Similar to the Iranian representation of Israel, Saudi elite discourse represented it as a Saudi Other by framing it as a hegemon whose 'blatant aggression' was an 'extension of the Israeli policy of occupation and hegemony…in the region' (al-Saud 2006e). Furthermore, and responding implicitly to Iranian claims of US and Western subservience, Saudi discourse framed the 'position of some countries' towards Israel as constituting a bias that 'led the Security Council to fail to take firm decisions to resolve this crisis' (al-Saud 2006e). Therefore, framing the image of the Saudi Self as an independent state acting against US-Israeli hegemony, was an attempt to bolster its legitimacy and leadership domestically and regionally. The Saudi 'conscience is satisfied' as they were undertaking an Arab 'duty…that the Lebanese affirm'. Consequently, Saudi discourse highlighted the Self as leading with Lebanese approval, 'having no one to apologise to' (al-Saud 2006f), implicitly referring to Hezbollah supporters such as Iran and Syria.

*i. Implicit Representation of Hezbollah-Iranian Adventurism*

The Saudi elite proposed a discourse of Iranian-Hezbollah adventurism that 'destabilised the security and stability in the region', in turn highlighting the role of Saudi Arabia as an Arab leader. Implicit references to 'parties' that destabilised the region – that is to say Hezbollah and Iran in Lebanon – highlighted the regional role of Saudi Arabia, Iranian meddling, and a framing of Iran and its proxy as hijacking Lebanese sovereignty (al-Saud 2006d, 2006e). The Saudi 'position on this matter' – that is to say adventurism destabilising the region – was deemed to be 'reaffirmed by the Arab League', while any issue regarding the Arab-Israeli

conflict was one to be discussed 'in accordance with the resolutions of the Arab summits'. Therefore, the Saudi Self was represented as the leader of the Arab world, indirectly framed Iranian involvement in the Arab-Israeli affairs as interference in Arab affairs. Whilst Saudi Arabia 'does not accuse any country by name… intervention from non-Arab states should be positive… privileged relations with any party should be in the interest of the state'. The Saudi Self was clearly defined in relation to the 'non-Arab' Other, i.e. Iran, while the former's aim was to 'support sovereignty and independence, and extend authority over the entire national territory'. Saudi Arabia's discourse viewed this adventurism as constituting interference in its leadership and the result was an implicit call for an end to Iranian influence in Lebanon (al-Saud 2006e; al-Saud 2006g).

### *ii. Discourse Representing the Self, Legitimacy and Arab Leadership*

Saudi discourse also focussed on reaffirming its role and legitimacy as the leader of the Middle East and the Islamic world. International speeches constructed an image of pragmatism and moderation when dealing with the Israeli attacks, while simultaneously highlighting Saudi leadership of the Arab world and its standing in the international arena. By juxtaposing the Saudi position with Hezbollah/Iranian adventurism, an image of pragmatism, peace, and leadership was constructed. 'Saudi logic' was claimed to be behind the pragmatism and restraint 'adopted by the Arab League' (al-Saud 2006e). This 'logic' as highlighted by al-Faisal, was a 'strategic decision to seek peace' and positive overtures, in addition to 'methodological measures…focused on an Arab Peace Conference…in Beirut'**.** Hezbollah and its Iranian supporters, on the other hand, were discursively constructed as causing 'chaos and destruction'. This representation of the Saudi Self was a message to its domestic audience, regional and Western states (latterly the EU and US), that Saudi Arabia prioritised and cared

for the plight of the Arab world, especially Lebanon and Palestine, that it was a strong Arab leader capable of guiding and swaying Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan, and therefore could achieve peace with Israel through negotiations, such as the Abdullah Peace Initiative of 2002 (al-Saud 2006g). The Other – namely Iran – was inherently constructed as hostile, chaotic, at enmity with the West, and most importantly meddling in regional affairs.

The framing of the Saudi Self in relation to its Arab and Islamic role in the context of the Arab-Israeli Peace Initiative was also visible in the Friday sermons (Sudais 2006b, 2006a). The Saudi Imam represented the Islamic nation as one riven by division and despair. Hezbollah's actions were characterised as forging division in the Islamic world, one that was 'worn out and humiliated', calling for a 'return to the early years of Islam', that is to say the Mohammadan era, an Islamic narrative similar to the Iranian notion of '*Islām-i nāb-i Muhamadī'*, and what the Sunnis call the '*al-Salaf al-sālih*' era. The juxtaposition being that this Salafi Islam carried with it 'characteristics of strength, eternity and promised victory', implicitly representing the Shi'i Islamic world, that is in support of Hezbollah, as weak, desperate and divided. The strength of Islam was represented as embodied by Saudi Arabia's 'strong political positions, humanitarian aid, and political aspirations' (Sudais 2006b). Meanwhile, their 'support for the Muslim Lebanese and Palestinian people' and established political team, i.e. Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Arab League, would 'aid the causes of the Muslim Ummah', that is opposed by 'haters' and 'infidels [who] yelled and conspired' against Saudi-led motives. In other words, the Hezbollah-Iran-Syria axis and Western support for Israeli were both represented as enemies of Saudi political positions. In turn, Saudi ulama discourse also legitimised the government's role in negotiations with the US and the EU by employing prophetic scripture (*hadith*) (Al Taleb 2006a). Citing a coalition between the pagan Arab tribes of Mecca twenty years before the prophecy. i.e. during the *jāhiliya* era, the Friday Imam highlighted that the prophet attended and supported the meeting, since it was an alliance based on the principles of realizing the truth,

supporting the oppressed, deterring the oppressor, and concerted efforts in the face of falsehood (Aal Taleb 2006a). The prophet's attendance enshrined legitimacy and the need to cooperate with any party – i.e. contemporary non-Muslims, the US and EU – to uphold the rights and support the oppressed (Aal Taleb 2006a). Therefore, similar to the Iranian utilisation of the Islamic narrative of Ahl al-bayt, the Sunni ulama of Saudi Arabia employed an Islamic discourse to legitimise the role of Saudi Arabia in negotiations with the West, agreement to a ceasefire with Israel, and the negotiation of an Arab Peace Initiative.

### *iii. Discourse on the Iranian proxy war in Lebanon and the destruction of the Arab Middle East*

As mentioned previously, Saudi editorials promulgated the discourse of Hezbollah-Iranian adventurism. However, the tone was more explicit and the representation was that of a proxy group working on behalf of Iran, one which sought to alleviate international pressure on Iran over its nuclear dossier. Furthermore, this proxy war was represented as one that would seek and witness the destruction of the Arab Middle East, recalling the Arab-Israeli wars fought in 1967 and 1973 (*al-Riyadh* 2006d). It is interesting to note that similar juxtapositions were also made by Iranian discourse. As will be discussed in more detail later, the difference between the two states' discourses was that Iran used the wars to frame an image of Arab weakness and defeat within days, in comparison to Hezbollah's resistance for 34 days which they represented as a victory and marking the rise of a new Arab and Islamic leadership. The Saudi editorial discourse on the other hand, utilised the narratives of the two wars with Israel to highlight the 'predicament of 1967 that dragged the region into destruction…with Israel being the victor' while 1973 resembled a 'symbolic victory' for the Arabs (*al-Riyadh* 2006d). The Saudi

editorials therefore represented the 34-day war as one that would lead to the destruction of the Arab region and a divergence from the path of development and regional peace.

*Al-Riyadh* represented Hezbollah as an Iranian proxy on the first day of the 34-day war (*al-Riyadh* 2006b). Although this construction was implicit given the rhetorical question, 'Who controls the cards domestically and externally in this game?' (*al-Riyadh* 2006b), this was a clear reference to the notion of a proxy war, underlining Iranian control over Hezbollah. *Asharq al-Awsat* (2006c) interwove the discourse on Lebanese sovereignty with narratives on external influence in the Arab world. Questions were raised about the leadership of the Ummah, asking 'who leads**:** governments or individuals?' and asked if it was 'logical for the Arab countries to have… a two-headed government' (*dawlah bi-raʾsayn*) (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006c). These questions were also related to a 'group that decided to ignite the region in the service of other agendas', thereby 'exposing the capabilities and resources of the people to destruction and ruin' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006c). The Saudi editorial discourse explicitly represented Hezbollah and its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, as agents and proxies of Iran, with the latter 'practising its wars by proxy' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006d).

It is interesting to note that Iranian support for Hezbollah was also juxtaposed with former colonisers who had governed Lebanon. While highlighting the position of Saudi Arabia as supportive of legitimate resistance, it was also noted that there was a difference 'between that and uncalculated adventurism', while there were references to 'Lebanese factions that depended on French support and others on Iran', however 'French cheese did not result in a fatty meal, nor will Iranian pistachios [be able to] compensate them for the famous cuisine' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006c). What the editorial refers to here is that French support and funds, and Iranian promises and aid, would not resurrect Lebanon in the aftermath of its destruction and 'internal divisions' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006c). Therefore, according to the Saudi editorial

discourse, its Iranian Other was comparable to the former coloniser, namely that they both sought division, destroyed territory, and did not have the capacity and ability to provide significant financial aid. In contrast, the Saudi Self was represented as a legitimate Arab leader, that is 'neutral, an interlocutor', with significant leverage over Western states while having the 'power to stop crises' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006c), thereby constructing the image of a Saudi regional leader and international player.

The proxy war narrative was also utilised to construct an image of an Iranian-US proxy war that had overshadowed the plight of Arabs in Palestine and Iraq. Lebanon was represented as a country that 'after Palestine, always saw the most of the Israeli-Arab conflict' and now it 'not only pays a price for Palestine, but also regional conflicts' (*al-Riyadh* 2006c). These conflicts, according to Saudi discourse, were due to the 'effects of the Iranian revolution, and continuous wars in Iraq'. Therefore, the formation of a Shi'i Islamic government in Iran and its support for regional Shi'i groups, was depicted as the main reason behind the plight of the Arab world and Islamic Ummah, especially since Iraq was the most 'intense warfront between Iran and the US' (*al-Riyadh* 2006c). This proxy war was represented as creating sectarian and ethnic divisions in the region and making room for regional states to interfere and 'support Sunnis and denounce Shi'i hegemony' (*al-Riyadh* 2006c). It is this interference that Saudi discourse argued resulted in 'Israel collaborating and supporting groups' acting against Iran, thus making Iraq 'the heart of conflict' (*al-Riyadh* 2006c).

Furthermore, the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict was explicitly represented as an Iranian war to alleviate Iranian regional pressures. These pressures included three contested regional issues. First, the Iraqi prime minister, Maliki's reconciliation process in Iraq was attributed as stemming from 'meetings in Riyadh rather than Tehran' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006a, 2006b), and therefore fears of Iraq drifting from the Iranian to the Arab sphere. Second, was the progress

of the investigation into the assassination of Hariri in 2005, which would implicate Syria, an Iranian ally, and Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006b). Third, Iran's nuclear programme was 'on its way to the UN Security Council' and would result in sanctions being imposed on Iran (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006b). Therefore, Saudi editorial discourse constructed Iran as 'planning the much-needed wars and conflicts', to make sure it sustains its control over Iraq, protects Syria and Hezbollah, and diverts attention from its nuclear programme. All that with an aim to 'destroying and planning the region's future' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2006a, 2006b).

### *B. Hezbollah's Historic Victory and Arab Leadership versus Iranian and Shi'i Hegemony*

During the course of the 34-day war and its aftermath, Iran and Saudi Arabia promulgated opposing discourses. These included Hezbollah's victory and Arab and Islamic leadership, and Iranian and Shi'i hegemony in Saudi discourse. Iranian tropes including Nasrallah's leadership and Hezbollah's support among the Arab masses constructed an image of illegitimate and weak Arab leaderships. Furthermore, comparisons were made between Hezbollah's 34-day resistance against Israel and the Arab wars of 1967 and 1973, suggesting the weak status of the Arab states and their subservience to the US. On the other hand, Saudi discourse constructed an image of Iranian and Shi'i expansion and hegemony in the Arab world, representing Iran as meddling in Arab affairs and raising fears of a hijacking of Arab identity.

In the early days of the attacks in Lebanon, Khamenei was quick to claim Hezbollah as an 'exemplary, honest, and honourable Islamic movement [that is] by no means comparable to the past', i.e. the Arab armies of 1967 and 1973. This movement and its war was represented by Khamenei as one that would bring 'dignity to the Islamic world' (Khamenei 2006f). The Supreme Leader's speeches also characterised the Islamic world as living in shame and, therefore, Hezbollah was a source of pride, especially since it stemmed from the 'Islamic flag

and revolution that was raised in Iran' (Khamenei 2006a, 2006e) with its hand 'in many global issues, especially regional affairs' (Khamenei 2006e). Khamenei's representation of Hezbollah was as an Iranian creation, their victory and resistance attributable to a 'mighty divine power' (Khamenei 2006e). This construction therefore gave rise to the definition of the Self as a strong and divine creation, in comparison to other movements and Islamic or Arab states.

This representation of divinity led to a discourse contrasting the weakness of Arab states with Hezbollah's strength. It can be therefore argued that since Hezbollah was characterised as a superior power to Arab countries, that meant that Iran was also superior to the Arab states since Hezbollah could be regarded as an extension of the Iranian Self. This was exemplified by Khamenei's sermon where he argued that the 'courageous and faithful stance of Hezbollah is a symbol of resistance spirit of the Islamic world' (Khamenei 2006d), thereby drawing a parallel between the Arab populace and their leaders. According to Khamenei (Khamenei 2006d), the 'Islamic and Arab worlds are supportive of Hezbollah…and its leader', discursively representing Hassan Nasrallah as an Arab and Islamic leader but not Saudi Arabia and its allies in the region such as Egypt and Jordan.

Furthermore, the discourse of 'Hezbollah's victory' was reinforced by employing an Islamic narratives and relating them to the vision of Khomeini's revolution. The 34-day war was also represented as a 'great Islamic epic…with a divine victory bestowed upon them' from God over 'America, the world's greatest tyrant' (Khamenei 2006a). This primordial seed of this victory was related to the vision of the 'late Imam', namely Khomeini (Khamenei 2006a). That is to say, Hezbollah was a creation of Khomeini, especially since 'the late Imam recognised people's power, discovered it, used it, and relied on people' (Khamenei 2006a). In other words, Hezbollah became a creation of Khomeini's revolution, and his vision of the oppressed versus the oppressor, i.e. Hezbollah versus the US tyrant.

Iranian editorials built on Khamenei's discourse on Hezbollah's victory and the Arab and Islamic leadership. Similar to the Supreme Leader's discourse, these editorials represented this victory and leadership as the fruit of the Iranian revolution and a fulfilment of Khomeini's vision. However, their representations and juxtapositions were more explicit: Iranian discourse aimed at highlighting the victory relative to Arab losses to Israel in the region, underlining their weakness as regular armies in comparison to a guerrilla group.

Hezbollah and its cadres were represented as 'honest and sacrilegious warriors [with a] popular and brave leader among the Arab masses' (*Ettela'at* 2006d). This representation of Hezbollah's grassroots support by the masses constructed an image of the Arab leadership's illegitimacy, thus highlighting a Shi'i leader established, trained and supported by Iran as a neo-Arab leader. In turn, it can be argued that the Iranian discourse implicitly represented Iran as a leader of the Arab and Islamic nations. To strengthen this argument, editorial discourse – especially *Kayhan* and *Jomhouri Eslami* – explicitly named, referred to and denigrated the existing leadership of the Arab world, questioning their legitimacy as well as domestic and regional roles. *Jomhouri Eslami* (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006a) compared Arab leaders, such as Saudi Arabia, to Western-imposed 'scarecrows' (*matarsak*), with the sole task of 'serving colonial powers [while holding] a club over people's heads'. In turn, Hezbollah's victory was therefore constructed as a liberation of the Arab masses from 'western-imposed dictatorships', where Hezbollah's resistance and alleged victory over Israel 'erased the fear' of the masses at the same time that Arab leaders' 'thrones are shaking' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006a). An image of cowardice and collaboration was framed when referring to the Saudi monarch. To give an example, Abdullah was argued to be 'shivering from fear and chaos' as this was the end of the 'mercenary elements that bolster Israel and do anything to defeat Hezbollah' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006a). Similarly, *Kayhan* (*Kayhan* 2006f) interwove this narrative with a historic background, with Hezbollah's victory designed and initiated by Khomeini, which in itself resulted in a 'Saudi state of

nervousness [with] Nasrallah the righteous heir of Khomeini and his follower' in leading the Arab and Islamic worlds (*Kayhan* 2006f).

A trope of Arab defeat at the hands of Israel dominated the Iranian editorials, which continued to contrast Hezbollah's successful resistance of Israel over the 34-day period compared to previous Arab wars with Israel (*Ettela'at* 2006f*; Resalat* 2006a, 2006e*; Kayhan* 2006b, 2006f). Although the editorials did not mention Saudi Arabia since it had not participated in the 1967 and 1973 wars, they did discuss Egypt since it was a strong Arab state, a Saudi ally, and had grievances with Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution. In this construction, Arab shame and weakness was the prevalent discursive representation, since 'Israel…within six days dragged the armies of a few Arab countries across the mud [and] invaded Sinai' (*Ettela'at* 2006f). The Arab army generals were framed as weak, while a shameful defeat 'forced the commander of the Egyptian army to commit suicide' (*Ettela'at* 2006f). In comparison, Hezbollah was defined as a 'a small army…able to extricate the enemy from its soil [without] equipment, facilities, and a regular army' (*Resalat* 2006a), which had led the 'minds of the Arab people to question the philosophy and value of their armies [as Israel] was weaker 40 years ago than it is today' but it had still defeated the Arabs (*Resalat* 2006e). As mentioned previously, the contrast made between Arab defeat and Hezbollah's victory was framed around revolutionary Islam and Khomeini. This 'absolute victory' was attributable to 'pure Islamic and Quranic thought', which had been built on Khomeini's *Islām-i Nāb-i Muhamadī* (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006a) rather than the 'self-selling muftis of the Saudi courts…and not on al-Qaeda and the ignorant stone age Taliban puppets' of Saudi Arabia (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2006a). This Islamic victory further represented an extension of a real and legitimate Islamic leadership, beginning with the 'blood of Imam Hussain…flowing in the veins of Nasrallah', a victory that was also due to Khomeini's Islamic revolution (*Resalat* 2006e).

*5.4.4.2 The Gaza War, 'Operation Cast Lead'*

Operation Cast Lead, also known as the Gaza War (Cordesman 2009), the Gaza Massacre in the Islamic World (Bregman 2016) and the 'Battle of Furqan' by Hamas (Kayālī 2009) was a three-week offensive carried out by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip. The conflict began on 27/12//2008 and ended on 18/01/2009, and involved the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and Palestinian militants, predominantly Hamas. Furthermore, Israel's reasons for launching the offensive included Hamas' weapons smuggling through tunnels and its continuous rocket attacks on Israel's southern territories (Cordesman 2009).

According to Cordsman (2009: ii), the Gaza war was 'the first major armed struggle between Israel and Hamas, as it distinguished between Israel and the PLO and Fatah', and possibly the worst conflict since the Six Day War in 1967 (Lambeth 2012).

Both Iran and Saudi Arabia had active roles during the Gaza war. From a historical perspective, Iran had always supported Hamas since its creation in 1987 and this was apparent during the Gaza offensive when it exerted both diplomatic pressure on Egypt to open its border crossing with Gaza as well as international pressure to end the Gaza blockade. Furthermore, Iran demonstrated continuous and active support of Hamas due to its Islamic ideology based on opposing the secular Palestinian Authority (PA), the latter supported by Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, although Saudi Arabia viewed Hamas as an Islamic group, it also saw it as an extremist faction hindering the Oslo Accord that had the potential to bring stability to the region through a two state solution. Finally, the Gaza war witnessed the formation of two camps in the Middle East, a pro-Hamas axis led by Iran comprised of Syria and Qatar, and a pro-PA axis led by Saudi Arabia and including the Persian Gulf states, Jordan and Egypt. Throughout the

Gaza offensive, both Saudi Arabia and Iran adopted active roles and strong stances, which were covered by the newspapers in both countries.

The response was to the attacks was immediate, starting with a statement by Khamenei on the second day of the war (Khamenei 2008). Similar to the 34-day Hezbollah-Israel war in 2006, Khamenei's argument focussed on one major theme, the silence and subservience of Arab leaders and the Islamic ulama. Although the reference to Saudi Arabia was implicit, the central point of his criticism was aimed at Egypt and the *al-Azhar* Islamic seminary. The denigration of Arab leadership and the 'clerics of the Islamic world' as Iran's Other, allowed him to highlight the Iranian Self as leading the Islamic world as well as feeling the plight of the Palestine people. The statement represented the Self as a continuation of true Mohammadian Islam, bolstering the legitimacy of Iran's regional and Islamic leadership.

It is interesting to note that from the beginning of the war, Khamenei discursively constructed the Arab leaders in three ways, first by questioning the Islamic identity of the silent states and representing them as Israeli collaborators. Khamenei explicitly labelled the silence of 'some Arab governments and those that claim to be Muslim' as 'encouraging silence' (Khamenei 2008), that is to say a silence that allowed these countries to 'insolently coordinate and agree to this great catastrophe'. Second, he represented the Arab leaders as acting against the wishes of their people, a form of schism between the Arab leadership and its nations. While the 'hearts of the people of Egypt and Jordan and other Islamic countries are aching and bloodied from this massacre', the leaderships' Islamic values were questioned (Khamenei 2008). The juxtaposition of the Iranian leadership and Arab governments constructed the Iranian Other as un-Islamic and lacking in Islamic values as evidenced by their inability to 'answer to the Prophet and the Ahl al-bayt' (Khamenei 2008). This characterisation of the Arab governments led to a third construction, namely the silence of the Sunni 'clerics and scholars of the Arab

world' (Khamenei 2008). By directly criticising the ulama of the Arab world in general and the seminary 'leaders of *al-Azhar* in Egypt' in particular, an implicit construction was developed where the Shi'a were represented as the defenders of the Palestinians 'at the hands of war infidels and the hypocrites of the Ummah' (Khamenei 2008). Thereby, Khamenei represented the Iranian Other – the Arab Sunni clerics – as silent and not 'fulfilling the duty of forbidding the evil and upholding the word of righteousness in front of the unjust' (Khamenei 2008), with the 'unjust' defined as the Arab leaders, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, the three main countries involved in the Palestinian peace process. Therefore, an Iran led by Shi'i clerics was following a Mohammadian path of upholding the word of righteousness against the unjust US-Zionist and Arab alliance, fulfilling the duty of protecting Palestinians and Islam from 'Zionist aggression'.

Khamenei's speech set down the main themes that the Friday sermons and editorials then took up, including the silence and subservience of Arab leaders and the Islamic awakening of the Muslim world. The aforementioned themes employed Islamic narratives and tropes, especially as the war coincided with the commemoration of Imam Hussein and the remembrance of the battle of Karbala.

### *A. Zionist-US Subservience and Arab Silence*

The elite discourse, especially that of Mottaki, the Iranian foreign minister, represented the war as Arab betrayal of the Palestinians. Speaking at a pre-Friday sermon, Mottaki argued that 'regional countries' were complicit in the attack on Gaza. Stopping short of naming these states, a narrative of Arab treachery and subservience to the West was constructed, claiming that 'those who stabbed the Palestinian movement in the back' had previously assured the Gazan officials that there would be no attack (Mottaki 2009). Furthermore, the Israeli attacks

were linked to the 34-day war with Hezbollah. A similar treachery was identified, with those complicit including the 'US and the Zionist regime of Britain' while highlighting the Iranian role in regional leadership. This role included the failure of the 'Rome conference…and the defeat of the Zionist regime' while Iran's Arab Other was negatively represented by underlining Iran's role in 'defending the 'dignity of Islam and the interests of the Islamic Ummah' in a region that was the 'heir to the divine prophets' (Mottaki 2009). The rhetoric of the 1980s war with Iraq was also promulgated at a technocrat level, echoing the Iranian narrative of victimisation during the Iran-Iraq war. The Islamic 'sanctities are subject to insults and crimes', with these insults identified with the 'mistakes' the Arab states committed in support of 'Saddam and his crimes', which was further represented as spreading discord in the region by supporting his war against Iran, 'a war between the Arabs, the Persians, the Shiite and Sunni' (Mottaki 2009). Therefore, the Iranian revolutionary narrative stressed Arab treachery, silence and subservience to a Zionist agenda. In addition, the attack on Gaza was identified as a war on Iran, where the Arabs sought to destroy the region by spreading discord and division among the region's states and the Islamic world, while Iran and its support for the resistance had defeated previous attacks in the 1980s and supported Hezbollah's 34-day war in 2006.

The representation of the Iranian Self as a leader of resistance alongside the discursive construction of Hamas as an extension of Iranian-led regional resistance was also promulgated in Friday sermons. Rafsanjani (Rafsanjani 2009) argued that Iran was the main support base and had 'led this field' of resistance that enjoyed the support of 'many Muslim nations' (Rafsanjani 2009). This Iranian-led resistance was explicitly discussed as based on 'political, cultural, propaganda, financial, and weapons support of any kind', which was available to the 'devout and sacrificial forces and the Islamic Ummah' (Rafsanjani 2009). While the Iranian Friday sermon discourse highlighted support for the resistance, it criticised the Arabs for

backing up the Israeli attacks on Gaza. Ahmad Khatami opined that 'some Arab countries are even providing the funds for attacking Gaza' (Khatami 2009). Consequently, the Iranian Self was represented as the leader of the Islamic world, fighting for its rights and freedom against the 'ultimate horror of the US, Europe and Arab states' that were collaborating with Israel against the people of Gaza and the Islamic world.

Whilst the editorials implicitly criticised Saudi Arabia and characterised it as an accomplice in the war on Gaza by referring to them collectively as part of the out-group, namely Arab states and Arab leaders, the editorials applied both implicit and explicit constructions of Saudi Arabian complicity in the attacks. When the war on Gaza was launched (*Kayhan* 2008b), *Kayhan* actively pointed its finger at the collusion of Arab leaders with Israel. Similar to the speeches of the elite and Friday sermons, there was no explicit naming of the Arab leaders but rather a passive grammatical agent referred to 'Arab regimes' and 'Arab leaders' of which Saudi Arabia was a major player (*Kayhan* 2008b). *Kayhan* also emphasised Arab collaboration with the 'Israeli genocide', highlighting the discourse of Arab silence and subservience to Israel by giving Israel a 'green light' to attack Gaza. Collusion was further highlighted and justified by *Kayhan*'s attempt to cite Israeli and Arabic sources when trying to hold Arab leaders accountable for the Gaza attack, thus the newspaper applied a strategy to legitimise its argument and demonstrate its unbiased nature. Furthermore, Tzipi Livni, the Israeli foreign minister, was quoted as claiming that 'Arab leaders had prior knowledge of the attack on Gaza' (*Kayhan* 2008b).

*Jomhouri EIslami* on the other hand deployed metaphors and symbols to illustrate Saudi Arabian collusion with Israel in the war on Gaza. The Jordanian, Saudi and Persian Gulf leaders' subservience and collaboration was described metaphorically as 'golden gifts' *(hadiyāhā-yi talā-yī)* to the US administration. Furthermore, the editorial discourse represented

the Saudi King as colluding and subservient, recalling the role of the monarch in pre-revolutionary Iran, echoing the Shah of Iran and his relationship with Israel prior to 1979 (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2008c). Similarly, the theme of Saudi-Zionist collusion was also represented by implicating the Saudi royal court (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2008a). In a tone similar to that used during the 1980s, Iranian editorials depicted the royal courts and monarchs as the 'errand boys of Israel and traitors', discursively constructing the image of the Saudi monarch as an 'errand boy', a state of affairs that was 'shocking [and] shameful'. This denigration of the Saudi Other in Iranian discourse further emphasised the notion of Saudi Arabia as a colluder and betrayer of the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic worlds (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2008a). This revolutionary Khomeinist rhetoric further constructed Saudi Arabia as a US lackey, corrupt like the former Shah of Iran, and questioned his king's legitimacy as an independent Arab and Islamic leader.

The subservience of the Saudi monarchy was also represented through historical juxtapositions. Drawing a parallel between Egypt and the signing of the Camp David Accords, Iranian editorial discourse portrayed Arab treachery and subservience against a historical landscape, framing the treachery of the Arab leadership and collusion with the US and Zionism in a series of events beginning with Anwar Sadat's accession to power and ending with the Saudi king Abdullah (*Ettela'at* 2009a). Subservience was shown as running through the Arab leadership, underlined by their betrayal of the Islamic and Arab worlds, beginning with the Camp David Accord and followed by the Madrid and Sharm al-Sheikh summits. The events of the Arab Peace Process were represented as a 'scene in a chapter 'of premeditated events, with the war on Gaza the final treacherous scene planned by Abdullah and Shimon Peres (then Israeli Prime Minister) at a meeting in New York. Therefore, the Iranian discourse framed Abdullah's subservience to Israel and identified a Saudi-Israeli collaboration as behind the planning of the Gaza war (*Ettela'at* 2009a).

*B. Silence of the Sunni Clergy*

The legitimacy of the Arab ulama was also questioned. Similar to the 34-day war in 2006, the editorials questioned the silence of the Arab ulama, mainly the Saudi and Egyptian clerics. Like the monarchy, the Saudi ulama were deemed to be equally to blame for the silence and support of the Israeli attacks on Gaza. However, they were also implicated in the suppression of popular Arab protests. Iranian editorials represented the Saudi ulama as employing religion to suppress the masses. Arguing that Saudi Arabia had never had a history of public demonstrations due to clerical edicts such as the fatwa by the mufti Bin Baz which called for the banning of demonstrations in support of Gaza (*Kayhan* 2009b). The discourse of clerical silence was also extended to a criticism of the main Sunni clerical centres' generalised silence. While the Saudi mufti were not mentioned by name, the Egyptian mufti was discursively represented as traitors and colluding with Israel. *Jomhouri Eslami* (2008a) constructed the Egyptian mufti as an out-group that included the Israeli prime minister and Saudi king. Referring to the presence of Tantawi and the King of Saudi in a meeting with Shimon Peres in New York before the Gaza attacks, the editorial questioned the status of the Sunni cleric, and claimed that '*al-Azhar* has also forged alliances with the Zionists' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2008a). The construction of the Sunni Other as having treacherous alliances with Israel innately represented the Iranian Shi'i Self as the only legitimate sect and ulama that represented a true Islam. The Sunni clerics were further represented as clerics of the court, while Iranians fought for the emancipation of the Islamic and Arab worlds. While the oldest symbol of the Sunni clergy, *al-Azhar*, was queried and constructed based on silence, hypocrisy and illegitimacy, with the Iranian Shi'i ulama that ruled Iran depicted as vocal, legitimate, independent and moral leaders of the Muslim world.

The discourse on Islamic clerical leadership also discussed and drew parallels between Khamenei and the Sunni muftis (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2008b), constructing an image of Khamenei

as an Islamic leader who upheld justice in the Islamic world. Utilising quotes from Khamenei's sermons, the Supreme Leader was represented as a leader of the entire Islamic ulama, advising the muftis that 'for the sake of Islam and Muslims' the clergy should 'forbid people from committing the prohibited' and preach righteousness in the presence of an 'oppressive leader' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2008b). Khamenei's piety was compared to the Sunni mufti Tantawi, with the former represented as an independent cleric that stood for the rights of the Islamic world, while the latter was characterised as under the control of Arab leaders such the Saudi monarchy, the latter 'relinquishing their religious and Quranic duties' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2008b).

The discourse of the Sunni clergy's silence utilised tropes of Wahhabi reticence. Similar to the Hezbollah war in 2006, the editorial genre wove together the Saudi Wahhabi ulama, with al-Qaeda, and Tantawi of Egypt, defining at as general silence of the Sunni sect. That is to say, the Shi'a school of thought resists and is legitimate while the Sunni school is taken over by un-Islamic forces that are detrimental to Islam. Questioning the quiet nature of radical Sunni groups, Iranian editorial discourse mocked the lack of sound 'coming from al-Qaeda and [the] Taliban', asking why 'the muftis of Saudi Arabia [were] defending Zionism and Israel rather than defending the rights of the people of Gaza' throughout the three-week war (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009c). Consequently, the Sunni clergy was constructed and represented holistically by grouping radical terrorist groups with the Wahhabi ulama of Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian mufti. That is to say, all Sunni Arab muftis were subservient to their respective leaderships and Israel, and silent to the plight of Gaza and the Islamic world. This conspiracy against the Islamic world was deemed to be targeting all of Islam as the war on this occasion was 'not the South of Lebanon', a reference to 2006, underlining that the 'people of Gaza are Sunni' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009c). Therefore, regardless of sect, the Sunni scholars were pro-Israeli and anti-Muslim, whilst the Iranian theocracy was represented as non-sectarian and the legitimate leader of Islam.

The Sunni muftis' Islamic credentials and legitimacy was also questioned. Characterising the Sunni ulama in Saudi Arabia and Egypt as 'hired muftis' (*muftiyān-i muzdawir*), the Iranian discourse employed Islamic scripture to strengthen their construction of the betrayal of Islam and the Muslim world. *Jomhouri Eslami* (2009c) argued that since the prophet mentioned that 'He who hears a man calling out for a Muslim and that Muslim did not obey the call, then he is not a Muslim', the muftis right to issue fatwas was void since 'they do not practise Islam, or identify with humanity and their Arab nationalism' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009c). In contrast, the Iranian Self was represented as proud, 'responding to the calls of the prophet' while the 'people of Iran and its seminaries and clerics…showed that the Islamic Republic of Iran stands by the people of Palestine and preserves the ideals of Islam and the revolution' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009c). Thus further demonstrated that the only w ay to free Palestine was through Islamic movements and an Islamic resistance led by Iran and its revolution.

### *C. Islamic Narratives and Tropes of Silence and Subservience to Zionism*

The 'pro-Zionist' theme in the Iranian newspapers was further conveyed using symbolism to paint a particular picture for their readers. This symbolism included Islamic comparisons, either drawn from the Quran or Mohammad's narratives, the 'Hadeeth'. *Kayhan* compared the war on Gaza to that of the battles of *Badr* and *Uhud*, the first two wars Mohammad had fought against the 'infidels' of Mecca. Furthermore, *Kayhan* employed Islamic symbolism and a discourse of martyrdom to identify the Gazan people and Hamas as Islamic warriors and contemporary martyrs. This represented the 'pious and holy warriors of Palestine and the Islamic world' as combatting latter day infidels, namely Israel and its supporters. Also, the the Arab leadership's treachery was framed, as the Arab leaders are engaged in a war of Islam against infidelity. In addition, the Gaza war was compared to the 'Holy Defence' war (*Difaʿ-i*

*Muqadas*), a reference to the Iran-Iraq war, which was also based on the 1980s discourse of a war of Islam against contemporary infidels, namely Saddam and the Arab leaders who supported him. Therefore, the Gaza war was constructed as a holy war while the resistance represented an extension of a war between good and evil, Islam versus infidelity, with Iran combatting the infidels, recalling a Mohammadian struggle and jihad evident in the *Uhud* and *Badr* wars (*Kayhan* 2008a).

Islamic references were also employed to represent the Arab leaders in a negative and denigrating light. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak was characterised as a contemporary pharaoh and a 'descendent of the lineage of the pharaohs' (*Kayhan* 2008a). Iranian discourse drew parallels with tyranny and reverence of infidels**.** Similarly, the Saudi monarch, Abdullah, was represented as *'Āl-i So'ūdī'* (*Kayhan* 2008a), a descendent of al-Saud, which was also a reference to autocracy as the word *'Āl'* signifies dynasty. Collectively, when both constructions are woven together, they construct an image of a Saudi aristocrat who was collaborating with tyranny in the form of a pharaoh while Israel oppressed the Palestinian and Islamic worlds. Furthermore, Islamic symbolism was employed to question the legitimacy of the Saudi monarch as an Islamic leader and to identify his conspiracy against Palestine. Criticising Abdullah's attempts to hold a Khatami-like dialogue with the international community, known as the 'Dialogue of Religion', Iranian editorial discourse constructed a narrative of treachery, conspiracy and collaboration with 'Zionist regime officials and the Great Satan in the cradle of infidelity and atheism…to begin the inhumane Zionist attacks' on Gaza (*Kayhan* 2008a). The Iranian Self, in contrast, was framed by representing Khamenei as 'the guardian and true leader of all the Muslim world', a leader who protected the Islamic world from the 'war infidel' (*kafir-i ḥarbī*) and who united the Islamic world 'against a criminal Israel' (*Kayhan* 2008a), whilst the Iranian Other, Saudi Arabia and its allies, were pitted against the Palestinian people and, therefore, against Islam.

The discourse of Zionist collusion and treachery was also constructed by employing a religious narrative that references the squandering of Islamic wealth as well as un-Islamic conduct and accountability. Weapons, such as the 'phosphorus bombs and laser-guided armaments' were acquired by the Israelis using the 'deep pockets of the Arabs and *Bayt-ul Māl*', i.e. the Islamic treasury responsible for the revenues and the economic matters of the state or caliphate (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009b). Verses from the Quran were also cited to provide credibility to the discourse and its construction, thereby framing the Saudi monarchy as having no respect for Islam or the Muslim nations. There were also references to Quranic verses that shed light on 'accountability' (*ihtisāb*) (*Ettela'at* 2009b) for one's deeds and actions, such as 'blocking medical aid and food supplies to the oppressed people of Palestine' by collaborating 'hand in hand with American and Israel…thus creating another Karbala' (*Ettela'at* 2009b). This juxtaposition with Karabla framed Arab collusion as a contemporary Karbala, with the collusion of the Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia with the Umayyads against Imam Hussein, namely the oppressed people of Gaza.

### *1. The Karbala Narrative: Tropes of Martyrdom and Resistance*

The Gaza war coincided with the month of Muharram and the Shi'i commemoration of Karbala, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, his family and companions by the Ummayads. The first day of Muharram (2008) coincided with the second day of the Gaza war, with the newspaper *Kayhan* correlating the Gaza war with Karbala by identifying the former with Shi'ism and an Islamic resistance by celebrating the 'martyrs of Gaza' as recalling the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed and his followers (*Kayhan* 2008a). Furthermore, *Kayhan* identified Hamas with Imam Hussein's resistance that resulted in a 'Mohammedian and Ashura-like victory' (*Nāb-i Muhamadī*) (*Kayhan* 2008c).

As the tenth day of Muharram loomed, the Karbala narrative was more potently utilised. Parallels to the Iran-Iraq were drawn (*Kayhan* 2009d), once again constructing a discourse of martyrdom that wove together Karbala and the Gaza war, thereby emphasising the treachery of the Arab leaders, such as Saudi Arabia, and their inhumane actions towards Palestinian children. In contrast, the image of Khamenei's leadership was framed by juxtaposing the role of the Supreme Leader with Imam Hussein. The editorial initiated the this with a story of a thirteen-year-old boy who begged his parents to travel to Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war. When parental permission was attained, the discourse described a second permission sought from Khamenei in his role as then president, to issue a fatwa banning poets from reciting poetry mentioning the martyrdom of teenagers on the battlefields of Karbala. That is to say, the editorial combined the discourse of martyrdom, heroism and Islamic leadership by representing Iran as the source and origin of Islamic sacrifice, with the young children of Gaza now emulating a similar fate, representing the greater struggle for Islam and resistance against 'Zionism' and the 'Great Satan' (*Kayhan* 2009d).

Furthermore, the article compared the Umayyad ban of any support for Hussein to the banning of the demonstrations by the Saudi king. This was further emphasised by quoting Imam Hussein, with the Gaza war compared to a war of 'all of Islam against all of infidelity' that would not stop at the borders of Palestine (*Kayhan* 2009d). Therefore, Iranian discourse identified infidelity with Arab leaders and the 'Pro-Israeli West' staging a war against the free Islamic world that only Iran supported. Imam Hussein is identified with Iran, his followers with Gaza, and the Umayyad with the Arab leaders, the West and Israel.

The use of quotes to emphasise the Karbala narrative in the Gaza war was also evident on the tenth of Muharram, the day of the battle. Representing the war as the 'Karbala of Gaza' (*Kayhan* 2009c), the suffering of the people of Gaza was juxtaposed with Imam Hussein's

message of truth and honesty. Like the Ahl al-bayt 's suffering under the Ummayad Caliph Yazid, when Gazans spoke the truth, the Arab leaders and Israel sentenced them to death. Like the Umayyad accusing Hussein of heresy and pronouncing his blood permissible when he spoke of righteousness and advice to obey the teachings of the Quran, so were the Gazans sentenced to death by the contemporary Yazid. Quotations were also employed to strengthen this construction, including citing the head of Yazid's army, Amr Ibn Saad, as proclaiming, 'Oh Armies of God mount your horses and go to heaven by killing Hussein ibn Ali!' (*Kayhan* 2009c), with the Arab leaders and Israel symbolised by Amr Ibn Saad and Yazid's slaughter of a righteous Hussein, symbolising Gaza. The treachery and illegitimacy of the Arab leaders was compared to the treachery of the Umayyad, thus portraying them as hypocrites and citing the hadeeth when constructing a discourse of a false Islam, with the latter represented as a façade by quoting Mohammad's companion Amar ibn Yasser: 'They show Islam but they are not Muslims' (*Kayhan* 2009c). Finally, Iranian editorial discourse attempted to highlight the Shi'i nature of the Gazans and their alignment with Iran by describing the slogans and graffiti on the streets of Gaza. The suffering of the people of Gaza was identified with the suffering and assassination of Imam Ali, the first Shi'i infallible. The walls of Gaza were also depicted as covered with graffiti quoting Imam Ali's famous words as he was struck by the assassin's sword (*Ibn Muljem*): 'I have won by the blessing of the God of the Ka'aba'. The discourse compared the assassin, *Ibn Muljem* to the Arab leaders, whereby the 'political ancestor' and the modern day Imam Ali were the people of Gaza oppressed and betrayed by the Arab leaders (*Kayhan* 2009a).

The 'atrocities' and 'killings' in Gaza were juxtaposed with Karbala using the Shi'i universal phrase 'Every day is Ashura and Every Land is Karbala' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009a). The quoting of Hezbollah's speeches on Karbala on the day of Ashura, with the war on Gaza, gave rise to the representation of Hamas and Gaza as an extension of Hezbollah and the Shi'i resistance of

Karbala. Hassan Nasrallah's quotes arguing that this era was witnessing the "oppression and injustice of new Yazids and Yazidis" exemplified such this strategy (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009a), with the Self – namely the Iranian-sponsored groups – described as embodying the 'spirit of bravery, resistance and struggle' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009a) which, like the followers of Imam Hussein, would rise up and resist. Therefore, Iran and its sponsored groups were the modern day Ahl al-bayt, resisting Israel and the treacherous Arab leaders, the contemporary Yazid and Ummayads. The Iranian Self was thereby a legitimate and just Islamic leader, while Saudi Arabia and its regional allies were traitors to Islam and the Muslim people.

The construction of the Iranian Self as an Islamic leader fighting Islam's enemies was also achieved by framing the revolution as a basis for all victories. The Iranian revolution was correlated with Islamic resistance, Karbala and Islamic unity. Although the editorial stressed that the people of Palestine were not Shi'i, over the previous 30 years Islamic awakening had achieved by Islamic resistance groups such as Hezbollah and their 2006 victory. This victory was depicted as a Karbala-like triumph that had erased sectarianism. Iranian discourse further emphasised that contemporary argument and discussion was not about 'who is Sunni and who is Shi'i' but rather concerned Islamic unity (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009a). Thereby the victory in Gaza was also a success for the Islamic republic. Shi'i narratives were correlated and linked Karbala and Hezbollah's war by demonstrating that Palestinians were Muslims and part of the Islamic world, therefore they were natural targets of 'Zionists, and their protectors the Europeans and US' (*Jomhouri Eslami* 2009a). Hence, the Arab leadership, including Saudi Arabia, were implicated in conspiring to destroy Islam and the Muslim world.

5.4.4.2.2 Saudi Discourse in the wake of Operation Cast Lead

Saudi discourse during the Gaza war revolved around two main themes, Iranian sedition in the Arab world, and hegemony and realpolitik. Each theme gave rise to discourses such as inter and intra divisions in the Arab region, the promotion of Iranian national interests, and the rebuilding of a Persian empire. These discourses were prevalent in the Saudi editorials. The discourse of the Saudi elite and the ulama focussed on their support for the Palestinian people and condemning the strikes on Gaza. Explicit representations of Iran were not made by the elite or ulama. The Saudi editorials framed Iran's support for Hamas and responded to Iranian discourse and representations of Saudi Arabia and the Arab leaders.

*A. Iranian Sedition*

Saudi editorial discourse discussed Iranian aspirations of Arab division and sedition by arguing that Iran aimed to divide the Arabs by stirring sedition. Furthermore, this Arab division by Iran was represented as a reflection of the Palestinian factions' divisions. That is to say, Iranian sedition of Arab movements and states aimed at destroying Arab unity. Similar to Iranian discourse on the Gaza war, Saudi discourse utilised the 2006 Hezbollah war to construct and frame an image of Iran. Furthermore, Saudi editorial discourse responded and commented on speeches from pro-Iran groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. A representative illustration includes *Asharq al-Awsat*'s criticism of Hamas as an Iranian proxy and the inaction of Hezbollah in terms of the Israeli strikes on Gaza (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008c). Saudi editorial discourse represented Iran in three ways. First, by creating proxy powers that were 'Iranian bullies' and depicting Palestine and Gaza as a victim of Iranian meddling in the Middle East. Second, the Iranian-supported Shi'i Hezbollah was represented as hypocritical with a 'mask that has fallen'. Although Narallah criticised the Arab states for signing a peace accord with

Israel, the Shi'i leader 'had requested that Egypt and the Arab world save Hamas and the resistance' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008c), thereby by framing Iranian-sponsored groups as hypocritical and weak and the Arabs states, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as strong regional leaders. This argument led to the third representation, namely that 'Iran is the real threat to Arab security' since it sought a war with Egypt and later Saudi Arabia, weakening the Arab world by destroying its unity. *Asharq al-Awsat* argued that an Iranian war sought to 'break the bracelet', i.e. destroying Arab unity, through the devastation of the Arab world by 'first initiating a war with Egypt, and later with Saudi Arabia' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008c).

Framing Hamas as an Iranian pawn, the 'Gaza card' was argued as fulfilling the Iranian agenda of destroying the Arab world. Saudi discourse described the destruction of the Arab world as being initiated by the US after its invasion of Iraq, and 'Iran has taken it upon itself to destroy the rest of the Arab countries to spread its influence' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2009c). Iranian fatwas released by Khamenei were blamed for spreading the destruction of Arab states, while Saudi discourse labelled Islamist groups such as Hamas as having their 'loyalty bought by Iran' with Iranian control attempting to make them 'superior to states' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2009c). This superiority, combined with fatwas 'ordering the Muslim world to defend Gaza' meant that those that 'die defending Palestinians are martyrs'. Therefore, *Asharq al-Awsat* ultimately accused Iran's leadership of employing Islamic fatwas in aid of their proxies for the sake of causing internal disruption within Arab states as protests would potentially lead to deaths with those killed labelled as martyrs, thereby expanding the Iranian sphere of influence in the region.

The kingdom's editorial genre discursively constructed Iran as having a sectarian agenda, creating an image of a seditionist and sectarian state as evidenced by a sectarian narrative. The Islamic republic's support for Hamas was characterised as a stepping stone in its expansionist ambitions. Saudi discourse correlated between different Arab states that Iran was involved in

to order represent the Iranian Other as a chaotic hegemon in addition to its interference in the Iraqi political process: 'Iran was not satisfied with dividing…Beirut between Sunnis and Shi'a…now it seeks to support the Houthi separation in Yemen' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2009d).

Saudi editorial discourse utilised the 34-day war further to create a representation strategy that blamed Iran for the intra-Arab division and destruction of the Arab world. *Asharq al-Awsat* (2009), argued that the Gaza war built on the divisions created after the Hezbollah-Israel war in 2006. A specific sectarian narrative was spun, accusing Hezbollah of being an anti-Sunni movement, 'engaged in a war against the Sunnis on Beirut' in May and June 2008, under the orders of Iran. Consequently, Hamas was 'utilised by Iran' on this occasion to 'strike the Arabs in an unprecedented way' by creating rivalries among Sunni and Arab parties (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2009b). Therefore, the Saudi discourse framed Iranian proxies as a source of sedition that would attack the Sunni population within their states, as evidenced in the siege of Beirut in 2008, and hence lead to a war that would attempt to destroy the two major Arab countries in the Middle East, Egypt and Saudi.

### *B. Iranian Hegemony and Realpolitik*

Another predominant theme in the Saudi discourse was Iranian hegemony and realpolitik, i.e. using the Gaza war as a tool to promote its national interests. As Iran was accused of being responsible for the Gaza war with Israel (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008b), Saudi discourse framed this theme through three main arguments in an attempt to answer a central question: 'Who benefits from this crime?' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008a). The specific arguments revolved around Iran's nuclear dossier, the spread of Iranian ideology, and leverage in the Golan Heights negotiations (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008a). Iran's role was characterised as 'one that in reality was indirect', while the Islamic Republic was labelled as a major actor that had caused a 'tragedy' and

committed a ‘crime’, as a result of which ‘Iran is the biggest beneficiary’ (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008a).

First, Saudi discourse framed Iran’s proxy wars to alleviate the pressures of the nuclear programme. By drawing parallels between the Hezbollah war in 2006 and Gaza attacks, Iran was represented as completing a malign nuclear programme while it sought to keep Israel occupied in a war with Iran’s proxies, Hezbollah in 2006 and Hamas in 2008-2009. This proxy war was argued to include ‘other plans to dominate the region’ (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008a). Saudi editorials further refracted Iran’s hegemonic ambitions through the creation of a false sense of national and Islamic resistance. That is to say, Iran was using Islam as a device to promote its own interests (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008a), thereby questioning Iran’s image of resistance, leadership, and Islam.

Meanwhile, a narrative of ‘political Shi’ism’ was promulgated to demonstrate that Iran’s proxy wars aim to spread its ideology, a main goal of its regional interests and hegemonic ambitions (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008b). Hamas was characterised as a weak military force while Iranian weapons provided to support the Sunni group were characterised sarcastically as ‘flammable fireworks’ (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008b), drawing an implicit contrast between strong support for a Shi’i Hezbollah compared to the ‘fireworks’ provided to Hamas. Iran’s support for the Hamas kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers was depicted as scapegoating the armed group and its people for the sake of Iranian national interests, raising the morale and therefore win the hearts and minds of the Arab masses. This allowed Iran to capitalise on the use of its proxy by spreading its ideology of ‘political Shi’ism’. Therefore, Iran was accused of using Shi’ism as a political tool to garner further support from the masses (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2008b).

Iran’s regional *raison d’etre* was depicted as characterised by the exploitation of Hamas and Palestine (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2009a), while Saudi editorial discourse argued that support for

Hamas as a proxy group might lead to total Iranian control over the Palestinian 'dossier', and therefore the end of the Arab Peace Plan, thereby giving Iran the upper hand in the region. Since both Syria and Hamas were both in the Iranian sphere of influence, that would lead to its leverage over Israel, and therefore influence over the US. This leverage would grant Iran 'US guarantees' that would result in an Iranian axis that dominated the region as the resulting benefits would include regaining the Golan Heights while the US might 'hand over Lebanon as an extra bonus' (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2009a). Therefore, Iran was represented as exploiting the situation and placing nations and the wider region in danger, an implicit allegation of adventurism in the pursuit of its regional goals of power and hegemony.

Meanwhile, *al-Riyadh* (2009) defined the Saudi Self in contrast to its Other, Iran, its role in the Middle East, and its impact in the Arab region. By emphasising Saudi Arabia's fairness and cooperation with Iran, the editorial underlined the king's leadership, pragmatism, and pursuit of peace by discussing his overtures with Iran. Furthermore, the king was framed as endangering the kingdom's position with the US and resisting American pressure, all for the sake of Islamic relations and unity with Iran. In addition, an image of Islamic leadership was projected by claiming that Abdullah was placing the interests of Islam and the region before the kingdom's interests with the US. In contrast, Iran was represented as a manipulator and hegemon, with ambitions to become the sole regional power. The Iranian leadership was thereby framed as an exploiter, taking liberties and abusing détente and rapprochement when relations were normalised with Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Self was a victim of its Other. Iran demanded 'expelling the US from the Gulf and vacating any military bases…withdrawing all the foreign reserves and boycotting oil sales', which was portrayed as a ploy by Iran to advance its military, financial and energy interests (*al-Riyadh* 2009). Meanwhile, Iranian regional involvement in Lebanon, the disputed islands with the UAE as well as Bahraini sovereignty were utilised again to illustrate Iranian hegemonic ambitions.

Saudi representation of Iranian hegemony was further promulgated by describing Iran as an agent of division in the Middle East (*al-Riyadh* 2009). Editorial discourse discussed the Iranian aspiration to divide the Arabs and spread its influence in the Middle East using two different strategies. First, blaming Iran for both Lebanon's 2006 war and Gaza's war with Israel, suggesting that Iran was the cause of the war with Israel and therefore responsible for the destruction of Lebanon and Gaza. This paved the way for a split in Lebanese party politics between the 8th and 14th of March coalitions and Iranian control over Lebanese politics. Consequently, Iran was framed for sedition by being responsible for cutting the ties between the two Palestinian factions. Second, the editorial discourse highlighted Iran's intention to sow sedition in the Gulf States and for Iraq to be the fifteenth state, arguing that it had interests in Iraq's south which had oil, fertile land and was rich in Arab culture. This would be accomplished by 'Iranian agitating the Shia in the Gulf to clash with the governments' (*al-Riyadh* 2009).

Finally, sectarian tropes were employed to identify an Iranian regional agenda to 'rebuild a Persian Empire' through religious collaboration and ties with Shi'i tribes and sects, that is to say the Gulf States such as Bahrain and Kuwait, the tribes located between Khuzestan (Iran) and Southern Iraq, as well as the Syrian Alawites and Lebanese Shia (*al-Riyadh* 2009). This framed Iran as having planned the re-emergence of its empire under the guise of religion, a sectarian narrative also supported by the criticism of Iranian religious freedoms as the latter did not allow 'for the presence of one Sunni mosque in the capital Tehran', although Iran had a 25% Sunni population (*al-Riyadh* 2009). Consequently, the Saudi Other was framed as racist, hegemonic and sectarian, while the Self was lenient, accepting and projecting true Islamic

values and leadership, especially since the Sunni states in the Gulf had smaller Shi'i populations who were allowed to build mosques in their capitals[6].

## 5.5 Conclusion

The chapter proposed a central argument that the Ahmadinejad tenure from 2005-2009 brought about a shift in Iranian-Saudi representation of each Other. A shift that would end Rafsanjani's period of détente and Khatami's eight years of rapprochement. Iranian factors, such as populism through the election of Ahmadinejad, the first non-clerical president since the exile of Bani-Sadr in 1981, the nuclear crisis, and Iranian regional expansionism were decisive to ending Iranian-Saudi rapprochement. Similarly, Saudi external and domestics forces also played a pivotal role in Saudi-Iranian representations. These included the rise in terrorism, pressures on democratic reform and the failure of the Saudi proposed Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. In this chapter I argued that Iranian-Saudi representation of the Self and Other during the Ahmadinejad period would signify a return to denigrating rhetoric that recalled the early post-revolutionary period, mainly due to the return of Saudi fears of Iranian regional expansion as a result of the fall of Saddam in 2003 alongside the rise of Hezbollah and Hamas in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories respectively.

The chapter put forward three main arguments. First, Iranian populism, represented by post-revolutionary discourse and a revival of Khomeini's revolution and its export, sought to appease not only the impoverished domestic populace, but also the broader Arab and Islamic masses. Domestically, a shift discourse of the Self was observed where Ahmadinejad's speeches highlighted the revolutionary mantra of oppressed versus oppressor. Discourses of martyrdom,

[6] It was claimed that although there are over one million Sunnis living in Tehran, there are no Sunni mosques (Gheissari 2009: 319).

the Mahdi and the Ahl al-bayt were echoed, along with the return to the Khomeini vision of an 'Islamic global government'. The rise of the neoconservatives also shifted the Iranian Self from international rapprochement to an image of 'powerful Islamic society'. The shift from Khatami to Ahmadinejad sought to pull Iran from 'westoxification' back to Khomeini's *'Islām-i nāb-i Muhammadī'*. The construction of the Iranian Other was intertwined with Iran's identity and its nuclear programme. The supra-discourse on nuclear energy and Iran's 'inalienable right', gave rise to a plethora of discourses that included leadership, legitimacy and western oppression. These discourses resonated a Khomeini-era revolutionary discourse, that utilised narratives of martyrdom and the war with Iraq, framing Iran's role as a regional and Islamic leader.

Second, I argue that the Saudi Self emanated mainly from a supra-discourse of terrorism. The Saudi Self was constructed to project an image of moderation, modernity, and Arab and Islamic legitimacy and leadership. Furthermore, the Saudi Self showed a sharp contrast to Iran, where the discourse of the president regressed the Iranian Self into a post-revolutionary Khomeinist identity. The representation of the Saudi Self included discourses aimed at the international audience and domestic populace. The former focussed on combatting terrorism, democracy and reform, the kingdom's stability, and its regional and Islamic leadership. The latter included combatting terrorism and promoting reform whilst reinforcing the image of stability of the kingdom and its Islamic identity through measures led by the ulama and the security services. The representation of the Saudi Self and defining its Other included discourses of Islamic leadership, the stability of the state, combatting terrorism, Islamic unity and true image of Islam that Saudi Arabia represented. Similar to Iran, where Khamenei set the trend followed by the discourse genres, the Saudi genres followed the monarch's narratives.

The discourse of the Saudi Self was constructed as part of a larger discourse intertwining terrorism with Islamic identity and legitimacy. Narratives such as peace, unity and respect were

intertwined with the construction and framing of the Self and its legitimacy. Furthermore, through the employment of Islamic narratives, an image of non-sectarianism, safety, stability, and therefore legitimacy of the monarchy was framed. The definition of the Self as an Islamic leader, fighting terrorism and ensuring the state's stability was also represented in the discourse of the Self and the Other. Saudi discourses constructed terrorists as Saudi Arabia's Other. Discourses of victimisation and at the hands of terrorism were highlighted. The Saudi Self was constructed as a true representation of Islam in a struggle against Islam's enemies, the terrorists, and also a member of the international war on terror.

External pressure, principally from the US, the establishment of democracy in Iraq, as well as fear of instability in the kingdom led the Saudis to move towards political reform. The Saudi Self was represented leading and combatting terrorism, in a discourse that was woven into democracy and reform. Two constructions of the Self were made an external image for the international community by Abdullah and Saud al-Faisal, and a domestic image by Nayef and the ulama. The former represented the Saudi Self as undergoing a holistic process that included women's rights along with political reconciliation across Saudi society. The latter, constructed a domestic image of limited democratic reform with women's rights being of minor relevance with the concept of 'intellectual security' taking priority.

Finally, I argue that Iranian-Saudi representation of each other is divided into two main phases. An overall implicit representation with instances of neutral to positive elite representation in 2005 to 2006. Therefore, leaving negative representation to the editorial and clerical discourse. The second phase witnessed and a more explicit representation of the Other from 2008-20009, including negative representations across all discourse genres. Furthermore, the first phase, marked by Ahmadinejad's Victory, reflected a populist narrative and a return to 1980s rhetoric witnessed in the Khomeini era. However, Iranian discourse also witnessed a bifurcated

approach to Saudi Arabia. Ahmadinejad's rhetoric was balanced with Rafsanjani's discourse of Iranian cooperation, unity and rapprochement. Similarly, Saudi discourse exemplified notions of cooperation, sustained rapprochement, and explicit support for Iran's nuclear programme.

Iranian populist discourse on Israel proved to be contentious for Saudi Arabia. Ahmadinejad's representation of the Iranian Self as an enemy of Israel and championing the cause of the Palestinians implicitly constructed Saudi Arabia as less Islamic and questioned Saudi legitimacy as an Islamic and Arab leader. This came at a time where Saudi domestic discourse was marred with al-Qaeda's accusations of al-Saud's treachery and subservience to Israel and the West.

Events in Iraq, including the control of a Shi'i led government and constitution, shifted Saudi representation towards Iran. This shift was illustrated in narratives of sectarianism, Arab losses, and Iranian expansionism, as part of a greater discourse on hegemony explicitly defining the Saudi Other. Iranian rebuttals on Iraq represented calm and sustained rapprochement across all discourse genres. The bombing of the Askari shrine and the sectarian violence that ensued began an Iranian discourse of Saudi Othering, albeit limited to clerical and editorial discourse. Tropes such as the '*musalas-i shūm'* from the Taliban period were promulgated by the Iranian editorials. Stopping short of labelling Saudi Arabia by name, Wahhabis denigrated in reference to Saudi involvement in the sectarian attacks, and their collaboration with the US and Baathists. Shi'i narratives of Karbala and discourses of martyrdom during Ahmadinejad's tenure were first cited during this incident. Modern day Yazid and his supporters were referenced to Wahhabism, and Saudi Arabia, against the modern day Imam Hussein and his followers, i.e. the Iraqi people and the Islamic world. Saudi discourses mimicked Iranian themes of Islamic unity and the negative attributes of foreign occupation. Similarly, Saudi editorial discourse took

the position of implicit Iranian Othering. Iranian support for a Shi'a led government discursively constructed the Shi'a as the force behind the sectarianism, fragmentation and extended occupation of Iraq. Although implicitly, the Askari shrine bombing of 2006 was the first sign of Saudi Othering of Iran as a malevolent force in the Arab world, since it supported the Shi'a and Iraq's constitution.

The chapter also argued that the 34-Day Israel-Hezbollah war had an impact on Iranian-Saudi representations of each other. Discourses in both countries began to shift from the start of the war, where more neutral and implicit discursive constructions of each other were apparent to more explicit and denigrating representations. Iranian-Saudi Othering was tiered and hierarchical. Discourses of a silence of Arab and Islamic leaders with subservience to the West and Zionism, and a shift in Arab leadership was constructed by Khamenei. These were promulgated by Ahmadinejad in his speeches, but through the use of harsher rhetoric. Clerical discourse echoed the state narrative, without explicit mention of Saudi Arabia. However, Iranian discourse mainly employed the revolutionary rhetoric and tropes of the Khomeini period. Post-revolutionary denigrative phrases such as '*sarān-i irtijāʿ-i Arab*', '*shyūkh-i ʿāj nishīn*', and '*sarān-i sazishkār-i Arab'*, were employed to construct an image of US-Zionist subservience and treachery against the Arab and Islamic worlds. Saudi discourse aimed at representing the Self and highlight the legitimacy and Arab leadership. Saudi Othering of Iran revolved around discourses of Iranian adventurism, Iranian-Shi'i hegemony and expansion.

Similar discourse representations were observed in the Israel-Hamas war in 2008-09. Saudi discourses discussed included Iranian sedition in the Arab world, and hegemony and realpolitik. Iranian discourses, on the other hand, were an extension of those constructed during the Hezbollah 34-day war. They represented Saudi Arabia mainly by discussing silence and subservience of Arab leaders and an awakening of the Islamic world. Furthermore, Iranian

took advantage of the Muharram and the commemoration of Imam Hussein. This gave rise to Islamic narratives and tropes. Saudi discourse employed tropes and narratives resembling the 1980s Iran-Iraq war. These include the promotion of Iranian national interests, and the rebuilding of a Persian empire.

# 6. Conclusion

The dissertation explored the concept of the ‘representation of the Other’ in Saudi-Iranian relations between 1979-2009 while using a diachronic approach in the context of Saudi-Iranian confrontation and Shi’i-Wahhabi strife. This thesis explores the factors which have shaped the image which Saudi elites have of the Iranian state, and conversely the image which Iranian elites have of the Saudi state. Attention is given to the ways in which these images have been projected in the relationship between the two countries, and the part which this has played in shaping relations. An understanding of how the images are constructed requires, for each side, an understanding of the elites’ conception of themselves and their state. The study used discourse analysis on three main discourse genres in both states. These included elite political speech, religious discourse in the form of Friday prayer sermons, and media discourse as represented by newspaper editorials. The three watershed epochs that were the focus of the research covered the tenures of four Iranian presidents, two Supreme Leaders and the reign of three Saudi kings. These periods were chosen to allow examination of discourses of Othering during periods of significant variation both in the internal political situation in the two states, and in their bilateral relations. They included the turbulent years immediately after the revolution, 1979-1983, the 1997-1999 period at the start of the Khatami presidency, and the early years of the Ahmadinejad presidency (2005-2009).

In this dissertation, I developed and proposed four main contentions. First, that Saudi-Iranian Othering are overwhelmingly responsive to changes in political relations between the two states, and the images each side had of the other drew on different historical backgrounds, cultures, religious structures and beliefs. This in turn formed a vocabulary which each state mobilised in different ways in national, regional and international contexts. Second, I argue that there is a relationship between political, economic, and international events and the

changes in the discourses used, which reflects the shifts in Iranian-Saudi relations. I also contend that while differences in political and religious opinions may possibly construct negative representations of the Other, they may not inhibit the construction of a positive discourse. Furthermore, the discourse in both states across all three genres, demonstrated a close intertextual relationship managed by political elites. Mutual Othering discourse also drew on deeply-rooted religious and political symbolic repertoires, utilised for given state agendas and for both internal and external consumption. Finally, in this thesis I have argued that Othering discourses operating on a domestic level were intended to bolster regime legitimacy and public loyalty to the ruling system through the creation of 'the necessary enemy', while externally aimed discourses operate in a similar way to enlist support for the strategic claims of the Saudi and Iranian states.

Overall, this work contributes to the existing scholarship on the Saudi and Iranian relationship on different levels. Firstly, it marks a structural shift in regard to theoretical and methodological frameworks, from realist and neorealist, security-oriented, geopolitical perspectives moving to a deeper analysis of domestic institutions, their roles and agency, which helps to understand the mutual 'Othering' that took place and how political decisions unfolded. Secondly, this work uses primary sources from both Arabic and Persian, thereby providing a more insightful analysis of the language employed and of the perceptions that evolved and circulated in the Saudi and Iranian public spheres. Thirdly, it contests the popular and generalised perception of the Saudi-Iranian relationship as religious and/or sectarian in origin and intention, arguing instead that it is based on political motives, and that religious and sectarian identities are employed as tools for 'Othering'. Using a similar approach, Wehrey (2018) argues that sectarianism is a tool of Iranian-Saudi Othering rather than a fundamental aspect of their rivalry. Finally, this work demonstrates how the Self and the Other in the Iranian and Saudi cases have been promulgated in reaction to each other's perceptions and positions.

These findings can prove to be beneficial in many ways. In an academic setting, they identify a paradigm shift in analysis of the Saudi-Iranian relationship, moving away from conventional geopolitical and sectarian paradigms, which have been dominant. These conventional notions contend that the relations between the two states is primarily governed by a competition over regional control, and the spreading of Shi'ism or Wahhabism in the Islamic world. The framework of Othering and an insight into the domestic, institutional processes for constructing narratives of the Self and the Other suggests that religious and sectarian identities remained a propaganda tool, whereas, the nature of the agenda promoted by both sides was political in nature. That is to say this study argues for the need to go beyond the conventional geopolitical paradigm of religious rivalry. The Othering framework also marks a shift in the longstanding understanding of 'rivalry' in the Saudi-Iranian setting, where the relations between these two sides were dependent on the perceptions of each other, rather than embodying any innate or deeply grounded ideological fervour. In addition to their academic contribution, these findings might prove to be beneficial for policy purposes as well. On the one hand, it informs us of complexities and a need to observe the triad of the political, religious, and media institutions in both countries, which reflect elite policy-making perspectives and preferences due to the intertwined nature of the three respective institutions. On the other hand, such an approach allows us to generate deep insights through engagement with the primary sources to understand the circulation of information in political and public spheres as well as identifying how the Self and the Other is not only constructed in discursive spheres but also influences shifts in policies and regional politics. In fact, the scope of this analysis can be extended further to the post-Ahmadinejad period and more recent developments in the region with Iran's nuclear deal and internal changes and shifts in the Saudi royal house and its politics. The Arab Spring led to a renewed rivalry between both states. Iranian-Saudi competition in Syria and Yemen, for

example, could be studied in a more elaborate manner compared to the standard realist and neo-realist frameworks. The following section discusses the main findings of the study.

*The Function and Nature of Othering in Iranian-Saudi Discourse*

The study analysed how the phenomenon of Othering could be understood in Iranian-Saudi discourse, a phenomenon related to political rivalry and religious conflict. This Othering was based on the Iranian and Saudi leaderships' respective discourses of legitimacy. This is related to political rivalry in that during this period they both competed for the leadership of the Arab world, mainly through the discourse of the Palestine-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Israeli peace process. Furthermore, religious rivalry was evident in competition over the leadership of the Islamic world. Therefore, when contention and rivalry is seen in Iranian-Saudi discourses, the image of the Self in comparison to the Other is defined. That is to say, the Self is defined along the lines of the ontological, namely identity, and existential, namely the survival of the Self. In 1979, the siege of Mecca as well as the Islamic revolution in Iran exaggerated these ontological and existential notions in both states.

In terms of their specific character – in other words, the question if the discourses are either political propaganda or religious polemics – both Iranian and Saudi discourses are evidence of their application in definitions of the Self while highlighting its Other and vice versa in a bidirectional manner. When the Other's legitimacy and leadership is negatively constructed, the legitimacy and leadership of the Self is inherently emphasised in a positive light. This works on both ontological and existential levels. The identity around which political propaganda is constructed ontologically, whereas existential constructions utilise religious narratives and polemics to define and bolster the image of the Self and the Other. The issue of religion and sectarianism developed as the relationship between the two states shifted, namely, religion – and sect to be more precise – was not an area of contention in the early days of the post-revolutionary period. What began as a narrative of acceptance and mutual respect later shifted to discourses characterised by animosity and denigration. Another change took place during Rafsanjani and Khatami's respective tenures. A discourse of Islamic unity predominated, with

calls for a joint Iranian-Saudi Islamic regional and leadership. Finally, sectarian and Islamic tropes surfaced during the Ahmadinejad period. Iranian expansion and influence in the Middle East – including Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine – which gave rise to Iranian and Saudi rhetoric reminiscent of the Khomeini-Fahd era. Consequently, sectarianism was employed as a tool and discursive strategy by the two states. In the early post-revolutionary period in Iran, it was framed around Saudi assistance to Saddam during the war, while in Saudi Arabia, it focussed on Khomeini's calls to export the revolution.

The analysis revealed an interesting relationship between the different discourse genres in both states, including the themes set by the leadership. In Iran, the main themes and narratives are set by the *valī-yi faqīh*. In Saudi Arabia, the king set the themes, though this responsibility shifted when the health of the king incapacitated him. In both states, the themes and narratives directed towards the Other were constructed and disseminated in a top-down fashion. The representation of the Other was developed by the elite, and disseminated to different layers of society as state propaganda through religious and media discourses. The difference in both states is the construction of the media discourse. In Iran, the media maintained some level of independence from the elite narrative and showed considerably differentiation among media outlets, whereas Saudi editorial lines maintained the elite discourse.

The structure of both states also played a major role in the relationship between their respective political, religious and media discourses. Iranian discourses were inseparable from one another, mainly due to the structure of the state and authority. The *valī-yi faqīh* set the main discourses and the other genres referenced or built on this by using different Islamic and political narratives. The Self has an inseparable legitimacy of political and religious authority because the position of the Supreme Leader – the Guardian Jurist – mixed religious and political leadership. The discourse in Saudi Arabia was inter-related. Due to the structure of the state,

the *ulama* gave the king legitimacy. The king mainly set the tone of the discourse, and this was continued by other elite elements. The religious discourse did not directly promulgate the discourse of the elite or build on it, however it sought to sustain and support it through discourses of legitimacy and leadership. The role of the media, on the other hand, promulgated the discourse of the elite.

The relationship between the discourses in both states was also evident in the representation of each other. In the early post-revolutionary period, Khomeini's denigration of the Arab leaders gave rise to a religious discourse and even more denigrative representation of Saudi Arabia in editorial discourse. The shift to rapprochement during Khatami's tenure was marked by a more neutral tone and leaning towards a positive representation of Saudi Arabia in Khamenei's discourse. Iranian religious discourse echoed Khamenei's focus on Islamic unity and leadership, even going as far as remaining silent on any Saudi involvement with the Taliban. As discussed above, negative representations are evident in Iranian editorial discourse. Meanwhile, the elite discourse reflected its political calculations and interests, that is to say, it reflected a supposed need to break out of international and regional isolation while building a relationship with Saudi Arabia, especially with regards to raising oil prices. Consequently, the denigrative role was championed by the editorial discourse.

Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, the representation of Iran as an Other moved from the silence of the monarch, to silent Othering during the rapprochement period, and finally a return to a vocal elite during Ahmadinejad's tenure. The explicit representation of Iran as Saudi Arabia's Other was championed by the elite, that is to say the ministers as well as the press. Furthermore, the shift in regional geopolitics and the subsequent drop in oil prices also led to positive elite discourse on Iran. In turn, the Saudi clerical discourse was largely silent, focussing mainly on Islamic unity. Unlike Iranian media discourse, Saudi editorials promulgated the elite's

discourse on Iran. Consequently, the relationship between the discourse genres in Saudi Arabia is closely inter-related; the king or the elite constructed the discourse on Iran, and the editorials mimicked and enhanced this narrative and its representation.

*The discursive practice of Othering and its function in Iranian-Saudi discourses: Themes and repertoires*

The themes and attributes ascribed to the Other can be defined in terms of the different episodes and shifts in Iranian-Saudi relations. Furthermore, the maturity of the state and its leadership had a direct influence on the representation of the Other. The post-revolutionary period witnessed an aggressive and highly rhetorical narrative across the Iranian discourse genre. After the death of Khomeini and Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, both countries entered a period marked by détente during the Rafsanjani-Abdullah tenure which later spawned into full rapprochement during the Khatami tenure. Explicit Iranian-Saudi Othering was evident again during the Ahmadinejad tenure, albeit gradual in nature.

Iranian-Saudi Othering exhibit two main supra-themes that reoccurred throughout the three epochs analysed. These include subservience to Western and Zionist powers, and subthemes based on Arab-Islamic hegemony, such as the revival of the Persian empire through Iranian expansion in the Middle East. Consequently, these two supra-themes gave rise to different sub-themes, tropes and repertoires that were political and religious in nature. Between 1979 and 1983, the subthemes of Saudi Arabia as a puppet of the US and Zionism was first constructed. The al-Saud were compared to a 'neo-Shah regime,' one submissive to 'American masters'. This explicit denigration, at least at this intensity, was not observed in the post-Khomeini era. Iranian discourse of Saudi subservience to the US and Israel was once again observed in the Ahmadinejad era. The 34-day war in 2006 and Gaza war in 2008 brought back the sub-themes

of the Arab and Sunni clergy's silence alongside subservience to the West/Zionism. Meanwhile, Saudi Othering of Iran framed Iran in a similar light. During the Iran-Iraq war themes of Iranian collusion with Israel was introduced. These themes were revisited once again during Ahmadinejad's tenure.

The discourses of Othering manifested themselves in two ways while these repertoires surfaced in the form of 'building blocks' or 'interpretative repertoires'. In this analysis, four 'supra-themes' of Othering emerged in post-revolutionary period, including subservience to imperialism and Zionism, expansion through hegemony and sedition, deception and hidden agendas, and domestic and social inequalities. Different metaphors, stereotypes, and predication strategies were employed under each of the aforementioned themes, facilitating the discursive construction of the Iranian and Saudi Other.

In contrast, the Iranian Other projected by Saudi Arabia was basic, lacking in detail and 'artistic imagination,' along with a strong emphasis on the state's Islamic credentials and questioning the moral basis for the Iranian regime. In a similar way, we see that the Iranian and Saudi discourse during the war questioned the moral authority and Islamic credentials of the Saudi monarchy and Iranian leadership respectively. In the case of Iran, the construction of the Saudi Other as immoral and un-Islamic preceded the construction of the Saudi construction of the Iranian Other. Eventually, the discourses of Iranian Othering by Saudi Arabia followed in the wake of the clerical consolidation of the IRP and by questioning Khomeini's persona and credibility with charges of Khomeini misleading people and brandishing fake Islamic slogans.

Predicational strategies and themes were applied to the discursive construction and demonization of the Other, thereby further exemplifying the political and religious repertoires. The religious repertoires, such as the one of *fitna*, were employed in the Saudi discourse to paint the Iranian Other as a source of sedition and a force dividing the *ummah*. Over that was

layered political propaganda build a narrative of covert collaboration and treachery against the Arab world. Furthermore, the notion that Khomeini-led Iran was trying to pursue a programme of Shi'i expansion while attempting to resurrect the Persian empire advances during the war.

In this way, historical and Islamic tropes and images were employed by both Iran and Saudi Arabia in their discourses representing the Other. The Prophet Muhammad's quest to spread Islam and his narratives were used by Iran to represent the Other. Iran was compared with the Prophet and his companions, whereas, the Saudi monarchy and King Fahd were, in general, associated with infidels. Woven around this rhetoric, Saudi counterparts were depicted as Yazid and Abu-Lahab, the enemies of the true Islam, against which Khomeini were likened to a contemporary Prophet Mohammad. The Saudi representation of the Iranian Other also used historical events, in particular narrative claiming Iran's hegemonic ambition were highlighted by equating modern Iran and Khomeini's concern with reviving the Persian Empire while the idea of exporting the revolution was juxtaposed with a grudge held since the Islamic conquest of Iran in Omar, the second Caliph's era. Similar to Iran's laying claim to Islam, the Saudi narrative projected itself as the place of Islam's birth alongside identifying revolutionary Iran as a pagan empire bent on taking a revenge for conquests made around the late-seventh century.

In contrast, in the period of détente and rapprochement, the nature of the political and religious repertoires used changed, as the actors involved in discourse dissemination did not belong to the government or the elite, but instead it was directed through media and religious sermons, often avoiding direct accusations. Meanwhile, the Saudi discourse on Othering was particularly visible in both Iran and Saudi Arabia during this period, where the political and religious repertoires may have been related to the maintenance of rapprochement, due to socio-economic problems and geopolitical issues, such as the presence of an Iraqi threat and the economic downturn in both states. In this period, Iran's Othering and its political repertoires developed a

'split personality,' i.e. a pragmatist approach to Khatami's regional and global rapprochement in contrast to a parallel and simultaneous evocation of early revolutionary zeal in Khamenei's fiery speeches. Indeed, Khamenei's speeches continued the discourse of the West as embodying a 'bullying domination,' marking continuity with Khomeini's early discourse. Consequently, the Iranian Self maintained contact with its earlier revolutionary Self, whereas the West – and the US in particular – remained the Great Satan and, thus, the Other.

The Saudi Self also underwent major changes during this period. In the aftermath of the Khobar bombings, the discourses on the government's legitimacy emerged, however, they were not circulated in the mainstream media. In addition, the tropes that emerged in response to the bombings were carefully framed so as not to blame Iran. In the official position, distinct tropes revolving around terrorism and Saudi Arabia's role as the protector of the Islamic world, aimed to re-establish its legitimacy against the internal Other, namely the *Sahwa* and bin Laden, and internationally, to bolster its role of regional leadership and stability.

Through the analysis developed in this dissertation, geopolitical concerns emerge as a crucial trope shared between the Saudi and Iranian construction of the Other and the Self. To construct Iran's Other, the geopolitical trope functioned at two levels. Firstly, given the US's active intervention in the region, the idea of the 'Ominous Triangle' was devised, whereby Iranian editorials used a carefully crafted discourse to point to the US and its regional ally Pakistan, while instead of explicit mentioning of the Saudi regime, Wahhabism was underlined as the major actor. The importance of this implicit reference, and separating Saudi Arabia from Wahhabism, could be related to the sustainability of détente and rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, especially since the Khatami era was marked as an era of collaboration and joint regional leadership as both states shared a common enemy, and economic recession.

The Saudi Other, meanwhile, was a discursive construction of its intertwined internal and external Other. In Saudi editorials, tropes constructing the external Other revolved mainly around the US's subservience to Israel and support for Israel, which became a war against the Arab world and Islam, while the trope of the Arab weakness was used to underline Saudi strength. The religious repertoires played an important role in shaping both Iran and Saudi Arabia's Self and the Other. One of the important tropes in this period for the Iranian Self was Khatami's 'Dialogue of Civilisations', which was initially formulated to project Iran's Self in the Islamic world and consolidate its position, thereby overcoming the country's isolation. Furthermore, the Iranian Self in this period reflected a careful balance between Khatami's efforts to strengthen Iran's position among Islamic countries in parallel with Khamenei's revolutionary rhetoric, which has been discussed earlier as a distinct repertoire. In contrast, the religious repertoire orbiting the Saudi Self emerged in this period to counter the internal Other, which was the challenge to the regime's legitimacy and credentials posed by Sahwa and bin Laden. These tropes were dominant, whereas the religious tropes played a supporting role in asserting the Saudi Self against the internal Other and to garner sympathy with the external Other concerning this issue.

Furthermore, historical and sectarian tropes were only employed by one main sermon in Medina to explicitly construct Iran negatively during the period of détente. This sermon by al-Huthaify denigrated Iran and the Shi'a sect while criticising the Saudi efforts to build both political and religious bridges and crown prince Abdullah's efforts in particular. In this case, al-Huthaify formulated the notion of the Shi'i as heretical against a political backdrop, where he isolated the efforts to achieve Islamic unity made by both the Iranian and Saudi regimes. It is at this point where the religious repertoires cross with the political ones in the historical and sectarian tropes, thus providing evidence of a 'split personality' between the members of the ruling and religious establishment. In addition, a conspiratorial trope was attached to the Iranian

Other, where Shi'i Iran was seen as a political supporter of the West against Saudi Arabia and the Islam practised in Saudi Arabia in particular. This allowed the discursive construction of a Saudi Self as the sole representative of the Arab and Islamic world against a denigrated Iran, which was perceived as allied with the United States. In understanding the détente period, political and religious repertoires were useful to identify the processes of implicit and explicit Othering.

In the third period, beginning in 2005, the respective Iranian-Saudi representations of each other divided into two main phases, the first being an implicit but neutral to positive elite-backed representation 2005-2006, followed by a negative representation in editorial and clerical discourses, then a more explicit representation of the Other from 2008-2009, including negative representations across all discourse genres. The Othering began with a discussion of the Israel-Hezbollah war in the Iranian and Saudi discursive spheres, where Hezbollah's engagement with the Israeli army was lauded in Iranian circles and compared to the Arab-Israeli war that saw the Arab armies defeated in a few days. Using this comparison, Iran constructed an image of itself as a regional leader and defender of the Palestinian cause, overshadowing Saudi Arabia and its contribution to resisting Israeli expansion.

In this regard, the first theme entailed a discursive struggle between Iran's 'Arab silence' against Saudi Arabia's 'Hezbollah adventurism' and irresponsibility during the first 34 days of the war. The Saudi criticism of Israel was interwoven with criticism of Hezbollah as a valid resistance force and was also directed towards the forces supporting Hezbollah. The Iranian discourse of Arab silence followed Khamenei's direct example, where the silence of some Arab leaders and Islamic government was questioned regarding Israel's aggression in neighbouring Arab countries. The trope of the silence of Arab leaders was political in nature and was utilised by the Iranian leadership to implicitly target the Saudi Other, while it not only challenged the

legitimacy of the Other as the leader of the Arabs, it also provided a clear discursive alternative while re-asserting the Iranian Self as the leader of Islamic and Arabic countries. The political themes applied here resonated with those applied in Khomeini's time, however, an interesting shift is evident in the speeches of Khamenei and the Friday sermons in the mosques, both of which did not target Saudi Arabia explicitly, rather they were pragmatically and implicitly aimed at the discourses produced by their Saudi counterparts. This pragmatism in representation of the Other could be related to Iran's nuclear programme. The relationship of Saudi Arabia with the US and more importantly the Saudi sway in the Arab world was important to show support for an Iranian nuclear energy programme.

The religious repertoires in this period were closely knitted with their political counterparts, where historical tropes emerged to link the two. Such tropes appeared to produce a discourse that employed historical images. In the case of the Arab silence in light of Israel's atrocities, religious discourse drew a parallel between Hezbollah and Salahuddin for example. In a similar way, the imagery of Karbala would often be recited in those sermons and speeches targeting the domestic audience mainly (because of the centrality of Karbala among the Shi'a). On another level, this meant that references to Saudi Arabia were implicit, thereby leading to an explicit Iranian Self but an implicit Saudi Other. In addition, Khamenei's speeches included Islamic discourses and tropes where the Iranian Self was equated to a given event in Islamic theology, whereas the Other would be implicitly villainised.

The discourse of the Sunni clergy's silence also utilised tropes of Wahhabi reticence. The Iranian editorial genre wove the Saudi Wahhabi *ulama* into other supposedly extremist sects, such as al-Qaeda, the Tantawi of Egypt etc., defining them as the embodiment of a general silence of the Sunni sects in comparison to the Shi'a during the Hezbollah war in 2006. This had direct implications for the Iranian Self as it could be condensed with the notion that the

Shi'a school of thought was based on resistance and, therefore, derive legitimacy from this, unlike the Sunni school which was taken over by forces which could be deemed un-Islamic and even detrimental to Sunni thought.

In contrast, the Saudi discourse during the Gaza War against Israel focused on two major themes evident in nearly all Saudi editorials. First was Iranian sedition in the Arab world with the second focused on Iran's hegemony and realpolitik. Each theme gave rise to discourses such as inter- and intra-divisions in the Arab region, the promotion of Iranian national interests, and the rebuilding of a Persian empire. The Saudi Self constructed and perceived the Iranian Other in three ways. First, it saw Iran's proxy involvement as based on Iran acting as a bully while depicting Palestine in general as a victim of Iran's behaviour. Second, was the depiction of the resistance against Israel – and especially Hezbollah – as hypocritical. Third, was the discourse of Iran as constituting a real threat to Arab security and unity as it sought to trigger a direct and indirect war with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In this scenario, the Saudi Self identified its legitimacy as based on it embodying the Arab ontology, which acted as the ethno-linguistic basis on which it disqualified Iran, followed by sectarian explanations. On another level, the Saudi Self found the Iranian Other and its presence as an aberration in the regional order and, therefore, rather than recognising Iran's role in Arab and Palestinian struggles, it chose instead to securitise Iranian identity over a strategic alternative.

In addition, the Saudi editorials portrayed the destruction of the Arab world as beginning with the US invasion of Iraq and Iran's subsequent expansion of its influence in Iraq. This trope identifying Iranian ambitions to create a Persian empire acted as a revision of the 1979-1983 period, where Iran's idea of exporting the revolution instigated a similar debate, albeit along different lines. Thus, the Saudi Self constructed an Iranian Other, both in terms of revisiting its revolutionary ambitions and also as an effort to reinstate its pre-Islamic glory and take revenge

against the Islamic invasions of Iran during the Sassanid era. The Saudi Self constructed the Iranian Other in a geopolitical trope, seeing Iran as 'invading' its sphere of influence, which the Saudi Self assumed leadership over by virtue of its status as the cradle of Islam. This was evident in Saudi editorial discourses that portrayed Iran's involvement in Palestinian affairs for example as furthering their national interests rather than contributing to the cause of Palestine.

*Iranian-Saudi discourse generation, actors and audiences*

The nature of inter-state relations and the constructions of the Other in both Iran and Saudi Arabia were formulated by the upper-level elites. In the case of Iran, this was represented by Khomeini (1979-89) and Khamenei (1989-) as they headed decision-making after the revolution, and in Saudi Arabia, by the king and crown prince, who were the two key power-holders. The discourse of *valī-yi faqīh* was mainly targeted towards both the domestic and broader Islamic audience with the aim of highlighting the image of the Iranian Self while underlining its leadership of the Islamic community. In a similar fashion, the discourses in the case of the Saudi monarchy were disseminated towards both domestic and international audiences, woven around the Saudi monarch and the crown prince. For example, these are evident in the speeches made on the anniversaries of the Hajj and Ramadan. The discourse propagated by Khomeini and Khamenei represented – albeit implicitly – the Saudi Other, which otherwise appeared explicitly in comparison to other genres, such as the editorials and political speeches in the *majles* and other ministries, which were aimed at the domestic audience. In contrast, the discourse propagated by the monarchs and crown princes (namely Khalid, Fahd, and Abdullah) reflected the notion of an Islamic brotherly community and the unity of the people of the faith. The Saudi editorials and ministerial discourses concerned with domestic issues – especially those of the Ministry of the Interior – explicitly reflected and

connected incidents between the both countries. A negative discursive projection and representation became explicitly visible, especially in the Hajj incidents alongside allegations of who was behind the Kuwaiti refinery and Khobar bombings in 1981 and 1996 respectively. The discourse emanating from the *ulama* were also aimed at both the domestic and international audiences. One example of this is evident in the Friday sermons in Iran prior to the satellite television and internet era, which were first recited in Farsi for the domestic masses, followed by a separate segment in Arabic for the broader Islamic world. With the gradual introduction of new technology over the following decades, this shifted to translated and dubbed sermons, such as those made by *al-Alam* in Arabic and *Press TV* in English. Meanwhile Saudi sermons were targeted at the domestic Saudi masses and the broader Islamic world and disseminated via television with subtitles followed by live coverage of the Mecca prayers from the mid-1980s onwards.

By the détente and rapprochement era of the mid-1990s, there were shifts in how information was disseminated, targeted and communicated in both Iran and Saudi Arabia. These shifts were two-fold. Firstly, there was a change in approach towards the Other. In the case of Iran, it came with an effort to balance ending isolation and keeping hold of the revolutionary spirit whereas, in the case of Saudi Arabia, it was evidenced by a recognition of Iran's détente and rapprochement alongside a shift in the Other at internal and external levels. Secondly, the shift paralleled the change in polity, i.e. in case of Iran with the election of Presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani and, in the case of Saudi, the ascension of Abdullah after Fahd and a move to a more Islamist and pan-Arab ideology. In this period, institutions in both Iran and Saudi Arabia adopted a very cautious approach, marking a departure from direct name-calling of the 1980s. Remarkably, in this period, both the Iranian and Saudi governments refrained from explicitly framing each other. This came up in the official statements targeted at both the domestic and international audience. However, the newspaper editorials were distinctive in their approach

and explicitly framed the government's position. Most of the Iranian dailies targeted the domestic audience as opposed to the Saudi Arabian newspapers which circulated among both the domestic and regional audience. The religious sermons, especially the Friday sermons, remained an interesting case. In Iran, the Friday sermons functioned in a manner similar to earlier, except that they aligned themselves with the government's position (as Imams were considered to be the representatives of the Ayatollah). In this period, their targets were both the Iranian domestic audience through sermons delivered in Farsi, and foreign audience via sermons in Arabic. In case of the Saudi sermons, it was slightly different, as most of the clerics aligned with the government's position on their perception of Iran, with the exception of al-Huthaify, whose sermon denigrated Iran explicitly. Apart from this exception, the implicit Othering continued between both the Saudi and the Iranian Self and the modes of transmission remained more or less same. In the case of sermons in Saudi Arabia, they targeted both the domestic and the regional/international realms, as they were in Arabic and derived from the implicit re-assertion of the role of the Saudis as the keeper of the two holy cities.

The third period saw a remarkable change in how discourses were generated and propagated as well as how the audiences were targeted. In the early phase, both Saudi Arabia and Iran maintained détente and rapprochement. The key propagators of the discourse in this period were the elites. In case of Iran, Khamenei persisted with implicit references to Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, in Saudi Arabia, the monarch and the crown prince remained the major manufacturers of the discursive production of the Saudi Self and the Iranian Other.

The primary goal in this discursive struggle remained of the leadership; both discourses sought to validate their leadership by claiming the struggle of Palestine through constructed themes. The discourses of the Iranian Self about the Saudi Other came with implicit references, both in the Friday sermons and the Iranian dailies' editorials. The former targeted both domestic and

international audiences as in previous cases, whereas the rise of digital media made the editorials widely accessible to both domestic and international audiences, but they are primarily aimed at the domestic audience. The discourses of the Saudi Self surfaced mainly through the editorials and these had a wider subscription and readership due to their language of publication, i.e. Arabic. In both states, the media was strictly regulated, therefore, editorials – despite their being more explicit than the elite actors – still published along state ideological lines. Therefore, the editorials acted as disseminators of government propaganda to a wider audience, both domestically and internationally. In addition, these discourses tried to generate support among the public to legitimise their Self by denigrating (implicitly or explicitly) the Other.

*Character and Genealogy of Iranian and Saudi Discourses of Othering and Their Effect on Changes in Bilateral Diplomatic/Political Relations*

The Saudi and Iranian discourses emerged in an action/reaction method, where Othering of another became important to assert and actualise the Self. There is a clear and direct correlation that emerges in this research between the Iranian and Saudi discourses, their character and genealogy. This relationship was based on a reaction to the discourse of Othering rather than any causality or reaction to regional and international events or incidents. This Othering discourse was produced, propagated, and rationalised in a specific context in order to actualise the meaning of the discourse while developing another discourse to attach meaning to the relationship.

The 1979 Iranian revolution was successful in deposing the Shah, but the revolution did not see itself finishing with deposing just one monarch. Instead, Khomeini's idea of exporting the revolution became an Iranian ambition. The revolution's export also coincided with the siege

of Mecca and popular unrest among the Shi'i minorities of eastern Saudi Arabia. The Iranian Self saw itself as the cauldron of a unique Islamic revolution and, with this belief, sought to overspill revolution in neighbouring countries to initialise the idea of establishing *vilayat-i-faqih,* and the continuation of Imam Ali's caliphate and the preparation of the Mahdi. The Saudi regime perceived the discourse of revolution as a threat to its established order, therefore it began a discourse asserting its legitimacy through re-asserting its status as the 'cradle of Islam,' the land of two holy mosques, and true representative of the Arabs against Shi'i claims of representation. In this way, we can detect the essential conflict in the discourse of Saudi and Iran concerning their respective legitimacy to lead the Islamic world drawn along political lines. The character of discourse in the early period was existential as well as ontological, whereas the assertion of identity remained essential to the existence of the state. In addition, the Saudi response to Iranian Othering began in 1981 after it gauged the supposed threat emanating from a revolutionary Iran.

The next period both states shared similar threats resulting from regional and economic woes. Iranian overtures in this period, particularly Khatami's pragmatism and desire to end isolation, was well-received by the Saudis. The presence of an existential issue here pushed both countries to slow down their claims on legitimacy and cooperate with each other. In this period, Iran and Saudi reflected their respective Selves in order to cooperate and maintain détente and rapprochement while simultaneously using this moment to overcome domestic problems in terms of weak infrastructure, high unemployment while progressing a bilateral discourse based on moving away from animosity and toward Islamic unity.

After the rapprochement period, which continued up to 2006, the discourse of Islamic unity shifted with Ahmadinejad's ascent to the Iranian presidency, whose populist fervour – both domestically and internationally – returned the focus back to the failing Arab peace process

with Israel. The discourse of the Iranian Self aimed to assert itself as the leader of the Islamic world. Iranian discourses were implicitly propagated through elite speeches and religious sermons and explicitly promulgated in the editorial genres. This was visible in their discourse in two main incidents, the Hezbollah-Israel 34-day war, and the Hamas-Israel war of 2008/09, that further exacerbated the negative representation of Saudi Arabia.

Similar to Iranian discourse, Saudi elite discourse and sermons were implicit in their engagement with Iran. The discursive struggle between the Iranian and the Saudi Selves proved to be defining in terms of broader events in the region. With this, we see that the discourses of Saudi and Iranian Othering was of a similar character, i.e. asserting their dominance and leadership over the region as the subject of Islamic leadership resided in the ontology of these states more than any realpolitik or hegemonic struggle. The discursive struggle shows the genealogical shifts in Iranian-Saudi relations which are specific to certain discourses produced and initialised only through the Other in the Self.

*Significance of the Othering of Them in Defining the Nature of the Self in Saudi and Iranian State and Propaganda Discourse*

The primary significance of Othering is embedded in the ontology of the states and signify their assertions of legitimacy. In the case of both Saudi and Iran, the Othering was implicit and explicit depending on the political situation in the region and their domestic issues. In order to understand the importance of Othering, we might compare two of the time periods bracketed and employed in this study: 1996-1999 and 2005-2009. Immediately after the revolution, Iran faced isolation at a regional and international level. Also, the war shifted in Iran's favour after the clerical consolidation of Iranian politics by a Khamenei-led government that led significant gains during the Iraq War. This isolation and battle gains were coupled with the simultaneous

Othering of the Saudi Arabian monarchy. The employment of direct and open denigration at all levels reflects revolutionary Iran at a juvenile period, where the primary motive appeared to be survival for sustainability and/or existence. However, in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, there was a shift in representations of both the Self and the Other, with the latter reflecting implicit reference in the absence of explicit denigration. Firstly, there was a shift in the leadership of Iran, thereby allowing a change in the leadership's strategy. This does not imply that Iran moved away from its revolutionary ideological trajectory, instead it transitioned from a juvenile order for only supporting revolution export to a more balanced prospect. As mentioned previously, with Khatami's rise, détente sought to end isolationism when oil prices were at their lowest and youth discontent was high alongside a weak infrastructure. The notion of balancing the country's ideological approaches was necessary for the state and regime's survival after an eight year-long war with Iraq.

Secondly, in the case of attacks on the Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, the Iranian institutions displayed restraint to keep their external relations intact, despite denigrating the Other, which had been the Iranian trajectory during the 1980s. Similarly, and as mentioned previously, during the Khobar bombings and the al-Huthaify case, the reaction by Saudi and Iran was pronouncedly mature and balanced, a foreign policy change also reflected the perceptions of each other and the discourses that created the latter. Saudi-Iran relations in 1996-1999, were embodied in their engagement and the recognition of joint regional leadership that they mutually agreed. In comparison to an immature and inexperienced post-revolutionary Iran, foreign relations in Khatami and Rafsanjani's era evidenced a more stable and outward-looking foreign policy.

During Ahmadinejad's ascendancy (2005-2009), the first year preserved and maintained the détente policy, thereby providing relative stability in Iran's relations with its neighbours. This

was visible in the support from the Arab states regarding Iran's nuclear dossier. The major shift in Iranian foreign policy came after 2006 Gaza war, when Iran and Saudi elites start producing implicit Othering discourses concerning the role that Iran-backed proxy groups played in the war against Israel. Furthermore, the first sign of shifts in the discourse of the Iranian Self appeared in the aftermath of Askari shrine blasts, that is Iran's accusations of Arab countries' silence and subservience in the advent of the 34-day war in July 2006. The significance of these shifts in discourse could explained as a relationship between representation of the Iranian Self as a regional and Islamic leader, as it sought to construct the resistance and moral gains of Hezbollah in the 34-day war to the Iranian Self. Therefore, highlighting Iran's regional and Islamic leadership, as opposed to a silent and subservient Saudi Other.

When contrasting these two periods and the Iranian Self in each, we see that the propaganda discourse produced to create the Saudi Other in the later period was based, first, on a change in foreign policy framing and, secondly, an ontological assertion to leadership by challenging the status quo based on ethno-linguistic lines. In either case, Iran's Othering of Saudi Arabia was an aspect of the Iranian ontological self which constituted the revolutionary values that it had adhered to for almost four decades. In this scenario, Othering played a role in realising one's Self via negating the values of the Other. Therefore, in the case of Iran and Saudi Arabia, Othering was needed to affirm and legitimise the Self, in order to engage in the production of those discourses that provided a meaning to both states' relationship and their entities.

**Study Limitations and Future Work**

The study took into account political, religious and editorial discourse genres in both countries. However, no study is without limitations. Access to data was the most problematic. Both states apply restrictions and stringent laws on dissemination of data. The data analysed during the

post-revolutionary period saw a shortage of Saudi Friday prayer sermons. This constrained the author in terms of more extensive analysis of religious discourse in Saudi Arabia for this period. Similarly, archival issues, mainly with the absence of some issues of the *al-Madina* newspaper between 2006-08, may have had a slight impact on Saudi editorial discourse analysis. To fill in any gaps in this dissertation, two periods could be examined in future work. First, Iranian-Saudi Othering in the advent of the 'Arab Spring' and during the Rouhani-Salman period, especially with the ascension of Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) as Crown Prince and Iran's post-JCPOA Treaty with the P5+1 could better examine and understand the tension and rivalry in the relationship. Second, analysing further data from Iran and Saudi Arabia will also allow for an improved analysis of the extent of the rivalry and discourse construction in both countries. This includes local Friday sermons from different cities, that have not been broadcasted on television, satellite or radio, but are archived locally or online on the websites of the Friday Imams.

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