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Introduction

Simon Mabon and Edward Wastnidge

In the years after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, few rivalries have had as important an impact on global politics as the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Following the toppling of Saddam Hussein and the removal of the Ba'ath regime, tensions between Riyadh and Tehran have shaped conflict in three states, resulting in a catastrophic loss of life and devastation. Engaging with the rivalry has shaped US foreign policy and fed into a broader realignment of regional security, best seen in the anti-Iranian alliance that helped forge the Abraham Accords. The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has also shaped political, social and economic life in Lebanon and Bahrain, along with manifesting in a broader competition in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the world's second largest inter-governmental organisation. The rivalry has also begun to resonate beyond the Middle East, manifesting in sectarian tensions across the world's Muslim population. Political in nature, yet couched in Islamic rhetoric, it reflects a desire to ensure regime security and legitimacy, whilst also increasing influence across the Middle East and wider Muslim world. Yet while taking on increasingly fractious characteristics since 2003, the roots of the rivalry are much deeper. Although by no means the sole factor shaping regional politics, the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has played an increasingly influential role in recent decades, prompting the publication of a growing body of literature on the topic.

As further elucidated below, the efforts to understand the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran have produced a body of literature that can be separated into three camps. The first suggests that the rivalry is best understood through a balance of power in the Gulf. The second camp suggests that religion plays a prominent role in shaping the nature of the rivalry and that so-called proxy conflicts have been drawn along sectarian lines. The third camp suggests that a more nuanced approach is needed, drawing upon concerns about regime power and legitimacy – externally and internally – with instrumentalised use of religious difference.

This book aims to offer further nuance to understanding and explaining the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia by considering the implications of the rivalry upon regional politics. Although both religion and geopolitics are important for understanding the nature of the rivalry, reducing analysis to either approach is deeply problematic. After the onset of the Arab Uprisings and the fragmentation of regime–society relations, communal relations have continued to degenerate, as societal actors retreat into sub-state identities, whilst difference becomes increasingly violent, spilling out beyond state borders. The power of religion – and trans-state nature of religious views and linkages – thus provides the means for external actors (such as Saudi Arabia and Iran) to exert influence over a number of groups across the region. Given these issues, the contributions to this volume, and the collection as a whole, have two main aims: firstly, to explore the nature of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran within the contemporary Middle East; and secondly, to consider the impact of this rivalry upon regional and domestic politics across the Middle East. To this end the book is structured around the core regional states in which the Iran–Saudi rivalry has been most apparent in recent years, these being Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, with further contextualising chapters on Iran, Saudi Arabia and religious contestation completing the picture.

Existing debates

In recent years, a burgeoning literature on the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has emerged. Much of this looks explicitly at the reasons for the rivalry and the ways in which tensions play out across the Middle East and beyond. Yet the proliferation of work on the post-Arab Uprisings Middle East has meant that a great deal of work has been produced that looks at the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran within the context of other lines of enquiry. In what follows, we seek to locate the rivalry in the context of broader intellectual discussions about the Middle East. For reasons of brevity, this is not comprehensive, but provides a steer into the types of questions and areas in which analysis of the rivalry between the two major Gulf powers occurs.

Within this literature on the rivalry, three main camps have emerged. The first seeks to understand the rivalry as a consequence of sectarian difference, the second reduces the rivalry to power politics, while the third argues that both religion and power politics are important, arguing that more critical approaches are needed that help to understand the ways in which religion and power politics interact, along with the repercussions across time and space.

Religion and the quest for legitimacy

After the events of the Arab Uprisings and the increased focus on sectarian difference in both zeitgeist and academic scholarship, it was hardly surprising to see work focussing on the impact of religious difference on the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran. Here, competition over leadership of the Islamic world and claims to legitimacy lead to tensions between the two, exacerbated by the incompatibility of Saudi Arabia's vociferously anti-Shia Wahhabist identity and the Shia identity enshrined within the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹ Indeed, after revolutionary events in Iran that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, relations between Riyadh and Tehran dramatically deteriorated. Here, parallels with the 'ancient hatreds' thesis found in the study of sectarianism are quickly apparent, which argue that tensions in the formative stages of Islam, manifesting at the Battle of Karbala in AD 680, are responsible for contemporary instability. Applied to the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, this argument would suggest that the two states are the political embodiments of their respective sects. Such a view is often reproduced in policy debates and journalistic articles, yet rarely finds traction in academia.

In spite of this, after the Arab Uprisings, the actions of Riyadh and Tehran in providing a degree of support to co-sectarian kin across the region helped to reinforce a narrative of a region becoming consumed by a sectarian struggle. Underpinning such fears were comments from King Abdullah of Jordan about a 'Shia Crescent' under the tutelage of Iran, stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. Yet much like the primordialist account of sectarian difference which seeks to reduce divisions to intractable, immutable factors – a position that has been largely discredited in academic parlance – such an account of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran rarely finds traction.

If one critically reflects on the role of religion in the Kingdom and Islamic Republic, it is easy to see that while Islam is integral to both, there is an instrumental dimension to its deployment, both in terms of its domestic and foreign policy. This is particularly evident when examining foreign policy behaviour, as sectarian identities provide scope for the cultivation of relationships with sectarian kin across state borders. Yet such an approach struggles to explain Iranian support for Hamas as part of a broader resistance axis and other foreign policy priorities. As Edward Wastnidge argues, while Iran's foreign policy is constructed in accordance with religious values, this is just one aspect of a multidimensional foreign policy that utilises a range of different identities.²

Additionally, Kim Ghattas's book *Black Wave* looks at the impact of 1979 on regional politics, with claims to Islamic legitimacy – in myriad

forms – central to the exposition.³ Dilip Hiro's book *Cold War in the Islamic World* also places Islam at the heart of regional developments yet fails to critically reflect on the ways in which religion resonates in regional politics.⁴ This point is made powerfully by Lawrence Rubin in *Islam in the Balance* acknowledging that competing claims to Islamic legitimacy can impact on relations between states.⁵

Power and regional security

Early efforts to comprehend the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran often adhered to realist analysis about power politics, threat perception and state survival. Such accounts sought to reduce the rivalry to a balance of power for regional hegemony across the Persian Gulf, pitting two powers against one another.⁶ Accordingly, state survival and the projection of power is deemed central in understanding the actions of Riyadh and Tehran. Here, work by scholars including Shahrām Chubin and Charles Tripp, Robert Mason, Henner Furtig and others explores a range of factors within the rivalry, from the rivalry between the Gulf Wars, to economic factors and the role of oil.

It is easy to see how this approach is appealing, with security often viewed in zero-sum ways by many, with devastating repercussions for the region. As scholars such as May Darwich, Bassel Salloukh, Chris Phillips, Thomas Juneau, Maria Clausen and others have acknowledged, competition between two powerful and influential states means that tensions can resonate across the region, shaping both the nature of regional politics and the specificities of particular arenas in the process.⁷ Take, for example, events in Syria where Saudi Arabia began funding rebel groups after the uprisings of 2011 in an effort to topple Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, with backing from Iran.⁸

These points were reinforced by erstwhile US President Barack Obama who, in a 2015 interview, stressed that

The competition between the Saudis and the Iranians – which has helped to feed proxy wars and chaos in Syria and Iraq and Yemen – requires us to say to our friends as well as to the Iranians that they need to find an effective way to share the neighborhood and institute some sort of cold peace.⁹

Although questions remain about the nature of 'proxy wars' and 'chaos', the focus on power politics and regional security is clear. This view of a rivalry spilling out across the Middle East is prevalent across policy discussions, journalistic accounts and also the broader literature that reflects on the rivalry.

Similar claims are made by Gregory Gause, who also argues that the 'best framework for understanding the regional politics of the Middle East

is a cold war in which Iran and Saudi Arabia play the leading roles'.¹⁰ This approach, for Gause, shares similarities with Malcolm Kerr's idea of the 'Arab Cold War' during the 1950s and 1960s. Here, the game is about a balance of power and while religion plays a role, it is not the key driving force. Building on this, Gause argues that it is the 'weakening of Arab states, more than sectarianism or the rise of Islamist ideologies, that has created the battlefields of the new Middle East cold war'.¹¹

The realist approach also helps account for the contrasting views of the US in the Gulf. For Saudi Arabia, a US presence was integral as a guarantor of regional security,¹² yet Washington's actions were viewed in a diametrically opposed way by Iran, which was a staunch advocate of Gulf states alone being responsible for regional security. Following this logic, some have sought to explore the ways in which the rivalry evolved during the Trump presidency as Washington took on an openly hostile stance against the Islamic Republic.¹³

A critical turn

A third camp seeks to bring together power politics and religion, exploring the ways in which religious identities can be used as a means of projecting power and influence; it also allows for an examination of the ways in which developments across the Kingdom and Islamic Republic contribute to actions across the region. Here, more critical understandings of security are routinely deployed, such as those posited by the Copenhagen school, in an effort to understand the construction of security and the ways in which religion features in these calculations.

One common approach found within the Copenhagen school has been to reflect on securitisation processes within the context of the rivalry, such as those proposed by Simon Mabon and Helle Malmvig. Here, a critical approach to the rivalry allows for analysis of the discursive practices used to frame the 'other', perhaps best seen in King Abdullah's demands for the US to 'cut off the head of the snake'.¹⁴

This approach takes analysis beyond examination of the structural factors shaping the rivalry to an exploration of the ways in which hostility and tensions are (re)produced, directly and indirectly. Once again, this has regularly been applied to particular arenas where the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran has played out, yet more detailed study is required of the analysis itself using these approaches. There is certainly a great deal of work that needs to be done on the nature of the rivalry itself, reflecting on a number of areas including: foreign policy decision-making; critical geopolitics; critical discourse analysis; political economy; the role of oil; and the ways in which the rivalry evolves.

Beyond the ways in which the rivalry is constructed and plays out, greater exploration is needed of the interaction and tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran and local politics in what is termed ‘the second image reversed’, which argues that regional politics can have a dramatic impact on local politics, and vice versa. Reflecting on events in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain and Iraq, it is easy to see how local politics have been conditioned by tensions between Riyadh and Tehran, although the extent of this conditioning is contingent upon the peculiarities of time and space. It is here where this volume seeks to build on existing debates, reflecting on the ways in which the rivalry plays out temporally and spatially through its detailed examinations of how it is perceived in both Riyadh and Tehran, how it is experienced in the politics of the five states chosen as case studies and what this means with regards to contestation within the realm of religious legitimacy.

Iran–Saudi relations in historical context

While current debates on the Iran–Saudi relationship are, by some necessity, centred on the contemporary manifestations of competition between the two sides, the sense of rivalry between them has a longer history.¹⁵ Iran’s revolution in 1979, so often heralded as a game changer in the region and Islamic world, certainly played a significant role in shaping the relationship as we see it now. However, the broader Cold War context, along with both states’ regional ambitions and roles as major oil producers prior to the revolution, are also key. In a past echo of the West’s current placing of trust in an authoritarian, ambitious leader, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was entrusted with securing Western interests in the region during the Cold War. As with Mohammad bin Salman, the shah was furnished with the most advanced weaponry and a blind eye was turned to the domestic repression that went hand in hand with modernisation efforts and vanity projects.

Both Iran and Saudi Arabia were seen as ‘twin pillars’ of Persian Gulf security following the UK withdrawal from the region,¹⁶ with Iran in particular playing a key role as a bulwark against the perceived Soviet threat to the region. The two monarchies were united by a common desire to maintain the regional status quo and push back against the tide of Arab nationalism that both saw as a major threat. As Saudi Arabia began to assert its position as a key oil producer, it was also able to undermine Iran’s regional clout – as seen through its role in the Arab oil embargo following the Yom Kippur War, and in its rapidly swelling coffers. Thus, in the lead up to the events of 1979, both states ramped up their military spending to reinforce their regional standing and domestic control.

Unsurprisingly, the events of 1979 across both states had a dramatic impact on regional relations. The establishment of the Islamic Republic under the tutelage of Ruhollah Khomeini added a theological dimension to geopolitical tensions across the Gulf that had become increasingly fraught.¹⁷ In Saudi Arabia, the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca demonstrated the precariousness of claims to Islamic leadership, which was further exacerbated by revolutionary activity across the Gulf.¹⁸ What quickly followed was a spiral of rhetoric as rulers in both states sought to demonstrate Islamic credentials along with demonising the other.¹⁹ The onset of war between Iran and Iraq exemplified the level of fear that many states across the Gulf felt at events in Iran and, although concerned about Saddam Hussein, Saudi support for Iraq was hardly surprising.²⁰ A key component of the nascent Islamic Republic's foreign policy was to provide support to the 'downtrodden' of the Muslim world as enshrined in Article 3.16 of the Iranian Constitution. This was quickly put into practice with support for groups across the Middle East, notably Hezbollah, and the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. These organisations sought to challenge the status quo and while the latter was ultimately unsuccessful in its efforts to topple the Al Khalifa ruling family in Bahrain, its legacy remains in how Shia groups have been treated across the island.

As the winds of change blew across global politics with the end of the Cold War, Iran was also transitioning to a new phase in its post-revolutionary political development following the end of the Iran–Iraq War and the death of Khomeini in 1989. Iran's need for post-war reconstruction and the ascension of a comparatively more pragmatic trend in Iranian politics in the form of the Rafsanjani–Khamenei axis had implications for its relationship with regional states. In Saudi Arabia, the emergence of Crown Prince Abdullah also heralded a new direction in the Kingdom's regional approach. As a result, the 1990s saw a burgeoning rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia which reached a high watermark under Iran's reform-minded president Mohammad Khatami.²¹ This period saw reciprocal visits by Khatami and Abdullah to each other's capitals, cooperative participation in international fora (both in terms of Islamic affairs in the OIC and oil affairs within OPEC)²² and increasing trade and security links being fostered between the two states.

Although the previous years had hinted at a thawing in diplomatic relations, the onset of the 'War on Terror' re-shaped the order of global politics. While Iran had provided support to the US in Operation Enduring Freedom, the State of the Union speech given in early 2002, which articulated the existence of an 'axis of evil', had a seismic impact on this burgeoning rapprochement. The ensuing invasion of Iraq – with a close eye on Iran – opened up space for a new arena of competition between Iran

and the US, supported by Saudi Arabia. With the return of a number of erstwhile Iraqi political figures from exile in Iran, the Islamic Republic quickly began to exert a great deal of influence upon the post-2003 state,²³ much to the concern of Saudi Arabia, who urged the US to ‘cut off the head of the snake’.²⁴ What followed was a discursive process of framing Iran as an existential threat to regional security, led by Saudi Arabia and Israel.²⁵ In Lebanon, the assassination of Rafic Hariri positioned the two rivals against each other in the formal political arena with the establishment of the ‘March 8’ and ‘March 14’ alliances, bringing together local allies with their external sponsors.²⁶ In spite of the burgeoning violence and hostility, Riyadh and Tehran were able to work together to prevent a descent into civil war. At the same time, however, Saudi Arabia sought to woo the new Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, reducing Iranian influence across the Levant.

The events of the Arab Uprisings opened up schisms between rulers and ruled, which quickly became arenas for geopolitical competition in a region underpinned by a range of shared norms, creating what Paul Noble termed a ‘regional echo chamber’.²⁷ In societies divided along sect-based lines – most notably Bahrain and Syria – schisms provided opportunities for Saudi Arabia and Iran to operate in pursuit of improved regional standing, often at the expense of the other.²⁸ As protests gained momentum and it appeared that regimes could have been toppled, events took on additional geopolitical meaning. In Syria, elite Iranian troops assumed a central role in devising Assad’s strategy to defeat the protesters and the Islamist groups that quickly emerged; unsurprisingly, the conflict had devastating repercussions for Syrians. In Bahrain, a Saudi-led Peninsula Shield Force crossed the King Fahd Causeway to ensure the survival of the Al Khalifa ruling family amidst widespread claims of perfidious Iranian activity.²⁹

What this brief historical overview shows is that the nature of relations between the two major Gulf and Islamic powers is shaped by the contingencies of time and space. While structural factors are certainly prevalent across these periods, notably concerns about regional order and claims to Islamic legitimacy, these structural forces are acted upon and shaped by agency operating in a range of different ways. As a consequence, while temporality is important, so too is spatiality.

Chapter overview

As noted above, this volume seeks to explore how the Iran–Saudi rivalry plays out across time and space. The following chapters do this by firstly focusing on how the two key actors, Iran and Saudi Arabia, understand

relations with each other, both bilaterally and through their regional policies in the post-Arab Uprisings geopolitical space. This sets the scene for understanding how Riyadh and Tehran comprehend the Iran–Saudi relationship and the extent to which it can be thought of as a rivalry. It then goes on to explore how the rivalry plays out in terms of wider contention within political Islam, before moving on to an exploration of the five case study countries of Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

In Chapter 1, May Darwich adopts a neoclassical realist framework to explain Saudi foreign policy towards Iran since 2011. Darwich highlights how Saudi foreign policy is at the intersection of international, regional and domestic conditions, with rising Saudi–Iran tension being the result of structural conditions. Following an explanation of the neoclassical approach and Saudi foreign policy, the chapter then looks at how the changing regional order has impacted on relations, and the influence of a confrontational nationalism from Saudi Arabia. The author shows how the Saudi portrayal of Iran as the enemy in the region is the result of the interaction between the regional structure in the post-2011 regional order and the nascent top-down nationalism in the Kingdom.

In the second chapter in this volume, Banafsheh Keynoush and Edward Wastnidge present the ‘view from Tehran’ regarding Iran–Saudi relations. The focus in this chapter is very much on the official, academic and policy discourses emanating from Iran about the relationship between the two regional powers. In doing so it presents a range of under-explored Iranian narratives and debates around Saudi Arabia’s regional policies and its stance towards the Islamic Republic, showing how the battle for regional influence is articulated through competing narratives as much as it is through material means. This covers Iranian elite views and discourses from Iran on Saudi–Iran relations, the role of religion in the relationship, Iranian perspectives on Saudi Arabia’s regional security policies and Tehran’s own security outlook for the region.

Chapter 3 explores how competition in the religious domain impacts on the foreign policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia. In this chapter, Lucia Ardovini unpacks the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran from the perspective of claims to religious legitimacy, showing how both countries have historically relied on their own understandings of Islam to legitimise state authority, frame nationalist projects and as a foreign policy tool. The chapter highlights how the struggle for religious competition between the two states goes beyond the Sunni–Shia schism, and translates into both geopolitical and domestic disorder. By using a comparative analysis Ardovini traces the ways in which the dependence on Islam as a state tool has influenced both domestic and foreign policies in each country and, in turn, the wider Saudi–Iranian competition for regional authority.

Chapter 4 is the first of the country-specific case studies exploring the temporal and spatial aspects of the rivalry. Drawing on the unique insight provided by fieldwork undertaken in Bahrain, Rashed al-Rasheed offers a deep investigation into how relations between Sunnis and Shia in Bahrain are influenced by the Saudi Arabia–Iran rivalry. This chapter shows how sectarian tensions have been exacerbated by competing regional agendas and a quest for hegemony. Through his interviews with a range of opposition and pro-government figures, as well as academics and analysts from across the different communities, al-Rasheed shines much needed light on how the wider regional dynamic impacts on inter-communal relations in Bahrain. Carrying out fieldwork in Bahrain on such a sensitive topic naturally raises important and challenging methodological questions regarding the positionality of the researcher. The chapter’s resultant emphasis on hitherto under-explored Bahraini Sunni concerns regarding the Saudi–Iran rivalry’s impact on the archipelago is both novel and a reflection of the challenges of conducting such research.

In Chapter 5, Stephen Royle and Simon Mabon use rich data from fieldwork carried out in Iraq to evidence how competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia is experienced on the ground in that country. The chapter starts with an important contextualisation of the importance of Iraq to regional security, along with the efforts of Iran to capitalise on the favourable conditions created for it by the fall of Saddam, and subsequent Saudi fears of Iran’s growing role there. The chapter homes in on the largely Sunni province of Anbar, and highlights the role of the Iran-aligned factions of the Popular Mobilisation Units in economic and political life there, as well as Saudi efforts to enhance its relations with sympathetic actors in the country.

The sixth chapter in this volume is authored by Hussein Kalout and explores the ever-complex roles of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon. In this chapter, Kalout presents Lebanon as the ‘irreplaceable piece’ in the foreign policy chessboard of competing Saudi–Iranian geostrategic ambitions in the Middle East. In a regional country where sectarian politics is arguably at its most overt, the author details how the Sunni and Shiite political landscapes have been cultivated by Saudi Arabia and Iran, respectively. This is shown as contributing to the continued political paralysis with the tutelary model of competition exercised by Iran and Saudi Arabia leading to a pronounced diminution of sovereignty.

Chapter 7 focuses on Syria as a space where one of the region’s longest-running and most brutal civil conflicts has been subject to the penetration of external powers, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. In this chapter, Christopher Phillips assesses the utility of different theoretical perspectives from international relations in explaining Iran’s comparative success

vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia in Syria. Phillips shows that while structural factors clearly were important, the significance of domestic and ideational factors alongside them suggests that purely systemic answers are insufficient alone to explain the conflict's outcome. Like Darwich, Phillips concludes that a neoclassical realist interpretation offers the best explanation for Saudi Arabia's inability to adapt to the changing external context and make the most of its advantages, due in part to the influence of domestic factors.

In the final country study of this volume, Maria-Louise Clausen looks at the case of Yemen as a theatre for the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In Chapter 8, Clausen explains how the notion of 'sunk cost effect' helps to explain Saudi Arabia's inability to extricate itself from the conflict in Yemen, due to the material and reputational resources that it has expended there. In doing so, the chapter highlights the ways in which the linkage of the Houthis to Iran by Riyadh helped frame the conflict as part of the broader rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The subsequent result of this framing has, ultimately, increased the reputational and material cost related to any possible Saudi withdrawal, whereas for Iran the involvement has had comparatively low cost materially.

The final chapter offers some reflections and conclusions as to how the rivalry between the two regional powers of Iran and Saudi Arabia is realised differently through time and space. Though competition and rivalry appear to predominate in the calculus of both states, shown starkly by how this has manifested in the cases explored in this volume, the authors seek to offer a less pessimistic outlook for the future of relations between the states. As key powers in a contested region, Iran and Saudi Arabia need to move towards greater accommodation and understanding of one another's interests to secure the future peace and prosperity of the Middle East.

Notes

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- 2 See E. Wastnidge, 'Iran's Shia Diplomacy: Religious Identity and Foreign Policy in the Islamic Republic', Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, September 2020, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/iran-s-shia-diplomacy-religious-identity-and-foreign-policy-in-the-islamic-republic> (accessed 12 December 2021); E. Wastnidge, 'Transnational Identity Claims, Roles and Strategic Foreign Policy Narratives in the Middle East', *Global Discourse*, 9:4 (2019), 605–625.
- 3 K. Ghattas, *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Rivalry That Unravelling the Middle East* (London: Headline Publishing Group, 2020).

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- 5 Rubin, *Islam in the Balance*.
- 6 H. Furtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2006); S. Chubin and C. Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996); B. Keynoush, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends or Foes?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); R. Mason, *Foreign Policy in Iran and Saudi Arabia: Economics and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).
- 7 On Lebanon, see the work of Bassel Salloukh, Amal Saad and Adham Saouli. On Yemen, see the work of Thomas Juneau, Maria Louise Clausen, Nadwa Dawsari and Peter Salisbury amongst others. On Bahrain, see the work of Toby Matthiesen, Simon Mabon, Rashed al-Rasheed and Jane Kinninmont. On Iraq, see the work of Toby Dodge, Charles Tripp, Renad Mansour and many others. On Syria, see the work of Christopher Phillips and Rahaf Aldoughli in particular.
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- 10 F. Gregory Gause III, *Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War* (Doha: Brookings Doha Centre, 2014).
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 12 B. Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2019); A. Cooper, *The Oil Kings: How the US, Iran and Saudi-Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East* (Banbury: Oneworld, 2011).
- 13 In particular, the work of Hassan Ahmadian, notably, 'Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Age of Trump', *Survival*, 60:2 (2018), 133–150.
- 14 S. Mabon, 'Muting the Trumpets of Sabotage: Saudi Arabia, the US and the Quest to Securitise Iran', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45:5 (2018), 742–759.
- 15 Some elements of this historical background section have appeared previously in a policy briefing prepared by the co-authors; see S. Mabon and E. Wastnidge, 'Saudi Arabia, Iran: Resilient Rivalries and Pragmatic Possibilities', in SEPAD Report, *Saudi Arabia, Iran and De-escalation in the Persian Gulf*, June 2020, www.sepad.org.uk/report/saudi-arabia-iran-and-de-escalaton-in-the-persian-gulf (accessed 1 August 2021).
- 16 For further insight into US policies in the region during the 1970s, including Nixon's 'twin pillars' policy, see S. Brannon, 'Pillars, Petroleum and Power: The United States in the Gulf', *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 2:1 (1994), 4–10.
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- 18 See J. Nevo, 'Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34:3 (1998), 34–53.
- 19 Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran*, chapter 6.
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- 29 S. Mabon, 'The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry', *Middle East Policy*, 19:2 (2012), 84–97.