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SAUDI ARABIA VS (SHIA`S FULL MOON) THEORY

by

Faisal Alghamdi, Colonel, Royal Saudi Air Force

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Advisor: DR. Jonathan K. Zartman

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Introduction

The first use of the “Crescent” terminology came from King Abdullah II of Jordan during his speech to *The Washington Post*, while visiting the United States in 2004. He warned of the growing influence of Iran in the Mesopotamia region (Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon), especially in Iraq. He also provided evidence of Iran’s intervention in Iraq’s election process. Many Shia writers criticized King Abdullah’s speech, called it a racist and an effort to split the Islamic ummah. “

However, as Hadi haddadin notes, King Abdullah II forewarned of “the possible disruption of the balance of power in the region. He never used the word Shia in a sectarian sense; he was rather referring to the political alignments and violent bloodshed that might result from such divides.”¹ Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak then used the same term (Iranian Crescent) again in 2006 during an interview with *Al-Arabiya News Channel*, he claimed that the Shia’s in the Middle East “are more loyal to Iran, not to the countries they are living in.”²

Iran seeks to expand its influence over these countries for many reasons: first, to export the Islamic revolution; Second, to gain operational proxy agents to accomplish its goals; and third to establish a ground bridge connecting Iran to the Mediterranean Sea, to facilitate low-cost importing through ground transportation for military and civilian purposes. Farhat, a retired Lebanese Army General, said, “if Iran can open this road, they will have access through Iraq, Syria all the way to Hezbollah in Lebanon.”³ A security adviser who works with some governments in the Middle East added, “there is a very high cost for air transport for the militias. Troops and small supplies are easy to transport, but it is hard to load heavy weapons on airplanes.”⁴

Saudi Arabia has suffered from the Iranian interventions both directly and through its proxies in the region since 1979. Therefore, it decided not to stand still while Iran expands its military capabilities in the area. Saudi officials decided to engage more in Lebanon to counter the Iranian influence through its proxy (Hezbollah) and to support Lebanon's legitimate government. In Syria, Saudis officials seek to defend the oppressed Syrian people to gain their rights. In Iraq, they try to empower the Sunni Muslims to regain their rights like the Shia Muslims, while weakening the Iranian influence, yet supporting Iraqi government effort to restore control over its territory.

Saudi engagements in Mesopotamia region have annoyed the Iranian leaders and prevented them from reaching their goals. In a retaliatory move, Iranian officials decided to open more fronts on the border of Saudi Arabia in Bahrain and Yemen. These two new fronts will have two effects: first, they will act as pressure relief valves to reduce the stress away from the Iranians in the Mesopotamia region. Second, they use them to exert pressure against Saudi Arabia to give up in the Mesopotamia region. Ibrahim Alzubaidi reports the boosting of Iranian support for militants in Iraq; "Qays al-Khazali, the most prominent leader of Al-hashed Alshabi, in his latest statement promises that the Iranian Shiite crescent will become Iran's Shiite Full Moon soon. With the emergence of Imam Al-Mahdi, the forces will be ready, the Revolutionary Guard in Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Ansar Allah in Yemen (Al-Houthi Groups), Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and their brothers in Syria and Iraq to form the Shiite full moon, not the Shiite crescent,"⁵ he said. Furthermore, Ali Reda Benahyan, a Shia cleric, and a leader in IRGC Amar Strategic Council addressed a crowd who gathered in Tehran on September 2015, to support the Al-Houthi rebels in Yemen saying: "If Imam Khomeini says that the road of Jerusalem passes through Karbala, Karbala is liberated today. and we need another wing, the liberation of Mecca and

Medina from the Saudis."⁶ He urged the Houthis to "destroy Saudi Arabia not only the conquest of Mecca and Medina."⁷ New Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, has called the Iranian Supreme Leader, the new Hitler. He called the world to counter him, not to wait till he repeats Hitler`s example. Prince Mohammed rejected any future dialogue with the Iranian regime due to its expansionist ideology and its goal of occupying Makkah. He threatened the Iranian government by emphasizing that Saudi Arabia will not tolerate their interventions again, "We will not wait until the fight is inside Saudi Arabia, and we will work so that the battle is on their side, inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia," he said.⁸

Iran intervention in Lebanon

Iran established official relations with Lebanon during the era of the late Lebanese President Camille Chamoun (1952 to 1958), which coincided with the establishment of the Baghdad Alliance, in which Iran took part. This alliance sought to counter the influence of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and his call for Arab national socialism. The Shah of Iran visited Lebanon in 1957 and established a good relationship with the International Shia`s Association.

After the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, Al-Khomeini`s regime sought to spread its influence over the Middle East. The Iranian government aims to propagate its ideology into the whole Muslim world. Iran`s strategy exploits Muslim compassion for Palestinians in their conflict with Israel to rally Muslims from all around the world, to support Iran and its revolutionary ideology. In early 1980, Iran founded Hezbollah in Lebanon to unify Lebanon`s Shia parties into one organization, and to fight the common enemy (Israel).⁹ This unification bore fruit as "Shortly after the Israeli invasion, approximately 1,500 IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) advisers established a base in the Bekaa Valley as part of its goal to

train Hezbollah members and export the Islamic Revolution to the Muslim world.”¹⁰ *Al-Arabiya*

News Channel provides the following important commentary:

A video circulated online that reportedly dates back to 1988 shows a younger Nasrallah saying: “Our plan, to which we, as faithful believers, have no alternative, is to establish an Islamic state under the rule of Islam.” Also, he added, “Lebanon should not be an Islamic republic on its own, but rather, part of the Greater Islamic Republic, governed by the Master of Time [the Mahdi], and his rightful deputy, the Jurisprudent Ruler, Imam Khomeini.” “Syria is the rear guard of the resistance (Hezbollah’s fight with Israel), its backbone, and the resistance cannot stay with its arms folded when its rear guard is exposed,” he said. “We are idiots if we do not act,” said Nasrallah, who avoids appearing in public for security reasons. “Hezbollah cannot be in the same trench as the United States, Israel, the takfirist (radical Muslims). Who disembowel, behead and desecrate tombs,” he said of reports that rebels had vandalized the shrine of a venerated Shiite saint.¹¹

Hezbollah successfully waged guerrilla warfare against Israel, which caused Israel to entirely withdraw its Army from South Lebanon on 24 May 2000. Israeli commander Givli Zur called Hezbollah “by far the greatest guerrilla group in the world.” Hezbollah recruited thousands of volunteers to join its organization; some report estimated the total number of volunteers exceeds 65,000 soldiers. Iran worked hard to equip its ally with a full range of weapons, varying from surface-to-surface missiles, including Iranian-made (Fajr and Zelzal), surface-to-air missiles (SAM-6), anti-aircraft artillery, and the Iranian made anti-tank missiles (Ra’ad). Many analysts estimated Hezbollah’s forces to outnumber the Lebanese Army itself.

The victory of Hezbollah forces against Israel gave it significant popularity among both Sunni and Shia Muslims equally. Many people believed that Hezbollah had accomplished what many Arabic countries failed to do. Despite the old notion of invincible Israel, Hezbollah proved that Israel is vulnerable and can be defeated.

Moreover, many Arabs’ officials saw Hezbollah as an Iranian proxy, which seeks to gain supporters among Sunni Arab to spread its revolutionary ideology in the Arabic world. Arabic governments were worried about the growing terrorist behavior of Hezbollah in the

region, especially after the group started to act on behalf of the Iranian regime. On 23 October 1983, Hezbollah bombed the U.S. Navy barracks in Beirut, killed and injured 211 persons.¹² On 3 December 1984, Hezbollah members hijacked Kuwait Airline Flight 221 and diverted it to Tehran. They demanded the release of 17 detainees in Kuwait accused of the multiple bombing incidents on 12 December 1983.¹³ “When the demand wasn't met, the hijackers killed two American officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development. On the sixth day of the drama, Iranian security forces stormed the plane and released the remaining hostages. Iran arrested the hijackers, saying they would be brought to trial. But the trial never took place, and the hijackers were allowed to leave the country.”¹⁴

On 5 April 1988, the group hijacked Kuwait Airline Flight 422 from Bangkok to Kuwait with 111 passengers on board, they diverted it to Mashhad in Iran and then to Algiers, they demanded the release of 17 detainees of a guerrilla group in Kuwait. They killed two Kuwaiti citizens during the crisis which lasted 16 days; the Algeria government granted them the freedom in exchange for releasing the rest of passengers.¹⁵

On June 25, 1996, Hezbollah members (Hezbollah Al-Hejaz) detonated a truck loaded with explosives in front of the American compound in Dhahran city in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 and injured 498.¹⁶ Because the attackers used the same truck type, and fertilizer-based bomb, just like the one used to attack the U.S. Navy barracks in Lebanon in 1983, investigators were able to link this attack to Hezbollah organization. Moreover, further investigations indicated that IRGC general Ahmed Sharifi was the operational commander for this terrorist attack after getting the blessing from the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.¹⁷

Saudi Arabia seeks to encourage and support all Lebanese, from all religions and sects to regain their right to live in a peaceful and developed country. Saudi officials remain impartial

and not connected to any party. On 22 October 1989, it hosted the Lebanon peace conference in Taif City, where the all Lebanese parties signed the Taif Agreement which ended 15 years of bloody civil war.¹⁸ Saudi officials worked hard to rebuild Lebanon; they invested heavily in Lebanon`s infrastructure and governmental sectors, while encouraged foreign investments in Lebanon. This support reached its peak during the government of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. Iran did not like that situation, primarily because of the declining power of Hezbollah, its proxy in Lebanon. Therefore, Hezbollah members planted a roadside car bomb on 14 February 2005 and detonated it when Lebanon Prime Minister Rafic Hariri`s convoy was passing, which killed him and twenty-one others. A Hezbollah`s member, Mustafa Badr Al-Din, and two others were convicted by the international court for planning and executing the assassination.¹⁹

Iran`s intervention in Iraq

Saudi Arabia terminated its relationship with Iraq after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990; they restored relations again in 2009, Baghdad named its first ambassador to Riyadh while Saudi Arabia named its ambassador to Jordan to act also as an ambassador to Iraq. Despite the antagonism against Saddam regime in 1990, Saudi officials called on the coalition to liberate Kuwait while preserving the Iraqi Army from destruction, to maintain the balance of power in the Middle East (especially against Iran). Later, Saudi Arabia opposed the U.S.-UK coalition`s invasion of Iraq in 2003 and rejected any idea of regime change. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said at a press conference in 2003:

If a change of regime comes with the destruction of Iraq, then you are solving one problem and creating five more problems. That is the consideration that we have to make because we are living in the region. We will suffer the consequences of any military action. Regime change can only be a possibility if it is done indigenously. He added, there has never been in the history of the world a country in which a regime change happened at the bayonets of guns that has led to stability.²⁰

When the U.S. invaded Iraq and dismantled its Army, it created a power vacuum; many regional countries rushed to fill this space. Unfortunately, Iran gained the upper hand in Iraq, especially after the parliamentary election, which Sunni citizens boycotted, allowing the pro-Iranian Shia parties to win the election. Saudi Arabia mistakenly took a step back from Iraq and monitored the situations. On the other hand, Iran strengthened its control all over Iraq's economy, population support, military, religious, and political scene.

Iran supported the creation of many Shia's predominantly paramilitary organizations called (Al-Hashed Alshabi) the Popular Mobilization Forces, which Iran has used to threaten the GCC countries. In many cases, the spokesmen of these extremist Shia's parties used violent language to intervene in the GCC countries to support the Shia's population. The Secretary-General of the Iraqi Asaib Ahl al-Haq militia, Qais al-Khazali, called for the adoption of "the option of armed violence against the Bahraini and Saudi governments,"²¹ He expressed willingness to participate and promote the formation of more "popular mobilization" militias in general. "Our Iraqi experience says that the diplomatic and political approach is not enough to achieve a real result," Khazali said in a video clip, commenting on political developments in the Bahraini arena. "The resistance side must join him"²² In his comment on the situation in Bahrain, Khazali said: "Unless the people of Bahrain are confronted with the thorny road, and the enemy finds a force that stands before it, it cannot overcome it. We are with this option, support it with all we can, and think about it, and we are ready to support our brothers in Bahrain, Al Ahsa, and Qatif more than we can speak now."²³

Moreover, Abu Mahdi Almuhandis, the leader over all of the Al-Hashed Alshabi (and the Kataib Hizballah in particular) said in June 2017 "The area will be cleared of fighters of the Islamic State Organization and pursued everywhere, to the Saudi capital Riyadh," he said, adding

that he is currently on the Iraqi-Syrian border with fighters from the militia.²⁴ During a recording broadcast on social networking sites, Abu Mahdi gave a special salute to the Houthi militias in Yemen and said he hoped the Houthis would join him in the battle against the Da`esh and reach Riyadh.²⁵ Moreover, the commander of the Quds force, part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Qassim Soleimani, was controlling the battle from the outskirts of Fallujah. Militants there advertised that they put pictures of Nemer Al-Nemer, a Saudi Shia cleric executed by the Saudi officials, on all the rockets which Quds Forces fighters fired into Fallujah. These actions portrayed Saudi Arabia, and ISIS as the same while promoting Iran as the guardian of freedom and human rights.

In response to these irresponsible comments, Adel Aljubair, the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs said in a news conference “Al-Hashed Alshabi is sectarian and led by Iran, and some abuses occurred during the battle of Fallujah. Those militias that fuel sectarian tension must be dismantled.”²⁶ These allegations from both sides, Saudi officials, and Al-Hashed Alshabi came immediately after the Al-Fallujah battle, and simultaneously with the spread of Al-Hashed Alshabi forces near Saudi Arabian`s northern border.

The Saudi ambassador to Iraq, Thamer Al-Sabhan criticized Al-Hashed Alshabi, “The refusal of the Kurds and [citizens of] Anbar for Al-Hashed Alshabi to enter their areas shows the unacceptability of Al-Hashed Alshabi by the Iraqi community.” He added, “wondering whether the Iraqi government would accept the creation of a Sunni organization with the same armaments and equipment equivalent to the current Shiite organization (Al-Hashed Alshabi), and why [it allowed only] the arming the Shiite organizations.”²⁷ The majority of Sunni Parties welcomed these comments and asked the Iraqi Government for equality among social groups. On the other hand, many Shia`s parties rejected and condemned Al-Sabhan's claims and demanded the Iraqi

government expel him from Iraq. Moreover, Iranian officials started to notice the growing leverage of the Saudi Ambassador to Iraq and begun to seek the available options to stop him. As usual for a terrorist regime like Iran, the easiest way to end a person come through assassination.

According to *Arab News*:

Iraqi Shiite militias, with Iranian support, made attempts to assassinate Saudi Ambassador to Iraq Thamer Al-Sabhan by targeting his armored car with RPJ-7 missiles. A source, quoted by a local publication, revealed that these militias have direct links to Iran, mostly the Khorasan Battalion, and a group dealing with Awas Al-Khafaji, secretary general of Abu Fadl Al-Abbas forces. According to informed sources, the militias have three attack plots, all of which call for carrying out the operation as fast as possible. Two plans, one belonging to the Khorasan Battalion, were uncovered, while a new plan, led by Al-Khafaji, was also identified. All plots, masterminded by Iranian elements, were unsuccessful. An Iraqi security official told *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* the assassination attempts on the ambassador by the Khorasan Battalion, and their aim to get rid of him and his statements against Iran and create a political and diplomatic crisis between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.²⁸

In response to this threat, and with the absence of any Iraqi officials' comments, or condemnations against the threats by Al-hashed, against the Saudi Ambassador, on 16 October 2016, the Saudi Government reduced its diplomatic representation from Ambassador to Charge d'affairs and recalled Al-Sabhan back to Saudi Arabia.²⁹

Three months later, determined to fight back the Iranian influence in Iraq, Saudi Arabia took the initiative to improve its relationship with Iraq. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adel Al-Jubair made a surprise visit to Baghdad on 25 February 2017; it was the first high-level visit for Saudi Official to Iraq since 2003.³⁰ "[The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hopes] to build excellent relations between the two brotherly countries,"³¹ said Jubair. "There are also many shared interests, from fighting extremism and terrorism to opportunities for investment and trade between the two countries."³² He also announced that Saudi Arabia would appoint a new ambassador to Iraq and would open flights between the two countries.

Five months later, the Iraqi prominent Shia's cleric Muqtada al-Sadr visited Saudi Arabia on 31 July 2017, "We have been very pleased with what we found to be a positive breakthrough in the Saudi-Iraqi relations, and we hope it is the beginning of the retreat of sectarian strife in the Arab-Islamic region." Sadr's office said in a statement after the meeting.³³ Moreover, Saudi King Salman and Haider Al Abadi the Iraqi Prime Minister met in Riyadh on 18 October 2017; both led the first meeting of the joint Saudi-Iraqi coordination council.

Observers argue that the two countries formed the council to counteract Iranian influence in the region.³⁴ King Salman said, "We are facing in our region serious challenges in the form of extremism, terrorism as well as attempts to destabilize our countries; these attempts require our full attention,"³⁵ Saudi King stressed the importance of the council to promote trust between the two countries and bring stability to the region.

Iran's Intervention in Syria's Affairs

The Iranian regime justifies its support for the Syrian government based on religious affiliation; the Alawites claims a connection to Shia beliefs. Even though Alawites represent only 12% of the Syrian population; they hold control of the whole country, the Ba'ath Party has controlled Syria since 1963. The Syrian regime was the only Arabic Shia ruling regime in the world. The Iranian government takes the preservation of this system as a strategic goal. According to the *Jerusalem Post's* report; Iran has used Syria to smuggle weapons to its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon for many years.³⁶

Iran encouraged all the public demonstrations that swept across the Arabic countries during the Arab Spring and so-called liberation movements. But, in contrast, to retain its most reliable ally in the region, it condemned the protests in Syria and supported Bashar Al-Asad's regime.³⁷ Moreover, it helped the Syrian President, Bashar Al-Asad's government with all types

of weapons and a massive number of soldiers and mercenaries. The conservative American website *Gatestone Institute* reports:

According to reports by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Syrian military has fewer than 50,000 men, Iran has deployed more than 70,000 Iranian and non-Iranian forces in Syria, and pays monthly salaries to over 250,000 militiamen and agents. According to a report entitled, *How Iran Fuels Syria War*, published by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), non-Iranian mercenaries number around 55,000 men; Iraqi militias are around 20,000 men (from 10 groups), Afghan militias are approximately 15,000 to 20,000 men, Lebanese Hezbollah are [about] 7,000 to 10,000 men, and Pakistani, Palestinian and other militiamen number approximately 5,000 to 7,000.³⁸

Iran`s Intervention in Bahrain`s Affairs

Like many Arab countries, especially in the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain has suffered from Iranian interventions in its internal affairs since the eruption of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Iran sought to export its revolution to all the Islamic nations, fulfilling the dream of re-establishing the old Persian empire, the primary project of the Islamic Revolution. Tehran`s regime used the Revolutionary Guard to target the Bahraini population, known for a long time for their peacefulness and kindness. Iran tried to recruit agents to protest the government, engage in hostile demonstrations, and create an armed political party (Hezbollah Bahrain).

Cecily Hillary reported that “Bahrain, ruled today by the al-Khalifa royal family, has a complex history of conquest and defeat. What is important to this narrative is that the *Bani Utbah* tribe of Qatar – of which the al-Khalifas were a family group – captured Bahrain from the Persians in the late 18th Century. Bahrain was a protectorate of Britain from the 1830s to 1971, and throughout that time, Iran tried to reassert its historical claim on Bahrain.”³⁹ Since then, Iran`s government [has] continued to interfere in Bahrain affairs, In 1919, the Iranian Parliament called for appointing an Iranian ruler for Bahrain as they considered it one of their provinces. In 1922, the Iranian government confiscated Bahraini passports from arriving Bahraini citizens who

visited Iran, according to a report from the British consulate. In 1927, it objected to the Saudi-British agreement guaranteeing Bahrain's independence, because Iran claimed it a part of Persia. To overcome this issue, they orchestrated immigration from Iran to Bahrain to shift the population balance of the small country. In 1943, Iran protested the Bahraini Government signing a contract with a western oil company without Iranian approval. In 1951, the Iranian Ministry of Education issued a memorandum mandating teaching Iranian children that Bahrain is a part of Iran.

In 1957, the Iranian government issued a decree that named Bahrain as the fourteenth province of Iran and called to regain the control of it. "An important turning point came in December 1981, when a Tehran-based group called the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain organized an uprising and attempted a coup in Manama. The plot failed only because the neighboring United Arab Emirates got wind of it and tipped off Manama."⁴⁰ Former Pentagon official Michael Rubin said the plot was "most certainly hatched in Tehran."⁴¹

In 1996, Bahraini officials revealed a secret organization under the name (Hezbollah Bahrain) which they believed Iran had created as a proxy. The Hezbollah Bahrain received training from Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and smuggled explosives including Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and weapons to Bahrain to carry out IRGC directions.

According to Jason Rivera,

"civil disobedience and disturbances directed against the ruling regime to include participation in arson and the facilitation of pro-Iranian radio communications from Iranian radio stations. Bahraini security forces soon after arrested 44 Hezbollah operatives, after which a subsequent investigation revealed that IRGC had trained Bahraini Hezbollah and that Iran intended to inspire events in Bahrain similar to that of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution."⁴²

These individuals were well trained to carry out military actions when ordered to do so; others were instructed to incite the crowds to revolt against the government and others to target

Bahraini officials and security officers. These actions aimed to cause chaos and disarray in the country which will eventually destabilize the government.

During the violent demonstrations which erupted in 2011, Bahrain pointed its finger at Tehran, accusing Iran of supporting the unrest in the Kingdom and expelled many Iranian diplomats from Manamah. The Iranian Government responded in the same way. Bahrain's King then asked for support from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to help his country to regain control over its territory. Most of the GCC countries responded and sent the Al Jazeera Shield Forces to Bahrain. Iran condemned this move as did its puppet government in Iraq.⁴³ On Aug 13, 2015, Bahrain's Interior Ministry confirmed that "five individuals suspected of orchestrating a deadly bomb attack in Bahrain have been arrested. The bomb blast, which occurred in the Sitra area of Bahrain at the end of last month (28 July 2015), killed two policemen and injured six others."⁴⁴ Police also, detained three persons accused of receiving financial support from the IRGC and Hezbollah Iraq. Bahrain's Chief of Police, Major-General Tariq Al Hasan said: "Police investigations have found that those arrested had connections to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, as well as Hezbollah, and have been linked to [some] terrorist incidents in Bahrain over recent years."⁴⁵ Iran has used and continue to use unconventional warfare to spread its influence in the region, Because Bahrain has Shia population, Iran will continue to use them to serve its objectives.

Iran's intervention in Yemen

Yemen was the lowest priority for Iran; it ranked way behind Syria and Bahrain. But because of the deteriorated situation in Syria and Bahrain, Iran sought to open a new front to keep the Arab countries busy, notably Saudi Arabia. Iran's intervention started with religious scholarships to Zaidi groups, who are known as a sect of the Shia. Even though they differ from

the Twelver Shia of Iran, Tehran managed to encourage them to visit Iran, to study Shia Twelver beliefs for free. Bader-Aldin Al-Houthi was the first Zaidi student in Qom Iran, and later he adopted their revolutionary ideologies and the Iran emblem (Death to the USA, Death to Israel).

Since the Al-Houthi group gained massive support from Iran, they demanded more authority and privileges from the Yemeni Government, which rejected these demands. This rejection resulted in six bloody wars between the Yemeni Army and the Houthi group during the presidency of the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Later, during the Arab uprising, and right after the ousting of Saleh, Alhouthi rebels gained more power, especially after they aligned with Saleh against the legitimate Yemeni President (Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi). During the Al-Houthi march to Sanaa, the Yemeni president, Hadi, openly criticized the Iranian role in his country, calling on Tehran to deal with Yemen as a whole and not with class, group or sect. He accused the Al-Houthi rebels of receiving support through satellite channels broadcast from Beirut. Noting that “some wanted Sanaa to suffer the same as Damascus, Baghdad, and Tripoli.”⁴⁶ Moreover, Saudi Arabia accused Iran of smuggling weapons to the Houthi`s rebels in Yemen to strengthen the group and undermine the legitimate government.

On 21 September 2014, Alhouthi rebels conquered the capital city of Yemen Sana`a, besieged the presidential palace, and forced President Hadi to resign. After few weeks of President Hadi`s palace siege, he managed to escape from Sanaa to the city of Aden where he repudiated his resignation and called it illegitimate due to the pressure that was placed on him from the Houthi group. “Houthi-controlled state television said a nearly \$100,000 bounty was being offered for the president’s capture,”⁴⁷ Hadi called for support from the GCC countries and the Arabic world to support the legitimate government of Yemen, and fight the growing Iranian influence in his country.

Saudi Arabia felt the heat and decided to counter the Al-Houthi-Saleh coalition and the Iranian influence in Yemen at the same time. Initially, Saudi Officials issued an ultimatum warning the AlHouthi-Saleh militia against attacking Aden city. Unfortunately, the militant leaders underestimated the Saudi warning and made their way into the city hoping to capture President Hadi. In response, on 25 March 2015, the Saudi-led coalition launched airstrikes against the Al-Houthi-Saleh militias in operation named Decisive Storm.⁴⁸ Fighter jets from United Arab of Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and Kuwait joined the fight from the first day. Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir said the airstrikes had targeted sites around the country, including Sanaa. "The operations are limited to defending the government and preventing its collapse,"⁴⁹ he said.

Operation Decisive Storm greatly irritated the Iranian and Syrian regimes, and they called for it to halt. "Iran wants an immediate halt to all military aggression and air strikes against Yemen and its people. Military actions in Yemen, which faces a domestic crisis, will further complicate the situation and will hinder efforts to resolve the crisis through peaceful ways. The Saudi-led air strikes should stop immediately, and it is against Yemen's sovereignty,"⁵⁰ said Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, according to AFP, "We will make all efforts to control the crisis in Yemen," he added. Moreover, Iran stepped up its support to Al-Houthi rebels and provided them with advanced weapons, drones and military advisors, contrary to the United Nations` Resolution 2216.⁵¹

Saudi`s New Strategy to Counter the Iranian Influence

Saudi`s officials have adopted a new strategy to counter the Iranian policy of exporting their revolution and ideologies to all the Islamic countries. The new approach evolved particularly after the President Barack Obama adopted the new U.S. Middle East, Hands-Off

Military Policy. This new strategy debuted for the first time during the Syrian conflict, especially when President Bashar Al-Asad crossed Obama`s Red Line and used the chemical weapons against his people. Obama administration only responded by passing responsibility for action to the US Congress and Russia.⁵² Obama said in a weekly address in September, “it’s more effective to use our capabilities to help partners on the ground secure their own country’s futures,”⁵³ Also, he insisted that the U.S. will not “dragged into another ground war” in the region.⁵⁴ Obama`s statement communicated clearly to all the Middle East countries that they must take the lead to protect their countries and regimes, and prepare their forces for greater involvement to restore regional security, with no or little support from the U.S. government. As the leaders of the Middle East looked for all available means to secure their countries` resources and borders, they also sought new allies. Regional expert Alon Ben-Meir, a Baghdad native of Jewish descent and a professor at New York University said, “They want to create the perception that nobody, including Iran, should take Saudi Arabia and the Sunni states for granted,”⁵⁵ “It’s sending a clear message: We are no longer going to wait for a green light to act. We are going to act because the changing dynamics in the Middle East are demanding that.”⁵⁶

The Iranian Nuclear program deal hit like a shock wave throughout the Middle East region, mainly for Iran`s neighboring states, for many reasons. First, the deal was constructed and signed, without a single representative from regional countries. Second, it gives Iran the right to access to more than \$100bn in frozen funds overseas. Third, Iran will be able to resume exporting oil to the world markets. Finally, Iran will gain access to the international trade system.⁵⁷ Many countries saw the deal as a great help for the totalitarian regime in Tehran to fuel up its terrorist activities in the region and the world. Furthermore, the agreement did not eliminate the risk of Iran building nuclear weapons, but it merely delayed it for few more years.

After the U.S. officials encouraged Muslim nations to increase their efforts to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Saudi Defense Minister, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Al-Saud announced on 15 December 2015, the establishment of the Islamic Military Alliances to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT). He called all Muslim countries to join the alliance. Initially, the Alliance consisted of 34 states, by the end of December 2016 members of the Alliance reached 41 countries. Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Pakistan's defense minister, told *The Newsweek* journal "This alliance is against terrorism, especially to help those countries which are threatened, but don't have the necessary wherewithal to combat terrorists."⁵⁸ Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said in a news conference that Iran had isolated itself by supporting terrorism, which had provoked the reactions of other countries, especially in the Muslim world.

On 27 February 2016, Saudi Arabia hosted North Thunder, a massive combined military exercise in Hafr Al-Batin city, near the Saudi-Iraqi's border, Twenty Muslims countries of the IMAFT participated in the exercise with Air Forces, Land Forces and Naval Forces. Many countries' leaders attended the final day of the exercise, including King Salman Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, the Saudi government replaced its long-known, soft speech to Iran with boldness. In a TV interview with *Al-Arabiya News Chanel*, Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed Bin Salman, claimed that Iran's extremist ideology made the dispute between Saudi Arabia and the ruling regime in Tehran unsolvable, because Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Iranian Supreme leader, demonstrate expansionist ambitions, he called him the "new Hitler of the Middle East." He emphasized the necessity for Iran's neighbors to counter him. "We learned from Europe that appeasement doesn't work. We don't want the new Hitler in Iran to repeat what happened in

Europe in the Middle East," he added.⁵⁹ When asked by the host about the possibility for future dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the Iranian regime, he rejected any chance to do so; then he explained why:

"How do I have a meaningful dialogue, with an individual, or a regime, that has a solid conviction, that his regime is built on an extremist ideology stated in his constitution and stated in the will of [the late Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah] Khomeini that they must control the Islamic world, and spread their own Twelver Jaffari way in all of the Islamic world until the Mehdi arrives. How do I convince him?"⁶⁰

Furthermore, Prince Mohammed Bin Salman warned the Muslims all around the world that the Iranian regime aims to occupy Makkah, "We will not wait until the fight is inside Saudi Arabia, and we will work so that the battle is on their side, inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia."⁶¹

Conclusion

Since the debut of the Iranian Crescent or Shia's Crescent terminology on the media, it has triggered a lot of debates and criticism about the reason and the timing. Despite the different point of views on that issue, the time has proved that it represents a real plan. Many Iranian and Arabic Shia elites have boldly confirmed it during their speeches and ceremonies. The Iranian interventions in the Arabic countries and the affiliation of the majority Shia's people for the Iranian regime over their home countries prove that Iran exploits the Shia population in other countries to support its expansionist ideology. The Saudi Crown Prince has changed the tone of speech to the Iranian government and threatened them to take the fight to their mainland.

Notes

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