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Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in Qatar Arab Spring in Terms of Role Theory

Rivalita Saúdské Arábie a Íránu v Kataru během Arabského jara prizmatem teorie rolí

Bachelor's thesis

Research supervisor: prof. Gökhan Bacik, Ph.D.

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Hereby I declare that the submitted bachelor's thesis is a product of my own work with the use of the listed literature and sources.

20th April 2023 in Olomouc   Martin Čeřovský

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Introduction

Saudi Arabia and Iran are the most powerful countries in the Middle East and have been competing for influence in the region for decades. According to Mabon (2016: 4), the beginning of the rivalry dates back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, after which the current regime was installed in Iran. Since then, relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have been characterised by ideological and political conflicts. Moreover, since that year, the two regional powers have begun to project a notion of themselves as leaders in order to ensure their security and to get ahead of their rivals by using the numerous religious, ideological and political struggles in the Middle East to their advantage.

In 2011, the Arab world witnessed a wave of public protests against governments there, known as the Arab Spring. The demand for democracy in the Middle East was nothing new, but during the Arab uprising, it turned into a nationwide movement that changed the socio-political context of the region (Zehraa et al., 2018). Riyadh and Tehran, in line with their rivalry, have adopted different positions vis-à-vis the Arab Spring, which has thus created a new dynamic in the regional rivalry. Concerned about the protests and their impact on its regional position and domestic stability, Saudi Arabia has supported the existing authoritarian regimes in their struggle to maintain power. Iran, on the other hand, has welcomed and supported the uprisings in some countries. The Arab Spring was thus a great opportunity for both powers to use the regional struggle to their advantage and strengthen their regional influence at the expense of their rival.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran during the Arab Spring was evident in many countries in the region, but this thesis focuses on the Saudi-Iranian rivalry during the Arab Spring in Qatar. One of the reasons for choosing Qatar was its specific characteristics as a country. A relatively small, rentier Sunni country located in the Arabian Peninsula, at first glance it naturally falls within the Saudi sphere of influence. One would not expect a country with such characteristics to take any major policy steps, especially not that such steps would have a significant impact on the dynamics of the regional rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran. These unexpected diplomatic moves to strengthen regional influence, represented by attempts at peace mediation, siding with the protesters and subsequent support for the Muslim Brotherhood, were the second reason for choosing Qatar as the focus of this thesis. The third reason for choosing Qatar is its specific course of the Arab Spring. The popular protests in Qatar were marginal compared to the mass protests in Tunisia or Egypt. The way in which Qatari leaders dealt with the threat of uprisings and the potential destabilisation of the country was

similar to that of Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. But even though protests did not develop, Qatar saw the Arab Spring environment as an opportunity to strengthen its regional position. Thus, the Arab Spring not only functioned as a form of popular discontent but also created a situation that government officials considered favourable given their goal of strengthening their regional influence.

The timeframe of the thesis is set from the beginning of the Arab Spring, i.e., from 2011 to 2017, when the diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar occurred, marking a turning point in their relations and the relations between Iran and Qatar. The Arab Spring was chosen as the starting point of the thesis because it represents an event that changed the entire region, including Qatar's behaviour in the regional power system. Moreover, the 2017 diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar represents the culmination of Qatar's foreign policy shift and the resumption of diplomatic relations with Iran. Furthermore, the regional and diplomatic crisis is a suitable example on which research on the concept of national roles, their manifestations and possible changes could have been conducted.

The main research questions of this thesis are *whether Saudi Arabia and Iran fulfil the defined roles, whether the roles played by Saudi Arabia and Iran have changed after the Arab Spring in Qatar, and if so, how these changes have manifested themselves*, and *how the role changes after the Qatari Arab Spring have affected the Saudi-Iranian rivalry*. Firstly, the descriptive method is essential in this thesis to understand the relationship between the two countries and their relationship with Qatar. Next, the fulfilment of the defined roles is examined through the application of role theory and qualitative content analysis. With the help of these, statements made by Saudi and Iranian officials and leaders, whether in speeches, interviews or official statements, will be examined. Based on these statements, it will then be decided whether the role is being fulfilled. Furthermore, a comparative method will be used to compare the manifestations of Saudi Arabia's and Iran's roles before and after the Qatar Arab Spring.

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is a perennial conflict that has influenced regional developments in the Middle East, and there is a large body of literature focusing on the Riyadh-Tehran rivalry or related issues. The same is true in the case of the Arab Spring, as it was a pivotal event for the entire region. In the following paragraphs, I briefly summarize the literature and sources relevant to this thesis. First, one of the main literature sources related to the theoretical framework is Kalevi Holsti's article *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, where he applied role theory to the field of international relations. He reached his conceptions of national roles by observing the foreign policy statements of policymakers in

the period 1965-1967. The main result of his work is 17 concepts of national roles, which represent the basic concepts used in later research. Most of the role conceptions I am using in this paper were developed by Holsti. The problem with this source is that it was written in 1970 and some aspects are outdated. For this reason, I also use a more recent publication from 2019 called *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa* by Yasemin Akbaba and Özgür Özdamar. As the title suggests, they apply role theory to Middle Eastern countries, which provided me with a useful basis for applying role theory to my case. In addition, Akbaba and Özdamar come up with material and ideational sources of roles, which helped me to understand the background of roles. Moreover, since Akbaba and Özdamar focused on the Middle East and North Africa in their research, their research provided me with a useful background for understanding the importance of applying role theory in this region. Finally, a suitable source for understanding the concept of rivalry was the publications of William R. Thompson, particularly *Shocks and Rivalries in the Middle East and Northern Africa*, which he co-wrote with Imad Mansour. In his writings, Thompson effectively defines the concept of rivalry and separates it from general conflict. In particular, in his work with Imad Mansour, they analyse the Middle East and North Africa and explain why the region is prone to rivalry.

To analyse the Arab Spring in Qatar, its context, background and implications, and in particular to analyse the change in Qatari foreign policy I use Kristian Coates Ulrichsen's *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. Another important source for the chapter in which I analyse Qatari Arab Spring is Stephen J. King's chapter entitled *Authoritarian Adaptability and the Arab Spring* in *The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System* edited by Raymond Hinnebusch and Jasmine Gani. King provides useful information on the steps Qatari officials have taken to limit the potential spread of the Arab Spring to Qatar. However, the author gives only a brief overview of the government's counter-protest measures and omits the changes in Qatar's foreign policy.

In examining the impact of Qatar's Arab Spring on relations with Saudi Arabia, Abdul Rezak Bilgin's article *Relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia after the Arab Spring* is a very comprehensive and important source. This article primarily deals with relations between Doha and Riyadh after the Arab Spring, but it also discusses the history and background of these relations. In addition, the author also discusses relations between Iran and Qatar, so the source was useful multiple times. A chapter by Sébastien Boussois entitled *Iran and Qatar: A Forced Rapprochement in Divided Gulf: Anatomy of a Crisis*, edited by Andreas Krieg, provides useful background for examining Iran-Qatar relations from the Islamic Revolution in Qatar to the post-

Arab Spring situation. The main contribution of this chapter is a detailed description of the pragmatic relationship between Iran and Qatar based on shared natural resources. Daily news services such as the BBC, Al Jazeera and Reuters were essential supplementary sources for describing specific events. Their timeliness, accuracy and reliability made the search for essential information easier. It should be noted, however, that the information obtained from Al-Jazeera regarding Doha could be distorted because this news service is owned by the Qatari state.

In the last part of my thesis, where role theory is applied and specific roles are assigned, the main sources are mostly official statements of the leaders of the countries. A reliable source for these statements is the UN General Assembly archive, which collects the reports of the sessions. Other important sources for this part of the work are the official websites of foreign ministries or the official websites of embassies. In the case of Saudi Arabia in particular, these websites are very detailed in terms of the country's official positions, statements and views. In the case of Iran, a reliable source of official statements is the official website of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, where most of his official statements are available in English. The news services, such as the BBC, Al-Jazeera or Reuters, are again indispensable sources, as official statements are often made through them.

This thesis is divided into three parts. The first one is theoretical and aims to explain the main aspects of role theory, which is applied to individual cases in the following chapters. The main focus is on Kalevi Holsti and his concept of national roles, which provides the basis for all future research on role theory in international relations. According to Holsti, concepts of national roles within the national self-perception represent the appropriate orientation and position of a country in the international environment, which is created by the government of a given country. (Holsti, 1970: 245-246). However, because the original theory is more than 50 years old, it is confronted with more recent research that views role theory more in terms of today's world order. In addition, the concept of rivalry is discussed and explained in the context of the Middle East.

The second part of the thesis is descriptive. This part aims to describe the relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively. Special attention is paid to the Arab Spring in Qatar, its course and the government's response. In particular, the change in Qatar's foreign policy after the Arab Spring and the impact of this change on the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran are explained in detail. In addition, this section examines the Saudi-

Iranian rivalry itself, explaining it in detail and providing examples of the rivalry in different states in the region.

The third and final part of this thesis is analytical-descriptive and comparative. It aims to capture the changes in the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia after the Arab Spring in Qatar. First, it explains the role assignments based on official statements, rhetoric and declarations by the leaders of these countries. Next, the roles and their manifestations are explained and placed in the context of the Qatar Arab Spring and the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Finally, the manifestations of national roles before and after the Arab Spring and Qatar are compared, the changes are captured in detail, and the implications for Saudi-Iranian rivalry are explained.

This thesis is written to look at the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran from a different perspective using role theory. It takes a different approach to policy statements considering them not only as a complement to politics but also as an important tool to understand the roles that are attributed to Saudi Arabia and Iran in the context of their rivalry by their leaders. Role theory is also useful for capturing changes in country behaviour, which is one of the objectives of this thesis. In addition, the thesis aims to understand the nature of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in Qatar, an environment where the rivalry does not take the form of proxy war but is shaped more through diplomacy and is not given as much attention compared to other areas of rivalry.

1 Theoretical framework

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first one aims to introduce and explain the role theory, its basic principles, the most relevant authors, and their works. Special attention is paid to Kalevi Holsti's article National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy, which represents the fundamental point in the application of role theory in international relations. Basic principles of his work, especially the actual national role conceptions are used later in the thesis. Further research is also discussed by Holsti's followers, which is largely based on his work. Furthermore, the chapter deals with the relevance of role theory in the field of international relations. A particular focus is devoted to the applicability of role theory in the Middle East and North Africa. The second part of the chapter focuses on the term rivalry, its definition and two main approaches. Finally, the chapter examines the rivalry in the Middle East and North Africa region, since the region possesses a comparatively higher number of rival states than other regions.

1.1 Role theory in International relations

Role theory has its roots in psychology and sociology. Its basic premise is that human behaviour is affected by one's psychological need to conform to the expectations of others and individual self-conceptions. Based on these two perceptions, an individual plays a role which is consistent with them. When it comes to foreign policy analysis, role theory was first applied by Kalevi Holsti in his article *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Holsti defines national role conception as follows: *"A national role conception includes the policymakers' definition of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their "image" of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment."* (Holsti, 1970: 245–246)

Holsti (1970) came up with his own basic national role conceptions to understand the main characteristics of countries. He carefully traced the foreign policy statements from the highest policymakers in the 1965–1967 period and looked for common features. Eventually, he

derived 17 main national role conceptions under which most of the states at that time fell (Table 1)[1].

These national role conceptions consist of several factors, from geographical location through history to the personality of policymakers. Holsti himself did not explicitly divide the factors but emphasized the importance of cultural sources. Nowadays, according to further research, we can safely distinguish the factors into two main categories: material and ideational. Material factors deal with aspects like the "age of the state" (how long the country has existed), the country's location, size, current alliances, economic condition and relative position and power in the international system. Ideational factors represent for example history, national identity, or cultural heritage. Early role theory application in international relations focused predominantly on material capabilities because of the strong influence of realism. Since the constructivist approach emerged, more role theory research devoted its focus to ideational factors. Ideational factors are certainly more dynamic than material ones and mostly the perceiving of material factors depends on the policymakers (who mainly represent the ideational factors) (Aggestam, 2006; Özdamar & Akbaba, 2019).

After Holsti, another major publication regarding using role theory in international relations is *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis* by Stephen G. Walker, published in 1987. His work sets a foundation for further application of role theory in international relations research and foreign policy analysis and contributed to a better understanding of the evolution of the roles (Thies, 2010). Many of the following scholars based their works on Holsti's and Walker's publications and use the original role conceptions developed by Holsti. For example, Jonsson and Westerlund (1982) apply the role theory to USA and USSR during their discussions in UN General Assembly from 1946 to 1975. Another important publication was edited by Philippe G. Le Pestre, *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition* (1997). The main goal of the research is to analyse the roles of the main international actors (e. g. USA, USSR, France or Japan) in the 20th century and to identify the transformation of these roles after the end of the Cold War. Finally, Vít Beneš in his work *Theory of Roles: A Conceptual Framework for Constructivist Foreign Policy Analysis* (2010) presents a conceptualization of role theory as a framework for foreign policy analysis. He also places role theory in the broader context of the application of social constructivism to foreign policy

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[1] While researching Holsti's national role conceptions, we must realise that he performed the research in the 1960s, which means that nowadays many countries have their role already changed or some countries do not exist anymore (e. g. Czechoslovakia or USSR).

analysis. Beneš further argues that role theory, due to its metatheoretical assumptions and conceptual equipment, is a suitable candidate for bridging the gap between constructivist theory and foreign policy analysis.

On the other hand, some researchers are using only the role conceptions related to their field of study and exploring them very deeply. For instance, Chafetz et al. (1996) analyse only these types of roles, that are somehow connected to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Another example is a work from Ghose and James (2005) that focuses on a few role conceptions related to governments' will to intervene in the ethnoreligious conflict.

SOME SOURCES OF NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS

Role Conception	Sources	Countries
Bastion of revolution-liberator	ideological principles; anti-colonial attitudes; desire for ethnic unity	Com. China Cuba Indonesia North Korea
Regional leader	superior capabilities; traditional national role	Egypt Japan
Regional protector	perception of threat; geographic location; traditional policies; needs of threatened states	Australia New Zealand U.S.A. U.S.S.R.
Active independent	anti-bloc attitudes; economic needs-trade expansion; geographic location	France India Yugoslavia Rumania Zambia
Liberator supporter	anti-colonial attitudes; ideological principles	most African, Asian, and Communist states in sample
Anti-imperialist agent	ideological principles; perception of threat; anti-colonial attitudes	Iraq Syria most Communist states
Defender of the faith	perceptions of threat; ideological principles; traditional national role	Rep. China U.S.A. North Viet Nam
Mediator-integrator	traditional national role; cultural-ethnic composition of state; traditional non-involvement in conflicts; geographic location	Lebanon Sweden
Regional-subsystem collaborator	economic needs; sense of "belonging" to region; common political-ideological traditions; geographic location	Belgium Ethiopia Guyana Japan Sweden Switzerland
Developer	humanitarian concern; anticipated consequences of underdevelopment; superior economic capabilities; balance U.S.-U.S.S.R. competition in underdeveloped areas	Canada France Japan Kuwait U.S.A.
Bridge	geographic location; multi-ethnic composition of state	Belgium Pakistan
Faithful ally	perception of threat; insufficient capabilities; traditional policies; ideological compatibility	Albania Hungary Italy Portugal Great Britain
Independent	anti-bloc sentiments; anti-colonial sentiments; economic needs; threat perception	many new African states; Nepal, etc.
Example	no revealed sources	
Internal development	socio-economic needs; perception of threat through foreign involvement	Brazil Finland Indonesia Pakistan
Isolate	perception of threat; insufficient capabilities	Burma Cambodia Laos
Protectee	perception of threat; insufficient capabilities	Laos Czechoslovakia

Table 1 (Holsti, 1970)

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1.2 Relevance of the role theory

Role theory is appealing to foreign policy analysis due to its significant ability in describing the decision-making process, as well as its focus on values and self-identification. This theoretical approach pays extraordinary attention to the process by which people reach decisions and the motivations behind them. More specifically, role theory is innovative in considering ideological factors (culture, history and societal characteristics). Another strong point of the role theory is its particular focus on policymakers, their perception of political reality and on factors that influence their decisions. The result of this novel approach is the finding that policymakers are not completely free to choose agents, nor is their behaviour entirely determined by external structures (Aggestam, 2006).

Role theory is suitable for researching international policy in the Middle East thanks to its emphasis on ideological factors that strongly influence the region's politics (Akbaba & Özdamar, 2019). Since role theory includes many concepts (such as expectation, perception, or identity) it can operate at various levels of analysis and connect distinct structures. This feature of role theory is especially useful in the environment of revolutions, uprisings and frequent governmental or leadership changes. Recently, we have seen a rise of the Persian Gulf states and their attempts to influence regional politics. View through the lens of role theory uncovers the dynamics of the changing roles of these states within the international system. Finally, role theory provides a different approach to already well-analysed topics (Darwich & Kaarbo, 2019).

Although ideational factors are important in terms of the Middle East, not many scholars have devoted their studies to them. One of the few comprehensive publications is *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa* by Akbaba and Özdamar (2019). They focused primarily on the omitted importance of faith in the region through the lens of role theory. Furthermore, Ovah (2013) uses role theory and its emphasis on ideational factors to explain the transition of Turkish foreign policy following the rise of Erdogan's AKP party. The above-mentioned different approach to well-analysed topics is represented by Thies (2013). He used the role theory attitude to analyse well-known relations between USA and Israel.

1.3 Rivalry: definition and approaches

The research on rivalry in international relations has appeared with realising that some countries are more likely to generate conflict with each other. Firstly, we must separate plain *conflict* from *rivalry*. The conflict appears whenever two states cannot reach a consensus on some mutual interest. Conflict changes into rivalry when the collision between the two states is

unresolved for a long time and policymakers start to perceive the contention as a steady issue. Additionally, unlike in a conflict, in a rivalry, there is always a potential military clash over a mutual disagreement. To qualify two states as rivals, both countries must operate approximately on the same level in the international system. The reason for this qualification is that in case of conflict between relatively stronger and weaker states, the weaker one usually does not have sufficient capabilities to compete with the stronger one and the conflict does not have enough time to evolve into rivalry (Thompson et al., 2022: 2–3).

When it comes to analysing rivalries, there are two main approaches. The main difference between them is that they are distinct in measuring rivalry. The first one, represented for example by Gary Goertz, measures the rivalry according to the number of armed conflicts between them during a specified time space (so-called *enduring rivalry*). As soon as the armed conflict between the two countries is not apparent, they are no longer enduring rivals. The second one, rather than focusing on armed conflicts, measures rivalry by analysing the policymakers' arguments, perspectives and decisions and based on them decide, whether a conflict between two states could be considered a rivalry (so-called *strategic rivalry*). Measuring rivalries by armed conflict is quite an objective way how to identify a rivalry. On the other hand, the rivalry between states could persist even though the armed conflict between them is ended, because there is still potential for returning of the armed clash. A suitable example is the rivalry between Egypt and Israel. According to the enduring rivalry perspective, there is no armed conflict between them, which means they are no longer rivals. But according to the strategic rivalry approach, they are still rivals, because according to decision-makers' statements, the armed conflict could be potentially re-ignited (Mansour & Thompson, 2020: 3). Apparently, for this thesis I consider the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran as a strategic rivalry because the two countries are not in an open military clash, but there is a potential for it. We can argue that their rivalry could fit into the enduring rivalry approach since the two countries are in a proxy war, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

According to earlier research, there are some regions where the density of rival states is comparatively higher (e. g. Middle East and North Africa). Such a place with a high density of rivals is called a rivalry field. Although the research on rivalry in the international system is not too rich, we can say that the more rivals are present in a certain region, the higher potential for instability or armed conflict. The Middle East is one of the best examples of a region with a high density of rivalries and, consequently, high intensity of conflicts. Throughout history, many traditional enmities have developed pitting Arabs and non-Arabs against each other, but

there have also been inter-Arab conflicts. As Volgy et al. (2018) put it, one explanation for the current unstable situation full of rivalries is the lack of regional hierarchy and leadership. Many of the earlier inter-Arab conflicts were, at least partly, caused by missing regional leadership. After all, even the present Saudi-Iranian rivalry is an indication of the absence of regional power (Thompson, 2020).

2 Arab Spring in Qatar and its consequences

In the following chapter, I will discuss the course of the Arab spring in Qatar. I will analyse the demands of the Qatari protesters, how they protested and the response of the Qatari government. In particular, I will focus on Doha's changing foreign policy during and after the Arab Spring. Furthermore, I will also examine the Qatari Arab Spring in the context of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Moreover, I will examine the relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and Iran and focus on the changes in these relations after the Arab Spring. Particularly, the changes in their relations are crucial for the following chapters of the thesis and role theory application.

2.1 The Arab Spring in Qatar

The beginning of the Arab Spring is widely considered to be the self-immolation of the young Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010, who expressed his frustration with the local authorities after his street stall was confiscated. This incident sparked large anti-government protests. Uprisings quickly spread from the countryside to big cities. Protesters were not satisfied with the socio-economic condition and the high level of corruption in Tunisia and demanded a change in the political leadership in the country. Then-president Ben Ali responded to the uprising with sweeping concessions and a promise not to run for the presidency in the next election. However, the protests did not stop, and people demanded an immediate change in the president's seat. When the army refused to quell the unrest, Ben Ali was forced to leave the country and was replaced by a transitional government (Gelvin, 2015).

After this partial success, the revolutionary wave spread to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa but not everywhere the protests took the same course as in Tunisia. However, the main reasons for the uprisings and the goals of the protesters remained the same: socio-economic discontent and political frustration with the authoritarian regimes and calls for greater freedom, human dignity, and social justice (Ulrichsen, 2014: 107).

The Arab Spring uprisings in Qatar did not develop to the mass scale of Tunisia or Egypt. However, there were some signs of popular discontent. Most often people called for revolution against Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani's regime, protested against corruption, censorship, and the absence of relevant political opposition and demanded a guaranteed minimum salary. Moreover, some protests emerged even in the online space. The main goals of the protesters were summarized by a popular writer al-Khalifa al-Kuwari in a manifesto called

The People Want Reform in Qatar Too and worked as a core text for the main figures of Qatar's Arab Spring (King, 2014: 77).

Qatari government responded to the protests in three ways: repression, cosmetic political reforms, and distribution of state benefits. Many protestors were jailed, including those who protested online. There were even cases of life sentences which should work as a warning example for protestors. One of them was sentencing the Qatari poet Muhammad ibn al-Deheeb al-Ajami based on his publicly recited poem *Tunisian Jasmine* which was praising the Arab Spring uprisings. However, a more standard way of silencing the protesters was appeasing them with salary and pension increases. The government was "buying" the loyalty of state employees by raising their salaries by 60 %. Pensions were raised by 60 % as well. In the same way, the government secured the crucial loyalty of the army, where an officer rank military staff (including retirees) received an increase in salary/pension by 120 %. The Qatari government has therefore correctly assessed the loyalty of the military as a key source of stability in the country. Across the region (e. g. in Tunisia or Egypt) it has been shown what disloyalty of the military to the government can do. (King, 2014: 77–78).

In terms of political concessions, the Qatari government announced in 2011 the holding of the first elections to the legislative body known as the Shura Council (Doha News, 2011). The elections were postponed several times and finally took place in 2021 but not all Qataris were allowed to cast their ballot. According to Qatar's electoral law, naturalised Qataris were not permitted to vote. Moreover, the international rights group Human Rights Watch considers the Qatari voting system "discriminatory" (Al Jazeera, 2021; DW, 2021). Such practices of securing loyalty and silencing dissidents with money and minor political concessions are common for all oil and gas-rich monarchies throughout the Middle East and North Africa (e. g. Kuwait or the United Arab Emirates) (Abouzzohour, 2021).

2.2 Change of Qatar's foreign policy after the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring caught Qatar at a time when was trying to bolster its international reputation. Such reinforcing international position was intended to act as a pre-emptive defence against a potentially aggressive Saudi policy against Qatar. Doha sought to convince the West, that it is a valuable regional actor capable of mediating abundant conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, it was also in Qatar's interest to stabilise the situation in the region. Arguably the greatest success of the mediation was the Doha Agreement of 2008, which resolved a long-standing conflict between Lebanese factions and ensured that the factions

would form a national unity government. Furthermore, Qatar proved itself as a competent mediator in different conflicts in the region, such as Yemen or Sudan (Steinberg, 2012). Doha's international position has thus strengthened due to its peace-making successes. Arguably the pinnacle of its international reputation was in 2010 when Qatar was selected to host the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup, just a few months before the Arab Spring erupted (Ulrichsen, 2014: 99).

However, many things changed with the Arab uprisings, including the Qatari foreign policy. Between 2007 and 2010, Qatar's officials pursued an increasingly pragmatic foreign policy, cooperating with as many local and regional partners as possible. Most of these regional partners also accepted Doha's role as a regional mediator. This foreign policy approach changed dramatically in January 2011 (Gray, 2019). When the anti-government protests in Egypt lasted for several weeks, the Qatari leadership recognized the seriousness of the situation. Qatar decided to side with the protesters, even though it had good relations with President Mubarak shortly before the protests broke out. Qatar's most powerful tool was the broadcasting of Al Jazeera, which, due to its wide coverage, served as a hub for the disaffected public to share their revolutionary protests. The government of Qatar started to emphasize the need for reforms, respect for human rights and freedom of expression. Qatari officials have thus distinguished themselves from authoritarian regimes throughout the region, despite having cooperated with them until a few weeks ago (Ulrichsen, 2014: 108–111).

Furthermore, Doha expressed its support for Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists in general. This political move had two main reasons. Firstly, as mentioned above, Qatar's foreign policy was characterized by a high degree of pragmatism. As protests erupted, Muslim Brotherhood quickly emerged as a potential new major power in the region. Qatar's leadership recognized it and started to support them against the authoritarian regimes. The assistance consisted not only of financial but also media support, as the leaders had ample airtime on Al-Jazeera television. (Gray, 2019). Secondly, the relations between Qatari Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and the Muslim Brotherhood date back to the 1990s when the Qatari government offered asylum to Islamist refugees and gave them international media space via Al Jazeera. Support of Islamists was most evident in Syria and Libya. During the uprisings in both countries, the Qatari government became the main driving force behind the protest movements. Particularly in Libya, pragmatism and support for the Islamists were clearly evident. In this case, pragmatism was also represented by the support and participation in the

NATO-led invasion, because Doha naturally did not want to damage its good relations with the West (Steinberg, 2012).

2.3 The impact of the Qatar Arab Spring on Saudi-Irani relations

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is evident in Qatar as well. However, the rivalry is somewhat different than in other countries in the region, where it is represented, for example, by proxy wars. As noted above, although there were no major protests in Qatar during the Arab Spring, there have been changes in the emirate. The most important of them was the change of foreign policy and higher diplomatic ambitions of the Qatari government. In the following chapter, I will describe how the changes in Qatari politics after the Arab Spring have affected the biggest players in the region, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

2.3.1 Changes in the relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar after the Arab Spring

At first glance, it might seem that both countries are determined to have stable and cordial mutual relationships. Both countries have common ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. They are both Sunni, based on a rentier economy, non-democratic, and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Despite the many similarities between the two countries, their relations are highly volatile. The Saudis have historically wanted no rival in the Arabian Peninsula, and since Qatar declared independence, Saudi Arabia has been trying to gain control of the small emirate. But Qatar's ambitions have always been higher than being a small ally of a powerful state. Moreover, the interests of Doha and Riyadh are often at odds, which is particularly evident in foreign policy. This split has deepened considerably since the Arab Spring (Bilgin, 2021).

The main struggle between Saudi Arabia and Qatar emerged when the two countries set contradictory goals in their Arab Spring policies and started supporting different sides. As mentioned above, Qatar wanted to become a respected power in the region and therefore supported the revolutionary forces. In contrast, Riyadh's main objective was to maintain the status quo and contain the revolutionary wave that could spill over into Saudi Arabia (Haykel, 2013). A rare moment when Saudi Arabia and Qatar pursued the same policy was when they supported the Al Khalifa regime in Bahrain. The reason for this foreign policy consensus is that Bahrain is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council and any potential instability in the Gulf region would undermine Qatar's economic and political interests (Bilgin, 2021).

A particular point of dispute emerging from the Arab Spring is the contradictory attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood[2]. Saudi Arabia has long-standing disputes with the Muslim Brotherhood and considers them hostile because they offer an Islamic model of government. (Roberts, 2015). Qatar, on the other hand, has had cordial relations with them in the past. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Doha considered them as a main new force that could topple the old authoritarian regimes (Khlebnikov, 2015; Haykel, 2013).

The strained relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia arguably culminated in the severing of diplomatic ties and the blockade of Qatar in 2017. The Saudi government (along with Egypt, UAE, and Bahrain) accused Doha of supporting extremist groups in the region, close alliances with Iran, undermining the stability of the region and using the Al Jazeera news service as a propaganda tool. Riyadh also demanded that Qatar cut ties with Iran, stop supporting extremist groups and other opposition movements in Saudi Arabia and pay compensation. (Kinninmont, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, Doha has rejected all these accusations, describing these actions as a violation of its sovereignty. Saudi Arabia probably expected Qatar to accede to its demands, change its foreign policy and abandon its international ambitions. However, Doha has long worked on its independence and foreign policy and intended to stay out of the Saudi sphere of influence. Furthermore, Iran intervened in the stalemate with its support for Qatar during the international blockade. Through this action, Iran acquired a valuable ally in its rivalry with Saudi Arabia (Pradhan, 2018).

Although relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia were already tense before the Arab Spring, the rift between them has deepened since the uprising. Simply put, each has taken a different side. Although both countries supported the status quo in Bahrain, this was a pragmatic move on Qatar's part rather than any change in its foreign policy during the Arab Spring. The 2017 diplomatic crisis represents the biggest blow to the already frayed relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Ironically, Saudi Arabia became the loser because the crisis improved the alliance between Iran and Qatar. Their relationship will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[2] Muslim Brotherhood is an influential religious group which played a key role during the Arab spring mainly because of its effective organization. Furthermore, because of its good organization, it was able to present the Islamic model of government to Arab countries (Roberts, 2015)

2.3.2 Changes in the relations between Iran and Qatar after the Arab Spring

Most Gulf Cooperation Council states consider Iran to be at least a hostile country. However, relations between Iran and Qatar are not that simple. Both countries do not see each other as a threat mainly due to pragmatic reasons. They share the largest independent gas field called the North Field. Therefore, relations are largely based on mutual commercial and economic interests, which are vital to both Qatar and Iran. For Qatar in particular, production from the gas field is a question of the country's survival as it accounts for most of its revenue. With 40% of its gas deposits lying in Iranian maritime waters, Iran plays an important role in ensuring the security of production (Boussois, 2019). Thus, secure cooperation in gas extraction also extends to maritime cooperation, which ensures mutual border protection, freedom of navigation and the fight against organised crime. (Tehran Times, 2010).

In addition to strong trade and economic relations, there is another reason why Qatar does not see Iran as an immediate threat, unlike, for example, Saudi Arabia. During the Arab Spring, the Saudi government feared possible unrest from Iranian-backed Shiites, similar to Bahrain. Qatar would naturally fear the same problem, as it too has a significant Shia minority. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, however, the Shias in Qatar are well-integrated and almost indistinguishable from the Sunni majority. As a result, they pose no security threat to the government. This is why Qatar maintained relatively calm relations with Iran during the Arab Spring and did not fear a possible Shia uprising in the country (Bilgin, 2021).

Nevertheless, in the wake of the Arab Spring, the relations between Iran and Qatar were not so promising. At the heart of the dispute was generally the support of different parties during regional conflicts. One of the main problems in the relationship has been Qatar's support for extremist groups in Syria fighting Iran-backed Assad forces. Similarly, Qatar's participation in the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen in support of government forces has not benefited relations (Zaccara, 2021). However, as written above, mutual trade relations are crucial for both countries, so they cannot afford to fatally damage their relationship.

The biggest thaw in relations between Qatar and Iran came in 2017 when the diplomatic crisis in the Persian Gulf occurred. Qatar found itself isolated when several countries cut diplomatic ties with Doha. Iran was therefore quick to take advantage of the diplomatic crisis in the Gulf to side with Qatar. At a time when isolation was deepening, Iran, along with Turkey, was the only regional power that supported Qatar politically, morally, and materially. As a result, trade and security cooperation between the two countries has increased significantly.

Since the change in its foreign policy, the Qatari government has always tried to balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, after diplomatic isolation, Doha had no choice but to ally with Iran (Pradhan, 2018).

All in all, the relationship between Qatar and Iran has always been founded on pragmatic basics. Since the trade relations between them are mutually crucial, no clash in their relations was fatally severe. This was particularly true during the Arab Spring and in the first years after when the relations were quite cold. However, changes came in 2017 with the diplomatic isolation of Qatar. Moreover, the intensification of the relations was also a pragmatic move from Iran regarding its rivalry with Saudi Arabia. With Qatar on its side, Tehran diversified its alliances and improved its relations with a country neighbouring Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Iran significantly improved its regional leverage and weakened Riyadh (Álvarez-Ossorio & García, 2021).

3 Roots and sources of the Saudi-Irani rivalry

In the following chapter, I will discuss the main characteristics of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first examines the historical roots of the rivalry, how the rivalry has evolved and how it has changed, especially after the Arab Spring. I will focus in particular on the cases of Syria, Bahrain and Yemen because the proxy conflicts in these countries are typical examples of what regional rivalries look like. The second part discusses the structural sources of rivalry. I have selected three main sources: religious differences, mutual security dilemmas and the struggle for power and influence. Each of these is carefully examined and their implications are evaluated. The nature of rivalry is key to understanding the essence of regional conflict, which is later explored in terms of role theory.

3.1 Roots of the rivalry

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is sometimes compared to the Cold War. The Saudi-Irani dispute has surely similar characteristics. Same as in the Cold War, each of the sides is led by distinct ideologies, but in the initial Cold War, the driving force was political ideology. However, unlike in the initial Cold War, each country represents one branch of religious ideology: Sunni Islam represented by Saudi Arabia and Shia Islam represented by Iran. This religious schism is a fundamental characteristic of the dispute between the two countries. Furthermore, both countries aspire to become the most powerful and influential Muslim state. (Al Jazeera, 2020). Another common characteristic is that the rivals do not fight each other directly. They clash in so-called proxy wars where they financially and militarily support one of the sides of the conflict. There is plenty of local conflicts in the region, but the rivalry is most apparent in the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon (BBC, 2019).

Since the beginning, their relationship was always tense. Although Saudi Arabia and Iran established diplomatic relations back in the year 1929, the true rivalry began fifty years later, after the Islamic revolution in Iran (Badeeb, 1993: 50–51). Since both countries considered themselves genuine Muslim countries, based on true Islamic values, they always wanted to influence their Muslim neighbours in the region. This inevitably led to perennial territorial and sectarian antagonism (Mirza et al., 2021).

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the dynamics of the rivalry were mainly influenced by the Iran-Iraq war. Iran could not afford a military confrontation with Saudi Arabia and the two states decided to conduct their rivalry in other ways. That means for example quarrelling over the oil price during the OPEC meetings. At the same time, we can see the first signs of

proxy wars when Iran established Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982. Tehran wanted to penetrate the Levant with this activity and complicate the Saudi-led restoration of peace in Lebanon and the establishment of a pro-Saudi government. (Calabrese, 2020).

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, the Saudi-Irani rivalry changed significantly. Although Riyadh did not consider Hussein an ally, it considered him a counterweight to Iran. The overthrow of his regime created a power vacuum from which Iran benefited greatly. Under the new regime, the Shiites dominated and governed Iraq which meant a great expansion of the Irani sphere of influence and a source of Saudi upset (Mirza et al., 2021).

The Arab Spring represents another jolt in the Saudi-Irani rivalry. The main change that comes with the uprisings is the geographical spread of the quarrel. The two countries have vied for regional influence since the beginning of the rivalry, but in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the competition for influence has intensified, particularly in Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. In these countries, the situation evolved into proxy wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran. (Ejaz, 2018). In general, Saudi Arabia and Iran have again taken opposite positions on the uprisings. While Tehran supported the protesters in Tunisia and Egypt, describing them as an "Islamic liberation movement", Riyadh considered the protests a threat to domestic and regional stability and supported the governments of the time throughout the region. (Oztig, 2021).

The case of Syria is particularly interesting since both Saudi Arabia and Iran initially stood on the same side. Naturally, Saudis supported the Bashar al-Assad regime against the protestors since they supported the status quo and feared destabilization. However, Iran supported Assad as well because of the traditionally good relations and Syria's valuable location on the supply road to Lebanon (Ansari & Tabrizi, 2016). Saudi Arabia desperately wanted to keep Syria and the entire region stable, so when the protests turned violent, Riyadh officials called on Assad to meet the protesters' demands and implement democratic reforms. Furthermore, Assad refused to apply any of the protestors' requirements which meant a change in Riyadh's approach to the Syrian crisis (Blanda, 2017). When the Syrian civil war broke out, the Saudis ratcheted up the rhetoric against Iran and backed non-Islamists allied with the West, Salafist organisations and the Free Syrian Army. Such a change of sides has naturally pitted Saudi Arabia and Iran against each other in the Syrian conflict (Hassan, 2013).

The cases of Bahrain and Yemen are slightly different to Syria. Both in Bahrain and Yemen the rivalry between the two major regional powers began even before the Arab Spring.

Particularly in Bahrain, the Saudi-Irani rivalry emerged back in 1971. The Iranian shah was claiming sovereignty over Bahrain which was carefully watched by Saudis. Riyadh's concerns were even increased in 1982 when Iran intended to export the Islamic revolution to Bahrain. Manama's stability has always been very important to Saudi Arabia, both in terms of regional and domestic stability. The growing influence of Tehran, linked to the 2011 uprising, was therefore not to the liking of Saudi officials. Finally, the uprisings in Bahrain were suppressed by the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council which intervened in Bahrain at the Al Khalifa ruling family's request. Although Iran supported the Bahraini demonstrators, its leaders probably did not want to risk a direct confrontation with the Saudi-led coalition and did not react militarily. (Mabon, 2012). Even though this action quieted the protest voices in Bahrain, the Shiite majority became more radicalized and the situation in the country triggers sectarian violence and deepens the Saudi-Irani rivalry (Rezaei, 2019).

The conflict in Yemen is another field where the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran caused instability. In 2004, the Houthis, members of the Shiite movement, started an insurgency against the Yemeni government. The main reason was allegedly the insufficient political influence and weakening of the identity of Houthis. Riyadh did not want to risk a Shiite takeover in Yemen and intervened in the country in 2009 to restore stability and government power (Boucek, 2010). The conflict was interrupted in 2010 when a ceasefire was declared between the rebels and government forces. However, this ceasefire lasted only one year, as the conflict re-emerged with the Arab Spring protests. After nationwide uprisings, then-president Ali Abdullah Saleh decided to hand power to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi (Rashad, 2011).

In 2014, the Houthi rebels, still not satisfied with a change of leadership, seized the capital Sana'a. In 2015, Saudi Arabia again formed a military coalition, backed by the US among others, to intervene in Yemen. The main objective was to restore Hadi to the presidency. Unfortunately, the war between the coalition and the rebels lasts until today and created a humanitarian disaster (Orkaby, 2017). Tehran reacted with condemnation of the Saudi-led intervention and called it genocide (BBC, 2015).

Overall, Saudi Arabia emerges from the regional rivalry as the more successful country. Although Iran has worked hard to support the Shiite population in the Levant and pit them against Saudi Arabia, most of the countries have chosen to side with the Saudis. Countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have reduced or completely severed diplomatic relations with Iran. Especially after the war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia gained more influence in the region due to informal alliances across the region. This strong regional position

was eroded by the disputes with Qatar in 2017, which were reviewed earlier in this Thesis. (Oztig, 2021).

3.2 Sources of the rivalry

When examining the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it is clear their areas of conflict are recurring. Mutual rivalry has become part of the policies and institutions of individual states and shapes their attitudes towards spheres of influence. (Mirza et al., 2021) Throughout the history of the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, I have chosen three categories of main sources of mutual hostility between them: religious differences, mutual security dilemma and the struggle for power and influence. These categories are usually evident in most of the manifestations of rivalry, such as proxy wars.

Probably the most fundamental source of the rivalry is the religious clash. As noted above, the main division between the two powers is based on the two main branches of Islam, Shiism (represented by Iran) and Sunnism (represented by Saudi Arabia). In recent history, both regional powers dominated their respective Islamic sect and became their leaders. Moreover, each country has always presented itself as a true Islamic state. Based on this argument, both countries demand sole control of the holiest sites in Islam, Mecca and Medina. Control of these cities gives Saudi Arabia tremendous prestige and influence in the Islamic world. Iran often challenges the status quo and desires to preserve the sites for the Shiite population to find solace there (Dupont, 2019).

In addition, religion is also determinant in the view on the state structure. The Saudi King is certainly a supreme political leader, but formally he does not bear religious authority or symbolism. In Iran, by contrast, the Supreme Leader is a major political and religious figure. These governmental differences inevitably provoke disputes between the two powers, who label each other's regime as harmful and not in line with their branch of Islam. This conflict is also manifested in regional proxy wars (e. g. in Syria, Yemen, or Bahrain), where each power tries to establish a regime according to the formula of its own form of government (Osiewicz, 2016).

The religious and ideological disputes are creating a tense situation between the two powers which could be considered a security dilemma. The concept of security dilemma was first examined by John H. Herz in 1950. In short, the concept is based on the argument that both countries are in an anarchic environment and constantly fear for their security from being attacked by another actor. This situation creates uncertainty and fear and leads to an increase in the security resources and power of one country to make it safer from the other. Paradoxically,

as a result of the increase in power, both countries are increasingly afraid of each other, which creates mutual distrust and neither actor feels safer (Herz, 1950).

This is exactly the situation in Saudi-Irani relations. Since both countries present themselves as the leader of their respective Islamic branch, any suspicious activities are perceived as threatening and are followed by reaction. For example, one of the suspicious activities is the Irani nuclear program. Riyadh is extremely sensitive about this issue and has repeatedly appealed to its ally the US to shut down the Irani nuclear program. (Ersoy, 2013) The religious and ideological difference described above creates a mutual lack of trust and views on the other power are increasingly threatening. Additionally, this security dilemma is not applied only in direct relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran but also in their proxy wars as both are guarding their allied side against the perceived threat from the other. Both countries view regional politics as an ideological zero-sum game. The stronger Irani Shiism and its influence, the weaker feel Saudi Sunnism and its influence, and vice versa (Huwaidin, 2015).

Since the begging, the struggle for regional power and influence is one of the cornerstones and main sources of the rivalry. For both countries, regional predominance is one of their key desires as they are the most politically and religiously powerful states in the region and actively. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran are trying to influence regional developments in accordance with their religious and political preferences and to become the most influential player in the Middle East region. Moreover, both countries are doing their utmost to avoid direct confrontation (Ersoy, 2012). The regional struggle for power has an enormous impact on the whole region's stability. In particular, political and religious differences lead to the support of various proxy groups against each other, creating a more difficult environment for the stabilisation of the region (Gul et al., 2021).

The sectarian dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran is once again defining the struggle for power and influence in the region, especially after the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring is one of the most important events that influenced the regional balance of power and spheres of influence. As authoritarian regimes fell throughout the region, Tehran saw this as an opportunity to forge alliances with these former authoritarian countries and expand its sphere of influence as much as possible. Moreover, Riyadh was aware of the power vacuum created by the Arab Spring and had to react, especially in the states with a Shiite majority, to prevent the expansion of Iranian power. Saudi response to the emerging power vacuum in the region was ranging from the support of the government forces (Egypt) to a full-scale invasion (Bahrain). Moreover,

Saudi Arabia fears the possible impact of Iran's revolutionary ideology on its own Shiite minority (Jahner, 2022).

4 Application of the role theory on the Saudi-Irani rivalry in Qatar

The main aim of the following chapter is to look at the Saudi-Irani rivalry in Qatar through the lens of role theory and to capture the changes that have taken place since the Arab Spring. The chapter is divided into three parts. First, I describe the way in which roles were assigned, on what basis they were chosen, and how roles may have interacted. In the second part, based on the foreign policy analysis and content analysis of the official statements of the leaders of these countries, I will assign three roles to Saudi Arabia and Iran before the Arab Spring. The roles chosen are those that both countries have performed most frequently and are also relevant to our case. Thus, some roles had to be omitted even though they were very common. Moreover, the characteristics of the roles are described in detail before the assignment. Second, I will analyse the impact of the Qatari Arab Spring and subsequent changes in Qatari politics on the manifestation of the two countries' roles. Each of the selected roles is analysed in detail and then the captured changes and their impact on regional rivalry are described.

4.1 Assigning the roles

Determination of the roles is based on the foreign policy of the country and on the official statements of the country's representatives. Consequently, the roles are self-projected by each country. The main way to assign a role was to measure the frequency of specific characteristics of the role under consideration in the country's foreign policy activities and official statements. As already mentioned, roles consist of two main sources: material and ideational. When analysing the foreign policy activities and statements of both countries, I was trying to match the roles developed by Holsti relevant to this Thesis. His concepts of national roles are well established and are key concepts for role theory research. However, since Holsti created the roles in 1970, newer roles are evident that take into account some aspects that Holsti did not consider. One of these is religion, which is crucial to our case. Moreover, both countries deviate more or less from Holsti's original roles, which is why some of the roles do not completely coincide with our cases.

A specific key has been maintained in the allocation of roles. The aim was to select roles from Holsti's original work because of the complexity of his concept of national roles. As already mentioned, his roles are the basis of most role theory research. However, some of the more recent roles developed by Holsti's followers represent a good complement to his conception and are more useful in today's context. This means that in one case an exception to

this role allocation key had to be made and one selected role for Saudi Arabia was not developed by Holsti. The second goal was to choose at least one common and one different role for both rivals. The common role should include the shared goals of Saudi Arabia and Iran, for example, the regional leadership. The different roles were chosen to capture the distinct characteristics of the two rivals, such as support for different groups during the Arab Spring. As a result, each country has three roles that are most relevant to our case, according to their official statements and performed policies.

Role interactions must be taken into account when assigning roles. Roles interact in two main ways. The first one is the reinforcement of roles within one country. In short, there is a positive relationship between national roles, where one role is related to the others. Thus, officials usually try to link all their roles to express reliable political behaviour. However, the intensity of each role may change over time because it depends on the leadership of the country. The second interaction is the clash between the two countries which is especially evident in the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran. Thus, the rivalry is also evident in the conception of roles, as both countries conceptualise their roles against those of their rival. Moreover, the roles are not only based on internal factors of Saudi Arabia or Iran but are also a consequence of the existence of a rival country that is considered a major threat. Therefore, the contradictory roles deepen the rivalry between the two countries (Cerioli, 2018a).

4.2 Saudi Arabia's roles before the Arab Spring in Qatar

Three roles for Saudi Arabia are as follows: *Guarantor of stability, Regional leader* and *Defender of Islam*. The first one is a more recent role used by several authors (Cerioli, 2018b; Darwich, 2019; del Miño & Martínez, 2019) to capture a country's willingness to maintain the status quo, a stable regional environment and a calm domestic situation. In the case of this role, the role selection key was skipped because the role was not developed by Holsti. However, the concept of this role was so important that an exception had to be made. The other two are Holsti's original roles. The hallmark of a regional leader is the perception of oneself as a power that has special obligations to other states in the region and acts as the leader of those states. The latter is also a role concept developed by Holsti but renamed from "defender of the faith" to "defender of Islam", which is a more accurate designation for our case. The characteristic of a defender of Islam thus encompasses a country's view of its foreign affairs in terms of defending Islamic values. Moreover, the government feels a responsibility to ensure Islamic purity for other states (Holsti, 1970). It should be noted that some other roles could also be chosen for Saudi Arabia, such as the role of a *Faithful ally*, which is often performed by Riyadh.

However, this role is not appropriate for our case, as in the Saudi context it is mainly associated with the alliance with the US, so it was omitted from the research.

4.2.1 Guarantor of stability

One of Saudi Arabia's most important roles is that of a guarantor of stability. It has always been crucial for Saudi leaders to maintain the status quo. A complex social security system is largely based on oil and guarantees the legitimacy of the kingdom. Thus, its leaders firmly believe that any external instability can affect state-society relations at home and threaten the survival of the regime (UNGA, 1981). One sign of this role is Saudi attempts at mediation. The history of mediation in Saudi Arabia dates back to the 1970s and 1980s. Saudi attempts at mediation occurred in the context of the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and in various conflicts, such as Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iraq (Kamrava, 2013). Moreover, during the Arab Spring, stability was one of the main goals of Saudi foreign policy, as described above.

The material sources of the guarantor of stability role are paramount, as the regime's legitimacy is largely based on oil revenues. Thus, the main material source of the role is the geographical location of the country coupled with its economic condition. Given the presence of oil fields on Saudi territory, it is essential for Riyadh to maintain a steady flow of funds from the oil fields, as these funds form a major part of the Saudi economy. Moreover, this economic resource is linked to the political one through a social security system based on oil revenues. This brings us to the ideological sources of the role. Riyadh presents itself as the ideological leader of Muslim countries. Therefore, it opposes any force that could change the status quo and challenge the Saudi position in the regional power system. Saudi officials are thus extremely sensitive to any sign of dissatisfaction with its regime, both domestically and abroad. This was particularly evident during the Arab Spring when the Saudis actively opposed uprisings, especially those motivated by Islamist forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Iran has been a long-term challenger to the Saudi position. The role of guarantor of stability is therefore at least partly directed against Iran, which, as will be shown later, presents itself as the main revolutionary force in the region.

4.2.2 Regional leader

Arguably Riyadh's most significant and characteristic role is that of a regional leader. Saudi Arabia sees and presents itself as a natural regional leader, whether historically, economically, or politically. Saudi officials typically emphasize the fact that their country is one of the wealthiest states in the region, present the Saudi regime as a model for smaller countries

in the Middle East, and also emphasize its rich history and the fact that Saudi Arabia was the first monarchy to emerge in the Gulf region (Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n. d.). In addition, the country's position at the international level is sometimes highlighted and described as the success of a desert country that has transformed itself into a developed country with modern standards. Furthermore, the fact that Riyadh represents and is beholden to the Arab and Islamic communities as a regional leader is articulated (Abdullah, 2010).

Material and ideational sources work effectively together in this case. Material sources such as Saudi Arabia's established regional position, natural wealth and relative international success provide a suitable basis for presenting Saudi Arabia as a regional leader. These sources combine well with ideational sources, including the country's rich history, noble origins, and cultural heritage. As a result, Saudi leaders can present their country as an unquestionable regional leader and support their arguments with both material and ideological resources. Moreover, by promoting a relatively successful regime, Riyadh presents itself as a reliable ally willing to provide financial, political, and religious support to any regional neighbour that accepts Saudi leadership. The perception of Saudi Arabia as a regional leader naturally implies distrust of any country with a similar goal. Therefore, Riyadh has reacted hostilely to Qatar's change in foreign policy approach and its subsequent quest for greater regional prominence. Moreover, regional dominance is also one of the key reasons for the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh, as both see themselves as regional leaders.

4.2.3 Defender of Islam

The religious issue is the focal point of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The role of the defender of Islam is therefore crucial to our case. Riyadh considers itself the home of Islam for several reasons. Control of Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, is one of the Saudis' primary arguments for why they perceive themselves as a defender of Islam. Moreover, the current Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz officially holds the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. In addition to its control of Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia bases its argument as the defender of Islam on the historical claim that it is the "birthplace of Islamic history" and the "heart of Islam." Riyadh further declares that it is committed to preserving and promoting peace in the Muslim world, and pledges to ensure safe pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. In addition, Riyadh has donated large sums to the Islamic Development Fund and other community funding projects as proof of its role (Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n. d.; Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, n. d.). The role of defender of Islam has been strongly articulated by Saudi officials on numerous occasions, who have affirmed that Saudi Arabia is "representative

of the Muslim world from whose soil the Islamic faith emerged" (Cerioli, 2018a). During the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia also presented itself as a defender of Islam as it fought against Islamist forces (e. g. the Muslim Brotherhood), as mentioned above.

In this case, the material source is only one - the location of Mecca and Medina on the territory of Saudi Arabia - but it carries a very strong symbolism and appears very often in the country's declarations. In addition, pilgrimages are associated with both holy sites, making Riyadh feel even more like a defender of Islam or Muslims. The ideational source is mainly history. Namely, Saudi Arabia is the original place where Islam originated, developed, and spread to the world. Another ideational source of this role is the Saudi identity. As noted above, the Saudis see their Sunni interpretation of Islam as the only true and pure one. Therefore, they feel an obligation to protect Islam from differing interpretations, whether radical Islamist or Shiite. As a result, Saudi Arabia sees and projects itself as the natural spiritual leader of Muslims, able to provide them with extensive support and assistance through Islamic financing.

4.3 Iran's roles before the Arab Spring

The following roles have been selected for Iran: *Regional leader*, *Defender of Islam* and *Bastion of revolutions*. In the case of Iran, all three roles are original concepts from Holsti. The first two are shared with Saudi Arabia and their characteristics are described above. The last of these, the bastion of revolutions, is characterized by the country's perceived responsibility for leading revolutionary movements abroad and "liberating" oppressed people. In addition, the country acts as a moral and material support for foreign revolutionary contemporaries, and as an ideological leader and key ally (Holsti, 1970).

4.3.1 Regional leader

One of the roles Iran shares with Saudi Arabia is that of regional leader, as the quest for regional dominance is at the heart of their rivalry. Since the successful implementation of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Tehran has gradually moved towards regional dominance. Two main paths can be traced - excluding other powers from the region and building diplomatic ties with non-aligned countries (Adel, 2021). Moreover, after the revolution, there were firm statements that Iran intended to build its regional dominance by spreading the revolution. Shortly after the revolution, the religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini called for the creation of Iran as the centre of a new Middle Eastern order. Iran thus presents itself as a leading revisionist power and sees the regional arrangement as unsuitable for Muslims (Takeyh, 2009). The view of itself as a regional leader is evident in the statements of many of the country's leaders, who

described Iran as "a regional power that will act responsibly with regard to regional and international security" (UNGA, 2013). Moreover, this self-image is usually accompanied by an emphasis on the flourishing of Iranian society, culture, economy, and identity after the revolution, which is presented as a successful model for other countries (Khamenei, 2011).

Although the role of regional leader is common for Iran and Saudi Arabia, the sources differ slightly in the Iranian case, in particular, the ideological ones. Iran does not build much on its history, rather it uses revolutionary ideas as the main ideational source of the role. Moreover, in line with the goal of spreading the revolution, Iranian identity, society and culture are important ideological resources for this role and are presented as model examples. In terms of material resources, the most important is the vast natural resources, a strong economy, and a strategic geographical location. A unique material source is a military power and in particular, the nuclear programme, which is a permanent aspect of the rivalry with Saudi Arabia. The outbreak of the Arab Spring has thus opened up new opportunities for Iran to expand its regional influence based on its perceived material and ideological superiority, including the already described opportunity in Qatar associated with a change in foreign policy.

4.3.2 Defender of Islam

As a second role was chosen the defender of Islam. As noted above since the Islamic revolution Iran perceives itself as the only genuine and pure follower of Islamic rule which should be spread around the globe. Moreover, it is clear from Ayatollah Khomeini's writings that Iranian clerics see their responsibility to the world as defending Islamic principles and disseminating them on a global scale (Özdamar, 2017). In addition, Khomeini considers other Muslims living under different regimes to be oppressed and portrays Tehran as a defender of these people and their rights. Furthermore, Khomeini has also identified as his goal the unification of all Muslims and the establishment of brotherhood among them worldwide under a genuine Islamic regime represented by Tehran. As in Saudi Arabia, this protective role is practically implemented by financial support, but unlike Riyadh, Iranian officials usually support Islamist organizations (e. g. Hamas, Hezbollah). As Tehran claims, this support fulfils its religious duty towards the true Islamic values and oppressed Muslims. (Nia, 2012).

It is already evident from the title of the role that the main sources are ideational. The material source is Tehran's relatively strong regional position, which allows it to act as a respected defender. The ideological sources are similar to those of Riyadh, such as history. Historically, the Islamic Revolution itself is an important event because it symbolises the

Islamic values being promoted. Furthermore, ideology is a key source of the role. Given that Iran is a theocratic regime that aspires to become the spiritual leader of all Muslims, the role of defender of Islam combines Tehran's two main goals: regional domination and the spread of the Islamic revolution presented as a religious duty and aid to the oppressed. The atmosphere of the Arab Spring was therefore ideal for playing the role of the defender in the face of an uprising of people who felt oppressed. This made it easier than before for Iran to exercise its protective role and strengthen its regional power at the expense of Riyadh, which sought to maintain the status quo at all costs.

4.3.3 Bastion of revolutions

One of the most characteristic roles of Iran is called bastion of revolutions, acting to some extent as a counterweight to the Saudi role as guarantor of stability. The difference between the two roles is quite clear; Riyadh is certainly more content with the status quo, contrary to Tehran, whose main goal is to change the current regional and possibly global order. Underlying this role is the perception of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic regime as the ideal ideological and social order which should be spread all around the world. Moreover, according to official statements, Tehran presents itself as "an inspiration to other nations of the world" (Khamenei, 2016). The commitment to spreading the revolution is also evident in the Iranian constitution. There is mentioned that the Iranian government is prepared to provide basic support for the continuation of the revolution abroad (Iranian Constitution, 1989).

Material resources are less important than ideological resources in this role. The only significant material source is again Iran's strong regional position. Tehran could hardly promote its revolution and offer revolutionary support without respect in the international arena. More important are certainly ideological sources such as history, ideology, and religion. The revolution itself and its legacy are an unquestionable part of the post-revolutionary Iranian regime. However, self-presentation as an ideologically and religiously superior leader is crucial to this role, as the assurance of support from fellow revolutionaries is enshrined in the constitution. As a revolutionary environment, the Arab Spring brought unprecedented opportunities to Iran. Many people suddenly embraced alternative forms of state regimes, including the Islamic one of which Iran was a key ally. Qatar was no exception to this plethora of opportunities that emerged for Tehran during the Arab uprisings.

5 Changes of the roles after the Arab Spring in Qatar

This chapter examines the changes in the roles of Saudi Arabia and Iran after the Arab Spring and the subsequent changes in Qatar. All three roles of the two countries are analysed in detail and based on official statements, rhetoric, policies implemented and a predetermined definition of the role, it is determined whether the role has changed after the Qatari Arab Spring and if so, how this change has manifested itself. The aim of this chapter is to determine whether and, potentially, what impact the Arab Spring in Qatar may have had on the role manifestations of both countries. All changes are analysed in the context of Saudi-Iranian regional rivalry and the significance of these changes for this rivalry is also examined.

5.1 Change of the Saudi roles

In this chapter, I will analyse the changes in the roles of Saudi Arabia after the Arab Spring in Qatar. Special attention is devoted to the diplomatic conflict between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 2017 which largely determined the changes in the Saudi role performance. The implications of the role shifts are examined primarily in the context of the regional dispute with Iran.

5.1.1 Guarantor of stability

As mentioned, stability has been a key concern for Saudi leaders for several decades. This determination to maintain the status quo was certainly evident during the Arab Spring and especially during and after the Arab Spring in Qatar. Riyadh has perceived Qatar as a major threat to the regional and domestic status quo due to its proactive foreign policy approach and support for revolutionary forces. Although Saudi Arabia intended to maintain its role as a guarantor of stability, its rhetoric and foreign policy became more assertive and sometimes publicly confrontational. This change has been reflected by Saudi officials and academics as a sign of growing self-confidence, but the explanation for this more assertive stance is probably a heightened sense of vulnerability (Obaid, 2011).

One of the first signals of a change of the role was in 2014 when Riyadh withdrew its ambassador from Doha. Although this was not the first time such a move had occurred, the diplomatic conflict with Qatar this time was confrontational and public. This was not expected from Saudi officials, who usually do not address such matters in public (Echagüe, 2014: 13). Moreover, in 2017, when the diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar erupted, one of the main reasons was to maintain regional stability. According to Saudi Arabia and its allies, this stability was undermined by Doha's support for the uprising (UAE Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and International Cooperation, 2017). The change in the role of the guarantor of stability is evident here in the assertive and aggressive language chosen, as well as in the increased and coordinated pressure on Qatar.

The objective of the role of guarantor of stability thus remained the same: regional and domestic stability and peace. However, the means of achieving this objective have changed significantly since the Arab Spring. It is rather surprising that even though Saudi Arabia declared its role as a guarantor of stability, it did not hesitate to use methods that were not expected of a representative of this role, such as assertive rhetoric or coercive diplomacy within the Gulf Cooperation Council. Moreover, while Riyadh has confirmed that stability is still one of its key concerns, it has made it clear that stability can be achieved in different ways than before.

5.1.2 Regional leader

The regional leader is one of the most typical Saudi roles. Given its vast natural resources, rich history, and relative international success, Saudi leaders present their country as destined to be a regional leader. To maintain its leadership role, Riyadh must of course build strong alliances with other countries in the region and persuade them to adopt the Saudi position and leadership. However, Qatar did not intend to subordinate its foreign policy to the Saudi leadership and felt that the Arab Spring would be a good opportunity to expand the regional influence it had sought in previous years. With the support of the revolutionary forces, Doha has thus become a challenger to Saudi Arabia's untouchable position as a regional leader.

Naturally, the Saudis were not about to give up their strong regional position, which was evident from their official statements and policies. Since the start of the Arab Spring, Saudi officials have criticised Qatar's support for the revolutionary groups, leading to the withdrawal of ambassadors in 2014. The criticism culminated in a diplomatic crisis, with Riyadh and its Gulf Cooperation Council allies accusing Doha of supporting terrorism and extremism (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017). It eventually escalated into severing diplomatic ties with Qatar and a subsequent blockade and diplomatic isolation (SPA, 2017). In addition, Saudi officials have decided to block Qatar's influential Al-Jazeera news service. The official reason was the support for Iran and Hezbollah on Al Jazeera's website. Given that this channel is the most watched in the Arab world and has brought considerable regional popularity to Qatar, this was a major setback for Doha's reputation (BBC, 2017a). Furthermore, Saudi officials have listed the demands that Qatar must meet in order to resolve the diplomatic crisis. The demands

included, among other things, the closure of the Al-Jazeera network and all its affiliates, the restriction of diplomatic relations with Iran and the severing of all ties with terrorist and extremist organisations, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood. (Al Jazeera, 2017a).

Saudi Arabia has thus firmly confirmed its role as the undisputed regional leader. Riyadh has made it clear that it will not allow any challenge to its regional dominance and has shown that it is willing to take tough diplomatic steps. With Iran at its back, Riyadh could not afford to undermine its regional position by Qatar, especially not during the Arab Spring crisis. Hence, Saudi Arabia has pursued its role as a regional leader more resolutely than before the Arab Spring. Ironically, even as Riyadh rebuffed Qatar's challenge to its regional dominance, the blockade and diplomatic isolation steered Qatar into Iran's sphere of influence, strengthening the Saudi arch-rival.

5.1.3 Defender of Islam

Based on its rich religious history and the location of Mecca and Medina on Saudi Arabian territory, Riyadh presents itself as the birthplace of Islam and acts as a representative of the Sunni Muslim world. At the same time, it claims that the Sunni form of Islam is the only pure one, thus opposing the Iranian Shiite interpretation. As already mentioned, Islamist forces (e. g. the Muslim Brotherhood) played a key role during the Arab Spring due to their effective organisation. However, because Saudi Arabia openly supported the governing rulers, its attitude towards these Islamist forces was hostile and disapproving of their basic interpretation of Islam. Riyadh thus felt the need to protect its perceived correct form of Islam. A rift between the two countries was inevitable given Qatar's support for these forces.

In many of the Saudi official statements that criticised Doha's support for the revolutionary forces, Riyadh acted as a defender of Islam. Qatar has been accused of revoking the Riyadh Agreement (2013), which committed signatories not to support the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017). In addition, Riyadh has accused Doha of supporting terrorist groups backed by Iran that are considered a threat to Sunni Islam. (SPA, 2017). The most visible manifestation of this role, however, was the Saudi condemnation of Doha's actions preventing Qatari citizens from making the pilgrimage to Mecca in 2017. Saudi officials have pledged to ensure the safety of all pilgrims to perform religious rituals on Arab soil, including Qatari citizens (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2017).

The religious dimension was at the heart of the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Qatar during the Arab Spring. The religious policies of both countries have the same basis. However, the source of the religious tension is the different approaches to the revolutionary forces and the different relations with Iran (Hellyer, 2017). The role change after the Arab Spring is not as radical as in previous cases. Riyadh has shown that it is capable of providing safe pilgrimage even for people from countries with broken diplomatic relations and in times of regional crisis. Riyadh has thus made it clear that whatever diplomatic or regional crisis occurs, Saudi Arabia will always ensure the smooth conduct of religious ceremonies on its territory. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has shown that it will not allow any of its neighbours to threaten Sunni Islam by supporting Iran and Iranian-backed terrorist groups.

5.2 Changes of the Irani roles

As in the case of Saudi Arabia, in this chapter, I will focus on the changes in role expressions after the Arab Spring in Qatar. Here too, much attention is paid to the diplomatic crisis of 2017. In addition, attention is paid to the principles of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which seem to be a major aspect of all the selected roles of Iran even after the Arab Spring in Qatar. The significance of role changes is analysed mainly in the context of the rivalry with Saudi Arabia.

5.2.1 Regional leader

Tehran's role as a regional leader is one of its most projected roles since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. During and after the Arab Spring, Iran stuck to its strategy of presenting itself as a role model for all Muslim countries, building strong alliances with non-aligned countries to weaken its principal regional rival, Saudi Arabia. The change in Qatar's foreign policy during the Arab Spring and the subsequent diplomatic rift between Doha and Riyadh opened a huge opportunity for Iran to build a strong relationship with an isolated country in the Saudi sphere of influence. It is worth noting that the new momentum in Qatar-Iran relations brought about by the diplomatic tensions in 2017 already had some basis in the pragmatic relations between Tehran and Doha based on shared natural gas resources in the Persian Gulf.

Although there were signs of rapprochement between Qatar and Iran in early 2017 regarding direct negotiations over Qatari hostages captured by Tehran-backed militias, which deeply irritated Riyadh, the main diplomatic rapprochement came only with the isolation of Qatar by Saudi Arabia. (Boussois, 2019). Shortly after the Saudis imposed a blockade on Qatar, Tehran quickly offered Doha material assistance in the form of food supplies, vital support for

an import-dependent country like Qatar (Reuters, 2017). Tehran subsequently condemned Riyadh's severing of diplomatic ties and expressed support for Doha, describing Qatar as a "friendly nation" and adding that "relations between Iran and Qatar have always been developing and powerful" (Al Jazeera, 2017b). The rapprochement between Doha and Tehran culminated in the resumption of diplomatic relations and the return of the Qatari ambassador to Iran after his dismissal in 2016 (BBC, 2017b).

Iran thus correctly assessed the situation of tense relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar during the Arab Spring and managed to use it to its advantage. Throughout the rising tensions, Tehran remained calm, and when Qatar was completely isolated, Iran offered Doha its diplomatic and material support, knowing that Qatar essentially had no choice but to accept it. Iran thus stuck to its strategy of allying with non-aligned countries and weakened Saudi Arabia's regional position. Overall, with relatively little effort, Tehran has successfully played its role as a regional leader by strengthening its influence, forging a new alliance, and weakening Saudi Arabia.

5.2.2 Defender of Islam

Since one of the main aims of the 1979 Islamic Revolution is to spread the principles of the revolution throughout the region, Iran presents itself as a defender of Islam. Moreover, Tehran sees itself as the leader and defender of Shia Muslims, insisting that Muslims living under regimes other than the Iranian model are oppressed and claiming to defend their rights. In this context, Tehran has publicly supported the Arab uprisings, describing them as an "Islamic awakening" and drawing parallels between the Islamic Revolution and the Arab Spring by claiming that the Arab Spring was inspired by the Islamic Revolution. (Tehran Times, 2011). Iran and Qatar thus sided with and supported the insurgent forces against the ruling regimes, while Saudi Arabia, which also presented itself as a defender of Islam as described above, sided with the rulers.

Although Doha and Tehran were on the same side during the Arab uprisings and Iran actively supported Qatar, especially after the 2017 diplomatic crisis, religion was never a way to improve their relations, simply because Qatar is Sunni and Iran is Shia. Moreover, in the case of Syria, Doha stuck to its strategy of supporting the revolutionary forces, but Tehran firmly supported the Assad regime for strategic reasons, which created tensions between the two countries (Steinberg, 2012). According to Saudi officials (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017), Doha supported various extremist rebel groups backed by Iran, such as the Houthis in

Yemen, which Doha immediately rejected. However, there is no independent evidence to confirm or deny such claims. We could argue about the coordinated support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which, as mentioned, was largely supported by Qatar, and had warm relations with Iran at the same time. However, although the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran share similar goals, the relationship between them is not based on shared religious aspects. (Badawi & Sayyad, 2019).

Iran thus positioned itself as a defender of Islam during the Arab Spring by presenting itself as a representative of pure Islam, a protector of all oppressed Muslims and a religious counterweight to Saudi Arabia. However, Tehran did not project this role into its relations with Qatar, and this role has not changed even after the Arab Spring in Qatar. Religious aspects have never played an important role in relations between the two countries, and so Tehran has not played the role. These relationships were based on largely pragmatic reasons and a shared goal of strengthening its regional position at Saudi Arabia's expense, rather than coordinated support for the same rebel groups on the basis of religion.

5.2.3 Bastion of revolutions

This role is largely derived from the principles of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, with Iran presenting itself as a revolutionary and ideological leader and provider of support to oppressed Muslims. In the specific case of the revolution in Iran, the main objective is to establish a genuine Islamic regime, represented by Tehran, as the ideal ideological and social order and then to spread the ideas throughout the world. As is obvious, this role is similar to that of the defender of Islam, since the main principles of the Islamic Revolution are religious. As mentioned earlier, Iran supported the Arab Spring uprising as it saw it as a real opportunity to spread the principles of revolutionary ideas and to change the existing regional ideological and power order (Barzegar, 2011). Thus, Iran and Qatar were once again on the same side in order to change the regional balance of power.

With the change in Qatar's foreign policy and Doha's subsequent shift away from the Saudi sphere of influence, Tehran's goal of reshaping the regional power structure has moved closer. Qatar's quick offer of material support after diplomatic isolation and blockade (Reuters, 2017) was one manifestation of this role. Moreover, the rhetoric by Iranian officials is consistent with their self-imposed duty to protect oppressed Muslims, describing Qatar's diplomatic isolation as "an unacceptable siege for us" (Al Jazeera, 2017b). Paradoxically, Iranian officials have spoken of the new alliance as a contribution to regional stability (Majidyar, 2017), even

though their goal of playing the role of a bastion of revolutions is to change the regional order, which does not imply a promise of stability.

Iran thus positioned itself as a bastion of revolutions in building stronger diplomatic relations with Qatar during the 2017 diplomatic crisis. However, not all aspects of this role were fulfilled. Material support and the obligation to protect oppressed Muslims were clearly carried out by Iran. Accordingly, these aspects have overshadowed the religious dimension of the role, i.e., the spread of revolutionary ideas, which have not been fulfilled. In this case, Iran's main motivation for performing this role was the two countries' shared primary goal of changing the regional balance of power in its favour at the expense of its main rival, Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on the Saudi-Iranian rivalry after the Arab Spring in terms of role theory, specifically in Qatar. The thesis aimed to capture the changes in the roles performed by Saudi Arabia and Iran after the Arab Spring in Qatar, the manifestation of the changes and the implications on the regional rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran.

I tried to apply role theory and find out *whether Saudi Arabia and Iran fulfil the defined roles, whether the roles played by Saudi Arabia and Iran have changed after the Arab Spring in Qatar, and if so, how these changes have manifested themselves*. Another part of the analysis was to find out *how the role changes after the Qatari Arab Spring affected the Saudi-Iranian rivalry*.

An analysis of Saudi Arabia's roles has shown that before the Arab Spring Riyadh fulfilled defined roles as a guarantor of stability, regional leader and defender of Islam and projected them into the rivalry with Iran. Moreover, all of the chosen roles were at least partially directed against Iran or functioned as a counterweight to Iranian roles. The most significant role reversal occurred in the case of the role of the guarantor of stability. In this case, Saudi officials chose a distinctly assertive rhetoric regarding the diplomatic rift with Qatar. Although the overall objective has remained the same, i.e. to maintain the regional status quo, the nature of official statements has changed substantially. In the case of the regional leader's role, the change was not as radical as in the previous case. With harsh rhetoric, coupled with tough diplomatic moves that were not so common on Riyadh's part before the Arab Spring, Riyadh confirmed and strengthened its role as a regional leader. Moreover, Saudi Arabia projected this role in a way that firmly rejected any challenge to the regional order. The role of the defender of Islam has remained largely unchanged. The manifestations of this role were not much different from those before the Arab Spring, with Saudi Arabia still supporting Muslims and providing security during the pilgrimages. This security for the pilgrims was also provided by Saudi Arabia to the Qataris after the diplomatic dispute. Rather, Riyadh was merely consolidating its role as the defender of Islam.

The analysis of Iranian roles also showed the same results as in the case of Saudi Arabia in the first phase. Thus, before the Arab Spring, Iran fulfilled its assigned roles as a regional leader, defender of Islam and bastion of revolution. Here, too, these roles were, at least to some extent, directed against its rival, Saudi Arabia. The role of Regional leader was projected in much the same way as it was before the Arab Spring in Qatar. After Qatar's diplomatic isolation,

the same tactic of allying non-allied countries was employed, and after friendly rhetoric, diplomatic relations between Qatar and Iran warmed. Moreover, the role of the defender of Islam has hardly been reflected in relations with Qatar and has therefore not changed at all. Iran and Qatar have never based their relations on the religious aspects underlying this role. The role of the bastion of the revolution is an interesting case where only part of it has been applied to the relations between Doha and Tehran. The religious dimension of this role has not been fulfilled, but the rhetoric and subsequent policy of alliance with Qatar has been consistent with the ultimate goal of reshaping the regional order.

In general, Saudi Arabia's roles have changed more than Iran's in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Qatar. In particular, the role of guarantor of stability has changed, as Saudi leaders have had to respond to the revolutionary environment of the Arab Spring. And while they have still tried to act as a regional guarantor of stability, assertive rhetoric has not contributed to building this image. On the other hand, Iran was not threatened by the Arab uprisings and could only wait for Saudi actions to play their role. Iran's roles thus did not fundamentally change because the Arab Spring, including the Arab Spring in Qatar and the subsequent diplomatic rift, was consistent with Iran's desire to strengthen its regional dominance. Moreover, in both countries, we could observe a difference between the rhetoric and the implementation of their roles. Riyadh, for example, still presented itself as a guarantor of stability, although its diplomatic isolation of Doha did not match this role. Also, Iran presented its flourishing diplomatic relations with Qatar as a contribution to regional stability, even though its goal of reshaping the regional status quo did not correspond to such a proclamation.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Qatar was strongly influenced by the Arab Spring in Qatar and the subsequent role change. Both countries have focused some of their roles against their rival, which can be seen in the conflicting roles of guarantor of stability and bastion of revolution. These roles were also key to the approach to the Arab Spring. In the case of Qatar, Riyadh failed to play the role of guarantor of regional stability and rather presented itself as a tough regional leader. Tehran, on the other hand, correctly assessed the situation and restored diplomatic relations with Doha. Iran thus benefited from the Qatari Arab Spring and the diplomatic crisis by forging a valuable alliance with a state from the Saudi sphere of influence that was also dissatisfied with the current regional order, in line with its role as a bastion of revolution.

While role theory can help explain some aspects of a country's behaviour in the international environment, research certainly has its limits. One is that countries do not always conform to the definition of roles. Role conceptions vary depending on the region or the current international situation. Thus, some roles only occur in a certain situation, and as the situation changes, so do the roles. The second boundary is that sometimes the real policy differs from the role inferred from official statements, which is what I encountered in this thesis. Another limitation is that, given the scope of the work, countries play a wide range of other roles that are not mentioned in this research, such as those related to their approach to the US as a key player in the region.

In terms of possible future research, it should be noted that this thesis focuses only on a country that had a very specific course of the Arab Spring compared to other countries in the region. The role conceptions of Saudi Arabia and Iran projected in other states such as Syria, Libya, Yemen or Bahrain could be the subject of further research. One aspect not mentioned in this research is Riyadh's and Tehran's perception of the US position in the Middle East. This perception and subsequent role formation with respect to the US presence in the Middle East could be the subject of further research. In addition, further research could focus on a different period, possibly closer to the present. The Middle East is a very dynamic region where changes occur frequently, and thus roles change and manifest themselves in different ways. Further research and analysis could also focus on the changes in perceptions of national roles in the context of the recent resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

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Abstract/Abstrakt

Abstract

The Bachelor's thesis focuses on the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in the Qatar Arab Spring from the perspective of role theory. The aim is to apply role theory to the cases of Saudi Arabia and Iran before and after the Arab Spring in Qatar based on the official statements of the leaders of these countries. Other areas of research include capturing changes in role performance and determining the impact of role changes after the Qatar Arab Spring on the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran. Based on the analysis, some of Saudi Arabia's roles are identified as changed after the Arab Spring in Qatar, particularly the role of guarantor of stability. On the other hand, Iran's roles are characterized as largely unchanged after the Qatari Arab Spring.

Key words: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar, role theory, Arab Spring, rivalry

Abstrakt

Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na saúdsko-íránské soupeření v rámci katarského arabského jara z pohledu teorie rolí. Cílem je aplikovat teorii rolí na případy Saúdské Arábie a Íránu před a po arabském jaru v Kataru na základě oficiálních vyjádření představitelů těchto zemí. Mezi další oblasti výzkumu patří zachycení změn v projevech rolí a určení dopadu změn rolí po katarském arabském jaru na rivalitu mezi Rijádem a Teheránem. Na základě analýzy jsou identifikovány změny některých rolí Saúdské Arábie po arabském jaru v Kataru, zejména role garanta stability. Na druhou stranu jsou role Íránu po katarském arabském jaru charakterizovány jako do značné míry nezměněné.

Klíčová slova: Saúdská Arábie, Írán, Katar, teorie rolí, arabské jaro, rivalita