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A Guarding of the Change: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Quest for Stability in the Middle East

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Introduction

Change is difficult. Civilizations have crumbled and the hopes and dreams of nations have been dashed on the rock of this seemingly incontrovertible truth. The modern Middle East reflects this truth. Despite (or perhaps because of) herculean U.S. investment, the region continues to crush and frustrate U.S. policy objectives in contemporary warfare. Even with the recent rise of Russia and China as the United States' primary nation state competitors, the Middle East remains vitally important. Great Power competition from Russia and China has only added new layers of threats to a region already featuring dangerous (albeit non-existential) threats to the United States from terrorism, war, and instability. In the midst of the regional instability, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia maintain a fierce rivalry vying for regional hegemony. Increasingly, Saudi Arabia appears to view Iran as an existential threat and therefore willing to take a greater range of actions to deter and disrupt Iran while creating advantages in the rivalry. The rivalry plays out across many critical dimensions of power and influence including religious, economic, and even direct military confrontations. Adding to the complexity, one state (Iran) remains one of the most overtly hostile actors towards U.S. policy while the other (Saudi Arabia) is a strong regional ally. The stakes of the Iran and Saudi Arabia rivalry for regional hegemony, which would allow the victor to control the bulk of the global energy flow and militarily encroach on key US regional allies, compel and incentivize U.S. action to at least monitor- if not actively influence- the regional competition.

Because both Iran and Saudi Arabia are not fully compatible (as partners or potential partners) with the United States in terms of their orientation towards Western political and economic values (namely liberal-democratic and free-market principles), U.S. efforts to support and influence the rivalry should start with identifying and encouraging reform efforts within each country that seek to better align political and economic structures with U.S. and Western values. The purpose of this article is to identify the change agents in both Iran and Saudi Arabia working to bring Western political and economic values to each country and establish the contributing factors behind these reform initiatives (the "who" and the "why" regarding change). Next, the article will analyze the dynamics that fuel the reform initiatives in each country with an eye towards offering recommendations for U.S. policy and actions in the region (the "how" and "what next" of change). A fundamental tenet of U.S. foreign policy asserts that U.S. interests are best served in a stable international community. Likewise, a biblical worldview demands that, to the best extent possible, people (and nations) live peaceably amongst themselves.¹ This implies an imperative to work towards peace and exhaust options before resorting to warfare. Smart policy and actions that effectively support, incentivize, and nurture reform initiatives to favorably resolve the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry in the Middle East represent the best chance for all parties to realize the great benefits of peace and stability in the much-maligned region.

Part I: History, Religion, and Change

For all their apparent differences, Iran and Saudi Arabia are remarkably similar (from a U.S. perspective) in one important area: they both desire regional hegemony in the Middle East. Their commitment to this shared goal is accompanied by a second, somewhat paradoxical, dynamic: the rivals often (as will be shown) either employ, or are influenced by, *opposite*

¹ Romans 12:18, NIV.

approaches and factors in their efforts to achieve hegemony.² There are many superficial (or at least superficially treated) differences that mark the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry that are often mentioned and frequently used to definitively (though perhaps not accurately) explain the differences and animosity between the two rivals. Foremost among these differences is that fact that Iran is a predominantly Shia Muslim country while Saudi Arabia is Sunni Muslim. Additionally, Iranians are Persians while Saudis are Arabs. These differences no doubt contribute to the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry and give it a (not-insignificant) religious and cultural dimension. However, there is much more to these differences, which apply only at the broadest levels, that transcend simple, neat, and tidy religious and cultural distinctions. Going beyond the surface-level differences tied to Iran and Saudi Arabia's differing religious and historical cultural heritage is critical to accurately evaluating and interpreting Western-style reform efforts in play in each country.

Perhaps the obvious starting point for discussing the critical cultural and religious factors that impact current reform efforts in each country lies with a brief sketch of Iranian and Saudi history. People groups identifying themselves as "Iranians" or "Persians" have existed in roughly the same geographic location (modern day Iran) in varying conditions of political sovereignty for thousands of years. Even as Iran's fortunes have ebbed and flowed with the currents of history, based on their own power and stability relative to conquering invaders, a distinctly "Iranian" identity can be traced back through this long historical lineage that still resonates with and impacts modern Iranians.³ Along with an enduring national identity, Iran's history gives it extensive experience developing, building (and re-building) economies and complex societies. By contrast, the history of the modern state of Saudi Arabia begins in 1932 – after Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud unified the Nejd and Hijaz regions of the Arabian Peninsula to form the modern Kingdom.⁴ To be sure, this is not to suggest that no history existed in the Arabian Peninsula prior to Ibn Saud's conquests (the peninsula founded a major religion and evidence of human existence dates back thousands of years). Additionally, Abdul Azziz's Kingdom represents the third such attempt- since the 18th century at forming a Saudi-family ruled kingdom on the Arabian Peninsula.⁵ However, unlike Iran, the history of a *unified political and geographic entity with a distinctly Saudi identity* is less than a century old. Using the metric of time, the Saudi state can be described as nascent (when compared with Iran) with considerably less experience building and developing the institutions of the modern state and (likely) a different set of societal expectations from government structures.

Besides being on opposite sides of the historical spectrum, the current expressions of the modern state in both Saudi Arabia and Iran relied on religion in their establishment – though in opposite fashions. In unifying the Hijaz and Nejd regions of the Arabian Peninsula to form the boundaries of the Kingdom, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud relied on armies of religious holy warriors, known as the "*ikhwan*," to fight and defeat his tribal enemies.⁶ These warriors, remnants of the ultra-conservative religious sect that formed the ideological basis of previous Saudi kingdoms,

² Kim Ghattas. 2020. *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East*. Henry Holt and Company.

³ Michael Axworthy. 2016. *A History of Iran: Empire of the Mind*. Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat04401a&AN=jsou.ocn951551474&site=eds-live>.

⁴ Robert Lacy. 1981. *The Kingdom*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

⁵ Lacey, *The Kingdom*, ch 1-2

⁶ Lacey, *The Kingdom*, 142.

fought (and won) many of the critical battles over competing tribes and territorial rivals on the Arabian peninsula for Abdul Aziz.⁷ Abdul Aziz could not have unified and created the modern Saudi state without the *ikhwan*. However, after establishing the Kingdom, the *ikhwan* – with their radical religious tilt- became too extreme in their beliefs and desire to influence the burgeoning Saudi state. This forced Abdul Aziz in 1929 to Saudi state without the *ikhwan*. However, after establishing the Kingdom, the *ikhwan* – with their radical religious tilt- became too extreme in their beliefs and desire to influence the burgeoning Saudi state. This forced Abdul Aziz in 1929 to first marginalize and then, ultimately, destroy the *ikhwan* a bloody final battle at the *ikhwan*'s desert stronghold south west of Riyadh. The defeat of the *ikhwan* gave Saudi kings latitude from the religious establishment to merge modernization efforts with religious traditions in a (mostly) supportive relationship. The space to engage foreign, non-Muslim entities created by the cushion between religion and politics proved critically important (and lucrative) after the discovery of oil in the Kingdom- which enabled the formation of the still-enduring “special relationship” between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. Saudi state without the *ikhwan*. However, after establishing the Kingdom, the *ikhwan* – with their radical religious tilt- became too extreme in their beliefs and desire to influence the burgeoning Saudi state. This forced Abdul Aziz in 1929 to first marginalize and then, ultimately, destroy the *ikhwan* a bloody final battle at the *ikhwan*'s desert stronghold south west of Riyadh. The defeat of the *ikhwan* gave Saudi kings latitude from the religious establishment to merge modernization efforts with religious traditions in a (mostly) supportive relationship. The space to engage foreign, non-Muslim entities created by the cushion between religion and politics proved critically important (and lucrative) after the discovery of oil in the Kingdom- which enabled the formation of the still-enduring “special relationship” between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. Saudi state without the *ikhwan*. However, after establishing the Kingdom, the *ikhwan* – with their radical religious tilt- became too extreme in their beliefs and desire to influence the burgeoning Saudi state. This forced Abdul Aziz in 1929 to first marginalize and then, ultimately, destroy the *ikhwan* a bloody final battle at the *ikhwan*'s desert stronghold south west of Riyadh.⁸ The defeat of the *ikhwan* gave Saudi kings latitude from the religious establishment to merge modernization efforts with religious traditions in a (mostly) supportive relationship. The space to engage foreign, non-Muslim entities created by the cushion between religion and politics proved critically important (and lucrative) after the discovery of oil in the Kingdom- which enabled the formation of the still-enduring “special relationship” between Saudi Arabia and the U.S.⁹

In post-1979 Iran, the opposite played out. Capitalizing on mass protests against a decadent, corrupt, and repressive government, Shia religious hardliners hijacked the movement and installed the current revolutionary regime. The so-called “Islamic Revolution” in Iran was not wholly (or even predominantly) religious. Indeed, many groups (such as the Kurds, liberal minded intelligentsia, and leftists) who initially supported Ayatollah Khomeini upon his return to

⁷ Lacy, *The Kingdom*, 142-146: description of *the Ikhwan*, their origin, and how Abdul Aziz used them.

⁸ Lacey, *The Kingdom*, 236.

⁹ Bruce Riedel. 2017. *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the US since FDR*. The Brookings Institute.

Tehran in 1979 found themselves the targets of his repression as he consolidated his gains in the aftermath of the uprising.¹⁰ As reported by Misagh Parsa, such efforts led to the arrest and slaughtering of estimated thousands of dissenters- including some in Khomeini's immediate and higher political circle- over the course of the regime's rise to power after 1979.¹¹ According to Parsa's account, few in Iran were expecting (or desiring) the religious clerical takeover that Khomeini implemented as part of his "religious guardianship" (*vilayat-e-faqih*) *theocratic system of government*.¹² The history of violent repression and suppression of all political and religious opposition continued through the generations that followed the revolution and today, many have declared the revolution "dead" while estimating that 85% of the population do not support the hardline religious regime.¹³ The adoption of Khomeini's hardline religious regime *vilayat-e-faqih* both directly (through its revolutionary policies) and indirectly (through the consequences of those policies) isolated Iran from Western ideology and collaboration.¹⁴

King Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud was a statesman who deftly co-opted tribal and religious elements to establish the modern political boundaries and identity of Saudi Arabia. In contrast, modern Iran's leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, infamously quipped that he was a "revolutionary, not a diplomat."¹⁵ In other words, he identified more as a religious zealot and not as a statesman. While being careful not to oversimplify, the difference in leaders reflects a great deal about the role of religion in the two states. Modern Western fear-mongers love to point to Saudi Arabia's historical alliance with so-called radical religious idealism to disparage the Kingdom as a sponsor of terrorism – lumping them into the same category as Iran. However, the facts tell a different story. In a very real sense, it can be said that Saudi Arabia *used religion (the ikhwan warriors) to establish a political entity (the modern Saudi state)* while Iran, by influencing protests for political change, *used political entities (the diverse and popular political unrest against the Shah in 1979) to establish a religion (Khomeini's 'vilayat-e-faqih')*. In this narrow sense, one can speculate that the revolutionary mechanisms and outwardly hostile disposition of the Iranian government are what Saudi Arabia might have looked like if the *ikhwan* had triumphed during the early years of the Kingdom and, conversely, the openness toward engagement with the West that marks the Saudi government is what Iran might have looked like if the political activists of the Iranian Revolution had not been totally subsumed by the radical religious clerics.

As noted from the outset, neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia align completely with U.S. conceptions of an ideal regional ally. The misalignment is likely related to the extent to which each rival has inculcated (or shown a willingness to inculcate) Western political and economic values. Accordingly, U.S. efforts to support or influence the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry require the identification and support of domestic initiatives to bring about desired changes in each country. Here too, the domestic dynamics within Iran and Saudi Arabia have taken on antonymous attributes. In Saudi Arabia, ruling elites represent the change agents advocating for Western

¹⁰ Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 257.

¹¹ Misagh Parsa. 2016. *Democracy in Iran: Why it Failed and How it Might Succeed*. Boston: MA. Harvard University Press. 65.

¹² Parsa, *Democracy in Iran*, 61-63.

¹³ Dexter Filkins, "The Twilight of the Iranian Revolution," *The New Yorker*, 18 May 2018, accessed 14 July 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/25/the-twilight-of-the-iranian-revolution>.

¹⁴ Parsa, *Democracy in Iran*, 84-88.

¹⁵ David Sanger, "Supreme Leader of Iran Rejects Direct Talks with the US," *New York Times*, 07 February, 2013

reforms and push efforts to integrate Western values (free-market and, to an extent, liberal democratic principles) from the “top down.” Recognizing the precarious state of a one-dimensional economy totally dependent on oil revenue, Saudi’s young crown prince, Muhamad bin Salman (MBS), introduced a grand vision for diversifying the Saudi economy, establishing more free-market principles, and introducing modest liberal democratic values in society to make Saudi Arabia more attractive to investors, tourists, and the world at-large.¹⁶ His plan, dubbed Vision 2030, represents an ambitious- and prescient- effort to bring western-style change to the Kingdom. However, the plan has encountered staunch resistance from –surprisingly- the Saudi citizenry.¹⁷ Accustomed to lucrative government benefits and support, Saudi citizens appear resistant to austerity measures related to Vision 2030 goals introduced by the government.¹⁸ Additionally, the near total reliance on foreign labor in critical sectors of their economy indicate that Saudis seem unwilling or unable to establish and form the type of manufacturing and construction industry sectors that the new and diversified economy (according to Vision 2030) will require.¹⁹

“Top down” efforts driving Western-style reforms have also manifested themselves in the social and foreign policy realms. MBS’ initiatives have recently introduced modest (but significant) liberal-democratic values into Saudi society by allowing women to drive, severely curbing the power of the *mutawa*- the Saudi religious police charged with enforcing Islamic social standards of decency-, and making the wearing of the traditional conservative female covering, the *abaya*, optional.²⁰ In the foreign policy realm, MBS has drastically re-defined the Saudi relationship with the Salafi-influenced Muslim Brotherhood, cutting ties with the organization and even going so far to label the group a “terrorist” organization while punishing Gulf neighbors for their support of the group.²¹ Saudi Arabia is perhaps trying to re-brand moderate Islam as the state religion and garner more widespread support for their soft-power approaches aimed at building and supporting Islamic institutions. These efforts demonstrate the comprehensive scope of “top-down” reform efforts aimed at steering the country more towards Western-values.

In Iran, the opposite reform dynamic holds sway as a frustrated Iranian citizenry represents the change agents advocating for Western reform. Weary of financing a plethora of foreign wars and angry at widespread government corruption that has impoverished the nation, protests demanding (among other things) Western-style reform emanate from the “bottom-up” in Iranian society. In January 2018, protests erupted in over 30 Iranian cities as the economy

¹⁶ Full Text: Saudi Vision 2030, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2016/04/26/Full-text-of-Saudi-Arabia-s-Vision-2030.html>

¹⁷ Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 is Too Big to Fail- or Succeed. Stratfor, 27 July, 2018. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/saudi-arabias-vision-2030-plan-too-big-fail-or-succeed> .

¹⁸ Zahraa Alkhalisi, “Saudi Arabia Eases Austerity After ‘Very Negative’ Response.” CNN, 09 January 2018. <https://money.cnn.com/2018/01/09/news/economy/saudi-arabia-austerity-backlash/index.html>

¹⁹ Laura El-Katiri, “Saudi Arabia’s Labor Market Challenge.” Harvard Business Review. 06 July, 2016. <https://hbr.org/2016/07/saudi-arabias-labor-market-challenge>

²⁰ Dona Abu-Naser, “Even Saudi Arabia’s Most Conservative Heartland is Opening Up,” Bloomberg News, 5 August 2019, accessed 14 July, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-08-06/even-saudi-arabia-s-most-conservative-heartland-is-starting-to-sing>.

²¹ Mohamed Qandil, “The Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia: From Then to Now,” Washington Institute, 18 May 2018, accessed 14 July 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-and-saudi-arabia-from-then-to-now>.

collapsed under the weight of government mismanagement and U.S. sanctions.²² Indeed, a popular chant among the protesters of this time cried “Death to the Ayatollah.” However, government agents and apparatus show little signs of reforming a system that enriches and empowers them.

Both the religious and historical factors discussed above heavily impact the state and disposition of reform efforts in Saudi Arabia and Iran. The “short-termism” (that is, a preference to maintain the lucrative status quo despite the long-term dangers) that characterizes the Saudi citizenry resistance to “top-down” reform reflects its nascent status as a political entity- still wrestling with how to develop and implement critical political and government structures to best support the citizenry in the long-term. As noted by scholar Dani Thompson, the nature of the “social bargain” between modern Saudi rulers and their citizens trades government assurances of prosperity (lucrative financial benefits) for unquestioned social and political patronage.²³ Saudi preference for lucrative government support is indirectly tied to the role religion played in the formation of the Kingdom- which allowed it to have a prosperous and open relationship with the West and has perhaps created a set of expectations for prosperity amongst the citizenry that is proving difficult to sustain. Likewise, Iran’s resistance to “bottom-up” efforts reflects its history and the role religion played in founding the modern (post-1979) state. Iran’s citizens have a historical perspective of events that influences their expectations of the state. They can clearly look back through history and see prosperous, fully developed Persian empires- such as the Achaemenids (550 B.C.), the Safavids (1500)- at the forefront of civilization.²⁴ These memories likely fuel bottom-up cries for change and also reflect the fact that (unlike the nascent Saudi state), Iran has all the ingredients for a diversified economy. However, the role of religion in forming the modern state makes enmity with the West a foregone conclusion (and, indeed, a stated policy objective from the current regime).²⁵ Thus, the ruling regime’s resistance to Western-style reforms is a natural and obstinate outgrowth of the system.

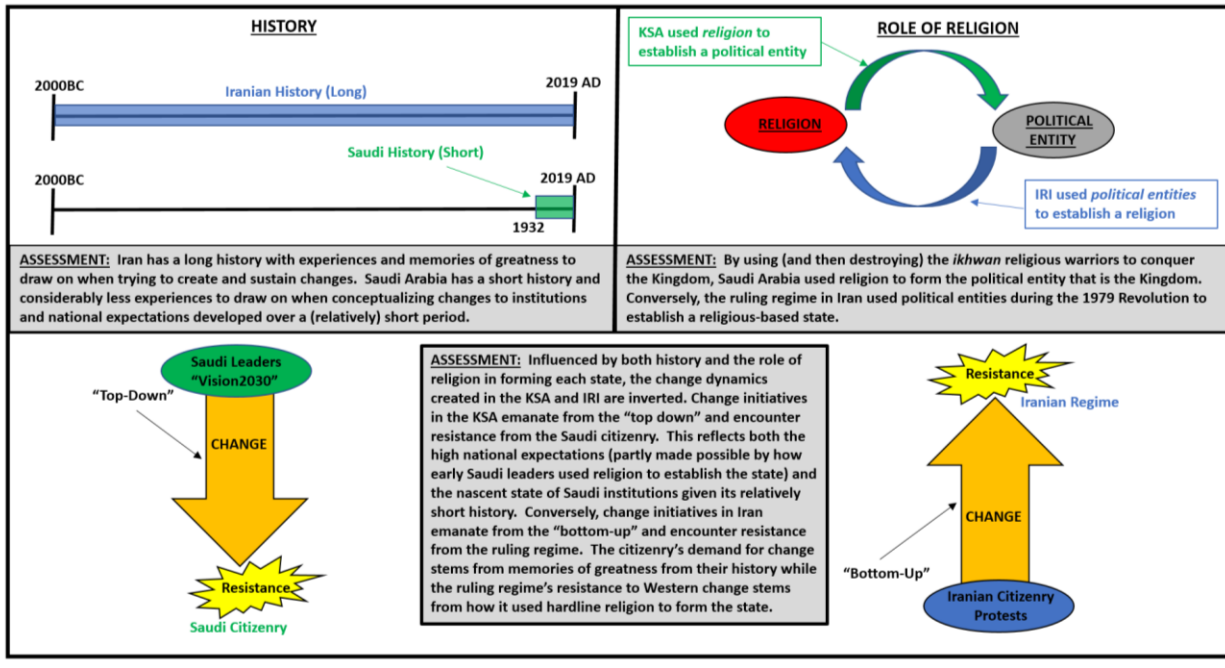
²² Thomas Erdbrink, “Protests Pop Up Across Iran Fueled by Daily Disatisfaction,” *New York Times*, 4 August 2018, accessed 18 September 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/04/world/middleeast/iran-protests.html>.

²³ Dani Thompson, “Saudi Arabia’s Creative Change of (He)art. Capstone Paper, The Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. May, 2020. https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/6/1613/files/2020/05/DaniThompson-Capstone2020SaudiChangeofHeart_3.pdf

²⁴ Axworthy, *History of Iran*, chapters 1-2.

²⁵ Parsa, *Democracy in Iran*, 100-103.

FIGURE 1: Change Paradigms in Iran and Saudi Arabia



Part II: Guarding of the Change: A Power and Systems Perspective of Reform Initiatives

Having distilled both who the change agents and resistance elements are in each country and why the reform paradigms are arrayed the way they are in each country, it is necessary to analyze how the change dynamics in Iran and Saudi Arabia develop and persist in order to recommend effective actions advocating for desired reforms while blunting unwanted resistance to change. While theories and concepts abound regarding how change happens, one way to approach the question is through a “power and systems” approach (PSA) as explained by author Duncan Green. In his book *How Change Happens*, Green articulates how those desiring to bring about reform must understand both the complex systems involved in the change process as well as the actors who wield the power to adopt changes in the system.²⁶ As an offshoot of the systems approach to change, researchers from Harvard University suggest and demonstrate that the prospects of introducing divergent change into a system is directly related to how open or closed the system is.²⁷ In closed systems with tightly organized networks, successfully introducing and adopting divergent change is very difficult. Conversely, in open networks (defined as having “structural holes” between the connections), introducing divergent change is often more feasible. In addition to these relationships between systems and change, Duncan Green also notes the role of power in the change process. Green identifies various dimensions of power that bear on the change process, notably “visible power” (i.e. the overt and official structures of government and political power), “hidden power” (i.e. the actions by actors behind

²⁶ Duncan Green. 2016. *How Change Happens*. Oxford University Press.

²⁷ Julie Battilana et al. “Change Agents, Networks, And Institutions: A Contingency Theory of Organizational Change,” Harvard Business School Faculty Publications, https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Publication%20Files/Change-%20Agents,%20Networks,%20and%20Institutions_28a6776e-06c7-46cb-8cec-d748d6855c48.pdf.

the scenes of official power structures), and “invisible power” (i.e. the psychological forces at work that cause societies to accept their condition). Taken together, the power and systems principles for analyzing change may go a long way in explaining the state of reform initiatives in Iran and Saudi Arabia.

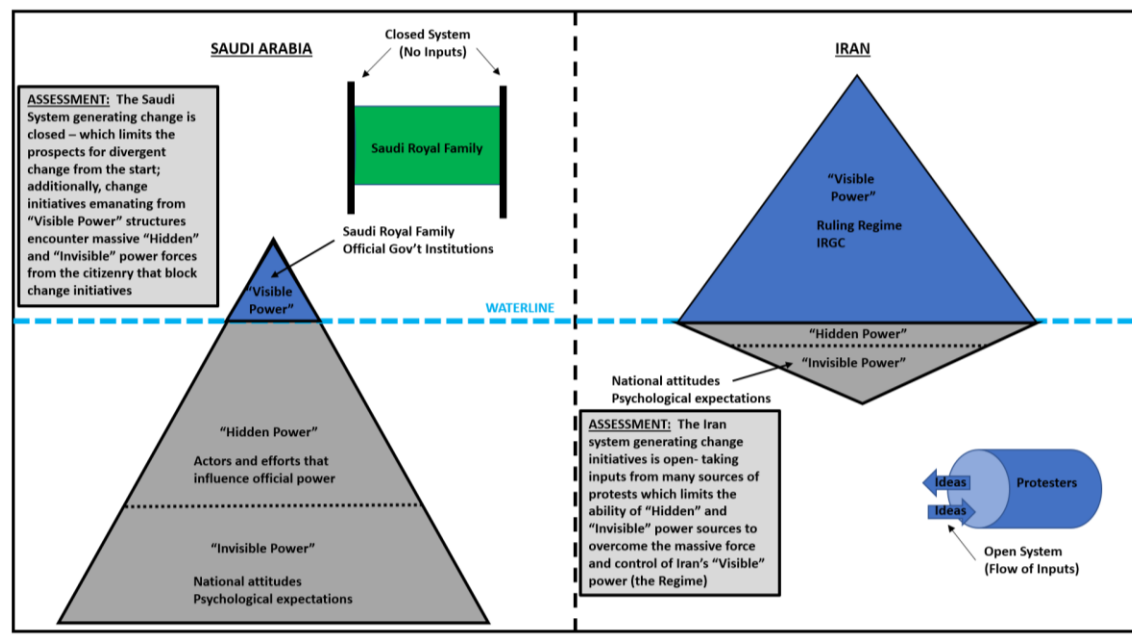
As a monarchy ruled by a single family, the political system in Saudi Arabia is a tightly closed system – deriving its inputs from a single source (the Royal family). As per the dynamics described above, this makes the introduction of divergent change, like the Western-style change described in Vision 2030, unlikely to succeed as securing needed support from critical societal stakeholders for rapid and large-scale reforms becomes difficult. Indeed, upon assuming his powerful new role as crown prince, MBS initiated a series of high profile arrests for corruption-including royal family members-which many saw as his attempt to consolidate power, or, in terms of power and systems, his attempt to influence the closed political system to support his Vision 2030 goals.²⁸ Much of the criticism surrounding MBS’ Vision 2030 highlights that his plan introduces ambitious and positive economic reforms without the necessary and corresponding political reforms to make it work. In other words, according to a power and systems approach to change, the closed Saudi system is too rigid to support such divergent economic reform without reforms that also open the political system. On the power side of the equation, the resistance from the Saudi citizenry reflects the “invisible power” developed over time from a population that has grown to accept (and protect) its condition as the beneficiaries of government sponsorship. Armed with this “invisible power,” the Saudi citizenry mobilizes its “hidden power” to obstruct and/or delay some of the government austerity measures (visible power) required for the implementation of Vision2030.

As noted earlier, in Iran, the reform initiatives advocating for Western values emanate from the citizenry in a bottom-up fashion. However, the system that generates these initiatives is extremely open- taking inputs from a number of sources. Unlike the “Green Movement” in 2009 that mobilized massive and sustained Iranian resistance to the government over the unified cause of alleged election fraud, the distinguishing characteristic of the most recent wave of protests in Iran in early 2018 was their inability to coalesce around a single issue.²⁹ Protesters trotted out a litany of slogans during the protests- from the traditional “Death to America” and “Death to Israel” to the more unconventional “Death to Rouhani” and “Death to the Ayatollah.” In essence, Iranians seemed to be saying “Death to everything” and thus no single issue emerged. In this environment, the “hidden power” of a mobilized Iranian citizenry lacks the unification required to influence the strong “visible power” structures of the Iranian regime.

It is difficult to have a changing of the guard while there is a “guarding of the change.” That is, even as movements exist in both Iran and Saudi Arabia advocating for Western-style reform, efforts in both Saudi Arabia and Iran remain frustrated as power structures in each system jealously guard any attempts at reform. In Saudi Arabia, a closed system, in conjunction with the “invisible” and “hidden” powers of the citizenry hinders top-down reform initiatives. In Iran, bottom-up reform initiatives born in an (overly) open system lack the unifying force from “hidden” and “invisible” power sources to seriously challenge the “visible power” of the Iranian regime.

²⁸ David Kirkpatrick. “Saudi Arabia Arrests 11 Princes, Including Billionaire Alwaleed bin Talal,” *New York Times*, 4 November 2017.

²⁹ Ray Takey. 2018, “Masses vs. Mullahs: Iran’s Rulers Losing their Last Group of Supporters,” *National Review*, (February 2018)

FIGURE 2: Power and Systems Iceberg Analysis of Change in Iran and Saudi Arabia

Part III: The Difference Between Reform and “Re-Form”

The above analysis and assessment of Western-style reform initiatives currently playing out within the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry throws into sharp relief the divergent dynamics of reform in each country. Understanding the differences makes it possible to evaluate the prospects of reform initiatives in each country and make recommendations that both support change agents and help overcome tension and obstructions from resistance elements in each country. In Saudi Arabia, reform initiatives require a more open political system – with more diversity among the inputs- that will more readily embrace the divergent reforms offered by Vision2030. Perhaps more difficult are the cultural and societal attitudes and expectations that must shift in Saudi Arabia to overcome the “invisible power” perceptions of the citizenry. The amazingly wealthy - yet dangerously one-dimensional economy resulting from oil wealth creates internal psychological resistance towards establishing an economy based on Western values that rely on diverse market competition from the private sector because it challenges (and threatens) the decades-old basis of the “social bargain” between Saudis and their rulers—forcing adjustments in expectations.³⁰ While the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia recognize the long-term unsustainability and in-feasibility of the current system (and have introduced Western-style reforms on this basis), they are learning a fact that the U.S. knows all too well from its foreign policy experience abroad: winning the “hearts and minds” of a society can be extremely difficult.³¹

In Iran (and unlike in Saudi Arabia), the groundwork for a diverse and complex economy already exists while a willing and able population clamors for the opportunity to return Iran to

³⁰ Dani Thompson, Saudi Arabia’s Creative New (He)art, 8.

³¹ Dafna Linzer, “Lost in Translation: Alhurra: America’s Troubled Effort to Win Middle East Hearts and Minds,” ProPublica, 22 June, 2008. <https://www.propublica.org/article/alhurra-middle-east-hearts-and-minds-622>.

the prominence it has enjoyed for long periods of its history. The problem lies in the corrupt “visible power” structures of the regime that control the wealth at the expense of the population. Perhaps no organization symbolizes the corruption of the Iranian regime better than the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Having evolved from its early role as a military protector of the revolution after 1979, today the IRGC controls large swaths of the Iranian economy and its appetite for wealth, power, and control comes at the expense of the Iranian people.³² Reform in Iran requires the “invisible” and “hidden” power sources within the Iranian citizenry to unite (like in 2009) and compel the necessary concessions and reforms from the regime.

On balance, the prospects for Western-style reform in both Iran and Saudi Arabia can be stated in terms of the difference between “reform” and “re-form.” In Iran, political reform of the mechanisms which distribute power and wealth will help re-vitalize an economy and society that is already built and awaiting the opportunity. In Saudi Arabia, “re-forming” the economy and society to be both less dependent on oil (economy) and less accustomed to its artificial wealth (society) will help re-align the power and systems dynamics to support Western-style reforms. Despite the current geopolitical dynamics in which the United States enjoys a much closer and productive relationship with Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia seems to have a harder path forward in terms of introducing and adopting Western reforms. While the difference between “reform” and “re-form” seems subtle (and possibly just semantics), one (reform) involves adjusting political mechanisms. This is (largely) what is required in Iran. The other (re-form) requires the arguably much more difficult and lengthy task of re-building not just an authentic economy, but also the psychological and cultural expectations of a society. This is the scope of the work for Saudi Arabia.

When considering how best to influence desired reform efforts in Saudi Arabia and Iran, a useful framework for characterizing national actions categorizes the elements of national power (the tools available to statesmen and policy makers) according to diplomatic, informational, military, and economic domains. Collectively, these elements of national power are known as DIME and provide a common language to articulate recommendations. In supporting Western-style reforms in the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry, the U.S. should seek to conduct DIME actions that support the change agents in each country while decreasing the concerns of the resisters. In Saudi Arabia, the “visible power” government leaders represent the change agents seeking to introduce and adopt Western-style reform in the country. U.S. actions, therefore, should seek to develop cooperation (when possible) with this entity to help nurture and advise the reform initiatives associated (mainly) with Vision2030. One action in the diplomatic (D) domain that the U.S. can (and should) take immediately is to end the politically motivated attacks and accusations emanating from American political circles that characterize the Saudi government as a state sponsor of terror and/or as bearing responsibility for the September 11th attacks in the U.S.³³ In 2016, congress passed the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA) which New York Democrat Chuck Schumer sponsored and which aimed to link official Saudi

³² Ramin Jahanbegloo, “Revolution Is Not Here,” *The Indian Express*, 3 January 2018, accessed 6 September 2018, http://dspace.jgu.edu.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/10739/1507/1/Revolution%20is%20not%20here%20_%20The%20Indian%20Express.pdf.

³³ Morgan Phillips, “US to Share Name of Saudi Suspected in Aiding 9/11 Attackers,” *Fox News*, 12 September 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/justice-department-to-release-name-of-individual-with-alleged-saudi-government-ties-who-aided-in-9-11-attacks>

compliance in the 9/11 attacks to justice for the U.S. victims.³⁴ However, after its passing and perhaps realizing the frivolity of the action (which incurred a presidential veto), many of the act's supporters immediately called for revisions to the act – acknowledging, among other things, the risks created for Americans serving in Saudi Arabia and the geopolitical consequences of undermining a strong regional ally.³⁵ These actions reveal the nakedly political objectives of the act while exposing the folly in seeking justice in the wrong places. Besides being widely disproven in the official U.S. investigation of 9/11, allegations of official Saudi involvement in 9/11 belie the fact that the Saudi government fought its own bloody battle against Sunni-extremism in the mid-2000s.³⁶ Calling Saudi Arabia Bin Laden's "third front" in his global terror campaign, Bruce Riedel highlights how Al Qaeda infiltrated the Kingdom and viciously fought to overthrow the "apostate" royal family in the mid-2000s.³⁷ During this time, U.S. and Saudi Counter-Terrorism experts worked closely to bring about the military defeat of Al-Qaeda in the Kingdom.³⁸ It is also worth remembering that before Bin Laden and Al Qaeda hated America, they hated Saudi Arabia. The Saudis expelled Bin Laden from the Kingdom in 1991 and Bin Laden himself reserved some of his most vitriolic comments for the Kingdom – not the United States.³⁹

Clearly, radical Islamic terrorism is a *shared* threat between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The extremist ideology that motivated the 9/11 attacks exists everywhere – including, as recruitment for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) demonstrates, in the West.⁴⁰ Laying this issue at the feet of the Saudi Arabia in the name of justice exposes American political intrigue to exactly the same extent that it compromises American ideals – the very ideals that the Saudi government has shown a willingness to import. It is irresponsible and short-sighted to manipulate the sanctity of American values for expedient political ends and those who supported the JASTA (against the judgement of the White House), seem to have acknowledged this reality. Plainly, linking official Saudi involvement to the terror attack of 9/11 is as frivolous and preposterous as claiming that the U.S. was complicit in the Oklahoma City bombing because Timothy McVeigh was once a government employee. The (unfortunately) oft-repeated narrative of official Saudi involvement in terror plots against the U.S. only alienates the very agents of Western-style change in Saudi Arabia that should be courted and supported. In addition to alienating the change agents in Saudi Arabia, falsely asserting Saudi links to terrorism for political gain undermines and discredits legitimate U.S. messages attempting to hold Saudi Arabia accountable to Western values in other areas. Bluntly, by trumpeting a false narrative of official Saudi support for terrorism, U.S. condemnations of Saudi Arabia involvement in potential human rights violations (i.e. Jamal Khashogi) sound hollow and disingenuous.

³⁴ Congress Overrides Obama's Veto to Pass Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act. (2017). American Journal of International Law, 111(1), 156-162. doi:10.1017/ajil.2016.7

³⁵ Ted Barrett and Deidre Walsh. 2016. Congress Suddenly Has Buyers Remorse for Overriding Obama's Veto. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/29/politics/obama-911-veto-congressional-concerns/index.html>.

³⁶ Thomas Small et al. 2015. Path of Blood: The Story of Al Qaeda's War on the House of Saud. Simon and Schuster.

³⁷ Bruce Riedel. 2008. Al-Qaeda's Third Front: Saudi Arabia. The Washington Quarterly.

³⁸ Thomas Small, Path of Blood.

³⁹ Who is bin Laden?: Chronology". PBS. Archived from the original on April 14, 2010. Retrieved June 09, 2020.

⁴⁰ Pilar Cerbrian. 2019. They Left to Join ISIS. Now Europe Is Leaving Their Citizens to Die in Iraq. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/15/they-left-to-join-isis-now-europe-is-leaving-their-citizens-to-die-in-iraq/>

In the informational (I) domain, the U.S. can decrease resistance to Western-style reforms in Saudi Arabia by expanding programs that allow Saudi citizens to study and collaborate in the U.S. Widening existing exchange programs to let Saudis observe and live Western values attacks the “invisible power” resistance currently playing out amongst Saudi citizens. This action advertises, in a supremely practical way, the American way of life. As an informational (I) tool, it gives Saudis (and all foreigners) better information and tangible evidence regarding the benefits of implementing American values. At a time when Middle East migration and travel to the U.S. is a hot button issue and often a black-eye for the U.S. in the Muslim world, encouraging exchanges for qualified Saudis could go a long way (over time) in reducing psychological attitudes resistant (or even ambivalent) to Western values.⁴¹ The dynamics of change outlined above and throughout this article indicate that Western-style reforms will be hard enough to achieve in their own right within Saudi Arabia. The U.S. should not make it harder by amplifying false messages that discourage Saudi Arabia change agents while doing little to entice and attract those within Saudi Arabia towards Western values.

In Iran, change agents advocating for Western values originate largely from the “bottom-up” within the Iranian citizenry. Therefore, U.S. efforts to support reform should work to support the movements generated by ordinary Iranians. One action in the economic (E) domain that the U.S. should consider taking is ending the robust (and often unilateral) economic sanctions imposed on Iran. As the centerpiece of U.S. efforts to exert “maximum pressure” on the Iranian regime, the sanctions are designed to curb Iranian support to terrorism in the region and coerce Iran to the negotiating table regarding its nuclear weapons program.⁴² However, to date, the sanctions are not achieving these ends. Iran has at least sustained (and perhaps increased) its support to regional terror proxies even in spite U.S. sanctions. Iranian-supported Shia militia groups (SMGs) in Iraq routinely target American and allied bases with rocket attacks.⁴³ Additionally, recent allied maritime operations have interdicted large Iranian shipments of weapons intended to support the Iranian-backed Houthi militia in Yemen.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Iran’s leaders have flatly rejected American overtures and offers for unqualified negotiations.⁴⁵ Perhaps even more significant than the sanctions failure to achieve their stated purpose is the fact that they these sanctions work to frustrate reform efforts in the country in several important ways. First, the economic hardship resulting from the sanctions falls on the Iranian people – the change agents. The value of the Iranian currency has plummeted to all-time lows because of the sanctions which has in turn created massive inflation and economic devastation in Iran.⁴⁶ During

⁴¹ Stuart Anderson, “Muslim Travel Ban: Less Immigration, Fewer Waivers,” *Forbes*, March 11, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2019/03/11/muslim-travel-ban-less-immigration-and-few-waivers/#56526d2c27f0>

⁴² Debates: The Maximum Pressure Campaign is Working. Hoover Institution. 04 March, 2020. <https://www.intelligencesquared.org/debates/maximum-pressure-campaign-against-iran-working>.

⁴³ Air Defense Systems Intercept Rocket Targeting US Embassy in Iraq, 05 July 2020. <https://112.international/politics/air-defense-systems-intercept-rocket-targeting-us-embassy-in-iraq-52780.html>

⁴⁴ Shawn Snow. Ship Seizures Included ‘relatively new’ Iranian surface to air missile bound for Houthi Rebels in Yemen. 19 Feb 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2020/02/19/ship-seizures-included-relatively-new-iranian-surface-to-air-missile-bound-for-houthi-rebels-in-yemen/>

⁴⁵ Robin Wright. Iran’s Foreign Minister Was Invited to Meet Trump in the Oval Office. *The New Yorker*. 02 Aug 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/irans-foreign-minister-invited-to-meet-trump-in-the-oval-office>

⁴⁶ Iran Rial Slides to New Low as Coronavirus, Sanctions Weigh *New York Times*. 04 July 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/07/04/world/middleeast/04reuters-iran-economy-rial.html>

the 2018 widespread protests across Iran demanding (among other things) better economic conditions, “Death to America” remained a popular refrain from the Iranian crowds indicating a perception of American blame for the economic conditions⁴⁷ In illustrating the reform-stifling effects of sanctions, a comparison to military targeting methods is useful. In the military, the “law of proportionality” dictates that lethal responses to aggression be proportional to the offense given. That is, it is unlawful to destroy a hospital full of civilians simply because a single terrorist enters the facility. Sanctions are the economic equivalent of this violation: in desiring to economically target the ruling regime (the single terrorist), U.S. sanctions level the entire Iranian economy (the hospital full of civilians). The devastating effects of this methodology are particularly acute in Iran because the vast collateral damage incurred through sanctions represents the very demographic (Iranian citizenry) that should be supported in their reform efforts.

More targeted options for economic actions exist that could be considered such as increasing the scope and support of U.S. and allied efforts tracking and penalizing Iranian financial support to terrorism through the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program (TFTP) initiated after 9/11.⁴⁸ According to the U.S. Department of State 2019 Country Reports on Terrorism, the Countering Transnational Terrorism Fund (CTTF), also established specifically to target funds earmarked for global terrorism, has produced tangible results building international coalitions dedicated to interdicting the money supply that supporters of terrorism, such as Iran, rely on to conduct de-stabilizing operations. Not only do such actions leverage the global community of interest in stopping terrorism, but they represent efforts committed to targeting strictly terrorist funds - not the national economy of a nation-state.

Besides engendering anger and hostility from the very population that U.S. actions should endeavor to support, the sanctions also enable the Iranian Regime to mask their corrupt practices by giving it a convenient and attractive (not to mention accurate) scapegoat for the Iranian economic malaise: the West – an in particular the U.S. Secondly, the sanctions marginalize and discredit moderate reformist leaders who represent the best chance for incremental and positive Western-style reform in the country’s “visible power” structures. Iran’s current president, Hassan Rouhani, is a moderate who won his election largely on promises of economic recovery tied to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, the recovery has failed to materialize- largely because of heavy U.S. sanctions- and Rouhani has in turn become the focal point for Iranian criticism.⁴⁹ Additionally, hard-liners all but swept the most recent parliamentary elections in Iran.⁵⁰ These results are either an indicator of increased Iranian popular support to the hard-liner agenda or of the persistent power of the hard-line regime to maintain political control in spite of “maximum pressure” economic actions. In essence, hard-liners within the Iranian regime can point to moderate reformist leaders and say to Iranians: “See, reformist

⁴⁷ Parisa Hafezi. 2018. Iranian Marchers Chant “Death to America on Eve of U.S. Oil Sanctions.” Reuters, November 4th 2018, accessed 09 June 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-usa/iranian-marchers-chant-death-to-america-on-eve-of-u-s-oil-sanctions-idUSKCN1N908J>.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Treasury: Terrorist Finance Tracking Program. Overview available at <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/terrorism-and-illicit-finance/terrorist-finance-tracking-program-tftp>

⁴⁹ Oren Dorell, “Iran Leader Sees No Short Term Payoff from Lifting of Sanctions,” USA Today (website), 18 January 2016), accessed 6 September 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/01/18/iranian-president-rouhani-sees-no-short-term-payoff-sanctions-relief/78965874/>.

⁵⁰ Golnar Motevalli. Hardliners’ Victory in Iranian Elections Turns Back the Clock on Relations With the West. Feb, 2020. <https://time.com/5789565/iran-elections-hardliners/>

policies don't work and you're better off under our hardline policies." Thus, sanctions actually seem to swing the country more towards hardline, anti-Western leaders and policy.

U.S. sanctions also seem to have pushed Iran into the orbit of great power adversaries of the United States as Iran seeks nation-state partners to circumvent the sanctions. Iran recently confirmed its "strategic" negotiations with China as part of a long-term partnership with Beijing.⁵¹ A "Sino-Persian" alliance- featuring a partnership between America's most potent great power rival (China) and its most dangerous nation-state threat (Iran)- would greatly destabilize the Middle East and displace American influence.

It is true that lifting sanctions would give the Iranian regime access to vastly more financial resources and perhaps invigorate its hostile military and foreign policy objectives. But without Western free-market principles under-girding their economy, it is unlikely that Iranians will see the trickle-down benefits of the increased capital. Thus, reform initiatives emanating from the citizenry will likely persist even without American sanctions because their core grievance against the regime will remain. As noted by scholar Afshin Shahi, since the early 1990s, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been consolidating economic power and control in Iran which ensures the formation of gross wealth inequalities between the ruling elite and the average Iranian citizen.⁵² Indeed, analyst Ramin Jahanbegloo also highlights how the IRGC likely controls all major industries in Iran.⁵³ This type of oligarchic control breeds corruption and is the antithesis of Western free-market principles. Lifting sanctions will (finally) expose and lay bare Iranian corruption (without Western scapegoats) for all to see which, in turn, could invigorate and unify Iranian change agents' initiatives aimed at steering the country towards Western values.

In the Information (I) domain, increasing broadcasts of Persian language messages of support to the protesters that emphasize American liberal democratic values is one way to help build and spread support for Western style reform efforts originating at the grassroots level in Iranian society. In March 2019, Voice of America announced the establishment of a 24/7 Persian language broadcast to help disseminate positive American messages and combat the spread of disinformation from the state-controlled Iranian media in Iran.⁵⁴ Demonstrating the power of this information tool, President Trump's Persian-language tweets of support for Iranian protesters in early 2019 became the most-liked Persian language tweet in history.⁵⁵ Conditions appear ripe in this domain to assist Iranian reform efforts.

⁵¹ Tehran Boasts About Strategic Cooperation With Beijing. ASharq Al-Awsat. 30 Jun 2020. <https://english.aawsat.com/h-ome/article/2362341/tehran-boasts-about-%E2%80%98strategic-cooperation%E2%80%99-beijing>.

⁵² Afshin Shahi. 2017. The Military and the State in Iran: The Economic Rise of the Revolutionary Guards, *The Middle East Journal*, (2017), 71, 1:67-86.

⁵³ Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Revolution Is Not Here," *The Indian Express*, 3 January 2018, accessed 09 June 2020, http://dspace.jgu.edu.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/10739/1507/1/Revolution%20is%20not%20here%20_%20The%20Indian%20Express.pdf

⁵⁴ Voice of America Launches Voa 365, a 24/7 Persian Language Network. 19 March 2019. Voice of America Public Relations Website. <https://www.insidevoa.com/a/voice-of-america-launches-voa-365-a-24-7-persian-language-network/4814792.html>.

⁵⁵ Carlin Becker, "Trump Sends the Most Liked Persian Tweet in History of Twitter," *Washington Examiner*, 11 January 2019. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/trump-tweet-in-farsi-the-most-liked-persian-tweet-in-history-of-twitter>.

In the military (M) domain, U.S. actions seem to be creating desired effects given Saudi Arabia and Iran's status as geopolitical ally (Saudi Arabia) or adversary (Iran). In Saudi Arabia, military sales from the United States will likely exceed over 110 billion dollars over the next several years - helping the Saudis modernize their force and, in the process, stimulating both economies.⁵⁶ In Iran, even as sanctions have failed to change Iranian behavior, strong U.S. military actions aimed at deterring Iranian aggression appear to have altered (in the near term) the Iranian risk calculus for leveraging their military apparatus against U.S. forces. After the U.S. strike that killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, Iran appeared reluctant to retaliate in a proportional and meaningful way against the United States.⁵⁷ These efforts in the military domain demonstrate that it is possible to reward allies (Saudi Arabia) and hold adversaries accountable through demonstrations of American military resolve and strength. Critically, neither of the actions taken in the military domain preclude or nullify the recommended suite of DIME actions aimed at encouraging reform efforts in both countries.

As a concluding thought, it is worth highlighting that none of the actions recommended above represent a "silver bullet" that can quickly and decisively usher in desired reforms overnight. Even taken collectively as coordinated actions across the DIME spectrum, change itself is a process and long-term proposal. Realist skeptics will no doubt characterize the above value-based actions as naive- or downright foolish- in an international community composed of states with defined and entrenched interests to defend. But if the DIME recommendations proposed here seem unrealistic, it seems more unrealistic to assume that Iran, a state adversary with (competing) interests of its own vis a vis the United States, will be coerced into changing its behavior. Realist skeptics should ask themselves what about the current interest-based policies regarding Iran are bringing success. Little about recent coercive actions undertaken as policy measures suggest progress towards forcing Iran to change its behavior. Military deterrence has shown the most promise in checking Iranian aggression and the suite of DIME actions recommended above can be implemented without abandoning this critical military role. The recommended suite of DIME actions also advance a coherent theme advocating the premise that it is better to entice adversaries to American values rather than coerce them. In this sense, the recommendations reflect idealist principles. By treating stability and peace as desired ends and critical interests, and military deterrence as an effective means for achieving those ends, the recommendations also reflect realist principles. According to popular legend, Einstein defined insanity as expecting a different result through repeated identical attempts and the long-standing policy actions that have failed to change Iranian behavior should be viewed in this light. Policy actions that break Iran (i.e. its economy and citizenry) in order to coerce behavior change represent, at best, Pyrrhic victories that do little to accomplish true and enduring change and the long-term required progress.

Conclusion

Even as Iran and Saudi Arabia engage in a rivalry that puts them at odds with each other and, concurrently, on opposing ends of the relational spectrum with the United States, all three countries share a unique point in history that once engendered cooperation and suggested an

⁵⁶ US Department of State: U.S. Security Cooperation with Saudi Arabia. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-saudi-arabia/>.

⁵⁷ Raf Sanchez. US has Encouraging Intelligence that Iran is Backing Down. Telegraph. 09 Jan 2020. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/09/iran-crisis-latest-news-us-has-encouraging-intelligence-iran/>.

immense potential for friendship. As the global order shifted after WWII and ushered in the United States as the world's preeminent power, both Saudi Arabia and Iran courted American friendship as a welcome alternative to the exploitation that seemed to characterize the Middle East under the imperial world order. After WWII, Mohammed Reza Shah, Iran's leader, made passionate appeals for American support to Iranian nationalism – drawing similarities between Iran's nationalistic agenda to the American Revolution.⁵⁸ A period of intense cooperation through the appointment of American business, military, and government advisors in Iran followed.⁵⁹ Similarly, King Abdul-Aziz met President Roosevelt in the Great Bitter Lake aboard the USS Quincy in 1945, beginning the so-called “special relationship” between the Kingdom and the United States.⁶⁰ At this inflection point, American ideals resonated loudly on the world stage-particularly in Middle Eastern countries that had just unshackled themselves from colonial practices. Yet, as America accumulated global interests, disillusionment with Western ideals, in one way or another, took hold in both countries. In Iran, American involvement in the coup d'état that ousted President Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953 contributed to anti-American sentiment that culminated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In Saudi Arabia, the perception of unfettered American support to Israel at the expense of Arab Palestinians drove a wedge in the relationship that manifested itself through the 1973 oil embargo that “weaponized” oil and greatly impacted global energy markets.

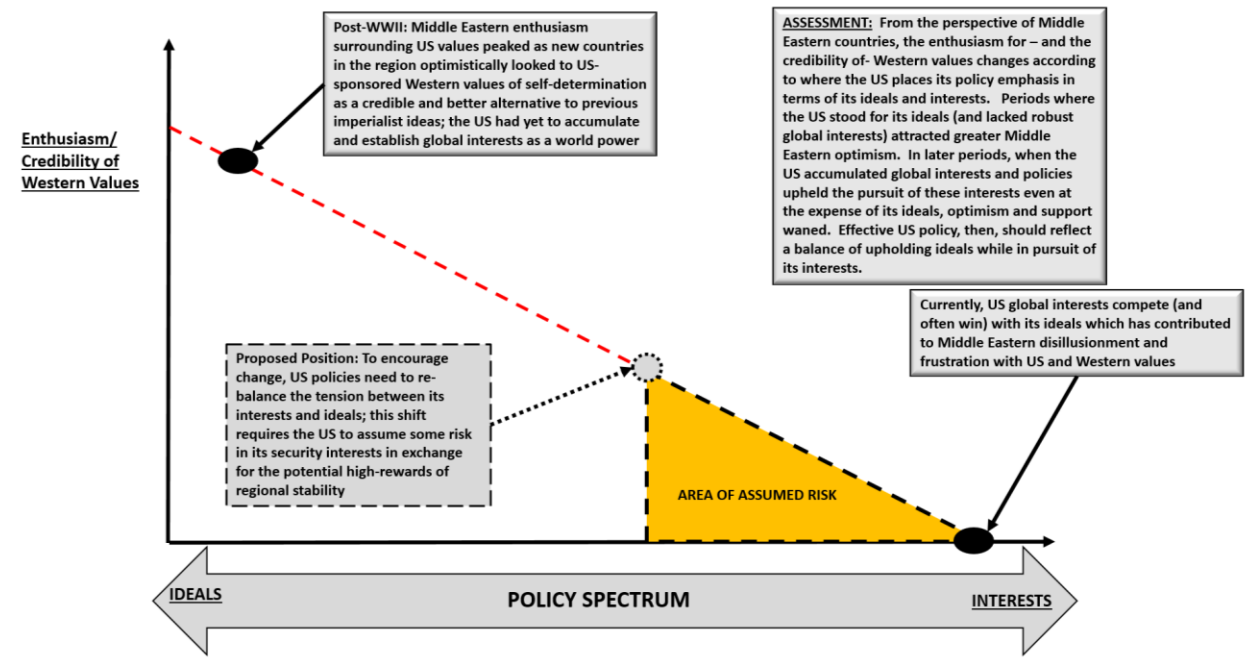
Since the disillusionment, the re-introduction of the potential of Western values has proven difficult in Saudi Arabia and Iran. History and the role of religion has created inverted paradigms for Western-aligned reform initiatives in each country. In Saudi Arabia, top-down change agents from the government encounter resistance from bottom-up expectations of the citizenry. In Iran, bottom-up change agents fail to overcome the top-down political power structures of the regime. In Saudi Arabia, a politically closed system clashes with “invisible power” from the citizenry to frustrate reform. In Iran, an open system generating reform initiatives fails to coalesce into a unifying force to challenge the “visible power” structures of the regime. These dynamics leave each country on un-equal footing with respect to the prospects of adopting Western-style reforms. While Iran, possessing all the ingredients of a complex and developed economic and social system, requires reform, Saudi Arabia, with a one-dimensional economy and unsustainable expectations from its citizenry, requires a re-forming of its economy and national expectations.

⁵⁸ Michael Axworthy, *History of Iran*, 232.

⁵⁹ Michael Axworthy. *History of Iran*, 234

⁶⁰ Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom*, 271.

FIGURE 3: A Healthy Change Mode



Healthy reform should not be a zero-sum proposition that prescribes winners and losers. Rather, it should be a shared burden and commitment towards progress. The potential for Western values to infuse the Middle East seemed to ring loudest when American ideals balanced its global interests as the U.S. entered the world stage after WWII. Therefore, the best way to support reform initiatives in Iran and Saudi Arabia demands that the United States also change and stand on its values while assuming some risk in its interests. For Saudi Arabia, the United States should model noble political behavior and refrain from frivolous, unwarranted, and politically motivated attacks that compromise its image and reputation – not to mention the credibility of Western values. In Iran, the United States should let its economic values stand alone to attract and entice others- renouncing economic sanctions that only serve to undermine reform initiatives and discredit moderate Iranian leaders. These actions require the United States to assume some risk in its short-term security interests. However, the long-term benefits of a peacefully resolved Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry and a stable Middle East far outweigh the risks. These actions also reflect biblical mandates to encourage peaceful living amongst neighbors and friends– whether in the local or international neighborhood- and help fulfill the hopes and aspirations of friendship between the West and the Middle East deferred since America’s ascent to world prominence after WWII.

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