Review of Proxy Wars and Their Impact on the Middle East Security

Jafar Farhadinasab[1], Anoush Jafari[2]

Abstract

   Due to lack of vital resources, there is constant conflict between states in the international anarchic environment. In such an environment, states compete for security, market, and so on. Therefore, the only way to survive is through self-help which is obtained through the permanent gain of power. The Middle East is one of the security complexesin which security of the states and their security order underwent changes after the transformations in the Arab countries. Regional rivalry, asymmetric conflicts, proxy wars and crisis expansion can be considered part of the reality of the new global geo-political system. Each political actor inevitably plays a regional and international role. In the new situations of the Middle East, identity actors are playing new roles in the form of a proxy war. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the proxy wars and their influence on the security of the Middle East. Accordingly, having a historic approach and using a historical-analytical method and library resources, as well, the paper attempts to explain and analyze the proxy wars and their impact on the security of the Middle East. Findings indicate that, as a strategy of great powers, proxy wars can be one of the factors of disturbing the Middle East security, and as long as the wars go on, the security in the Middle East would be tense.

Keywords: the Middle East, Cold War, Proxy wars, Iran

[1]Ph.D. student, Political Science Department, Islamic Azad University, Chalous, Mazandaran, Iran (corresponding author) Email: j.farhadinasab@ gmail.com
[2] Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamic Azad University, Chalous, Mazandaran, Iran

Introduction
The Middle East is one of the regions whose security is not only important for the countries of the region,but for great and trans-regional powers, including the United States. Therefore, given its geo- strategic and geo- economic importance, great powers such as the USA are striving to stay thereand provide their interests in the region.

The Middle East is in a complicated security condition and all of the powers, either within the region or outside it, attempt to act in accordance with their national interests. Too many actors in the region and trans-regional powers resulted in a mess and turbulence in the region. The spread of insecurity and conflict in the Middle East stems from a variety of factors. Beside all the influential factors in the spread of insecurity in the Middle East, lack of great global powershas increased the divergence, lack of solidarity of most of the influential countries in the Middle East.Turning of the USA foreign policy towards Asia and the Middle Eastand turning the Middle East into the second priority of that countryled to USA measures in the region in order to control the influence of China in the region, and thusthe peace and security of the Middle East being addressed. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran attempt to adjust their foreign policy orientationto national interests and security(Salehi, and Zare, 2016:94). Crisis in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen implies this bitter fact that the West and its regional allies began intrigues and internal wars between the opposing religious, political and ethnic groups,through "proxy war", to fight against Iran. Accordingly, proxy wars and their effect on the security of the region are studied within an analytical-historical approach.

1. **Theoretical Literature**
    1.1 Cold War

Cold war is defined as a period of rivalry, tension, and political and geopolitical struggles between the Eastern bloc (the Soviet Union and its holistic states) and the Western bloc (the United States and NATO allies) after the Second World War. Historians do not quite agree on the beginning and the end of the Cold War, but have a common opinion on the period between 1947 Truman Doctrine (a

USA foreign policy committed to help nationsin danger of Soviet domination)and the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. During this period of time, the rivalry between the two superpowers has continued in different areas such as, military alliance, ideology, psychology, spy, sports, military equipment, and industry and technology development.The rivalry had some consequences such as spatial tournaments, the cost of exorbitant defenses, nuclear warfare rivalries and a number of indirect wars. Although during the Cold War there was never a direct military conflict between US and Soviet forces, the expansion of military power and political conflicts led to proxy wars and major conflicts between the followers and allies of these superpowers. Though the United States and the Soviet Union were united during World War II against Nazi Germany, even prior to the end of the war, they had conflicts on how the world would be rebuilt after the war. While the USA attempted to limit Communism in the world after the war, the Cold War was extended to many parts of the world, especially Western Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia (Simon Adams, 2015:151).

In this period, the world encountered repeated crises such as the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961-1989), the Korean War (1953-1950), the Vietnam War (1975-1959), the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), and the Soviet War in Afghanistan (1979-1989), which might lead to another world war. However, it finally didn't take place. One of the main reasons for avoidance of both parties from a direct war was their access to nuclear warfare, and the fear that the other party might use it. Eventually, the cold war ended at the end of 1980s, and meetings of senior officials arranged by the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, and his reforms. The Cold War ended with the collapse of Communism and decomposition of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Simon Adams, 2015:151).

During the Cold War, proxy wars were common, because the two superpowers (the USA and the Soviet Union) were reluctant to directly fight against each other, due to their fear of the nuclear war. Instead, to increase their influence, they supported their mediators in wars such as Afghanistan, Angola, Korea, Vietnam, as well as in the Middle East and Latin America.

1.2   Proxy War

Proxy war is a condition in which the powers don't fight into each other directly; instead, they try to put the other side under pressure or undermine them through financial, weapons and propaganda support of the armed group or countries which fight against the opposing powers or allies (Qyasvand, Torkashvand, 2017).

In many cases, due to high military potentials of the main powers, their direct military fight has a lot of political, economic and human costs for both sides. Therefore, each one tries to hit the opposite side without beginninga full- fledged war and through support of the third countries or groups. In other cases, the two major powers might fight into each other, and simultaneously develop a proxy war against the other one through support of the third countries or groups in other regions.

There is almost no pure proxy war, becausethe groups fighting against a particular country are usually looking for their own interests and goals,which may not necessarily be the same as the interests of the country supporting them and be out of control. Typically, proxy warsare mainly used in the Cold War, becausethe countries continue to pressure the opponentswithout anydirect conflict with the opposing powers and beginninga great and costly war (Helton, 2014:1).

The Syrian war can be considered a prototype of the proxy war in which world powers such as Russia support Syria, and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, the USA, England, and France support different terrorist groups to undermine indirectly the rival governmentsand maintain and increase their own influence in this country. The USA authorities concluded that Bush's doctrine based on which 150 thousand troops were sent to Iraq, leading to billions of dollars of damagesand killing of 10 thousand people, has defeated. Therefore, they need to exploit affiliated countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar as their proxies toachieve their illegitimate goals with the least damages. Proxy war is defined as a war between two or more sides in which at least one side is supported by a foreign country and aims to achieve the goals and interests of the supporting country/ countries. Indeed, in a proxy war, the two sides enter into a conflict for some particular reason(s); however, the reason for their being a "proxy" is support

of a foreign country. The "proxy" is supported because it has a goal which is desirable for the supporting country/ countries. In the 20th century, many countries are using proxy groups, instead of direct military conflict, to achieve their military or quasi- military goals. Loveman believes that to understand the proxy wars, realism in the framework of modern paradigm in the international system, andhigh costs of military intervention should be well understood (Lovemen, 2002:33-36).

In the last century, proxy war has become an important variablein forming a strategic outcome of a conflict through an indirect interaction.The history is full of proxy wars in which governments fulfill their strategic goals without using their troops, resources, and financial affairs. Although there is much research available on international relations and security studies on contemporary warfare, there is a gap in the analysis of proxy wars (Toomar, 2014:149).

2.   Objectives of the Proxy War in the Middle East

Security of any society depends on the interaction of some variables inside and outside. Moreover, the security environment always contains opportunities and threats which national groups profit, depending on their status. Proxy war is not just a military war; however, it takes place in different areas, such as media, culture, economy, politics,etc. For instance, satellite channels such as Al Arabia are a media proxy war, which in fact, indicate the West strategy in the region and are propaganda to express Western views and ideologies (institute of American studies, 2013). The main objectives of the proxy war in the Middle East include:

- Distinguishing between the soft and hard power of the two countries.
- The need to support public opinion on international warsand concerns about global reactions in the event of a direct war between two countries.
- Reducing and eliminating insider casualties.
- Maintaining the prestige of bigger countries that lead the warand achieving goals without the use of facilities and capital.

- Breaking down the geographical boundaries of the region to achieve the Great Middle East.
- Undermining resistance focus with the erosion of proxy wars.
- Brunt to the economy of Russian and Iran and making gas export route insecure.
- Sales of billions of dollars of military weapons to the region.
- Balance of power and geopolitical superiority of the United States in the region.
- Facilitating Israeli gas exports to Europe (Parsapour, 2015:2).

After the Arab revolutions and proxy wars in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and presence of ISIL terrorist group in Arabic countries, as a means of the West influence in the region, the dominance system of the Middle East has been challenged, so as to consolidate US position and undermine Iran's influence. One of the main elements influencing the process of modern transformations in the Middle East is the US strategic and long-term objectivesbeing enacted both by physical presence and the economic, political and security reforms of the Great Middle East plan, and by exploiting Middle East oil and gas resources; andultimately, integration of the Middle East into the global political economy system. Being strategic, these objectives did not seem to undergo serious changes, even when there was the slogan of US foreign policy changes with Barack Obama being the president. Thus, through the Great Middle East plan and reform, the USA was seeking to turn the Persian Gulf and the Middle East into its exclusive domainand avoid the serious presence of other rival powers in the region.

The American Normalization Policy seeks to change the cultures, beliefs, and values of the Middle East. The policy is in factone of the goals of American soft power tools to manage and influence the Middle East public opinion. In this regard, the US has encountered Islamic and ideological conflicts on the one hand, and democratic values on the other hand.

Furthermore, the Middle East is a strategic regionwhich due to its prominent features plays an important role in the American foreign policy doctrine.The privileged geopolitical position, the massive

amount of energy resources, and the ancient civilization and religion are some of the features of the region. Besides, Israeli strategic alliance with the United States, as well as some rivals of the US with unfavorable identities and instable situations of the national and sub- national activists some of whom with anti-American tendencies indicate significance of this region in the American foreign policy system (Javaadi Arjmand et al, 2016:68). In addition, Oil and gas production allowed the US to launch an Iranian oil boycott since 2008. In fact, increased US oil production over the last few yearsand thus, decreased US demand undermined the significance of Iran's share of the market. Therefore, sanctions on Iranwere considered an effective alternative (Dehshiri et al, 2015:183).

The Arab transformations in 2011 changed the balance of power in the Middle East more than ever.While undermining Iran, as the main regional power,was targeted by the US and its regional allies, transformations in the Arabic countries challenged many compromise countries. Thus, the USA policy was to put more pressure on Iran and isolate it in the Middle East and undermine its allies; an issue being pursued in different ways, for instance, economically, and with different excuses such as the nuclear program, human rights, support of the terrorism, etc (Dehqani Firouzabadi et al, 2012:176).

3. The United States of America and the proxy war

The policy of involving into international conflicts or isolation is one of the issues which the USA has encountered since its formation. However, in the last two decades, a new concept developed in its military strategies- proxy war.

The Middle East is full of rivalries and conflicts among the states. In fact, rivalry and divergence replaced cooperation and interaction. In this regard, the occurrence of conflicts and wars in this area can be investigated.Aggravation of domestic crises in the countries of the regioncould provide an opportunity for regional powers to interveneand change the insecure countries into a place for conflict and rivalry of other powers. In fact, weakness of national identity in many countries led to regional states' exploitation of social gap, and some religious, sectarian and ethnic groupsto reinforce and expand their own influence (Niakoui, 2013). Given the contribution of the Middle East in the international policies, great powers such

as the USA policies are also important in the region. In fact, international policies and the approach of great powers have always influenced the results of transformations. For instance, in the bipolar period, each of the east and west blocs sought to maintain their strategic supremacy. Accordingly, they mainly supported puppet countries regardless of the state of democracy. On the other hand, the events of 22 September made fighting terrorism and Islamic fundamentalist groups the first priority of US foreign policy by the end of George Bush administration (as if their primary objective was the spread of democracy in the Middle East.

It is important to examine the response of major powers, especially the United States, Russia and the European Union, to the transformations in Iraq and Syria, and the expansion of Takfiri movements. In this regard, it should be noted that the US had a particular emphasis on the Middle East since 11th September; so that, the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and the doctrine of the great Middle East and the spread of democracy in the Middle East became the main concern of American neoconservatives. Being influenced by the events of 11th September, the USA considered terrorism and Islamism a major threat to its national interests, and even put pressure on allies like Saudi Arabia to democratize, expand the open social context, and make educational reforms. In fact, during the Bush administration spread of democracy in the Middle East along with unilateralism and the use of military power and disregard for the international institutions and regimes became the main part of the USA foreign policy. In this regard, occupation of Afghanistan and invasion to Iraq without Security Council license, and talking about change of regime in Iran can be examined. In fact, there is some logic of democratic and liberal peace among the neoconservative elites of the Bush administration (Niakoui, 2013). Nevertheless, with the Obama administration, major changes occurred in the USA policy in the Middle East. Obama's major policies in the region included an emphasis on multilateralism, respect for the international institutions, and avoidance of military intervention in the Middle East (Niakoui, 2013).

Such political priorities can also be observed in Syria crisis. By 2011, the USA provided financial support and provided weapons

for most of the opponents of Assad, including the Free Syrian Army, and tried to provide the opportunity for the collapse of the Assad regime.However, Russia's resistance against the United States and a soft-balance policy hampered the efforts of the United States.

The essence of Obama's doctrine is cost sharing both strategically and operationally. Strategically, the doctrine emphasizes the necessity of collective action through coalition warfare and use of the potentials of allies and local partners; operationally, it emphasizes hidden War, relying on technology platforms, Special Forces and CIA officers' missions to achieve strategic goals.Denial, legitimacy, necessity, costs and potentials of the war motivated the Obama administrationto resort to proxy war. Definitely, the main and determining element in decision making in the USA is the relation between necessity and costs (Qyasvand, Trkashvand, 2017). The reasons for the USA proxy war are as follows:

- Avoiding direct disputes, and remote management
- Spread of the Americans' hatred of war
- Weakness of the USA military
- Serious economic problems
- Arabic transformations in 2011
- Undermining Iran as the major power of the region

On the one hand, the sub- national officials' ability developed along with the new political transformations; on the other hand, the inter-state balance of power is changing. In such a situation, Iran's development and influence can provide an opportunity to form strategic alliances against the USA. Given that the recent transformations in the Middle East were influenced by the reflection of the nations' identity, particularly the Islamic identity, in the political and public areas which challenged the secular discourse. Thus, to counter Islamic discourse, some trans-regional authorities (US) are trying to form new polarization against Iran. Using the Arab Balancing Approach in the region, the USAput Saudi Arabia against Iran in a proxy war. The USA considers Iran the overwhelming force of stability in the region, the supporter of terrorism and violator of human rights which is trying to expand its influence among the Shiites around the world (Rafati, 2015:50).

In his presidential election rivalry, Trump stated that he would support the stability of the region. Despite general contradictions in Tramp's words, three points have always been repeated regarding the Middle East; the first is fighting against ISIL. However, it should be noted that the USA does not attack ISIL through land missions implying that no military interventions will take place(In fact, his approach seems to be quite the same as the Obama administration). Thus, the USA second priority would be fighting against terrorism without the entry of US military forces into the Middle East.

4. Iran and the proxy war

The proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia- known as the Cold War in the Middle East- is a contention for more influence in the Middle East. The war is realized in Yemen civil war and Syria civil war.Iran is expanding its influence from Tehran to Baqdad, and from Damascus to Beirut. Its magnificence that began with the 2003 US invasion to Iraq, and accelerated with the onset of civil war in Syria and Yemen,made the impression that Iran is turning into a hegemonic power in the region. To the USA and its allies-Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates-such an ambition is an intolerable threat. However, Iran that is passing through the long- termsanctionsnow encounters a region dominated by powers with superior military potentials.After the Arab uprising in 2011, the Iranian leaders used their military force to support their longtime ally, the Syrian regime.They considered Syria's defeat as a beginning to Iran's siege and a threat to their political system. The parties' incomprehension of the each other' motivations and concerns is one of the reasons forIran and its rivals struggling in the pitfalls of the proxy warswhich destroy the region. The first step to détente is to have a more accurate understanding of Iran's decision making about policies of the region.

As two major powers in the Islamic world, Iran and Saudi Arabia have a significant contribution in transformations of the Middle East. The recent transformations in Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq affected the interests and security of these two powers, and thus leading to conflicting interests (Qyasvand, Torkashvand, 2017).

Furthermore, the USA attempted, with the help of the powers of the region, to prevent one of them gaining too much power and the other undermining. Therefore, the USA can pursue their political and economic goals in the region. The American Normalization policy aiming to change the cultures, beliefs, and values of the Middle East is one ofthe goals of American soft power means to manage and influence Middle Eastern public opinion. In this regard, the United States encountered a conflict of Islamic and ideological values on the one hand and democratic values on the other.Some instances of proxy wars indicating US efforts to undermine Iran and maintain US dominance are as follows:

Syria: the trend of transformations in Syria indicates that Iran succeeded to turn Syria crisis into an opportunity to increase its influence in the region, and at international level as well. Syria crisis explicitly involved Iran into the international interactions of world powers. Besides, military cooperation of Iran with Russia in Syria can be recognized as its involvement in the great powers game in the region (Karami, 2016:237).

Not only did Iran and Syria fight against the Arab conservatives, but also werean important barrier to full American dominance and hegemonic regional order. Since the West always attempted to impose its values on the Middle East, and as the USA claims, manage the transformations of the region, Iran and Syria have always been important barriers against the USA full domination in the region. Thus, the issue of Syria is not just a civil issue, but is important at regional and international levels (Qyasvand, Torkashvand, 2017).

Once again, the revolutionary transformations of the Arab world in 2011 changed the geopolitical condition of the regionmore profoundly, so that Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen were all involved.As the revolutionary transformations of these countries began to turn into civil wars,areas of rivalry and confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia expanded from Iraq and Lebanon to Syria and Yemen. Given that Syria has been a strategic alliance of Iran for many years,Saudi Arabia considered infiltration of the Arab Spring to Syria and the fall of Bashar al-Assad a golden opportunity to block the increasing influence of Iran in Iraq and the Levant. Structural transformations in Syria were important to Saudi Arabia at two levels: geo- political and ideological. From the

ideological perspective, Saudi Arabia has always accused Syria of supporting resistance groups, which they believed could endanger the policy of 'preserve the status quo' and foster the resistance in the region. It considers Syria a risk for the future of conservative kingdoms. From the geo- political perspective, the significance of the transformations in Syria can be analyzed from two respects; regional balance with Iran and Syrian intervention in Saudi Arabia's area of influence in Lebanon and Palestine (Kavianirad et al, 2013:13). Today,regional and global powers are looking to determine the future of Syria through the proxy wars. Therefore, it is not surprising to see powerful states supporting the states, institutions, and individuals some of which being mainly political and armed, and some others trying to create horror. Saudi Arabia and Qatar's support of different groups in Syria are instances of such a support.

Iraq: for geo- political and geo- strategic reasons, Iraq has the potential to change the balance of power in favor of or against actors in the region.USA occupation of Iraq and regime change in this country can be recognized as the most important event leading to a new era of interactions and approaches among regional actors,balance of power in West Asia, and generally, a modern image of the region. Iraq has been suffering foreign interference for many years, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar intelligence services are striving to hinder the Iraqis to achieve real democracy. Regarding ISIL, it is obviously a terrorist group directly sponsored and logistically supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

On the other hand, the Western countries, led by the USA, who are in greed of Iraq oil and gas resources, will not leave the country.In the last transformation, there was a "human tragedy"when the White House continued to intervene in Iraq to prevent the usage of its resources. Although political struggle, tribal context, disintegration of the body of the army, and foreign intervention are the main causes of rise of the crisis in Iraq (emergence of ISIL), definitely many other factors exacerbated the crises in this country. For many reasons,the USA will not ravage ISIL completely in Iraq. One of the reasons is the effect of ISIL's ravaging on increasing regional power of Iran. Moreover, ISIL can put pressure on the central government of Iraq and justify the re-

engagement of the USA in this country.The USA seeks to create insecurity for the countries of the region in order to attract their attention to the West's salvaging measures, and American measures. Indeed, the USA would like to recognizethe rise of ISIL as the result of its withdrawal from Iraq, and thus, justify its probable presence in the future (Assistant Political - Armed Forces, 2014:24).

Yemen: Expansion of the Houthi's power as Zaidi Shiite protesters against the political structure of the state made Riyadh more sensitive to the changes in Yemen; because it involves Saudi Arabia in an indirect war with Iran who claims to support the Houthis. Although Saudi Arabian authorities' accusation of Iran's educational and equipment support of the Houthis has not been proved, Saudi government leaders have repeatedly accused Iran of supporting the Houthis. However, Iran protected the Houthis only according to the policy of *protecting the oppressed*.Saudis' most important argument to justify the military aggression in Yemen is the Houthis' dominance over Yemen by the support and planning of Iran, and thus, the probable security threats it might have for Saudi state, and Bab Almandbe Strait and region. In other words, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia was formed aiming at confronting immediate and critical threats; that is, expansion of Iran's influence. To Saudi Arabia, empowerment of Zaidi Shiites in Yemen means Iran's increasing power in the region; so that, it finds itself surrounded by Shiites. In fact, Shiite state in Yemen has turned into a great problem for the Saudi regime (Nejat et al, 2016:160).

One of the measures of Saudi Arabia regime in the fight against Yemen is formation of the Arab coalitionincluding Qatar, Kuwait, Emirates, Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and Jordan. The main reasonsof this measure include, more intense concern of the Saudi state over the imbalance of forces in the region, particularly in Yemen;infiltration of public uprisings into Saudi Arabia; and missile launch from Yemen, announced by the Saudi Ministry of Transportation and intercepted near the international airport of King Khalid- a suburb of Riyadh, the capital. As a result, Riyadh intensified its verbal war against Iran and its relation with Iran entered a new phase. Accusing Iran of involving in the missile attack, the coalition led by Saudi Arabia claimed that the attack was

"direct military aggression" from Iran, and warned that Saudi Arabia reserve the right to respond to Iran in a timely and appropriate manner. Also, US president Donald Trump stated that he believed Iran was in charge of launching missile from Yemen to Saudi Arabia (Qyasvand, Torkashvand, 2017).

4.   Saudi Arabia and the proxy war

Saudi Arabia is one of the important and effective states of the international system, especially in the Persian Gulf, with its specific features and identity. The Saudi regime is currently the most tyrannous political system in the region. That is why it is involved in crises caused by Arab transformations in the Middle East. Thus, it is trying to keep the country from crisis. Saudi Arabia is traditionally conservative whichseeks to maintain its own security in Islamic Awakening (Barzegar, 2012:3).

Saudi Arabia recognizes Iran as its main rival in the region. The political system in Iran has a Shiite and revolutionary and non-committed identity; in contrast, political system in Saudi Arabia has a Sunni and Salafi and non- committed identity. Influenced by the regional and international conditions, theidentity is demonstrated differently, ie, highlighted, weak, or contradictory interpretation (Saee and Alikhani,2013:110). Furthermore, another identity conflict between the two countries is the traditional and kingdom structure in Saudi Arabia versus Citizen-centered structure in Iran. Iran claims to have a revolutionary identity,and to be in favor of disturbance of the current situation and collapse of dictators. In contrast, Saudi Arabia claims to be in favor of the current situation (gahner,2012: 39). Due to the geo-strategic and geo-mechanical features of the Persian Gulf region, and particular geo- political and ideological features of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two countries became each other's main rival in the Middle East, as well as, the Muslim world. Politically, Iran has an anti-American and anti-stateless approach; in contrast, Saudi Arabia is one of the USA allies. Religiously, Iran is the leader of Islam and Shiite; in contrast, Saudi Arabia claims to be the provenance and source of Islam and the guard of Islamic holy places,and therefore claims to be the leader of Islamand Sunni. Moreover, some researchers

believe that dominance over the Persian Gulf is not only a regional dignity, but an important worldwide issue (Furtig,2002: 144).

Thus, there is a rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia which is indeed intensified by ethnic and identity issues (Arab versus Iranian). Nevertheless, the relationship between the two countries fluctuated during the last century; so that, sometimes they had quite friendly relations, and sometimes they were quite enemies. Some researchers argued that the main reason influencing the relation between the two countries is identity and religion.

Saudi Arabia is worried about Iran's influence over Shiites and attempts to reduce its influence. In fact, one of the objectives of Saudi Arabia in the region is to confront Iran's influence in Syria, Lebanon and its nearby neighbors Bahrain and Yemen (Nejat et al, 2016:157). The transformations led to changes in Saudi Arabia's status; so that, in case of imbalance of power, it will lose but Iran will benefit.

With Hassan Rouhani's presidency, a new period began in Iran's relations with the international system based on the approach of détente and interaction with the international systemModeration was the dominant discourse of Rouhani's administration; so that, a kind of moderation of foreign policy ideology could be observed, compared with the previous administration.At the first post-election news conference, Rouhani expressed his tendency to re-establish relations with Saudi Arabia and change them within the framework of respect and mutually beneficial arrangements. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia believed thatthis rationality formed a new, more positive viewpoint toward Iran (Singh Roy et al, 2013:5). But, even in this period, continued regional challenges and rivalries of Iran and Saudi Arabia for regional influence led to further escalation of existing conflicts, including in Syria and Yemen (Salisbury, 2015:1).

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's main concern is the empowerment of Shiite groups such as Ansarullah and the Houthis in Yemenwhich are in line with the interests of Iran. Besides, Saudi Arabia viewed Iran's ambitions and military capabilities as its more influence on OPEC and Saudi Shiite minority (Nasr, 2006: 59).

Moreover, Iran's nuclear deal with the West couldremove the economic sanctions, more proximity of Iran and Europe and increasing Iran's economic potential, and therefore, increasing its

strategic strength to support its allies in the region (such as Hizballah in Lebanon and Ansarullah in Yemen).Thus, it is noted that the most important factorinfluencing the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabiais the events changing the geo-politics of the region, and leading to more serious rivalry between the two countries.In such cases, contribution of identity and ideological factors can also be considered (Bayat, Eslami, 2018:172).

Some international observers believe thatthe events in Syria have a foreign source rather than domestic.Syria's internal problems resulted in the exploitation and competition of regional and international powers. Based on this argument, Syria continues to be a victim, not onlyby violent conflicts with the military, but by different policies of regional and international powers. In fact, regional and international powers are looking to their own specific interests in the transformations of Syria.As one of the most important contributorsof the crises in Syria, Saudi Arabia is not exceptional. Given a widespread regional rivalry with Iran, it seems thatSaudi Arabia aims at collapse of Basher al Assad's state in order to undermine Iran's power in the region (Nyakoui, 2012:2).

On the other hand, according to Saudi theorists and decision makers, collapse of Basher al Assad's state could terminate Iran's influence in Lebanon while re-balancing the regional disequilibrium after the outbreak of the Iraq war and the Arab revolutions. Therefore, as two powers of the Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia confronted each other in Syria's civil war. To achieve its goals in Syria's crises, Saudi Arabia took extensive measuresrunningthe Gulf cooperation council and the Arab union to put pressure on Bashar al-Assad, preparation for repetition of Libya's experience in Syria, financial, logistic, and equipment support of Syrian opponents both inside and outside the country, cooperation with Qatar, Turkey, and Israel, reinforcement of the Salafi and Wahhabi groups in Syria, and running social media, such as Al Arabia channel and the press, such as Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (the Middle East) and al Hayat (the Life) (Nooralivand, 2017:12).

Saudi Arabia's main approach regarding the Middle East transformations is the policy of *preserve the status quo.* However, Arab transformations surrounded Saudi Arabia; transformations such as collapse of Egypt, challenges in critical areas such as the

contract between Bahrain and Yemen, confronting democracy, and sporadic internal crises. Such transformations influenced Saudi Arabia as an important country in the region.

Therefore, the transformations in Syria were a great opportunity for Saudi Arabia to try to change the regime in Syria in order to get out of the challenges of the Arab-Western approach. The crises in Syria provided Saudi Arabia with the opportunity to describe their desirable order with the help of Arabic and Western countries. To undermine one of Iran's main allies in the region, Saudi Arabia began a full-fledged proxy war in Syria; so that, by the support of Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East, and entry of extremists like Al-Qaeda, and arming Syria's hardliners,sectarian wars between internal and external opponents and Assad's government have been be observed since the spring of 2012.Saudi Arabia made extensive efforts tocollect funds for the Syrian rebels by following activities and charity funds. However, any non-governmental charity activities in Saudi Arabia, even under Sheikh Mohammed al-Arifi, is prohibited (Kohen, Tajri, 2014: 117).

Conclusion

Proxy war can be defined as an aspect of a partnership war in which there is some strategic and operational cooperation between regular and irregular forces. In a proxy war, the two sides complement each other's activities through strategic and operational cooperation. Proxy war is like an umbrella under which the sponsor and successor can be governmental or non-governmental activists.Non-governmental activists might be terrorist organizations, insurgent groups, transnational movements, mercenaries, or private security companies.

By developing proxy wars in the Middle East, on the one hand, the USA aims to establish dominance of the West over the Middle East,because it seeks to control oil wells, fossil resources, and maintain Israel's security and stability; and on the other hand, to develop a geopolitical structure the same as the one prior to the Islamic Revolution, because Islamic revolution took place when the Middle East was an area of exploitation for the USA and the West. In fact, the revolution made a gap in the process of their exploitation and collapsed part of the geo-political structure.Involving Iran in proxy wars (including ISIL's influence

on Iran) to decrease Iran's influence and power in the region, is one of the strategies of the United States and its supporting countries in the past few years.The emergence of the extremist president of the USA was a good incentive for Saudi Arabia to demonstrate more anti-Iranian politics, and make a better triangulation of United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Finally, proxy wars as a strategy of great powers, could be one of the disturbing factors of the Middle East security environment. As long as these wars are not over, the security environment in the Middle East will be tense.

Reference:
- Atlas of the World History, Adams, S.; Negahi, M.; Norouzi, J., Ofoq Publishing, p.169
- Bayat, J. & Eslami, M. (2018) Iran- Saudi Arabia; Détente model planning focused on regional disputes. Strategic public policy studies quarterly, 8, vol 28.
- Parsapour, R. (2015) Proxy wars in the Middle East and the Great Middle East plan. Persian Gulf and security monthly, PersianGulf studies center.
- Saaee, A. & Alikhani, M. (2013)Investigating conflict cycle in Iran relations. Political science quarterly, year9, vol22.
- Javadi Arjmand, M.J.; Parhizgar, A.; & Khezri, E. (2016) Barak Obama's foreign policy in Western Asia and Northern Africa until 2015. International relations studies quarterly, year 9, 3.
- Salehi, M. & Zare, R (2016) Power gap and its effect on the security of the Middle East. International relations studies quarterly, year 10, 4.
- Qyasvandi, F. & Torkashvand, J. (2014) the United States of America, proxy wars, and security of the Middle East. Political research in the Islamic world quarterly, year 7, 4, pp.167-205.
- Dehqani Firoozabadi, J. & Farazi, M. (2012) Islamic awakening and national security of Iran. Islamic revolution studies quarterly, 28.
- Dehshiri, M. & Qafouri, M. (2015) Strategic requirements of Iran for the new US Middle East policy. Strategic and macro policies quarterly, year 3, 12.
- Kouhkan, A. & Tajri, S. (2014) Syria crisis and Saudi Arabia's regional policy (2011-2014). Policy strategic research quarterly, year3, 10.
- Political directorate of the ideological-political organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2014) ISIL Takfiri group; background and functions. Tehran: ideological-political organization of the army.
- Nyakoui, A. & Behmanesh, H. (2012) Opponents in Syria crisis: objectives and approaches. Foreign relations quarterly, winter, 4.
- Nyakoui, A. (2013) Investigation of Iraq and Syria based on security theories. Worldwide policy quarterly, period 2, vol 2.

❖ Nejat, A. & Mousavi Taremi, M. (2016) the Strategy of Iran and Saudi Arabia for the crises in Yemen. International relations quarterly, year 9, 33.

❖ Nooralivand, Y. (2017) Saudi Arabia and efforts to rebalance against Iran. Strategic studies quarterly,۳۲:(۱)۲۰

❖ Barzegar,kayhan (2012), the arab spring and the balance of power middle east belifer center for science and international affairs the kennedy school, October.

❖ Furtig, H. (2002) *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars*. Ithaca Press.

❖ Helton, Shawn (2014)"US-NATO Proxy War in Iraq and Syria: US Financing and Training of "Moderate" ISIS Rebels in Syria", Global Research, June 29, see at:http:// www. globalresearch .ca/us-nato-proxy-war-in-iraq-and-syria-us financing -and-training-ofmoderate- isis-rebels-in-syria/5389053.

❖ Loveman, Chris (2002) "Assessing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervetion", Conflict and Secur -ity & Development, Vol. 2, No.3.

❖ Tomar, Sanjiv (2014) "Proxy Warfare", Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 8, No. 2, April- June.

❖ Salisbury, Peter. (2015) "Yemen and the Saudi –Iranian Cold War". *Chatham House*. February.

❖ Singh Roy, and et al. (2013) "Iran under Hassan Rohani: Imperatives for the Region and India". IDSA Issue Brief. Retrieved from:https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/167574/IB_IranunderHassanR ohani_WestAsiaCentre_190713.pdf.

❖ Nasr, V. (2006) "When the Shiites Rise". *Foreign Affairs*. 2006 Jul 1. pp 58-74.

❖ Nuruzzaman, M. (2012) "Conflicts between Iran and the Arab Gulf States: An Economic Evaluation". *Strategic Analysis*. Vol 36. No 4. pp 542-553.