

The Struggle for Supremacy in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and Iran

Simon MABON

Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2023, 299 pages, ISBN: 9781108603690

Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict

Ibrahim FRAIHAT

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, 248 pages, ISBN: 9781474466202

Iranian-Saudi Rivalry Since 1979: In the Words of Kings and Clerics

Talal MOHAMMAD

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The Evolution and Ramifications of the Iran-Saudi Rivalry Through Multiple Lenses: A Review of Mabon, Fraihat and Mohammad

This review endeavors to identify key themes and critical perspectives discernible in the scholarship of Simon Mabon's *The Struggle for Supremacy in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and Iran*, Ibrahim Fraihat's *Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict*, and Talal Mohammad's *Iranian-Saudi Rivalry since 1979: In the Words of Kings and Clerics*, who have meticulously investigated Iranian-Saudi relations in the Middle Eastern context. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, bilateral relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have assumed paramount importance in elucidating the multifaceted political, religious, cultural, economic, and societal dynamics of the Middle East. The post-revolutionary trajectory brought a volte-face to relations, instigating a protracted period of

rivalry and conflict spanning four decades, thereby catalyzing the escalation of conflicts across the Middle East. Both countries perceive each other as existential security threats, while concurrently aspiring for regional hegemony. Amidst this backdrop, seminal events such as Saudi Arabia's support of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the recalibration of the political landscape after the United States (US)-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the reverberations of the Arab Spring, the execution of Nimr al-Nimr¹ in 2016, and the Yemen Civil War have markedly intensified the discord in bilateral relations between Riyadh and Tehran. Although there have been short periods of restrained rapprochement and diplomatic overtures, the prevailing atmosphere of acrimony and relentless pursuit of dominance, both regionally and within the greater Islamic sphere, determine the framework of their relations. Consequently, pejorative labels such as "suspicion", "infidel", "enemy", and "confrontation" often feature in describing the complicated dynamics characterizing Saudi-Iranian relations.

Considering the transformative influence wielded by Iran and Saudi Arabia over the trajectory of Middle Eastern affairs, the complicated nature of bilateral relations between Tehran and Riyadh furnished grounds for scholarly inquiry, yielding novel avenues of investigation, fresh insights and arguments.

It is important to emphasize the deliberate selection of works by Mabon, Fraihat, and Mohammad, each offering new and distinct theoretical and empirical perspectives to evaluate the Iran-Saudi rivalry. While these books address various facets of the conflict, they transcend simplistic narratives of sectarian strife and proxy wars. The authors acknowledge the significance of the Shiite-Sunni strife, recognized as a contributing factor that exacerbates and complicates their rivalry. However, they collectively argue that the causal mechanism underlying this rivalry and conflict extends beyond this discussion and subordinates the religious identities of both countries, particularly evident in both Mabon's and Fraihat's works.

Mabon's book, *The Struggle for Supremacy in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and Iran*, not only evaluates the Iran-Saudi rivalry but also illuminates the roles played by state and non-state actors, emphasizing the local dynamics that shape its trajectory and resource utilization. In contrast, Mohammad's book addresses the rivalry through discourse analysis of political elites, clerics, and media, covering over four decades, from Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 to 2021. His work highlights periods of mutual stigmatization and occasional moderation during the Khatami era yet pivots towards broader geopolitical leadership aspirations in the Islamic world rather than Sunni-Shiite sectarian dynamics. Fraihat's contribution stands apart by focusing on multifaceted approaches to resolving this persistent and entrenched nature of the Iran-Saudi rivalry. Instead of investigating where these countries compete and conflict, he discusses the deeper reasons for their irresolvable conflict and negotiation deadlock. What is differentiated in Fraihat's argument is that he provides an excellent example for diplomatic studies because he does not mainly focus on the countries shaping the Iran-Saudi rivalry. He

1 Saudi Arabian Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a harsh critic of the Saudi regime, was arrested in 2012 and charged with terrorism in 2014. On January 2, 2016, Nimr al-Nimr was executed in Saudi Arabia, which escalated tensions between Tehran and Riyadh. Following the execution, Iranian demonstrators targeted Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Mashad, ransacking both and setting the embassy ablaze. The diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran were cut, and both sides did not take steps to restore diplomatic relations until March 2023.

focuses on how diplomatic approaches could not lead to a permanent reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While Mabon and Mohammad delve into the complexities of the rivalry's dynamics, Fraihat's research underscores its intractability and ongoing relevance in international relations discourse. This review aims to elucidate how their research brings together the pieces of a complicated puzzle, thereby affording new perspectives and insights. Finally, a critical evaluation of each author's contributions to understanding the overarching themes common to their respective work is offered, culminating in brief remarks on their endeavors for a broad readership.

Mabon's book argues that the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia stems from their purpose of seeking supremacy over each other and across the Middle East. Employing five countries as case studies—Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen—Mabon illustrates how these countries shape Iran and Saudi Arabia's competitive dynamics. Contrary to conventional narratives that emphasize sectarian and ideological dimensions, Mabon critically subordinates the power struggle between Tehran and Riyadh, eschewing terms like “proxy wars” and “cold war” in favor of a nuanced examination of their regional rivalry. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's social theory, he elucidates how Iran and Saudi Arabia leverage economic, cultural, military, human, and social capital, to determine the level of transnational relationships and assert their influence. Pertinent regional events, such as the US-led invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring, further underscore the impact of these capitals in establishing supremacy.

Mabon highlights the transformative impact of political turmoil, such as Saddam's fall in Iraq, which favored Iran's ascendancy through security cooperation, the development of bilateral relations with Iraqi elites, and the drawing on of its cultural and economic capital. By advancing the transnational relationship with the Kurdish Regional Administration and the Popular Mobilization Force, it has also consolidated its power in Iraq's politics. Mabon underscores pivotal events, including the election of Haider al-Abadi as the prime minister of Iraq, the defeat of Daesh in Iraq, and the Tishreen protests, as opportunities for Saudi Arabia to counterbalance Iran's dominance, leveraging financial aid for reconstruction and presenting its cultural capital to revive shared Arab identity. Bahrain's geopolitical proximity and Shia majority intensify the power struggle, with Al-Khalifa's regime reliant on Saudi's economic and coercive capital to counter Iranian influence. Lebanon's fragile political environment and sectarian divisions become battlegrounds for Iranian and Saudi interests, with alliances formed around Hezbollah and Saad Hariri's factions, respectively. Mabon highlights Syria's strategic importance for Iran's utilization of its economic, social, religious, military, and human resources as a crucial gateway for Iran's expansion into the Arab world and its ability to maintain its presence despite being portrayed as solely representing Persian and Shiite identities. Additionally, the act of exerting influence in Syria serves to strengthen the foundation of the Axis of Resistance, allowing for the utilization of Syria to connect with Hezbollah. Despite Saudi attempts to isolate Damascus diplomatically, such as its suspension from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League, these efforts have failed to weaken the Iran-Syria alliance, and have instead significantly strengthening it. Lastly, Mabon details how Iran and Saudi Arabia exploit Yemen's fragmented political structure and internal conflicts to deploy their military and financial capitals. The conflict between Houthis and Yemen's government is crucial for both countries. Iran's support to Houthis is part

of Tehran's long-term strategy to boost its influence in Yemen, often misunderstood as having started pre-2009. Mabon emphasizes the mutual, non-subordinate relationship between Iran and the Houthis. Unlike other cases, Iran does not have authority over the Houthis, nor do they comply with Iranian directives. Mabon also highlights Saudi Arabia's aspiration to control Yemen's politics, exacerbating instability, with Operation Decisive Storm² illustrating Saudi Arabia's attempts to counter the Houthis.

In *Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict*, Ibrahim Fraihat delineates a conflict resolution model to resolve conflict issues between Iran and Saudi Arabia, starting with identifying how both countries' rivalry has been established and then focusing on underlying reasons for the conflict issues, ways of managing this conflict, and methods to resolve this conflict through the theoretical framework of area studies, conflict resolution, and peace studies. While acknowledging the security dilemma as the crux of the conflict, Fraihat examines how additional factors, including aspirations for Muslim World leadership, internal legitimacy struggles, and the politicization of sectarianism, contribute to escalating tensions.

Amidst the conflict landscape, Fraihat advocates for a multifaceted approach to conflict management, emphasizing the importance of direct communication channels and confidence-building measures to prevent escalation. Furthermore, he proposes the establishment of peace zones as a mechanism for managing the conflict, albeit hindered by external interventions in regional politics. Fraihat delineates five key strategies for conflict resolution: rebalancing regional order, reforming conflict strategies, mediation, track-two diplomacy, and bottom-up peacebuilding.

Through rebalancing regional order, he posits that strategic interventions in Iraq's internal affairs should be avoided to restore regional equilibrium. Moreover, he advocates for sectarian policy reform and domestic reforms within Iran and Saudi Arabia. While Iran needs to cease its sectarian policies in the region and change its approach to the Shiite communities by adopting a guardianship role in other countries, Saudi Arabia should not ignore its Shiite population and engage them in essential positions in the government. Secondly, domestic reforms are also necessary. Establishing trust and cooperation between government and society enables stability inside the countries, which leaves little room for intervening in each other's internal politics. Thirdly, he highlights the importance of soft power in shaping image and enhancing credibility. Iran's intervention and prioritizing hard power tools damage its credibility and its soft power. For Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabism and its extremist understanding undermines its soft power.

2 Yemeni President Mansur Hadi formally asked for the assistance of the UN Security Council on March 25, 2015, in response to the threat posed by the Iran-backed Houthi militia advancing toward Aden. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia launched a military intervention in Yemen's civil war on March 26, 2015, under the banner of Operation Decisive Storm. The primary objective of this intervention was to bolster the Yemeni government under Hadi in its struggle against the Shi'a Houthi insurgency in the northern regions of Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition, comprising Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members such as the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain (Oman declined to participate the operation), along with Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan, later augmented by Senegal and Malaysia, undertook this military campaign. The coalition's strategic aim was to curtail the territorial expansion of the Houthi movement, identified as a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia. Initially termed Operation Decisive Storm, the military endeavor persisted for three weeks before transitioning to Operation Restoring Hope, a phase that continues presently.

In terms of mediation, Fraihat identifies potential mediators from the West (Germany), small states (Oman, Qatar, Kuwait), and regional powers (Turkey, Pakistan). Additionally, he underscores the significance of bottom-up peacebuilding, which proposes establishing people-to-people relationships between countries, suggesting that the strong bond among people of both countries can deliver a determined message to their leaders to show their desire for non-confrontation and underlines that this could complement track one (government-to-government) diplomacy. The unavailability of track-one diplomacy required the utilization of track-two diplomacy, which involves non-officials discussing emerging conflict issues and conveying them to government officials. Despite the potential of track-two diplomacy as a supplementary tool for conflict resolution, Fraihat acknowledges its limitations, particularly due to authoritarian government constraints and the reluctance of participants to deviate from official stances. To address these challenges, he proposes the innovative concept of track one-and-a-half diplomacy, which brings government officials and non-government actors in conflict resolution efforts.

Talal Mohammad's book, *Iranian-Saudi Rivalry since 1979: In the Words of Kings and Clerics*, delves into the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry by scrutinizing the discourses of political elites, Friday prayer sermons, and newspaper editorials. The book analyses the construction of Self and Other narratives within these discourses, spanning pivotal moments from 1979 to 2020, comprising two supreme leaders and six presidents from Iran and the reign of four Saudi kings. Conceptually, the theoretical framework is centered on Foucault's portrayal of power-knowledge dynamics, Edward Said's concept of Othering, and the dichotomies derived from his work on Orientalism and the image theory that emphasizes the "necessary enemy" as presented by Hermann and Fischerkeller. Mohammad argues that political developments are significant in forming these narratives, with both nations leveraging historical, cultural, and religious features in producing discourses.

Central to the discourse is the contest for leadership and legitimacy in the Islamic world, with both sides portraying themselves as responsible actors while attributing instability to the Other. While the Saudi discourse exhibits cohesion, Iranian newspapers occasionally diverge, reflecting internal ideological dynamics. The rupture in bilateral relations during the Iran-Iraq war and the 1987 Mecca clash profoundly impacted discourse, leading to mutual delegitimization. Saudi discourse characterized Iran's revolution as fake, while Iranian discourse placed Saudi Arabia as subservient to the United States and having hegemonic aspirations. Iran's foreign policy under Rafsanjani and Khatami is analyzed to illuminate the shifting contours of Self and Other representations. Khatami's rapprochement with Saudi Arabia demonstrated how leadership identity could transform discourses. The OIC Summit in Tehran in 1997 was noteworthy to play an essential role in Saudi's definition of its Other. By framing Khatami positively, Iran was evaluated as an important regional and international actor, and Iran's geopolitical, cultural, and historical importance in discourses underlined. During Khatami's presidency, Iranian-Saudi representations of the Self and the Other primarily focused on discourses that fostered confidence, promoted Islamic unity and facilitated cooperation between states. Both states consciously decided not to create negative stereotypes of the Other. The narrative arc extends to Ahmadinejad's presidency, characterized by a portrayal of Iran as a staunch adversary of Israel, which indirectly challenged Saudi Arabia's Islamic leadership

narrative. Subsequent events, such as Iran's support for Hezbollah during the 34-Day War serve to reinforce the Iranian self-perception as the guardian of the Islamic world and regional leader while casting doubt on Saudi legitimacy, defining it as a 'colluder' and 'betraye' to the Palestinian cause. The Syrian Civil War emerges as a significant flashpoint, exacerbating tensions and prompting both sides ignore domestic challenges and focus on external issues to frame the Self and the Other. Mohammad also examines three events, which are the Yemen war, the hajj stampede of 2015, and the execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr, demonstrating the evolving nature of the rivalry and its impact on Self and Other representations. The rupture in diplomatic ties following the Saudi embassy attack in Iran underscores the depth of animosity, with both states resorting to discursive labelling of Iran as an "irresponsible international actor" and "terrorist state." In the final section, Mohammad delves into Saudi Arabia's shifting Self-Other discourse under Mohammad bin Salman, marked by heightened rhetoric likening Khamenei to "Hitler". Additionally, strategic alliances with the Trump administration serve to mutually reinforce Iran as a shared threat, further shaping the discourse surrounding regional stability and security.

Moving beyond summaries, it is essential to critically analyze each scholarly work. In evaluating Simon Mabon's book, three crucial points emerge. Firstly, Mabon brings a novel perspective on the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and their pursuit of supremacy, contextualized within a well-designed theoretical framework. Secondly, while existing literature predominantly discusses the rivalry through the lens of proxy or sectarian warfare, Mabon's approach underscores the complex and multidimensional nature of both countries' spheres of influence, challenging the notion of unilateral gains. Mabon's analysis of this situation from the perspective of transnational relationships provides an original standpoint from which to look at this rivalry from the angle of the state and non-state actors. By delving into each case study, it is apparent that various factors, such as different political structures, religious majorities/minorities, and the power of state and non-state actors are significantly important in shaping the dynamics between Iran and Saudi Arabia. These factors significantly impact the extent to which they can infiltrate the target country and establish dominance over one another. Thirdly, Mabon offers a nuanced understanding of the rivalry, shedding light on the roles played by various capitals in influencing the trajectory of the rivalry. He also highlights the capitals of Iran and Saudi Arabia that can be leveraged to bolster the power of state and non-state actors within the country, enabling them to seize control. However, a notable omission in the narrative pertains to the significant role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Quds Force to underpin Iran's military capital in those countries. While Mabon explores a range of factors to prove the impact of different capitals, the absence of acknowledgment of the IRGC's influence on Iran's aspiration to seek supremacy over Saudi Arabia is conspicuous. This oversight underscores the complexity of the geopolitical landscape and the multifaceted dynamics at play within the region.

Ibrahim Fraihat's research warrants examination for three key reasons. Firstly, the book's novel suggestions for achieving a peaceful and lasting resolution to the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia offer a fresh perspective on this longstanding issue. Secondly, Fraihat employs a comprehensive three-pronged approach, identifying the conflict's root causes, exploring management options, and proposing resolution methods, thereby sparking

critical inquiry into the feasibility of potential resolutions. Thirdly, by combining a theoretical approach with field experience, Fraihat's work navigates the complexities of long-term conflict resolution, illustrating the requirements of the long-term efforts to overcome the obstacles to the rapprochement through examples. Notably, Fraihat follows a similar analytical approach as Mabon, by refraining from focusing on the IRGC despite the IRGC's Quds Force vital role in escalating the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this oversight poses a challenge to the resolution endeavors, which remain inconclusive due to this omission. Nevertheless, Fraihat's proposals are noteworthy for offering valuable insight into future Iran-Saudi conflict resolution prospects. Another critical point is the retrospective analysis of Khatami's presidency, explained in detail in Talal Mohammad's work, which underscores a historically productive period for Iran-Saudi rapprochement. However, comprehensive scrutiny of this era's contributions to conflict resolution is imperative to grasp the intricate dynamics at play and missing from Fraihat's work. Furthermore, Fraihat persistently features the position of Iraq and how it can play the mediating role between Iran and Saudi Arabia, contingent upon its independence from both Iran and Saudi Arabia's spheres of influence. Despite ongoing efforts by both states to bolster their presence in Iraq, Fraihat's proposition appears optimistic, necessitating careful consideration of its feasibility amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics. Fraihat also underlines that Saudi Arabia's heavy dependence on the US regarding security arrangements forces Riyadh to take a new position after a new government takes office in the US. Therefore, although Saudi Arabia intends to moderate its relations with Iran, the US variable could not be ignored. The lack of interaction between the societies of Iran and Saudi Arabia is also presented as one of the reasons for lack of conflict resolution. What makes this argument noteworthy is that if there is no direct engagement with the other side, the possibility of reaching a solution is also unlikely. Lastly, I argue Iraq, contrary to Fraihat's suggestion, does not provide compelling ground to mediate the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Although Iraq shares common grounds for rapprochement of both countries, the political dynamics and both countries' ambition to seek dominance in Iraq's politics does not leave too much room for this option. However, as Fraihat has argued, this might be possible in the future if the political environment in Iraq becomes fully independent from Iran and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, his conflict resolution envisagement regarding Iraq's independence from both countries seems unlikely in the short term. At that point, I agree with Fraihat that small Gulf Corporation Council states such as Oman, Kuwait, or Qatar could be better options for mediators.

In analyzing Talal Mohammad's research, which traces the rivalry of Saudi Arabia and Iran through the discourse of political elites, clergies, and newspaper editorials over four decades, a meticulous approach becomes imperative. His work makes a noteworthy contribution to existing literature, effectively addressing a significant gap in scholarship concerning the systematic and historical establishment of their discursive rivalry through the Self and the Other representation. This book is reminiscent of Beeman's work³ which focusses on how Iran and the US "demonize" each other between 1979 and 2005 in their discourses. What is salient in Mohammad's book is the nuanced exploration of how decision-makers,

3 William O. Beeman. 2005. *The "Great Satan" vs. The "Mad Mullahs": How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

while central to discourse construction due to their governance roles, are complemented by the pivotal roles played by the media and the clergy in shaping the multidimensional political motives of both countries.

Regarding media discourses, Mohammad delicately underlines the differing dynamics between the Saudi and Iranian media landscapes. While the Saudi media is consistent with the government, Iranian media's relations with different political camps can put the elected officials in a difficult position. Within the Self-Other representation, Mohammad subtly shows how discourse design has evolved from state-to-state to leader-to-leader, starting with Mohammad bin Salman. These discourses, aimed not only at praising the Self or denigrating the Other but also at asserting leadership superiority and garnering legitimacy within the region and the broader Islamic world, bear striking similarities to Mabon's examination of rivalry for supremacy.

Although Mohammad and Mabon utilize different cases to support their arguments, both scholars present compelling evidence demonstrating the evolving dimensions of the rivalry. Unlike Mabon, however, Mohammad prefers to draw on "proxy war" and "Cold War" to define the rivalry at some points. Another similarity that draws attention to Mabon and Talal is that Iran and Saudi Arabia are concertedly responsive and reactive by correlating actions and discourses. Moreover, Talal's work aligns with Fraihat's perspective in highlighting the pivotal role of discourse tone in exacerbating or mitigating tensions, thereby contributing to the impasse in conflict resolution efforts.

While the authors primarily focus on themes of supremacy, identity dynamics, and conflict resolution within the Iran-Saudi rivalry, their works also explore various determinants of this rivalry. For example, Mabon's analysis highlights the geopolitical dimensions that significantly impact the quest for supremacy in targeted countries. He underscores Iran's strategic influence in Iraq and Yemen, which not only intensifies pressure on Saudi Arabia but also enhances Iran's political and economic leverage in those nations. Mabon elucidates the intricate nature of rivalry dynamics in these regions, suggesting enduring uncertainty for both parties. Furthermore, Iran's political foothold in Syria and its association with Hezbollah in Lebanon are noted as pivotal factors. In Mohammad's book, discourse analysis reveals historical and religious narratives that shape perceptions and interactions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. For instance, Iran often portrays Saudi Arabia as a pawn of Israel and the US in confrontational rhetoric, illustrating the role of Saudi-US relations in fueling the rivalry. Mabon also examines Saudi Arabia's utilization of the GCC as a strategic tool against Iran, albeit noting the GCC's intermittent role in enhancing Saudi Arabia's regional stature. Fraihat's contribution diverges by identifying Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar as potential mediators in the Iran-Saudi standoff, highlighting their diplomatic potential in conflict resolution. Moreover, Fraihat posits Turkey and Pakistan as influential mediators due to their diplomatic ties with both Iran and Saudi Arabia. Mohammad further analyzes how shifting US administrations influence the construction of Self and Other identities between Saudi Arabia and Iran. For instance, during the Obama presidency, Iran-Saudi relations exhibited relative improvement, whereas under Trump, Saudi Arabia resumed portraying Iran as subservient to the United States. Critically, despite their comprehensive analyses, none of the authors extensively

address the regional repercussions of the Iran-Saudi rivalry, such as the famine in Yemen, the Syrian refugee crisis, and political instability in Lebanon, which have profoundly affected societal segments across the region.

Furthermore, both Mohammad and Fraihat share concerns on the detrimental impact of Wahhabism on Saudi Arabia's credibility in the region. Mohammad underscores that Wahhabism is a vital obstacle preventing Saudi Arabia's advancement against Iran. Despite these parallels, Mohammad draws on primary resources in Arabic and Persian, enriching the scope of his research and ensuring the clarity of his arguments. Notably, his emphasis on the challenges of resources that are not accessible is a critical point to be considered for further studies.

At one point, the three books briefly mention the role of the IRGC and its Quds Force in Iran's rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Yet, the IRGC is also considered one of the prominent actors that set the foreign policy along with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and they play an active role in escalating the rivalry and directing the trajectory of the mediation with Saudi Arabia. Fraihat criticizes this situation because the voices of several actors, such as the supreme leader, president, religious elites, and IRGC, entangle the negotiation and resolution process with Saudi Arabia.

Analyzing foreign participation in a political setting necessitates insight into the state's role in the transnational landscape and the structural composition of the political field. This review ultimately aims to evaluate three recently written books on the rivalry and conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia to understand better how both countries' multifaceted foreign policy motives determine their rivalry, particularly in the Middle East. These resources can be suggested as guidebooks for researchers and anyone interested in this topic because they complement each other to have a holistic approach to the Iran-Saudi rivalry. The theoretical frameworks are diligently applied to the case studies, and the resources drawn on provide a rich bibliography for further research.

By re-emphasizing briefly, Mabon's book sparks a great discussion on how Iran and Saudi Arabia deliberately deploy their capital in the target countries to surpass each other in the competition for supremacy in the Middle East. Fraihat's book prompts us to think outside the box by suggesting resolution methods in the Iran-Saudi conflict and why and how they continuously fail. Lastly, Mohammad's book meticulously presents the capability of discourses to explore the representation of the Other in the Iran-Saudi rivalry, by investigating not only the speeches of political elites but also newspapers' editorials and clergies' Friday sermons, demonstrating that the rivalry is maintained via multiple channels.