

## **Security Cooperation of Iran and Saudi Arabia**

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### **Abstract**

*This article examines security cooperation agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia that took place in 2001. The paper reveals that economic cooperation of the two countries in 1999 in the field of oil, confidence building by Iranian leaders during 1990s, presence of Prince Abdullah in Saudi's foreign policy arena, improvement of relations between Iran and the West, threat of Al-Qaeda and Taliban in the region and reduction of Iran's revolutionary zeal and thoughts alongside absent of any war between Iran and its Arab neighboring countries in the Persian Gulf region during 1990s had the most crucial role in signing of this novel security agreement.*

**Keywords:** Iran, Saudi Arabia, security cooperation

### **1. Introduction**

Iran's Islamic revolution turned Iran-Saudi pre-revolution cordial relations into confrontational one during 1980s which finally gave rise to cutting off their diplomatic ties in 1988. The main reasons of devastation of their relations were Iran's ideological foreign policy which was based on export of revolution, applying revolutionary slogans, maintain of the Shiite groups and movements in the region, holding of demonstration of 'liberation from infidels' which coincided with Iran-Iraq war, and Saudi support of Iraq. Notwithstanding the facts, the two countries gradually moved toward improvement of their mutual ties after renewing diplomatic relations since 1991. Despite economic and political problems between Iran and Saudi Arabia such as disputes over oil price and quota, differences over security arrangement of Persian Gulf region and also question of the Hajj during most years of the decade, they finally reached at an agreement on security cooperation. This agreement which signed between Iran's Interior Minister, Hojjatoleslam Abdolvahed Mousavi Lari, and his counterpart Prince Nayef, on April 18, 2001 in Tehran was an unexampled event that happened in the history of relationship of the two countries. For this, analysts believe that security pact was "turning point" in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In this paper, a qualitative research method was used and the primary data were collected through in-depth interview. The informants were 10 diplomatic officials and experts in Iran-Saudi matters who have held office in Iran's Foreign Ministry.

### **2. Spill Over of Economic Cooperation to Security Section**

Signing of Security agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia was very significant issue which took place between the two sides with regard to their previous long-term antagonistic relations. Iran needed Saudi's assistance for regional integration since on one hand the latter is the biggest and the most powerful Arab country in the Persian Gulf region and on the other hand Saudi Arabia is considered as leadership of other Arab states in the region. Moreover, since Saudi Arabia has always felt threat from Iran, the cooperation could release it from this fear because "Security is vital need for Saudi Arabia and do not change it with anything<sup>1</sup>." Anyway, following Iran and Saudi Arabia economic cooperation concerning oil within OPEC in 1999, they gradually advanced their cooperation in other field afterward.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, 12 October, 2009

In fact, the economic cooperation paved the way for promotion of political cooperation which security cooperation was placed on the top of this segment. In this regards, Barzegar (2008, p.56) explains that “More diverse exchanges with the neighboring countries will further mutual interactions, leading to an appropriate level of political-security relations.” In other words, when Iran and Saudi Arabia benefited from economic cooperation based on “positive-sum game”, they understood that they could achieve more interests by other cooperation. In addition, both countries also reached to this point that they could not act independently if they wanted to attain some of their goals. In this respect, Menashri (2001, p. 245) indicated that “The new relationships were essentially based on recognition of Iran’s needs and the limits of its power on the one hand, and the recognition by its Arab neighbors of Iran’s importance and the political change in Iran, and advisability of attempting to resolve their differences in friendly ways.” In other words, the both countries were aware of their mutual needs, so they moved towards further cooperation which benefited the two countries of Iran and Saudi Arabia in different ways.

### 3. Iranian Leaders and Confidence-Building

Confidence building by Iranian leaders during 1990s was one of the effective factor in the security cooperation because, as Taghizade (2011) stated, Persian Gulf countries has always had a viewpoint mixed of fear and respect towards Iran simultaneously. According to Barzegar (2008, p.50), “Since the early 1990s, Iranian foreign policy had been based on confidence building and *détente* in the region [...] which believes in close relations with the Arab world.” In fact, “Iran needed Saudi’s cooperation in the region<sup>2</sup>” and without building confidence between them noble security cooperation would not happen. In this regard, role of President Hashemi Rafsanjani and Khatami was very crucial.

#### 3.1 Confidence-Building of President Hashemi Rafsanjani

Although signing of security cooperation agreement took place in 2001 however some factors which had role in this regard dated back to the early of 1990s when Hashemi Rafsanjani took power as Iran’s president. In fact, in order to advance political and economic situations President Hashemi attempted to improve Iran’s relations with other countries in particular with neighbors which were devastated during 1980s. Therefore, he changed dominant discourse namely radical revolutionary discourse to conservative developmental (Tosegara) discourse in the framework of *détente* and cooperation with the neighbors<sup>3</sup>. Accordingly, Iran tried to diffuse tensions with its Arab neighbors by choosing neutrality position in the Second Persian Gulf in 1990-1991, also backed away from maintaining Shiites in southern Iraq against Saddam’s massacre, avoided supporting Bahrain’s Shiite insurgency in 1996, halted propaganda against the Gulf monarchs, and pursued a working relationship with the UAE over the disputed islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb (Banafsheh Keynoush, 2007). In addition, “Iran pulled back from effort to encourage Saudi Shiite unrest and terrorism, halted its attack on the Saudi royal family, and stopped supporting riots and protestors during the Hajj” (Cordesman, 2003, p.45). Further, during presidency of Hashemi Iran tried to be more flexible concerning Iran’s revolutionary thoughts. In other words, Hashemi attempted to make decisions on the basis of reality of the world and priority of national interests instead of emphasizing on ideological demands.

Despite the fact, it seems that Al-Khobar event, which led to death of nineteen US forces in Saudi Arabia, had very significant role in Iran and Saudi relations and process of confidence building. In other words, it was a “turning point” in their mutual relations. “The way that they solved the Al-Khobar issue was a turning point in Iran-Saudi relations<sup>4</sup>.” Indeed, the leaders of the both countries attempted to cooperate and solve the problem together. In other words, “After the incidence, which caused serious threat to Iran from US, Hashemi accepted that not to interfere in Saudi sovereignty because internal security is the most important thing for Saudi Arabia in that Saudi family or kingdom to be safe<sup>5</sup>.” “When Iran assured Riyadh about its internal security their relations improved gradually and they faced less problems about other issues<sup>6</sup>.” In total, according to Moghaddam (2006, p. 50):

Within the framework of confidence-building measures, the Iranian state signaled its acceptance of the legitimacy of the al-Saud leadership in Saudi Arabia and the importance of the country for regional stability. This change of perception, whilst not absolute and irreversible, moved beyond mere rhetoric and symbolism.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, February 14, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, November 2, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, February 15, 2010

<sup>5</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, February 12, 2010

<sup>6</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, October, 12, 2009

Although Hashemi's term of presidency ended in 1997, he played remarkable role in Iran and Saudi Arabia relations even during Khatami presidency. In that period, which is known as "new honeymoon" in relationship of the two countries, many high-level visits took place which were unprecedented since the revolution in 1979 and had great effect on Iranian-Saudi relations and cooperation. Among them, Hashemi's visit was very important. By Hashemi's visit, indeed, Iran could make Persian Gulf states confident pertaining to its intention in the region more and more. It took place when Iran and Saudi Arabia had already improved their mutual relations and this visit, with regard to Hashemi earlier positive steps towards Riyadh during his presidency, was considered as double assurance to Saudi rulers and strengthened their relations further. Ahmadi (2008, p.177) stated that Rafsanjani visit to Saudi Arabia: "Opened the way to cooperation and more serious attempts at overcoming distrust. These and many other visits, aimed at building confidence, led to some warming of relations". In general, role of Hashemi Rafsanjani and his confidence-building coincided with conducting serious negotiations to make it practical was one of the main reasons in security cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

### 3.2 President Khatami and Continuous of Confidence-Building

During first term of Khatami presidency; Iran achieved more prosperity because he could lessen suspicious of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, in particular Saudi Arabia, by confidence building which was effective in security cooperation later. Although the confidence building was a policy that had been initiated from Hashemi period, "Khatami himself believed in confidence building in Iran's relations with neighbors and endeavored to maintain it. In other words, he followed Hashemi way in this field<sup>7</sup>." Although he pursued the same policy as Hashemi, Khatami was more successful since possessed "cultural background", as Minister of the Islamic Guidance and Culture (1981-1992). So he was accepted by Saudi leaders much easier.

Following Khatami's victory, further, noticeable developments occurred in the foreign policy arena that influenced Iran and Saudi Arabia relations. For instance, like period of Hashemi, verbal attack and propaganda decreased, however more than before. In addition, Khatami by adopting *détente* as main principle of the foreign policy could soften Iran's relation with Persian Gulf courtiers in particular Saudi Arabia. In this regard Mafinezam & Mehrabi (2008, pp. 69-70) indicate that "Unlike 1980s that the both countries had worked at cross-purposes in the economic and political realms, the new *détente* that was achieved between them enabled them to focus on cooperation, instead of competition, in their own region and beyond." The *détente* was more successful in this period because at the same time Khatami, in contrast to closed internal atmosphere during president Hashemi, followed open atmosphere within the country namely political development. Put differently, Khatami's internal and external policies were the two sides of one coin and placed in one line. That is why, he was responded positively by the Arab countries and others including Europe as well.

In the direction of the *détente* policy, Iran's withdrawal from its primary revolutionary principles was also very effective in the security cooperation. In this regard, Mafinezam and Mehrabi (2008) stressed that the main reasons of reconsolidation and cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia were Iran's distancing from militant and revolutionary zeal and also they did not question Islamic legitimacy of the Saudi Kingdom any more like 1980s. By such actions, in fact, Khatami could "generate much greater trust in Iran's intentions among the Gulf States" (Kechichian, 2001, p. 14). His call to establish trust was "welcomed" by Iran's neighbors (Marschall, 2003) since Khatami was using his mild manner and eloquence to reassure Arab leaders that Iran is no longer bent on regional dominance (Jehl, 1999). In response to Iranian new approaches Jamil al-Hujailan, headed the GCC, said that:

The Gulf States were encouraged by new signs of possible thaw in relations with Iran: we welcome the new signs coming from Iran, which take a new trend in relations. We hope these signs are in harmony with our belief that our relations with Iran should be the strongest relations ... Iran is a big and strong neighbor ... Agreeing with Iran and deepening its conviction on the need to cooperate with the GCC is important to stability in the region (Marschall, 2003, p. 143).

Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, moreover, proclaimed that there are no limits to cooperation with Iran (Sheikh, 2003). "The high level of understanding and cooperation with Saudi Arabia could be described as the most important success for Iranian diplomacy in the last ten years" (Tehrani, 2003, p. 55). Indeed, Khatami "changed Iran's image in the world and provided a condition for our foreign policy that if we do not say the great powers, at least we should say middle power and small powers competed together in order to approach Iran<sup>8</sup>."

<sup>7</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, September 20, 2009

<sup>8</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, February 10, 2010

In general, Khatami's word and action provided the suitable atmosphere for confidence-building and improvement of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia which eventually contributed to security cooperation. For this, during the signing of security cooperation agreement Nayef, Saudi Interior Minister, said the agreement lies within the framework of confidence building, adding, "the region should enjoy full security and the agreement should benefit the whole region" (Haeri, 2001).

#### **4. Presence of Prince Abdullah in Saudi's Foreign Policy Arena**

Presence of Abdullah, Saudi Prince, in foreign policy arena since 1995-96 due to sickness of King Fahd was another factor that paved the way for security cooperation. Abdullah "understood that Saudi Arabia could not view Iran by glasses of 1980s. So, it needed some changes in its foreign policy"<sup>9</sup>. In other words, Saudi counterpart understood that "Iran and Saudi cooperation can advance the mutual interests and they can play main roles in the region together"<sup>10</sup>. Therefore Saudi leaders attempted to respond appropriately to Iran confidence building. For instance, "if he, [Abdullah] did not want the 8<sup>th</sup> Summits of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) held in Iran it would not take place"<sup>11</sup>. According to one of the officials:

Saudi permission for holding the 8<sup>th</sup> OIC summit in Iran was a great privilege (emtiza) since after that revolution we were not able to bring together all these summits in Tehran. Before that we asked to hold it but Saudi Arabia always rejected our requests. The presence of summits of Islamic countries was in fact a diplomatic ceremony which Saudi Arabia granted this advantage to us.

The way Saudis welcomed Iranian officials and also their invitations for Iranian leaders were another examples. In this regard, as a first time in Tehran-Riyadh relations after Islamic revolution Saudi Arabia invited an Iranian president, Khatami, to visit Saudi Arabia for the annual pilgrimage, as Cordesman, (2003) asserted, it was a further sign of improving relations between the two countries. Iranian spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, was also invited to Saudi Arabia in 2000. Although it did not take place, it was affirmative signal from Saudi side in Tehran-Riyadh relations. With regard to Khatami visit, Afrasiabi (2005) believes that the visit "paved the way to an agreement on low security cooperation with the Saudis." During this visit, when Crown Prince Abdullah was asked about possibility of military confrontation between the Kingdom and Iran, he said that:

This would be strange, since the two countries are linked by ties of religion, history, and heritage. He noted that the Kingdom and the other Gulf states are as anxious as Iran to settle all disputes through dialogue and peaceful means, and referred to the visit to Saudi Arabia by Iranian President Khatami as having a positive role in enhancing Saudi/Iranian relations (Asharq Al-Awsat 06/01/1999).

The statement revealed will of Saudi leader for having a better relationship with Iran. However, as Taghizade (2011) indicates, improvement of Iran and the Persian Gulf countries in second half of 1990s mainly was due to Iran's flexibility in this period.

#### **5. Iran's Relations with the West: Paving the Way for Security Cooperation**

The most important success of the first four years of Khatami's presidency was that he could improve Iran's position in the international scene, particularly with the European Union (EU) (Rakel, 2007). As a result, Khatami was the first Iranian president who was received by EU since the 1979 revolution. Khatami, indeed, tried to solve two main problems pertaining to the EU. First was Khomeini's life-threatening *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie and the Second was Mykonos case (Mousavian, 2008). Khatami also attempted to reconcile Iran's relations with United States (US). In this case, Khatami's foreign policy approach that stood on the dialogue among civilizations, mostly aimed United States. Khatami said "Nothing should prevent dialogue and understanding between two nations, especially between their scholars and thinkers (Alnahas, 2007, p. 201). In this case, Khatami was the first figures after the revolution who considered developing a formal US-Iranian relationship provided that US respected Iran's dignity and national interests (Alexander & Hoenig, 2007). In addition to welcoming Khatami's democratic reforms by US leaders, CNN interviewing with Khatami in January of 1988 was regarded as an initial positive step in relationship between Iran and US. In the interview Khatami declared "Iran and the United States should create a "crack in the wall of mistrust" by exchanging writers, scholars, artists and thinkers.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, February 15, 2010

<sup>10</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, September 20, 2009

<sup>11</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, October 12, 2009

...I believe all doors should now be open for such dialogue and understanding and the possibility for contact between Iranian and American citizens” (CNN, January 7, 1998). This new atmosphere played very important role in Iran’s relations with other countries such as Saudi Arabia since “their relations are under influence of Iran’s relationship with the West<sup>12</sup>.” In other words, “The Gulf countries do not have their own decision and foreign influence play grave role in their decision-making<sup>13</sup>.” Therefore, when Iran’s relation progressed with the West due to Iran’s new approach in foreign policy, which was mainly on the basis of Khatami’s *detente*, Persian Gulf countries especially Saudi Arabia saw less limitation to improve their relations. In this regard, one of the Iranian official states that “to make such agreement needs support of the Great Powers or at least absence of their opposition. Concerning Iran-Saudi security agreement, US ‘green line’” was certainly resulted from suitable international atmosphere which was created by Khatami administration<sup>14</sup>.” He added that:

With regard to US presence in the region and its traditional influence on Arab politicians especially Saudi’s, in that period improvement of our relations with the West affected on our relations with others countries especially Saudi Arabia which had close relations with US. Indeed, if Saudi leaders did not have the West permission they could not reach agreement on security cooperation with Iran<sup>15</sup>.

That is why; Saudi Arabia, as the biggest and the most powerful Arab country in the Persian Gulf region revised its relations with Iran and improved it up to security level. In sum, when Iran’s new approach in foreign policy, based on compromise and reconciliation with international community, was welcomed by the West in particular United States caused that Saudi’s leaders feel they could move further in their relations with Iran and sign security agreement since their decision-making was under foreign influence.

### **6. The Danger of Al-Qaeda and Taliban**

Iran and Saudi Arabia security cooperation was to some extent, as it was mentioned in the security agreement, influenced by phenomenons of Al-Qaeda and taking power of Taliban in the region. Al-Qaeda, initially, by leadership of Osama bin Ladin brought together Arabs to fight in Afghanistan against Soviet Union in late 1980s. However, during 1990s Al-Qaeda became US enemy by virtue of presence of the latter in the region. Al-Qaeda believes in overthrowing of "non-Islamic" regimes and expelling Westerners and non-Muslims from Muslim countries. “Al-Qaeda leaders claimed that United States was as imperialist force. Bin Laden’s goals was to ‘provoke and bait’ the United States into ‘bleeding wars’ throughout the Islamic world” (Riedel, 2007, p. 26). In this case, radical Taliban government that had some similarities with Al-Qaeda caused closeness of them. That is why, up to collapse of Taliban regime in the fall of 2001, Afghanistan had been a fertile breeding ground for Al-Qaeda and it was estimated, Al-Qaeda had trained up to 60,000 jihadists there (Riedel, 2007).

With regard to risk of Taliban, Hunter (2003) stated that “ The collapse of the Mohammad Najibullah-led Afghan government in April 1992, the onset of the Afghan Civil War, and the subsequent rise of the anti-Iran Taliban produced new challenges in the east” borders of Iran. In this case, Rohani, Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security, during the visiting which led to signing of security cooperation agreement, said that the Taliban-ruled Kabul has been turned into "a centre" for export of terrorism and narcotic drugs and suggested that Iran and Saudi Arabia launch joint campaign against terrorism and drug trafficking in the region. Prince Nayef also said that production and trafficking of drugs in that country is one of the most serious existing concerns at the regional and international levels (Haeri, 2001). However, Nayef refrained from criticizing the Taliban, a regime that is officially only recognized by Riyadh, the United Arab Emirates and Islamabad. In general, during Khatami presidency Iran began “security cooperation against radical and terrorist Islamic groups especially Al-Qaeda and Taliban. There was a common perception that these groups threatened interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia and can sabotage in regional security. This issue paved the ground for multilateral cooperation between the two sides<sup>16</sup>.

Despite the fact, it seems that on one hand Saudi Arabia was worry of friendship between Taliban and Iranian government, so it strived to make a distance between them by cooperation with Iran. “Fear of US and Saudi Arabia in which Taliban give some privileges to Iran in compensation of killing of Iranian diplomats in August 1998 and also incursion of Iranian borders, caused that they attempt to keep Taliban away from Iran<sup>17</sup>.”

<sup>12</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, 23 September, 2009

<sup>13</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, 14 September, 2009

<sup>14</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, 9 October, 2009

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, 22 September, 2009

<sup>17</sup> Interview with officials of Iran’s Foreign Ministry, 25 February, 2010

On the other hand, Saudi leaders were worry of growth of Al-Qaeda and believed that it was more dangerous than Shiite political movement<sup>18</sup>. The reason was that this movement had attempted to overthrow the government of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, nevertheless it failed (Riedel, 2007). So, Saudi leaders decided to compromise with Shiite opposition groups within the country and develop their relations with Iran in order to focus only on Al-Qaeda in viewpoint of security<sup>19</sup>. In other words, for controlling Al-Qaeda Saudi Arabia needed Iran's cooperation. Indeed, Saudi Arabia worked with Iran to fight Al-Qaeda terrorists and also find a solution to the Arab provocations (Banafsheh Keynoush, 2007). In brief, the danger of radical and terrorist movements and groups caused Iran and Saudi Arabia work together in the security field. The danger threatened the both countries even Saudi Arabia which once was founder and supporter of these groups. Therefore, Iran and Saudi Arabia moved towards cooperation against common danger in the region.

### **7. Termination of Iran-Iraq War and Cooling of Iran's Revolutionary Zeal**

In 1990s, unlike the previous decade, revolutionary thoughts and slogans were not intensive and dominant over Iranian foreign policy and also there was not any war between Iran and neighboring Arab countries that tense Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia. Therefore, with the absence of these problematic factors and instead emergence of more peaceful atmosphere, the ground was paved for their further cooperation. Indeed, collapsing of Pahlavi regime and victory of Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 gave rise to surfacing of a Shiite government in 1980s in the Persian Gulf region, which was totally controlled by Sunni Arab states. This matter inherently was a challenging issue due to differences between Shiite and Sunni thoughts. In addition, during 1980s, Iran's foreign policy was controlled mostly by ideology, in that the officials made decision based on religious and revolutionary standards. During this period, Iran's relation with Saudi Arabia was influenced by the wave of Iran Islamic revolution and Saudi support of Iraq in the war. Indeed, Iran had engaged in the "indirect war" with Saudi Arabia during the Iran-Iraq war since Saudi Arabia assisted Iraq economically, politically and militarily.

In this period, in general, there was a feeling of "insecurity" by Saudi leaders which rooted in the Islamic Shiite revolution and the war. Put differently, Saudi Arabia viewed Iran as source of threat for their stability and sovereignty and thought that there was a new regime in the region that its goal is complete change of political structure of the Kingdom. It means replacing Saudi Arabia by a regime like Iranian model. Their perception stemmed from, as Walt (1996) explained, Iranian revolutionaries' argument that the Arab masses should follow Iran and replace the US-backed sheikhdoms by Islamic governments. According to Alexander & Hoenig (2007, p. 25), "Khomeini wholeheartedly embraced the concept of exporting the revolution beyond Iran's borders, in which he consistently appealed to the Shiite communities in Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Bahrain to overthrow their Sunni-dominated governments and install theoretic Shiite regimes." For this, Iranian leaders helped them by rhetoric, financial support, and action (Rakel, 2007). This ideological environment that continued until last years of 1980s destroyed Iran relations with the Persian Gulf states in particular Saudi Arabia.

However, since 1990s, new atmosphere dominated in Iran's domestic and foreign policies and consequently in relationship of Iran and Saudi Arabia which was mainly rooted in elimination of the war and decreasing of primary revolutionary circumstances. In fact, in this decade, Iran neither had that radical revolutionary zeal nor was engaged in war with any regional Arab countries which could be considered as a threat for the Saudi Kingdom. Absence of these challenging elements provided the better circumstance for mending of earlier devastated relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In other words, in the second decade of the revolution these problematic factors that were vanished due to time circumstances paved the way for rapprochement of the two countries and their cooperation<sup>20</sup>. In this period, in addition to ending of the war, changing of Iranian foreign policy was very important. This new foreign policy, which has been known as pragmatic, persisted more on national interest and decision-making based on realities of international system instead of merely emphasizing on ideology. In fact, in this period, Iran's "religious idealism" replaced by pragmatism or "geopolitical realism." In other words, as Mafinezam & Mehrabi (2008) state, revolutionaries attempted to understand the reality of international system as well as Iran's position in the system in contrast to first decade of the revolution. The writers continue that the main reasons of reconsolidation and cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia were Iran's distancing from militant and revolutionary zeal and also they did not question Islamic legitimacy of the Saudi Kingdom any more like 1980s.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, 20 September, 2009

<sup>19</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, 23 September, 2009

<sup>20</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, February 10, 2010

Therefore, “in this period the Gulf countries felt secure and this feeling of mutual security paved the way for signing of security agreement between the two countries<sup>21</sup>.”

## 8. Conclusion

As discussed earlier, common interests of economic cooperation directed Iran and Saudi Arabia for more cooperation in other section such as security's. Despite the fact, Iran and Saudi Arabia security cooperation was also influenced by improvement of relations between Iran and the West. In fact, when Iran and the West relationship improved, Saudi Arabia did not see any restriction to increase its relations with Iran up to security level. Moreover, Iran's confidence building during 1990s played a key role because without existing of trust between the two countries no cooperation would happen. It was at the same time that Crown Prince Abdullah became main decision maker in foreign policy arena due to sickness of King Fahd. In this period, regional common threats like Al-Qaeda and Taliban were also another factor which approached the two countries. Although at first Saudi Arabia supported these terrorist group and radical government, later their danger for the Kingdom caused that Saudi rulers cooperate with Iran in this regard. Meanwhile, changing of environment in 1990s, that was more peaceful due to end of Iran-Iraq war and cooling of revolutionary zeal, helped Iran and Saudi Arabia for improvement of political relation as well as security cooperation. Indeed, the two states did not follow antagonistic policy in this decade unlike 1980s which played significant role in the cooperation.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, February 12, 2010