

Explaining Saudi Arabia-Israel Détente: Balance-of-Threat and Constructivism

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ABSTRACT

Israel's independence and the first Middle East war are the beginning of the long-term hostility between the Arab world and Israel. With the signing of "Camp David Accords" and "Oslo Accords", Israel's efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israel conflict gradually reduced its threat to the Arab world, thus starting the process Arab-Israel reconciliation. Since the outbreak of the "Arab Spring" in 2010, Iran's threat to Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries has continued to rise. At the same time, internal and external pressure has forced the Saudi royal family to gradually promote liberalization and secularization reform. According to balance-of-threat theory and constructivism theory, the rise of Iran's threat and the convergence of Saudi Arabia and Israel in the ideological field are the important reasons for the rapid easing of bilateral relations. However, in view of the possibility of Iran's offensive posture shrinking or Saudi Arabia's stopping reform, the sustainability of Saudi-Israel relations 'détente' is very fragile.

Keywords: *Détente, Saudi-Israel relations, Balance-of-threat, Constructivism, Arab Spring.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of the "Arab Spring" movement in 2010, the relationship between the Arab camp led by Saudi Arabia and its old enemy Israel has eased rapidly. In terms of diplomacy, in 2018, Benjamin Netanyahu made a surprise visit to Oman. In 2020, with Saudi Arabia's tacit consent, its important allies, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain will successively establish diplomatic relations with Israel. In April 2021, Saudi Foreign Minister publicly announced that normalization of relations with Israel is Saudi's long-term vision. In terms of security, the two sides have taken a series of concerted actions to deal with the threat from Iran since the Obama era and have formed a de facto informal alliance. However, in the past, nearly 70 years, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries have long pursued a hostile policy towards Israel, and Arab-Israeli relations have always been highly strained. Comparing today with the past, the détente in Arab-Israel relations is extremely unusual. Therefore, the emergence of this phenomenon

raises two questions for us: how to explain the détente in Arab-Israel relations? Is this détente sustainable?

To answer these questions, we need to examine the background of the détente in Arab-Israel relations, especially the political and social changes in the Middle East. First of all, in recent years, great changes have taken place in the distribution of power and the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East. The continued growth of Iran's power has made other countries in the region feel more and more threatened. Secondly, some Arab countries began to promote social reform. The secularization and liberalization of their domestic society have been continuously improved. And the distance from Western values has been shortened. Among the existing international political theories, Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory builds a bridge between threat and state's foreign behavior. In contrast, constructivist theory can analyze a country's foreign policy from the perspective of idea and culture [1]. Therefore, we choose the above two theories to explain the relationship between the threat from Iran, the change of cultures, and the détente in Arab-

Israel relations, and further analyze the sustainability of the détente.

As the leader of the Arab world and Sunni countries, Saudi Arabia can exert great influence on the foreign policies of other Arab countries, and its attitude towards Israel can largely represent the collective will of the whole Arab world. At the same time, as Saudi Arabia bears the responsibility of maintaining the security of the Arab world, it will be more sensitive to external threats. In addition, after Muhammad bin Salman came to power, the speed of Saudi social reform was significantly accelerated, and its idea and culture also changed to a certain extent. Therefore, Saudi Arabia can represent the whole Arab world. The change of its relations with Israel can be considered a representative case to study the détente in Arab-Israel relations.

The practical significance of this study is that it can help people deeply understand the root causes of the détente in Arab-Israel relations and the drastic changes in the Middle East situation and further predict the future of Arab-Israel relations. In addition, at the academic level, this paper attempts to prove that realism and constructivism are not contradictory. The combination of them is conducive to a more comprehensive interpretation of a country's foreign behavior. In other words, eclecticism in the field of international relations is reasonable and should be encouraged.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The conflict between Saudi Arabia and Israel began with the Zionist movement at the end of the 19th century. In August 1897, the first World Zionist Congress was held in Basel, Switzerland. At the conference, Jews announced that they would immigrate to Palestine and establish a "Jewish homeland" there. Since then, with the support of the British colonists and the American government, about 500,000 Jews have returned to Palestine from all over the world, seizing Palestinian Arab lands and driving them out of their homes [2]. The seeds of hatred have since been sown between the two nations.

As the guardian of the two holy cities of Islam and the leader of the Arab nation, Saudi Arabia firmly opposes the Zionist movement and its attempt to build an independent nation. According to Benjamin Sumner Welles, who was one of President Franklin Roosevelt's top diplomats, to prevent the United States from supporting the Zionists, Ibn Saud had written 'unpleasant' and 'childish' letters demanding an end to Jewish immigration to Palestine [3]. In February 1947, UN General Assembly resolution 181 (also known as the "two-state plan") was adopted. According to the resolution, Palestine will be divided into "Jewish state" and "Arab state" [4]. Undoubtedly, the resolution was opposed by the Arab world. Saudi Arabia and other countries were determined to eliminate the newly

established Israel by means of war, but they were defeated in the end. For more than 30 years since then, the two sides have always been hostile to each other and fought three wars in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Under the background of Arab Israeli confrontation, there is almost no communication between Saudi Arabia and Israel, and the relationship between the two countries is in a crisis of complete isolation and hostility. For instance, according to Feiler, Saudi Arabia went as far as to prohibit Jews from entering the kingdom or working in any foreign company based there [5]. In addition, in the three Arab-Israeli wars, Saudi Arabia was an important supporter of the Arab army. It provided a lot of material support and did not hesitate to destroy Saudi-US relations and led the oil embargo during the fourth Middle East war.

After decades of confrontation between Arabs and Israelis, it is difficult for anyone to drive each other into the sea, a reality that both sides have to admit. The two sides are burdened by war and need rest and recovery. In this context, Egyptian President Sadat visited Israel in November 1977 through United States intermediation and met with Prime Minister Begin. According to Jimmy Carter Library, in September 1978, Sadat and Begin met at Camp David at U. S. President Carter [6]. In March of the following year, the two countries signed a peace treaty that provided for the phased return of Israel to the Sinai Peninsula, ending the state of war, establishing diplomatic relations, and exchanging ambassadors. Egypt's separate peace with Israel without consultation with the Arab countries broke through the principles of non-contact with Israel and non-recognition of Israel established by the Arab summit and was strongly opposed by the Arab world. The Arab League decided to impose diplomatic and economic sanctions on Egypt and suspended its membership in the Arab League, which moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunisia. Arab countries have broken ties with Egypt. Islamic extremists also assassinated President Sadat in 1981.

Egypt's negotiations to normalize relations and recover the occupied Sinai are both a shock and an inspiration to the Arab world. In 1981, Saudi Arabia proposed a program for peace in the Middle East. From a new reality, the Arab States immediately accepted this principle. However, Israel's intransigent refusal to return the occupied Arab territories, the United States Government's policy of favoritism towards Israel had not changed, and Arab unilateral efforts had not received a positive response. To compel Israel to make concessions, the PLO has, since 1987, launched an anti-Israeli insurgency in the occupied territories, which has indeed put some pressure on Israel but has had little effect advancing the peace process.

After the Gulf War, the process of Arab-Israeli reconciliation was further accelerated. Following the Gulf crisis, the United States has been strongly criticized

for applying double standards to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. The struggle also led the United States to realize that relying solely on Israel has made it difficult to defend its strategic and oil interests in the Middle East. To that end, while declaring the end of the Gulf War, President Bush stressed that "the time has come to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict" and then sent the Secretary of State to the Middle East to promote the convening of the Middle East Peace Conference. Yet, the biggest resistance to US peace efforts comes precisely from the then-ruling Israeli right-wing Likud group. To force Israel to abide by the principle of peaceful settlement, Bush imposed the killer copper and suspended the \$10 billion loan guarantee, forcing Israel to agree to participate in the Middle East Peace Conference. In August 1993, under the mediation of Clinton, the PLO leader Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin reached an agreement on peace and Palestinian autonomy in Oslo, known as the "Oslo Accords". In September of the same year, the two sides formally signed the agreement on the front lawn of the White House [7]. The signing of the "Oslo Accords" is a great leap forward in the process of Arab-Israeli reconciliation. It establishes the basic principles for a political settlement of the Palestinian issue. Since then, although small-scale conflicts continue to occur between the PLO and Israel, Israel's relations with other Arab countries have always been peaceful, which has created conditions for the détente in bilateral relations.

3. DÉTENTE IN SAUDI-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Since the beginning of the new century, although the possibility of another outbreak of war between Arab and Israel has approached zero, the bilateral relations have not yet made a breakthrough. According to Wang Jin, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries have long regarded the realization of final peace between Palestine and Israel as a prerequisite for normalizing relations with Israel. In 2005, Saudi Arabia put forward the "Arab peace initiative" and expressed its willingness to establish diplomatic relations with Israel on the premise of achieving peace between Palestine and Israel. In 2014, when Kerry, then Secretary of state of the United States, organized the Palestine Israel peace talks, the two sides set "preconditions" for the talks with each other, and the talks ended in vain. Since then, there have been no peace talks between Palestine and Israel, and the road to peace is far away [8].

However, the "Arab Spring" outbreak in 2010 ushered in a great turn in Saudi-Israeli relations. In this massive democratic movement, the legitimacy of Arab monarchies was seriously challenged by the people. At the same time, Iran took advantage of the chaos to expand its sphere of influence in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and other countries. At the same time, Iran restarted its nuclear capacity-building process after the collapse of the Iran

nuclear agreement in 2018, making the "mushroom cloud" closer to the Middle East. In this context, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries have to seek the help of external forces to deal with the Iranian threat. Undoubtedly, Israel is the best choice.

The détente in Saudi-Israel relations is mainly reflected in diplomacy and security.

At the diplomatic level, 2020 is a "bumper year" for Israel's diplomacy. Since August 2020, Israel has established formal diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain in West Asia, Sudan and Morocco in Africa, Bhutan in South Asia, and the number of diplomatic countries has increased to nearly 170. Israel's diplomacy is winning. As Arab countries, the normalization of relations between UAE and Bahrain and Israel has caused an international public outcry. Although Saudi Arabia has not yet established diplomatic relations with Israel, the establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and its allies, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, must be approved by Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the normalization of relations between the UAE (or Bahrain) and Israel can symbolize the détente in Saudi-Israel relations to a great extent. According to ALJAZEERA, on April 3, 2021, Saudi foreign minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud publicly said that normalization of Saudi-Israel relations would "bring great benefits to the whole region". "Normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel will be very helpful in terms of economy, society, and security," he said. Faisal also said that normalization of relations with Israel has long been one of Saudi Arabia's visions [9]. Compared with Saudi Arabia's aggressive attitude towards Israel in the past decades, Saudi Arabia's diplomatic stance has sent a positive signal to Israel.

At the security level, Iran's strong rise is jointly recognized by Israel and Saudi Arabia as the biggest threat to national security. According to Wang, the two countries reach a strategic consensus and form a "security strategic alliance" to jointly contain Iran [10]. The "alliance" between the two countries is informal. Still, judging from the policies adopted by the two countries to deal with the rise of Iran, the "alliance" relationship has been formed. During the Obama administration, the two countries lobbied the U.S. Congress to dissuade the U.S. from signing a nuclear agreement with Iran. After Trump took office, the two countries jointly pushed the U.S. to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement; in Syria, the two countries firmly opposed Iran's expansion of power and demanded that Iran withdraw its troops from Syria. Muhammad has made it clear to the media that the Middle East is divided into two hostile camps: one is the Saudi led coalition of moderate countries, including Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Oman, and the other is Iran-led "evil triangle". Although Muhammad did not mention Israel, judging from the logic that the enemy of the enemy is a friend, Israel's

contentious relationship with Iran makes it a "natural" ally of the "moderate state alliance". In terms of the expression of the alliance between the two sides, Israel is more direct and open. According to TRT World, Netanyahu called Israel an "indispensable ally" of the Arab countries against Iran [11]. The reason why Saudi Arabia and Israel can "ally" to check and balance Iran lies not only in their common national security interests but also in their mutual recognition of each other as another powerful and resourceful country in the Middle East. Both Saudi Arabia and Israel realize that "alliance" is not enough to contain Iran. They should try to keep the United States in the Middle East, make it a strong backing to contain Iran and build an international strategic alliance. In Saudi Arabia's view, Israel has strength, but what is more important is the special relationship between Israel and the United States. Because of the Obama administration's policy, Saudi Arabia has lost confidence in the security guarantee provided by the United States but hopes that the United States can continue to stay in the Middle East. Only Israel can keep the United States in the Middle East. From the Obama administration's comprehensive contraction strategy to the Trump administration's selective contraction strategy, Israel is the only country that the United States cannot abandon in the Middle East. Israel is interested in Saudi Arabia's religious status in the Arab world, its economic strength, and its huge economic attraction to the United States. Both Saudi Arabia and Israel hope to use each other's relationship with the United States to build an international alliance with "Saudi Arabia-Israel-US" as the axis to check and balance Iran and ensure national security interests.

4. ANALYZING THREAT OF IRAN FROM BALANCE-OF-THREAT THEORY

The basic logic of Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory is that threat imbalance leads to the national alliance, which depends on the common threat they recognize. In other words, the purpose of a national alliance is not to check and balance the most powerful countries but to check and balance the most threatening countries to maintain their security. Walt believes that the degree of a country's threat is determined by four factors: comprehensive strength, geographical proximity, offensive ability, and intention. A country with strong comprehensive strength, geographical proximity, high offensive capability, and obvious aggressive intention is a greater threat, leading to the formation of alliances among countries in the region against it. If the most threatening country or group of countries is more dangerous than the second threat, it will lead to the imbalance of threats and then lead to alliances to restore the balance of threats.

In terms of comprehensive strength, Stephen Walt did not give this concept a clear indicator. Still, from the consensus of the academia of international relations,

economic level and military level are indisputable indicators to measure a country's comprehensive strength. According to the latest data from Trading Economics, Saudi Arabia's GDP is 792 billion US dollars, while Iran and Israel's GDP are only half of Saudi Arabia's [12]. However, Iran has 10 percent of the world's oil resources and the world's second-largest natural gas resource, ranking fourth in the world in oil production capacity and second in oil exports before U.S. sanctions. In other words, once the U.S. lifted sanctions against Iran, its economic level will leap forward due to the recovery of energy exports. In addition, according to World Population Review, the Saudi army has 251000 soldiers, while the Iranian army has a staggering 4.51 million [13]. According to Donovan et al., the IRGC has more than 130,000 troops, including 100,000 fighters, and can quickly assemble 20 infantry divisions and several special brigades on the battlefield [14]. More importantly, almost all of Saudi Arabia's military equipment depends on imports, and Iran not only can produce most of its conventional weapons and equipment but also can develop new weapons.

In terms of geographic proximity, according to DistanceFromTo, Saudi Arabia has no common border with Israel and Iran, and the airline distance between Saudi Arabia and both countries is about 1200km. However, given that Iran is very close to other countries in the Persian Gulf region, it is one of the countries guarding the Strait of Hormuz, an important channel for energy exports in the Arab world. Iran's geographical position is far more important than Israel's [15, 16].

In terms of offensive ability, the Middle East has seen the emergence of an unprecedentedly powerful "Arc of Shia". According to Open Democracy, the so-called "Arc of Shia" is that the Shiites of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon are directly connected and become a large sphere of influence. Iran's power is to the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and directly to the Mediterranean Sea [17]. Arc of Shia's greatest features are anti-American, anti-Semitic, and the biggest obstacle to U.S. hegemony in the Middle East. Compared with the highly armed Sunni Arab world, the Houthi Movement, Hezbollah and the Syrian government, and even Iraq's Shiite militias, which, despite their poor military equipment, are far more combative than an army of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Iran has established two fronts to attack the Arab world from the north and south, which greatly strengthens its offensive ability. Although Israel also has strong comprehensive strength, it is actually surrounded by the Arab world, which greatly limits its offensive ability.

In terms of intention, Iran is hostile to Saudi Arabia. According to Marcus, Iran is hostile to Saudi Arabia due to religious differences. Iran is a Shiite country [18], which means "inherent hatred" between Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia. Also, Saudi Arabia, as a monarchy, considered itself as the leader of the Muslim world. Still,

Iran's leadership position is challenged when 1979 Islamic revolution created a new type of state in the region. Especially after 2010, the Arab world fell into civil strife. Iran took the opportunity to copy the "Hezbollah model" everywhere in the Middle East, supporting Shiite agents and encouraging Shiite people in Arab countries to carry out anti-government movements. Compared with Iran's aggressiveness, Israel has no attempt to attack the Arab world because the Arab world has fully recognized its sovereignty and independence.

Generally speaking, there is little difference between Iran and Israel in geographical proximity, comprehensive strength, and offensive ability. However, the most important thing is that Israel has basically no intention to attack Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. In contrast, Iran has always maintained great hostility to the Arab world. Therefore, intention becomes a decisive variable in this analysis, making Iran the number one threat to Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries.

5. ANALYZING SAUDI ARABIA'S IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE FROM CONSTRUCTIVISM THEORY

Traditional constructivism holds that ideas and culture play a decisive role in international relations and greatly impact a country's foreign policy.

Saudi Arabia chose to ally itself with the US to win legitimacy for its regime in the international community. Saudi Arabia has received capital support and military protection from the United States as part of a potential oil market and an important voice in the Middle East. Admittedly, this is also a double-edged sword. The alliance with the United States has forced Saudi Arabia to accept a large amount of imported modernity, which is at odds with the conservative retro provisions of Shariah law. Conservatives and modernization seem to have exacerbated the Saudis' sense of disunity, which sets the stage for further problems. During his reign, King Faisal pursued a series of westernization and liberalization policies. This limited pluralism is progress, but it is also designed to curry favor with the West and deter Israel from gaining Western support. According to Zhang, the outbreak of the Arab spring lit the Saudis to decay, old-style discontent in the old society. In response to the split between conservatives and westernization, Saudi Arabia has adopted a series of measures to cater to people, including weakening the religious police authority, decision to lift its ban on women driving, the introduction of entertainment, tourism projects, and other measures to increase the free space [19]. This is fundamentally an effort to improve people's living standards. Still, in reality, we cannot deny that it is this compromise with western liberalism that has won support at home and abroad. According to Zhang, the social reforms driven by the Arab spring have adapted to the development aspirations

of young people and provided legitimacy for individual centralization [20]. Individual centralization attracts young people's support and guides and moderates social expectations through large-scale adjustment of domestic and foreign policies. In coping with the crisis, the regime has realized direct and extensive interaction with the society, thus promoting the transfer of the regime's support base. Here, we argue, public criticism is typical of the democratic behavior on which western capitalist free markets are built. In addition, the U.S. government is critical of human rights in adequations in Saudi Arabia, where the regime has a very negative history of arresting, imprisoning, and destroying its critics, activists, and opponents. According to China News, these include torture, detention, enforced disappearances, unfair trials, and harassment of human rights activists [21]. To address this problem, Salman's government introduced liberal reforms. As a result, Western governments and public opinion have played an irreplaceable role in the process of Saudi democratization.

The fierce struggle between the rise of popular power and the power monopoly of the Saudi family is the root of the political storm. Although the Saudi family initiated many political reform measures, Saudi family politics, parliamentary politics, and electoral politics are undoubtedly in the historical stage of elite politics. The Saudi family's policy adjustments and the political reforms promised by the government are obviously not enough to calm people's discontent. With the help of modern Islamism, folk religious politics emphasizes theocracy, popular participation, or Jihad violence, aiming to replace elite politics with popular politics. The pluralistic trend of the folk religious, political movement represents the initial sign of the development of civil society in Saudi Arabia. It is an indispensable condition for the democratization process. However, the illegal status of most folk religious, political movements leads to the lack of normal social channels for people to reflect their demands.

At the turn of the century, there is no doubt that the civil, religious-political movement in Saudi Arabia is rising, and the political influence of civil, religious-political factions is also expanding. "The awakened Sheikh" participated in the process of national political reform to a certain extent. The political petition of the liberalism movement left a deep impression on Saudi Arabia's political stage. The "Jihad" movement and the violence of "Al Daedalus in the Arabian Peninsula" brought great pressure to the rule of the Saudi family. However, due to the lack of a political platform accepted by many political parties and leaders, it is difficult for Saudi Arabia's religious, political factions to form a long-term stable political alliance. "Awakening Sheikh" and "Islam liberalism" movements have remained in the development stage of elite politics for a long time, and their social foundation is relatively weak. In addition, there is an inseparable relationship between the middle

class and the Saudi family. The middle class has obvious weaknesses and compromises in challenging the Saudi family power monopoly and promoting the democratization process. The "mujaheddin" movement and "Al Daedalus in the Arabian Peninsula" are mainly related to the transnational network. Their supporters in Saudi Arabia are limited to the mujahideen returning from Afghanistan and the urban poor with radical religious and political ideology. To a certain extent, they deviated from the mainstream direction of Saudi Arabia's social development and failed to get wide support from the Saudi people. The historical movement of modernization at the political level shows the decline of traditional political stability and the gradual establishment of modern political stability. The alternation of political stability and political turbulence is an inevitable historical phenomenon in the process of national modernization. Political petition and political violence are both manifestations of political participation. When autocratic politics oppress the people's political petition, it becomes political violence. Political violence is an important way to expand political mobilization in a special political environment. The goal of political violence is to express the will of the people and realize political participation. The diversified development path of modern Islamism in Saudi Arabia, from moderate to radical, is a special manifestation of the expansion of people's political participation.

Generally speaking, in response to the growing demands of domestic reform and the pressure from the United States and other western countries, Saudi Arabia and other Arab monarchies gradually promote social reform to consolidate their political legitimacy and win the support of the West. According to Ma Xiaolin, after Saudi Crown Prince Salman junior took power, he carried out a series of drastic reform measures. First, the Saudi government has issued "Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030" to promote economic diversification reform and prepare to build a special zone for women's employment. Second, break through the Wahhabi tradition, strictly restrict the development of religious forces, and promote the reform of religious moderation. Thirdly, Riyadh actively promotes multi culture and promotes the process of social secularization [22]. There is no doubt that implementing these reform measures will greatly promote Saudi society towards the direction of liberalization and secularization. If this process continues, Saudi politics will gradually move towards democratization. In other words, Saudi Arabia's ideas and culture will be more and more similar to Israel's democratic politics. According to constructivism, the convergence of ideas and cultures will gradually establish strategic mutual trust between Saudi Arabia and Israel, thus laying a cognitive foundation for the development of bilateral relations.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, history, reality, and theory are combined to comprehensively analyze the background, causes, and prospects of the détente. In the first part, our analysis fully shows that the Palestinian issue is the biggest obstacle to the Arab-Israeli reconciliation process, and the outbreak of three Middle East wars has made Israel the biggest threat to the Arab world. In the second part, we introduce the rapid easing in Saudi-Israel relations during recent years and raise a question: what are the reasons for the détente in Saudi-Israel relations? In the third and fourth parts, we apply Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory and constructivism theory to explain the détente in Saudi-Israel relations and deduce the core point of this paper: the rapid easing of Saudi-Israel relations is due to the rise of the Iranian threat and the convergence of Saudi-Israel in the field of ideology.

Based on the analysis of the reasons for the détente in Saudi-Israeli relations, we believe that the further development of bilateral relations is fragile. On the one hand, Iran's threat to the Arab world will rapidly decline once Iran's foreign policy becomes moderate, no longer hostile to the Arab world, and stops its nuclear efforts. On the other hand, social reform maybe just a temporary measure taken by the Saudi royal family to relieve internal and external pressure. Classical realists clearly point out that the ongoing pursuit of power is rooted in human nature. If social reform ultimately threatens the monarchy, the Saudi king is likely to stop the process immediately. In other words, if Iran's threat drops or Saudi Arabia's social reform is interrupted, détente in Saudi-Israel relations will quickly lose momentum and even become a "posthumous son".

Unavoidably, there are still many limitations in our analysis. Firstly, the balance-of-threat theory is essentially a theory used to explain the alliance behavior among countries, while the détente in Saudi-Israel relations is not an alliance process. Secondly, in measuring Iran's comprehensive strength, we only choose two indicators, which makes the evaluation results less convincing. Finally, the national conditions of each Arab country are different. We choose a case to represent the whole Arab world, which may lead to inaccurate conclusions.

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