

## **Geopolitical Feasibility of the Second Wave of Arab Revolutions in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is going to assess the feasibility of the second wave of Arab revolutions in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. A decade after the beginning of the Arab revolutions, the question of the possibility of another wave of revolutions, especially in the Arabian Peninsula, is a serious question. Another question is what changes will take place in the geopolitics of the region in the event of the second wave of the Arab revolutions in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula? These questions are difficult to answer, but it is clear that the countries of the peninsula cannot be categorized as one. Transition in the global geopolitical structure, internal variables affecting the geopolitics of these countries, their different positions for world powers, the high volume of trade between the two countries with economic poles, the position of non-indigenous forces in these countries on the one hand and the intervention of foreign forces in the region and trans-regional power shifts on the other hand are all variables that determine the possibility or impossibility of revolution in these countries. Given these variables, the hypothetical answer is that revolution is unlikely in some Arabian Peninsula countries, but possible in others, including Saudi Arabia. In order to test the hypothetical answer, in this article we examine the variables that encourage and deter the revolution in Saudi Arabia and the UAE and evaluate the impact of each of them on geopolitical changes.

**Keywords:** Arab Revolutions, Social Divide, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Arabian Peninsula.

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## **1. Introduction**

Regional conditions, changing roles of actors, the non-permanence of friendships and enmities, and the occurrence of wild cards have caused over time; The geopolitics of the region is constantly changing. Among these, several variables play a decisive role. The outbreak of the Arab revolutions and the change of political systems, although not necessarily leading to the achievement of public will, changed the geostrategic and geo-economics approach of the countries. Concerns of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates about declining US support for regional allies have shifted their strategic approach to Washington and their slow movement toward China to balance foreign policy, this issue led to strategic agreements between China and the two countries. Despite these circumstances, a decade after the Arab revolutions, the debate over the possibility of a revolution and the resulting geopolitical changes has become a contentious one. Basically, the very concept of "Arab revolutions" is a holistic one, free from the classification and categorization of countries; However, the same future cannot be considered for these countries.

The Arab countries, and in particular the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, have different structures and textures. Although many similarities have led to a general overview of these countries, a closer look shows that a similar fate in geopolitical, political, social and ideological terms cannot be considered for them. The occurrence or non-occurrence of the revolution cannot be overstated. In addition to the issue of objectivity in the construction and context of these societies, the way these countries look at change can also be different. In other words, the failure of these revolutions in the Arab countries has become a negative experience that has cast doubt on other countries, especially the relatively prosperous Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, as the revolutions of countries such as Libya, Syria and Yemen eventually turned violent (Fraihat and et al,2020:331).

Demographic debate, along with other levels, has become an important issue. A large part of the structure and social body of the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf is made up of foreign forces who are basically reluctant to engage in political change, as any instability in these countries will make economic conditions vulnerable for immigrants. This experience and the feeling of economic insecurity of the expatriates occurred temporarily in Qatar after the severance of relations with Saudi Arabia and the fear of war,

which also led to the concern of the Qatari rulers (Gengler,2020:242). On the other hand, this population has somehow eliminated the homogeneity of the population and divided it into two categories: the indigenous population of the peninsula and the non-indigenous population.

Currently, the discussion of the revolution in Yemen is out of the question, because this country has both experienced a revolution and is engaged in a devastating war, the consequences of which will last for a long time. The situation in Bahrain is also a function of geopolitical conditions; In other words, if there is a revolution in Bahrain where Saudi Arabia has been weakened, the geography of Bahrain is such that it has increased the possibility of Saudi domination of this country, especially after the opening of the King Fahd Bridge between the two countries. Kuwait is one of the few countries in the peninsula that has established more optimized political conditions, which has canalized outputs of the protest towards participation. The UAE and Qatar, with a non-indigenous population of nearly 90 percent, have little chance of seeing these developments.

On the other hand, due to economic interdependence with many countries in the world, these countries are in a situation where the interest of other countries is in maintaining the stability of these two countries. In many Gulf countries, good governance has a significant relationship with the ability to attract foreign direct investment (Siriopoulos and et al,2021:8). Reciprocal economic interaction with them is also an advantage for other countries, even if there is a general tendency to launch a revolution, the structure of world power will hardly tolerate such developments .

the position of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on the China's Belt and Road Initiative has given them high geopolitical value, and encouraging China to establish a stable economic relationship with These countries. The demographic situation of the countries in the region is also an important variable to influence the geopolitics of these countries. In comparison, Saudi Arabia has a much larger indigenous population and is therefore more at risk. The economic transition from an oil economy to a post-oil economy is also an important issue. Its success will lead to growing expectations in Saudi Arabia, and its failure will reduce the legitimacy of the government. Muhammad bin Salman sought to link his political legitimacy to the success of the 2030 vision.

According to this introduction, the present study seeks to first have a combined approach to theories of revolution. In the second step, the

research methodology is presented, and then the drivers that prevent and encourage the revolution in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will be mentioned.

## **2. Methodology**

The research method of this article is based on a descriptive-analytical approach based on documents. In fact, this study attempts to study the documents related to the 2011 Arab revolutions and to adapt them to the current situation in the Arabian Peninsula, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and to measure its impact on geopolitics.

## **3. Conceptual Framework: A Hybrid Approach to Revolutionary Theories**

The theories of revolution, as theories that were considered after the developments, have largely experienced different conditions. Many of these theories involve different levels, ranging from internal variables to geopolitical and structural variables. On this basis, it can be said that the theories of the revolution have come a long way, so we can see different generations of theories of the revolution. The first generation of revolutionary theories were descriptive in nature. The second generation of revolutionary theories studied the revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, influenced by the modernization paradigm and the third generation has a structural nature that was introduced in the 1970s by Tilly and Skocpol and Finally, the revolutions of the 1970s, and especially the Islamic Revolution of Iran, developed the fourth generation of revolutionary theories (Foran, 1993:3-27). This generation of theories, under the influence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, took an immaterial approach and instead of considering the revolution as a one-factor phenomenon, it took a multi-factor approach to them (Dehghani firouzabadi and Mohseni,2013:94).

Despite these approaches, post-2011 revolutionary theories also appear to have a structural approach that mainly evaluates immaterial variables. Prior to this, of course, John Foran separated the revolution in the Third World from the revolution in the developed world. In his view, four conditions must be met for a revolution to take place in the Third World. The first condition is dependent economic development, which is itself a product of the social structural conditions of the Third World. The other three conditions are the political culture of opposition and resistance, the internal

economic crisis and the evolvment of the world order. Meanwhile, because political and economic dissatisfaction is inseparable from their cultural, value and ideological context, it has a decisive role in the revolution (Foran, 1992:232).

Some theorists, such as Johnson, Smelser, Jessup, and Hart, have used the Talcott Parsons sociological framework in their analyzes. Accordingly, they saw societies as systems whose proper functioning depended on maintaining a balance in the general flow of demand and resources between the system and its environment, as well as between the various political, economic, social, and cultural subsystems that make up the social system. Therefore, any kind of turmoil that damages the balance of demand flows and resources in a society, also puts that society in a state of imbalance or malfunction and makes it prone to revolution. In these analyzes for the malfunctioning situation; There are different sources such as the unbalanced effect of technology and modernization on the demand and resources of different sub-systems or changes of external origin in values such as the growth of a new religion or ideology, changes in the distribution of power among the elites of different sub-systems (in Jasup's view) or that only asynchronous transformations in different subsystems are considered. Nevertheless, the theorists of this approach generally believe that the key and fundamental factor for the emergence of a revolutionary situation is a severe imbalance in society. Therefore, the purpose of their analysis was to identify and describe events that create or affect systemic pressures (Goldstone,1980:425).

Nevertheless; It seems that a hybrid approach to revolutions, which includes the third generation of the revolution and includes structural factors, and the fourth generation of the revolution, which includes immaterial variables such as the historical perception of the revolution and the outcome of previous revolutions, can be the best approach. This is also true of the Arabian Peninsula, because of the complexity of societies in these countries with a large foreign population and their prominent geopolitical position, it is not possible to study the possibility of a revolution in these countries' univariate. In fact, a combination of structural, social, economic and political variables must be considered, which includes a wide range from demographic composition, geopolitical developments to the expectations and ideology of the respective countries; The drivers that can both provoke and encourage the revolution and the drivers that can become an obstacle to the revolution in these countries. These drivers are all taking on new

meaning in the form of an understanding of the transition in the global geopolitical structure and the decline of the United States.

#### **4. Findings**

The findings of the article are classified into two general sections: deterrents of revolution and motivators of revolution. Each of these sections includes several drivers, according to which differentiate the probability of occurrence or non-occurrence of revolution in countries. The following will first point out the deterrent drivers of the revolution.

##### **4-1 .Deterrent Drivers in the Occurrence of Revolution**

Perhaps the most important answer that can be received from the experts of the Arabian Peninsula regarding the question of the occurrence or non-occurrence of the revolution in these countries is the negative answer. However, countries like Saudi Arabia have relatively different conditions. In general, it seems that the reasons for the absence of the revolution; There are more convincing reasons than the reasons for the revolution in these countries. Accordingly, the reasons for the absence of revolution in these countries will be discussed first.

##### **4-1-1. The Geopolitical Importance of Saudi Arabia and the UAE for the Great Powers**

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are among the most important countries for global powers due to their position in the energy market and global trade, as well as access to sensitive geopolitics such as the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea. In general, a prominent geostrategic position is likely to affect the number of states that play a role in the crisis. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have such a situation (Daheshyar and Aminabadi,2022:230). The importance of these actors increased with the beginning of the new millennium and the increasing role of the economy in global relations. In proportion to the importance of the world economy and trade, both during the oil economy and during the transition, the importance of these two actors also increased (Pashapoor,2018:181). As the largest country in West Asia, Saudi Arabia not only has the world's largest onshore oil field (Al-Ghawar), but also the world's largest offshore oil field (Al-Safaniyah). This privilege, along with political relations with the center of world power, has increased Saudi deterrence (Bernard Cohen,2008:678-679).

According to the geopolitical approach, competition is inevitable in the first stage and continues in the second (Abdi, Farajirad and Ghorbaninejad, 2020: 9). US-Soviet rivalry also followed this rule during the Cold War. the United States sought to expand its sphere of influence in Saudi Arabia, which historically encouraged the United States to forge a strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia following the threat of Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf during the Cold War (Zuhura,2011:3-8). By redefining the threat from the United States, Saudi Arabia maintained its position in the structure of the American order. With the emergence of China as the future world power and the geopolitical importance of Saudi Arabia as the junction of Asia and Africa, the country found one of the most important positions in China's Belt and Road Initiative. The same is true for the UAE, as the UAE is one of the few countries which China has signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with (Fulton,2019:3). This important variable has caused the poles of world power, especially the United States and China, to seek to maintain the current stability and political structure of the two countries. Following this goal, political support for the Saudi and Emirati governments is an important deterrent driver to the revolution.

#### **4-1-2. Negative Historical Picture of Political and Geopolitical Changes**

The historical picture of the events of 2011 and its negative consequences, such as the outbreak of civil wars, the countries on the verge of collapse and disintegration, the failure to achieve the desired aspirations and the ambiguity in the future after the revolution, reduced the incentive for radical change. This showed that immaterial variables can be both "encouraging to the revolution" and "preventing the revolution". The developments of 2011 were the result of a combination of economic and social and political and geopolitical problems, and in addition, a wide gap was created between the real expectations and capabilities of the people and the government (Dalacoura,2012:67). In these countries, the path of revolution did not go as expected.

Egypt returned to past way after a period of crisis, Tunisia is still in crisis, Libya is embroiled in a civil war and has hosted numerous regional and trans-regional actors, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, two countries that support General Haftar and confront the revolutionary current in order to bring a government like Egypt back to power in Libya. For these two countries, the suppression of political Islam movements is important (Bakir,2020:160). Syria and Yemen also became embroiled in a

deep war and crisis, and the Bahraini revolution was severely suppressed by the intervention of the Saudi government.

The outcome of the 2011 revolutions was the despair of a favorable change. This public perception has become one of the most important deterrents to the revolution in these countries. On the other hand, governments that did not have a democratic approach were replaced by governments that, after a short time, faced the same problem that the return of Egypt to the government of Hosni Mubarak and the elimination of political movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood, can be considered in this regard. A similar trend continued in Tunisia, leading to a decline in the power of political Islamists (Lazreg,2021:3). Most of the centralist political systems in this region, which includes the political systems of the peninsula; do not have the ability to manage the democratization process in such a way that eventually the whole system survives in a reformed way (Hafezian,2009: 66-69). Given this inability, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates prefer to pursue unbalanced development based on economic and social development while controlling political conditions.

From the point of view of the people of the peninsula countries, the revolution does not mean the desired change of conditions, but it means the loss of these relative conditions. Accordingly, the state media of the countries in the region also constantly refer to the crises caused by the revolution in these countries (Khan and et al,2020:45). To a large extent, this issue has also led the minds of the public to believe that, at least in the current situation, there is no need for fundamental changes at the political level. The peninsula governments have also invested heavily to prevent this from happening. Part of these policies is in the field of infrastructure and addressing some of the concerns of society, and part is aimed at secularizing society. The most important efforts are religious reform, greater centralism of the government and reducing the consequences of political, economic and social changes, and ultimately maintaining the cohesion of the regimes (Farouk and Brown,2021:7-9).

From the point of view of the governments of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, a secular society can fight for the desirable demands of a liberal democracy, but in a non-secular society, both worldly and spiritual demands can be put on the agenda. Thus, it is easier to face and meet the needs of secular

societies than a religious society, because with economic indicators, such a society can be persuaded and through economic prosperity, they can be dissuaded from widespread actions against the government. However, in the current situation, these deterrent propellants have a higher persuasive power. In this direction, the media, on the one hand, and economic reform programs instead of political reforms, on the other hand, have become the most important tools of this persuasion.

#### **4-1-3. Lack of a Common Strategy for Change**

Beside a negative historical memory associated with change, the lack of a common strategy by political opponents is one of the drivers that acts as a deterrent. In addition to depicting an uncertain future, this variable prioritizes the negative nature of the revolution over its positive one. In other words, the opposition groups can agree on not wanting to, but they disagree on what political system and what kind of government is desirable. This was also the case with the 2011 revolutions, so that even in some cases, such as Libya, the gender gap in the tendency to revolution was clearly visible (Barakat and Fakhri, 2021:11). This difference increases the schism in revolutionary groups and increases the dominance of the political system over potential alternatives.

Many people in the peninsula see the goal of change as achieving prosperity and well-being. This is if at least in some of these countries such conditions are provided. There is a lack of consensus among the political oppositions in these countries, ranging from ideological groups to Western technocrats and the educated, who naturally do not agree on the future of the political structure. This difference has led to minimal convergence. World trends are on a path that is "linking the economy to political legitimacy." In other words, public opinion space is one in which the definition of an efficient government is based on economic indicators such as GDP, life expectancy, purchasing power and overall level of economic well-being, and in short, "economic satisfaction" is a variable considered important (Barakat and Fakhri, 2021:5).

Accordingly, it seems in the future, countries that will pursue the path of political legitimacy through political propaganda rather than economic efficiency will be mainly challenged. Aware of this, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar started to make the government more efficient based on economic variables earlier than Saudi Arabia, and now Saudi Arabia is trying to follow such a path, which is why Bin Salman is linking his political

legitimacy to the economic transition. However, according to Davis' theory about increasing the level of expectations and the government's inability to meet it, the differences are not so great as to bridge the gap between all political groups against the government (Tiruneh,2014:2).

The UAE trend has become a model for other countries, but the truth is that Saudi Arabia has more specific and complex conditions. However, the simultaneous economic transition in Saudi Arabia and social reforms, along with economic support mechanisms under King Abdullah during the 2011 developments, somehow delayed the notion of a revolution and extended the hope of improving the situation. On the other hand, the lack of party activity in the countries of the Peninsula, especially in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has led to a lack of clear idea of how activities are organized against the ruling structure. In addition, structural pressure eliminates possible links between "opposition islands."

#### **4-1-4. Geoeconomics Links with Countries in the Region Through Expatriates**

Today, with the permeability of national sovereignty, due to the expansion of international relations and the formation of new patterns of governance between developed or developing countries, the distinction between inside and outside has been severely affected and its semantic boundaries are changing (Mossalanejad,2021:5). Based on this, one of the most important deterrents to the revolution is the geoeconomics link between the countries of the region with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This link covers a wide range of economic relations, especially in the field of energy, to labor income. The economic conditions of Saudi Arabia and the UAE have made these countries an attractive destination for foreign labor and have created a large community of foreign labor in these countries. The extent of the non-indigenous population can be both opportunistic and threatening. In other words, it is an opportunity to maintain the system in that it reduces the social cohesion of indigenous forces in the face of the ruling structure, but it becomes a serious threat if a large community of foreigners is formed.

In the past, the foreign labor force was largely unskilled, but this has changed over time, especially in the last decade. Under the long-term plan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have sought to attract regional elites by increasing the attractiveness of regional markets, both in terms of economics and services. The UAE is a leader in this field (thenationalnews,

2021). Nevertheless, a large part of the population of these countries is still unskilled workers. The existence of these workers has always made stability a priority over instability and the economy over politics. In other words, a large part of society is practically reluctant to engage in political change because they seek to improve the economic situation of their families in poorer countries, mainly Syria, India, Pakistan, Egypt and South Asia (Globalmediainsight,2021). Pakistani labor income from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is about \$ 4.5 billion and \$ 3.47 billion a year, respectively. For Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and for Indians the UAE is the first destination (Latif,2021). On the one hand, this issue has led countries such as India and Pakistan to pay attention to the security of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and on the other hand, if there are any changes to be made, it is in the minority population, which is easier to control and manage.

So far, the peninsula countries have been able to use this threat as an opportunity. The two countries should use the ethnic and religious differences of immigrants as the most important factor of social incoherence and the variable that prevents unity against the ruling structure. This is despite the fact that in many cases the governments in the Middle East have not managed ethnic and religious conflicts properly. This population was 80% in Qatar and the UAE and about 30% in Saudi Arabia, which has been changing over time. The "Saudization" plan and the replacement of foreign workers with domestic ones is both an opportunity for the Saudi government in reducing unemployment and increasing satisfaction, and a threat in assimilating a pluralistic social structure and increasing the risk of cohesion against the structure. Foreign population decline has also accelerated with the outbreak of the corona pandemic (Internationalinvestment,2020). This trend, of course, is different for Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Saudi Arabia has made it a priority to increase job opportunities for Saudis, which will naturally lead to a reduction in the non-Saudi population in the long run, while the United Arab Emirates seeks to attract regional elites with long-term plans and appropriate services. Although Qatar enjoys a large foreign population, like the UAE, it does not yet have a comprehensive plan for the future of foreign forces. Despite all this, the large foreign population of these countries is still a variable that can be considered as a deterrent to the revolution in these countries.

**4-1-5. Replacing the Lack of Political Development with Economic and Social Development**

The issue of "participation" is considered as one of the important issues in the field of balanced development and sustainable development, which is based on human resources (Lacroix,2016:148). However, the discussion of participation in its political sense is not a priority for many peninsula countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and this statement does not mean that there is no desire for political participation. The majority of foreign populations in these countries are more interested in sustainable economic income than in political participation. The UAE and Qatar are leading in this direction, and the government of Bin Salman is following the two countries with social reforms and economic diversification, one of the most important parts of which is the development of the private sector and the use of females in Labor market (Al Naimi, 2021:8).

Increasing attention to women's society will have two major benefits for these countries, first, it will greatly increase the hope of changing the situation and reducing the risk of revolution. Second, the use of new forces in the economy can shorten the path of economic development and increase public welfare, which in turn reduces dissatisfaction. The UAE is trying to develop a kind of "national branding" based on increasing soft power in order to gain public satisfaction; The soft power that, in Joseph Nye's words, "is the ability to get what you want through attraction, not coercion" (Zeineddine,2017:213).

However, the flow of social change in the direction of economic programs in countries with less traditional context is accelerating, but in Saudi Arabia has been slower because the traditional part of society has not yet been able to align itself with social reforms. This issue becomes even more important when, in addition to the cultural and social divide, the transition period also leads to an economic divide. Economic transition, if not proceeded cautiously, can lead to dissatisfaction of at least a large part of traditional society and lead to the formation of economic, social and political crises (Fattouh,2021:8). In the UAE and Qatar, this issue is not given much attention because the social context experiences different conditions and the large foreign population is mainly receptive to social change, especially since the UAE is known as a tourist country where different cultures intersect. It has raised public tolerance for social change. In the United Arab

Emirates, on the other hand, the economic gap is not significant, at least in the indigenous population. The sum of these conditions can be an important variable in social deterrence to move towards revolution.

In addition to the deterrent drivers of the revolution, which seem to have a heavy weight in the calculations, there are also drivers that can accelerate the process of revolution in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are described in more detail below.

#### **4-2. The Accelerators of the Revolution**

In addition to the impulses that hinder the advance of the revolution; There are also some drivers that can accelerate the revolution. Nevertheless, such a set of drivers is truer of Saudi Arabia than the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar. These drivers will be discussed in more detail below.

##### **4-2-1. Economic Shocks and Damage to the Geoeconomics Position**

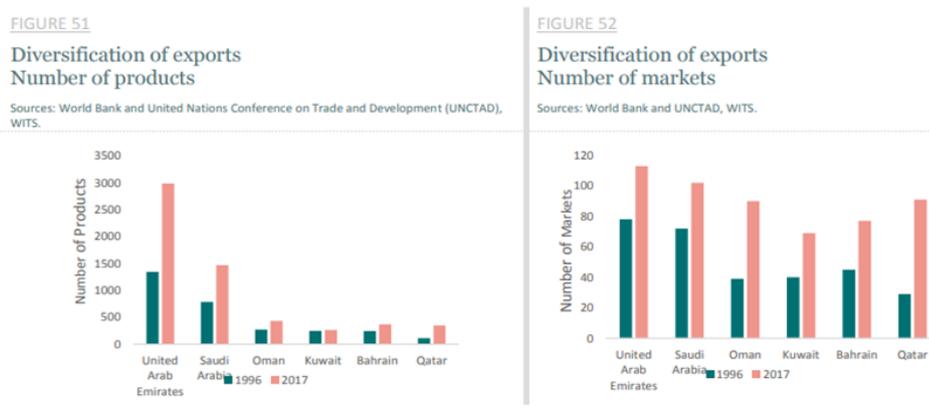
Economic shocks are the wild cards of the international economy that have a structural impact on the economies of the world. These shocks can have many internal and external consequences. Changing the economic position of countries in the international economy or domestic dissatisfaction and political protests; These are the most important consequences. Before exploration of oil, Saudi Arabia was an arid land with marginal territory in geopolitical equations. Exploration of oil in Saudi Arabia has changed geopolitical centrality in economic sub-network in favor of this country (Afzali and et al,2021:251). At present, 63.8% of Saudi Arabia's exports are crude oil, which, along with other petrochemical products, are the country's highest exports. These exports led to economic ties with China with 20.1 percent of imports, India with 11 percent, Japan with 10.8 percent and the United States with 5.37 percent. These statistics indicate the creation of an economic neural network between Saudi Arabia and the world economic and political powers. The UAE is in a similar situation. Crude oil accounts for 23.1 percent of the country's total exports, with India being the top export destination with 10.8 percent (The Observatory of Economic Complexity,2021). These economic variables indicate a complex economic network that benefits the stability of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, increasing economic interdependence can also mean being more vulnerable to economic shocks.

In addition to external influence, in the domestic sphere, it can be said that

the economy of each country is one of the most important variables that are considered in the study of its developments. Reducing social gaps and eradicating poverty is one of the most important goals of a country on the path to achieving sustainable economic development; The goal of which the most important tools are efficient government and economic stability. In general, a country's per capita income can be the best option to assess the well-being of individuals in a society, this variable in many ways cannot be a good indicator of individual well-being, but it is still considered the best evaluation criteria. Factors such as the amount of consumer goods, education, health services and welfare facilities are some of the factors that have reflected the economic situation of a country (Dtt,2001:204).

With this explanation, it can be said that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, by moving towards economic stability, have been able to gain a degree of political legitimacy by increasing economic efficiency. Part of the economic stability program of these countries is done in the form of "economic diversification", which to a large extent keeps the two countries away from fluctuations and shocks of the oil economy. The chart below shows that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are among the top regions in terms of product and market diversification.

**Figure (1): Diversification of UAE and Saudi Arabia Exports by Commodity and Market**



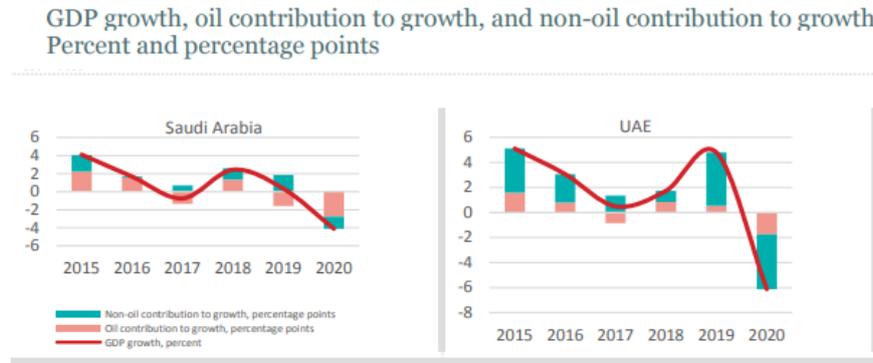
(Source: World Bank Group,2021:43)

The political atmosphere in these countries is closed and political activity is very limited. If the economy, as the most important stabilizing and legitimizing variable, suffers, then it can be said that the possibility of a political crisis also increases. This trend is clearly evident in the vision 2030 and the economic transition of Muhammad bin Salman, so gaining legitimacy in this way to eliminate rivals such as Muhammad bin Nayef and gain public confidence in the smooth transition of power from King Salman to the Crown Prince could be a dimension of the issue.

The UAE has sought to shift economic responsibility to the global economy by diversifying its economy and turning it into an international port. Any economic shock to the global economy, although it can affect the UAE as well, does not directly threaten the UAE government, and secondly, due to its interdependence with many countries, they try to keep the UAE in a state of economic and political stability.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is going through a different phase. The country is experiencing an economic transition and Muhammad bin Salman has directly taken responsibility for this transition (Bianco,2018:9). As much as this could be an opportunity for bin Salman, it will be just as threatening, as economic shocks such as the failure to sell shares in Aramco and the Pandemic Corona could make economic plans vulnerable and ultimately increase public protests against bin Salman. Below the impact of the Corona pandemic as an economic shock can be seen on the economies of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

**Figure (2): Impact of Corona Pandemic Shock on GDP, Oil and Non-Oil Economy Share in Development**



(Source: World Bank Group,2021:43)

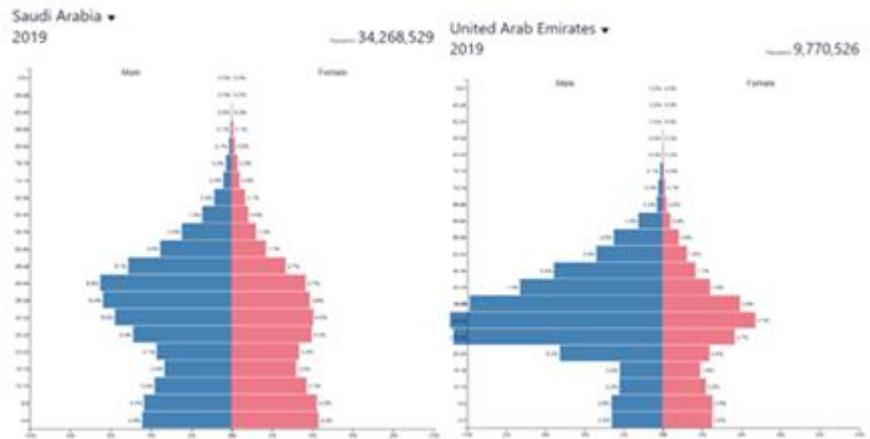
According to Figure 2, although the UAE started economic diversification earlier than Saudi Arabia, it was more affected by the economic shock caused by the Corona virus due to its more international economy. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, was negatively affected by the pandemic because it still desperately needs oil revenues to transition from an oil economy.

#### **4-2-2. Increase in Young Indigenous Population**

Young population is one of the most important drivers of geopolitical change. This was true of many countries involved in the 2011 revolution, with young people in Egypt and Tunisia as far as Iraq, Syria and Libya proving this claim. This can be true of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, especially Saudi Arabia. The growing population of young people in the Persian Gulf countries has become a stable trend that a large part of this population, even if immigrants and the labor force are considered, can have their own opportunities and threats. In many countries in the region except Iran, the young population is increasing. By comparison, the young population of Saudi Arabia is made up of indigenous, while the young population of the UAE is predominantly expatriates. In Saudi Arabia by 2030, this huge population wants both job opportunities and entering the political arena, which in these circumstances could challenge Saudi rule. The young population is considered one of the most important drivers of the revolution in Egypt and Tunisia, a variable that will clearly affect Saudi Arabia as well (Mansouri,2020:17).

In this regard, Saudi Arabia has different paths ahead. Learning from the experience of open political space and its consequences, it has sought to inject some kind of "drip liberties" into society. On the other hand, the Saudi government is willing to follow the path of the United Arab Emirates and turn Saudi Arabia into an international market whose sensitivity will provoke a reaction from the international economy and thus lead to deterrence. On the other hand, the Saudi government has also intelligently recruited foreign labor (Saudi Arabia Population,2020). It may be concluded that the young population of Saudi Arabia, which is predominantly indigenous, is more likely to protest under the influence of social and political space, while the young population of the United Arab Emirates, which is predominantly foreign, is more likely to be affected by economic shocks and economic issues. Shown below is the population pyramid of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

**Figure (3): Population Pyramid of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates**



(Source: populationpyramid.net)

According to the chart, first of all, what is clear is that the population growth trend of both countries is a rapid trend that has been formed to a large extent under the influence of a suitable labor market for foreign workers, especially since the 1990s. Second, both countries have detailed plans to attract the elite young population, which, given the special circumstances, can eventually lead to the challenge of raising expectations.

#### **4-2-3. Transition in the Global Geopolitical Structure and Increasing the Influence of Foreign Forces**

A retrospective study shows that a decade of unrest in the region followed the demand for a political transition of power in the Arab world. Nevertheless, the conditions of the global structure show that a larger transition in the international order has increased the speed and direction of the rearrangement of the regional order. In this sudden change in the global geopolitical structure, large-scale changes at the regional level also seem inevitable in a way that provokes geopolitical rivals in the region (Aras and Kardaş,2021:397-398). The countries of the Arabian Peninsula are no exception to this rule.

An important issue for the revolution to take place is that many believe that a revolution in the peninsula is almost impossible without foreign intervention. The situation in the region is such that, given the power of the regimes and the lack of protests due to the fragmentation of society, the

protests can be successful if a strong government, perhaps regional and transregional, supports the revolutionaries. For Saudi Arabia, this accusation applies to both the Brotherhood and the Shiites. From the Saudi government's point of view, the Shiites are the soft power of the Islamic Republic in the region and in Saudi Arabia (Neo,2020:204), and for the UAE, this concern is less, although the number of Muslim workers who have migrated from countries such as Pakistan and Syria are considered dangerous because of the possibility of developing radical thinking.

The support of the respective governments of the foreign community is also a significant issue, India, Pakistan, Iran and Egypt have the most nationalities in the UAE, which are also considered as levers of pressure of these countries inside the UAE (Globalmediainsight,2021). In other words, the role of trans-regional actors in political developments in these countries is important. This is something different from revolutions in North Africa, because countries in the region, such as Egypt and Libya, have both demographic potential and a history of such developments. However, in the peninsula, there is not much history of such developments, and on the other hand, high population potential cannot be imagined. Understanding this issue has caused regional rulers to seek the satisfaction of trans-regional actors.

Extensive cooperation with the United States and even concessions to maintain stability and survival within this framework are justified. This is seen in the rivalry of Muhammad ibn Salman with his political rivals for further cooperation with the United States. In the UAE, there is a similar tendency to buy weapons extensively, even though the UAE does not have the potential to use such weapons. Overall, the UAE has sought to work with China to balance its foreign policy and build a strong economic network. In 2018, out of a total of \$ 240 billion in oil imports, China purchased about \$ 103 billion of its oil from six Middle Eastern countries (Fulton and et al,2019). However, oil alone has not been the subject of foreign trade between China and the UAE. In 2018, the two countries' non-oil trade amounted to \$ 43 billion, which is a high volume for the UAE.

The sum of these relations, which can be mentioned in even more detail, shows that the UAE is more important to China than an oil country. It may not be wrong to say that the UAE is a "strategic port" for China or a "Chinese Trojan horse to enter the Persian Gulf" (Thenationalnews,2018).

Qatar, by providing its base as a base for US forces, has linked the survival of sovereignty to the support of the United States. On the other hand, such an argument does not mean that these countries are unaware of the currents of power at the macro level. As China's power has grown, the peninsula has shifted to China. Of course, this does not mean distancing itself from the United States, but it can certainly mean a desire to balance foreign policy and create a positive balance.

However, one of the most important conditions for a revolution in the peninsula is the support of a powerful foreign actor. So far, foreign actors have not been convinced of the tide of change in these countries, and at least in the short term it seems unlikely that they intend to do so.

#### **4-2-4. Unusual Change in the Internal Political Structure**

Unusual shifts in power levels are among the variables that can lead to revolution but there are some preconditions for this. First, the person who is ousted from power has a high social status and the ability to mobilize the public. Second, there is a big difference between a person who comes to power and a person who is removed from power. In practice, in some peninsula countries, there has been an unusual transfer of power, but this has not led to a revolution. In this regard, the UAE has more stable conditions than Saudi Arabia.

There may not be room for revolutionary change in Saudi Arabia at the moment, but it has such potential. Wider populations and social divisions - although not necessarily economic gaps and inadequate distribution of wealth - can set the stage for change. The transfer of power from Muhammad bin Nayef to Muhammad ibn Salman did not lead to any particular changes in the society, however, the absence of such an incident does not mean that the transfer of power from King Salman to Muhammad bin Salman is also safe. The Saudi government's control mechanisms have also had a major impact. Complete control of the media space along with the concentration of power and political structure have been its most important tools (Boserup and et al,2019:3). However, uncertainty over the transfer of power in Saudi Arabia is far greater than in other peninsula countries. Yemen was another country with a larger population and social diversity in which political developments took place, and in this respect, it is similar to Saudi Arabia. Bahrain has the same characteristics, but due to the dominance of the non-national actor in this country, the political developments in this country have not been successful so far.

**4-2-5. Increasing Demand for Political Participation**

The situation of many peninsula countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, may be different from that of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria regarding the crisis. The economic crisis and the desire for political participation were among the most important variables encouraging the revolution in the countries involved in 2011 (Barakat and Fakhri, 2021: 11). In these countries, the demand for political participation stems from systemic inefficiencies, which can vary with the possibility of increasing demand for political participation in the peninsula as a result of rising expectations. Whether there will be an increase in demand for political participation as welfare increases is a matter that needs to be carefully considered.

Upgrading the economic level leads to a desire for political participation when the population is indigenous and more sensitive to current trends in the country. There will be no such deep feeling if the nonindigenous population has a temporary and short-term approach to the place of residence. So, the first variable, like the other variables, is the size of the native population. Second, the expectations in the economic sphere are so high that the political ruler cannot meet them. If the ruler is himself a leader in the economic field, this excuse will be moderated to some extent, and then the individual's ability to achieve the slogans presented will be the criterion.

This can be true of Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision and whether a promise is feasible, as many obstacles such as the traditional fabric of society, the economic viability of launching costly projects, and the ability to attract foreign investment will determine (Kosarova, 2020: 129).

Another point is that basically such a right has been given by the ruler to the subordinate people to have a political output. This is not allowed in many countries on the peninsula. Kuwait is in a better position than other countries in this regard, and Saudi Arabia is moving very cautiously in this direction. The UAE and Qatar also have special social conditions where the demand for political participation is not very credible. Given this, it is possible that the demand for political participation in Saudi Arabia will increase in the future, although the Saudi government is trying to tightly control the political opposition. Part of this oversight goes back to Bin Salman's pressure, such as the Ritz-Carlton arrests in late 2017 to control influential

people; To this end, another action took place on March 15, 2020 (Henderson,2020).

When the trends intersect and the demand reaches a point where it can shape political developments depends on the social conditions and how the rulers act. With the current trend, Saudi Arabia is closer to this issue than the UAE and Qatar. It is likely that in the near future Saudi Arabia will see a growing demand for political participation.

## **5. Conclusion**

The occurrence or non-occurrence of the second revolution in the Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and their impact on geopolitical changes in the region require several variables. The relationship between geopolitical position and political developments is a bilateral one. This means that both geopolitics can lead to political change and political change can lead to geopolitical change. The geopolitical position of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates has become more than a stressful element, it has become a variable that has increased the strategic and geo-economic ties of regional and transregional countries with these two countries. This has led to an increase in the level of security of the political structures of the two countries. The importance of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia as US regional allies, on the one hand, and their prominent place in China's economic programs and initiatives, on the other, have led to the formation of a tacit global agreement to maintain stability in the two countries.

However, the mutual economic interests of the countries in the region, especially in the context of a large labor market for foreign forces, have also made Pakistan, India and Egypt, as three intermediate powers, sensitive to change in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Apart from effective external variables, material structural variables and immaterial variables such as the historical picture of the fate of revolutionary countries and the lack of a common strategy of the opposition forces have become the most important internal variables preventing the revolution. To these two must be added the lack of social cohesion. Given these cases, a few points should be considered as a summary of the findings.

First; That in the short and medium term it is not possible to change based on the existing trends in the two countries because there is both an implicit international agreement on maintaining the political structure in these two

countries and the internal conditions of these two countries are not ready for political changes.

Second, the major countries of the peninsula have similar general conditions but differ in details such as internal drivers. The interior of Saudi Arabia is far more political than the interior of the United Arab Emirates. Meanwhile, political Islam, although somewhat weakened under bin Salman, still has a strong position, thus increasing the possibility of political change in Saudi Arabia compared to the UAE.

Third, and finally, psychological and immaterial variables, although not observable, have a profound effect on the reluctance to revolution within these two countries. The historical experience of the revolution in the Arab countries has shown that the threats of revolutions are greater than the opportunities created, and in the event of a revolution, the future of the political systems in the region will not be clear. This becomes even more important when the rich geography of the region can lead to the presence of regional and trans-regional actors, which in itself will perpetuate the crisis.

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