A Geopolitical Approach Toward Deficit and Non- Growth of Democracy in The Middle East [Case Study: Iran and Saudi Arabia]

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Abstract

It is argued in this paper that the non-formation or non-growth of democracy in the Middle East is related to geopolitical centrality. The network analysis of Iran and Saudi Arabia in terms of geopolitical centrality indicates that the high geopolitical centrality of these two countries in the existing geopolitical sub-networks at this region is one of the important barriers against realization and promotion of democracy. In Iran before 1979 Revolution, its high centrality under geopolitical sub-networks of security and the west and also after the 1979 Revolution, its high centrality in several ideological sub-networks have made slower Liberal democratic growth in this region.in contrast In Saudi Arabia, high centrality of this country since 1980s in ideological sub-networks and its role in geopolitical sub-networks of west and security on three past decades has hindered formation of Liberal democracy in this country..

Keywords: Democracy, Geopolitical Centrality, Middle East, Iran, Saudi Arabia.

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1. Introduction

The Middle East is one of the key geopolitical regions that has always been at the forefront of political competition, regional conflicts, and endless challenges (Mossalanejad,2011:136). Democracy has been entered into the Middle East lately and as well it is developing slowly. The expansion of democracy lacks uniform trend in this region; democracy is still relatively rare goods in the Arab zone of this region (Ehteshami, 2007: 100). Also, despite of long campaigns of individuals, groups, and democratic groups in the rest parts of countries in the Middle East, the utility of democracy has not been proved yet. The challenges, caused by weakness and lack of democracy in the Middle East, have made many scholars to explain the reason for this problem. Various theories have been posited why democracy in the Middle East has not been realized.

Some of scholars such as Giacomo Luciani have assumed oil revenues of countries in the Middle East as the factor for non- formation and or weakness of democracy in them (Luciani,1994:130-155). Some specialists including Hisham Sharabi have considered authoritative culture of Middle Eastern communities as the main cause for non- realization of democracy and its growth in these nations. Focusing on modern patriarchal system as the foremost strengthening factor of authoritative culture in Arab communities of the Middle East, he knows it as an important barrier against emerging and growth of democratic parameters in these countries (Sharabi, 1992). The other group of scholars such as Professor Ahmad Ashraf assumes lack of social classes and groups independent from the government as the main factor against realization of democracy in these nations. By comparing the trend of formation of these classes and groups- particularly guilds in the western Community- with Islamic communities in the Middle East- he looks for weakness of democracy in the Middle east in nature and practice of these groups (Ashraf,1995). A group of scholars including Huntington and Bernard Lewis consider the religious as the barrier against formation of democracy in the region. For example, Huntington assumes religious tradition as a major distinctive factor in prevention from democratic developments (Huntington,1991:12-13 & Lewis,2002:180). At last, some individuals such as Mehran Kamrava assume presence of authoritarian government in the Middle East countries as the main barrier

against formation and growth of democracy in these nations (Kamrava & Mora, 1998).

In all these theories regarding non-realization of democracy in the Middle East, the political and social and cultural and economic factors have been addressed while the role of geographic and geopolitical factors has been less so far taken into account. The current essay tries to explore role of geopolitical situation as an environmental factor in non-realization of democracy in the region. The main argument of this article is that the high geopolitical centrality of both Iran and Saudi Arabia has essential role in non-realization of democracy in them.

2. Methodology

The present research, in terms of purpose, is in the category of developmental and applied research. This paper is a descriptive-analytical study with emphasis an comparative approach and the method of data collection is based on books and articles. The data on the theoretical issues are taken mainly from English databases and the data on issues related to Iran and Saudi Arabia are also taken from sources that address political and geopolitical issues.

Descriptive research has both practical and a fundamental uses; As regards its practical use, the results of this kind of research are used in decision-making and policy-making, as well as in planning. In terms of its fundamental use, this kind of research leads to the discovery of the facts and realities of the universe. In descriptive-analytical research, in addition to depicting the status, the researcher explains and interprets the reasons for how and what the status and its dimensions. Overall, this type of research is highly valued in scientific research as it can result in the discovery of facts and the creation of general knowledge and the formulation of general theorems in all human sciences and knowledge (Hafeznia,2009:59-61)

Applying comparative methods to study societies, systems, phenomena and political agendas is of particular importance. This method can increase the researcher's knowledge of the phenomenon, prevent him from making inappropriate generalizations, and can lead to make the best of other societies' experiences in formulating and implementing policies and the best of resources and facilities. The comparative method can make up for the restraints and shortcomings of different traditional, case-study and statistical methods and helps the researcher compile theories according to the common

ground between the studied samples and classifying the phenomena, while taking into account the points of differences between samples. The way to select samples in the comparative method should be such that at least one sample of each type is examined and the number of samples is selected according to the similarities and differences between the studied phenomena so that the researcher can achieve two main goals of picking comparative method: theorizing and typology. However, the theories and classifications may be rejected or confirmed (Harsij,2002:7)

Using a comparative approach, this article studies the geopolitical centrality of Iran and Saudi Arabia. First, in the introduction, the indicators related to the two main variables, namely centrality and liberal democracy, are discussed, followed by the research literature and theoretical issues of statistics, and then the relationship between these two variables is analyzed comparatively for Iran and Saudi Arabia.

3. Theoretical Bases

Centrality is an important concept in network analysis. The roots of centrality refer to concept of *star* in group measure. In group measure, *star* is the individual as the most well-known in the given group or an individual that is assumed as focus of notice (Scott,2000:83). The centrality concept is used for identifying characters in the network in psychology and sociology. Centrality refers to situation of a node or character inside a specific network. The higher centrality of a character causes acquiring higher rank and having more communications and obtaining more favorable status of that character. The centrality of various networks is measured according to several parameters. Degree centrality, closeness centrality, betweenness centrality and Eigenvector centrality are some of paramount types of these measures.

Degree centrality is the simplest type of centrality in which value of centrality for any actor is obtained only by counting number of its neighbors. Degree centrality refers to number of the given links or exited from a node in the network (Mohammadi Kangarani et al,2011:154). The closeness centrality measures distance among an individual with the others in the network. The more close to the other individuals someone is, the more selective and well-known one will be. As those vertices with the minimum distance from all other vertices possess higher closeness centrality in a graph (Degenne and Forse,1999:135), the characters, which are more accessible with shorter lengths of paths by the other characters, have higher

centrality (Cheng,2006:76). Betweenness centrality denotes position of a character based on its potential for communication with the other characters inside a network. The character with the highest betweenness centrality in the network acquires favorable and consolidated position and it may highly impact on what takes place in the network (Kilduff and Tsai,2003:108).

Eigenvector centrality refers to rate of closeness of a character to other characters which are very close together in the network. Eigenvector centrality measure tries to identify the nodes which acquire power through linking to powerful nodes in the network (Soheili & Assar,2013:101). Although these nodes apparently are less linked together, due to their communication with powerful nodes with higher degree, they are considered as strong nodes. Here, quantity and type of links of an actor determine its degree. Namely, the degree may show number of links so that as a point is more central it possesses higher degree. The character with higher degree communicates further with the other individuals and it enjoys more supports and it can impact further on trends, degrees of individuals and characters are increased with respect to their relations with powerful characters and salient positions.

Network analysis in geopolitical issues is useful because it helps to better understand the hidden aspects of political power exercised by political actors in a geographical area (Merz,2018:8). Accordingly, a geographical area can be considered as consisting of different geopolitical networks in which countries have different roles in these networks and the rate of their centrality in each of these networks differs. Naturally, countries that have centrality in more networks would have more political power (Kaplan, 2013:67)

The meaning of geopolitical centrality is close to that of geopolitical weight and means determining the role of an actor in the geopolitical network. Geopolitical centrality, as Bower et al. (2015) have said, has parameters in addition to superior geopolitical power that shows the semantic similarity with geopolitical weight, which include superior communication position in the network, more access to network actors, more influence on network actors, more capability to resolve conflicts within the network, and the power of networking using your own relations with other actors. Accordingly, in a region, any country that enjoys having greater geopolitical centrality has more weight and can have a greater influence on other actors.

But there is a negative relationship between geopolitical centrality and consolidation of democracy, meaning that geopolitical centrality makes sense in a situation of imbalance of power among countries in a region and therefore witnesses the superiority of one country over the others. Therefore, geopolitical centrality has political consequences that create tensions which, in turn, hinders the formation of democracy. Within a network of political actors, a country that has more centrality is exposed to serious political challenges and tensions due to greater communication and sensitivities, and the resulting tensions delay or block the formation of democracy at the national level.

3.1. Network Analysis on Geopolitical Centrality
The geopolitical environment may be assumed similar to a network in which there are various characters and actors. Either of characters in this network has different role, weight, importance, relations and potential for effect and action so that one can observe hierarchy of power, the effect and influence in it. Due to their higher effect, some of characters possess further centrality and they are assumed as the main characters. These characters may not widely communicate with all actors and factors, but because of their relationship with powerful actors and eigenvector centrality, they are assumed as powerful node inside geopolitical network. Centrality is not exclusively geographical and a character may possess high potential for characterization while it is not geographically present in that region. However, the regional characters lack such potential (Cohn,2008:710).
Likewise, there are some characters which possess unique advantage because of having some features so that in order to take some strategies and policies, other actors have to use them as mediator link or intermediate. In fact, these characters, which possess betweenness geopolitical centrality, may facilitate the link for other geopolitical actors. These actors possess the needed potential for creating link with other pairs or groups in the network and they have favorable and firm position from this perspective in the network in such a way that instability in their position may lead to instability inside the network. In other words, the link between other characters will be removed by deletion and passivity of these characters or it may be done at higher cost. Such characters are present in various sub-networks and they have key positions. For this reason, deletion of them will lead to passivity or deletion of a sub-network and because such streams are

more powerful, the resulting networks will also be more visible in the system (Qasemi,2011:188)

Some characters also lack such a position and potential but at the same time they do not need to a mediator to communicate with other characters. These characters possess closeness centrality or adjacency and due to political, cultural, identity, and geographical reasons they can communicate with other actors and affect in them. Similarly, these actors are the most available characters with the closest distance to the other characters. (Yari & Esfandiari,2018,823-825)

4. Research Findings
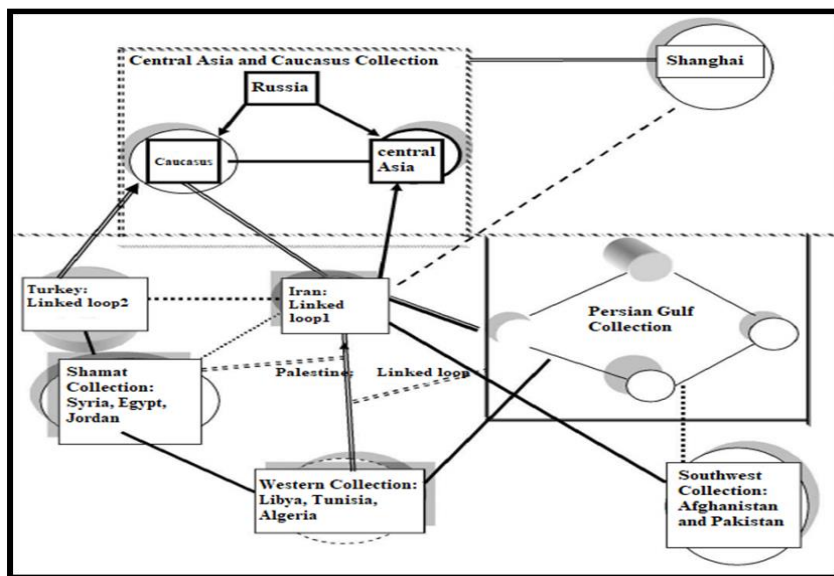### 4.1. Middle East Geopolitical Network

Middle East is the geopolitical network in which various characters compete for control and influence in this region and such competition is present in a few sub-networks. Middle East geopolitical network is composed of eleven geopolitical sub-networks including sub-network of resources, economy, and energy which comprises of some actors e.g. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Qatar as energy- producers and some minor actors like Yemen, Syria, Oman, and Egypt. In addition, some important regional energy-importers and commercial partners are present for the regional states i.e. United States, European Union (EU), and also China in this sub-network. Nonetheless, Iran and Saudi Arabia are deemed as the key actors in this sub-network. Islamic sub-network includes all of regional states except Israel and it is divided into two Sunnite and Shiite sub-networks itself. Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon are included in Shiite sub-network in which Iran is deemed as key actor. Saudi Arabia and Turkey are the key actors in Sunnite sub-network and most of present regional states (Noi,2014:3-5)

Fig 1: Middle East map

(**Source**: mapsofworld.com,2018)

Fig 2: The Middle East Network in Modern International Politics

(**Source**, Qasemi,2010: 69)

The Arab regional states (which include all regional countries except Iran, Turkey and Israel) form Arab sub-network which has been formed according centers of Arab ethnicity, culture, and language (Dehghani Firoozabadi & Farazi,2011:291). Saudi Arabia and Egypt (and Syria in the past) are the key actors in this sub-network. Security is another sub-network in which the important international and regional powers are present. The US, UK, France, Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Saudi Arabia are considered as the foremost actors in this sub-networks. The terrorist sub-network is composed of the supporter countries for religious fundamentalists, Salafi Jihadists, terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even Qatar, which feed terrorist groups in terms of financial and ideological support and human resources, are the paramount actors in this sub-network. (Aqil,2016:119-123) The western sub-network covers US and European countries and regional allies in this region e.g. Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia.
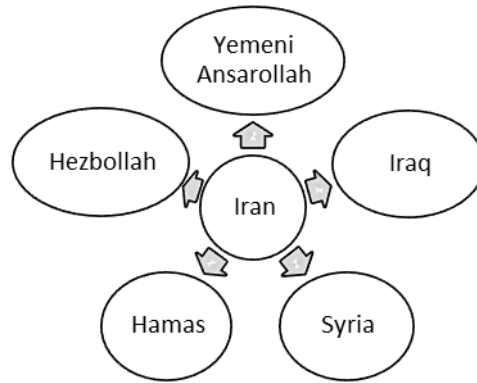
Axis of Resistance is a sub-network which has been formed against the west and it tends to form Middle Eastern climate toward diversity and resistance against the west and its regional allies especially Israel (Sullivan,2014:9).

Fig 3: sphere of influence of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the axis of resistance

(Authors,2020)

Fig 4: Positions of Iran and Axis of Resistance Actor

(Authors,2020)

Iran is deemed as a key player in this sub-network and Syrian government and Iraq, to some extent, are present as well but some movements like Lebanese Hezbollah, Yemeni Ansarollah, and to some extent Hamas are also identical actors versus in these governments. As the foremost regional actor in the Middle East, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council is the sub-network in which Saudi Arabia is the highest key actor. Finally, sub-network of democracy also includes countries with democratic governments or nations as promoters of democracy. The US and the west, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, and Israel are classified in this group.

Among the Middle East states, Turkey and Israel are more distinct. Israel is placed in two sub-networks of security and the West, and Turkey is present in three sub-networks of Sunni religion, security, and the West. Overall, Israel is isolated within the geopolitical network of the Middle East and, as aforementioned, is located in only two sub-networks affiliated with the West without any centrality. Also, some geopolitical sub-networks have been formed in the Middle East, such as the sub-geopolitical network of the so-called Axis of Resistance against Israel.
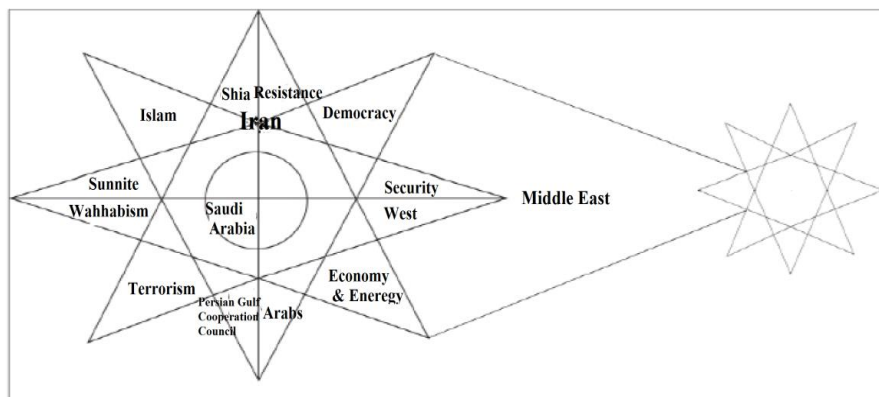
Turkey, too, due to its different policies towards the Islamist and secular governments in the Middle East has not been able to influence the geopolitical sub-networks of the Middle East to achieve a stable centrality.

4.2. Geopolitical centrality and marginalization of democracy in Iran and Saudi Arabia

The network analysis on geopolitical centrality in Iran and Saudi Arabia indicates in the Middle Eastern region that high geopolitical centrality is one of the foremost factors for non-realization of democracy process in both countries. The evidences and documents show that high and low intensity of formation of democracy process in Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as their fluctuations throughout historical eras has been impacted by the rate of their geopolitical centrality in these nations(Erdman,2000:231-240).

Iran and Saudi Arabia have always been considered as two influential powers in the Middle East region and each one based on reasons, considers themselves the superior role in regional developments (Morteza nourmohammadi & seifi,2020:164). Iran and Saudi Arabia possess higher centrality in most of Middle Eastern geopolitical sub-networks. Fig 1 displays geopolitical centrality of these two countries in these sub-networks. The evidences show geopolitical centrality in sub-networks has been the important resistance factor in formation and or utility of democracy process in both countries(Erdman,2000:231-240).

Fig 5: Positions of Iran and Saudi Arabia in geopolitical centrality at Middle East

(Authors,2020)

4.2.1. Iran

Iran has been placed at the hub of resistance, Shia, democracy, and terrorism sub-networks. Similarly, centrality of this country is relatively favorable in security, western, economic, and energy and Islam sub-networks. Study on trend of formation of liberal democracy and its inhibiting factors in Iran signify that geopolitical centrality of Iran has importantly impacted on this trend in these sub-networks.

The effect of Iranian geopolitical centrality on democracy trend in this country has been different in two periods before and after Islamic Revolution in 1979. During the Pahlavi era, Iran played a regional power role due to its geo-strategic advantage and to its presence in the West's security belt. (Vazirian & Shakoori ,2019:49) Before Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran possessed higher geopolitical centrality in the Middle East and thus there was more resistance against democracy in this country. Following to reduced geopolitical centrality after revolution, resistances were also decreased against democracy and democratic trend obtained more favorable form. Likewise, different nature of effective sub-networks has influenced in Iranian geopolitical centrality in both pre- and post- revolution eras in high and low intensity of democracy (Abrahamian,2008:205).

Before Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran enjoyed higher geopolitical centrality in both western and security sub-networks. Before collapse of Soviet Union, the western geopolitical sub-network was present as western capitalism system sub-network versus Communism system. Although, western capitalism system supported democracy against communism, the western countries did not consider this subsystem deserving for democracy by this justification that they were newly independent countries and thus needed to be protectorate (Moradi,2014; Mahdavizadegan,2002). In the course of their interests, the west governed these countries by suppressant and puppet regimes and as a result democracy was waned in them. Although, Iran was not protectorate, due to geographic situation and adjacency to Arab states in Persian Gulf and western side of Middle East it was noticed by the west and therefore the highest geopolitical centrality has been devoted to Iran in this sub- network. From western perspective, any type of development in this country might transform political system of other countries in this sub-network and tarnish their political stability. Thus, the west made the best effort to support monarchical system of Mohammad

Reza Pahlavi and to suppress freedom-seeking movements. (Bill,1992:141, 191,405).

Security was another geopolitical sub-network, which caused democracy to be exposed to barrier, due to high centrality of Iran in that country before the Revolution (1979). The US was gradually turned into the main stage-conductor for Middle East policies after coup on 19th August 1953. Iranian shah succeeded to convince US that the Soviet risk was not similar to the past and therefore this country should focus its efforts mainly in providing security for energy sources in the region. On the other hand, exit of British forces from the eastern Suez Strait and divesting responsibility of the British government in providing security for Persian Gulf created some gap that had to be filled by the US. During this period, regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt did not play an independent regional role and were responsible for US and Soviet policies. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were allied to the West and Egypt, Syria and Iraq were allied to the East(Barzegar et al,2018:129) The security network designated by the US was initially a great defensive union that included Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and countries in Persian Gulf region, but Egypt and Iraq and Syria dealt with serious promotional campaign before preparation of grounds for execution of this plan while Turkey and Pakistan and Kuwait expressed declination to membership in it. The US renounced to pursue this plan and substituted another solution under title of twin-pillar policy. Based on this policy, policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia were assumed as two main columns for defense from security of Persian Gulf. Of course, Saudi Arabia was less-populated and retarded country, it practically played no essential role in providing regional security and the main burden of guarding from security on Iran's back (Rubin,1980:91-123).

As a result, since early days of 1960, Iran achieved high geopolitical centrality. Mohammad Reza Shah assumed this responsibility voluntarily and the US also accepted it. According to Shah's attitude, the major risk in that region was radical forces and extremist governments which endangered American interests and through strengthening of its military force by security network defined by the US, Iran could manage these risks. The Nixon's well-known doctrine was declared in Guam isles in 1969 and centrality of Iran was officially recognized in providing security for the region. Based on American doctrine (Guam Doctrine), the US assigned the

task for defending from its interests to the friend countries in the Middle East and Iran was the centroid of this doctrine (Rubin,1980:124-133).

After this time, Iran became more important for the US and this issue justified more intervention in domestic policies of this country. The American role in supporting from Shah's government was intensified against opposition against dictatorship since the beginning of 1970s which might be analyzed within framework of this geopolitical network. In contrast, the US supported from Shah's despotic rule against democracy-seeking efforts made by the revolutionary forces (Rubin,1980:215-216).

During post-revolution era (1979), the high geopolitical centrality of Iran has become important factor for non-realization of liberal democratic process in Iran. Nonetheless, this effect differs from pre-revolution era based on two aspects. The first is that the level of Iranian geopolitical centrality in Islamic Republic of Iran has been reduced in comparison to before the revolution and the minimum formation of democracy is also a function of this change. The second aspect is that the effective geopolitical sub-networks have been changed in this period compared to before the revolution. The foremost geopolitical sub-networks, which have caused hindrance in realization of liberal democracy in this country in this period because of higher geopolitical centrality in Iran in this period, are as follows: Shiite, resistance and democracy sub-networks while security and western sub-networks, which have been effective more during Pahlavi era, were downplayed in terms of importance. Change in these sub-networks was also led to alteration in resistant factors against democracy (Abrahamian,1982:256). The resistances were mainly focused in economic interests and security of the west in previous period and they were revealed as oppositions by the westerns against formation of democracy. However proportionally to the aforesaid sub-networks, during period of Islamic Republic the resistances are mainly ideological with focusing in nature of religion and Iranian efforts in presentation of model for Islamic world through resistance movements and other religious groups.

The Shia geopolitical sub-network composed of Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon- was played up following to outbreak of Islamic Revolution in 1979 and Iran achieved high centrality in them as the most pivotal political actor. The main argument is that Iran assumes this country as the intellectual and political leader for Shiites in this sub-network and it has denied liberal

democratic model both inside and in Shia-inhabitant regions of this sub-network with its high centrality.

The formal narration of government in Iran does not tolerate western democracy. Based on this narration of government, the ruling belongs to God and for this reason legislation is also at His disposal. The fully-qualified Mojtahed (cleric) as successor of Imam of this Era is responsible for political ruling in the role of Islamic Jurisprudent Authority in the country. (See: Hafeznia & Ahmadi:2009 and Ezzati,2019). Although this narration is not formally recognized and accepted in other Shia countries, by using its strategic influence, Iran could impact on political forum of Shia community in these countries. The Shia community lacks power in these nations and this issue has intensified impact of Shia guidelines of Iranian government for criticizing of democracy in them (See: Pishgahifard et al, 2015). Using Shia teachings- e.g. renunciation of secularism and fighting against arrogance- Iran has not only renounced western democracy inside the country, but also thereby it has created geopolitical sub-network beyond the borders so that it could achieve certain political identity versus Sunnite geopolitical sub-network. The Shia geopolitics is a title that has been adapted by some authors to describe status of this sub-network in recent years (Nasr,2006:25). The Shia geopolitical sub-network as well as the resistance has been developed and widespread with some groups e.g. Hezbollah in Lebanon and recently in Syria, Hamas in Palestine and followed by Ansarollah in Yemen. Following to emerging of the so-called movements of Arab spring in Arab world and their entry in Syria and exploitation from some groups like ISIS and Al-Nusra Fronts (Conquest of Syria), some new Shia fronts started to develop. One of these movements is Popular Mobilization Force (Hashd Al-Shaabi) in Iraq. This Shia popular force has been established by excerption and taking model from Iranian mobilization force (Basij) in Iran (Nouri Al-Maliki,16/08/2016) after issuance of a fatwa by Ayatollah Sistani to contribute to Iraqi army and security forces (Javan Online,13/06/2014) and its mission is to fight against threatening Salafi movements for government with the maximum Shia support in Iraq. This militia group was formally recognized by the majority of votes of deputies in Iraqi Parliaments as an independent corps from Iraqi army on 26th November 2016 (BBC,26/10/2016). Thus, one can observe the consolidated Shia centrality by Iran in creating militia groups in countries

such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen thereby to find such Shia geopolitical centrality may by followed by type of diversity with liberal democracy as symbol of its western rivals in the region for Iran (See: Ahmadi et al,2012 and Afshordi, Akbari,2013)

The failure of liberal democracy in Iran is not exclusively due to anti-secular teachings of Shiite belief, but it is mainly influenced by Iranian high centrality in Shia geopolitical sub-network. As the leader of this sub-network, Iran's mission is to present distinctive style of political life that may not tolerate liberal democracy. Therefore, renunciation of democracy inside the country makes sense with its political reference in this sub-network. This political reference does not only include religious aspect, but it has become more salient in line with other political, economic, and security interests (Afzali.2009:210-230).

Iranian high centrality in this resistance network, which is composed of countries e.g. Iran, Syria, Iraq, and movements of Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and Yemeni Ansarollah, is another factor in lack of formation of liberal democratic process in this country. Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khamenei has assumed term of resistance beyond military resistance against the west and its ally in the Middle East; namely, Israel but as concept of persistence against western political symbols including liberal democracy and he follows it throughout Islamic world (Seyed Ali Khamenei Iranian Supreme Leader,2008). Iran is deemed as vanguard in resistance movement against Israel and an exemplar for campaign against western manifestations especially liberal democracy. Such centrality has acted as an important barrier against formation of all parameters of democracy in this country.

Expansion of Iranian geopolitical centrality in Shia geopolitics and axis of resistance as well as recently role-playing of Iran in countries like Syria, Iraq, and Yemen (Zweiri,2016:4-9; Wyss,2016/08/03:27-39) and even in some African nations (McAnenny, 2014) has developed Iranian centrality feature in geopolitical topics and as a result the expansion trend of liberal democratic barriers is going to increase in this country. Similarly, definition of anti-western security axis is also continued to become systematized as procedure by centrality of Iran and Russia in years after 2011 will contribute to further geopolitical centrality of Iran and this issue will challenge the path of developing liberal democracy in Iran, more than ever.

Iran lacks high geopolitical centrality in geopolitical network of democracy but its membership in this sub-system has created problem against realization of liberal democracy in this country. Democratic sub-network in the Middle East is composed of world actors e.g. the US, EU, and countries like Turkey, Israel, Iran and Iraq. Among world regions, the Middle East has possessed poorer experience in democratization of political system. Moreover, different networks and processes have been established from democracy process in this region. This issue originates from intellectual and thinking foundations of these patterns and mainly derived from religious teachings of various religious groups and sects in the country.

Thus, the different intellectual and practical patterns have been converted into a factor to acquire political position in the region and such competition has been turned into a barrier against internalization of liberal democratic process in itself. In Iran, Shia religious government has offered religious democracy versus liberal democratic model and it dodges to accept parameters of liberal democracy e.g. freedom of the females. (Salavati, 2011:158) The Iranian religious government assumes liberal democracy as opposite to its political status i.e. leadership of Shiites in this country at the world and fights against it. Similarly, Iran does not accept the model from other member states in this sub-network such as Turkey about democracy. According to attitude of Iranian leaders, this model will result in superiority of Turkey in Islamic world and undermining of power of Iran throughout this region. Following to emerging of Islamic Revolution in Iran and starting a new form of Islamism, the geopolitical centrality of Turkey that has been culminated in Islamic world during period of Ataturk was challenged and type of Iranian centrality in Islamic world was increased further with presentation of new democratic model deemed under title of religious democracy (Sayyid,1997:52-84). Iranian leaders claim following to Islamic Revolution in 1979, political centrality of Islamic world has been transferred spatially from Turkey to Iran and at present it should not be allowed to return it to this country again. Pursuant to occurrence of freedom-seeking movements in Arab states well-known as Arab Spring, Turkey tried to take the leadership of these movements through introducing its political democratic patterns. Since the Turkish Justice and development Party came to power headed by Rajab Tayib Ardogan in Turkey and redefinition of this nation as a Sunnite Islamic state, this country looks for exiting from

geopolitical status into geopolitical centrality position in Sunnite world. This has also caused Turkish competition and diversity with the nations with Sunnite centrality such as Saudi Arabia and Islamic centrality e.g. Iran (Venetis,2014:4-6) and this has typically put this country under condition of geopolitical centrality similar to Iran and Saudi Arabia so that to lead to move the governing party in this country toward chairmanship system to take entirely control of political power and to inhibit the movement of other civil parties and organizations inside Turkey in order achieve power under democratic conditions. This issue suggests geopolitical centrality and undermining and obstruction of democracy the today example is seen in Turkey. As Turkey moves toward centrality in Turkish, Sunnite, Salafi sub-networks (Venetis,2014) and security and democracy and playing role in energy network, numbers of the existing barriers are also increased further against Turkish democratization path.
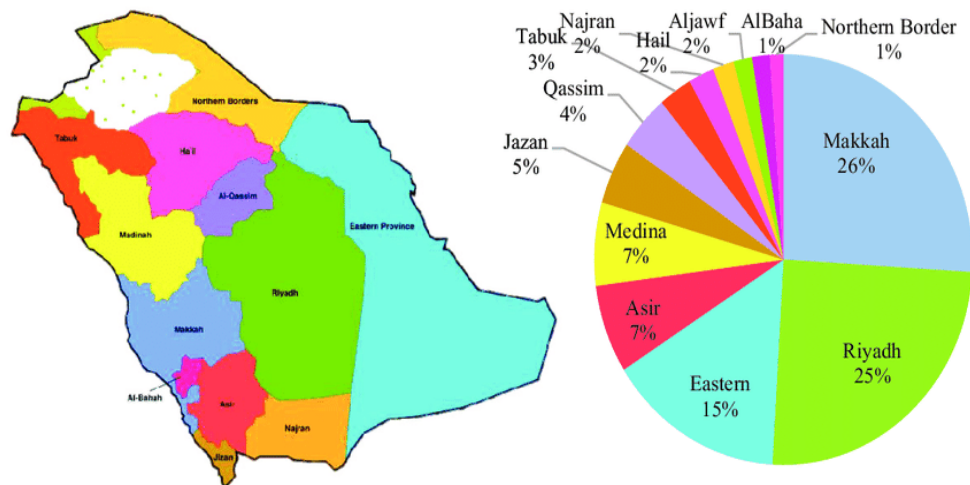
At the same time, geopolitical centrality of Saudi Arabia in some networks has caused undermining of democracy in at the same time; geopolitical centrality of Saudi Arabia in some networks has caused undermining of democracy in this country. Saudi Arabia possesses high geopolitical centrality in terms of economy and energy, western, Sunnite, Wahhabism, Islam, and Arabs' sub-networks and Persian Gulf Cooperation Council respectively. The political behavior of Arabia government with other nations has hindered formation of liberal democracy in these sub-networks at this country (Fig 1).

4.2.2. Saudi Arabia

The centrality of Saudi Arabia in economic sub-network is related to oil factor. This sub-network is composed of all oil producing state in Persian Gulf and oil- importer countries particularly Western countries. 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 so that it gradually overtook other countries like Iran. This country has influenced in political and economic interactions in oil-producing countries of this region and trans-regional powers as the greatest oil-producer of this region and the second greater oil producer and other derivative of petroleum in the world (US Energy Information Administration,2014:1-3) so that democracy process has been exposed to barrier due to impact of such

centrality. In addition, through its leadership in Arab world, Saudi Arabia has impacted lifestyle in other oil-producing countries in the Middle East to the extent that the citizens in these countries have replaced the welfare provided by rentier state's services with realization of social and political freedoms. As the greatest oil-producer and leader of Arab world, Saudi Arabia has legitimated this pattern with its high centrality. Likewise, the vital importance of oil for the western economy, this has caused security and stability of Arabia regime to be more preferred than expansion of democracy for the western countries (Jones,2010:33). For this reason, western nations do not seriously criticize Saudi Arabia despite of clear weakness of democracy. Hence, Saudi Arabia has the same condition similar to Iran during period of Pahlavi II. Also despite clear weakness of democracy in that period, the west not only did not criticize Mohammad Reza Shah, but also supported his antidemocratic measures.

Fig 6: Political map and population percentage of Saudi Arabia in 2015

(**Source**: www.researchgate.net,2017)

Also Saudi Arabia also possesses high geopolitical centrality in western geopolitical sub-system and it can be typically implied that it has acquired the position of Iran during period of Pahlavi II. Following to outbreak of Islamic Revolution (1979), the west substituted Iran with Saudi Arabia so

that by utilization from its potentials to follow their interests in the Middle East region. Since that time due to high centrality of Saudi Arabia in this sub-network, which has created many accesses and capacities for it at regional level, exertion of pressure by the west to democratic changes has been minimized in this country. The Saudi Arabia could prevent from implementation of democratic changes rather than avoidance from putting its confederates into pressure by OPEC, Arab Union, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, and Salafi groups as well. For example, despite of efforts made by citizens in Bahrain, important changes did not occurred in this country. This is due to link among this country with Saudi Arabia and its potential against domestic pressures and being secured from critiques from western countries. The high centrality of Saudi Arabia in this sub-network has caused the western countries to regulate their preferred policies occasionally in this region based on non-democratic wishes for this country. For instance, when the US tended to grow liberal democracy within the framework of Great Middle East in this region, Saudi Arabia changed preference of US policies by supporting from Salafi and terrorist groups and creating insecurity in this region.

The characteristics of other geopolitical sub-networks in which Saudi Arabia possesses relatively high centrality have also led to non-realization of democracy in this country. The geopolitical sub-networks of Arabs, Sunnite (Kayaoglu,2015:16-19), Wahhabism (Shane,2016/08/25; Bunzel, 2016:4; Fukuda,2013:3-5; Racimora,2013:7-9), Islam (Venetis,2014:6), and Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (Martini et al, 2016:40-41) that have been mainly influenced by Saudi Arabia, has hindered growth and expansion of liberal democracy. During recent years, Saudi Arabia has achieved purchase power due to rise in oil price. Therefore, it has widely bought the weapons in order to strengthen its central position in the given sub-systems as well as security, west and energy sub-networks. According to the latest statistics, this country has been recognized as the greatest weapons importer in the world (Syeed,2016/06/13). This country is now in close competition with Iran so that some experts have highlighted this competition as Cold war among Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East (Koelbi et al, 2016/05/09, Grumet,2015:115-138).

The major role of this country in energy production, placement of holy Islamic Shrines in this country, as founder and promoter of Wahhabism,

leadership of Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, noticeable access to free sea waters and neighborhood with different countries and leadership of Arabs has caused Saudi Arabia to devote undisputed centrality of this network if some network is formed for each of aforesaid cases. For example, communication with Saudi Arabia is the best way for establishing relation with Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and its impact since this country plays role of step-father among members of this council. The communication with this country is the best way to establish relationship with Arab world. Due to its position among Arabs, Saudi Arabia has been responsible for their leadership in many world issues and it has possessed the needed potential for change of behavior of Arab states (Farnian,2015: 79-78).

 The best way of influence in production and energy market is the communication and effect on this country and omission of this country from energy market may cause extensive changes in it since this country is the greatest oil- producer country in the region. Similarly, the communication with this country is deemed as the best way of impact by Wahhabism because Wahhabism has dominated politically and religiously over Saudi Arabia and this issue has been guaranteed by supporting from Saudi Family (http://www.britannica.com). Saudi Arabia is the center for exporting Jihadist forces to the other countries. For instance, experts have estimated during Soviet invasion to Afghanistan that out of 35 thousand peoples who have rushed for helping to this country against Soviet, between 12 to 25 thousand peoples were Saudi Arabian nationals (Commins,2006:174). Therefore, absorbing of support from Saudi Arabia is the best way to impact on these forces. Through formation of Jihadist Salafi forces after Soviet invasion to Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia has been undertaken to provide financial resources and human and intellectual support for them. Saudi Arabia is looking directly and indirectly at the Salafist jihadist forces as an ally to expand their influence in the peripheral environment. (Kazemi,2017: 162)

After returning to Afghanistan and then in Iraq, a great number of Salafis promoted their anti-democratic paradigms in Saudi Arabia. In fact, Salafi and Wahhabi centrality has caused these peoples to hinder creating open political climate and giving freedom to the citizens, especially the females and Shiites inside Saudi Arabia (Navidi Pashtiri,2019:7).

On the other hand, in diversity with Iran as Shia religious country, this country is also responsible for leadership of Sunnite Muslims as well and Salafi and Wahhabi Sheikhs and religious universities and schools in Saudi Arabia play important role in formation of beliefs among Sunnite clerics who opposed to democracy in the Middle East and even in other points of the world. These factors have caused that even though the west or some of regional states tend to support from opposition to Arabian Government, due to potentials caused by its betweenness centrality, Saudi Arabia obstructs such a measure by creating challenge for this nations or resistance against them. The western countries, which promote democracy as well, had to leave away democracy from their preferences because of high centrality of Saudi Arabia especially its betweenness centrality thereby they could keep their links with this country to realize their interests. This factor has caused Saudi Arabia to get rid of democracy- seeking pressures of western countries and not to make any effort to internalize it.
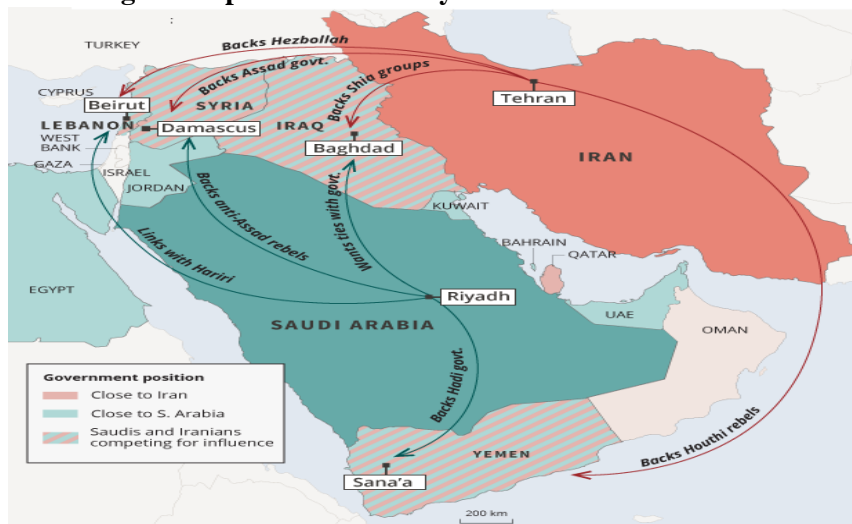
5. Analysis and Concluding

The geopolitical centrality of countries in the Middle East was more unstable than other parts of the world and it has impacted more deeply on domestic processes of those countries. The severe political competitions in the Middle East have changed geopolitical centrality of these nations during short-term periods. Two countries of Iran and Saudi Arabia were more subjects to these changes and development. The position of these two countries has been permanently changed in regional geopolitical sub-systems during recent decades. By Four decades before, Iran possessed centrality in two geopolitical networks of the west and security and the same factor was converted into one of the foremost factors for realization of democracy inside it. In these sub-networks, Iran was an actor which provided western interests by its centrality where in this trend democracy should be sacrificed to this centrality. Position of Iran changed in sub-networks after occurrence of Islamic Revolution in 1979 so that in diversity with period before the revolution it has achieved high centrality in sub-networks of Shiite, resistance, Islam, and democracy. Of course with different nature, this centrality also exposed trend of democracy to the barrier inside the country. The higher centrality of Iran in these sub-systems also impacted democracy process in the affiliated nations. Syria, Iraq,

Bahrain, and Yemen are some of countries where the slow trend of democracy has been implied as a function of Iranian high centrality in geopolitical sub-systems.
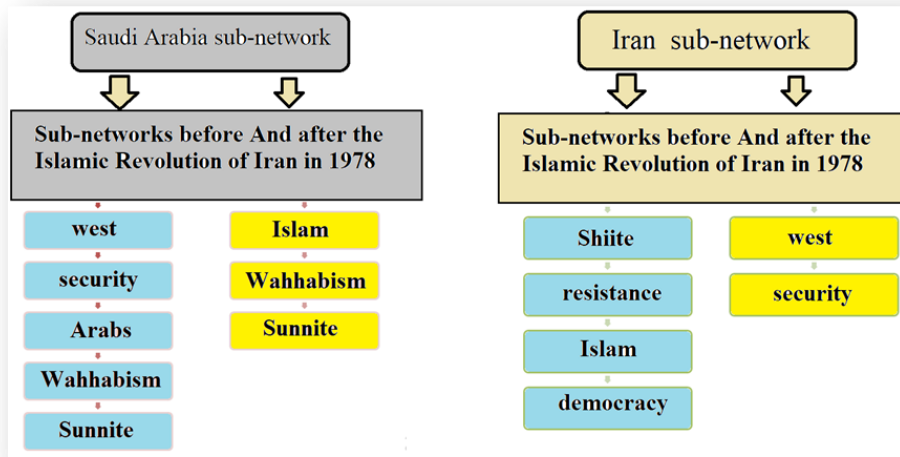
The Arabian centrality status has also varied in the Middle East in geopolitical sub-networks during recent years; nonetheless, it has caused non-realization of democracy in that country all the times. Before Islamic Revolution in Iran, Saudi Arabia lack suitable position in western and security sub-networks and played role further focused on sub-networks of Islam, Wahhabism, and Sunnite. In all of these sub-networks, centrality and playing role of Saudi Arabia hindered formation of democracy in this country and the other affiliated nations. After Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran was replaced with Saudi Arabia in western and security sub-networks and additionally through its centrality in sub-networks of Arabs, Wahhabism, and Sunnite and Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, it caused further to inhibit realization of democracy in this country.

Fig 7: Geopolitical centrality of Iran and Saudi Arabia

(**Source**: AFP: 2019)

Fig 8: General description of Iran and Saudi Arabia subnets

(Authors,2020)

Currently, Iran's lack of centrality in subnetworks of West, security, economy, and energy has reduced domestic political challenges and has given it relative political stability. This political stability has paved the way for the strengthening of an indigenous form of democracy which is called religious democracy in Iran. Although this form of democracy is very different from liberal democracy, one of the factors behind its creation was the reduction in Iran's centrality in the aforementioned geopolitical networks and its prominent role in the geopolitical sub-network of Shiite or the so-called Axis of Resistance. By contrast, Saudi Arabia's centrality in these sub-networks has made it somehow a place for regional and global political bargaining, and the resulting tensions have prevented the formation of even a poor or an flawed form of democracy there.

6. Acknowledgment

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