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Iranian cleric says Saudi Arabia is ‘center of sedition’

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An Iranian cleric accused Saudi Arabia on Friday of giving refuge to terrorists and committing crimes in Arab states including Syria, the Iranian Students' News Agency ISNA reported.

Relations between Gulf heavyweight Saudi Arabia and Iran have been strained over Iran's

nuclear program and what Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf Arab states say is Iran's meddling in Arab affairs.

Tehran denies the charge and has condemned what it calls foreign interference in the affairs of its closest Arab ally, Syria.

"The Saudi government has become the center of sedition in the region and a safe haven for terrorists," hardline cleric Ahmed Khatami said during a sermon at Friday prayers.

"They are taking seditionist acts in Syria ... I warn them that if they do not stop such actions, they will be burned with the fire they have created themselves," Khatami said, according to ISNA.

Shiite Muslim Iran backed popular uprisings which have removed leaders in Egypt, Libya and Yemen, but has steadfastly supported Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who is a member of the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Backed by Western countries, Riyadh has spearheaded Arab efforts to counter Assad's suppression of a year-old uprising and to demand that he step down.

In October, the United States said it had uncovered an Iranian-backed plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to Washington. Iran denied any involvement.

Riyadh suspects Tehran of backing unrest in neighboring Bahrain and supporting Shiite rebels in northern Yemen.

Saudi Arabia has indicated it could increase oil output to make up for Iranian crude in the event of a European Union embargo against Iranian oil, a stance criticized by Iranian officials.