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Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization -
Middle East as a Comparative Case Study: Conflicts in
Syria and Yemen“

verfasst von / submitted by

Melanie Luana Makay

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Wien, 2020 / Vienna 2020

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ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Friedrich Edelmayer, MAS

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the globalization of conflict and how it has impacted the “territoriality” of countries, using the Middle East as a median core of the case study. Two areas of separate conflict with similar characteristics will be discussed and compared: Yemen and Syria. These states are chosen, because the intrastate wars are used as an advantage to create proxy wars between the two same leading states, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, involvement by western states such as the United States and intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations can have negative consequences as well as poor international perception, allowing the extension and fueling of a seemingly never-ending conflict. The international involvement participating in these New Wars seem to have been triggered by various factors, such as religion, natural resources (oil), nuclear powers and the profits gained from weapon trade, all serve as self-interest reasons to intervene within the intrastate conflicts.

Abstract (Deutsch)

In dieser Arbeit wird die Globalisierung von Konflikten und ihre Auswirkungen auf die „Territorialität“ von Ländern untersucht, wobei der Nahe Osten als Kern der Fallstudie herangezogen wird. Zwei verschiedene Konfliktbereiche mit ähnlichen Merkmalen werden diskutiert und verglichen: Jemen und Syrien. Die beiden innerstaatlichen Kriege mit scheinbar ähnlichen Merkmalen sind Stellvertreterkriege, die zugunsten von Iran und Saudi-Arabien geführt werden. Darüber hinaus kann die Involvierung von westlichen Staaten wie den USA und zwischenstaatlicher Organisationen wie den Vereinten Nationen Folgen haben, die international zu einer negativen Wahrnehmung der Konflikte führen. Das hat zur Folge, dass die scheinbar nicht enden wollenden Konflikte zusätzlich angetrieben werden und sich ausweiten. Die internationale Beteiligung an diesen Kriegen scheint durch verschiedene Faktoren, wie Religion, natürliche Ressourcen (Erdöl), Atomkräfte und Waffenhandel, ausgelöst worden zu sein. Eigeninteresse scheint der Grund für die Interventionen in den beiden innerstaatlichen Konflikten zu sein.

Abbreviations

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CAST	Conflict Assessment System Tool
CSPA	Child Status Protection Act
EIA	Energy Information Agency
FCV	Fragility Conflict and Violence
FSI	Fragile State Index
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GNI	Gross National Income
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran Nuclear Deal)
LAS	League of Arab States
LIC	Low Income Country
MbS	Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia
MIC	Middle Income Country
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NDF	National Defense Forces
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDRY	Democratic People's Republic of Yemen

PNPA	Peace and National Partnership Agreement
PRC	Public Resistance Committees
PSF	Peninsula Shield Force
SCMCHA	The Supreme Council for Management, Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, International Cooperation
SIPRI	Swedish Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WBG	World Bank Group
WFP	World Food Program
YAR	Arab Republic of Yemen

1. Introduction

With the recent territorial conflict between the nations of Azerbaijan and Armenia, it is not farfetched to assume a new “new war” is on the rise. New Wars, or proxy wars are conflicts fueled and backed by outside nations with questionable interests. Unfortunately, the expense of such wars is heavily weighed on innocent civilians without clear or near sight to an end. Destructive and inhumane by nature, these conflicts rarely see swift and peaceful conclusions.

Conflict and the broader issues it poses are difficult to overlook in an interconnected “global” era. The unfortunate consequence that millions of impoverished and displaced individuals will face cannot be overshadowed with the world’s increased awareness. Combined with such fragile states and the consequences that come with it, prepare a reasonable call for political and international intervention. Consequences overseas do not only reflect the first world’s privilege but also directly impact political negotiation there. The conflicts “there” have instant consequences “here” (for the military, for migration flows, for service provision). All this combined, creates a powerful diplomatic consensus for action (Woolcock, 2-3).

In the past century, conflicts in certain countries have become global issues, leading to international involvement and proxy wars. New Wars are a fairly new byproduct of our modern globalized world. With an interconnected world, now more than ever, one fragile state’s issues can have severe effects on its neighbors and other countries around the world. David Harvey argues in his essay “Globalization and the ‘Spatial Fix’” that the contemporary form of globalization is nothing more than yet another round in the capitalist production and reconstruction of space. This form has been the product of several geographically grounded processes that Harvey mentions. First, it entails a further reduction of distance through another round of technological innovation in transport and communication. Secondly, it involves a geographical reconstruction of capitalist activity across the earth, the production of new forms of uneven geographical development, the recalibration and re-centering of global power, and a shift in the geographical scale in which capitalism is organized. He believes that capitalism is addicted to technological change and endless expansion through economic growth, calling it “the spatial fix” (Harvey, 24-29).

Ulbe Bosma and Eric Vanhaute mention that the word frontier denotes a space defined by action, making a “frontier zone” a specific spatial setting of the process of incorporation and change (Bosma, Vanhaute, 4). They further argue that Jason Moore introduced the concept of commodity frontiers to clarify the distinct nature of capitalist incorporation, “the ways in which the production and distribution of specific commodities, and of primary products in particular, have restructured geographic space at the margins of the system in such a way as to require further expansion” (Bosma and Vanhaute, 4)

On the topic of territoriality and conflict, the world of the early twenty-first century displays both persistent attachments to territory and violent conflict over those territorial stakes. Even as the interstate conflict has declined, many costly internal disputes have taken on a territorial dimension. As mentioned previously, these internal conflicts are fueled by outsiders as means of a proxy war. The persistence of territoriality and the conflict that it inspires, run counter to one popular view of the consequences of growing globalization: capital, goods, and populations display increased mobility, and their detachment from territory should reduce the importance of conventional territorial boundaries. Globalization has produced changes in territoriality and the functions of borders, but it has eliminated neither. However, we do not live in a “borderless world” or one that has seen the “end of geography” (Kahler, 19-20).

Buhaug and Gleditsch describe intervention, such as New Wars, as a form of negative interaction. They argue that intervention (an exchange of value or information between two or more parties) can be positive, like diplomatic ties, trade, and mail, while armed conflict and war are clearly negative. Both types of intervention are driven by opportunity, motive, and identity. To engage, a party needs a motive, like willingness to gain from the interaction, be it financially or other. The interaction has to be realistically achievable, and the actors need to have sufficient identity or coherence to be considered an actor. Buhaug and Gleditsch call this the three-factor model and argue that both forms of interaction are unrealistic unless all three factors are present (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2). They further argue that the opportunity of location is often underestimated, as with globalization, the argument of distance being a negative factor is way less important than before (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 7).

According to the World Bank Group (WBG), poverty and fragility are increasingly intertwined. It is predicted that 60 percent of all people in extreme poverty will be residing

in countries where fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) are prevalent in ten years' time. In fact, civil wars, armed conflicts, and other severe disturbances have been increasing in impoverished countries over the past 15 years. The World Bank estimates 2 billion people live in FCV regions, with 38 percent living in lower-middle-income countries (MICs), 37 percent in upper-MICs, and 25 percent in low-income countries (LIC). Addressing these matters is a pressing issue as conflict impedes development (World Bank Group, 1-2).

According to the IMF, conflicts drive 80 percent of all humanitarian relief and decrease global GDP growth by an average of 2 percentage points per year. The total economic loss due to conflicts in the world economy was around 14.3 trillion USD in 2016, which surmounted around 12 percent of the world's GDP. WBG further notes that around 30 to 40 percent of political violence was directed at private civilians, of which mostly women and children had to bear the consequences. The violent conflicts have reached record heights of murdered people in 20 years' time and the highest number of refugees since World War II (World Bank Group, 1-2).

While it is important for organizations such as the UN to help countries in need during their crisis, problems arise from aid in various ways. Whether or not aid and funding are used correctly is a speculative subject and requires further investigation as to whether or not the benefits outweigh the negatives. If it is deemed true that aid from organizations is furthering harm, it would only be logical to either stop the influx of support or, at the very least, refine the process of aid through the remedies of better regulation and the likes.

Countries with the most people internally displaced by conflict and violence are Colombia, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Nigeria, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Afghanistan (World Bank Group, 13). Arguably, these New Wars have been most prominent in the Middle East in the last decade. As such, this thesis will focus its topic on the area, via the ongoing conflicts occurring in Syria and Yemen. The international involvement participating in these New Wars seemed to have been triggered by various factors, such as international trade, religion, natural resources (oil), nuclear powers, and the profits gained from weapon trade. The main outside involvement in both conflicts are Saudi Arabia and Iran. These countries have pre-existing disputes that are not being dealt with on a direct basis but through other countries' territories. Saudi Arabia and Iran receive support from other countries with a global military presence.

This thesis will begin with a theoretical and conceptual outline, in which the concepts of New Wars, bilateral asymmetry, fragile states, international and United Nations interventions will be discussed. Following will be the analysis of the complicated bilateral relation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Crucial to this are the religious differences, the OPEC, and the royal family of Saudi Arabia. It will then examine the international weapon trade. After this, it will analyze Yemen and Syria's case studies, researching the backgrounds of the countries, as well as the conflicts and international involvement, respectively. In the concluding chapter, a debate will be outlined on the harm and the benefit of international involvement in FCV countries.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

New Wars

In her book “New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Globalized Era”, Mary Kaldor coined the term “New War”. She focuses her thesis on the idea that the current age of globalization has created a unique form of organized violence. She breaks down the term “new war” in saying the “new” faction is in reference to a never-before-seen perception of war. The “war” faction describes the characteristics that these “New Wars” or conflicts have: violent nature. The New Wars are confusing by nature and difficult to outline, as war, organized crime, and large-scale violations of human rights overlap. Kaldor argues that in most literature, New Wars are defined as internal, civil, or conflicts of “low-intensity”, yet they involve a multitude of transnational involvement, making it challenging to distinguish affairs that are dictated internally and those controlled externally (Kaldor, 1-2).

In his book, Herfried Münkler furthers Kaldor’s definition of New Wars. He starts by distinguishing old wars and new wars and lays out a number of characteristics of these New Wars, which are recognizable by their outsider influence, such as no clear timeline, natural resources, financial dependency. He argues that classical “state-building” wars in Europe or North America took place under nearly clinical conditions, with no major “outside” influences, whereas that is not the case in the new “state-disintegrating” wars in the Third World or the periphery of the First and Second Worlds. The state-disintegrating wars lead to the collapse of unstable states that have been subjected to constant political attempts from outside to influence the course of events, and above all, have been linked into world market systems that make it impossible for them politically to control the development of their national economy (Münkler, 8).

In intra-state wars, all participating armed groups have to agree to renounce violent behavior. This way, peace agreements from the old wars are replaced by peace processes, that as a rule, are only successful when outside mediators are able to exclude any violent option, and considerable funds are available to make the peace dividend appealing (Münkler, 13).

An important feature of New Wars is that apart from violence, it is accompanied by famine and epidemics. Thus, New Wars become evident through significant refugee flows, shanty towns, and starving populations instead of significant combats. There is no apparent difference between civilians and combatants, nor are there clear goals and purposes. It becomes unclear whether certain violent actions are acts of war or merely criminal activities (Münkler, 15).

Moreover, natural resources intensify conflicts over its appropriation and distribution. While finding an abundance of natural resources in a country marked by poverty and using it to promote economic development sound self-evident, it has proven to be hard to achieve frequently in reality. These third world nations suffer from the “resource curse” and continue to have less economic growth, less democracy, and worse potential for development than countries with low natural resources.

Whereas old wars would die down after a certain considerable time, it is not the same with New Wars, which have neither an identifiable beginning nor an end. Their economy is characterized by high unemployment, high import levels, and a weak, fragmented, decentralized administration. They are linked in many ways to the world economy through the phenomenon known as “shadow globalization” and can draw from it the resources necessary for their continuation (Münkler, 10-13).

Shadow globalization is an emerging term that highlights the expanding understanding of the dynamic interrelatedness of the wealthy’s living conditions in seemingly well-regulated western countries and the marginalized masses living in impoverished conditions. This term includes emigrated communities that support either or both warring parties through money transfers, all manner of businesses, the recruitment of volunteers, and the reception of wounded or exhausted fighters (Fischer et al., 3).

Another difference with old wars is the profile of the people affected by the violence. In old wars, 90 percent of the wounded and dead were combatants; in New Wars, merely 20 percent would fall under that category, while 80 percent of the killed and wounded are civilians. Key in this change is that the violence usually is aimed at the civilian population, either to claim a specific territory to support and supply their armed group or in the name of “ethnic cleansing” (Münkler, 14, 20).

War becomes a lifestyle in which supplying the violence is a goldmine, and the actors are financially dependent (Münkler, 14). New Wars are characterized by the state losing the monopoly of military force. In the case of a warlord configuration, violence is used as a tool in regulating the state's economy. This turns violence into a sort of commodity or service; usually, warlords will be found where the economy or market has no protection whatsoever from the state (Münkler, 16-17).

The United Nations refugee camps have played an essential role in almost every one of the New Wars. That explains why one in four of these New Wars lasts over ten years, which would have scarcely been possible without support from outside powers, especially shadow globalization. Warlords are known to use refugee camps for two reasons: recruiting and a place to fall back to help themselves with international relief aid. This way, the camps have become a resource of war. Child soldiers have become a critical contribution to New Wars because they are cheap to enlist during wartime activities. Lack of regular activity and day to day life, along with civil unrest and persuasion to fight for a cause, give child soldiers a reason to join wartime conflicts. Young prospects for war seek guidance, leadership, and meaning that they see as obtainable from warlords like individuals within their society (Münkler, 77, 78).

The United States Department of State released a report on trafficking in which the definition of child soldiers is given according to The Child Status Protection Act (CSPA). To be considered a child soldier, defined by the CSPA:

- any individual less than 18 years of age who commits directly to activities of war in light of membership of state armed forces or police;
- any individual less than 18 years of age required by law to join state armed forces or police;
- any individual less than 15 years of age that had by choice joined state armed force or police;
- any individual less than 18 years of age who was recruited and joined non-state armed forces.

All these qualifications include giving any form of support, such as a “cook, porter, messenger, medic, guard, or sex slave.” (United States Department of State, 34). The CSPA report lists 15 countries that actively use child soldiers. Syria and Yemen are both part of

the list, of which Yemen is considered a special case having appeared on the list repeatedly since 2010.

In Yemen, there have been successful efforts in strengthening anti trafficking law enforcement. Between the months of April and December of 2019, there were at least 23 children in the age bracket of 10 to 17 that were unlawfully recruited by armed groups, this is much less than the previous two reporting periods 96 and 370 respectively. While this observation shows promising effectiveness in refraining child trafficking, there are still significant efforts to be made. Since March 2015, there has been an issue to get data on human trafficking in Yemen, and accuracy on reporting cannot be all together trusted or verified (United States Department of State, 545-546).

In Syria, similar situations regarding accuracy and standards are seen. Unfortunately, the Syrian government-held no traffickers to be criminally accountable for their crimes. The government fails to identify and protect trafficking victims, and many actions taken by the state contribute to Syrian civilian vulnerability regarding trafficking. The government seems to actually promote the use of child soldiers and the illegal recruitment of these children into state armed forces. Other armed organizations, such as ISIS, also promote and teach acts of trafficking. In December 2014, ISIS released to the public guidelines on “how to capture, forcibly hold, and sexually abuse female slaves.”. As of 2019, approximately 3,000 women and girls of Yezidi background are missing. Accounts of illegitimate arrests and violent rapes, tortures, and executions have been perpetrated by the Syrian government for association with the armed groups, while no protection for these children was offered (United States Department of State, 472-473).

Further, these groups recruit child soldiers and convince them to commit heinous acts such as suicide bombing. Also, furthering their exploitation, children are used as human shields, abused for forced labor, and sent on spy missions. Children, as young as the age of six, are often recruited, especially by pro-state regimes such as Hezbollah and the National Defense Forces (NDF). ISIS also recruits young children and forcibly implements violent mindsets in the youth by giving them roles as executioners in beheading their “enemies”. Forms of indoctrination are used in inadequate education systems that promote military regimes (United States Department of State, 472-473).

Bilateral Asymmetry

One speaks of a bilateral asymmetry when there is an obvious and relatively stable inequality between the capabilities of the states involved, e.g., The United States and Cuba. A disparity is evident when the stronger state's Gross National Income (GNI) exceeds the weaker one by 50 percent, a large disparity when the stronger one is twice as big, and an overwhelming disparity when the stronger one is ten times larger. The gains from unequal trade also create a situation in which the state that gains less from trade becomes dependent on the stronger state (Womack, 1).

Furthermore, Womack explains that “attention is focused first on those unexciting international relationships in which the smaller side cannot threaten the larger, and yet the larger cannot force its preferences on the smaller at a cost acceptable to itself—asymmetric international relationships”. He also notes that most international relations are asymmetric (Womack, 1).

Fragile State

During the United States General Assembly in March 2009, Pierre Nkurunziza, the president of Burundi, addressed the term “fragile states” as a term that should only be used with caution. He stressed that the notion is by no means neutral, but that it has emotional, financial, and political implications that give a bad image to a country.

According to Grimm et al., the ability to reshape a state reality's image is a powerful position to be in, next to military and diplomatic capacities. Therefore, by deeming a state as “fragile”, it can be seen as an asymmetrical power attempt to describe a state's reality in accordance with their foreign policy motives. They also argue that on the donor side of things, the concept of “fragility” or “failing” is mainly used to classify states that are in extreme poverty or face major political crises to legitimize aid spending and strategies to intervene. Grimm et al. note that aid-dependent states exploit the concept often for their own gains, e.g., to delay political reforms or to receive more aid money. Their resources have allowed them to “resist, ignore, engage with, disengage from, and exploit” international involvement (Grimm et al., 2005). They argue that the fragile state definition itself is somewhat unstable, making it hard to understand the real state of politics,

economics, and social factors of developing countries, as it is used by various international actors with different agendas to describe different national contexts of political instability, institutional weakness, and collapsing economies.

The reasons for a state to be fragile are often complex but not unpredictable. It remains critically important to closely monitor the factors that contribute to the fragility of states and for international actors to understand this so they can be prepared to take necessary steps to solve underlying issues and prevent future negative results. While Grimm et al.'s concerns around the notion are understandable, it remains a helpful tool for measuring the severity of a state's condition.

The OECD defines a fragile state (or provinces) as having “weak capacity to carry out basic governance functions, and [which] lacks the ability to develop mutually constructive relations with society. Fragile states are also more vulnerable to internal and external shocks such as economic crises or natural disasters” (OECD, 15). Likewise, the World Bank defines it as: “facing particularly severe development challenges: weak institutional capacity, poor governance, and political instability. Often these countries experience ongoing violence as the residue of past severe conflict” (World Bank Group, 2018).

To determine the fragility of a state, especially the Fragile State Index (FSI, formerly the Failed State Index), is a helpful tool in measuring a country's improvement over the years. This measuring tool is based on the Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) created in the 1990s, which is based on a comprehensive social science approach with three main components: pre-existing quantitative data sets, content analysis, and qualitative expert analysis. The key figure is established by the Fund for Peace organization and rates 178 countries worldwide on a scale from 0 (= a stable state) to 120 (= an unstable state). The index is calculated by the summation of the score of twelve measurements sectioned into four groups. Each measurement is graded on an ordinal scale from 10 (worst) to 0 (best) (Fragile States Index). These sections, according to The Fragile State Index, are:

1. Cohesion

- a. Security Apparatus: takes into account security threats to a state, such as bombings, assaults and battle-related deaths, rebel activities, mutinies, coups, or terrorism. Significant criminal factors, such as

organized crime and murders, and residents' perceived trust in domestic security, are also considered.

- b. Factionalized Elites: an indication of power struggles, competition in the political field, transitions of power, and a view into the election process. The indicator also measures the fragmentation of a nation in a variety of factors, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, religion, etc.
- c. Group Grievance: an indication of between independent groups in society – focused on divisions reflecting social or political characteristics – and the roles they play in access to resources and inclusion in the political sphere, amongst other factors. The indicator also may base a score on a historical account regarding previous injustices.

2. Economic

- a. Economic Decline: an indication with purpose in computing factors related to reasons for a current and/or future economic decline within a state. GNP, unemployment rate, inflation, and other economic scores are used in determining the score. Both formal and illegal trade are included within the Economic Decline indication and attempt to rate a country's response to deteriorating economic conditions.
- b. Uneven Economic Development: factors the inequality that is internal with the states' economy, as well as the perception of inequality, but does not reflect the actual performance of an economy.
- c. Human Flight and Brain Drain: indicates the relation between economic well-being and human displacement and the effects this relationship potentially has on a nation's development.

3. Political

- a. State Legitimacy: measures representation, and leniency, and the relationship of both with citizens. It uses citizen confidence in state affairs, including institutions and political processes. It assesses public unrest when confidence in the state is low or when the state is corrupt.

- b. Public Services: reflects the availability of simple public functions that serve citizens, including infrastructure, emergency services, sanitation and health service, etc. It also measures the public sectors' ability to protect citizens, policing, as well as maintenance in these sectors.
- c. Human Rights and Rule of Law: an indication of the relationship between government and citizens in light of human rights and whether or not these rights are at least fundamental and protected, as well as observed. The measurement also takes into account legal, political, and social abuse of rights, whether they be in regard to individuals, institutions, or groups.

4. Social

- a. Demographic Pressures: focuses on pressures faced by the state, originating from citizens or geographical placement. The indication may be measured from access to clean drinking water, necessary resources for sustainable life, etc., which may have social, economic, and political effects.
- b. Refugees and IDPs: indicates pressure received by the state due to forced displacement resulting from social, political, environmental, or any other causes, as well as refugee emigration into other states. The indicator also includes Internally Displaced Persons and displays internal state pressure due to violence, environment, and political factors, as well as health epidemics. It is reflected in the state's per capita statistics, including population, among other factors.
- c. External Intervention: involves the influence and effects of outside states in the mode of function within the state, particularly in a military and economic sense (Fragile States Index).

In the next sections, the Fragile State Index of both Yemen and Syria will be analyzed based on the graphs (figure 1) provided below.

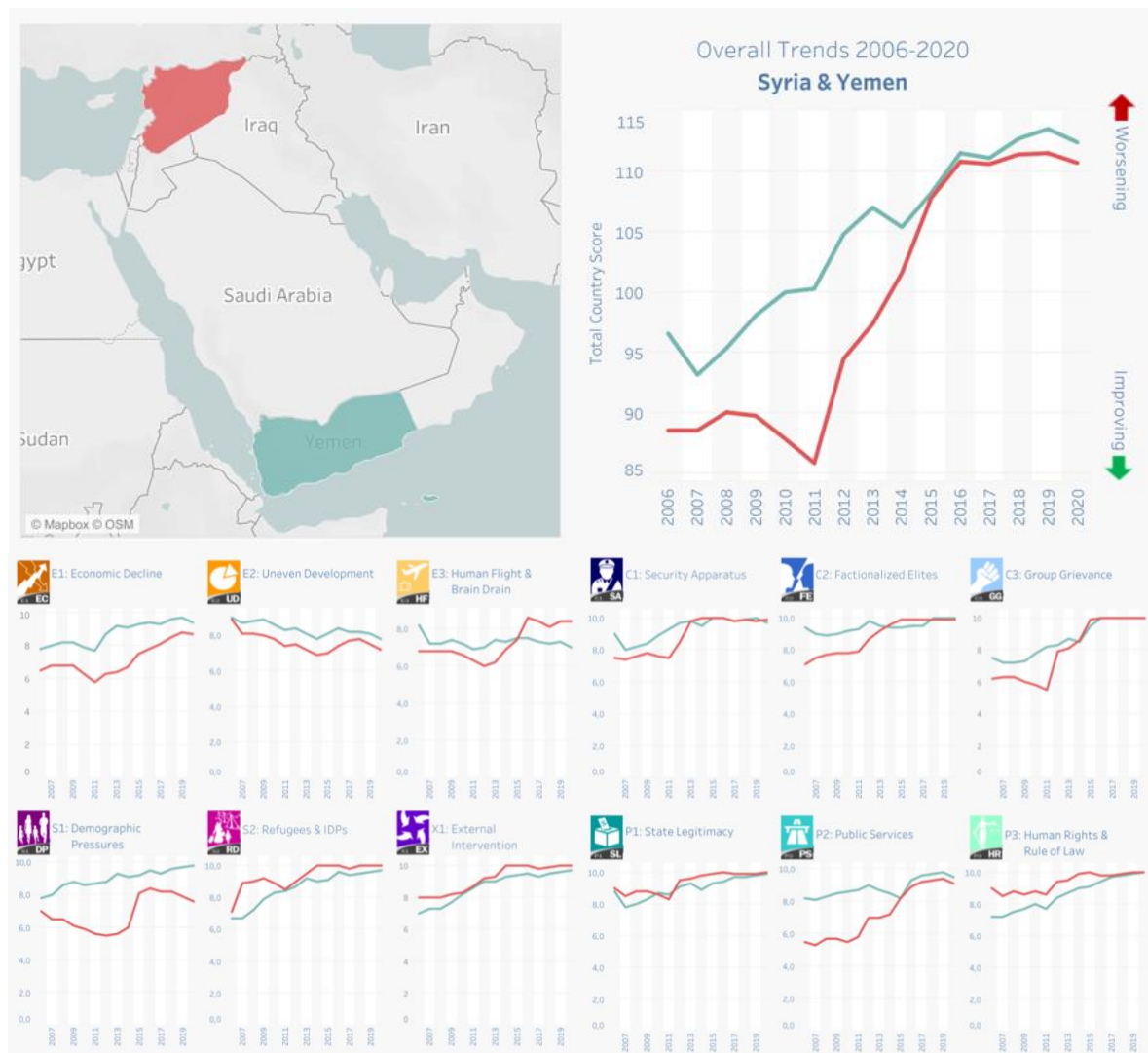


Figure 1 “Comparative Analysis.” *Fragile States Index*.

◆ *Yemen*

Since its creation, the FSI only had three countries rotate as the number one most fragile state: Somalia, South Sudan, and Cote d’Ivoire. Since 2019, Yemen has taken on this title for the first time, with a total score of 113.5. According to the FSI, Yemen has received a maximum score of 10.0 in the areas of Security Apparatus, Factionalized Elites, and External Intervention. It also scores a 9.0 or above in all indicators besides Human Flight and Uneven Development. Additionally, Yemen is the fourth-most worsened country over

the last decade, with Libya, Syria, and Mali taking the top three. The country experienced the most significant regression in External Intervention (+2.7 points), Human Rights and the Rule of Law (+2.2 points), Group Grievance (+1.9 points), and Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (+1.7 points) during this timeframe. Now in 2020, Yemen still takes the first place, with a slight improvement with the score of 112,4 (Murphy, 17). Yemen holds notably high FSI scores in the following categories:

- Demographic Pressures (9.7)
- Refugees and IDPs (9.6)
- Public Services (9.8)

As such extreme scores reflect, Yemen faces an ongoing crisis. The conclusion of 2018 showed that about 75 percent of Yemen's population was in dire need of aid, and over 3.5 million individuals remained displaced. According to Murphy, roughly 14 million individuals also battle with starvation and lack of infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, water treatment facilities, and public services. Various health hazards run rampant in Yemen, as well as the worst breakout of cholera the country has faced since 2016. In July 2020, the United Nations has warned that malnutrition is on the rise, and the food security of around 40 percent of the population will be affected (Fragile States Index; Murphy, 17).

Even more pressing, with the recent Covid-19 outbreak globally, these health crises are exacerbated. According to the UN Office of Coordination and Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the virus can spread without detection, and it has a death rate nearly five times higher than the global average. With a lack of necessary infrastructure, which is troublesome for numerous developed countries to combat the pandemic effectively, Yemen's healthcare system is far overworked and unable to cope. According to the UN, at the end of May 2020, Yemen had access to a measly 675 ICU bed and 309 ventilators. In retrospect, this holds little to no value to the population of 28.5 million Yemen citizens (2018). Nearly 20 percent of the country's 333 districts have no doctors. This can be attributed to the rapid deterioration inflicted on the healthcare system since the conflict took an accelerated pace in the spring of 2015. Strictly from a healthcare perspective, Yemen citizens face danger in the numbers of millions, lacking access to quality or any medical assistance and care. As of the end of June 2020, more than 300 people have died due to COVID-19, out of a positively tested group of 1,100 cases. It must be kept in mind that with a lack of a stable health care system, testing is lackluster, and data cannot be deemed

in reality accurately. Numbers shown currently may simply be a “tip of the iceberg” situation, so to speak (UN News).

The overall situation in the country, torn apart by conflict, is very fragile. Health infrastructure, in particular, is largely inadequate. Health Cluster Partners, a group of IGOs and INGOs, supports a total of 2,041 health facilities across the country. However, nearly one-fifth of Yemen’s 333 districts have no doctors. The country’s health system has deteriorated sharply since the conflict intensified in March 2015, with only 51 percent functional facilities. At the end of May, the UN reported that Yemen only had 675 ICU beds and 309 ventilators nationwide. Weeks later, the International Initiative on COVID-19 in Yemen, chaired by Yemeni philanthropist and business leader Hayel Saeed Anam, mobilized a “43-ton shipment of medical and laboratory supplies,” including an extra 426 ventilators, with oversight from the World Health Organization (WHO) (UN News).

◆ *Syria*

Since 2018, Syria has found itself in the fourth worst place on the FSI chart, with a score of 110,7 in 2020. The state of the country worsened significantly after 2011 when the conflict developed. Syria scored a maximum score of 10.0 in the areas of Group Grievance, State Legitimacy, Human Rights, Refugees and IDPs, and External Intervention. It also received a 9.0 or higher in the categories of Securities Apparatus, Factionalized Elites, and Public Services. Since around 2015, the situation has not been improved and remained around the bracket of 107-112 in Total Country Score. All qualities indicate an extremely fragile state for years on end, and based on recent qualifications, there is no positive projection insight. Like Yemen, Syria is considered extremely vulnerable to the Covid-19 virus, as lack of infrastructure provides little to no social safety service for civilians. Also, like Yemen, because of weak healthcare systems, testing is not readily available, and therefore the scope of Covid-related infections is unknown and unreliable. The pandemic itself also imposes harsh consequences on Syrian food security and economic welfare. With restrictions and uncertainty, panic runs rampant through the country as food prices soar (Fragile States Index, UN News).

Throughout the conflict, nearly half a million Syrian lives were lost, and 5.6 million refugees out of a population of 22 million were displaced from Syria. There are 6.2 million people in Syria, of which 2.5 million are children who are displaced, making it the largest internally displaced population in the world. More than 1.8 million people were displaced

in 2017, and a majority of those displaced have been so on multiple occasions. The UNHCR's offers support to those displaced, with aim to protect individuals and provide vital community services, along with aid through shelter and education assistance and health care support. The continuous growth of displacement in Syria reflects the current intensity of conflict within major battleground cities (UNHCR, 2020).

In 2017, the UNHCR created the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) in collaboration with Syria's Government. In the HRP, a framework is set out for the aid response based on prioritization within and across sectors to large-scale protection and humanitarian needs in Syria. It furthermore shows the urgent funding necessities in a country with continuous deterioration. Due to the systematic destruction of healthcare services, there has been a rise in infant mortality, infectious diseases, and people with chronic diseases who are unable to get treatment. The destruction of residential and food infrastructure affects basic shelter and food demands. Thus, HRP's three main focuses are saving lives and relieving suffering, improving protection, and building resilience (Cheung et al., 2; UNHCR, 2020).

The similarities between Yemen and Syria in the effects of the pandemic displayed through food security and economic well-being are no coincidence. With a lack of vital infrastructure, both nations face severe health consequences in an already war-torn state. As of now, over 80 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line, while the cost of living has increased by more than 100 percent year on year. The increasing price of food, as high as 250 percent during the pandemic, as well as panic and hoarding with an already poor economic status, leave little room for proper distribution. Gas prices are also rising, causing further worry for both states. The civil war in Syria may have slowed down due to the virus and the restrictions it brought, but the humanitarian crisis is still going strong and perhaps more intense than ever (Ozalp, 2020).

Military intervention

It is an international crime to militarily attack or intervene in other countries under the United Nations Security Council Charter. Military intervention that falls under anything that requires a level of national government security or intervention usually perpetuated with government spending using armed force. Chapter VII of the Charter provides the framework under which the UN may decide to take action. According to article 39, the Council is allowed to "determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the

peace, or act of aggression” and to make recommendations or to resort to non-military and military action to “maintain or restore international peace and security” (UN Charter, art. 39).

Article 51 provides the exception to the rule of the prohibition of the use of force that is set in article 2 (4) of the Charter: “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.” (UN Charter, art. 51).

United Nations Intervention

The United Nations is the globally recognized supranational organization that involves whenever armed conflicts occur. The involvement occurs on different levels and depends on the severity of the conflict as well as on the willingness of states to cooperate with UN bodies. Since the UN Charter has banned interstate wars, the vast majority of armed conflicts were and are intrastate conflicts. It took a long time until most of the states developed an enlarged understanding of “security” and agreed to interfere militarily in civil wars when a civilian population on a large scale was at risk.

It is clear that when interstate conflict occurs, the UN jurisdiction declares foreign intervention as illegal. However, the complexity of New Wars makes it challenging to impose effective sanctions on nations fueling conflict, especially when these nations pose a powerful military presence and do not always adhere to guidelines presented by the UN. It is without a doubt that both Iran and Saudi Arabia possess a powerful global presence. This, in simple terms, makes it difficult to prescribe appropriate sanctions as well as enforce them. Furthermore, deciding on intervening or not in an interstate conflict is a complex dilemma. The UN is known for making decisions around conflicts like these either too early or too late. An intervention not only weighs heavily on a nation’s budgets, which is also a concern to relevant nations’ citizens and their views on the conflict, but it occasionally may

also do more harm than good. Such significant decisions are rarely decided on a whim. The complexity of the matters regarding said foreign affairs relies on risk management of all types: economic, political, moral, humanitarian, etc.

There are multiple missions by the United Nations that are seen as “failed” campaigns, e.g., such as the Rwanda mission (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR)) in 1993 or the ongoing Kashmiri conflict. The Rwanda mission was supposed to aid in the placement of the Arusha Accords to end the civil war. In the case where the UN was expected to prevent escalating conflicts between the Hutu and the Tutsi groups, due to limitations of the rules of the mission, the UN failed to engage and prevent what is now known as the Rwandan genocide, a historically renowned crime against humanity. This failure was a global negative press for the UN, and the UN’s legitimacy and effectiveness were quickly questioned. Another example of a failed mission like this is the Somalia mission, where the peacekeeping force was met with hostility. Several of them were killed and desecrated human bodies. US soldiers were dragged around the streets to make a statement by the Somali warlords. After a US helicopter was shot down, they withdrew their troops, after which the UN followed suit (Henderson; Jett, 89-93).

Such failed missions give intergovernmental organizations like the UN little room for negligence. As an organization that strives for maintaining peace and security, global humanitarian progress and stability, when the UN happens to miscalculate or mishandle strategically, it has been seen that these miscalculations can result in destructive outcomes for nations in need. When this occurs, it is reflected in the UN’s credibility - is the organization able to intervene when necessary or effective, and can the organization leave a positive impact? In other words, can the UN live up to its own standards?

On a macro aspect, the UN has a strong track record, and according to public opinion, a majority of citizens applaud the organization and their work globally. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center, 30 out of 32 reviewed country’s opinions of the UN are rated positive, with a median of 61 percent approval across the board. Out of the 32 countries, only Israel and Russia sided on an unapproved view of the organization. However, Russia’s view on the matter in relevance to the Pew survey is ambiguous, as 24 percent of those surveyed had no opinion on the matter. Also interesting to the matter is the growing approval of the UN among younger audiences worldwide. Therefore, it is safe to say on a majority scale that nations globally approve of the UN (Fagan and Huang).

3. Saudi Arabian-Iranian Bilateral Relations

The Shia clerical rulers in Tehran, Iran, and the royal family in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia committed to Wahhabism have seen each other as rivals for political and religious influence in the region and even the Muslim world in general since the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran. The relationship between politics and religion in the Middle East has driven the area to a period of extreme instability and conflict. Out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and Western colonialism, conflicting interests in the region seek to address and reverse the geopolitical imbalance and course of foreign policy in the Middle East. In the last fifty years, Saudi-Iranian relations have been a central determinant of Middle Eastern politics. Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been engaged in a heated rivalry. Their continuing conflict and Sunni-Shia proxy wars will continue to have significant consequences and a halt on the goal for global peace.

In 2006, both Iran and Saudi Arabia supported and used Lebanon as a proxy war territory during the Israeli-Lebanon war. During the battle, President Ahmadinejad of Iran openly threatened the dynasty of Saudi Arabia, while Saudi Arabia was wary of the rising Shia population in Iraq simultaneously. Saudi Arabia also shows its heavy energy arm in Yemen by providing the principal partner of Iran, China, counteroffers. Saudi Arabia, during 2013, admitted to a plan in which they would take advantage of the instability occurring within Iran regarding the falling during what seemed an imminent collapse of the al-Assad regime within Damascus in hopes that it would remove Iran from the Sunni stage (Cardinali, 27).

In an attempt to improve Hezbollah's¹ national security and other possibly threatening organizations, the US has been very involved in its Middle East policy. Iran has not kept its reasons transparent concerning its post-Saddam Iraq ambitions and the possession of nuclear arms. These uncertainties encourage the United States to develop a strategy that supports Saudi Arabia or restrict its contacts with Iran. This support is not so much an encouragement of Saudi Arabia policies but rather a vote for the Kingdom as an Arab force balance against Iran. Aid for Saudi Arabia will effectively be a means of confronting Iran because the Sunni-Shia division already exists. The countries will continually face each

¹ Hezbollah is a Shia Islamic political party and armed group in Lebanon.

other with the domination of the Middle East, which leaves it incredibly challenging for Iran to pursue its quest for supremacy. If such a policy is effective, nuclear missiles' danger will decrease, and US military investment in the Middle East will become increasingly difficult to reconcile Iran with Saudi Arabia. America must seek ties with all nations since influence and supremacy in the Middle East will have national security repercussions for America because of the possible production of nuclear arms and the Middle East as breeding grounds for terrorist groups. The continued development of domestic oil and imports of oil from Canada and Latin America would help decrease oil from the Middle East and shield the US from the theological, geopolitical, and economic tensions that could threaten the United States' economic and national security. This economic influence could also strengthen the force to deter nuclear missiles from settled in petroleum-rich areas of Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda (Cardinali, 27).

It may very well be that the reasons for Saudi Arabia's new foreign policy are rooted in the increasingly tense relationship it holds with Iran. Especially in recent years, Iran has been identified as a significant threat to Saudi Arabia's security and a threat to its region. This can be attributed to a few reasons; beginning with Iran's goal to establish a territorial influence within the Persian Gulf, it wishes to be immune from any external involvement and protect any region it considers having influence over. In regard to these matters, Saudi's deeply fear whether or not Iran can produce nuclear weapons, as such military power would enable the nation to bulldoze the region as it wishes, with military power supreme over the region. Further, this would also allow Iran to gain leverage over OPEC. In the perspective of Saudi Arabia, Iran is an ambitious country with capabilities that can soon allow it to achieve its ambition (Antonopoulos, 119; Baghishadbad, 119; Berti and Guzansky; 26).

The theological tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran has the ability not only to influence certain nations but also to the international community. Both Muslim opponents continue to fight over religious and economic concerns, with each tactically threatening the superpower of the Middle East (Cardinali, 28). In this chapter, their relationship will be further explored. The most crucial difference between Iran and Saudi Arabia is their interpretation of the Islam, with Saudi Arabia being mainly Sunni and Iran being mainly Shia. After this, the two Arab alliances that Saudi Arabia is a part of will be discussed; this also shows the alliance Saudi Arabia receives in the region. Iran is not a part of these organizations. They are, however, both a part of the OPEC, which brings along a new

ground of conflict between the two countries. Lastly, the royal family of Saudi Arabia will be examined. The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, is known to have aggravated conflicts and is personally responsible for starting the attacks on Yemen in 2015. Opinions on the progressive and modern Crown Prince are very diverse.

Sunnis and Shias

The religion of Islam is an overarching characteristic of the region in which these conflicts occur. Islam is branched into two significant schisms, the Sunnis and the Shias. The two sides are divided after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. Prophet Mohammed was the last Prophet and messenger of Allah, meaning that he was the last person to interpret the rules of the Quran correctly and ask Allah for explanations (Schacht, 33-34). The basis of the division is over who is recognized as the successor to the Prophet of Mohammed. In terms of population, Sunnis make up the majority of the Muslim community taking roughly 87 to 90 percent of the Muslim population, whereas Shias represent around 10 to 15 percent (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 130). The rest are considered nondenominational Muslims, who do not identify with either. The schisms are not spread equally as geographical location usually determines a Muslims' identification (Cardinali, 26). The Muslims in Iran are mainly Shias, while the Muslims in Saudi Arabia are mainly Sunni. Saudi Arabia actually follows a stricter form of Sunni Islam called Wahhabism. Wahhabism has shaped Saudi Arabia for more than 200 years. It is a hyper-conservative type of Islam that insists on the Quran being interpreted literally. Strict Wahhabis believe that anyone that does not follow their form of Islam are heathens and enemies (Campo, 704; Chuck; Yemelianova).

The critical distinction between the two schisms of Islam, the Shia, and the Sunni, is that the Sunni revere only to the Prophet Muhammad while the Shia follow his grandchildren and son-in-law, Ali. The Sunni do not accept Ali as the legitimate successor of the Prophet. One of Shia Muslims' most significant events is Muharram's tenth holy month (the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar). Shias are mourning the death anniversary of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and the son of Ali. They both share the Holy Book of the Quran; however, in practice, the Sunni Muslims depend primarily on the Sunnah, a record of the teachings and sayings of the Prophet

Muhammad, to guide their acts, whereas the Shia rely on their ayatollahs², whom they see as a symbol of “God on earth.” Shia Muslims believe that just as a prophet is chosen by God alone, only God has the power to choose a successor to his Prophet. They believe that God wanted Ali to be the successor of Muhammad, infallible, the first Caliph of Islam (Khalifah, head of state). Nevertheless, both parties believe that Muhammad is God’s messenger and practice the five ceremonial principles of Islam, including Ramadan fasting, five daily prayers, and the Hajj, an annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Campo, 422-424; Schacht, 33-36, 60; Tasch).

As the Sunni schism, much of the characteristics embodied by the schism have a more significant emphasis on the traditional followings of the Prophet Mohammed. The name Sunni originates from the term “Sunnah”, which refers to the behavior of Mohammed. As he was the last one in contact with Allah, the Quran remains unchanged since. After his death, his successors took over as state leaders and advisors of the Islamic state, the caliphs. The prophecy is over, and the caliphs cannot claim to be divinely acquired. Sunnis believe, according to the Sunnah, that the succession process would be a democratically nominated one. This nomination would go to Abu Bakr, whose daughter was married to Mohammed (Campo, 25-26; Schacht, 30, 33-35).

Furthermore, he was Mohammed’s closest adviser and companion. According to Sunni belief, political and administrative functions were given to him post-death of Mohammed. A significant aspect of Sunni belief is that Abu Bakar was indeed the first Caliph (Khan). This is where the central dispute between Sunnis and Shiites is born from. The Caliphate is viewed in two interrelated ways: the core of Islamic state power and a specific government form. In Sunni tradition, there are four equally orthodox schools, in comparison: in the Catholic faith, there is only one “decision maker”, the pope. As new problems occur that have no specific rule in the Quran, simply because it did not exist, yet the scholars of the schools now have to deal with changing circumstances. They find similar ways to deal with the rules if they were mentioned in a similar situation (Hallaq, 17-19; Shahab; 73-78).

Interestingly, even though the four schools are orthodox, they are not in agreement with each other. However, if the scholars of one school accept a law, the other schools accept it

² Ayatollah is a designation earned by academics in the religious establishment who have shown exceptionally extensive understanding of Islamic law and theology.

as well. Do they all agree on substantive points? There are certain (relatively broad amount of) things they all agree on, such as the need for pilgrimage, the point of prayer should be Mecca, and how to become a Muslim. Not all of these fundamentals can be found in the Quran and Sunnah. This does not significantly restrict Muslims. They can flexibly select between the different forms of government in different circumstances. It, however, is not intended to cherry-pick between the schools. We can detect the lack of institutional organization in Islam. There seems to be an issue with the political organization that makes it, unlike the catholic organization.

So why are they equally orthodox? It is based on the assumption of human fallibility, and we are all equally sincere in the meaning of these texts; our efforts are equally valued. One cannot do it themselves but should have to go to specialists. It has to be in the four schools. Now, they take the sources, and they try to make a proper legal system out of these sources. Analogy and consensus are the two principal methodologies to get to these rules. They are careful about simply coming up with new rules; one has to simply follow the handbooks. The differences between the four schools of Sunnis are relatively small. The dogma never seems to control the state in both traditions. This is because of basically two reasons, dogmatic and practical. Dogmatically the state cannot make norms. Alternatively, in Sunni tradition, the state is something that is inheritably illegitimate. Islamic law becomes the language of justice. The law is not controlled by the state but by private individuals (Hallaq, 17-19; Shahab, 73-78).

A difference between the Shia and Sunni tradition is that the imams of the Shias have divine authorities. They are the bloodline of Mohammed and share some of his characteristics. The Shia believe that the son in law of the Prophet Mohammed, Ali Ibn Abi Talib is the true successor of Mohammed. In Shia belief, Ali Ibn Abi Talib is considered to be the Imam, or the leader, of Islam. However, this was prevented after the assassination of Ali while he was praying in the great mosque of Kufa (Razwy). According to Shia belief, he was declared Imam after the event of Ghadir Khumm, where supposedly a sermon was delivered by Mohammed shortly before his passing.

Another peculiar fact is that the Sunnis are independent of the state, but they are tolerated, paid, and controlled by the state, and they use them for their own purposes. The Shias, however, are much more independent, plus a person can follow whichever Shia law

they want. They get their salary directly from the believers instead of the state. It is intellectually and financially independent (Hallaq, 31-37).

The dispute between the two schisms has since the passing of Mohammed has been relevant in the Islamic community. The faction has created historical and modern differences within the religion. While many Shia and Sunni Muslims live together peacefully, the 2012 Pew Research Center survey reveals that 40 percent of Sunni Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa do not consider Shias as fellow Muslims. A significant factor in the conflict between the two is based upon their geographical location. In many ways, the nation of Saudi Arabia can be considered an unofficial capital of Islam, as it holds the holiest site of the Kaaba in Mecca. Saudi Arabia is considered the birthplace of the Islam (Tasch). It can be argued that the tempestuous relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia relies on a historical complex situation in which a large part is focused on the religion of Islam and whether one schism is the true legitimate form of the religion over another. After all, both states are home to one school of thought, as mentioned, Shia under Iran, and Sunni within Saudi Arabia (Berti and Guzansky; 26).

An allusion similar to the schisms faced between Shia and Sunnis could perhaps be compared to the differences faced between Confederates and Union members in the United States. While both sides certainly followed the Constitution, they did dispute interpretation, which led to bloodshed. This can be seen in the New Wars fought in Yemen and Syria. Although Saudi Arabia and Iran are not directly fighting, they are essentially disputing their schisms by funding war between two factions representing each side, e.g., the Shia Houthis by the Iranians and the Sunni government of Yemen by the Saudis. The umbrella may fall under Islam; however, the interpretation of the religion on itself leads to conflicts.

GCC

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern monarch countries—the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the Sultanate of Oman. The Council was established in 1981 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The goal of the GCC is to achieve unity among its members based on their common interests and similar political and cultural identities rooted in Arab and Islamic cultures. The most important Article of the

GCC Charter is arguably Article 4, which states that the alliance was formed to strengthen relations between its member countries and promote cooperation among citizens of the countries. The Council Presidency rotates every year. The GCC also has a council for defense planning, which coordinates military cooperation among member countries. In terms of security cooperation, policies included the formation of the Peninsula Shield Force in 1984, a joint military venture based in Saudi Arabia, and the signing of an intelligence-sharing agreement in 2004. The first major deployment of the Peninsula Shield Force was in Bahrain in 2011, during the Arab Spring demonstrations, to guard government facilities against an insurgency there (Britannica).

The GCC countries have several parallels, such as the oil sales account for one-third of overall GDP and almost three-fourths of annual government revenues and exports. Together, the GCC countries are in possession of 45 percent of the global proven oil reserves, as well contribute to 25 percent of crude oil exports; it also holds nearly 20 percent of the proven natural gas reserves. The states are highly reliant on a big expat work community, accounting for around 75 percent of the total workforce in the region. The expatriates have been welcomed into the GCC countries since the 1970s and were important in the development and diversification throughout the years in the sector (Fasano-Filho and Iqbal, 4-5). Furthermore, all GCC member states are also members of the Arab League.

Although GCC membership has been stable over its first few decades, shifts in regional ties have often led to uncertainty about membership changes. When the interests of the Gulf countries were matched with those of other Arab nations, extension seemed feasible. In 2011, in the wake of the Arab Spring revolt, Jordan and Morocco, two other Arab monarchies, were invited to join the GCC. Morocco refused, whereas due to internal GCC differences, Jordan's application remained postponed. Conflicting priorities within the GCC have contributed to frictions at times. A blockade against Qatar was initiated in 2017 by Egypt and fellow GCC members Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. Qatar's head of state missed the annual summit of the GCC in December 2018 and sent a delegate instead, while he sent his prime minister in 2019 as relations appeared to take a more positive stance. Though there have shortly been talks about a shared currency, similar as the Euro is to Europe, it has never been followed through (Britannica).

Yemen is the only country on the Gulf peninsula that is not part of this Council. This is in light of the fact that the country is not a monarchy, is the poorest, and overall does not reflect the identity of the members of the Council.

Peninsula Shield Force

For the GCC, security has always been a necessity for all six nations. In order to secure the GCC, the Peninsula Shield Force was created in 1982 to defend initially against Iran, and later Iraq up to 2003. Five out of six of the members actively see Iran as an enemy, other than Oman due to shared interests the two nations hold, including their bilateral border, the strait of Hormuz. Oman does not oppose Iran, as the nation simply does not want direct conflict and would prefer Iran to be dealt with through conversation and perhaps endorsement from the GCC (Al Jabri, 2).

Forming the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) was in reflection to the Soviet-Union and its campaign in Afghanistan, as well as the Iranian-Iraqi war. Iran and its geographical nearness to the GCC nations, as well as expansionist policies in regard to advancing the Islamic Revolution to regions surrounding it, left the GCC at unease. Over the years, the Peninsula Shield Force has gained more strength, rising from a 10,000-troop count in 1984 to about 40,000 troops currently occupying the PSF (Al Jabri, 5).

Each of the members in the PSF holds their own bases for troops within their borders. If necessary, all troops from each member state will be able to combine under one commander swiftly. If an individual member calls for assistance from the GCC, the military alliance will also be present. The PSF holds a permanent HQ in Hafr Al-Batin, Saudi Arabia, and the geographical reasoning for the location is to limit quarrels of bureaucracy and confirm permanency (Al Jabri, 5).

Currently, GCC affairs are in regard to Saudi Arabia's coalition in the civil war of Yemen. In fears that borders would be attacked by the Houthis group, which Saudi Arabia claimed to have been supported by the Iranian government based on religious faction, Saudi Arabia called on all forces of the GCC to participate in the coalition, except for Oman, who refused. This caused issues within the GCC in the sense that perhaps the military cooperation within the PSF is not as strong as it was originally intended to be. While not

officially a PSF operation due to the absence of Oman, many capabilities of the remaining five nations are being used by their forces (Al Jabri, 5).

While Oman claims to have independent views regarding the Yemen conflict, many of the other states question whether Oman refuses to join because of Iranian support to the Houthis within the Yemen conflict. The security concern to Saudi Arabia regarding the Yemen conflict makes it the biggest concern to the rest of the GCC, as Oman and Saudi Arabia share borders with the country. With Iran involved in the new war, the conflict becomes not a localized issue to Yemen, but an issue that affects the Gulf region as a whole, whereas the Syrian war is globalized, therefore minimizing the GCC influence on the subject (Al Jabri, 6; Antonopoulos, 1-2).

Post Islamic Iranian revolution, relations between Iran and the GCC are rather in a series of peaks and valleys. Between Saudi Arabia and Iran, tensions have always been the most intense in the Gulf area, where Saudi Arabia clinched more support from other states. Much of this support is on a religious orientational basis, as well as Mecca being located in Saudi Arabia. This gives Saudi Arabia more support, as a majority of Muslims are of the Sunni orientation. While there has never historically been a direct military conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the previous tensions between the two seemed to merit a proxy war, choosing Yemen as the battleground. Even dealing with the Syrian War, Saudi Arabia took a stance against the government of Syria under Bashar Al Assad, a well-known Iranian ally. A direct conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran would be devastating, as Iran's capabilities have far advanced from previous competence, including advancement in nuclear capability. Saudi Arabia continues to attempt to rally the Gulf nations against Iran through union ship like the creation of a Gulf Union, although lacking Oman's support on the rivalry. Oman has helped Iran mediate nuclear deals between Iran and western countries and looks to maintain positive relationships with Iran (Al Jabri, 6).

The Arab League

The Arab League, or the League of the Arab States (LAS), was formed in March 1945, holding seven members in its first year: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan (then known as Transjordan), Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. It was charted as a response to concerns over the division of territory in the aftermath of war and postcolonialism. Its creation was also

aimed to be a strong response to the foundation of the Israeli State in Palestine. The British granted their full support for the Arab Unification during World War II. The regional organization of the Arab World now holds 22 members³, with Syria being suspended since 2011. Traditionally, Egypt took leadership in the Arab League, as it hosted the headquarters, the offices and provided most of the staff (Britannica; Bani Nasur, 28-29).

Apart from regarding the affairs and interests of the Arab states, the main objective of the LAS is to foster closer relations and to manage partnerships between the Arab countries, as well as to collectively protect and preserve the independence and sovereignty of the members. In accordance with their objectives, five member states pursued armed conflict against Israel in Palestine's honor resulting in the first of many bloody battles between the Israeli and the Arab states (Britannica; Bani Nasur, 28).

A reason for critics calling the league a failure are Article 5 and Article 6 of the Pact created by the LAS in 1950 to address war and conflict between members and non-members:

Article 5: "The recourse to force for the settlement of disputes between two or more member States shall not be allowed. Should there arise among them a dispute that does not involve the independence of a State, its sovereignty or its territorial integrity, and should the two contending parties apply to the Council for the settlement of this dispute, the decision of the Council shall then be effective and obligatory.

In this case, the States among whom the dispute has arisen shall not participate in the deliberations and decisions of the Council.

The Council shall mediate in a dispute which may lead to war between two member States or between a member State and another State in order to conciliate them.

The decisions relating to arbitration and mediation shall be taken by a majority vote." (Pact of the League of Arab States)

³ Members: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Article 6: “In case of aggression or threat of aggression by a State against a member State, the State attacked or threatened with attack may request an immediate meeting of the Council.

The Council shall determine the necessary measures to repel this aggression. Its decision shall be taken unanimously. If the aggression is committed by a member State the vote of that State will not be counted in determining unanimity.

If the aggression is committed in such a way as to render the Government of the State attacked unable to communicate with the Council, the representative of that State in the Council may request the Council to convene for the purpose set forth in the preceding paragraph. If the representative is unable to communicate with the Council, it shall be the right of any member State to request a meeting of the Council.” (Pact of the League of Arab States)

Nevertheless, this article has not helped the Middle East since its creation, as multiple wars and conflicts have been present in the region. There were some successful operations, such as the support for the no-fly zone over Libya and the removal of Muammar al-Qaddafi. Conversely, the fact-finding mission sent by the LAS during the Syrian crisis to make truthful observations of the disruption, and after months of fatal clashes with the protesters, forcing Bashar al-Assad to step down. Nonetheless, the LAS is criticized as a “glorified debating society”, having no apparatus to coerce its members with the set resolutions. The problem with the charter is that it is only binding for the member states that accept them, limiting the organization’s power. The league has not only proven not to be able to manage or prevent conflicts and wars in the region but, moreover, an inability to generate cooperation between the member states in the political, economic, and military spheres (Bani Nasur, 28-29).

OPEC

The Gulf countries are becoming a strategic actor in globalization due to their oil revenue. The area has 55 percent of the proven world reserve of oil; several of the countries are members of The Organization of the Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC). The

OPEC was founded to coordinate and unify the petroleum policies of the participating countries. It is a permanent intergovernmental organization founded in 1960 by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. Elyassi argues that at that time, “even an optimistic observer would be more inclined to dismiss the new entity as yet another association of underdeveloped countries set up, often with exaggerated objectives, to rapidly lose relevance or degenerate into ineffectual forums for airing differing grievances, settling bitter rivalries and eventual disintegration.” (Elyassi, 139). Yet, the organization still exists and currently has 14 members⁴.

OPEC’s mission is to ensure the stabilization of oil markets with the objective to guarantee a supply of petroleum that is efficient, economical, and regularly available to the customers, a steady income to the producers, and a fair return on capital for the investors (OPEC). The organization accounts for more than 40 percent of global oil supplies.

From its formation on, OPEC was seen as a formation of technical experts rather than a political alliance of nations. Because of this, participating members avoided internal political conflicts as all decisions remained analytical of the state of the oil market. To illustrate the power of the organization, one could look at 1973-4 when OPEC caused an oil crisis in the USA and several other countries that supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War by putting up an embargo. In 1976, the organizations’ non-political stance was put to the test when the pricing policy got subordinate to the politics of the member states. It was also questioned whether one member would take leadership in the organization. The political questions remained oil-related subjects rather than of political and economic nature. Saudi Arabia took on the role of the head of the organization and seemed reluctant to impose its will on the group permanently. Because of the economic benefits the organization offered, it was also in Iran’s interest to preserve it, even though that meant to adhere to Saudi Arabian rule. Ultimately, OPEC remained a professional body with no political intentions for the time being. This, however, would change by the end of the decade (Elyassi, 145).

⁴ Current members: Islamic Republic of Iran (1960), Iraq (1960), Kuwait (1960), Saudi Arabia (1960), Venezuela (1960), Indonesia (1962), Libya (1962), the United Arab Emirates (1967), Algeria (1969), Nigeria (1971), Ecuador (1973), Gabon (1975), Angola (2007), Equatorial Guinea (2017) and Congo (2018).

In February 1979, the Shah of Iran, long seen as a moderate member within the organization's radical faction, was abolished from his position after months of civil conflict and industrial action, including the halt of Iranian oil export. While groups and activists overthrew the monarchy from different political and social persuasions and goals, a Shiite clergy and its social and economic allies managed to take over the Government and create the Islamic Republic, with a strong, ideologically based increasingly uncompromising political stance both at the time. The understanding of Islam of the new Iranian leadership stood in stark contrast with that of Saudi Arabia, which is internationally accepted as the birthplace of Islam and the international Muslim symbol of faith, making Iran a rival (Elyassi, 145). While Saudi Arabia and Iran share many similarities, both being an Islamic Persian Gulf States, they are very dissimilar OPEC states (Luke, 31-32).

The Iranian oil industry resumed operations with the new regime's formation, but a loss of installations and critical personnel's withdrawal led to drastically reduced production and export volume leading to a global market shortage. With no sign of any progress shortly, the global oil markets were panicked; consumer pressure pushed the prices to new heights, causing a second oil crisis recognized by some Western media. However, the political ramifications of the change of regime in Tehran were more critical for the history of OPEC (Elyassi, 145).

With its old government, Iran usually produced the second most oil of all OPEC members. Iran was a nation strongly aligned with the organization's efforts to secure the best rates for its members and regulated by an administration that is vigorously pursuing a rapid economic development program. However, this new government was driven by revolutionary ideals that involved the complete dedication of the country's human and material resources at home and abroad, including membership in foreign entities, to advancing those ideals. With these new changes, Iran's attitude towards OPEC was unsurprising. During the former Iranian political sphere, Iran focused on projecting a future economic status that would rival other major countries worldwide. Through OPEC membership, Iran looked to harvest vital financial resources to aid in its economic progress. Because of said aid, Iran's new government was less worried about focusing directly on economic progress and shifted its attention to natural resources. The natural resources the new government's tool to "the export of the revolution". The Oil Minister of Iran was

forced to implement state ideology instead of staying politically neutral in OPEC with the goal of earning the highest possible revenue from oil sales (Elyassi, 146).

Within two years of the Iranian revolution, war broke out between Iran and Iraq, both part of the establishing nations of OPEC. This war resulted in Iranian oil export being severely reduced and Iraqi oil export nearly completely wasted. Saudi Arabia and other regional oil producers decided to financially support Iraq in this war, which made it possible for them to continue to fight. Iran noticed the support for Iraq by the other states and singled out Saudi Arabia as particularly distrustful.

A ministerial conference in Ecuador in 1982 turned into a political scrimmage between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The critical role of oil in a deadly war and its effect on regional loyalties dominated Ecuador's 1982 ministerial conference. It turned it into a platform for the open political dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Iranian minister threatening to "isolate" Saudi Arabia in the OPEC and, cold consolation to the Saudis, settle accounts with Riyadh "outside OPEC" after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Until that moment, situations like these were successfully avoided by OPEC. Furthermore, there were crucial changes in the world energy sector while the organization was in chaos instead of solidarity (Elyassi, 146). Though the conflicts resulted in oil shocks throughout the years (mostly in the 1970s, but also more recently in the 1990s and early 2000s), OPEC countries remained remarkably resilient.

A common and pressing issue that is continuously disputed between the members of OPEC is the quantity of barrels that each country is capped to extract yearly. Especially during oil crises, this problem seems to result in a selfish mentality, refusing to cut back. As profits are in question, each country seeks to extract as much monetary gain as possible disregarding other members' share of oil. In the 2010s, OPEC was again subject to an inside political tug of war between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Elyassi, 149).

In 2018, Qatar was the first country to withdraw itself from the organization since 1960. By leaving the OPEC, the gulf country is not limited to the production agreements made by the oil cartel anymore. However, with Qatar being the 11th biggest oil producing country, the withdrawal raises a lot of questions. According to OPEC-skeptics their future is more fragile today than ever, as the Saudi-led group's problems are becoming more external than internal, thus harder to fix.

The withdrawal of Qatar is not the first difficulty the organization has faced in the past few years to raise this question. According to an article by Thijs van de Graaf in 2016, there were three main trends that the 60-year old organization was going to face. He labeled them as some of the most severe threats in its existence for which it was unable to take up a stable stance. Firstly, a global surplus of new oil and gas supplies had emerged due to the so-called “fracking revolution”. The fracking technique was financially feasible as a result of the global crisis in 2008 when the Fed cut interest rates to zero (Geels). This way, the United States, who is the second biggest importer of the product, became less dependent on importing fossil fuels from the OPEC countries and started producing themselves, causing an imbalance in the market between OPEC and non-OPEC crude oil-producing countries. As a result, the oil prices dropped dramatically from mid-2014, causing economic problems to many OPEC countries that are heavily dependent on the revenues of the foreign sales of crude oil. For example, Venezuela’s economy shrunk by 5.7 percent in 2015. Secondly, the Paris Agreement in 2015 became a new disruption, as 195 nations pledged to limit climate change to “well below” 2°C. Consequently, this would render the bulk of fossil fuel reserves “unburnable”. Lastly, the prices of alternative energy solutions had dropped dramatically (more than 60 percent between 2009 and 2016). This meant a risk of prolonged low energy prices (Graaf, 182-187).

However, since that article, a lot has changed; first off, the political crisis in Venezuela has worsened, leading to possible internal problems in OPEC, as the country holds most oil reserves in the organization. Qatar has left the organization, saying it will concentrate its production more on liquified natural gas (LNG), aiming to lift its export from 77 million tons per year to 110 million tons. The ex-member country produced around 610.000 barrels of oil per day before its leave in October 2018. Coincidentally, Qatar’s withdrawal is a year after its Sunni neighbor Saudi Arabia (the most influential OPEC member), broke ties with Qatar last year, along with Egypt, The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Yemen. They had cut off Qatar completely and even accused the country of supporting international terrorism. To take the boycott even further, Saudi Arabia announced plans to completely isolate the country by digging a channel along the border, causing Qatar to become an island. These drastic measurements have been taken because of Qatar’s close ties with Shiite Iran, with whom they share the biggest gas field worldwide, North Field (Ritholz).

The Middle East and North Africa, where most of OPEC members originated from, were the scene of aggression and instability over the past ten or so years, from military action against Iraq to civil strife in a variety of regional countries to foreign armed involvement in Libya and internal war in Syria and Yemen. What took place during these scenes not only resulted in casualties of citizens and their property but also aggravated political unease within the region, most notably between Iran and Saudi Arabia. OPEC became a source of allegations alluding to oil being weaponized on a political level. This left OPEC's image to be unstable and questionable. Fortunately, by 2016, OPEC members reached an agreement to cooperate with non-members to stabilize the market. Saudi Arabia seemed to concede to Iran by agreeing to this in regard to saving the oil price decline (Elyassi, 149). All in all, OPEC's power may have decreased over the years because of internal conflicts, the oil glut caused by the fracking revolution, the climate change regulations, and the energy transition, but it is without question that the organization holds significant power and relevance in an oil-driven world. It is so significant of an organization that even Iran and Saudi Arabia put their differences aside when it comes to business affairs.

Mohammed bin Salman and the al-Saud family

The third Saudi state was established in 1932 by Abdulaziz al Saud when he united four regions of Arabia. With the easy accessibility to British arms and subsidies, in the face of restless tribal politics, he was able to establish an expansionist political agenda and secure his position. Saudi Arabia was a state forced on citizens with no historical memory of nationalism or cultural heritage. King Abdulaziz needed to strengthen the borders without any collective identity or shared history to ensure political unity and needed to find alternative approaches. These approaches included intertribal marriages, where the new King married into 30 different tribes. While this created a large support base, it also provided an enormous royal family, with the consequence of having an estimate of 10.000 princes, creating political problems in the present day. Current King Salman is one of the last remaining sons of King Abdulaziz, leaving the next succession to the third generation). After his death in 1953, every King of Saudi Arabia has emerged from that pool of sons, and several of those sons have had countless children of their own in turn (see fig. 2 for a

comprehensible family tree). Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud⁵ is destined to become the first monarch of the third generation (Hope and Scheck, 19; Mabon, 53).

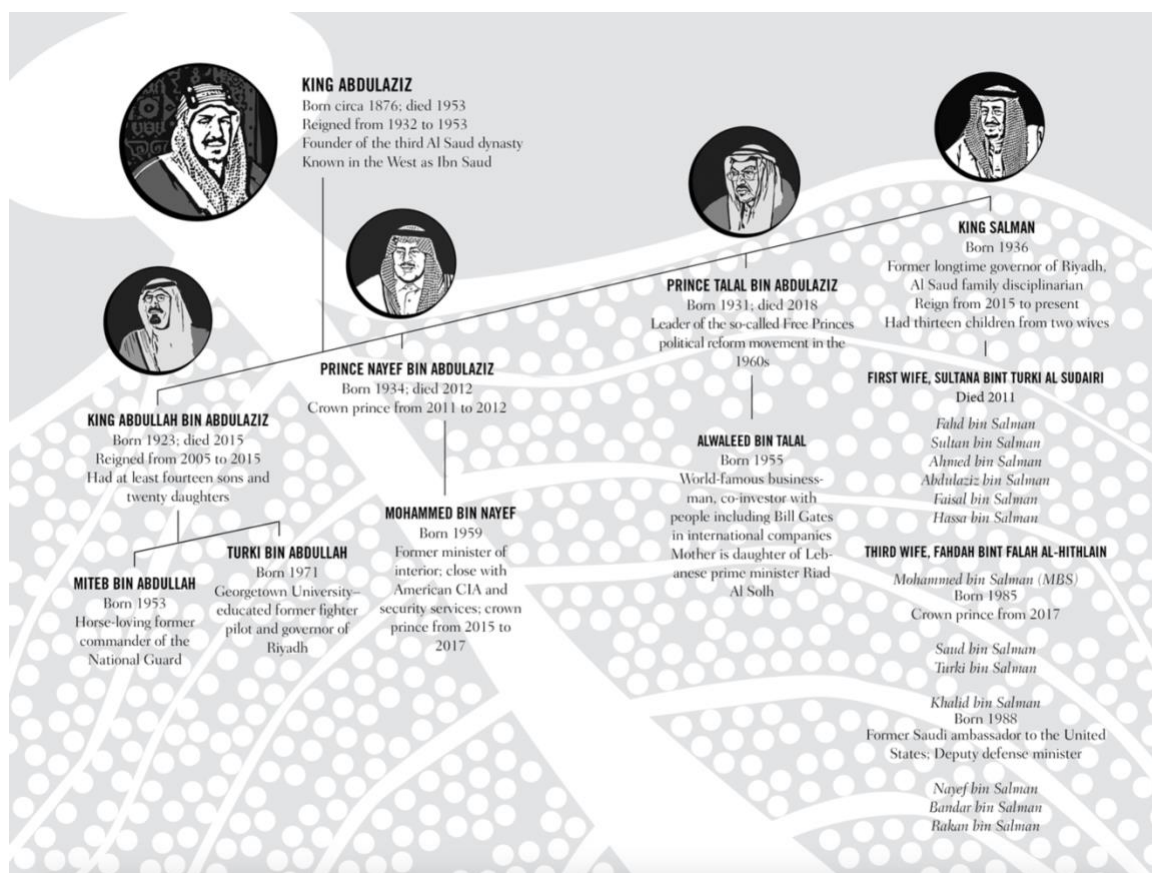


Figure 2 – Saudi Royal Family Tree. Hope and Scheck, *Blood and Oil: Mohammed Bin Salman's Ruthless Quest for Global Power*

Recently, ultraconservative Saudi Arabia has been reforming their policies, offering more freedom to its citizens at a fast-paced tempo. The man behind these reforms has been King Salman's son, Mohammed, otherwise referred to as MbS. According to Hope and Scheck, Mohammed is the opposite of his uncles, who, for fear of jeopardizing the family, derived their authority from a royal consensus and leaned towards extreme conservatism. Most men in the family had been “desiccated old men” by the time they were in power, unlike MbS, who was young and full of energy. In a very short time, MbS declared war on Yemen, boycotted a neighboring government, and consolidated more power than any member of the royal family since the Kingdom was created (Hope and Scheck, 23-25).

⁵ The name literally translates into Mohammed son of (bin) Salman.

At first, some of MbS's family members were excited about the modernization of Saudi Arabia, where for example, women were getting more rights, such as being allowed to drive, which was illegal before. However, six months after being appointed Crown Prince, MbS ordered around 200 people who were businessmen, royal family members, and officials to be arrested on suspicion of corruption in the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh. These men were some of the most powerful men in the Arab World, holding unimaginable wealth and held secrets that needed to be released. According to MbS, this had only been possible due to decades of corruption. It must be acknowledged that the actions and deals that MbS deemed to be corrupt were approved by the previous King and his closest deputies. Looking back at this particular event, after all the detainees have been released (apart from the select few that had died during their stay at the Ritz) and the government collected tens of billions of US dollars in cash and assets, Hope argues that the event clearly resembles a coming-out ceremony for MbS. It clearly showed his devious, risky character, his ruthlessness, and his love for bold and dramatic acts. Though there had been allegations of torture during what is now referred to as "*the Sheikhdow*n", these have been denied by the Saudi government and some of the detainees as well (Brown; Hope and Scheck²⁵⁻³⁴; Mabon, 51).

King Abdullah al Saud, the sixth member of the second generation of the Al Saud dynasty to rule in Arabia, passed away at 90 years old in January 2015. He was King from 2005 onwards, so he came to rule at 80 years old. During his forties, Saudi Arabia changed rapidly after the discovery of an ocean of oil under the desert, yet the hyper-conservative form of Sunni belief, Wahhabism, stayed central to everyday life. New Saudi Arabia's existence rests on the twin pillars of Wahhabism and oil wealth. Even though the country's infrastructure was modern, politically, and socially it remained centuries behind. King Salman al Saud became his successor, who elected his second wife's son Mohammed (MbS), Minister of Defense, without any previous experience (Hope and Scheck, 63-64; Mabon, 53).

In his first eight weeks as Minister, MbS ordered the US to send in the F-15s to start attacks on Yemen. He decided to do so after a Houthi rebel declared that if Saudi Arabia intervened, they would expand their region until at least Riyadh. This decision was considered the most ambitious military operation in the history of the country; however, it is in line with the late King Abdulaziz' wish to "keep Yemen weak" at all costs. A strong

Yemen would be a significant threat to Saudi Arabian domestic security. The order came as a surprise to the United States. MbS promised to make the attacks short-lasting and brutal, saying it would be over within a couple of months. Saudi generals, as well as the State Department, were left rattled, and although Saudi Arabia had been urged by the United States to take care of its own defense for years, the Kingdom had never led a front-line attack, putting people in the path of harm. Accustomed to dealing with a long line of conservative and deferential princes, US security officials quickly learned that they were negotiating with a different form of leader, one who seemed completely comfortable bombing Yemen with or without US assistance. The White House refused to get involved but started to propose targets and intelligence (Hope and Scheck, 63-65; Salisbury, 3).

With these events, MbS had built himself quite a reputation within three years of him becoming Minister of Defense. Mabon argues that with his reform, MbS creates a serious risk to the dual pillars of oil wealth and Wahhabism at the heart of Saudi Arabia. Though, his actions made him be appointed crown prince in June 2017. The perception of MbS across Saudi Arabia is not unilateral; on one side, people describe him as a modernizing, hard-working, and a business-leader that has confronted corruption. The other side describes him as a power-hungry, young guy that is not aware of the dangerous consequences of reforming too quickly (Mabon, 54-55).

The overall conclusion that Saudi Arabia faces severe economic difficulty as a result of the makeup of the current economy, which is predominantly public sector-based and overloaded with bureaucracies who also make up a vast majority of the workforce. It is also true that the public sector has been a tool to hold domestic dissatisfaction, which has been noted with the conclusion of the Arab Uprisings. Luckily for Saudi Arabia, protests were by no means as severe in comparison to other Middle Eastern states, and King Abdullah proposed a welfare bill at the value of about \$130 billion USD, and which vowed to introduce numerous new jobs within the Ministry of Interior as well as infrastructural repair and a rise of the minimum wage. The package also included major political reforms, such as the right for women to vote in municipal elections. With rapid reform came some adversities within the state, including a quick plummet in oil prices that would affect the country's treasury, leading to a significant loss of the state's capital reserves. As it is becoming more apparent that the Kingdom is unable to sustain the extra jobs created, civil unrest is growing, demanding a written constitution, an end to corruption, and more

reforms. This is mainly pushed by some Shia groups that are based in the Eastern Province (Mabon, 55).

Because of increased awareness of the ongoing socioeconomic problems coming from within Saudi Arabia, more individuals, especially in the country's youth, look to employ a transformation to a "post-oil world" which was referred to as Vision 2030. The main component of this idea was the envision of NEOM, which would be a carbon-neutral city, the first of its kind in the heart of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan thought to be the future city of the world. This, of course, boasts a strong commitment, requiring enormous economic investment and hopes to be the pinnacle of Saudi Arabia's economic and social innovations. Also, because of its geographical location, ordering so many neighboring states, it would be an advanced territorial region with its sovereign laws being within Saudi Arabia's framework, and commercial rules under NEOM itself to give it the ability to regulate the purpose and objectives of the city itself. This innovative agenda has been pushed by MbS. He also pushed for opening Saudi's borders to tourism, and he lifted a 35-year ban on cinemas (Mabon, 55-56).

MbS's modernization process does not only ensure domestic stability, but it also continues the support from foreign allies. Outside of Saudi Arabia, MbS has formed an anti-terrorism alliance made up of the Sunni States, intended to resolve the region's terrorism and to protect state sovereignty. Furthermore, Saudi's current foreign policy is enforced by MbS' two close friendships, the de facto ruler and Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed bin Zayed and the United States President, Donald Trump. Under MbS, Saudi foreign policy can be understood by analyzing two ways of thinking: firstly, reducing Iranian power in the Middle East and the Islamic world; and secondly, securing the role of Saudi Arabia as the GCC's hegemonic actor (Mabon, 58-59).

4. *Weapon trade*

Weapon deals are often made behind closed doors. According to the Swedish Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) - which traces international arms deals - the United States has delivered the most weapons to Saudi Arabia in the past ten years of all nations. Under Obama's administration, United States arms exports to Saudi Arabia increased by 225 percent (Kirkpatrick). The United Kingdom followed in the footsteps of the United States, making it the leading European supplier of aircraft, bombs, missiles, and guided missiles to Saudi Arabia. France, Spain, and ex-supplier Germany come after them. Since the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Turkey in 2019, pressure on arms exports has increased, especially in Europe. More and more countries are taking a critical stance on Saudi Arabia. For example, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, and Norway stopped exporting weapons to Saudi Arabia after Khashoggi's death. For France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, trade is primarily a political instrument: ally Saudi Arabia serves as a buffer against Iran (Musa, 436-439; Sabbagh; Stone).

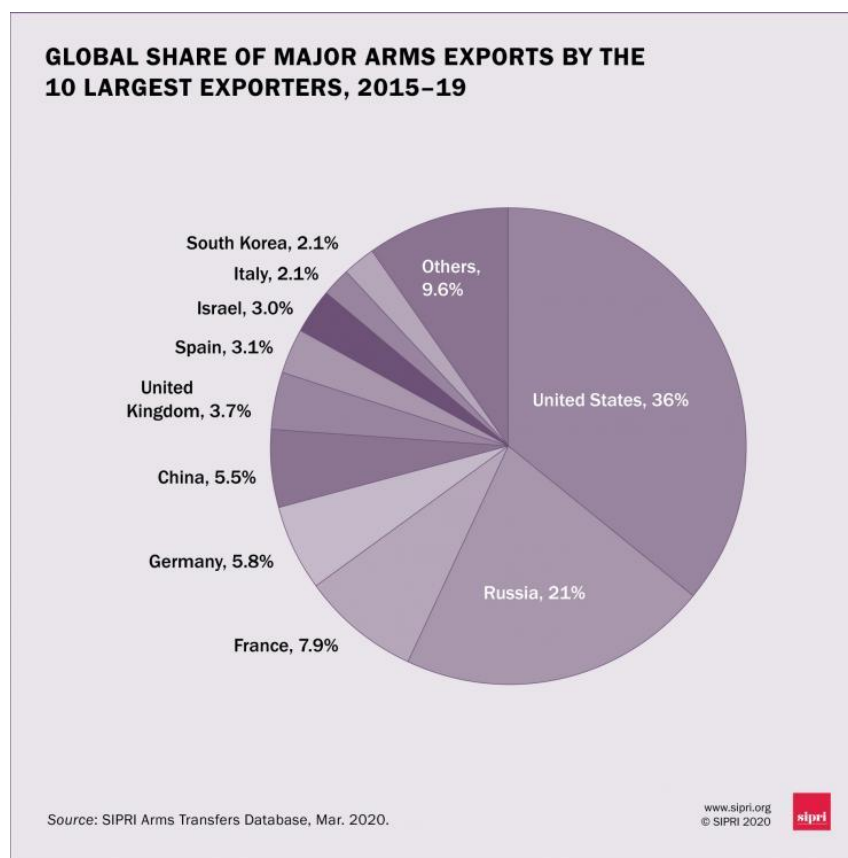


Figure 3 – source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 2020.

Weapons trade and sales are a powerful instrument that states may advantageously implement to showcase authority. Historically, the Middle East is a strategic area for trade, especially in regard to arms, particularly when considering the relative population. Countries in the Middle East are one of the most heavily militarized and territorial, so the purchase of arms is critical for them, as these countries are more likely to use weapons in conflict rather than diplomatic measures. Through New Wars, support from outside states and wealth held by those states allow for a higher influx of arms to be purchased and traded. Further, help from these outside states has enabled many Middle Eastern states to have developed their own production lines for military defense purposes, as well as to profit from weapons exports. The Middle East is the second most crucial region for arms imports, with a growing share of imports from major arms systems. Asia and Oceania are first, but the gap is rapidly closing. The global average share of foreign arms trade from Asia and Oceania dropped between 2010–2014 and 2015–2019 from 46 percent to 41 percent, and the Middle East rose from 23 percent to 35 percent. Three of the five most powerful importers of weapons are based within the Middle East, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar (Soubrier, 49; Thomas, 1).

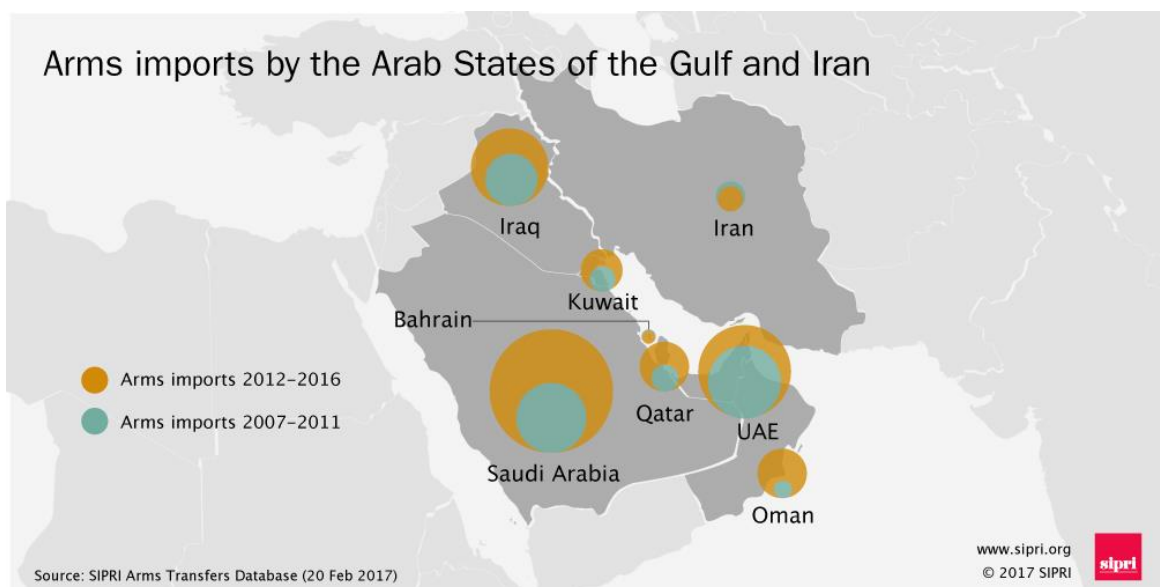


Figure 4 – source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2017.

According to Soubrier, the military acquisition has always been more critical for the Gulf states than those who possess the resources to counter security threats directly. Lucrative arms sales are a way of ensuring foreign ally's continuing interest, support, and

security. One of the primary drivers for the Gulf leaders in weapons procurement is to retain their Western security guarantors by spending heavily in and funding their commercial, military complexes through these contracts. Naturally, for many reasons connected with their national security and their geopolitical interests, Western powers, in particular the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, have been interested in Gulf security for a long time — not only the value of maintaining and sustained flow and of their access to oil. The oil-dependent economies have shown an incentive to move arms to the oil-rich countries to reduce their chances of unpredictable situations and, thus, disruptive oil supply, even in the absence of a direct bilateral oil-for-weapons trade (Soubrier, 49).

Soubrier mentions another strategic component of international arms trade that is scarcely discussed: domestic security and stability. Purchasing a range of notable jetfighters, rockets, or other weapons might foster national unity and inspire loyalty to the government. People might feel national pride and an existential concern for an actual or imaginary enemy. It may also pose an unspoken threat to persecution, motivating people to behave (Soubrier, 50).

Lastly, Soubrier mentions that weapons production has mainly been part of trade dynamics in the Gulf rentier states. As the rentier state model's basic theory suggests, natural resource rents establish particular power structures, creating strong co-optative ability and related poor political resistance to leaders. Not only can the absence of taxation contribute to the creation of a rentier social pact, allowing politicians to keep their citizens away from decision-making systems, but it may also produce communities of people who are reluctant to change as long as they profit from the rents. Modern weapons spread has been used by foreign employers for a long time to influence trends of superiority within countries, increasing the role of state-oriented elites' internal security while weakening the position of other classes who can benefit from alternative concepts of security and growth (Soubrier, 50).

As has been argued elsewhere, the Gulf area's instability since the beginning of the Arab Spring has become a driving force for strong and conflicting Gulf power. The power vacuum has led the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to adopt more vigorous policies to protect their security and stability and impose their views on the country's path. In some areas, they used military might (Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen), but often they used their economic muscles through proactive "riyal politics" (economic diplomacy using

riyal). Likewise, when many countries were suffering economically, their considerable wealth has made them considerable outreach to the rest of the world. Thus, arms trade in the Gulf may be seen as a weaponization of the regional actors' more assertive Riyal politics (Soubrier, 52).

The United States is a well-known and large supplier of arms to the Middle East, and United States policymakers have many times claimed to downsize arm sales to the region. However, this is yet to be seen put in action by the executive branch. Other significant arms producers that sell to the Middle East include Russia, France, and China, which are all prominent players within the region. Although they all sell the same commodity, their strategies and objectives for the reason to do so are very across the board (Thomas, 2).

There are a variety of incentives included in selling arms to other nations. It may buffer the security of allied states or suppress enemy forces. The use of arms becomes a sort of leverage on governments' behaviors and makes the forms economies that support arms industries (Thomas, 1).

Foreign sales of arms make up a crucial part of the United States' economic system, 6.2 percent of US exports between 2007 and 2014 were as a result of arms sales, which dwarfs the world average of roughly 0.8 percent that the average world exports. Even one of the main competitors in the sales of arms, Russia, only yields a 1.9 percent export rate (Thomas, 2).

Recent United States public opinion does not favor the deployment of US troops along with US military resources to Middle Eastern blocks, at least paling in comparison to post-9/11 terrorist attacks faced by the country. With a less favorable public opinion of deploying troops, proxy through the use of arms sales has proven effective for the United States along with other nations to yield influence in the Middle East through partnership and political-military interests. It must be kept in mind that with exporting weapons comes a sense of responsibility in the use of these weapons by foreign actors. There may be situations where these arms reach the hands of partners who may not share United States interests or follow international laws of military engagement (Thomas, 2).

It would seem that the most influential of the three branches in the guidance of United States arms sales fall upon the US congress, which plays an essential role in mandating US policy within the Middle East. Throughout history, the US Congress had always done the

accounting for opinions and actions based on specific previous experience in regard to arms sale and shaped policy maneuvers (Thomas, 2). Since World War II, the Middle East has always had the United States' interest in regard to arms sales. With the aftermath of the war, arms became a significant competition in the Cold War feud between the United States and the Soviet Union.

As mentioned before, the Middle East currently remains one of the militarized zones globally. Nearly every state within the Middle East holds a plethora of conflicts, and each considers themselves to be facing threats from states surrounding them. This forces leaders to continually maintain and advance their imposing military forces. Most commonly seen as a threat to the region would be Iran, as it holds hostile relationships with most of the countries within the Persian Gulf Peninsula. Examples of conflicts that show the influence of outside states seeking to manipulate outcomes by supplying arms would be Yemen and Syria (Thomas, 3).

Numerous factors create colossal demand for weapons in the Middle East, including interstate terrorist threats as well as domestic revolution. It is also not uncommon for many countries within the region that yield large military operations that play essential roles on a domestic and international political scale. Because military technology is often advancing, keeping systems up to date is a requirement amongst nations in the area, and this necessitates a continual repurchasing of military technology. There are even anecdotes that the harboring of a boastful arms collection is a sense of national pride or identity (Thomas, 3).

In nearly every aspect, the Middle East counts as one of the most important regions for global arms trade, representing around 61.1 percent of the total value of arms agreements perpetuated by global suppliers within a developing world between the years of 2012 to 2015. It also made up 54.5 percent between the years of 2008 to 2011. Out of these numbers, the United States by far accounts for the highest percentage, 46.2 percent, of total arms shipped to the region between 2008 to 2011 and 45.8 percent from the years 2012 to 2015. To give a comparison to the next country in line for that ranking, Russia delivered 19.1 and 17.5 percent within those respective years. Overall, evidence shows there have been no efforts made to reduce the exponentially militarizing region (Thomas, 2-3).

Clayton Thomas in his analyst report states the following statistics:

- “Of the 57 major U.S. arms sales proposed in 2016, 35 were to nations in the Middle East, totaling over \$49 billion (or 78%) of the \$63 billion aggregate total of proposed U.S. arms sales for that year.
- In FY2017, the State Department announced \$75.9 billion worth of proposed sales, \$52 billion of which were to Middle Eastern states.
- While three Middle East states had annual budgets putting them in the top 15 of global defense spenders in 2016 (Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iraq, at 4th, 14th, and 15th, respectively), 6 out of the top 10 defense budgets as a percentage of GDP are in the Middle East (Oman, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Israel, and Bahrain)”. (Thomas, 3-4)

There are only a few countries that play a major role in this external supply of arms to the Middle East region. The United States has had the largest share of exports for over two decades. The following will be a review of Saudi Arabia and its counterpart, the UAE (Thomas, 6-7). In the Middle East, United States policy seems to be motivated in part by a willingness to limit the ability of Iran to intimidate US allies and/or interests in the region or to restrict the free flow of energy-related trade across waterways like the Hormuz Strait.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has continued to purchase a large volume of arms throughout the United States. This partnership has always been reflected in controversy and debate by both the US public and Congress. Through both the Obama and Trump administrations, Congress has been presented with arms deals valued over \$120 billion USD from between 2009 to now. The technologically advanced arms trades are the basis of Saudi and US bilateral relations. President Trump has continued to present large sales to Saudi Arabia throughout his sitting. This can be presented in President Trump’s decision to veto the US congressional bill to block a billion-dollar arms trade to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, under the pretense that these countries must be supported as a buffer against Iran and that Saudi Arabia is a crucial ally to the United States. The Congress wanted to stop an \$8 billion USD sale to protest the high killings done in Yemen by Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Telegraph; Thomas, 11).

The United States' changed position on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal; Saudi's bad relationship with Israel and a growing concern about Saudi's involvement in regional conflicts (such as Yemen and Syria), as well as their domestic governance presence with regard to international terrorism all challenged the Saudi-US ties. Although relations are still good, this has led to Saudi Arabia diversifying their arms purchase through other international sellers, such as Russia and China (Thomas, 11-12).

UAE

The United Arab Emirates works closely and directly with Saudi Arabia on many political, economic, and social affairs. Similar to Saudi Arabia, the purchasing of arms from the US compose a vast amount of the UAE's military capacities. Also similar to Saudi Arabia, and despite the purchases of expensive high-tech military weapons such as the THAAD missile defense system, the UAE is diversifying its foreign arms purchases like their counterpart. The UAE also looks to establish arms production domestically as a result of concerns about recent US policy. The UAE has looked explicitly at Russia to be suppliers of F-35 fighter jets after the United States refused to sell the jets to the UAE in light of the possibility it would threaten Israeli security. While it is not entirely clear whether the UAE will go through with purchasing via Russia, as it may just be a subliminal request for the US to concede sales, it still shows dropping confidence towards the US as a supplier. According to Thomas, "...the UAE has been described as the most promising of the Arab candidates seeking to gain emerging arms producer status.". It is possible that the UAE in the future can develop into a hub for arms within the Middle East (Thomas, 15-16).

5. Yemen

Overview

Yemen, or the Republic of Yemen, is a geographically mountainous region located in the Gulf Peninsula's southern-west point. It is bordered to the east by Oman and to the north by Saudi Arabia. The capital is Sana'a. Yemen's geographical location has proved itself to be a strategic trade route, which influences the country in economic and social ways, amongst other things. The Republic of Yemen, as it is known today, was created after a merging of North Yemen and South Yemen in May of 1990. As of 2019, the population of Yemen sits at around 30 million, with a majority of Yemini people considering themselves to be Arabs. Yemen is religiously affiliated with Islam, the division amongst the two schisms are a reality, with an estimated 65 percent of the population being Sunni and 35 percent being Shias (Britannica; Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 156-157).

Economically, Yemen is a notably poor and undeveloped country, even with the commercialization and exports of oil and natural gas. Because of domestic conflict since 2015, economic and social issues have only gotten more severe in Yemen. According to the UN, Yemen suffers the "worst humanitarian crisis in the world", and as conflict continues, the state leads itself deeper into an economic crisis, with poor infrastructure and worsening food security. As of 2020, the UN estimates 24.3 million people of the 30 million are at risk of hunger as well as disease, and of this portion, about 14.4 million "were in acute need of assistance". The year 2020 has shown only more deterioration, as global oil prices continue to fall, and COVID-19 furthers economic distress. Further, Yemen has faced climate disasters, including mass flooding that have alone over the summer of 2020 killed at least 20 Yemen citizens (Bir). Yemen is extremely vulnerable to climate crisis as poor public infrastructure fails to offer any protection, and as global climate crises continue to become more severe year by year, Yemen will continue to face insufferable consequence. According to the International Trade Centre, Yemen receives a 2.47 for "Quality of overall infrastructure", placing Yemen at the near rock bottom in the global country list, 131/148 (International Trade Center).

Yemen's poor infrastructure poses many problems for its citizens, economy and political sphere. Yemen has an extremely weak transportation and communication network,

lacking entirely a railroad network, poor internet and telephone service, and mediocre road size and maintenance. Without these necessary functions, it is difficult to conduct transport and trade throughout the country efficiently, and with ongoing crisis, it seems original plans to build railroads and new roads are unable to have focus for the foreseeable future.

A second social feature that characterizes Yemen is the fragmentation of the population into tribes, or tribalism. The three largest tribes in Yemen are the Hashids, the Bakils and the Madhhijs, however under the Shia faction alone there are at least 400 other tribes said to exist. These tribes each have functions that are independent from one another and can be considered “states within a state”, performing different governmental tasks. In fact, according to Claussen, these tribes are more effective in completing governmental tasks than the government itself. Historically, tribes have played an important role in the political transitions of Yemen, both during earlier colonialism and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and are therefore also represented in the Yemeni political system. The Yemenis are proud of this traditional tribal system and refer to themselves as “tribesmen” (Brandt, 15-17; Clausen, 16-29; Fraihat, 210-211; Hoff, 11; Miller, 3).

Of these communities, in the background of the current war, many stick out. Among these parties, many stand out in the continuing war. The Zaydis are a Shia community, only in Yemen and parts of Saudi Arabia. They are a significant portion of the Yemeni people, but many of their representatives converted to Sunni Islam to gain Saudi blessing and protection. Another group of Zaydis founded a political party, al-Haq, whose young-oriented wing were the Houthi’s. Throughout the following decade, the youth community formed into a well-organized militia. The Houthis have since been the hallmark of Yemen’s Shia forces, who opposed the Sana’a government. However, the now-ousted government is backed up by southern Sunni tribes and militias known as Public Resistance Committees (PRCs), indigenous communities built on “the tribal tradition of collective responsibility.” (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 157)

Gun culture

A study by the Small Arms Survey concluded that Yemen, with 54.8 weapons per 100 capita, ranked second overall in terms of civilian gun ownership. Heinze confirms these results in a qualitative study, in which 60.8 percent of the interviewed Yemenis had a

weapon at home. Yemeni legislation in regard to the sale, acquisition, and carrying of weapons does not require a license or have a limit- it is a right of every citizen. Further, the use of open carry is normalized for any boy who has reached the age of 15 years old. This proves there is a gun culture, or at least a weapons culture. On an economic scale, Yemen spends around 3.6 to 4 percent on weapons, giving strong evidence that there is a lasting demand for weapons and a high one for that matter (Heinze, 70-95; Miller, 3).

Unfortunately, a lot of the weapon culture can be attributed to the harsh history of conflicts that Yemen has faced. As well as its fractioned tribal traditions and normalized violence. Certain celebrations prove the gun culture to be true, such as festive firing bullets in the air. The Small Arms Survey publication by Miller furthers the point that tribalism of Yemen contributes to gun culture in ways such as values encouraged by Yemeni society. It is viewed that honor, courage and self-control are not only trained through firearms, but also cannot be maintained without them. Heinze argues that this weapon culture promotes violent aspects within Yemeni culture, especially through cultural ideas of revenge or vendettas that may occur between individuals or their tribes, and therefore create a criminal behavior that goes hand in hand with the gun culture. Finally, it may be possible that this gun or weapon culture promotes a sort of arms race, which is participated in by different tribes, giving good reason for high demand of weapons within Yemen (Heinze, 74).

Crisis

Yemen holds a history of instability, including fragile institutions, vulnerable geographical location, and a national identity that empowers localized conflicts as well as civil unease. Historically, Yemen had been under the Ottoman rule for quite some time, but Yemen citizens were known for continuous rebellion. After the Ottoman presence lost strength, post WW1, the first recognized leader of northern tribes, in what was a majority of modern-day Yemen became Imam Yahya Hamid, who had ruled until his death in 1948 (Bonney and Schoch, 19-20).

Before the unification of the Arab Republic of Yemen (hereinafter YAR) and the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen (PDY) into the Republic of Yemen in 1990, numerous political events took place in the respective northern and southern parts of Yemen. In 1918, under the Shia schism of Islam, it became an autonomous kingdom. The

southern part of Yemen was a colony under the British Crown from 1937 to 1963 called the Colony of Aden. A civil war became apparent in 1962, after the death of Ahmad bin Yahya, Imam's son. The Yemeni Arab Republic was declared in North Yemen after this event. Both Ahmad and his father were conservative and rejected modernization within Yemen. When civil war occurred, Egypt deployed military action and supported rebels that were recognized as Arab nationalists. Saudi Arabia, as well as the United Kingdom, backed the previous regime and later, so did Israel as an act against Egypt. The war ended in 1970, and the nationalists had established the Yemen Arab Republic in the northern region, and in the south, with influence from the Soviet Union, radical socialists had set up South Yemen. Due to the numerous frontier wars with southern Yemen and uprisings led by chieftains and many state coups, there was little political or economic peace in the YAR during the 1970s. After Ali Abdullah Saleh came to power in 1978, though external ties with South Yemen strengthened, the internal contentment of the people in the YAR deteriorated dramatically. Various political groups, such as the Houthi Group, headed by Hussein al-Houthi, stressed this frustration. These two regions eventually were united in 1990 under the northern regime. However, another civil war quickly rose when an attempt for secession from the south occurred. During the 1990s and early 21st century, this phenomenon referred to as Ansar-Allah in political discourse, developed into a well-organized and popular military-political body. To this day, in the Yemeni war, the Houthis play a significant part (Bonney and Schoch 22-24; Claussen, 16-29; Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 156; Fraihat, 39-57; Miller, 3-7; Salisbury, 1-12).

The crisis in Yemen follows as an extension of the uprisings of the Arab Spring that started in 2011 in Yemen. Since 2011 two governments have been overthrown on, first on 27 February 2012, and following 22 January 2015. On the 19th of March in 2015 a civil war in Yemen had been established between the Yemeni government and the Houthi armed movement, after a battle concerning the power in the port city of Aden. This port is important, since it's located near the Bab al-Mandab Strait. As stated by EIA, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a critical and strategic route for shipments of oil and natural gas. The Strait is a crucial sea route between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. In 2017, the total flows of petroleum through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait contributed to 9 percent of the overall seaborne-traded petroleum. The straight is well-known as the most dangerous straight in the world due to the ongoing Yemeni civil war (Aljamra; Bonney and Schoch, 36-37).

Political Violence & Protest Events, Yemen, January 2015 - June 2019

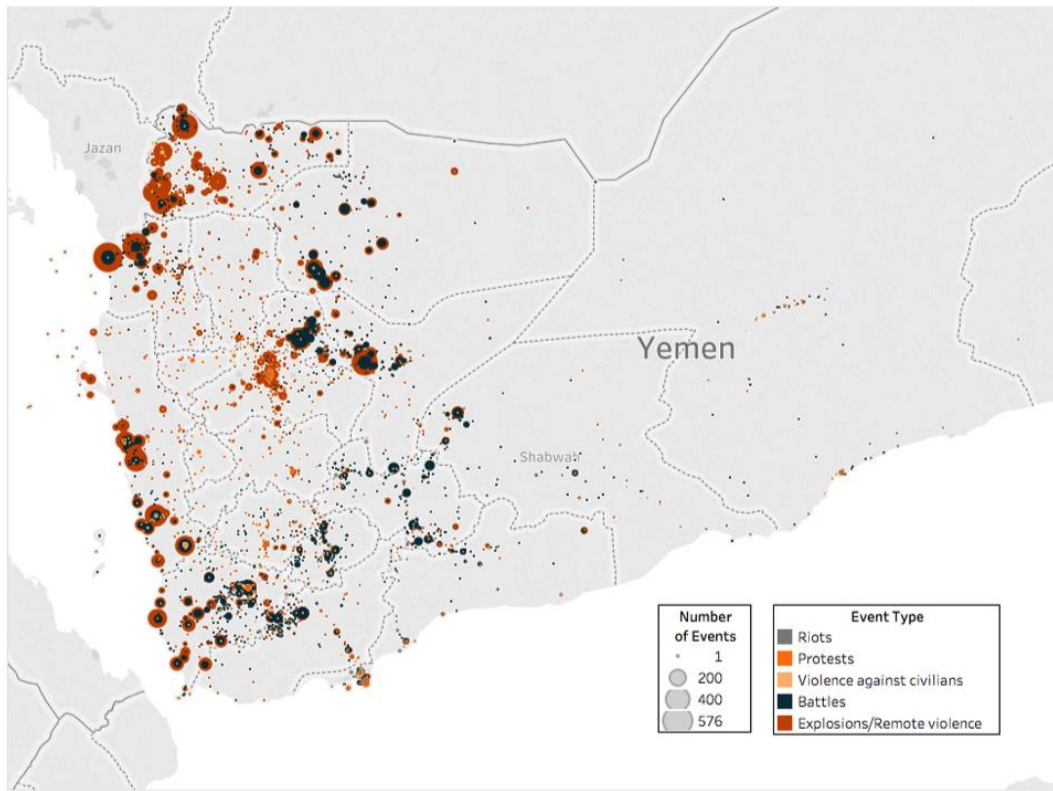


Figure 5 - Source: Sulz, *Yemen Snapshots: 2015-2019*

Since 2015, the civil war has already killed over 70,000 people, including deaths caused by famine and health crisis that are a direct consequence of the conflicts. It has also displaced millions of its citizens, adding to the global toll of the increasing number of refugees globally (Al Jazeera).

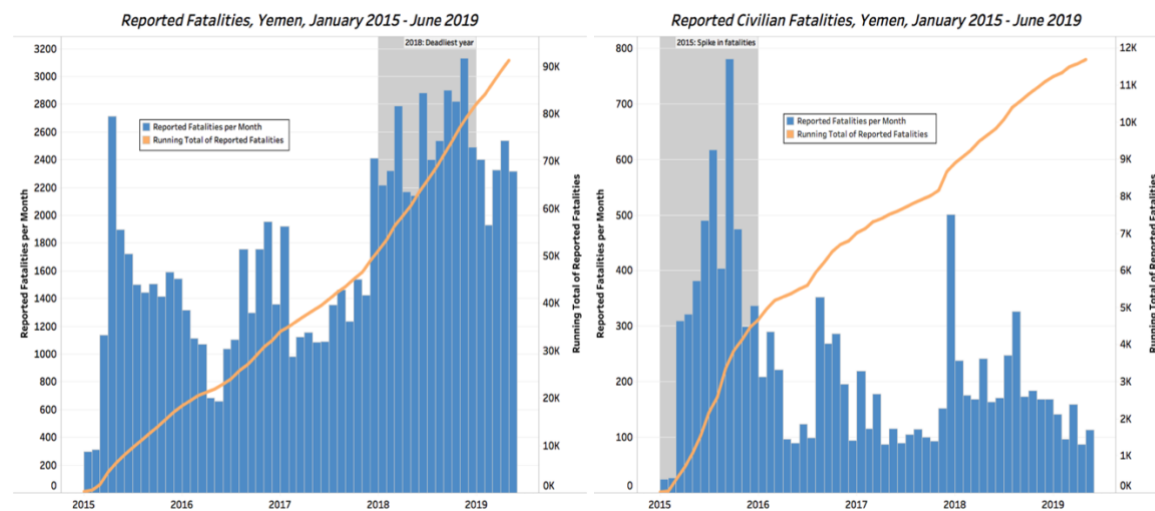


Figure 6 – source: (Sulz, *Yemen Snapshots: 2015-2019*)

The actions of the Yemeni government are backed by the Arabic Coalition: Saudi-Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Egypt. Saudi-Arabia mainly leads the coalition, particularly supported by the controversial Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, who also has the support of the United States of America. The involvement of the United States of America mainly concerns the supply of arms, that has grown with 225 percent under the Obama administration. The Houthi armed movement, however, is backed by Iran, making Yemen yet another battlefield of the cold proxy-war between Saudi-Arabia and Iran, and indirectly the other countries involved (Kirkpatrick; Larosse et al.).

Before the rebellion of the Houthis in September of 2014, Yemen was considered one of the many successful outcomes of the Arab Spring. However, after the Houthis entered the capital city of Sana'a, deadly conflicts became apparent. Frustrated over the deteriorating living conditions and absent reform expected by the Yemeni government, Houthi rebels used the popular demand of immediate change in Yemen to their advantage. In order to suppress unrest within Yemen, the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) was quickly signed on the 21st of September in that year. This agreement looked to accomplish a variety of policies, including removing cuts from fuel subsidies in return for a ceasefire and step-back from Houthis rebels in Sana'a. Unfortunately, this deal was not respected by the Houthis and conflict continued to worsen across the city. This resulted

in the resignation of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi and other government officials in the beginning of 2015 (Clausen 16, 17).

Interstate conflict and resignations proved the state of Yemen to be fragile and vulnerable. The transition after the Arab Spring was also proven to make no standing stability, or effective reform during the political transition state.

The transition itself can be attributed to the Yemeni youth and their desire for political change, which they demonstrated through protests. However, this movement was quickly swept up by the elite, and ended up becoming “.... a reshuffling of elites” rather than any substantial change. This was guided by the UN as well as the remaining Gulf nations, and it seemed that the only goal in mind was a short-term period of stability within Yemen. Any individuals or groups within Yemen who advocated for political shift were immediately direct to the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), a forum which lead to little or no response in terms of actual fundamental progress. The NDC hoped to unite all factions of Yemen’s broken political sphere and encourage discussion on rebuilding the political climate. A major topic to be discussed, was whether Yemen would become a federal or unitary state, and structure of regions within Yemen, which would be ignored until the very end of the NDC’s livelihood. A decision of an 8+8 group was made, with eight representatives from both North and South Yemen, and they recommended Yemen should be established as a federation (Clausen, 566-567).

As these processes went on, the elite within Yemen had their goals set on the future landscape of the state. As decisions continued to be stalled, Yemen’s state quickly began deteriorating, as food security became obsolete, and infrastructure began failing. Tensions between Yemen citizens and the political elite began to raise, as the NDC’s decisions were continuously overlooked, and the hope for a proper transitional government slowly diminished. While the Houthis group continued engaging with the NDC, they were also planning military operations in northern Sana’a, the bedrock for their future attack on the capital (Clausen, 567).

International Intervention

Salisbury claims that the main drivers of tensions and violence in Yemen are local, but the assumed and sometimes overvalued foreign players’ roles appear to influence the

Yemeni actors' judgments and the numerous regional actors. As mentioned before, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia for regional dominance is aggravating a number of current conflicts in the region, where the two nations support opposite sides (Salisbury, 3).

As mentioned before, in regard to the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it may be characterized by two main competitive measures. First would be the clash between the two nations' religious schisms; as Saudi Arabia is home to Sunni Muslims, and the Shia compose the majority of Iran. Second, would be the competing political spheres and territorial conflicts between the states. After the Arab Spring, conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia have only gotten worse, and an allusion to this intensity is shown in the civil war displayed in Syria. Since the uprisings, Saudi government has taken Iranian action and has attempted to gain territorial area and influence. The perceived threat from Iran has forced Saudi Arabia out of a passive state in regard to its foreign policy, enough so for Saudi Arabia to form a new alliance amongst Arab nations to pose as a defense against Iran (Berti and Guzansky, 25).

Saudi Arabian influence in the Middle East plays a variety of roles, and while current circumstances may point towards detrimental intervention, it is important to understand that early in Yemen's crisis, Saudi's managed to play a crucial role by implementing a deal for President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign in exchange for immunity. This was not a first-time intervention for Saudi Arabia in the post-revolutionary stage of the Middle East, as it had influenced campaigns within Libya, as well as Egypt. These were all counter-revolutionary interventions, while Saudi Arabia had taken an anti-government stance against Syria, supporting oppositions to President Bashar al-Assad (Berti and Guzansky, 25-26; Isaac, 424-425).

Yemen's relationship with its neighboring country Saudi Arabia, is a complicated one. Many Yemenis see Saudi Arabia as a young, new money start up with overwhelming regional power. Meanwhile, the Saudis see Yemen as a problematic and overpopulated country in their own "backyard," demanding close consideration and vigilance. Saudi leaders have long called for "containment and maintenance" in Yemen, where any government in control in Sana'a is funded sufficiently to avoid a regime's breakdown, yet a degree of political instability is seen as appealing (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 155; Salisbury, 3).

For Riyadh, Yemen is a crucial zone of control and a high priority. Saudi Arabia has been active in Yemen's politics for decades, shaping different communities for its own advantage. Although Yemen does not have anything to offer by resources, for the House of Saud, power over Yemen is a prestige and legitimacy point. Functioning from a perceived role of vulnerability, the Saudis depict Iran's involvement in Yemen as one of sheer power play, an attempt to surround the Arab Gulf state strategically and pose an existential challenge (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 155-156).

Saudi Arabia has been the most crucial external player to the Yemen political sphere and has had a historical affair in Yemeni politics for quite some time. Iran on the other hand, has not had extensive influence. According to Esfandiary and Tabatabai, Tehran's involvement in the dispute in Yemen has been more nuanced and limited than is argued by Saudi Arabia. Unlike their other involvements in Iraq or Syria, Iran's policy on Yemen is lacking an ultimate goal and seems patchy. Although they do provide some level of support to the Houthi rebels, it does not go as far as deploying their elite forces. So, the idea that Iran began subsidizing and controlling parts of the Houthis movement has been pushed by the Yemen and Saudi Arabian governments, looking to extinguish the Houthis in their campaign. With the Houthis power over Yemen quickly growing, Saudi Arabia felt uneasy with the influence gained by the group, especially if Iran's role in the movement was not just speculative. As it became apparent that Iran had been influencing the Houthis group, what at first seemed as a scramble between Yemeni elites, soon looked to become a proxy-battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This, however, should not take away from the original political instability faced in Yemen, as the fueling to conflict by both Iran and Saudi Arabia does not mean they began the conflict in the first place (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 156).

Historically, Saudi Arabia has funded Yemen enough to create some form of stability, as it is against Saudi interest to have Yemen become an advanced state that would in turn make Saudi Arabia lose their influence over the nation. Saudi Arabia also seems to place political standings within Yemen who help maintain their influence over the state. With a severe collapse of Yemen, Saudi Arabia fears the migration situation would be uncontrollable. Also, if collapse were to be imminent, al-Qaeda would be able to stronghold the land and have geographical positioning to attack Saudi Arabia. From Saudi Arabia's point of view, Ali Abdullah Saleh was no longer useful in controlling Yemen, and they

quickly looked to transfer power to Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi as the new ruling president. This required mass funding from Saudi Arabia, through campaigns and setting up the transfer. Saudi Arabia also supported Wahhabism and Salafism's spread throughout Yemen, which eventually reached the Sa'ada area, which laid the Houthis group. As a predominately Shia group, who followed the school of Zaydi, it seemed the two would not fare well with one another, although the Salafists managed to gain some support from areas that were predominately Shia by enticing them to unfollow the hierarchal structure natural to Zaydism (Clausen, 563).

While Yemen faced uncertainty throughout 2014, it may be apparent that Saudi Arabia did not act as swiftly as usually expected in regard to the transition. This can be attributed to a few things, including the preoccupation faced by Saudi Arabia in regard to the question of who would succeed King Abdullah as he was ill. Also, during the time it seemed the Houthis were not as vigilant in their agenda, and it looked as though they focused more on former enemies of theirs including the Islah Party. Houthis, at the time, specifically aimed for reform in the economic and political sphere, and did not directly challenge President Hadi, who was known to be supported by the Saudi's. At the time, it was not claimed by Iran that they directly supported the Houthis in their efforts, but they were vocally applauded and encouraged by the Iranian government on their mission. Post-resignation of Hadi in the beginning of 2015 gave a good glimpse into the influence of the Houthis group- at this point, they seemed to have control (Clausen, 20).

Because the Houthis were becoming so influential across Yemen, Saudi Arabia and fellow GCC nations were quickly becoming fearful of Iranian influence in the region as a whole. As Iran refused to step down to the United States in their efforts with the nuclear issue, the GCC was quickly losing confidence in the United States' ability to give them protection from enemies like Iran. However, it must be re-emphasized that the Houthis movement in its grassroots was not to become a proxy for Iran, as it is well known that the movement itself is a Yemen related one. There are a multitude of reasons why either Iran or Saudi Arabia may have chosen to intervene, but they are not the rooted reason for the original conflict within Yemen (Clausen, 20-21).

An important aspect of the conflict lies within the schisms within the Islamic religion; Sunni and Shia Muslims. The Houthis are as mentioned previously, a predominately Shia organization, which would give good reason for Iran's support.

Likewise, Yemen is traditionally Sunni, and gives an equally good reason for Saudi Arabia's support. Historically, this schism had little to no effect over the political sphere in Yemen and has actually only gained importance through the strengthening of regional factions in the state through conflict. It seems that Saudi Arabia looks to encourage the tension between the factions, as they rely on Yemen Sunni's to support them alone on the fact that they identify on this religious matter. Houthis and their configuration with Zaydism, are a minority within Yemen, and the school of Zaydi is almost strictly taught in northern Yemen (Bonnefoy and Schoch, 20-21; Clausen, 23).

Although the two factions may not agree on everything in regard to the religion of Islam, they still both are under the umbrella of Islam, and the history of the two do not point to any sufficient evidence that would depict it as a politically deciding factor. For instance, there are instances within the conflict itself where even the Houthis group looked to seek alliance with the previous ruling party, the GPC lead by President Saleh. Perhaps a better use of analysis when examining the factions would be how it can be used as tools to influence support. While these may seem like determining factors and have the possibility of influencing the conflicts within Yemen, it cannot be said that the schisms are a major component of the original conflict occurring, although they certainly can have some effects on the conflict itself (Clausen, 23).

Though the Houthi's consider themselves Shia Muslims, they reject certain elements of the belief system that are important to the Iranian Shia's. According to Esfandiary and Tabatabai, their form of Islam is actually closer to the Sunni schism than the Irani Shia schism. Argued is that some Iranians and Gulf states do not perceive them as Shia's at all. Allegedly Iran has little influence over the group. However, by changing the narrative into them being a Shia group that is heavily supported and groomed by Iran, President Saleh, and Saudi Arabia have created tension between the Gulf countries. According to Esfandiary and Tabatabai, the Houthis are merely a native group with a closer identity to the rest of the Gulf Peninsula than with Iran. While Iran is happy to use the Houthis as a tool in their conflict with Saudi Arabia, they do not have deep ties with them (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 157-158).

Whether or not Iran has connections with the Houthis is contested amongst different sources. A UN report that came out in February 2020, the Houthis' weapons resemble Iran's weaponry. Some arms, including a new drone type and a new cruise missile model, had not been seen in Yemen prior to 2019. The UN article cited a US Navy armed shipment intercepted off Yemen's coast on November 25, including a Quds-1 cruise missile, C802 anti-ship missile, and surface-to-air missiles. Brian Hook, the United States Special Envoy for Iran, claimed the weapons were of "Iranian origin" at a December 5 press conference. The United States and Sunni states claimed that Iran and its Hezbollah proxy offered weapons, preparation, and financial assistance to the Houthis. However, officials from Iran and Hezbollah refuted or downplayed reports (U.N. Report: Houthi Arms Resemble Iran's).

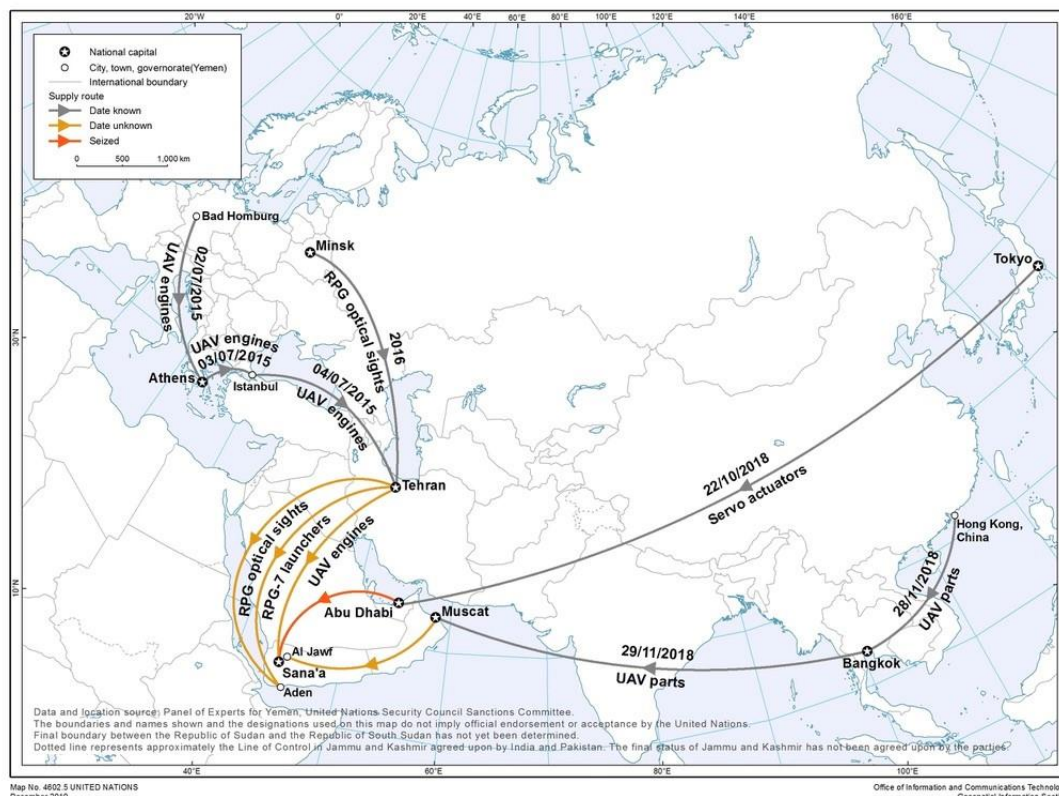


Figure 7 – Map of Houthi supply networks documented during the reporting period. *U.N. Report: Houthi Arms Resemble Iran's.*

Another source, the Arab News, reveals how Iran smuggles weapons to the Houthis through Somalia. The four traffickers were captured in May 2020 in Bab Al-Mandab, the vital strait connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. The leader of the group has reportedly admitted being recruited by the Houthis five years prior to trafficking the Iranian weapons through Somalia. They were first flown to Iran through Oman and underwent

training on the use of GPS, camouflage, steering vessels and engine maintenance (al-Batati).

The current situation in Yemen, regardless of standards is disastrous. Yemen continues to hold weak governing ability, and the humanitarian crisis has no end in sight. The country faces near collapse, as starvation and disease run rampant. Saudi Arabia is continuously feeding resources, and since the long period of time the conflict has run, it would seem they are grinding their efforts to a slower momentum. So far, Iran looks to be gaining the most benefit from the conflict, as it now has a front to prevent Gulf states from expanding influence where previously Iran lacked influence. As the situation furthers and becomes more hectic, terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS are finding entrée's into Yemen (Byman, 142).

Through US involvement under both former president Obama, and current sitting president Trump, problems within Yemen have become more severe. Neither Trump nor Obama made any significant efforts in stopping Saudi Arabia from intervening in the conflict. In a variety of ways, the US has been counterproductive by providing logistics and intelligence support, furthering the strength of involvement (Byman, 143).

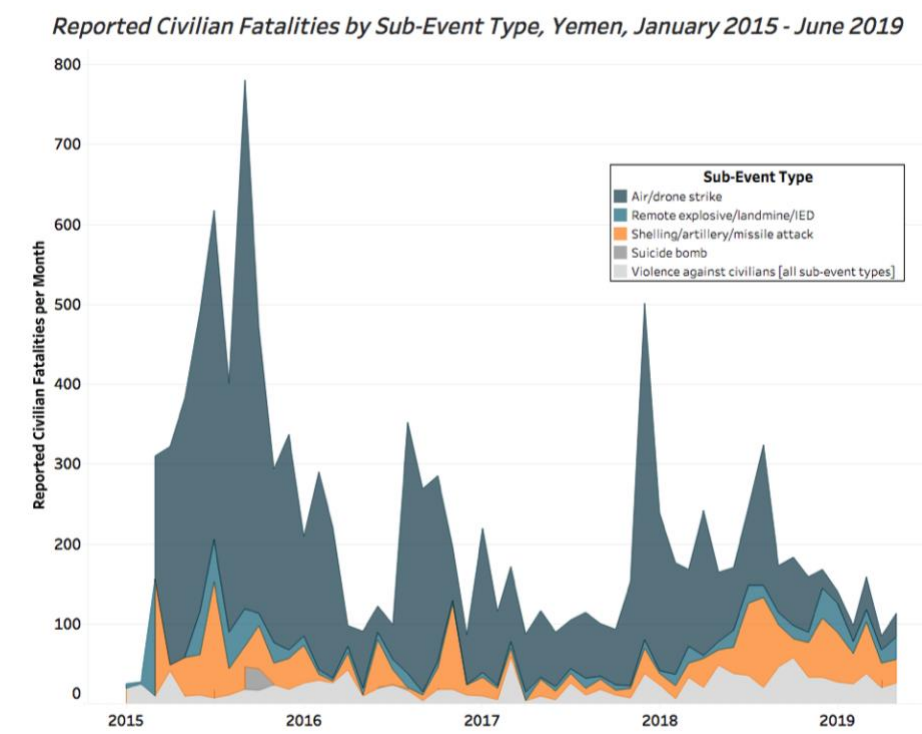


Figure 8 – source: Sulz, *Yemen Snapshots: 2015-2019*

While the Houthis became more pronounced in the north of Yemen, as well as assigning leading members into places of authority and put restrictions on any humanitarian aid organizations attempting to settle within the area, through 2019, Houthis attacked the WFP because of their use of biometric tracking systems implemented to help them reduce the misplacement of nutritional support. Shortly after, the WFP discontinued aid, which then prompted a quick response from the Houthis to allow the biometric system to be used again. Although later on, the Houthis continued to block the use of the system. This led to numerous issues of deliveries of aid. Control and diversion is one way the Houthis finance their operations. As stated before, humanitarian aids often come in the armed groups' hands, helping them maintain power (Sharp, 7).

The Houthis put forward an order creating the Supreme Council for Management, Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, International Cooperation (SCMCHA). The SCMCHA was involved with renewing international aid agreements and coordinating deals with aid agencies, although some of the provisions were declined by international aid organizations quite often (Sharp, 7).

As time went on, many international states and organizations became quickly frustrated with Houthi handling of aid, and as a result, warned that if the continued abuse of aid takes place, they will lose aid assistance. In a conference between the European Commission and Sweden in 2020, participants giving aid agreed that if the Houthi group refused to abide by international humanitarian law, the international participants involved would either reduce aid sent or halt aid completely (Sharp, 7).

The United States under Trump's presidency had given full support to pressure Houthis with consequence if they lacked adherence to international law. In March of 2020, the USAID had begun a partial cut off aid that normally funded humanitarian causes within the north of Yemen, and this cut had only been enacted after multiple warnings had come from the United States administration directed to Houthi leaders. In February of 2020, the United States Ambassador to the UN stated:

“The United States is also extremely concerned by mounting Houthi interference with the work of aid partners in northern Yemen, which limits the ability of the UN and other humanitarian organizations to deliver assistance to the most vulnerable Yemenis. Houthi actions – including

imposition of a 2-3 percent per project levy – amount to a flagrant rejection of a principled humanitarian response.... In light of these entirely avoidable circumstances, donors are faced with the difficult dilemma of how to continue delivering aid while remaining responsive to taxpayers. We may be forced to consider suspending or reducing our assistance in northern Yemen as early as March unless undue Houthi interference ceases immediately and access to vulnerable populations improves.” (Sharp, 7-8)

Since spring of 2020, the partial suspension of aid to Houthi regions of Yemen has not been retracted. Other international agencies joined the suspension of aid, including the WFP who had stated that it would actually only supply about a half of its original food aid to those in northern Yemen. Many within Congress asked for the executive administration within the United States to take up more importance in fixing the issue between the Houthis and aid agencies worldwide. Eventually, many within the House of Representatives asked Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo to not completely suspend aid, as the country faced the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other interstate health issues and needed all the aid it could get (Sharp, 8).

6. Syria

Overview

The state of Syria is geographically positioned on the East coast of the Mediterranean Sea in southwestern Asia. Present day Syria is not the same as ancient Syria, which was a piece of land between the Eastern Mediterranean coast and the desert of North Arabia. The capital of the country is Damascus. The current population of Syria is at bay around 26.3 million. The majority of the Syrian population are Muslims and follow Sunnism which accounts for about 75 percent of the Muslim population in Syria. The Shia faction of Syria resides in the South at al-Suwayda and make up around 11 percent of the Muslim population. Syria's geography was a significant aspect of the formation of its institutions. The Syrian environment features broad deserts with arable land extending around the larger cities' coast and oases. Population densities differ widely, from deserts to fertile field ranges. This geography and the subsequent population change acted toward the creation of a dominant centralized administration across two different channels (Britannica; World Bank, 3).

Syria had achieved independence in 1946. The political sphere of the country at the time was extremely unstable, because of conflict within the state regarding social, religious and political affiliations. Starting in 1970, Syria was governed by President Hafez al-Assad, who is considered an authoritarian ruler. After Hafez al-Assad came to power, presidential elections were never disputed and a single nominee (Hafez al-Assad, then his son Bashar) never received less than 99 per cent of the vote. Hafez looked to promote national security as well as security within the nation, while also recovering lost territory to Israel from 1967. As such, Hafez had focused on hoarding mass amounts of arms, which depleted a majority of the Syrian national budget. There was little left in the budget to dedicate to development (Britannica; World Bank, 7).

Hafez had passed in 2000, and power was transferred to his son Bashar al-Assad. Early on, during Assad's political regime, signs of reform were present, however this ultimately returned to the previous authoritarian rule of governance. Because Syria had stocked such a grand number of weapons, it had a well-equipped military, which was able to prevent

internal conflict for some time. Although, eventually, long term suppressed issues eventually broke out the Syrian civil war during 2011 (Britannica).

Sectarianism has long been an important factor in Syria: the Assad family granted a lot of autonomy to local leaders in exchange for political support (Khaddour and Mazur, 3). Parts of Syria may have been connected physically, but perhaps not socially, like the three large Kurdish regions in North-Syria which had very little connection to one another. However, they united against radical Islamists like ISIS and later on the Syrian government (Khaddour and Mazur, 6-7). The Kurdish are heavily armed and look for independence, however this seems to be unachievable for quite some time.

The economy policy of Syria has officially been socialism since 1963. The overall trend since 1963 has trajected to socialist and industrial economies. The state of Syria mainly controls foreign exchange operations. The government allowed private banks to operate in Syria for the first time in 2004 after more than 40 years and opened the stock market in 2009. This pattern had intensified since 2005 when Syria implemented “Social Market Development” in its Tenth Five-Year Plan. In the time leading up to 2011, Syria has undertaken many market-friendly changes. In particular, the Syrian government concentrated on improving the market climate, and took initiatives to eliminate tariffs, lower the top income tax rate and unify the exchange rate. The fall in oil demand has, in several respects, acted as a motivation for these changes. It also operates oil refineries, electricity plants, railways, as well as manufacturing. The Syrian government pushes for higher savings with the incentive of higher rates of interests and welcomes investments by citizens as well as other Arab countries (Britannica; World Bank, 8).

After Assad’s rise to power, he announced the “liberalization and opening of the economy” (Krieg, 56). In 2003, Syria even signed an agreement with the European Union, and in 2010 negotiations started to join the World Trade Organization (Fanack, 2018; World Bank, 8). However, this agreement created unrest in the Syrian population due to elites connected with Assad taking advantage of the deal. Large portions of the population were being excluded in the economic system (Krieg, 116). Shortly after this period, the country began facing large protests despite it on paper growing an economy. The unemployment rate was high, the currency had little value and due to ongoing violence, infrastructure was weak and constantly pummeled. According to the World Bank, it seems that between the years of 2011 and 2016, Syria had lost approximately \$226 billion from

its GDP. Aside from this, the population as a whole faced a major humanitarian crisis, psychological damage and loss of lives (Word Bank, ii).

President Bashar al-Assad

Bashar al-Assad is a continuation of family enterprise, common within Arab states. Due to the structural composition of Syrian governmental organization, it is impossible to have a truly democratically elected official in the higher rankings of office. It can be assumed that with Assad remaining in power, the change to political structure within Syria will not occur within his lifetime, although there have been reports that in February 2020, he was on the verge of seeking refuge and looked to resign. As of now, he remains the president of Syria (Krieg, 45; Poor and Ahishali).

From an outside perspective, it seems Assad struggles with keeping loyalty from civilians. It would seem his crackdown and attacks on the civilian population with chemical weapons diminished the support he still had. While it may seem that resignation is foreseeable in the majority of individuals who would like to witness it, not everyone is convinced Assad will resign. It is obvious that his opponents do not want him to stay in office, but external support from governments like Russia and Iran show he does have alliance in parts of the world (Gupta, 31-37).

According to Gupta, a complete change of regime would eventually lead to the end of Syria and then create more conflict in the region, a reasoning Iranian and Russian governments share. This may or may not be a good idea, because with Assad in power (Gupta, 37-38). Gupta believes negotiations within the international community should occur without Syria, as he believes no Syrian party alone is powerful enough to participate in decision making on behalf of the Syrian people. This may not be a good idea as conflicts within the region are so severe and require representation in peace talks.

Conflicts

In March 2011, anti-government protests broke out in Syria, inspired by the Arab Spring wave of similar demonstrations in the Middle East and North Africa that began in December 2010. The Assad regime reacted aggressively from the first days of the crisis,

deploying the country's powerful security services to break up rallies, often with live fire, and arrest suspected dissidents. However, the use of said brutal tactics did not suppress the protest movement and seemed to create backfire; allegations of brutality by security forces motivated more Syrians against the regime, and funerals of dead demonstrators became meeting places for new protests. Owing to the Syrian regime's harsh constraints on journalists, information on the crisis has circulated mostly through eyewitness accounts and amateur recordings. In several ways, the Syrian conflict has been taken out of Syria's hands, which became a proxy war between regional and international forces, often exploiting the country's divided society for their benefit (Antonopoulos, 17-21).

Nevertheless, this secretary fragmentation was not created when the war began in 2011; it came from an inherited Ottoman millet system whose features were accentuated by the policies of Bashar's late father Hafez's "divide to rule." The war pushed Syria to cling more firmly to its secretary ideologies, whether out of socio-economic self-interest or merely to survive. The leading international players in the proxy war in Syria are Saudi Arabia, supporting the Sunni rebels, Russia and Iran, who are supporting the Assad regime. Continuing, The United States, Turkey, and Qatar also have varying levels of contribution to the conflict (Antonopoulos, 15-23).

The Baath party has been a tool of rallying and a political eye in the state. The ideology behind the Baath party looks to unite all Arab states into one nation. It had a strong Pan-Arab and secular orientation. Its primary recruitment force was the agricultural market and the lower middle class (many schoolteachers). These rural sections, and middle-class individuals were to replace the higher-class individuals within the state. While Hafez Assad rose to power in 1970, he established the corrective movement which declared national revolution and a direct blame on Israel for its struggle. During his evaluation for policy, his main goal was to remain in power. The secular ideology of Syria remains intact at a structural level, because Syria is not a satellite state. This control of government on structural level, allows Assad to maintain a regime that allows him and his colleagues to control the country, and not allow intense reform or act upon the wants of the people (Antonopoulos, 11; Couvreur, 102-103).

Syria, because of its history, especially twenty years before Hafez took office, has been exposed and continues to fear extreme instability. Syria has been one of the politically most unstable countries in the world and citizens are not ignorant to this, as they witness

Iraq and Lebanon, their neighbors in the region struggle of sectarian violence (Antonopoulos, 32-33).

As mentioned before, the Arab Spring in 2011 started a chain reaction of protests across the Middle East. Before these protests, President Bashar Al-Assad held firm control within the country. With shoes to fill from his father's success in stabilizing the country, Assad began his political campaigns in 2000 with milder political policy in comparison to his father. At first, he backed economic liberalization, which initially had a positive effect on the situation, but eventually enlarged the gap between urban and rural areas. The economic reform eventually affected a large portion of Syrian civilians. Necessary subsidies were withdrawn, less opportunities for employment and food prices rose. The rural side of the country began quickly becoming impoverished and the elite of Syria got wealthier. The domestic economy was largely dependent on agriculture, and the oil industry dominated exports (Zemni and Peeters, 135-136, 138; Rieger and Yashiv, 71-72).

Bashar al-Assad kept his father's authoritarian reign alive. The regime under Bashar is still very repressive against enemies of the state and criticism. In order to protect his seat, any opposition is seen as an immediate threat and is immediately exterminated (Zemni and Peeters, 135-136, 138).

When the Arab Spring Uprising began in Syria, small demonstrations took place haphazardly with inspiration from surrounding countries. The protests reached their peak only a few months later. During early March of 2011, the Syrian people demanded change, which had not yet led to a level that would affect Assad but did demand a change in his regime. This, however, sparked a severe reaction from Assad where insurgents were arrested and temporarily (in some cases forever) disappeared behind bars. People were killed by security forces and the conflict began to escalate through ongoing protests, which were met with increased government reaction. Assad aimed to demoralize the people of Syria, but only made them more discontent with his rule as civilians became more rebellious, the increase of militarization went hand in hand. This began the civil war that continues in present day Syria (Gupta, 29; Zemni and Peeters, 140, Van Ostaeyen 77-78).

The Free Syrian Army was a group founded under rule of deserted Syrian soldiers. Initially composed of groups of soldiers and armed civilians it has grown to become one of the main oppositions of the Syrian regime. During 2012, the various groups in opposition

to Assad had united to form the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which had hopes of being an umbrella of opposition to form a singular front but proved to have no effective power. As time and conflict went on, the authorities within Syria were losing support amongst remaining loyalists in the Syrian population, along with their authority. The country became fractionated amongst local rulers, including the Islamic State caliphate. In the north Kurdish armed groups began defending for themselves, as they do not identify or associate themselves with the Assad regime and opposition regimes. The country had become completely split into multiple groups, each aiming for their own interests (Antonopoulos, 17-20; Gupta, 30; Laub and Masters; World Bank, 4).

The conflict's magnitude and repercussions were not the same everywhere in Syria. If the continuing war has influenced Syrian geography and demography, various types of differing severity across the vastly heterogeneous area have taken on. Figure 8 indicates differences in dispute exposure in multiple regions. A large proportion of Syria has had extensive conflicts of low intensity (defined as more than 70 percent of inhabited areas in the low-intensity district). The especially destructive types of violence, aerial bombardment, and airstrikes are not evenly spread. For example, Raqqa was mainly subjected to intense airstrikes (defined as more than 2,000 strikes from 2011 to 2017) but did not experience heavy bombing or severe low intensity fighting. Aleppo (town and district) has the maximum degree of violence in all divisions (World Bank, 18).

The crisis has caused substantial destruction to the physical infrastructure of Syria. Cities like Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus have functioned as war fields for government and rebel violence with tragic humanitarian implications on their residents. In many cities, the war has led to a partial or total collapse of urban structures by destroying houses and public facilities such as bridges, schools, and hospitals, leading to the decline of economic life in many regions. The numbers increased due to physical destruction, as roads, water supplies, grain silos, and other economically essential properties were strategic targets (World Bank, 18).

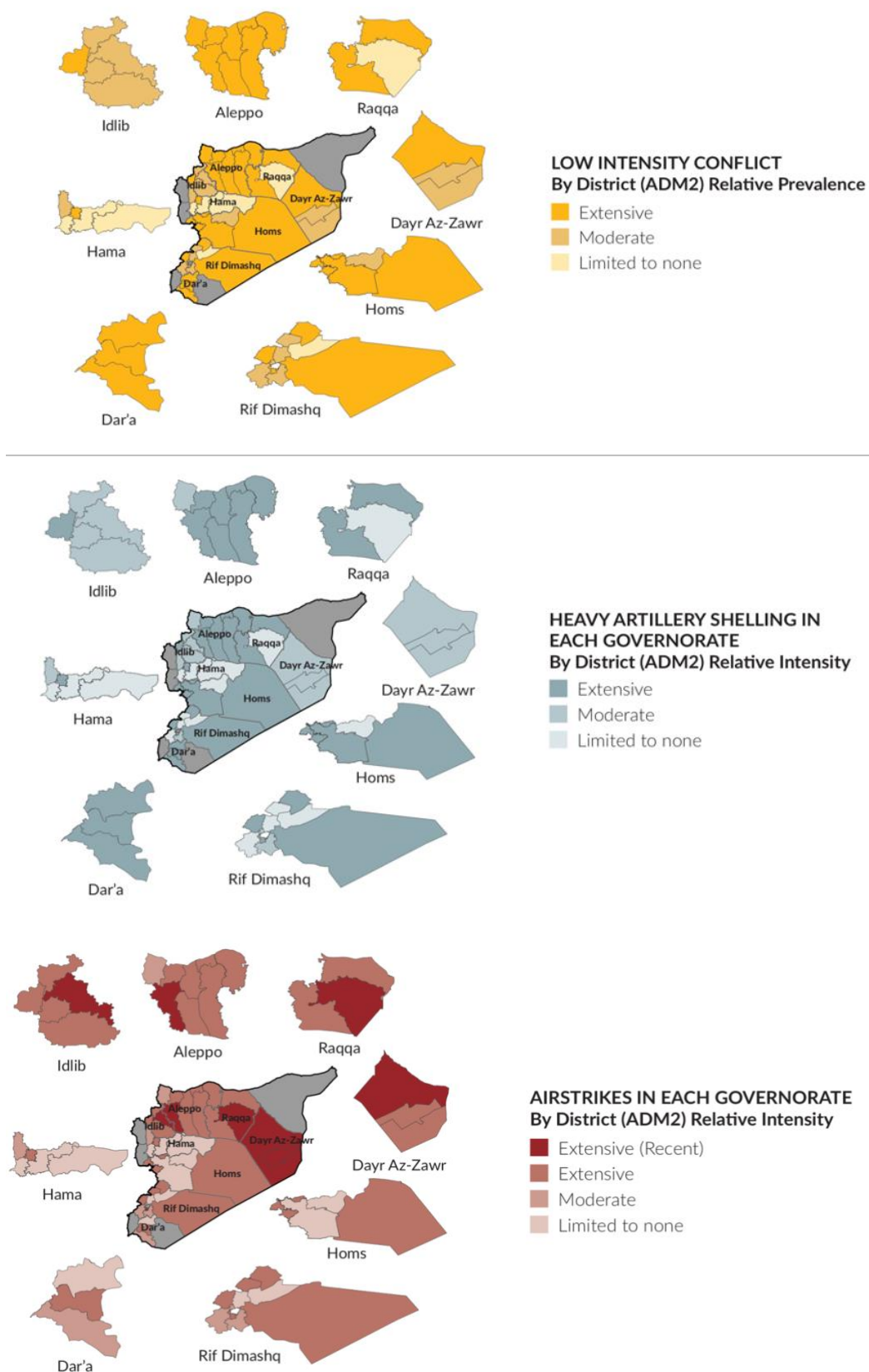


Figure 9 - Incidence of Conflict, 2011–17 source: *Toll of War*. World Bank Group.

International Intervention

Syria is well known to be Iran's closest Arab ally within the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's relationship with Syria went downhill after President Bashar al-Assad reacted violently to what was originally a peaceful protest that grew into retaliation against Assad's regime post-reaction (Antonopoulos, 104; Berti and Guzansky, 26).

The relationship between Syria and Saudi Arabia began deteriorating noticeably quickly after the assassination by Shia Hezbollah of the Lebanese Prime Minister and Saudi national and protégé Rafik al-Hariri, who was in a Syrian opposition. This was the start of Saudi Arabia's change in foreign policy from being relatively passive to interventionist. This change of policy was solidified following the May 2008 Doha Agreement, which had united a Lebanese government. Previous to this, Lebanon had been a tool for the Saudis goal to suppress and single out Syria. The settlement between the two countries became important after Israel's Operation Cast Lead between December 2008 and January 2009. In the next two years, the dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Syria continued; however, the two's relationship was never a concrete alliance. This, because Riyadh failed to break up the so-called 'Axis of Resistance' that comprised of the anti-Israeli and anti-Western alliance between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah (Antonopoulos, 104-105; Berti and Guzansky, 27).

Since those events, Syria and Saudi Arabia had quickly become more distant and developed an opposition to one another. The protests within Syria quickly shifted Saudi Arabia's foreign policy on the matter, and the Saudi's brought back the ambassador to Syria in August of 2011, committing to an anti-Assad regime stance. Saudi Arabia went forward with military intervention, beginning in Bahrain against Shia protests, showing evidence that they grew worried about Iran's influence within the Middle East. Then, by intervening in Syria, Saudi Arabia hoped a demoralization amongst the Shia related movement would occur. With Qatar's help, Saudi Arabia continued to weaken the link between Iran and Syria, suspending Syria's membership within the Arab League and funding Anti-Assad Syrian opposition financially and in a military aspect. (Antonopoulos, 105-106; Berti and Guzansky, 27)

Saudi Arabia's more forceful approach since the Arab Spring has been in the aim to reform multiple alliances within the Middle East that fit with Saudi's interests. Saudi Arabia's previous track record in regard to confrontation would fit the category of reactive. It may be the case that a previous Saudi leadership would have resented the United States for not immediately creating a coalition to attack the Assad regime. However, now was the case that when the United States did not intervene, Saudi Arabia decided to become the more prominent figure within the region, and it was the head leader in action, leading support to opposition against the Assad regime. Through funding opposition, Saudi Arabia had found a more effective form of destabilizing not only Syria but the relationship it had with Iran, therefore taking Iranian influence one step back (Antonopoulos, 106; Berti and Guzansky, 27).

Specifically, Saudi Arabia upped the ante against Syria during the summer of 2011, after the GCC demanded Syria halt on their "deadly suppression of citizens", which was queued by Abdullah's demand that Syria "stop the killing machine". This was an unusually powerful stance taken by the King and proved his frustration. After this call from the GCC and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar had joined the task with the Saudi's in aiding opposition forces within Syria. The goal in mind for Saudi Arabia within these matters was to arm rebels enough to overthrow the regime, therefore weakening Iran, and when this overthrow of Assad occurs, the rebel forces would be able to control Syria from thereon. However, Saudi Arabia's influence is not strictly on the matter of giving material and monetary assistance to the opposition forces, but also aiming to "boost the status and capabilities of the political opposition to Assad, and especially the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces". Although, this does not mean that Saudi Arabia is strictly offering aid to one or two opposition groups, as it distributes financial aid amongst nearly all opposition groups to Assad's regime. Saudi Arabia does not and will not fund ISIS due to their terrorist identification (Antonopoulos, 106-107; Berti and Guzansky, 27).

In some ways, Saudi Arabia's decision of presence within Syria may be attributed to its attempt to maintain regional security that they felt was being threatened by Iran's regional presence since 2003. Saudi Arabia has been a significant sponsor of the conferences of the diplomatic collective "Friends of Syria", which focused on the support of Syrian opposition organizations. In the first meeting, 70 countries participated. The

meetings grew in size over time, and Iran had been excluded from participation on purpose. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and UAE promised \$900 million USD to the collective in 2013 (Baghishadbad, 125).

However, previous to this decision, Saudi Arabia used many tactics, including supporting armed Salafist/Jihadist opposition groups that follow Wahhabism's ideology (Baghishadbad, 119). ISIS is currently the most important of all Salafist/Jihadist groups, founded by "Abu-Mosab Zarghawi" and initially expanded as "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," but suppressed by Iraq's central government in 2007. During that time, Saudi Arabia used ISIS as opposition against Iraq's Shia government. With the Saudis' financial and military assistance, especially Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, former head of Saudi intelligence, ISIS has been able to strengthen its power. The Iranian response to Saudi Arabian policy, as expected, was not satisfactory. In an interview, the Iranian foreign minister declared Saudi Arabian policies within Syria to hurt not only themselves but also the area surrounding them. Even though Iran's opposition was well known, Saudi Arabia still kept relationships with ISIS, which was matched by Iran's support to the opposition (Antonopoulos, 112; Baghishadbad, 127-128).

Nevertheless, irrespective of the funding from Saudi, the group's primary financial source is oil, which has made ISIS the world's most affluent militant group. However, while Saudi Arabia supports Salafist/Jihadist groups abroad, they mitigate them domestically as they are seen as a threat. The al Saud family fears terrorist groups. Some of the ISIS members, much of the members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are Saudi Arabians whose goal is to overthrow the monarchy. When ISIS claimed the Islamic caliphate in 2014, it was publicly stated that they did not recognize late King Abdullah as the caliph and are therefore independent. After these events, Saudi Arabia collaborated with the United States in halting activities by ISIS alongside Qatar and Turkey (Antonopoulos 26-27; Baghishadbad, 127-128).

All in all, Saudi Arabia sought to influence the Syrian crisis by making ISIS a mighty military power and a well-organized army. However, as discussed above, an unlikely development occurred: after capturing its independent financial center, ISIS turned to Saudi Arabia to attack it. ISIS is now using its Wahhabi-born theological rhetoric but is attempting to shift the Middle East's geopolitics (Antonopoulos, 6; Baghishadbad, 127-128).

Currently, despite Saudi Arabia and groups like ISIS belonging to the same schism of Islam, Saudi's remain uneasy by the groups and disagree on a multitude of policy. For instance, ISIS does not find Gulf Peninsula ruling families to be deemed legitimate, and therefore it would be a self-sabotaging effort to support the group. ISIS also claims to campaign in a land-grab within the GCC areas, another security issue for Saudi Arabia, and the GCC as a whole. There have also been supposed attacks that did not successfully execute by ISIS on Saudi officials, example being during the summer of 2014 when Saudi police arrested sixty-two individuals suspected of attempting assassinations. Even though Saudi Arabia officially considered ISIS as a terrorist organization since 2014, it does not prevent other nations from the Gulf Peninsula from supporting the group. Radical groups seeking donations from other states look to compete for said funding, and this, in turn, has actually made anti-Assad organizations more radical in ways (Berti and Guzansky, 28-29).

Saudi Arabia actively looks for additional international assistance in dismantling the regime in Syria, particularly the United States. This was particularly the case after the chemical weapons used in Syria by Assad against civilians in 2013 became global news, and Saudi Arabia attempted to entice the United States in intervention based on war-crimes. Saudi's also claimed Syria had extended their reach in violence in accordance with precedence set by Obama in 2012 and would require military intervention to suppress the oppression occurring (Berti and Guzansky, 29).

After evidence was shown by Saudi Arabia to the US, proving chemical weapon use by Syria, the United States still rejected involvement. Because of this, Saudi Arabia, and its allies within the Middle East, became unconfident in the United States as a defensive provider. Using the lack of intervention as an indicator of diminishing influence within the Middle East, Saudi Arabia quickly became frustrated with the United States. The King of Saudi Arabia quickly contacted President Obama, making it clear that he believed by not intervening; the United States' credibility was being put to the test. (Berti and Guzansky, 29)

Some believe that the Assad government, through these attacks and many alike, have actually created more bloodshed against its own than some opposition groups. According to the Washington Post, "for every Syrian that ISIS kills, Assad forces kill seven more". However, according to Iranians, Saudi Arabia's "indoctrinations" have done far more destruction than any bloodshed through a heavily financed promotion of Wahhabism.

A United States Senate Committee on terrorism heard testimony that in the prior two decades, Saudi Arabia had spent \$87 billion on supporting Wahhabism globally (Baghishadbad, 126; Hugh).

By the new year of 2014, it seemed that Saudi Arabia began once again to rethink its foreign policy regarding the Middle East. From an outside perspective, Saudi Arabia looked as if it had begun realizing the difficulties within the Syrian battlefields, as Assad and his regime were claiming slow but steady victories. At this time, Assad's regime had managed to sharpen their warfare techniques, and proved it through a variety of successful battles according to Bertl and Guzansky: "...first the battle of Qusayr in the summer of 2013 and then the battles for the Qalamun area and Homs in the first months of 2014". These victories allowed an improvement within Syria's geographical positioning and security, as well as creating a connection between Syria's capital and Alawite regions. This resulted in more division within the opposition groups and a rise in radical warfare in general, prompting an observation that there was a possibility for Saudi Arabian policy to aim for less intervention and attempts at soothing relationships with Iran directly. Evidence of change for policy can be found in some disarming comments directed to Iran, starting from May 2014 when Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal made a declaration to Iran that their Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif may visit the capital "anytime he sees fit". Also, modifications to policy toward Syria were revised to be less aggressive (Bertl and Guzansky, 30).

Through the invitation sent by Saud al-Faisal, a newer and less aggressive tone had been set by Saudi Arabians and their dialogues with Iran, and whether sincere or not did not matter: two main components that make up a conflict of ideology and territory are now able to open communicative measures and work towards decreasing tension. Because both nations keep a balance of power within the Middle East, both prefer to take measures into lighter warfare; like psychological or through proxies- not direct conflict. Both nations also have influence within each other nations, Iran over the Saudi Shias and Saudi Arabia over Sunni's in Iran. Keeping economic and diplomatic means open is essential to the two's relations (Bertl and Guzansky, 30).

7. Conclusion

Through the establishment of New Wars, as well as cross state intervention fueled by high-tech military and soft warfare, such as psychological tactics, these neo-proxy wars have become seemingly never-ending conflicts. Perpetuated by state self-interest and the lack of regard of foreign citizens, the conflicts we see in Yemen and Syria can be simply categorized by one word: hell. The inhabitants of both countries face wretched consequences of which none of them deserve, poor infrastructure, unable to house the weak, the elderly and the young and dire need for improved health systems all while being enticed by a sort of “puppet-mechanism” imposed on them by two superpowers of the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and Iran. While other actors may be involved in one way or another, such as the United States or Russia, the feud can be concentrated within a poor relationship between the Middle Eastern countries, who prefer to not directly attack one another, but concentrate resources and lives into a territory that was not theirs to begin with. These are only some of the components involved in the complex scenarios that engulf New Wars.

Yemen and Syria’s crises fit in the New War paradigm as they are both internal civil conflicts and involve a multitude of transnational involvement. This makes it challenging to distinguish affairs dictated internally and those controlled externally. Neither have a clear timeline nor are financially dependent on external actors. The countries are rich in natural resources which can be exploited by more powerful outside states, or by those in power within the state. The actors in the crises are now financially dependent on war activities. Furthermore, both wars are accompanied by famine and epidemics, and create a major refugee network. It is clear that the conflicts have led to deteriorating consequences that are vulnerable to manipulation of influence from foreign actors and makes it difficult for those within the state to reach stability and control their own economic and political matters. For intrastate conflict to reach any sort of settlement hostile groups from all sides, opposition or not, must pledge to retracting arms and violence and working on peace agreements for any chance of success to be achieved.

As of now, Yemen continues to struggle in finding a peaceful solution, in the midst of its sixth year of civil war that is seemingly intensifying. According to the UN in July of 2020, along with Covid-19 and other healthcare-related struggles, the civil war is yet to see any progress on either front of the conflict. The UN describes: “Mr. Griffiths said that the

military situation in Yemen has not improved during the past month [July], with fighting in the oil-producing Marib region, liable to undermine ceasefire prospects...With food prices rising, the value of the Yemeni rial depreciating, and most Yemenis without enough money to meet their basic needs, the two sides must agree on ways to keep the economy out of the conflict” (UN News, 2020). Noting that the number of active front lines in Yemen has grown to 43 from 33 in January, Mr. Lowcock said that nearly 1 million displaced people are sheltering in and around Marib – and if the city comes under assault, waves of already vulnerable people are certain to flee the area.” Mark Lowcock, UN Humanitarian Affairs Chief further explains the necessity for a nationwide ceasefire (UN News).

Fears of a complete collapse of Yemen, he also describes the severity regarding the lack of funding for aid operations necessary to keep operations afloat. As Yemen suffers the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, Yemeni children are dying at unrivaled rates due to health-related issues as confirmed by Lowcock; “Without more funding, we should all expect large increases in hunger, malnutrition, cholera, COVID-19 and, above all, death”. In southern areas of Yemen, there has been an increase of 15.5% of children diagnosed with acute malnutrition, and data has yet to be harvested from the northern side indicating an equal or worse situation occurring there as well. Because of economic despair, food prices are inflating at astronomical rates (140% higher on average than pre conflict), leaving many insecure about when their next meal would be served. On the lower end of the economic spectrum, even minimal increase in prices of food lay devastating effects to those who already struggle with hunger, with some families facing a third or fourth displacement as a result (UN News).

Despite the 50% increased assistance received in 2018 by the WFP, that successfully stalled a possible famine, resources are quickly being depleted and Yemen citizens cannot rely on the expiring assistance for much longer due to the increasingly deteriorating economic status as well as intensifying conflict (UN News, 2020). With nations’ concerns’ being increasingly focused on domestic affairs during the crisis of Covid-19, there is a critical lack of attention being spent abroad in Yemen from western countries. Negotiations between the Government in Yemen and Houthi rebels regarding a ceasefire and a hopeful resumption of peace are indeed still in play, but necessary compromises must be achieved in a time sensitive window in order for them to be successful, according to UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths (UN News).

Unfortunately, Syria also faces many of the complications that Yemen does, with the current Covid-19 pandemic, as well as other health outbreaks they are facing such as polio and measles. Lowcock has particular worry about Damascus and crowded displacement camps in regard to their vulnerability to the deadly COVID-19 virus. Again, the issue faced is whether reported cases are accurate and when reflecting upon the overall infrastructure of Syria it is most likely these numbers are underreported a ditto to Yemen. On top of the health insecurities food shortage is also an issue as well as seasonal wildfires. Though there have been successful ceasefire talks, there are still high tensions that have yet to be resolved for a successful long-term peace negotiation. Recently, Russia and Turkey have agreed upon a ceasefire after a dreadful air and land operation that lasted three months, killing hundreds and driving one million citizens fleeing to the Turkish border (Karam and Mroue; UN News).

During both the Obama and Trump administration, the United States had run a campaign that successfully mitigated ISIS threat levels to a low level. Following this, President Trump has made multiple attempts to withdrawal troops from Syria, though he was always advised against. Now retiring US Ambassador to Syria Jim Jeffrey said in an interview that: “There was never a Syria withdrawal, when the situation in northeast Syria had been fairly stable after we defeated ISIS, [Trump] was inclined to pull out. In each case, we then decided to come up with five better arguments for why we needed to stay. And we succeeded both times. That’s the story.”. He furthermore called Trump’s sudden withdrawal of troops “the most controversial thing in my fifty years in government.” (Williams).

The UN states that 80 percent of the Syrian people now face poverty after an entire decade of civil war. Currently there are five different external states within the country. Both the United States and the European Union threatened to impose severe sanctions, it is wise for the Syrian political sphere to soon develop some sort of roadmap leading to a positive change within the regime. This is difficult with Syria’s lack of effective diplomacy. The country finds itself on the brink of an economic collapse with the COVID-19 pandemic and neighboring country Lebanon’s banking crisis. Furthermore, the WFP has warned that 9.3 million Syrians are currently living in food insecurity, while more than 2 million are at risk. In recent weeks, Syrians have been staging street demonstrations against a number of grievances in Sweida, Daraa and Idlib. In the meantime, Russian mediation helped prevent

a violent conflict in the south-western region of the Tafas. In the northeast, the UN stated that heightened shelling and reports of pro-state airstrikes and brand-new civilian displacements cast a shadow over the relative stability decided by the Russian Federation and Turkey (UN News).

Both Yemen and Syria currently face high levels of stress economically, socially, politically, and health wise. Both countries face a division amongst political affiliations and are influenced by external states and their political ideologies. A continuation of funding from both Saudi Arabia and Iran to their respective interest groups within both war-torn countries poses a few questions. First, does either Saudi Arabia or Iran funding their special interest groups come to a final benefit of either the people of either Syria or Yemen? Also, has participating in these proxy wars actually given either the state of Iran or Saudi Arabia any actual leverage? As evidence has shown, the sponsoring of these wars by Saudi Arabia and its allies or Iran and their allies seems only to elongate and promote more numerous cases of death, lengths of starvation and poverty, and overall misery within those who inhabited the states they manipulate. Both Syria and Yemen were not exactly stable, to begin with, but data clearly points to a continuous decay and fragility of the states in all aspects. After all, it is not just a coincidence that both countries are ranked number 1, Yemen, and number 4, Syria, on the Fragile State Index. Though much needed, a dilemma is posed whether humanitarian efforts are being put in the right hands. While the morality of the case may be that it is grim to envision not supplying those in need, it still stands if those in need are regardless not receiving the aid put forward fairly, then are humanitarian efforts simply elongating misery, death, and suffering? If all external factors were to retract from intervening within the states of Syria and Yemen, it is likely at this point that they will achieve stability at a quicker rate, perhaps much quicker, for that matter. The international audience is witnessing a sheer manipulation of two weakened states by two dominant forces within the region who prefer warfare away from domestic terrain at the expense of innocent civilians. Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran should be confronted diplomatically between one another directly and not transferred into easily influenced and exploited territories.

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