

The Influence of External Parties in the Yemen Civil War: The Rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia and Iran have been at logger heads ever since the Iranian revolution of 1979. The rivalry between both nations has contributed to continuous instability in the Middle East region. Tensions between both nations worsened with the Arab spring of 2011 which swept across the Middle East. The countries hold the most influential and economic systems in the region and aim to establish dominance and further their interests within the Middle East, this presents an opportunity to expand their powers and also poses a security challenge for both nations, who have not had direct confrontation but have instead fought through a series of proxy wars supporting different sides in civil wars with the latest being the Yemen Civil war as they each bid to become the regional superpower.

The Yemen civil war while not a direct result of tensions between both countries has evolved into struggle for regional power and establishment of a regional hegemon between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This research seeks to find out how the involvement of Saudi Arabia and Iran in their quest for regional supremacy have worsened and further complicated pre-existing tensions in Yemen's civil war, as they both competing interests clash.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Iran, Yemen, Proxy warfare, Saudi Arabia, Houthis.

ÖZ

Suudi Arabistan ve İran, 1979 İran devriminden bu yana kafa kafaya veriyorlar. Her iki ülke arasındaki rekabet, Orta Doğu bölgesinde sürekli istikrarsızlığa katkıda bulundu. Her iki ülke arasındaki gerginlik, 2011 Arap baharı ile Orta Doğu'yu kasıp kavurdu. Bölgedeki en etkili ve ekonomik sistemlere sahip olan ve Ortadoğu'da hakimiyet kurmayı ve çıkarlarını ilerletmeyi hedefleyen ülkeler, güçlerini genişletmek için bir fırsat sunuyor ve aynı zamanda doğrudan çatışma yaşamamış her iki ülke için de bir güvenlik sorunu oluşturuyor. ancak bunun yerine iç savaşlarda farklı tarafları destekleyen bir dizi vekalet savaşında savaştılar; en sonuncusu Yemen İç Savaşı'dır ve her biri bölgesel süper güç olmaya adaydır.

Yemen iç savaşı, iki ülke arasındaki gerilimlerin doğrudan bir sonucu olmamakla birlikte, Suudi Arabistan ile İran arasında bölgesel güç mücadelesine ve bölgesel bir hegemonya kurulmasına dönüşmüştür. Bu araştırma, Suudi Arabistan ve İran'ın bölgesel üstünlük arayışlarına katılımının, her ikisinin de çatışan çıkarları çatışırken, Yemen'in iç savaşında önceden var olan gerilimleri nasıl kötüleştirdiğini ve daha da karmaşık hale getirdiğini bulmaya çalışıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı, İran, Yemen, vekalet savaşı, Suudi Arabistan, Husiler.

DEDICATION

To God, my family, all who have supported me on my academic journey and victims
of wars globally.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EIA	Energy Information Administration
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
MBS	Mohammad Bin Salman
MENA	Middle East and North Africa

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Arab spring uprising in Yemen and the subsequent civil war in Yemen, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia had maintained a strong grip on the political landscape in Yemen via financially backing political parties and tribal leaders. Whereas Iran had a limited role in Yemen not going beyond offering support to the Houthis and other groups seeking to destabilize Yemen. All that would change though since the Arab spring of 2011 as Iran openly now supports the Houthi rebels and has increased its involvement in Yemeni politics due to the chaos that followed the Yemeni revolution and the removal of the dictator Ali Saleh. The chaotic conditions proved beneficial to Iran as it began to make inroads into Yemen and spread its influence in the country.

According to the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (2017), the war in Yemen is “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis”. According to a report by the Council on Foreign Relations, “over twenty- four million people are in need of assistance, four million people have being displaced and over a hundred thousand have died since the eruption of the civil war” (2020). The conflict has being termed the forgotten war by observers due to the low media coverage in garners, as Matt McGarry (2018) states “Yemen is termed the forgotten war because most of the world’s attention has been focused on Syria”. The situation in Yemen has kept

deteriorating as different regional and external actors each with their own agendas and motives back the warring parties of the Yemen Government and the Houthi rebels. The Yemeni Government is supported by the Saudi Arabia led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) while the Houthi rebels are backed by the Iranian Government. To fully gain an in depth understanding of the conflict it is pivotal to examine the events leading to the outbreak of the war.

The country has a population of 26.7 million people, most of whom are muslim with 64% being Sunni and 35% being Shia while the rest are Jewish, Hindu and Christian (Mariana 2015). The civil war currently going on in Yemen began in 2015 after a prominent Shia rebel group named Al Houthi situated in the North of Yemen launched attacks against the government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and captured the capital city of Sana'a. This was as a result of failed negotiations over the future of the country in the years following the Arab spring. The conflict however, is far more complex than just a rebel group aiming to seize power from the government.

In November 2011, President Saleh stepped down as the leader of Yemen following widespread protests over his years of dictatorial rule since 1990. His deputy Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi was appointed his successor in a transitional government for two years, instigated by the United Nations with support from the Gulf Cooperation Council and Western States. Hadi's appointment was then ratified in a referendum in February of 2012 thereby, beginning his tenure. During this transitional government, President Hadi was tasked with arranging and supervising a National Dialogue Conference for a period of six months where there was to be peace talks and

discussions about how to move the nation forward as well as a constitutional reform and how to plan for future elections for both the Presidency and the parliament in February 2014. This would prove to be unsuccessful and any attempt to reach any sort of a consensus on a national level proved abortive and it was called off in January 2014 (Sharp 2018).

The Houthis were not happy with the failed conference and in July 2014 when the government lifted fuel subsidies, the Houthi movement organized mass protests demanding lower fuel prices and a new government and in less than two years after the removal of Saleh, Yemen was thrown into more disastrous crisis as the Houthi forces led an uprising against the Hadi led government and they would later join with forces loyal to the former President, Ali Abdullah Saleh and capture the capital, Sana'a, igniting a civil war between Houthi-Saleh forces and the Yemeni Government that continued through to the year's end. The elected civilian authorities did not maintain effective control over all of the security forces, most of the national security apparatus and some former state institutions were controlled by the Houthi. The Houthi uprising had initially forced the Yemeni government to sign an UN-brokered peace deal calling for a "unity government." However, the government was forced out after Houthi forces seized the presidential palace in January 2015. Houthi forces would later dissolve the parliament and replace it with the Supreme Revolutionary Committee, which was linked to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) party. President Hadi escaped house arrest in Sana'a and went to Aden, where he declared the actions taken by Houthi-Saleh forces in the capital unconstitutional and reaffirmed his position as President.

The Houthis would later break up with Saleh and he was killed in December 2017 (Sharp, 2018).

The Yemeni war started out as an internal conflict but is now being influenced by different foreign actors. The complexity of the war and unclear objectives of the two main actors has led to people challenging the claim that this conflict could be termed a proxy war between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yemen shares a border to the north of Saudi Arabia, for that reason it is a vital geographic position for the Kingdom where Iran seems to be offering support to the Houthi militia by supplying them weapons and military intelligence (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2016).

According to some scholars Mabon (2016) and Gause (2014) several researches have varied from the realist's assumptions on balance of power regionally to political issues like national foreign policies, oil and resource management, civil societies and states' approaches to shared security dilemmas. Iran is a revolutionary Shia Republic, whilst Saudi Arabia is a conservative Sunni monarchy and both states are currently competing for regional supremacy in the Gulf region. Simon Mabon (2016:4) argues that the rivalry between both states is characterized by "political and ideological struggles" and which since 1979 have played key roles in shaping the foreign policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both states are keen to portray themselves as leaders and powerful states to ensure their security and overtake their rival whilst taking advantage of the various religious, ideological and political divide within the region so as to be recognized as the regional power.

The power dynamics and fight for political relevance by Riyadh and Tehran visibly impacts the Middle East region and various conflicts happening in the region are often as a result of their quest for regional dominance by both states. These outside influences in Yemen only worsen any efforts in trying to resolve the war.

Hence, in the light of all this, this study seeks to examine the roles and implications that these two regional actors have had on the Yemen civil war.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Ever since the war in Yemen began Saudi Arabia and Iran have played crucial roles in supporting the warring sides and this has only worsened the situation in Yemen, as both parties compete for dominance not just in Yemen but in the Middle Eastern Region. This study aims to look at the disastrous impact of this Middle Eastern cold war between the Sunni Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Shitte Islamic Republic of Iran. As Gause states, “The desire to be a regional power and having control over geopolitical events drives Iranian and Saudi foreign policy, as both countries heavily associate regional supremacy with regime survival”. The thesis also aims to examine the impacts of this intervention as competing interests have made the conflict more devastating and its resolution difficult.

1.2 Research Questions

- i. What influences the Saudi-Iranian rivalry?
- ii. How have both states acted in the war in trying to gain regional supremacy?

1.3 Hypothesis

The rivalry between both nations has far exceeded the political and religious issues and is now a fight for regional hegemony and economic dominance in the Middle East.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The Yemen war is often tagged the forgotten war due to it being under reported by the media and its complicated nature. The United Nations terms it the “worst humanitarian crisis” presently but it has largely been ignored because Yemen is not viewed as a vital economic state in the Middle East. Furthermore, I believe that studying this rivalry is key to understanding what is taking place in the poorest country in the Middle East. A country which since its inception, has been fraught with numerous challenges but has also been one of the lesser studied nations in the international academic political arena. The little attention which the media has given to the war in Yemen compared to the focus on Syria and the decade long Israeli-Palestinian is one of the major reasons I have decided to focus on Yemen for my Masters’ thesis. This research hopes to fully explore the intricacies of the war and bring light to the underlying factors at play in Yemen war and how these external actors do nothing but worsen the situation in and for Yemen.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the Yemen civil war and the two major external parties involved in the war. It covers only the actions of Saudi Arabia and Iran and not other actors like the United States. Also, inability to conduct primary research on ground means that the study is limited to information gotten from other primary and secondary sources. This study is restricted to just the presence and influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran in the ongoing Yemen civil war.

1.6 Methodology

This paper would involve a qualitative research. The methodology applied in this research is the study of existing literature and analysis of sources such as news reports. Primary and secondary sources of data will be used for the research. Primary

sources are sources of data that provide first-hand information about a topic and for this research they include; United Nations documents, interviews reports and manuscripts while secondary sources provide information collected by other researches or second hand information and they include existing records like journal articles, news articles and internet materials. Data to be researched will cover from 2015-2020 of the ongoing conflict.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The paper will analyze the conflict using John Mearsheimer's offensive realism. Mearsheimer's theory is built on five bedrock assumptions. The first assumption is that the international system is anarchic, which means that there is no hierarchically superior, coercive power that can guarantee limits on the behavior of states (Mearsheimer 2001:30). Second, all great powers possess offensive military capabilities, which they are capable of using against other states (2001:30-31). Third, states can never be certain that other states will refrain from using those offensive military capabilities (2001:31). Fourth, states seek to maintain their survival (their territorial integrity and domestic autonomy) above all other goals (2001:31), as it is the means to all other ends (1990:44). Fifth, states are rational actors, which means that they consider the immediate and long-term consequences of their actions, and think strategically about how to survive (2001:31).

Offensive realism seeks to contextualize the political interests and power moves of countries and in this case examines the positioning of Yemen as a proxy war between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is in contrast to defensive realism which argues that the international system encourages states to

moderate their behavior, so they would not try to maximize their power as it could provoke a security dilemma.

Offensive realism offers the best means to describe the power hunting plans of both nations. It seeks to find an answer and explain the reasoning why states pursue power and how they choose to further their interests. The offensive realists are of the opinion that the more powerful states focus on power accumulation and then try to achieve hegemony, which can be noticed in the case of Saudi Arabia and Iran and their actions as they vie to become the regional hegemon.

1.8 Organization of the study.

This research study comprises of five chapters. Chapter one of this research paper introduces the research topic; it also contains the statement of the problem, the research questions, hypothesis, the significance, scope and limitations of the study. It also contains the research methodology and theoretical framework applied in this research.

Chapter two deals with the review of literature relevant to the study including proxy warfare, examining different perspective to the Saudi–Iran rivalry and also why offensive realism is appropriate in examining this rivalry.

Chapter three discusses the actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

Chapter four details the Sunni and Shia rivalry and the war in Yemen. The chapter also examines in detail, the impact of this war on the Yemen.

Chapter five looks at the major peace agreement that has been proposed and offers possible recommendations that may aid in resolving the conflict as well as an overall summary and conclusion of the research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The complex nature of the Yemen civil war has led certain scholars and academics to conclude that this war has gone beyond that of rebels challenging a local state government. Various literature analysis of the civil war has led to a surge in studying the Iranian-Saudi Rivalry in the Middle East and especially the war in Yemen due to political events and outcomes. How has their influence further exacerbated the situation in Yemen has being examined by various actors and organizations?

The United Nations describes the situation as the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis”, the Council on Foreign Affairs in a report stated that “over twenty- four million people are in need of assistance, four million people have being displaced and over a hundred thousand have died since the eruption of the civil war”. The conflict has being termed the “forgotten war” by observers due to the low media coverage it garners. The situation in Yemen has kept deteriorating as different regional and external actors each with their own agendas and motives back the warring parties of the Yemen Government and the Houthi rebels. The Yemeni Government is supported by the Saudi led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Houthi rebels are backed by the Iranian Government. To fully gain an in depth understanding of the conflict it is pivotal to examine the events leading to the outbreak of the war.

Esfandiary & Tabatabai, (2016) argue that the Yemeni war started out as an internal conflict but is now being influenced by different foreign actors. The complexity of the war and unclear objectives of the two main actors has led to observers challenging the claim that this conflict could be termed a proxy war between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yemen shares a border to the north of Saudi Arabia, for that reason it is a vital geographic position for the Kingdom where Iran seems to be offering support to the Houthi militia by supplying them weapons and military intelligence.

Simon Mabon (2016:4) points out that that the rivalry between both states is characterized by “political and ideological struggles” and which since 1979 have played key roles in shaping the foreign policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both states are keen to portray themselves as regional leaders and powerful states to ensure their security and overtake their rival whilst taking advantage of the various religious, ideological and political divides within the region in order to be recognized as the regional power.

The power dynamics and quest for political relevance by Riyadh and Tehran visibly impacts the Middle East region and various conflicts that occur within the region often bear the mark of this struggle for regional supremacy. These outside influences in Yemen only worsen any efforts in trying to resolve the war.

According to a UN report in 2018 by the end of 2019 about 102,000 lives would be lost in the ongoing war, in the same vain Jonathan Moyer (2019) says "It's one of the highest-impact internal conflicts since the end of the Cold War on par with Iraq,

Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo conflicts with an impact on development that lasts for a generation". According to Moyer, a large number of the major victims of this conflict are children under the age of five. Moyer (2019) states that "one child, dies from the war and its side effects every 11 minutes and 54 seconds". The war has mainly been fought between Houthi militia group whom are backed by the Iranian government and the Yemeni government- Saudi led coalition group. The war is seen as scholars and international observers as a "Middle Eastern proxy-war" between Iran and Saudi Arabia for dominance in the region.

2.1 What is Proxy Warfare and why does it occur

Proxy wars can be traced to the cold war era where the Capitalist and Democratic Americans and the Communist Soviet Union vied for supremacy and a number of wars were fought in different parts of the world with each super power supporting different sides as they tried to spread their different political ideologies to the world. The emergence of nuclear weapons and the ensuing arms race also ensured that there was not a direct confrontation between both sides; the two superpowers began to resort to proxy war methods to solve their indirect conflicts in strategically important areas. Using these techniques, they had the opportunity to achieve their goals without endangering either their territory or population. So what exactly is a proxy war? According to the Cambridge dictionary a proxy war is "a war fought between groups or smaller countries that each represent the interests of other larger powers, and may have help and support from these". Andrew Mumford (2013: 40-46) in his work titled "Proxy warfare and the future of Conflict" states that:

"Proxy wars are the product of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and the chosen proxies who are the conduit for the benefactor's weapons, training and funding. In short, proxy wars are the logical replacement for states

seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare”.

Dan Byman (2018) states that proxy wars are set to happen when major powers who do not want to engage directly in fighting instigate or support as well as direct the actions of a party to the conflict. Another author defines proxy warfare as, “a conflict between two parties taking place in one country, on behalf of parties that are not directly involved. The parties can be State or non-State actors” (Birchall, 2018).

Many proxy wars occur because a far more powerful political actor decides to play a prominent part in assisting one side in a conflict whilst also managing a war in the country but only performing in a small percentage of the war itself. This is in contrast to the well-known traditional conflict style, where the most powerful countries are fully engaged and carry the burden of the war and the smallest ones contribute proportionally. Nowadays, these powerful countries in order to cut costs or avoid backlash from their citizens and also minimize their casualties, tend to finance different armed groups by providing money and weapons for prosecuting the wars, they also offer military intelligence and train soldiers to execute the war. The balance between the major powers and their proxies can evolve gradually depending on the development and needs of the war being fought. There are several examples of proxy wars that have been fought throughout history such as the Korean War, Vietnam War and now the Yemen war. Proxy war represents “an indirect implication in a conflict by third parties that wish to influence the strategic outcome” according to Andrew Mumford.

Hughes in his book “My Enemy’s Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Relations”, argues that three conditions are necessary to define a proxy war: “direct assistance of the sponsor to the proxy (provision of military equipment, nonphysical military aid, formation, intelligence, logistics, finance and troops), one target or common objective, and the relation between the local and external actor that remains in time”. Hughes further points that the sponsor and its proxy must have certain common ideologies or objectives such as:

- i. Political link to the direct military action
- ii. Concern about security
- iii. High level of sensibility and respect to the possibility of victims
- iv. A shared ideology between the State and the proxy group
- v. Avoidance of direct conflict
- vi. Military campaign assistance
- vii. Intelligence collection
- viii. National and religious link
- ix. Revenge towards the target
- x. Preserve or reinforce the sphere of influence
- xi. Greed and ambition

Why do proxy wars take place? Reasons are varied and depend on the specificity of each country. For the USA, usually, the reason is related to the cost: locals fight and die instead of US citizens. Moreover, as they are local fighters, they are better accepted by the communities involved and can have easier access to intelligence. However, for many other states, there are other factors that come into play: ideological, resources management or influence. For example, Iran that resorts to

support the Houthis to gain influence in Yemen even though they do not have enough internal military capacity; Russia that rejects its support to armed groups in Ukraine to limit conflict escalation (Dan Byman 2018).

Chris Loveman points out his idea that a shared ideology and values between make a benefactor and the proxy agent “share a mutual desire to cope with a common enemy”. Geraint Hughes (2018) outlines three categories of strategic objectives for a proxy war and they are: “coercion, disruption and the achievement of transformative goals, such as encouraging separatists’ movements to achieve the separation of the State or even a regime change”. Bar-Simon-Tov likewise has described the proxy intervention as “one where the proxy agent assumes the majority of risk” Andrew Mumford points out that the use of proxies ensures that superpowers “avoid the biggest part of risk, but definitely not all of it”.

Table 1: Different Perspectives on Proxy Wars

PERSPECTIVE ON PROX WAR	EXPALANATION	CRITIQUE	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
COST EFFECT	Using proxies ensures that states cut back on funds that would have been used in executing wars directly. Also it means that they do not have to lose their own soldiers in the conflict	This perspective is one of the major reasons why states engage in proxy wars. They do not have to send their own soldiers to die in a war that can be prosecuted using “outside” forces.	Financially cost efficient Saves the principal state from unnecessary loss of lives	If the conflict is not going the way the sponsoring state wants it can abandon the war and its proxy, thereby worsening the situation and it may be forced to directly intervene later.
CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL MODEL	Groups who share similar cultural or ideological perspective are mainly chosen by the sponsoring state to act as their proxies. For example Iranian proxies throughout the Middle East are mainly Shia Mulsims. Tehran	This perspective is very powerful as shared cultural and religious ideology is exploited by the principal actor to	Shared cultural values or ideologies make it easier for states and their proxies to work together as they both believe in the same thing or share a common	This can lead to exploitation of the proxy by the sponsoring state. The tight cultural bond between principal and agent results in a stalwart proxy

	leverages on cultural similarities, generally Shia Islam, to establish a network of tightly coupled proxies across the Middle East, As can be seen with Iran supporting Hezbollah and the Houthis in Lebanon and Yemen respectively.	galvanize its proxy.	history.	that will often stand by the principal agent, sharing high degrees of risk. For example Kata'ib Hezbollah's remains steadfast despite continued attacks by American forces through the winter of 2019 and early 2020. The group lost its headquarters, lost scores of operatives and senior officials and its primary principal support, Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani. Despite all these it still remains committed to Iran's Shia ideology.
AGENCY THESIS	The basic premise of this argument is that states cannot be used as proxies, because they only act to fulfill their own interest hence states will only intervene if they have some interest in doing so.	Principal actor mainly a state aligns with a non-state actor which shares similar interests with it or whom it has managed to coerce to act on its behalf. Proxies can be voluntary or coerced .	The proxy is backed by the principal actor financially, logistically and has all it needs to persecute the war provided by the principal actor	The problem occurs when the interests of the principal and agent come into conflict or the proxy decide to pursue their own agenda which goes against the principal's wishes

2.2 Different views on the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry in Yemen

Iran and Saudi Arabia are driven by the desire to be the regional hegemon in the Middle East so as to have a measure of influence on geopolitical happenings in the region and this desire shapes their respective national foreign policies. Both states believe that this would aid with regime survival. Tehran and Riyadh consider the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a vital area in their quest for power and

recognize that external circumstances can lead to serious threats to their respective national political systems (Gause 2014:4)

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is heavily influenced by their various religious ideologies and political leanings. This rivalry is borne out of the seemingly unending dispute between the Sunni and Shi'a sects of Islam (Arthington, 2019). This sectarian conflict is reflected in their domestic political structures with Iran functioning as a Shia Islamic state and Saudi Arabia, a Wahabi monarchy (Wehrey, et.al, 2009). Iran as a state understands Islam as the rejection of any form of government above the Islamic laws which has led to a strained relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Wehrey, et.al, 2009). The popular belief is that the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh is driven by differences in the religious ideology of both nations however, the conflict between both these states lies in their quest for regional dominance in the Middle East, and Yemen is the most recent example.

In the 1950's up until 1979 when the Iranian revolution occurred, Saudi Arabia and Iran were close allies and were partners in the United States of America's "Twin Pillar Diplomacy". During this time the two nations were American allies in the fight against communism and also wanted to be the prominent supplier of oil to the West and for their support America provided them with military, economic and diplomatic support (Altorai 2012: 33). However, there would be a shift in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Iran and the West after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 which toppled the monarchy and brought a theocratic regime in the country. Subsequent happenings over the years have contributed to shaping Iran's view of international politics. Iran is now known as a theocratic state which is critical

of the West's actions and of monarchies. This revolution had an adverse effect on Saudi-Iranian relationship, as both states were no longer allies but viewed one another as enemies and began competing for regional supremacy (Mabon 2015: 12). Tensions would eventually cool down for some time in the 1990s and up until the mid-2000s as both states sought regional collaboration. However, their deep mistrust for one another did not lead to anything worthwhile and their hatred has been firmly rooted in their very different political identities and states policies and values. Tehran and Riyadh do not see eye to eye on a lot of issues that are specific to the Gulf region varying from oil prices to geopolitics, regional security and even how the region should be addressed, as both states argue over it should be addressed as the "Arabian or Persian" Gulf (Gause 2014: 6).

Madawi Al-Rasheed (2011) says "Most analysis of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry seems to miss the fundamental points that underline the tension. Iran is trying to save itself from either foreign intervention or domestic unrest while Saudi Arabia does not fear foreign intervention, like Iran it is concerned with domestic dissent". Goldberg et al writing in (2019), says "Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has been acting in any way possible to promote its interests in the Middle East, including the expansion of its sphere of influence within the Shiite communities, whom it has been able to harness to its needs". Tehran has for many years been seeking to gain a foothold in MENA region and steadily build its influence. The series of revolts termed the Arab Spring presented Iran an opportunity to expand its influence and it leveraged on this chaotic situation to make inroads in the region. Goldberg noted that Iran did not initially support the Houthis openly but when the Saudis and the GCC coalition became involved, the situation changed.

The actions of Tehran and Riyadh in Yemen show that what they really want is to gain control of vital oil transportation routes in the country in order to fortify their economic dominance and increase their sphere of influence in the Gulf. The political instability in Yemen gave Saudi Arabia the opportunity to conduct air-raids in support of the deposed President Hadi's government (Sharp, 2019:2). On the other hand Iran supported the Houthi rebels by providing weapons, military intelligence and training (Sharp, 2019:2). Iran was in support of the protest as it viewed it as the Yemeni people standing against an oppressive regime (Salisbury 2015:7), therefore Tehran threw its weight behind the ousting of Saleh and rejected the appointment of Hadi (Vatanka 2015). Supporting the liberation of the Yemeni people was in accordance to its revolutionary history and after Saleh was removed Iran showed its support for the Houthis and their cause (Brehony 2015:235).

The geostrategic importance of Yemen has also been considered by different authors when examining the importance of Yemen to both Tehran and Riyadh. Yemen is not the most resource rich country in the Middle East but it contains the vital Bab al-Mandeb Strait. The strait is situated in the north of Yemen and is of immense value to Iran and Saudi Arabia (Sharp, 2019). According to US Energy Information Administration, "an estimated 6.2 million barrels per day of crude oil travels through the Bab al-Mandeb strait towards Europe, the United States, and Asia" (EIA, 2019). This strait links the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea through the Red Sea and Suez canal and it is one of the world's most important locations on earth. Ships must pass through this strait to get to the Red sea and Suez Canal (Calabrese, et.al, 2020). If ships want to avoid going through this strait, then they must travel a more costly

and dangerous route, around the southern hemisphere of Africa (Calabrese et.al, 2020).

Orkaby (2019) states that Saudi rationale for its involvement in Yemen revolves around them maintaining their position as a top player in the global oil industry. Riyadh's involvement in the Yemeni conflict is not out of some sort of moral decency but simply dedicated to the pursuit of oil security.

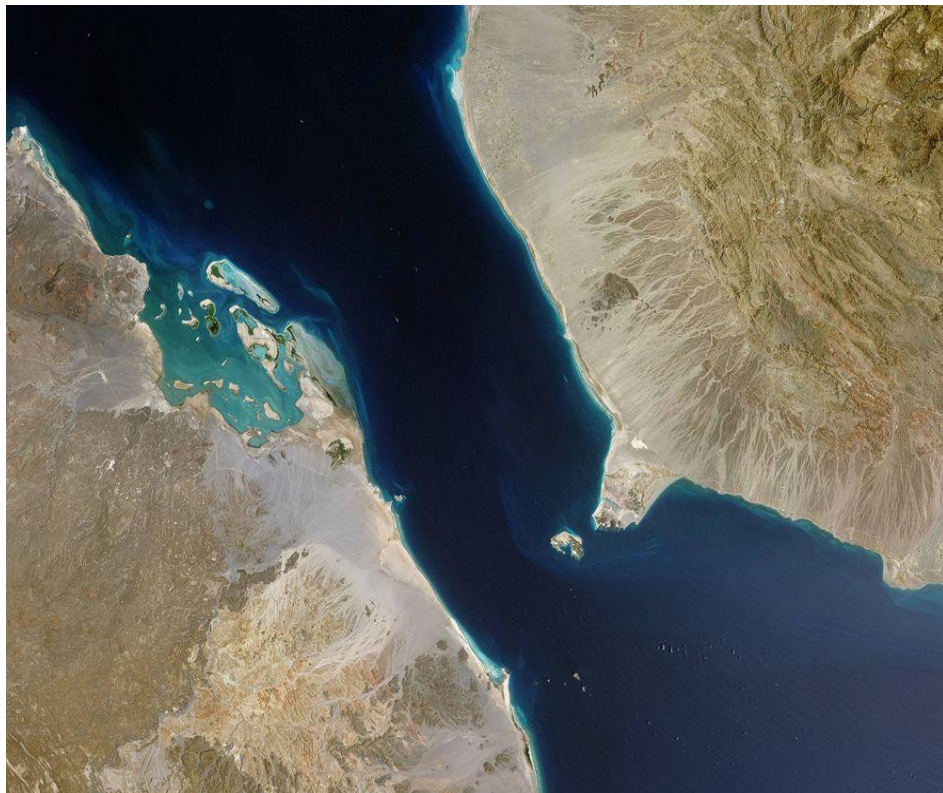


Figure 1: Satellite view of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. Photographer: USGS/NASA Landsat/Orbital Horizon via Getty Images. Retrieved from Bloomberg

Different authors have compared the Iran-Saudi rivalry to the cold war era, as this rivalry looks set to dominate the Middle East for the foreseeable future. Talia Grumet writes that Saudi Arabia and Iran are involved in an ideological and political struggle in the Middle East via camps (Grumet, 2015:1-2). Wehrey (2009) argues that the

Saudi government is afraid and overacting to the possibility of Iran becoming a nuclear power which is why Riyadh adopts a strategy of spreading its own ideologies to promote itself as the regional power. Hence as the BBC News 2020 puts it, Saudi Arabia's justification for involving itself in the Yemen war was for ideological reasons and to also ensure its own security as it shares a border with Yemen. Iran has also backed the Houthis because both parties are Shi'a Muslims. Despite previous claims, it is obvious that one of the reasons both states are involved in the war in Yemen is due to the geostrategic importance of Yemen and what it will mean economically for either state to control the country. Religious and political ideology though of importance play a small role in their motivations.

In the analysis of Grumet and Wehrey religion plays a pivotal role in the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Grumet goes further to add that the states religious ideologies add another layer of distrust and enmity as it has led to a contest for which of the states is to be considered the leader of the Muslim ummah (Grumet, 2015). Saudi Arabia and Iran through their various ideologies claim to be the rightful leaders of the Islamic world and that their doctrines are right and the other's wrong (Grumet 2015). Wehrey says that Iran's values go against any form of monarchy and that Tehran has argued that the Saudi Royal family are not the custodians of two of both Islam's holy sites in Saudi Arabia (Wehrey, et. al, 2009: x). Wehrey (2009) explains that the religious conflict between the two nations is worsened by ethnic differences which have led to this immense hostility between them.

Different authors have examined the rivalry of Iran and Saudi Arabia through a religious lens, this school of thought is well acknowledged and explored but I do

believe that the present rivalry between both nations has far exceeded the political and religious issues and is now a fight for regional hegemony and economic dominance in the Middle East.

Table 2: Different views on the Iran-Saudi Arabia Rivalry in Yemen

	CRITIQUE	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
Economic Control	The Bab al-Mandeb Strait is situated in Northern Yemen. It is of significant economic value as an estimated 6.2 million barrels of crude oil passes through the strait each day heading towards the Western world, America and Asia. This strait links the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea through the Red Sea and Suez canal and it is one of the world's most important locations on earth. Ships must pass through this strait to get to the Red sea and Suez Canal. Therefore, country that controls Yemen controls the Bab al-Mandeb strait.	Control of Yemen either Iran and Saudi Arabia control of a very important route in the world's oil transportation.	Control of Yemen doesn't really add anything except the Bab al-Mandeb strait to either party as Yemen doesn't have much natural resources that can be fully exploited.
Religious Ideology	Iran views the regional order in the Middle East as not favorable for the Muslim society and as the bastion of Islamic revolution hopes to spread its ideology by gaining control of Yemen via the Houthis Saudi Arabia views itself as the head of the Muslim world and has exported its unique interpretation of Sunni through Wahhabism throughout the Muslim world.	Gaining control of Yemen aids both states in furthering their religious ideology.	This just acts as a mask for their real intent which is economic dominance.

2.3 Offensive Realism

Realism is one of the three major mainstream theories along with Liberalism and Constructivism in International Relations. It is often referred to as a “power theory”

and is grounded on the basis that the anarchy is the order of the international system due to the unavailability of an overarching central authority to put states in check like the police or judicial system in a domestic setting. Segbers & al., (2006) says there is no centralized definition of Realism. However, Brown & Ainley (2005) argue that Hans Morgenthau in trying to explain realism identified States as the primary actors of international politics whose main goal is to pursue and fulfill their interest and to maximize power. Essentially he describes states as being the leading players within the international system that just want to achieve their national interests and maximize power. Kenneth Waltz a prominent realist author postulates his own definition of neorealism in his work "Theory of International Politics", this he does by examining classical realism. Waltz sought to explain that how states behaved is all due to the international system. A system he describes as "self-help" as the system is anarchic, lacking any supreme justice system that can help regulate state behavior in the international arena and provide guidelines on how states should act within the international system. This lack of rules ensures that states have to look after themselves and prioritize their well-being whilst seeing others as possible threats (Brown & Ainley, 2005). Waltz defines the concept of power as "an instrument for states security and a vital survival tool" (Donnelly, 2000) and from this perspective, because of the anarchy filled nature of the international political arena; countries want to first of all safeguard themselves (Pashakhanlou, 2009). Agnew (2002) argues that "States pursue hegemony to serve their own interest by means of power and armed force". That is, states would base their security policies on the promotion and safeguarding of their national interest and where there are no threats either internal or external, states can then offer protection and support by reinforcing their allies' power and military forces.

In reference to security, Neorealism has two notions: Offensive and Defensive Realism. Various defensive realists' scholars like Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt and Christopher Layne .argue that the nature of the international system ensures that states act calmly thereby preventing them from acting irrationally in way that might lead to a serious national security threat (Lobell, 2010). However, in examining the rivalry between The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran and what consequences it has on the Yemeni conflict, offensive realism is better suited to explain the actions of both states.

The major promoters of Offensive realism have mainly been Eric laps and John Mearsheimer who both argue that powerful nations within the international structure would try to capitalize on its authority in pursuit of regional or global hegemony. Thus creating a never ending quest for power among competing states and breeding a lot of tension amongst states and sometimes may lead to war (Steinsson, 2014). Mearsheimer (2001) says that "states are aggressive because of the anarchic international system which leads to them not only trying to ensure their survival but also acquire power at every opportunity possible". Thus if they want to amass power and survive as Lobell (2010) points out "states can expand their foreign economy and their political and military policies to alter the balance of power". "Offensive realism points out that states are in a constant stage of security dilemma and the main source of their action is the fears of others, which often leads to conflict without any means" (Danset, 2020).

After studying the actions of Iran and Saudi Arabia, this study suggests that both parties are acting offensively in Yemen to expand their authority in the Middle East

therefore ensuring their survival. Consequently, both seek more power and via their actions are trying to protect themselves. Just as Mearsheimer points out that the major objectives of states are survival, domestic autonomy and territorial integrity. Saudi saw the domestic instability and the rising importance of Iran (its rival in the region) in Yemen, its neighboring state as a threat to its territorial integrity. In line with Neorealist thought, it is Iran's interest that Yemen stays unstable and creates new ideological conflict within the state (Tang, 2009). Tang (2009) acknowledges that the support the Houthis get from Iran is due to their shared religious ideology and to also challenge Saudi Arabia's regional supremacy. As this would act as a way to weaken the opponents and for Iran to gain influence. Al-Otaibi, (2019) points out that "the civil war with sectarian dimensions within an anarchist international system led to Iran getting involved in Yemen's affairs in order to support the Houthis, a pro-Shia group". Saudi however, is involved in the war not only to counteract Iran's religious ideology but to protect its own borders as Yemen shares a border with Saudi (Al-Otaibi, 2019).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has been able to define proxy warfare from the views of different authors and explain why states prefer to use proxy warfare rather than engage directly in wars. It also examines different perspectives on why there is a rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia for Yemen as they both aim to be regional hegemons and it also explains how offensive realism explains the actions of both Tehran and Riyadh. The next chapter discusses the actions of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

Chapter 3

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

3.1 Introduction

For over half a decade, the continued intervention of Tehran and Riyadh in the Yemen civil war has made the war more complex and tedious to be resolved. However, for one to discern the current roles of Iran and Saudi in Yemen, it has to explore the historical relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. As well as the actions of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen and how their interference worsens the situation in Yemen. Thea actions of both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

3.2 The External Actors

As Gause (2014) argues “the desire for regional supremacy, extending their influence across their borders and gaining control over geopolitical happenings drives Iranian and Saudi foreign policy, as both countries heavily associate regional supremacy with regime survival”. Iran and Saudi Arabia consider the Middle East region as a vital part for their power expansion and believe that any external turbulence within the region could significantly affect the internal political affairs in either Tehran or Riyadh and thus it is imperative that to either of them to control the affairs in the region. Arthington (2019) states that the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is influenced by political and religious ideology and is simply a manifestation of the dispute between the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam.

In the 1950's up until 1979 when the Iranian revolution occurred, Saudi Arabia and Iran were close allies and were partners in the United States of America's "Twin Pillar Diplomacy". During this time the two nations were American allies in the fight against communism and also wanted to be the prominent supplier of oil to the West and for their support America provided them with military, economic and diplomatic support (Altoraifi 2012: 33). However, there would be a shift in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Iran and the West after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 which toppled the monarchy and brought a theocratic regime in the country. Subsequent happenings over the years have contributed to shaping Iran's view of international politics. Iran is now known as a theocratic state which is critical of the West's actions and of monarchies.

3.3 The Islamic Republic of Iran

The Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 is considered a turning point in Iran's foreign policy and international image as Iran moved from being a pro-Western, secular state to an anti-Western, theocratic state where the Sharia is supreme. The revolution was led by Ayatollah Khomeini and in its aftermath, he championed a course for the spread of "real Islam" with extra importance placed on the promotion of the Shi'a sect and wanted the revolution to happen in other states within the region. This would lead to a strain in the relationship between Iran and other states in the region and would cumulate in Tehran being frozen out by other states. Particularly, the states of the Arabian Gulf who had felt extremely troubled by Iran, a Shia Muslim state with enormous natural resources and in close proximity to other states in the Gulf with a leader calling for the overthrow of other nations leaders. The leaders of the Arab states which also include Shia minorities have always being skeptical about Iran's influence on the Shiites in their territories. Amongst the states in the Middle

East, Iran has the most problematic relationship with Saudi Arabia as both states vie to be leaders in the region and the Muslim world in general. Iran in order to advance its course in the region has sought to develop relations with both state and non-state actors in the region.

It is the only Islamic Republic in the Persian Gulf peninsula and this is seen by Iran as a religious legitimacy challenge to other countries in the region, especially Saudi Arabia. Iran simply has two main objectives when it comes to its regional and external policy and they are: to guarantee the survival of the Islamic Republic and to assure that Teheran plays a crucial role in the management of the regional order (Mohammad, 2017).

3.3.1 Iran in Yemen

Iran historically had never had a significant presence in Yemen though both countries have always maintained diplomatic relations. In the years following the uprisings against former President Saleh, Iran's role began to change and they began to support the Houthis. After his removal former Yemeni President Saleh, turned to the Iran after he was overthrown, as he calculated his chances of returning to power. It has long been speculated that the Iranians might have had a hand in the formation of the Houthi-Saleh partnership which started the present war.

However, since the Arab spring uprisings Iran has been trying to get a foothold in Yemen politically, so as to get it to act as its proxy state as Tehran contends with Riyadh for regional supremacy. Iran's government was in support of the protests against the government of President Saleh as it viewed the uprising as one which was similar to the Iranian revolution. Tehran thus promoted the protests and

demonstrations as an “Islamic awakening in light of the Iranian Revolution” (Chubin 2012). Iran recognized the protests as the Yemeni people standing up to an oppressive leader (Salisbury 2015) approving the ousting of Saleh’s government and refusing to support Hadi’s rise to power (Vatanka 2015). After Saleh was overthrown, Iran threw its weight behind the Houthi’s and their cause (Brehony 2015: 235). Despite this show of support Iran was careful and made sure there was no direct contact with the Houthis at the start of the conflict (Peter Salisbury 2015: 8). Tehran was eager to deny any accusations that they had been sponsoring the operations of the Houthis since 2011 (Esfandiary and Tabatabai 2016: 160). The leaders of Iran had repeatedly gone public to deny claims that they had offered military support to the Houthis in their fight against the Yemeni government (Milani 2015; Vatanka 2015). According to a report by the Tehran Times (2015) the government through The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Corps have denied claims of offering help to the Houthis and have said that those accusations were made by the Saudis in order to divert attention away from their atrocities in Yemen, also the Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Abdollahian had informed journalist that Iranian aircrafts were only there in Yemen to assist the injured and help the Yemenis people with medical aid (The Daily Star 2018). The Iranians have only claimed that the only time they have offered any sort of training to the Houthis was before the 2011 well before the conflict started and have only offered humanitarian aid after conflict intensified (Esfandiary 2016: 165).

They have tried to achieve their aims by supporting the military actions of the Houthi militia discreetly, however in recent years their support of the group has been more open. Tehran has worked out a way to strengthen its ties with the Houthis via

symbolic actions like renovating the Shrine of Nasser Haqq (a Zaidi Imam from the 3rd century AH. The shrine is currently situated in the province of Mazandaran in Northern Iran). Dozens of Yemeni Zaidi leaders were invited to visit the shrine by the Iranian government in 2014. This was done in order to build a strong relationship between Iran and Yemen Shiites. Tehran has continued to fortify political ties with the Houthis by tightening its ideological connection by showing support for empowering influential blocs and elements that have accepted Iran's brand of Shiism. Thus, laying a foundation for a religiopolitical culture bound by the Twelve Shiite principles adopted by Iran (Mohammad Hassan Al-Qadhi 2017: 41).

Contrary to the international community, which considers the Houthis rise to power to be illegitimate, as outlined in United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2216, Iran freely admits that it considers the Houthis to be the only legitimate authority currently within Yemen. This rhetoric has been backed by its actions in the intervening years. Just as Juneau (2016: 648) retorts, "Iran tends to intervene in national contexts characterized by instability and discontented internal actors, seeking to penetrate these states as the cases of Iraq since 2003 and Lebanon since the 1980s have demonstrated".

Ever since the Houthis captured Sana'a, Iran has openly supported the rebels with supplies and military personnel as well as offering their forces military training. In the wake of the capture of the Yemeni capital, Houthi leaders went to Tehran to sign up on an agreement to institute constant air service between Sana'a and Tehran and to increase cooperation between both states.

The Islamic republic of Iran has also tried to play peace maker in the conflict by proposing a four-point plan to ending the conflict in Yemen. In 2015 the Iranian foreign minister Mohammed Zarif argued that Iran's four-point plan was the only way to end the Yemeni conflict. However there has being no evidence suggesting that Tehran plans to end its support for the Houthis, as Tehran continues to view this conflict as a continuation of its push to sustain political, military and economic pressure on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as their intervention in the war reportedly costs them about 5-7 billion dollars a month whereas Iran spends millions of dollars a year in offering support to the Houthi militia.

Iran's support for the Houthis has led to further strengthening of their claim to power, as with Iranian backing them, the Houthis have continued to fight the Saudi led coalition which has only worsened the situation in Yemen.

3.4 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an authoritarian monarchy, with a legal and political system based on the interpretation of Islamic Law (Sharia) on the Wahhabis principles. The Saudi king, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, took position in January 2015. The legislative body and the judicial activity are based on the Sharia. With Iran becoming an Islamic theocratic state, the Saudi government felt threatened by the rise of Iran and the impact its success would have on its own Islamists who might be inspired to establish their own theocratic state. Thus, the government pursued a project to ensure that the Saudi version of Islam (Wahabism) was spread all around the world and its clerics were charged with increasing the frequency with which they criticized the Shiite ideology (Madawi Al-Rasheed 2018).

Saudi Arabia has not only exported Wahhabism but also pursued reciprocal containment through the forging of alliances and the effort to counter Iran's ideological and geopolitical interests in the region by any means. Riyadh is pro-West and has strong alliance with the United States and views Tehran as a legitimate threat to its interest in the region not just politically but religiously. Failure to curtail the growth of Tehran might lead to Riyadh losing its foothold in the MENA region. Saudi always looks for ways to extend its influence in the Middle East region and the Islamic world. In times past Saudi Kings like, Khalid (1975-1982), Fahd (1982-2005), and Abdullah (2005-2015) had encountered different challenges in trying to contain the influence of Iran, the current crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) is up to his wits in trying to keep Iran isolated and to turn the public's mind away from the current challenges presently bedeviling the kingdom by curtailing the spread of Iran's influence in Bahrain, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

The regime wants to remind the Saudi people that monarchy is fighting a serious threat to the existence of Saudi Arabia propagated by the Iranians. The Saudi government has magnified the threat posed by the Iranians and has sought to justify their actions against Tehran as its mission to save the MENA region from Persianization and shiification. MBS highlights his resolve to curtail the spread of Iran's influence, as he hopes to be seen as the savior of not just Saudi Arabia but the Middle East as a whole. This stance is very similar to the cold war era where successive American governments sought to collectively denounce communism and the Russians.

The key for Saudi Arabia to maintaining its economic supremacy is the maintenance of its share in the world's oil market and its prime placement as an investment hub for global investment capital in the region. Therefore, ensuring that Iran a large oil producing country with a huge market with great potential is kept under international pressure and excluded remains vital to Saudi Arabia. Riyadh views Iran and its potential robust economy as a competitor rather than an ally that it can partner with to foster regional integration. It seeks to shrink or even collapse the Iranian economy under sanctions and has never tried to engage Iran in an attempt to promote regional harmony in which the human and natural resources of Iran could be easily utilized to advance the economic interests of the region.

In accordance to Saudi's national interests its main there are four main reasons why Riyadh is ready to aid President Hadi's government and they are: "securing Saudi Arabia's border, stemming Iran's regional expansionist ambitions, combating terrorist threats and safeguarding regional security". In this respect opposing the Houthis and their allies in Iran is currently one of the major concerns of the Saudis.

The Houthis have over the years launched several attacks on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia (2017) have stated that "between May 2015 and January 27, 2017, there were more than 40 missile strikes by the Houthi separatists targeting against Saudi Arabia, among which nine of them struck the Saudi territory". Also an increase in Yemeni immigrants flooding Saudi Arabia is a concern to the border security of the Saudis as more than a million refugees have sought shelter in the country (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2016: 162).

3.4.1 Saudi Arabia in Yemen

The Saudis were key in the negotiations that removed Saleh. Ever since the protest began they were involved in trying to resolve the issue primarily because they were afraid that any sustained form of insurgency or rebellion will affect the Arabian Peninsula and its stability (Salisbury 2015: 6). When Hadi took over as President, Saudi Arabia intensified its efforts to bring peace back to Yemen, increased aid to the government, increase international donations and raised funds for international donors (Brehony 2015: 248). When the conflict worsened and Hadi was toppled, Saudi Arabia quickly reiterated its support for the government and took in Hadi as the government's guest. Their emphasis on trying to contain the Yemen crisis and maintaining their allegiance and support for a regional partner speaks on how valuable the roles of regional hegemon and peace guarantor are and how they are linked.

As Khaled Fattah (2012) puts it, "the Saudi intelligence and security apparatus views Yemen as the weakest link in the chain of security of the Arabian Peninsula, and thus easy prey for Tehran to penetrate and manipulate". The leaders of Saudi Arabia have always paid rapt attention to the happenings in Yemen to see if anything is of concern to them and if it is, they have always tried to intervene either directly or indirectly. Saudi Arabia shares a border with Yemen and with an increase in the flow of migrants from Yemen to Saudi Arabia and a number of challenges such as its past and present security issues, economic situation and the relationship between tribes in both nations have helped to shape Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards Yemen (Hill and Nonneman, 2011: 8).

The government of Saudi Arabia views the war against the Houthi rebels as a struggle of ideologies against Iran and have announced that “no other result besides total victory is acceptable” (Al-Rasheed 2015). The Saudis believe that the Houthis are a threat not to be taken lightly and pose a serious security risk to the region because of their apparent connections with Iran and thus they have taken a severe stance against the rebels and see defeating the group as a way to stall the rise of Iran within the region. In March of 2015 in response to calls from the deposed President of Yemen, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi for military support after his government was toppled by the Houthi movement, Saudi Arabia in coalition with eight other Arab nations from Africa (Egypt, Morocco and Sudan) and countries that are part of the Gulf Cooperation Council namely UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Jordan decided to aid the deposed President (Sharp. 2018).

The Saudi-led coalition initially began with a strategy of airstrikes code-named Operation Decisive Storm. The coalition conducted airstrikes against Houthis, destroying some of their bases, arm depots and strongholds. The coalition also sent ground troops and naval warships to aid the Yemeni government in the war (Younes, 2019).

The Saudis would later end the airstrikes and would adopt another strategy called Operation Restoring Hope, which was aimed at protecting the civilian population whilst continuing the fight against the rebels, also facilitating the removal of foreign nationals and to increase medical assistance and the provision of relief materials for the Yemenis. This move is seen as a combination politics, diplomacy and military tactics (Younes, 2019).

The strategy, Operation Decisive Storm led to condemnation of the Saudi-led coalition by the international community as it led to the death of civilian lives and despite the air strikes it did not dissuade Houthis, as they continued to fight on. The Saudis would later declare Operation Decisive Storm over in April 2015 after claiming that it had put an end to all threats posed by the rebel groups ballistic missiles and heavy artillery.

Operation Restoring Hope had initially being seen as a success but the situation in Yemen has only worsened as the lives of the Yemeni people has not improved significantly since it was launched. MBS in an interview insisted that Restoring Hope “does not mean we will allow the militia to expand on the ground, they must realize that every day they do not get closer to the political solution, they lose on the ground” (The Economist 2016).

Riyadh seeks to achieve a “decisive victory” in Yemen which at the moment seems unattainable. The conflict has grown to an extent that it cannot just be resolved by air raids and heavy duty warfare. This failure by the Saudis has driven a wedge between the GCC allies as the war has imposed significant costs on the states involved. This fact is also not lost in Tehran which has being intensifying its efforts in aiding the Houthis.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been able to explain how the intervention of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen civil war has exacerbated the situation. As we observed in the study, the Iranian government recognizes the Houthis as the legitimate leaders of Yemen and have offered both financial and technical support to the rebel group as can be

evidenced by the Houthis confirming that they received training from Iran way before 2011, which has strengthened their resolve to continue with the war. The Saudis on the other hand have supported the deposed President Hadi and have provided financial, logistical and military hardware to the Yemeni army since 2015 as well as financially backing the Government of Yemen (GOY). This support from the Saudis has enabled the GOY to continue prosecuting the war against the Houthis. In this light, we can discern that the continued assistance from Tehran and Riyadh has been key in the continuation of the war. However such support has had a tremendous implication on Yemen and its people, therefore the next chapter will examine the ideological rivalry of both sides and discuss the implications of the war in detail.

Chapter 4

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SAUDI-IRAN CONFLICT ON YEMEN

4.1 Introduction

The ongoing proxy war in Yemen is down to a conflict exacerbated by sectarian ideologies and the two main external actors pursuing their own aims in order to gain Yemen as a proxy state. The implications of this Saudi-Iran involvement in Yemen has only worsened the situation and has led to major hostility in an already fragile country and region. The major victims of this never ending war are neither Iran and Saudi Arabia nor her allies, but the poor people of Yemen. This chapter will examine Sunni-Shia rivalry, the Yemen war and the impact of this war which has largely been ignored by the media and other academic scholars on the Economy, its Ecological impact and the humanitarian crisis it has led to.

4.2 Sunni and Shia Ideological Rivalry

The Middle East has two major regional powers which are Saudi Arabia and Iran and being the leading states within the region both Riyadh and Tehran have had a tense relationship ever since the latter's Islamic Revolution of 1979 because the Saudis see themselves as the rightful leaders of the Muslim world and head of the Sunni Islamic sect while the Iranians consider themselves the leaders of the world's Shiites (Karakir, 2018). This has led to an existing rivalry between both states for the leadership of the Muslim world.

Mohammed (2019) states that, “Riyadh and Tehran are both holding a predominant Islamic status, although their ideologies differ”. Iran views Saudi Arabia as the representative of the opposing Sunni sect of Islam and itself as a radical leaders of the Shia Muslim world leader thus their actions with reference to their relationship with the Saudis are based on this premise (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019). The yearning to be the sole regional power is what drives Saudi and Iran’s foreign policies (Grumet, 2015). Both states seek to be leaders of the Islamic world and solidify their presence and influence in the Middle East. This has led to a race for power using the ideological divisions in Islam which has caused tensions between Sunnis and Shias in the Middle East (Huwaidin, 2015; Mervin & al., 2013).

As a result of this competition between the two nations for who gets to be the leader of the Muslim world, there has been a widespread debate about whether the ongoing war in Yemen can be termed a “proxy war” between Saudi Arabia and Iran based on ideological differences. A kind of Middle Eastern cold war. There have being arguments put forward by several scholars that ever since the Arab Springs in the MENA region an Arabian cold war has emerged between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Powel (2016) argues that this rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran will define Middle Eastern politics in the 21st century as both Iran and Saudi Arabia view one another as significant threats to their standing in the region (Eski, 2020). Saudi Arabia follows a policy that seeks to maintain the balance of power along a security regime and their foreign policy is based on this balance (Eski, 2020). However, the Arab spring threatened to upend the regional status-quo that Riyadh seeks to protect. Due to this uncertainty in the region, Iran has risen and has tried to overthrow the Saudi’s who are trying to maintain their power, thus birthing a regional rivalry, propped up by

their rival Islamic leanings (Eski, 2020). Presently, Iran is working constantly to spread its influence within the Gulf while Saudi Arabia and other states in the Gulf are working hard to contain Iran's quest for expansion (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019).

To really understand what is happening in the Middle East, it has to be pointed out that states in the region do not relate with each in the way and manner that European states do. There is a quite often a clash between ethnic nationalities and nationalism in Arab nations over what influence Islam should have on the people. Majority of the people in the Middle Eastern are led by various religious leaders (Rahigh-Aghsan & Jakobsen, 2010). Iran has been left to questions its status-quo in the region and what role it plays after its ideological revolution in 1979 (Huwaidin, 2015). Iran has thus focused on protecting the Shia Muslim populace the world over.

Iran, historically is the world's first Shia State, therefore, it is not surprising that it has taken a role as the guardian of Shitte Muslims all across the world (Cerioli, 2018). Its culture, values and religious heritage are complementing its race for power thereby forming a soft Power through its newly acclaimed role as the defender of Shia Islam. Thus, Iran saw the Arab Spring uprisings as a chance to begin an Islamic revolution and to try and make the Shia communities in Muslim states rise up and rise up and overthrow Sunni governments (Eski, 2020). . Iran "increased its influence of Shiite people and produced a sectarian-ideology-based foreign policy that aspires to make those people the strategic instruments of the propaganda policy of Iran" (Eski, 2020). This strategy implemented by Iran was seen and taken as a threat to the

existence of the Sunni Muslim states, most especially The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; this would only worsen the rivalry between the states (Danset, 2020).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the other hand, is a conservative Wahhabi kingdom. Saudi holds a special place in Islam as two out of the three holy Islamic cities of Medina and Mecca are situated in the country. Moreover, the Saudi King is often referred to as the “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques” and this simply means that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the King have a duty to support the Muslim Ummah in times of need (Cerioli, 2018). According to Huwaidin (2015) “various International Islamic Organizations view Saudi Arabia as the natural spiritual leader of the Muslim world”. Saudi Arabian leaders implement conservative Wahhabi policies within the Kingdom and Wahhabism sees the Shia sect as its enemy. Therefore, the Kingdom considers Shittes as infidels and Iran as its enemy (Huwaidin, 2015). Danset (2020) says that “Saudi Arabia is afraid of the expansion of Shia’s sect since the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Kingdom authorities are still controlling today the Eastern part of the country to prevent Shiites to exercise religious activities and protest”. Saudi Arabia abhors anything relating to Shia Islam even going as far as removing references to Shia belief in school textbooks (Danset, 2020).

Alliances in the Middle East are made via religious affiliation, and both states are careful not to see the rise of the other’s Islamic sect most especially Saudi with Shiism. Riyadh is suspicious about the rise of Shia believers because of Iran’s rallying cry to Muslims all over the world to overthrow Sunni regimes and this is viewed as a threat to the Saudi state and its status quo and as Mearsheimer points out

the primary objectives of all states are survival, domestic autonomy and territorial integrity. Therefore, Riyadh is ready to combat the spread of Shiism in the region.

Iran sees Saudi Arabia as traitors of Islam and puppets for the West especially the U.S. and therefore, the Saudis have chosen to side with Kafirs (Panah, 2007). Saudi Arabia's disdain for Shia Islam coupled with its alliance with the U.S and other Western states has led Tehran to view Riyadh as its greatest foe in the Middle East (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019). The quest to become the regional power by both states has led to them promoting their culture and religious sects to other states, this can be seen as both states trying to leverage on their soft power but Riyadh and Tehran are also showcasing their hard power by displaying their military might through the support of warring factions in the region in order to spread their ideologies, this is noticeable in the Middle East including Yemen.

4.3 The War in Yemen

Prior to the war, Yemen was already known to be one of the poor nations in the Middle East (Easterly, 2018). The country, then was governed by President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi who was a Sunni Muslim and an ally of Saudi Arabia (Karkir, 2018). President Hadi was made President following the Arab spring uprisings when the people of Yemen rose up against the former leader President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Houthis played a prominent role in the protests that led to Saleh's removal and the events of the Arab spring had a resultant effect in radicalizing the group. They became influenced by all the revolutions and events happening around the Arab world and believed that they could overturn the political order in their country. They believed their struggle would lead to a positive outcome (Juneau, 2016). After the demonstrations and protests in Yemen, Saleh stepped down

as President and the Sunni Prime Minister Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi was made President (Karakir, 2018). The Houthis however did not trust Hadi and saw him as a Sunni puppet of Saudi Arabia (Taves, 2019).

After years of disagreements the Houthis would collude with Saleh and with the backing of Iran would launch an attack on the capital city of Yemen, Sana'a in early 2015. This event was decisive in starting the civil war in Yemen today. President Hadi would flee the country to Saudi Arabia for help (Taves, 2019). Due to the ongoing war Yemen lacks a proper authority or government to govern the country and enforce law and order. In order for things to return to a semblance of normalcy the government of President Hadi has to be restored. The deposed leader of Yemen, President Hadi has garnered support from members of the International community and is recognized as the legitimate leader of Yemen. The Saudi government backs its support for Hadi by claiming that they seek to "restore Yemen's sovereignty and establish an independent modern state applying a system of administration and law" (Clausen, 2019). The United Nations recognizes the Hadi led government as the legitimate government of Yemen and the Security Council has shown its support of the Saudi-led intervention by resolution 2216 reiterating their support for his reinstatement as the true leader of Yemen (UN, 2015).

Since the attacks began the living situations of the civilian population has worsened significantly. There have been attacks on cultural sites, hospitals and schools with lots of casualties. The Yemeni government backed by Saudi Arabia has implemented embargoes on all goods coming into the country through planes or via

the harbor. These embargos are controlled by the Saudi backed Yemeni government and is done in order to checkmate Iranian supplies to the Houthis (Edwards, 2019)

Iran has been supporting the Houthis by sending arms and ammunition and offering military assistance to the group and is the only major state supporting the rebels. Ever since the Arab spring uprisings Iran has been trying to get a foothold in Yemen politically, so as to get Yemen to act as its proxy state. They have tried to achieve their aims by supporting the military actions of the Houthi militia discreetly, however in recent years their support of the group has been more open. As opposed to the international community, which considers the Houthis rise to power to be illegitimate, as outlined in United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2216, Iran freely admits that it considers the Houthis to be the only legitimate authority currently within Yemen. This rhetoric has been backed by its actions in the intervening years (Settembrini, 2019).

Ever since the Houthis captured Sana'a, Tehran has openly supported the rebel group with supplies, military personnel as well as offering their forces military training. In the wake of the capture of the Yemeni capital, leaders of the rebel group went to the Iranian capital Tehran in order to sign a pact for the establishment of air travel between Sana'a and Tehran, the two nations capitals so as to strengthen and intensify the relationship between both Yemen and Iran (Juneau, 2016).

The involvement of Iran in Yemen shows its long-term geopolitical strategy in the Middle East. Tehran feels that supporting the Houthis is a way to gain influence in the region at a moderately low cost. However, for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it is different as its reaction is a direct security measure to contain the situation and avoid

the insecurity spilling over into its borders and also to prevent Iran from controlling its next door neighbor.

4.4 Economic Impact on Yemen

Yemen, before the civil war was already the poorest country in the Middle East. The war has only further exacerbated the situation. The continuous fighting has greatly affected economic activities negatively in a country largely dependent on oil exportation. This coupled with extensive damage to the country's infrastructure has led to a suspension of basic public services and economic activities. "Yemen was not deeply integrated within the global economy, with natural resources making up the bulk of trade and foreign investment. Oil and natural gas made up 90 per cent of Yemen's exports and 88 per cent of FDI between 2005 and 2010. Capital flight has been a problem for decades. Between 1990 and 2008, US \$2.70 left the country illicitly for every US \$1 received in aid" (Moyer et al 2019: 23). Furthermore, Moyer et al (2019:24) states that "In Yemen, the current conflict has exacerbated already high levels of poverty. By the fall of 2015, 45 per cent of Yemenis surveyed said they had lost their main source of income due to the conflict. Public employees have not received full and regular salaries since the fall of 2016, ultimately reducing incomes and hurting sectors like health and education. In 2017, 48 per cent of the population lived on less than US \$1.90 a day (up from 30 per cent in 2015) and 78.5 per cent lived on less than US \$3.20 (up from 65.6 per cent in 2015)".

The war has brought economic activities in Yemen to a halt. GDP has been contracting every year since the conflict began, according to a UNDP report in 2019 "Yemen's GDP had shrunk at a rate of almost 28 per cent in 2015, 9.8 per cent in 2016, and -5.9 per cent in 2017". Many businesses have had to scale down on their

operations while most have shut down completely. Extraction of gas still continues although primarily for local usage, the country's major source of revenue, oil production has since stopped and this has led to fall in revenue available to the government. "Oil and gas production overall has fallen 90 per cent since 2014, leaving the country with limited foreign exchange. Imports have been halved since 2014 and with the Central Bank of Yemen largely inoperable, go primarily through unofficial channels" (Moyer et al 2019: 23).

The World Bank in a 2019 report states that in Yemen "the loss of oil receipts has created an acute foreign exchange shortage, while government revenue has plummeted. This, coupled with the fragmentation of state institutions, including the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY), has interrupted supply of foreign exchange for essential imports and payment of public sector salaries, fueling inflation and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis".

4.5 Ecological Impact

Yemen is considered an ecological hotspot, it currently experiences exposure to the three main indicators of resource measured in the Ecological Threat Register (ETR) – food security, water shortage and population growth and presently Yemen lacks the ability to respond to these threats.

The ongoing civil war which is being fought between the Yemeni government backed by Saudi Arabia and Iranian backed Houthi militia has meant that the detrimental impact on both the environment and the people of Yemen has been tremendous. This conflict has led to devastating effects which have so far been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yemen is already the most food insecure

nation on the planet. As a nation, before the war began Yemen had depended mainly on food imports with the country producing just 25 percent of its food domestically. The outbreak of the war and continuous fighting means that Yemenis now depend on food aid provided by donors and food availability and affordability is a major concern for various homes. According to Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, IPC, report (2019), up to 53 percent of Yemenis which number about 15.9 million are facing severe food shortages. This food shortage insecurity is more prevalent in provinces where the fighting is more intense such as Al Hudaydah, Amran, Hajjah, Taiz and Saada with the most affected being Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

In 2019, the UN reported that almost 19.7 million people in Yemen could not access basic healthcare. The ongoing conflict has worsened the situation and coupled with rising ecological threats which has led to millions of people being displaced all across the country. It is estimated that more than 3.4 million people have been displaced as a result of this war. Ecological disasters such as floods have contributed to this with over 177,000 new displacements. The situation has been worsened by intense floods brought about by torrential rainfalls which have not only worsened sanitation problems but has led to people being unable to access health care services and led to the outbreak of water borne diseases like cholera and dengue fever.

Scarcity of water is a major manifestation of this unending war. This dearth of water has mainly being made known in the urban areas but it is however more prevalent in rural areas which harbors up to 70 percent of the citizens. This scarcity of water is

one of the major issues and perhaps the most pressing of Yemen's environmental issues exacerbated by the war.

For years, there have been several factors whether “direct and local and international and indirect” that have been the cause of some of Yemen's main ecological problems which have been made worse by years of political instability and this war. In an important contribution Lackner & Al-Eryani (2020) highlighted the ecological effect of the war on Yemen to quote him specifically;

“The most urgent and best-publicized environmental issue in Yemen is the threat posed by a neglected oil tanker floating off the west coast of the country. The supertanker Safer is moored about eight kilometers west of Ras Isa on the Red Sea, and may leak its massive cargo of crude oil into the ocean. It has not received any maintenance since Houthi rebels captured it in 2015. If it sinks or explodes, it will cause a historic environmental catastrophe. A release of the supertanker's 1.148 million barrels of oil would be a spill four times the size of the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster in Alaska, destroying marine life and human livelihoods on a massive scale. The damage would take decades to recover from, and would impact the entire Red Sea region and all the countries bordering it but would be most extreme for Yemen itself”

Not only has this conflict affected the environment but also the peace of the populace and has led to Yemen being ranked 162 out of 163 countries in the 2019 Positive Peace Index by the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP). Thus, Yemen is viewed as the most susceptible to the effects of ecological threats which include social disintegration, economic meltdown, civil unrests and political instability.

4.6 Humanitarian Crisis

Yemen has hardly gotten any break from violence since the beginning of the war in 2015 between the Hadi-led government and the Houthis. The Saudi Arabia-led GCC campaign on Yemen to combat Houthi rebels and Iranian influence in the area has led to staggering numbers of casualties: an estimated 17,729 civilians have been

killed or injured since March 2019. Yemen is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis after the emergence of civil war. Yemen is the poorest Arab country in the world. The country has approximately 27.4 million people with chronic natural resource and food shortfalls (Sharp 2017).

The United Nations describes the situation in Yemen as the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis”, the Council on Foreign Affairs in a report stated that over twenty- four million people are in need of aid, about four million are displaced and over a hundred thousand have died since the eruption of the civil war. The war led to what has been referred to as “the worst famine in a century” as there is a widespread food shortage that has led to 13 million Yemeni civilians facing starvation. The World Food Program (WFP) states that “an estimated 7.3 million Yemenis need immediate food aid”. In similar vein, a United Nations Report (2019) states that Yemen is presently experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world now. The report states that over of Yemen’s population of about 30 million over 80 percent of its citizens need any sort of aid and about two-third of them do not have access to food. The UN estimates that over one-third of the Yemeni population suffer from extreme hunger and out of the nation’s 333 districts, 230 are in danger of experiencing severe famine. The report concludes by stating that “humanitarian assistance is increasingly becoming the only lifeline for millions of Yemenis” (UN Report 2019).

To further worsen the situation there was a cholera outbreak with the number of reported cholera incidents in Yemen haven risen dramatically since 2015 with 109,000 cases of suspected cholera have been reported since the beginning of 2019.

Similarly, The World Health Organization (WHO 2019) reports that almost 2,000 new cases are added each day. Health experts are certain the cholera endemic coincided with the outbreak of war between Houthi rebels and a Saudi-led coalition in March 2015. This situation is made worse by the fact there was a complete blockade of food and medicine by the Saudis in Yemen in 2015 leaving the country susceptible to starvation and disease outbreaks. The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the health situation in Yemen. The pandemic coupled with the collapsing health structure in Yemen has made testing difficult with health centers and hospitals either closed or operating partially. As at January 2021, there had so far being 2,104 reported cases of COVID 19 with a reported 611 deaths. The UN has said that the health sector in Yemen was close to collapsing as only just about half of the nations health facilities are still operational with most of them lacking the necessary equipments to deal with the increasing health challenges in the country. They lack oxygen tanks, clean water and personal protective equipment (PPE) needed by front line health workers to combat the Covid-19 virus. As a result of these clearing deficiencies most of the medical personnel in the country have had to work without protective equipment and have not been paid their salaries. This is worsened by the fact that for years both sides have been attacking hospitals and health centers and have also threatened, injured, abducted, detained and killed medical personnel.

UNICEF in a press release in 2019 confirms that the war has led to more than 2 million children dropping out of school and 3.7 million more are estimated to be at risk. The outbreak of this war has led to almost a fourth of children dropping out of school. A 2019 report by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that “the severity of needs is deepening, with the number of people in

acute need, a staggering 27 per cent higher than last year, when it was already the most acute crisis on the globe”.

Yemen has rarely had a reprieve since the outbreak of the war .The worst hit from all this fighting are the Yemen people with acute food and water shortages to spike in diseases and countless deaths. No one really knows when the war will end and what it means for the future of Yemen but what is certain is that the crisis in Yemen will continue to worsen as long as the Saudi-Iran proxy war continues in Yemen.

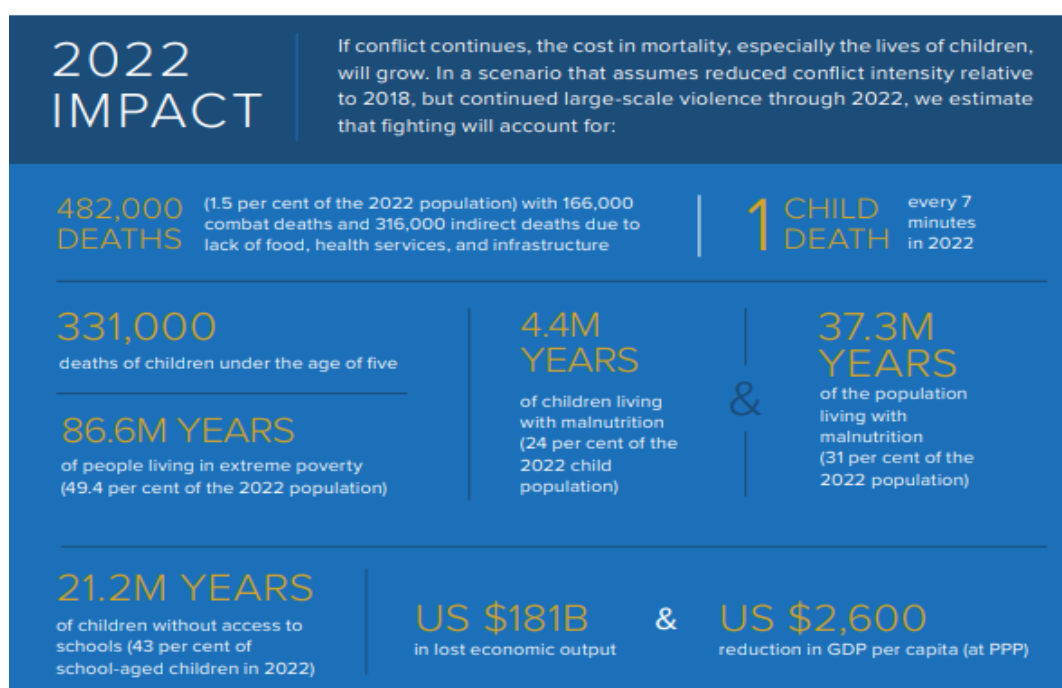


Figure 2: UNDP Estimated Impact of the Cost of the Yemeni Conflict
Source: Moyer D. Jonathan “Assessing the impact of war on development in Yemen”

The above figure shows an estimated impact that the war will have on Yemen if the conflict continues to intensify till 2022.

4.7 Conclusion

The situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate as the armed conflict remains the major cause of this devastating humanitarian, economic and ecological disasters

happening in Yemen. These issues are further worsened by rising inflation, increasing unemployment and poverty as well as a lack of a proper government to tackle certain challenges like the cholera outbreak or Covid-19 pandemic. Yemen so far relies on aid from international donors to stay afloat; this has obviously not been enough to stop the situation in the country from becoming worse. The next chapter will look at a previous a peace agreement and try to provide possible recommendations to resolving this seemingly unending conflict.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION TO THE CONFLICT

5.1 Introduction

In an attempt to bring an end to the Yemen war there have been several proposed peace initiatives made in order to resolve the conflict under the supervision of the United Nations.

Proposals such as the Ramadan Peace Agreement, Omani Initiative and Kuwait peace initiative have all failed due to several reasons which range from a distrust amongst the parties to each party refusing to even attend peace agreements. However, in 2018 the warring sides came together and agreed on a series of decisions that gave rise to an opportunity for a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Stockholm, Sweden under the guidance of the UN envoy, Martin Griffiths and this came to be known as the “Stockholm Agreement”. The terms of the agreement focuses on three major terms which are:

- i. Ceasefire in the port city of Hodeidah,
- ii. An opening of humanitarian corridors for the movement of aid via these ports in Hodeidah
- iii. A prisoner swap between both parties.

While these terms have been accepted by the parties involved and steps have been taken in implementing the agreement, I do firmly believe that the solution to a long

lasting peace in Yemen goes beyond the Stockholm agreement. This agreement however was unsuccessful and the war has continued to rage on.

However, due to the global pandemic there is now a chance for peace, just this past year, Riyadh had announced on the 8th of April, 2020 that it will commence a two week cease fire, to enable the Kingdom focus on the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and allow humanitarian aid be rendered in Yemen (Sharp, 2020). Saudi is also now open for negotiation and has begun negotiating with the Houthis (Lynch & al., 2019), also this world wide pandemic has presented a chance for deliberation and cooperation that would permit the Saudi Arabia a chance to end its costly military interventions (Sharp, 2020). As of October 2020, Riyadh was gradually trying to haul itself out from Yemen with some challenges, as its national security is being threatened. Furthermore, its continued engagement and actions in the war has put a dent to its image in the international community (Krause & Parker, 2020).

5.2 Conclusion

In this thesis I have tried to show that this quest for regional dominance by Iran and Saudi Arabia has only worsened the situation in Yemen, as both states have brought their own sectarian ideologies and regional rivalry into a national civil war thereby bringing another layer of conflict into the whole situation and worsening it. Thus, this rivalry was examined using Mearsheimer's offensive realism to understand the actions of Tehran and Riyadh in this conflict. Iran and Saudi Arabia have been at the forefront in the quest for regional supremacy. Both states have proven overtime to be the most influential actors in the Middle East but so far they have each remained stagnant in their quest to overtake each other in their quest for political and religious influence in the region as they race to be regional hegemons. This race has led both

states to Yemen. Having examined the historical and present happenings, these two nations have shown that their search for regional dominance is demonstrated by their need to be gain control of Yemen for their own interests whether it be economical or religious like spreading Shiism or Wahhabism.

The rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh stems from a total distrust of each other whilst also propagating sectarianism. Offensive Realism is a comprehensive concept for explaining the Iranian-Saudi Arabia security strategy in the Middle East. Tehran and Riyadh are using their influence as the region's religious leaders in fighting the war. However, that is just a minor part of the underlying cause of the war. Both states seek to gain economic and military power in the region. Saudi Arabia's action are based on the facts that according to Mearsheimer (2001) states think about immediate and long-term consequences of their actions, and think strategically about how to survive in an anarchic system. Riyadh has to defend its territory and ensure that its security is not compromised, as allowing a country at its border to fall into an openly hostile Iran's hand would be dangerous for the Saudis. Therefore, the government of Saudi Arabia has to ensure that there is a pro-Saudi government in power in Yemen. Also, just as Mearsheimer (2001) points out all "great powers possess offensive military capabilities, which they are capable of using against other states". Riyadh has used the war in Yemen to demonstrate its military power to its rival. Iran on the other hand is seeking to become the regional hegemon and to do this Tehran has to upset the the balance of power in the region. To achieve this, it has to challenge the Saudi dominance not only in the region but in the Muslim world. This it has done by backing the Houthis a known Shia rebel group in Yemen, a country close to the Saudi border. Iran seeks to gain power and this it does by

challenging the Saudis not only in Yemen but in Syria, Iraq and other countries in conflict in the Middle East. Both countries continue to function under the framework of Offensive Realism, and their involvement in Yemen emphasizes their race to regional hegemony. The major aim for States such as Iran and Saudi Arabia is to become the regional hegemon, and maximize their power but their policies are a zero-sum game/relative gain and would engage for expansionism when possible (Rich, 2019).

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