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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**An Analysis of the United States and Saudi Arabia's
Foreign Policies Toward Yemen**

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Abstract

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The Republic of Yemen (referred to as Yemen henceforth), one of the world's most catastrophic humanitarian crisis perpetuated by years of civil unrest, political turmoil, and a concoction of fatal internal/external conflicts, continues to pass under the international community's radar and remains hidden under a veil. Various organizations and even countries as a whole have attempted to alleviate the Yemen crisis, but there is little sign of any form of recovery in the dark corner of the Middle East. Hope was hinted at when a coalition led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (SA) and supported by the United States (U.S.) was formed back in 2015 during which the Yemen crisis had reached its "boiling point". However, the foreign policies of the said two nations toward Yemen have proven to be anything but effective since.

This study utilizes the qualitative research method in order to analyze, compare, and contrast the foreign policies of both the U.S. and SA toward Yemen;

more specifically, the foreign policies regarding the current Yemen crisis will be analyzed for both countries. This study will examine any major changes in the two nations' foreign policies toward Yemen that may have occurred based on major time periods. The major time periods will be defined as Cold War, post-Cold War, Arab Spring, and post-Arab Spring. The reasoning behind the said time periods will be discussed in detail later on. Each time period will entail how Yemen was affected in terms of communal conflicts/implications, geopolitics, religious conflict, and domestic politics. The foreign policies of both the U.S. and SA will be covered for each of the time periods and will be analyzed just how such policies may have contributed, either positively and detrimentally, to the aforementioned elements.

This study claims that while it may seem at first the U.S.' and SA's foreign policies are formulated towards alleviating the crisis in Yemen, the aforementioned policies have only exacerbated the said situation. This study argues that the overlapping policies of the U.S. and SA toward Yemen have only exacerbated the catastrophe that which is currently engulfing Yemen. Throughout history, the influence the U.S. and SA have had on Yemen in terms of its communal, geopolitical, religious, and domestic politics aspects, have proven to be substantially detrimental for the country of Yemen.

The implications of conducting this study are as follows: First, the Yemen Crisis is fundamentally a low-intensity conflict (LIC), fueled by chaotic communal conflict, a prolonged proxy-war of geopolitics and religious dominance between SA and Iran, and failed intervention from the U.S. and SA. Second, the complexity of the Yemen Crisis imposes a near-impossible challenge to fully understand and

potentially propose a uni/multi-lateral solution. Third, as was argued earlier, the foreign policies of the two hegemons, while at first they may seem to focus on reforming Yemen, are only doing so at the surface level; ultimately, as one would expect, the foreign policies focus more on attaining their own goals whilst utilizing Yemen as a mere vessel.

Limitations of this paper are as follows: First, the complexity of the issue at hand poses difficulty in obtaining sufficient information regarding the topic of this paper. The lack of scholarly and media attention on the issue has limited the number of accessible sources needed for a thorough, extensive research. Second, the scope of analysis of this paper has been limited to three nations and their policies based on different epochs. The said epochs were chosen based on historical significance and relativity to the purpose of this study. Third, the Yemen Crisis continues to rage on, thus there is no guarantee what the future holds for not just the state itself, but for the region of Middle East as well.

Future researches should focus on attaining and delivering accurate information that reflects upon the true nature of the situation discussed within the paper. Policymakers should try to approach the issue via multi-faceted approaches, rather than trying to isolate and solving one problem at a time.

Keywords: Yemen, United States, Saudi Arabia, Yemen Crisis, low-intensity conflict, war, humanitarian crisis, Ali Abdullah Saleh, al Houthi

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List of Acronyms

AQAP	Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IRIN	The New Humanitarian
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LIC	Low-Intensity Conflict
MBS	Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman
MENA	UNICEF Middle East and North Africa
U.S.	United States
SA	Saudi Arabia
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WFP	World Food Programme

I. Introduction

1. Purpose of Study

On November 4th 2018, Geert Cappelaere, the UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), described Yemen as a place where it is a “living hell for children. A living hell not for 50-60 per cent of children. It is a living hell for every single boy and girl in Yemen.”¹ Since then, if nothing else, the living conditions in Yemen have only deteriorated. As of March 2022, UN agencies estimated that almost 17.4 million people were in dire need of food assistance, whilst the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), and UNICEF predicting that that number would increase up to 19 million between June and December of 2022². Despite its severity, however, Yemen has over the years received little media coverage across the globe. Figure 1 shows that even at its initial starting phase, the Yemen crisis had barely been mentioned by the media³.

¹ As cited in “Yemen: Acute Hunger at Unprecedented Levels as Funding Dries Up”, *UNICEF*, released in March 14, 2022.
<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/yemen-acute-hunger-unprecedented-levels-funding-dries>.

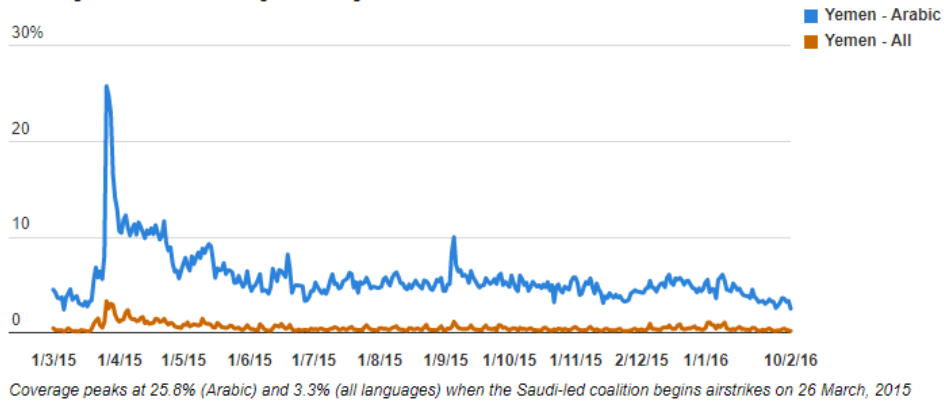
² As cited in “Yemen: Acute Hunger at Unprecedented Levels as Funding Dries Up”, *UNICEF*, released in March 14, 2022.
<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/yemen-acute-hunger-unprecedented-levels-funding-dries>.

³ Annie Slemrod, “Why does no one care about Yemen?”, *The New Humanitarian*, February 11, 2016,

[Figure 1] Remember Yemen?

Remember Yemen?

Percentage of online media coverage mentioning Yemen



Source: [GDELT](#)



(Source: The New Humanitarian, February 11, 2016)

Many are left to wonder, then, as to why such a humanitarian crisis continues to remain “hidden” under the international community’s radar.

Annie Slemrod states that the reason for this phenomenon is that

Yemen is simply not a priority, regionally or internationally. The war was born of a failed political transition after Arab Spring-inspired protests, a movement dubbed the “forgotten revolution” long before the current fighting became Yemen’s “forgotten war”.⁴

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2016/02/11/why-does-no-one-care-about-yemen>.

⁴ Ibid.

Taking into consideration the predicament that the world currently faces- conflicts in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, to name only a few- it should come as no surprise that one would arrive at such a conclusion.

The first and foremost purpose of this study is to raise awareness of the Yemen Crisis. The decade long crisis continues to this day, with little indication of any potential recovery in the near future. United Nations- brokered truces between the fragile Yemeni government and the hostile Houthis have recently allowed some room for relief for the Yemenis this year, but the most recent cease-fire truce expired on October 2nd, 2022, with no signs of the two parties forming an agreement to extend the truce⁵. The people of Yemen continue to live in fear that the chaos that had swept their nation for over a decade would once again run rampant. The multilateral efforts to contain the situation in Yemen has done little to actually solving the state's core crisis. The lack of media attention that the nation receives, which has inadvertently resulted in the lack of awareness from the international audience, has only exacerbated the situation. Without proper awareness, there is little room for viability in terms of a proper resolution or solution that may provide some insight as to how to alleviate the direness that continues to plague the forgotten nation in the Middle East.

⁵ Al Jazeera Staff, "End of Yemen's truce leaves civilians afraid dark days are back", *Al Jazeera*, October 7 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/7/end-yemen-truce-leaves-civilians-afraid-dark-days-back>.

This study will focus on the U.S. and SA's foreign policies toward Yemen- whether there are any overlapping or contradicting aspects- and how they are affecting the current Yemen crisis. In addition, other variables- such as "political marginalization, economic disenfranchisement, and the effects of an extractive, corrupt, rentier state"⁶- will also be explored and analyzed based on their key roles regarding communal, geopolitical, religious, and domestic policies of Yemen. Having provided nearly \$4.5 billion in humanitarian assistance alone since the start of the Yemen crisis, the U.S. acts as one of the biggest external players regarding the said crisis⁷. A Saudi-led Coalition in 2015⁸, as the title implies, shows SA as the key player within the Middle East regarding the Yemen crisis. The study will also show that SA has been a major influencer to Yemen in terms of the country's communal relations, its role as a geopolitical proxy state, a ground for religious conflict, and its domestic politics since the Cold War era. Although there are other nations that may have played a role in the Yemen Crisis, the scope of this study will focus primarily on the two main players that have influenced and shaped Yemen's current situation. Rather than

⁶ Gerald M. Feierstein, "Yemen: The 60-Year War.", *The Middle East Institute*, February 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/201902/Yemen%20The%2060%20Year%20War.pdf>.

⁷ Office of Press Relations, "The United States Announces Nearly \$585 Million in New Humanitarian Assistance for the People of Yemen as Crisis Threatens Millions of Lives", *USAID*, last updated May 05, 2022, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/mar-16-2022-united-states-announces-nearly-585-million-new-humanitarian-assistance-yemen>.

⁸ Montgomery, 2021.

focusing briefly on numerous variables, this study will focus primarily on the effects that the U.S.' and SA's foreign policies have had on Yemen. This study will analyze just how the said two nations' policies toward Yemen, over the course of many decades, have influenced and shaped Yemen.

This study attempts to address and answer the following research questions:

- What is the U.S.' current stance regarding Yemen? How does it compare to previous stances of policies?
- What is SA's current stance regarding Yemen? How does it compare to previous stances of policies?
- Are there any overlapping principles or policies regarding Yemen?
 - o Are there any key differences?
- How have the two countries' policies toward Yemen alleviated / exacerbated the Yemen crisis?
- Are there other potential key factors that may play significant roles in the Yemen crisis?
- Does Yemen fit into the definition of a 21st Century LIC, and how has it been alleviated or exacerbated by the U.S. and SA?

2. Analytical Framework

This study employs a qualitative research method that consists of analyzing and comparing any similarities or differences between the foreign policies of the U.S. and SA concerning Yemen. Qualitative research will

allow for an extensive research and analysis of the Yemen Crisis that will allow the readers to understand just how the crisis came about and why it continues to run rampant today. Quantitative values such as numbers- as pertaining to casualties, funds, budgets, and etc.- may provide some insight to the gravity of the situation, but it would not be appropriate to understanding the essence of the origin of the said crisis. Understanding how the actions of the two key players, Washington and Riyadh, have influenced and affected Yemen could raise the awareness of the global audience towards Yemen and allow for a better understanding as to how and why Yemen has become a forgotten “hot-potato” of the Middle East. In order to focus on the issue at hand primarily from Yemen’s perspective, the study will be conducted based on the following four aspects in relation to the effects of the foreign policies of the U.S. and SA toward Yemen: 1. Yemen’s communal relations/conflicts. 2. Yemen’s role in the Middle East’s religious conflict. 3. Yemen’s role in the geopolitical proxy-war between SA and Iran. 4. Yemen’s domestic policies.

This study will be divided based on critical epochs as follows: Cold War, particularly the Arab Cold War, post-Cold War era, Arab Spring, and post Arab Spring. The reasoning behind these epochs is as follows: First, Malcolm Kerr coined the term “Arab Cold War” in order to describe the

“inter-Arab politics in the 1950s and 1960s”.⁹ This was a time where political rivalry between “revolutionary republics and conservatives monarchies” would later set the stage for the modern regional dynamics within the Middle East.¹⁰ Furthermore, the Cold War had set the stage for international rivalry between the then two hegemon- the U.S. and the Soviet Union- that which itself would also impact the region of the Middle East. The Arab Spring was a tumultuous period filled with political unrest, economic disasters, and social reconstruction that would change not just the states involved, but the overall dynamic of the entire region. Finally, the post-Arab Spring epoch, which is between the early 2010’s to the present, is filled with three administrations from the U.S.’ side all with different policies toward Yemen. Furthermore, the post-Arab Spring epoch includes the major Saudi-led coalition that greatly influenced and changed the fate of Yemen today. Hence, this study has incorporated specific historical epochs in order to analyze and examine the variables that may have had pivotal influences on the Yemen Crisis, including the foreign policies of key major players like the U.S. and SA.

⁹ Kerr M. H. (1967). *The Arab Cold War 1958-1967: A study of ideology in politics* (2nd ed.). as cited in Zeynep Sütalan (2014). [Review of the book *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* by Marc Lynch]. *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 5(2).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 167.

3. Literature Review

Many experts and scholars concur on certain notions regarding the U.S.' and SA's involvement in Yemen. In 1953, the then- king of Saudi Arabia Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud allegedly warned his sons to "Keep Yemen weak"¹¹. The stage had already been set regarding how SA would initiate its relationship with Yemen. Fast forward to 2011 and Yemen finds itself in the midst of the Arab Spring, a series of pro-democracy revolutions that stretched across not only in the Middle East but also parts of North Africa¹². During this time, the Houthi movement (which is to be covered later) was turning into a "snowball" force with little to hinder its path to dominance. It wasn't until February 2012, however, when Ali Abdallah Saleh's government of 33 years was replaced by Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, which ultimately resulted in nothing¹³, seeing as how Hadi was forced to resign and flee to SA¹⁴. Hadi's lack of leadership and presence ultimately placed Yemen into more turmoil, as his government was neither welcomed nor accepted by the public. Yemen finally reached its tipping point when SA launched massive airstrikes on Yemen, aka Operation Decisive Storm, "with the aim of restoring the rule of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and

¹¹ Stig Stenslie, "Not too Strong, not too weak: Saudi Arabia's policy towards Yemen", *The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) Policy Brief*, March 2013.

¹² Erin Blakemore, "What was the Arab Spring and how did it spread?" *National Geographic*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/arab-spring-cause>.

¹³ Alley, April Longley. "Tracking the "Arab Spring": Yemen Changes Everything... And Nothing." *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 (2013): 74-85. doi:10.1353/jod.2013.0070.

¹⁴ (Montgomery 2021).

destroying the Houthi movement”¹⁵. The former Obama administration had supported the aforementioned military operation, a fact that which according Robert F. Worth played detrimental role in the current Yemen crisis and how such an action by the U.S. may not have been for the same reasons as the supposed Operation Decisive Storm¹⁶. Worth incurred that ulterior motives may have existed for the U.S. The study will examine whether such ulterior motives did exist and if so, what they consisted of. Yoel Gurzansky notes that SA’s recent shift to adopting a more aggressively assertive regional policy, has not served SA favorably, in comparison to when the Kingdom “showed restraint in managing its foreign relations”¹⁷. One of the key questions that this study asks then, is why has the U.S. and SA adopted such foreign policies that ultimately have failed to not only alleviate the crisis in Yemen, but has inadvertently tainted their own reputation in the grand scheme of international relations?

The analytical framework of this research will incorporate the concept of LIC. The reasoning and necessity of the utilization of the said concept are as follows. First, as defined by Martin Van Creveld, LIC’s tend

¹⁵ Darwich, May. “The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status” *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 2 (2018): 125-142.

¹⁶ Worth, Robert F. “How the War in Yemen Became a Bloody Stalemate- and the worst humanitarian Crisis in the World.” *The New York Times Magazine*, Corrected on November 6, 2018, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/31/magazine/yemen-war-saudi-arabia.html.

¹⁷ Guzansky, Yoel, “Saudi Foreign Policy: Change of Direction Required”, *INSS Insight* No. 975, September 26, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep08714.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A41cced92f32ee6a6ffab34bcb5df0748&ab_segments=0%2F5YC-6398%2Ftest&origin=.

to occur in developing parts of the world via small-scale armed conflicts under different names, such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and etc¹⁸. Yemen fits this first description, in the sense that not only is it one of the poorest countries in the world, but it has been struggling to fight against various terrorist and insurgent groups, most particularly the Houthis, for decades in primarily guerilla-fashioned warfare. Second, Creveld argues that between the states interlocked in conflict, most of the time only one side utilizes “regular armies... fighting guerrillas, terrorists, and even civilians, including women and children, on the other”.¹⁹ In the case of Yemen, the government has been in conflict with various organizations, including the al-Houthi movement in the north, along with the secessionist movement in the south.²⁰ As such, it can be inferred that the situation in Yemen is also aligned with Creveld’s second definition of an LIC. Lastly, Creveld asserts that “most LICs do not rely primarily on the high-technology collective weapons... of any modern armed force.”²¹ Yemen has had no choice but to receive military support from other nations, since the state itself lacks the capability of own military-grade weapons.²² On the opposite end of the conflict, the Houthis have supposedly received their military support, funding, and

¹⁸ Creveld, Martin Van. (1991). *The Transformation of War*. Free Press.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Foust, Joshua. “Fact Sheet: Yemen”, American Security Project. 2012.

²¹ Creveld, 1991.

²² Robert Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*, New York: Viking, 2009, p. 245 as cited in Terrill, 39.

training from Iran.²³ The lack of advanced weapons technology and military infrastructure for the domestic players in the Yemen crisis befits the third definition of an LIC. As such, the Yemen Crisis, from a domestic conflict perspective, can be categorized as an LIC. The key players- the government and the al-Houthi group- possess the traits that pertain to an LIC, and hence it has been deemed appropriate to use the framework of LIC for this research. As far as the foreign policies of U.S. and SA are concerned, the effects of the said policies on the Yemen Crisis in terms of the LIC framework will be analyzed in further detail in later chapters.

Another key aspect of an LIC is its “regional and global security implications.”²⁴ The LIC that is currently occurring within Yemen has not only inadvertently turned into a proxy-war between SA and Iran, but has had major political and economic impact on the U.S. as well. Supporting details of the aforementioned statement will be covered in detail in the following chapters.

Taking into consideration the complexity of the Yemen crisis and the structure of this study, the literary review aspect of this study will be integrated into the study as a whole rather than being limited to a single section.

²³ Terrill, 22.

²⁴ Guštin, Tin, “Some aspects of the low-intensity conflict”, *Strategos*, 5(1), 2021, p. 219.

II. The Arab Cold War

1. Communal Conflict / Implications

As mentioned earlier, the Arab Cold War was a term coined by Malcolm Kerr to refer to the epoch between 1950s and 1960s within the Arabian Peninsula.²⁵ This was a period in history where new alliances and political boundaries were being formed within the peninsula. After the Suez War of 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt set out to create an “Egypt-centric Pan-Arab system” that essentially polarized the Arab politics “between the revolutionary republics and conservative monarchies”.²⁶ During this era, Egypt went into a Cold War against SA, which essentially was an extension of the bigger Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Indeed, even the U.S. and the Soviet Union were involved in the Arab peninsula even as far back as this time period.

During this period, Nasser was determined to make it his absolute goal to “restore Egypt’s prestige and recapture the initiative in the rancorous struggle for power and legitimacy that characterized inter-Arab politics between 1955 through 1967.”²⁷ He believed that a golden opportunity to oust his primary rival, the then- king Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of SA, had arrived at his doorstep when the North Yemen Civil War broke out in 1962. At this point in time, North Yemen, or the Mutawakkilite Kingdom as was

²⁵ Sütalan, 167.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ferris, Jesse (2008). Soviet Support for Egypt’s Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1963. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10 (4), 5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26922982>.

its name before the civil war, was ruled by a Zaydi monarchy, against which a revolutionary army rose up against to overturn.²⁸ It was during this civil war that Nasser decided to side with the nationalist and help topple the monarchy in North Yemen. However, their lack of sufficient resources forced them to seek assistance from the Soviet Union, to which the latter agreed.²⁹ In a desperate response to the communal rivalry and potential threat of its southern borders being jeopardized by the combined forces of Egypt, Soviet Union, and the North Yemeni nationalists, SA, supported the monarchy.³⁰ Although the civil war eventually resulted in victory for the republican nationalists and inadvertently Egypt, the said campaign led to a crippled economy “and left a permanent scar on society; it also destroyed Nasser’s neutralist foreign policy by pushing Egypt onto a path of confrontation with the United States and dependence on the Soviet Union”.³¹ The ironic outcome of Nasser’s feeble attempt to regain and retain his regional supremacy against SA only led to his and Egypt’s eventual downfall.

Before further analysis of the effects of Egypt’s involvement in the North Yemen Civil War, one must take into consideration and keep in mind that during this time, South Yemen was a colonial state of the British Empire. In the midst of a civil war up in the North, South Yemen itself would also experience a revolution; by 1967, South Yemen gained

²⁸ Bruce Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and Why are We at War with Them?” *Brookings Institution*, Markaz, December 18, 2017, www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/12/18/who-are-the-houthis-and-why-are-we-at-war-with-them/.

²⁹ Ferris, 5.

³⁰ Riedel, 2017.

³¹ Ferris, 7.

independence and overthrew British imperialism.³² Domestic Politics will be discussed later in this chapter.

There were many reasons as to why Egypt, despite being triumphant in assisting the North Yemeni nationalists take over the monarchy, eventually spiraled out of control. One of the reasons was Nasser's "unforeseen need to adapt to the exigencies of guerrilla warfare".³³ In alignment with LIC, the North Yemen Civil War was fought in a guerrilla-like fashion, a low-intensity conflict for supremacy within North Yemen which Nasser was poorly prepared for in tactical aspects. However, this was merely the tip of the iceberg; Egypt's involvement in North Yemen, whilst receiving support from the Soviet Union, directly placed itself in conflict with SA, which inadvertently meant that it would be in direct conflict with the latter's ally, the U.S.

As was stated before, during the early stages of the North Yemen Civil War, whilst South Yemen was still under British imperial rule, Egypt's presence in Yemen not only threatened SA, but also Great Britain as well. For SA and Great Britain, the entrance of Egypt into the civil war meant that a new, common enemy had appeared; this ironically resulted in a "near-immediate Saudi-British rapprochement after decades of conflict".³⁴ In essence, Egypt soon found itself not only facing SA, but also Great Britain as well. This inadvertently meant that Egypt was facing two allies of the then one of the key major hegemons, the U.S. This was the phase in which

³² Grant, Ted. "The Colonial Revolution and Civil War in South Yemen", *Ted Grant Internet Archive*, 1986. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1986/yemen.htm>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ferris, 7.

the foreign policies of the U.S., although not directly towards Yemen, consequentially affected the latter state eventually. Seeing as how Egypt had started to fight against its allies, the U.S. eventually suspended its aid to Egypt, which led to catastrophic results for Egypt.³⁵ Even before the U.S. stopped its aid to Egypt, the said Arab state was already spiraling out of control; the pricy involvement in the North Yemen Civil War, coupled with the “radical socialization drive of the 1960s... drove Egypt more deeply into the Soviet sphere.”³⁶ Nasser’s attempt at regaining his national supremacy and regional hegemon only led to his downfall. The decision to get involved in the nationalist movement in North Yemen essentially turned Egypt against not only its regional rival SA, but also the then British Empire and ultimately the U.S. As mentioned earlier, this only led to Egypt’s deeper involvement, voluntary or involuntary, with the Soviet Union. With the Cold War raging between the U.S. and the Soviet Union all the while on a global scale, Egypt found itself pitted against an undefeatable force. The disastrous Six-Day War of 1967 was the last nail to completely seal Egypt’s fate. For a small victory in North Yemen, Egypt found itself “in the throes of political, military, and economic crisis”.³⁷ . While there were diplomatic ties between the two countries dating back to the 1880s, such ties were “primarily for consular purposes relation to American citizen services”³⁸. Essentially, the initial ties between the U.S. and Yemen had hardly any direct economic or military components. Despite this, the U.S.’ foreign

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

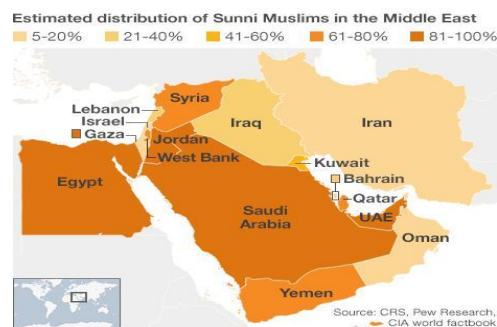
³⁸ “U.S. Relations with Yemen”, *U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs*, December 30, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-yemen/>

policy decision against Egypt resulted in a somewhat domino effect in the Arabian Peninsula for the years to come.

2. Religious Conflict

In order to truly understand the origins of the conflict that currently is consuming Yemen, one must first take into consideration the two sects of Islam- Sunni and Shia. While distinguishing the religious aspects of the two sects is unnecessary for this study, it is important to note that “Sunnis make up 90% or more of the populations of... Saudi Arabia... [coupled with the fact that] more than 1.5 billion Muslims are Sunnis”³⁹.

[Figure 2] Estimated distribution of Sunni Muslims in the Middle East



Source: (BBC News, December 19, 2013)

[Figure 3] Estimated distribution of Shia Muslims in the Middle East



³⁹ “Sunnis and Shia: Islam’s Ancient Schism”, *BBC*, January 4, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16047709>.

Source: (BBC News, December 19, 2013)

Figure 2 provides an estimated distribution of the Sunni population within the Middle East, which shows that the majority of the Sunni Muslims are concentrated within SA.

On the other hand, only about 10% of all Muslims- approximately 154-200 million- are Shia⁴⁰. However, figure 3 shows that despite the smaller population, Shia Muslims are predominantly residing in Iran. Thus, from a sectarian perspective, it should come as no surprise that the relationship between Riyadh and Tehran has never been completely amiable.

3. Geopolitics

During the early epoch of the Arab Cold War, as was shown in the previous sub-section, the geopolitical struggle for Yemen was not so much between Iran and SA, but more between Egypt and SA. However, this did not necessarily mean that SA and Iran were on agreeable terms. As was stated earlier on, even before the North Yemen Civil War, SA wished to keep Yemen in a weakened state.⁴¹ However, with Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, Riyadh's relations with Tehran began to deteriorate almost too quickly, which would eventually lead to decades-long proxy war for

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Stig Stenslie, "Not too Strong, not too weak: Saudi Arabia's policy towards Yemen", *The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) Policy Brief*, March 2013.

⁴¹ Erin Blakemore, "What was the Arab Spring and how did it spread?" *National Geographic*, March 30, 2019,

regional dominance.⁴² Initially, SA found itself in conflict with Egypt. However, once Iran experienced its Islamic Revolution, SA soon found itself in a situation where it would have to ensure its national security and regional dominance against different Arab states consecutively.

The rivalry between Iran and SA, however, goes beyond sectarian reasons. While on the surface level the Saudi-Iranian rivalry may seem rooted in sectarian conflict, “at heart, however, the rivalry constitutes a geopolitical struggle for political, economic and military supremacy and religious legitimacy”⁴³. SA and Iran both strive for something greater than simply asserting their superiority in the religious sense. The complexity of the two states’ relationship goes beyond a simplified religious quarrel. Iran aspires to be the hegemon within the Middle East, which directly conflicts with SA’s assertion as the regional leader⁴⁴. Both states aspired and continue to aspire to be the dominant leader in the region, with only one seat available. The geopolitical struggle between SA and Iran had only just begun.

4. Domestic Politics

Whilst North Yemen struggled to overthrow the royal monarchy during this epoch, South Yemen faced a different struggle. As was

⁴² Patrick van der Heiden and Alex Krijger, *The Saudi-Iranian rivalry: An ominous zero-sum game for supremacy*, *Atlantisch Perspectief* 42, no.2 (2018): 11-15.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48581412>.

⁴³ Patrick van der Heiden and Alex Krijger, *The Saudi-Iranian rivalry: An ominous zero-sum game for supremacy*, *Atlantisch Perspectief* 42, no.2 (2018): 11-15.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48581412>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

mentioned earlier, South Yemen gained its independence from British colonial rule in 1967. By 1978, South Yemen officially declared itself a Marxist state by transforming into the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP).⁴⁵ Despite its seemingly successful economic progress in the early 1980's, the YSP eventually found itself in a bloody state after a civil war broke out in 1986.⁴⁶ Furthermore, South Yemen's affinity towards leftist radicalism placed the state under the U.S.'s radar while what little support it was receiving from the Soviet Union had trickled to almost none by 1990⁴⁷. The lack of support, internal turmoil, and communal alienation would eventually leave South Yemen little choice in terms of maintaining its sovereignty, let alone its existence.

The civil wars that plagued Yemen during this epoch aligns with LICs. In essence the said civil wars, while they in themselves may have had political significances, could hardly be said to have been at the level of a conventional warfare. In addition, as mentioned earlier, much of the fighting were based on guerrilla warfare, one of the main aspects of an LIC. While the U.S. may not have had a direct influence on the LICs within Yemen during this time, its foreign policies toward other players within the region ultimately impacted the way Yemen's political, economic, and social dynamics would change in the later decades to come. SA's presence would also continue to grow inside the geopolitical and domestic politics scenes,

⁴⁵ Halliday, Fred. (1986). "Catastrophe in South Yemen: A Preliminary Assessment." *MERIP Middle East Report*, 139, 37-39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3012044>.

⁴⁶ Müller, M. M. (2015). Then and Now: Why the Past of Yemen's South and the GDR's Role in it matter. In *A Spectre is Haunting Arabia: How the Germans Brought Their Communism to Yemen* (pp. 19–30). Transcript Verlag. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1fxhb7.5>

⁴⁷ Ibid 25.

where its influence would greatly shape and mold the Yemen would function as a whole within the peninsula.

III. Post-Cold War

1. Communal Conflict / Implications

The 1991 Gulf War had major implications and influences on the Yemen's roles within the Arab community. The nature of the said conflict itself was intricately tied in with the geopolitical struggle regarding SA and the domestic politics within Yemen.

Diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Yemen can be traced back for decades past. However, one could argue that Washington's future relationship with Sana'a was set in motion when the USS *Cole* was attacked by Al-Qaeda in 2000 off the southern coast of Aden, Yemen. At that point, Saleh had only half-heartedly complied with the U.S.' request of investigating the attack on one of its military ships, which inevitably resulted in strained ties between the two states.⁴⁸ Saleh would soon come to realize that his lax compliance may not have been advisable.

The general atmosphere between the two states changed drastically when President George W. Bush declared the Global War on Terror (GWOT).⁴⁹ After the September 11th attacks (9/11) in 2001, President Bush

⁴⁸ Riedel, Bruce, "A brief history of America's troubled relationship with Yemen", *Brookings Institution*, 22 Oct. 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/10/22/a-brief-history-of-americas-troubled-relationship-with-yemen/>.

⁴⁹ "Global War on Terror", *George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum*, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/global-war-terror>.

would go on to describe the incident as “an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world”⁵⁰. This statement would set the stage for how the U.S. would view the Middle East, and how Saleh would find himself yet again trying to balance his foreign and internal relations. Previously, Saleh had viewed al-Qaeda as just another rogue faction that he could potentially manipulate for his own benefit, but the Bush administration’s adamant “with us or against us” rhetoric and open declaration against terrorism changed “everything about how the Yemeni government viewed al-Qaeda”.⁵¹ Saleh already knew that he was not in good standing with Washington, particularly due to his “reputation of laxity with Islamic militants” and disappointing lack of cooperation with the aforementioned incident regarding USS *Cole*.⁵² President Bush also made it clear of his disapproval of Saleh after their first encounter in November 27, 2001, where he would go on to describe Saleh as an “irritating, uncooperative, and unreliable ally.”⁵³ Saleh was running out of time before he would have to make a decision as to whether to remain “uncooperative” or unambiguously ally with the most powerful hegemon of the Western Hemisphere.

It is important to note as to why Saleh may have initially been assumed to be uncooperative, perhaps even hostile, to some U.S.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Ibid.

⁵¹ Terrill, 51.

⁵² Terrill, 52.

⁵³ Woodward, Bob, *Bush at War*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003, p.327, as cited in Terrill, 66.

policymakers in terms of fighting against terror and al-Qaeda. As was made evident during the wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003, the majority of the Yemeni population was quick to show its blatant, anti-American sentiments.⁵⁴ The anti-American sentiments from Yemen gave little reason for Washington to think otherwise of its head of state. The root of such anti-Americanism stemmed from many variables, including Yemenis' innate nature of having a "great deal of pride in their heritage as citizens of a country which, at least in the case of northern Yemen, was never ruled by a Western power".⁵⁵ Before the unification, not only was South Yemen temporarily under British colonial rule, but it had eventually formed ties with Soviet Union as well. Thus, for North Yemen, having been free of Western influence was something to take pride in as a nation. Cultural preference for affinities over individuality may also have played a large role in Yemenis' hostile perception of the U.S.⁵⁶ Rather than siding with a stranger, Yemenis tended to harbor and vouch for their own people. Thus, Saleh was stuck in a murky situation where he would be forced to balance between appeasing two opposing sides. Siding with the U.S. would leave the Yemeni population infuriated, whilst siding with the people would leave the U.S. frustrated and resentful.

⁵⁴ Terrill, 67.

⁵⁵ Terrill, 68.

⁵⁶ As quoted in Terrill, 68.

It wasn't until Saleh made surface-level attempts at cooperating with U.S. in terms of waging war against al-Qaeda that the bilateral relation between the U.S. and Yemen saw some improvements.⁵⁷ Saleh knew he couldn't compromise his already shaky relations with Washington any further. However, his decision to unambiguously cooperate with the U.S. would not be without dire consequences. On November 3rd, 2002, six al-Qaeda militants were reported to have been killed. The issue lay not with the report itself, but with whom or what had killed the militants. Later on, U.S. officials dropped hints that the said incident was carried out via U.S. Predator drones.⁵⁸ Naturally, Saleh and his government were infuriated by such "rumors", for he knew what would happen should the public find out. Unfortunately, for Saleh, U.S. officials thought little of this disclosure of sensitive information, because in their eyes, the drone strike neither caused collateral damage nor infringed upon Yemen's sovereignty⁵⁹. The standard for which one considered something to be collateral or an infringement upon sovereignty was completely different for the U.S. and Yemen, a difference of standard that led to confusion and bitterness, particularly for the public. Saleh continued to deny approving the drone strike, until public outcry finally forced him to admit that his government authorized the U.S. drone

⁵⁷ Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations", *Congressional Research Service*, February 11, 2015
<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Ester Schrader and Henry Weinstein, "U.S. Enters a Legal Gray Zone", *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 2002, as cited in Terrill, 68.

⁵⁹ Terrill, 68-69.

strike⁶⁰. However, Saleh's admittance to the authorization of the drone strike only left the public more infuriated. As mentioned earlier on, this public outrage against Saleh and the U.S. had been exacerbated by the overlapping timeframe of the U.S.'s invasion of Iraq⁶¹. During the Bush administration, while the bilateral relationship between Washington and Sana'a may have had some improvement, the relationship between Washington and the Yemen population, along with the relationship between Saleh and his people, deteriorated significantly.

In July 2010, President Barack Obama praised Yemen during a press release for its willingness and cooperativeness to continuously fight against terrorism⁶². This praise was accentuated by the fact that ever since Obama took office, the U.S.' support/aid to Yemen had steadily increased. In the year before, the Obama administration had developed a new foreign policy towards Yemen that aimed at not only combating AQAP, but at ensuring the developmental assistance to the region and urging global support for the region as well⁶³. President Obama looked to ways in which he could assist Saleh in not only deterring the presence of terrorist insurgent groups within Yemen, but to also bring about overall stability within the country. In terms

⁶⁰ Johnsen, Gregory D. "Al-Qa'ida in Yemen's 2008 Campaign", *Counter Terrorism Center Sentinel*, January 2010, P. 13., as cited in Terrill. 68.

⁶¹ Terrill, 69.

⁶² Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Readout of the President's Call with President Saleh of Yemen," Press Release, July 15, 2010, as cited in Terrill, 72.

⁶³ Sharp, Jeremy M, "Yemen: Background and U.S., Relations", *Congressional Research Service*, February 11, 2015.

of military assistance alone, U.S. aid had increased from a measly \$4.3 million in 2006 to \$66.8 million in 2009⁶⁴. This aid increased drastically in the following year, during which Washington had authorized aid amounting to \$155 million⁶⁵. Initially, it seemed as though the Obama administration was striving to cooperate with Yemen in its continued efforts to rid the region of terrorist insurgents. The following years, however, would be tainted with failed legacies, and too-little-too-late policies that would plummet Yemen into spiraling chaos.

2. Religious Conflict

As was analyzed in the earlier chapter, sectarianism is a deeply-rooted issue not just for Yemen, but the entire Arab Peninsula as a whole. Any changes in its relation to SA resulted in a butterfly effect. Should Yemen be amiable to SA, the Sunnis would enjoy a more favorable situation. On the other hand, during times where SA showed hostility and bitter contempt towards Yemen, the minor Shia populations, most notably the al-Houthis, would spring into action. Religious conflict during this time is also heavily tied in with geopolitics and domestic policies of Yemen during this era. Hence the issue will be dealt in a comprehensive, overarching manner throughout this chapter as well.

⁶⁴ Terrill, 70.

⁶⁵ Topol, Sarah A. "Why Yemen's US-aided fight against al-Qaeda could backfire," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 30, 2010, as cited in Terrill, 70.

3. Geopolitics

Conflict of interest regarding regional dominance was not the only factor that has placed a wedge between the two states. To Iran, “the US presence and influence in the [Middle East]... is an abomination”⁶⁶, while SA has remained an ally to the U.S. and resides under the U.S. security umbrella.⁶⁷ SA’s alliance with a state that Iran had despised for decades would only fuel Iran’s contempt and rivalry against SA.

Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was the former king of Saudi Arabia whose presence mostly influenced the foreign policy towards Yemen during the Gulf War period. The Gulf War resulted in a major setback regarding the diplomatic relationship between SA and Yemen. After Hussein’s crippling loss during the Gulf War, Yemen paid the consequence of having sided with Iraq when King Fahd deported hundreds of thousands of Yemeni workers back into Yemen, which inadvertently caused massive economic and social crisis within Yemen⁶⁸. Riyadh’s grudge against Saleh had trickled down to the people, ultimately causing them to take the brunt of the force and suffer. In an indirect manner, this decision by Fahd had only worsened the fragile state that which Yemen was already under.

When the civil war broke out in 1994, the rift between Fahd and Saleh only deepened. SA had in fact sided with the southern secessionists

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Terrill, 36.

during Yemen's civil war, a move that left many nations surprised.⁶⁹ It has been speculated that Fahd's decision to support the south, rather than Saleh and the north, was an extension of his "desire to continue punishing President Saleh... and perhaps to support the division and hence weakening of a potential regional adversary."⁷⁰ For Fahd, Saleh's decision to side with Iraq was not merely a "playing favorites" act. The decision left Fahd infuriated and potentially prompted him to take a more firm, oppressive action against Yemen. Fahd's foreign policy may seem like an extension of his vendetta against Saleh, but having to examine it from another perspective reveals that it was also to ensure that Yemen would continue to remain weak and under Riyadh's heels. By keeping Yemen weak and dependent, SA would potentially allow for a state to become its inevitable ally through dependency.

Fahd's foreign policy would later prove to be substantially different from those of his successors. A.F.K Organski stated that a state attempts to retain its superiority via aggressive policies or policies that would potentially delay a potentially challenger's ascension.⁷¹ Fahd's decision to oust the Yemeni foreign workers from SA proved to be a "two birds with one stone" tactic. Not only did it prove to be an aggressive policy to expand

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 37.

⁷¹ Organski, A.F.K. (1968) *World Politics*, 2nd edn. New York: Knopf, as cited in Lobell, 2017.

its influence and to jeopardize Yemen's economic and social stability, but it also ultimately delayed Yemen from development. This delay could be attested to the fact that only a few years later, Yemen suffered a civil war in which SA again sided with southern secessionists. This decision could be interpreted as a means for SA to maintain its superiority via keeping its neighbor divided and weakened.

Although Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud didn't officially become the reigning monarch of SA until the death of the former king Fahd, he had in fact been the *de factor* ruler of the kingdom since November 1995, due to Fahd falling ill from a stroke.⁷² It was during this epoch that SA and Yemen worked together to mend their strained relationship. Not only did the two nations sign the Jeddah Treaty⁷³, but Abdullah had also attended in May of the same year the "10-year anniversary celebration of Yemeni unity".⁷⁴ Furthermore, Abdullah had begun to steadily increase the amount of aid given⁷⁵ to Yemen over his reign, further attesting to the notion that SA and Yemen relationship had begun to improve. Abdullah's firm stance against the Houthis, along with mutual cooperation to rid the peninsula of AQAP, once again showed that the two nations were working together to strengthen their diplomatic ties and partnership. However, this amiable relationship would not last for long. With the arrival of the Arab Spring, the kingdom took on a more aggressively defensive stance against Yemen, in an effort to not only keep its borders safe, but to ensure that the factions, particularly the

⁷² Terrill, 38.

⁷³ Ibid, 39.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 38.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 39.

Houthis, would not jeopardize the kingdom's place as the hegemon of the Middle East.

In terms of geopolitics regarding SA and Iran, a "new" Middle East cold war had erupted.⁷⁶

While the U.S. may deny that the Predator drone strike had any significant implications of political or military influence on Yemen regarding al-Qaeda, it had been mentioned previously that the Yemeni population viewed the incident completely differently. For them, the U.S.' actions could very well seem as though they were trying to control Yemen, both politically and militarily. The majority of the Yemeni population viewed the drone strike, along with the invasion of Iraq, as acts of aggression. The U.S.' attempt at increasing its security only inevitably resulted in its decrease. This is because as the security of Yemen faltered from internal turmoil that was fueled by the U.S. actions toward al-Qaeda and Iraq at the time, it in turn jeopardized the security of the U.S. further. Whether it was coincidental or unintentional, the Bush administration's determination to actively intervene in Yemen dampened its relationship with the region in the long run. In the end, President's Bush aggressive actions against the Middle East may have at first seemed to have been taken in order to secure the U.S.' national interests of security, but in reality, the resulting phenomenon was that while on the surface the two states may have seemed

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to recovered their relations, the internal struggle against the Western hegemon only grew.

4. Domestic Politics

Yemen's demise was hinted at since the early 1990's after North and South Yemen's shaky reunification under the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had held his position as the president of North Yemen since 1978⁷⁷. Choosing one ruler over a formerly-divided nation was a decision that was neither easy, nor agreed upon fully. Unresolved, bitter contempt towards each other, and a lack of proper framework for a practical government and power-sharing left little room for stability within the country⁷⁸. A government without a solid infrastructure, let alone a government in which two groups of people have unbalanced power/privileges, cannot last for long. The conflict of interests between North and South Yemen would only be exacerbated by the imbalance of power between the two countries. The unstable foundation upon which the two Yemen's had unified was built from "differing expectations about how a unified Yemen would be governed"⁷⁹. Lack of support left South Yemen little choice but to concede

⁷⁷ Montgomery, Marcus, "A Timeline of the Yemen Crisis, from the 1990s to the Present", *Arab Center Washington DC*, February 19, 2021, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/a-timeline-of-the-yemen-crisis-from-the-1990s-to-the-present/>.

⁷⁸ Al Jazeera, "Yemen: The North-South Divide", *Al Jazeera*, December 8, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/al-jazeera-world/2017/12/8/yemen-the-north-south-divide>.

⁷⁹ W. Andrew Terrill, "The Conflicts in Yemen and U.S. National Security", *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College* (2011), January 2011, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep11758.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9d78fc20b28ad813841e2d9b705bf067&ab_segments=&origin=.

to the idea of a unified Yemen. With the unification, however, South Yemen and its leaders had hoped that their involvement in the new government would result in some form of alleviation. However, Saleh and the northern Yemenis viewed South Yemen as how West Germany viewed East Germany- “A neighboring state that no longer possessed much justification for an independent existence after its system of government had failed”⁸⁰. They believed that South Yemen, now “under” their rule, should have little to no say in matters dealing with politics or economics. The imbalance of power and leadership roles within the newly unified Yemen would leave many south Yemenis bitter and resentful.

Saleh’s decision to support “Saddam Hussein in the crisis leading up to the 1991 Gulf War”⁸¹ would ignite the first spark that would eventually engulf the entirety of Yemen, which had become a brooding cauldron of resentment between unresolved tensions and disparities. Saleh was in a diplomatically troublesome position; as the “only nonpermanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)”⁸², Saleh found himself

⁸⁰ Kostiner, Joseph, “Yemen,” *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. XVIII: 1994, Ami Ayalon, Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, eds., Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996, p. 709, as cited in W. Andrew Terrill, “The Conflicts in Yemen and U.S. National Security”, *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College* (2011), January 2011, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep11758.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9d78fc20b28ad813841e2d9b705bf067&ab_segments=&origin=.

⁸¹ W. Andrew Terrill, “The Conflicts in Yemen and U.S. National Security”, *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College* (2011), January 2011, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep11758.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9d78fc20b28ad813841e2d9b705bf067&ab_segments=&origin=.

⁸² *Ibid.*

incessantly pressured to use force against Iraq.⁸³ However, a near unanimous pro-Hussein government and public opinion also meant that Saleh could not simply adhere to UN's resolution that called for "all necessary means to oust Saddam from Kuwait"⁸⁴. Saleh would soon find that his indecisiveness and feeble attempts at "juggling" his relations would bring about severe consequences for his country.

As was mentioned earlier on, On September 19, 1990, infuriated by Saleh's "disloyalty", SA- as Paul Dresch put it- began to oust Yemenis out of its borders, an action that other Gulf monarchies followed soon after⁸⁵. By early 1991, Saleh found himself on the losing side of the Gulf War and having to deal with over 800,000 Yemenis who flooded back into Yemen⁸⁶. This sudden overflow of workers not only crippled Yemen's economy at the time, but sparked public outcry against the incompetency of Saleh. By 1994, still-fresh wounds and lingering hostility between the former North and South Yemen, topped with a severely crippled national economy and near-pariah status amongst other Gulf countries spiraled Yemen into a chaotic civil war. While there still remained a haze of implication of SA supporting South Yemen out of spite towards Saleh⁸⁷, the Kingdom's effort was too

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ As cited in Terrill, 35.

⁸⁶ As cited in Terrill, 36.

⁸⁷ Terrill, 37.

little too late; the Saleh-led North eventually quelled the civil war and remained the dominant governing body of the “re” reunified Yemen.

Fortunately for Saleh, Saudi-Yemeni relations eventually turned more amiable as time passed; the said relations reached a key turning point when the two nations signed the Jeddah Treaty in the year 2000⁸⁸, the treaty that essentially equated to a “border demarcation agreement”⁸⁹. At this point in time, it seemed as though Saleh had finally undone many of his wrongdoings and had managed to clean up after himself in terms of foreign relations with the largest regional leader state. The signing of the said treaty however, further extended to Saleh’s attempt at disarming the Houthis, a Zaidi-Shia rebel group that up to that point was in support of Saleh⁹⁰. It wouldn’t be long before the Houthis would bare their fangs.

The origin of the Houthis can be traced back to the Mutawakkilite Kingdom that came to existence after the Ottoman Empire’s fall⁹¹. However, the Houthis didn’t truly emerge until a leader by the name of Hussein al Houthi rallied a resistance against Saleh and his corrupt government in the 1990s⁹². Furthermore, seeing Saleh, who at one point was

⁸⁸ Ibid 38-39.

⁸⁹ Montgomery 2021.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Bruce Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and Why are We at War with Them?” *Brookings Institution*, Markaz, December 18, 2017, www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/12/18/who-are-the-houthis-and-why-are-we-at-war-with-them/.

⁹² Ibid.

on amicable terms with the Houthis, turn his back on them in hopes of earning both the U.S. and SA's favor only fanned the flames that would soon prove more deadly than anyone could have anticipated.

In January 2003, the Houthis, rallied under Hussein al-Houthi and, took to the streets in the northern Yemeni province of Sa'dah, and protested via nonviolent demonstrations⁹³. The demonstrations were primarily against what the Houthis believed to be unacceptable actions by Saleh and his government that had placed the U.S.'s interests over Yemen's⁹⁴. To the Houthis, Saleh was acting like a puppet under the command of an unwelcomed Western hegemon. Voices calling out against Saleh only intensified as the Houthi demonstrations had coincidentally overlapped with the U.S.' invasion of Iraq.⁹⁵ The U.S. invasion of Iraq only gave confirmation to the Houthis that the U.S. was not a nation to be trusted or to be allied with. Saleh at first attempted to negotiate with the Houthis but failed to make any progress. Frustrated with the lack of said progress, Saleh later changed his stance against the Houthis and moved in to arrest them⁹⁶, a failed and ill-advised move that would throw Yemen further into chaos.

⁹³ Terrill, 17.

⁹⁴ Terrill, 18.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The epoch between June 2004 and March 2006 was filled with frequent skirmishes between the Houthis and Saleh's government⁹⁷. Futile attempts at negotiations between the two forces were made until Saleh launched Operation Scorched Earth in August 2009 in Sa'dah, a city located on the northern border of Yemen.⁹⁸ It was during this time that a new player emerged in the conflict between Saleh and the Houthis. The Houthis at this point in time had crossed into SA territory and killed SA inhabitants⁹⁹. SA responded by employing massive firepower and aiding Saleh to rid the Houthis.

Although there were signs of a potential truce when the opposing forces were nearing a ceasefire agreement in February 2010, Operation Blow to the Head was carried out by Saleh on both the Houthis, and this time al-Qaeda, in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)¹⁰⁰. Saleh believed that a direct military confrontation was the solution to his Houthi problem. When the operation merely ended in a bitter, awkward truce, it was clear that by this point Saleh was merely delaying the inevitable.

In her 2009 article "Water Crisis at Heart of Yemen's Conflicts", Laura Kasinof claimed that a lack of water could potentially play a pivotal

⁹⁷ Montgomery 2021.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Terrill, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Montgomery 2021.

role in dragging Yemen down further into turmoil.¹⁰¹ High population growth, misuse of water, lack of regulations, climate change, and war have only exacerbated the water crisis¹⁰². The fight for what little water remains in Yemen will continue to be the cause of territorial and resource-based conflicts.

One can see that in terms of the domestic conflict within Yemen, the conflict itself still remained under the aforementioned definitions of an LIC. Whilst the U.S. and SA may have had more influence and perhaps even pivotal presence within the country, the bitter conflict against the southern secessionists, AQAP, and the al-Houthis were all below the level of a conventional, full-blown warfare, with more guerrilla/insurgent oriented skirmishes and little employment of modern military technology.

¹⁰¹ As cited by Class, Nicole, "The Water Crisis in Yemen: Causes, Consequences and Solutions", Global Majority E-Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1 (June 2010), pp. 17-30.

¹⁰² Ibid, 20.

IV. Arab Spring

1. Communal Conflict / Implications

When the Arab Spring bloomed in the Middle East, the Gulf states attempted to seize their opportunities for personal gains in their own ways during the Arab Spring uprisings. For example, whilst Qatar actively tried to “ride the wave” of the uprisings, SA and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) instead did their best to keep Qatar in check.¹⁰³ A tug-of-war struggle between the Gulf states had been started, each attempting to keep each other in check in order to ensure their own national security and hegemony within the region.

By the time the Arab Spring erupted in 2010-11, the “Gulf’s backseat influence... morphed into direct political interference, and even military action and expeditionary warfare in the case of... Yemen”¹⁰⁴. As mentioned before, certain gulf nations saw the numerous uprisings in various Arab states as a pivotal opportunity to accelerate their political agenda and expand their influence across the Gulf. As mentioned before, the most influential Gulf states at the time- Qatar, SA, and UAE- were in direct conflict with each other in terms of their political and communal agendas. Whilst Qatar pushed for change, SA and UAE remained more conservative¹⁰⁵. These states’ “diametrically opposed agendas was hugely

¹⁰³ Stephens, Michael. “The Arab Cold War Redux: The Foreign Policy of the Gulf Cooperation Council States since 2011”, *The Century Foundation*, Feb. 28 2017. <https://tcf.org/content/report/arab-cold-war-redux/>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

damaging for Arab democracy movements across the region”¹⁰⁶. With the three major powers in the peninsula contending against one another through various means such as “weapons shipments, funds to proxy groups, and overt political interference(s)”¹⁰⁷, the Gulf states were placed in a state of confusion and soured relations. While certain Gulf states were able to capitalize on the effects of the Arab Spring, many of the states that were directly affected by the uprisings would still be faced with the turmoil and consequences of having to quell or succumb to said uprisings. It indeed was a time where certain states like Qatar tried to push their own agendas by “helping” those who partook in the uprisings, while other states like SA may have seemed to “help” out as well, but consequentially pushing their own agendas of quelling the same uprisings and maintaining their traditional, conservative influences across the Arab peninsula.

2. Religious Conflict

One must take into consideration the fact that the Houthis, against whom SA has been fighting against for the last few decades, have their origins as Zaidi-Shia¹⁰⁸. Coupled with the fact that “Iran- Saudi Arabia’s traditional rival- has backed the Houthis with ongoing support”¹⁰⁹ and one could deduce the reason as to why SA would be rather eager to rid Yemen of the Houthis. Further details regarding religious sectarianism will be

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ (Montgomery 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Third Way, “2020 Country Brief: Saudi Arabia and its role in Yemen”, *Third Way*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.thirdway.org/primer/2020-country-brief-saudi-arabia-and-its-role-in-yemen>.

explored in the next sub-section, as religion itself has played a major role in the geopolitics between SA and Iran.

It has been clearly made known up to this point in this study that the rivalry between SA and Iran is a deeply rooted conflict exacerbated by conflicting religious ideologies that the two states have used as a means to extend their own agendas unto other state players within the region. It was known that Saleh would often times exaggerate “the extent of Iranian influence on the Houthis as he sought Saudi support for military operations against them”¹¹⁰. In a way, Saleh knew he would need the assistance of a greater foreign power to fend off against the Houthis. What better means for him to do so then to employ the assistance from a regional hegemony whose sworn enemy was the one that was backing the very insurgents whom he tried to fend off against? It did not matter the extent of Iranian influence and support of the Houthis. For Riyadh, it was a priority to defeated the Irani-backed Houthis and secure Yemen¹¹¹, which would secure SA’s own position as the regional hegemony, which would inadvertently secure its position as the regional head figure in terms of religious superiority. However, it would later be revealed that SA’s determination to fend off Iran and defeat the Houthis would ironically and ultimately strain its ties with other Gulf states and even with its Western allies.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

3. Geopolitics.

At the beginning of the Arab Spring, Obama had made it clear that he would align himself with the protesters in the Arab region¹¹². For him to align with the protesters, however, had deeper implications than he may have anticipated. Supporting the said protesters, while it may have rung the bell of moral change and progress back in Washington, meant that he was in direct conflict against many of the regimes that which the very protesters he supported were striving to topple down¹¹³. As mentioned before, SA was one of the Arab nations that wished to contain the Arab Spring uprisings and maintain stability through conservative means. However, the fact that Obama initially showed support for the protesters and praised them essentially indicated that his politically and morally progressive agenda of democracy was in direct conflict with SA's geopolitical agendas. Obama had failed to recognized that the protesters he supported were fighting against many regional orders that historically were not only U.S.-backed, but that which they were concerned with maintaining.¹¹⁴ For the states like SA, it would seem ironic how despite their decades-long alliance, Obama would be in support of the very protesters that fought against regional orders that which Riyadh wished to contain and maintain. It will be discussed and

¹¹² Lynch, Mark, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 09, 2015, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/10/09/obama-and-middle-east-rightsizing-u.s.-role-pub-61582>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

analyzed later on how, ironically, Obama's decision to allow SA to take the lead in dealing with Yemen during the midst and aftermath of the Arab Spring would be the cause of antidemocratic results¹¹⁵. However, Obama's initial decision to actively show support for the Arab Spring protesters would not be the only action that he would conduct that would ultimately shape and mold the later relations that Washington would have with the rest of the Arabian Peninsula.

In terms of its implications, no one truly was prepared for the storm that followed in the footsteps of the Arab Spring. Unlike the previous administration, with its aggressive movement against terrorism and the Middle East, Obama was unwilling to continue Bush's legacy in that sense.¹¹⁶ It was clear that the Obama administration wished to continue to protect the US' national interests and security from any potential threats, but it wasn't necessarily willing to do so in a more active type of way like the previous administrations had. Eventually, out of fear of seeming to be "meddling" in the Middle East's affairs, Obama did not wish to intervene beyond what he had already done in the past.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Bentley, Michelle, "Arab Spring: When the US needed to step up, it stood back - now, all eyes are on Biden", *The Conversation*, February 11, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/arab-spring-when-the-us-needed-to-step-up-it-stood-back-now-all-eyes-are-on-biden-155058>

As mentioned earlier, Obama initially aligned himself with the pro-democracy protesters of the Arab Spring. However, for Yemen, it was an entirely different case. Perhaps not too surprisingly,

The Obama administration withdrew its support two months into the uprising, after concluding that Saleh's government could not survive the revolts, and that US interests were better served by getting a new government in place that might pursue the fight against al-Qaeda.¹¹⁷

The irony was that this decision to stay back only allowed Saleh and his followers to cause more dissent, as Saleh was naturally unhappy of the fact of his forced resignation. With their previous relationship barely mended through their mutual cooperation and fight against al-Qaeda, Washington was initially "reluctant to be too critical in its comments"¹¹⁸ regarding the public outcry for Saleh's resignation and the latter's response to such outcries. From the perspective of Yemen, Obama may have initially shown support, but when public outcry calling for Saleh's resignation occurred, he did little in stopping Saleh from continuing to cause havoc within the country¹¹⁹. Saleh would continue to try to stay in power as long as possible, which only caused more public outcries and his already abundant enemies to

¹¹⁷ Pinto, Maria do Céu de Pinho Ferreira, "Mapping the Obama administration's response to the Arab Spring", *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, Vol. 55(20: 109-130, December 2012, <https://www.scienceopen.com/document?vid=00a46462-4a93-4e7a-bbe6-d8f7aa264ab0>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

have all the more reason to despise the now nearly powerless leader. However, with neither a strong support or rebuke from both the US and SA, Yemen was placed further down into a cesspool of confusion and turmoil.

It was also during this time that Iran began to outshine SA. As the supposedly "secularist, American-allied regimes in Tunisia and Egypt"¹²⁰ were toppled over during the uprisings, Tehran in turn grew in its influence both as a regional power and religious authoritative figure. With once US-backed regimes toppled in the region, SA was eventually losing its political and communal influence in the region. This was a time period where SA faced many difficulties in terms of maintaining its status as a regional powerhouse, as many of its allies began to fall under the Arab Spring, whilst Iran continued to triumph, especially when the Obama administration showed its willingness to jeopardize its fragile alliance with SA in exchange for appeasing Iran. From SA's perspective, Obama's initial support of pro-democracy protesters was something of a puzzling decision, since as mentioned before the very regimes the said protesters were attempting to overthrow were mainly US-backed. However, when Obama slowly changed his stance to become less involved and less active in the region, whilst simultaneously trying to make a deal with Iran, the already strained relationship between Washington and Riyadh had taken a turn for the worse.

¹²⁰ Gause III, F. Gregory. "Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War" *Brookings Doha Center* 11, July 2014. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/english-pdf-1.pdf>.

Obama's attempt to make some form of amends with Iran, whilst he did so in order to protect the US' national interests and security, had ironically jeopardized the US' political influence and strained the its relationship with the rest of the key players within the Arab Peninsula. Details regarding Obama's attempt at making a deal with Iran will be discussed in the following chapter.

4. Domestic Politics

When the Arab Spring bloomed in Yemen in January 2011, Saleh had lost what little control he had over Yemen. The people called for Saleh to step down and give up his 33-year throne. Initially, Saleh tried to appease the demonstrators by "promising not to seek reelection"¹²¹, but the people had had enough. There was little reason to believe that Saleh would keep his word. By November, after having fled to SA for several months, Saleh returned to officially sign a deal to hand over power to his then vice president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi¹²². However, the Houthis remained disgruntled at this transition; not only was Hadi a Sunni, but he also considered himself and his administration to be close allies with SA, two aspects that the Houthis could not accept. The Arab Spring left many Arab nations' governments overturned and its people rising up against their often-times brutal and corrupt governments. Yemen was no exception in this matter. Saleh's frequent yet failed attempts at holding onto his power only

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

angered the public and ruined his already fragile or nearly non-existent alliances.

In terms of LIC, again the same was the case for Yemen during this epoch as well. Only this time, the effects of the foreign policies of the U.S. and SA only exacerbated the crisis that eventually consumed Yemen on a state-wide level. However, from Yemen's perspective, the Arab Spring had been an uprising against a corrupt government, where the opposition used continued to use guerilla warfare not only to overthrow the then Yemeni government, but to also expand and extend their own political, economic, and social agendas. However, what's interesting to note in this epoch is that despite the elements of the LIC as mentioned before, the Arab Spring also held some significant implications for Yemen's future in that the conflict would go beyond the concept of guerilla warfare when seen from a scope beyond the borders of Yemen.

V. Post-Arab Spring

1. Communal Conflicts / Implications.

When Hadi finally took over Saleh in 2012, The U.S. conducted “one of its most intense counterterrorism campaigns” in support of Hadi and his government over the next few years¹²³. With a new government in place, Washington believed that it was appropriate timing to enhance its counterterrorism activities, which in turn would allow for the security of U.S. borders.

During those years, Hadi, with immense military support from Washington, was able to flush out AQAP forces from their strongholds across central and southern regions of Yemen¹²⁴. The support however, would end up only patching up one of Yemen’s many wounds, while the remaining ones continued to rot freely. As mentioned earlier on, the Houthis did not approve of Hadi and the manner in which he took office, not to mention his blatant alliance with the U.S. In an unexpected and hypocritical turn of events, in 2014, the Houthis colluded with Saleh in secret to take down Hadi¹²⁵. No one expected an alliance to reform between the Houthis

¹²³ Luke Hartig and Oona A. Hathaway, “Still at War: The United States in Yemen”, *Just Security*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.justsecurity.org/80806/still-at-war-the-united-states-in-yemen/>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Riedel 2017.

and Saleh, especially considering their tumultuous past. A common enemy, in this case Hadi, was enough to bring old foes to make a paper-thin alliance. By 2015, Hadi's lack of leadership and failure to gain support resulted in the Houthis storming the capital and essentially taking over the country. It wouldn't be until SA launched campaigns against the Houthis that the U.S. would once again intervene.

By January 2015, Hadi and his cabinet was forced to resign and the Houthi insurgents overtook the capital¹²⁶. During this time, Houthi had been receiving support from Tehran and cooperation between the two solidified¹²⁷, placing more pressure and tension on SA as not only a potential radical group continued to grow in power in its southern borders, but its long-term rival in the region was indirectly but consequently expanding its influence and territory.

A SA-led coalition of Gulf States launched military strikes and economic sanctions against the Houthis starting in March 2015¹²⁸, which has now turned Yemen into an isolated, humanitarian disaster with no end in sight. Saleh later himself described his attempts at juggling relations with various players whilst also trying to manage Yemen was “like dancing on

¹²⁶ Center for Preventative Action, “War in Yemen”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, updated May 04, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen>.

¹²⁷ Riedel 2017.

¹²⁸ Center for Preventative Action, 2022.

the heads of snakes”¹²⁹. In the end, Saleh’s actions only attracted more snakes for him to dance upon. The Arab Spring, coupled with Saleh and his desperate struggle for power, had given way for the U.S. and SA to continuously transform, adapt, and assert their foreign policies toward Yemen.

2. Religious Conflict.

Diplomatic relations with Yemen had plummeted during the Gulf War, but it didn’t reach its all-time low until 2015, when SA, more specially orchestrated by MBS, launched a campaign against the Houthis which has continued to this day. Whilst Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud has been the official king of SA since 2015, it is important to understand that MBS had been designated as the defense minister in 2015 followed by the title of crown prince in 2017. Thus, when referring to SA’s recent policies toward Yemen, it is based primarily on MBS’ policies toward Yemen¹³⁰

As mentioned before, SA has been in a decades-long rivalry with Iran, perceiving itself “as the dominant Arab nation and the veritable custodians of Islam”.¹³¹ While the two states’ rivalry may at first seem to stem from sectarianism between Sunni and Shia groups, it has been shown in this study that internal conflicts “driven by political, economic, tribal, or

¹²⁹ Brian Whitaker. (2020.) [Review of the book *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* by Victoria Clark]. *The Guardian*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/apr/24/yemen-victoria-clark-review>

¹³⁰ Gardner, Frank, “Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman named prime minister”, *BBC News*, September 28, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63058091>.

¹³¹ Patrick van der Heiden and Alex Kriger, 13.

regional disparities”¹³² were the major influencers, particularly when referring to the relationship between SA and Iran.

When Trump took office, much effort was made by both Washington and Riyadh- one of the reasons pointing towards the two nations’ attempts at resolving the tensions that existed during the Obama Administration¹³³. This epoch was marked by the Trump administration expressing interests in “a united Sunni front in the struggle against the Islamic State and the jihadi terror organizations, as well as against Iran”.¹³⁴ Essentially, Washington desired for an ally that could not only hinder their mutual rival, in this case Iran, but one that could eventually come out on top as the dominant religious figure in the region as well. A strong Sunni front would not only mean triumph for SA from a sectarianism perspective, but its implications would include an opportunity for both the U.S. and SA to solidify their influence in the region.

3. Geopolitics

SA’s intervention in Yemen against the Houthis would in turn have allowed the Kingdom to remain a regional power in the Middle East, argues May Darwich¹³⁵. What may have started off as a marginal support by Iran, however, the Houthi-Tehran relationship has now grown beyond the borders

¹³² Farea al-Muslimi, “How Sunni-Shia Sectarianism is Poisoning Yemen”, *Malcom H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center: Diwan- Middle East Insights from Carnegie*, December 29, 2015, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/62375>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Darwich, May, “The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status”, *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 2 (2018): 125-142.

of Yemen, to the point where some may even claim that the Houthi movement is a regional power on its own, with the capability to extend its own foreign policies to countries tied with Tehran¹³⁶. Recognition by a major power in the region, in addition to having the capability of conducting its own policies towards other nations, has allowed the Houthis to gain some form of legitimacy, which in turn makes it all the more difficult for SA to deal with. Should the Irani-backed Houthi take over Yemen completely, SA would be at a disadvantage geographically. It would potentially have to deal with a two-front war, should a full-scale war ever occur within the Middle East. SA's desire to keep Iran at bay inadvertently required its presence and influence over Yemen. SA was not so much focused on expanding its influence towards Yemen for its own conquest as much as its desire to maintain its role in the region. The complicated and volatile triangle relationship between SA, Iran, and the Houthis has turned Yemen into a battleground for the biggest kid on the playground.

In March 2015, the Obama administration began to provide “logical and intelligence support” to the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis.¹³⁷ The aforementioned coalition's supposed targeted air strikes, however, over the course of nearly a decade, resulted in almost 10,000 civilian casualties

¹³⁶ Juneau, Thomas, “How Iran Helped Houthis Expand Their Reach” *War on the Rocks: Texas National Security Review*, August 23, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/how-iran-helped-houthis-expand-their-reach/>.

¹³⁷ BBC, “Yemen Conflict: US ‘could be implicated in war crimes’” *BBC News*, October 10, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37607248>.

along with millions more becoming displaced, with little effect in snuffing out the Houthis.¹³⁸ Despite having third largest defense budget in the world, coupled with some of the most advanced military technologies and weapons in the world¹³⁹, SA and its campaign against the Houthis showed little fruit.

By 2016, the U.S. had poured more than \$100 billion in military sales to SA, in its continued attempt at ending the war against the Houthis.¹⁴⁰ The amount of aid, however, was not the most pressing criticism that Obama and his cabinet faced that year. Even back in 2015, when the Obama administration authorized a sizeable \$1.3 billion worth of arms to be delivered to SA, many officials had questioned the move and warned that the resulting aftermath could spell human rights infringement and war crimes¹⁴¹. The death toll was already at a staggering high; for Obama to provide more weapons to SA was a foul, suspicious act for many.

Despite its immense military support, the relationship between Washington and Riyadh had staggered since the beginning of the Arab

¹³⁸ Worth, 2018.

¹³⁹ Yoel Guzansky, "Saudi Foreign Policy: Change of Direction Required", *INSS Insight* No. 975, September 26, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep08714.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A41cced92f32ee6a6ffab34bcb5df0748&ab_segments=0%2F5SYC-6398%2Ftest&origin=

¹⁴⁰ Samuel Oakford and Peter Salisbury, "Yemen: The Graveyard of the Obama Doctrine; *The human costs of facilitating Saudi Arabia's proxy war*", *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2016,

¹⁴¹ Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay, "Exclusive: As Saudis bombed Yemen, U.S. worried about legal blowback", *Reuters*, October 11, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-yemen-idUSKCN12A0BQ?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=Social.

Spring¹⁴². One of the main reasons was the two states' opposing views on issues related to human rights violation. Some have even brought into question the legitimacy of the U.S.'s presence within Yemen,¹⁴³ arguing that there was no reason for U.S. to intervene in matters that were irrelevant to the welfare and security of the U.S. The White House rebuked SA of its violation of human rights and urged the state to "exercise the utmost diligence in the targeting process and to take all precautions to minimize civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure"¹⁴⁴. However, this was merely a "slap on the wrist", one that did little in stopping the SA from continuing its campaign in a ruthless manner.

The signing of "Iran Deal" that essentially outlined the limits on Tehran's nuclear weapon capabilities in 2015 did little to improve the shaky relationship between Washington and Riyadh.¹⁴⁵ For SA, an Iran with, though limited, capabilities of operating a nuclear program spelled a potential security disaster. The already tense rivalry between SA and Iran with regards to the dominant hegemon in the region, had only gotten worse. Despite its advanced array of weaponry and military support from the U.S., SA has shown little sign of actually wiping out the Houthis. If anything,

¹⁴² Samuel Oakford and Peter Salisbury, 2016.

¹⁴³ Luke Hartig and Oona A. Hathaway, 2022.

¹⁴⁴ As quoted in Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay, 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, "Why Saudi Arabia and Israel oppose Iran nuclear deal", *Al Jazeera*, April 14, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/4/14/why-saudi-arabia-and-israel-oppose-iran-nuclear-deal>.

there campaign has only proven the resilience of the Houthis, or perhaps even hints at the incompetence of the SA military in such a setting.

During the Trump administration, to the disapproval of many, efforts to rebuild relations with SA meant that Trump would refuse to acknowledge or question SA's human rights violations¹⁴⁶. Critics have argued this may have inadvertently been interpreted by Riyadh as a "green light" to continue its atrocities in Yemen.¹⁴⁷ Whether Trump had intended to "approve" SA's actions against Yemen or not, the fact remains that based on the aforementioned acts alone, Trump certainly seemed to forego all other priorities or issues when it came to dealings with SA. Trump's staunch support for SA became even more apparent on in April 2019, when he vetoed against bipartisan resolution that, had he signed it, would have forcefully ended U.S. military involvement in the Yemen Crisis.¹⁴⁸ The veto came as a shock and disappointment to many, considering the fact that Trump was infamous for speaking out against U.S.' foreign engagements.¹⁴⁹ For someone who had rebuked past administrations for hefty defense spendings on foreign engagements, his ironic, and potentially hypocritical,

¹⁴⁶ Gearan, Anne. "For Trump, the bottom line on Saudi Arabia takes precedence over human rights." *The Washington Post*, 20 Nov. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/for-trump-the-bottom-line-on-saudi-arabia-takes-precedence-over-human-rights/2018/11/20/a8813bb0-ecf4-11e8-baac-2a674e91502b_story.html, as cited in Third Way, 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Mark Landler and Peter Baker, "Trump Vetoes Measures to Force End to U.S. Involvement in Yemen War", *The New York Times*, April 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/16/us/politics/trump-veto-yemen.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

decision to allow continued U.S. presence in a foreign land was certainly not a notion that was well-received. Trump spoke out against his critics, declaring that while indeed “great nations do not fight endless wars”¹⁵⁰, maintaining alliance with SA and continuing to isolate Iran would take priority in terms of national interests.¹⁵¹ Trump simultaneously reaffirmed his steadfast support of SA and his desire to keep Iran at bay during one of his speeches in 2018, where he described the nuclear agreement with Iran as a “horrible one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made.”¹⁵² Going back on the deal may have strained ties between the U.S. and Iran, but such matters were trivial from Trump’s viewpoint. For Trump, diplomacy with SA took all precedence, despite heavy opposition and disapproval.

The Trump administration and SA faced more criticism in the later years, when Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered within the walls of the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.¹⁵³ Despite evidences and reports from the US intelligence community that had pointed to the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) as the perpetrator, Trump

¹⁵⁰ As quoted in Mark Lander and peter Baker, 2019.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² As quoted in “President Trump Withdraws from Iran Deal”, *The New York Times*, uploaded by *The New York Times*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/politics/100000005889701/live-trump-iran-deal-decision.html?action=click>ype=vhs&version=vhs-heading&module=vhs®ion=title-area&cvview=true&t=15>.

¹⁵³ Third Way, 2020.

continuously refused to acknowledge that MBS had any dealings with Khashoggi's murder.¹⁵⁴ Trump further vouched for the advantages of maintaining close ties with SA when he signed a deal with SA worth over \$110 billion in 2017, for which he confidently claimed that the said deal would create numerous jobs for American citizens (although this claim was later found to have been grossly exaggerated)¹⁵⁵.¹⁵⁶ It was no surprise that many activists, officials, and the public were outraged; even with clear evidence, Trump refused to directly point fingers at the one person that was primarily responsible for the death of an American citizen.

When Biden took office, he announced three decisions regarding Yemen in his speech "America's Place in the World". The three decisions were:

1. "The end of all support for offensive operations including arms sales"¹⁵⁷
2. "U.S. support for the UN-led peace initiative"¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Horsley, Scott and Tim Mak. "Angry Senators Say Trump Administration Is Stonewalling Amid Saudi Crisis." NPR, 28 Nov. 2018, www.npr.org/2018/11/28/671613142/in-break-with-trump-senate-blames-saudi-crown-prince-for-khashoggi-killing, as cited in Third Way, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ Kessler, Glenn. "Trump's claim of jobs from Saudi deals grows by leaps and bounds." The Washington Post, 22 Oct. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/10/22/trumps-claim-jobs-saudi-deals-grows-by-leaps-bounds, as cited in Third Way, 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Diamond, Jeremy and Zachary Cohen. "Trump signs Kushner-negotiated \$100B Saudi arms deal." CNN, 20 May 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/05/19/politics/jared-kushner-saudi-arms-deal-lockheed-martin/index.html, as cited in Third Way, 2020.

¹⁵⁷ Alamer, Sultan, "Biden and the War in Yemen: The Larger Context of the Shifts in the American Position", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Sada Middle East Analysis*, April 14, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/84326>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

3. “Appointment of veteran diplomat Tim Lenderking as a special envoy to Yemen”¹⁵⁹.

Biden’s decisions, while they did not drift away from those made by his two predecessors, showed that the U.S. was attempting to switch its role as a specific-party supporter to that of a peace-inducing middle-man¹⁶⁰. Hence, rather than a direct intervention, Biden has now reverted back to playing a more passive role, at least on the surface level. Steven A. Cook has described Biden’s policy towards Yemen as “ruthless pragmatism.”¹⁶¹ The administration came under fire when the Senate voted for yet another \$650 million deal in “defensive” weapons to be sent to SA¹⁶². This deal was in direct conflict with the Biden’s first decision regarding Yemen. However, his administration argued that it was not conflicting to make such a deal as the weapons were intended to be used for “defensive” purposes. Many had begun to question the merit and purpose of continuously supporting SA in its ruthless campaign against the Houthis. However, many experts have agreed on the fact that simply cutting supplies to SA will do nothing to stop the Yemen Crisis.¹⁶³ Even if they were to completely cut supplies to SA, the only resulting situation would be a resentful SA that in turn would

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Cook, A. Steven, “Biden’s Middle East Strategy Is Ruthless Pragmatism”, *Foreign Policy*, January 7, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/07/biden-middle-east-saudi-arabia-syria-yemen-strategy/>.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

jeopardize the fragile diplomatic relations between the two states. The difficult task that the Biden administration must now face is how to properly manage and balance, or potentially even change, its relationship with Riyadh. For Biden, the Yemen Crisis is not the only issue that he must consider when remeasuring the value of ties with SA. For Biden, it is imperative that SA maintains some form of control against the Houthis, which will prevent the Houthis from creating any potential obstacles in terms of the oil trade.¹⁶⁴ Biden must take into consideration that the oil trade may take a toll if the Houthis were to take full control of the coasts of Yemen, notwithstanding the fact that they are heavily tied with Iran.

4. Domestic Politics

Jervis argues that should geography favor the defenders, the resulting behavior from the offenders would involve more buck-passing¹⁶⁵. Yemen's geography allows for small, effective guerilla warfare for the Houthis. The lack of infrastructure, and the fact that any Houthi can simply blend in with civilians¹⁶⁶, causes massive problems for the offensive side, in this case SA. The aforementioned fact attests to a distinct characteristic of an LIC, where in the case of Yemen whilst SA may have employed military grade troops, the Houthis have the option to blend in and use indistinguishable, guerrilla tactics. The fact that the U.S. has continued to pour in massive amounts of military aid implies that the U.S.' behavior

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Jervis 1978, as cited in Lobell, 2017.

¹⁶⁶ BBC News, 2016.

resembles that of buck-passing¹⁶⁷, where it is using SA as a means to channel their influence, yet still pushing the majority of the fighting and responsibility unto Riyadh.

After Biden announced his shift in the aforementioned policy towards Yemen, the Biden administration and SA was met with retaliation from the Houthis; drone and missile attacks on SA intensified almost immediately, and a later attempt by SA to offer peace initiatives was met with further drone attacks on critical oil sites.¹⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that the Houthis, who up until now may seem to have been on the defensive side, by intensifying its attacks on SA, appear to have adopted a more offensive stance. Ironically, SA's aggressive stance to maintain its role as the leader of the Middle East, along with Biden's shift in his foreign policies towards Yemen, have consequentially only resulted in a more weakened, and often criticized, state in the eyes of the international players.

Lack of media coverage and social awareness has only aggravated the situation in Yemen. The complexity of the Yemen Crisis poses immense difficulty for journalists and advocates to spin a narrative that the American

¹⁶⁷ Lobell, 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Alamer, Sultan, "Biden and the War in Yemen: The Larger Context of the Shifts in the American Position", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Sada Middle East Analysis*, April 14, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/84326>.

audience is willing to hear.¹⁶⁹ Smear campaigns against local journalists,¹⁷⁰ a censorship that has plagued the Yemeni media all play critical roles in the lack of awareness of the international community and their exposure to misinformation.¹⁷¹ Censorship has prevented the international audience from seeing what has really been going on within Yemen. In its attempt to “save face”, SA’s refusal to elaborate and provide accurate depictions of its campaign has only led to international criticism. The lack of proper intel prevents policymakers and activists from taking effective measures to alleviating the Yemen crisis.

To this day, the Yemen Crisis continues to decimate the land and force its citizens to suffer without end. The LIC that infects Yemen today has not changed fundamentally in its essence. However, the foreign policies of the U.S. and SA have driven the dynamic within the region to the point that now, Yemen has little choice or say in even its domestic policies.

¹⁶⁹ Kerins, Triump, “The Silent War: How the U.S. Media Failed Yemen”, *The McGill International Review*, Jan 28, 2020, <https://www.mironline.ca/the-silent-war-how-the-u-s-media-failed-yemen/>.

¹⁷⁰ Sultan, Zainab, “Why the press struggles to cover the war in Yemen”, *Columbia Journalism Review*, Sept. 2, 2019, <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/yemen-war.php>.

¹⁷¹ Nasser, Afrah, “The Yemen War, Media, Propaganda,” *Atlantic Council*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-yemen-war-media-and-propaganda/>

VI. Conclusion

The relationship between the U.S., SA, and Yemen was imbalanced from the start. Yemen was simply a by-product of proxy-war between the U.S. and terrorism and SA and Iran, respectively. To the two states, Yemen's location and role was simply unfortunate. This study has shown that Yemen has been plagued with LICs throughout most of its history, exacerbated by outside forces, particularly the U.S. and SA. The U.S. has strived to maintain its security and influence in the Middle East through SA, but was never truly, directly involved in the conflict. There was little reason for Washington to do so; their "buffer" ally SA was already engaged with Yemen. In some ways, one could even argue that Yemen has been "pushed around" by SA, an unfortunate but inevitable destiny of a weaker state. Yemen eventually caused more issues for both the U.S. and SA, issues that are yet to be resolved. Additionally, due its complexity, there is no true, one solution to the Yemen crisis. In order to even attempt at tackling the disaster that is Yemen, decade-old feuds and conflicts must be resolved; simply providing more military aid or humanitarian aid blindly will do little for the people suffering within the borders. The foreign policies of the U.S. and SA toward Yemen seemed to be geared towards helping Yemen with their hefty sums of military and monetary aid. However, ultimately, the policies had ulterior motives that were primarily geared towards enhancing the respective states, without realizing that such policies would eventually cause Yemen to crumble further.

As was explored in this study, it is nearly impossible to analyze each and every variable and potential factors that may have caused and are

perpetuating the current Yemen crisis. Furthermore, comparably, little information and coverage is available regarding this part of the Middle East.

The scope of analysis also imposes limitation on the study as a whole. For the purpose of this study, the scope was reduced to mainly focus on the relationships between the U.S., SA, and Yemen. This scope thus limits possibilities of other potential influencing elements or players that may ultimately have influenced the tri-state's relationships. Time periods were chosen based on relevance, importance, and influence on the overall Yemen Crisis. This in turn could potentially isolate or neglect other potential players that may have an influence on Yemen that could potentially cross over certain epochs. The greatest limitation, perhaps, is the fact that the crisis is on-going. No one can tell just what the future will look like and what fate has in store for those still clinging on to hope withing the dying borders of Yemen.

Then what is the prospect of Yemen and best hope for it? Simply providing humanitarian aid or monetary assistance would, at this point, be similar to that of pouring water into a bottom-less cup. First and foremost, more attention must be brought about to this region; with accurate media coverage and more precise information regarding Yemen, more individuals will be made aware of the severity of the said situation. However, simply increasing awareness of the Yemen crisis is anything but sufficient; in order to even attempt at unraveling the mess that is Yemen, the roots of the conflict must be resolved. The roots of the conflict have

long been embedded and entwined with one another that simply trying to solve the issue from one side/aspect would cause the rest to be entangled further. For now, the future of Yemen seems bleak, but it would be ill-advised to simply abandon all hope.

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초록

미국과 사우디아라비아의 예멘 외교정책 분석연구

배진근

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예멘 공화국(이후 예멘으로 불림)은 수년간 지속된 사회적 불안, 정치적 혼란, 치명적인 내부/외부 갈등의 혼잡으로 인해 세계에서 가장 재앙적인 인도주의적 위기 중 하나이지만, 국제 사회는 이에 대해서 아직 명확하고 실용적인 조치를 취하지 않고 있다. 예멘 사태 완화를 위해 여러 단체와 심지어 몇 국가 전체가 노력했지만, 중동의 어두운 구석에서 어떤 형태의 회복의 조짐도 거의 보이지 않고 있다. 희망은 예멘 위기가 "비등점"에 도달했던 2015년에 사우디 왕국이 주도하고 미국이 지원하는 연합이 형성되었을 때 암시되었다. 그러나, 예멘에 대한 두 나라의 외교 정책은 그 이후로 결코 효과적이지 않다는 것이 증명되었다.

본 연구는 미국과 SA의 예멘에 대한 외교정책을 분석, 비교, 비교 분석하기 위해 질적 연구방법을 활용하고 있으며, 보다 구체적으로는 현재의 예멘 사태에 대한 양국의 외교정책을 분석하고자 한다. 본 연구는 주요 기간을 기준으로 양국의 예멘에 대한 외교정책의 주요

변화를 살펴볼 것이다. 주요 기간은 냉전, 탈냉전, 아랍의 봄, 탈아랍의 봄으로 정의될 것이다. 상기 기간의 배경이 되는 이유는 추후 상세히 논의될 것이다. 각 기간은 예멘이 공동체 갈등/의미, 지정학, 종교 갈등 및 국내 정치 측면에서 어떤 영향을 받았는지를 포함할 것이다. 미국과 SA의 외교 정책은 각각의 기간 동안 다뤄질 것이고 그러한 정책들이 앞서 언급한 요소들에 긍정적이고 해로운 영향을 어떻게 끼쳤는지 분석될 것이다.

본 연구는 미국과 SA의 외교정책이 처음에는 예멘의 위기를 완화하기 위한 것으로 보일 수 있지만, 앞서 언급한 정책들은 상황을 악화시켰을 뿐이라고 주장한다. 본 연구는 예멘에 대한 미국과 SA의 중복된 정책이 현재 예멘을 집어삼키고 있는 재앙을 악화시켰을 뿐이라고 주장한다. 역사를 통틀어, 미국과 SA가 예멘의 공동체, 지정학적, 종교적, 국내 정치적 측면에서 예멘에 끼친 영향은 예멘 국가에 상당히 해로운 것으로 입증되었다.

본 연구의 시사점은 다음과 같다. 첫째, 예멘 위기는 근본적으로 혼란스러운 공동체 간의 갈등, SA와 이란의 지정학적·종교적 지배력의 장기화된 대리전, 미국과 SA의 실패한 개입에 힘입은 저장도 분쟁(LIC)이다. 둘째, 예멘 위기의 복잡성은 단일/다자적 해결책을 완전히 이해하고 잠재적으로 제안하기 위해 거의 불가능한 도전을 부과한다. 셋째, 앞서 주장했듯이, 두 패권국의 외교 정책은 처음에는 예멘 개혁에 초점을 맞춘 것처럼 보이지만, 표면적인

수준에서만 그렇게 하고 있다. 궁극적으로는 예상대로 외교 정책은 예멘을 단순한 그릇으로 활용하면서 자신들의 목표를 달성하는 데 더 초점을 맞추고 있다.

이 문서의 제한 사항은 다음과 같다. 첫째, 당면한 문제의 복잡성은 본 논문의 주제와 관련하여 충분한 정보를 얻는 데 어려움을 제기한다.

이 문제에 대한 학계와 언론의 관심 부족으로 철저하고 광범위한 연구에 필요한 접근 가능한 자료의 수가 제한되었다. 둘째, 본 논문의 분석 범위는 세 국가와 시대별 정책으로 제한되었다. 본 연구의 목적에 대한 역사적 의의와 상대성을 바탕으로 하여 상기 시대를 선정하였다. 셋째, 예멘 위기가 계속해서 맹위를 떨치고 있기 때문에 국가 자체뿐만 아니라 중동 지역의 미래가 어떻게 될지 장담할 수 없다.

향후 연구는 논문에서 논의된 상황의 실체를 반영하는 정확한 정보를 얻고 전달하는 데 초점을 맞춰야 한다. 정책 입안자들은 한 번에 하나의 문제를 분리하고 해결하려고 하지 말고 다면적인 접근법을 통해 문제에 접근하려고 노력해야 한다.

키워드: 예멘, 미국, 사우디아라비아, 예멘 분쟁, 저장도 분쟁, 전쟁, 인도주의적 위기, 알리 압둘 살레, 알 후티

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