

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University 8 Mai 1945 – Guelma

جامعة 8 ماي 1945-قائمة

Faculty of letters and Languages

كلية الآداب واللغات

Department of Letters and English Language

قسم الآداب واللغة الإنجليزية



OPTION: CIVILISATION

**Iran-Saudi Arabia Strife for Regional Dominance: Proxy Wars in the Middle East
(Yemen as Case Study)**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements of Master's Degree in Language and Culture**

Submitted by:

Supervised by:

ZERAFA Ghada

Mrs. SADAOUI Lamia

RAHMANI Warda

Board of Examiners

Chairwoman: Mrs. ZIYAYA Rima (MA. A) University of 8 Mai 1945-Guelma

Supervisor: Mrs. SADAOUI Lamia (MA. A) University of 8 Mai 1945-Guelma

Examiner: Mrs. BARES Meriem (MA. A) University of 8 Mai 1945-Guelma

2019-2020

Acknowledgements

We present our cordial thankfulness to our supervisor **Mrs. SAADAOUI Lamia**, for her patience and valuable guidance throughout this study. Also, we would thank all our teachers who paved the way for us to reach this current level of success, from the primary school till university. Special thanks to **Mrs. CHERAITIA Nadia**, a secondary school teacher who motivated and believed in us.

Dedication

First and foremost I thank Allah for giving me the strength and patience to accomplish this work despite all difficulties.

This dissertation is dedicated to a beloved person who meant and still means to me everything though he passed away since years, my late father *Athman*.

I'm so grateful to two women in my life who were in my back and have never left my side: my mother and my sister; I'm honored to have them in my life.

To my best mother, *Fatiha* for her unrivaled keenness, prayers, staying up with me nights and nights during my illness, exams and when work on this thesis.

Unique gratitude to my sweet sister, *Halima* who has been supporting me since my childhood and taught me to trust in God and hard work and never give up regardless the challenges.

I dedicate this work and give deep thanks to my second sister and my partner, *Warda* without her harmony and understanding this work will not be finished.

Special thanks go to the closest person to me, my friend *Housseem*, for his support, advice and respect. Thanks for being there for me.

Zerafa Ghada

Dedication

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful. My big heartiest gratitude is for Allah Almighty for enabling me to accomplish this research.

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved parents for their unconditional love and endless support. I submit my deepest thankfulness for my father **Nadji** and my mother **Houria** for supporting me throughout my life. I ask God to reward you the upper paradise. I would like to express how I am lucky of having you.

I submit great thankfulness to my sisters **Sabrina, Houda, Sounia** and my brother **Khalil** for their continuous support.

I would like to dedicate my friend **Ghada** for her good companionship. I will always appreciate her good sense of friendship.

Special thanks to my fiancé and my soulmate, **Ahmed**, for his love and respect and for supporting me.

Rahmani Warda

Abstract

This thesis examines Iran and Saudi Arabia rivalry for regional dominance in some Middle East countries in general, and Iran and Saudi Arabia proxy war in Yemen in particular. Its main concern is to investigate how the Saudi-Iranian relations have historically developed and more importantly what factors have stimulated this conflict. It argues that the Arab Spring that started in 2011 was one of the major reasons that have further developed the tension between the two countries, in which Iran and Saudi Arabia have not confronted each other militarily. The thesis analyses the two states' rivalry in some Middle East countries like Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain and Syria and takes the civil war in Yemen as case study. It sheds light on two important movements which are the Houthis and Hadi's government. The former represents the most significant movement in Yemen since 2011; this military and political movement controlled the Yemeni capital and is backed by Iran. The latter is largely supported by Saudi Arabia.

ملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة التنافس بين إيران والسعودية من أجل الهيمنة الإقليمية في بعض دول الشرق الأوسط بشكل عام، والحرب بالوكالة بين إيران والسعودية في اليمن بشكل خاص. الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الأطروحة هو دراسة كيفية تطور العلاقات السعودية الإيرانية عبر التاريخ والاهم من ذلك ما العوامل التي حفزت هذا الصراع. كما تظهر ان الربيع العربي الذي بدأ سنة 2011 يعد من أهم الأسباب التي أدت إلى زيادة التوتر بين البلدين، حيث أن إيران والسعودية لم يتواجهتا عسكرياً، تعد هذه الأطروحة تحليلاً للتنافس الإيراني السعودي من أجل الهيمنة في بعض مناطق الشرق الأوسط مثل العراق، مصر، البحرين و سوريا، وتتخذ الحرب الأهلية اليمنية كدراسة حالة. كما تسلط الضوء على أهم حركتين في اليمن: الحوثيون وحكومة هادي. تعد الحركة الأولى الأهم في اليمن منذ 2011 حيث سيطرت هذه الأخيرة على العاصمة اليمنية وهي مدعومة من قبل إيران، في حين أن الأخيرة مدعوم إلى حد كبير من المملكة العربية السعودية.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Yemen: Who controls what 31 August 2020.....	50
---	----

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FFC	Framework For Cooperation
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IRGC	Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action
NPT	Non- Proliferation Treaty
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDRY	People's Republic Democratic of Yemen
PSF	Peninsula Shield Force
P5+1	Five permanent members of the UNSC : U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China Plus Germany
RDF	Rapid Deployment Force
SANG	Saudi Arabia National Guard
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNOCHA	United Nation Office the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter one: Historical Background: Geopolitics of the Middle East and Iran-Saudi Arabian Relations Prior to 1979 Islamic Revolution	5
1.1 The external Geopolitics of the Middle East	6
1.1.1 The Middle East and International Affairs during the Cold War	6
1.1.1.1 The Nixon Doctrine (Twin Pillars Strategy)	7
1.1.1.2 Carter’s Doctrine	8
1.1.1.3 The Middle East Peace Process	9
1.1.2 The Middle East and International Affairs after the Cold War	10
1.1.2.1.1 Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988)	10
1.1.2.1.2 The Gulf War (1991)	10
1.1.2.1.3 Dual Containment of Iraq and Iran	11
1.1.2.4 War on Terror	11
1.1.2.5 The Iranian Nuclear Program	13
1.2 International Geopolitics of the Middle East	14
1.2.1 Rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia	14
1.3 The Periods of Engagement and Rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia prior to 1979	16
Chapter Two: Saudi-Iranian Relations after the Islamic Revolution and Post-Arab ..Spring Rivalry in the Middle East	19
2.1 Relations after Islamic Revolution	19
2.2 Iranian-Saudi Rivalry in the Middle East	21
2.2.1 Iranian-Saudi Rivalry in Post-Invasion Iraq	21
2.2.1 Arab Spring and Iran-Saudi Arabia Rivalry	26

2.2.1.1 Iran and Saudi Rivalry in Egypt.....	27
2.2.1.2 Iran and Saudi Rivalry in Bahrain.....	29
2.2.1.3 Iran Saudi Rivalry in Syria.....	32
Chapter Three: The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in Yemen: A Proxy War	38
3.1. Historical Background of Yemen Civil Crisis	38
3.2. Saudi Arabia’s Position and Reaction to the Yemen Civil War.....	40
3.3. Iran’s Position and Reaction to the Yemen Civil War	42
3.3.1 Iran’s Support of the Houthis.....	43
3.4. Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen.....	45
Conclusion.....	47
Index.....	50
Work Cited.....	51

Introduction

In order to understand the nature of the crack in the Middle East region, particularly the Iran-Saudi Arabian rivalry for regional dominance, one should analyze how the conflict between the two states stokes tension across the Middle East. The answer can be embodied in several key issues including the regional and extra regional geopolitics. More importantly the Arab Spring in 2011 could represent a reason that has further developed the tension between the two countries. These aspects form the bedrock of enmity between the two rivals despite the fact that they engaged in diplomatic and commercial relation before the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The relationship between the Kingdom and the Republic of Iran has been mercurial. The real tension between the two countries started in 1979 because of their position as the two major powers in the Middle East, and because each of them strives for political and religious leadership in the region. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran give a great value to the idea of being the center point of the Islamic world and in the Middle East, though with two different ideologies. The first one follows the Sunni while the second follows the Shiite stream of Islam, and this was the main reason behind the conflict as each of them aspires to spread its doctrine in the Middle East.

In the process of searching for an explanation for the continuing rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, this thesis seeks to examine the competition between the two countries in the Middle East region, particularly in Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain and Syria with much more focus on the civil war in Yemen as case study. It aims to give a background to the history of the relations between the two countries, how it started and developed to become a struggle for regional dominance in the Middle East. It aims at investigating the reasons that led to their entanglement in an open-ended struggle. The research sheds light on the extent of the power and influence each country has gained in the Middle East region generally and in Yemen particularly.

Apparently, Iran and Saudi Arabia are waging a proxy war in some countries of the Middle East like Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen instead of starting a direct confrontation, leading the region into instability, chaos, and bloodshed. Such a proxy war will not only avoid an open confrontation between them, but it will also guarantee a greater leverage if the groups they correspondingly support win the struggle inside their countries and if the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Iran can be considered as a proxy war, the Middle East security can be threatened.

In order to make a thorough analysis of the key points that surround the Saudi-Iranian conflict and strife for regional dominance, this research addresses the following questions: How did the strife start between the two countries? How does their rivalry in the Middle East affect their relationship? What are their aims behind this conflict? How does the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia stoke tension across the Middle East? How and why did Yemen become a regional conflict? Is the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and intervention in Yemen a proxy war?

This research depends on historical and descriptive approaches. The descriptive approach will be suitable as the current study aims at describing the major events concerning the Saudi-Iranian rivalry for regional dominance, with primary focus on Yemen as case study. This research provides case study which relies heavily on the historical method since it tackles and investigates recent events through a historical overview about their relationship.

The shared history between Iran and Saudi Arabia is full of many attracting events. Starting from the rapprochement policy between the two nations to the Islamic revolution and the Arab Spring in the Middle East countries, many writers tackled their relations. Derika Weddington, from Missouri State University, in his 2017 article entitled *Rivalry in the Middle East: The History of Saudi- Iranian Relations and its Implications on American Foreign Policy*, argues that Saudi Arabia and Iran witnessed rousing but friendly relations; their

diplomatic connections had been cut and fixed many times. In his book entitled *Iran and Saudi Arabia: A Regional "Cold War" with Global Relevance*, Erzsébet N. Rózsa, professor at the National University of Public Service in Hungary, claims that the relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia was built on the interest of influencing the Gulf. Although each country is focusing on its own interests, Saudi Arabia was interested in controlling the Arab countries of the Gulf; Iran was looking for more allies at the international level. She also added that their relationship is based on the differences between history and ideologies, but it is much more based on political and regional interests.

In an article entitled *The Battle for Regional Dominance between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Valeri Modebadze, Professor of International Relations at St. Andrew the First-Called Georgian University of the Patriarchate of Georgia, argues that the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia increased after the civil war of Yemen. Saudi Arabia supported the Sunni steered by President AbdRabuh Mansur al-Hadi because it wants to defeat the spread of Iranian influence on the Middle East. Iran on the other hand, supported the Shia Houthis against al Hadi, who in turn escaped to Aden where he declared unconstitutional the act by the rebel Houthis who forced him to leave the rule.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with geopolitics of the Middle East and Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement prior to 1979. The aim of this chapter is highlight the geographical importance of the Middle East, the major events that contributed to shaping the Iran-Saudi Arabian struggle and also the periods of alliance between the two countries.

The Second chapter deals with the relation of Iran and Saudi Arabia after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Furthermore, it gives clarification about Iran-Saudi Arabian relationship in the period after Arab Spring mainly in Egypt, Bahrain and Syria in addition to the Iran-Saudi Arabian rivalry in post invasion Iraq (after 2003).

The third chapter examines Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry in Yemen; it gives a historical background on Yemen civil crisis, analyzes how did Saudi Arabia interfered and responded to the crisis, what chaos this war brought the country and answered the question whether Saudi Iranian rivalry in Yemen is a proxy war or it is just a domestic issue analyses.

Chapter One

Historical Background: Geopolitics of the Middle East and Iran-Saudi Arabian

Relations Prior to 1979 Islamic Revolution

To understand the contemporary rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to understand the geopolitics that contributed in shaping the Middle East region, with considering the historical roots of Iran and Saudi Arabia relationship. This chapter tackles the geographical and energy resources of the Middle East region and how they brought the attention of the international powers, a particular focus would be on the United States' policies initiated in the era of the Cold War and after the Cold War end. It also concentrates on the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia before 1979, which was the period in which the two rival powers established a cordial diplomatic relationship.

The Middle East is a common term used to describe the countries of South East Asia and some countries in North Africa (Everton 2); it first appeared in 1902, in a book entitled *the Persian Gulf and International Relations*, written by Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American naval officer and historian. The term Middle had been known previously as the Near East and it referred to the following countries: the Balkans, Turkey, Rhodes and Dodecanese, Cyprus, Syria and Lebanon, Palestine, and sometimes Egypt while the term Middle East refers to the following countries: Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, and the other countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Generally, the term Middle East is used to refer to the region in South East Asia and North Africa expanding from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, bounded by the black and Caspian seas in the North and Sahara Desert and Indian Ocean in the west (Everton 3).The region of the Middle East has shared history, characteristics and religious traditions as it was the birth place of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. All the countries of the Middle East are Arabic speaking, the exceptions being Iran

and Israel, where the official language of Iran is Persian and the official language of Israel is Hebrew (Everton 4).

The Middle East, and especially the Persian Gulf, is of major strategic importance because of the abundance of different energy sources in the region. It is estimated that the region has 52.5% of oil and 44.6% of natural gas reserves of the world. In addition, the Middle East is bounded by five seas which are: the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea (the Gulf of Aden) and the Arabian/ Persian Gulf. Those five seas are considered to be very important for both the Middle East region and for the foreign powers that aimed at dominating them (Zulfqar121).

Furthermore, naval transportation takes place through three points: the first one is the Suez Canal, which links the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, the second one is Bab-al-Mandab, which links the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and the last one is the Strait of Hormuz, which joins the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea. This naval transportation renders the Middle East and the Persian Gulf an extremely important region in worldwide economy. The Middle East has great geographical importance and strategic location since it links three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe (Burl 1). However, the geographical importance of the Middle East brought the attention of the imperial powers, which have not steadied the Middle East. Further, it caused the conflicts among the Middle East regions since the outside powers supported the regional conflicts in the region (Zulfqar122).

1. The External Geopolitics of the Middle East

1.1 The Middle East and International Affairs during the Cold War

The USA policies in the Middle East started in 1920s when oil was found in the Middle East region. The strategic location and the huge energy resources of the Middle East have made it one of the most important regions in the world. Since the Middle East links three

continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, the United States thought that creating authority over the Middle East allow it to use the energy sources of the region, in particular oil. Thus, the USA considered the Middle East as a safe and an open route of transportation without any obstacles. Because of that nearly all the American presidents, since the Second World War, highlighted the importance of the Middle East region to the USA economically, strategically and politically (Tuna 85).

The military relation between the Middle East and the USA mainly emerged in the Cold War period. The Middle East is of crucial strategic significance for the USA and its Western allies. The USA struggled to prevent any other power from threatening its interests in the Middle East or dominating it. Furthermore, the United States was highly concerned about its interests and those of its Western allies, particularly after 1945; as the region has been receptive to the rising influence of the Soviet Union. It is seen that the USA policy related to guarantee the security of the Middle East region is continuous within its framework. Thus, the USA started to reinforce the region with military power (Tuna 85).

1.1.1 The Nixon Doctrine (Twin Pillars Strategy)

The American President Richard Nixon demanded a study on the US reaction to Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf; the study concluded that the responsibility of peace making should fall on the countries of the region. James H. Noyes, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Near Eastern, African, and South Asian Affairs, at a 1973 hearing in front of the House Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia, states: "The United States would not assume the former British role of protector in the Gulf area, but that primary responsibility for peace and stability should henceforth fall on the states of the region" (Noyes).

Eventually, Nixon's Middle East policy ended up by selecting Iran and Saudi Arabia to maintain peace and stability in the region because the US was trapped in the Vietnam War

and did not want to waste its military budget and at the same time wanted to keep its interests in the Gulf (Weddington 13).

Both countries had been chosen because of their status in the region and their relation with the US. Tehran had a great military power and Riyadh owned a financial capacity and credibility among the Arab World. So, their relation during this period became complementary because they had similar aims. The turning phase in their partnership was in 1973, in the Yom Kippur War, when OPEC Arab states including Saudi Arabia imposed an embargo on western countries that sided with Israel during the war. Iran did not join the boycott; instead, it took advantage of this event and provided supply for the United States. Working on different goals did not strain the ties between both countries; the peaceful phase in their relation was during 1968-1979 since their interests were similar (Weddington 15-18)

1.1.2 Carter's Doctrine

Following the coming of Jimmy Carter into power, the Nixon Doctrine which had comprised the basis for the USA policies in the Middle East at that time came to an end and another policy was approved, known as the Carter Doctrine. The latter allowed the interference of the USA military forces in the Middle East (Tura 93). On January 23, 1980, Carter stated this policy. He recommends that:

An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force. (Ismael 155-156)

The Carter Doctrine demonstrated an approach that is totally different to the Nixon Doctrine which focused on military support to contain the Soviet flow. From that time the USA was allowed to use the military forces to protect its interests in the Persian Gulf region (Tuna 93). In December 1979, The Carter government created a Rapid Deployment Force

essentially to guarantee the safety of the Persian Gulf region and to defend the American economic interests in the region. Also, the RDF was created to prevent any Soviet attack on the region (Tuna 93-94).

1.1.3 The Middle East Peace Process

The United States of America has announced a national interest to the security of Israel. It has long been U.S. official position that a peace contract should be based on the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) in which this resolution based on Israel's removal from Palestinian territories in 1967, at the same, ensuring Israel's security from its neighbor countries. While Palestinian approved on these resolutions as a basis for peace negotiations in 1989, the United States seems to have changed its decision. At the end of 1989, settlement activity enlarged intensively (Modigs 29). Secretary of State James Baker declares in 1989:

For Israel it is time to lay aside, once and for all, the unrealistic dream of a greater Israel. Israeli interest in the West Bank and Gaza, security and otherwise can be accommodated on a settlement based on resolution 242. Forswear annexations Stop settlement activity. (Boudreault et al. 174)

Also, the president Bush declares: "My position is that the foreign policy of the United States says we do not believe there should be new settlements in the West Bank or in East Jerusalem" (Rossi 183).

Initially, the USA agreed on the two UN Security Council resolutions, 446 in 1979 and 465 in 1980 which call for Israel removal from the settlements in Palestine in particular in Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. However, between 1972 and 2000, the USA has used its veto thirty-nine times in the UN Security Council to obstruct decisions critical of Israel's policies. Also, US ensured that the UN SC no longer has the right to resolve the Israeli- Palestinian conflict (Modigs 30).

These policy actions illustrate that United States is protecting its national interests in the Israel's security. The objective of the USA is to keep UN and international community out of a significant role in the peace process through using its influence in favor of one of the opponents; this strategy was not successful to establish a peace negotiation because of the bias position of the United States toward Israel (Modigs 31).

1.2 The Middle East and International Affairs after the Cold War

1.2.1 Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988)

Iran-Iraq war, also known as the First Persian Gulf War, it was armed war between the military forces of Iran and Iraq from September 1980 to August 1988. This war started when Iraq invaded Iran, Iraq launched the Iranian territories with air and land invasion in 22 September 1980 after a long history of border clash, and fears of Shia rebellion among Shi'ites in Iraq influenced by the Iranian Revolution.

Iraq was also seeking to be the dominant Persian Gulf state. Even though Iraq wished to benefit from the revolutionary disorder in Iran and assaulted it without warning, the result of this attack was only limited progress into Iran, but within six months, Iran regained the lost territories occupied by Iraq in 1982. For the next six years, Iran kept attacking Iraq. The United Nation Security Council called for a ceasefire, but the two counties did not stop the struggle and it continued till 20 August 1988 when the conflict ended by a ceasefire form of United Nations Security Council Resolution 598, which was approved by both Iran and Iraq (Iran-Iraq war 1).

1.2.2 The Gulf War (1991)

The Persian Gulf War, known as the Gulf War (from August 2, 1990 to February 28, 1991), was a war waged by an UN alliance from thirty-four nations headed by the United States against Iraq in reaction to the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi forces. This war has also been named by Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader, as the Mother of All Battles. Iraq's invasion

of the State of Kuwait was met with the international censure, as it brought direct economic sanctions by U.N Security. Also, George H.W Bush, the American president, installed American military forces in Saudi Arabia, as he insisted on the other countries to send their military forces to the region. A collection of nations united with the coalition, but the majority of military powers in this coalition were belonging to the USA, in addition to United Kingdom, Egypt and Saudi Arabia (these countries contributed with military and financial support).The conflict ended with the influential victory of the coalition forces, which liberated Kuwait (Gulf War).

1.2.3 Dual Containment of Iraq and Iran

On May 18, 1993, Martin Indyk, Clinton's special assistant for Near East and South Asian affairs, in a speech delivered at the Washington Institute for the Near East Policy, presented the main elements of the policy of dual containment. He claimed that the United States of America would no longer balance Iran against Iraq. The power of the United States and its allies in the region which are: Egypt, Israel, Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council States of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman would let Washington to oppose both Iran and Iraq. Indyk claimed that the USA government considers the Iraqi regime as criminal and should be changed. As he warned that a focus completely on the Iraqi threat on the interests of the United States of America could lead to dangerous consequences "if the balance of power in the Gulf in favor of Iran" (Indyk). USA action against Iran did not enjoy extensive support, because of that "containment" of Iran was difficult. Indyk recognized that sanctions against Iran must be multilateral, as he stated that Washington should convince the other countries to not connect with any military or economic relations with Tehran (Myers 11-12).

1.2.4 War on Terror

The rising danger of international terrorism gave an exceptional reason for achieving the political aims throughout the use of military forces. On September 11, 2001, President Bush states:

America was targeted for attack because we are the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining [...] the search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them. [...] America and our friends and allies join all those who want peace and security in the world and we stand together to win the war against terrorism. (Bush, 2002)

After seven days, on September 18, 2001, the American president, Bush signed "Public Law 107-40" which legalized the use of military power against those who were responsible for the 9/11 attacks. This law provided the American president with constitutional authority to react against Al-Qaeda, as it enabled additional protective action in order to prevent any future assaults against the United States; the War on Terror had been passed into legislation.

The terrorist attacks paved the way for creating the Bush Doctrine; "The main elements of the Bush Doctrine held that Washington would use its military power to topple totalitarian regimes that menaced the United States, preempt terrorist attacks and spread democracy" (George W. Bush White House). The Bush Doctrine sought to put an end to terrorism and spread freedom. The 9/11 attacks determined that protecting American interests at the internal and external level was their right of sovereignty.

The Global war on Terror is an exercise of political objectives through the use of military force: the first war on terror was waged in 2001 on Afghanistan (which is a war against Al-Qaeda and Taliban), the second was in 2003 against Iraq, over allegations of pursuing Weapons of Mass Destruction (Kobek 82-83).

1.2.5 The Iranian Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program was a stimulus for the conflict in the Middle East region and the world. Although this nuclear program was under the safeguards of the Non- Proliferation Treaty and was for peaceful purposes, great powers in the world considered it as a threat (M. Khan 112).

The west, Israel and the GCC countries did their best to disrupt Iran's program. However, Iran worked secretly on its nuclear program till it was hinted at being developing nuclear weapon in 2003. Consequently, the US passed sanctions on Iran, unilaterally and multilaterally through its allies, denying Iran from foreign loans and investments. Iran had recovered only after the agreement with the P5+1 (permanent members of the United Nations plus Germany) known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which was signed in 2015 and the Framework for Cooperation (FFC) signed with the IAEA and Iran. Iran viewed the agreement as a sign of relief; under these agreements the sanctions on Iran have been reduced (M. Khan 113).

Great powers, like France, UK and Germany, announced their agreement on the agenda of Iran's nuclear deal in Lausanne, Switzerland on April 2, 2015. In the announcement they states: "today, we have taken a decisive step: we have reached solutions on key parameters of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)" (qtd in M. Khan 113). This agreement involved the limitation of Iran's installed enrichment centrifuges; Natanz enrichment plant of Iran will cease enrichment and instead will be used as physics research

Centre, also Iran would reduce its low-enriched uranium stockpile from 10,000kg to 300kg for the next 15 years (M. Khan 113).

Tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia had been increased because Saudi Arabia rejected the treaty and favored a military action to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure as it threatens the security of the Middle East. However, Iran succeeded in developing long range missiles which had terrified Saudi top officials since those Nuclear weapons helped Iran to strengthen its position and statute in the Middle East's countries (M. Khan 114).

1.2 Internal Geopolitics of the Middle East

1.2.1 Rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia

The clannish nature that many states in the Middle East have led today to the sectarian wars in the region; the tribal system means that citizens are faithful to their tribe, origins and ancestor not to the government. This is what weaken the states and made the strife taking the sectarian path. Saddam relied on Sunni population, Al-Maliki on Shias, Assad on the Alawites and the Al-Khalifa dynasty relied on Sunni. Tehran and Riyadh exploited this sectarian dimension in the neighboring countries to feed their geopolitical strife (Gause III5-7)

To understand the region of the Middle East one must have an idea about the sectarian division between Sunni and Shia which is based on a religious rift. However, it was used as a tool to achieve geopolitical goals through influencing public opinion. The list of countries that belong to the Shia sect are few compared to the Sunnis, and they include Iran, Iraq with Shia majority in the South, Syria where the Shia are minority and are led by Bashar al-Assad, and the group of Hizbollah in Lebanon. On the other hand the Sunni countries include Bahrain, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Crikemans 3).

The 'shadow war' between the two major regional players (Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran) according to David Criekemans, from University of Antwerp (Belgium), is waged in many battlefields: in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and across the strategically important Strait of Hormuz since June 2019. Criekemans argues that

The geopolitical struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran can be seen through many looking glasses: the regional component of Shia versus Sunni, the political component of a kingdom against a theocratic republic, the energy dimension of an oil economy at the summit of its power or in potential decline versus a country endowed with natural gas. (1)

This clash of different interests of two great powers was the motive that pushed them to support their proxies in their civil wars, either directly or indirectly (Criekemans 1). After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has become the essential reason behind the changes in the balance of power in the region, in other words, the competition that has become now a cold war at the regional level is the pulp of the strife in the Middle East. Dr. Raja Muhammad Khan, professor of International Relations at National Defense University (Islamabad), in his article: *A Perspective on the Evolving Geopolitics in the Middle East* emphasizes that "Owing to their size, population, resources and influence in the region, security and politics in the Middle East is conditioned by the way the Royal Kingdom and the Islamic Republic play their cards" (111).

The struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia is evident across all the region of the Middle East, in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain and many other places. Concerning Riyadh, it is using the sectarian card specifically, by advocating the Saudi Wahhabi against the Iranian Shia Islam. However Iran plays its card of anti-Israel and anti-American position since the Shias are a minority in the region. Thus, Iran is taking the sectarian path indirectly in order to spread its influence ideologically and to win more support. This winning card had

changed the balance of power, Saudi Arabia now is facing a crucial risk since Iran is feeding and widening its influence on many countries in the Middle East, especially in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen. Additionally, Iran has changed politically and economically compared to the early 2000s when it was isolated internationally, because sanctions on its nuclear program have been reduced after the nuclear deal that was signed in 2015. Many countries are becoming too close to Tehran: Iraq after the fall of Saddam has maintained ties with Iran and has been influenced by this regional power. Also Iran has been supporting Assad's regime and rejected his ousting. This is how Iran's plan worked effectively to gain support and control in the Middle East (Khan 115).

1.3 Periods of Engagement and Rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia prior to 1979

Despite the fight between Saudi and Iranian monarchs, they signed a friendship treaty on 24 August, 1929. The treaty highlighted the basis of their political, commercial and diplomatic ties. Both rulers congratulated each other and appointed their representatives in each country declaring the beginning of diplomatic relations. The reason behind getting close to each other in that period is that they were the only two independent and prominent countries in the Middle East as Badeeb states: "The processes of nation-building in what would become Saudi Arabia and Iran ... were significant not only in themselves, but also in the fact that they occurred at a time when nearly all Middle Eastern countries were still under colonial rule" (37).

Riyadh and Tehran shared similarities in the process of nation building. However they differed in how each one dealt with Great Britain. The Saudis would benefit from their option of making no decision that would not satisfy Great Britain. But Reza Shah's contention to Britain, lead to his dethroning since he sided with the Axis powers and he was forced to abdicate to his son Mohammed Reza. The latter preserved the diplomatic ties with Saudis till

the accident of the Iranian pilgrim who vomited on the Ka'aba and his execution by the Saudis leading to the cutting of the ties. Relation had been resumed after Ibn Saud had officially asked for that in a written letter to the Shah in 1946 (Weddington 8).

In 1953, Prime Minister Mossadeq had been removed after the British and the Americans succeeded in deposing him by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) coup. In the same year, Saud became the ruler after his father died. This dual change in regime drive both countries to new era of relations that was centered on common issues: regional politics, international security and oil (Weddington 9)

The national Arab movement of Pan-Arabism that aimed to unifying the countries of North Africa and West Asia emerged in 1950 led by the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser expanded over the Arabian Peninsula. The idea of this movement focused on socialism and rejected the royalist system, thus posing a threat for the Saudis. Abdel Nasser wanted to extend his ideology over the region, so he became involved it in the Yemeni Civil War of 1962. In response to that Riyadh provided military aid to the Yemeni dethroned Imam Muhammad al-Badrin in collaboration with its ally Iran. Since the shah also was alarmed by the threat of Arab Nationalism, the threat was shared with that of Saudi Arabia, and thus the ties between both monarchs became much stronger (Weddington10-12)

To sum up, the Middle East, an unstable region has been facing different challenges. The feeling of distrust that shred between the Middle East countries contributed in the instability of the region. Moreover, the strategic location and the different energy resources, mainly oil, in the region considered as an important factor that led to the rise of tension and competition among the Middle East countries, in particular between the two rivals, Iran and Saudi Arabia. In addition to that, the energy richness of the region became a point of attraction of the outside powers in particular the United States which developed different policies to contain the Middle East regions. So, the instability of the Middle East region which

caused by ethnic and sectarian conflict and the struggle between the regional and extra-regional powers make the Middle East a region of conflict aperture.

Chapter Two

Saudi-Iranian Relations after the Islamic Revolution and Post-Arab Spring Rivalry in the Middle East

The Iranian revolution started from 1977 with the failure of the Shah's "white revolution" as described by Andrew Scott Cooper aimed at economic and social reforms in which he relied on the influx oil income, unfortunately oil prices declined which affected the economy negatively driving people to turn back to Islam and religion to placate their unrest (Weddington 23-24). People had been united under their shared hatred to the Shah under the leadership of Khomeini; who adopted an anti-western and anti-monarch ideology in which he expressed his rejection of monarchical system which Saudi followed and the alliance with US which also Riyadh participated in that resulted in the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Because of these different ideologies and beliefs Saudi Iranian disagreement took the form of a Proxy war which can be defined as two opposing countries avoiding direct war and instead supporting combatants that serve their interests. In some occasions, one country is direct combatant whilst the other is supporting the enemy of the first one. The outlook of this type of war appeared also during the 21st century in the aftermath of the Arab Spring; in which each of them sided with different ideological groups.

2.1. Relations after Islamic Revolution

After the Islamic Revolution there were a complete shift in relations between Tehran and Riyadh. The Iranian revolutionaries wanted to sweep to the neighboring countries alleging that Muslim countries were hoping for Islamic rule and principles. Nevertheless, the Saudis formed rivaled Iran in the idea of ruling the Islamic world for owning the two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina. At first the Saudis tried to calm down the new Iranian government and its structure by welcoming the modification of the leadership and they believed that they share common Islamic principles. However, Khomeini rejected the idea of commonalities

because he wanted to be the leader of the Muslims, that's why he challenged the ruling family in Riyadh about to what extent it was committing Islam describing it as "American Islam" or "False Islam" (Weddington 20-22). That's to say Khomeini exploited the Saudi –American league of mutual interests to feed his ideology and gather people around him.

The Iranian revolutionaries posed the strongest dissent of monarchical system and of the pro- American foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. In November, the same year the revolt succeeded, the Shi'ite in Saudi Arabia celebrated the holy day of Ashura with illegal religious marches that hold the picture of Khomeini and signs condemning Saudis and the United States, leading to riots that the Saudi authorities tried to stop as they resulted in damage in the property which made the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) interfered to suppress the riots and led to the death of civilians. Additionally, in 1980 Iranian demonstrations gathered to celebrate one year anniversary of Khomeini's return to Iran but turned t violence as the marches clashed with security forces leading to the disruption of the Hajj pilgrimage. This accident became serious in 1987; when around 400 people died in an Iranian protest leading Saudi Arabia to reduce the Number of Iranian pilgrims (Tyler and Boon 7-8).

Relations started to improve gradually after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and with the coming of the new leaders, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, who were less contentious. Khatami was the first president to visit Saudi Arabia after the revolution. Nevertheless, none of these leaders succeeded in maintaining relation with Riyadh because the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp was conducting secret actions in Saudi Arabia without the permission of the president since he was not the commander in chief. Khatami aimed to improve relations with Saudi Arabia because US was working on isolating Iran from the Gulf region due to its nuclear program (Tyler and Boon 8).

Khatami's successor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad did not focus on enhancing relations with the Saudis which led to bad results; in early 2010, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pushed the Gulf Arab states to influence China to accept the US sanctions on Iran. For its part Saudi Arabia covertly worked to encourage Beijing to support sanctions using its commercial ties with China. It ended up with accepting a limited level of sanctions, Saudi Arabia was in middle position between US policies and keeping normal relations with Iran because Saudis did not want to neither return back to the bad ties of 1980 where Iran supported propaganda, subversion and terrorism against Arab monarchies nor entering in direct rivalry between US and Iran. Also they were afraid and more hesitant to raise any confrontation with a nuclear power (Tyler and Boon 9).

2.2. Iranian-Saudi Rivalry in the Middle East

2.2.1 Saudi-Iranian rivalry in Post-Invasion Iraq

The balance of power in the Middle East between Iran and Saudi Arabia totally changed after the invasion of Iraq by the Americans, and Iran became the most influential power in the region because of the increasing number of its supporters in the Middle East region (Grumet76). So, Iran's first aim is to attract more supporters in the Middle East in order to ensure its dominance in the region and Iraq was one of the most major regions that gained the interest of both rival powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The Middle East is a region full of internal conflicts and within the region itself, it is important to mention the split in the Middle East region between cults, in particular between Sunnis and Shiites. So, the problem of sectarianism is defined as:

An institutional set of arrangements that determines familial, local, regional and even global loyalties or affiliations. It has been shown that sectarian conflict leads to what experts identify as sectarian violence, which implies symmetrical confrontations between two or more non-states actors representing different population groups. (Stepanova)

Sectarianism became source of violence and conflicts between members of the same region as well as between the same cults due to the misinterpretation of the principles of Islam (Abdo7).

Following the foundation of Iraq, the Arab Sunni residents, minority of the Iraqi population, started its dictatorial rule. But, after 82 years, the Sunni population dominated in Iraq while the Shi'ites concealed. The Shi'ites' became under pressure specifically under Saddam Hussein authoritarian rule and the Ba'ath party. The Shi'ite society was mostly assembled in Southern Iraq. In addition to that, Saddam Hussein totally ignored the Shiite group by denying and neglecting their needs as human beings (Grumet78).

The 9/11 attacks on the USA was a direct reason that led the Bush government to invade Iraq in 2003 an attempt to fight terrorism in both Iraq and Afghanistan and in particular al-Qaeda training camps, the other aim of Bush is to put an end to the rule of Saddam Hussein and democratize the region. With the fall of Baghdad, the Sunnis, Shiites and other extremists profited from the current situation to gain control over the region. Like the case of Shiite, the leader of Shiite community, Sayyid al-Sistani, saw the fall of Baghdad as great opportunity to become the dominant political power in the region under the assistance of the USA. Then, with the help of United States of America, the Shiite community reached their goal after the fall of Saddam Hussein and the end of the Sunni rule (Altoraifi).

The civil war in Iraq became a point of attraction to both Iran and Saudi Arabia to fulfill their aims to be the most dominant power in the Middle East region through depending on Islam as a device. According to Iran, Iraq had great value because of the Shiite Muslims in Iraq and the two holy cities in Islam, Askari shrine, Najaf as well as Kerbala, which symbolize the history of Shiite for the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other side, with the removal of Saddam Hussein, Saudi Arabia became threatened by the loss of its dominance in the region because of the bad situation of Sunnis in Iraq (I. Khan).

Since the overthrowing of Saddam Hussein, the Middle East region started to recognize the problematic situation of the Sunni political standing, particularly Saudi Arabia which was afraid of losing their dominance in the region. The collapse of Saddam Hussein has generated terror within the family of al-Saudi while Iran has made major efforts to influence the post-Shi'ite rules. Saudi Arabia worries that the dominance of Shi'ite regime in Baghdad will create a coalition that will enable them to organize themselves diplomatically and make rebellion, which would eventually be damaging to the interests of Saudi Arabia in the region (Terril 45).

While Saudi Arabia had truthful position and concern about the U.S. led invasion of Iraq, at first, Saudi Arabia tried to influence the new Iraqi government. The relationship between USA and Saudi Arabia was good till the 9/11 attack when the American government discovered that fifteen hijackers were Saudis, trying to maintain the good relation as before, Saudi Arabia tried to provide the USA with all its needs. In other hand, Saudi Arabia was thinking about the results of USA invasion to Iraq and about the dominance of Shiite over Iraq that could minimize or threat the leadership and Influence of Saudi Arabia. So, the primary interests of Saudi Arabia in Iraq were: first, to prevent the conflict in Iraq from threatening the security of Saudi Arabia land, second, to protect the Sunnis in Iraq from the oppression of the new Shiite government, and third, to limit the dominance and interference of Iran in Iraq.

According to Saudi Arabia, emergence of sectarianism in Iraq may lead to a civil war and with the interference of Iran (to help the Shiite in Iraq), the Sunni minority might be threatened by both Shiite if Iraq and Iran. King Faisal criticized the USA government by claiming, "We fought a war together to keep Iran out of Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait...now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason (Gibson).

After the invasion Kuwait (1991), Saudi Arabia totally cut off relations with Iraq. When Saddam was ousted (after the 2003 invasion) and the Sunni regime was substituted by a Shiite government, Saudi Arabia rejected resuming diplomatic relations with Baghdad as well as establishing an embassy in Iraq. Saudi Arabia's refusal to establish an embassy was a way of complaining about the rule of Shiites in Iraq (Al-Marashi).

For Saudi Arabia, the Iraq war of 2003 is considered as an impediment for their interests at the regional level. At the beginning, Saudi Arabia did not show a huge interest, but it adopted an extremely serious position against Al Maliki, the new prime minister of Iraq. For example, at an international conference in Egypt, the Saudi King Abdullah, refused to meet up with Al Maliki and described him as a person who reinforces the sectarian division. This behavior of Saudi Arabia made resonance over the whole Middle East region and worked on reducing the authority and respect of the new Iraqi government (Grumet 87).

Saudi Arabia was really distress with Maliki's incapability to help the Sunni minority and to resolve the increasing of the sectarian division, also his rejection to tackle its controversial decisions. According to Saudi Arabia the accomplishment of Iraqi reconciliation attempts established by the government were prominent influential reason to if they will carry on or stop to fear the empowerment of Shi'ite Arabs and the increasing of the Iranian dominance in the region (McMillan 14). In addition to that, Saudi Arabia has also been blamed of not opening the borders in order to enable the Saudis to join the Sunni rebellion against the government (Grumet 87).

In 2010, at some point in the lead up to the March Iraqi election, Saudi Arabia, highly worried about the increasing dominance of Shi'ite ruled Iran and its support of Maliki led it to become more concerned with the Iraqi politics, in which Saudi Arabia supported the secular leader Dr. Ayad Allawi, who directed a political alliance which was open to Iraqi Sunni community. Saudi Arabia sponsored Dr. Allawi during his organization's campaigning

efforts. In addition to that, Allawi uphold a deep vital outlook against Iran's sustained interference in Iraq's political negotiations. In spite of Saudi denial, some observers thought that Saudi government provided the Sunni Arabs in Iraq, who were related to the Awakening movement, with financial aid (Blanchard).

On the other side, after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iran became extremely concerned with Iraqi politics as it recognized that it needed to seize upon the chance to influence Baghdad. But, the USA warned Iran from the growing influence in neighboring regions, particularly Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to lessen Iraqi conventional forces and the USA involvement in the region, Iran directly sought to influence the post-Saddam Iraq, in which Iran has involved "diplomacy, economic investment, cover action, and cultivating Iranian clients within the Iraqi political system including the leadership of armed militias." (Terril 45)

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, Known for its training terrorist groups and for spreading the revolutionary message, this organization was training the Iraqis to revolt against the federation and Iraqi security forces. Since 2006, the USA military officials estimate that the IRGC organization provides the Shiite militia groups with \$750,000 and \$3 million worth of tools as financial support every month (Kagan et al. 19). Iraq has fundamentally turned out to be a significant proxy conflict for Iran and Saudi Arabia. The invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003 and the ousting of Saddam Hussein and his Sunni-dominated government gave the power to the exploited Shi'ite population to build strong community that came to rule the next government, also many Saudis were unsatisfied about the situation in which the fall of Saddam Hussein brought back the conflict in the region because of the shift from Sunni rule to Shi'ite government that resulted the shift of Baghdad from Riyadh's path to Tehran's' where it has remained for the past ten years (Hampton 6). Iran succeeded to get control over Iraq, influence was apparent through the alliance in oil

fields, development of trade relations between Iran and Iraq which currently stands at eighty billion dollars in one year. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Iraq keeps on increasing, further threatening an already unstable and weak political region (Grumet 91).

2.2.2 The Arab Spring and Iran- Saudi Arabia Rivalry

During the Arab Spring revolutions, both Iran and Saudi Arabia were competitors in the Middle East region. Iran adopted a supporting position to all uprisings except Syria because it failed to take in consideration the demands of economic and social improvements. Also Iran support its ally to encourage the triangle; Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. Iran considered those uprisings as an expansion to the Islamic Revolution, despite the fact that those revolutions were not inspired by religious interest nor guided by religious parties. Instead all the Arab revolutions were social. On the other side, Saudi Arabia's view about the Arab Spring differed from one country to another and depending on the situation of the country. Saudi Arabia supported all the uprisings except the Bahrain uprising because Saudi Arabia is required to the Bahrain government, under its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) responsibilities. Also, Saudi Arabia would defend its own soil security from any Iranian aggression, and that would only be possible if the Bahraini opposition succeeds in Bahrain (Ghunaim 111-112).

According to Iran, in addition to that the Arab uprising considered as an expansion to the Islamic revolution of Iran, it can be also considered as indication to the existence of USA policy in the Middle East. The Egyptian uprising was supported by Iran because Iran consider Egypt and Israel as allies, in other side it supported the new government of Morsi and help him to rule the country based on the rule of an Islamic state. While the view of Saudi Arabia differ from Iranian's view about the Egyptian case, at first, Saudi Arabia supported Mubarak, later on this position change to support the revolution in Egypt and the Saudi government provided the Egyptian military with financial aid, this position continued till Morsi's regime.

But, many viewers claimed that Iran and Morsi relationship was the direct reason to the fall of Morsi regime. Then Saudi Arabia welcomed the rise of Sissi as the new president of Egypt and provided the new government under Sissi' rule with financial assistance (Ghunaim 112-113).

2.2.3 Iran and Saudi Arabia Rivalry in Egypt

The 2011 civil wars in the Arab world, known as the Arab Spring, presented different worries for Iran and Saudi Arabia concerning their interests in the Middle East. When it comes to the Arab Spring in Egypt, both Iran and Saudi Arabia became involved in the Egyptian civil war. Hosni Mubarak, Egyptian president, had occasionally acted a major role in opposing the increasing of Iranian dominance in the Middle East region, as well as the two regions never established a diplomatic relations during the Hosni Mubarak presidency. In particular, Mubarak often reacted against Hamas, the radical Palestinian Islamist group, which is significant ally to Tehran. However, the relationship between Iran and Egypt still unclear, because following the Egyptian revolution, the Egyptians decided on their future foreign policy orientations. Yet, there is tough favoritism among Egyptians favoring significantly expanded regional control role for their country following the years of typically passive foreign policy under the rule of Hosni Mubarak. At the same time, the temporary military government has been under public force to develop its relationship with the Palestinians, involving Hamas. The removal of Hosni Mubarak after 18 days from the uprising can be considered as advantage to Iran since the relation between the two countries during Mubarak presidency was not good (Birnbaum 9).

The Iranian's aim is an Egyptian Islamist government, in a sense that Egypt should be controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood, the most significant Islamist group in Egypt. However, Iranian aims are inappropriate for Egyptian interests; the decline of Mubarak government is predictable to permit the Islamist Brotherhood to share political authority in

Egypt because this can disturb the United States of America. In addition to that, the desire for a great and significant country like Egypt to be the most important regional country in the Middle East might be a reason for divergence between Egypt and Iran, which looks for the same location of control. Regardless of these complications between Cairo and Tehran, Saudi Arabia as well has fears about the progress of Egypt, and currently thinks that their kingdom is more isolated because of the decline of Mubarak's regime. As its position was totally against the protesters while showing a complete support to Mubarak's regime (Terrill 10-11)

At the beginning of the Egyptian Civil War, Saudi King Abdullah, convicted what he named protester acts of "malicious upheaval" and fitnah which produced disagreement and confusion with the Islamic public. Later on, when Saudi Arabia recognized that the fall of Mubarak's regime is absolute, they became more soft and concentrated on bringing peace between the protesters and the official government. Following Mubarak's regime decline, it appears gradually potential that Riyadh will become further involved in the Middle East politics in particular in Egypt meanwhile it is uncertain about the support of Egypt's new government to repress and limit the Iranian power in the Middle East. So, the Saudis watched the fall of Mubarak with fear, in other side, Iran expected a new possible opportunities in the Middle East. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Iranian Supreme Leader, made excited declarations sanctioning the Egyptian protesters as well as trying to depict events in Egypt as an Iranian-style uprising expected to lead to an Egyptian Islamic government. He also claimed that the revolution in Egypt and the desires for Islamic regime was ordinary expansion to the 1979 Iranian revolution. This declaration embodied an inappropriate analysis of the events because neither Tunisian nor Egyptian government ruled by Islamic elements, however the Islamist groups did wish to profit from the revolutionary consequences. The Khomeini's statements suggested that the protesters sought to expel their leaders and replace it with Islamic government based on the Iranian model (Terrill 11-12).

After the decline of Mubarak rule, the Iran aimed to make a good and diplomatic relationship with Egypt, however, Nabil AlArabi, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, stated that the relation between the two countries should reproduce their civilization and history, and based on common respect of country independence and to not interfere in the internal matters of both countries. Certainly, after AlArabi declarations that pushed Egypt to limit the relationship with Iran, Saudi Arabia leadership was surprised with these offers. Then, in April 2011, EssamSharaf, the Egyptian Prime Minister, met with Abdullah, the Saudi king, in Riyadh in order to negotiate some regional affairs and the Saudi king obviously stressed GCC worries about Iran. On the other hand, the Egyptian Prime Minister emphasized Egypt's desire to establish strong political and economic relationship with Saudi Arabia (Terrill 12-13).

2.2.4 Iran and Saudi Arabia Rivalry in Bahrain

Bahrain is a major region of Saudi-Iranian conflict in the Middle East and in particular in the Gulf region. Bahrain is a monarchy ruled by a Sunni Royal family, and Sunni represents the minority elite group in the country. The proximity of Bahrain to Saudi Arabia makes Bahrain a special case to Saudi Arabia as it took the responsibility to protect it from any external threat; Because Saudis are always distrustful about Iranian purposes concerning Bahrain since the majority of the population of Bahrain is Shi'ite (Terrill 18).

Bahrain had undergone many hard encounters during both the last Iranian shah's reign and the Islamic Republic, after the independence of Bahrain from the rule of the United Kingdom (UK) in 1971. During that time, the Shah revived past Iranian declaration to Bahrain and proclaimed that the Island nation would be joined up with its Iranian homeland ahead the British removal. He also stated that union would be accomplished by power if required. Yet, Iranian declarations were weak and stand on the provisional Persian occupation of Bahrain in the 18th century. The majority leading of the international community

contrasted this annexation. The disaster was turned away when the Shah instead concentrated more on seizing three small however important islands near the mouth of the Gulf. These Islands were also stated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which took its independence in 1971, the same when Bahrain achieved its independence. Then, Iran backed away from its declaration concerning Bahrain; however, the problems of Manama with Iran did not finish with the removal of the Iranian Shah. Ayatollah Rouhani, the leader of the Islamic republic, in brief confirmed again the Iranian claim to Bahrain following the Shah removal from power, though his irredentist claim did not receive any authorized follow-up. In addition to that, the Iranian naval military exercises next to Bahraini waters led the Bahraini government to request the military support from Saudi Arabia which approved the Bahraini request (Terrill 18-19).

The Bahraini Arab uprising started in 2011, when irritation concerning the social differences, the subjective custody of some of the opponents, and the violence of police against the Shia objectors inside the country (Joyce 115). The reaction of the government to the uprising was aggressive in which many of protesters were killed (Joyce 116). Additionally, the kingdom affirmed that the manifestations were Shia reinforced by Iran in order to weaken the government and threaten the AlKhalifa's sovereignty (Terrill 20). Month later of instability, Bahrain called on the GCC mutual defense pact, in order to help it to put an end to the uprising. Bahrain regime insisted that these manifestations supported by Iran which would be a direct danger to the whole GCC countries (Joyce 17).

On 14 March 2011, the military branch of the GCC, the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF), was activated. Thousands of Saudi soldiers and 600 Emirati soldiers went to Bahrain in order to decrease the pressure over Bahrain. The Bahraini government imprisoned Shia protesters, killed many opposition politicians, and burnt up all Shia mosques (Joyce 118). Following the interference of the GCC, the kingdom rapidly repressed dissent. In the meantime, the

kingdom promised improvements (Ismail). however, Tehran was angry because of both the Saudi intervention and also because of the GCC' accusations that instability in Bahrain was the responsibility of Iran, that is why Iran requested the intervention of the United Nations (UN) to stop the killing of Bahraini people, and in particular the Shiites (Cerioli302-303).

On 21 March 2011, the Bahraini king Hamid claimed, "An external plot has been fomented for 20 to 30 years until the ground was right for subversive designs...I announce today the failure of the fomented plot." This blame was obviously intended basically for Iran, but Manama blamed also the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah for playing a role in reinforcing the instability and war within the region. Also the Bahraini regime was upset from Hezbollah for encouraging the violence in the country by claiming that "their blood would defeat the tyrants". The Manama regime stopped flights from Bahrain to Lebanon and then accused Hezbollah of preparing Bahraini oppositionists at armed campsite in Lebanon and Iran. In other side, the Saudi Arabia did not revoke its military forces from Bahrain in case there will be unrest in the region again (Terrill 23-24).

After the interference of Saudi Arabia, Bahraini system allowed the widespread repressiveness to establish a strong system; the Bahraini government instituted its own control over all mosques in all the country, confirming that this was essential to guarantee that the members of clergy did not uphold extremist ideas. Additionally, the government damaged at least 30 Shiite places of worship. In this sense, Bahraini Sunni antagonism to Bahraini Shiite became obvious and horrible and Bahraini Sunnis thought that Shiite of Bahrain have good relation with Iran and devoted to it (Terrill 24).

Other problem occurred when Bahraini regime was not able to unify its power. In April 2001, The Bahraini regime established the Wafaq party and the Islamic Action Association which Shiite party and the largest political party in Bahrain and seized eighteen for fourteen seats in the lower elected house of the Parliament of Bahrain.

When the Bahraini regime wanted to defeat the Shiite political organization was definitely viewed as valid and legitimate political organization by both Saudi Arabia and USA because this party was seeking for reformation by using legal ways. The Bahraini regime rapidly thought again about its point of view concerning this Shiite party because of the jugged USA criticism, and the actions to prevent the Shiite parties should be stopped. In this sense, the Bahraini government maintains to give an importance to the good relationship with USA, though its most significant ally is Saudi Arabia. It is feasible that Bahraini government still need the help from its best ally to not lose its control over the country. In addition to that, the Bahraini give a great importance to the collaboration with the USA against Iran to stop the interference of Iran in Bahrain and use military forces against them (Terrill 24-25).

The problematic situation in and over Bahrain also led to a considerable increase of antagonism between Iran and GCC over different issues. In April 2001, an assembly of the GCC foreign ministers stated “deeply worried about continuing Iranian meddling” and also claimed that Tehran “violating the sovereignty” of GCC countries. Earlier, Riyadh had replied to Iran about its interference in Bahrain by claiming that Iranian blame was irresponsible and have “void allegation and blatant offence against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia”. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Muhammad Sabah al-Sabah also demanded from Iran to modify its behaviors and performance; however, no country in the Gulf region cut off its relation with Tehran. Many times Bahrain imprisoned members supposed to have relations with Iran (Terrill 25-26).

2.2.5 Iran and Saudi Arabia Rivalry in Syria

Since in the Islamic Revolution, Syria has been an Iranian supporter as it was the only Arab country which sustained Iran in the war with Iraq in 1980s. Both Syria and Iran share similar interests like Hezbollah, Lebanon and the Palestinians, as they have the same opponents such as USA, Israel and Iraq. Also, Syria is governed by a minority whose faith

originated from Shiism. So, the Syrian-Iranian relations that are based on shared strategic interests affected the relation of Saudi Arabia and Syria (Weddington87).

Iran maintained a good relationship with Maliki, the Iraqi prime Minister, because of his support to Iran policies in backing up the Assad government in Syria. As kind of help to the Syrian government, the Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki provided Assad government with weapons in the Syrian civil war. The reason behind this help is that Iraq considered Syria as an ally since the civil war in Syria started. However, before the Syrian civil war, the relationship between Iraq and Syria was tense, because following the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraq Following the collapse of Saddam Hussein, Iraq blamed Syria for harboring Al-Qaeda members along with previous Iraqi Ba'ath party members because they opposed the Maliki's regime. Both parties' members of Al-Qaeda and Ba'ath were providing fighters in Iraq with weapons and all means of war (Katzman and Humud).

The existence of Al-Qaeda and Ba'ath Iraqi party members in Syria prevented a mutual collaboration, though both countries, Syria and Iraq are considered important allies to Iran. On the other hand, Damascus and Baghdad became allies since they both faced the threat of Sunni Jihadists. Iraq's worries rose because Jihadists of both countries were working together, also the emergence of new strong Syrian government might threaten Iran's interests in the region that is why it cooperated with Russia to help the Assad regime and to prevent the establishment of a new government (Al Khoei 34).

By supporting the Assad regime, Iran created a situation from which it cannot easily extricate itself, because of that it depends on the policy of admonition of the Syrian protests as an attempt to take control over the protesters in 2011. Moreover, Tehran advised Assad to apply new reforms and to speak with the protesters and allow them limited participation in the government. But, Assad rejected these suggestions and chose to use force to depress and stop the opposition groups and protests (Terril 69).

The failure of Assad's plan made Iran provide Assad regime with military help and weapons, as it was able to persuade Shiites from Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight in Syria, Hezbollah also has been helpful, not only in fighting, but also in training the Syrian fighters. The policy of Tehran in Syria is different from its policy in Iraq which is based on national security. In Syria, in addition to national security, Iran's main aim was to become the dominant power in the Middle East. That is why Iran was afraid from removing Assad's regime and thus losing a significant Arab ally. Also, if Assad will be removed, Iran will be unable to offer help for Hezbollah, since Syria has border with Lebanon, and Damascus is the only way to provide Hezbollah with weapons, funds as well as advisors (Weddington89).

Hezbollah is used as security and revenge tool against any probable Israeli or American attack into Iran, as it is used to support the Palestinians. If Assad regime replaced by another new government, it would be unfeasible that the new government would help or be ally to Iran and thus to reinforce Hezbollah capacities against Israel. Therefore, being ally to Assad is a means of defending both Hezbollah and Iran's interests concerning Israel and Palestine since the Palestinian case is very important to Iran.

Iran considers the collapse of Assad as threat, beginning with the new government might be Sunni and then the Sunni-led regime could be eager to deal with other Arab countries over Iran and also USA. Also, the fall of Assad regime could lead to sectarian war in Syria as well as the spread of terrorism within the region (Weddigton 90). Iran's desire was to control and influence Syria to remain its ally. Tehran would not permit Syria to become an opponent, as it recognized that if the Syrian regime remains under Assad run, Assad would be debtor to Iran. But, Iran did not focus only on Assad staying at power; it wants the same Syrian system that existed before under Assad rule. Hokayem claims:

The organization (sic) of the Syrian state, based on assadiyyah, or kinship, made it impossible to remove him and his top lieutenants while keeping the

system in place...Most, importantly, powerful constituencies in Tehran saw Assad as an indispensable ally, and equated Syria's security with Iran's security. (72)

Tehran was afraid from a total shift of Syrian government. Therefore, Iran had been useful in assisting Syria to improve its economic situation. Despite its bad economic condition, Iran had provided Syria in 2015 by spending around \$6 to \$20 billion. It also aided by giving military assistance, funds, weapons, and supporters from Iraq and Hezbollah. Eventually, the Assad regime has become totally dependent on Iran. This situation may or may not be the desire of Iran, but Iran did need Assad in order to guarantee its dominance in the region (Weddington92).

At the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, the relationship between Syria and Saudi Arabia was uncertain, as well the interests of Saudi Arabia in Syria. Riyadh was against the fall of Assad government, but it would not be against Iran's loss one of its significant supporters. In other side, Saudi Arabia did strongly support the Status quo that it is why; it considered the fall of Assad government went against Saudi foreign policy (Terril 33).

Riyadh has considered Hezbollah as a terrorist group through the declaration of the GCC which accused Hezbollah of "carrying out 'hostile acts' in the six GCC member-states and engaging in campaigns of 'terror and incitement' in Syria, Iraq and Yemen" (Legrenzi and Lawson 31).

At the beginning, Riyadh did not show any reaction about the Syrian civil war. Its prudence was planned to avoid more revolutions in the Arab world and in particular within the Middle East region. The Saudi monarchy alerted Assad from using forces against the Syrian protesters and recalled its ambassador as the other monarchies did. Additionally, Saudi Arabia suggested on Assad to make reforms in Syria (Weddington 93). King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia stated, "What is happening in Syria is not acceptable for Saudi Arabia ...Syria should

think wisely before it is too late and issue and enact reforms that are not merely promises but actual reforms” (AlMarashi).

Saudi Arabia has changed its position because of the massive support of the Saudis to the Syrian protests (Hassan 19). Then, Saudi Arabia tried to pass an act against the Syrian regime in the Arab League aiming for its isolation and weakening the Assad government. At the beginning, Saudi Arabia did not announce clearly its desire to overthrow the Assad regime, but it wanted to help Syria. Later on, when Assad refused the Saudi suggestions, Saudi Arabia began supporting the protesters. Thus, the overthrow of Assad regime has become a priority to Saudi Arabia in order to restore its loss of Iraq in favor to Iran (Al Saud 39).

Though the fall of the Assad regime would not be the solution to the problematic situation in the Gulf as Riyadh wish, but it would be the first step to restore the balance of power in the Gulf region. Riyadh thought that if the new Syrian government become under Sunni rule, since the population of Syria is nearly three quarters Sunnis, then the new Syrian government would be more tending to support Saudi Arabia, as well preventing Iran from reinforcing and helping Hezbollah (Katzman).

The major aim of the Gulf monarchies is to return the power to the Sunni, but they differ on how to realize this aim. The two major states in the Gulf region, Riyadh and Doha, sustained different opposition parties. They were not unified to face their common enemy, Iran. As an example, Qatar supported the jihadists in Syria as an attempt to bring down Assad government (Katzman). While Saudi Arabia has been careful concerning whom it supports and is not eager for Assad to be substituted by jihadists whose intentions are in opposition to Saudi Arabia (Weddigton 97).

Initially, Riyadh supported the fall of Assad regime through using military forces, and then it changed its situation when it recognized that the west was not concerned in being

involved with military forces. Thus, the jihadists took control over Syria who Saudi Arabia opposes (Hassan 22). Despite financing different opponent groups, Saudi Arabia has stopped supporting the Islamic State particularly Jabht al-Nusra, a party belonged to al-Qaida, mostly because both parties, al-Qaida and Jabht al-Nusra, hate the Saudis. Saudi Arabia had also passed procedures to prevent the Saudis from contributing financially to these groups, as they declared them terrorist associations in 2014 (Gause 120).

Chapter three

Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in Yemen: A Proxy War?

Historically speaking, the most important region of strife between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been the Gulf. Riyadh maintains political ties with the monarchies of the Gulf while Iran has worked on mobilizing the local Arab Shi'ite communities to increase pressure on the Gulf countries through focusing attention and supporting the Shi'a minorities (Terill 14). Saudi Arabia and Iran's competition fostered into a proxy war; after the eruption of the Yemeni crisis a civil war between the Houthis who are Shiite movement that has been fighting Yemen's Sunni majority government and the Yemeni government led to external intervention in Yemen by Saudi Arabia and Iran who sided with different factions further intensifying tensions and driving Yemen to be the stage of one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

3.1 Historical Background of Yemen Civil Crisis

the Republic of Yemen that was established in May 1990 was divided into North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic) which was a military dictatorship established in 1962 following the overthrow of the Zaydi imamate and South Yemen the Marxist state (Democratic Republic of Yemen) that was established after the British departure in 1967. However, both were weak even after the unification because of the weak central government that suffered the opposition from many groups (Karakir 125).

Abdallah Saleh the president of north Yemen from 1978 became the ruler of RY in 1990 and ruled for 34 years till he was deposed in 2012 (Juneau 656). His policies towards the competing groups were prudent; in 1994, Yemen witnessed a civil war after the first multiparty elections which led to a rift between the south and the north who voted for two distinct parties (Arimatsu and Choudhury 20). This split led the southerners to ask for separation and clashes in the country which were controlled by the army of Saleh who won

the civil war that ended with the defeat of the south (Karakir 125). Saleh succeeded in keeping Yemen unified but the south was influenced negatively and became more marginalized in politics and economy.

During his reign, he forced disappearances and torture of the competing groups which led to the growth of the pressure on him and on the ruling party General People's Congress (GPC) and uprisings started in 2004 seeking for political reforms in Sa'ada led by the Houthis. The uprisings turned into violence and the government's armed fight against the Houthis lasted till 2010 when Saudi Arabia which has borders with Sa'ada intervened and started an air strikes to retaliate from the Houthis leading to the death and displacement of many civilians (Arimatsu and Choudhury 20).

Inspired by the overthrow of many leaders in the Middle East because of the Arab Spring, Yemenis went in demonstrations motivated by the opposition parties against President Saleh calling him to resign. The first response of Saleh aimed at placating the people by providing financial concession and promises. When he failed in easing them, security forces who caused several casualties intervened in addition to the organization of counter manifestations led by his loyalties on 18 March 2011 turning the uprising into an armed conflict and excessive violent by opening fire on the crowd and many people were killed and injured. In the aftermath of this event many officers retired and Saleh's position became more fragile so he reached a transitional agreement with the GCC representatives and the support of the US in which he abdicated to his vice Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi in November 2011 in return for a guarantee to his immunity from trial (Al Dosari and George 55). No one can deny that the motive of the so called Arab Spring was people's desire to take back their dignity, Yemen was the weakest country in the Gulf because of low living condition, corruption and the egoism of northern elites who dominated politics which provoked the marginalized people who revolted and asked for reforms .

Even during Hadi's rule the mess continued, he faced a lot of difficulties to handle the country's issues. His government was weak and Saleh had intervened and manipulated politics since he was still on the head of the leading political party in Yemen and Hadi could not stop him. The National Conference Dialogue failed in reaching agreement which derived the Houthis' armed force supported by the pro-Saleh Sunni group who were not satisfied with the transition to collaborate and advance to take control of the capital Sana'a by September 2014. The Houthis seized the presidential house, arrested and forced Hadi to resign, then he fled to Aden and declare it as temporary capital. The Houthis did not welcome this declaration and followed him to Aden where they clashed in March 2015; Hadi escaped to Riyadh and asked the GCC for international intervention to protect Yemen from the rebel Houthis. Saudi Arabia then led coalition and launched air strikes and naval blockade under "Operation Decisive Storm". The US backed the operation and confirmed Hadi as the legitimate president of Yemen (Karakir 127).

3.2 Saudi Arabia's Position and Reaction to the Yemen Civil War

Saudi leaders have always focused on Yemen because of the security challenges, the shared borders, the flow of migration from Yemen to Saudi Arabia, the economic ties and the relations with the tribes in Yemen. Thus, Riyadh intervened in Yemen (Hill and Nonneman 8). Although Yemen was weak state that has no rich resources, Saudi Arabia considered the patronage over Yemen a prestigious, alarmed by the crisis in Yemen, Saudi Arabia realized that the weakening of the central government in Yemen would strengthen the Houthis who are backed by Iran and the terrorist groups such as the AQAP. Presenting a threat to Saudi security, Saudi rulers supported president Hadi against the Houthis to maintain a strong central government through the direct intervention in 2015 (Rough 151). Even though Yemen was poor country that had nothing that would benefit Saudi Arabia, the latter offered its

assistance and economic aids for Yemen as a step that would facilitate the intervention in Yemen to widen its influence over the region.

After the national turmoil of the Arab Spring the number of the armed and unarmed Houthis increased to 120,000 and they extended their control over the country, they initiated direct air flights to Tehran which offered them port facilities. They also signed a profitable deal with the National Iranian Oil Company; Riyadh considered this deal as an evidence to prove the Iranian aids to Houthis. As it was stated before, the houthis with Saleh advanced towards Aden and Hadi fled to Riyadh asking for intervention. Ibn Salman responded and mounted Operation Decisive Storm on 26 March 2015. Saudis expected that the operation would weaken the Houthis, however the later also launched artillery and mortar attacks across the Saudi borders that's why Adel bin Ahmad al Jubeir, the Saudi ambassador to the US asked for assistance from president Obama (Hiro 281- 283). The operation was intended to restrain the Houthis seized territories and expelling them out of the capital, destroying and taking back the weapons from them because concern was that they use them in their fights against their competitor another objective was to act against the terrorist groups(Pradhan 74).

Hours after starting the attacks on Yemen, eight Arab countries backed the coalition: Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Sudan, and Morocco. The US, the UK and France provided diplomatic and logistic support. Defending the legitimate government in Yemen and saving Yemeni people from the Houthi aggression was the goal of the intervention. King Salman during the 26th Arab League Summit in Sharm al-Sheikh 2015 vowed: "The campaign will continue until it achieves its goals for the Yemeni people to enjoy security" (Al Arabiya News).The media described Yemen as a battleground for Saudis to combat the Houthis who were considered as threat for the region, the intervention was considered as a Sunni effort to curb the Shi'ite Houthis who caused sectarian division because of their alliance with Iran. From this argument the media portrayed the war in Yemen as a

sectarian one between Riyadh and Tehran (Darwich 7). However, Houthis' crawling and demonstrations started before Iran's support and even before the coalition; they walked in the streets calling for reforms and the removal of the dictatorship. And after the humanitarian crisis that was caused by the coalition forces intervention attacks, Saudi Arabia looked for justification to repudiate itself and found only the accusation of Houthis as an ally of Tehran driving the war to sectarian dimension.

Operation Decisive Storm had two phases; the first aimed to expel the fighter jets, anti-aircraft guns and ballistic missiles which are affiliated with the Houthis and the second started in 22 April 2015 titled Operation Renewal Hope, aimed to protect civilians, fight terrorism and engage in political discussion but continuing its airstrikes against the Houthis which led to the destruction of Yemen's infrastructure, economy and the death of many civilian. Nine months after the airstrikes the economy had been ruined; oil production was halted, exports stopped, the Yemeni port had been blocked which was a passage for the goods and aids driving to the widespread of hunger all in all the picture of Yemen was catastrophic . According to the UN rates, in December 2015 more than 2,700 civilians had been killed, more than 5,000 wounded, about two millions became refugees and 82 percent of the population were in need for humanitarian assistance (Hill 276).

3.3 Iran's Position and Reaction to the Yemen Civil War

As it was mentioned earlier, Iran after Khomeini's revolution emphasized and focused on Shi'a sect and had developed its relations with both state actors; that is to say the government and non-state actors; which includes non-governmental organizations or groups in the neighboring countries to widen its influence in the region. Iran supported Assad's regime in the civil war and fought Da'esh and ISIS. On the other hand, Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is a non-state actor, had been perceived as an ally to Iran and it also established ties with the non-state actors in Bahrain and Yemen. Iran interfered in countries where the

situation is unstable and where there is an opposite and unsatisfied internal groups in order to infiltrate in those states. In most of these countries, the discontented internal actors are depressed of their rulers and expressed their opinion either by violent or non-violent tools. Furthermore, Iran focused on the geographical location of the non-state actor to strengthen itself in the conflict with Saudi Arabia (Karakir 134).

3.3.1 Iran's Support of the Houthis

Iran's connection with Houthis is historical as the Houthis were inspired by the Islamic Revolution, Iran's supreme leader and his anti-American and anti-Saudi ideology. Many Yemeni Zaydi Shi'a clerics received their religious training in Qom, these connections have been seen only in the context of Yemen's war in order to involve Tehran in the mess of Yemen civil crisis. Iran's support was limited to training them and providing them with some expertise and advice in the military and fight square. From their part, the Houthis supported Iran's political stand in the region and showed their appreciation of Hizbollah who is an Iranian ally. This dual support and ties were not secret because the Houthis, after controlling Sana'a, made visits to Iran and were provided as it was discussed earlier with one year oil supply to provide Yemen with what it needs from oil in returns they open the doors for Iranian companies to investigate in energy, electricity and transportation that's why they started daily flights in 2015 (Al Dosari and George 62). The dual exchange of investigation derived the Gulf countries with their alliance US, to impeach the Houthis of being an ally to Saudi Arabia who fought together the coalition and that without Iran's backing, the Houthis would not held up more.

Iran's support to Houthis would strengthen its position against Saudi Arabia; Iran warned all the neighboring countries to not interfere in Yemen as any chaos in that country would influence the regional security of the entire region. It also proposed the rehabilitation of the government's relations with its public including the Shi'a minority. Tehran condemned

the Saudi intervention and alleged the Operation Decisive Storm as military aggression against Yemeni people and called for peace and stability in the country. It clearly expressed that it did not accept the coalition and sympathized the Houthis by insisting on their involvement in any future roadmap in Yemen (Pradhan 75).

As Saudi Arabia gathered some countries around her to organize the coalition, Iran also succeeded to increase pressure on Riyadh through its allies who also condemned the operation. The Syrian regime considered the coalition as heavy aggression, Hizbollah also rejected the coalition and declared that the Saudis intend on domination and subjugations in Yemen and they did not achieve any goal by the strikes. Iraq also called for a peaceful resolution and that there is no need for military intervention and that the problems of Yemenis are within Yemen (Pradhan 78).

Before the outbreak of 2015, Yemen as any country acquired some weapons and different Scud-B missiles and when the Houthis captured the capital they seized the weapons they found. In 2016, they fired what they named the Burkan short- range missiles into Saudi Arabia, the Burkan-2H was also fired in November 2019 and the Saudi coalition and US said that the Burkan-2H is manufactured in Iran. In January 2018, the United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen ended up with that Iran did not respect the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216 when it failed to ban the transfer to Houthi forces of Iranian made short-range ballistic missiles. In the summer of 2018, the United Nations Panel of Expert on Yemen reported to the UN that Iran is violating the arms embargo by providing Houthis with modern weapons. After the experts visited Saudi Arabia to investigate the debris of missiles fired by Houthis, it was found that the missiles had the same characteristics of the ones made in Iran and they were fabricated outside Yemen and shipped to Houthis. They also claimed that Iran's support of the Houthis escalated the conflict and posed a threat to US interests in the region (Sharp).

The claims of Saudi led coalition and Hadi's government about Iranian involvement in Yemen are exaggerated, Iranian support of Houthis is marginalized compared to the Saudi direct intervention, Iran's supply did not form their decision making and it was just limited to training them through Hizbollah. There is no proof for large scale supply of Iranians arms since the coalition gripped Yemen's naval and air spaces (Araf).

3.4. A Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen

The humanitarian situation in Yemen had heavily deteriorated; many people are in need of food, water and medicine. According to the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), there is around 14.4 Million who are food insecure, more than 2.5 million internally displaced, however this number of displaced people increased four times by 2015. After the escalation of the situation in March 2015, 82 percent of the population is in real need for humanitarian aids and protection. Also according to the UNOCHA there has been an increase in civilian casualties since the start of the airstrikes by the coalition. Yemen's economy is underdeveloped and the situation since the Arab Spring has been decadent; there is no clear water resources, bad nourishment, health problems, no access to schools, violence and killing of innocent people and women's abuse. These are the main issues that block the country and forbid it from developing. There was a glimmer of hope to a fresh spring for Yemenis after the expulsion of Saleh and the GCC initiatives, however, the mistrust between the evolved groups, the external intervention, violence and Hadi's house arrest represent an obstacle for the success of the transitional path of Yemen(Pradhan 87- 88).

After analyzing what is going on in Yemen, one concludes that both Riyadh and Tehran are seeking to achieve their goals of gaining more influence and control in the country; Saudi intervention, coalition and air strikes did not come with a middle resolution it could not restore Hadi's government nor could it stop the Houthi's advance or driving them

out of the capital. It is clear that Saudis are just serving their interests and protecting its national security. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia's support to the competing forces in Yemen made the situation more complicated and made the peace process and stability in Yemen related to their activities if they continue their conflict of influence and power Yemen will suffer and remain bloody.

Yemen crisis opened the door for a proxy war, this war is taking the form and dimension of competitive interventions by two regional stable powers which are Saudi Arabia and Iran through supporting fighting internal groups; Riyadh is adherent to the government of Hadi that is not recognized by Yemenis people and Tehran is backing the dissent Houthis who rebelled against the regime. These competing groups serve Iran and Saudi's interests without any direct confrontation between them leading to worsening violence in Yemen.

Conclusion

The geographical location of the Middle East is very important, being a transcontinental region that combines three continents, south East Asia, some countries in North Africa including Egypt and south east Europe specifically Turkey. The region also is a meeting point of major seas of the world which are Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Dead Sea, Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. In addition to the reach and various natural resources like oil, water resources and fossil fuels which made the region of the Middle East a central concern of the outstanding powers either those within the Middle East itself or the foreign ones.

Despite all of these various features of the Middle East which is supposed to unify and made the region the leader of the world, internal crisis and wars specifically; the Israeli colonization of Palestine, Iran- Iraq War, the Gulf War and the War on terror obstructed the process of development, led the region to be under external mandate and allowed world powers such as the US to interfere in the region's politics and build military basis there claiming the role of protecting the security of the countries. However, covertly they intended to take over and profited from the bliss of the Middle East.

The two greatest internal powers in the Middle East which are Iran and Saudi Arabia also were fighting to control and widen their influence over the region. However, their fight was not direct rather they select a battleground in another country that suffers crisis or split to show their muscles which can be referred to as the Proxy War. The aftermath of the Arab spring had illustrated the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh, After the Arab Spring, Tehran and Riyadh entered in a serious cold war because of their different interests in the Middle East and because of the different reaction to these events; Iran supported the regime of President Morsi in Egypt and inveighed the right of the Shiites minority in Bahrain, it was also the supporter of Assad. Iran also gained influence in some countries like Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and Lebanon. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia welcomed the idea of removing Morsi,

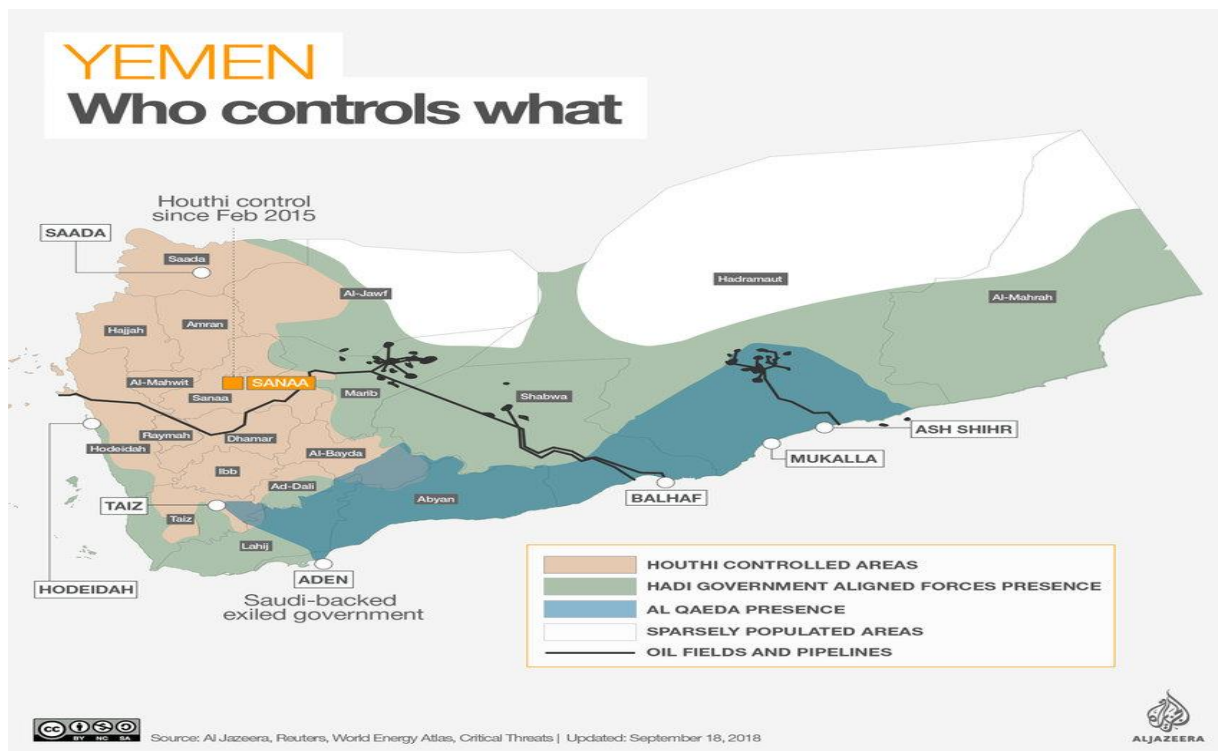
supported and provided aids to the Syrian opposition. Also it rejected the uprisings in Bahrain when it saw the Al Khalifa regime weakening. In addition, when Saudi Arabia attacked Yemen, the relation between both powers reached its climax and the civil war in Yemen is considered to be a proxy war between Riyadh and Tehran leading the region of the Middle East to be a bloody land in which people inside one country from the same territories are rising the different flags and slogans.

To give concrete example of the saying “When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers”, then the Yemen crisis was the best one to illustrate this. Yemen crisis started before 2012 when the south asked for separation from the north as they were marginalized, but they were defeated by President Saleh’s forces. As oppression aggravated, Yemenis insisted to get rid of the dictatorship of Saleh and went in peaceful demonstration calling for his removal and for political and economic reforms. However these manifestations turned to chaos, thus provoking Saudi Arabia and Iran to get involved in the Yemen civil war by supporting distinct groups. Their intervention, however, was not to solve Yemen’s problems rather to extend their control and influence over the country. Unfortunately, Yemen under this clash of interests could not succeed in improving its situation and instead it witnessed the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. It seems that Tehran and Riyadh are indignant on the division of Middle East countries and its independency and they do not appreciate the idea of autonomous countries or independent Gulf countries in order to remain the only prominent leaders. The Yemen crisis started as a domestic issue as any country would suffer from. However, when Saudi and Iran interfered and supported the fighting groups inside the country the war in Yemen became a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the solution to solve Yemen’s struggle is based on the withdrawal of Saudi Arabia and Iran from the Yemeni ground as the issue is between Yemenis themselves and the repartition of Yemen as it used to

be before because the first uprising started because of the unfair representation between north and south in addition the marginalization of the south.

Index

Map of Yemen Who Controls What



Source: Al Dosari and George. Yemen War: An Overview of the Armed Conflict and Role of Belligerents. Journal of Politics and Law. 2020. Web.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Dissertations

- Alhunaim, Ghadah. *“Conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran: An Examination of Critical Factors Inhibiting their Positive Roles in the Middle East.”* PhD thesis, Nova SouthernUniversity, 2014. Web.
- Altoreifi Adel. *“Understanding the Role of State Identity Foreign Policy Decision-Making: The Rise and Demise of Saudi-Iranian Rapprochement (1997-2009).”* PhD thesis, the London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012. Web.
- Everton, Adrienne B. *“Where in the World is the Middle East.”* Action Research Approach, Center of Middle Eastern Studies, n.d. Web.
- Grumet, Tali Rachel. *“New Middle East Cold War: Saudi Arabia and Iran’s Rivalry.”* Electronic Thesis and Dissertations, University of Denver, 2015. Web.
- Hampton, Kalesy. *“Doctrinally and Politically Opposed On the Battlefield in Syria: Iran and Saudi Arabia’s Cold War in the Middle East.”* MA thesis, Boston University, 2014. Web.
- Kobek, Maria, Luisa Parraguez, Mariana Gonzalez Rodriguez. *“The American Way of War: Afghanistan and Iraq.”* MA thesis, Mexico City Campus, Mexico, King’s College London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012. Web.
- Modigs, Ronny. *“United States Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the Cold War.”* MA thesis, U.S Army Command and General Staff College, 2003. Web.
- Myers, Harry L. *“The US Policy of Dual Containment toward Iran and Iraq in Theory and Practice.”* Research Report, Alabama Air War College, 1997. Web.
- Self, Burl. *“Geography 533/325 Middle East Fall 2015”.* Action Research, Department of Geography George Mason University, 2015. Web.

Weddigton, Derika. *“Rivalry in the Middle East: The History of Saudi Iranian Relations and its Implication on American Foreign Policy.”* MA Thesis, Missouri University, 2017. Web.

Articles

“Iran-Iraq War.” Web.

“The Gulf War.” Web.

Books

Abdo, Geneive. *The New Sectarianism: the Arab Uprising and the Rebirth of the Shi’a-Sunni Divide.* The Saban Center for Middle East Policy and Brookings, 2003. Web.

Al-khoei, Hayder. *Iraq: Sunni Resurgence Feeds Maliki’s Fears. The Regional Struggle for Syria.* Ed. Julien Barnes-Dacey and Daniel Levy. London: The European Council on Foreign Relations, 2013. Web.

Badeeb, Saeed M. *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982.* London: Centre of Arab Iranian Studies, 1993. Web.

Boudreault, Jody, Emma Naughton and Yasser Salaam. *U.S. Official Statements: Israel Settlements the Fourth Geneva Convention.* Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992. Web.

Hassan, Hassan. *The Gulf States: United against Iran, Divided over Islamists, in the Regional Struggle for Syria.* Ed. Julien Barnes-Dacey and Daniel Levy. London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2013. Web.

Ismael, Tarek Y. and Glenn E. Perry, eds. *The International Relations of the Contemporary Middle East.* Canada: Routledge, 2013. Web.

Joyce, Mariam. *Bahrain from the Twentieth Century to the Arab Spring.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Web.

Pradhan, Prasanta K. *Arab Spring and Sectarian Faultlines in West Asia: Bahrain, Yemen and Syria.* New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2017. Web.

Rossi, Lorenza. *Who Shall Guard the Guardians themselves? Analysis of U.S. Strategy in the Middle East since 1945*. European University Studies, 1998. Web.

Stepanova, Ekaterina. *Trends in Armed Conflicts: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Web.

Tyler, Mackenzie and Anthony M. Boone, eds. *Politics and Economics of the Middle East: Rivalry in the Middle East Saudi Arabia and Iran*. UK: Nova, 2012. Web.

Journal articles

Al-Saud, Al-Faisal Abdul Aziz. "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy." *Middle East Policy*, 20: 4 (2013): 37-44. Web.

Al Dosari, Abdullah and George Mary. "Yemen War: An Overview of the Armed Conflict And Role of Belligerents." *Journal of Politics and Law*. 13:1 (2020): 62-64. Web.

Cerioli, Luiza Gimenez. "Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain's and Yemen's Arab Spring." *Contexto International*, 40: 2 (2018): 302-303. Web.

Criekemans, David. "Iran Versus Saudi Arabia: Geopolitical Struggle in the Middle East." *Vereniging voor de Verenigde Naties*. 2019. Web.

Gause, F. George. "British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968-1973" *Review of International Studies*, 11: 4 (1985): 247-273. Web.

Hill, Ginny and Nonneman Gerd. "Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: Elite Politics, Street Protests and Regional Diplomacy." *Chatham House Briefing* (2011): 8-10. Web.

Hokayem, Emile. *Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War, Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*. New York University: Routledge, 2015. Web.

Juneeau, Thoumas. "Iran's Policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: A Limited Return on a Modest Investment." *International Affairs*. 92:3 (2016): 656-657. Web.

Karakir, Aşkar. "Conflict in Yemen: a Proxy War?" *Turkish Journal of TESAM Academy*. 5:4

(2018): 125-136. Web.

Khan, Raja Mouhamed. "A Perspective on the Evolving Geopolitics in the Middle East."

Margalla Pape. 2015. Web.

Matteo, Legrenzi and Fred H. Lawson. "Saudi Arabia Calls Out Hezbollah: Why Now?"

Middle East Policy, 2016. Web.

Rugh, William A. "Problems in Yemen, domestic and foreign. *Middle East Policy*."

Middle East Policy. 22:4(2015): 140- 142. Web.

Tuna, Tulin. "The Middle East Policy of America during the Cold War." *Turkey:*

International Journal of Human Resources Studies, 2.2 (2012): 85. Web.

Zulfqar, Saman. "Competing Interests of Major Powers in the Middle East: The Case Study of Syria and its Implications for Regional Stability". *Journal of International Affairs*,

23. 1 (2018): 121-122. Web.

Governmental and Institutional Reports

Arimatsu, Louise and Choudhury Mohbuba. *The Legal Classification of the Armed Conflict*

in Syria, Yemen and Libya. Chatham House. 2014. Web.

Terill, Andrew. "The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and the Future of Middle East Security

institution." *Strategic Studies Institute*. 2011. Web.

Congressional publications

Blanchard, Christopher M. "Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations." Washington D.C:

Congressional Research Service, 2010. Web.

Katzman, Kenneth. "Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy." Congressional Research

Service, 2017. Web.

Katzman, Kenneth and Carla E. Humud. "Iraq: Politics and Governance." Washington D.C:

Congressional Research Service, 2016. Web.

Sharp, Jeremy M. Yemen: “Civil War and Regional Intervention.” Congressional Research Service. 2019. Web.

Speeches

Noyes, James H. “New Perspectives on the Persian Gulf: Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia.” *U.S. Congress*. November 1973. Web

Secondary sources

Newspapers

Binrabaum, Michael. “Egypt Shows Signs of New Assertiveness Abroad.” *Washington Post*. 2011. Web.

Bush, G. W. “Text of Bush’s Speech at West Point.” *The New York Times*, 2002. Web.

Gibbons, Robert. “Saudi Says U.S. Policy Handing Iraq Over to Iran.” Assyrian International New Agency, 2005. Web.

“King Salman Vows to Continue Yemen Campaign.” *Al Arabiya News*, 2015. Web

Websites

Al-Marashi, Ibrahim. “Saudi’s Bold Political Gambit.” Aljazeera, 2015. Web.

Al-Marashi, Ibrahim. “Saudi’s Bold Political Gambit The reopening of Saudi embassies in Iraq reflects a fundamental reassessment of Riyadh’s foreign policy.” Aljazeera, 2015. Web.

Khan, Imran. “Why is Iraq so important to Iran?” Aljazeera English, 2014. Web

Reports

Gause, F. Gregory. “Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War.” Brookings. 2014. Web.

”Kagan, Kimberly, et al.” Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan.” A Report of Review of International Studies 1985. The American Enterprise Institute, n.d. Web.