CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

INTERSTATE RIVALS' INTERVENTION IN THIRD PARTY CIVIL WARS:
The comparative case of Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen (2004-2018)

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Supervisor: Marton Péter, Phd
Associate Professor

Palik Júlia

Budapest, 2020

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Who should be thanked for the research we conduct? I thought a lot about this question and identified three groups of people.

The first group entails individuals who lived through violence. And these individuals gave me their time, answered my questions, recalling events that majority of us can't comprehend. I learnt about compassion, strength, and humbleness. I learnt that humor matters. I learnt that the more I know, sometimes the less I understand. I can't list their names for obvious reasons. A 'thank you' will never be enough.

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This work is recommended for everyone who wants to understand how small changes can lead to big steps.

"The easy is elusive."
A friend from Yemen, 2018.

Abstract

How does interstate rivals' intervention in third-party civil conflicts impact conflict duration and outcome? To answer this research question, I apply a qualitative case-study research design and compare Saudi Arabia and Iran's military and non-military interventions in Yemen during the Saada wars (2004-2010) and in the post-Arab Spring internationalized civil war (2014-2018). Though research has shown that there is a correlation between the presence of interstate rivalry and intervention, sufficient explanations for *how* and *why* intervention by rivals influences civil wars are unavailable. Moreover, previous research suffers from two shortcomings: it focused on one type of intervention (military or non-military), ignoring the multiplicity of tools in rivals disposal during intervention, and it did not take into account proxies capacities to influence their sponsor's relations to each other. This dissertation applies a structured-focused comparative methodology and triangulates data from three sources: my own novel dataset construction (mediation and ceasefire dataset in Yemen), 14 elite interviews, and the review of primary and secondary sources. Findings show that two mechanisms contribute to protracted conflicts: rivals *conflict integration* and domestic conflict parties *instrumentalization of rivals*. These two simultaneous mechanisms create *networked interdependencies* that makes conflict settlement more difficult by influencing the commitment problem and information asymmetries between civil war belligerents. The results of the Yemeni case are applicable to a wider universe of cases, namely civil wars involving inter-state rivals interventions, such as in Libya, or Syria.

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, former US president Barack Obama referred to Yemen as an example of peaceful political transition for other Arab Nations (White House 2012). Today's Yemen is anything but peaceful. In April 2019, a UNDP-commissioned study concluded that the civil war has already reversed human development by 21 years (Moyer et. al 2019). In 2019, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) dataset recorded approximately 100,000 fatalities since 2015 (ACLED 2019). In total more than 250,000 people have been killed directly by the fighting and indirectly by the lack of access to food, medicine, and basic infrastructure. Sixty percent of the deaths are children under the age of five and 24 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (Moyer et. al 2019). The civil war has become internationalized in 2015, when the Saudi Arabia led Coalition (SlC) intervened in support of the Government of Yemen (GoY) to restore its rule and to reverse Ansar Allah's (Houthis)[1] territorial gains. The Kingdom considers Ansar Allah as an Iranian supported proxy. Saudi Arabia and Iran, the two most important regional strategic rivals considerably contribute to the prolongation of the conflict. Finding a negotiated solution to the conflict in Yemen is imperative but growing more complicated as both the number of external actors and internal parties increase. Due to space limitations and too keep the theoretical focus parsimonious, this dissertation does not focus on three additional conflicts that are present in Yemen: the conflict between the wider anti-Houthi coalition (e.g. between the Southern Transitional Council and the GoY), the conflict between the Houthis and other non-state actors, or the US-led counterterrorism campaign against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Rivals interventions into civil wars is not unique to Yemen. A brief look at the global trends of interventions shows that internationalized civil wars in fact have become more prevalent in the past decades: Since the end of the Cold War civil wars have replaced inter-state wars. The examination of civil wars as purely domestic phenomenon partly stems from the scholarly tradition of International Relations (IR) which places a great emphasis on the Westphalian model of nation states. According to the latest UCDP dataset on organized violence, 2018 saw 52 active state-based armed conflicts, 2 of them being interstate conflict, while the remaining 50 conflicts are within

[1] Ansar Allah and Houthis are used interchangeably.

states (ie civil wars). 18 of the 50 civil wars were internationalized, i.e.: external state troops were present in the civil war affected country supporting one or both conflict parties. Moreover, since 2013 more than 30% of all civil wars have experienced this type of internationalization, which never happened previously in the post-II World War era. (Petterson et. al 2019:2-3). Quantitative research on the impact of external involvement in civil wars has shown that internationalized civil wars are longer, more intense, and less likely to be resolved through negotiations (e.g. Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000; Gleditsch 2007; Gleditsch and Beardsley 2004; Salehyan 2007; Regan 2002). Figure 1. shows the different types of conflicts recorded by UCDP between 1946-2018.

Figure 1: Conflicts by type (1946-2018)
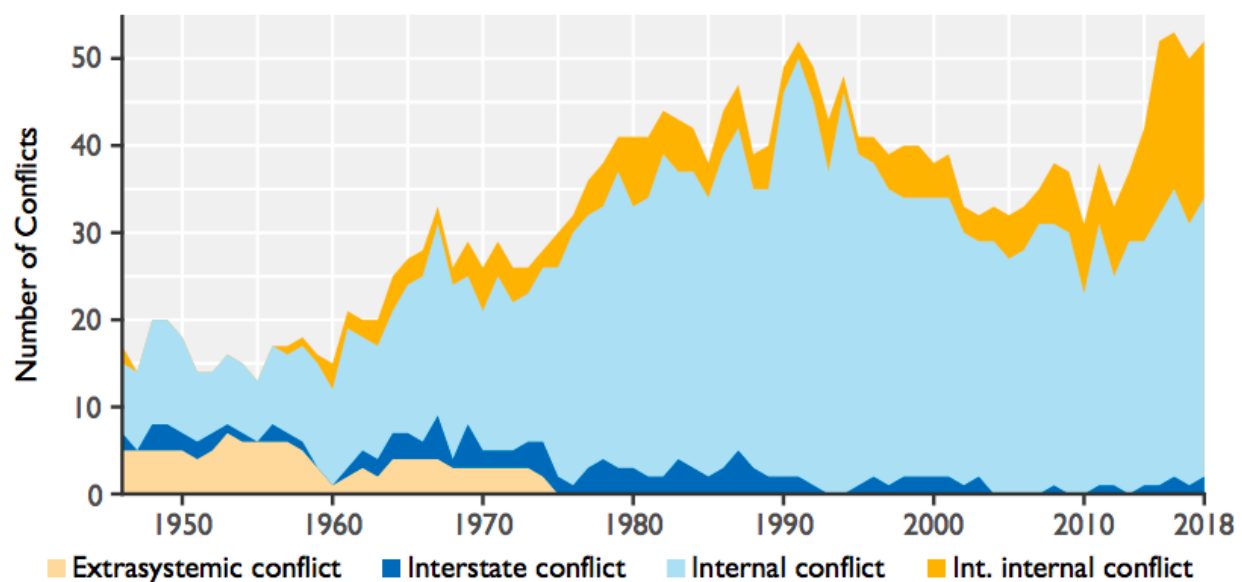
Source: Strand et al. 2019

Civil wars however are not "black-boxes" but they exhibit strong cross-border dynamics. The "closed polity approach" (Gleditsch 2007) is merely an illusion. If one takes a conflict cycle perspective, transnational ties are pertinent to every stage of a conflict: intrastate wars in fact rarely if ever confined within the boundaries of a single state. Onset, duration, and termination are influenced by and impact external actors. As Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham (2011) argues, "one cannot fully understand civil conflicts without noting the pervasiveness of external support for rebels, and one cannot fully understand international conflict without an appreciation of the incentives to undermine rivals through indirect means" (2011:710). Multiple external stakeholders

have different interests in civil war outcomes. Some engage for benevolent, others for more benign intentions. States, individuals, regional and international organizations, civil society, and non-governmental organizations, although to a varying extent, but shape civil war dynamics. These inextricable links create challenges for IR scholars in general and for conflict scholars in particular: How to account for the various "faces" or "levels of analysis" (Walt 1959) when one seek to make theoretically informed explanations of various stages (onset, duration, termination) of civil wars?

This dissertation focuses on strategic rivals' intervention into civil wars in third-party countries.[2] The dissertation asks the following research questions: How does intervention by interstate rivals impact the bargaining problem and the potential solutions to it between civil war belligerents in a third country? More specifically, how does conflict between third parties impact credible commitment and information asymmetries between the civil war belligerents in another state (1) and how does interstate rivalry in a state's geopolitical surroundings shape its conflict and settlement dynamics (2)? Civil war research thus far has concentrated on how intrastate conflicts influence regional and international dynamics, such as refugee flows, spatial contagion, and diseases. In this dissertation I turn the tables and focus on the impact of intervention by strategic rivals on civil war dynamics.

This dissertation has four goals relating to theory, methods, data, and policy. First, I seek to develop an integrative theoretical framework that focuses on inter-actor dynamics by highlighting those links spatiotemporal context. By doing so, my aim is to advance our current knowledge on civil wars by focusing on transnational mechanisms over time. I believe that this line of inquiry is of utmost importance if we seek to overcome the limitations resulting from focusing on aggregate effects and macro correlations. Secondly and thirdly, this project utilizes a unique 9-month long data collection effort (Yemen country profile of the global ceasefire dataset 1989-2018) in a qualitative manner. Fourth, this dissertation is meant to provide input not only for the academic audience, but also for policymakers. I do not provide policy recommendations but identify areas of interest. I do so by providing a more real-life examination of potential political and security risks not just in the onset, but also when civil wars come to an end. In line with previous research

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[2] This phenomenon is called by many names: proxy wars, balancing interventions (Findley and Teo 2006) or dual-sided interventions (Hironaka 2005).

(e.g.: Akcinaroglu & Radziszewski 2005), I argue that interventions involving rivals are qualitatively different than the ones without rivals. This means that conflict management actors should not only focus on and engage with the government and non-state actors (primary conflict actors) in the process of settlement but simultaneously focus on the presence or absence of external rivals.

The dissertation is organized as follows. First, I provide an overview of the research design by focusing on the data, methods, ethical considerations, and limitations of this project. Chapter two reviews the literature on strategic rivalry, third-party intervention into civil wars (both military and non-military), transnational dimensions of civil wars, and rebel governance. Chapter three discusses the analytical and theoretical framework. Chapter four provides a backgrounder on the Saudi-Iranian strategic rivalry. Chapter five introduces the case of Yemen, the Saada wars, and the internationalized civil war. Chapter six contains the structured focused comparison (empirical analysis). Chapter seven concludes.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter discusses the research design, methodology, and the data sources of this dissertation. During the empirical investigation, I addressed both methodological and data limitations, and the potential ways to mitigate these problems. Before turning into a more elaborate discussion on the methods and data, I address epistemological and ontological questions, and the broader philosophical underpinnings of the present research. The ontological base of research refers to the question of *what* we study, whereas epistemology refers to the question of *how* we study certain phenomenon. Ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions are interconnected. A discussion on the researcher's epistemological standpoint is quintessential because it shows the researchers' understanding and approach to social reality and knowledge (Keating & Della Porta 2008:2).

In social sciences in general, and particularly in International Relations (IR), three key authors are cited when discussing the meta-theoretical aspects of research: Kuhn (1962), Lakatos (1970), and Popper (1959). I take a Popperian approach to knowledge and theory development. Contrary to

the "paradigm" and "scientific research program" schools[3] advocated by Kuhn and Lakatos, Popper argues that paradigm mentalities limit scholars' curiosity. His views are in stark contrast to the Kuhnian normal science approach which understands progress as incremental developments within the confines of one dominant theoretical framework.[4] By developing the falsificationist methodology, Popper advocates for a critical approach to existing and dominant theories. He argues that "according to my proposal, what characterizes the empirical method is its manner of exposing to falsification, in every conceivable way, the system to be tested. Its aim is not to save the lives of untenable systems but, on the contrary, to select the one which is by comparison the fittest, by exposing them all to the fiercest struggle for survival "(Popper 1959:20). Accordingly, when theories are falsified, researchers can respond by refining the existing theory or by rejecting it in favor of a rival one. This evolution of knowledge calls for methodological individualism and theoretical pluralism.[5] He opposed historians attempt to develop general laws covering the whole of human history, because unlike in natural sciences, hypotheses on social reality cannot be subject to critical testing (1959:3). As the literature review and analytical framework sections will show, I apply theoretical pluralism to provide plausible explanations for such complex phenomenon as protracted civil wars. This metatheoretical discussion then naturally leads us to the questions of ontologies and epistemologies.

Using Keating and Della Porta's (2008) classification, I take a post-positivist approach to research. This approach in most parts resembles the classic positivist understanding of social sciences but relaxes some of its assumptions. In term of ontologies, it argues that social reality does exist, but it uses a critical realist approach to its study. I argue that reality is external to the researcher (or

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[3] In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Kuhn argued that scientific disciplines are based on a paradigm. A paradigm defines the subject to be studied (what question), the reason to study that question (hypothesis development), and how to study (methods). An important feature of a paradigm is that it is accepted by the whole scientific community of a certain discipline. Paradigms allow for the accumulation of knowledge in normal times. Change in paradigms is the result of scientific revolutions. (Kuhn 1962). Lakatos's *Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes* (1986) stands in-between the Kuhnian and Popperian methods. Lakatos argued that a "theory" is the result of incremental and gradual changes of a common hard core theory. This collection of theories constitute a research program. Members of a research program shield the core of the theory from falsification with auxiliary hypotheses. Scientific research programs for Lakatos are either progressive (theoretically and/or empirically) or degenerating.
[4] For a comprehensive overview of the different metatheoretical arguments and the key differences between Kuhn, Lakatos, and Popper, read Walker, T. (2010)
[5] Popper also offers guidance for social scientists in his work from 1945, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and more explicitly in his 1994 article the *Poverty of Historicism*.

objective), but it is not easy to capture, and it has to be interpreted. In epistemological questions, this school of thought argues that the relationship between the researcher and his/her research object is not independent but influenced by the researcher's deductive procedures. The forms of knowledge research can take is closer to probabilistic laws than natural (or causal) laws. This also means that as reality is only imperfectly knowable, a certain degree of uncertainty has to be acknowledged and accepted (Keating & Della Porta 2008:23). This epistemological and ontological approach implies that such probabilistic laws can be discovered in two ways: inductively, i.e. "deriving generalizations of specific observations in a large number of cases" (Keating & Della Porta 2008:26) or deductively, in which "the study of social reality utilizes the conceptual framework, techniques of observation and measurement, instruments of mathematical analysis and procedures of inference of the natural sciences" (Keating & Della Porta 2008:26 citing Corbetta 2003:13). I apply a mixture of deductive and inductive techniques in the empirical analysis.

In sum, the meta-theoretical foundations of this research can be traced back to the Popperian understanding of science. In terms of ontologies and epistemologies it rests on a post-positivist approach which is accompanied by qualitative case-study methodology. The case study methodology relies on a combination of deductive and inductive logic. This means that the data gathering process is structured by existing theories of interstate rivalry, proxy wars, third-party intervention, and the micro-level literature of civil war studies (deductive level). At the same time, the interpretation of data and the resulting causal inferences were more flexible (inductive level), since my goal was both to refine existing theories of interstate rivalry and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the transnational dynamics of civil wars. The inductive part of the dissertation developed from my own data collection, interviews, and document reviews. While throughout the dissertation I placed a special emphasis on counterfactuals, explicitly addressed endogeneity, equifinality[6], and multicollierality problems, one should maintain a healthy skepticism to the findings of this work.

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[6] Equifinality is defined as "the outcome of interest may be the result of alternative causal pathways" (Bennett and George 2005:161)

1.2. Methodology

The most important criterion for selecting a research method is to find a method that is appropriate for answering the research question(s). To reiterate, this dissertation asks the following research questions: *How does intervention by interstate rivals impact the bargaining problem and the potential solutions to it between civil war belligerents in a third country? More specifically, how does conflict between third parties impact credible commitment and information asymmetries between the civil war belligerents in another state (1) and how does interstate rivalry in a state's geopolitical surroundings shape its conflict and settlement dynamics (2)?* This dissertation develops a theory of how strategic interstate rivalry impacts the length, intensity and settlement of civil wars in other states. As I am interested in causal processes and finding answers to *how* a particular outcome (in this case civil war duration, and termination) occurs, rather than *how frequently* it takes place, I apply a qualitative research design and select process tracing as the within-case method.[7] Qualitative methods take an *effects-of-causes* logic and often rely on backward logic. This means that first I look at the outcome/dependent variable of interest (civil war duration, intensity, conflict management) and then examine certain causes and/or causal pathways that led to the outcome of interest.

Qualitative case research has been widely criticized for being unscientific, non-generalizable, and closer to journalists' work.[8] One of the most frequently cited shortcomings of the case study approach concerns external validity or representativeness (King, Keohane, & Verba 1994: 34). Case studies suffer from lower external validity compared to large-N statistical studies, they are often difficult to replicate, and they do not provide a proper design to study causal effects, i.e. how much does the independent variable impact the outcome of interest. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that case study research allows researchers to make only contingent generalizations. At the same time, the case study approach excels in multiple dimensions: These types of inquiries are particularly well-fitted to analyze complex causal relations and excel in maximizing concept

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[7] Put it in a different way, "Case study researchers are more interested in finding the conditions under which specified outcomes occur, and the mechanisms through which they occur, rather than uncovering the frequency with which those conditions and their outcomes arise." (George and Bennett 2004:31)

[8] Maoz (2002) for example argues that "Case studies have become (…) a synonym for free-form research where everything goes and the author does not feel compelled to spell out how he or she intends to do the research, (…) how data are processed and analyzed… Yet, at the end of the story, we often find sweeping generalizations and 'lessons' derived from this case" (Maoz 2002:164-5, quoted in Gerring 2007:6).

validity and internal validity. Case studies provide a "thick description" of a certain phenomenon and help to address the problem of endogeneity by establishing a sequence of events.[9] Case-studies provide valuable insights into historical events, aid the development of concept and hypotheses, and the understanding of causal mechanisms and processes (George and Bennett 2004: 19-22).

While qualitative research has good and bad examples, I argue that "bad" qualitative research is the result of non-transparent and non-reflexive research processes rather than being a problematic method. To address these concerns, I adopt the following techniques to ensure rigor throughout the research and to facilitate both the falsifiability and replicability of my findings: data triangulation, reflexivity, multiple coding, and respondent validation. This approach mirrors King, Keohane, and Verba's (1994; henceforth referred to as KKV) seminal work on research design. The KKV framework for qualitative research is adopted from the quantitative tradition and relies on the logic of regression analysis. Their contribution, although widely criticized (McKeown 1999; Brady & Collier 2004; George & Bennett 2005) applies a positivist understanding of qualitative research (in contrast to other methods such as ethnography or grounded theory approaches).[10] Although the positivist method is most often associated with large-N quantitative statistical analysis, this categorization is misleading. Positivists utilize non-quantitative methods such as case studies, structured focused comparison, and interview data and they rely on the same logic – or epistemological framework - used by quantitative scholars. As such, the positivist approach is better understood as an epistemological and ontological understanding of the social reality, rather than a school which prescribes a certain method to study the phenomenon of interest. Based on this long-standing divide between the qualitative and quantitative traditions, one specific goal of this project is to encourage cross-fertilization and produce a qualitative analysis that future quantitative research can benefit from.

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[9] In quantitative research one possible way to address endogeneity bias is to apply an instrumental variable (IV) approach. This method involves finding and exogenous variable (the instrument) that impacts Y only through the causal variable X.

[10] Mahoney and Goertz (2006) show that quantitative and qualitative researchers are "two alternative cultures. Each has its own values, beliefs, and norms. Yet both qualitative and quantitative research is aimed at producing valid descriptive and causal inferences." (Mahoney & Goertz 2006:228-229).

1.2.1. Case study approach and case selection

The case study approach denotes a *research design* within which a range of different methods may apply. Case-study approach is defined as "the intensive (quantitative or qualitative) analysis of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases), where the researcher's goal is to understand a larger class of similar units (a population of cases)" (Seawright & Gerring 2006:296). Case in this dissertation is defined as "an instance of a class of events (a phenomenon of scientific interest) with the aim of developing theory (generic knowledge) regarding the causes of similarities or differences among instances (cases) of that class of events" (George & Bennett 2005: 17-18).[11] As this project illustrates, case study approach allows researchers to uncover the impact of strategic rivals' intervention in third-party civil wars in a more nuanced manner than quantitative studies would be able to do so.[12]

In this dissertation I am primarily concerned with causal inference, rather than predictive ones. As noted before, inferences rest on a backward induction logic. Here, I start with the case and the outcome and examining the causes, adopting a "causes-of-effects" (Mahoney & Goertz 2006:230) approach to explanation. Accordingly, my goal is not to general law-like statements, rather to explain a particular population of cases (civil wars that experience intervention by strategic rivals). The question of case selection ultimately concerns the cross-case characteristics of the case, i.e.: "how the case fits into the theoretically specified population?" (Seawright & Gerring 2006:296). Case selection should be guided by the intention to maximize leverage for drawing inferences that are theoretically and/or substantially important. In short, the validity of causal inferences depends on the selection of cases (Blatter & Haverland 2012:25). Multiple case-selection typologies have been developed in the past decades (e.g. see: Mill 1843; Lijphart 1971; Eckstein 1975; Gerring 2007; Seawright & Gerring 2008; and the most recent ones by Blatter & Haverland 2012). In the quantitative tradition, random selection is typically the best method to reduce the risk of endogeneity and selection bias (Collier 1995:462). At the same time, in this dissertation, random

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[11] Gerring (2007) defines a case as "a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time. The type of phenomenon that an inference attempts to explain" (Gerring 2007:19).

[12] Mcadam, Tarrow, and Tilly's (2001) takes a similar "clarifying approach" by identifying causal mechanisms and processes to open up the black box of contentious politics. Sambanis (2004) also shows that comparative case-study research helps to expand and refine existing models of civil wars.

selection of a case would have resulted in a sample that predominantly includes no-war and no-rivalry intervention cases, given the rare occurrence of both civil wars and interstate rivalries.

Seawright and Gerring (2008:295) argue that the method of case study selection should be *purposive* rather than random. This is necessary in order to select cases that are representative of the larger population. Defining a population means delimiting the relevance of the study empirically and theoretically. Thus, to circumvent the problems posed by random selection, I chose a case based on the dependent variable, i.e.: country experiencing both civil war and external involvement by strategic rivals. These two scope conditions then inform the generalizability of the study and define the universe of cases where this case study belongs (i.e.: civil wars experiencing intervention by strategic rivals). Yet, it is important to highlight that some researchers (Geddes 1990; Collier & Mahoney 1996) warn against selecting cases on the dependent variable. They argue that this type of case selection results in biased conclusions and thus findings are only relevant for the analyzed case. I employ a within case comparison strategy to mitigate the potential problems arising from selecting on the dependent variable (Collier and Mahoney 1996:89-90). This means that I compare two civil wars within the same country. The first conflict (2004-2010) did not experience intervention by both members of the strategic rival pair, only by one actor (Saudi Arabia). The second conflict (2014-) however experienced intervention by both members of the interstate rival dyad. The within-case comparison allows me to hold most independent variables constant except for the dependent variable of interest, i.e.: intervention by interstate rivals.

1.3. Process tracing

As the goal is to uncover causal mechanisms, I apply process tracing, as a within-case methodology. Bennett and George (2005) define process tracing as it "attempts to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome or the dependent variable" (Bennett and George 2005:206). [13] KKV (1994:86) argues that "we can define a causal effect without understanding all the causal mechanisms involved, but we cannot identify causal mechanisms without defining the concept of

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[13] Collier define process tracing as "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator " (Collier 2011:823).

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causal effect." I adopt the definition of causal mechanisms from Checkel, according to whom causal mechanism is "the pathway or process by which an effect is produced, or a purpose is accomplished" (2013:10, citing Gerring 2007b:178). This definition highlights that mechanisms are "invisible". But this doesn't mean that they cannot be measured. What scholars can measure are the *observable implications* of mechanisms. To illustrate this rather abstract discussion, take Stephan Hamberg's (2013) study on the demobilization of child soldiers by the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). One mechanism he tests is whether the "naming and shaming" practices of transnational human rights networks are able to induce behavioral change within rebel groups. The observable/testable implications of this mechanisms requires us to examine whether human rights organizations have consistently shamed the SPLA/M, or whether these transnational actors called for material sanctions targeting the SPLA/M. (Hamberg 2013: 157). In short, when searching for observable implications of a certain mechanism, we have to find the manifestations (similar to indicators) or the phenomenon of interest.

Process tracing, when properly executed, focuses on careful description and highlights the role of sequencing independent, dependent, and intervening variables. Thick description of events, although might seem only providing a historical narrative of the case, is a "crucial building block in analyzing the processes being studied" (Collier 2011:823). The main difference between process tracing and statistical analysis is that process tracing focuses on sequential processes within a case, not on correlations of data across cases. The mechanism-focused approach to research helps in developing counterfactual arguments. Counterfactuals are of particular importance in case-study research because by examining the validity of alternative explanations and pathways, one's findings can be further validated.[14]

Process tracing takes historical processes into account. Ludvig (2015) notes that "One common form of process tracing focuses on long-term causes to explain particular outcomes. In such cases, researchers seek to account for an outcome of intrinsic or theoretical interest by looking not just at

[14] Fearon (1991) argues that "analysts with few cases and many variables are compelled to resort to counterfactual argument by a statistical principle; and counterfactuals also appear to play a key role in the assumptions that justify large-N regression analysis, when the data employed is quasi-, or nonexperimental. The difference between regression and the counterfactual strategy is not that one relies on counterfactuals while the other does not. Rather, the strategies differ in the way that each employs counterfactuals and in the way that each evaluates support for a causal hypothesis" (1991:170).

the immediate circumstances that triggered the outcome, be it a revolution, a civil war, or the initiation of a transition towards democracy, but at the longer-term process that over time gave rise to that outcome" (Ludvig 2015:4). This long-term approach takes path dependence and critical junctures seriously. By examining a rather long period, from 1989 to 2018, I am able to account for intervening variables and otherwise hidden critical junctures, such as changes in strategic rivals relations to the US or the impact of the unification of Yemen on its propensity to experience civil war and third-party intervention. The longer-time frame also allows me to adequately reflect on the dynamic nature of civil wars and interstate rivalries, a condition that is often overlooked in empirical studies (Cederman & Vogt 2017; Dreyer 2010). Lastly, while researching mechanisms in the context of a civil war can be a challenging endeavor due to data limitations, I am aimed at demonstrating that causal mechanisms and process tracing can help us to specify when, why, and how interventions by interstate rivals may play a causal role in the initiation, perpetuation, and termination of civil wars.

1.4. Data sources

This section provides background information on the three types of sources that informed my causal inferences. Before detailing the empirical foundations of this study, a brief discussion is in order about the international standards of transparency and rigor and this dissertation's stand on these issues.

In 2012 the American Political Science Association's (APSA) Ethics Guide have undergone substantial revisions and resulted in the Data Access and Research Transparency, or DART Statement. DART is aimed at improving research quality and transparency by imposing upon authors three requirements: to provide data access, to specify the analytic procedures upon which their published claims rely (analytic transparency), and to provide references to/for all pre-existing datasets used (production transparency) (DA-RT 2014). This dissertation explicitly aims to adhere to these standards. I do so by uploading the dataset I created in an online repository that is open access, I make the interview guide public, and reference every source I use. Transparency about how my causal inferences have been generated allows my findings to be properly interpreted, evaluated, and to replicate by other scholars. To ensure the validity of my causal inferences I place a special emphasis on data triangulation, ie. I use three distinct sources of data during the empirical

analysis. With triangulations I "cross-check the causal inferences derived from my process tracing by drawing upon distinct data streams" (Checkel 2013:23). Data comes from three sources: the development of a mediation and ceasefire dataset (1), semi-structured in-depth elite-interviews (2), and document reviews (3).

First, I developed a unique dataset on all ceasefires and mediation efforts by third parties in Yemen between 1989 and 2018. Why ceasefires and mediation? As I argued in the introduction, external actors' intervention can take many forms, both military (e.g.: troop provision) and non-military (mediation). Different types of interventions can alter civil war belligerents' capabilities differently. Yet, third-party intervention does not take place in isolation. It is always motivated by influencing the outcome of the conflict, for example by being a rebel-biased mediator (Svensson 2009). To my knowledge, this dataset is the first comprehensive dataset on such non-military third-party efforts in Yemen.[15] This dataset will be accompanied by using existing UCDP datasets on third party military interventions, and external support for rebel groups. The ceasefire dataset is part of the Global Ceasefire Dataset developed by PRIO and ETH Zurich. The project receives funding from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. This dataset is compatible with other UCDP conflict data. Coding is based on using local and international news sources in English language via Factiva. The Yemen ceasefire dataset coding took place between December 2018 and June 2019 and included more than 13.200 articles to code. The coded unit of observation was a directed ceasefire declaration, i.e.: each actor declaring a ceasefire towards one addressee constitutes one observation. 26 variables have been coded for each ceasefire. Intercoder reliability - which is aimed at ensuring data objectivity and validity - has been ensured by applying a percent agreement index. For further information on the search string for articles, the codebook, and the coding convention see the Appendix.

While quantified data on various forms of interventions (both military and non-military) is of utmost importance for the dissertation, I supplemented this data with interviews and content analysis of primary and secondary sources. I conducted 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews between August 2017 and March 2019 with individuals identified as key actors with insights about

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[15] For a more elaborate discussion on the relevance of mediation and ceasefires in civil war dynamics, see the empirical analysis.

the various manifestations (e.g.: negotiations and humanitarian aid provision) of the impact of interstate rivalry on civil war processes. Interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours and were conducted either via Skype or in person. Interviews were based on a 12 point interview guide based on Bryman & Bell blueprint (Bryman & Bell 2016: 200-202).[16] The interview guide focused on eliciting participants' perception of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, its impact - or the lack thereof - on peace negotiations, agreement implementation, and humanitarian aid provision.

Interviewees were identified and contacted by using a purposive or snow-ball sampling technique. Snowball sampling refers to the process of seeking additional contacts from one's interviewees. While this method makes identification processes easier, it can result in a biased population. This also skewed my sample towards individuals who were having experiences in war-time Yemen and not in peaceful settings. I explicitly address concerns of bias in the analysis by considering alternative explanations. I contacted 23 individuals for interviews, the non-response rate was 3, 6 individuals declined their participation, and 14 people agreed to be interviewed. In some cases, I contacted potential participants via email without having made any previous personal connection. In these cases, I referred to my position as a researcher at Corvinus University Budapest and at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), and I included a short description of the project as well as a contact list to my supervisor and program manager. These interviews belong to the category of elite interviews, a category that is rarely defined explicitly. By elites I do not refer to some specific hierarchical position between the researcher and interviewee, but "the term indicates a person who is chosen by name or position for a particular reason, rather than randomly or anonymously" (Hochschild 2009:1). Interviews were aimed at uncovering how different actors experience, understand, and interpret the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in Yemen. I selected interviewees from different backgrounds and roles in the Yemeni conflict to be able understand how rivalry might impact the different dimensions of the conflict, such as the humanitarian, military, and mediation field. I conducted interviews in a positivist manner, (in contrast to the reflexive/interpretivist approach) where my goal was to extract information regarding the impact and manifestation of interstate rivalry in a civil conflict. I interviewed two mediator practitioners from the UN (one working at a track I and the other working at a track II level), the Yemen country director of Save the Children, the Yemeni country officer of Doctors Without Borders (MSF), a female representative of the

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[16] For the interview guide see the Appendix.

Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group for the UN, one representative of the International Youth Council in Yemen (IYCY), a former ministry official from Yemen, and Yemeni locals.

The third data source for this dissertation comes from the analysis of key primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included all relevant UN Security Council Resolution, official statements of government actors, reports and white papers of key ministries. Secondary sources included conflict analysis reports by such research institutions as the Saana Center, Crisis Group, Rand Corporation, and Chatham House amongst others. I also used local English language newspapers. In case of Saudi Arabia these papers were: Arab News, Saudi Gazette, Riyadh Daily. In case of Iran I consulted Tehran Times and Iran Daily, whereas in case of Yemen I used Yemen Observer, Yemen Post, Almasdar Online, and Yemen Times. In qualitative social science research, content analysis is a useful way to analyze textual material to draw out and synthesize data to gain a broader meaning about a particular subject (Bowen 2009). Well executed qualitative content analysis is systematic, flexible, and results in data reduction. Bowen notes that document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" in which data (is) examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (2009: 27). This involves close reading of text to extract themes, quotes, phrases and passages of text that can be organized around key themes, subjects, categories and examples of practices/behaviors/action that shed light of a research question or theme (Labuschagne 2003).

1.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical issues during data collection arose during the semi-structured interviews. To adhere to the highest possible scientific standards, while designing and planning my interviews, I have relied on the European Commission's 2018 *Ethics in Social Science and Humanities* guide. Once interviews were finished and coded, I consulted the guide again to ensure the procedural appropriateness of my interviews. In accordance with the guide, I focused on procedural and practical ethics. While I did not interact with conflict-affected or vulnerable populations, I conducted interviews with experts and two high-level policymakers on sensitive topic, i.e.: a civil war that is defined by the UN as the "world's worst humanitarian crisis." I sought and obtained informed consent from every participant. All interviews have been anonymized and led by the "do no harm principle." While replicability and publicity are central elements of this research, interview transcripts and notes are

available only upon request to protect the identity of interviewees.[17] It is also important to highlight, that as this research examines policy processes as they unfold in real time, i.e. the civil war in Yemen and the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran are ongoing and dynamic processes, particular methodological and ethical challenges has been encountered. For example, when I asked interviewees about the conditions attached to and distribution of humanitarian aid by the Saudi coalition, participants often declined to answer. I address these shortcomings and perform the empirical analysis by constantly being reflexive.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

"No single factor and no single level of analysis provides a complete explanation for the causes of war. As a result, theories of war must necessarily combine causal variables from different levels of analysis" (Levy 2007:22).

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature that concerns various aspects of interstate rivals, their propensity and reasons to intervene, and the impacts of third-party intervention in civil wars. Arguments derived from these strands of literature are informing my analytical framework. First, I begin by a literature review on the macro level perspectives of studying rivals and then focus on the micro level literature on third party intervention in civil wars. More specifically, I review large-N studies' findings from the interstate rivalries literature, and research on two different types of external intervention into civil wars: external military support for conflict actors and diplomatic interventions. Although this dissertation rests on qualitative methods, by taking quantitative models' findings as a starting point, I apply an indirect mixed-method or nested analysis framework. (Lieberman 2005; Sambanis 2004). As Checkel (2010) argues "statistical methods play a more indirect, but still important role: establishing that there is a relation in the first place that requires explanation"(2010:19). The literature matrix and the key examples of the theories are presented in Table 1.

[17] This restriction is in line with the DART principles. 6.4 point in the DART statement states that " Scholars may be exempted from Data Access and Production Transparency in order to (A) address well-founded privacy and confidentiality concerns, including abiding by relevant human subjects regulation; and/or (B) comply with relevant and applicable laws, including copyright. Decisions to withhold data and a full account of the procedures used to collect or generate them should be made in good faith and on reasonable grounds. Researchers must, however, exercise appropriate restraint in making claims as to the confidential nature of their sources and resolve all reasonable doubts in favor of full disclosure." https://www.dartstatement.org/2012-apsa-ethics-guide-changes

Table 1.: Literature matrix

Level of analysis	Theories	Example
Systemic level	System polarity and rebellion	Kalyvas & Balcells 2010; Hironaka 2005; Wimmer and Min 2006
International/Inter-state	Strategic rivalries	Thompson 2015; Colaresi et al. 2008
	Proxy wars	Byman et al. 2001, Mumford 2013; Salehyan 2010
National/Civil war level	Military interventions in civil wars	Salehyan & Gleditsch 2006; Gleditsch 2007
	Diplomatic interventions in civil wars	Regan 2002; Svensson 2007
	Rebel Governance	Olson 1993; Metelits 2009; Kasfir 2005; Mampilly 2011; Weinstein 2006; Huang 2012

In order to clarify the scope conditions of this dissertation, a brief discussion on the topics that are not covered is in place. This study does not discuss the emergence or the termination of interstate rivalries. For a non-exhaustive literature on this topic see: Hensel (1999); Bennett (1996). I also do not address whether interstate rivalry impacts the onset of civil wars or not. (Toukan 2019). Furthermore, I do not focus on the literature on peacekeeping and its impact on civil war dynamics (Fortna 2003, 2004; Hegre et. al 2019).

The first important observation is that interstate wars and civil wars - especially in quantitative research - are analyzed separately. Yet, the utility of this separation is questioned by some (Cunningham & Lemke 2013) especially since the civil war literature have adopted concepts such as the security dilemma (Walter 1997), the role of territory (Regan 2009), or the balance of power (Butler & Gates 2009) from International Relations scholarship. Large-N civil war studies are primarily applying a state-centric approach, following Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon and Laitin's (2003) econometric, greed framework. Accordingly, civil war studies usually focus on structural characteristics of the conflict-ridden state and give less attention to the strategic interactions both between conflict parties and almost no systematic attention to secondary warring parties or transnational ties between non-state actors and their external supporters.

External support in civil wars is nothing new and it is not limited to the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Ongoing interventions by regional powers in civil conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo are vivid illustrations of the blurred lines between interstate and intrastate conflict.

When analyzing interventions in civil wars, there are at least four shortcomings with the structural, closed-polity (i.e. only analyzing domestic conflict actors) approach: First, focusing only on national-level attributes of civil war affected countries, such as regime type, GDP, or ethnic fractionalization, scholars tend to overlook the reality of interconnectedness in general, and more specifically the transnational nature of most interactions (Checkel 2013). Secondly, studies - this is often due to data scarcity - usually look at third-party support for one of the conflict parties. In reality, many conflicts - between 1975 and 2010 about 75% of all civil war dyads have received external support at some point in the war. (Högbladh et. al 2011) - experience opposing or symmetric intervention on both the government and rebels' side. Third, we have only a handful of systemic and international-level theories of civil war onset, duration, and termination. Yet, changes in the aggregate level of international politics are likely to impact certain domestic phenomenon, such as civil wars. The end of the Cold War's bipolar system and the ensuing reduction of superpower support for various insurgencies illustrates this argument. Fourth, and related, we need to move beyond the government-rebel dichotomy when building complex models and theories of civil wars. By looking at the international level, we are able to locate explanatory variables at a higher level of aggregation than the national or subnational levels. This requires us to acknowledge that civil wars display clear transnational characteristics and as such one possible useful source of theorizing about civil war duration and termination lies outside the conventional realm of conflict studies. This acknowledgement is the starting point of this dissertation. For other sources of theorization, I turned into Middle East Area Studies (MEAS). Due to space limits, I do not provide an overview of this literature, nor do I introduce its evolution.[18] The integration of regional studies is necessary, because the dissertation focuses on the Middle East as a specific geographical region

[18] For an extensive overview of Middle East Area studies see: Tessler, M., Tessler, M. A., Nachtwey, J., Banda, A., & Dressel, A. (Eds.). (1999). Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics. Indiana University Press, Teti, A. (2007). Bridging the gap: IR, Middle East studies and the disciplinary politics of the area studies controversy. European Journal of International Relations, 13(1), 117-145, Valbjørn, M. (2004). Toward a'mesopotamian turn': Disciplinarity and the study of the international relations of the Middle East. Journal of Mediterranean Studies, 14(1), 47-75.

which is proposed to have its own distinct political, economic, cultural, and social character. The regional level of analysis also fits well into other parts of the literature review, since I review systemic, national, and sub-national level theories on civil wars.

Throughout the dissertation I refer to several recent (i.e..: post-Arab Spring) conceptual innovations from this field that informed my analytical framework, and which proved to be useful in nuancing quantitative studies' findings. MEAS is not a monolithic school of thought, but it employs theoretical pluralism by drawing on multiple levels and perspectives to understand regional politics (Lynch & Jamal 2019). On the systemic level, this school proposes that the post-Arab Spring era has evolved to one without a regional balance of power structure and thus characterized by multipolarity. This school also notes that the "New Middle East Cold War" fundamentally differs from that of the 1950' and 1960's, because in the post-Arab Spring one Western-allied conservative monarchies are pitted against "no countervailing coalition of military-backed regimes" (Ryan 2019:10). The second important proposition is that regimes in the Middle East in particular use alliances "not just as external defense pacts, but also and perhaps even more often for domestic regime security" (Ryan 2019:9).

Transiting from the systemic level, the state level analysis shows the limits of the application of Westphalian state framework to the Middle East. This region is characterized by transnational identities (Arabism and Islam) which can denote primary identity markers in contrast to identification with the state (Hinnebush 2016). Identity-markers are important both for state and non-state actors for mobilizing the population for their respective cause. Middle East area studies also places a special emphasis on domestic politics' impact on foreign policy decision-making. For example, states' response to external threats is conditioned by "elite threat perceptions and the capacity of institutions to mobilize power" (Hinnebush and Ehteshami 2014:20). Accordingly, threat is often shaped by identity related aspects, something that is difficult to account for in realist and rational theories of war. Lawrence Rubin (2014) calls these conflicts as ideational security dilemmas. States respond to the identity related threats by engaging in "ideational balancing" during which a regime "aims to mitigate the domestic political threat from a projected transnational ideology" (Rubin 2014: 37). Ideational balancing is clearly visible in case of the Saudi-Iranian transnational competition over influencing Sunni and Shia populations across the globe. Threat

perceptions matter both at the domestic, regional and international level. While Saudi Arabia views Iran as the main threat to its security, Iran considers the US its main enemy. Since the election of President Donald Trump, Saudi and US threat perceptions are the same as they both view Iran as the most serious national, regional, and local threats. An important qualitative difference is however that Iran poses a direct threat to the Kingdom (due to its geographical proximity) while in case of the US, Iran is only able to inflict indirect costs. Ideational balancing is also a useful concept since it accounts for non-military forms of competition, such as the propagation of one state's religious ideas through media or education. An overemphasis on identity related matters however can divert scholars attention from other non-identity related socio-economic grievances. As Cavatorta (2017) argues, "focusing on identity-based mobilization as the most pervasive threat to the Arab State marginalizes socio-economic struggles" (Cavatorta 2017: 36). In the empirical analysis I explicitly account for both identity related and non-identity related grievances of the Houthis.

MEAS also made some significant progress in analyzing non-state actors. This literature also challenges the state failure narrative and shows that non-state actors still "define themselves via or against the state which indicates that what is challenged is not statehood as such, but rather methods of governance" (Gaub 2017:55-56). When Gaub (2017) for example talks about state vacuum, in which "control has vanished without being replaced" he cites Yemen and states that "perhaps the closest to state failure is Yemen (...) as of August 2016, although the government was still delivering six hours of electricity a day, salaries of state employees were no longer paid, leading to a nationwide strike" (Gaub 2017: 54). What he shows is that the existence of state actors does not mean the complete absence of a state because even in cases of state vacuum situations, certain elements of service provision are still present. Furthermore, non-state actors are not only challengers of government structures, but states have also frequently outsourced security to non-state actors (ibid.).[19] In sum these observations point to the fact that "the clear-cut dichotomy of traditional International Relations theory between state and non-state actors alone appears increasingly unfit to assess power relations in international affairs (Kausch 2017:67). Importantly, state vacuum invites not only other internal actors, but external ones as well, and thus weak state

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[19] Citing again Yemen Gaub notes that "In Yemen, tribal militias have supported the military for decades; more recently, they have operated under the name Popular Resistance Committees against AQAP as well as against Houthi militias" (Gaub 2017: 57).

structures can facilitate the development of proxy relations. External actors are not aimed at filling regional vacuums, but "prefer to team up with local non-state actors who have the domestic roots, connections and knowledge but lack the financial and military resources, and the ideological and political support, to advance their agendas and (...) non-state groups' influence on the regional balance of power is mostly rooted not in whatever ambition they may have to supplant the domestic regime, but in their increasing impact on which regional power will prevail " (Kausch 2017: 69-70). In sum, the concepts of transnational identities, multipolarity, ideational balancing, and the multiple roles of non-state actors in influencing domestic and regional politics are key issues that informed this dissertation's empirical analysis.

2.1. Excursus: Systemic level theories

Although my goal is not to develop a systemic level theory of civil wars, this literature is still important to consider and review, since I argue that states are embedded in larger regional and international structures and processes - or the lack of thereof - which impact micro-dynamics of civil wars. Furthermore, this literature provides valuable insights on the interconnectedness of the various levels of analysis, an observation that informs my theoretical argument. Put it differently, interstate rivals are not just impacting civil wars, but they themselves are impacted by other actors. By only looking at the regional level's (i.e. interstate rivalry) impact on civil war duration and outcomes, I would simply dismiss the larger context in which both interstate rivals and their supported groups are embedded in.

Systemic level explanations of civil wars are rare (Florea 2012; Hironaka 2005; Wimmer and Min 2006; Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Kalyvas & Balcells propose that the post-WWII and post-Cold War period saw substantial changes in the technology of rebellion, and this resulted in symmetric-unconventional intra-state conflicts (Kalyvas & Balcells 2010). Yet, it is plausible that systemic changes not just impact technologies of rebellion, but the technologies of other types of contentions, such as interstate rivalries. Wimmer and Min (2006) argues that institutional changes, i.e. the development of nation states and empires, is the cause for both inter and intra-state wars. In *Neverending Wars,* Hironaka (2005) turns to the post-IIWW decolonization process and argues that the emergence of weak states and the subsequent external interventions in forms of military

support and foreign aid has made civil war lengthier, by the continuous flow of resources. Systemic level theories for example are able to highlight that the Saudi-led Coalition's (SlC) war fighting capacity is stemming from the Kingdom's role in the world economy and its ability to purchase arms from the US and other Western countries. At the same time, this level is too aggregate to be able to explain micro-dynamics of rivals' interventions.

2.2. Interstate rivalry

Since the early 1990s, the interstate rivalry research program has been a vibrant field of research but reached an analytical plateau because of methodological and conceptual issues (Vasquez 1993). The study of interstate rivalry equals to taking a dyadic level perspective to the study of international relations (Casman 2014:237).[20] The underlying observation of rivalry analysis is that rivalries are special conflict-prone dyads, or pairs of states. In other words, there are only a handful of states that wage wars against each other and a large number of these states constitute rivals. Thompson (2015) sums up rivalries relevance by noting that "Rivals are thus the states most likely to clash, to clash repeatedly, and to go to war. They are not only the actors who become involved in conflict but also the most likely culprits. Focusing on them explicitly, accordingly, affords one useful way to reduce the noise in world politics, without sacrificing too much" (Thompson 2015:2). Besides being conflict-prone, rivals tend to persist: "the average duration of rivalries over the past two centuries is about 42 years. Major power rivalries tend to last about 55 years on average while minor power rivalries average about 38 years in duration" (Thompson 2015:4). One of the most important theoretical take-aways of this literature is the acknowledgement that conflict (whether it is between or within states) does not evolve in a vacuum and studying wars as discrete events might result in missing out some important independent variables in explaining the onset of conflict. This perspective is equally applicable for civil wars. As Colaresi & Thompson (2002) puts it, "rivalry processes (can be understood as) antecedents to interstate conflict and that conflict within the constraints of rivalry works differently than conflict outside of rivalry" (2002:263).

[20] Another strand of rivalry research focuses not on pairs of states, but on triads and rivalry fields. See for example: Thompson and Dreyer (2011), Maoz, Terris, Kuperman, and Talmud (2007).

What we know empirically about rivalry, however, depends on how the concept of rivalry is operationalized and which dyads are identified as rivals.[21]

2.2.1. Definitions and measurements

The most influential contemporary approaches to defining and measuring rivalries are the dispute-density (Diehl and Goertz 2000; Goertz and Diehl 1992,1993) and the strategic rivalry approaches (Thompson 1995, 2000; Rasler & Thompson 2005; Colaresi et.al 2008). According to Diehl and Goertz (dispute density approach), "a rivalry relationship means a conflict or competition in which one or both sides use the military tools of foreign policy: foreign policy is conceived and conducted in military terms" (Diehl and Goertz 2000:22).The authors differentiate between three types of rivals: proto, isolated, and enduring. Enduring rivals are pair of states that experienced six militarized interstate dispute (MID) within a twenty-year period. Proto-rivalries are dyads that have experienced up to five MIDs but fail to reach the threshold of enduring rivals in the twenty-year period. Lastly, isolated rivalry constitutes one or two disputes and does not escalate to proto or enduring rivalry.

On the other hand, the strategic rivalry approach proposes that rivalries can be both militarized and non-militarized (Colaresi et al. 2008). Accordingly, the strategic rivalry approach does not develop a measurement criterion, instead they look at perceptions and examine who state leaders themselves identify as their enemies. As Colaresi et al- (2008:27) argues, "actors categorize other actors in their environment. Some are friends and others are enemies. Threatening enemies who are also adjudged to be competitors in some way, as opposed to irritants or simply problems, are branded as rivals." This approach to rivalry studies - although implicitly - builds on and closely reflects the leadership theories of International Relations (Kissinger 1994; Allison & Zelikow 1999). This connection is especially prevalent if we consider Colaresi et. al.'s (2008) threefold reasoning for studying rivals: combination of "expectations of threat, cognitive rigidities, and domestic political processes" (2008:28). This literature recognizes that state leaders can introduce fundamental changes into their states foreign policy. Current US President Donald Trump and his

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[21] Goertz & Diehl (1993), and more recently Thompson (2015) provides an extensive overview of the numerous ways scholars have operationalized and measure the concept of rivalry.

reconciliatory approach to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is a vivid illustration of this process. Colaresi et al. (2010) further distinguish between three types of strategic rivalries: *spatial*[22] *positional*, where rivals compete over relative shares of influence over activities and prestige within a system; and *ideological*, where rivals contest the relative virtues of different belief systems relating to political, economic or religious activities.

The most important difference between the two approaches is that the dispute density approach requires a military component, while the strategic rivalry approach does not. In other words, the conflict density approach requires evidence of some minimal number of militarized interstate disputes within a specified time period to qualify a dyad as a rivalry, thus essentially "using conflict to explain conflict" (Thompson 2015:3). Identification criteria and thus coding relies on different sources in case of these two approaches. The dispute density approach is easier to replicate, while the strategic rivalry relies on historical texts and state leaders' official speeches. This makes coding decisions somewhat subjective and more time-consuming, thus replicability is more difficult. The new dispute density dataset (Klein, Goertz, and Diehl 2006) covers the 1816-2001 period and it identifies 290 cases of rivalry, 115 being enduring and 175 are proto-rivalries (ibid). The strategic rivalry approach yields slightly different results: It identifies 173 strategic rivals and show that strategic rivals have opposed each other in 77 percent of wars since 1816. (Colaresi et. al 2008:21)

In sum, the literature on rivalries views path-dependence and historical relationships between rivals as independent variables that contribute to conflict onset. This understanding can be easily matched with this dissertation's mechanism centered methodological approach. Rivalry research is not in the forefront of IR's current research agenda, but the rivalry lens helps us to understand the antecedents to conflict onset (Diehl & Goertz 2000:1-2). At the same time, most studies on rivalries study the onset of a direct conflict between members of the rival dyad and do not take into account that rivalry can manifest in multiple forms and spaces even in indirect conflict between the rivals in a third-party state's territory, a phenomenon most often termed as proxy-conflict. In other words, the rivalry approach extends researchers time horizon by including the analysis of pre-conflict period in their analytical framework, but it fails to take the broader spatial

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22 Spatial rivalry understands territories as physical land, yet I consider the religious concept of Ummah - the global Muslim community which transcend national boundaries - to be part of the definition of territory.

and structural implications into account, i.e. how can interstate rivalries impact ongoing civil wars and vica-versa. This means that it is very likely that rivals are not just conflict prone dyads in the inter-state levels, but they utilize civil wars in third-party states for their own strategic advancement.

2.2.2. Interstate rivalry and intrastate conflict

How interstate rivalry impacts domestic affairs has a relatively small and fragmented literature. Uzonyi (2018) examines the impact of rivalries on genocide and politicide; Salehyan, Gleditsch & Cunningham (2011) find that rivals are more likely to support insurgents; or terrorists that are fighting against their rivals (Findley, Piazza & Young, 2012). Maoz and San-Akca (2012) examine the conditions under which strategic rivals choose to support non-state armed groups that target their rivals and find that rivalry makes cooperation between the state and non-state actors more likely and this cooperation in turn increases the likelihood of rivalry escalation. In sum, while we know a lot about the correlation between the presence of rivalry and intervention in civil conflicts, these studies mostly focus on situations when one member of the rival dyad is experiencing a conflict and how its rival exploit these situations. But there are only a handful of works that study *why and how* rivals decide to intervene (or not to intervene) in civil wars in third party states. Moreover, there are almost no studies addressing the competitive peace-making efforts of rivals in civil wars.

2.3. Third party intervention in civil wars

"It is inappropriate to treat civil war as a fully domestic phenomenon."
(Gleditsch 2007:294).

This section provides an overview of literature on the impact of different types of third-party interventions in civil wars. Note that this literature shifts the focus from interstate rivals to civil wars. I grouped the literature according to military and non-military forms of intervention to highlight the different impact of these measures. First, I provide an overview of the basic trends in intervention, followed by an overview of the different types of conceptualizations of intervention. External support, regardless of being military or non-military, can be provided to governments and

rebels and both of them. From the rivals' perspective support provision (depending on the recipient) entails different costs and benefits. A more comprehensive elaboration on these concepts will be given in the Analytical Framework chapter. Military related support covers the following types of intervention: direct military intervention (boots on the ground), military equipment provision, training, safe-haven provision. Non-military support refers to the provision of development and humanitarian aid, peace negotiations, mediation, ceasefires. I do not consider the impact of peacekeeping. It is also important to note that there is spatial and temporal variation within the total period of intervention. Some states might start by providing mediation then later on in the conflict they shift to other forms and provide military assistance for one of the conflict parties. As it will become clear in the empirical analysis, these interventions are frequently applied by intervening interstate rivals, exert high levels of fungibility, and they are neither mutually exclusive nor constant throughout the life cycle of a civil war.

2.3.1. Trends in and impact of intervention in civil wars

Civil wars are notoriously difficult to resolve. These conflicts are plagued by information asymmetry, commitment problems, and a climate of mutual mistrust between the belligerents (e.g.: Fearon 1995, Walter 1997). Civil wars in this study are defined as "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year" (Pettersson et. al 2019:589). According to the UCDP External Support Dataset, between 1975 and 2010 about 75% of all civil war dyads have received external support at some point in the war. (Högbladh et. al. 2011). The most recent UCDP dataset (1946-2018) concludes that "for the fifth consecutive year more than 30% of the state-based conflicts were internationalized, a level not witnessed before in the post-World War II period" (Pettersson et. al 2019:596). External states involvement in civil wars mean that the conflict transforms into an internationalized intrastate war, i.e.: there is a transition from the closed polity to the open polity structure (Gleditsch 2007, Buhaug&Gleditsch 2006, Salehyan 2011). The most common form of intervention is through the sponsorship of non-state armed groups. These groups do not fall under the command of a sovereign state's armed forces and they resort to violence to achieve political objectives over a period of time (San Akca 2009:590). Non-state actors encompass a wide range

of actors. To keep consistency with the UCDP definition of civil wars, I apply UCDP's definition of non-state actors. The UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset and the UCDP Dyadic Dataset includes "opposition actors" and "opposition organisations", defined as any non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force to influence the outcome of the stated incompatibility (Allansson 2020).

Interventions have been specified as important explanatory variable in civil war duration (Regan 2002) and outcome (DeRouen and Sobek 2004). In brief, there are two broad schools of this literature: One looks at the transnational or neighboring effects of civil wars, while the other examines the impact of certain external phenomenon on civil conflicts. The first school treats the civil war as the independent variable and looks at different types of transnational/international phenomenon as dependent variables, such as: refugee flows (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006), health consequences (Ghobaran, Huth, Russett 2003); economic impact of civil wars in neighboring countries (Murdoch and Sandler 2002, 2004); and contagion effects of civil conflicts (Buhaug & Gleditsch 2008). The second strand of literature selects specific external phenomenon as the independent variable which is then hypothesized to explain or impact the onset, duration, and termination of civil conflict. This scholarly work has examined a broad range of topics, such as the impact of different types of external support for conflict parties (Salehyan 2007, 2009; Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham 2011); the impact of international relations on civil war (Thyne 2006, 2009; Toukan 2019), and diplomatic intervention in the form of mediation (Regan & Aydin 2009; Svensson 2009). The present dissertation belongs to this latter perspective, since I am interested in the impact of interstate rivalry (independent variable) on civil war duration and outcomes (dependent variable).

Civil wars scholars have long recognized the transnational nature of civil wars (e.g.: Deutsch & Singer 1964; Rosenau 1964), yet the systematic study of this phenomenon is a more recent strand of the literature. The impact of these interventions is multifaceted: Research has shown that external support makes wars longer (Balch-Lindsay and Enterlien 2000; Hazen 2013, Cunningham 2006), especially when both sides receive outside support (Regan 2006; Aydin & Regan, 2012), deadlier (Lacina 2006; Heger & Salehyan, 2007), and less amenable to negotiated outcomes (Cunningham 2006, 2010). As civil wars are characterized by power asymmetries, i.e. rebels are

usually weaker both in terms of human and material capital than the government, third party intervention can be critical especially for the weaker side. External support for rebel groups is hypothesized to move parties closer to a 'balance of power' situation in which neither party is able of bringing the conflict to a decisive end. Because external resources are plentiful, the parties can continuously rearm and thus reaching a mutually hurting stalemate is protracted (Zartman 2001). In addition, the duration of the conflict is highly correlated with its destructiveness.[23]

Yet, findings are not conclusive because some research indicates that external support to just one of the conflict parties increases the likelihood of victory for that particular actor and thus shorten the conflict. External support to the rebel side generally increases the likelihood of insurgent victory (Balch-Lindsay, Enterline & Joyce, 2008; Lyall & Wilson 2009) while it appears that support to the government side is only effective when the fighting capacity of the rebel forces either matches or exceeds that of the government (Sullivan & Karreth, 2015). In a recent study, Sawyer et al. (2017) finds that conflicts are less likely to end if rebels receive highly fungible external support such as money or guns. This leads to greater insecurity that can hinder agreement on a settlement. Third parties can provide access to more advanced weaponry to the conflict parties that they would otherwise not have access to. This quantitative and qualitative increase in military capacity enables the belligerents to inflict far greater damage on their opponents. Weinstein (2006) shows that resources provided by third states can make rebel movements less dependent on their local constituency. This structural change can in turn result in higher levels of civilian targeting (Wood, Kathman & Gent, 2012; Salehyan, Siroky & Wood, 2014). Furthermore, Fjelde & Nilsson shows that groups that have received support from a foreign state have a higher likelihood of engaging in inter-rebel violence (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012).

2.3.2. Rebel governance

The discussion on both military and non-military support to domestic conflict parties means that it is not enough to only look at the *provision* of support, but one has to examine conflict parties' *ways of using that support*. This in part requires that one has to look into rebel governance, i.e.

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[23] One consistent finding in the literature is that the longer the civil war is, the less likely that it ends in a military victory. Mason and Fett (1996) finds that conflict duration is the most important predictor of whether a war will end in a military victory or in a negotiated settlement. External intervention is associated with increased duration.

what kind of governance structures emerge *during* fighting. Insurgent behavior is not solely defined by the deployment of force, but by the administration of civilian affairs. The study of rebel governance (Olson 1993; Metelits 2009; Kasfir 2005; Mampilly 2011; Weinstein 2007; Huang 2012) provides crucial insights into how insurgents can acquire legitimacy, how civilians life unfold under insurgents' rule, and how rebels renegotiate power structures in the areas they hold. In other words, studying *processes during conflict* contains important insights into possible post-conflict environments. The concept of rebel governance aligns well with the observation that "Yemen is a state in the making (Carapico 2006:184)." Mampilly[24] (2011) argues that "variation in civilian governance provision by insurgents emerges from a combination of the initial preferences of rebel leaders and the interaction of insurgent organizations with a variety of other social and political actors active during the conflict itself. As a result, governance is, by nature, an evolutionary process in which the outcome cannot be predicted by a single variable" (2011: 15-16). Non-military means of support for rebel governance is a crucial component if we are to understand how Ansar Allah was able to retain occupied territories and to gain a more nuanced view especially with regards to Iran's strategies to impact the conflict. As the empirical analysis will illustrate, one of the most crucial differences between the Saada Wars and the current war is the presence of rebel governance (the governance of civilians by armed groups).

2.3.3. Defining intervention

Intervention goes by many names such as external support, third-party support, and sponsorship. External intervention, from a humanitarian perspective, is often portrayed as imperative for the broader international community to bring civil conflicts to a swift end. Yet, the record of interventions' effectiveness is mixed at best. Luttwak (1999) for example argues against external intervention and advocates to "give war a chance." Majority of the research on intervention restrict its focus to only one type of intervention, such as large-scale military interventions or third-party assisted mediation processes. Research has found that military intervention, by altering parties

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[24] Mamphilly's work on rebel governance goes beyond the warlord vs state-building theoretical lenses and offers an alternative analytical framework. As he argues "What is really an issue with rebel governance is not state formation but rather the formation of a political order outside and against the state" (2011:36).He posits that according to which rebel's ability to govern population under their control is constrained by pressures from and interactions with multiple actors, such as citizens, internal factions in the group, or humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations.

capabilities, can bring conflicts to a swift end but it simultaneously can reduce the prospects for a negotiated termination of the conflict. On the other hand, research on mediation have found that under certain conditions external diplomatic intervention can shorten conflict duration by bringing a negotiated end to the civil war. It has been concluded that the manipulation of information by third-party mediators is a more effective tool for conflict management than the manipulation of fighting capabilities (Regan 2010). Regan summarizes this contradiction and argues that, "external intervention (military interventions) can serve to exacerbate these asymmetries (information asymmetries and commitment problems) or reduce them (mediation)" (Regan 2014:317). Much of the inconclusiveness in the literature on intervention thus stems from the different definitions and operationalization used by studies.

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP), an internationalized internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and internal opposition groups with intervention from other states in the form of troops (Petterson & Wallensteen 2015: 549). Yet, this definition is problematic because it ignores the multiple types of intervention external states can pursue. In reality, intervention entails a myriad of forms of third-party behavior ranging from non-violent to violent activities, such as mediation or direct military intervention. Understanding the concept of intervention helps us to define the scope conditions of this study. Rosenau (1968; 1969) argues that interventions are at their core: (i) convention breaking and (ii) authority-targeted actions. I apply Regan's (2002) rather broad definition of intervention, who states that "third party intervention is the use of an actor's resources to affect the course of a civil conflict" (Regan 2002:9). Accordingly, these resources can broadly be disaggregated into the following categories: (1) diplomatic intervention, i.e. mediation, arbitration, negotiation (e.g.: Regan and Aydin 2006); (2) coercive and supportive forms of economic intervention, such as sanctions and foreign aid (McNab and Mason 2007); (3) covert or overt support like funds, safe haven, training and weapons (Salehyan 2009; Salehyan et al. 2011); (4) direct military intervention (Balch-Lindsay et al. 2008); (5) and the deployment of peacekeepers (Fortna 2004; Hegre et al. 2019).

According to the realist, rational bargaining theory: credible commitments, issue indivisibility, and information asymmetries are the most often cited causes of conflicts (Fearon 1995, 2004; Walter 1997, 2002). Yet, we have to recognize that all these factors are subject to external manipulation.

In fact, often it is not even necessary for external actors to actually manipulate those bargaining problems, but it is enough if the primary conflict parties believe or perceive that external parties do so. Accordingly, if conflict parties perceive that their relative position (either military or negotiation) improved, they are expected to update their beliefs and act accordingly.

2.3.4. Who intervenes, who receives, and what type of support

As noted in the previous section, research has painted a rather bleak and often contradictory, picture of the impact of external support on civil wars. Interveners entail a broad range of actors: states, multilateral organizations, regional organizations, NGO's, armed non-state actors, and the combinations of these. As civil wars are spatially interdependent (Gleditsch 2007) and come with negative externalities for neighboring countries, neighboring states or great powers are the most frequent actors to intervene (ibid). The first and most obvious impact of external intervention is simply quantitative: it increases the number of actors involved in a specific conflict. As a consequence, the bargaining environment is getting more complicated through the presence of an additional actor's interest (Cunningham 2006; 2010) and as the number of stakeholders increases, so does the number of potential spoilers (Stedman 1997). Yet, interveners are not mere external spoilers, but they can contribute to the emergence of additional internal spoilers by increasing the expectations of certain groups that they would receive support in case of continued fighting. These interventions, depending on the recipient, can be government-biased, rebel biased, or balanced. To follow the actor-centric approach to the study of civil wars (Theo & Findley 2006), it is important to emphasize that external support does not evolve in a vacuum, but it is the function of civil war actors and the civil war context. Intervention has a demand and supply side, i.e.: external actors (both state and non-state actors) have to be *willing* and *capable* of providing external support (supply side) and civil conflict parties (both states and non-state actors) have to *accept* and *utilize* the external support they receive (demand side) (Siverson & Starr 1990; Salehyan et al. 2011). The capacity to provide support is related to geographical proximity, colonial and/or ethnic ties, diaspora presence, and whether the state possesses sufficient capabilities. Neighbors usually have a strong interest in the conflict as they are more likely to be directly affected by its outcome and potential spillover effects (Kathman 2011).

States also need incentives or willingness to intervene. Humanitarian reasons can be important, but there are often strategic motivations behind the decision to provide support. External support can serve as a low-cost foreign policy tool to weaken an adversary and in some cases as a form of conflict delegation (Salehyan 2010). Interventions impact on conflict duration is in part the function of intervening actors' motives: Some interventions - such as peacekeeping and negotiations - act in order to resolve civil wars, while others seek to deliberately lengthen the conflict for economic purposes, or influence the balance of power between the primary conflict parties for interveners own strategic purposes (Balch-Lindsay et. al 2008; Balch-Lindsay & Enterline 2000). These strategic purposes of external actors often have nothing to do with the original causes of the civil war (ibid.). Assessing the real motives of external interveners has been subject to a great deal of research but uncovering them is difficult. Yet, as Linebarger and Enterline (2016:97) notes, "although it is clear that conflict management is an increasingly important motive, accumulating evidence shows that third parties are anything but selfless". Furthermore, as Forsberg (2016) noted, "when a state provides support to a rebel group in another country, it is not always primarily driven by solidarity towards the rebel group, but often is meant to destabilize a rival regime" (Forsberg 2016:84 citing Byman; Salehyan et.al 2011). Who intervenes matter and it's not just intervention, but the *strategic dynamics between interveners* also matter for how civil wars unfold, end, and what form the post-conflict development takes.

In addition, the onset, level, and type of external support is not constant during the course of the conflict. In fact, one major shortcoming of large-n studies is that they usually code only the onset of support and do not take into account the dynamic nature and multiple forms that external support can take. Furthermore, the form of external support is in part the function of the recipient. For example, external support for governments is usually a public undertaking, whereas support for non-state actors in most cases is a clandestine activity. From states perspective, providing support to non-state armed groups can result in an interstate conflict with the target government (Gleditsch et al. 2008). This explains why states are reluctant to admit to sponsoring groups, a phenomenon that San Akca (2009: 590) calls the *sponsors' dilemma*. Non-state armed groups also face certain costs when accepting support: it can make them vulnerable and dependent on their supporters (Bapat 2012). This bi-directional dilemma exhibits some of the problems associated with the principal-agent relation (Salehyan et al. 2011). That is, external supporters have a limited control

about the actual utilization of the support they provide. Rebels can divert external resources for their own purposes. It is also important to note that some states, especially fragile and weak states, are more amenable to external inference than others.

Building on the supply-demand logic, Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham (2011) applies a principal-agent framework to identify conditions under which external states offer their support to specific rebel groups and the conditions under which those rebel groups accept external support. The authors find that "rebels who are moderately strong, have a transnational constituency, and who are fighting governments that are engaged in an international rivalry with other states are most likely to receive external support. Moreover, we find that countervailing intervention, in which external states support rebels who are facing governments that receive external support, are common" (2011:711). External actors can also change the form of support they provide from providing military support to one side to mediating between the two or the reverse (Svensson 2007:178). For example, in 2011 Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen by mediating an agreement between the GoY and the broader opposition, which was a government-biased agreement, while four years later it intervened militarily on the governments' side. As such, talking and fighting are neither isolated nor exclusive categories of third-party interventions.

2.3.5. Intervention by interstate rivals

As the section on interstate rivals has shown, we know that rivals are more conflict and intervention-prone dyads. Yet, it is essential to turn to civil war studies to examine the micro impacts of rivals' intervention. External support - regardless of the form it takes - is a foreign policy decision and it is aimed at achieving a specific outcome in the civil war, whether its peace, conflict de-escalation, or promoting the victory of the preferred side. Intervention achieves one or more of these objectives by altering the capabilities of at least one of the conflict parties, i.e.: increasing its military strength or legitimizing the non-state actor by including it into formal negotiations and eventually to the post-conflict political settlement. The academic and theoretical origins of rivalry intervention lies in the proxy war literature. As Mumford (2013) puts it, "proxy wars are indirect third-party engagements in conflicts aimed at influencing strategic outcomes. They are constitutive of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and their chosen proxies who are the conduit for

weapons, training and funding from the benefactor" (2013:11). This definition highlights several important factors: intervention must be indirect (with no men representing the third party in an on-the-ground, fighting capacity); third parties can be either non-state actors or states; the conflict must have started before outside intervention; and the conflict can be between states, between states and non-state actors, or between non-state actors. Yet, the proxy war literature suffers from conceptual overstretching (Anderson 2019). This literature fails to take into account supported groups' agency and it applies the proxy war label to many situations that do not involve military support to non-state groups.

Interstate rivalry has become an important determinant in explaining support provision (Akcinaroglu & Radziszewski, 2005; Maoz & San-Akca, 2012; Colaresi 2014) in ongoing civil wars. The relationship between the interveners (international level of analysis) and this relationship's impact on civil war's dynamics however receives scant scholarly attention. Recent exceptions include Toukan (2019), who analyzes the impact of interstate rivalry on civil war onset; Anderson (2019), who examines competitive interventions' impact on civil war duration; and Salehyan (2008) who finds that regional rivalries enable access to external bases and increase conflict duration. In another work, Aydin & Regan (2012) focus on the impact of a network of third-party states on civil war duration, and Findley & Teo (2006) are taking a different approach by not focusing on civil wars that experience intervention, but on interveners decisions and motives to intervene, or not to intervene. This actor centric approach is in line with Marton's (2013) approach to the study of foreign policy decision-making and so of this dissertation.

Regarding gaps, the literature on civil war intervention by rivals usually take a binary approach and codes whether an intervention has taken place or not. Another significant lacuna is that while the relationship between the domestic conflict actor and its external supporter is analyzed, in cases of opposing interventions the relationship between the external actors remains a black-box. Previous studies have repeatedly shown that balanced intervention correlates with longer and deadlier conflict, often termed in policy jargon as protracted conflicts. These studies integrate rivals in two different forms: The first branch examine cases that are characterized by the presence of a *direct rivalry* in which one or both states are also engaged in civil war at home. Examples of this type of rivalry include the relationship between India and Pakistan or Sudan and Chad. The

second strand of research analyses *indirect forms of rivalry*. These are situations in which two external rival states seek to influence a third state's civil conflict. The most widely cited example of this type is the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, which impacted multiple civil war. A more contemporary example is Saudi Arabia and Iran, which are backing opposing sides in multiple conflicts such as the ones in Syria and Yemen. This dissertation then focuses on indirect forms of rivalry and the various manifestations of that.

2.4. Conflict management: diplomatic intervention in civil wars

Getting parties to the negotiation table, albeit first sounds surprising, serves the same goal as altering their military capabilities: influencing the outcome of the conflict. The most important difference between talking and fighting is these methods respective modus operandi: while the first relies on non-military tools, the second one uses either direct or indirect military coercion to achieve a preferred outcome. *Mediation* is understood in this project as a "triadic bargaining relationship" (Crocker et al 2015: 367) which is defined as "a process of conflict management where disputants seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from an individual, group, state or organization to settle their conflict or to resolve their differences without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law" (Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille 1991:8). Mediation has some unique characteristics: it is a voluntary, non-binding, and non-military type of third-party intervention. Furthermore, it is path-dependent and subject to selection effects, i.e.: often only the most difficult cases receive mediation and this observation influences the success rate of mediation (Reagan 2002). Mediators engage in civil wars for a variety of reasons ranging from security, economic, and normative considerations. Furthermore, mediators have different leverage, resources, and strategies.

To increase the likelihood of settlement, mediators try to alter the cost-benefit calculation of each party by increasing the costs of continued fighting, while decreasing the costs of settlement. Third parties can guarantee the terms of a domestic settlement, monitor compliance, and protect against defections from a peace deal. These factors help civil war conflict parties to overcome the credible commitment problem and reduce information asymmetries that prevents domestic combatants from committing to peace (Regan and Aydin 2006: 740). As such, third party intervention can play a critical role in helping to end civil wars. As civil wars are characterized by power asymmetries,

mediation entails different costs and benefits for government and rebels. Mediation is an important step for rebels to raise their status; and as such these groups are generally interested in negotiations (Clayton 2013). On the other hand, third-party mediation signals state weakness and governments are expected to be more reluctant to engage in mediation processes (Svensson 2007, 2009). Scholarly literature on third-party mediation in civil wars has considerably expanded in the last decades. (e.g.: Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, Duursma 2014, Svensson 2007, 2009). Multiparty mediation in civil wars have become the norm rather than the exception. (Beber 2010, Croker et. al 2001, Svensson and Wallensteen 2014). The multiplicity of international and regional organizations active in a conflict creates overlaps and often complicates the mediation process. From a research perspective, what Wallensteen and Svensson remarked is still valid: "the tensions between different third-party interests have not been systematically examined. For instance, how are conflicts between the mediators mediated? From both a research and a practice perspective, the *inter-mediator mediation processes* (emphasis added) require further examination" (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014:322). Surprisingly, there are no works that analyze competitive peacemaking efforts of various external actors and the impact of mediator competition on civil war conflict resolution.

2.5. Summary of literature review

As the previous sections illustrated third-party intervention - irrespective of being only in support of the government, the rebels, or both sides - manifest in multiple, non-exclusive forms. Examples include direct participation of militaries or "softer" forms of intervention such as mediation, aid provision, security force training, intelligence and logistical support, funding, or sanctuary provision. Existing research offers ample explanations as to why states initiate support and has been able to identify a range of meaningful correlations. Nevertheless, we still lack a more detailed understanding of the political decision-making process of state sponsors in general, and of the interactions of interveners in particular. Interstate rivalry processes' impact on a civil war in a third-party state deserves closer theoretical scrutiny and appropriate integration into the growing understanding of civil war dynamics.

Regarding intervening rivals' strategic interactions, clear theoretical arguments accounting for these dynamics impact on civil wars is currently missing. Though research has shown that there is

a correlation in the presence of interstate rivalry and intervention, sufficient explanations for how and why rivalry intervention influences civil wars are unavailable. Moreover, by only focusing on one type of intervention and not on the reasons for selecting that particular type of intervention (and not others) have not been addressed. As San-Akca (2016) argues, "the repertoire of empirical researchers delving into how states display an act of animosity against another state has to move beyond direct use of force" (2016:14). Hence, by asking how and why interstate rivals intervene in third-party civil wars, this project addresses important gaps in the literature on both rivalry and civil war.

3. THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Thus far, the dissertation considered existing approaches to civil war intervention and inter-state rivalries and highlighted an important research gap: a middle-range theories that can connect the two strands of literature and have the potential to result in contingent generalizations regarding the relationship between inter-state rivalry and civil wars. Recognizing this gap in the literature, in this section, I advance a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the international and the civil war level through examining inter-state rivals interventions in third party civil conflicts and conflict parties ability to influence rivalry dynamics. The analytical framework suggest that, in order to fully understand rivals interventions in third-party civil wars, we must examine both rivals and civil conflict belligerents, the type of support rivals provide (both military and non-military), and these three factors interactive effects on civil war's duration and eventual outcome. To this end, I argue that to explain interstate rivals impact on civil wars in third-party states, it is not just rivals (external level) and their changing relationship over time that has to be taken into account, but the changing relations between domestic conflict parties as well (domestic level).

This chapter proceed in three stages: First, I address the macro level account of how inter-state rivalry relations can lengthen civil conflict by altering the pre-intervention bargaining environment. I do so by adopting a two-step logic: First, I look at interstate rivals initial decision to intervene in third-party civil wars. I separate this stage from the subsequent decision(s) to *remain engaged* in those conflicts through two different means: providing military and non-military support to their chosen sides. I define these two steps as the mechanisms of *conflict integration*.

In the second section, I look into the micro perspective and examine civil war conflict parties' interest and capacity to impact rivals by keeping them engaged in their conflict through the mechanism of *rivalry instrumentalization*. I account for both mechanisms observable implications that are examined in detail in the subsequent, empirical analysis. The macro and micro perspectives are necessary to account for, since they are reinforcing and feeding into each other and create *networked interdependencies*. Accordingly, in the third section of this chapter, I propose a unified account of the mechanisms connecting the two levels of analysis. Both analytical frameworks build on bargaining perspectives and complemented by concept borrowed from Middle East Area Studies. Figure 1 depicts the levels of analysis and the relations this chapter addresses. Majority of existing accounts on intervention's impact focus on how Rival 1/2 support for Government/Rebel (links number 2 and 3) impacts the relationship between domestic conflict actors and their sponsors (link number 1). How inter-state rivalry relations (link number 4) impacts intra-state conflict actors' relations (link number 1) and how that relationship impacts inter-state rivalry relations (link no. 4) have thus far received scant scholarly attention.

Figure 2. Analytical Framework
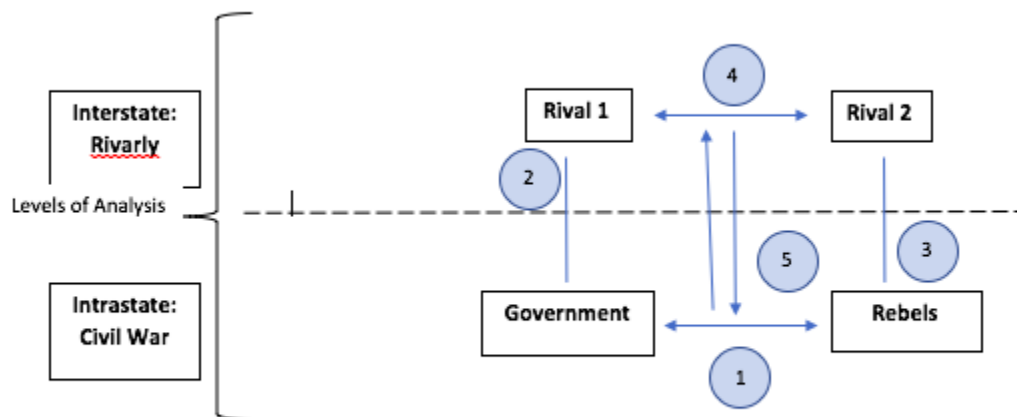
3.1. EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS OF CIVIL WARS: The mechanism of conflict integration by rivals

3.1.1. Decision to intervene

Rivals who intervene in third party civil wars face a unique strategic dilemma resulting from their primary objectives and the means to achieve those objectives. Rivals primary strategic aim is to impose costs on their rivals, but as Vasquez (1996) and Salehyan (2009) argues, rivals are also aimed at avoiding direct military confrontation.[25] The reason for avoiding inter-state war is that the costs of direct conflict are prohibitively high, thus rivals have to constrain their level of engagement. The unwillingness to challenge the rival directly and the need to advance foreign policy goals result in developing other, indirect means of prompting the rival to change its behavior. [26]

If one party observes that its rival counterpart have intervened in a third-party civil conflict by providing support for one domestic actor (e.g.: rival 1 supports the government), then the other rival has incentives to intervene in the same conflict by providing support to the other side(s) of the conflict (rival 2 supports the rebels). This situation mirrors a stimuli-response, or action-reaction situation (Toukan 2019). As Castellano (2015) argues, "intervening in a civil war where the rival state has an interest signals to that rival state the concern, and importance the intervening state has for the rivalry (2015:56)."As such, under certain circumstances the presence of civil wars and the use of proxies *enhances* rather than *constrains* the foreign policy options of rivals vis-a-vis each other. As a consequence of this action-reaction dynamic, rivals become opposing supporters in a civil war in a third-party state. Rivals primary aim is still to impose costs on their counterpart, but they do so by affecting the length, costs, and the outcome of the civil war. In short, from rivals perspective, civil wars are opportunities. Opportunities not just for greed or grievance-driven rebels to challenge the domestic status quo, but for external states to pursue their foreign policy goals, while those objectives sometimes have nothing to do with the issues that civil war

[25] Michael Knights has also highlighted that Iran and Saudi Arabia are vulnerable to one another, so they seek to avoid direct conflict while using proxies to wage war (Rondeux and Sterman citing Kinghts. 2019:47).
[26] As Salehyan (2009) explains, "We may witness less direct violence between the armed forces of rival states when governments shift some or all of their aggressive behavior to rebel agents. This is not to say that armed conflicts between rivals that delegate to rebels never occur, only that a share of the conflict behavior is conducted through proxies (2009:55)"

conflict parties are fighting over (Cunningham 2010). States are aware of the potential loss of autonomy when deciding to use proxies, but they are also aware that delegation is a cost-saving device (Salehyan 2011: 495). Accordingly, the initial decision to provide support for selected groups means less investment than engaging in a direct state-to-state confrontation, whilst still providing opportunities to impose costs rival states.

3.1.2. Decisions to continue support provision

But why do rivals remain engaged in third-party civil conflicts? And what kind of support do they provide for third-party belligerents? As Gent (2008) argues, the length of intervention is in part the function of interveners motives, but motives impact intervention strategies. As the domestic conflict evolves, rivals constantly revise and update their beliefs regarding the methods of intervention (from military to non-military or the other way around), and the level of engagement. Rivals condition their support by observing their counterparts' level of intervention and battlefield developments. Rondeux & Sterman argues, "proxies offer a means of extending supply lines, creating strategic depth where it might not otherwise exist, and projecting power at a discount" (Rondeux & Sterman 2019:47). Sustaining support can stem from the motivation to induce the other actor to stay engaged in the conflict and to invest more resources than it would have otherwise done.

The second reason for sustained intervention stems from more constructivist, identity related accounts. As Thompson (2016) has shown, one strong characteristic of enduring rivalry is that over time, rivals have the tendency to frame non-rivalry related events as part of their rivalry. Furthermore, as I showed in the literature review section MEAS proposed that elite's threat perception is often shaped by identity related aspects. This means that even if in the early stages of the intervention, the primary aim was to impose costs on the rival, rivals are locked in certain psychological dynamics and they start reframing the ongoing war as part and parcel of their own rivalry. As a consequence, enduring rivalry has a micro-level impact: it evolves to enduring and competitive intervention, further enhancing the conflict integration mechanism.

3.2. Internal dimension of rivalry intervention: The mechanism of rivalry instrumentalization

As discussed previously, research has repeatedly shown that intervention by interstate rivals increases conflict duration (e.g.: Akcinaroglu & Radziszewski 2005; Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000). But the causal mechanisms underlying this correlation have been overlooked. As a consequence, conflict research is characterized by considerable uncertainty over certain micro foundations of rivalry interventions: exactly how can interventions lengthen conflict? Understanding how civil war belligerents can shape their sponsors' perception of each other provides one plausible explanation for this question. At the end of the day, civil conflict belligerents are the ones who continue to fight and thus making conflicts longer. By focusing on extra-rivalry processes (e.g.: civil wars in third parties) impact on rivalry dynamics, I am able to open up the black-box of supported groups and shows that they possess agency beyond their immediate strategic environment.

I start by the same observation that I have made in case of interstate rivals. Civil war combatants have strategic aims and preferences for achieving those aims: The government is aimed at preserving the status quo, while the rebels are aimed at challenging it (either by seeking to replace the government or by gaining territorial independence). Two consequences follow from this proposition: First, conflict parties are primarily interested in their domestic environment, less so in regional dynamics (similarly to rivals who are interested in each other less so in a third-party civil war). The second well established observation is that civil wars are asymmetric by nature, meaning that rebels material capabilities usually are below that of the government (e.g.: Blattman & Miguel 2010). What unites the two parties is that both the government and the rebels prefer to rely on domestic resources both in terms of manpower, training, and financial resources. At the same time, external resources are desired because they "liberate combatants from domestic resource constraints" (Anders 2019:526). 27 Conflict actors, but especially rebels, are interested in obtaining the most possible support, but they are also aimed at fighting and negotiating from a position of strength. This means that in most instances, admitting the exact amount of support

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27 Or as Staniland argues, "Mobilizing against the state requires resources, and external support can be a crucial element in growing and sustaining an effective organization "(Staniland 2012).

would de-legitimize conflict parties cause. As such, there is a need to secure as much support as possible, but to disclose as little as possible to hide potential sponsor dependence. Yet, note that under certain circumstances and especially for rebels, openly acknowledging support is an important tool for legitimization. I expect that these two types (denial and acknowledgement of support) are not exclusive options, but rather they are the function of battlefield developments and the type of support rebels are receiving at a given point in the conflict. In the bargaining literature this means that actors have an incentive to misrepresent private information about their capabilities and resolve (Thyne 2009) which in turn enhances the information asymmetries between the civil war belligerent, thus making wars longer.

As the previous section on macro-foundations and the literature review have illustrated, states often utilize proxies for their own, non-conflict related ends. The same is expected from civil war conflict actors, who by being the local agents, are able to shape rivals' perceptions both about conflict dynamics (and the need for continued support) and the rivalry itself (by misrepresenting the level and/or type of support provided by the rival). Conflict actors look for external support and they are aware of the potential pool of supporters (both states and non-state actors). If a domestic party (in case of Yemen the government) reaches out for support to a state (this case Saudi Arabia) then rebels are expected to recognize that they have external parties incentivized to provide support for them (Houthis gaining support from Iran). Inter-state rivalries are not secretive, closed-door enterprises. This observation stems from my interviews with Yemenis, who have repeatedly showed that rivalry dynamics are well known to both state and non-state actors.

Accordingly, domestic conflict actors can utilize pre-existing rivalries to galvanize and maintain external support for their domestic causes which they might otherwise not be able to gain. From the government's perspective, "the potential involvement of outside actors confers a level of salience to a conflict that may otherwise be lacking" (Toukan 2019:815). On the other hand, from the rebels' perspective, rival support provides legitimacy and helps them to match the capabilities of the government. In cases when both the government and rebels receive external support, combatant capabilities can move closer to parity. Parity - and even the perception of it - generates uncertainty which in turn results in divergent expectations regarding the relative strength and resolve, encouraging parties to continue fighting. Accordingly, the manipulation of external

security dilemmas across rivals and the prospects of receiving support are expected to be part of domestic conflict actors' calculus.

Conflict parties utilize rivals through the mechanism of *rivalry instrumentalization*. The observable implications of this mechanism rest on two pillars. We would expect to observe, at the domestic level, an acknowledgement that (1) conflict parties are aware of and frame their conflict narratives by evoking the rivalry framework in their public statement (2) rivals are actually providing some kind of support for their preferred side. In sum, the structural conditions that make civil wars difficult to resolve, information asymmetries, commitment problems, and lack of trust, provide a fertile ground for conflict parties to misrepresent the presence, type, and the level of support they receive from external parties (either by overstating or understating the extent of external support).

Lastly, this section was aimed at overcoming the Cold-War framework that still dominates the study of proxy wars. As Inns (2012) argues, "in that Cold War formulation, proxies were little more than third-party tools of statecraft without any agency, intent, or indeed interest visibly separable from those a well-resourced state sponsor" (Innes 2012:13). Accordingly, little systematic attention has been given to local agencies. Proxies today operate with much greater flexibility and autonomy and are able to exploit deeper connections because of global interconnectedness resulting from technological and supply chain innovations (Rondeaus & Sterman 2019). As Rondeaus and Sterman (2019) puts it, "in contemporary proxy warfare, newly empowered non-state actors are both principals and agents, marketing their comparative advantage over direct intervention to potential sponsors and sponsoring groups themselves" (Rondeaus & Sterman 2019:51).

3.3. Linking the internal and external levels: Networked interdependencies

This section integrates the internal and external perspectives of intervention in order to elucidate the causal mechanism of rival mobilization in response to civil wars in third-party states. To recall, this dissertation asks the following research question: *How can intervention by rivals impact the credible commitment problem and information asymmetries of civil war belligerents (and thus*

increase conflict duration)? I argued that the ambiguity over inter-state rivalries impact on civil wars is an unresolved macro-micro problem: it is difficult to model the simultaneous presence of rivals at the civil conflict level, but highly mixed and fluid motives of civil war belligerents (to attain support, but under certain circumstances deny its existence) in their approach to rivals. As a consequence, inter-state rivalry at the external level and civil conflict at the internal level create *networked interdependencies* (Dorrusen et. al 2016) through the joint mechanisms of conflict integration and rivalry instrumentalization. Figure 2 locates those mechanisms at their respective levels of operation. Conflict integration takes place in the context of inter-rival relations (link 4), while instrumentalization takes place in the context of domestic combatants' relations (link 1) and provides a framework to explain rival intervention dynamics.

Figure 2. Mechanism-based explanation protracted conflicts
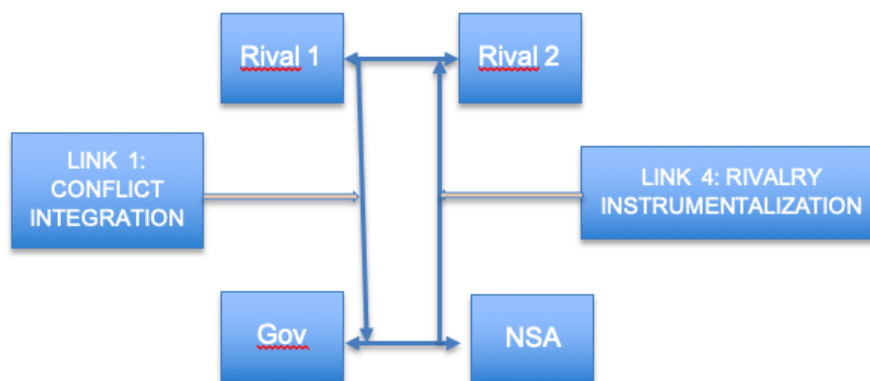
Intervention by interstate rivals impacts the credible commitment problem of domestic conflict parties through one "hard" (military support provision) and "soft" (non-military support provision) type of support provision. Rivals can promote the victory of their supported allies by engaging them in peace talks, altering fighting capacities, and froze the conflict by negotiating ceasefires. The provision of military support is the most often analyzed type of intervention and without any questions, the one that has the most direct impact on conflict actors' ability to carry on fighting. From rivals' perspective, the provision of arms is also a preferred, cost-saving way of engagement compared to sending boots on the ground. Yet, rivals' intervention impacts the credible commitment problem and adds uncertainty to the bargaining process through another, more long-

term mechanism: the provision of aid. The instrumentalization or politicization of aid however can contribute to exacerbating existing social cleavages and creating new ones in the civil war-torn country.[28] The politicization of humanitarian aid leads to the distribution of aid along the lines of conflict parties. Accordingly, aid can evolve into a resource employed to prolong conflict because it feeds into greed and legitimacy seeking dynamics of parties involved (Eisler et. al 2018:4). The empirical section provides further evidence on how aid can contribute to prolonged conflicts.

From a temporal point of view, it is important to emphasize that neither rivalries, nor civil wars are static. Rivals' impact is different before, during, and after a conflict. On the other hand, civil wars in a third-party territory influences rivalry dynamic differently over the course of war, sometimes encouraging or discouraging support provision or changing the type and level of support by rivals. A case-study approach helps to highlight this dynamic nature and co-evolution of rivalries, civil war dynamics, and their interactions.

4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

4.1. External dimension of domestic conflicts: Overview of Saudi-Iranian relations (1979-2018)

Though research has shown that there is a correlation in the presence of interstate rivalry and intervention, sufficient explanations for *how and why* rivalry intervention influences civil war are unavailable. This chapter addresses these how and why questions in the framework of rivals' *conflict integration* mechanism. This section does not focus on the case-study of Yemen but provides contextual background for Saudi Arabia and Iran's propensity to intervene in third-party civil conflicts. While parts of this chapter are more descriptive than analytical, the historical narrative of the Saudi-Iranian relations provides the necessary background for both the application of the theory and the empirical analysis. As Thompson (2001) argues, the most valuable sources

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[28] Furthermore, when parties who intervene militarily to conflict simultaneously provide humanitarian aid, then it becomes questionable whether aid can adhere to international humanitarian law (IHL) and to the humanitarian principles defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), namely to universality, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

for information pertinent to identifying strategic rivalries are the political histories of individual state's foreign policies (Thompson 2001:567).

The first and most important observation is that Saudi Arabia and Iran have never fought a conventional war against each other.[29] A direct war between the two rivals is in fact unlikely: Ostovar (2018) concluded that "both sides seem to have concluded that a direct war isn't in their interest" (2018:1) an observation confirmed both by Saudi and Iranian leaders themselves (Malsin 2019). In order to understand the fluctuating nature, non-militarized conflictual, and cooperative phases of the rivals relationship I chose to discern variables that are *structural* from the more *contextual* ones.[30] The selection of these variables was guided by the literature on Saudi-Iranian relations and informed by the MEAS literature. Structural variables are disaggregated into the following units: geographic position, relative material capabilities, religion and state-building. Contextual variables entail the following variables: leadership changes, regional conflicts, and perceptions and relations to the U.S. Table 3 provides an overview of these variables. Understanding the differences between these two categories is important not from a merely theoretical perspective, but from a policy aspect as well. Contextual variables, by nature, are dynamic and subject to change over time and as such provide critical intervention points for external actors. Discussing these variables in a structured, focused manner helps us to grasp the fundamental conditions that enable rivals to intervene in third-party states. While most of the data for this section comes from primary and secondary sources, key informant interviews have provided significant inputs to this chapter.

[29] In fact, the first documented direct military confrontation took place in 14 September 2019 when Iran attacked two oil facilities (Khurais oil installation and Abqaiq processing facility) owned by Saudi Aramco. The attack has been described by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeio as an "act of war" (BBC 2019). For a short period, the drone attack had a devastating effect: it reduced Saudi oil production by 50% and cut 5% of the global oil supply. In the longer-term it revealed how vulnerable the Kingdom's strategic assets are. The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack, but neither the Kingdom, nor the US believed in it. According to a Reuters Special Report, the proposal for an attack was discussed four months earlier by top Iranian military and security officials. Targeting strategic infrastructure in a key US ally country was a signal to the US rather than to the Kingdom (Reuters 2019).
[30] Structural variables shape both rivalry dynamics and rival's propensity and capacity for intervention. These variables interact with the contextual variables.

Table 2.: Rivalry: Structural and contextual independent variables

Structural variables	Contextual variables
Geography	Leadership changes
Relative capabilities	Regional conflicts
Religion & State-building	Relations to the U.S.

4.1.1. Making sense of the rivalry

Saudi Arabia and Iran are key regional powers in the Middle-East. Saudi Arabia, a Sunni-majority country and Iran is a Shia Muslim majority country. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran are major energy exporters and their geographical location makes them key strategic states. Since 2003, the rivalry between the two states has occupied a central role in shaping the region's security landscape. This chapter provides a backgrounder to the rivalry, a step essential, to understand their competitive intervention in Yemen. Saudi-Iranian bilateral relations have been described in multiple ways. Some refer to it as the "New Middle-Eastern cold war" (Gause III 2014), while others characterize it as a "sectarian confrontation and pragmatic rapprochement" (Wehrey et al. 2009:14). When reviewing historical accounts of the Saudi-Iranian relations, most studies differentiate between four relatively distinct phases: Post-revolutionary rivalry (1979-1989); post-Gulf War detente (1990-2002); the emergence of the regional cold war (2003-2010); and the competing interventions in states affected by the Arab Spring (2011-) (Rabi & Mueller 2018:47; Mabon 2016). Besides these temporal categorizes, certain theoretical frameworks are also prevalent in the literature: The Saudi-Iranian relations are most often analyzed from classical and neorealist perspectives (e.g.: Fürtig 2007; Chubin & Tripp 1996; Keynoush 2016; Mason 2014), focusing on issues such as oil and military capabilities. More constructivist accounts look at state-identity and the role of religion, or the ideological competition's impact on foreign policy strategies (Downs 2012; Mabon 2016; Majin 2017). Yet, analyzing the bilateral relationship exclusively through one of these lenses is redundant. In fact, sectarian, ideological (a conflict between conservative and revolutionary ideologies), ethnic, economic, and security issues (such as US foreign policy in the region) all shape the dynamics of their relationship (N.Rozsa 2018; Wehrey et al. 2009) and as such these states propensity to intervene.

4.2. Structural variables: Geography, relative material capabilities, religion and state formation

4.2.1. Geography

The greater Middle-East and especially the Gulf is one of the most important economic and security regions. This region however is also home to one of the highest numbers of armed conflicts (ACLED 2019). The Gulf's magnified geostrategic importance stems from its massive oil and natural gas reserves and its location at vital trading routes. Saudi Arabia borders the two most important strategic naval trade routes, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, whereas 40% of the world's oil exports pass through the Iran controlled Strait of Hormuz (Jones et. al 2019). Saudi Arabia possesses approximately 18 percent of the global petroleum reserves and it is the largest oil exporter. This makes the Kingdom a member of the G-20, with a GDP of 782.500 billion USD in 2018 (World Bank 2019). The oil and gas production accounts for around 50 percent of gross domestic product and 70 percent of export, making Saudi Arabia's economy almost exclusively natural resource dependent (OPEC 2019). The Kingdom covers around two million square kilometers and has a population of over 33 million (CIA World Factbook 2019). Map 1. shows the geographical location of the two rivals.

Map 1.: Saudi Arabia and Iran

Source: Wall Street Journal (2017) Saudi Arabia and Iran: Four Proxy Conflicts Explained.

Oil was first discovered in the Kingdom in 1938 in the Damman oil field. Saudi Arabia's main wealth-generating sector—the oil industry and its refineries—is vulnerable because it is mainly located in the unstable, majority-Shia quarters in the country's Eastern Province. Besides being the lifeline of the Saudi economy, the presence of natural resources exerts considerable influence on state-building practices, the development, and endurance of the monarchical regime type. The oil wealth possessed by Saudi Arabia gave rise to the "rentier state" phenomenon (Beblawi 1987). Rentier states incorporate only a fraction of society in the production of rents, whilst, with the government acting as the principal recipient of the wealth, the majority engage in its distribution and utilization (Beblawi 1987:385). Rentier states are also more likely to be autocracies because the lack of taxation translates into the lack of accountability and substantial autonomy of the regime in decision-making (Herb 2005:299). As subsequent chapters will show, national wealth generated by oil has been the single most important factor in Saudi Arabia's capacity to engage in third-party conflicts.

The Islamic Republic of Iran compromises around 1,650 thousand square kilometers and has a population of around 82 million. In 2017, Iran had an estimated GDP of US$447 billion (World Bank 2019). Iran is also strategically located: Iran's proximity to the Indian Ocean is a key security and economic factor, since majority of global oil and gas reserves is transported via the Indian Ocean (Morady 2011). Iran's economy, similarly to Saudi Arabia's, is also dominated by the hydrocarbon sector and ranks second in the world in natural gas reserves and fourth in proven oil reserves (CIA World Factbook 2019). Iran's coastline on the southern edge touches the Persian Gulf and the Straits of Hormuz. This gives Tehran strategic control over the waterways through which much of the world's oil travels. Iran's primary geographic challenge has been to secure itself from the many external threats on its borders, dating back to the era of the Persian Empire (Stratfor 2014). Iran's strategic proximity to Afghanistan is also of major importance, especially from the US perspective and in the post-withdrawal phase. [31] The Indian Ocean is another key site where Iranian geostrategic interests are present: Iran has been developing economic and security relationships with several key countries in the region, such as Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka.

[31] Iran's policy towards the Afghan Taliban is complicated. Both actors oppose the US. Iran's policy has been described as one of "strategic hedging" in which Tehran supports both the Afghan government and the Taliban "and playing them against each other whenever its necessary". To learn more about Iranian-Taliban relations, see: Behravesh (2019) What does Iran want in Afghanistan. AlJazeera. 4 February, 2019.

Energy security, in the form of Iranian supplied gas and oil, has been a key driver in these relationships which helps to develop a strong Iranian naval presence in the region (Alexander 2011).

4.2.2. Relative Material Capabilities

The strategic location and resources of these two states requires robust protection both from internal sources and from external states. In case of Saudi Arabia, the most notable external security guarantor has been the US. Protection from the US is in fact one of the most important contextual drivers of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Saudi Arabia relies on US protection, whereas Iranians regard the US as their primary enemy. As noted earlier, this factor results in different threat perceptions. While Iran considers the US as its primary rival, Saudi Arabia views Iran as its biggest threat. Turning back the focus to internal security provision, I examine the relative military strength of Saudi Arabia and Iran, the size of military, the quality of equipment, and their military forces effectiveness.

From a domestic perspective, Saudi Arabia and Iran have amassed considerable offensive and defensive military power, making the greater Middle-East one of the most the most heavily militarized regions in the world. In fact, 4 of the world's top 10 arms-importing countries in 2014-2018 were in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia received 33 % of arms transfers to the region, followed by Egypt, the UAE, and Iraq (Aljazeera 2019). Yet, Saudi Arabia and Iran markedly differ in the size and quality of their military forces. Iran has the larger military – compromised of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its special forces division, the Quds force, and Artesh regular military. Yet, as the below section demonstrates, Iran's military technology and weapons are relatively outmoded and weak. The Saudi military is smaller in size but have better and more modern capabilities. According to the latest Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report on military expenditure and arms transfers, between 1994 and 2018, one can observe a "pattern of rapid military build-ups in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE over the past 15 years, high levels of military spending as a share of GDP in all four countries, and growing military asymmetry in which Saudi Arabia and the UAE continue to build diverse and advanced military capabilities, while Iran is unable to do the same" (Wezeman & Kuimova 2019:1). Figure

4 and 5 shows the disparities over time with regards to arms transfers and military expenditure. Table 3 and 4 shows annual data of military expenditure (USD million) for only Iran and Saudi Arabia and it displays the data in a graph format as well (Figure 6).

Figure 4. Military expenditure by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, 1994-2018
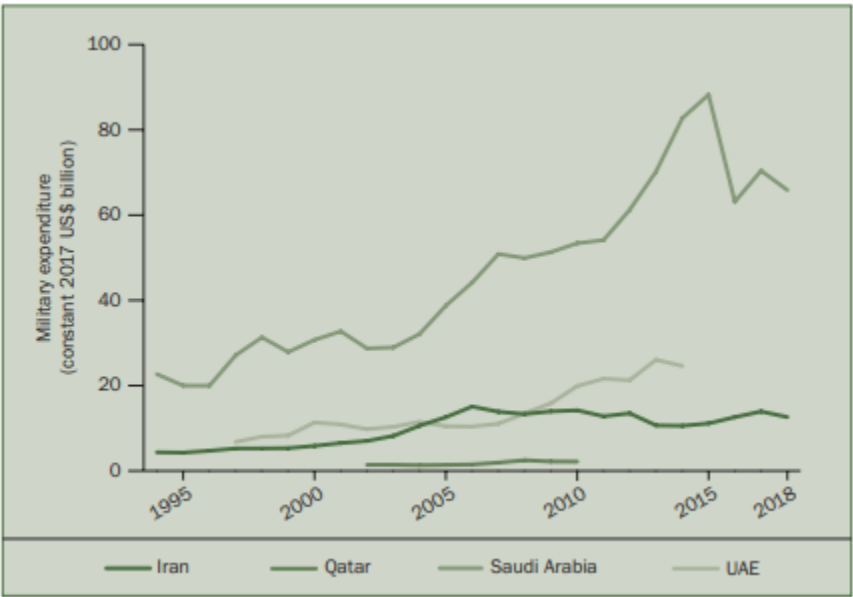
Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, April 2019.

Figure 5. Arms imports by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, 1994-2018

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, March 2019.

Table 3. Saudi Arabia and Iran: Military Expenditure (USD million) 1994-2019

Year	Saudi Arabia (US $m)	Iran (US $m)
1994	23 243	4 592
1995	20 489	4 504
1996	20 456	4 967
1997	27 780	5 541
1998	32 091	5 545
1999	28 562	5 608
2000	31 480	6 175
2001	33 531	6 874
2002	29 432	7 399
2003	29 641	8 635
2004	32 892	11 159
2005	39 720	13 269
2006	45 246	15 889
2007	52 118	14 611
2008	51 152	14 056
2009	52 568	14 707
2010	54 713	14 965
2011	55 456	13 495
2012	62 761	14 220
2013	71 925	11 233
2014	84 772	11 141
2015	90 409	11 719
2016	64 698	13 280
2017	72 136	14 678
2018	74 400	11 231
2019	62 525	9 582

Data comes from SIPRI Military Expenditure dataset (2020) which includes data for 173 countries for the period 1949-2019. To access the dataset see: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2020, https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex

Figure 6: Saudi Arabia and Iran: Military Expenditure (USD million) 1994-2019
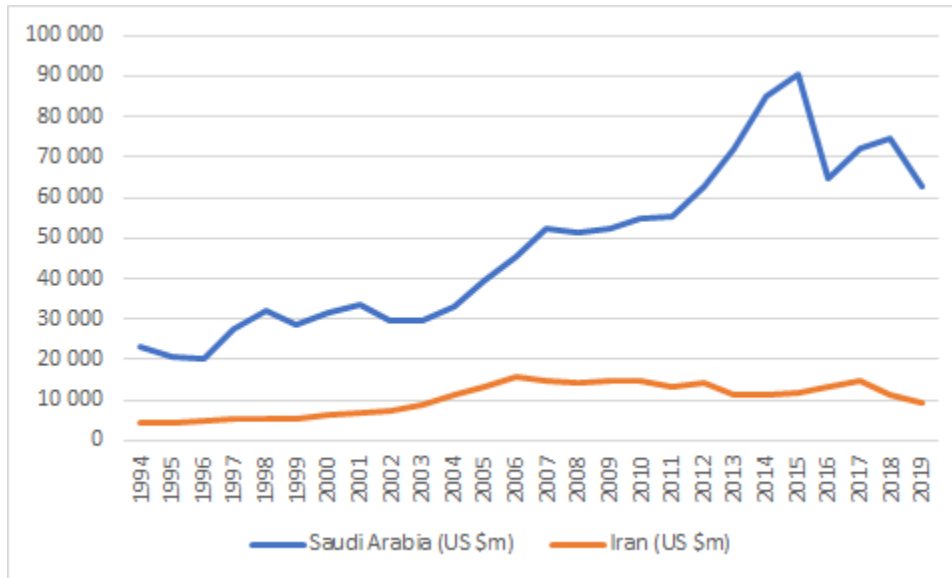
Source: ibid.

Iran's inability to match the capabilities of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states in large part stems from its international isolation and decades of economic sanctions imposed by multiple actors, such as the US, UN, and the EU. As Figure 4 and 6 show, Iran's military spending peaked in 2006 and experienced sharp decrease since the EU imposed economic sanctions. In 2018, military spending was 2.7 percent of the GDP, the 25th highest globally (Wezeman & Kuimova 2019:2). Figure 5 shows that between 1994 and 2018 Iranian arms imports saw a decrease. Between 2009 and 2018 the total value of Iran's arms imports equaled to just 3.5 percent of Saudi Arabian arms import in the same period. Due to a wide range of sanctions 96 percent of Iran's arms imports between 2014 and 2018 were originated from Russia, while the remaining 4 percent came from China (Wezeman & Kuimova 2019:3).

On the other hand, in 2018 Saudi Arabia ranked as the third-largest military spender and the world's largest arms importer between 2014 and 2018. In 2018 the Kingdom's military spending equaled to an estimated 67.6 billion USD, representing 8.8 % of its GDP. Figure 4 and 6 show that Saudi military spending peaked in 2015 when the Kingdom have spent 13 percent of its GDP, the same

year in which its military operation in Yemen have begun. The largest arms suppliers to the Kingdom are the US and the United Kingdom together with several European countries such as Germany, Spain, and France (Wezeman & Kuimova 2019: 3-4). The variation in military capabilities is not exclusively quantitative, but qualitative as well.[32] Saudi Arabia has acquired a massive stockpile of the most advanced military equipment including, the Royal Saudi Airforce's (RSAF) modernized version of F-15s, Typhoon combat aircrafts, SLAM-ER cruise missiles with a 280-kilometer range, and a variety of guided bombs, all of which have been used in Yemen. At the same time, Iran lacks such a sophisticated military technology (ibid p.5).

Yet, a crucial difference concerns the effectiveness of these states' military forces. Iran has decades of combat experience in protracted interstate wars (Iran-Iraq war) and war delegation to its most effective proxy, Hezbollah. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia have comparatively little combat and on-the-ground-experience which makes the military an ineffective force even though being one of the world's largest spender of defense (Knights 2018). In short, there is a disparity in asymmetrical capabilities. Although Iran is not able to compete with Saudi Arabia when it comes to conventional military capabilities, it excels in asymmetric warfare. Iran has developed the capacity to conduct war through third parties, a considerable strategic advantage over rivals who rely on conventional strategies and air force. This policy is designed and executed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, led by Qasem Soleimani. Krieg and Rickli (2019) notes that "Iran is probably the most experienced patron in the late twentieth and early-twenty first centuries to conduct warfare by surrogate. Iran's strategic defense relies on its ability to mobilize militias as surrogates domestically and overseas to protect its borders as much as possible as it relies on ballistic missiles, tanks, and fighter jets" (2019:165). Interestingly, the utilization of external actors has a constitutional basis. Article 154 of the Iranian Constitution states that "While scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the freedom fighters against the oppressors in every corner of the globe".[33] Interviewees highlighted that the unconventional war fighting capacity originates from Iran's

[32] The SIPRI report notes that Iran is the most transparent in its public reporting on military expenditure whereas Saudi Arabia has a "single line in the government budget for defence and security" and it is unlikely to be accurate (Wezeman & Kuimova 2019:7-8).
[33] The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979). Accessed on 1January 2020 at https://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Iran_Constitution_en.pdf

experience in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. Interviewee number 3 more specifically stated that "What appears for others as offensive is in reality defensive for us (Iran). We know how to live under sanctions, we know that countries such as the US, Iraq, and Israel have more developed military capabilities. But they lack one crucial component: they don't know that supporting the oppressed in third countries is not just a religious duty for us, but it helps to build reliable alliances and to defend Iran from external attacks" (02.04.2019, Lebanon, IPS Conference interview). As such from the Iranian perspective, the provision of different types of support for non-state actors serves both deterrence and influence extension purposes. Having allies within states can deter outside powers from intervention by raising the costs of such a move. Examples of these proxies are abound in the region: The IRCG have trained and equipped forces such as Syria's National Defense Forces (NDF), factions within the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (MPF), The Houthis, and Lebanese Hezbollah (Heiden & Krijger 2018:12; Zweiri 2016:4).

Saudi Arabia also employs non-conventional tools for defensive purposes. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's historical bilateral military and security cooperation is an important factor to consider when discussing Saudi-Iranian relative capabilities. Islamabad facilitated the development of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) in the 1960s, assisted the Saudi military forces during the 1979 Grand Mosque seizure, in 1982 co-founded the Organization of Saudi-Pakistani Armed Forces and sent approximately 13,000 troops to the Kingdom during the 19991 Gulf War (Zamarayeva 2014). Pakistani military personnel frequently serve in the Kingdom, and train Saudi soldiers. In 2015, Islamabad however decided not to take part in the Saudi-led coalition's fight against the Houthis, fearing a domestic backlash due to its own sizeable (20%) Muslim Shia minority (Siddiqi 2019). Saudi Arabia has long aspired to achieve its own nuclear capacity, a strategic goal that is primarily aimed at countering Iranian nuclear developments. In the absence of nuclear infrastructure, Saudi Arabia provided extensive financial and diplomatic support for the Pakistani nuclear program. The "Islamic bomb", as Pakistani leaders refer to it is a strategic tool not only for Pakistan to counter Indian, but it also serves as an extended arm of Saudi military capabilities.

The Saudi petrodollar enabled Saudi Arabia to push for the geographical distribution of *Salafism* globally. According to various literatures, it has been estimated that in the past two decades Saudi Arabia has spent at least $87 billion propagating Wahhabism abroad (Valentine 2015: 252). The

funding has been said to go towards the construction and operating expenses of religious institutions (madrasas, mosques, etc.) that sermonize Wahhabism. This funding also goes towards the training of imams, dominating media and publishing outlets, and distributing Wahhabi textbooks. These institutions have been described as hotbeds for radicalization, extremism, jihadist violence, and terrorism (Hegghammer 2010). Saudi Arabia in fact is not only the home of Osama bin Laden, 15 out of 19 hijackers of the 9/11 attacks, but also sent the highest number of suicide bombers to post-2003 Iraq, and an estimated 2,500 foreign fighters to the Islamic State (Fisunoglu & Greer 2016). Saudi transnational educational institutions purpose is to enhance the domestic legitimacy of House of Saud and to promote the Wahhabi version of Sunni Islam. Scholarly analyses of the ideology taught in Saudi schoolbooks find that it promotes an anti-pluralistic worldview that encourages the emergence of stereotypes of the enemy (Center for Religious Freedom of Freedom House 2006; Groiss 2003). In addition, as Kovacs (2014) notes, "in the Saudi/Iranian struggle for hegemony, Saudi educational institutions play a major role in repressing Shia Islam in other countries and establishing international ideological alliances" (Kovacs 2014:5).

4.2.3. Religion and state formation

Before discussing the role and influence of religion in case of the Saudi-Iranian relations it is necessary to address the differences between the Westphalian and Islamic notion of sovereignty, a factor that has been noted earlier in the MEAS literature section. The most important difference between the Westphalian state models' definition of nationalism and those of the Middle-East is that the latter exhibits strong transnational characteristics, while the first one assumes congruence between nation and state. This difference translates into a tension between the concept of nation state and that of Umma. Middle Eastern states do not confine the concept of nation to state boundaries. In fact, the multiplicity of identities, exhibiting strong trans-state characteristics, such as Sunni and Shia communities, can contribute to the eruption of violence both within and between states (Mabon 2016: 107). Accordingly, both Saudi Arabia and Iran are aimed at managing these identity groups in order to prevent the eruption of conflict. Besides these differences, as Mabon (2016) puts it, "both Saudi Arabia and Iran have sought to export their Islamic beliefs across both the Gulf and wider Middle East regions" (Mabon 2016:111).

Any discussion on Saudi Arabia and Iran involves the examination of religious lens. Religion has played a special identity construction, state-building, and conflict framing role in the current political system of both states. Yet, religious differences per se - the Islamic Republic of Iran is a Shia Republic, whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a conservative Sunni Monarchy - does not presuppose a conflictual relationship. Both states political systems are based on Islamic values, but apply a different interpretation of religion. Religion shapes both states national role conception (Holsti 1970) and by providing a fundamental identity marker, religion can be mobilized both by the state and non-state actors for political purposes. Both states consider regime survival as a domestic and foreign policy priority. In fact, competing ambitions to achieve regional hegemonic positions are intertwined with the need to secure regime survival, as N.Rózsa (2018) puts it, "both Saudi Arabia and Iran are considered "nation-states," but behave like empires" (N. Rózsa 2018:287). Regime survival in general can be threatened from internal and external sources.34 Managing particular identity groups - both religious, tribal, or ethnic - with trans-national agendas is of utmost importance for both states. Yet, as both states are autocratic, regime change from internally induced events are more likely to be repressed at their early stages. As Mabon (2013) highlights, "the late 1970s and 1980s saw a spate of riots and some of the worst repression of Shi'i Muslims in the Kingdom's history, highlighted by the use of 20,000 members of the National Guard" (2013:54). Even though that the likelihood of domestic dissents' success is relatively low, external threats to regime survival are of key concern for both states. According to a 2009 RAND Report, "each state sees the expansion of regional influence by the other as a net loss for itself, whether Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, or the Gulf littoral" (Wehrey et al 2009:12). There are three interdependent layers to be considered when discussing religion and state-building: the Arab-Persian cultural differences, the Sunni-Shia divide, and the different regime types.

Besides differences in religion and regime types, the Arab and Persian conception of nationalism (Halliday 1996, N.Rózsa 2017) rest on different tenets. Historically, Iran's continued independence from direct colonial control and its experience of the Iran–Iraq War fostered a belief in the principle of self-sufficiency and independence from any kind of foreign influence—quite unlike Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors, who depend on foreign assistance for their security (Hiro 2018:3). For today, Iranian nationalism involves a strong emphasis on Islamism and it is also

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34 These threats can result in internal or external security dilemma. (Mabon 2013)

fueled by strong anti-American sentiments due to decades of economic sanctions and hostile rhetoric from the US. As Tabaar (2019) concludes, for today, "Iran's leaders have found that President Trump's hostility toward Iran is helping to rally otherwise resentful citizens behind the regime and create a new cohesive Islamist-nationalist ideology" (Tabaar 2019:1).

In case of Saudi Arabia, traditionally, tribes constituted the basic social and political units. Although the post-oil era restructured the societal system in the Kingdom, hundreds of tribes remain scattered around the country, similarly to Yemen. King Abdul Aziz (founder of present day Saudi Arabia) integrated the tribes into a new political entity through the unifying force of Hanbali school of Islamic law and inter-tribal marriages (Hiro 2018; Mallakh & Mallakh 1982) Tribes, as a result, were forcefully integrated into the newly developed Saudi national identity. At the same time, as Mallakh and Mallakh (1982) concludes, "indeed, despite a half-century's official campaign against tribalism in the name of encouraging national and Islamic solidarity, clan and lineage links remain a potent force in Saudi Arabian society" (Mallakh & Mallakh 1982:2). The Saudi conception of nationalism, or its most contemporary "hyper-nationalist" (Alhussein 2019) sentiment however opposes pan-Arab or pan-Islamic unity which by definition supposed to transcend national boundaries. Historically Saudi Arabia have used religion to unite and to create a sense of national belonging for the multitude of different identity groups, but this tendency is changing especially since the rise of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (Nevo 1988). Nationalism in the Middle East is, similarly to other transnational identity-markers, often instrumentalized by domestic elites to ensure regime survival.

4.2.3.1. Sunni-Shia divide

The first important observation to make is that Sunnis and Shias, the two main sects of Islam, both draw their faith from the Quran.[35] The divisions between the two sects dates back to the 7th century and originates in a dispute over the succession of Prophet Muhammad who died in 632. Followers of Ali (son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, husband to the Prophet's daughter Fatima), who believed that Ali was appointed by the Prophet to become the political and spiritual leader of the Muslim community, became the Shia (Shiat Ali, or partisans of Ali). The Sunnis (named after

[35] The majority of the world's Muslim population follows Sunni Islam, while 10 to 15% are followers of the Shia branch of Islam (Blanchard 2005).

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followers of the *sunna*, or tradition) however believed that Abu Bakr (close companion of the Prophet) should lead the Muslim community. This group opposed political succession based on bloodline to the Prophet and proposed that the leader (imam) should be selected on the basis of community consensus and the individual merits of the leader (Blanchard 2005). The question of succession was initially settled by electing Abu Bakr as the first Caliph (successor). Followers of Ali however considered the election of Abu Bakr (and the two succeeding Caliphs) as being illegitimate. Some of Ali's followers assassinated the third Caliph in 656 AD and Ali became the Caliph. In 991 AD Ali was assassinated and divisions between the two sects grew. Sunnis and Shia adopted different approaches to religious and political leadership (the Sunnis trusted the secular leadership system of caliphs, while Shias considered Imams as their leaders whom they believe to be divinely appointed leaders from the Prophet's family). There are further divisions between Shia and Sunnis when it comes to theology and religious practices (Sonn 2010).

Iran is home to the largest percentage of Shia Muslims, viewing itself as a protector and leader of this community. Twelver Shiism (ithna 'ashariyya) is the largest branch of Shia Islam and the prevalent sub-sect practiced in Iran. While almost 90 percent of the Iranian population adheres to Twelver Shia[36], Iran recognizes three other religious minorities: Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian religious minorities. Human Rights Watch notes that Sunni Muslims in Iran have faced religious discrimination and they were denied from "gathering and praying in designated sites to commemorate holy days" (HRW 2013). In Saudi Arabia, Sharia is interpreted through the special sub-sect of Sunni Islam whose followers are officially called Muwahideen, or Unitarian believers in the unity of Allah. (Hiro 2018:112). Both Saudi Arabia and Iran ascertain religious primacy over the global Islamic community comprising of all Muslims (Umma). Hiro (2018) refers to these competitive dynamics as both states "claim to exceptionalism" (2018:2). Since 1979, Iran perceives itself as the legitimate leader of the Muslim world and the leader of the global resistance movement against the United States and the Western influence. This claim places Tehran at odds with Saudi Arabia, who similarly claims global leadership over the Umma. On the other hand, the House of Saud's legitimacy rests on their claim to custodianship of the Islamic holy cities of Mecca

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[36] Sunnis compromise approximately 10 percent of the population.

and Medina and that the Kingdom is the home of the Hajj,[37][38][39] While this division in Islam has always existed, the divide between the Shias and the Sunnis intensified after the 1979 revolution.

4.2.3.2. State formation (regime types)

The competitive claims for exceptionalism in the religious sphere are closely tied to the Saudi-Iranian enmity over the ideal type of governance. Iran is a theocracy with democratic elements, while Saudi Arabia is a hereditary monarchy. The political philosophical underpinnings of the Iranian Islamic Republic reject the monarchical regime that characterizes Saudi Arabia (Wehrey et. al 2009). Following the 1979 revolution, Iran has a mixed political system in which the executive, parliament, and judiciary branches are overseen by various bodies dominated by the clergy. Shia Islam in Iran is based on Sharia and amended by the "checks and balances contained within the political construction of the *velayat-e faqih*" (Guardian of the Islamic Jurist or Regency of the Jurist) posited by Ayatollah Khomeini (Mabon 2016:139). In practice, the constitution grants the absolute primacy to the Supreme Leader who has the right to challenge the decision of the executive president.[40] The Supreme Leader is the official head of state, the spiritual leader of the state, and the head of the armed forces. The 1979 constitution also codifies the popularly elected unicameral 290-member parliament. This body, the Islamic Consultative Assembly – or Majles – is supervised by the Guardian Council, a body made up of 12 appointed Islamic jurists (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). All legislation passed by the Majles has to be approved by the Council. Although the Majles has less influence than the presidency, the military, and the Supreme Leader, it does play an important role in domestic matters. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRCG) exerts a significant influence over politics and economy,

[37] During the Hajj an estimated three million Muslims visit Mecca and perform Islamic rituals (Keynoush 2016:20).
[38] Wahhabism is an Islamic school of thought located outside of the four orthodox thought of Sunni Islam.
[39] Note that Wahhabism in not homogenous in Saudi Arabia. There are tensions both within the clerical establishment and between the Al Saud family and the Wahhabi clerics.
[40] "Article 5 of the Iranian constitution stipulates that an individual jurist, who is endowed with all the necessary qualities, or a council of jurists, has the right to rule and exercise leadership in the Islamic Republic as long as 'The Lord of Time', i.e. the Twelfth Imam of the Shias, remains in occultation" The constitution gives the velayat-e-faqih total control over the affairs of the state. Article 57 states that 'he (vali-e-faqih) is to have supervision over the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government' The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979). Accessed on 1January 2020 at https://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Iran_Constitution_en.pdf

mostly through informal means. The pluralistic system is characterized by a high degree of factionalism and informality that produced three main overlapping factional coalitions: conservative, reformist, and pragmatist all operating within Khomeini's Islamic ideological and political framework. (Green et. Al 2009: 25-30)

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 by King Abd al-Aziz Al-Saud (commonly known as Ibn Saud) and the followers of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The monarchy is governed by Sharia and the 1992 Basic Law and the Al-Saud dynasty holds a monopoly of political power. Decision-making processes in the Kingdom are conducted behind closed doors and based on consensus-making among the elite. The clerical establishment exerts powerful influence on political-decision making processes by shaping the government decision-making on social and legal matters (Blanchard 2017: 3-4). The most vulnerable and protest-prone domestic element of the Kingdom is its Shia minority, which constitutes approximately 13% of the population and reside in the Eastern Province that is also home to key oil facilities.[41] Shias in Saudi Arabia are subject to wide-spread discrimination and they do not benefit from health and social services of the state (HRW 2009).

This section provided an overview of three structural variables – geography, relative material capabilities, and religion's role in state-building practices – influencing the Saudi-Iranian relations. These structural variables however have to be analyzed in tandem with the more contextual ones that can mitigate, or other times exacerbate tensions between the two countries.

4.3. Contextual variables: leadership changes, regional conflicts, relations to the US

Contrary to structural variables, dynamic or contextual variables are subject to both internal and external change. By focusing on contextual variables over time, we are able to gain a more nuanced picture of the rivalry, especially by showing how pragmatic considerations of individual leaders, or broader regional and international dynamics have often mitigated the otherwise structurally driven enmity. I disaggregate contextual variables to the following units: domestic leadership changes, perceptions of external actors (most importantly each states' perception of and relations

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[41] Note that the Eastern Province also entails conflicts stemming from tribal tensions (Keynoush 2016: 59)

to the U.S.), and regional conflicts.42 One particular benefit of focusing on contextual variables is that they provide important explanatory variables for rivals propensity to intervene.

4.3.1. Leadership changes

Leadership changes, albeit not able to shift structural variables, provide important triggers to improve or worsen Saudi-Iranian relations. Mabon (2013) also underlines this argument by stating that, "in order to fully understand the nuances of the rivalry, and indeed of Middle Eastern security, one needs to have an awareness of the internal dynamics upon external relations between states" (Mabon 2013:7). Some important caveat remains: Despite the different priorities of domestic leaders, there are elements of continuity in both states foreign policy: The main pillars of Iranian foreign policy is Pan-Islamist, Pan-Shia, anti-Western, and revolutionary. In foreign affairs, as mentioned in the previous section, Iranian political leaders' freedom of action is heavily circumscribed by the Supreme Leader's authority, as well as the significant economic and political influence wielded by the IRGC. On the other hand, since 1932 Saudi foreign policy has sought to ensure two overriding objectives: protection from external threats, survival of the Al-Saud regime and as such the monarchical governance system.

In the pre-revolution era, and particularly during the 1960's, the common pan-Arab and anti-monarchist enemy of Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser united Saudi Arabia and Iran (Fürtig 2007). Peaceful relations however suffered a long-lasting backlash from the 1979 Revolution which exacerbated previously well-managed geopolitical concerns by transforming Iran into a revolutionary and anti-monarchical regime. This domestic critical juncture resulted in profound changes in Tehran's foreign policy, because Ayatollah Khomeini actively promoted the export of revolution. Iranians overthrew the secular government of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in a non-violent mass revolution. Hiro (2018) notes that the end of the Iranian monarchy was of special importance, since it was built on a grass-root political base, but the Saudi monarchy, that time under King Khalid, failed to fully grasp the importance of this fact (Hiro 2018:63). In fact, Saudi Arabia immediately recognized the new government and King Khalid sent a letter to Ayatollah Khomeini congratulating and expressed the Saudis will to cooperate on the basis of

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42 Note that this is not an exhaustive list of contextual determinants. I selected these variables because they serve as proxies for different levels of analysis.

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"Islamic solidarity" (Keynoush 2016:326). Khomeini however saw the Saudi monarchy as a mere extension of US presence in the region and explicitly aimed at overthrowing the monarchy (Entessar, 1984). Governments replacement was to be achieved through the unification of Shia populations; a region-wide goal later termed as the "Shia Crescent" by King Abdullah of Jordan (ibid).

The Saudi regime thus perceived changes in Iran as an internal threat to regime security (fear of the end of monarchy) and an external threat to its territorial integrity (fear of Saudi Arabia's own Shia population's revolution and potential call for secession) (Niblock 2006). By 1979 Saudi Arabia became especially vulnerable to the emergent revolutionary rhetoric. The most protest-prone domestic element of the Kingdom has historically been its Shia minority in the Eastern Province. Saudi concerns were indeed valid, as various Shia anti-monarchist groups were organized a revolt, simultaneously to Khomeini's peak of popularity, culminating in the first politico-religious uprising[43] within the Kingdom in November 1979 (ibid). The occupation of the Grand Mosque by Juhayman al-Utaibi was aimed at overthrowing the House of Saud and after several weeks of protracted conflict it ended with the heavy-handed repression of the Saudi security forces (Rabi & Mueller 2018:50). The immediate post-revolutionary period was centered around the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, a conflict in which Saudi Arabia supported the government of Saddam Hussein. The subsequent section on regional conflicts provides a more elaborate discussion on the war, this section focuses on direct bilateral relations.

During the 1987 Hajj 450 pilgrims were killed in clashes with Saudi security forces, 275 of them being Iranians (Keynoush 2016:98). As a response to this incident, protesters attacked the Saudi Embassy in Tehran, killing a Saudi diplomat (ibid). A longer-lasting effect of the 1987 Hajj conflict was that Iranians were banned from attending the annual pilgrimage for four years. The end of the Iran-Iraq war, a weakened Iranian economy, and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 resulted in the emergence of a more pragmatic post-revolutionary leadership in Iran. Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei served as the President of Iran between 1981 and 1989 before becoming the second and current Supreme Leader of Iran. Khamenei has repeatedly asserted that the US is

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[43] Similar developments were taking place in other Gulf countries. 1981 saw a failed coup attempt in Bahrain, and bombings in Kuwait in 1983.

aimed at a regime change in Iran (Reuters 2014) and took a particularly hardline stance against Israel, calling it a "cancerous tumor" that needs to be removed. He also supports the IRCG in its efforts to support regional pro-Iranian groups (Katzman 2019:3).

In 1989, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-1997) was sworn in as the new president. Rafsanjani's governance was more pragmatic aimed at safeguarding Iran's interests and sought to reestablish ties with Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors (Mafinezam & Mehrabi 2008:37). Rather than being exclusively driven by ideology, Iran has adopted a pragmatist foreign policy on many occasions by refraining from providing support to various Shia insurgencies, such as the 1991 one in Iraq (Rabi & Mueller 2018:52). The 1990's saw the first brief period of rapprochement between the Kingdom and Iran. In 1991, Saudi Arabia and Iran resumed diplomatic relations and the Kingdom started re-issuing visas for Iranian pilgrims, yet the fundamental disagreement over the U.S. presence in the region continued to inhibit real cooperation between Tehran and Riyadh (Hiro 2018:72). While Saudi Arabia viewed US military presence as a security guarantee, Iran's perspective was that US forces pose a major threat and that US withdrawal is necessary for Muslim states to achieve full sovereignty. Another serious setback for improving bilateral relations took place in 1996 during the bombing of the Khobar Tower in Saudi Arabia. Iran and the Tehran-supported Saudi Hezbollah al-Hajez group executed the bombing, killing 19 US military personnel in Riyadh (Vakil 2018:6).

The 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) ensured continuity in Iran's more detente-oriented foreign policy by pursuing the policy of "dialogue between civilizations" (Marschall 2003:145). The Kingdom had reciprocated Iranian attempts at opening, partly because of their shared interest in stabilizing falling oil prices in 1997. In 1999, Khatami became the first Iranian president who visited the Kingdom since the revolution. A number of cooperative agreements and memorandums of understandings were signed between the two regarding issues such as oil production quotas, joint economic initiatives, and defense related issues. The 2001 re-election of Khatami have further cemented the progressing relationship and resulted in the signing of a security accord on combating terrorism, drug trafficking, and money laundering (Bahgat 2000; Okruhlik 2003).

2005 however saw a fundamental departure from the improving relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran due to the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's (2005-2013). Tehran's former major has been characterized as an ultraconservative leader, whose foreign policy was described as one that combines a Shia revolutionary identity and a strong sense of Persian nationalism (Mabon 2013:2, Kazemzadeh 2007: 435). Iran under Ahmadinejad has resumed uranium conversion and enrichment at Nataz and Isfahan, but insisted that it was for peaceful purposes.[44] During Ahmadinejad's presidency Iran became one of the most sanctioned states worldwide resulting in considerable harm for the Iranian population. Ansari (2007) argues that "Ahmadinejad's policies have resulted in the exacerbation of tensions, and inaugurated a depreciating cycle of crisis and repression, increasingly driven and determined by its own self-justifying logic" (Ansari 2007:6). In 2009, after a contested election Khamenei backed Ahmadinejad's victory. Ahmadinejad's Saudi counterpart, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud (2005-2015) became King at the age of 81. His more than a decade-long reign was characterized by moderate reforms, such as a foreign-education scholarship system, but its foreign policy have been dominantly pro-status quo (Hiro 2018:401).

The 2013 election of current Iranian president Hassan Rouhani was closely monitored in the West as he promised to improve Iran's international position by adopting a new, more pragmatist policy. In his first term, Rouhani has identified four interrelated foreign policy goals: rebuilding the Iranian economy, resolving the nuclear issues, ending Iran's international isolation most importantly developing relations to the US, and regional engagement[45] (CRS 2019:24). Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein Amir-Abdullahian visited the Kingdom in August 2014, and Foreign Minister Zarif personally offered his condolences in Riyadh following the death of King Abdullah in January 2015 (ibid). Rouhani's presidency was most famous for the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015.[46] Under the JCPOA Iran agreed to limit its nuclear activities in return for lifting international economic sanctions. At the same time,

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[44] Iran's nuclear program began in the 1950's and by the 1970's Tehran started pursuing a nuclear program. Iran tried to show that it was not pursuing nuclear weapons by signing the nuclear Non-proliferation treaty (NPT) in 1968. Iran cancelled its nuclear program after the 1979 revolution but restarted it in 1982. Since then the Iranian government argued that it seeks to expand its reliance on nuclear power for electricity generation purposes which in turn will aid Iranian efforts to export its oil and gas (Kerr 2009).

[45] Kuwait's emir visited Tehran for the first time in June 2014 and met with the Supreme Leader. The UAE reopened its diplomatic relations with Iran in November 2013 (CRS 2019:25).

[46] Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif have been instrumental in the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and early on, he took an opening approach to neighboring countries.

Rouhani has encountered powerful domestic opponents, particularly among the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Iran's conservative elites, and hardliners in the parliament (Shanahan 2015, Zarif 2014). The 2015 Hajj saw one of the deadliest stampedes in the history of the pilgrimage: more than 700 people died, including 464 Iranian pilgrims (BCC 2015). Khamenei has called on the Kingdom to publicly apologize for the accident and a year later he accused the Saudi authorities of murdering pilgrims and called on Muslims to "fundamentally reconsider the management of the Two Holy Places" (BBC 2016).

King Salman bin Abd al Aziz Al Saud (age 82) succeeded his late half-brother King Abdullah following the latter's death in January 2015. Shortly after ascending to power, the King named Prince Mohammed bin Nayef as the Crown prince and Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abd al Aziz, or most widely referred to as MbS, as Deputy Crown Prince and Defense Minister. Saudi-Iranian bilateral tensions experienced another critical juncture in 2016, when the Kingdom have ordered the execution of 47 people on terrorism charges, including the prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. In response Iranians attacked the Saudi Embassy in Tehran followed by the Saudi Foreign Ministry's announcement of cutting diplomatic ties with Iran. President Rouhani tried to reduce tensions with Saudi Arabia through mediation by Kuwait and Oman in 2017, albeit with little tangible success. In 2017, an air land and sea blockade was imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt claiming that Qatar, a GCC-member state, is a terrorist financing hub and an active supporter of Iran, thereby undermining regional security (Vakil 2018:8). The outbreak of the intra-GCC crisis further complicated Iranian- Saudi relations. This intra-bloc tension exacerbated the fragmentation of GC into two blocs, one including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain against that of Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. Since the outbreak of the crisis, Iran, despite its differences with Qatar over Syria, has adopted a pro-Qatar stance (for example it made its airspace available to Qatar) and helped to ease the impact of the blockade through various economic measures. These developments in sum, are in part caused by and exacerbated Qatari-Iranian relations, and provided a useful opportunity for Tehran to exploit intra-GCC tensions (Luciano 2019; Sanam 2018).

In June 2017, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was relieved of his positions and Prince Mohammed bin Salman was elevated to the position of Crown Prince, placing him in line to succeed his father

and making him the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia. MbS promotes a significantly more assertive foreign policy than his predecessors. His position as the Minister of Defense - and later, the head of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs and the Saudi Aramco - allowed him to begin a new, more hawkish foreign policy[47], and to exert and multiply Saudi influence through the relatively inactive Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Many analysts see MbS's rule as a challenge to the traditional power-sharing pact between the Wahhabi religious establishment and the House of Saud (Hiro 2018). These arguments rest on the domestic social reforms introduced by the Crown Prince, such as the lifting of the ban on female drivers, the Vision 2030 agenda, the wide-spread anti-corruption campaign, and the reduced powers of the Mutaween, the Saudi religious police (House 2019). Yet, the latest Human Rights Watch Report on repression under King Salman (HRW 2019) argues that "behind the glamor and pomp of Prince Mohammed's newfound fame abroad and advancements for Saudi women and youth, however, lay a darker reality, as the Saudi authorities moved to sideline anyone in Saudi Arabia who could stand in the way of his political ascension" (HRW 2019:4). Although MbS's power centralization is tangible, political shifts in the House of Saud started earlier. Traditionally, Saudi Arabia's domestic stability has been ensured by the horizontal consensus between the various members of the House of Saud, the religious establishment, and the tribes (Stenslie 2018). Saudi Arabia's shifting political landscape however is also influenced by other, more structural factors such as the country's demographic constellation - as of 2020, youth in Saudi Arabia, i.e. people between the ages of 15 and 24, account for more than 15% of the population - (CIA world factbook 2020), the widespread usage of internet and social media (according to 2016 estimates, more than 20 million people, 73 % of the population, uses internet (ibid), the shifting US policies in the Gulf region, and the need to develop a post-oil future for the country. In the context of these more macro-level changes, MbS simultaneously utilized the window of opportunity for power centralization and also enhanced it.

4.3.2. Regional conflicts

As I argued in the literature review, the presence of civil wars in third-party countries, under certain circumstances, can *enhance* rather than *constrain* the foreign policy options of rivals' vis-a-vis

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47 The new Saudi foreign policy era has also manifested in the Kingdom's increasingly more visible ties with Israel. The unlike new partner shares one fundamental common goal with the Kingdom and that is to contain Iranian nuclear and political expansion.

each other. This chapter will provide an overview of major regional conflicts that have exerted considerable impact on the Saudi-Iranian relations.

Understanding the Gulf security landscapes necessitates the examination of the triangular relationship between Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia (Fürtig 2007, Keynoush 2016). The first decisive regional conflict that had a long-lasting impact both on domestic and foreign policy of Iran was the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988. The origins of this interstate war are complex: One significant contentious issue concerned the Shatt al-Arab waterway which, during the pre-WWI era, constituted the border between the Ottoman Empire and Iran for centuries. The discovery of oil in both countries significantly increased the importance of the waterway which is a key transportation route for oil export. Iraq sought to ensure that the border ran along the Iranian side of the bank, so Iraqi permission would be needed to use the waterway (Woods et al. 2011: 9). Iran wanted a shared usage in which both states would enjoy equal rights of access and transit. This regional dispute was further enhanced by the Cold War competition framework in which Iran was a US ally, whereas Iraq received Soviet support. The second contentious issue concerned Kurdish separatists: Iran supported the Iraqi Kurdish separatists between 1974 and 1975. This conflict episode was solved with a negotiated settlement in 1975 in Algiers (Karsh 2014). Iran and Iraq agreed to cease providing support to separatists in each other's territories and that the Shatt al-Arab border would be in the middle of the river (thalweg). Despite the negotiated settlement, Saddam Hussein's grievances were further enhanced by demonstrations of Iraq's Shia population in support of the Iranian revolution. Saddam was elected as Iraq's president in 1979. He was aware of the Iranian military's relative weakness right after the revolution and that a new era of international isolation was on the rise for Tehran. Capitalizing on the perceived weakness of the immediate post-revolutionary Iran, Saddam Hussien invaded Iran on 22 September, 1980 (Murray & Woods 2014; Karsh 2014). Despite early Iraqi territorial gains, the war soon entered into a stalemate. Kamrava (2005) argues that the Iran-Iraq war was the result of four simultaneous dynamics: (1) Saddam Hussein's domestic political power consolidation efforts; (2) the political upheaval and the accompanying power vacuum in Iran; (3) Iranian propaganda which called on the Arab masses to replace their leaders through revolutionary means; (4) Saddam Hussein's vision for regional leadership and Arab unity, or to become the "Nasser of his day" (Kamrava 2005:172-183). The first year of the war was marked by Iraqi success. Saddam's forces were able to capture

the oil-rich southwestern part of Iran, most notably the city of Khorramshahr. The heavy losses of Iran, contrary to Saddam's expectation, strengthened the new regime by developing a united front against Iraqi troops (ibid 179). The irregular Baseej (volunteers) forces, under the control and command of the IRCG, played a pivotal role in the early resistance and advancement against Iraq. Between late 1981 and 1982, Iranian forces were able to recapture lost territories and forced the Iraqi forces into defensive positions. The subsequent years of 1983 and 1984 were marked by the notorious "tanker war" and the "war of the cities", both of which inflicted heavy infrastructural, economic, and human losses on both sides (Sick 1989; Karsh 2014).Staring from 1984, Iraq also used chemical weapons against its own Kurdish population. The last six years of the war was characterized by a stalemate. After considerable human and economic losses, on July 18 1988, Iran accepted the UN-brokered ceasefire and the war ended without a decisive victory (Kamrave 2005).

The early stages of the war saw a rather limited Saudi support in the form of granting permission for Iraqi aircrafts to be stationed in Saudi territory. Yet, when Iraq started encountering significant losses from the Iranians, Saudi Arabia took a more visible role and spearheaded financial support for Iraq. As stalemate ensued in 1984, the US and other Western states begun to send their naval forces to the region. By 1988 Iran have accepted the UN proposed ceasefire and the war ended with a considerably weakened Iran and Iraq and without a victor (Kamrava 2005, Fürtig 2007:629). As a collective response to the Iraq-Iran war, in 1981, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional political, economic, and defense organization. The GCC was intended to provide a collective security agreement for its members in the wake of a potential Iranian and Iraqi threat.

Shortly after the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein continued its expansionist military foreign policy by invading Kuwait in August 1990 and declaring it Iraq's nineteenth province (Jacobs 1991). As Iraq evolved to a greater security threat than Iran, the Kingdom sought to ensure more cooperative relations with Tehran. Fürtig (2007) states that Iran's response was similarly positive based on the tenet of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" (Fürtig 2007:630). The GCC interpreted Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait as an attack on all member states. Gulf monarchies fear from Iraq's expansionist foreign policy propelled a turn towards requesting the presence of US coalition

forces in the region. This choice albeit enhanced Gulf monarchies security perception, it also constrained the Saudi-Iranian détente (Chubin & Tripp 1996:20). Iran remained neutral in the war, but was the first state to object to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and called for withdrawal (Ehteshami After Khomeini 152-153). By 1991, the UN-authorized and US-led coalition have successfully restored the territorial integrity of Kuwait and severely weakened Iraq. Mohsen describes Rafsanjani's policies during the Gulf War as one of "active neutrality: by choosing to stand on the sidelines without antagonizing either Baghdad or Washington, Iran would be acting to promote its national interest" (Mohsen 1994:340). Keynoush (2016:124) notes that Iranian neutrality was respected and rewarded by the Saudis and thus the war provided a window of opportunity to develop more cooperative relations. At the same time, the fundamental incompatibility – US presence in the region - remained unresolved between the two countries. Vakil (2018) argues that Iran's relations with the GCC countries lack a coherent strategy, but rather guided by opportunism. The reactionary stance of Iran can in part be explained by the fact that "traditionally, Tehran has focused on Israeli and US threats in the Middle East rather relations with its southern Gulf neighbors" and that "Iran's ties with the Gulf states are based on convenient openings stemming from intra-Arab tensions and miscalculations of others, such as Saudi Arabia (Vakil 2018:1).

The 9/11 attacks have further increased the geostrategic and security importance of the Gulf by posing a direct threat to US domestic security. Shortly after the terrorist attacks it was revealed that 15 of the 19 hijackers were from the Kingdom and that Saudi Arabia provided financial support for Al Qaida (Blanchard 2017). The Bush administration's close cooperation with Saudi Arabia stood in stark contrast to the declaration of Iraq, North Korea, and Iran as being part of the 'axis of evil' for sponsoring terrorism and seeking to possess weapons of mass destruction. The US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq was the next watershed event impacting the Gulf security architecture, or as Fürtig (2007) puts it "the external actor (US) has reduced the traditional triangular system to – or respectively replaced it by – a balance system made up of Saudi Arabia and Iran, but neither have any experience whatsoever in dealing with such a system" (Fürtig 2007:633). The ensuing insecurity upon the removal of Saddam Hussein and the Baathist regime coupled with the emergence of multitude of non-state armed actors provided a window of opportunity both for Saudi Arabia and Iran to provide support to competing groups in Iraq. The 2005 election in Iraq marked a historical power shift from the Sunni minority to the Shia majority.

The government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki developed unprecedentedly close working relations with Iran, alarming Sunni Arab states. Saudi Arabia has perceived the loss of Iraq as a strategic buffer against Iran (Cordesman 2016: 4). As Gause puts it, "since 2003, when Iraq became a playing field rather than a player in regional politics, the Saudis found themselves the only Arab power with the means to check Iranian regional ambitions" (Gause 2011:16). According to Milani, Iran decided to respond to the situation with a three-pronged strategy: it sought to empower Shias in Iraq, make the occupation of Iraq as difficult and costly for the US as possible without directly confronting US troops, and to develop retaliatory capability inside Iraq to deter the US from attacking Iran (Milani 2010).

The diffusion of protests against authoritarian regimes across the Arab world in 2011 provided both states with challenges to their own regime survival as well as opportunities to exert their influence at the expense of the other. In fact, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei described Iran as a role model for the "Islamic awakening" and encouraged demonstrators across the region to continue their protest (Chubin 2012:48). Saudi fears over the outcomes of these protests were further exacerbated by the Obama-administrations' support for the region-wide democratization efforts. As Gause III (2011) argues, "the apparently ad hoc and sudden invitation to Jordan and Morocco to join the GCC in May 2011 stems from the same desire to preserve monarchy as a regime type in the Arab world" (Gause III 2011:18). Saudi Arabia and Iran were not immune, but less affected by these developments.[48] Saudi Arabia and Iran have found themselves supporting different sides in the region-wide protests in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen. Tehran and Riyadh repeatedly accused each other of igniting sectarian tensions between Shias and Sunnis (Blanchard 2019:39). The deployment of the Saudi military both to Bahrain (in 2011) and to Yemen (from 2015 onwards) is the exception to the usual "behind the scenes" diplomatic approach of the Kingdom. The 2011 Bahraini episode of the Arab Uprisings ended with the heavy-handed intervention of the Saudi forces. Both Bahrain and the Kingdom accused Tehran of igniting and sponsoring the protests in the Pearl Roundabout, yet these accusations have not been proved (Gause III 2011).

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[48] Saudi Arabia has experienced some demonstrations in February and March 2011 in the Shia populated Eastern Province. Gause III (2011) lists four reasons for the lack of protest escalation in Saudi Arabia: buy-in: financial commitments in the form of social services by the House of Saud on citizens; deterrence: deployment of security forces; mobilization of patronage system (religious network, tribes, influential individuals); and the opposition's division (Gause III 2011: 6-7)

Saudi foreign policy toward Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon continue to be defined by its concerns about Iran's ties to various actors in these states. Iran's policy has been to support the governments in Syria and Iraq. On the Syrian front, Saudi Arabia evolved to one of the most important supporters of rebels fighting to replace Syrian President Bashar al-Assad who in turn has been supported by Iran. Tehran's support for Syria stems from its strategic location next to Lebanon where Iran's most important ally, Hezbollah is located. In addition, Syria and Bashar al-Assad are among the very few supporters of Iran in the region.[49] As it has been indicated earlier, the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings is characterized by multipolarity, fluid regional alliances, and the increasing role of non-state actors. Ryan (2019) summarizes the current security landscape as one in which "Saudi Arabia attempted to rally Arab monarchies together against Iran and its regional ambitions (...), but the intensity of their rivalry yielded no bipolarity of hostile but stable alliance systems "(Ryan 2019:10-11).

4.3.4. Perception of and relations to the United States

Rivalries cannot be fully understood apart from the global context in which they emerge, develop, and endure. Since the Iranian revolution, through succeeding presidents, US policies both towards the Kingdom and Iran show continuity and resistance towards change. US interests in the region center around the provision of security for oil infrastructure, counterterrorism cooperation, and shared threat perceptions. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and Iran view the US in opposite ways: For Saudi Arabia, US presence means security, while for Iran it translates to the single most significant threat (Mabon 2013:59). More specifically, while Saudi Arabia is aimed at the internationalization of regional security in the Gulf region, Iran seek to eliminate any foreign sources of security provision, especially that of the US. After the 1979 revolution, Khomeini repeatedly called for independence from foreign influence in Iran and the region, developing a "Neither East, nor West" policy. Another reason why the United States is an inevitable actor in the Saudi-Iranian relationship is because its interest has to be taken into account both by the Kingdom and Tehran, limiting the rivals independence in foreign policy decision-making. Keynoush (2016) cites his interviews with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, according to whom it is

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[49] Iran's visibility in Syria concerns Israeli leaders who "perceive Iran as using Syrian territory to exert greater leverage against Israel, adding to the threat posed by Hezbollah on Israel's northern borders" (Katzman 2019: 38).

unlikely that "the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran could shape itself independently of the US factor" (Keynoush 2016:12).

Upon the British withdrawal from the region in the 1970's the US have declared Saudi Arabia and Iran to be the "twin pillars" of security in the Gulf (Mabon 2013:4). The reliance on the Shah of Iran as a US-ally ended with the Islamic Revolution, leaving the Kingdom as the primary ally in the region. In 1933 the Standard Oil Company of California won a sixty-year concession to explore oil in the Kingdom, making the first discovery in 1938 (Hiro 2018:115). The nascent US-Saudi relation was cemented in 1945 in a meeting between Roosevelt and Abd-al Aziz ibn Saud on the USS Quincy's board in Egypt. Today, Saudi Arabia depends on the US for most of its military training, support, and weapons. Although from time to time, US-Saudi relations are overshadowed by differences over regional conflicts (most profoundly different interests in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), human rights abuses, and terrorism financing among others, their strategic alliance endures, even it becomes more transactional (Gause II 2011).

During the presidency of Barack Obama, diplomatic overtures to Iran caused a great deal of frustration amongst many in Saudi Arabia, prompting and exacerbating a more pro-active, diversified Saudi foreign policy. These fears were exacerbated by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JPOA), the 2015 nuclear deal agreed by the permanent five members of the UN Security Council, Germany, and Iran. The JCPOA sent a costly signal to Saudi Arabia about the end of Iranian isolation from the West. Coupled with the Obama administration's policy of disengagement with the Middle-East, improved US-Iranian relations were translated in Saudi Arabia as a sense of 'abandonment'. Under Obama's successor, the vehemently anti-Iranian Donald Trump, relations with the Saudi Kingdom – and the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman in particular – dramatically improved, in no small part due to the decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal and the belligerent stance taken against Iran. President Trump made Saudi Arabia his first official visit as the President of the US. He addressed the 55 member Muslim meeting in Riyadh, which meant that he officially broke the pro-rapprochement Obama-era foreign policy towards Iran and recognized Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Gulf region (Blanchard 2019). President Trump and King Salman bin Abd al Aziz agreed to a "Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century" during the President's May 2017 trip to Riyadh. Bilateral ties have been bolstered by new arms sales and

continued counterterrorism cooperation on shared threats such as Iran, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State (ibid).

Contrary to the above described close ties, US-Iran relations since the 1979 revolution have been mostly adversarial. Relations between Washington and Tehran turned openly hostile after the November 4, 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy and its 66 U.S. diplomats by pro-Khomeini radicals (Katzman 2019:15). Iran has, since 1984 when the Reagan administration designated Iran as a "state sponsor of terrorism", been viewed by every successive US administration as hostile to US interest in the Middle East, the main funder of armed non-state actors, and a significant threat to US interests and allies. Benjamin and Simon (2019) argue that US concerns of Iran are stemming from two interlocked causes: Iran could block the flow of oil by closing the Strait of Hormuz and if Iran managed to produce nuclear weapons, it would pose a significant threat to Israel, the closest US ally in the region (Benjamin & Simon 2019:1).

The Clinton era's "dual containment" policy was aimed at keeping Iran and Iraq both weak. In the period 1995-1996, the Administration and Congress banned U.S. trade and investment with Iran and imposed penalties on foreign investments in Iran's energy sector, in response to Iran's support for terrorist groups seeking to undermine the Israeli-Palestinian peace process (Katzman 2019:20-23). In his January 2002 State of the Union message, President Bush named Iran as part of an "axis of evil" including Iraq and North Korea. The 2003 removal of Saddam Hussein left Washington with "an enemy, Iran, but no local partner to contain it" (Benjamin & Simon 2019:10). The Obama administration applied a mixed-strategy (multilateral sanctions and negotiations) to persuade Iran through diplomatic means to limit its nuclear program. In a speech to the "Muslim World" in Cairo on June 4, 2009, President Obama acknowledged that the United States played a role in the overthrow of Mosaddeq and said that Iran had a right to peaceful nuclear program. The Obama-administration applied a "two track" strategy: stronger economic pressure coupled with offers of negotiations that could produce sanctions relief. The two presidents spoke on the phone on September 27, 2013, the first direct US-Iran presidential contact since Iran's revolution (Reuters 2013). Since Trump's election, US-Iranian tensions have significantly worsened. As of 2019, the US is applying its "maximum pressure campaign" on Iran, placing a wide-range of sanctions on Iran to compel it to renegotiate the JCPOA to address the broad range of US concerns and to deny

Iran the revenue to continue to develop its strategic capabilities or intervene throughout the region (Katzman 2019). On April 8, 2019, the Administration designated the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization, blaming it for involvement in multiple past acts of Iran backed terrorism and anti-U.S. actions (Katzman 2019:30). If the Obama-era was characterized by discussions on American retrenchment from the region, then the Trump presidency even further complicated regional actors' perception of the US, due to "the uniquely profound uncertainty about the actual policies of the Trump administration" (Lynch & Jamal 2019:4).

4.4. Conclusion

The literature on intervention has provided some invaluable insights in analyzing the timing and target of intervention, but it has a limited utility in uncovering interveners' relationship with each other and this inter-state relation's impact on civil war dynamics. Ignoring this dimension means that some important motivations behind intervention left unaddressed. This chapter shed some light on a set of structural and contextual variables that drive Saudi Arabia and Iran's propensity to intervene in third party civil conflicts. This framework intertwines with but differs from other accounts that look at the main drivers of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Vakil (2018) for example argues that, "since the revolution, Iran has anticipated its main geostrategic challenges coming from larger powers like the US and Israel. Saudi Arabia meanwhile, views Iran and its policies of interference and support for non-state actors as their principal regional challenge. This mismatch of threat perceptions and a structural disparity between the states lies at the heart of the tensions between the two" (Vakil 2018:5). Yet, as this section showed, rivals' propensity to intervene does not exclusively stem from their mismatch of threat perceptions and structural disparity, but also shaped by domestic, regional, and international dynamics. The main strategic interest of rivals is summed up by Keynoush (2016) who notes that "to preserve their immediate border security, even when Saudi Arabia and Iran disagree on policy issues, their preference is to avoid open confrontation. Instead they rely on indirect, covert, or proxy operations, no matter how evasive the goal of reaching political solutions through these means are" (Keynoush 2016:14).

Four important conclusions stem from this chapter: First, Saudi Arabia and Iran have avoided direct military confrontation and are likely to do so in the future. Second, structural features, especially the means of preserving regime security (through pro-status quo versus revolutionary

means) encourages intervention in each other's and third parties' domestic affairs. Third, the sectarian lens provides an important transnational identity-marker that helps to mobilize conflict actors in third-states. Lastly, non-violent means of power projection, such as education and media, are important and frequently deployed soft power sources of both states.

5. THE CASE STUDY OF INTERVENTION IN YEMEN

Between 2004 and 2010 Ansarallah fought six rounds of wars (Saada wars) against the GoY headed by the then President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Saada wars although ended in 2010, but without addressing or providing any remedy for the underlying grievances of the Houthis. In 2011 the Arab Spring has reached Yemen and culminated in the end of President Saleh's more than three-decade long rule. The political transition however proved to be unsuccessful and the country descended into a civil war in 2014 when the Houthis occupied the capital Sanaa. In 2015, the Saudi led Coalition has begun its military intervention in Yemen to restore the internationally recognized presidency of Hadi and to reverse the Houthis territorial gains. As of 2020 the conflict shows no signs of peaceful resolution. The following sections provide an extensive empirical analysis of the tumultuous period between 2004 and 2018.

Scholars and policy analysts quickly moved to examine the Yemen war as a by-product of Saudi-Iranian rivalry and another manifestation of a region-wide war between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Yet, this approach takes away the agency of domestic combatants and their ability to influence policies on a more aggregate level, i.e. at the level of rivalry. The Yemeni civil war is a crucial case (Bennett 2005) for this dissertation, representing a vivid illustration of the interdependence between rivalry and civil war processes. Since 2015 up until the completion of this dissertation (2020), Yemen has been the site of an interdependent web of conflicts that simultaneously took place at sub-national, national, regional, and international levels. These different levels had conditioning effects on one another. As it was discussed in the chapter on Research Design, I take a comparative approach, by focusing on the Saada wars (2004 - 2010) and the current internationalized civil war (from 2014 until 2018). In this chapter I focus on two conflict actors in Yemen, Ansar Allah (Houthis) and the Government of Yemen (GoY). This means that I do not provide insights into the Southern Transitional Council (STC), AQAP, or other non-state actors and their relations to the GoY or vis-a-vis each other. Furthermore, I do not consider the

fragmentation within the Saudi-led coalition and the UAE's special role in the South of Yemen.50 Future work could extend the number of actors involved in the analysis and explore the evolution of Ansar Allah and the STC, their ability to organize, to attract foreign support, and their relations to the GoY in a structured focused manner. This type of within-case analysis would then provide important insights into local non-state actors competitive and/or cooperative patterns over time.

This chapter provides conflict analysis in three interrelated dimensions: First, I move beyond analyzing the two most often examined, onset and termination stages of a civil war by integrating ceasefires over time. Ceasefires are defined here as "all arrangements by or between conflict parties to stop fighting from a specific point in time" (Clayton et al. 2019: 2). Ceasefires are understudied phenomenon in civil war research, yet for conflict parties, they are strategic tools to advance their political goals. This observation is crucial, because it shows that party's intentions for entering into a ceasefire agreement sometimes have nothing to do with peace negotiations. Common conclusions are that ceasefires result from a significant breakthrough in the peace process, emerge to provide space for humanitarian work, or result from devious tactical intentions, such as belligerent desire to buy time to regroup and rearm (ibid; Akebo 2016).

Secondly, I focus on different types of support provision for conflict actors. I do not only consider the type and level of military support, but also focus on non-military support to conflict actors. Civil war interventions more often take the form of military power, but it is almost always also channeled through foreign policy, diplomacy, and soft power, concepts that are difficult to quantify.51 Thirdly, as I posited in the analytical framework, I also open-up the "black-box" of conflict actors, by focusing on the observable implications of conflict parties ability to impact rivals perception of each other (rivalry instrumentalization), a dimension most often neglected by studies of proxy-conflicts.

The empirical analysis that follows represents the form, function, and utilization of intervention in Yemen by drawing on an extensive set of primary resources - elite interviews and the ceasefire dataset construction - and secondary resources. Table 5. shows the variables of interest and the data sources used for the empirical analysis.

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50 For an overview of the UAE's role in Yemen, see for example: Patrick 2017; Feierstein 2019.
51 It is worth keeping in mind that there is a great deal of fungibility when it comes to soft and hard power.

Table 4. Categories of support provision and data sources

Section	Data sources
Military support	primary and secondary document review, Yemen Data Project
Foreign aid	Financial Tracking Service, Aid data, key informant interviews
Education	Interviews, secondary sources
Peace Processes and ceasefires	Interviews, Yemen Ceasefire Dataset

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: First, I provide a backgrounder on Yemen in order to elucidate structural factors that made intervention possible in the first place. This section is followed by an overview of the key domestic actors and their relations to the rivals; section three provides the structured-focused comparison of the Saada wars and the internationalized civil war. Section four compares Saudi and Iranian support for domestic conflict actors along military and non-military lines.

5.1. Opportunity for intervention: Yemen in context

As emphasized in Chapter 2, intervention has a supply and demand side, and an opportunity and willingness perspective. Yemen, the poorest state in the Arab world even before the current war broke out, has such structural features that makes not just the onset of civil war more likely, but also makes it more prone to external intervention. It is also important to note that third-party intervention and competitive intervention are nothing new to Yemen. Egypt supported the socialist South Yemen and Saudi Arabia supported the royalist North. (Bonnefoy 2018: 24-25) Yemen is plagued by multiple security challenges, some of which are stemming from structural factors (e.g.: natural resource scarcity, mountainous geography), while others (state repression, corruption, horizontal inequalities) are attributable to the peculiar evolution of the Yemeni economic and political system. Map 3. shows Yemen and its neighbors.

Map 2: Yemen and neighboring countries

Source: Palik & Jalal (2020)

Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argues that the likelihood of civil war onset is impacted by structural economic factors and less by socio-political grievances.[52] While this dissertation does not agree with the irrelevance of the grievance model, the CH model's structural variables provide a useful starting point in understanding how conflict and intervention took place in Yemen over time. The greed model disaggregates opportunities to rebel to four structural variables: the availability of financing rebellion (1), atypically low cost/cost of rebellion (2), low costs of conflict specific capital (3) atypically weak government military capabilities (4) (Collier & Hoeffler 2004). Yet, it is important to note that although these factors can make rebellion easier, rebellion is not necessarily driven by profit-seeking behavior. I will address certain horizontal inequality related aspects of the Houthi rebellion to show the limits of the greed theory. The remainder of this section analyzes Yemen along these dimensions and complement it with accounts on horizontal inequalities persistent between and across non-state and state groups in Yemen.

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[52] Structural characteristics on the aggregate level have important consequences on rebel group's opportunity to organize. The so-called greed, or opportunity model of civil war (e.g.: Collier and Hoeffler 2004, Fearon and Laitin 2003) argues that structural conditions that favor insurgency – state weakness, marked by poverty, large male population, and inaccessible terrain– are better predictors of civil war onset than indicators of ethnic and religious diversity or state discrimination against minority religions or languages.

5.1.1.　Availability of financing rebellion:

The present Republic of Yemen was established in 1990 when South Yemen, previously known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDR) and North Yemen, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) was unified under the leadership of Ali Abdullah Saleh and his General People's Congress (GPC) party.[53] The unification however did not lead to the effective integration of the South and North. The short-lived civil war in 1994, when South Yemen tried to regain independence, resulted in a more pronounced Northern domination without meeting the basic needs of the South (Brandt 2018:24). The unification of Yemen in 1990 was marked by sudden socio-political and economic changes, led by the rapid development of the oil sector. The discovery and development of oil fields however proved to be a double-edged sword: It helped to overcome many of the challenges posed by the unification, but it created a new source of vulnerability for the government due to price fluctuations (IMF 2001) and a potential opportunity for greed-based rebellion through the mechanisms of asymmetrical resource revenue redistribution policies and wide-spread corruption.

Yemen's economy has historically been dependent on three key sources: remittances from neighboring Gulf countries, oil revenues, and international aid. Between 2000 and 2009, the hydrocarbon sector accounted directly for 15 % of Yemen's GDP, 80-90 % of its exports and 65 % of government revenues (IMF, 2011). At the same time, since 2001 oil output has been drastically declined and the sector is plagued by highly inefficient fuel subsidies. This trend signals weak government capabilities, the lack of effective institutions, and the suboptimal redistribution of oil revenues[54] across governorates. Historically, another important source of income for Yemenis was remittances sent home by Yemeni workers and international aid. (Schmitz & Burrowes 2017:139). Even though precise estimates are hard to make due to the informal nature of remittances, according to Lackner (2014) between 2000 and 2010 remittances to Yemen fluctuated between 1,4 and 1,5 billion USD. This means that controlling for the demographic changes in this period, remittances constituted between 15,7 and 6,25 % of GNI (Lackner

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[53] North and South Yemen went through different historical developments. South Yemen was part of the British Empire from 1839 to 1967, whereas North Yemen has never been under colonial rule.
[54] Most of the oil fields are located in the southern part of Yemen and one of the main problems of the Southern movement is that they did not enjoy the wealth generated by the oil sector.

2014:270). Remittance dependence also signals weak government capacity, since it means that people are ready to move to a different country, leaving their families behind in order to earn enough money. Besides oil and remittances, a crucial source of income for Yemen has been international aid. Carapico (2007) notes that bilateral and multilateral donor programs have enabled the further rise of corruption and contributed to the creation of an institutional structure in Yemen that has not been able to alleviate deteriorating living conditions (Carapico 2007:203-204).

5.1.2.   Atypically low cost of rebellion

Yemen is often referred to as the "poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula" (Lackner 2014, World Bank 2019). Yemen is a low income country, in 2005 the GDP per capita was 928.6 USD and it increased only to 1310 by 2010.[55] According to the World Bank (2015) between 1990 and 2010 on average, the economy grew at 5 % annually, but due to the enormous demographic pressure -- the annual population growth rate was at 3.1 percent over this period -- GDP per capita rose only 1.3 % a year. This number is the lowest in the MENA region. These numbers have just worsened since the outbreak of the current conflict: In April 2019, a UNDP-commissioned study concluded that the civil war has already reversed human development by 21 years. Approximately 250,000 people have been killed directly by the fighting and indirectly by the lack of access to food, medicine, and basic infrastructure. Sixty percent of the deaths are children under the age of five and 24 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (Moyer et. al 2019). Since the internationalization and escalation of the conflict in March 2015, the economy has deteriorated sharply. In its 2019 report, the World Bank notes that "while official statistics remain unavailable, anecdotal evidence suggests that GDP contracted by an accumulated 39 % since the end of 2014" (World Bank 2019:2). It is important to note that given these economic indicators, both the Houthis and the government are operating under resource constraints, making them more likely to seek out for external support.

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[55] This number is well below the regional MENA average which was 5,730 USD in 2010. Another sharp contrast is that Saudi Arabia's GDP per capita in the same year was more than 10 times more than Yemen's, 15,836 USD. (World Bank Statistics 2010)

5.1.3.   Low costs of conflict specific capital

There is no single Leviathan in Yemen, meaning that no entity has a monopoly on the use of violence. This situation led to the competition of multitude of armed actors for control. The greed model identifies atypically cheap conflict specific capital - i.e. the wide availability of weapons - as another factor which increases the propensity of civil war onset. Yemen, as the second most heavily armed nation (Small Arms Survey 2007) justifies gun ownership not just as a mere tool of defense, but guns are an integral part of masculinity, ceremonies and tribal gatherings (Palik 2018:2). It is commonplace to see young males to openly carry AK-47s. Likewise, the jambiya, a curved dagger worn attached to a belt, is routinely carried by men. [56] The exact number and types of weapons remain challenging to assess, especially since the outbreak of the civil war. Older estimates claimed the number to be between 40 to 60 million. According to Miller and Karp (2003:172) however a more realistic number is between 6 and 9 million. This translates to an average 33 and 50 gun per 100 people. Saada is home to Suq al-Talh, the largest weapons market in the entire country which operates like a "grocery store" with no formal requirement to purchase weapons (Salmoni et. al 2010:31). Rebel armament costs are therefore low, since the availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is high, government control over SALW is virtually non-existent in Saada, and carrying weapons openly in the public is a socially accepted and embedded practice. Weapons have always served political purposes too: the arming of tribal leaders by the central government has been an integral part of the co-optation system, where the Yemeni government would try to tie political favor over rival tribes with loyalty to the state (Al-Dawsari 2012:4). The diffusion of firearms in Yemen is however a relatively new phenomenon: SALW were brought to Yemen during the Ottoman and the British colonial period. The bipolar era and the competing international support of the United States and the Soviet Union considerable shaped SALW availability in Yemen. From the mid-1960s until the end of the Cold War, colonial-era weapons were gradually replaced by the Soviet Union shipments mostly concentrated in the southern areas. At that time, Northern-Yemen was supported by Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Knights 2018). The devastating 1994 civil war between the North and the South resulted in Northern victory and cemented the suppression of Southern tribes. The civil war was especially beneficial

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[56] Yet, as Miller notes, "Weapons in Yemen are said to be part of the national character and more linked to heritage, tradition and norms than to violence and killing" (Miller 2003:3).

for the northern tribes, because as the fighting ceased, small arms used in the conflict were not collected centrally by the government, but as part of the cooptation-based patronage system, they were redistributed among northern tribes (Miller 2003).

5.1.4. Atypically weak government military capabilities

Atypically weak government military capability entails a focus on geography and suggests that forests and mountains provide rebels with safe haven. Yemen is located at the strategic southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. According to Clark (2010) "The region's jagged mountains and roomy caves have always favored the rebels" (Clark 2010:250). The population of Yemen is approximately 28 million people with the majority belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam, while approximately 34-45 percent are Zaydi Shia Muslims, and less than 1% of the population belong to other religious minorities (Brandt 2018:22). The northern highlands are also home to the two largest tribal confederations of Hamdan (consisting of two large sub-confederations of Hashid and Bakil) and Khawlan b. 'Amir (Heinze & Transfeld 2019:5). Yemen is characterized by a unique dual-governance structure. Historically, the central government possessed only a limited degree of control over the country's peripheral provinces.

Theoretically, governments possess a monopoly over the use of force, and responsible for the provision of public goods, most importantly of security. However, governments often fail to exercise their power over large swaths of territory. As a consequence, certain micro-states emerge where local warlords, tribal leaders and all kinds of Olsonian stationary bandits fulfill the role of protection. These factors explain why conflict in Yemen can be characterized as a competition over who controls the state and which actors can be considered as legitimate (Clausen 2108). Water scarcity, the lack of employment opportunities and harsh weather conditions are all factors that contributed to the semi-autonomous nature of the northern region where Ansar Allah originates from. Here, the dominant social value system is qabyla (tribalism), in which kin networks structure the daily lives of locals. In practice, tribal confederations and their powerful leaders are responsible for providing conflict mediation, public services and other basic state functions. Therefore, the local population's loyalty is based on these socio-cultural microstructures and as such territory and power is organized quite differently from the Westphalian state model. These structural features have important consequences on rebel group's ability to organize. The semi-autonomous nature of

the northern region is partly explained by the lack of road system and necessary infrastructure that could connect the Northern provinces to the capital, Sanaa. According to Salmoni et. al (2010:3) "Perhaps more than any other Arab country, Yemen has a central government that possesses an extremely attenuated degree of control over its peripheries – and the north is the least responsive to Sanaa." In sum, according to the greed-model of civil war, Yemen's geographic, economic and political settings are making the country more prone not only to civil war, but to external interventions too.

5.1.5.   Besides the greed model

Besides the above detailed structural factors, Yemen's unique socio-political structure is part of the reason why powerful non-state actors, amongst them Ansar Allah has emerged, militarily developed, and has been able to challenge the central government. Regional identities, such as the separatism driven South, the land-owning farming families of Central Yemen, and the Northwest highlands of Yemen are important markers of fault lines (Heinze & Transfeld 2019:2). Yemen can roughly be categorized as the historically Zaydi north around Sanaa and Saada, the Sunni lower Yemen (around the governorate of Taiz and the Tihama coastal plain), and the midlands (Ibb and al-Baydha). (Bonnefoy 2018:22-23). Jews are also present. Although tribes are of paramount importance in Yemen, their influence is not homogenous across the country (ibid.). In general, tribal affiliations are stronger in rural areas where state weakness is especially prevalent. Yemeni tribes are numerous, well-armed, and amongst the most important political actors in Yemen. Their unity or division can be decisive for any internal or external actors in Yemen. Throughout the conflict, tribes played a key role both in terms of supporting and resisting the Houthis. Ansar Allah is not a tribal organization, yet leaders have intimate knowledge of Yemeni tribal relations and they have secured many tribal allies mostly by building on former president Saleh's network (ACLED 2019). At the same time, many of these relations have deteriorated in the past years due to the Houthis repressive rule in the areas under their control, including arbitrary detentions, abductions, arrests, and killings (HRW 2017). Furthermore, tribes and tribal relations are transnational by nature and as such they create natural relations and physical safe havens for Saada residents across the Saudi-Yemeni border. These relationships also provide the Kingdom with substantial leverage in dealing with individuals and groups in the governorate through its own patronage networks (Clark 2010). Saudi Arabia thus enjoys a sphere of influence that allows it to

affect events in the area to an equal or greater degree than that of the GoY itself. The way in which Saudi Arabia exercises this influence can affect conflict and local development (Salmoni et. al 2010:36)

5.2. Actor Mapping

Map 3: Yemen: areas and groups in control (2019)
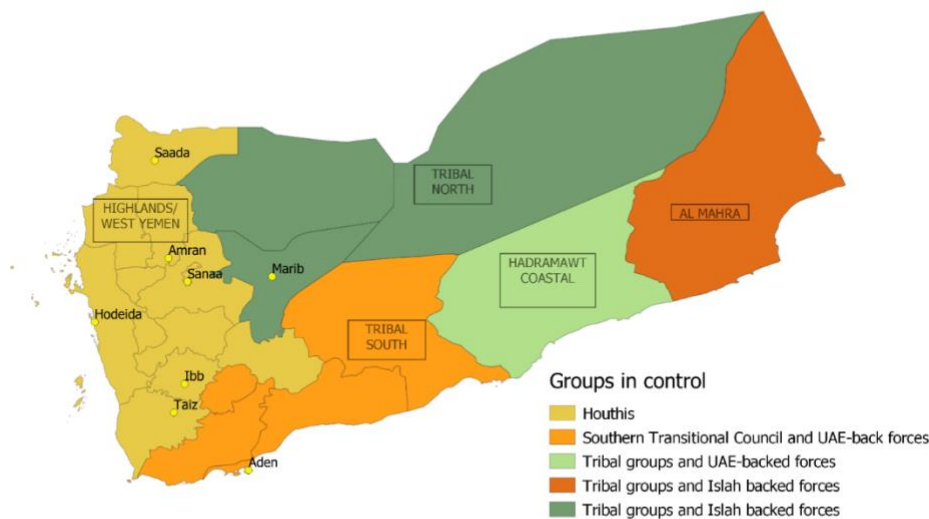
Source: Palik & Rustad (2019)

5.2.1. Houthi movement

Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), or more widely known as the Houthi movement[57], originates from the Zaydi Shia minority from the northern governorates of Yemen. Ansar Allah began as a theological movement to protest the dilution of Zaydi identity, and later transformed into a military resistance movement. Ansar Allah is an insurgent group engaged in a civil war against the internationally recognized government of Yemen and other non-state actors (such as the Southern Transitional Council and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) since 2004. Members of Ansar Allah

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[57] The terms "Ansar Allah", the "Houthis", "Houthi rebels", and the "Houthi movement" is used interchangeably.

originate from the Zaydi branch of Shia Islam. Zaydis originate from the mountainous northernmost provinces of Saada, al-Jawf and northern Amran. Although Zaydi Shi'ism (or the so-called "Fivers") is a sub-sect of Shia Islam, it is doctrinally different from the dominant "Twelver Shiism" which is practiced in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. In fact, Zaydi religious practices are closer to Sunni Islam (Bonnefoy 2009:1). There are some important differences between the Twelver Shia and Zaydism: Zaydism does not explicitly refuse to recognize the first three caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman) as successors to the Prophet, they do not believe in the hidden imam, and their jurisprudence is closer to Shafi Sunnism. (Bonnefoy 2018:20)

To understand the Houthi movement and it's relations to both the state and other non-state actors, it is necessary to understand the social stratum they emerge from. Ansar Allah was established and led by members of the *sadah* (sing. *Sayyid* or also called Hashemites or ashraf) social stratum. Sayyid constitutes a religious elite and claiming to be the descendants of the Prophet through his two grandsons, Husayn and Hasan. The Sayyid is the leader of secular, religious, and military affairs of the Zaydi community and occupies the position of Imam (Bruck 2005:35-40). Succession is not based on a hereditary logic and each sayyid is entitled to dispute his predecessor's authority if the latter is deemed unjust and corrupt (Bonnefoy 2018:20). In the North, the sadah enjoyed religious and political preeminence due to their noble descent which also placed them above the tribes. They are from different lines that the local tribes who descend from Qahtan, the ancestor of Arabs of the South (ibid p.21). Sayyid is an extra-tribal class and thus different from the Shaykhs (sheiks), the ruler of a tribe. Although the Houthis family is a sayyid family, sayyids and the Houthis are not necessarily overlapping groups. The Houthis do not represent all sayyids and not all sayyids embrace the Houthi political aspirations.

The Zaydi Imamate was established in northern Yemen in 893 and lasted until the 1962 revolution. The Yemeni sadah trace their descent to the first Zaydi imam, Yahya b. al-Husayn (d.911) who was invited to Yemen by tribal leaders to mediate an inter-tribal violent conflict according to Sharia (Dresch 2001:8). Upon successfully resolving the inter-tribal conflict, Yahya remained in Saada and established the Zaydi state under the Zaydi Hadawi school of law (Brandt 2017:21). Zaydis believe that their imam has to be both a descendent of Ali and one who makes it his religious duty to oppose and fight unjust and corrupt political rulers (*khurūj*) (King, 2012:407). The Zaydi

imamate and the sadah leadership was eliminated by the 26 September Revolution of 1962. Egyptian-supported Yemeni army officers overthrew the last imam, Muhammad al-Badr and the Imamate was replaced by a new political system, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) inspired by Gamal Abdel Nasser's political system in Egypt (Bonnefoy 2009:1).The revolution and the ensuing civil war (1962-1970) between the royalist and republican forces marked the beginning of the transformation of the socio-political institution of sadah.

The Imamate era's religious and political elite have lost political and economic power and the sayyid hegemony was substituted by shaykhly hegemony. By rewarding shayks with key governmental and military positions, tribal leaders managed to shape Yemeni politics on the national level, which meant a considerable expansion of their influence from their original tribal areas (Clark 2010: 34). At the same time, in the long-run this national level integration of shayks negatively affected their tribal ties, as they often moved closer to the capital city of Saana to ensure proximity to the central government and neglected their basic tribal duties (Brandt 2017:40). Horizontal inequalities[58] and the ensuing marginalization of the Zaydi minority can partly be traced back to this post-revolution *elite transformation*. In this new period Sadah were considered as backward and reactionary by other segments of the Yemeni society. Brandt (2017:50-57) characterizes the patronage based post-imamate era as a "big-man game" in which tribal shayks have been co-opted by the central government through integrating them into important government and military positions. From the government's perspective, this system served two purposes: to ensure shaykhly loyalty and to expand the state's influence into otherwise remote and hard-to-govern areas. This model constituted the foundations of Saleh's and the northern Hashid tribe monopoly (ibid, Clark 2010).

This "competitive sectarian environment" (Brandt 2017:103) and the resulting economic and political marginalization of the Zaydis triggered a multifaceted resistance movement led by the prominent al-Houthi family. The first institutionalized manifestation of this resistance movement was the establishment of the Believing Youth (*Shabab al-Moumineen*) organization in 1990. The

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[58] Horizontal inequalities are systematic economic and political inequalities between ethnic, religious or regional groups. Horizontal inequality differs from vertical inequality. Vertical inequality is a measure of inequality among individuals or households, not groups. Measurement of vertical inequalities often is confined to income or consumption (Stewart 2008).

Believing Youth (BY) started as a network of educational centers for the marginalized northern Yemeni youth. When the BY began to open their summer camps to gradually regain their local influence, they simultaneously began to politicize the Zaydi cause (Freeman 2009: 1008). This grassroot level institution was aimed at re-engaging the Zaydi tribal youth and to counter the Wahhabi/Salafi influence in the Zaydi heartland. The BY's Summer Camps were the Zaydi's response to the Sunni Scientific Institutes. The BY have rapidly gained ground and by 1994 it had at least 15,000 members (Brandt 2017:117; Granzow 2015:163). The BY's activity had not received considerable attention from the Yemeni government up until 2003. In fact, the government often supported the BY which in times has been deemed by Saleh as a useful counterforce against the Sunni Islah party and the excessive Saudi-Wahhabi infiltration in the northern governorates (Granzow 2015:166).

On 22 May 1990 the two former Yemen's were unified under the new name of the Republic of Yemen which replaced the YAR with a multiparty political system. In the post-unification period, the North continued to be dominated by Saleh's GPC party and seconded by former secretary general of the Yemeni Socialist Party from the South, Ali Salim al-Bidh. (Bonnefoy 2018: 29). In 1994, al-Bidh led a short-lived secessionist war against the North. Southern grievances were triggered by the privatization of land and industries in the South, a process that overwhelmingly benefited Saleh's circle in the North (ibid.). [59] In this new, nominally multiparty system, the Islah party is of particular importance for understanding the emergence of the Houthis.[60] The first political representation of the Houthis also occurred in this period when members of the Houthi family joined the al-Haqq party. Badr al-Din al-Houthi served as vice president of the party (Brandt 2017:119). Hussein al-Houthi, the eldest son of Badr al-Din, have won the 1993 election, but lost the 1997 and afterwards turned away from politics. After spending the period of 1999-2000 in Iran and Sudan, he returned to Saada and focused on contributing to the work of the BY (Brandt 2017:131). In 2001 the BY was split between the Houthi family and the faction led by Muhammad Izzan and al-Din al-Muayyadi (Brandt 2017:132). The group led by Hussein al-Houthi, known as Ashab al-shiar (Followers of the Slogan) constituted the original members of

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[59] The al-Haqq Party still exists in Yemen, but has dissociated itself from the Houthis (Yemen Post 2010).
[60] The Sunni Islah party has been dominated by Hashid tribal shayks and it governed the country in coalition with the GPC until 1997. Afterwards, Islah was in opposition. Islah is considered as an anti-Houthi force (Schmitz 2011:2).

Ansar Allah (ibid). The structured focused comparative sub-section details the post-2004 development of Ansar Allah up until 2018.

5.2.2. Government of Yemen (GoY)

President Ali Abdullah Saleh headed Yemen from mid-1978 until his November 2011 resignation. Although the post-unification Yemen was nominally a multiparty system, Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) party dominated the political landscape (Schmitz & Burrowes 2018:414), the only opposition being al Islah party. Yemen has traditionally been governed by a small number of elites, most of whom originated from the northern highlands of Yemen and having close tribal ties to Saleh's own Sanhan tribe in the Hashid confederation. Internally, the GoY maintained power through co-optation, coercion, and opportunistic alliances. The patronage system has extended to political, security, and economic realm considerably enhancing corruption in the country (Phillips 2011; Alley 2010; Clark 2010, 2015). During his tenure in 1991, Saleh faced severe regional and international punishment for refusing to join the coalition against Iraq during the 1990-1991 Gulf War. Relations both with the US and Saudi Arabia were severed. The US cut aid and Saudi Arabia expelled at least 700.000 Yemeni guest workers and cut the economic lifeline of the country by preventing the inflow of remittances (Scmitz & Burrowes 2018). The Saleh's regime subsequent foreign policy aim was to restore relations with Gulf Arab neighbors and being part of the US War on Terror campaign. Although, relationships have been restored and a significant amount of international aid started floating to Yemen, the GoY have systematically misused and diverted these sources to enrich members of the patronage system and GPC members at the expense of ordinary Yemenis (Clark 2015). Saleh's control of three key mobilization instruments - media networks, the use of violence by proxy, and political alliances - ensured his continued influence on Yemeni politics even after his resignation (Phillips 2011; Carvajal 2015). In fact, even when deposed, Saleh was granted immunity by international actors and ensured his continued influence through the election of his former Vice-president. The subsequent sections elaborate further on Saleh's policies.

Although the dissertation does not focus on counterterrorism in Yemen, a short discussion on the impact of Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its activities in Yemen is necessary. After the Saudi crackdown on Islamist extremism, Saudi jihadists fled the Kingdom and by 2009

the Saudi and Yemeni branches Al Qaeda merged into AQAP (Johnsen 2012). Jihadi militancy is not a new phenomenon in Yemen. Since 2000, AQAP has been the dominant militant jihadi group in the country. AQAP poses a significant international terrorism threat and multiple high profile terrorist attacks are attached to its name, amongst them the USS Cole bombings in 2000, the suicide attack on a Spanish tour group in 2007, and an attack against the US Embassy in Sanaa in 2008 (Kendall 2018, Johnsen 2012). AQAP capitalized on the political unrest in Yemen between 2011 and 2012 and it took hold of parts of Abyan and Shabwa, and later between 2015 and 2016 it expanded into the eastern province of Hadramawt (Kendall 2018). Part of AQAP's success in Yemen is attributable to its high level of local integration, community development, and youth engagement (Kendall 2018, Reuters 2016). National insecurity and political crisis in Yemen benefitted both AQAP and the Islamic State (IS), yet they evolved to a lesser extent than many analysts anticipated in 2011. The highest period of influence of AQAP and IS took place in 2016 and since then these groups' local influence and activity has declined (Kendall 2018). The reasons for the diminishing influence are multifold: The US carried out an intense airstrike campaign in Yemen, especially during the Obama-administration. This led to a considerable weakening of AQAP who lost some of its most high-profile leaders. AQAP and ISIS are important actors in Yemen, because these groups give international salience to Yemeni domestic affairs. Secondly, the presence of armed jihadists played the single most important factor in Yemeni-US relations (Johnsen 2012; Reuters 2016). Third, Saleh used the presence of AQAP to galvanize international support which he used to fight other domestic non-state actors, such as the al-Hirak movement or the Houthis. As mentioned earlier, Yemen's topography, remoteness, and wide availability of weapons makes it an ideal place for jihadist activities. As of 2019 AQAP's influence is declining in Yemen, although not diminished. IS's position in Yemen is weaker than that of AQAP, as it never held any territory and could not engage with tribes (Kendall 2018).

5.3.   Rivals vis-a-vis domestic actors: Historical backgrounder

As it will become clear from the descriptive analysis, Saudi Arabia and Iran has fundamentally different historical relations with Yemen. Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, has been an integral part of Yemen's political, economic, and social development. On the other hand, Iran has had little relations to Yemen. The historical discrepancies, albeit do not determine, but foreshadow the two

interveners asymmetric influence in the Yemen's domestic developments as well as Yemeni actors' capacity to impact rivals.

5.3.1. Saudi-Yemeni relations

Saudi Arabia, the direct neighbor of Yemen, has historically been the most actively involved actor in Yemeni internal affairs, as Phillips put it "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia exercises more influence in Yemen than any other external actor" (Phillips 2011:75). Famously, in 1953 King 'Abd al-'Aziz advised his sons to "keep Yemen weak"[61] a policy that according to Salisbury (2015) is based on the two pillars of "containment and maintenance" (Salisbury 2015:3). Yemen poses a significant and proximate threat to the Kingdom: The two neighbors share an 1,8000 km long porous border which has historically enabled the influx of Yemeni guest workers, drugs, illegal migrants, and jihadi fighters in the Saudi territory (Clark 2010: 215). Part of the security problem stems from the fact that much of Yemen's border has never been satisfactorily delineated, despite recently heightened security coordination (ibid.). The Saudi- Yemeni border dispute is in fact a long-standing one, dating back to the 1926 Mecca Agreement concerning the south west Arabia Idrisi Emirate (compromising of the regions Asir, Jizan, and Najran). This dispute resulted in a brief border war between the two neighbors that was concluded in 1934 with the Treaty of Taif. The Taif Treaty has been replaced by the new Jeddah international boundary treaty in 2000 that established a security barrier along the newly demarcated border (Al-Enazy 2002). To further protect its internal stability, the Kingdom engaged in opportunistic alliances and support provision throughout Yemen's history. In the 1960's, it supported the Zaydi imamate in its fight against the Republicans who were backed by Egypt and in 1994 it backed the Southern separatist movement in a brief civil war.[62] In post-unification Yemen, as Saleh's rule has cemented, the neighbors have gradually developed close working relations.

Besides considerable influence on internal political dynamics, Saudi Arabia has historically provided extensive economic support for the GoY and became the primary source of remittances.

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[61] Saudi Arabia's founding father had fought against Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din for control of Yemen's northern provinces, which eventually became part of Saudi Arabia after a war in 1934. The imam was forced to sign the Ta'if Treaty, which meant that the Yemeni provinces Asir, Jizan and Najran became part of Saudi Arabia (Salisbury 2015, Brandt 2017).
[62] The socialist regime and the Kingdom only established diplomatic relations in 1976 (Bonnefoy 2018:56).

Due to these states close historical ties, Saudi policy-makers are very well aware of the informal patronage system that have historically sustained the Saleh regime (Phillips 2011:77). One vivid illustration of the unique importance of Yemen in Saudi affairs is the existence of the Special Committee for Yemeni Affair (SCYA), a Saudi government body that grants monthly stipends to more than 6,000 influential Yemeni Sheiks (Clark 2010: 219).[63] The bulk of financial support has been transferred to influential sub-state actors who although operate outside of the former state structure, bear considerable leverage over the course of Yemen's internal political stability. As such, Saudi Arabia has played a significant external role in sustaining and even enhancing the grievances of state challengers within Yemen. Another particularly important strategic role that Yemen plays for Saudi policy boils down to geopolitical reasons and co-ethnic ties: Yemen's eastern governorate of Hadhramaut has been a strategically important site for Kingdom. Shortly after the conclusion of the Yemeni border treaty in 2000, the Kingdom revealed its plan to build a pipeline through the governorate to have sovereignty over a corridor, a move that would grant access to the sea for its oil exports (Hiro 2018:376). Saudi Arabia has been pursuing a pro-stability and status quo policy towards Yemen, sustaining the rule it perceives necessary to keep Yemen from posing a security threat and to ensure access to the Bab el-Mandeb strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean and is Saudi Arabia's main gateway for exporting oil (ibid). The 2000 border agreement, joint military exercises, the Saudi intervention against the Houthis in 2009, and the joint fight against AQAP are all clear signs of close cooperation between the GoY and the Kingdom. Bonnefoy however (2018) argues that "no single enduring national interest or any Saudi government policy orientation emerges clearly. Multiple, sometimes antagonistic, actors are involved in these relations and these cannot be reduced to a single rationale" (2018:60).

5.3.2.   Iran-Yemen relations

Saudi Arabia is the single most important external actor in Yemen, whereas Iran's involvement in the Yemeni domestic affairs is less documented. Salisbury (2015) noted that pre-revolutionary Iran cooperated with the Kingdom in backing the Imamate. While the northern Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) had close ties to the Kingdom and Iraq, it was in opposition to Tehran. Tehran thus maintained friendly relations with the communist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

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[63] At its height the committee's annual budget was estimated at $3.5 billion, until it was drastically cut following the border agreement in 2000 (Clark 2010:219).

(PDRY), whereas the 1990s have been characterized by cordial relations (2015: 4). Interviewee 4 and 5 note that "Yemeni student in Iran were numerous during the 1990s and in the early 2000s" (02.08.2019, Oslo). This is the period when Hussein-al Houthi travelled to Iran to receive education. In the mid-2000s Yemeni leaders have repeatedly expressed their support for Iran's right for nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Yemen and Iran did not develop significant economic relations (Zweiri 2016:11). In 2009, the US ambassador to Yemen wrote a cable to Washington saying that 'Iranian influence in Yemen has thus far been limited informal religious ties between Yemeni and Iranian scholars and negligible Iranian investment in the energy and development sectors" (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2020:161). The subsequent sections provide the analysis of Iran-Houthi relations.

6.   EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: STRUCTURED-FOCUSED COMPARISON

This section provides the empirical analysis. When comparing the Saada Wars (2004-2010) to the internationalized civil war (2015-2018), I took George & Bennett's (2005) approach and conducted the structured focused comparison by "asking a set of standardized, general questions of each case, even in single case studies (...) which is necessary to ensure the acquisition of comparable data" (George & Bennett 2005:69). Table 6. lists the questions that I asked in both cases.

Table 5.: Structured-focused comparison, list of questions

Mechanism	Question
Conflict integration	Was Saudi Arabia providing support for any sides?
	What kind of support was Saudi Arabia providing?
	Was Iran providing support for any sides?
	What kind of support was Iran providing?
	Was Saudi Arabia referring to Iran when providing support for the GoY?
	Was Iran referring to Saudi Arabia when providing support for the rebels?
Rivalry integration	Do the Houthis acknowledge Iranian support?
	Does the GoY acknowledge Saudi support?
	Do the Houthis refer to the enmity between Saudi Arabia and Iran?
	Does the GoY refer to the enmity between Saudi Arabia and Iran?
	Do the Houthis frame Iranian support by referring to Saudi Arabia?
	Does the GoY frame Saudi support by referring to Iran?

6.1. Saada Wars: 2004 - 2010

International developments, especially the second intifada and the 9/11 terrorist attacks resulted in a global geopolitical shift in which Yemen gained a strategic role as an ally in the US-led Global War on Terror campaign (Knights 2018:17). These developments and the subsequent invasion of Iraq marked a new era for Hussein al-Houthi, who began to raise his opposition against the Yemen-US alliance. Hussein claimed that by cooperating with the US the GPC leadership have sold out Yemen's sovereignty (Basu 2015). Hussein al-Houthi have successfully capitalized on the culmination of decades of economic, socio-political marginalization, and the anti-establishment, anti-imperialist sentiments of the northern region. By 2003, Hussein started to organize anti-American protests across the country and ordered its followers to chant the Houthi's infamous, "Allahu Akbar, death to America, death to Israel, curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam" slogan after Friday prayers (resistance identity). Hussein also advised his followers to stop paying zakat to the state, and instead give it to the Houthis (Day 2012: 216). His widely visited Friday sermons

have attracted authorities' attention and they began to consider Hussein's political activism as an internal threat to state security (Salmoni et al. 2010:7). The government claimed that the Houthis are funded and supported by Iran and were aimed at re-establishing the Imamate. That time president Saleh was able to portray the fight against the group as part of the counterterrorism efforts of the government (Hammond 2012).

Between 2004 and 2010 Ansarallah fought six rounds of wars (Saada wars) against the GoY headed by the then President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Already in 2004 during the first deployment of military forces the government was accusing the Houthis of cooperating with Iran (Boucek 2010:6). In fact, as early as 2004 Saleh claimed that the Houthis were receiving support from Libya, AQAP, Hezbollah, and Iran. The GoY however never produced any evidence to these claims, although it is likely that "some private Iranians have informally funded the insurgency, but this is far from official Iranian government support for Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iraqi insurgents" (ibid p.11). The localized conflict in this period was waged mostly in the northern governorate of Saada, the original stronghold of the rebel movement. Ansarallah stated that the movement was fighting the government over socio-economic and political grievances but made no references to replacing it.[64] In May 2007, Saleh invited the Qatari Emir to help find a solution to the conflict with Ansarallah. In 2007 Qatari representatives intervened and offered to broker a peace deal which demanded a ceasefire and the compliance with the Yemeni republican political system. However, this attempt was only a short-lived initiative. In May 2009, Saleh declared Qatari mediation to be a failure due to disagreements over the disbursement of reconstruction funds to Saada and withdrew the promised investments (Palik 2019).

[64] UCDP has not included data on the conflict between the GoY and Ansarallah before 2015 due to the lack of a stated incompatibility. According to UCDP, "the conflict between the government and Ansarallah was for several years not included in UCDP data due to the lack of a stated incompatibility. The UCDP definitions states that incompatibility, or the conflict issue, can be either concerning government (the type of the political system, the replacement of the central government) or territory (secession or autonomy for intrastate conflicts). Ansarallah has persistently claimed that they don't want to overthrow the sitting government. Instead, the group has stated that it want the government to end what they perceive as socioeconomic injustices and the governments political discrimination of the group and the Huthi tribe. On 9 March 2014, however, the leader of the group, Abd-al-Malik al-Huthi, called on the government to step down. The leader cited what the group perceived as the government's failure to improve living standards in the country as well as corruption as reasons for its call for resignation." UCDP: Ansarallah, downloaded from: https://ucdp.uu.se/#/actor/1091 03.06.2019

In November 2009, Saudi Arabia became involved in the conflict in support of the government, staring the first unilateral military Saudi operation in decades. The 2010 RAND report on the Saada war argues that, "armed confrontation between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Huthi fighters beginning in November–December 2009 has added a transnational dimension to the conflict and risks pulling in other regional countries, such as Iran. Such an eventuality would fundamentally undermine security in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf" (Salmoni et. al 2010:1). The conflict became regionalized with the direct military intervention of Saudi Arabia and the fighting continued until the 13th of July 2010 when the Qatar-brokered Doha Agreement and the ceasefire were "re-activated" by the parties. The Saada wars although ended in 2010, but without addressing or providing any remedy for the underlying grievances of the Houthis. More than 250,000 people were displaced, several thousand have died, and the governorate suffered further infrastructural and economic setback (Salmoni et. al 2010; Boucek 2010:2). Important to note that the Saleh-government severely restricted both national and international media access to region and as such there are only a handful of quality secondary sources from this period.

Prior to the 2009 Saudi involvement, there is no evidence of Iranian influence in the conflict. In fact, Libya, another Saudi rival have intervened in the conflict. In 2006, reports on mediation efforts by Libyan leader, Gaddafi were leaked. Brandt (2018:208) argues that Gaddafi's "mediation initiative seems to have been a scheme to upset his political opponent: Saudi Arabia" (Brandt 2018:208). After several high-level visits by Libyan political figures to Saada, Saleh began to portray Libya as biased towards the Houthis. Cash transfers and arm deals to Northern tribal leaders were aimed at exploiting insecurity in Saudi Arabia's immediate southern border. Tripoli's intervention was officially terminated in 2007, when Qatar began its official mediation and the Yemeni government recalled its ambassador to Libya and Saleh asked for US assistance to ensure that Libya is not intervening further (ibid p.210). In 2009 Iranian foreign minister expressed its disapproval of Saudi intervention in Yemen and indicated Tehran's willingness to participate in conflict resolution (Salmoni et. al 2010: 267-268).

Yet, in 2015 the UN Panel of Experts Report stated that Iran has been shipping weapons to the Houthis since 2009, using fishing vessels to ship "hundreds of anti-tank and anti-helicopter rockets to the rebels" (S/2016/73: 22-25). When discussing Iranian influence, Salmoni et. al (2010)

predicts the current intervention when arguing that "Iran's leverage in the region is highly contingent on the evolution of the Huthis as a movement. If the conflict continues and the Huthis evolve from an organism into an organization (..), it may be more tempting for regional security officials to view the group as approaching the Hizbullah/Hamas model. This could intensify speculation about Iranian contacts with the group, increasing anti-Iranian and anti-Shi'a sentiment in the Gulf. In this case, the GCC states (...) could take further actions to prevent Iran from meddling—thus legitimating such involvement in Tehran's eyes" (Salmoni 2010:280).

The utilization of the sectarian lens in fact became the dominant narrative after 2015. This lens has been advocated by regional powers, but increasingly by domestic actors too, most notably by the GoY. As the RAND Report continues "when paired with the GoY-approved tendency of analysts to refer to the Huthis as Shi'ite rebels and the increasing readiness of Iranian speakers to speak of Zaydis as "al-Huthi Shi'ites," the sectarian motif of the GoY information operations could become the dominant conceptual paradigm through which the conflict comes to be understood—not only by outsiders, but by regional protagonists themselves. This would harm prospects of conflict abatement" (Salmoni et. al 2010: 269). The Saada wars resulted in multiple decisive outcomes for the Houthi movement: Since 2004 Ansar Allah have gained extensive combat experience and went through a considerable military transformation. This evolution made the Houthis, yet not strong enough to replace the GoY, but sufficiently capable to receive external support.[65] The second important consequence of the Saada wars was the broadening of the Houthi insurgency's constituency. What began as a family-led and mostly Zaydi university student populated organization, became a broader Yemeni resistance movement. Third, the Saada wars were more defensive in nature - against the Yemeni military's attacks - than the 2015-2018 war which exhibits strong offensive characteristics. From the GoY's perspective, who at that time considered the Southern Secessionist Movement to be a priority threat (Brandt 2018, Salmoni et al 2010), the wars in Saada provided a window of opportunity to receive external military and financial support from Saudi Arabia that the GoY could utilize for its own strategic purposes (i.e. to repress the Southern Movement).

[65] It is also noteworthy, that Yemeni and Western officials believe that Iran supports not just the Houthis, but also the Al-Hirak, or Southern movement (Salisbury 2015:2; Wall Street Journal 2013.)

6.2.   Inter-war period: Yemen's Arab Uprising

Approximately a year after the end of the Saada wars, in 2011, the Saleh-led GPC announced that it would seek to remove the limit on the number of terms in office for the president. This triggered widespread resistance as many Yemenis feared that Saleh would retain office for life. At that time, he had already been governing Yemen for 33 years. In early January 2011 the Arab Uprising have reached Yemen (Fraihat 2013). At this time at least three distinct conflicts broke out: The GoY-Houthi conflict, the independence movement in southern Yemen, and the elite struggle in the capital city of Sanaa between the Saleh-led GPC and the opposition. For the first time in its history, the GCC, alerted by the potential violent escalation of the Yemeni conflict in its immediate neighborhood, offered its mediation services (Palik 2019).

The Houthis were amongst the first to join the country-wide street demonstrations in Sanaa's Change Square (BBC 2011). The March 18 indiscriminate violence by the government - approximately 50 protesters were shot, and hundreds were wounded - led to the defection of important military factions, most notably the al-Ahmar brothers and General Ali Mohsein[66] (Gaub 2015:1). As international pressure has mounted over Saleh, he was forced to sign a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) brokered peace deal on 23 November 2011. The ultimate goal of the GCC-brokered deal was to negotiate a power rearrangement, rather than a real transition of power. In November 2011, the government and the opposition parties signed the UN-led *Agreement on the Implementation Mechanism for the Transition Process in Yemen in Accordance with the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council* (Implementation Mechanism). In exchange for relinquishing his presidential power, the agreement granted immunity for Saleh and his family and allowed him to remain a GPC-member (Palik & Rustad 2019).

In the 2011-2015 period, neither Saudi Arabia, nor Iran was focused on Ansarallah. At the same time, new reports suggest that in 2011 and 2012 Iran paid for a number of Yemeni activists to visit Iran to offer the protesters financial help and training (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2020:162). The Kingdom's aim was to negotiate a peaceful transition of power from former

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[66] The Al-Ahmar family has been one of the main political challengers of Saleh. The family originates from the Hashid tribal confederation. Abdullah al-Ahmar has been a Saleh supporter, but his sons have gradually distanced themselves from both Saleh and the GPC (Aljazeera 2011).

President Ali Abdullah Saleh and to establish a unity government. As the GCC focused only on finding a solution to the elite-struggle in Sanaa and neglected the other drivers of the uprising. The resulting Gulf Initiative demanded Saleh to step down and envisioned the establishment of a unity government consisting of the GPC and the opposition parties, dominated by the Sunni reformist Islah-party (Schmitz 2014). The ultimate goal of the GCC-brokered deal was to negotiate a power rearrangement, rather than a real transition of power. The implementation mechanisms placed former Vice President Hadi in power of the GoY, as an interim president, and included measures on security-sector reform, transitional justice, and created the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) (Fraihat 2013). Saleh's November 2011 resignation left a power vacuum, which allowed the rebels to seize Saada, al-Jawf, and Hajjah provinces by May 2012 (International Crisis Group 2012). The GCC agreement failed to address the core grievances of Yemeni protesters and it rather re-established the status quo ante. By February 2012, former Vice-President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, as the only candidate, was elected as interim President for a two-year period.

The NDC's task were divided into nine thematic areas[67], one of which was the conflict in Saada. Although the Houthis have rejected the GCC plan, they have participated in the NDC. The NDC (2013–2014) was tasked with reaching national consensus on a new political system for Yemen by including all previously marginalized groups, such as the Houthis, the Southern Movement, women, youth, and civil society.[68] Despite the NDC's unprecedented inclusivity (565 members participated in the conference), the transition government remained an intra-elite bargain and excluded the Houthis and Southern Movement. Furthermore, there was no discussion of disarming any parties. The UN-sponsored transitional plan included three priorities: the drafting of a new constitution before the scheduled February 2014 election based on national dialogue, addressing the issues of transitional justice, the unification, and the reform of the armed forces (Bellal 2018:147). One of the most important recommendations of the NDC was to reform the federal structure of Yemen by establishing six regions instead of twenty-six. This new system however would have limited Houthis reach the Azal region, isolating them from strategic port and oil

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[67] The nine thematic groups were the followings: Southern Issue, Saada Issue, Transitional Justice, State-Building, Good Governance, Military/Security, Special Entities, Rights/Freedoms, and Developments (NDC official website 2018).

[68] The NDC was the first forum that specifically addressed women's issues and required a 30% quota for women in all state authorities.

reserves. This proposal was rejected by both the Houthis and the Southern Movement (Bellal 2018:148).

After the conclusion of the NDC, the security situation deteriorated rapidly: In June 2014, the Hadi government's decision to cut fuel subsidies prompted a wave of protests. In July 2014, the Houthis seized the province of Omran. By September, backed by Saleh loyalists, the Houthis overran Saana and placed President Hadi under house arrest (Schmitz 2014). In early September 2014, former President Saleh and his military allies joined forces with the Houthis. This step marked a significant shift in the balance of power and the Houthis were able to capture Sanaa. As a last attempt to reverse the developments on the ground, the UN (led by Special Envoy Jamal Benomar) brokered the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) between Hadi and the Houthis. The new agreement was never implemented (Palik & Rustad 2019). The Houthis took over Hodeidah in October 2014 and the city has been subject to a coalition blockade since 2015.[69] In January 2015, - after the rejection of the UN-brokered Peace and Nation Partnership Agreement - the Houthis placed president Hadi under house arrest, dissolved the parliament and established the Supreme Revolutionary Committee (SRC), headed by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi. Later, Hadi escaped to the port city of Aden and then to Riyadh, where he established a government in exile and denounced the Houthi take-over as a coup (Gaub 2015:3). From 2014 onwards Ansar Allah have expanded its territory from Sa'ada, to Al Jawf, took over Amran, Sana'a, the strategic port of Hodeidah, Marib, Ibb and Taiz (ibid). Ten years of insurgency and mastering the terrain, coupled with the alliance with Saleh made Ansar Allah the "strongest armed group in Yemen" (UN S/2015/125:22).

6.3. Internationalized civil war (2015-2018)

On 25th March 2015 Saudi Arabia has intervened in the Yemeni civil war upon the request of President Hadi when the Houthi rebels reached the temporary capital of Aden. The Saudi and UAE-led ten-member[70] coalition launched "Operation Decisive Storm" with the stated goal of restoring the legitimate government of Hadi and reversing the territorial gains of the Houthis,

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[69] Retaking Hodeidah has been a strategic priority for the coalition.
[70] Coalition members are: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Qatar (until 2017), Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Sudan.Every GCC-member participates in the coalition except Oman.

whom they accused of being an Iranian-funded military force (Brandt 2018). The Houthis have received domestic support from the Hashed, Bakeel, and Khawlan tribes (Al-Hamdani 2019). Early on in the war, SlC's airstrikes prompted previously neutral tribes to support the Houthis. A large segment of the tribesmen who joined the Houthis had been neglected for years by both the government and their own tribal leaders (ibid). On the other hand, central and Southern tribes resisted the Houthis expansion. Tensions between the Houthis and various tribes have intensified since 2011 when the Houthis began their territorial expansion from their original stronghold in Saada. Fighting between the Houthis and tribes is frequent. For example, the Houthis fought against the Sunni Hashid tribes as early as 2014, tribes of Hajour, and Salafi tribes in the northern governorate of Hajjah (Al-Hamdani 2019, Yadav 2018) The increasingly frequent and violent relations between the Houthis and tribes illustrates the negative impact of the war on historical tribal traditions. Traditional customary law which is based dialogue and various mediation techniques became increasingly challenging to enact (ibid).

In July 2015, the Houthi forces entered into Aden. This move marked the beginning of Operation Golden Arrow, the ground campaign of the coalition forces (Byman 2018). As of today, the coalition is fighting with air and ground forces and receives intelligence, logistical and military support from countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, or Germany. The military campaign also involves aerial and naval blockade of Yemen, a development that has disrupted imports of food, fuel, aid, and medical supplies. As of 2018, the US accounts for more than 60% of major arms sales, followed by the UK (23%), and France (4%) (Dewan 2018). In April 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2216, which imposed sanctions on individuals undermining the stability of Yemen and authorized an arms embargo and travel bans against various designated individuals within the Houthi-Saleh forces (UN SC 2216/2015). Resolution 2216 also demanded that the Houthis withdraw from all territories seized during the conflict, and to hand on weapons seized from military during the fighting (UN SC 2216/2015). Between 2015 and 2018 battlefronts froze and Yemen evolved to the worlds' worst humanitarian crisis. In December 2018, under the third UN Special Envoy to Yemen, the GoY and the Houthis signed the Stockholm agreement which consists of three agreements, one on the exchange of prisoners, a ceasefire in the port city of Hodeidah, the establishment of humanitarian corridors in Taiz, and a handover of the three Red Sea ports (Hodeidah, Al-Salif, and Ras Isa) to the United

Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (OSESGY 2019). As of 2019, stalemate has ensued and no significant development took place in the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement.

6.4. Varieties of external support

In what follows, I delve into the different types of support the GoY and the Houthis have received from Saudi Arabia and Iran. Table 6 provides an overview of the key support types and their content.

Table 6. Varieties of external support to AnsarAllah and the GoY

Saudi Arabia - GoY		Iran - Ansarallah	
Military support	*non-military support*	*Military support*	*non-military support*
cross-border attacks	export of Wahhabism	2009: anti-tank, anti-helicopter rockets	provision of education for Houthi-family members
Air and ground force provision, local security force training	GCC Initiative, largest humanitarian aid provider,	UAV, fuel, ballistic missiles, military training provision	4-point peace proposal; media support; training on "rebel governance"

6.5. Military support

For six years the Houthis waged a sporadic guerilla warfare in the mountainous strongholds, but for today they are capable of sustaining a sophisticated military campaign in urban areas across multiple fronts. This transformation is attributable to Ansar Allah's access to better military equipment which it gained both from external and internal sources (S/2015/125:22). Ansar Allah has looted and gained access to tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, and short-range ballistic missiles, and to the institutional founding blocks of security, i.e. defense ministry, intelligence services (Knights 2018:17). The crucial military development of the Houthis took place when they allied with former-President Saleh in 2014. Since 2014, Ansar Allah has acquired an impressive stockpile of missiles, rockets, mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and such innovations as drone boats (ibid). Access to more and better technology have substantially increased the group's capability of striking more critical, transnational infrastructure inside Saudi Arabia.

Majority of the missiles and the rockets were purchased by the government in the 1990s mostly from North Korea and the Soviet Union (Schmitz & Burrowes 2018; Reuters 2016). Mines and IEDs originate from Yemeni army stockpiles and domestically produced by the Houthis (CAR 2018:2). In 2017, the Conflict Armament Research (CAR) concluded that the more sophisticated weapon systems, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were manufactured in Iran and smuggled to the Houthis (CAR 2017:3). It is also equally important to stress that the Houthis have gain important combat experience during the Saada wars, an experience that during the internationalized civil war compensated for the relative technological inferiority of their armed forces. This combat experience in guerilla warfare has been further strengthened by Iranian and Hezbollah military training.

Externally, albeit to a limited degree, Iranian support facilitated the expansion of Ansar Allah. Empirical evidence regarding Iranian support is in fact scarce: There is no evidence that Iran provided the Houthis with any support prior to the outbreak of war in 2004 (Zweiri 2016:31). According to the 2016 UN Panel of Experts Report, Iran has been shipping weapons and fuel to the Houthi rebels since at least 2009 (S/2016/73:22-25). Iran's monthly fuel donations has reportedly allowed the Houthis to generate revenue by selling the fuel on the black market. Furthermore, Tehran has sent military training advisors to Saada and Saana (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2020). The UN Panel of Expert report details various cases in which Iranian fishing vessels attempted to secretly ship hundreds of anti-tank and anti-helicopter rockets to the rebels The report concluded that Iran was in noncompliance with UNSCR 2216 for failing to prevent the transfer to Houthi forces of Iranian-made short-range ballistic missiles (S/2016/73:23-24). Both Iran and the Houthi leaders deny the accusations (The New Arab 2018). Interviewees were unable to provide evidence for Iranian weapon shipments, as Interviewee 2 put it, "for the ordinary Yemeni it's impossible to tell where weapons are coming from. And honestly, we don't care about that. We care about the bombings and the destruction of entire villages and killing of children. Whether its Saudi or Iranian? It kills and destroys in the same way." (2017.11.21, Oslo)

Since the 2015 Saudi intervention, the Houthis have frequently used ballistic missiles both within and outside Yemen. In November 2017, the Houthis launched a short-range ballistic missile from Amran which exploded near King Khalid International Airport. As a response, Saudi Arabia closed

all Yemen's air, sea and land ports, and thereby effectively locking out international aid from the country (HRW 2018; Reuters 2017). As the war progressed Ansar Allah increasingly utilized missiles attacks and deployed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) against coalition forces. The initial coalition air strikes failed to completely destroy the supply of short-range ballistic missiles. The first confirmed short-range ballistic missile launched against Saudi Arabia took place in 2015 and the last reported attack took place in 2019 targeting both airports, oil and gas fields in various locations in the Kingdom (Aljazeera 2019). A recent example of the advancement of the Houthis weapon system is the Burkan 2-H medium-range ballistic missile, which has been used to attack Riyadh. The UN Panel of Experts found that Burkan 2-H has been produced in Iran (S/2017/81:26).

As of October 2018, the Saudi military sources reported that the Houthis had fired approximately 200 missiles since 2015 (Middle East Monitor 2018). According to Knight (2018) "the accumulated balance of evidence strongly suggests that Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah have developed powerful military and technical advisory mission in Yemen since 2014" (2018:21). Since 2016 Ansar Allah have also targeted commercial and military ships in the Red Sea by using water borne improvised explosive devices, sea mines, and anti-ship missiles (Sharp 2018:7). In 2018 Ansar Allah carried out attacks on Saudi oil tankers. One such attack was followed by the temporary suspension of oil shipments through the Bab al Mandab Strait leading to a short-lived oil-price increase (Aljazeera 2018). For Iran, Yemen has been a cost-effective way of antagonizing Saudi Arabia. Reportedly, the Saudi coalition spends approximately 5-6 million USD monthly on the war, while Iran is estimated to spend only a fraction, few million dollars annually (Riedel 2017). When comparing the support Iran provides to the Houthis with other regional conflicts it becomes clear that Iranian aid to the Houthis does not match the scale of its involvement in other Middle Eastern conflict such as in Syria, Lebanon, or Iraq.

The government of Yemen relies on the Saudi-led coalition's (SLC) air and ground support for its military campaign against the Houthis. Besides considerable air and naval campaign, the coalition heavily relies on local supported groups. There is a lack of military strategic analysis of the coalition's campaign, much of which is attributable to the opaque inner-working of the SLC (Shield 2017). The government of Yemen relies on the Saudi-led coalition's (SLC) air and ground

support for its military campaign against the Houthis. Besides considerable air and naval force, the coalition heavily relies on local Yemeni groups. There is a lack of military strategic analysis of the coalition's campaign, much of which is attributable to the opaque inner-workings of the SLC (Shield 2017). In 2015, the SLC intervention emerged as a truly regional undertaking: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Sudan all provided support for Saudi Arabia and the UAE-led military coalition. Eritrea and Somalia offered their airspace and naval bases for the coalition forces. Mercenaries from Colombia and Sudan are also present in Yemen (Byman 2018). The SLC's Yemen campaign, Operation Decisive Storm, was meant to be a quick and decisive war (Shabaneh 2015). The naval and air blockade was in part aimed at preventing weapons entering Yemen from Iran. The destruction of Yemen's air forces and ballistic-missiles was aimed at preventing the Houthis from conducting cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia (Hokayem & Roberts 2016).

This regional undertaking was defined as a "new era in the Gulf's security discourse, and perhaps praxis" (Hokayem & Roberts 2016:157). By 2016, the SLC had begun to target AQAP forces as well (Strategic Comments 2017). The results of the SLC intervention are mixed. The coalition forces possess technological superiority and command of air force. In sum there are some seemingly critical advantages in armor and firepower, yet some important caveats remain: the SLC failed to translate these adreal dominance of the terrain or sustained political gains. The reasons behind this are multifold: First, Saudi and Emirate forces, although working together, but with a clear geographical separation and autonomy.[71] Secondly, there is a significant asymmetry in the Saudi and Emirati coalition forces combat experience which in turn influences battlefield effectiveness. While the UAE has some important combat experience from Afghanistan and Libya, Saudi Arabia has historically been reluctant to deploy its forces (Hokayem & Roberts 2016). The relative inexperience Saudi forces and the lack of adequate military training became evident in 2009 when Houthi forces (that time substantially weaker) were able to attack Saudi positions within the Kingdom. Military analyst argue that the coalition faces multiple challenges: the coordination of 9 states airpower is a logistical challenge, as ground troops advanced into Houthi-held territories their supply lines were frequently targeted by the rebels, local anti-Houthi groups

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[71] The UAE operations are mostly concentrated in the south and along the western coastline, whereas Saudi Arabia focuses on the central and northern areas of the country.

allegiance is fluid and unpredictable, coalition members lack experience in engaging with local militias. As Hokayem & Roberts (2016) concluded, "Gulf countries lack a defense doctrine that prioritizes asymmetric warfare and investment in proxies" (Hokayem & Roberts 2016:179). This inexperience stands in stark contrast to Iran's ability to influence non-state actors in thrid-states. In sum, from a military point of view, the war in Yemen highlights the importance of asymmetric unconventional capabilities and shows that technological superiority in itself is not a guarantee for military victory.

According to the Yemen data project, since 26 March 2015 the SLC have conducted 20,306 air raids (number as of November 2019) leading to a total 18,350 civilian casualties. (Yemen Data Project 2019). As of today the Yemeni army is composed of a plethora of loosely connected militias and tribal fighters united by their heavy reliance on external supporters (Mello & Knights 2018; Ardemagni 2018; Salisbury 2015). The 2012 Security Sector Reform (SSR) initiated by Hadi replaced the Saleh-era "tribal-military-commercial complex" and enrolled a substantial number of local Islah members. By 2015 the army became fragmented between Hadi loyalists and others, loyal to former president Saleh began to support the Houthis. The current heterogenous anti-Houthi coalition consists of the Yemeni army, the Salafi Al-Abbas Brigade, more than 90,000 militias in Southern Yemen including the Security Belt Forces and Local Elite Forces trained and equipped by the UAE, and a number of non-allied armed local tribal groups. The intervention also transformed Yemen's security sector and facilitated the development of a hybrid defense sector between formal and informal military actors. Similarly to governance, security provision also evolved to a non-hierarchical, localized, and often competing service, or as Ardemagni calls it, a "patchwork security" scheme (Ardemagni 2018). Ardemagni (2018) also notes that this system is marked by horizontal power relations, a trend that external actors magnify (ibid). Simiraly, the UN Panel of Experts note that the security landscape is further complicated by the presence of competing authorities, i.e. UAE-trained military forces are "affiliated", but "operate largely outside of the control of the legitimate government" (S/2018/68) responding to the UAE. Ardemagni (2018) notes that extensive foreign assistance to the Yemeni security forces resulted in the increasing militarization of Salafist groups in Yemen, who are considered as being one of the most prevalent challenges for post-war Yemen. The further instability caused by external backing was vividly illustrated by the large-scale fighting between the Southern Transitional

Council and the Hadi government and the subsequent integration of STC in the government by the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement (Crisis Group 2019).

6.6. Non-military support

6.6.1. Peace processes and ceasefires

In line with the theory's expectations of inter-state rivals aim to impact third-party conflict outcomes, rivals can facilitate particular outcomes non-military means as well. Taking part in or leading peace negotiations is one possible way of being able to influence the outcome of a conflict. The following section analyses trends in third-party peace attempts and ceasefires in Yemen to assess the relative degree of involvement of Saudi Arabia and Iran over time. The reason why ceasefires are analyzed separately is twofold: First, as it was argued earlier, ceasefires are strategic tools for conflict parties. For example, as this section demonstrates, the initial territorial expansion of the Houthis was possible by joining their forces with that of Saleh (military expansion) and because of a series of ceasefires negotiated with local tribes (non-military expansion). This is important, since it debunks the myths according to which Iran enabled the Houthis to conquer the capital (Reuters 2014). Secondly, after the 2015 intervention of the SLC a number of ceasefires were concluded between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia. This send strong signals about whom the Houthis regard as their main enemy.

6.6.2. Mediation

Between 2004 and 2018, five different mediators in five distinct attempts have tried to resolve the conflict between the Government of Yemen (GoY) and the Houthis.[72] Table 7. lists the peace attempts, the leading mediators, and the outcome of peace negotiations. The end of this section also provides a brief overview of Oman's facilitation activities. Oman's involvement has not been

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[72] In this dissertation I do not code or focus on local (exclusive of third-party) mediation efforts. Local mediation however is deeply embedded in the Yemeni society and exists in tandem (and irrespective) of third-party mediation efforts. Future work should systematically explore the ways through which local (Track II) peace efforts can inform and feed into Track I processes. To learn more about the prevalence, role, methods, and effectiveness of tribal mediation in Yemen see for example: Adra N (2011) Tribal Mediation in Yemen and its Implications to Development. AAS Working Papers in Social Anthropology Vol. 19; Nagi, A. (2020) Eastern Yemen's Tribal Model for containing conflict. Carnegie Middle East Center; Marieke Brandt (2013) Sufyān's "Hybrid" War: Tribal Politics during the Ḥūthī Conflict, Journal of Arabian Studies

coded as a mediation activity because of the mere nature of the Sultanate's involvement. Facilitation is not mediation and an important characteristic of facilitation is that it takes place behind closed doors, making data collection (and comparison) difficult.[73]

Table 7: Mediation between the Houthis and the Government of Yemen (2007-2018)

Year	Mediator	Outcome
2007	Qatar	Ceasefire
2008		Doha Agreement
2011	GCC	GCC Initiative
2014	Jamal Benomar (UN)	NDC concluded
2015	Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmad (UN), John Kerry (US)	Geneva Peace Talks
2016		Kuwait Peace Talks
2018	Martin Griffiths (UN)	Stockholm Agreement

Qatar, the UN, EU, US, and the GCC have tried to mediate the conflict between the Government of Yemen and the Houthis but these efforts have been complicated by the duality of roles: some mediators have been directly involved as a conflict party, and others indirectly involved, providing support to those engaged in the war. These factors violate the mediation principle of impartiality and negatively impact the mediator's credibility and leverage.

In the Saada Wars, only Qatar provided mediation services, whereas the internationalized civil war (2015-2018) involved three mediators: the GCC, the UN, and the EU. In June 2007, Qatari mediation efforts resulted in a joint ceasefire agreement, which broke down after only a few months. The February 2008 Doha Agreement envisioned a more comprehensive solution for the

[73] To learn more about the differences between mediation and facilitation, see for example: Mason A. S. (2007) Mediation and Facilitation in Peace Processes. ETH Zurich and Keethaponcalan S.I. (2017) Conflict Resolution: An Introduction to Third-party intervention. Lexington Books, US.

conflict and included provisions for the Yemeni government to release prisoners, grant amnesties, and reconstruct war-torn areas. The Houthis were expected to disarm as part of this agreement, and, to sweeten the deal, Qatar offered political asylum to rebel leaders and a $500 million reconstruction assistance for Saada Province (Barakat 2014:15). This agreement fell through in May 2009 when Saleh declared Qatari mediation to be a failure due to disagreements over the disbursement of reconstruction funds. Qatar then withdrew its promised investments. Fighting quickly resumed after this action and Qatar withdrew its mediation activities as well (ibid). Despite being perceived as a credible and impartial mediator, Qatar lacked the institutional capacities to translate the Doha agreement into a sustainable resolution. Qatar did not have sufficient leverage over the Houthis and the failure to deliver on its reconstruction policies prevented it from making any further substantial engagements. More importantly, while the Houthis were expected to make significant concessions, no concessions were required from GoY (Palik & Rustad 2019).

In 2014, as a last attempt to reverse the Houthis expansion, the UN (at that time led by Special Envoy Jamal Benomar) brokered the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) between Hadi and the Houthis. The PNPA sought to halt the unpredictable escalation by stipulating the establishment of an inclusive government with the Houthis and members of Southern secessionist Hirak movement (Transfeld 2014). The new agreement was never implemented. In April 2015, the UN appointed Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed to replace Benomar. Ahmed took a leading role and facilitated the conclusion of UN Resolution 2216 in April 2015, which required the conflict parties to resume the political process, called for the Houthis to unconditionally withdraw from government and security institutions, recognized the Hadi government as the legitimate government, and established an arms embargo on the Houthis and Saleh loyalists (S/RES/2216:2015). This resolution, however, placed substantial restrictions on the mediator's room for maneuver, since the UN Special Envoy's main task has been to convince the conflict parties to resume the political process in accordance with the GCC Initiative and the NDC outcomes (Palik & Rustad 2019). Recall that those political processes had already been rejected by the Houthis in 2014. Ahmed's term saw the conclusion of five short lived ceasefires and prisoner exchanges.

Four separate rounds of talks in 2015–2016 did not produce any tangible results. After the final set of talks in Kuwait in August 2016, then-US Secretary of State John Kerry stepped in to find a political solution to the conflict. In November 2016, the Hadi government refused to sign the Kerry plan for fears Hadi would be politically sidelined (Palik et al.2019). It is important to emphasize that Yemen's Hadi-led government derives its legitimacy from external actors and lacks popular support, factors which make his post-conflict position vulnerable. In fact, Yemen has been characterized as a country with competing centers of legitimacy[74] and a country which requires a more holistic, multidimensional understanding of legitimacy (Salisbury 2018; (Alshuwaiter 2020). After the Kuwait meeting, the Houthis refused to engage in any subsequent mediation efforts for two years. In September 2018, peace talks in Switzerland collapsed because the Houthi delegation refused to attend. They claimed the Saudi coalition prevented the delegations from traveling to the talks (Reuters 2018). Then in December 2018, after a two-year deadlock, a third UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, initiated a new round of peace talks in Sweden, still based on UN Resolution 2216. The GoY and the Houthis signed the Stockholm agreement which consists of agreements on the exchange of prisoners, a ceasefire in the port city of Hodeidah, the establishment of humanitarian corridors in Taiz, and a handover of the three Red Sea ports (Hodeidah, Al-Salif, and Ras Isa) to the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (OSESGY 2018).

As indicated earlier, this section would be incomplete without examining the role of Oman and its quiet diplomacy in Yemen. Oman has never been an official mediator, yet it facilitated multiple talks between the warring parties and was invited to talks between the Quartet.[75] Oman is well positioned to appear as a neutral facilitator of negotiations. It borders Yemen, has not been part of the SlC, and maintains good relations with all internal and external actors. Several of key Houthi figures are based in Muscat, and many politicians from the GPC have also relocated to Oman after the death of Saleh (Almasdar Online 2019). Furthermore, given the Sultanate's close relations with

[74] For example, the Houthis who control the capital, the STC backed by the United Arab Emirates in the South, and President Hadi's internationally recognized government amongst others

[75] The Quartet consists of the US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the UK and its tasked by resolving the Yemen crisis in coordination with the UN. Amongst others, Muscat hosted meetings between US Secretary of State John Kerry and the Houthis in 2016. On Oman's facilitation activities see: al-monitor (2019) Oman's rising diplomatic role in Yemen met with mixed reaction in GCC. Downloaded from https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/04/oman-role-yemen-tensions-saudi-arabia-uae-gcc-houthis.html in 10 May 2019

Iran, it is well positioned to facilitate Iranian-Saudi talks as well. On a more sub-national level, Oman has close relations with key tribal figures in the eastern governorate of Al-Mahra (Nagi 2019). The land-border between the governorate and Oman is a major security issue for Oman.[76] The Sultanate's facilitation activities are however opposed by some: Tensions arose between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the one hand, and Oman on the other, because the Sultanate adopted political attitudes not aligned with the Saudi-UAE politics in the region, especially in relation to Qatar and Iran (Nagi 2019). Oman has also been accused of facilitating smuggling activities for the Houthis, including arms and ammunition, a claimed denied by Oman (Almasdar Online 2019).

6.6.3. Ceasefires

Figure 7. shows all ceasefires between the government of Yemen and Ansarallah. Figure 8. shows all ceasefires between Ansarallah and other non-state actors. Between 1989 and 2018 Yemen saw 59 ceasefires, clustered in three distinct peace-process related time periods.[77] The figures denote the number of ceasefires (colored bars), the x-axis shows years, while the y-axis denotes the number of ceasefires. The legend shows the actors who entered to a particular ceasefire.

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[76] Since 2017 however Saudi influence has considerably grown in Al-Mahra governorate including controlling its air and seaport border with Oman. Saudi support for certain tribes and the resulting local skirmishes led to community division in the eastern-province, which up until 2019 was largely intact of the war both in terms of violence and economically, since the governorate relied on Omani markets to obtain food and fuel (Nagi 2019). This resulted in skirmishes between local tribes and the Saudis, and threatening the spillover of instability to Muscat. Analysts maintain that Saudi Arabia seeks to build an oil pipeline that crosses Al-Mahra toward the Arabian Sea. The UAE was also present in Mahra and trained around 2,500 new recruits and provided humanitarian assistance (Nagi 2019).
[77] 31 ceasefires were not related to peace processes but had other stated objectives: Eight of these 31 ceasefires were declared to allow humanitarian aid to enter the war-torn areas. These ceasefires were often explicitly limited in their duration and declared for two to five days.

Figure 7: Ceasefires between the Government of Yemen and Non-state actors (1989-2018)
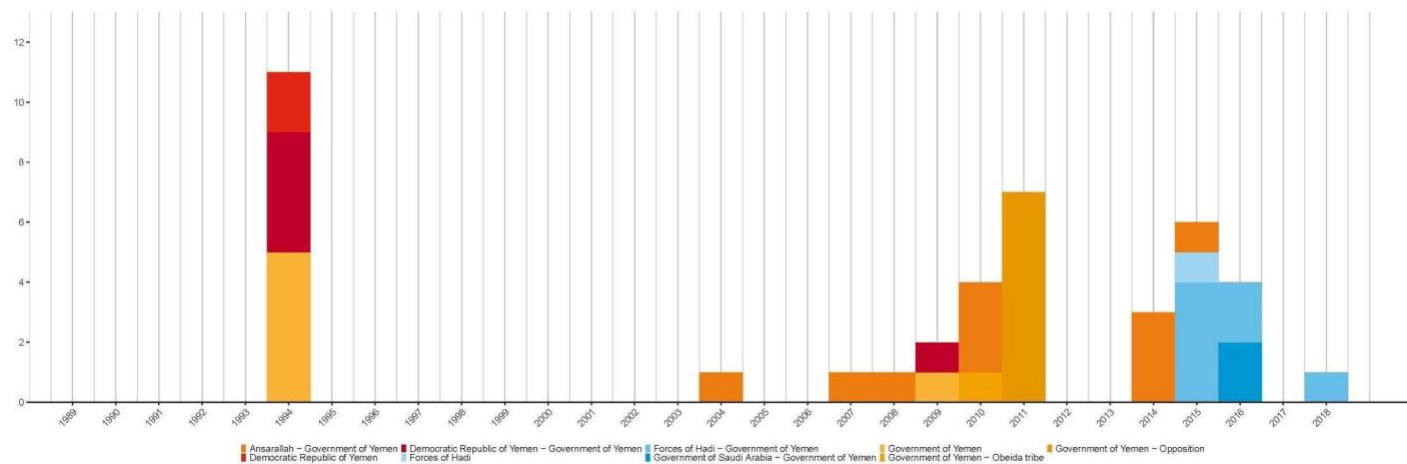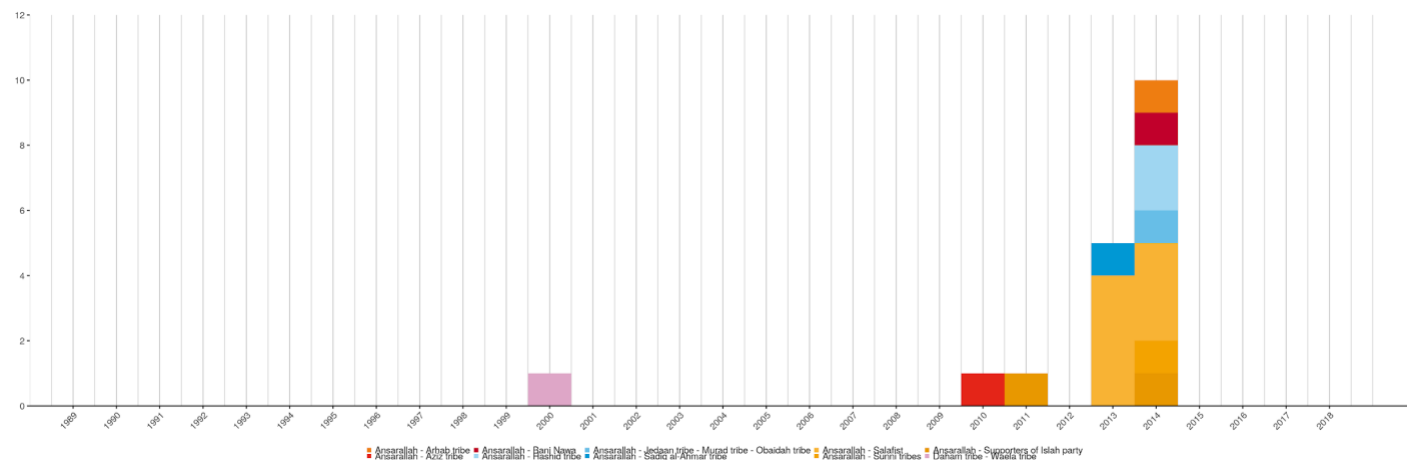

Figure 8: Ceasefires between non-state actors (excluding the GoY) (1989-2018)

The first period corresponds to the Saada wars, the second being the 2011 transition process under the aegis of the GCC, UN, EU, and US. The third phase concentrated around the UN-led peace process from 2015 onwards. In total 42 ceasefires involved mediators, the most frequent being Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the GCC, and the UN (Palik et al. 2019). In 2016, fighting between Ansarallah and Saudi Arabia reached the Saudi border area. The Saudis and Ansarallah negotiated a ceasefire for prisoner-exchange purposes. When asked about ceasefires, interviewees are cynical, as interviewee 1 states, "ceasefire here and there. Yet, I haven't seen fighting ending even for a day. Parties say they stop fighting, maybe they have a good night sleep and then on the next day they attack each other. Then the other party bombs them by saying that the other side was the first one who violated the ceasefires. It is a blame-game, I don't take ceasefires seriously at all" (02.06.2018,

Oslo). Besides conflict parties utilization of ceasefires as periods to rearm and conduct surprise attacks, or to shift the location of violence, virtually no ceasefire agreement entailed a monitoring or an enforcement mission. This means that parties knew that they would not be held accountable or be punished in case of violations. The 2011 –2015 period saw 16 non-state ceasefires (cf. Figure 2). These ceasefires have been concluded between Ansarallah the Salafists, the Sadiq al-Ahmar tribe, and multiple smaller loosely organized tribes. Notably, these ceasefires and their location overlapped with Ansarallah's territorial expansion (see the previous section on the interwar period) (Palik et al. 2019). The Yemeni experience regarding ceasefires shows that in countries where the state does not have monopoly over violence, ceasefires between non-state actors are significant strategic tools in the hands of conflict belligerents.

When comparing Saudi and Iranian peace-making attempts (both mediation and ceasefires) it becomes clear that Saudi Arabia exerted considerably more impact than Iran. Iran has never officially been part of any peace negotiation or never brokered a ceasefire. Iran has neither led, nor participated in any formal peace processes in Yemen. Tehran has been advocating a four-point Yemen peace plan since 2015 (Reuters 2015). The plan calls for an immediate ceasefire an end of all foreign military attacks, the provision of humanitarian assistance, a resumption of broad national dialogue and the "establishment of an inclusive national unity government (Zarif 2017)." Iran wants to ensure that any post-conflict political settlement will include the Houthis (as official members of the governing coalition). This also means the Tehran seeks to preserve the unity of Yemen. Despite Iranian efforts to engage in peace talks, it is unlikely that either the UN Security Council or the SlC would grant any role to Tehran whom they view as a destabilizing force. Mediators on the other hand failed to recognize that UN Resolution 2216 is not a viable framework for negotiations. Since 2015, the Houthis have not only occupied territories, but also consolidated their gains, and, as such, any peace initiative based on UN SCR 2216 would be considered as a setback from a Houthi perspective.

6.6.4. Humanitarian aid

The provision of aid is the second key non-military dimension through which the discrepancies between Iranian and Saudi involvement become clear. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

have traditionally been the top humanitarian donors to Yemen (Salisbury 2018). They are also the ones who most likely will be bearing most of the costs relating to the reconstruction of post-war Yemen. Iranian aid, whether humanitarian or development, is negligible to that of the Gulf states. Furthermore, besides Gulf governments, a number of Saudi private donors and semi-public organizations provide biased support to areas under the nominal control of the Hadi government. This section uses data from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) for humanitarian aid, the Aid data website for development aid, and interviews with representatives of humanitarian organizations working inside Yemen. Tables 8 and 9 provide data on Saudi humanitarian funding to Yemen during the Saada wars and the internationalized civil war. Figures 7 and 8 depict this data in a different format to better visualize trends in changes of humanitarian aid provision.

Table 9.: Saudi Arabia's humanitarian aid to Yemen during the Saada wars (2004-2010)

Year	Saudi Arabia (USD million)	Total (USD million)
2004	NA	3
2005	NA	7
2006	NA	3
2007	0,2	9
2008	103	136
2009	9	161
2010	NA	141

Table 10: Saudi Arabia's humanitarian aid to Yemen (2015-2018)

Year	Saudi Arabia (USD million)	Total (USD million)
2015	3,167	1,757
2016	294	1,790
2017	318	2,384
2018	1,314	5,167
2019	948	3,385

Figure 9. Saudi Arabia's humanitarian aid to Yemen during the Saada wars (2004-2010)
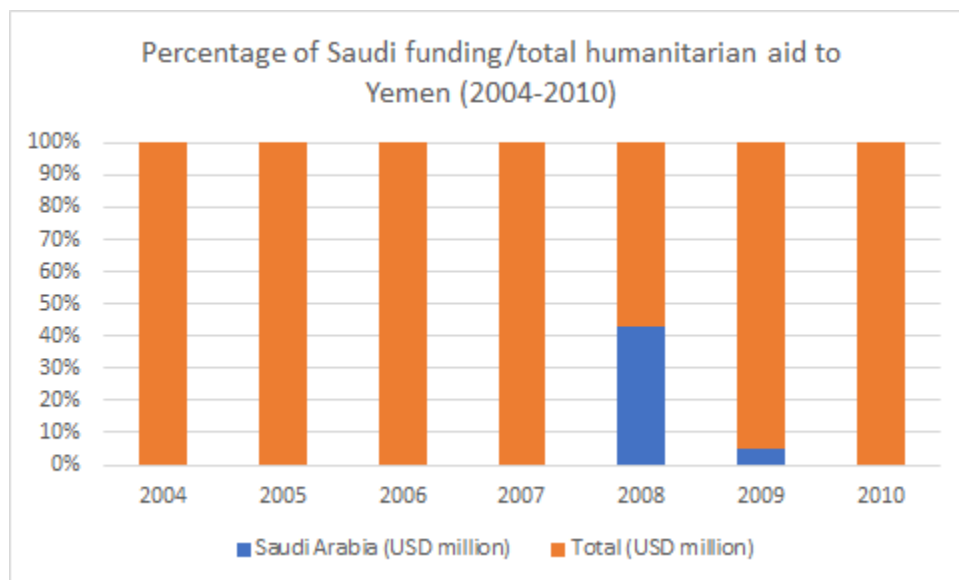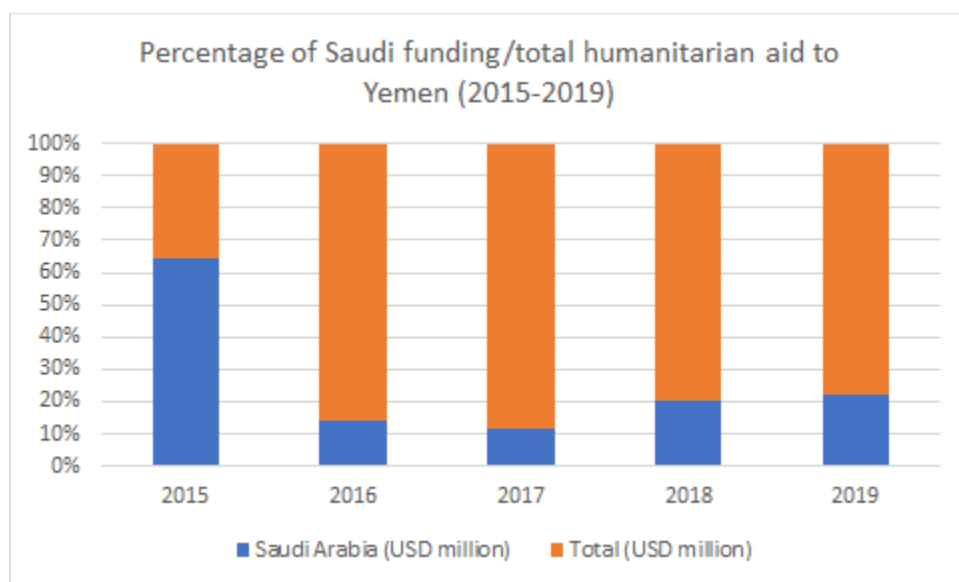

Figure 10. Saudi Arabia's humanitarian aid to Yemen (2015-2018)

What becomes apparent from the numbers is that there is a correlation between the level of military involvement of the Kingdom and the aid it provides. Yet caution is required: Non-western donors are rarely transparent about their aid, thus these numbers most likely only cover a fraction of Saudi aid to Yemen. No such detailed humanitarian funding data t is available from Iran. In fact, the FTS dataset does not have any data on Iranian humanitarian aid to Yemen, except for the year 2015 when Iran has provided 3,959,451 USD to Yemen (FTS Donor Profiles: Iran). The same

year, Saudi Arabia provided 316, 772, 023USD. The Iranian Red Crescent reports that Tehran has "delivered pharmaceutical aid, food aid and trained man-power to the countries with their attention particularly directed towards the Yemeni civilians who are on the brink of famine following the Saudi-led coalition blockade (Reliefweb 2018)." Iran is also unlikely and economically unable to invest in post-war reconstruction in Yemen which then hinders its ability to exert influence in Yemen beyond the Houthi controlled territories.

Since the 2015 intervention, Saudi Arabia have developed a number of new institutions for its humanitarian aid in Yemen: The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, The Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program Yemen (SDRPY), and the Saudi-led Coalition Yemen Comprehensive Humanitarian Operation (YCHO). In 2018, the Yemen Comprehensive Humanitarian Operations Plan pledged $1.5 billion in new funding to the UN's 2018 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan, committed $30-40 million for port expansion, and an additional $20-30 million to improve roads (Alterman 2018:1).[78] The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre also agreed to provide 900,000 liters of fuel for hospitals throughout Yemen. Saudi Vision 2030 (The Kingdom's National Plan), or the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has no data or policy document on foreign aid. The only official source which provides quantitative information on aid is the Saudi Aid Platform established by KSRelief in 2015. While a welcoming development, data in this site is highly aggregated and not supplemented by qualitative evidence (in the form of white papers or reports). As such, little is known about specific projects location (on sub-national level or on individual projects costs). KSRelief provides annual reports from 2015 on and special country reports on Syria, Yemen, Tajikistan and other countries. According to the Report, the Humanitarian Aid program in Yemen consisted of 21 projects in the country with more than 27 million beneficiaries (KSRelief 2016:93).

According to the Aid Data website, Yemen has received the second highest amount of Saudi Development aid between 2004 and 2013, totaling in 246.4 million USD (9% of all development aid) (Aid Data 2014). The data project also states that development aid's influence of policy agenda was the highest in case of Yemen (defining it as "extremely influential"). No similar dataset is

[78] Yet, pledging aid and the actual delivery of it are two different issues. All interviews with humanitarian organization members note that aid delivery has been one of the biggest problems in Yemen.

available for Iran. Saudi Arabia's foreign aid policy has been defined as "Rial diplomacy" (Li 2019) which is ultimately a political tool to "promote and safeguard national interest" (Li 2019:166 citing Morgenthau). Li (2019) also notes that historically Saudi aid has been mostly channeled to Muslim countries. The Kingdom's foreign aid policy although contributes to South-South cooperation and economic development, but it also actively promotes Wahhabism, which under certain circumstances, can contribute to the rise of jihadi militant groups.

Six interviews with NGOs and Humanitarian organizations however paints a bleak picture about the delivery of aid to Yemen. Interviewee 5 have stated that "access, data, and monitoring of the delivery of humanitarian aid is challenging. My biggest concern however is the actual usage of aid. The rebels have repeatedly stopped us on our way from Sanaa to Sadaa, in total 45 times. Yes, on several occasions we had to pay them to let us through, call it a bribe or a tax. Even when we get to the most in need, armed actors assert the responsibility to actually distribute aid. And it is then going to their supporters or to themselves" (02.06.2018, Skype, Jordan). Saudi Arabia and the UAE are not just active conflict parties, but the two most important humanitarian actors. This complicates adherence to the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality. Interviewee 2, the holder of Yemen portfolio in an international organization raised an additional worrisome development: "There is a problem not just with the delivery of aid, but the intended recipients too. We are seeing biased aid provision on the local level. What it really means is that certain areas in Yemen are getting more money than others. And this is not determined by humanitarian needs, but it is rather the question of control. Cities or even districts that are controlled by the government are getting more aid than the rebel-held areas. Denying aid in Houthi areas hurt no one, but the civilian population." The unequal and biased distribution of aid can become one of the key prolongers of the war.

Furthermore, both sides to the conflict have instrumentalized and weaponized humanitarian aid to support their war aims, a trend widely documented by both the UN and multiple international NGOs. The Houthis have repeatedly blocked and confiscated food and medical supplies and repeatedly interfered with aid delivery (HRW 2018, UN S/2018/594:53). As a consequence, the World Food Program partially suspended their operation in Sanaa in 2019.On the other hand, the SLC have introduced restrictions on imports by closing critical ports, the airport in Sanaa, diverting

fuel tankers, and frequently threatening to block aid (UN S/2018/594:53). The 2018 UN Panel of Experts letters states that "the blockade is essentially using the threat of starvation as a bargaining tool and an instrument of war" (ibid). When aid becomes part of the war-economy or it is provided to the supported side then it is likely to exacerbate existing social cleavages, create new fault lines, and as such can significantly prolong the conflict. Matters are further complicated by the alleged and wide-spread corruption of UN agencies (AFP 2019). It is worth recalling that part of the reason why the Saada wars broke out was the massive neglect and economic underdevelopment of the governorate, a problem that regardless Qatari pledges has not been remedied.

6.6.5. Influencing identity

Peace processes, ceasefires, and humanitarian aid are specific non-military tools that rivals can use to influence the outcome of thrid-party civil conflicts. Yet, there is a fourth, rather long-term tool that could be used to influence supported sides: Mandaville and Hamid (2018) describe the "geopolitics of religious soft power" as governments foreign policy strategy to deploy Islam both to state and non-state actors as, "efforts by the state to harness the power of religious symbols and authority in the service of geopolitical objectives"(Madaville & Hamid 2018:5-7). Religious soft power deployment is difficult to quantify, but the observable implications of this specific type of conflict integration mechanism can be identified. As discussed in the previous chapter, Saudi Arabia's export of Wahhabism and Iran's export of pan-Shia revolutionary ideology can be considered as both states' specific transnational projection of religion. Here, I turn to the actual effects and outcomes experienced by those third-party domestic actors at the receiving end in Yemen.

In the early 1980s, Muqbil Hadi al-Wada'i, who was a Salafi cleric trained in Saudi Arabia, instructed the youth of Saada and other northwestern provinces to abandon Zaydism and follow the religion of the early followers of Islam, or the "ancestors" who were prevalent during the early times of the Prophet Muhammad (Zweiri 2016:12). The 1980's saw the expansion of the Saudi-funded Wahhabi/Salafi religious establishments in north Yemen, a development that was not unique to Yemen. The 1980s saw Islamic revivalism across multiple countries in the Middle East, such as the Muslim Brotherhood's activism in Syria, Egypt, and the communal organization of

Lebanese Shia factions (Bonnefoy 2018:20). These broader regional developments, the Iranian revolution, and the Saudi response to the rise of Ayatollah Khomenei "produced a defensive reaffirmation of Zaydi identity among many Yemenis in Saada governorate" (Salmoni et. al 2010: 84). The conversion of many Zaydis to Wahhabism posed an existential threat to the Zaydi community (King 2012: 406).

Wahhabi influence was led by both external and internal forces. Externally, Saudi Arabia sponsored the Wahhabi infiltration which was aimed at the gradual transformation of the socio-cultural and religious landscape of northern Yemen. Internally the "Sunnization" of northern-Yemen was spearheaded by returning Yemeni guest workers from Saudi Arabia (Bonnefoy 2010:16). From the 1980s into the 1990s, as these Yemeni "converts" to Salafism returned to Saada, they established study circles and schools. They also began to infiltrate previously Zaydi-dominated mosques and attain teaching posts in government schools. In both locations, they propagated ideas about Islam and the social order explicitly at odds with Zaydism, shifting the values of some students and worshipers and attracting adherents. When talking about Saudi Arabia's transnational religious influence, Mandaville and Hamid (2018) also highlights that "workers returned to their home countries exposed to stricter, more conservative forms of Islamic practice" (Madaville & Hamid 2018:11). Remittances, religious exposure, and economic aid collectively generated a distortion to local culture through the export of foreign religious practices. Funds for mosque building does not only entail an infrastructural investment, but the acceptance of Saudi-trained imams and specific texts in religious books, resulting in a complex process of adaptation including the mediation of local context (Bonnefoy 2018:25).

The observable implications of the promotion of Wahhabism took both violent and non-violent forms. On the one hand, it entailed the establishment of religious and education institutions, mosques and a massive social benefit system. In its violent form, Wahhabi proselytizers have pursued an aggressive anti-Shia policy and denounced the Zaydis as being infidels. They attacked Zaydi Mosques and vandalized local tombs of the Zaydi religious leaders (Day 2012:408, Brandt 2017:105). [79] The most prominent organizational manifestation of Salafism was the emergence of

[79] The GoY also supported these policies, since Zaydis were seen as anti-republican forces who had to be neutralized (Phillips 2008:43-45).

the Yemeni Islah Party (al-Tajammu' al-Yamani li-l-Islah), which emerged from initiatives encouraged by both the YAR and the Saudis in the 1970s and 1980s to counter leftist regional tendencies (the PDRY) (Salmoni et. al 2010:74). Bonnefoy argues that while Yemeni Salafism is a product of "transnational processes" , these are largely "bottom-up" processes occurring at the grassroots. Bonnefoy dedicates a chapter to the question of authenticity, arguing that Salafism, rather than representing the 'Saudization' of Yemeni society, has itself undergone a 'Yemenisation' process: while belonging to a wider, pan-Islamic reform movement, Yemeni Salafism is adapted to the Yemeni environment (Bonnefoy 2011). The Wahhabization process is important not only to understand the internal evolution of Ansar Allah, but also provides a historical explanation for Iran's ability to establish ties with the Houthis. As it was indicated, the Wahhabization process gave rise to a strong resistance identity. The observable implications of the resistance identity were the Believing Youth, the al-Haqq party, and the emergence of Ansar Allah. It was precisely this resistance identity that Iran was able to capitalize on and much less the Shia identity of Ansar Allah (Interviewee number 5. 12.13.2018, Skype from Yemen).

Iran's impact of Yemeni identity groups have been distinct from that of the Saudis. The most often cited (Salisbury 2015; Brandt 2018) early connection between Ansar Allah and Iran dates back to 1997, when the movement's leader Al-Houthi traveled to Iran, Syria, and Sudan to expand his religious education. Ansar Allah's official slogan "Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews, Victory to Islam" borrows heavily from Iran's radical revolutionary rhetoric. Salisbury (2015) also notes that despite the differences between Twelver and Fiver Shiism, "a number of prominent Houthi supporters have converted to Twelver Shia over the past two decades and have visited Iran for religious instruction, prompting speculation that there is fact a Twelver faction within the wider Houthi movement" (Salisbury 2015:6). Some researchers argue that Iranian support for the Houthis, although increased since 2014, remained limited, more reactive than proactive (Juneau 2016:656, Zweiri 2016:32, Transfeld 2017). Yet, Hussein al-Houthi have repeatedly referred to Iran and Hezbollah in his lecture, agreeing with Khomenei in describing the US as the "Great Satan" and viewing Iran as an example of strength, unlike Saudi Arabia. At the same time, while he makes references to Tehran several times, he does that from a resistance perspective and less from sectarian solidarity (Salmoni et. al 2010:120-121).

When asking about local's perception of Iranian involvement in Yemen, interviewees point to the fact that Tehran is supporting the Houthis internal capacity to govern, rather than their external capacity to fight. This is a less costly, more sustainable method of intervention. As interviewee 10 put it, "back in 2011 the Houthis occupied mosques, but they didn't know how to manage those affairs. If you can't govern a mosque, how do you want to govern a country? For today the Houthis established multiple Popular Committees and new ministries. Someone had to tell them how to run these institutions effectively" (06.08.2019, Oslo, Yemeni local). Security governance in Sanaa is based on Houthi appointed supervisors (musharafeen) and exhibits strong centralization characteristics. Ansar Allah have recently released an 82-page long document, entitled "National Vision to Build the Modern Yemeni State" (Government of Yemen website 2019), a plan which details their governance plan for the upcoming five years. Another vivid illustration of the governance capacity development of the Houthis is the recent (November 2019) establishment of the Supreme Council for the Administration and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation as an alternative to the National Commission for The Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (NAMCHA) (Almasdar online 2019). This reflects in part Iran's mobilization force in creating strong civil-militia bonds, or to aid rebel governance efforts. This process has been documented elsewhere, most notably by Salisbury who notes that "the Houthis are notable in Yemen for cohesive internal management of security and administration, which 'can only' have come about through some form of external support" (Salisbury 2015:7).

Although Iran has initially built on the resistance identity of the Houthis, attempts to establish closer religious ties have been also documented: A newly released report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (2020) notes that in the 1970's Badr al-Din moved to Iran, but rejected attempts to convert to Twelver Shiism and eventually returned to Yemen in the 1980s (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2020:114). By 2019 however, the religious picture became more nuanced: today the Houthis encompass a wide range of actors united by their opposition to the Saudi-led intervention. The so-called "Saada core" of the Houthis became more closely aligned to the to the Iranian Twelver Shi'ism practices, like the commemoration of Ashura or the observation of the Shiite religious celebration of Eid al-Ghadir, something that is alien to

Yemen (Al-Hamdani 2019). This leadership level maintains the closest ties with Iran and Hezbollah. Krieg and Rickli[80]. This argument can clearly be observed in Yemen.

Iran has been the only country that recognized Ansarallah as the government of Yemen, providing an important source of legitimization for the group. In fact, Houthi officials frequenty travel to Iran and Iran maintains an embassy in Sanaa. Iran is the only country to still do so, after Russia closed its embassy in December 2017 (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2020:115). Alizera Zakani, a former member of the Iranian parliament claimed that the 2014 Houthi takeover of Sanaa constituted a victory for the regime in Tehran and that Iran is now controlling four capitals: Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and Sanaa (Middle East Monitor 2014). Yet, it has been repeatedly asserted that Iranians were unaware and not supportive of the Houthis 2014 takeover of Sanaa (Transfeld 2017). Iran has also facilitated the Houthis external outreach and control of information: From 2014 onwards, Ansar Allah has developed a public relations strategy and an extensive media presence. In 2007, the movement established an FM radio, Station26, and in 2008 it began issuing a newspaper, Al-Haqiqa (The Truth) (Albloshi 2016:146). Parallel to developing its own media apparatus, Ansar Allah have also eliminated opposition media outlets in areas under its control (Saana Center for Strategic Studies 2018:23). The current media structure involves a TV Channel Almasirah TV, operating from southern Beirut and a website AlMasirah.net which has both English and Arabic versions and features daily updates of (both news, videos, and photographs) Ansar Allah's battlefield successes and the coalitions' human rights violations (Transfeld 2017). Prominent Houthi people also maintain their own social media accounts, including Twitter and Facebook. Observers agree that Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah have aided the Houthis with advice, training, and arms shipments, but the extent of support is debated. More recently, Ansarallah conducted a fundraising campaign for Hezbollah after the US imposed new sanctions on the group and they have also met Hezbollah leadership in Beirut (Weiss 2019).

80 The authors mention the Badr Corps in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982 as the most illustrative examples of IRCG's strategy to create not mere fighting forces, but "socio-military organization with a paramilitary wing that had extensive communal support. Similarly to the IRGC in Iran, communal support was achieved through social programs, cultural activities, and economic power - all embedded in a powerful Shia Islamist narrative" (2019:179).

6.7. Rivalry instrumentalization

How do domestic actors utilize the Saudi-Iranian rivalry for their own strategic purposes? Domestic conflict parties do utilize the rivalry framework, albeit in an asymmetric fashion. The GoY have framed both the Saada Wars and the current war in the rivalry framework, while the Houthis have denied Iranian support in both cases. As this section showed, the Houthis have received both military and non-military support from Iran. Yet, Iranian support developed only when the Houthis have evolved to a sufficiently strong challenger to the GoY. While Iranian leaders have expressed solidarity with Ansar Allah and IRCG commanders have openly acknowledged their support for the group, the Houthis have been denying Iranian support. This is not at odds with the theories expectation if one looks at the core narrative of the Houthis. Since 2003, the Houthis have been strong opponents of any foreign interference in Yemen. As such, it is expected that they are going to deny the sponsorship they receive externally.

On the other hand, as the chapter on the Saada wars has illustrated, the GoY have repeatedly framed its conflict with the Houthis in the framework of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, both during the Saada wars and to a greater extent in the current internationalized civil war. The reason for utilizing the rivalry framework is the GoY's need for economic and political support. The continued flow of external support helps Yemeni government officials to sustain their power (by co-option local actors) and to legitimize their fights (against multitude of armed non-state actors). During the last, 2019 address to the UN General Assembly, Yemen's foreign minister thanked the Kingdom for continued support against the Houthis, stating that Iran "has created, trained, armed and financed Houthi militias, who brandish the slogan of the Iranian revolution," and that for today Ansarallah "have transformed the region into a stronghold to launch rockets, in order to threaten the security of neighboring states and navigation in the Red Sea (UN News 2019; Aljazeera 2019)."

7. CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined the impact interstate rivals' intervention in a third-party civil war through the comparative case study of Saudi Arabia and Iran's intervention in Yemen during the Saada wars (2004-2010) and the internationalized civil war (2014-2018). I applied a qualitative

case study method to uncover the impact of military and non-military external support on civil war duration and outcomes. I disaggregated non-military support into the following categories: mediation, ceasefires, humanitarian aid, and religious soft power promotion (or the ability to influence certain groups' identity). I complemented the rivalry perspective with a focus on local actors (GoY and the Houthis) and their ability to attract sustained support from external actors (Saudi Arabia and Iran). More specifically, I applied a structured-focused comparative methodology and triangulated data from three sources: my own novel dataset construction (mediation and ceasefire dataset in Yemen), 14 elite interviews, and the review of primary and secondary sources. Findings show that two mechanisms contribute to protracted conflicts: rivals *conflict integration* and domestic conflict parties *instrumentalization of rivals*. These two simultaneous mechanisms create *networked interdependencies* that makes conflict settlement more difficult by influencing the commitment problem and information asymmetries between civil war belligerents. I accounted for both mechanisms' observable implications.

Three conclusions emerge from this study: First, and at the minimum, I confirm previous findings by showing that opposing intervention is likely to lengthen conflict and that external support is more likely when a rebel group is moderately strong. Second, I provided novel empirical evidence and showed that Saudi Arabia and Iran are asymmetrically involved in the Yemeni civil war. The asymmetric nature of their involvement can be observed throughout the period between 2004 and 2018. Rivals keep providing support to their preferred side due to rivals' conflict integration mechanism. Quantitatively, Saudi Arabia provides more military and non-military support to the GoY than Iran to the Houthis, yet there remain some important qualitative differences in the support they provide. Third, I move beyond conventional accounts of the proxy war literature and show that supported groups (both state and non-state actors) instrumentalize their supporters and keep them engaged in their conflict through the mechanism of rivalry instrumentalization. When the mechanisms of conflict integration and rivalry instrumentalization are simultaneously present, conflicts become protracted. The current internationalized civil war evolved to a protracted conflict due to the simultaneous presence of the two mechanisms.

With these three main findings, this dissertation contributes to three distinct strands of literature. First, it directly speaks to the pericentral literature of Cold War (Smith 2000) by showing that how

"weak" actors can contribute the acceleration and lengthening of regional rivalries. Second, this dissertation complements existing accounts on micro-dynamics of third-party intervention by providing a detailed historical overview of the various domains in which third party intervention introduced new and exacerbated existing local grievances. Third, by focusing on networked interdependencies between interveners and supported groups, I speak directly to the new proxy-war literature and debunk the oversimplified sectarian lens applied to the conflict in Yemen. As Bonnefoy (2018) puts it "the extent to which each party in the region believes and acts according to the oversimplified geopolitical frame of interpretation is remarkable (2018:42). Despite these important findings, the dissertation has a number of limits. First, I only focused on two actors and did not address conflicts within the broad anti-Houthi coalition or the impact of the US-led counterterrorism efforts in Yemen. Second, I did not focus on sub-regional variation in terms of support provision. Future research can further refine the analytical framework presented here by applying different research designs, such as network analysis. Future work is also encouraged to integrate a gender lens in the analysis.

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Appendices

Ceasefires in Yemen (1989-2018) and codebook

See separate attachment.

Interview Guides

Interview guide 1 – NGOs working in Yemen
Julia Palik, Oslo, Norway 04-02-2019.

Background

According you organization's website, the organization has offices around Yemen. Please say a few words about them: which one is the biggest (in terms of staffing), which one is the oldest, and other things you consider important.

Your organization is working in Yemen since <mark>DATE</mark> . Please tell me about milestones you consider important in the evolution of your organization's work in the country.

Are offices in the Houthi-held areas work under different conditions than the ones in the government-controlled areas? If yes, what are the main differences between the two?

Current tasks and challenges

Which are the most urgent tasks for your organization in Yemen?
What are the main challenges with regards to those tasks?
Which office would you consider as facing the most security challenges?
What were the main tasks of the organization *prior to 2015* and especially during Saada wars?
What were the main challenges associated with those tasks in the pre-2015 period?

Other actors on the ground and your relationship with them

According to your estimations, how many NGOs are working in Yemen as of 2018?
Which governorate (area, districts) has the highest number of NGO presence according to your estimations?
What is the relationship between your organization and other NGOs? Please elaborate on the nature of the relationship (i.e. cooperation, coordination, competition, no-relationship)

Outlook

Have the 2018 Stockholm agreement changed realities on the ground for your organization?
If yes, how so?
Is there anything else that you consider being important and I have not asked about? Please elaborate

Interview guide 2 – locals
Julia Palik, Oslo, Norway 04-02-2019.

Background

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
Where are you living now and what was the reason behind your decision to move?

Actor perceptions: Houthis and the Government

Now, I am going to ask a few questions about the Government of Yemen and the Houthis.
How would you describe the Houthis, who are they, and what are they doing in Yemen?
Do you know anything about their origins? Please elaborate
Please tell me a few words about the General People's Congress party and former President Ali Abdullah Saleh?

Saada wars

Do you know about the Saada wars between the Houthis and GoY between 2004 and 2010? If yes, please tell me what you know and the source of your information.
How did that war end?
Was there any, and if yes, what was the role of Saudi Arabia in that war?
Was there any, and if yes, what was the role of Iran in that war?
Were there any foreign powers in the country who tried to influence the outcome of the war?
What happened after the war? Both with the Houthis and the GoY

Inter-war period and Internationalized Civil War

Now, I am going to ask a few questions about the 2011/2012 transition and the current conflict.
In your opinion, what happened in 2011 in Yemen?
Have you heard of the GCC Initiative? If yes, what do you think about it?
What do you think about the National Dialogue Conference? Were you, or anyone you know part of the consultations?
What do you think about the 2012 Presidential elections that resulted in the victory of current president Hadi?

In your opinion, why was the transition process unsuccessful?

Intervention and internationalized civil war

Please describe what events led to the current conflict?

Who intervened and how in 2015?

Do you think that the Saudi Arabia and UAE-led coalition makes Yemen safer? If yes, why? If no, why?

What are your experiences with the intervention?

In your opinion, how did the Houthis manage to conquer territory and occupy Sanaa?

Are the Houthis, in your opinion, receive support from foreign actors (both state and non-state actors)? If yes, from whom and what do you think, what is the reason behind the support?

What do you think of the United Nations' activities in Yemen? What are those activities and their effects?

Have you ever experienced a ceasefire in the area where you live? Who negotiated that ceasefire/truce and what was the effect of the ceasefire?

Outlook

In your opinion, what are the main challenges in your country? What do you think, what are the possible solutions to these challenges?

Is there anything else that you consider being important and I have not asked about? Please elaborate