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Yemen, a possible strategic stage for the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran since 2015

By

Anastasie Odile Camille Danset

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Supervisors:	Dr. Ivo Hernandez
	Dr. Shawn Donnelly
Programme:	European Studies, Master of Science
	Comparative Public Governance, Master of Arts
Institution:	University of Twente, Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences, The Netherlands
	Westfälische-Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Department of Political Science, Germany

Anastasie Danset

Abstract:

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not recent. Symptoms of this disparity appeared in 1979, after the Iranian Islamic Revolution, and have developed over time. Whereas, before both states were allies, their relationship progressively moved into a conflictual one. They are today competing through a religious scope to become the regional power. The aim of the thesis is to analyse if the war in Yemen represent a strategic arena for Saudi Arabia and Iran's competition, and if their actions in Yemen since 2015 have developed the conflict into a proxy warfare. By following the offensive realism and security dilemma theory of the International Relations field, this thesis is examining if this rivalry has any consequences on ongoing war in Yemen.

Keys words: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, Realism, Regional Power, Shiite, Sunni, Security Dilemma, Balance of Power

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I.   Introduction

'The worst humanitarian crisis of recent history' (UN, 2017).

This is how the War in Yemen has been described by the United Nations in 2019[1] (UN, 2019). In 2015, the Saudi-led coalition[2] started a military operation that developed into a complicated war. The heavy external interventions by the Saudi-led coalition and the fact that they are controlling and restricting naval and airs import of essential goods and aids for the population is disastrous and the first victims are the civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Austin, 2019). The supply of energy is also limited, thus, there is not enough generators for the hospitals and to pump water from homes (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Since the beginning of the war, more than 10.000 civilians have died, 3.1 million have been displaced, famine and disease as cholera are hitting the population (Grumet, 2019). The UN is estimating that 80% of the Yemenis would need assistance (UN, 2019). Despite multiple attempts by the international community and the United Nations to negotiate a cease-fire[3], the war remains ongoing until today (Sharp, 2020).

A local conflict had already emerged before, however, the well-known war of Yemen started in 2015, when Saudi Arabia's military forces, with eight other Sunni Arab states[4], (the so-called Saudi-led coalition), bombed the North of Yemen targeting Shiites rebels and their allies (BBC, 2020; Gambrell, 2015). Nonetheless, a few months before this attack, a local conflict had already started. The national political instability of the country created an internal discord that resulted in a civil war (Mitreski, 2015). The origin of the conflict was a local tension between the Houthis and the central government. The Houthis are a northern Islamic political group following Zaidism[5], a sect from the Shia branch of Islam, and are often referred to as the 'Shiites Rebels' (Michael, 2015). The Yemeni's central government at this time was led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who was leading the country

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[1] Stephen O'Brien the U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator pronounced these words in the U.N. Security Council in New York after visiting Yemen on March 10, 2017 (UN, 2017)

[2] The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco are Sunni Arab countries and are part of the Saudi-led coalition (Gambrell, 2015).

[3] The Stockholm Agreement is the first agreement achieved between President Hadi and the Houthis on 13 December, 2018., This accord has been promoted by the United Nations, by the Resolution 2451 (OSESGY, 2019) and has been signed in Stockholm after a series of failed negotiations. This agreement did not result in a peaceful end of the war, but it was the first agreement that improved the humanitarian situation in the country (OSESGY, 2019 & Lackner, 2020).

[4] The Saudi-led coalition

[5] Shia Islam represents 10% of all Muslims, is one of the two main branches of Islam with Sunnis Islam. Shia Muslims are in the majority in Iraq, Iran, Bahrain and Yemen (BBC, 2016).

through the Sunni[6] Branch of Islam. When Hadi was president, he had developed close ties with the Saudi government (Mitreski, 2015). This close relationship was based on religious interests since, Saudi Arabia is considered as the centre of the Middle East, and of Sunni Islam.

Before 2015, tensions between the government and the Houthis were already present, the Houthis distrusted the government's behaviour toward Saudi Arabia and were demanding recognition and rights for its group (Mitreski, 2015). Due to the lack of dialogue between the two parts, the Houthis started to take control of the North of Yemen in 2014. Once the Houthis managed to take over the capital, Sanaa, the civil war has turned into a regionalised war (Salisbury, 2015). Because the Shiite group managed to take control of the political institutions in the capital, the threat was ubiquitous for the Hadi government and the neighbour states. This event generates a coalition of nine Arabs states led by Saudi Arabia and this group started to launch air strikes against the Houthis in March 2015 (Baron, 2019; BBC, 2020; Juneau, 2016; Salisbury, 2015).The official explanations of these attacks were to re-instore the Hadi government, recognised by the international community as being the official one of Yemen (Buys & Garwood-Gowers, 2019).

However, there are other explanations behind the actions of Saudi Arabia in Yemen. Besides the official reason for the Saudi-led coalition to attack Yemen, different reports and authors argue that Saudi Arabia had more personal reasons for the attack (Stenslie, 2015; Ponížilová, 2016; Beck, 2020; Clausen, 2015; the Independent, 2018). Saudi Arabia has had "a continuing interest and involvement in Yemen" (Clausen, 2015, p.20) and it would have been against its interests to give up its influence. The Monarchic' state is sharing a consequent border with Yemen, therefore, keeping its neighbouring States stable account for Saudi' national security. Indeed, the vulnerability of the country would generate threats, as for example, the development of a terrorist group or the raise of Shia with the influence of Iran, which would affect Saudi' national security (Ibid.). Plus, Saudi Arabia has the ambition to "establish Saudi Hegemony in the Sunni Muslim world" (Stenslie, 2015, p.1), the monarchic government had to react after the Shiites Rebels' influence grew in Yemen and the national government led by Hadi, was not able to prevent the country to fall into the Houthi's hands (Buys & Garwood-Gowers, 2019). Therefore, after the Houthis managed to take over the capital, Sana'a, on September 21, 2014, President Hadi turned to Saudi Arabia and other Arabs states to seek help to retake control of his country (Aljazeera, 2019). Besides, there was a lot of assumptions that Iran was already supporting the Houthis. Since Tehran and Riyadh are competing in the region and distrust each

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[6] Majority branch of Islam with 85% of Muslims in the world. In the Middle East it represents 90% of the populations of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (BBC, 2016)

other, Saudi's government decided to react to the growing influence of Iran in Yemen (Independent, 2018).

Indeed, Iran and Saudi Arabia's relationship deteriorated in 1979 when Iran became the Leader of the Revolutionary Shia branch of Islam with its Islamic Revolution (Marcus, 2019). Strong ideological competition was born between the two states and amplified during the years. However, their rivalry includes other factors as the oil trade, stability, and dominance in the region (BBC, 2020). For these reasons, both states are active in different conflicts in the Middle East, as they are in Yemen, and are creating alliances with other nation-states or ideological groups that are following the same sect of Islam, in order to counterbalance their power (Fathollah-Nejad, 2017). They both seek to become the regional leader through their religious position. It is assumed that one of the reasons why the local conflict in Yemen turned into a regional one is due to the tensions and distrust between Tehran and Riyadh. Therefore, Yemen has supposedly turned into a stage for the confrontation between the two-regional powers of the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA): Saudi Arabia and Iran (BBC, 2020; Fassihi & Hubbard, 2019; Clausen, 2015).

1.1.   Research Question

The thesis aims to analyse Saudi Arabia and Iran's actions in Yemen since 2015 and their consequences. By following the offensive realist and security dilemma theory of the international relations field, it will be examined if the actions of both States in Yemen are driven by the competition to become the regional power through secular strategies and, thus, if Yemen can be qualified as a proxy war driven by this competition. The research question is the following:

Is the war in Yemen that started in 2015 a strategic arena for the development of a proxy war between the two regional powers: Saudi Arabia and Iran?

1.2.   Hypotheses

Following the research, four hypotheses can be advanced:

The first hypothesis is related to Saudi Arabia and Iran's rivalry to become the hegemon in the region. The competition was already present before, however, the conflict in Yemen exacerbated it.

H1: Yemen is geographically and strategically important for Iran and Saudi Arabia and their power competition in the region. Hence, Saudi Arabia, before the crisis, had a certain control over Yemen's

policies and to protect its borders and have access to the oil roads from Yemen, it is actively acting in this war. And Iran is supposedly present to win some influence.

The second hypothesis is linked to secular matters. Both states, Iran and Saudi Arabia, are basing their strength, motivation and alliances following which Islamic sect there are depending on. Consequently:

H2: Iran and Saudi Arabia seek to gain regional hegemony[7] by gaining ideological dominance. In the context of the war in Yemen, they are using their religious authority to boost ideological trust and power in the region. If the dominant religion and the government of Yemen is switching from Sunni to the Shia part of Islam, the Saudis would lose their leverage and Iran gain an ally.

The third hypothesis is related to the nature of the conflict, it is assumed that:

H3: The conflict started as a civil war, yet it moved into a proxy warfare as a result of the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran.

The fourth and last hypothesis is based on the end of the conflict:

H4: The intervention of Riyadh and Tehran in Yemen, fall into a balance of power strategy and the only solution to end it would be to wait for one of them to be defeated. It is assumed that power-sharing is not a feasible option.

1.3. Structure and methodology

To complete this analysis, a qualitative methodology employing a case study on the war in Yemen was chosen. Data from primary and secondary sources was collected and analysed such as scholarly articles and policy briefs. Academic articles were needed to complete the theoretical concepts and to give a scientific measure to the work. Consequently, academic works were also used to explain the offensive realism, security dilemma, and the balance of power theory and properly explain of the terms 'Regional Power' and 'Proxy Warfare'. In addition, academic works were also used to give an overview of the previous research that has already been carried out. Furthermore, secondary sources such as scholarly books, newspaper articles, official documents from governments or international organisations were

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[7]Hegemony: in the Oxford bibliography, the definition of Hegemony refers to an actor that has the capability to shape the international system through different means: coercive and non-coercive (Norrlof, 2015). Howard Lentner and Inan Clark argue that hegemony can be defined under two words: domination and leadership (Lentner & Haugaard, 2006; Clark, 2011). In the realist theory, hegemony is described as the ability to use the power to dominate. The hegemon would be identified as a state that controls bigger material resources as military, economic, and soft power capabilities (Dune & Schmidt, 2017).

exploited to analyse the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as their impact in the war in Yemen. Since the conflict is still ongoing recent information was needed to analyse the evolution of the situation.

To answer the question, defining the theoretical framework is crucial and developed in the second chapter which has been divided into two parts. The first one considers the offensive realism and security dilemma theory. These theories are the base of this thesis. Thus, this step is certainly important to understand in which point of view the paper must be conducted and to describe the situation in the Middle East. The second sub-chapter concerns the development of the balance of power theory. This subpart is also important to understand the rest of the paper, namely the action of Saudi Arabia towards Iran and vice versa. But also, to understand their actions in Yemen. It determines a previous understanding and explanation of their actions.

Following this, chapter three interprets and explains the concept of Regional Power. Since it will be focusing on the Middle East and North Africa, the two Islamic main powers, at the moment are Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both powers are fighting to be the hegemonical state of the region and thus, balance each other's power. This chapter is divided into four sub-chapters, each of them aims to understand how they came to this position of the opponent. The first sub-chapter is defining the concept of regional power and the two following ones identify why Saudi Arabia and Iran are perceived as being one. And lastly the last one is emphasising the importance of religion as a crucial factor of being influential in the region and explain that religion is the main reason for their confrontation.

The following chapter is identifying another important concept for the understanding of the paper, the Proxy Warfare. This chapter will be divided into two subchapters, the first one is giving a clear definition of the concept, the second one is giving an example of the Vietnamese war and the Ukrainian war that have been qualified as proxy warfare. This sub-chapter is aimed to give a realist example to give a good understanding of the concept.

The fifth chapter is related to the fourth one, however, it will be focusing on Yemen. Indeed, it first gives a detailed comprehension of the beginning of the conflict and how it became the war we know today. Furthermore, it explains the connections between the two sides in Yemen with the respective outside powers and the development of their relations over time. Subsequently, the final chapter is giving the strategic importance of Yemen today for both states and what they would gain or lose in every outcome of the conflict and therefore, why they are actively participating in Yemen. These two subparts are also emphasizing the actions of Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen and the reason why they choose to act like this. Finally, the last point is answering the question of knowing if Yemen can be qualified as a proxy war.

1.4.   Subject of research and relevance of the topic

This thesis is meant to bring an understanding of the current situation of the Middle East regional politics and international relations by focusing on the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and how it affects Yemen. It is dissecting what is driving the two regional powers to base their possible strategies in Yemen. The study of the war in Yemen is a good way of understanding how both States are behaving in the region and what kind of foreign policies they are applying. By examining their actions towards Yemen, we could anticipate their next moves and further actions in the region. Furthermore, the war is still ongoing, therefore, it is important to analyse every action of both States since the outcome of the war is not yet determined. It will be analysed if their actions fall either into an offensive realist perception of a State behaviour and thus if their motivations are driven by ideological motives. Either, if their motivations are more driven by a fear of each other following the security dilemma theory. It is assumed that Riyadh and Tehran behaviours towards each other can be explained by both theories and their purposes are to become hegemonic power of the region. Since their rivalry is affecting the entire region of the Middle East and is destabilizing it; it is important to fully understand their strategies. This thesis will also try to answer to a possible solution to end this conflict.

Offensive realism and security dilemma are the main theoretical frameworks used in the literature to describe foreign policy development in the Middle East. Realism is a theory of the International relations field, that was first conceptualised by Henry Morgenthau who laid out the base of the theory that states are the main actors in the international system and their main objective is to promote their interests and power. However, debates among realist theorists shifted towards a new concept of the theory, called structural or neo-realism. It was mainly explained by Kenneth Waltz and he described the international system as an anarchist one. Therefore, he argued that the ultimate concerns of a State is his survival, therefore security is the most important matter for states and not power. Following this conceptualisation, neo-realism is split into two categories, defensive and offensive. The defensive is supported by Kenneth Waltz and the offensive mainly by John Mearsheimer. John Mearsheimer believed that states can only assure their security by maximizing their power and that there will always be a form of competition between States. This competition is generating a continuous fight for the hegemon position and a constant balance of power. John Mearsheimer also gave a complete definition of the concept of balance of power, with Kenneth Waltz and the definition of regional power. Daniel Nolte, in 'How to compare regional power: analytical research topics' (2010) provides a clear overview of the concept of regional power and is describing and criticising authors that have conceptualised it over time. Plus, he defines the difference between great, middle, and regional power and the evolution of this status in history. Following the understanding of concepts

used in this thesis, Andrew Mumford mainly in his article from 2013 'Proxy warfare and the Future of conflict' is the most influential author for the description of a Proxy War, while Karl Deutsch was giving a more simple definition.

Concerning the Saudi-Iranian relationship, the literature is examining the rivalry through the lens of international relations theories. Most of the studies are using realism to analyse the geopolitical dimension of their relations and are often incorporating foreign policy analysis. In most of the academic work treating the Saudi-Iranian relationship are dividing the degradation of their relationship and rivalry in three steps. First, in 1979 after the Islamic Revolution, then during the Iraqi war, and finally during the Arab Spring event (Beck, 2020; Cerioli, 2018; Ponížilová, 2016; Eski, 2017). Mohammed Bin Huwaidin in 'The security dilemma in Saudi-Iranian Relations' (2015), divided the chapter in another way, by describing the Saudi' interpretation of Iran and vice versa. This different point of view gives a good understanding of how their rivalry started.

To conclude, the literature divided the war in Yemen into several parts. First the history of the country, by the division and reunion of the two Yemen in one, then, the creation of the Houthis group and its development, followed by, the Arab Springs influence on the country and the civil war in 2011 and the country ties with Saudi Arabia. Finally, they are identifying a radical change within the Houthis movement during the first civil war of the 21st century in Yemen and the possible link between the Hezbollah and Iran to this group, to the second civil war, started in 2014. The last distinctive step is the beginning of the Saudi-led intervention in the country, following by other external intervention, that have changed the proportion of the conflict (Eski, 2020; Taves, 2019 & Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). Authors like Nuruzzaman are focusing on the Saudi's intervention in Yemen (2015) and on its will to become the new regional dominance (2019). While, Simbar (2016) or Juneau (2020) are focusing on Iran's strategy in the Middle East.

II.   Theoretical Framework: Realism and Balance of power

2.1. Offensive Realism and Security Dilemma theory

Realism is one of the three main theories of the International Relations Field. There is not an official identified definition of realism (Segbers & al., 2006). Hans Morgenthau[8] explained the theory by

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[8] Hans, J. Morgenthau is a German-Jewish that immigrated to the United States. He published in the 40s serval books but the most influential one would be 'Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace'. That

identifying States as the main actors of the international sphere and emphasis that they are driven by their own national interest and absolute gain of power. He also describes States as being the central actors of the international system and that they are driven by power and self-interest (Brown & Ainley, 2005). Another realist author, Kenneth Waltz[9] specifies his definition of neorealism[10] by reviewing Classical Realism in his book 'Theory of International Politics'. The main purpose of Waltz was to explain that the behaviour of States is explained by the international system. The system is defined as 'self-help' as the international arena is anarchist, with a lack of justice, and of a supreme international institution above States to regulate the system. Thus, States have to look after themselves and are obliged to see other states as a potential threat (Brown & Ainley, 2005). Waltz is defining the notion of power as being an instrument of security and represents a fundamental survival tool (Donnelly, 2000). Therefore, in Waltz's perceptive, due to the anarchical international system, States would seek power to protect themselves (Pashakhanlou, 2009). States are pursuing hegemony to serve their own interest by means of power and armed forces. Following this theory, the security policies of a State would only be based on the safeguard of their national interest. In the absence of direct threats in the homeland, states can react to protect their allies, and reinforce their power and military forces (Agnew, 2002). However, when a State feel threatened by another state growing, the balance of power[11] is an act of survival. Neorealism with respect to security has developed two theories: Defensive and Offensive Realism. The structural defensive realists as Christopher Layne or Stephen Walt and Kenneth Waltz argued that the international system encourages states to moderate their behaviour, therefore they would not try to maximise their power since it could provoke a security dilemma[12] (Lobell, 2010). Nevertheless, in the context of the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the consequences of the war in Yemen, the offensive structural side of realism is more suitable. Offensive realism has been mainly theorised by John Mearsheimer and Eric Laps, they argued that any consequent power in the international system would try to maximise their power to pursue hegemony at the regional or global level. This is creating a constant competition of power and generating lots of tensions and sometimes wars (Steinsson, 2014). According to Mearsheimer, states are aggressive because of the anarchic

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book would become the standard textbook for the field of International Relations for a generation (Brown & Ainley, 2005).

[9] Kenneth Waltz (1924-2013) was a pre-eminent thinker of the disciplines of International Relations. He was a senior research scholar at the University of Columbia. He was trying to explain how nations interacted and believed that each state will push to advance their self-interests. For this reason, he theorised his idea about international politics called 'structural realism or the shift of relative power is not only the result of the development of the military assets. The changes in material capabilities are an important factor. For example, Saudi Arabia has increased its relative power due to its oil exports which give it a higher income (Beck 2020). 'Neorealism' (Martin, 2013)

[10] Neorealism appears after 'realism' with Kenneth Waltz, he specifies the definition of the theory bringing a more scientific side of the definition (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018).

[11] See chapter 2.2.

[12] See chapter 2.1.

international system, it leads them to ensure their survival but also to acquire power at every opportunity possible (Mearsheimer, 2001). In order to gain power, states can expand their foreign economy and their political and military policies to alter the balance of power (Lobell, 2010). Following offensive realism, States are in a constant stage of 'security dilemma', and the main source of their action is the fears of the others, which often leads to conflicts without any means.

Security dilemma is explained within the structural realism framework (Chisem, 2012). It is described as states uncertainty toward other states intentions. The concept of security dilemma is important to understand international relations and permit to explain states' interaction as war and peace. The concept was first described by Herbert Butterfield and John Hertz. They explained that war was unavoidable because all states are status quo powers and fear for their security from the anarchic structure of the international system (Wivel, 2011). For offensive realists, the security dilemma makes war rational (Tang, 2009). Other scholars argued that states are not seeking to maximise their security but to maximise their power at the expense of others. However, the result comes to the same outcome (Wivel, 2011). This mistrust results in defence measures that can be perceived as offensive. This dilemma encourages States to secure themselves by creating new alliances and investing in their security defence department. Robert Jervis was defining Security Dilemma as "Many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security and decrease the security of others" (Jervis, 1978, P.169). Therefore, states never feel completely secure which creates a vicious circle of security and power accumulation (Tang, 2009). States leaders are constantly looking for security policies that would weaken the capacities of their 'enemies' while improving their own power. Mearsheimer was calling it 'The Tragedy of Great Power Politics' due to the constant security competition between states, even when there is no reason for it (Mearsheimer, 2001). In the context of the Middle East, two states are having enough power and influence to become hegemonical and, thus, shielded for its security: Saudi Arabia and Iran (Fathollah-Nejad, 2017). This region has been in a continuous fight for the balance of power for decades.

In this work, it is suggesting that Tehran and Riyadh are acting in an offensive way in Yemen to gain influence in the region to assure their own safety. By consequent, there are both seeking more power and are trying to protect themselves by their actions. The primary goals of all states according to Mearsheimer are survival, territorial integrity, and domestic autonomy. The domestic instability in Yemen and the supposedly important presence of Iran, in Saudi's neighbouring State, was disturbing its territorial integrity. Following Neorealism, it is in the interest of Iran that Yemen is staying instable and creating new sectarian conflict inside the Gulf states (Tang, 2009). Supporting the Houthis for Iran is due to their sectarian affiliation as well as to challenge the regional hegemony of Saudi Arabia (Tang, 2009). That would permit to weaken the opponent and for Iran to gain power. The civil war with

sectarian dimensions within an anarchist international system led Iran to intervene in Yemen affairs to support the Houthis, group pro-Shia (Al-Otaibi, 2019). Saudi Arabia on the contrary is involved in the Yemeni conflict of sectarian dimensions because it lies to its own security field. For both states, the intervention in Yemen is related to the security dilemma. (Al-Otaibi, 2019).

2.2. Balance of Power

Balancing is an action when a state is becoming too powerful and starts to threaten the security dilemma of others, they are increasing their own hard power capabilities to restore the balance of power (Wivel, 2011). Following realism, this phenomenon can be explained due to the nature of the international system. Indeed, states must seek power to protect themselves by constantly analysing the position of other states since they are considered as a constant threat. Balancing power can be seen as a basic survival move. Following classical Neorealism, "states give priority to maintain the balance power" (Eski, 2020, p.136). States are self-interested and would choose their strategies to maximise their security and welfare. The balance of power was first theorised during the cold war[13] when the world was bipolar. At this time, there were only two main powers in the world, the U.S. and the USSR were balancing each other power, meaning they were both preventing the other to gain too much military, political, diplomatic power to be able to dominate and become hegemonic. During this time, other states were not powerful enough[14] to manage to balance their power, thus, their only solution was to bandwagon[15]. After the end of the Cold War, the world became unipolar and slowly developed into a multipolar system with several regional powers[16]. Today, the world system can be defined as multipolar, and the balancing is organised mainly at the regional sphere (Nolte, 2010). For realists, a multipolar system is the result of the emergence of regional powers and coalitions to balance Great Powers (Wohlfort, 1990). Waltz analysed the balance of power theory and explained how States are acting according to their power and their capabilities. If a state does not have a consequent material or political instrument to be hegemonic it will most likely bandwagon. However, if a state, like Iran or Saudi Arabia, has an important ideological domination and material forces to be hegemonic, it will try to counterbalance each other power. For offensive realists, to maximise their security, states would try to expand their relative power, because "power is the best means to survival" (Mearsheimer,

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[13] Cold War: from 1947 and 1947 was a period of geopolitical tension between the two main powers: the U.S. and the USSR. During this time the International system was bipolar.

[14] The Cold War was the result of the second world war that put forward the two 'winner' of it and had strongly weakened the erstwhile power: Europe.

[15] Bandwagoning is a strategy for weaker states to seek protection from a stronger and threatening power. Following the realist theory of International Relations, states have two options, either balancing power, or bandwagoning, to preserve basic security concerns. By creating an alliance to a stronger power and following their will, states are giving up on their autonomy in exchange for protection (Ja Ian, 2003).

[16] See 3.1.

2001,p.11). Counterbalancing power is a good way to gain power and becoming a hegemon. Becoming a regional hegemon is the goal for each state since it is the only way to protect themselves (Valeriano, 2009).

In the Middle East, the last decades witnessed lots of power shifts due to conflicts. The decline of Egypt and Turkey and the slowly disengagement of the Americans in the region, generated lose and gain of relative power for a lot of States (Beck, 2020). First, after 2003 and the US occupation, Iraq was no longer able to assume the role of a regional power. Kenneth Waltz was suggesting that Iran should get the nuclear bomb to re-balance the situation in the Middle East in 2013 (Waltz,2000). Indeed, Israel, allies of the United States, is supposedly the only nuclear power of the region. In his argument Waltz saying that it is an anomaly and would re-balance the power of the region if Iran is possessing the nuclear weapon (Manning, 2012). Following, the Arab Springs[17] in 2010-2011, states as Turkey, Syria, or Egypt stopped being in the centre of the region. Which let the position for Iran and Saudi Arabia to replace them. Their rivalry is now upon the region, they are today trying to balance each other power (Eksi, 2020). This theory cannot be proven, Iran is trying to get the nuclear power, however, so far it only worsens its relations with its neighbour. Today's situation in the Gulf Region represents a multilateral balance of power since the two main actors are basing their strategies by reinforcing their military forces but especially by allying based on their religious affiliation. Therefore, they are basing their approach in the enemy of my enemy can become a friend (Beck, 2020) to become the regional power of the MENA region.

III.   The concept of regional power in the Middle East: Iran and Saudi Arabia as regional power

3.1. Understanding the concept of 'regional power'

The concept of regional power appears in the international relations after the Cold war. Indeed, the establishment of states being more powerful and directing a region did not totally appear in the 1990's, however, it has been contextualised at the time (Beck, 2020). The end of the Cold War had a profound impact on the international and security system. At this time, the world entered a transition of power (Buzan & Waever, 2003). With the end of the bipolarity, regional autonomy was formed in answer to

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[17] The Arab Springs were a series of pro-democratic protests in several Arabs countries that resulted to a change of the regime in 2010-2011. The main goal of these uprisings was to promote democracy and culture freedom. The political impact of these uprising remains significant today. It started first with Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, had positive outcomes to these demonstrations, however, in Libya, Syria, and Yemen they end up in civil wars.

security related issue, indeed the formation of an unipolarity system was possible. Another element that tend to explain the sudden interest of regional power at this time was the decolonisation process, nonetheless the ending of the Cold War has accelerated this process (Katzenstein, 2000). The independence of a certain number of non-western states created a space for them to rise regionally (Ponížilová, 2016). Another form of superior power was to be found and the position of regional power was highlighted. Indeed, without superpower rivalry, local powers have more room to develop (Buzan & Waever, 2003). For neorealist, the end of bipolarity established the global political and security structure interplay with the balance-of-power logic (Buzan & Waever, 2003).

The definition of regional power combines two concepts, the geographic and the concept of power (Ponížilová, 2016). First, the region needs to be defined geographically, within a designate area with similar characteristics. Concerning the Middle East, the territory has been defined and named by the British imperial in the early twentieth, 'Great Britain's possession in South Asia made the Middle East not only a geostrategically important region but also the middle of the journey east to India, hence the term "Middle East"' (Culcasi, 2010 p.585). This region included Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Jordan, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula states of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Afghanistan (Ibid.). The MENA is including the North African states of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Western Sahara (Ibid.).

After defining the notion of 'region', the concept of power needs to be explained. 'Power' is a basic concept of realism in the International Relations field, it refers to power hierarchy in the international system (Nolte, 2010). Power for offensive realist is mainly defined by material resources disposal of a state, otherwise known as Hard Power[18] (Mearsheimer, 2001). However, other authors argue that political or cultural factors, known as Soft Powers[19] (Yukaruc, 2017; Nye, 2004; Lee, 2011) are a stronger power instrument than the Hard one (Nye, 2004). For example, Japan was considered being one of the one of the biggest Power in the world, even though it did not have an army or military power (Akaha, 2008). As a global definition it can be argued that a regional power is a State with a potential leadership in the region and can exercise hegemonic functions due several factors. The regional powers are the "central players in the local balance of power, they protect their regional sphere of influence, their interests are largely defined by regional issues, and they have the ambition to achieve the position of a regional leader" (Ponížilová, 2016, p.160). The term 'regional' consequently reflects a state that needs to be able to present factors of hard and/or soft power or

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[18] See 3.2.1
[19] See 3.2.2

smart power[20], and use these capabilities to demonstrate dominance in a determined region. The geographic emplacement, size of the land and of the population could be positive or negative asset for a state to become a regional power yet does not obligatory play an important role. However, a state that inspire to become regional power needs to be able to hold a role of influence, either having a political, economic and/or an ideological weight in the delimitating region. In this sense it needs to be interconnected in political, cultural or ideological affairs with the states around it and articulate a common identity and needs to be respect and see as a power State in and out the region (Flemes, 2007; Lake, 2006). Thus, a regional power has an important leadership position, having a role of moral authority is to keep a certain balance that assures peace in the region. All in all, a regional power is having a leading position in geographically and politically-ideationally delimited region (Nolte, 2010).The most important feature that defines a regional power is the recognition of its power status by the international community (Ponížilová, 2016). Indeed, the status of middle power or regional power is 'a social category' (Lake, 2006) and to be recognised of members of the club, by great power states as well as their operations in the international system (Nolte, 2010). Moreover, weaker States also need to accept their authority and their legitimacy, just as the great powers need to recognise the middle powers. Being a regional power is being a significant geopolitical player that can guarantee a favourable regional political order (Cerioli, 2018).

In the case of the Middle East, three states have the capacity to become a regional leader: Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia (beck, 2020; Gause, 2007; Cerioli, 2018). However, this thesis is evoking the feud to become the potential Islamic leader that would lead to the position of regional hegemon, and only Saudi Arabia and Iran are in competition for this matter. The regional system of the Middle East as it is today, as emerged after the Second World War and is shaped by the high involvement of the U.S. in the Middle East affairs and a pronounce power dispersion (Beck, 2020). Before the Iraq war and the Arab Spring, no less than six states were competing for the regional hegemony: Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia (Nolte, 2010). Plus, the United States that was the dominant power beginning of the XXI century and according to Robert Mason had outweighed the potential regional powers by increasing material and technical advantages to some states in the Middle East as Israel and Saudi Arabia (Mason, 2015). Nevertheless, in the recent years, the U.S. administration has slowly withdrawn its troops and influence out the region which gave the opportunity to other states as Iran to take part of the competition of the hegemonic place.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have both the feature to become hegemonic[21]. In this situation they both seek to create unity in the Middle East through the spectrum of Islam, however, through different sects. In

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[20] Smart power can be defined as being the right combination of the use of hard and soft power.
[21] See chapter 3.2 & 3.3.

order to reach the hegemonic status, a middle power or regional power are often creating alliances with other states. In this case, both states are receiving aid of other powerful states in the world (Flemes, 2007). Alliances, from direct or indirect aid is mainly received when there is a share of common interests. Saudi Arabia is receiving indirect help from Western states for economic and security reasons and a strong alliance with the U.S., which is a significant benefit for the competition in the region (Gause, 2016). Iran is building his strategies and allies through its ideologies, through religious and political ones. Indeed, different states as Russia are Iran strategic partners. Moscow has gained appreciation for Iran as a barrier to Sunni development and obstacles against Western influence (Parker, 2016). This is the main reason how their rivalry started, because of their different alliances.

3.2. Riyadh and Tehran's relationship

The rivalry between Saudi Arabi and Iran can be analysis in three different steps. It started after the Iranian Islamic Revolution. The nature of Iran Nation-State changed completely and entered in a quest of protection of all the Muslim Shia in the world and generate other Islamic Revolution (Dehghani, 2018). Riyadh started to fear the action of Iran and the possible popularity its new system could gain[22]. The second event that disturbed their relation was the Arabs Spring, were the political system of the region was disrupted. Regional power as Iraq, Egypt and Turkey abandoned the quest for the leadership, for the survival of their internal policy. These events opened a space for Riyadh and Teheran. Since they both see one of the other as an element that can jeopardised their security, they entered into a competition that would lead to aggressive foreign policies from both parts[23]. Finally, the last event is the U.S. changing their strategy in the MENA, leaving the leadership to their allies in the region, to Saudi Arabia and Israel and resulted to a rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Eski, 2020). The strongest foreign policy Tehran instore since 1979 is its mistrust towards the United States, since Riyadh is one of its largest allies in the Middle East, Iran generated a total distrust on Riyadh's affairs.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are today bitter rivals, however, besides having opposite allies and not representing the same sect of Islam they also have a lot in common. First, they both seek hegemony in the MENA through sectarianism. Back in their history, both entities have been created under the domination of colonial powers that initiate trade and economic policies and controlled their resources. Thus, they have never been officially colonised, they have been subjected to an important influence from the European colonisation. The United Kingdom reached Iran by establishing a monopoly over tobacco trade and take control of the oil reserve with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1908 (Yergin,

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[22] See more Chapter 3.3.
[23] See chapter 3.3.

2009). After the World War II, Russia imperialist also took control of the North of the country, however, its influence did not last. Saudi Arabia has a similar history with the United Kingdom, and the U.S.. They were the major players on the creation and development of the kingdom and the discovery of its resources. After the World Wars, the U.S. became the Superpower and took control of the region. At the time of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979), Iranian Leader, Iran and Saudi Arabia were representing the pillars of the U.S. policy in the region and both able to keep their status quo in the regional (Ponížilová, 2016). Tehran and Riyadh were important allies. Thanks to their economic capacities and logistic of the U.S., they were able to hold a strong position. With the time Saudi Arabia was an indispensable part of the U.S. security Defence Policy and energy strategy. Indeed, oil was an important material for the Power of the country and started to be dependent of Riyadh's oil. If at first oil companies in Saudi Arabia was majority hold by foreigners, the Saudi's government managed to slowly get the part of oil companies back. In 1950, Saudi Arabi and the U.S. were sharing the part of Aramco [24]equitably, with 50-50% (Yergin, 2009). In Iran, the situation was different, and an event broke down the relationship between Iran and the United States, which also emphasises the deterioration of the Iran and Saudi Arabia's relationship.

In 1950, Anglo-Iranian oil company was hold by more than one half by the British[25] (Cavendish, 2001; Yergin, 2009). The Iranians were poor, and the British was hatred by the population. When Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh[26] was elected democratically as Prime Minister one of his major statements was to introduce a policy to nationalise the Iranian oil industry (Ghasimi, 2011; Simbar, 2006). In June 1951, Mossadegh was giving a speech at The Hague to the International Court of Justice before the United National Security Council[27]. In his speech he said: "The Iranian state prefers to take over the production of petroleum itself. The company should do nothing else but return its property to the rightful owners […] With the oil revenues we could meet our entire budget and combat poverty, disease, and backwardness among our people. Another important consideration is that by the

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[24] Aramco: Saudi Aramco formerly Arabian American Oil Company, is an oil company that was founded in 1933 by the Standard oil Company of California. With the agreement of the Kingdom, the company started to explore for oil and once, discovered produce and export it. In the 1970'-1980's the control of the company gradually passed to Saudi Arabia authorities and they managed to completely take over it in 1988 and renamed it Saudi Aramco.

[25] The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company) was established in 1909. The British government owned 51% of its shares and Britain had made more money that Iran had with it (Cavendish, 2001)

[26] Dr Mohammed Mosaddegh (1882-1967) was a professor, lawyer, politician and democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran. He was fighting against corruption and foreign interference in Iran. He created the political party Iranian National Front. He wanted to create a free and secular democratic Iran and had for ambition social and progressive reforms for his country before he was overthrown.

[27] In 1951, laws were passed in Iran for the nationalisation of the oil industry, however, the Government of Iran and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company made a concession agreement in 1933. Therefore, the United Kingdom took up the company's case and brought it before the International Court of Justice. The Court decided that it had no jurisdiction to deal with the dispute in 1952 (International Court of Justice, Case 16).

elimination of the power of the British company, we would also eliminate corruption and intrigue, by means of which the internal affairs of our country have been influenced" (Iran Review, 2016). The U.S. and the UK entered into a long negotiation with Mosaddegh which came out unfruitful. The United States were worried that the Soviet Power could take advantage of Iran's oil if Britain were living or, if Iran would take control over their resources. The fear of the United Kingdom was to lose face in front of other states in the region. Indeed, if the UK were to leave the Persian state, it would give a weak signal to other States as Egypt that could nationalise the Suez Canal which would be a regrettable situation for the British economy (Yergin, 2009). In answer to the non-agreement with Mosaddegh, first an embargo on Iran has been implemented. Although it did not manage to change Mosaddegh mind; the CIA organised a coup d'état, under American and British orders, to overthrow the prime minister newly elected and restored in power Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah (Ponížilová, 2016; BBC, 2013; Simbar, 2006). The United States recognised only recently their participation in this event[28] that destabilises the Iranian politics and forever changed its relationship with Iran. There are assumptions that the event in 1953 could have emphasis the revolutionary movement in 1979 by creating a system that isolate itself from the rest of the world. Mark J. Gasiorowski, wrote in 1987 "If Mosaddeq had not been overthrown, the revolution might not have occurred" – "The 1953 coup was thus a decisive turning point in Iranian history […] the anti-American character of the 1978-1979 revolution" (Gosiorowski, 1987, P.261 & p.279).

Few years later the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran was the result of the 1978-1979 revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini[29] (Shorish, 1988). The new revolutionary system is entirely based on secular laws, indeed Khomeini envisioned to rule the country through "Independence and Freedom along Islam" (Simbar, 2006). Khomeini's aims was that Iran would not accept any external intervention to influence Iranian's policies and the leader of Iran is taking back full control of the country. This decision led to the isolation of Iran and a strong bitterness toward the U.S. and other western that had controlled and influence the country for years. A sentiment of mistrust took part in Iran and the new government based the new regime on secular laws and on an anti-Western policy, that generated the isolation of the country (Vaez, 2004). The roots of mistrust between Riyadh and Tehran come from

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[28] In 2013, the CIA has released documents which formally confirm its key role in the coup d'état in Iran in 1953. Before the release of these official documents, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama had already publicly talk about the U.S. role in the coup. While revealing the documents the CIA have also admitted the part of the British Intelligence Agency in the operation (BBC, 2013; Dehghan & Norton-Taylor, 2013; Byrne, 2016)

[29] Khomeini (1902-1989) was an Iranian Shiite cleric who led the revolution and overthrew Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. He was educated in different Islamic school and he became a Shi'i scholar. He was writing and teaching on Islamic philosophy, law, and ethics. He was denunciating the Western influence in Iran. In the 60s he became a supreme religious leader of the Shi'i community. Because he was openly criticising the former government he was imprisoned and exile from Iran in 1964. He became the Leader of the Islamic Republic in 1979 in Iran (Britannica, 2020).

there, since Saudi Arabia is still a close ally of the United States and is supported by lots of European powers. Since 1979 and 2001, the U.S. focalised its foreign policy of the Middle East by supporting Riyadh. Both states have developed simultaneously an accentuate deficit of Trust for each other.

Their mistrust also has sectarian roots, since one state is a Wahhabi conservative monarchy, support and supported by Sunni states and the other one is a Shia revolutionary Republic. Wahhabism historical rejection of the Shia as a legitimate Islamic community (Steinberg, 2001). Therefore, both states are in competition to pursue the hegemonic position through sectarianism and for that they are developing different kind of power: soft and hard power.

3.3. Iran and Saudi Arabia as potential Regional Powers

3.3.1. Hard power

Hard and Soft power have both being defined by Joseph Nye[30]. He is defining hard power as the ability to influence using coerce force (Nye, 1990). States can develop their hard power by extending their military forces, like increasing the army and military equipment. An example of a state having a strong hard power in the Gulf Region would be Iran. Iran has developed one of the strongest military deterrence in the Middle East. Iran's consequent military force is its main power in the region today and its main strength to become the hegemonic power. Tehran has the third largest population of the region, with 82 million of inhabitants, which permits it to possess a consequent army. Focusing on its population, the Iranian are one of the world's oldest civilisation[31], most of its population is Persian[32] and 89% is Shia Muslim (OPEC, 2019; World Population Review, 2020). Due to its poor relationship with some of its neighbours since 1979; Tehran has extended its hard power to defend its domestic and foreign interests. The development of its hard power is part of its security and foreign policy. Iran is view as a threat by most of the states in the MENA, thus, it has hold consequent military forces in order to protect itself and to balance the expenses of some powers as Israel, Saudi Arabia, before Iraq (Ponížilová, 2016). In the recent years, Iran has been focusing on developing the Nuclear weapons. The acquisition of the most powerful weapon would give it a certain advantage for the race for the regional

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[30] Joseph Nye (1937 - …) is an American Political Scientist. He is a distinguished professor and former dean of Harvard University Kenndy Scholl of Government. He was chairing the National Intelligence Council from 1993 to 1994 and he was assistant secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs from 1994 to 1995. He is the co-founder of the International Relations theory of neoliberalism and he developed the concepts of 'Hard Power' and 'Soft Power'. He was rated the fifth most influential over the past 20 years, and in 2011, *Foreign Policy* named him one of the top 100 Global Thinkers (CSISI)

[31] Iran is one of the World's oldest continuous civilisations, with settlements dating to 7000 Before Christ.

[32] Persian, is the predominant ethnic group in Iran with 61%

power (Zaccara, 2016). Kenneth Waltz believed that it would recreate the balance of power in the region is Iran would possess the nuclear arm (Manning, 2014). The development of the nuclear program is the biggest answer Iran gave to its Hard Power; it would like to be able to influence actors' behaviour towards it by deterrence. However, since the Islamic Revolution, a numerous number of countries stated to be afraid of Iran' military expansion, especially of its nuclear program which have been the object of several international sanctions (Rahigh-Aghsan & Jakobsen, 2010). In 1981, a Gulf Cooperation Council[33] have been created by the monarchies of the region, against the Iranian threat and the U.S. is cooperating with (Beck, 2008). It reveals, despite everything that Iran is still recognised as a military power in the region, however having access to the hegemonic position by deterrence would be complicated to achieve.

On the contrary, Saudi foreign policy is normally built on security principle, in the concept of security dilemma and more based on soft power (Gallarotti & Al-Filali, 2012). Nevertheless, since the Arab Springs, the Saudi authorities have been redirecting their foreign policy in a more aggressive way, by reinforcing their military instruments. These new policies have been implemented by the new King Salman[34] changed the policies strategy. Indeed, "Saudi Arabia entered into a quest for the regional hegemony through a shift from the status quo policy to revisionist policy in the Middle East" (Eski, 2020, P.144) with the administration of King Salman. King Salman bin Abdul Aziz is commander in Chief of the armed forces and exercises control over security decisions. The new organisation marked the beginning of the Wahhabism State transition from defensive to an offensive State (Rich, 2019). The new crown prince was establishing the 'Salman Doctrines' that were the turning point of the Saudi's foreign policies from a soft power one to a hard power (Cerioli, 2018). These principles were directly linked to the action taken in Yemen and the fight against Iran's growing influence. This new strategy is dependent on a high defence spending and on military alliance (Nuruzzaman, 2019). From 2014 to 2018 Riyadh was the world's largest importer of military goods buying essentially in the U.S., Britain, and France (Ibid.). Furthermore, Saudi's monarchy was searching for military alliance against Iran's

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[33] Gulf cooperation council is a regional and political intergovernmental union and have for members Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The members are all monarchy Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The main focus of this union is to counterbalance Iranian influence in the region (Al Jazeera, 2017)

[34] Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Al Saud (1985- …): he is the direct descendant of the Saudairi tribe and recently rise to one of the most important position in Saudi Arabia. On June 23rd, 2017 he was appointed Crown Prince by his father making his way to the throne. Before sitting of the throne, he was already Minister of Defence, Minister of State, Secretary General of the Royal Court, Chief of Royal Protocol and special advisor to the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques. Since he is sitting in the throne, he changed the kingdom by introducing diversified economic measures and small socio-cultural changes. In the Western medias he is famous for being involve in a strong persecution against his political opponent, to try to develop better diplomatic and economic link with Europe and the U.S. and to have developed small social reform in favour for women, for example, by granting them the right to drive (Nuruzzaman, 2019).

power in the region. Nevertheless, the two military alliances[35] that were created have hardly made major achievement. Indeed, the war in Yemen is continuing without seeing the end. The reason was that the doctrines were too ambitious for a country that has never had a strong military power, it takes a long time to build one. The problem with Riyadh strategy was that the imports of a high number of arms creates a dependence in import. The Salman doctrine, from today on had had more negative repercussion than positive ones. They had a heavy economic toll, creating an unfavourable political diplomatic image of the kingdom (Ibid.).

Saudi Arabia's hard power is rather different than ran's. Indeed, Iran has been developing its military asset for years and Saudi Arabia only started few years ago to expend it by investing in new technological weapons. Concerning the structure of its hard power, Saudi Arabia's population is only the seventh largest in the region and its military capabilities are rather limited (Nuruzzaman, 2019). However, for few years now, the expansion of its import of weapons and military forces is among the Riyadh's priority. It is investing a lot on weapons and military assets that it had a consequent growth the last years. Today Riyadh has the highest military expansion and modernisation in the region. Its economic funds are sufficient to acquire the latest military technologies from the Western states. In return of selling their latest technologies, the Western States and especially the United States, are waiting for security guarantees, which created a close military cooperation (Eski, 2020). However, even with the newest military weapons, the Kingdom does not have the same weight as the Iranian army. And since 2010, Saudi Arabia has been more willing to develop and use its hard power to protect its interest against Tehran. And Iran, is developing his hard power, to balance the Saudi's influence in the region (Cerioli, 2018). From the security dilemma perspective, they both see each other as a threat and in consequence they are developing their hard power.

Despite their hard power possibilities, Iran and Saudi Arabia's conflict never escalated into an open conflict, but into a substitution one, indeed they are both indirectly active by proxies[36] in different parts of the region (Nuruzzaman, 2019). Even if they are both developing their military asset, they do not have any intention to start an open conflict against each other and they are confronting in another way: by using their soft power.

3.3.2 Soft Power

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[35] The Saudi-led coalition and the 34-nations Islamic Military Counter Terrorist Coalition created in December 2015 to fight Islamic state terrorism (Nuruzzaman, 2019).
[36] See Chapter 4.1.

The concept of Soft power is also defined by Joseph Nye. He describes it as the ability to influence the behaviour of a state without using military forms of actions or deterrence (Nye, 2004). Soft power involves the culture, political values, and foreign policies. For the case of Saudi Arabia and Iran their soft power is mainly viewed as their resources and their religious status in the region.

First, the geostrategic localisation of Riyadh and Tehran are an advantage in the region. Riyadh for example, is located at the crossroads of three continents and share borders with eight Arab States. It also bordered the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. Iran is sharing its border with six countries; it is in the centre between the Middle East and Western Asia and has a direct access to the Caspian Sea and the Arabian Gulf. Furthermore, Iran is controlling the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic place for the import and export of goods between the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. This strait is mainly important for the export of oil from the region to Europe (Ardemagni, 2018). Related to their crucial location, both states possess lots of natural resources within their Lands, which represent an important power potential. The Arabic kingdom possesses around 18 per cent of the world's proven petroleum reserve and is the world's largest exporter. As the Persian state has the fourth largest proved reserve of crude oil and it constitute to a large part of its GDP (EIA, 2019). Thanks to their land's rich in natural resources, they are one of the wealthiest states of the Middle East. However, today Saudi Arabia is enjoying more its economical position thanks to its oil than Iran since it is still subject to international sanctions and embargos.

In the 1970's the world's oil market went through a shift when the state's producers managed to take the control over their resources. Saudi's government took the lead by demanding to participate to the local operation of foreign oil companies (Yergin, 1990). Gradually, in 1972, Saudi's authority's buyout operations of the biggest oil company in their soil: Aramco. 10 years later, Riyadh exceeded 50 percent and was controlling the company. The situation changed around the 1970s since the United States, the European states and Japan were dependent on oil from the Middle East. In late 1973, the United States support to Israel in the war against Egypt and Syria. The decision to support Israel instead of Arabs states, the oil producers[37] in the region decided to impose an embargo in the United States (Alhajji, 2005). The cuts of the production created a significant rise of the oil's prices. American energy politics turned to chaos and created a consequent economic crisis. This event demonstrated that Saudi Arabia in cooperation with other Arab states could use oil as an international political tool. Oil is the biggest soft power Riyadh could use. It also reveals that the U.S. were losing its influence in the region (MacFarland, 2020). Today, the oil and gas sector represent 50 per cent of Saudi Arabia's GDP (Gross Domestic Product), it is the nineteenth largest GPD in the world (OPEC, 2019a). Its economic growth is

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[37] OPEC members

heavily dependent of its oil exports but also to its imports of food and goods, as weapons, from the major industrialised countries. Although Saudi's production was growing rapidly in the 1970's, today a lot of states are dependent of Saudi's oil, including big states as the U.S. and European States, which gives Riyadh a certain leverage in the international policies.

In the 1970's, Iran was also part of the OPEC states that was cutting its oil production. However, the story of Iran differs from the Saudi's one. While Saudi's government managed to take slowly control of the oil companies, it has not been that smoothly in Iran. Indeed, as explained above the CIA organised a coup d'état when the new prime minister tried to nationalise the oil companies which led to an indignation of the population and the government (Ponížilová, 2016; BBC, 2013; Simbar, 2006). The Americans decided to put sanction and blockage of import and export after the revolution after Iranian students took hostage U.S. diplomats from the Embassy in Tehran. After this event, the Iranian imports were banned from the U.S. (Kumar Sen, 2018). The sanctions did not stop; on the contrary they became broader and broader from 1995 until today. In 2010, European states and United Nations decided to put sanctions on Iran because of its nuclear program[38], which durably weakened its economy (Levs, 2012).Because of the sanction, the oil prices dropped which negatively affected its economic growth. The Iranian economic situation increases the vulnerability of the country and its potential to become the regional leader. Because of this element, Iran's soft power does not have the same structure as the Saudi's. It does not have the same economic manoeuvre. Moreover, Iran has a limited number of allies, it is supported by Iraq, support of Assad in Syria and some military/ political movements as the Hezbollah and the Houthis (Eski, 2017). Even if the Islamic Republic of Iran was a founding member of OPEC, it is not member of a lot of regional and international organisation and is economically weakened by the sanctions. Iran policies are based on multiples historical identities: Persian, Shiite and revolutionary (Katzman, 2017). The principle goal Tehran today is to protect the Shiite population everywhere in the world and support all states or non-states actors that criticise the current regional and international order.

In contrast with Iran, Saudi Arabia is member and part of a lot of different international groups as the G20[39] (Groups of Twenty), which regroup the twenties world's largest economies and the European

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[38] Iranian Nuclear Program: in 1957 the U.S. and Iran signed a nuclear cooperation agreement; within the agreement the U.S. was supplying uranium and plutonium to Iran for the research reactor. In 1968 Iran signs the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran and the U.S. stop all their cooperation and Tehran planned to build their Nuclear Technology Centre by their own. Iran signs a contract with China and Russia to get all material it needed. In 2002 the U.S. accused Iran to try to build a nuclear power (Tarock, 2006). Since this time Tehran received lots of sanction for its nuclear program, from the U.S., Europe but also from the United Nations (Saikal, 2006).

[39] G20 Countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union (Europa, 2020).
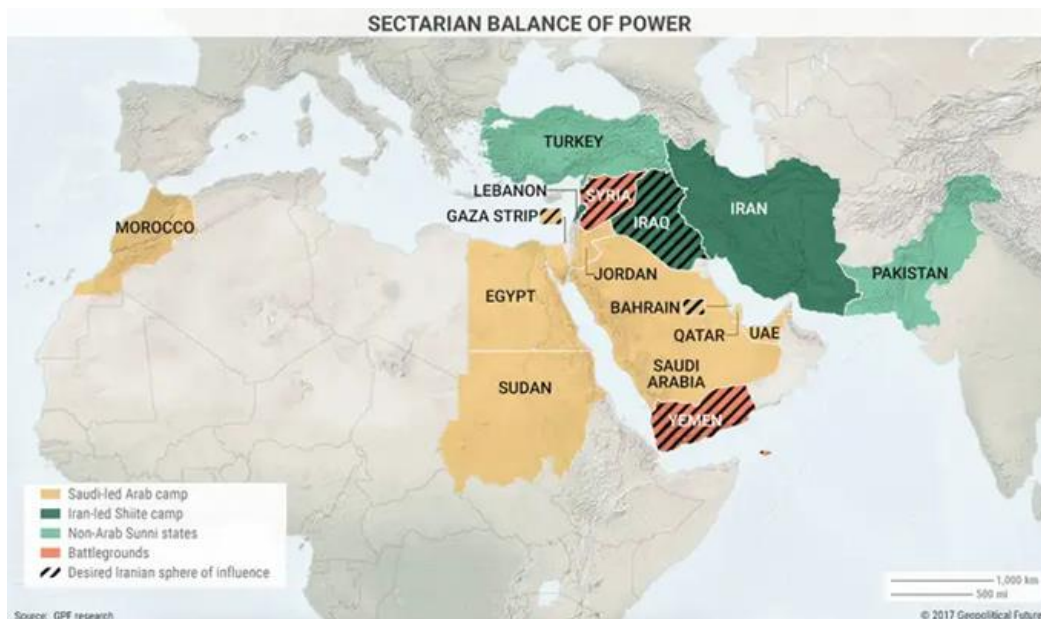
Union, in a discussion platform (Europa, 2020). Plus, it is part of an important group for the world economy as OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries). And it is defined as being the most influential leader and de-facto leader of the global oil market (Obaid, 2020). Riyadh's influence goes also from its donations that serve as a powerful tool for pressuring neighbouring states and to achieve geopolitical interest (Ponížilová, 2016).Today Saudi Arabia is focusing on consolidating its regional status as Arab leader and protecting its Sunni Arab allies. For Saudi Arabia, oil wealth is more than an economic asset, it is influencing political, military and religious policies. The Kingdom invested a lot for the protection of Muslim states. Faisal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud [40], once Prince of Saudi Arabia pointed out that the oil funds were destinated to strengthen their economy and industry but mainly to serve the Islamic community and nations (Ponížilová, 2016). Lots of their funds were then used to serve Saudi's status as the protector of all Muslim. Riyadh send funds to help Islamic Arabs states as Egypt and Jordan and the militants of PLO against Israel (McFraland, 2020). This interdependence led to the respect of Saudi's voice and decision in the region. It also created an informal pressure from the state that are receiving this help, to follow Saudi's lead, and this can be qualify as Saudi a strong soft power. For example, several academics linked that since Egypt felt interdependent with Saudi Arabia, it had to sign a peace treaty with Israel (Aviel 1980; Dajani & Daoudi, 1986; Russell, 1992). Besides using its financial asset as a soft power Saudi Arabia have a status of Islamic leader. It is consolidating a position of the protector of Islamic values and it is a source of its soft power. The ideological point is the main point of its rivalry with the other Islamic leader of the region. The religious scope is the centre of the rivalry between the two states, it is important to understand why.

3.4. Sunni VS Shia – Becoming a Regional Leader by being ideologically dominant

Riyadh and Tehran are both holding a predominant Islamic status, although their ideologies differ (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019). Saudi Arabia is representant of the conservative Sunni leader and Iran the revolutionary Shia leader and their rivalry and alliances are based on that (Ibid.) The desires to be a regional power is driven by both Saudi's and Iranian's foreign policy (Grumet, 2015). They are seeking for leadership within the Islamic world in order to solidify their position in the region. The race for power using sectarian division caused bilateral tension that created division between Sunni and Shia in the Middle East (Huwaidin, 2015; Mervin & al., 2013). The ideological division was already present before; nonetheless it was accentuated after the Iranian Revolution when Iran became a solid a Shia

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[40] Faisal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud or Faisal of Saudi Arabia (1906-1975), Prince of Saudi Arabia from 1964 to 1975. He was an influential figure of the Islam world. During his reign he modernised the economic and educational programs. He managed to assert the state in the involvement of Aramco. And the Foreign Affairs while he was in power was more assertive in the region, he was challenging the regional dominance of Egypt. He was assassinated by his nephew in 1975 (Britannica)

regime. Structural realism is considering the emergence of a multipolar system as a regular and explain the aim for each state to gain relative power. Nevertheless, it does not believe that ideologies or domestic affairs can play an important role, but it is explaining the alliances system by defining it as 'enemy of my enemy can become my friend'. However, in this case it cannot be ignored that securitization plays an important role in the structure of the Middle East (Cerioli, 2018). Both States mutually see each other as threats because of their religious status (Eski, 2002). Saudi authority follows a policy that maintain the balance of power along a security regime and the state is foreign policy is based on this balance that it has to maintain (Eski, 2020). However, this balance has been threatened during the Arab Springs with the region status-quo that Saudi Arabia tried to protect. Because of this insecurity and uncertainty of the stability of the region, Riyadh, that tries to keep the system stable and Iran that tries to overthrow it, entered into a regional rivalry (Eski, 2020). As seeing in the map below, the Iranian influence in the region is not as widespread as the Saudi's one. Plus, it is showing that Saudi Arabia and Iran are trying to develop their influence and are fighting for it in Syria and Yemen today.

Friedman, G. & Bokhari, K. (2017). 5 maps that explain the new Middle East. Mauldin Economics. Business Insider. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/5-maps-that-explain-the-new-middle-east-2017-6?utm_content=buffer9b4cf&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer-politics

What seems impossible today was before true: both states were perceiving each other as partners for keeping the region safe and for the protection of the pan-Arab platform (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019). Although, Iran is today constantly working for the expansion of its influence in the Gulf, and Saudi Arabia with other Gulf states[41] are working to ensure that Iran's quest is contained (Mohammed

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[41] State from the Gulf Cooperation Council.

& Moorthy, 2019). However, to be able to fully understand the situation in the region it has to be mentioned that States in the Middle East are not interacting in the same way as the European's. There were a collapse of nation states and nationalism in the Arabs Nations, over the religion's influence. Most of the Middle East North African' population are being directed by different religious leader (Rahigh-Aghsan & Jakobsen, 2010). Iran is questioning its State status-quo since its fundamental role has drastically changed after its ideological revolution (Huwaidin, 2015). Today, Iran's main goal is to protect the Shia Muslim of all world.

Historically, Iran was the first Shia Republic, it is thus not surprising that it is taking a role as the protector of Shia Muslim forces over the world (Cerioli, 2018). Its religious heritage, its culture and values are completing is race to power by forming a soft Power through its new role: defender of Shia Islam. Today, Iran is governed by secular laws inclusively from the Sharia (Tamadonfar, 2001). The Iranian Revolution generate lots of reforms that completely modified the life of the Iranians. The constitution and the laws of the state are directed by a theocratic system (Cincotta & Sadjadpour, 2017). Tehran established an anti-western campaign and is being suspicious of everything coming from the West. The distrust, plus de sanctions had for consequences to drop the financial situation of the country. Furthermore, the government said that in accordance with the Islamic rules, lots of social freedoms has been removed: women lost the right to divorce, they had to wear the headscarf in public, political activists denouncing the Islamic Republic are arrested etc. (Etehad & Mostaghim, 2019). With the new system, the Iranian's constitution is giving the supreme Leader lots of power as being the commander in Chief of the armed forces and has the final authority over the foreign policies. Because of the economic instability and a high employment rate, there is a low rate of fertility and lots of Iranian were leaving the country at the time of the reforms (Etehad & Mostaghim, 2019). However, the education improve with highest rate of literacy and women are attending more college than before according to the UN (UNESCO, 2017). Plus, the revolution period permitted Iran to take a leading role within MENA, by building its legitimacy and Islamic reputation by becoming the figure of the Islamic revolution. The hard and soft power and the soft one by using ideological and religious factors Iran choose to establish a 'public diplomacy', instead of the basic 'state diplomacy'; which means that instead to deploying a policy from state to state, Iran is directly talking to individuals (Eski, 2020; Rahigh-Aghsan & Jakobsen, 2010). With the Public Diplomacy strategy, the Iranian authorities are rested on winning the support of the people. Through this strategy, the Iran President Hatemi launched in 2001 the initiative for 'Dialogue between Civilizations' at the United Nations and through it, tries to achieve its leadership in the Muslim world at the global level (Eski, 2020). Its main goal is to transcript its new system over the world (Rahigh-Aghsan & Jakobsen, 2010). For Iran, the Arab Springs were the opportunity to start a revolutionary movement, to try to convince Shia communities to rebel

themselves and overthrow Sunni governments (Eski, 2020). This strategy was being perceived as a threat for the survival of Sunni Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia; their rivalry escalated at this time (Ibid.). Iran "increased its influence of Shiite people and produced a sectarian-ideology-based foreign policy that aspires to make those people the strategic instruments of the propaganda policy of Iran" (Eski, 2020) – creation of ideology foreign policy based on Shia geopolitics strategy. The Saudis were seeing Khomeini's ambition to lead the Islamic sphere as a threat for its Islamic guide position through Wahhabism (Beck, 2020). Through the concept of Security Dilemma and balance of power can apply to this situation (Huwaidin, 2015).

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a conservative Wahhabi kingdom. The monarchy has been created in 1923 and the country is holding out two of three holy cities of Islam; Medina and Mecca where Muslim from all around the world are coming for a religious pilgrimage every year. Plus, the king of the Saudi's kingdom is having the title of 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' (Cerioli, 2018). This title is giving him and his kingdom a duty to all the Muslim to support them and help them. According to different International Islamic organisations[42], Saudi Arabia is the Muslim natural spiritual leader. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia' rulers pushed the country towards conservative Wahhabism policies. And Wahhabism is seeing Shia sect as its enemy. Consequently, the Kingdom is today considering Shia as infidels (Huwaidin, 2015). Saudi Arabia is afraid of the expansion of Shia's sect since the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Kingdom authorities are still controlling today the Eastern part of the country to prevent Shiites to exercise religious activities and protest (Ibid.). The education program has also been changed since they decided to remove from children textbooks references to Shia belief or event in the Wahhabi teaching classes (Ibid). Since alliances are being made, in the Middle East, by religious affiliation, both states are mistrusting the raise of one of the sects of Islam, especially Saudi Arabia with Shiism. The reason why Sunni states are suspicious about the raise of Shia believers is because Khomeini was calling the Muslim in the Middle East Region to overthrow their regimes (Ibid.). Khomeini justified his expansion effort by religious matter and his will is to create a new Islamic centre. He is seeing this role as a Holly Goal that it needs to pursue since the Revolutionary Islamic state. And he is seeing himself as the superior leader in the Islamic world. The Islamic Republic of Iran has for aims at leading the oppressed states or population of Islam toward Freedom and Justice (Huwaidin, 2015).

Toward Saudi Arabia, Iran is really critical, the government believes that the Saudis have become the 'puppet' of the U.S. and therefore is on the side of the oppressor (Panah, 2007). It is challenging the vision of Saudi authorities towards Islam, the Islamic Republic of Iran does not mince its words when

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[42] International Islamic Aid Agency or International Islamic World Assembly

talking about the Saudis and by calling them an "Islamic traitor" (Mabon, 2013, P.175) and "unworthy to be the guardian of Mecca and Medina" (Mabon, 2013, P.176), which are the two most Islamic Holy sites in the world (Huwaidin, 2015). Plus, the strong ties between Saudi Arabia and the Western states, especially the U.S., compelled Iran to consider Riyadh as its most dangerous enemy in the region (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019). The intention to become regional leader through the sectarian spectrum and using their culture and religion can be perceived as using their soft power. However, Iran and Saudi Arabia are also using a form of coercion, hard power, by actions in proxy in different conflict in the Middle East including Yemen.

IV.   The concept of Proxy war

4.1. Proxy Warfare: the conflicts of the future

Today's international relations, tensions and wars between actors do not have the same costs and levels of risk than 80 years ago. Indeed, new technologies offer a diversity of new kind of weapons and military equipment that are designed to be more efficient and precise. The most powerful weapon created this day is the nuclear one, and since its creation, wars have never been the same. Therefore, new approaches of conflicts have been made, to defend States's interests, to protect themselves and to gain power. One of these new ways of waging war is the proxy one.

However, proxy warfare in not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, empires and states have opted to act in proxy for their political and military interests (Karabulut & Ogus, 2018). The term of proxy warfare means that two parties, States or non-States actors are confronting each other indirectly in a third conflict on behalf of two parties (Brichall, 2018). A proxy intervention is described as an indirect actions. It can be all kind of funding and/or materials assistance, mainly weapons. The idea is to give resources to one of the main actors in order to contribute to a favourable outcome of its actions. As discussed before, due to new technologies, war is having a higher cost, not only financially but also in human life. President Dwight Eisenhower was calling proxy wars "the cheapest insurance in the world" (Mumford, 2013, p.40) because it permits to states to intervene and defend their interests by minimum cost. Participating in a war in this way, hence as the replacement for a developed nation, is beneficial for the developed nations in terms that they reduce their political, human, and economic costs while at the same time defending their interests (Byman, 2018). Andrew Mumford, in 2013 has distinctly resumed the concept by writing "Proxy wars are the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome. 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. Such arm's-length interventions are undertaken ostensibly for reasons of maximizing interests, while at the same time minimizing risk. In short, proxy wars are the best choice for States seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly, and bloody warfare" (Mumford, 2013, p.40). The definition by Andrew Mumford is complete and includes a comprehensive definition of this new type of war. It also includes the possibility of non-states actors influencing a conflict. Answering the paper of Andrew Mumford about proxy warfare, Jack Wartling is adding that there could be multiple sorts of strategies when an actor is getting involved in proxy wars (Wartling, 2019). He is making a difference between strategic advantages and strategic goals (Rauta, 2020).

However, there is not an official definition of the term proxy war from any official organisation. A major of the U.S. Army[43] gave a definition of what the United States military organisation define as a proxy war. This analysis is important since, the U.S. is, today, the biggest military power in world and is impacting lots of conflicts. They believe that "a proxy environment is one marked by two or more actors working toward a common objective; however, the relationship between the two actors is hierarchical. The principal actor employs the agent, or proxy, as an intermediary to accomplish its objectives. By default, the principal's objective becomes the agent's objective. Proxy warfare, on the other hand, is the associated theory of action for a proxy environment. It is the physical manifestation of a dominant actor, or the principal, leveraging an intermediary, or a nondominant actor (the agent, or proxy), against an adversary to achieve the dominant actor's objectives" (Fox, 2019). This definition given by the U.S. military emphasises different understanding of the issue of the conflict once the proxies are joining the conflict. Indeed, the definition of Mumford emphasises softly that the dynamic of the conflict would change, and the proxies have interest to be part of it. While the definition given by Major Fox, is clearly identifying the proxy as being the dominant actor and its interests become the principal objectives. This difference of perception is necessary to understand in which way, proxy states, as the U.S., are basing their strategy to influence a region. Today, the U.S. is still using this military strategy (Gold & Rosenau, 2019). The definition given by Major Fox is therefore more realistic in terms of the U.S. strategy, while Mumford's one was a definition that has been theoretically given. Understanding could differ on which position the actor is taking.

In the following sub-part it will be given example of two proxy wars in order to have a better understanding of what it is and how they are impacting the 21st century's conflicts.

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[43] Major Fox, for the association of the United States Army with the Institute of land warfare

4.2. Example of Proxy Warfare

During the cold war, the U.S and the USSR were the two most powerful States in the world, and they were fighting to become the hegemonic power. The cold war was an indirect conflict since a direct war between those States would have been devastating because of their consequent military asset. By consequence both countries were competing in different ways. One of this way was to act by proxy in a third country. Indeed, the Americans and the Soviet Union were present in lots of places in the world to develop their influence by acting in proxy (Mumford, 2013). Proxy warfare played a crucial role and stood in for direct confrontation. However, from this timeline, this paper will only describe the War of Vietnam. Continuing in a more recent history, with the example of the Ukrainian local conflict that turned into a proxy war when Russia decided to intervene.

The Vietnam War started in 1955 and ended in 1975. It emerged following the previous Indochina war, where the French, former colonial power, were defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and lost control of the country (Hess, 1994). The Geneva Agreement granted Vietnam independence and temporarily separated Vietnam in two parts. Subsequently, Communist forces took power of the north of the country. However, in the South, Ngo Dinh Diem a strong anti-communist politician became president of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (Hess, 1994). These events emerged in the middle of the cold war which accentuated the conflict in a worldwide position. The U.S. was seeking to contain the spread of communism, and for this reason intervened in South Vietnam to preserve its interests. Because of lots of tensions and several small attacks from the North to the South, the U.S. thought that the Soviet Union and China were actively present in the North of Vietnam. Consequently, the United States spent lots of dollars to contain the communist to take control of the South of the country. The U.S. was coaching, giving military equipment to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, and finally sending troops (Zahoor Khan, 2011). Witnessing the strong implication of the U.S. in the region, the Soviet Union reacted by bringing an economic and military support to its ally, to strengthen North Vietnam's defences. In 1968 there was an agreement to supply the North Vietnam by the Soviet Union in food, energy, economic aid, and military equipment that proves the proxy intervention of the Soviets (Ibid.). The war costed 58,000 American and 2 million Vietnamese lives. The violence of American soldiers had a negative impact on their success and turned public opinion against the war. Furthermore, the U.S. has failed to stop communism in the region. This conflict is qualified as being proxy warfare, since there is a conflict between two powers in a third country of their interest. Even if the U.S. acted directly in the war, the USSR did not fight directly which can be called as a proxy conflict. Plus, it was a conflict that grew on the behalf of two parties: the U.S. and the USSR.

Another example of a proxy warfare is the recent conflict in Ukraine. This crisis started in 2014. First it took form of street protestations supported by the Western States. These demonstrations were criticising the pro-Russian government of Ukraine (Karabulut & Oguz, 2018). Seeing its lack of popularity and being afraid of the European States taking control of Ukraine, the Russian government took the initiative to annex Crimea. Although, the events in 2008 permitted to fully understand the conflict. During, the Bucharest Summit in 2008, NATO declared that Ukraine and Georgia could become member of the Alliance (Karabulut & Orguz, 2018). The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has been created in 1949 by the Northern America and a dozen European States to promote peace and to provide collective security against the Soviet Union (NATO, 2017). In Moscow, the organisation is still seen as a serious threat for their security and for President Vladimir Putin this announce was crossing the line of its tolerance toward the Alliance (Karabulut & Orguz, 2018). A disagreement already breaks out in Georgia against Western State and Russia. However, it is when the European and U.S. States showed their support to the protesters against the Pro-Russian government, that the Russian government decided to react by illegally invading Crimea. This annexation was justified by the Russian authorities by a controversial referendum. This conflict is described as a proxy warfare since it resulted in a fierce competition between Russia and the Western States in Ukraine. Plus, both parties were indirectly supporting a side. Only Russia decided to directly intervene in Crimea (Heinsch, 2015).

V.   Yemen a Proxy warfare? A ground of confrontation
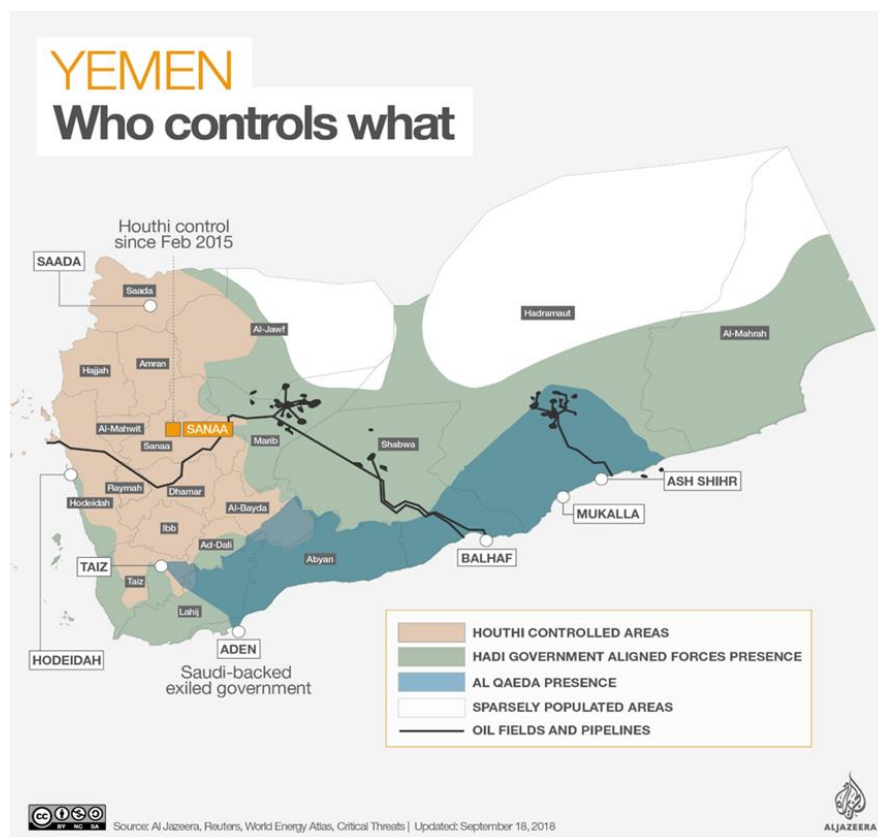
5.1. The War in Yemen

In 2014, Yemen was already considered as one of the poorest states of the region (Easterly, 2018). At the head of the state was President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi partisan of Sunni Islam and a close partner of the Saudi's government (Karkir, 2018). The country was internally instable and already presented disparity within its population due to previous conflicts[44]. In the North of the country a movement was created. This movement was asking for recognition of different rights; named the Houthis. They are a religious political group affiliated to the Zaydi sect of Shi'ite Islam created in 1992 (Mohammed, 2019). The Houthis were held at the beginning by a cultural and open-minded educational vision, was a non-violent and non-armed group, however, overtime, they developed into

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[44] Before 1990 the country was divided in two part: a Shiite Republic in the North and a Marxist Republic in the South (Karakir, 2018). There in war in 1972 and 1979. By the end of the cold war the country has been reunited and Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of North of Yemen, became president of the united country. During his time at the head of the state Saleh did not manage to bring the people back together and create a unity. Furthermore, Saleh was known for his seek to power and his corrupting manners of buying voters and stealing money for the state (Edroos, 2017). The country was economically marginalised, and it created two civil wars in 1994 and 2004 and the formation of the Houthis in the North of the country (Edroos, 2017).

an armed group. The Houthis emerged in consequence of the misleading of the country by the former government of Ali Abdullah Saleh, that was suspected of corruption and to have close ties with Saudi Arabia. The American invasion of Iraq in the 2000's radicalised the movement with an anti-American feeling emerging (Riedel, 2017). At this time, the Houthis started to tie close relations with the Hezbollah and had the support of Iran (Tabatabai & Clarke, 2019). They are seeking support from these actors through sectarian believe. Indeed, it has been proved that the gorvernment of Tehran was providing material resources to the Northern socio-political movement, however, no one knows how important this aid was or is still today (Juneau, 2016). Due to the growing influence of the Houthis in the North of the country, President Sahel decided to launch a military campaign with the cooperation of Saudi Arabia to erase them in 2003. At this time, with the support of Iran and the Hezbollah, the Houthis started to be an offensive and a military group. In 2003, the campaign of President Saleh failed. This event and the Arab Spring in 2011 had a consequent impact on the radicalisation of the group. Being influenced by all the events and revolutions around their country, they believed their fight could result in a positive outcome. They were fighting to overturn the political order (Juneau, 2016). Following the events of Arab springs and the demonstrations in Yemen, President Sahel was replaced by its Sunni prime minister Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (Karakir, 2018). Hadi was unpopular in Yemen and was seen as the 'Saudi's puppet' (Taves, 2019). The political armed group was not satisfied by this choice and neither did Sahel. So, in the meantime, the former President Sahel, unhappy about this nomination was secretly colluding with the Houthis to destitute him. In early 2015, the Houthis continued their fight, and managed to take control of the Sanaa, the capital city. This was the decisive event that led to the war we know today. Indeed, President Hadi scared for his life managed to escape and go to its closest neighbour to ask for help to the Saudi government (Taves, 2019).

The war started on the 19th of March 2015 by the military intervention of the Saudi-led coalition on the Yemeni soil (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). The Saudi-led coalition constitutes an alliance between nine Arab States (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, Qatar and United Arab Emirates), hence, Qatar is not part of the coalition since June 2017 and the diplomatic crisis with Saudi Arabia (Karakir, 2018). The Saudi-led coalition claims that the interventions are an effort to restore Yemeni sovereignty and establish an independent modern state applying a system of administration and law (Clausen, 2019). Because of the war, today the state does not have a government or high authority in place, that rules the country. To do so, they want to restore the government of President Hadi. Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi is supported by lots of international actors and is identified by the international community as being the legitimate represent of Yemen. The United Nations through the resolution 2216 (2015) recognise the legitimacy of President Hadi (UN, 2020). On the contrary the Houthis are considered as illegitimate non-state actors. The Saudi-led coalition is named 'the coalition

to restore legitimacy in Yemen' (Clausen, 2019). The United Nations Security Council supports the Saudi-led coalition concern by the resolution 2216 from April 2015 by reaffirming their support to the legitimacy of President Hadi (UN, 2015). However, the UNSC (United Nations Security Council) did not authorise the military intervention which has put Yemen in an "internal chaos" (Clausen, 2019).According to the United Nations, the 'legitimate government' is controlling 80% of the land, however, 70% of the population lives in parts controlled by the Houthis (UN, 2020). And as seen in the map, the 'Hadi government aligned forces presence' are controlling the major oil fields and pipelines, however, they are having the presence of Al-Qaeda in some part of their territory.

Al Jazeera (2019). Yemen: Who controls what. Reuter. World Energy Atlas. Critical Threats. Al Jazeera. Last viewed 12/09/20. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2016/08/yemen-conflict-controls-160814132104300.html

Since the beginning of the attacks the situation for the civilians have dropped significantly. Coalition attacks cultural sites, schools, hospitals and killed lots of civilians. The coalitions implemented embargos of all resources coming through the harbour and by planes, which generate a food and medicine supply shortage. The embargos are controlled by the Saudi-led coalition in order to contain Iran supplies to the Houthis. Indeed, Iran's have been acting indirectly by sending weapons and military equipment to the 'rebels'. Currently it is not possible to know to what extand Iran is influencing the conflict and what the Houthis are receiving by Tehran (Hokayem & Robets, 2016; Edwards, 2019).

Nonetheless, these embargos generate a famine and a rise of diseases, that civilians are first to suffer (Edwards, 2019). The attacks from 2018 are mainly targeted the coastal region of Hodeida, and the Houthis responded to the coalition airstrikes with missile attacks on Saudi's infrastructure and territory (Cook & Gordon, 2020). While the Houthis are receiving indirect aid from Iran and the Hezbollah; the Saudi-led Coalition is fully supported by the United States that invest in combating terrorists. Therefore, the U.S. had carried over two hundred strikes in Yemen (Cook, Gordon, 2020). These attacks have been mainly intended to the Houthis that were perceived as being close to terrorist groups (Juneau, 2016). However, for Saudi Arabia, acting in Yemen is also a self-defence action. Indeed, Riyadh is sharing a consequent border and Sanaa's instability could affect the security of Saudi Arabia (Sharp, 2019).It is complicated to analyse the ongoing war due to the numerous numbers of actor involved in the conflict. (Salisbury, 2015)

5.2. How Yemen can jeopordise and profit Riyadh's security

For years, the Kingdom was considering Yemen as a benign neighbouring border that should not be a threat. In this way, the Saudi's government has invested and enforced different policies in this regard (Huwaidin, 2015). For example, by investing and giving financial aid. It created a Special Office for Yemen Affairs– the Saudi-Yemeni High Coordinating Council - because of its fears that its neighbouring state would become too instable and fall into a 'failed state'[45] (Stenslie, 2013). As seen above, Riyadh's financial aid is one of its strong soft powers to influence behaviours of states around. On this matter, Saudi Arabia was maintaining transnational networks in Yemen to affect the Yemeni internal policies (Hill & Nonneman, 2011). It considers its neighbouring country as vital for its interests that could also compromise its security. Due to Yemen's poor resources, a heterogeneous population and not being a monarchic country, Saudi Arabi's government are afraid of radical changes in the region. For these reasons and for many years the state was relying on Ali Abdallah Saleh, the former President of Yemen (1990 to 2012). He and the Saudi's government were having close ties and for Riyadh it was seen as being a security key (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). However, because of the demonstration in 2011 following the Arab Springs, President Saleh was destitute, and its prime minister was taking power: President Hadi. Nonetheless, the Royale family is having the same sort of relationship with the new president and therefore, this was not a problem. The problematic situation appeared when the Houthis managed to take control of the Sana'a and when President Hadi was not able to control the

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[45] The notion of 'Failed state' is identified and used by the United Nations when a state is fragile and can disrupt the international order. It is often through the scope of the North-South relation to legitimate intervention and undermining the norm of sovereignty because they are codifying as being jeopardise for the international security. The notion has been used for numerous of Western interventions in the Middle East and today, used by Saudi-Arabia, a non-Weberian state that is using the same language than one (Goldberg, 2010).

situation anymore which made him asking for help. The first interventions Saudi Arabia carried out with the Saudi-led coalition was asked by Hadi's government. However, this sort of interventions is part of a long-term strategy from Riyadh. Indeed, in 2011, Bahrain became part of the conflict to suppress Shiites-led movement and related actions in Syria and Iraq (Nuruzzaman, 2015). Saudi Arabia is afraid to be surrounded by states controlled by Iran and it fears to lose its influence in the region. If Iran is gaining power and influence in the region, Riyadh is losing some. Intervening in Yemen, in this matter is related to its foreign policy and its ambition to become the regional hegemon. The view of Saudi's government through sectarian prism believes that Houthis actions are guided by Iran Shiite resurgence in the Middle East (Nuruzzaman, 2015). The instability in Sana'a can jeopardise Riyadh's domestic security policies. As a matter of fact, Saudi's government believed that the instability of the country would be the nest for terrorist groups as IS or Al-Qaeda to develop. They also suggested that the Houthis were affiliated with those groups, which would also relate to an international security threat. Riyadh interventions are directly aim to stopping an eminent threat but to prevent and impediment it (Hausken, 2008).

The last reason of the important present of Riyadh's in Yemen is of economic and geostrategic nature. Yemen disposes vital interest for the Saudis due to its geographical position. Indeed, it controls the Red Sea chokepoint of Bab-el-Mandeb (Hill & Nonneman, 2011). Which means that from this territory, it is possible to control the routes of oil that connect the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea. This Strait is the main transit route for oil from Middle East and Europe, the U.S. and Asia (EIA, 2019). The strait of Hormuz is the most important transit point for oil exportation (EIA, 2019a), and Iran is compromising the petroleum transportation since it has direct access to it to block the exports. Saudi Arabia already started the construction of an alternative oil pipeline though Mahra, the region of the Bab-el-Mandeb chokepoint, that is the backup export oil route to the Strait of Hormuz (Fenton-Harvey, 2019). In the case, Riyadh does not manage to restore the President Hadi in power, and Iran would manage to have a strong impact on Yemen's policy, it would harm Saudi's oil exportation and its economy. This situation would be dramatic for Saudi Arabia, since it holds its power mainly from oil exportation and money.

5.3. Yemen's strategic value for Iran

For Iran, the situation is different. Yemen does not represent a threat for Tehran, only opportunities (Juneau, 2016). By intervening in Yemen, the loses are relatively limited, compared to the gains. Since 1979, Iran is supporting actors that are opposed to status quo defined by the regional order and tries to help them to gain more influence and to balance the regional power in its favour (Juneau, 2016).

The aid Tehran is sending to Gulf Southern state represents this strategy. Nonetheless, the degree of action of Tehran in Yemen is controversial. Different authors believe that its impact is marginal and being overstated by the Saudi-led coalition (Juneau, 2016; Zweiri, 2016; Thompson, 2015; Salisbury, 2015). There is limited evidence and non-official reports that show the level of implication of Iran, T. Juneau wrote in 2016 "while the level of Iranian assistance further increased after 2014, there is still no indication that it has reached significant levels" (Juneau, 2016. P.657). The UN experts, on the contrary, believe that the financial and material aid from Tehran to the Houthis is more important (UN News, 2019a). While, the Iranian's government is not sharing official report or number of its aid supply, it is officially supporting the Houthis, President Hassan Rouhani congratulated them in 2014 after taking control of Sanaa: "brilliant and resounding victory" (Al-Ghad, 2015)

Although, Iran's interests in Yemen are rather limited compared to the Saudi's ones; it is gaining an important influence in compromising Saudi's security policy. However, Iran's government knows that it would be risky to enter in direct confrontation with the Saudi-led coalition (Juneau, 2016). However, the fact that the Houthis are criticising the political order of Yemen and of the region, represent an attractive partner for the Islamic Republic. The support of the Houthis is providing Tehran a certain level of influence on the ground by making a small investment. Yemen is part of it and the secular premise of the conflict answer the conflict between Tehran and Riyadh are having. For Iran, the fact that 35% of the Yemeni population of Shia Zaidis constitute a great deal for Iran's policies. This group wants to protect the Zaidi sect and stop the export of Wahhabism from its neighbouring country in the North of Yemen. Iran officially supports this group since it answers its security policy of challenging the regional hegemony. However, Tehran denies any military intervention in Yemen. The Persian state's intervention in Yemen fully correspond with its will to balance the power in the region and the rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Following this strategy, it is assumed that Iran would benefit of the situation when it is instable. Therefore, it is assumed that Iran does not have for purpose to enter into direct war or to stop the conflict. This proxy involvement of Iran in Yemen is viewed by the Arab community of the Middle East as jeopardising the global economical and secular structure of the region (Eski, 2020). And Iran is discreetly acting the Southern State to maximise its power for its own security.

Iranian involvement in Yemen answers a long-term geopolitical strategy in the region. Tehran is seeing in the rise of the Houthis a gain for leverage in the region in a relatively low cost. However, for Saudi Arabia it is different, its reaction relies on direct security measure.

5.4. Yemen, a proxy warfare?

A proxy warfare, as explained in 4.1. refers to a conflict between two parties taking place in one country, on behalf of parties that are not directly involved. The parties can be State or non-State actors (Birchall, 2018). In Yemen, the national civil war develops into a regionalised one, where two major powers of the region are trying to be the most influential and ensuring their security; which makes the war complicated to solve. And the ongoing conflict in Yemen is described as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran by several authors (Karakir, 2018, Krause & Parker, 2020, Salisbury, 2015). Indeed, two major powers are opposing each other in Yemen to achieve geopolitical goals in low cost. the outside parties' interventions have worsened the conflict Iranian and Saudi's policies are the result of an ideological war and security which generates a competition to be the Islamic leader in the Middle East and therefore the hegemon of the region. Their actions answering the offensive realist theory emphasised the fear of the other.

However, the question is if the war of Yemen can be qualified as a proxy war. The question is complicated to answer since, yes, there are two external parties playing an important role war the war. Nonetheless, the conflict did not occur because of Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalry. Plus, Riyadh's actions are not quite indirectly since with the Saudi-led coalition is it directly bombing some parts of Yemen and blocking others (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019). Although, Iran is influencing the conflict in an indirect way, thus, in a proxy way. But following the definition of a proxy war by Major Fox the external parties are supposed to guide the conflict (Fox, 2019). Nonetheless, it would be misleading to affirm that the Houthis are answering only to Iran. The Houthis have their own claims and are not fully dependent of the Iranian regime. It can be affirmed that the Persian State is intervening in Yemen to attack Saudi's security. And that Riyadh was pressure to interven with force because of Iran's presence. Plus, Yemen represents a highly important issue for Saudi Arabia for a longer time and Riyadh has more interest to defend there than Tehran. Therefore, the conflict is more complicated than a proxy war between these two States. Other powers, such as the United States and some Western States are supporting the Saudi-led coalition by proxy. And the Hezbollah, for example is also supporting the Houthis in a proxy way (Mohammed & Moorthy, 2019). However, while describing examples of proxy warfare as the Vietnamese war, the U.S. was acting directly, but the conflict was recalled as being a proxy since two major powers were competing in a conflict. Plus, today, the conflict has been described as only being part of the rivalry of the two States competing for ideologies.

VI.   Conclusion

The exciting security dilemma between Saudi Arabia and Iran is pushing them to counterbalance each other's power in the region. Both the Riyadh and Tehran have developed a zero-sum game foreign policy (Rich, 2019). It means that the gain of one of the States would be equivalent to the loss of the other. In this situation, only one State would manage to win. Indeed, this thesis suggests that to end up this war, there must be a winning as well as a losing party. The negotiations of peace already established do not give any possible alternative. Although the religious differences played a role in the amplification of the conflict, the causes of the war as it is today going deeper than that.

For the conflict itself involvement of external actors such as Saudi Arabia and Iran who already spread tension elsewhere, created a new kind of crisis (Karakir, 2018). However, the conflict did not erupt because of these tensions. By analysing Iranian and Saudi's security policies in the Middle East and their reasons, an accurate picture of the complexities of the ongoing war in Yemen is defined. The complexity of the rivalry is emphasising the predominant role of the religion, sectarian and revolutionary ideologies in the security policymaking of both countries. The background of Yemen's conflict represents this logic. However, having a closer look at the motivation of both states' actions in the Middle East, different arguments can be suggested. First, the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh does not stem from an absolute hate from each other, but from a total distrust while also religion plays a minor role in their rivalry. Security dilemma is a comprehensive notion to explain Iranian-Saudi security strategy in the Middle East predominated by the role of religion and revolutionary ideologies. Second, Riyadh and Tehran are using their status as religious leader to fight this war, nonetheless, the interests of both States are wider. They are answering a policy of expansion to defend their own security and economic interests. The intervention of Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition was and still is directed by Saudi Arabia and responds to the new offensive strategy of the kingdom. Riyadh's actions are explained by reshaping the regional security environment and re-establishing a pro-Saudi Administration in Sanaa. It was also motivated by a desire to demonstrate its consequent military power. The only goal of major States as Iran and Saudi Arabia is to become the hegemon, and a power maximisation. But their policies are a zero-sum game and would engage for expansionism when possible (Rich, 2019).

To conclude, in the recent events of 2020, Saudi Arabia announced two weeks of cease fire on April 8, 2020, to respond to the outbreak of the COVID-19 and giving a humanitarian help (Sharp, 2020). The Houthis and Saudi Arabia have been negotiating for months (Lynch & al., 2019), the global health pandemic gave an opportunity for a cooperation that would permit the kingdom to end up its expensive military interventions (Sharp, 2020). Today, in October 2020, Riyadh is trying to slowly extract itself from the war with difficulties; since, its national security is threatened. Plus, it resulted in a negative image within the international community (Krause & Parker, 2020). The limits of military

power and the new Prince Salman aggressive policies can be seen in Yemen today, since it is not progressing. Furthermore, it has accelerated the polarisation process between Sunni and Shia blocks in the Middle East. In the meantime, the instability of Yemen's justice and coordination have opened the door to radical terrorist organisation in the country and the civilisation is the one that is suffering the most from this crisis.

VII.   Literature

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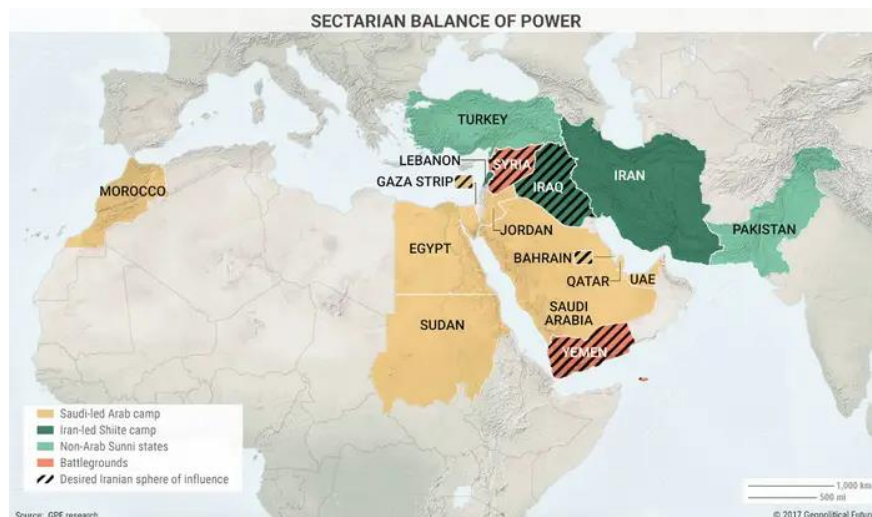
VIII.   Appendix

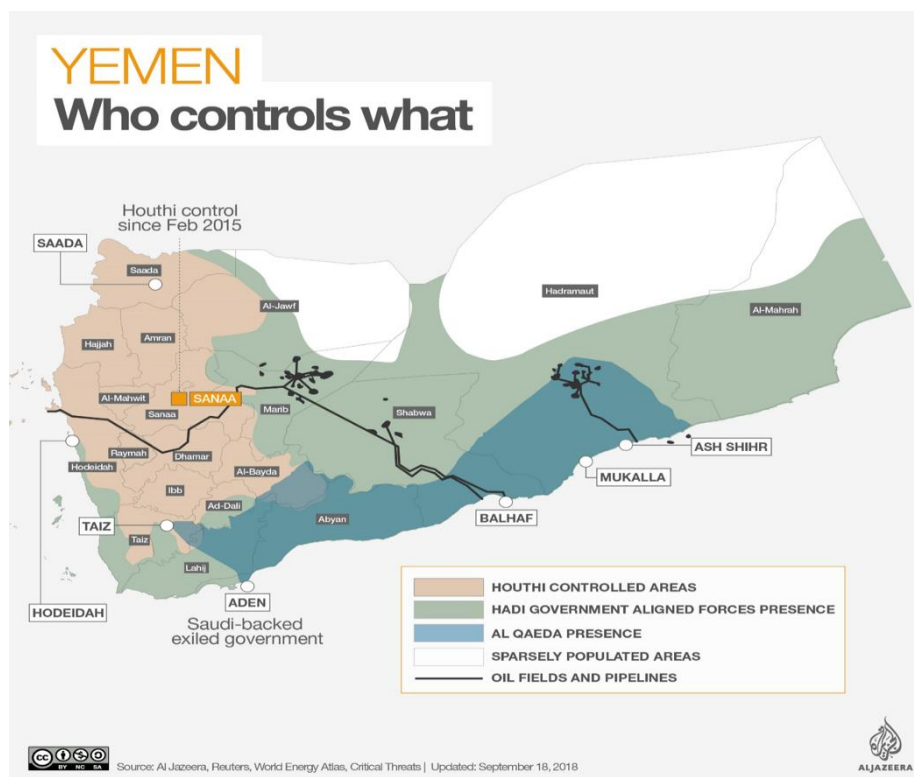Index 1: Shiite population in the Middle East (2017)

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Index 2: Sectarian Balance of Power (2017)

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Index 3: Yemen: Who controls what (2019)

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