TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

School of Business and Governance

Department of Law

Islam Hisham Ismael Sleem Aboulela

MANIFESTATION OF SAUDI-IRANIAN PROXY WAR: THE YEMENI STRUGGLE

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Supervisor: Holger Mölder, PhD

Co-supervisor: Mensur Akgün. PhD

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Islam Aboulela ……………………………

              (signature, date)

Student code: 157855TASB

Student e-mail address: islamaboelela@live.com

Supervisor: Holger Mölder, PhD:

The paper conforms to requirements in force

……………………………………………

(signature, date)

Co-supervisor: Mensur Akgün, PhD:

The paper conforms to requirements in force

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Chairman of the Defense Committee:

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ABSTRACT

Yemen's arms conflicts and political disorientation, for over a decade, remains rich in complications yet still lacks clear, appropriate explanations to the causes behind its brawls, notably, the 2015 Yemeni Civil War. Overshadowed by simultaneous regional events, Yemen was driven into a devouring civil war with close to no other intellectual explanations of its causes than that of a sectarian one under the umbrella of the Saudi-Iranian proxy war. The questioning of this hypothesis leaves the current civil war vulnerable to numerous theories to emerge and provide alternative explanation than the latter, however arguably, none should undermine Yemen's domestic executors. As dominant as both proxies appear, it would be negligent to undermine and overlook Yemen's internal political actors, whereas the emergence of Al-Houthi movement and the Sa'dah wars were carried out, substantially, by domestic actors. Thus, in order to detect the validity of this hypothesis and, or provide secondary approaches, analyzing Saudi Arabia and Iran's separate viewing of Yemen in addition to their policies' activity since the emergence of the Al-Houthi movement is important. The proximity of a clear understanding of the historical emergence of Al-Houthi movement demands a look at Yemen's internal dynamics to understand the peculiarity of and effects of the proxies' involvement and how it shapes the conflict. Cultivated with external involvement, costs of external meddling post and during the civil war surely impairs not meddlers, though minor economical and global prestige dwell, but civilians whom the future of Yemen's coherence depends on.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, proxy, civil war, sectarianism

INTRODUCTION

Sana'a, Sa'dah, Ta'iz and Aden regions in Yemen have been a battleground for many who seek the interest of exploiting political dominance in the Middle-East. Having been a war zone baring several occupations in the 20ᵗʰ century, namely the Ottoman dissolution and Imamate rise to power, an eight-year civil war, a deep division incapacitating its own dependence rendering space for Arab—despite seeming to be the rise of Arab Nationalism and universal calls for unification at the time—involvement in a proxy war and concluding the century with a, now known to be, a failed unification of North and Southern Yemen under military leadership in 1990 (W. Wenner, M. & Burrowes, R. 2018, 8). As the 21ˢᵗ century begins, unease refuses to walk out of Yemeni soil disallowing citizens and tribes to align and counter recent, but severe interior feuds. Internal tribunal wars, the Sa'dah wars, took over after the U.S. invasion of Iraq increasing Middle-Eastern Islamic movements—notably, that of Yemen's Zaydis.

Since the start of the 21ˢᵗ Century, Yemen's territory encountered alien intrusion; ideological, political, economic and militia examples are provided throughout the research; which—rather than helping stabilize the region—has damaged the country's fragile structure. However, Yemen's more complex internal structure, politics and dynamics have been—seemingly having low impacts on the Sa'dah wars since its attraction of media attention—the main drivers of the conflict if closely observed. Arguably, much of yesterday's Middle-Eastern conflicts are conceived as rather sectarian-based entangled under a proxy war between Iran and Saudi-Arabia. Indeed, a proxy war takes place while its adversaries are of different sects, and in fact, sectarianism takes place within the spheres of those conflicts, however, the argument of the proxy war itself being sectarian is deceitful. Having a look on current struggles in the Middle-East, Iran and Saudi's involvement link up to several ongoing conflicts, such as that of the Syrian Arab Republic. Though, when referring to the current *Yemeni Civil War*, lack of understanding yesterday's Middle-Eastern conflict derivatives can lead to unjustified misconceptions whether the civil war is a product of the proxy war or not.

Overshadowed by simultaneous regional events, Yemen was driven into a devouring civil war with close to no other intellectual explanations of its causes than that of a sectarian one under the umbrella of the Saudi-Iranian proxy war. The questioning of this hypothesis leaves the current civil war vulnerable to numerous theories to emerge and provide alternative explanation than the latter, however arguably, none should undermine Yemen's domestic executors. As dominant as

both proxies appear, it would be negligent to undermine and overlook Yemen's internal political actors, whereas the emergence of Al-Houthi movement and the Sa'dah wars were carried out, substantially, by domestic actors. Thus, to detect the validity of this hypothesis and, or provide secondary approaches, analyzing Saudi Arabia and Iran's separate viewing of Yemen in addition to their policies' activity since the emergence of the Al-Houthi movement is important. Using Yemen's recent history as the case study, the interpretation of Saudi-Iranian proxy war as sectarian conflict rather than a political struggle for influence in the Middle-East will be inspected to measure the validity of this argument advertising the civil war as a product of this power struggle. Moreover, an in the case of validating of the latter argument, brief dynamics of the domestic factors are to be listed for a broader understanding of the conflict. In case the argument appears invalid, dismissing it will then reflect an inspection of the domestic factors and their role leading up to the civil war's initiation. Furthermore, a multidimensional angle will be adopted for thorough justification of what will yet result in the findings of this research. Thus, much is to be studied if the proxy war argument as the root of the civil war is to be adopted or dismissed. For this, domestic and international first-degree contributors and the premises of events leading to the civil war are to be examined for a sufficient explanation of the causes to prevail. Hence, this paper will not only negate whether the Saudi-Iranian proxy war being sectarian is accurate or a misconception. Additionally, the findings will then be studied whether they reflect on the causes of the civil war or being distant from it. Lastly, it will seek to reveal whether the proxies precipitated the civil war contrary to the internal dynamics of factions at the root of the causes in respect to its historical and external ones.

To start off, Chapter 1 will represent the key events, which will be briefly detailed as a narration of events allowing the paper to provide sufficient background knowledge up to the current civil war. It will also lead the reader into the conflict's contemporary history, for a better understanding of the pre-conflict phase, especially that of Al-Houthi's movement. This should lay out a platform providing the reader with enough knowledge to understand—in case lacks sufficient background information. Then, Chapter 2 will tackle the main questions of this research, which asks: Applying Yemen's events, is the Saudi-Iranian proxy war a sectarian one? Also, is the current Yemeni Civil War an offspring of the ongoing Saudi-Iranian proxy war? A considerable portion of this paper will devote its content for a better understanding of the proxies' standpoints about Yemen's recent history and better explanation of both sides' roles in the conflict in this chapter. It will additionally provide an explanation as well as establishing the arguments adopted in this research by elaborating whether the proxy war is an offshoot of a sectarian conflict at its origin or a struggle

for geopolitical influence in the region. Chapter 3 will then follow by providing alternative arguments that support the findings, and, in case of a dismissal of the roots being sectarian, alternative arguments will be approached to help find an adequate answer for the causes of the current civil war. The intentions of this chapter will also aim at condemning western interference in the region for the incitement of the civil war. The research, in a more respectful manner, will add on by questioning the role of the conflict's ideology being sectarian with the addition of those caused by alien involvement in the conflict. Moving on, how these international participators' presence initiated, affected or stimulated events will be clarified. The global perception linked to either finding will thereby explain why the Middle-East's political positioning is worsened briefly before the conclusion.

As the conflict is often demonstrated as a sectarian-based proxy war led by Saudi Arabia and Iran, disregarding this manifold narrative that renders the civil war, representing the conflict as such helps study this assumption—in this research paper—for broader assimilation to renounce and exquisitely terminate the indicated allegation. Once focused on, it will allow the paper's resolution, as the initiation causes being domestic and enlarged by external factions, to be added. A collaboration of ideas and perspectives would explain to the reader why it is often demonstrated as a sectarian one. Therefore, the methodology of this research will be mixed where both qualitative and quantitative to help investigate the topic from a multi-dimensional angle. Additionally, it will provide linkage of notions, forcing the conflict's structure into a miscellaneous one, introducing another aim: to prove the conflict could, but should not be approached from a solitary perspective. Then finally, a short summary of the research will follow; helping the reader recollect thoughts and ideas provided by this paper as the Conclusion.

1. POST-INTRODUCTION: KEY EVENTS

The 21ˢᵗ century, so far, is sorrowful and dismal for the Yemeni people who witness the ongoing fatality of their fellow citizens, the chaotic situation their country is facing and the verge of famine for more than half the population. Three major consecutive events accompany one another in what seems to be a chronological series of events. Those are, the emergence of the Al-Houthi movement, also referred to as Ansar Allah, and the start of the Sa'dah Wars, the 2011 Revolution and particularly, the Yemen Civil War. By no means are these events separate from one another, though perceiving each as an offspring of another is, in fact, inaccurate.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, once more, ignited hatred towards western interference for the years to come. For Yemen, it had done much more than fuel U.S. hatred, rather devoted to the creation of a movement, known as the Houthi movement. A respected tribal cleric, a *Sayyid*—an Arabic word meaning lord/sir used frequently in Shi'i countries to refer to male descendants of the Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) (Oxford Dictionary of Islam)—of Zaydi—a branch of Shi'i Islam—decent known as Husayn Al-Houthi influenced several students attending his lectures against the U.S. and Israel. The followers of Husayn Al-Houthi at the time were not many, however, their chants and slogans calling for the "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" attracted hundreds (Al-Jabri & Zaid 2008). "Their insistence on chanting the slogans attracted the authorities' attention and increased government worries over the extent of the al-Houthi movement's influence. The security authorities thought that if today the Houthis chanted `Death to America', tomorrow they could be chanting `Death to the president [of Yemen]'", added Zaid said. Thus, leading the government to act; order the arrest of Husayn, which eventually led to his death on 18ᵗʰ of June 2004—the first round and the starting point of the Sa'dah wars.

The death of Al-Houthi triggered the transformation of his movement to a rebellion, which, being a martyr, increased the rebellion's potential. Within Shiism, martyred personality is at its core, making Husayn's death the "*mise-en-scène* of Shia unfinished history" as described by Marieke, highlighting the start of Zaydi revivalism (Brandt 2017, 12069-80). Despite Zaydi's revival, Al-Houthi's movement demonstrated more than sectarianism and anti-Americanism. His rapid influence was established by aims directed also from political and social-revolutionary views generated by his speeches. The lectures were not merely focused on the Zaydi community, but rather on negative aspects of everyday life which interested many locals suffering economic neglection, political side-line and, more importantly, religious marginalization from various areas

and different tribes—not necessarily following Zaydi doctrine. The mobilization of such crowd should not pass by unnoticed, as these were the very start of a destructive chain of events. Brandt claims after years in the field studying Yemen's history, tribal system, sects' adaptability to one another and political streams, this mobilization was something "neither political parties nor civil society organizations nor the *shaykhs* could or would do" (Brandt 2017, 12040-50). Shaykhs' roles have increased drastically in Yemen following the 1962 civil war whereas the decline in the political importance of the Sayyid role ensued. A Shaykh is an honorific title of pre-Islamic origins given to a male, though since the emergence of Islam, it became—and still is—a title attained by possessing scriptural learning which gives its holder a status of a chief, elder, counselor etc. (Oxford Dictionary of Islam). If a clear conception would exist for Yemen's case, the differentiation between a Shaykh and a Sayyid can be summed up where one is earned and the other is inherited. The vast influence caused by Husayn's death has not only driven an insurgency into existence nor generated anti-Shaykh sentiments, but it has also permitted the Saada—plural form of Sayyid—to once again fight for the retrieve of their "rightful" positions stripped from their families after the 1962 civil war.

Six rounds of war erupted, the Sa'dah wars, following the death of Al-Houthi. The further the conflict continued, the worse it became and the harder it was for peace mediation to take place. Disallowing peace mediation was constant for reasons indicating the unwillingness of governmental efforts to halt the conflict. Proven after the third round of war, where mediation was proven effective, however, cease of the fire was only temporary where the fourth round of warfare continued in 2007—after the 2006 Yemen presidential elections. By the time the fourth war emerged, mediation was proven useless, notably, the efforts of international brokers, especially that of Qatar, were constantly disregarded due to all Northern tribes involuntarily finding themselves aligned with either side (Brandt 2017, 5182-5195). The remaining rounds of war were more destructive, due to the escalating involvement of different tribes inside and those surrounding Sa'dah region—eventually leading to the involvement of all Yemen's Northern tribes.

The government's successful mission ending with the murder of Husayn Al-Houthi developed into a conflict far from government control. The fact that this military mission, supervised by the newly appointed governor, recruited mercenaries from the Hashid tribe, which had a longstanding rivalry with tribes in Sa'dah region, to bring Husayn and his movement to demolition was flawed. This, unintentionally, mandated elders from those rival tribes, such as Khawlan ben Amir and Bakil, along with volunteers to defend their territorial sovereignty. Importantly, one should note that at

the time, those tribes and tribesmen were not supporters of the Houthi movement but fighting for their integrity. A resistance of the government's mission was unachievable, at first, due to the competence of the sizable overestimated operation, where the government dispatched aircrafts, tanks and other vehicles for a rather small crowd. The brutality of the armed forces was practiced on civilians and uninvolved individuals who showed defiance rather than solely primary targets. By the end of the first war, due to the nature of the tribes' laws, norms and traditions, such as vengeance and honor, many tribes were deeply involved in this conflict. Due to recognizing the government's military capability, the rebels had to improve their strength producing what are now stronghold carrying weaponry that—allegedly—is supplied from Iran—highlighting these allegations will follow in addition to their sources. While the Sa'dah wars dominated Northern Yemen, both sides gained ascension of allies and enemies during the eight years of fighting.

Gingrich argues, that prevalence of any influence on Yemen's northern tribes by the government has always been based on mediation, where signs of good governance and quality rule's presence (Gingrich 2014, 117-24). Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president of Northern Yemen from 1978-1990 and the first President of Yemen since 1990-2012, was not competent enough for maintaining the fragile unity of Northern and Southern Yemen. Looking at Ali Abdullah Saleh's methods, his failure to contain this conflict and his government's unwillingness to stop the bloodshed led to the loss of many local allies and a bulk of the population's will to trust the existing regime. The inevitability of the proceeding events traces back to the Sa'dah wars considering that a closer look at the nature of the wars reveals abundant behavior constituting temporary alliances, the rivalry between *Shaykhs* and *Sa'dah* for tribal influence and, more importantly, the dynamics of allegiance initiatives. Also, the entry of Saudi Arabia—backing the government—has, despite claims of winning the sixth round, resulted in the outlast of the insurgency. The point of the conflict where Saudi interfered was in fact necessary—tackling why will be elaborated in further details in chapter 2—for either side to take the upper hand bringing ongoing violence to halt, however, it was only a pause where one year later, in 2011, Saleh's regime collapsed fundamentally by protests administered by Saleh's opposition parties. Nationwide protests then emerged without the Houthis initiation, leading to one of the Arab Spring uprisings—the Yemeni Revolution.

The Yemeni Revolution of Dignity, simultaneously occurring with Arab Spring revolutions, started with great potential to change the existing regime. Boosted by the drive, Yemeni citizens took their case to the streets. Unsurprisingly, they were met with brutality—adjacent to the same handling of Al-Houthi movement in 2004—that increased the will of the people to dismiss the

current regime. In Yemen's case, people's continuous mistrust due to unemployment, economic rottenness, corruption and, of more relevance to this research, the government's negligent method of ending the Sa'dah wars was enough to spark popular opinion. Saleh tried containing the situation at first, promising not to run for re-elections nor hand power to his son. A statement which angered pro-government supporters who took the initiative of protesting against anti-government protestors generating violent clashes. Efforts by the Gulf Cooperation Council were disregarded by Saleh's lack of cooperation triggering the defiance of the country's then most powerful tribal federation, the Hashid, causing the ferocity of its leader, Sadiq Al-Ahmar, to support the opposition parties (Hill 2017, 238). Despite Hashid being an ally of Saleh during the Sa'dah wars, their turning over was not in their benefit, as the Houthis support of the opposition's agenda, though virtual, was only temporary.

A better government was needed, yet a better government was not established. Violence took over for months causing hundreds of casualties and thousand injuries, including Saleh himself. Increased tension forced Saleh to, with the help of the Gulf Cooperation Council, relinquish the power on February 2012, transferring the power to Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi—vice president of Yemen 1990-2012 and President of Yemen 2012-present—for a two-year intermediary period. Hadi's promising start interrupted by Al-Houthis' reappearance. Al-Houthis were calling for support of the transitional government regardless of their refusal to take part in the "unity government" as reported by Ghobari (McDowall 2014). Despite the seemingly diplomatic path Hadi took while harvesting and expanding his influence, the Houthis too spread their influence in different governorates winning more territory and support than before. In late 2014, after gaining enough power to play a role in Yemen's transitional politics, Al-Houthis commenced a bureaucratic assault over Yemen's capital, Sana'a, along with Hadi's proposed cabinet, using both Hadi's own party's support, the General People's Congress, and—crucially important for the research—reappearance of Saleh supporting of the Houthis (Sabbour 2018). Anew, violence took over Sana'a for days with government forces clashing with Al-Houthis while Hadi tried reaching peaceful solutions. These clashes, however, led to Hadi's unwilling resignation while under house detention by Al-Houthis until after his resignation was finalized. Calling out for peaceful solutions, the Houthis, according to Chris Johnston, stated Hadi's decision was fundamental as it ratifies Hadi's outlawing for bypassing his power-sharing deal with which he became the acting president (Johnston 2015). The Houthis, meanwhile, seized the opportunity of controlling government central institutes, dissolving the parliament and forming a new committee, the Revolutionary Committee, naming it the new ruling entity. Additionally, ceased control over government's civil

services institutions and several military strongholds—conspicuously with the aid of Saleh's military loyalists. After weeks of Hadi's detention, he managed to escape to Aden, where he named it the interim capital of Yemen and announced his resignation "illegitimate" and the Al-Houthis' actions were "unconstitutional", marking the start of what is now the ongoing Yemeni Civil War (Al Jazeera 2015).

This chapter, meeting its original purpose, provided enough background information to proceed with the initial research that helps to answer the secondary research question asking what the causes of the Yemeni Civil War were. By no means does it provide all the necessary information to understand the conflict from a multidimensional angle. Neither does it provide sufficient information representing individuals mentioned above as it is only a tool for a briefing of previous events that produced the civil war. Since the uprising of Al-Houthis along with the Zaydi revival, Yemen has endured unrest. One could instinctively criticize their behavior where it could lead to the animosity of the Zaydi sect if not for Shiism as a whole. However, as the government's actions causing the movement's revival were vital, one could also criticize the government's failed efforts to restore the balance. In such case, instead of supporting the government, Al-Houthis' side could be braced. Similar diverse conclusions currently exist in the political realm. An example would be the dissimilar conclusions adopted by various scholars implying that Yemen is a failed state. This appears in works of devoted scholars with the likes of Victoria Clark who argues the presence of "special difficulties involved in ruling the south-western end of the peninsula" which justifies her claim that "their land has never escaped foreign attention for long"—though arguing against government's actions justification of the Sa'dah wars—(2010, 126-148), Ginny Hill calling it a "hybrid state" (2017, 137-155)—despite arguing the fact that many of the government's actions were justified due to the nature of Yemen's civics—and most recently that of Isa Blumi who claims "the war's deeper roots derive from the policy of destroying Yemen long ago by heretofore obscured foreign parties"—arguing a diverse claim—(2017, 216-227). Consequently, there are various chronicles that lead to different interpretations of the conflict. Not to say that obtaining either perspective is incorrect, rather further elaborate the complexity of the conflict where this paper will help unveil, starting with the Saudi-Iran proxy war standpoint.

2. THE CIVIL WAR: REFLECTION FROM THE SAUDI-IRAN PROXY RIVARY ANGLE

The poorest—implying to wealth, GDP per Capita (Chepkemoi 2017)—country in the Middle-East being exploited by the two regional rivals, Iran and Saudi Arabia, does give the impression of western propaganda trying to infiltrate popular opinion against these economic regional rising powers. As the west has regularly shown great interest meddling in the Middle-East's during the age of imperialism (W. Wenner, M. & Burrowes, R. 2018, 7) and more recently during the Arab Spring, "given their links with the regimes in question, both Britain and France redeemed themselves somewhat by military intervention" said Macintyre (Macintyre 2011). The indicated tale depicts some attractive storylines easily adopted universally with the rise of Islamophobia. Could, possibly, Iran-Saudi proxy war help divert condemnation, especially these directed at the United States, for its role in creating what is now the Houthi movement? After all, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria ideologically fight the west, nonetheless, genuinely, fighting Muslims on Muslim controlled territories. Thus, marketing a similar story highlighting theological differences as argument hypotheses suggests rationality at its core.

Yemen—because it is the poorest country in the Middle-East—on the other hand, appears as an easily annexed ally to those seeking dominance in the region. Thus, explaining Yemen's territory subject to constant occupations, undergoing colonialism, and unwelcomed military campaigns as well as a refuge by foreign powers—including nonstate factions. In addition, during Northern and Southern Yemen unification, already complex task due to a mostly Shia North and a majority Sunni South, Yemen's northern administers whom the parliament and, increasingly over time, the government enriched, were unable to adhere to the measures their newly unified state demanded. As a result, the state became vulnerable to external meddling by powers wishing to expand their influence in the Middle-East.

Making light of allegations by the west, both Saudi Arabia and Iran, as a matter of fact, view Yemen an important partner in their political race to dominance over the Middle-East. Therefore, factualizing these allegations do not disapprove the current existing rivalry of Saudi Arabia and Iran surrounding Yemen. Nonetheless, frequent fabricated arguments suggest a "sectarian" war between Sunni and Shia sects, funded and administered by both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Numerous existing media agencies tend to advocate wrong sketching regarding the rivalry. Take notice of some examples posted by some well-recognized agencies, starting with one published by National

Geographic. In a 2014 report written by Eve Conant using Iraq Crisis as the article's playground describing "Ancient Hatreds Turning into Modern Realities" while adding: "The rhetoric on both sides is extremely inflammatory, extremely sectarian, and the atrocities that are happening every day are just furthering that agenda" (Conant 2014). Others continue to vigorously accuse the current sectarian schism as it traces back to the routes Islamic history, matching another posted by Independent news. In Paul Vallely's article "The vicious schism between Sunni and Shia has been poisoning Islam for 1,400 years - and it's getting worse", he states the main causes for the Syrian conflict are traced back to the 7ᵗʰ century. He then, by blaming Iran and Saudi Arabia's ongoing discrimination against their co-religionists, continues:

> The tensions are deep-rooted in wider economic and geopolitical concerns. But the risk - given the long history of division and tension - is that predictions of a transnational civil war between Sunni and Shia could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Vallely 2014).

Essentially, to comprehend the Yemeni Civil war's proximity to the current Saudi-Iranian power struggle, a point of clarification is needed for procession: the renouncement of a cultivated sectarian war entirely. Regularly, some alluring yet dishonest media articles deliver updates on Iran and Saudi Arabia's proxy war making it probable for phony articles arguing sectarianism from within to cross one's eye. To deny similar international allegations, another rationale needs to replace the gap the argument of a sectarian conflict leaves. Nonetheless, can the Saudi-Iranian proxy war be explained without referencing either as Sunni and Shia dominant powers? Keynoush (2016) explains his "theory" for the feud is far from being sectarian. Though, before referring to his theory, one must analyze the accuracy of announcing Saudi Arabia's leading role for Sunnism and similarly that of Iran to Shiism.

Saudi Arabia does appear as a world Sunni power, but to those who lack sufficient knowledge, Saudi Arabia's religious prodigy is being the guardian of the two Holy Mosques. It gives Saudi the power to control the number of pilgrims conducted by Muslims around the globe. Due to that fact, Saudi Arabia is viewed as the Sunni leading power disregarding the fact that majority of Saudi Arabians follow the Wahabbi doctrine which is derived from Hanbali, one of four major Sunni doctrines (Al-Hanafi 2013). Meaning, regarding Saudi Arabia, which its politics also claims, as the global Sunni representative is inadequate. The same applies to Iran, which its main Shia school of jurisprudence is that of Ja'fari which is derived from the Athna'ashariyysh, one of three Shia doctrines (Al-Hanafi 2013). Due to this incognito knowledge, one could only obtain, if closely

studied, the cultural environment of the Middle-East, a common misinterpretation of the division of power appears in the Middle-East which resembles their regional allies as part of their circle of Sunni/Shia dominance.

Returning Keynoush's work, he tries to fill the gap by clearly stating "the Saudi-Iranian political relations began to revolve around three major issues: regional politics, oil, and international security" rather than basis of sectarianism (2016, 131-132). Those three pillars are the overshadows of the current proxy war. Acknowledging the rise of both states being owed to their natural resources during the collapse of imperialism, nationalism began to incline. Generally, one could claim the Iraqi-Iranian 1980-1988 war was the first act of proxy by the Saudis backing Iraq in its conquest. Though, some scholars date it one year earlier with the overthrow of the Shah by the Islamic Revolution in 1979 which called upon nearby countries to act similarly—alarming the Saudi monarchy and neighboring Shiite majority Iraq. Despite the rise of Iran-Shia clerics to power against the Sunni Saudi royalists, a clear struggle has taken over which, overruling sectarian allegations, does support the idea of a geopolitical struggle rather than a sectarian conflict at its root. In the following section of this chapter, examples supporting political interests rendering the existence of non-sectarian alliances present for geopolitical rather than sectarian interests, helping to clarify this chapter.

2.1. The Saudi standpoint

Learning the relation between Saudi Arabia and Yemen as well as Iran to Yemen are essential for the argument's sake. Indeed, much has happened since the Iraqi War and the presence of deteriorated relations between both nations, Saudi Arabia and Iran, has constantly provided atrocities among states aligned with either side. Nonetheless, Yemen appears to be a distinctive ally to both since its resolution of the Sa'dah wars was inadequate and the current civil war still lacks to determine who dominates the state. Looking at Saudi's relation to Yemen, the first appearing connection is their shared borderline. Additional to that, one cannot ignore the majority Sunni population of nearly 17 million (60%) Yemeni citizens (see Figure 1) (Fanack.com 2018). Though Yemen under Saleh has not had its best relations with neighboring Saudi due to border issues that constantly, as claimed by Saudi authorities, impacted the stability and security of territory (Brandt 2017, 1251-1268). Nevertheless, since Saleh's rise to power in 1978 until his removal from power in 2012, there have been important developments worth mentioning. For instance, despite the hostile relations between Saudi Arabia and Yemen in 2009, due to Houthi

incursions on Saudi territory, Yemen's army could pass through Saudi territory to flank Al-Houthis. However, after even more incursions, Saudi Arabia waged a war on the Houthis providing aid for Saleh on the northern frontier. Saudi Arabia's entry did not "win" the war due to Houthis winning battles, but Al-Houthis were battered from fighting two armies and accepted terms proposed by Saleh (Brandt 2017, 10742-10871). Thus, marking, what became clear, a pause of Al-Houthis rebellion by concluding, as described by Brandt, "verbal communication" rather than a contractual peace.
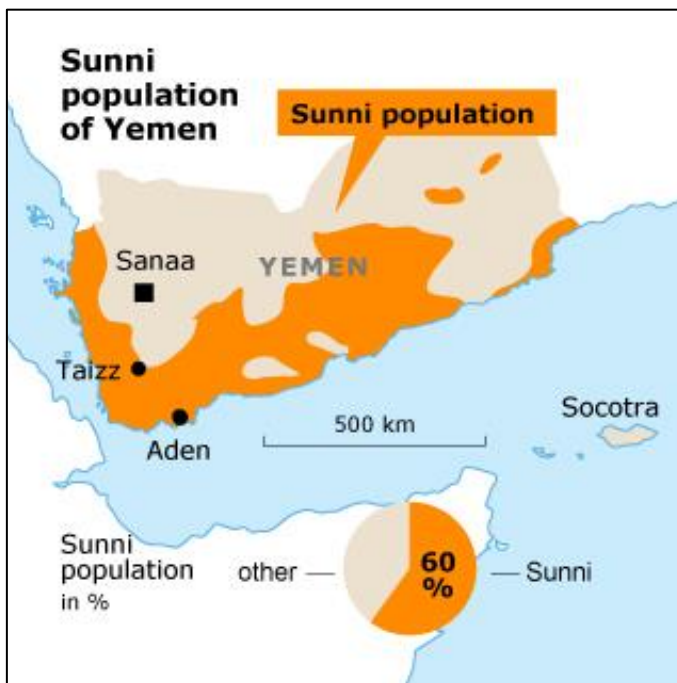

Figure 1. Geographical stationing of Sunni Population of Yemen
Source: Fanack.com (2018)

Respectively, after the ceasefire and 2011 Revolutions, Saleh was forced to turn over power. The Saudi government, under King Abdullah, seeking regional stability for further fear of a domestic uprising, provided aid to ousted Saleh to reinstall him back to power. Here is where it gets tricky, Saleh along with his military and political loyalists cooperated with Al-Houthis whom, together, formed the Saleh-Houthi "secret" coalition—was later announced under contradistinctive circumstances. Both parts were seeking personal agendas and using each other to fulfill them, thus, they disregarded the longstanding eight-year war especially since the succession of Sana'a was owed to the loyalist military forces and several anti-Saleh resistances in regions like Ta'iz, Aden etc. were crushed ((A) UN Security Council Report S/2015/125 2015). This, predominantly for the research, meant that Saudi Arabia, because of their support to Saleh at the time, indicated their support to the Saleh-Houthi coalition described by Saudi officials as "thoroughly thought out"

(Hearst 2014). An important aspect to clarify here would be Iran's ongoing support for Al-Houthis during that time implying the ability of both powers to align their activity according to their interests in contempt of their ongoing version of a cold war. As elegantly described by Samburu: "far from proxy conflict, Saudi Arabia and Iran were at that point supporting the same forces" (Sabbour 2018).

Possibly, Riyadh's support to the coalition emerged from exclusive animosity to the current opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood along with their Yemeni subsidiary, the Islah party. The Muslim Brotherhood gained much power during the transition period of the Arab spring alarming the Saudi monarchy—seen thoroughly after events occurring with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; the 2013 coup d'état. Notably, one should also mention Al-Houthis support to the Islah party during the dawn of the revolution, anew, pursuing personal agenda. However, after their mistrust in the transitional government, they have switched sides making this coalition with Saleh completed by his obscure alliance with Saudi Arabia. Clearly then, Al-Houthis were not the only appearing double-dealers before and during the civil war.

Before Saudi Arabia's then King Abdullah passed away, his stand to contain the Arab Spring movements can be summed in clear terms. Avoiding uprising in Saudi Arabia by producing ambiguous policies such as 1. Addressing the uprisings as threats 2. Seek necessary actions to back anti-revolutionary organizations—mainly that of the brotherhood uprising in Egypt and Yemen to avoid their "popular constituency" against the monarchy. Thus, explaining the support of Saleh's Al-Houthi coalition alongside Iran (Sabbour 2018). In 2015 following King Abdullah's death, Saleh and Al-Houthi coalition, each with a separate agenda, managed to do more than crush the rebellion. Taking over the capital and dissolving the government was their following grand scheme, however, disregarding the new Saudi Arabian successor's mindset. King Abdullah's successor—who was also his defense minister—King Salman and his Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, however, had dissimilar prospects regarding the Arab Spring aftermaths in neighboring countries, remarkably that of the Yemen's anarchic outcome.

Approaching rather a direct involvement policy in Yemen's standpoint, the new monarch had a rather different point of view which one could argue comes from his previous position as the defense minister. With rising tension with Iran in 2014 and with the help of the Saleh-Al-Houthi coalition's recklessness, Saudi's new entitled King had all the reason to boost their gains in the proxy war from another frontier. Since Riyadh already backs rebels against Iran-backed Bashar

Al-Assad of Syria, an opportunity to increase a further geopolitical influence is beneficial. Certainly, Syria's case is different than that of Yemen with excisions of casualty and displaced persons with the direct involvement of Russia and Iran. Nonetheless, Saudi's intervention in Yemen is similar to that of Russian and Iranian dialogue in Syria. Operation Decisive Storm is the Saudi's model designed in response to the Iranian involvement in Syria (Nußberger 2017). It is a military operation by the Gulf Cooperation Council members, excluding Oman, backed by U.S. and U.K. against Yemen's Al-Houthis. Nußberger also explains in his research how this military campaign's beginning is compatible with international law which authorizes Saudi's direct military intervention after Hadi's appeal. According to article 2(4) of the UN Charter which states:

> All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations. (UN Charter, ch.1, art.2, para.4).

Thus, highlighting Saudi's "legitimacy" for launching a military campaign generating its direct involvement in the civil war. However, its involvement only existed after the official declaration of war by Hadi against the Houthis. In addition to Saudi's involvement, the policy changes shifted when the power shifted following King Abdullah's death. Though at some point, Riyadh's entry to the sixth round of war resulted in peace residing in Riyadh's power. Despite unofficial documented closure to the conflict, the Saudi administration decided to end the eight-year-long war. Thus, relinquishing their chance of getting rid of the insurgency that endangers its territory regional influence over Yemen. While this is the case, an assumption generated from this scope would conclude with Saudi's invitation to the conflict rather than refueling. Hence, marking Saudi's proxy role and intervention irrelevant to the evolutionary mechanism that sparked the civil war.

2.2. The Iranian standpoint

Tracing back to Yemen's long-ruled imamate by Zaydi Shiites since the 9th century. Additionally, the existing Shiite population consisting of 11.3 million (40%) Yemeni inhabitants (see Figure 2 for geographical stationing) (Fanack.com 2018). Iran's interest in gaining an ally bordering their regional rivals, Saudi Arabia, logistically incites affinity. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Yemen is a distinctive ally Iran would enjoy as an associate in its struggle for Middle-Eastern influence. Whereas Shiites in Yemen are a minority, its associates are rather larger in number than other Sunni compact countries. Iran's relation with Yemen has not been neutral since the Iranian

Revolution of 1979. The revolution promised an uprising of Shia majority communities in neighboring countries like Bahrain, Azerbaijan, and Iraq. Its call for revolutionary demands reached minorities in Lebanon and most importantly, Yemen. The rise of Iranian Shia clerics to power after the revolution alarmed Sunni dynasties in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Rhetoric by Iranian clerics was incapable of affecting Zaydis in Yemen though. This disaffect, driven from Yemen's recent 1962 civil war, could be found throughout the Zaydi hierarchy in Yemen (Brandt 2017, 3279-3305). Moreover, the Zaydis are relatively different from Ja'faris in Iran. The distinction between Iran's doctrine and Yemen's is important for the conflict's dynamics reinforcement of the argument. Yemeni Shiites follow the Zaydi doctrine whereas Shiites in Iran are mostly Ja'fari. Zaydi is believed to be the closest Shia sect to Sunnism. According to a U.S. diplomatic cable from Yemen released by WikiLeaks, Zaydis in Yemen are not dissimilar to their Sunni acquaintances. It adds:

> Yemen's Zaydis and Shafi'is often pray in the same mosques and practice many of the same customs. Yemen's Zaydis do not celebrate Ashura, one of the holiest of Shia occasions, […] On matters of Islamic law, Zaydis are closer to Sunni Shafi'i beliefs than to other Shia interpretations. (WikiLeaks 2007).

Distinguishing the differences between Shia sects in both countries proves beneficial as it helps underlines the exclusivity of political motivation rather than sectarian in the civil war. Though, connecting Iran to Yemen's Shia population later in this chapter explains their role as Shiite leaders.

Figure 2. Geographical stationing of Shiite Population of Yemen
Source: Fanack.com (2018)

Unlike Saudi Arabia, Iran's political presence in Yemen was not full of evidence as they are in Iraq, Bahrain or Kuwait. Till this day, a challenge in tracing Iranian direct involvement in Yemen's Sa'dah wars or the current civil war remains. With the found evidence, Iran's interest in Yemen is most likely, particularly during the final phases of the Sa'dah wars. Particularly, after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the execution of Saddam Hussein, interest could be intensified after Shia government ascended to power in Iraq leaving Iran with the more reason to exploit another ally in the Middle-East.

Asserting the situation, the U.S. invasion of Iraq benefited Iran's linkage to Yemen with the Houthi movement emerging. It was unclear whether it was going to be a successful movement or not, but a fact that could not slip through is Husayn Al-Houthi's temporary residence in Iran, 1999, for a master's degree (Brandt 2017, 4486-4499) making it another reason for allegations hinting the movement's ties with Iran from early stages. Repetitively, denials from Iranian authorities were present on regular basis and as doubtful as they seemed, these allegations are not far from comprehending during Al-Houthis period of dominance. Near the end of the Sa'dah wars, some ships were captured providing—despite skeptical—sufficient evidence for arguments of Iran's meddling.

20

In 2015 UN Security Council Report "suggests" the origin of a weaponry shipment under the Panamanian flag was from Iran intended to reach either Yemeni Houthis or other recipients in neighboring states and that it traces back to 2009. Indeed, in 2009, the Yemeni authorities ceased an Iranian Vessel on October 25th carrying weaponry to, as proclaimed by the authorities, Al-Houthi "Rebels" ((B) UN Security Council Report S/2015/401 2015).

Subsequently, despite UN sanctions, Tehran's continuation of pushing back all claims of supplying equipment to Al-Houthis could be true whereas Iran has not supplied Al-Houthis, at best non-directly. On that note, the spokesman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, Hossein Naqavi Hosseini, responds, "We have announced repeatedly that the Yemeni army and people have the support of Iran. However, we have also made it clear that we have not given any missiles to Yemenis" (Ahmado & Jedinia 2017). It could be Tehran's Middle-Eastern munition possessors allies in the region, Hezbollah in Lebanon or Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Importantly, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas's reference to Iran presents an important feature of contradicting the argument claiming sectarianism at the root of the proxy war. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas are Sunni Palestinian groups—Palestinian Islamic Jihad being solely an insurgency against Israel while Hamas is also a political entity providing social services and is open to dialogue with the "Zionist State"—which are funded by Iran (Fetcher 2008). Under the umbrella of sectarianism, Shia Hezbollah in Palestine and Lebanon fairly represents Iranian interest during a sectarian conflict, however, supporting Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas could reduce Shia influence in the region if empowered. Repeatedly, the insistence of sectarian conflict at the conflict's roots is challenged by the Iranian stands, much like those of the Saudis. Furthermore, Shia Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad have launched joint attacks against Israel in the past (Fetcher 2008). Thus, clearly resembling unified intolerance to Israel, rather than each other.

The funding and supplying of Al-Houthis could possibly be received from any of the mentioned above groups seeing their alignment with Tehran's interests. Yet again, no traces can be linked to either side's activity. One fact remains, Al-Houthi's maintenance of supplies was external near the ending of the Sa'dah wars. Indeed, Al-Houthis have managed to cease much of the government's spoils after successful battles, however, Al-Houthis possessed far more weaponry than lost by government forces. Thereby, Iran's denials in place, after all, innocent until proven guilty.

Indeed, this argument can be resumed after the Sa'dah wars during the Yemeni revolution and the civil war afterward. After the enlargement of Al-Houthis during the Sa'dah wars, their influence dominated Northern Yemen allowing them to challenge the sovereignty of Yemen. Iran's support to Al-Houthis would prove beneficial for their influence to expand to the Red Sea and south of the Arabian Peninsula. The outset of Saleh following the Yemeni revolution also marks Iran's consecutive thrive for a geopolitical influence of supporting Sunni revolutionary factions rather than solely Shia actors which, once more, highlights anti-sectarian evidence of Iran's approach to Yemen. In addition, Yemen's Saleh was, in fact, a Zaydi in correspondence with Al-Houthis. Not only so, many of Saleh's administration such as Saleh's "right hand" General Ali Muhsin Al-Ahmar and Abdullah Al-Ahmar, the leader of the Islah party—as mentioned above being a Sunni group acting as a subsidiary of the Muslim Brotherhood—and his son, the current successor Sadiq Al Ahmar are all of Zaydis decent (Schmitz 2016). Moreover, Al-Houthis movement was empowered not by Zaydi exclusiveness but along with Sunni tribes' aid and co-operation (Brandt 2017, 12081-12103). Thus, Iran's support for Al-Houthis was strategic especially after their rise of the pre and post-revolution periods.

Essentially, post-revolution Al-Houthis' artillery reappearance witness much improvement which, according to the UN report mentioned above, implies to an Iranian military aid. The Yemeni Civil War, however, still does not witness strengthened evidence despite the logistical might Al-Houthis suddenly gained. To this extent, alleging proxy Iran's role insignificant to the bring about of the civil war finds its place along the argument. Assumingly, Iran might be impacting the civil war and perhaps meddled in Yemen's revolution, though, due to lacking sufficient evidence, the academic inquisitions remain skeptical rendering this argument, as of today, sound.

Comparing logistical might, whether Iran funds and supplies Al-Houthis are incomparable to that of the Saudi's coalition supporting the government. Yet, regardless of Saudi's "legitimate" interference and Iran's "shadow" support, their intrusions, genuinely, worsened the civil situation. Questioning these foreign intrusions despite being, anew, the poorest country in the region can clearly be traced to political desires. As the illusion of the ongoing Saudi-Iranian proxy war's links suggests a sectarian conflict within its roots, the studies prove the proxy war is far from being a sectarian one. Additionally, the study finds that the reasons behind the civil war are not caused by the proxy war, but rather finds the proxy involvement merely adding to the conflict's dynamics with other origins causing the civil war. Thus, considering the civil war a sectarian or proxy-formed can be considerably dismissed in this chapter.

2.3. Presence of the proxy war throughout the Middle-East

In light of the proxy war bottom line concluding as a geopolitical conflict, the following examples bring forth a solidified confirmation of the proxy war roots not being sectarian. Before listing those examples, clarifying a misconception serves best for expanding full understanding of the conflict. The initiation of the proxy war as a non-sectarian conflict cannot elude the fact that both rivals are of different sects. In alignment with the historical content aiding and constant reignition of arguments found in yesterday's political blogs, plentiful researches and zealous news articles backing the existence of the proxy war's sectarianism owes gratitude to <u>Sectarian Politics</u>. The difference between a Sectarian Conflict and Sectarian Politics, as explained by Aboulela, is baffling because of their relation to one another. As elaborated, a sectarian conflict occurs if a party uses force, violence, emotional rallies and hate propaganda towards another party baring the same views but "are either inferior/superior" to reach power consolidation (Aboulela 2018). Whereas Sectarianism in politics is to accuse a group of prioritizing alliances, rivalries and differences with politically close groups (Reese 2013).

Having defined the difference, sectarian politics can be detected in the Saudi-Iranian proxy war. As both nation's rhetoric and policies are based on reciprocal alliances including countries with similar ruling factions, Iran's deliberate support to Assad can be explained despite Syria's 81% majority Sunnis (theglobaleconomy.com 2013); Assad's school of thought is Alawites, an offshoot of Shia. Additional to an Alliance with Syria's Assad, Turkey's Sunni majority was disregarded due to Iran's relations being exceptional under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is Sunni conservative. The same applied to Saudi's support to Egypt's post-kingdom monarchs reckons Al-Azhar institute's appreciation. Furthermore, the alignment of the Kingdom of Bahrain whose royal family belongs to the Sunni faction yet ruling a 72% Shiite majority (theglobaleconomy.com 2013).

Similar non-state proxy nonchalant activity is worth mentioning. The existence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria does not only pose a threat to their main adversaries, but they also cause regional instability that threatens both Riyadh and Tehran's administrations. Indeed, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's slogans and threatening speeches claim their want to kill every Shiite they can lay their hands on and yet, due to lack of sectarianism in its roots, Riyadh's administration calls for action against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Ruthven 2015). The organization seeks the death of all Shiites, but Saudi Arabia stands against them in times where they could prove beneficial for

Saudi's influence race in the Middle-East. Iraq's Shiite government is also backed by their strongest political adversary, the Iraqi Islamic Party composed of the Sunni major against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Iran backs Palestinian Sunni groups, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas despite their military adventurism devoted mostly for their cause. In Libya, a different argument possibly contrasts that of sectarianism being at the roots of every Muslim vs Muslim can be made where their current civil war involves Sunni vs Sunni insurgencies. More examples of state violence, militias and political organizations can be found, nevertheless, the previously mentioned examples suffice for the argument's sake.

3. WHAT INCITED THE CIVIL WAR?

Acknowledging Saudi-Iranian proxy war allegations postulates numerous labyrinthine debates which complicate the researching process. Compelling reasons appeared invariably during information gathering supposing different logic behind the incitement of the civil war. The intentions of the research aimed at condemning western interference in case of a failure in justifying the proxy war's argument as the inciters of the civil war. The research, however, provided a shift disparate from the original one with much to mention. Amid researching, however, Yemen's case seemed far from falling under the unchanging explanation calling upon western governments to be convicted for the mess they helped create. Yemeni Civil War's dynamics are far more complex than televised. By no means does it deprive Middle-Eastern conflicts of having their own complex dynamics—possibly more complex than Yemen's. Thereby, the direction of the following research essentially seeks to find an answer to what produced the civil war?

Tracing back the roots of the events might benefit the purpose of identifying what caused this political conflict to take place; treating the conflict is not the intention of the research though within the conclusion an approach on how to "cure" the civil war will proceed. Genuinely, the conflict's current updates seem far from reaching a peace resolution due to the government's Saudi-led coalition and Al-Houthis, along with the soon to be discussed Al-Qaeda, dominating each significant territory in Yemen (see Figure 3). Nonetheless, two important aspects will be considered. One echoing the allegation of sectarianism and seeing its relativity to Yemen outside the proxy agenda. The other will challenge the originally intended dialogue of western interference in a broader fashion which expands collectively to foreign intervention in contrast to local rebellion—hopefully explains the multi-latitudinal influences that caused the civil war.
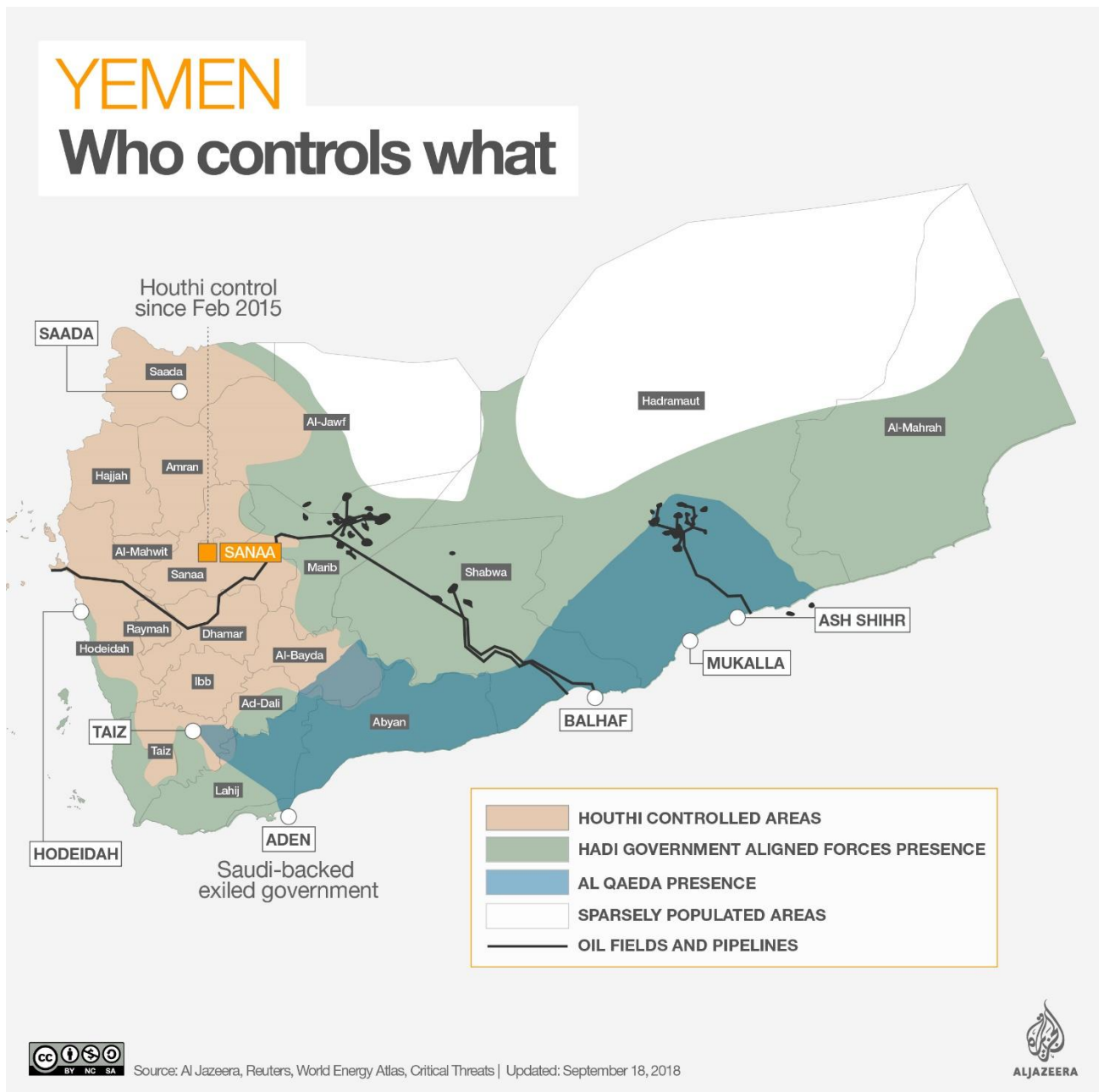
Figure 3. Territorial control of Yemen 2015-2018
Source: Chughtai & Edroos (2018)

3.1. Sectarianism

Speaking of sectarianism once more brings dull characteristics due to overly repeating the rejection to apprehend the proxy war as sectarian. Though earlier, the dismissal of sectarian allegations as the reason for the proxy war's existence does not dismiss the presence of sectarianism within the elements of the civil war. Indeed, as can be examined above, the start of the war witnessed a political agenda with Saleh aligning with Al-Houthis for political gains. Pre-alignment phase, starting from 2014, witnesses a great coverage from the media with all its violence amid the

revolution and the civil war. Storylines, however, implied to sectarianism fueling Al-Houthis. Uncovering what Brandt reformed, "To a great extent, our image of the Houthi conflict is determined by these 'external' narratives, which highlight the regional and international relevance of the Houthi conflict but fail to explain the dynamics pushing forward the battles on the ground" (Brandt 2017, 5196-5203). Relatively, Brandt also speaks, in depth, about the Sa'dah wars where she believes has a stronger influence over the current civil war rather than the post-transition period leading to the civil war. Without drifting from the main categorization, her outlook will be discussed subsequently in short where ideology regarding the causes of the civil war will be presented in the upcoming sub-chapter.

Sectarianism has not been the main derivative of the Sa'dah wars. Though, claims of the existence of sectarian acts within the conflict legitimately remain. The Houthi movement embraced thousands of sectarian advocates fighting under the umbrella of Religion and more specifically Shiism. Unarguably, the Zaydi revivalism which collaborated the Houthi's existence, as mentioned in the pre-phase, was only a branch of the Houthi's entire movement, however, much of the pre-revolutionary rhetoric of Al-Houthi leaders were under the name of Religion and some Zaydism. After the revolution, much of the movement's followers remained, not only Saada and their tribes, but also Sheikhs of other non-Zaydi affiliated tribes, to whom the movement owes gratitude forging a change of in the leadership rhetoric. In short, eliminating the essence of sectarianism as the main driver of the Al-Houthis' side does not revoke the facts claiming sectarianism majoring within the updates of the Sa'dah wars.

Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, Husayn's brother, successor and current leader of the group used rhetorical sectarian speeches to address his fellow Zaydis during the wars. The emergence of the revolution witnessed Abdul-Malik in a different form, adapting to a rather irregular agenda of the group's previous ones. Take note of Abdul-Malik's approach after the revolution where he positioned himself as the "revolutionary national leader" whereas before the revolution, his structure of speech targeted mainly Zaydis (McDowall 2015). Not necessarily following the footsteps of the secular government that has acted since 1990 yet adapting to the popular. The Sa'dah wars, Yemen Revolution of Dignity and Yemen Civil War stumbled on regular sectarian campaign policies and actions by both the government and Al-Houthis. Notably, these polities favored one very important faction in Yemen's 21st century history, —which the research is yet to reveal—the predominant presence of the Al-Qaeda. Thus, in conclusion of this sub-chapter, sectarianism in the roots of the civil war cannot be factualized. However, the existence of sectarian

politics and sectarianist acts can be spotted during the mounts building up to create the existing civil war. Hence, a sectarian root is, anew, denied of its stance as persistently promoted; the driver of the civil war.

3.2. Foreign interests vs. insurgencies

Each of the participators has their own agendas to fulfill disregarding that pursued by the others. Previously, Saudi Arabia and Iran's relation to Yemen was inspected beyond other relations that intertwin up until the development of the Yemeni Civil War. In such manner, fulfilling the degree of the original explanation of the conflict's multidimensional impacts influencing the outcome will characterize this sub-chapter onward. Furthermore, key actors like the United States and the United Kingdom, despite disregarded in previous content, both play an important role in the coalition against Al-Houthi rebels. As U.S. and U.K. presence remains, a sense of colonization haunts the Middle-Eastern political arenas delivering more reason for their tampering of the civil war. These allegations will be studied in addition to Al-Qaeda, as previously promised. Then, crucially, demonstrating concisely the internal tribes, movements etc. will follow. A broader perspective on these actors' relations requires an unbiased examination of the following section in order to help the reader unlock gates allowing them to bridge the connection between all actors to the uprising of the conflict. Although there have been different actors in the 20th century than of the 21st century, including the Ottomans, the British Empire and subsequently Egypt, the actors focused on this chapter are categorized by their important roles starting from the 21st century. By all means, one can argue that the 1962 Yemeni Civil War and the Unification of Yemen in 1990 are relevant for this ongoing conflict, but this chapter rather focuses on the contemporary aspects piling up for the Yemeni Civil War's autopsy.

3.2.1. Western schemes?

The United Kingdom's relation with Yemen has been tense since the liberation of Southern Yemen in 1967. Since then, not much hospitality was extended to the U.K. regardless of the Kingdom's efforts. Over the course of time, Yemen's deteriorating condition established newly mild relations under British development funding and Saleh's rule. An overflow of funds to Saleh's government since 2004—possible earlier, data registered in the Department for International Development dates to 2004 only—marks the start of looser relations between the countries (Devtracker). The lack of collaboration was rapidly vanishing with more funds pouring in Yemen's central bank. The

U.K. funding of Yemen presently remain for various projects through the Department for International Development makes almost a total £151.6bn which has, is and will be spent as of 2004 (Devtracker).

Despite Saleh's government receiving financial aid, military support was unclear until counter-terrorism aid was announced during Saleh's 2009-2010 Al-Qaeda crackdown. Special Air Service and Special Reconnaissance Regiment were deployed in a U.K.-U.S. joint operation targeting several states where Islamic extremist groups were thought to occupy (Brady 2010). After the crackdowns, Britain's stance appeared to align with governments during the Arab Spring they previously allied. It has not involved itself directly in Yemen's case except under the Saudi-led coalition which started in 2015 amidst rising tension in the territory. Particularly, after Al-Houthis missiles targeted areas in Saudi-Arabia, especially that which was intercepted on its way to Riyadh's official residence compound. U.K.'s logistical assistance was provided to the Saudi-led coalition then. Therefore, marking its involvement in the civil war (Hearst 2014). Perhaps without logistical involvement of the U.K. and U.S., the outcome might have differed, but to accuse the U.K.'s 20th century colonization of Yemen falls inaccurate as the later internal events proved more altering to the civil war.

The United States played an unforeseen huge part in the creation of Al-Houthis. The intentions and motives of Al-Houthis included the slogan "Death to America" where he condemned Saleh's tolerance for American troop deployment especially after the invasion of Iraq. Not only so, but the constant backing of Israel has ignited further hatred amongst the group initiators towards the U.S. Its role in the conflict, however, was skeptical since Washington refused to designate Al-Houthis as terrorists despite receiving constant appeals from Saleh. U.S.'s funding to Saleh's government was guided by Washington's bitterness to Al-Qaeda—will be discussed thoroughly in the upcoming sub-chapter—and refused to play a role in the Sa'dah wars. Following the revolution, Obama's administration aided the Saudi-led coalition by contributing air raids and financial backing to the operation. As Saleh's hatred increased, Al-Houthis and their allies accused the U.S. of supporting Saleh against the crushing of their movement simultaneous with U.S.-Iran relations continuing to deteriorate over Iran's nuclear program (Sabbour 2018). Al-Houthis sentiments against U.S.'s foreign policies and their previous interference in the Middle-East remains political rhetoric of the group. U.S.'s existence in the Middle-East possibly characterized the behavior of Al-Houthis. Nevertheless, identifying the U.S. as a reason for the Sa'dah wars and ultimately the

civil war remains Al-Houthis' burden whereas the U.S., despite meddling in other crises, is unaccountable for the causing of the civil war.

As international participators, the United Kingdom previously and the current presence of the United States, political and martial, does stimulate political instability in the Middle-East similar to that during British decolonization (W. Wenner, M. & Burrowes, R. 2018, 7). Accordingly, the emergence of anti-western radicalism to counter their presence, direct or represented by local delegates, alarms Middle-Eastern states as threats to their sovereignty. Saudi Arabia as an actor stimulates further anti-western sentiments due to its longstanding alliance with the United States rendering the proxy war with Iran western-influenced. When it comes to the Yemen Civil War, the Saudi-Iranian proxy war signaled pro-sectarian arguments. The same applies to the presence of the U.K. and U.S. since it resembles sum-up conclusions hinting the meddling of both nations. Indeed, there are conspiracy theories suggesting both nation's role for the anarchy residing within Middle-East (Brady, 2010). However, Yemen's Civil War should not be one of their list of undesired outcomes in the Middle-East as this conflict remains under the strong effect of internal contests.

One could argue U.S.'s obscure role for the creation of Al-Qaeda and Al-Houthis and if it wasn't for U.S. meddling neither would come to existence. Another could be branched as a sub-British post-colonization criticism where if it wasn't for the British, military rule wouldn't have existed and thus such suppression of citizens wouldn't have generated hatred touching regimes. Many more arguments can derive from the historical perspective which can be traced back to, not only decades but centuries. As shown in yesterday's media, particularly in the previously mentioned report by Conant, these theoretical arguments support sectarian roots in addition to hinting at the conflict's core dating back to the 7th century (Conant 2014). These invalid predictions find their way into contemporary politics thus explaining the increase of Islamophobia in the west and western distaste of the Middle-East. For instance, Bush's statement on 9/11 exemplifies current media fallacy: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Bush 2001 cited in Kneeling 2005). Respectively, western media is pushing their articles as undisputed in need of exclusive acceptance of their claims.

Due to previous intentional media blockage caused by parties benefiting from the isolation of the conflict, massive news agencies—such as those headquartered and operated in U.S., U.K. and Saudi Arabia—coverage not providing enough details of conflict's updates. Inaccurate understanding of the situation screens the public opinion on the war due to this lack of up to date, diverse and constant coverage. These articles, particularly those covering the civil war, generate invalid global perception on Yemen, moreover, the Middle-East and subsequently Islam as a religion. Indeed, many articles do not articulate the cloaking of western misapplications of the civil war, however, they do the cloak other meddling activities by these powers causing readers to formulate defective assumptions for their interest, such as the one formed prior to the research, but additionally, some that question their virtue.

3.2.2. Al-Qaeda insurgency

Al-Qaeda constitutes a twist in both the proxy war and the civil war causing alternative latitude to the conflict's arena since its finding in 1988. In addition to Al-Qaeda's activities since 2000 which led to the group's designation as the deadliest radical terrorist group worldwide, —reported involvement in over eight thousand deaths and twelve thousand injuries—the group has an extension in the Arabian Peninsula, which is currently residing over Yemeni territories, the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Martin 2017). Saudi Arabia's tolerance for the group's existence close to their borders constantly worries the Saudi administration—also UAE. There have been doubts concerning the group's funding sources which was linked to Saudi Royal Family members. Within a document posted by New York Times, there is evidence of Saudi Royalists and Al-Qaeda funding drafted German criminal investigators who compiled a report for which tracks millions contributed to Al-Qaeda during Bosnia's onslaught (Meckenheim 2003, 31). Finding official reports relating to the Saudi administration's linkage to Al-Qaeda's funding is unprecedented. Granted, Riyadh's denial and designation of Al-Qaeda as a terrorist group. This section, however, does not seek to confirm Al-Qaeda and Saudi Arabia's ties. Instead, it seeks unveiling Al-Qaeda's relation in Yemen's current civil war in respect to Saudi's coalition. More importantly, whether Al-Qaeda's presence is the main cause for the civil war.

Al-Qaeda's presence was detected in Aden since the demolition of USS Cole Ship in the year 2000 (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018). After the 2001 9/11 attack, Saleh has increased his relationship with the U.S. causing Saleh's securing of external funds for anti-terrorist activity. Since 2002, U.S. troops stationed in Yemen launched missile attacks and air bombing against Al-Qaeda suspected activity. These activities continued until 2015, though in between, the aid has been criticized by

U.S.'s country reports on terrorism. The report claims, "Despite Yemen's history of terrorist activity and repeated offers of assistance from the USG, Yemen lacked a comprehensive counterterrorism law. Current law as applied to counterterrorism was weak" (Office of Coordinator for Counter Terrorism 2008). Saleh has, additionally, misused U.S. aid during his war against Al-Houthis—although unpermitted by the U.S.

The U.S.'s efforts towards obliterating Al-Qaeda as mentioned above are questioned when spoken about Yemen's civil war. Strong sentiments for the group exists, yet, the U.S. administration has shown tolerance for the group under the Saudi-led coalition. The Associate Press investigated "secret" agreements between the Saudi-led coalition and Al-Qaeda within the scope of the civil war claiming:

> In one conflict, the U.S. is working with its Arab allies—particularly the United Arab Emirates—with the aim of eliminating the branch of extremists known as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP. But the larger mission is to win the civil war against the Houthis, Iran-backed Shiite rebels. And in that fight, Al-Qaida militants are effectively on the same side as the Saudi-led coalition—and, by extension, the United States. (Michael, Wilson & Keath 2018).

These agreements, as investigated, include payments in cash, weaponry and equipment in exchange for departure from cities. Additionally, several Al-Qaeda's attacks on Al-Houthis fall under these secret agreements.

Tracing back to the pre-civil war period, in fact, Al-Qaeda has played a huge role in the Sa'dah wars leading to their crackdown in 2010 by Saleh's government with the assistance of the United Kingdom Special Air Service and Special Reconnaissance Regiment, and United States counter-terrorism training. Following these crackdowns, their re-appearance in 2011 after the revolution should not be discarded following their claim of establishing an Emirate of their own in Yemen. They have, in fact, managed to weaken the government and capture important locations, including weapon factories and key cities (Michael, Wilson & Keath 2018). Their battles, however, were mostly against government forces before the civil war. Over the course of the civil war, Al-Qaeda has been fighting Al-Houthis rather than weakening the already weakened government which further favors the previous investigation. Thus, one can claim Al-Qaeda's role in igniting the civil war, but as the start of the civil war erupted between Al-Houthis and the government, Al-Qaeda's role becomes subordinate to the civil war's ignition rather than primary.

3.2.3. Northern Tribes Insurgency

Finally, reaching the final major actors of the conflict and whom the research process manifested as the genuine founders of the civil war, the Yemeni tribes. Their involvement in the consecutive chain of events—Sa'dah wars and the revolutions—is of great importance to understand their role as the main ignitors of the civil war. As mentioned in the introduction, the three major events building up to the civil war are connected, but not entitled to each other's existence. The revolution, exceptionally, stands out between the Sa'dah wars and the civil war. Its incitement was rather fundamental during the Arab Spring seeing the government's vulnerability after the Sa'dah wars. The government's mistrust between the tribes found its way to the people, raising more distrust than there was. The co-relations between Sa'dah wars and the civil war, however, can appear a re-construction of one another as the Sa'dah wars perfectly fit the criteria defining a civil war. The Sa'dah wars, however, had higher multifaced complexity in its roots as it involved rather a great deal of tribal norms piling up before the political agendas were prioritized. The analysis based by scholars, media and state authority's circumference guides the political debates in the diplomatic world, but in Yemen, they are the local agendas which "shaped the reality of tribal, political and sectarian practice and implemented these policies on the ground" (Brandt 2017, 11936-43).

The civil war can be summed up as the result of the incompletion peace process conducted by parties involved. Notably, the government's consideration and refusal to "cure" the conflict but rather "treat" it in the meantime has backfired as the country now suffers a full-scale civil war. Thus far, civilians are paying the price; a famine affecting over 70% of Yemen's population and in the aftermath, cholera outbroke, causing over fifty thousand children casualties and a toll of nearly a million citizens displaced (International Organization for Migration 2015).

The current post-constructive civil war is not similar to that of the Sa'dah wars which oscillated politics embedded within. Supplementary to this, the alliances forged after these oscillations, disregarding that of Saleh and his loyalists, were taken from the final round of the Sa'dah wars to the beginning of the civil war. Worth mentioning, the Sa'dah wars' developments were not purely tribal but combined a complexity of ideologies, sectarian politics, personal motivations etc. (Brandt 2017, 12103-12121). As a result, the Sa'dah wars can appropriately fall accountable for their rebirth in the form of the civil war and local parties such as the transitional government, the opposition, tribes, movements and insurgencies. As indiscriminating as it may sound, the full potential of the current civil war cannot be singled out as an effect of a single event causing the

happening of the civil war, in this respect, the Sa'dah wars. Indeed, the study found tribal dynamics at the root of the civil war, however, the expansion of these tribal feuds during the Sa'dah wars, the revolution and the civil war pay attribute to all precipitators, the proxies, sectarian politics, western interference and, most importantly, the complex nature of Yemen tribes' actions since the Sa'dah wars which was, more or less, guided by inferior implementation of personal agendas headed by unsighted use of the state's vulnerability for need of personal achievement. Having reached this point, following the establishment of a well-informed network of information allowing this section to cultivate brings the research to completion, hence, allowing the conclusion to effectively follow.

CONCLUSION: FAR FROM PROXY

In conclusion, the interpretation of Saudi-Iranian proxy war as sectarian conflict rather than a political struggle for influence in the Middle-East will is dismissed by the findings of this research while dismissing advertisement of the civil war as a product of this power struggle. The findings also revealed the true causes behind the war being domestically initiated where the involvement of the proxy war enlarges the conflict rather than direct it. Yet, these domestic initiations' expansion owes a great deal to the proxy adversaries and several foreign meddlers, making the civil war a multidimensional conflict. The Saudi-Iranian proxy war characterizes much of the early 21st century Middle-Eastern alliances. Furthermore, it destabilizes the region and outsets violence due to the proxies' characteristics of following different sects. However, the study shows the proxy war being solely geopolitical rather than a sectarian-based conflict with sectarianism as a factor of fueling local sentiments and international opinion. Moreover, as the study shows, the proxy war's relation to the civil war proved to adjust along further developments occurring in Yemen. Thus, making their meddling simultaneous rather than conductors leading to their exemption from assumptions claiming their responsibility for causing the Yemen Civil War. While allegations suggest the occurrence of sectarianism shaping the proxy war, the research poses various challenges to these implications including the exoneration of western powers causing the civil war nor the Sa'dah wars. As for the civil war, contradictory, the local disputes causing the civil war are far more than proxy incited where Saudi-Iranian conflicts happen to Moreover, the civil war combines multiple degrees that resulted in the conflict's ignition and continues to play a role in the dynamics within making it a multidimensional conflict with much to be considered before casting conclusions.

By now, the reader came across a pre-phase providing enough knowledge regarding the civil war's history starting from the 21st century. This allows the research to present the flow of ideas from a broader perspective without worrying about historical apprehension difficulty. Prior events necessary for the circulating of the argument came handy where much of the argument demanded constant reflection and perhaps memory refreshment.

Following the chronology of events, the researched continued by thoroughly highlighting the existence of the proxy war in the civil war. By tackling each of the proxies, the relationship of Saudi Arabia, as well as Iran, to Yemen's politics, sects and actors were analyzed in depth with the aim of keeping a framework to the relevance of information. The connection between Al-

Houthis and the government with the proxies needed to be examined in depth to elude culpability of sectarianism at the root of the proxy war. Simultaneously, the in-depth studying allowed the linkage between the eruption of the civil war and the proxy rivalry to be elaborated. As the hypothesis needed a solidified base before jumping to new arguments, a conclusion of the proxy war's relevance needed a clear demonstration.

After ending with the redundancy of proxy/sectarian allegations, the need of logical explanation came in effect where three different sound arguments were presented. Firstly, came that which disconnected sectarianism from the proxy's sectarianism. Then, the argument of foreign intervention was discussed as it was one of the intended studies of this paper. Following, came the predominant argument which highlighted the domestic effects by local actors leading to the genuine reason causing the civil war. Arguably, the research tried delivering the resemblance of notions cumulative to each other. In the end, the civil war can be viewed from one angle, but doing so will almost certainly precipitate faulty presumptions of the civil war being a product of the civil war. The fact that unbacked discrimination of actors and sects in the conflict derive from the lack of understanding of the conflict entirely, and, accordingly, similar unfair point of views towards similar parties in the Middle-East can exist when studying complex conflicts as such.

The civil war is much more complex than what appears on the media. It is a mournful tragedy affecting foreign policies, modified relations to the worse, and wistfully, millions of civilians. Though updates of openness to dialogue recently rumored the conflict, notably, those of Martin Griffiths, claims of ongoing reforms of Yemen's Central bank, the exchange of prisoners and the re-opening of Sana'a's airport appear promising. "We remain committed to bring the Yemeni parties to the negotiations table within a month [October 2018]. Dialogue remains the only path to reach an inclusive agreement" (Griffiths 2018). As positive as the UN's envoy under Griffiths seems, its history remains as a tragical crisis causing further turmoil in the Middle-East.

The Civil War continues to raise questions until this day. Are the Houthis getting support from Iran? Who is winning the proxy war? How is the international world dealing with this crisis? Endless questions can derive from this research which, optimistically, eluded suspicions claiming the war was caused by one factor, such as that of the Saudi-Iranian interests. Concluding, anew, the proxy war is not responsible for the occurrence of the civil war, however, it is due to the complex nature of the internal dynamics of the tribal feuds and the previous Sa'dah wars. In the foreseeable future, Yemen's reconciliation and stability hinge entirely on domestic actors to

resolve their hostility. As Yemen's history suggests international interference, which continues to witness foreign brokers, adopting resolutions set by external factors will not cure the foundation but merely fix it. Still, as proven for centuries, Yemen's vigorous will to recover remains solid as it continues to overrule vulnerable foreign meddling actively; characterized bizarrely, "Yemen Endures" (Hill 2017).

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