Iranian Involvement of Rising Political Violence and Terrorism in Yemen

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Abstract

The study focuses on Iranian involvement in Yemen to achieve its political and economic ambitions. Since Iran has been under economic pressure for years, it has tried to create instability in the Gulf regions and other Arab countries by rising political violence and supporting terrorist group. The study aims to explore the reasons for Iranian intervention in Yemen, identify the factors that contributed to Iran's control of Yemen, and evaluate the level of influence caused by the Iranians on the Yemeni state. The result of the study shows that Iran has succeeded in its hegemony in Yemen, after Houthis group have access to power. Iran seeks to control the strategic border crossings in the southern Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf by supporting the Houthis and keeping them in power. The Gulf States are aware of the Iranian threat in the region, and have taken the necessary military measures to curb Iranian ambitions, which spent billions of dollars on an Open War in Yemen. This military spending can use for economic development instead provoking political violence and terrorism in Yemen and the region by Iran.

Keywords

Iran, Political Violence, Terrorism, Yemen, Gulf Countries.

1.   Introduction

The Middle East has been severally marred by political violence and uprisings over the years and these can be attributed to several reasons ranging from political instability, corruption, religious sectionalism, external influence but to mention a few. Denisoff opined that violence, as a concept can be balkanized

into 3 major groups, in his view the first type of an be categorized as the prevalent type of violence – which is the type of violence which is mostly used by the military, intelligence agencies, the police, legislative most especially in certain policies within and without the borders of a nation – his second type of violence - is that type directed against the imperialists or against the colonists, also this type of violence is vetted towards the elitist authorities and channeled toward their military oppressors - the final type of violence in his views are those types that comes with several types of organized gangs and public criminality.[1]

The Yemeni society has been one that has been marred by violence right from its inception, safe to say even prior to the formation of the unified Yemeni nation; the state was no stranger to political or socio-religious violence and uprisings. However, this section looks at the nature of the Yemeni political state from a historical perspective so as to grasp the variables responsible for the present nature of the nation (Gopalan, Desai, & Acharjya, 2020).

In 1967, following the moving out of British Army from the northern part of Yemen, a Marxian nation called the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen came into existence in the southern parts of the newly formed nation. As a result, while the conflict between northern and south Yemen, the government of Saudi Arabia took sides with northern Yemen owing to its anti-communist position during that time. At this time, both countries expressed their willingness to unify. This subsequently resulted into discussions of reconciliation between the two sides, finally in 1990, unification between northern and southern Yemen was declared (Hamsal et al., 2021).

The Shia faction of Yemen's Zaidi group makes up 35% of the total population of Yemen. They are mostly inhabitant of the northern half of Yemen. Generally, the Zaidi community is considered Shia, but they are quite different from the Shia majority. The Houthi movement was founded in the late90s by the Houthi family to protect the rights of the entirety of the Zaidi community as a religious organization called Ansar Allah. The Houthi's anti-US views, the faction got into violent engagement with the government of Saleh. Owing to the fact that he was allied with Saudi Arabia and the United States, the Saleh government was able to restrain the influence of the extremist group's influence in the region, this included the Al-Qaeda and Houthis, the curbing of these extremists at the time wouldn't be possible without the support of the US and Yemen's Asian neighbor Saudi Arabia (Ichsan et al., 2020).

In 2015, the Houthis coup threw the Yemeni state into turmoil. While Saudi Arabia perceived that the rebel group was a proxy for Iran, due to the strong support from Iran at that period in time. To tackle the Houthis effect and stand against the weakening of Yemeni rule, Saudi Arabia and their other nation-states allies were strategically supporting Yemen and financially bankrolling them, in order

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[1]Abdulrahman Al-Fawwaz, *"Motives of Political Violence in the Middle East with Special Reference to Syria,"* ASSR Journal 5, no. 1 (2018).

to prevent it from collapsing economy and security wise, which was a dangerous indication for its surrounding nations and regions. However contrary to the conventional perspective about conflicting groups in Yemen, which claimed that there were only two separate groups, i.e., Houthi, fighting the military forces loyal to President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi, (who also has the support of the Saudi-led alliance). There were at the time other minor factions their present in various areas and parts of Yemen that weren't directly under the influence of any of the major competing parties.[2]

1.1 Objective of the study

This study is aimed at assessing the weight of Iran's influence on the Yemeni state, more succinctly understanding the involvement of Iran on the political violence and tensions in Yemen.

1.1.1 Specific Objectives

- To explore the current political situation of Yemen
- To identify the factors that contribute to the political instability that have marred the Yemeni state
- To assess the extent of Iran's influence on the Yemeni's political scenario

1.2 Research Questions

- What is the current political situation of Yemen?
- What are the factors that contribute to the political instability that plagued the Yemeni state?
- What is the level and extent of Iran's influence on the Yemeni's political scenery?

1.3 Methodology and Materials

The study employs an exploratory research design; from Haye's 1942 perspective, a study can only be considered as exploratory provided that the tool utilized by the researcher for the collation of data did not undergo any form of refinement, precision or accuracy check, and it also requires that the statistics provided in the data do not show high level of reliability.

Be that as it may, in scenarios where knowledge as regards the topic and/or problem the research looks to tackle is sparse and limited, the exploratory research design is applied since it creates a platform upon which new discoveries on the area under discussion can be made. It is also worth stating that it is of less usefulness in the quantitative approach when compared to the qualitative approach where it

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[2]Peter Salisbury, *"Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order ,"*Chatham House. Middle East and North Africa Program, 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/yemen-national-chaos-local-order.

is of greater value. The study looks to place the influence of Iran in the political violence, as is evident in the Yemeni State. To this end, data to be used in the study would be drawn forth from secondary repositories such as websites, news articles, Journals and government portals. From the information collected, the proper comprehension of the roles played by Iran in the situation in Yemen; and seek to also investigate other extraneous variables.

2.   Literature Review

In the view of Alesina and Perotti; political instability could be measured by the Socio-Political Instability (SPI) index, which is a yardstick for measuring a country's average political instability this was prevalently used between the periods of 1960-1982. Using core component analysis, they build their index from data on the range of politically driven assassinations per year, the range of individuals killed in domestic violence occurring amongst the masses (as a percentage of the total population of the country), the number of active and provisional coups, and a categorical variable as to whether the year is a democracy or a dictatorship.

Owing to the fact that this index uses such notable disruptions like political assassinations and military coups whereas simple electoral change of government no matter how frequently would not count as instability, but on the flipside violent changes no matter how infrequent counts as instability. The index could be said to be weighed as an indicator of democracy.[3]

Kew 2006 opined that one of the major factors that is responsible for political instability is the inability of the political class to strictly abide by the rules and tenets of democracy which would subsequently foster constitutionalism.[4] Harriman further buttresses that the above situation more often than not gives rise to corruption, the abuse of power and negligence and abuse of the electoral process and the disempowerment of institution.[5]

In a study conducted by Zureiqat, of the 25 countries handpicked from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America, over 17 were observed and used as case studies. What is more, the chief reason for which the investigations were performed in the selected nations was to assess what influence PI exerts on the growth of GDP per capita. After the investigations were concluded, it was inferred that the variable indicators which were put to test are heavily linked with the economic growth of the countries in question.[6]

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[3]Alberto Alesina and Roberto Perotti, *"Income Distribution, Political Instability, and Investment,"* European Economic Review 40, no. 6 (1996) .

[4]Sanja Tatic and Christopher Walker, "*Countries at the Crossroads: A survey of democratic governance"* (New York: Freedom House, 2006).

[5]Temi Harriman, *"Is there a Future for Democracy in Nigeria?,"* A Text of Public Lecture Delivered at the Department of International Development, Oxford University, (2006).

[6] Hazem M. Zureiqat, *"Political Instability and Economic Performance: A Panel Data Analysis,"* Award Winning Economics Papers, (2005), https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/econaward/1.

A survey, which employed the mechanism of a neoclassical model, was carried out by Farida & Ahmadi in a bid to look into the effect that corruption has on the growth of the economy (of Lebanon), in the role of an indicator for political instability. What is being postulated in this study is simply an assumption that the standard of living, using the real per capita GDP as a yardstick, is being downscaled by practices of corruption. However, the findings gotten from the study showed that by way of some activities such as a decrease in investment and productivity yielded by human capital, and the inefficiency depicted in the inability to properly handle government expenditure; corruption has an adverse, indirect impact on the GDP in Lebanon.[7]

The manner in which the growth and development of an economy is impinged upon by political instability was placed under scrutiny by Aisen and Veiga. To this end, in an investigative survey, over the course of 45 years (extending from 1960 to 2004) - a duration which was further broken down into five-year intervals -, the authors made use of the GMM estimator to place data collected from 169 countries under scrutiny. One of the discoveries that was made from the study which was carried out was that political instability was hinged upon the rates of gross domestic product in the economy. This implies that when the rate of the gross domestic product is lowered, it results in a consequential increase in the possibility for instability to come into existence in a political system. Also, in a similar manner, when a political setting is instable, it could have certain impacts in varying forms on the integral factors that determine economic growth of a country. Such influences are including, but are not exclusively limited to, negative impacts on small-scale businesses, labor and unemployment rates; it could also cause the rate of productivity to take a nosedive. Also, it was stated that, in the event that a political environment becomes instable, even a democratic state where high rates of political insurrections can be observed, can do almost nothing to alter the state of the nation's economy at that point in time.[8]

Like the Middle East there a few regions in the world, that have been bestowed with a gift and a curse; which are the unique history of religion and the presence of oil.[9] This resource is penned a curse given that the availability of oil has made the Middle East a point of focus for the world hegemonies who have over the years tussled and struggled for control over assets and power in these parts of the world. This is not to say however that oil is present in all terror-inflicted countries in the world or more specifically the Middle East, countries such as Israel, Lebanon and turkey (Middle East) and Pakistan and Uzbekistan in the wider scope are not known to be oil producing nations. In the same vein terrorist incidents in Gulf region are very much lower than North Africa and the Levant.[10]

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[7]Moe Farida and Fredoun Z. Ahmadi-Esfahani, *"Corruption and Economic Growth in Lebanon,"* in 52nd Annual Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society Conference paper (February 5–8, 2008, Canberra, Australia).

[8]Ari Aisen and Francisco José Veiga*, "How does Political Instability Affect Economic Growth?,"* European Journal of Political Economy 29 (2013).

[9]Michael L. Ross, *"Does Oil Hinder Democracy?,"* World Politics 3 (2001).

[10]National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *"Global Terrorism Database,"* 2015, http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd.

Political violence pertains to all organized assaults against the political system, its actors within a political administration or regimes, this also extends to opposing political parties and or a rise against governmental policies.[11]A 1997 study, Lee, also clarified that there must be a desire to reform the political structure in order for violence to be regarded as political. Therefore, when the state feels threatened and turns to aggressive measures in order to defend itself; this leads another type of political violence which can be regarded to as state violence.[12] Furthermore, it was confirmed that political violence involves the use of force, generally but not always, physical or lethal force, to harm or kill human beings or non-human objects, but It could also come with the intention to maintain or alter a political organization, structure, government or policies. An act can account as an act of aggression, both when used to preserve and modify an already existing framework or arrangement.

The role of the operation of governmental institutions in the generation or suppression of this phenomenon is highlighted under conditions of political violence. Democracies are institutions that produce various frameworks for the prevention of violence, and these includes frequent elections, law enforcement agencies, court hearings.[13] The fact that violence still presents itself is generally often an indicator of significant flaws in the systems and institutions of democracy. In furtherance it indicates that a high degree of legitimacy is closely knitted with low rates of violence.[14] Lupsha and Mackinnon investigated 1404 cases of politically motivated use of violence.[15] The population was drawn based on reports published in the press and organizations involved in documenting national events in the US-press and research institutions; with the years 1965-1971 as the cut-off points. Violence is commonly seen in this approach as a mode of protest arising from blocked outlets of political participation.[16] It was observed that if people are unable to articulate their needs and desires through the legitimate political participation channels, they communicate them through channels of coercion, one of which is political violence.

In Glenn's opinion, America has a long history of political violence like other nations – a deep river of bloodshed, even savagery that runs through the whole national experience. The American conventional political violence dates back to the colonial period, in 1676 when Nathaniel Becon and a large number of Virginians

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[11] Ekkart Zimmermann, "*Political Violence Crises and Revolution"* (Routledge Revivals): Theories and Research , (Abingdon: Routledge , 2011).
[12] Oladipo Fashina, *"Frantz Fanon and the Ethical Justification of Anti–Colonial Violence,"*Social Theory and Practice15, no. 2 (1989).
[13] John Keane, "*Violence and Democracy* ",(Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[14] Bryn Hughes B*, "Political Violence and Democracy: Do Societal Identity Threats Matter? The Security and Politics of Identity"* (paper presented at the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Adelaide, (29 September – 1 October, 2004).
[15] Peter A. Lupsha andCatharine A. MacKinnon, *"A Sociocultural Perspective on the Nature of Political Violence . Domestic Political Violence, 1965-1971: A Radical Perspective,"* in *Violence as Politics*, ed. H. Hirsch and D. C. Perry ,(New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973).
[16]Steven E. Barkan and Lynne L.Snowden, "*Collective Violence* " ,(Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001).

rose up in armed revolt against the colony's royal governor. Several other violent uprisings took place in late 17th century against colonial authorities in New York and Maryland.

In furtherance, America in the same vein as Africa has a lot of historical background which indicates youthful violence as far back as the early 1770's, when Ethan Allen, the Vermont patriot, led his Green Mountain Boys into aggressive confrontations with New Yorkers over territorial disputes; while Connecticut Yankees fought with Pennsylvania over the territorial dominance of Susquehanna River settlements.[17] While in his research which focused on political violence in America, "Civil Strife in the United States," it was reported that there existed close to around 4381 people lost their lives in political disputes in America during the 20th century; and people between the range of 4700-5000 people were killed in racial conflicts, while 622 people were killed in labor disputes.

While America's history of political violence may vary from Africa's, but it does have some strong similarities. As Africa's political violence is traced to the legacy of the colonial period quite like America's history of political violence has a connection to the colonial era.[18] The constitution which regulates the electoral process of any nation could be said to establish the political structure of such country. Elections are known to make a huge quota of contribution to the stabilizing of a political system.[19]

Therefore, most national governments, in developing countries use political violence to quell any uprisings from their opposition owing to the major fact that they don't want to leave the seat of power, this is also applicable to various nations in the Middle East region, Africa and Asia. The Political violence in Egypt was one that saw several state institutions such as the police, the military, and the judiciary, act as a means of political repression; on the other hand, political violence is also being perpetrated by non-state actors as indicated by,[20] such as the repeated bombings that incessantly went on throughout the country since President Mursi's downfall.

3.   Arab uprising

The "Arab Uprising" is an incident which is the latest one to epitomize a process of noteworthy evolutions in the nature of politics; it extends across vast geographical confines. According to Haynes,[21] it came into existence subsequent to the third wave of democracy (which was around the middle stages of the 1970s and later parts of 1990s), following the two earlier waves. When considered as a whole, it is seen that the three democratic waves propagated democracy into parts

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[17]W.L.Glenn, *"Our Permanent Culture of Political Violence,"* last modified March 2011, http://www.salon.com/2011/10/11/lafantasie_political_violence/.

[18]Ibid.

[19]E. M. Ngaji, *"Managing Political Violence in Nigeria,"* in Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Issues & Perspectives, ed. A. B. F. E. S. N. Olasupo (Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003).

[20] Maged Mandour, *"Political Violence and State Repression in Egypt,"* Carnegie Middle East Analysis, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/60985.

[21]Jeffrey Haynes, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Democratization* (London: Routledge, 2012).

of the world where forms of undemocratic systems of politics were being practiced. Although, these parts do not consist of the Arab nations of the Adriatic region nor the Middle Eastern and Northern African regions on a more general note. Lewis,[22] in an attempt to elucidate on the aforementioned point, directs attention to the fact that, whilst partially excluding Lebanon, Arab countries also happen to be Muslim countries, by and large. From this statement, we can infer that the author is insinuating that Islam is associated with some doctrines that do not comply with the concept of democratization. However, Fuller[23] have alternative perspectives of the issue; they are of the opinion that the position of being Islamic is actually not the barrier, further stating that the real problem is seen from the perspective that Arab nations possess structural traits developed through history that encourage an anti-democratic behavior. Halliday[24] contends that in the Arab region of the world, the perceptible hindrances to democracy are associated primarily with some social and political features which they commonly follow; this somewhat negates the view of the previous author as it stresses on the acts not being as a result of Islam. Some things that can act as obstacles are prolonged periods of dictatorial regimes, weakened and unorganized civil societies, and self-serving political parties, in the scenarios that they exist. Even as they may attempt to make some of the features being discussed above authentic and embedded in their state laws using an ambiguous "doctrine from Islam" – to conceal their true motive – there is usually nothing particularly Islamic to it, in actuality. In a study by Karl,[25] it is stated that the Arabic/Islam world is typified by "a culture of expressionism, and political passivity which directly goes against the ethics and principles of democracy"; this is due to a series of structural and historical events and occurrences that shape their decisions and behavior. Also Fattah,[26] placing a great deal of focus on the Arab region and its constituent nations, asserts that there is no question that Muslim countries are disproportionately autocratic … no single Muslim country qualifies today as a consolidated democracy …"

Three principal worldviews (Islamic to be exact), have a substantial amount of influence on the topics of governance and religion– this is inclusive of the behavioral tendencies they show to democracy and its tenets in the Arab or Muslim nations (which also comprises of those ones located within the Adriatic region), as stated by Fattah.[27] The aforementioned worldviews which would be discussed further are the (Muslim) "Secularists,""Traditionalist" Islamist and the Modernist "Islamists." Essentially, the "Traditionalist" Islamists are of the perception that they are the ones who uphold the historical traditions of Islam, which they believe would linger for eternity; this, they do with two beliefs as the focal point of the whole

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[22] Bernard Lewis, *"Islam and Liberal Democracy," The Atlantic Monthly*27, no. 2 (1993) .
[23] Graham E. Fuller, *"The Future of Political Islam," Foreign Affairs*81, no.2 (2002) .
[24] Fred Halliday, *"The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology"*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[25] Terry Lynne Karl, *"The Hybrid Regimes of Central America,"* Journal of Democracy 6, no. 3 (1995).
[26] Moataz A. Fattah, *Democratic Values in the Muslim World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006).
[27]Ibid, 4-5.

idea. The beliefs are declared thus: the concepts of politics and religion are interwoven and as a result cannot be regarded individually; and that the Sharia Law be applicable to every Muslim person. According to the Traditionalist Islamists, in order for something to be truly regarded as "Islamic," it is imperative that it is within the acceptable limits of the Sharia law and the Muslim clerics who are known as *Ulama*. Democracy of the Western –style liberal sort is considered to be against the standards and norms of Islam. There is however an additional, less significant conviction which points to the existence of a conspiracy that is composed of western imperialists and Zionists who intend to usurp the authority of Muslims over lands, and petroleum resources in their possession.

4.   Terrorism in Yemen

The conflict between the UN security council recognized Yemeni government under the leadership of President Abd Rabiu Mansour Hadi and the Iran backed Houthi militants have created a void, and several terrorist groups have exploited the political and security vacuum left unguarded by the conflicting parties to wreak havoc on the Yemeni populace, reports from the American bureau of counterterrorism have it that some of this terrorist groups are backed and supported by the Iranian government. However, in this section of the study the literatures relating to the cases of the Al Qaeda (AQAP), the Islamic State (IS) and the Salafi militants will be analyzed.

4.1 Al Qaeda

According to the Stanford University,[28] Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (known for short as AQAP) was founded in 2009, this was subsequent to the amalgamation of the Saudi and Yemeni divisions of Al Qaeda in reaction to the attempts of Counterterrorism made by Saudi Arabia; the Saudi Branch was forced to move across the border and into Yemen.[29]The first set of Jihadist organizations from which the AQAP came into being, was comprised of a certain number of fighters who came back from Afghanistan between the periods of the later parts of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s after they had engaged in battle with the Soviets. In the midst of these fighters, there were some jihadists who hailed from foreign countries [Osama bin Laden also happened to be in this faction], advocated for Yemen to occupy a vital position in the global jihad movement. In accordance with report made by the Council on Foreign Relations in 2015, the Saleh regime utilized the groups mentioned above to wage war, in the initial stage against the Yemen government who had the support of the Soviets at the time, and afterwards with the secessionists who occupied the southern region. At the moment, the AQAP is spearheaded by Qasim al-Raymi, who assumed position in June 2015 after the

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[28] Mapping Militant Organizations. *"Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula."* Stanford University. Last modified February 2020.https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula
[29]Dylan O'Driscoll, *"Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Yemen,"*K4D Helpdesk Report (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 2017).

former leader, Nasir al-Wuhayshi died in a drone strike by the US. Also the chief bomb maker of the AQAP, in the person of Ibrahim al-Asiri, is a significantly high ranking member of the terrorist organization; as bombs are usually an integral part of the group's activities, according to the Counter Extremism Project, In a bid to broaden its pull domestically and detach the local group from the organization's international brand – an action perceived as a tool for the facilitation of the regime by the Yemenis – the AQAP set up a similar group in 2011.[30] As the regime of the President Saleh of Yemen was about to come to a close, the chaotic status of the political environment was preyed upon by the AQAP; who did so by instigating insurgent activities in the Southern Part of Yemen. In the end, they seized outright control of that territory in 2011. AQAP were no longer in control of the territory following the removal of Saleh whose place was taken by the interim President Hadi, early in 2012. The AQAP took advantage of the void created in the political system by the Civil war which broke out in February of 2015 and ended in March (the same year), and created some sort of quasi-state of its own in the southern territory. The hold and dominance of AQAP has been bolstered by the withdrawal of Western intelligence forces from the country – over matters of the safety of the citizens.[31]

With estimates from the US State Department in 2015, the fighters of the AQAP's forces are thought to have figures around 4,000. As stated in 2017 by the International Crisis Group, the great amount of attention given to the Houthi rebels has worked in favor of AQAP, by giving them the opportunity to take over the territory for prolonged periods; a time in which they were able to improve their weaponry, garner funds, and recruit individuals for their cause. In the al-Mahfad area of the Abyan Province, the southern part of Yemen is where AQAP's primary fortress is situated; also, a major portion of the training camps they have are based here. On the other hand, they also have training camps located in the provinces of Hadramawt, Marib, and Shabwa. A greater part of the security forces was preoccupied with the activity of combating the Houthi rebels in the north, as a result of the civil war in Yemen. This occurrence has created a vacuity with which AQAP act out their operations in the southern region. By means of making security and public services available to the local population, AQAP has been able to achieve a partial status of legitimacy. In contrast to the actions of IS who have coerced the people in Iraq and Syria into submitting to them, AQAP has applied a different approach by making an attempt towards gaining the trust of the district by availing them with the infrastructure and services they lack (Counter Extremism Project, 2016).[32] The control of AQAP over the territory is being alternated by the day –

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[30]International Crisis Group, *"Yemen's al-Qaeda: Expanding the Base,"* ICG Report, 2017,https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/59ad50b540f0b6616a1cbd68/154-156-Violent-Extremism-and-Terrorism-in-Yemen.pdf.
[31]Counter Extremism Project. *"Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula"* (AQAP) (2016), https://stanford.app.box.com/s/t1d32ch1kwfljdw8ev22d9hqldf0k5l5
[32] Ibid.

between them and the government, chiefly. Nonetheless, the following three maps from February, March and June, observed in that order, further elucidate and provide an enhanced comprehension of the presence of AQAP in Yemen.

From AQAP's viewpoint, the Islamic State (IS) is regarded as direct rivalry, the leaders of AQAP have openly censured IS and its activities, also heavily criticizing the IS's attacks on mosques. Then again, they have given commendations to the parties who made declarations of acting in the interests of the Islamic State in the west. Instead of cooperating in any form, both parties are in contention for the same followers and recruits. In line with the position of the,[33] AQAP is known to have connections with the Salafi groups; the modus operandi of the said affiliations is being placed under scrutiny.

4.2 Islamic State (IS)

The presence of the Islamic state in Yemen was first publicized in November 2014, as soon as a group of fighters, via an audio recording online, pledged their commitment to the leader of IS, al-Baghdadi. It was not until later in that month that the leader, al-Baghdadi corroborated the establishment of an affiliate of the IS in Yemen. Afterwards, the IS has acted on that and created a presence for itself in some Sunni-controlled territories of Sanaa, Aden, Hadramawt, Lahji, al-Bayda, Taizz and Shabwah. It was reported that there was a conflict in the higher ranks within the AQAP with respect to the issue of Leadership at the period in time when the IS entered into Yemen; the IS however looked to exploit this issue in order to obtain backing. According to Kuoti,[34] information about the leadership of the IS's Yemen branch is very scarce, Nashwan al-Adeni is however the most prominent of its leaders. Ideology and Goals: Consistent with the ideologies of the Islamic State generally, the IS affiliate in Yemen dogmas are concerned with establishing a caliphate that has worldwide recognition and influence, and the marshalling of Muslims to take part in the Jihadist movement against unbelievers based in the West and purported renegade states in the Muslim circle. In accordance with the study of Kuoti,[35] for the reason of the border it shares with Saudi Arabia, Yemen is extremely vital to the IS for the performance and completion of its strategic plan – also on the basis of religious significance to the group. At the same time, they do not enjoy the same amount of support that AQAP does, especially seeing as the approach taken by the IS – as observed from their massacres of people and bombing of mosques – is not in conformity with what is expected by societal and traditional customs. In that correspondence, the Yemen affiliate of the Islamic State, has come in contact with some challenges in the mold of rebellions occurring within the organization, and the public departure of over hundreds of their members who professed that the IS was acting in desecration of the Sharia law

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[33]International Crisis Group,"Yemen's."
[34]Yasir Yosef Kuoti, *"Islamic State in Yemen,"* Terrorism Monitor 14, no. 24 (2016).
[35] Ibid.

with their activities in Yemen.[36] On the word of Arrabyee,[37] the IS in Yemen looks to make the Aden-Abyan province to function as its capital in this nation. As it stands, the Islamic state's strategies in Yemen are built around wreaking vicious havoc to the greatest possible extent; and in a quest to attain this aim, they have made use of numerous makeshift explosive devices, multiple targeted exterminations, and suicide onslaughts. Even as they have directed their attacks at Houthi Mosques on some occasions, the assaults of in Yemen by the Islamist State have been majorly targeted at the Yemeni security forces. Completely contradicting the AQAP, trying to acquire the control of territory in Yemen is not in the immediate plans of the IS.[38]

Unlike AQAP, IS in Yemen does not attempt to provide the local population with services and also criticizes AQAP for focusing on soft power rather than on global jihad.[39] IS in Yemen is seen as far more brutal than AQAP and as a result they can be said to be more successful in areas driven by sectarianism, such as the Yemeni southern port city of Aden. Many of IS' members have experience in Iraq and Syria and they use the same tactics of a well knitted network of informant and local propagandists who tips them off when the need arises. IS routinely uses suicide bombings at military recruitment centers and crowded gatherings of men of the armed forces collecting salaries.[40]Although IS does not control territory in Yemen, it does operate training camps in areas in the south. IS has gradually also been gaining approval in some areas controlled by the houthis in northwest Yemen, as Salafi groups turn to them following defeat by the Houthi faction.[41]

Like AQAP, IS has used the chaos of the battle between the government/coalition forces and the Houthis to increase its operations in Yemen. Correspondingly, as IS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, it is likely that more of its operations will move to countries like Yemen where the dynamics make it easier to operate.[42] However, the maps below demonstrate that IS' operations in Yemen decreased in 2016 when compared to 2015.

4.3 Salafi Militias

For a while now, a number of Salafi groups have taken Yemen as a domicile, albeit they were both not involved in politics and peaceful before the war took place. The amount of knowledge currently available on the mode of operation of the Salafi groups is very little, since the IS and AQAP are largely more predominant. Be that as it may, in reaction to the expansion of the Houthi around the southern area, the Salafi groups have begun to launch far-reaching attacks.[43]

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[36]International Crisis Group,"Yemen's."
[37] Nasser Arrabyee, *Rising Extremism in Yemen; Riyadh's Support for Militants Fighting the Houthis has Greatly Benefited Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Yemen* (Sada, 2016).
[38]Kuoti, *"Islamic."*
[39] Ibid.
[40]International Crisis Group,"*Yemen's."*
[41]Arrabyee, "*Rising".*
[42]Kuoti, "Islamic."
[43] O'Driscoll, "Violent."

Rebels from a certain religious institute located in Kitaf, Saada and the Dar al-Hadith religious institute situated in Dammaj, also in Saada have pooled their resources together and have taken their ammunitions against the Hothis on several fronts.[44] As a result of the coalitions they have built and the support they got from the Saudi-led alliance, the Salafis have seen their level of prominence increase. In Aden, for instance, coupled with the support the United Arab Emirates is giving them, they function as state-endorsed unconventional security agencies. In a bid to drive into Saada, the sanctuary of Houthis, in October 2016, the al-Medhar Brigade (in 2015, they served as a local security agency), situated in the districts of Sheikh Othman and Mansoura, linked up with other Yemeni forces that had Saudi backing to cross the border. Another UAE supported agency (albeit a Militia) – with Nabil Mashwashi as their leader –, the Security Belt forces which was brought into existence by a presidential edict in May 2016 to assist with keeping Aden safe, has a notable Salafi constituent.[45] More often than not, the Salafis can be seen at the pole position of the attempts of the Coalition led by the Saudi to thwart the assaults of the Houthis; there are also some parties whose alliances change on a continual basis. The Salafi and other partisan militias have been incorporated into the Yemeni army, officially and in name only whilst still standing as an independent group in actuality.[46]

The Salafi groups are specifically operational in Taiz, the third largest city in Yemen; a place where the forces of the Salafi are believed to occupy the largest portion of resistance alliance formed to combat the Houthi. In accordance with Kalfood,[47]consequently, the fact that the Salafis go to battle, surrounded by the other forces that make up the coalition, it is a hurdle to estimate how much they are; but a known fact they are rapidly gaining prominence in the region.

5.   Discussion and Results

Since around early 2015, Yemen has been engulfed in turmoil. Before the conflict escalated, Yemen was already the most indigent and poverty-stricken nations amongst the Middle Eastern nations and even the Northern African region, Yemen is presently suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis according to the United Nations Organization. Wars have ravaged the economy, ruined vital infrastructure, and reduced food shortages to the very verge of famine: in 2019, the UN reported that 24.1 million people—80% of the population — were "at risk" of hunger and disease, and about 14.3 million of the above population were in urgent need of aid.[48]

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[44]International Crisis Group,"Yemen's."

[45] Ibid.,174.

[46] Ibid.,175.

[47] Mohammed Ali Kalfood, *"In Yemen, Saudi-Led Intervention Gives Rise to New Armed Religious Faction,"* The Intercept, last modified April 27, 2016, https://theintercept.com/2016/04/26/in-yemen-saudi-led-intervention-gives-rise-to-new-armed-religious-faction/.

[48]World Bank, *"Yemen; Country Outlook,"* 2020https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-april-2020.

Approximately 17.8 million people lacked safe water and sanitation, and 19.7 million appears to lack proper healthcare. As a direct consequence, widespread outbreaks of preventable diseases such as cholera, diphtheria, measles, and Dengue Fever have been faced by Yemeni. Waves of currency devaluation in 2018 and 2019 generated inflationary pressure that have worsened the humanitarian crisis, and disruptions to public infrastructure and financial services severely affected private-sector operation.

It is estimated that more than 40 per cent of the Yemeni citizenry lost their primary sources of making ends meet and thus find it hard to buy even the minimum amount of food. The Poverty situation in the country is getting worse by the day: while prior to the crisis, nearly half of the country's population of around 29 million were poverty stricken, it presently affects an estimated three-quarters of it—71% to 78% of Yemenis. Women are worst hit than men.[49]

The economic and social prospects are unclear, both in 2020 and beyond, focusing closely on the political and security situation. Recently, the combined risks of ongoing violence, COVID-19 spread, intense flooding, and locusts drive the nation closer to catastrophe. Food accessibility is a rapidly growing danger to household welfare, as pre-existing global food price rises and the Yemeni rial's depreciation interacts with food exporters' trade restrictions aligned with COVID-19.[50]

Yemen's reliance on imports is growing due to the effect of desert locusts on the cropping season. A discontinuation of violence and a glitter of hope for political reconciliation and the rehabilitation of key state institutions will strengthen the private sector's operating environment, enabling the rehabilitation of the economy and reestablishing the social fabric of the country.

Iran is economically strained and yet overwhelmingly allocates its assets to finance the projection of power through Lebanon to Yemen by supporting several uprisings in the aforementioned nations. And by so doing, they have proved to be experts at leveraging faulty lines between Arab countries and within them. The "status quo" forces of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)'s– which is led by the Saudi Arabians – and have tried to respond using less passive but even more assertive measures. Yet we've seen a schism in the Gulf as regards issue concerning the Iranian in recent years, as Oman, Kuwait and – particularly since June 2017 – Qatar have struck a more reconciliatory tone in the proceedings of affairs[51].

As a result of the American nation no longer eager to address long-staying overseas military intervention and deployments, The Saudis have responded by channeling more and more attention and energy and resource to its own armedforces capabilities following the removal of the security umbrella of "Pax

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ribale Sleiman-Haidar, *"Saudi Arabia and Iran beyond Conflict and Co-existence?,"* Middle East Centre (London School of Economics (Houghton Street London, 2018).

Americana" The Saudi Arabians have announced that their current stance will not change until Iran discontinues attempting to destabilize the gulf region, a feat the present Saudi administration feel will only happen through regime change.[52]

Whereas from the Iranian perspective, the nation is considered as an ancient regional force to reckon with, one which is traditionally powerful and urged to continue to maintain that feat. Post-1979 governments in this regard were merely managers – rather than significant shapers – of the Iranian foreign policy as they bask in maintaining an existing status quo. Like most other sovereign nations, Iran participates in power politics, but the significant difference is that the Iranian state (since 1979) have had little or no interest in participating in international politics or being any international community's member. Although Iran wants economic engagements, and access to foreign trade channels, Iran clearly maintains a clear separation between these activities and dealings of a political nature; a reflection of their political Islamic ideology. Neither has the nation involved itself in exchanging information or expertise with other nations within the gulf region on issues that hinge on national security.

Saudi Arabia has tried severally to engage in coalitions and alliances since its establishment in 1932, in a bid to expand their regional clout. Today, the Middle East region of the world is comparable to Europe of the eighteenth century given that there exists an excess of powerful nation state forces in the region (Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and Iran), every one of them striving to be amongst the dominate forces if not the only ones. Only six percent of trade takes place within the region, ensuring constant conflict as history shows that stability depends on economic interdependence. Seeing this, Iran may try to "leave" the Middle Eastern region in the coming years, and go back to its original inclination to look to economic advancement outside the region.[53]

Iran's increasingly ideological foreign policy stems not from a crave for isolation from the rest of the region or a rigid philosophy, but from the institutional divide between the state and the government of Iran. The former – represents the agencies that are under the Supreme Leader's direct control – they form the overall domestic and foreign policy structure, while the government that was elected is quite merely responsible for upholding such policies. The current administration wants to establish to the global community, but the state seeks for the order it has built to be preserved (maintaining balance of things). In essence, the foreign policy of Iran can be explained to be a reflection of its domestic politics; there's only a slight adjustment in the latter (where subtle issues such as the education, environment, and inflation can put a level of pressure on the state) can lead to a newer direction in the former, that is the state being influenced by the government.[54]

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[52] Ibid.,6.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 7.

The intervention of Iran in the neighboring countries is placed under examination – most particularly in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen – it is observed that in their experiences of intermediation, Iran has fallen back on three key thoughts, which are thought to form the schemes with which Iran would realize their objectives of making their way into the region and broadening the scope of control and domination it exerts over the region.[55] The thoughts are discussed below:

Firstly, by way of its operations in Yemen, Iran intends to its hegemony in Yemen, due to the fact that Yemen is strategically positioned and the geopolitical influence in that sphere. Iran is of the mindset that by allying with the Houthis, as well as acquiring military and political backing from them, in order to strengthen the role, they occupy at the forefront of the authority in Yemen; so that they can consequentially expand their control and hegemony in the region. To do this, Iran set up a base close to a strategic, crucial international corridor; to give them jurisdiction over the traffic in the Strait of Bab Mandab and the Gulf of Aden – which serves as a geographical bridge that links the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean in the Red Sea to the Suez Canal. This passage way is taken to be the central waterway of the oil circulating throughout the world.[56] In this model, Iran works towards transmogrifying the Houthis (Ansarullah) into a political and military authority that would hegemonize Yemen's political procedure. To achieve this, Iran plans to recreate the event that occurred in Lebanon with Hezbollah, in which Beirut was usurped by military supremacy in 2008 and then reached a consensus with the opposition (in terms of political power) to sign a new contract for distribution of jurisdiction; and create a new governance which would see the party have veto power over all its decisions.[57]

Secondly, Among the most vital goals of Iran's intervention in Yemen, is the plan to clandestinely, strategically and progressively subvert the neighbors around that region and constrain their influence; the scheme originates from its perception that an expansion of the Iran's control in Yemen would result in a corresponding decrease in the influence of the Arab Gulf states, Saudi Arabia in particular. To that end, Iran has the intention of encouraging its Houthi confederates to debilitate the link between Yemen and its neighbors and also impede any potential actions or complementary plans between Yemen and its regional neighbors which might lead to the unfavorable (for Iran) bolstering of the Gulf States' influence in Yemen and the region, on the whole. Provided that Iran fails to succeed with this objective, it would act in the direction of impelling Yemen towards more disagreements, bedlam and disintegration; in order to give room for further penetration by Iran into Yemen

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[55]Hassan Al-Qadhi, "*The Iranian role in Yemen and its implications on the Regional Security"* (Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies,2017).

[56] Amal Mudallali, *"The Iranian Sphere of Influence Expands into Yemen,"* Foreign Policy, last modified October 8, 2014, https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/08/the-iranian-sphere-of-influence-expands-into-yemen/.

[57] Ibid.

and to pose a threat to the stability and security to the nations with which Yemen shares borders. Iran believes that if it is unable to broaden its hegemony and improve the benefits it enjoys from the region by establishing a pro-Iranian political system in the southern parts, at the very least, or in Yemen overall; it must then attempt to inflict more damage on Yemen. It aims to do this by completely undermining the Yemeni State by hampering its capacities, so that it becomes of no use to its neighbors and a danger to them; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to be specific – to which Yemen is strategically beneficial and vital.[58]

Thirdly, in the Yemeni environment, the role played by Iran is enlisted under: the larger range of the policy it enforces on the region in order to keep its control over Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, to start with; its nuclear and missile programs; and on a final note, the affiliation it has with the Americans. On the basis of this policy, Iran ardently feels that by taking up active, aggressive, foreign policies and the extension of its influence and intervention over the regional neighbors (Yemen, to be particular, seeing the importance of the nation being strategically located), it can compel the US into acknowledging its interests, acceding to Iran as a central actor in the region and therefore permitting it to take up bigger responsibilities. Additionally, by toughening up its coalition with Ansarullah and increasing the political and military support it gets, Iran looks to create a bargaining chip, akin to what is obtainable in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria, in Yemen to better its reputation when it comes to negotiations with the US and its ability to handle pressurization by the US and allies who are concerned with curbing the domination of Iran in the region and its goal to secure nuclear military technology – and enhancement of its proficiency to utilize long-range missiles. Iran's goal in Yemen is to incorporate the Houthis into its treaty or regional affiliation which comprises of Bashar Assad's reign in Syria, numerous Shiite organizations present in Iran, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran has however made threats to utilize the partnership to cause more harm to America (and those allied with America in the region) interests if they pressurize Iran; or if it happens that both parties resort to a military clash as a consequence of the situations that may ensue in Iran's deal on nuclear weapons, especially considering how the policies vary with changes in administration of the US.[59]

Finally, one of the most significant goals of Iran's role and intervention in Yemen, and in some other nations, lies in its aspiration to realize success on the external setting in order sustain the events occurring on the inside of Iran's regime. It is clear that there is a connection between the interference of Iran in the affairs of other nations and the region, and its internal situation – which is becoming progressively detrimental to the nation and has resulted in the legitimacy of the regime being substantially diminished. In addition, there is a predicament in

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[58] Ibid.,32–33.
[59] Ibid., 33–34.

confidence taking place between the social sectors in Iran and the regime.[60] By strengthening the backing it offers to factions that share a common doctrine and ideology in countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Syria, the Iranian regime has a working policy for interference in order to conceal the issues they are going through internally. The Iranian reign also enlist these groups for the same purpose; in carrying out its regional schemes that would alleviate the situations induced by the decrepit political lawfulness and strengthen the internal conditions of the country. As seen from the economic status of the nation, the citizens seem to be dissatisfied with the fact that the regime has not recorded any form of success in its endeavor to tackle socio-economic issues; problems which include a surge in the level of poverty, unemployment, the decline of development rates, inflation and the deterioration of the people's standard of living. These difficulties have been worsened due to the restrictions levied on Iran on grounds of the nuclear programs it had been conducting; and also, by the fall in oil prices. From a political viewpoint, it can be inferred that the mutinous system of government in Iran is undergoing a deep cataclysm on the internal level, especially seeing as the principles and ethics it has declared is not consistent with the practices performed in actuality, as well as the expanding lacuna existing between the reign and broad aspects of the Iranian culture.[61]

6.   Conclusion

From the foregoing discourse it is obvious that Iran's influence on the festering of the political violence in Yemen is telling but the Iranian's interference cannot be pegged as the only causal variable in the political violence and instability going on in Yemen, because the Yemeni situation has also been affected by some other factors amongst which are the battle for regional hegemony between archrivals Saudi Arabia and Iran, the religious schisms existing in the country, militancy (and the perpetual struggle for power), more so Yemen's socio-economic standing has also given room for dependence on external influence.

As it stands Iran's influence appears to have had a rather detrimental effect not only on the polity but also on Yemen's substructure, hence it is safe to say that this interference has done more harm than good, with the state of affairs in Yemen there might be some concerns over the safety of humanitarians and social aid workers – Though this was not within the scope of this particular study. Not withstanding factoring such an element could go a long way in having a better understanding of the situation in Yemen particularly as it concerns governance

Again, weighing on Iran's inclination to keep pressing on their political Islamist ideology in a host of nations within the gulf region – of which Yemen is very much inclusive – and with the unyielding Yemeni government's effort in sustaining its sovereignty, the situation might remain unchanged for a long time to

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[60] Ibid., 34–35.
[61] Ibid.,34–35.

come. However, a redress can be sort with the international community acting as a mediator between the warring party and the constitutionally and globally recognized government on the negotiation table, such a move - if successful – could possibly reduce the influence of Iran on the Yemeni polity. It should however not go without saying that based on historical perspective achieving such a feat will be very difficult thus the future state of Yemen's polity is one that can be commendably predicted.

Going by the discussion in this review, it can be seen that where all these circumstances leave the entire Yemeni populace is yet to be adequately explored. it is therefore expedient that future research focuses on this particular area.

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