12-10-2019

Explaining the Sectarian Violence in the Middle East: a Conflict Analysis of the Case Study of Saudi Arabia and Iran

Ahmed Elsayed Eltally
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds

Part of the [Islamic Studies Commons](#), [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#), and the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Eltally, Ahmed Elsayed, "Explaining the Sectarian Violence in the Middle East: a Conflict Analysis of the Case Study of Saudi Arabia and Iran" (2019). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 5444.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.7317>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Explaining the Sectarian Violence in the Middle East:
A Conflict Analysis of the Case Study of Saudi Arabia and Iran

by

Ahmed Elsayed Eltally

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Conflict Resolution

Thesis Committee:
Harry Anastasiou, Chair
Vandy Kanyako
Robert Asaadi

Portland State University
2019

© 2019 Ahmed Elsayed Eltally

Abstract

The Middle East has been rife with conflicts, extremism, and sectarianism in recent decades. Many explanations attribute the rise of sectarianism in the Middle East to the historical divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims, while others attribute it to power or identity concerns. This thesis explores the factors that contributed to the rise of contemporary sectarianism in the Middle East through the case study of Saudi-Iranian rivalry. The literature on the history of the Middle East, Islam, theories of international relations, and conflict studies underlines how Saudi Arabia and Iran use sectarianism to further their interests. This research examines how key elements, including the rule of government, ideology, and economic interests, contribute to the escalation of the sectarianism. A Conflict Analysis Framework analyzes the conflict from five different dimensions: strategic, political, socioeconomic, psychological, and cultural. This framework and qualitative methods argue that the milestone events, such as the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Arab Spring uprisings, and the Iran Nuclear Deal, affect the geopolitics of the region. This study offers a multi-dimensional analysis, so policymakers can gain a better understanding of the geopolitics of the Middle East to work towards its stability.

Dedication

To those who dedicate their lives to a better and more peaceful world

&

To the Egyptian people, to whom I belong and for whom I work

Acknowledgments

First of all, all praises to Allah for His blessings and the strength to complete this thesis.

I would like to thank my thesis committee for constructive feedbacks and valuable guidance throughout the process. I had the privilege to work with diverse committee members from different backgrounds and areas of experience, which enriched my research and provided me with valuable resources. Dr. Harry Anastasiou, who recognized the importance of the research topic from my first class at the graduate school, and gave full backing to me. Dr. Vandy Kanyako who provided brilliant feedback during the paper's drafts. Dr. Robert Asaadi who was insightful and knowledgeable on my research topic.

This thesis would not have been accomplished without the much-appreciated guidance of the Conflict Resolution Graduate Program's staff, students, and professors. Special thank you to the program coordinator, Aislyn Matias, and the program director, Professor Patricia Schechter, for encouraging and supporting me during my study at Portland State University.

Also, I would like to thank the Middle East Studies Center at Portland State University, through which I had the opportunity to meet with many scholars who enriched my research, such as Professor Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, Dr. Harout Akdedian, and Professor Melani Cammett.

My debt of gratitude extends to my supportive family and friends, who have helped me stay motivated throughout this process. Being an international student, studying, and working fulltime is not an easy thing, but my family and friends' love and support always encouraged me and kept me focused.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Figures.....	vi
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	vii
Note on Transliteration.....	viii
Glossary	iv
Disclaimer.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.1 Background: Deciding on the topic.....	1
1.2 The necessity of the study.....	3
1.3 Scope and organization of the thesis	5
1.4 Problem statement	6
1.5 Research questions.....	6
Chapter 2: Methodology	
2.1 Research method.....	7
2.2 Theoretical framework.....	8
2.3 Limitations of research.....	10
Chapter 3: Literature Review	
3.1 Historical background on Sunni and Shia Islam.....	12
3.2 Saudi Arabia and Iran	16
3.2.1 The Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran).....	17
3.2.2 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.....	19
3.2.3 The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran.....	21
3.3 Supporting theories.....	24
3.3.1 The Harvard Approach of Negotiations	24
3.3.2 The Human Needs Theory	25
3.3.3 The Conflict Transformation Approach	25
3.3.4 Negative and Positive Peace	26
3.3.5 Bar-Tal's Theory of Intractable Conflict	26
3.3.6 Deterrence Theory	28
3.3.7 Enemies and Allies	28
3.3.8 Galtung's typology of violence.....	29
3.4 Religion and violence	30
3.5 The Battle of Karbala and the conflict supporting narratives	31
Chapter 4: Analysis	
4.1 Milestone events that have served to escalate and perpetuate sectarian conflicts.....	33
4.1.1 The Iranian Revolution	34
4.1.2 Iraq Invasion.....	38
4.1.3 The post-Arab uprisings	42
4.1.3.1 The response to the Arab uprisings	45

4.1.4 Iran Nuclear Deal	46
4.2 Religion as a political tool.....	48
4.3 Conflict Analysis Framework	49
4.3.1 The strategic dimension.....	50
4.3.2 The political dimension	53
4.3.3 The socioeconomic dimension	55
4.3.4 The psychological dimension	56
4.3.5 Cultural dimension	58
4.4 Stakeholder analysis.....	60
4.4.1 Lebanon	63
4.4.2 Hezbollah	64
4.4.3 Syria.....	66
4.4.4 Iraq	67
4.4.5 Yemen	68
4.4.6 Israel	69
4.4.7 United States	71
4.4.8 Russia	72
4.4.9 Egypt	73
4.4.10 Turkey	73
4.4.11 Gulf states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.....	75
4.4.11.1 The United Arab Emirates	75
4.4.11.2 Bahrain	76
4.4.11.3 Qatar	76
4.4.11.4 Sultanate of Oman	77
4.4.11.5 Kuwait	78
4.5 Conflict mapping	79
Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations.....	80
Figures.....	84
References.....	92

List of Figures

Figure 1 (Map of the Greater Middle East).....	84
Figure 2 (Map of Saudi Arabia).....	85
Figure 3 (Map of Iran).....	86
Figure 4 (Power Structure of Iran).....	87
Figure 5 (Royal Family Tree in Saudi Arabia).....	88
Figure 6 (Sectarian Balance of Power in the Middle East).....	89
Figure 7 (Shia Crescent).....	90
Figure 8 (Stakeholders Map).....	91

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IIG	Iraqi Interim Government
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Sham
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
STL	Special Tribunal for Lebanon
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Note on Transliteration

In transcribing Arabic and Persian into English, the plural of Arabic words has been marked by the addition of “S” to the singular. Also, the Arabic language, in particular, contains sounds that do not exist in English, and there are several ways of transliterating foreign words, such as spelling names of Hussein and the Islamic prophet’s name, Mohammed. I have chosen Mohammed and Hussein and stayed with theses spellings for the sake of consistency. Moreover, for the word Shia, there are many ways of writing this word, such as Shiite and Shi’a, but I have chosen this spelling, Shia, and I have stayed with it. I have employed the term Shia without distinguishing between the word as a noun and an adjective. Finally, all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Glossary

Ashura: the tenth day of the month of Muharram; commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein in A.D. 680

Alawi: a sect of Islam, an offshoot school of Shiism

Ayatollah: high ranking cleric, meaning “the sign of God.”

Ba’athist: belong to the Ba’ath party in Iraq

Caliph: the title for the ruler of the Islamic Ummah, a successor of Mohammed

Faqih: Islamic jurist, an educated cleric with an experience on religious law

Fatwa: religious pronouncement

Hajj: pilgrimage, one of the five pillars of Islam, during which Muslims go to Mecca

Hussainiyyat: Shia mourning houses, a community center for Shia, a mosque for Shia.

Ibadhi: Islamic school that is widely existed in Oman

Iftar: the meal when Muslims break their fast in the month of Ramadan

Jihad: means in Arabic “struggle,” used in the sense of holy war against infidels

Imam: one of the twelve recognized hereditary successors of the prophet Mohammed in Twelver Shia Islam. In Sunni Islam, the person who leads the prayers

Om Al-Moemeneen: a title given to Prophet Mohammed’s wives.

Rafidah: derogatory term for Shia referred to them as rejecters who “refuse the legitimacy of the Sunni Caliphs

Majlis: meeting, parliament

Sharia: religious law

Ulama: clergy

Ummah: Arabic word meaning “nation” or “community;” usually refers to the collective community of Muslim believers

Walit al-Faqih: guardianship of the Islamic jurist

Disclaimer

Twelver's branch of Shia: In my thesis, I will focus on the mainstream of Shia Islam, the Twelver's branch of Shia Muslims who believe in a line of twelve imams stretching from Ali to the twelve one (the Mahdi) who went on a state of occultation and he is expected to return one day in the last days of earth. Although there are different Shia subgroups, they all continue to share the belief in infallible imams, and the last Imam did not die but went into 'occultation' only to reappear at the end of times.

The definition of the Middle East: There are many terms to refer to the Middle East region, such as Near East, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the Greater Middle East. The Middle East that I mean in the scope of this thesis refers to the territory of southwest Asia and North Africa (see Figure 1).

The Persian Gulf: Is the shallow marginal sea of the Indian Ocean that lies between the Arabian Peninsula and southwestern Iran (see Figure 1). In the last decades, there is a dispute and controversy, especially in the Arab world, over the name of the Persian Gulf, which is commonly used in the western media, maps, scientific, geographic societies, and academic works. This term is rarely used in the Arab world as it reflects the hegemony of Iran, and it comes against Arab nationalism, which is competing with the Persian identity. In the context of my thesis, I use both terms interchangeably as there are some quotes that contain one of the terms.

Arab uprisings: There is a controversy over naming the demonstrations that swept some countries in the Middle East as revolutions or uprisings, and whether to name these demonstrations Arab Spring or not. In this thesis, I use the terms Arab uprisings, Arab Spring revolutions interchangeably.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background: Deciding on the topic

The Middle East region is of great importance due to its civilizations, diversity of cultures, geopolitical and geographic location, and availability of natural resources. Recently, this region has grabbed attention as an area of conflicts and a source of instability, failing governance structures and government services, rising extremism and sectarianism, the rise of non-state actors, high youth unemployment, the prolonged conflicts in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Palestine, and Yemen, and other threats facing the region. Also, there are many other factors that have impacted how things are going in this region, such as colonization, the Cold War, post 9/11, the 2011 wave of Arab uprisings, and many internal and external forces. In the recent decades, there has been a confrontation in the Middle East between Sunni and Shia Muslims, and many questions remain unanswered, such as what happened that transformed the relations between both sects toward conflict, and how to get out of the current situation and bring stability and coexistence to the relationships in the region.

The idea for this research was born in 2015, even before starting my graduate degree in September 2017, when I was participating in a leadership program in the United States. During this program, I was invited with other students to an iftar in the holy month of Ramadan in a mosque in Portland. When I arrived at the mosque, I figured out that it was a Shia Mosque. I was shocked by this fact, and I had to make up an excuse to my friends to leave immediately. During this situation, I remembered only what resonated in my mind when I used to hear the word “Shia.” Although I was 22 years old, I remembered the voice of the Imam of the Friday prayer when he always warned us against Shia and designated

them as enemies of Islam, who curse the prophet's companions and his wife, Aisha, who is considered a mother for all believers, Om Al-Moemeneen, as mentioned in the Holy Quran (Qur'an 33:6). I forgot this situation although I had a hard time justifying my decision to leave for my other colleagues, some of them were Shia from Iraq and Kuwait. The other perspective in my relation to the Sunni-Shia context is the requests I always receive on Facebook to vote against renaming the Arabic Gulf to the Persian Gulf.

Another situation that motivated my research interest is my working experience in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, where I lived and worked between Dammam, Al-Ahsa, Awamaya, and Al-Qatif, for nearly three years, where the majority of Saudi-Shia Muslims live, so my manager and most of the people I dealt with were Shia Muslims. On my first day in this job, a Sunni colleague talked to me in private and introduced me to the fact that we were in a company owned by a Shia Muslim, so keep religious issues out of conversations. Moreover, besides dozens of daily situations of Sunni-Shia interactions, I noticed that my Shia manager used to close his office door when he was praying, and sometimes he refused business deal from a customer whose name was Yazid, to which he seemed allergic. Furthermore, I witnessed the attacks on Shia mosques and the deadly attacks targeting mosques in May 2015 in Qatif and Dammam. Also, I witnessed the demonstrations and tensions following the execution of the prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in January 2016.

As a native of the Middle East region, I am aware of the polarization and the escalation of this problem and how it affects not only the region but also many different parts of the world. Finally, my personal experience living in Egypt, a majority Sunni-

Muslim country, and in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, with a majority of Shia Muslims, introduced me to different narratives and sparked my research interests to investigate this complex topic and brought so many questions to my mind about religious nationalism and the use of religion by politicians.

In an attempt to understand the situation in the Middle East, I shifted my career and started a master's degree in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies in which I took many classes, such as Nationalism and Ethnic Conflicts, Conflict Analysis for Resolution and Negotiations and Mediation, Dialogue across differences, the psychology of Conflict Resolution, and other relevant classes that provided me with the framework to analyze this conflict from multidisciplinary approaches.

Those experiences have given me a personal agenda that guides my research interest. The recent sectarian tensions have preoccupied me ever since, and I began to ask myself, as a Muslim and a researcher, whether Islam is inherently violent or not. How could I read the Holy Quran every day, a book which is full of mercy and peace, and have different interpretations of the verses? The need for further understanding of conflicts in the Middle East is essential, so we can explore ways to deal with them and contain or prevent the killing in the name of God.

1.2 The necessity of the study

It is worthwhile to examine the sectarian violence in the Middle East for many reasons. The first reason is the sheer number of killings. In the post-9/11 war on terror, according to Crawford (2018), the estimated total direct death toll from the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is at least 480,000- 507,000 people, more than 244,000 of

them civilians and hundreds of humanitarian workers and journalists. In addition, there are millions of indirect deaths, resulting from disease and displacement.

Also, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project (2017), the U.S. government has spent more than five trillion dollars on military efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria in the post-9/11 wars. Moreover, in 2014, Pew Research Center concluded in a report titled, "*Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High*" that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was the most common region that experienced sectarian violence.

Furthermore, the region's conflicts continue to destabilize economies, devastate the local populations, and influence the stability of other parts of the world. The current emergence of fundamentalist groups in the Middle East represents a security threat to other parts of the world, such as the United States and Europe. The Middle East represents a hub to export terrorism to other places in the world. This is evidenced by the terrorist attacks that hit Belgium in 2015, Spain in 2004, France in 2015 and 2017, and the United Kingdom in 2005 and 2017.

Another dimension about the Middle East is the sacred geography of all the three world religions that began there, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. There is perhaps no other region in the world that has drawn the continued attention of the world community as much as the Middle East, especially among the adherents of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Finally, the stability in the Middle East is crucial to secure the oil exportation and global trade routes that connect the east to the west. This thesis provides a comprehensive explanation of the sectarian conflicts in the Middle East, which

could help decision-makers understand the dynamics of the region and work towards its stability.

1.3 Scope and organization of the thesis

This paper provides a precise analysis of the current state of sectarian violence in the Middle East, including challenges and opportunities, with future possibilities and perspectives to move forward to a peaceful region.

In my research, a literature review, which aims to synthesize contributions from a variety of academic disciplines, is organized into several sections. My thesis begins with an analysis of the Sunni-Shia conflict in order to create a theoretical framework of the relations in this region and subsequently focuses on the religious dimension of the conflict. The literature, I chose to review, derives from the religious ideology of both Sunni and Shia and the perspectives of other scholars. This literature includes the examination of both sects (Sunni- Shia), their narrative, how their religious ideology connects to nationalism, and how they incorporate their fundamentalism into an approach to the conflict, including the use of violence. More specifically, the research examines the roots of the divide, historical triggers, and the external players. In addition, I address what happened during the Iraq invasion and post 9/11. In brief, my literature review focuses on the case study of Saudi-Iranian relations (the general history and the development of relations in the aftermath of 9/11) and how this case relates to the study of Conflict Resolution.

Moreover, this thesis examines the rise of sectarian violence in the Middle East in the last four decades, where political interests are tied to religion. The analysis focuses on the development of Saudi-Iranian relations as a case study. Also, this study aims to produce

knowledge and build meaning on the current state of affairs in the Middle East and how sectarian violence impacts the identity of the Middle East citizens and shapes a new reality in the region. Finally, the last section of this thesis offers some perspectives to deal with the current situation and move forward in a peaceful direction using Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution theories.

1.4 Problem statement

This thesis focuses on the factors that have escalated the relationship between Sunni and Shia into violence and the role played by Saudi Arabia and Iran in the conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the Middle East region during the last four decades.

1.5 Research questions

Throughout my research, there are many central questions which guide the study, such as:

- What factors have contributed to transforming the Saudi (Sunni)-Iranian (Shia) relationships into lethal conflicts in the Middle East region in the last four decades?
- What are pertaining factors, including the rule of government, the global actors in the region, ideology, economic interests, etc., that contributed to the escalation of the conflict?
- What is the role of religion in motivating and legitimating acts of violence?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research method

Given the complexity of the subject matter in this research and the number of research questions it raises, this research uses a qualitative and interpretive approach. It is based on the critical review of existing literature from a variety of academic fields, including but not limited to peace and conflict studies, politics, international relations, theology, history, security and terrorism studies, and social psychology. Besides, the analysis of scholars, political figures, religious leaders, and the press.

Leavy (2017) explains that qualitative research is an inductive approach to build knowledge and generate meanings, especially in my topic where there is a need to investigate and unpack the meanings, situations, and events to build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life. Also, the qualitative researcher uses content analysis to understand the meanings that circulate in texts and makes interpretations of the data and get the sense of the big picture.

Given the complexity of this research, this thesis uses the case study approach as an analytical approach to help the readers understand the conflict. George and Bennett (2005) define the case study approach as “a well- defined aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events by assessing complex relations, such as tipping points” (p. 5). Also, the case study allows the reader to be aware of the different socio-economic and historical contexts of the conflict. In addition, it identifies some of critical features and examines if and how the features intersect with each other.

Moreover, Bhattacharjee (2012) highlights the importance of case research in giving more contextualized, and more authentic interpretation of the phenomenon of interest than most other research methods. Also, the case study research approach offers multiple levels of analysis to the phenomenon of interest, particularly in complex relations, where there are multiple participants and interacting sequences of events (pp. 93–94).

Finally, it is essential to select a case study that is relevant to the research. This study examines the sectarian violence in the Middle East and how authoritarian regimes in the Middle East manage to consolidate power. This thesis offers a structured-focus comparison and rigorous exploration of the Saudi-Iranian relation transitions after certain milestones in the history of the relationships with a specific focus on the proxy wars that emerged in response to sectarian narratives in the post 9/11. This study explores the case of the Saudi-Iranian relationships in theoretical frameworks where central concepts, political and religious grievances, hostile interactions between political groups, and competition for power are discussed.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This research uses a conflict analysis framework developed by Matthew Levinger in his book; *Conflict Analysis: Understanding Causes, Unlocking solutions* in 2013. The framework includes a conflict assessment framework, conflict mapping, and stakeholder analysis in a way to understand the multi-dimensions of the conflict and develop effective peacebuilding strategies. Levinger (2013) identifies conflict assessment frameworks as “qualitative analytical tools to help forge a shared set of questions about the nature and potential trajectory of conflict and a shared vocabulary with which to discuss opportunities

for preventive actions” (p. 87). Also, he mentions that this framework provides an understanding of the area of consensus and critical disagreements.

Through this framework, the strategic, political, socio-economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the conflicts will be introduced with emphasis on the case study of this research, and it is supported by theories from different knowledge areas. Also, this research introduces the narratives of conflict’s stakeholders, Sunni and Shia Muslims, to gain insights into the conflict from both perspectives. Moreover, conflict mapping presents a graphical representation, which focuses on actors, their interrelationships, and the various dimensions of the conflict as a way to simplify the complexity of the conflict and to help anticipate the possible steps within the conflict.

Part of the framework is the stakeholders’ analysis, which is an integral part of this research. Grimble and Wellard (1997) mention that stakeholders might include individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, societies, policymakers, government officials, businesses, companies, future generations, and the national interest. Also, the World Bank Group (n. d.) highlights the importance of understanding and analyzing each stakeholder’s position, the power or the level of influence, the level of interest, and the affiliation of the group. Moreover, stakeholder analysis is beneficial to policymakers who can use it to identify key actors and to assess their knowledge, interests, positions, alliances, and importance related to the policy.

Finally, Levinger (2013) identifies conflict mapping tool as “a graphical representation of various dimensions of a conflict that seeks to illuminate a conflict’s dynamics, evolution, and scope” (p. 135). Moreover, a conflict map helps the reader

visualize the dynamics of the conflict through synthesizing information and identifying the main actors among the system. There are different types of conflict mapping techniques such as geospatial mapping, temporal mapping, and relational mapping, but I use the relational mapping in this thesis.

2.3 Limitations of research

Regarding the methodology of this research, George and Bennett (2005) identify the limitations of a case studies approach, such as bias. Bias is evident when researchers sometimes deliberately choose cases that share a particular outcome to prove their theory and argument. Moreover, regarding the stakeholder analysis, my research is limited by the timeframe when writing this thesis. Stakeholder analysis should be done regularly as the stakeholders' power and interest may change quickly, or the number of stakeholders may change. Also, Ambler and Wilson (1995) highlight some other limitations associated with the stakeholder theory, such as determining the stakeholder, confusion of the purpose, or measure the stake.

Furthermore, Bhattacharjee (2012) mentions that qualitative analysis depends on the skills, experiences, and knowledge of the researchers. The more the researcher is aware of the context of the data, the more the researcher could produce better work. With this point in mind, my analysis and conclusions are not entirely neutral even if I recognize all expressed interests, values, and concerns as legitimate.

There are other limitations. First of all, most of the Muslim sources related to Conflict Resolution are written in Arabic, and it is hard to translate the Arabic texts to English and keep the same meaning, although I am a native Arabic speaker. As a result, I

depend on professional translations of the texts. Also, there are time constraints of this thesis because such research needs a much deeper understanding of the problem. Another limitation of this study is that I am not a speaker of Farsi, and considering that many sources on the Shia Muslims are in Persian, so I depend on professional translations and Persian authors who are fluent in English. Finally, as a Sunni Muslim, I may have a bias towards one sect when doing the analysis, so I follow the framework, methodology, and introduce the narratives of both sides using credible sources.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

For the comprehensive literature review, I locate the existing scholarly works into three categories. First, a brief historical overview of the divide and the development of relations between Sunni and Shia Muslims will be introduced. I focus on the last four decades, starting in 1979, which marks the Iranian Revolution. Second, I analyze the relationship between religion and violence. Third, I elaborate on the case study of my thesis, the Saudi- Iranian relationships. Also, I incorporate the Conflict Resolution and international relations literature with many theories that cover the interdisciplinary approach of my thesis and explain each side's narratives, how their narratives connect to nationalism, and how each side incorporates religious identity into their politics.

3.1 Historical background on Sunni and Shia Islam

To understand the intractable conflicts in the Middle East, particularly the sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni Muslims, we need to look back to history and the development of relations between both sects. The next few pages illuminate some of the brief historical dimensions and focus on some specific points for the sake of the scope of this thesis.

In brief, the divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims goes back to the seventh century, when the Prophet Mohammed died in A.D. 632 without appointing a successor or informing the Muslim community about the process of choosing a successor. At that time, the Muslim community divided into two groups over the leadership of the nascent Muslim nation. On the one hand, one group claimed that the successor of the prophet should be elected from among the prophet's companions, so based on this opinion, this group elected

Abu Bakr, a close friend, advisor, and father-in-law to the prophet, to become the first successor or Caliph of the Muslim nation. On the other hand, a second group claimed that the successor of the prophet should be from his bloodline, so this group thought that Ali, the prophet's cousin and his son-in-law, should be the Caliph (Halm, 2007; Hazleton, 2010; Haider, 2014; Hashemi & Postel, 2017; Momen, 1985). The first group now is called Sunni. The word "Sunni" in Arabic means one who follows the traditions of the Prophet. The second group is called "Shia," which means in Arabic, a group, or a supportive party of people or partisans. Also, Blanchard (2009) and Hiro (2018) highlight another dimension to the claim of the Shia group as this group believed that the Prophet Mohammad himself had named Ali as successor, so electing Abu Bakr was a violation of divine order.

Over the years, the first Caliph was Abu Bakr, followed by Umar, and then Othman. Ali finally became Caliph in A.D. 656, but he was assassinated five years later in Kufa, in present-day southern Iraq, in AD 661. After Ali's death and the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus, his partisans in Kufa encouraged his son Hussein to challenge the Umayyad caliphate, which was established after Ali's death in Damascus, so in response to this call, Hussein who was residing in Mecca, headed to Kufa to lead the revolt against the "tyrannical and immoral" Umayyad Caliph, Yazid. Hussein never reached Kufa; instead, he and his small group of followers were intercepted at Karbala, in present-day Iraq, by the Caliph Yazid's forces. The people of Kufa broke their promise to support Hussein, and he was killed along with most of his family and companions at the Battle of Karbala in 680 (Hazleton, 2010; Halm, 2007; Haider, 2014; Hiro, 2018; Momen, 1985; Nakash, 2006). Many scholars shed light on the significance of the Battle of Karbala

and the martyrdom of Hussein, which represents a milestone in Shia history and is a turning point in the relationship between Shia and Sunni. According to Hiro (2018) and Halm (2007), Karbala and the symbolism of Hussein's death represent a symbol of justice, religious devotion, and spiritual power for Shias.

Over time, each sect has developed different rituals and traditions. Although Sunni and Shia Muslims differ in rituals and interpretation of Islamic law, both sects share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and the main articles of Islam. Both sects believe in one God, follow the same prophet, and recite the same holy book, The Quran, give money to the poor, fast during the holy month of Ramadan, and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hiro, 2018; Hazleton, 2010; Halm, 2007; Haider, 2014; Momen, 1985).

Another point in the comparison between both sects is their view of leadership. The Imam in Shia Islam is infallible and has the political and religious leadership of the community, unlike Sunni Islam that separates between religious and political leadership. Moreover, Shia Muslims choose to follow a line of Imams, which they believe have been appointed by the Prophet Mohammad or God Himself, so Shia Muslims do not recognize the authority of elected Muslim leaders (Dodge, 2019). Understanding the belief systems of both sects and understanding how each sect perceives the leaders of their communities, whether states or other levels of governments, are crucial in this thesis.

Nowadays, according to Pew Research Center's estimates in 2009, Muslims' population is about 1.6 billion Muslims, and the Sunni Muslims make up the majority (87-90%) of Muslims all over the world while 10-13% are Shias. Significant populations of Shia Muslims are in Iran and Iraq, and significant minority communities in Yemen, Bahrain,

Syria, and Lebanon. It is hard to distinguish Sunni from Shia Muslims. Nakash (1994) mentions that the two sects have lived at peace more than in conflict. For centuries, Sunnis and Shias have lived together peacefully, intermarried, prayed at the same mosques, and cooperated over the years. For example, according to Gelvin (2018), at the time of the United States' invasion of Iraq, marriage between both sects represented approximately 30 percent of all marriages in Iraq.

The historical literature shows many examples of sectarian cooperation. During the Sunni Abbasid Dynasty (750 CE-1258 CE), which is considered by many historians as the “Golden Age” of Islam, Sunni rulers relied on the Shia support to establish their empires. Moreover, Nakash (1994) gives more examples of the cooperation between Sunnis and Shias against common enemies, such as European crusaders or Mongols. Furthermore, he emphasizes with another case study on Muslim unity and the jihad movement against the European penetration of the Iranian and Ottoman territories in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Dr. Carool Kersten, in an interview with *Live Encounters Magazine* in 2014, highlights another example of sectarian cooperation during the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, in which Shia ministers assisted the Sunni Caliphs, such as the Buwayhid family, who were essential patrons and sponsors of learning and culture at the court. Moreover, South Asia has witnessed the simultaneous presence of Sunni Mughal Sultans in Delhi and their semi-autonomous Shia vassals in nearby Lucknow. Also, Lipka (2014) mentions that most Muslims do not identify themselves by affiliation to a specific sect and they do not even see the distinction between Sunni and Shia Islam as relevant; instead, they prefer to

call themselves “Muslims” as is the case in Kazakhstan and Indonesia.

Recently, Sunnis and Shias have united together in specific periods. For example, Kirmanj (2013) highlights significant events in the course of relations between both sects in Iraq. Both Sunnis and Shias joined in opposing the British mandate over Iraq in the 1920s, and there were signs of cooperation, such as attending each other’s religious ceremonies. Shias attended Sunni’s celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, and the Sunnis attended the commemoration of the killing of Imam Hussein. Also, Gettleman (2004) mentions another example of sectarian cooperation during the U.S. invasion to Iraq in 2003 when both sects condemned the invasion and formed armed groups to fight the U.S.-led coalition forces.

3.2 Saudi Arabia and Iran

Although there are many Sunni-majority and Shia-majority countries in the Middle East, this study focuses on Saudi Arabia as the representative case of Sunni Islam and Iran as the case of Shia Islam. Both countries offer a valuable case study for this research. Hiro (2018), Nasr (2007), and Nakash (2006) explain the common factor between Saudi Arabia and Iran is their claim to exceptionalism and their battle for the leadership of Muslim Ummah. As evidence, in Saudi Arabia, the king's official title is the “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques,” and the official name of Iran is the “Islamic Republic of Iran.” In addition, both countries have strong leadership and reliable apparatus. Finally, both countries have a history of supporting non-state actors in other countries. The next few pages provide a brief introduction to both countries to help the reader understand the complexity of current events.

3.2.1 The Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran)

Iran, which was historically known as Persia until 1935, has traditionally been a significant power in the Middle East region. Iran is a country of rich civilizations, culture, natural resources, and strategic geographic location. It locates on the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, which are vital maritime pathways for crude oil transport and world energy supplies (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2019).

In 1979, conservative clerical forces led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini toppled the monarchy and established a theocratic system of government with the ultimate political authority vested in a learned religious scholar referred to commonly as the Supreme Leader (CIA, 2019). Iran has a complex political system (see Figure 4). The U.S. Department of State's report on Human Rights and Labor (2018) explains that the supreme leader holds constitutional authority over the whole country. He has authority over the judiciary, government-run media, armed forces, and indirectly controls internal security forces and vital institutions. When it comes to the army, defense issues, and foreign policy, the supreme leader is the one who decides on these issues. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (2019), Iran's population is 83,024,745 (July 2018 est.), and it has the second largest population of the region after Egypt (The World Bank Group, 2015). Iran contains a diversity of ethnic groups, such as Persian, Azeri, Kurd, Lur, Baloch, Arab, Turkmen, and Turkic tribes. In addition to the diverse ethnic groups, Iran has many religious groups, such as Muslims (official) 99.4% (Shia 90-95%, Sunni 5-10%), other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian) 0.3%, unspecified 0.4% (2011 est.) (CIA, 2019). Article 12, in chapter

one of the Iranian constitution, states that Shia Twelver school is the official religion in Iran.

According to the Iranian constitution, the role of the supreme leader is based on the ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini. The supreme leader is at the top of Iran's political power structure. Another component of the Iranian political system is the Guardian Council, which is the most influential body in Iran. BBC News' guide (2009) explains in detail how the Guardian Council works. It consists of six theologians appointed by the supreme leader and six jurists nominated by the judiciary and approved by Majlis. The Assembly of Experts is responsible for appointing the supreme leader, monitoring his performance, and "removing him if he is deemed incapable of fulfilling his duties" (Rose, 2016, para. 8). The 290 members of the Majlis, or parliament, are elected by popular vote every four years. The Majlis has the power to introduce and pass laws, approve the country's budget, summon and impeach ministers or the president. However, the conservative guardian council must approve all Majlis bills. The president, who is the second-highest-ranking official in Iran, chooses the members of the cabinet or Council of Ministers, and Majlis must approve them. The president is elected for four years and can serve no more than two consecutive terms. The constitution describes him as the second-highest-ranking official in the country. As the head of the executive branch of power, the president is responsible for ensuring the constitution is implemented and representing the country internationally.

From the economic perspective, Cordesman (2018) explains the economic situation in Iran. Also, the CIA World Factbook summarizes that "Iran's economy is marked by stat-

ist policies, inefficiencies, and reliance on oil and gas exports, but Iran also possesses significant agricultural, industrial, and service sectors" (as cited in Cordesman, 2018, p. 9). According to Chapter Four in the Iranian constitution, Article 44, "The Islamic Republic is not a communist state as the Islamic scholars fiercely oppose this." All large-scale and mother industries, foreign trade, significant minerals, banking, insurance, power generation, dams, and large-scale irrigation networks, radio and television, post, telegraph and telephone services, aviation, shipping, roads, railroads and the like" are entirely owned by the government.

According to the World Bank's overview of Iran in 2018, Iran is the second-largest economy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region after Saudi Arabia. Also, "Iran ranks second in the world in natural gas reserves and fourth in proven crude oil reserves. Economic activity and government revenues still depend to a large extent on oil revenues and therefore remain volatile" (The World Bank, 2018, para. 1). However, according to the Central Intelligence Agency (2019), deteriorating economic conditions in Iran are due primarily to government mismanagement and international sanctions, but Iran's internal security situation remains stable.

3.2.2 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is named after the ruling Al Saud family, which came to power in the 18th century. It lies in the Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, north of Yemen (see Figure 2). It is an important country because of its resources and unique political, economic, and social affairs. Saudi Arabia is also the birthplace of Islam and home to Islam's two holiest mosques in Mecca and Medina.

In 1932, Abd Al-Aziz bin Abd al-Rahman Al Saud (Ibn Saud) founded the modern Saudi state after a 30-year campaign to unify most of the Arabian Peninsula (CIA, 2019; Al-Rasheed, 2010). According to the World Bank (2019), the Population of Saudi Arabia in 2018 is 33,699,947. The population consists of 90% Arab and 10% Afro-Asian and Muslim citizens. Sunni Muslims represent 85-90% of Muslim citizens, while 10-15% are Shia (CIA, 2019).

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy (see Figure 5). According to the fundamental law of Saudi Arabia, adopted by royal decree in 1992, the king must comply with Sharia (Islamic law), the Quran, and the Sunnah (the traditions of Prophet Mohammed). All of the above are declared to be the country's constitution. There are no national elections and political parties, but it is worthy of mentioning that the government held its first-ever elections in 2005 and 2011, when Saudis went to the polls to elect municipal councilors. The king, who should be one of the founder's male descendants, rules the country, combining legislative, executive, judicial functions, and royal decrees, which form the basis of the country's legislation. The king is also the prime minister and presides over the Council of Ministers of Saudi Arabia and the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia (CIA, 2019; Al-Rasheed, 2010).

From the economic perspective, it is a rich country with natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, iron, gold, and copper. Saudi Arabia has an oil-based economy with strong government controls over major economic activities. It possesses about 16% of the world's proven petroleum reserves, ranks as the largest exporter of petroleum, and plays a leading role in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The

petroleum sector accounts for roughly 87% of budget revenues, 42% of GDP, and 90% of export earnings (CIA, 2019).

3.2.3 The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran

Wehrey, Karasik, Nader, Ghez, and Hansell (2009) argue that the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran ebbs and flows, and it ranges from tension to accommodation when dealing with regional orders. Many scholars describe bilateral relationships as a cold war (Gause, 2014; Hiro, 2018; Hashemi & Postel, 2017). Moreover, Gelvin (2018) argues that the animosity is political, not religious, as both countries have different governance systems and survival goals.

Before the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Hashemi (2019), in an interview with *Fair Observer*, highlights that both Iran and Saudi Arabia were pro-Western monarchies with good relations. Hiro (2018), Mabon (2016), and Teitelbaum (2013) mention that both countries shared the United States security umbrella as part of the anti-Soviet policy “Twin Pillar policy,” in which both countries were able to acquire billions of dollars of the most advanced arms during the 1970s. Also, Gelvin (2018) argues that autocrats in Iran and Saudi Arabia benefited from British support in the last century. Hashemi (2019) gives another example of cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia during the civil war in Yemen in the 1960s when both countries supported the Zaydi Shia against the republican forces backed by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

All of the previous examples of cooperation changed after 1979 when the Saudis and their allies worried about the Iranian Revolution and started playing the sectarian card. Even though King Khalid, the ruler of Saudi Arabia at that time, sent the leader of the

Islamic Revolution, Khomeini, a congratulatory message after the revolution, stating the importance of Islamic solidarity as the basis for closer relations of the two countries (Hussein, 2012). Also, King Fahd, the Saudi Prime Minister, expressed no public alarm, stating that “what was happening in Iran was a domestic problem that was best left to Iranian to resolve” (Hiro, 2018, p. 63). Shortly, Khomeini started to talk about exporting the revolution to other Islamic countries, sharing his interpretation of legitimacy regarding Islamic governance, and his critique of monarchies, Saudi Arabia, among other Gulf monarchies, started to be concerned.

From 1980-1988, the Iraq-Iran war took place. Iraq received massive financial support from Saudi Arabia. Also, Saudi weakened Iran’s economy during the war by flooding the oil market, which caused a decrease in oil price from \$28 to \$10 a barrel by July 1986 (Hiro, 2018). Saudi Arabia also granted permission for Iraqi aircrafts to be stationed at Saudi airbases (Fürtig, 2007), and Saudi jet fighters shot down two Iranian jets in 1984 (Gause, 2014). During the same period, both countries started a proxy war in Pakistan, where Saudi Arabia backed the Islamization drive in Pakistan by Sunni General Zia al- Haq, who was against Shia. Some riots resulted in the assassination of the Iranian consul general in Lahore in 1990 besides assassination against sectarian leaders (Hiro, 2018). Marschall (2003) highlights a key event in the bilateral relationship when Iranian pilgrims gathered in Mecca on 31 July 1987, chanting “Death to America” and holding portraits of Khomeini. The situation escalated when Saudi security forces arrived and left over 400 Shia pilgrims dead. Following this incident, Khomeini increased his criticism and efforts to overthrow the Saudi regime.

In the 1990s, there were short periods of warm relations, a reduction of regional tensions, and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations under the reformists' presidencies of Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani and President Mohammed Khatami, who made reciprocal visits to Saudi Arabia during this period. Also, the animosity toward Iraq's Saddam Hussein, who in 1990 invaded Kuwait, helped bring the two sides together (Gause, 2014; Kinzer, 2011). During Khatami's presidency, there were mutual agreements and discussions between Saudi Arabia and Iran regarding Afghanistan, oil production quotas, and defense issues (Kechichian, 2000).

In the 2000s, the critical event was the American invasion and occupation of Iraq, followed by the rise of Shia political parties with close ties to Iran (Hashemi, 2019). Nasr (2007) highlights that the American Invasion of Iraq changed the regional balance of power in the Middle East, causing the Saudis to panic. Simultaneously, the rise and growing prestige of the Shia militia of Hezbollah in Lebanon, that expelled Israel from southern Lebanon in 2006, resulted in its growing popularity among Sunni Arabs. Another significant milestone in this period was the election of hardliner Ahmadinejad in 2005. During his period, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia steadily deteriorated.

Recently, the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings damaged these relationships further. In Syria, Saudi Arabia supported the ousting of Syrian President Bashar al Assad, who is supported by Iran. In Yemen, the Zaidi Shia captured the Yemeni capital and expelled the Sunni President, Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi, in 2014, so that Saudi Arabia led a military coalition to fight Houthi- Shia militia backed by Iran.

In September 2015, more than 400 Iranian pilgrims died during Hajj stampede near Mecca (Hubbard, 2015). Following this event, Iran accused Saudi Arabia of incompetence and called for an international Islamic fact-finding committee. In January 2016, the execution of the Shia religious leader, Nimr al Nimr, in Saudi Arabia, was followed by ransacking the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran and the Saudi consulate in Mashhad. Soon after, Saudi Arabia and five other countries cut diplomatic relations with Iran.

3.3 Supporting theories

The field of Conflict Resolution is an interdisciplinary field that covers a variety of approaches to resolving conflicts. It draws upon international relations, psychology, sociology, theology, political science, among other disciplines. This section covers and defines the main theories in my analysis.

3.3.1 The Harvard Approach of Negotiations

The Harvard principle is a negotiation technique. It was developed at Harvard University by Professors Roger Fisher and William Ury (2011) in their book on negotiations entitled “*Getting to yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.*” This approach identifies the difference between the two commonly used terms by conflict practitioners and negotiators: positions and interests. In brief, positions are what people say they want, but interests are why people want what they say they want.

This approach highlights the importance of focusing interests instead of positions, and developing a jointly accepted framework to solve the conflict (Mason & Rychard, 2005). The approach has four pillars. First, separating the people from the problem subject to negotiation. Second, focusing on the interests of the parties involved, not on the positions.

Third, generating different options for mutual gain. Fourth, basing the agreement reached on objective criteria. Also, Roger Fisher and William Ury have developed the concept of BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement). This concept refers to the best alternative that we can possibly have when facing a negotiated agreement.

3.3.2 The Human Needs Theory

Human Needs Theory proposes that all humans have specific basic universal needs, such as safety, identity, and social security. When these needs are not satisfied, conflict is likely to occur. From the Conflict Resolution standpoint, aggressions and conflicts are a result of institutions and social norms that are incompatible with inherent human needs. Also, this theory asserts that personal recognition and identity are essential parts of individuals. Moreover, this theory highlights that humans are not so malleable to be deprived of their needs for the good of a system as when these needs are neglected, individuals will seek them out, and that may cause ethnic wars.

Finally, this theory sheds light on the broad definition of the conflicts. Conflicts have been defined by physical terms (for example, territory, workers strike, divorce) but tend to disregard human values and non-material needs that are a part of these conflicts (such as; unfair treatment and lack of recognition).

3.3.3 The Conflict Transformation Approach

According to John Paul Lederach (2014), “conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (p. 22).

Lederach (2014) argues that the conflict transformation approach sees conflicts as destructive or constructive interactions, depending on how conflicts are dealt with or transformed. Also, a transformational approach aims to understand the particular episode of conflict not in isolation, but as embedded in the greater pattern.

Moreover, conflict transformation focuses on the dynamic aspects of social conflict and a view of conflict as an opportunity. Finally, conflict transformation suggests dialogue as a fundamental way to promote constructive change on all these levels.

3.3.4 Negative and Positive Peace

Johan Galtung (1996) distinguishes between negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace can be defined as the absence of violence and tensions. While definitions of positive peace include the absence of violence, peaceful cooperation between groups, harmony, political moderation, social justice through equal opportunity, fair distribution of power and resources, and equal protection and impartial enforcement of the law.

3.3.5 Bar-Tal's Theory of Intractable Conflict

Bar-Tal (2013) lists seven characteristics as inherent in intractable conflicts. They are total, protracted, violent, perceived as unsolvable, viewed as a zero-sum contest, central, and demanding great investments. Being total, such conflicts are “perceived as being about essential and basic goals, needs, or values that are regarded as indispensable for the group’s existence or survival” (Bar-Tal, 2013, p. 37). Being protracted, they have not only “accumulated increasing amounts of prejudice, mistrust, hatred, and animosity” but also evolved into “a socio-psychological infrastructure that includes collective memory, the ethos of conflict, and emotional orientations” (pp. 51-52). Since they are violent, they

escalate the conflict and are burned into society's collective memory. "The collective memory of physical violence serves as a foundation for the development of a culture of conflict" (p. 43).

Such conflicts are perceived as unsolvable for several reasons, including "a long history of failed attempts to achieve a peaceful resolution or to subdue the rival party, mutual delegitimizing practices by both sides, the resistance of involved societies to changing their conflict's goals and making compromises, or a lack of accommodating leadership" (Bar-Tal, 2013, pp. 47-48). Since each side of the conflict believes it is unsolvable, their beliefs "often serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy, because both sides initiate acts of violence on the basis of this belief that provides a confirmation to the established belief" (p. 48). This leads into the zero-sum condition, where the parties perceive "any loss suffered by the other side as their gain, and conversely any gains of the other side as their own loss" (p. 44). The conflict becomes central to the lives of the society so that members of society are engaged in the conflict with their energies.

In any conflict, Bar-Tal says that centrality is exhibited in several ways. He mentions that unfulfilled needs and vested interest are key motivations of conflicts, especially for leaders, elites, and ideologues who use the conflict for their own purposes. Also, some politicians promote fear and active security measures to get citizens to vote for them. In contrast to these negative factors, Bar-Tal mentions the positive factors of trust, hope, and empathy that help deescalate the conflict. Trust is one of the most crucial factors because it "denotes lasting expectations about future behaviors of the rival group that affect the welfare of one's own group and allows taking risks in various lines of behaviors" (Bar-

Tal, 2013, p. 340).

Finally, Bar-Tal introduces his thoughts on ending the conflicts. Intractable conflict can be reduced in intensity over time if the societies involved in changing their views or the nature of the conflict changes. Also, he sees that change is required in leadership in order to solve conflicts

3.3.6 Deterrence Theory

Due to the enormous changes in international politics in the aftermath of the Cold War, there have been lengthy discussions over the viability of the deterrence theory. According to Barash and Webel (2018), deterrence theory is based on the idea that “nuclear war will be prevented by the threat that any attacker would suffer unacceptable retaliation” (p. 132), so no country would use nuclear weapons against the other as long as the victim retains the ability to cause unacceptable damage to the attacker.

Many scholars argue that deterrence became the central resource for sustaining international and internal security. Morgan (2017) highlights the serious effort to reduce the reliance on deterrence in international politics, but it was soon replaced by severe movement in the opposite direction.

3.3.7 Enemies and Allies

Vamik D. Volkan’s political psychology approach of the “Need to Have Enemies and Allies” is a founding approach in Political Psychology and Conflict Resolution. Volkan (1985) highlights one’s need to identify some people as allies and others as enemies as a way to protect the sense of self, ethnicity, and nationality. When dealing with international conflicts, he assures the importance of grasping the psychological cogency of one’s need

to have enemies and allies, as well as one's stubborn adherence to identification with a group when undergoing hardship and danger.

3.3.8 Galtung's typology of violence

Galtung (1969; 1990) identifies three different types of violence; direct, structural, and cultural violence. According to Dinham and Francis (2015), Galtung's three-pronged typology of violence highlights how violence occurs and functions in a community. Also, Galtung's typology highlights the different factors which control the environment of violence; these factors range between cultural, historical, or both. According to Galtung (1969), direct violence represents any behaviors that serve to threaten life itself and/ or to diminish one's capacity to meet basic human needs. Examples of this type are killing, bullying, and sexual assault. Moreover, structural violence represents the systematic ways in which institutions play a role in preventing some groups from equal access to opportunities and services that enable the fulfillment of basic human needs. This definition sheds light on the unequal share of power to decide over the distribution of resources. Also, structural violence can be formal behavior, such as legal structures that enforce marginalization of specific groups as indicated in constitutions or laws, or it is culturally functional but without a legal mandate, such as limited access to governmental positions for marginalized groups (Dinham, Francis, 2015).

Furthermore, Galtung (1990) defines cultural violence as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence, exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science, and formal science (logic, mathematics) that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (p. 291). Culture symbols or icons are essential

to construct what Benedict Anderson (1995) calls “the imagined community” of the nation, but these culture symbols play an influential role in enforcing the environment of violence and the nationalist narrative by creating a sacred narrative and ideologies that can cause violence.

3.4 Religion and violence

Religion has assumed a critical responsibility in defining the guidelines for life in societies of the Middle East, and the religious texts are now under great scrutiny with their different interpretations and contexts, particularly after the use of these texts by fundamentalist groups to justify their violent acts. It is essential to explore the nexus of religion and violence and be aware of the conflicts with religious dimensions. By taking into consideration the scope of this research, this thesis focuses on Islam, which is always associated with negative images, sentiments, and stereotypes by the west (Said, 1979).

Scholars have argued that religions are the drivers of violent conflicts. Huntington (1996) argues that different religions would be a reason behind the conflict between civilizations, particularly between the Muslim and the non-Muslim world. Also, Avalos (2005) argues that religions are a cause of violence as they create sacred resources, such as one God. Munson (2011) mentions that religion is a killing tool as people throughout human history have killed in the name of their Gods.

Islam’s holy scripture, the Quran, is interpreted by many rival groups in a way to justify sectarian violence. For example, recently, sacred spaces in Iraq have been attacked in intra-Muslim wars between Sunnis and Shias. Also, the Wahhabis, a Sunni school of thought who are supported by the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, believe that “the

reverence of Shias martyrs and saints is nothing more than a form of idolatry” (Avalos, 2005, p. 261). The Wahhabis see Shias as infidels, and they use many verses from the Quran to justify their violence against Shias. More examples will be introduced in Chapter Four about the role of religion in the sectarian conflicts in the Middle East.

3.5 The Battle of Karbala and the conflict supporting narratives

It is crucial to understand the relationship between Sunnis and Shias from the perspective of one of the historical milestones, the Battle of Karbala, which is a turning point in the relationship between Shias and Sunnis. Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut (2014) mention that “in every intractable conflict the rivals construct conflict supporting master collective narratives that focus on the conflict's entirety and that often become dominant” (p. 665). This explanation applies to the Battle of Karbala, which has been told and retold over the centuries. Aghaie (2004) mentions that the Shias use this even as the root metaphor upon which many of their religious beliefs and practices are based. Also, it has served as a vindication of the Shia cause in the face of Sunni criticism.

Over the years, Karbala has been used by Shia Muslims in their intractable conflicts with Sunni Muslims. Bar-Tal et al. (2014) explain this phenomenon and highlight the use of conflict-supporting narratives to satisfy the basic socio-psychological needs of the parties involved in the conflicts. Furthermore, Bar-Tal et al. (2009) mention that this narrative often uses victimization of the group as a tool (as cited in Bar-Tal et al., 2014).

Also, the functions of conflict-supportive narratives play a significant role in helping society members on both individual and collective levels to adapt to the harsh, stressful, and demanding conditions of the intractable conflict. Additionally, the narratives

prepare the society for threatening and violent acts by the enemy as well as for the severe living conditions that may encounter. Based on this explanation, the Iranian leaders justify the recent tough economic situation of Iran and ask combatants to join fighting in Syria. Similarly, Saudi Arabia asks its soldier to sacrifice their lives in Yemen to fight the Shias.

Furthermore, the Battle of Karbala sets up as part of the collective sociopolitical culture of these societies and ethnic groups.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Milestone events that have served to escalate and perpetuate sectarian conflicts

From the previous literature, I argue that it is not a religious conflict; instead, it is a political conflict that continues and escalates to this moment with many implications over the centuries. The political power struggle between the Sunni camp, led by Saudi Arabia, and the Shia camp, led by Iran, has many serious consequences. In recent decades, many milestones shift the relationship and bring the sectarian tensions into the scene again, namely the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the invasion of Iraq, the post-Arab uprisings, and the Iran Nuclear Deal. The current conflicts in the Middle East cannot be understood without studying the historical roots and understanding the different economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Also, understanding the impact of other factors such as colonialism is crucial.

Colonialism shaped the politics and social structures of the Middle East in the last century and caused strong nationalist sentiments. For example, Gasiorowski and Reich (2014) argue that in Iraq, the British favored the Sunnis, who supported and oppressed the Shias, who opposed them, so after the British granted Iraq independence, they continued their favoritism by placing a Sunni Muslim in power. These historical events still affect the scene in Middle East politics. Also, the secret terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916, which staged for the creation of arbitrary borders and enclosing artificial states. Former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden states in a speech in Iraq in 2016, “because of history, we have drawn artificial lines, creating artificial states made up of totally distinct ethnic, religious, cultural groups” (Arango, 2016, para. 15). The next few pages explore the recent

milestones and factors, as indicated in my problem statement.

4.1.1 The Iranian Revolution

Iranian Revolution or the Islamic Revolution is the popular uprising that took place in Iran in 1978-79 when millions of people took the streets against the Iranian monarchy and the pro-Western shah. The revolution resulted in toppling the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, on February 11, 1979, and ending the Pahlavi dynasty. The Iranian Revolution marked an essential milestone in the Middle East. It led to the establishment of the current state, the Islamic Republic of Iran. Also, it came with new doctrines embodied by the leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which established a new era of relationship between Iran and other countries, not only in the Middle East but throughout the rest of the world.

One important implication of the revolution is that it has converted the Shia ulama into a ruling class. Also, the leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, went beyond the idea of a Shia revolution as he first defined it, into an Islamic revolution (Nasr, 2007). Khomeini wanted to be accepted as a leader of the whole Muslim world. Moreover, the new Islamic Republic declared itself as the rule of the oppressed people in a way that made Iran become the Mecca of Muslim activists against oppression and a source of inspiration for all oppressed people in the Muslim world (Rahnema & Behdad, 1995).

Furthermore, Khomeini used his vision of a Muslim world, and he sought to emancipate the Islamic Ummah from the Western imperialism. That is why he believed that the United States is a source of evil that threatens Islam and works against the Islamic Ummah. He explicitly called it the “Great Satan.” He also saw any country in the Muslim

world that deals with the United States as a sign of a betrayal of Islam. He condemned regional powers, such as Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, but also other countries, such as Egypt, which he described as “Mini Satan” that serves to accommodate the “Great Satan.” He asked these countries to sever relations with the “great Satan,” the United States (Hiro, 2018; Takeyh, 2006).

Khomeini used the slogan “A Revolution Without Borders” to identify his strategy to export the Revolution to other Islamic countries. Takeyh (2006) highlights that the original constitution of the Islamic Republic states that the purpose of the state was to create conditions to spread the noble and universal values of Islam. Moreover, in his speeches, he urged the local populace in the mini- Satan countries to emulate the Iranian Revolution model in their countries. Khomeini did not see himself as a head of state, but the leader of the entire community of believers. In addition to that, Iran clearly sought to undermine established authority in the name of Islamic redemption. Furthermore, Khomeini saw that the monarchical order was a source of oppression and tyranny, and this order was against Islam (Hiro, 2018; Nasr, 2007; Takeyh, 2006), which explicitly de-legitimated the Saudi monarchies and directly challenged their claim of legitimacy (Gause, 2014).

In response to the Iranian Revolution, the Shia world welcomed the Iranian Revolution with great enthusiasm and hope. The Shias look at themselves as the oppressed sect that passed through a long history of oppression under Sunni leaders since the death of the Prophet. When the Shia population saw the Iranian Revolution that brought a Shia government to rule a Muslim country, they gained courage to loudly voice their rights and representations in their countries. Khomeini succeeded in introducing himself as a leader

that Shias in the whole world could depend on him. For example, Nasr (2007) gives an example of Khomeini's support of the Shias in Pakistan when he threatened the Pakistani military ruler to face the same destiny of the ousted Shah in Iran if he mistreated the Shia, and the Pakistani government conceded.

Nakash (2006) argues that "The Islamic Revolution created an upheaval that emboldened Shia in the Arab world and reinforced a trend toward activism within Shia that continues to this day" (p. 158). Following the Iranian Revolution, Shias in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia celebrated the Ashura rituals after a lengthy 65-year ban in Qatif and other Shia majority towns, in a challenging message to the government (Hiro, 2018). Moreover, one year after the Iranian Revolution, the Saudi Shias celebrated the first anniversary of Imam Khomeini's return to Iran by organizing a massive demonstration and a series of strikes in Qatif in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 1998). Nasr (2007) highlights other forms of Shia activism following the revolution, such as the failed coup attempt in Bahrain, terrorist plots in Kuwait in 1983 and 1984, and riots in the Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia.

Khomeini used Iran's Arabic-language radio to send messages to Shias to encourage them to rise against their regimes. One of the Shia activists was Hassan al Saffar, a Saudi Shia who lived in the Eastern Province. Al Saffar called to end the denunciations of Shia by Wahhabism, and he called for religious freedom for Shia in practicing their traditions. Following al Saffar's calls, clashes between the Shia protesters and the national guard led to arrests, injuries, and killing (Hiro, 2018).

With the previous points in mind, the Iranian Revolution brought considerable

threats to the Gulf monarchies, particularly Saudi Arabia, which saw it as a declaration of war against their monarchies and a severe threat to their rule. For example, Khomeini ridiculed Saudi Arabia for being named after a single-family (Nasr, 2007). Also, Khomeini made it clear when he called al-Sauds traitors to the great divine and puppets of the United States (Takeyh, 2006). He also attacked monarchies in his series of lectures published in 1971 "*Islamic Government: the rule of the faqih*," where he argued that "Shia clerics must strive to oust corrupt officials and repressive regimes and replace them with one led by just Islamic jurists" (Hiro, 2018, p 57).

Also, Iran used violence and terrorism as another strategy to export its revolution to other countries. Iran started to export violence and terrorism to destabilize these states. For example, the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers, the housing of military personnel that killed nineteen American citizens. Also, during the pilgrimage (the hajj), Iran encouraged protests in the holy mosque in Mecca to challenge Saudi monarchy and spread revolutionary messages around Muslims in the whole world. In July 1987, 402 Muslims died after clashes between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi police (Nasr, 2007). The Gulf states responded to the Iranian threat by establishing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 1981 to counter and contain Iran's influence (Hiro, 2018; Quandt, 1981; Takeyh, 2006). As a way to counter Iran, the GCC's started its work by extending financial and military support for Iraq's war against Iran in the 1980s (Bazian, 2019).

4.1.2 Iraq Invasion

Another significant milestone in the course of sectarian violence in the Middle East is the Iraq Invasion by the United States-led coalition in 2003. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and some targets in Washington, DC by al- Qaeda, the United States President George W. Bush declared his strategy of Global War On Terror (GWOT), promising to attack any target that may threaten the United States. Part of the GWOT strategy is fighting governments that export terror and shelter terrorists. According to Gasiorowski (2008), the goals for the U.S. invasion to Iraq were destroying the Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) sites and programs, getting rid of all Ba'athist influence, creating democratic political institutions, and restoring civil society and domestic security.

The Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was Sunni, who ruled since 1979, a Shia majority country. According to the Pew Research Center in 2009, Shias in Iraq represent around 65-70 percent of the population, while Sunnis represent 25-35 percent of the Muslim Population. Moreover, research conducted in 2012 by Pew Research Center shows that sect affiliation is a defining aspect of Iraqis' religious identity. Throughout history, the Sunnis in Iraq had most of the power and wealth, while Shias were oppressed and marginalized (Nasr, 2007; Rayburn, 2014). The discrimination against Shias continued until the end of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. According to Anderson and Stansfield (2005), Sunni regimes have maintained their political dominance by keeping the Shia weak and divided. Shias have suffered from the systematic targeting and repressive activities of the central government. Saddam favored the Sunnis, who dominated the army and

government positions while also benefiting economically. Asquith (2009) mentions that the Sunnis had better access to land and electricity, and Saddam allocated the state resources and public funding to Sunni areas. Moreover, Karam (2007) highlights another dimension in the discrimination against Shias in Iraq. He states that “Sunni tribes also received special access to land, money, and weapons” (as cited in Hoffman, 2014, p. 8).

Also, Shias faced religious discrimination, including rituals, publications, and institutions (Kirmanj, 2013). The Ba’ath regime also oppressed the Shias by closing religious schools, canceling religious media, and arresting Shi’a leaders (Anderson & Stansfield, 2005). Another major event in Iraq was the Shias and Kurds’ attempt to revolt after the Gulf War. Saddam sent his army to suppress the rebellion, which left about 30,000-60,000 Shias dead, according to Zenko (2016). Anderson and Stansfield (2005) argue that the discrimination against Shia in Iraq was because the successive Sunni regimes, particularly of Saddam’s regime, worried about the potential threats of Shias to initiate mass political activity against the government. Also, Rayburn (2014) mentions that Saddam and his ruling party, the Ba’ath, had used the sectarian cards and cultivated ethnic and sectarian differences to shore up their rule.

In March 2003, the U.S. led a coalition to invade Iraq, which led to toppling Saddam Hussein’s regime. The regime change led to sectarian violence by opening up preexisting sectarian fractures. All sects aimed to exploit the post-Saddam political vacuum to advance their interests. Haddad (2013) argues that “one result of these developments was an intense and violent sectarian backlash facilitated and accelerated by the security vacuum and the general sense of chaos that followed the fall of Saddam” (p. 3). Two

months after the invasion, according to Kirmanj (2013), the United States established the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), a transitional government which issued the controversial order: the “de-Ba’athification” of the Iraqi state, a process barring all but the party’s junior members from public life, and the disbanding of the Iraqi army and all other state security organizations. Also, the CPA issued the dismantling of the Iraqi military and security forces. These two controversial orders shifted the situation dramatically. These sudden changes caused anger and unemployment, igniting Sunni opposition to the democratization process as these orders mean the exclusion of Sunnis, who had also been dominated these institutions and allowing their rivals from the Shia side.

At the same time, Iraqi Shia groups and the Iranian allied exiles returned to Iraq in 2003, intending to cement a permanent Shia ascendancy in Iraqi politics and society (Rayburn, 2014). Also, Barzegar (2010) highlights the emergence of many Shia parties aligned with the Iranian regime to exclude Sunnis and Ba’athists from Iraqi politics and government. During the parliamentary elections, Iran backed Shia-friendly factions and forcefully opposed the US policy of reintegrating some Ba’athist officers into Iraq’s army and law enforcement to prevent a Sunni-Ba’athist resurgence.

In 2004, the U.S. created the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), which set the stage for continued sectarian conflict throughout the establishment of the new Iraqi government and for years to come. The main task of IIG was to hold elections. They succeeded by holding an election in January 2005 for the Transitional National Assembly that would create the constitution. This election contributed to Sunni marginalization for two reasons. First, Sunnis boycotted the election, which resulted in a small amount of Sunni seats in

parliament. Of the 275 seats, Shias won 146 seats while Sunnis only won six. Therefore, the Sunnis lacked even proportional representation and influence in the government. The second way this election contributed to Sunni marginalization was because the Sunnis were not well-represented in parliament, they did not have much influence over the creation of the constitution that would shape their government and their lives. In effect, most Sunnis voted against the constitution, which was adopted in October 2005 (Rayburn, 2014).

As a result of the U.S. invasion, the majority of Shias gained power and wealth denied to them for centuries, and the Sunni minority relinquished their domination over Iraq. These sudden changes caused anger and unemployment, igniting Sunni opposition to the democratization process. Sunni insurgents began to use violence against Shias, and Shias retaliated. Sunni extremists thought they could regain their power through violence and fear. This thought was the introduction to al Qaeda's emergence, which did not exist before the U.S. invasion.

Sunnis began to wage war on the new Iraqi government and the Shia population. The leader of al- Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, indicated his desire to "draw the Shia into civil war as a means of mobilizing the Sunnis" (Rayburn, 2014, p. 112). This sectarian message by al- Qaeda received acceptance from Sunni insurgent groups. Also, Sunni groups and tribes supported al- Qaeda's takeover in parts of Iraq to reduce the power of the Shia-led government (Abdo, 2017). In a clear sign of sectarian violence, al- Qaeda bombed the iconic Shia shrine in Samara in February 2006, al- Askari mosque. This event brought a massive response from Iraqi Shia militants (Kirmanj, 2013). Rabi and Mueller (2018) argue that the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) emerged out of the ashes of al-

Qaeda with a doctrine to establish a Sunni Islamic Caliphate. This narrative contributed to the sectarian violence in Iraq as ISIS saw Shias as enemies and infidels who should be beheaded, and in response, Shias in Iraq started to respond violently.

Last but not least, Shias in Saudi Arabia were watching the situation in Iraq. They thought that a Shia empowerment in Iraq would improve their lives by forcing their government to introduce serious reforms (Nakash, 2006). Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia started to fear the Shias' empowerment in a neighboring country and took many steps to counter this new update in the regional power dynamics. Based on the previous events, Rayburn (2014) and Nasr (2007) argue that the U.S. invasion changed the power balance by bringing the majority Shia to power in Iraq and setting the stage for sectarian conflict in the Middle East.

4.1.3 The post-Arab uprisings

There is a long debate about the validity of describing the events that hit the Middle East region in terms such as the Arab Spring, Arab revolutions, revolutionary waves, and Arab uprisings. Gelvin (2018) mentions the advantages and disadvantages of each term or metaphor in detail. I use the term "Arab uprisings" in this thesis.

The Arab uprisings began on December 17, 2010, when a street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, as an objection to a policewoman who confiscated his stuff one day earlier. As a reaction, demonstrations quickly spread across Tunisia, calling for improving living conditions and political and social reform. These demonstrations continued and forced the resignation of President Zain Al- Abidine bin Ali after 23 years in office.

Later on, particularly on January 25, the demonstrations continued to Egypt, where young people took Tahrir Square in Cairo as an assembly point, calling for freedom, social justice, and bread, as a metaphor for good living conditions, before the demonstrations started to spread to other provinces in Egypt. Following this, in every major city, there was Tahrir square where the protestors started to call for regime change and they came up with the slogan “the people want to overthrow the regime.” On February 11, 2011, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak announced his decision to give up his authority and hand it to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces.

The popular movements started in Tunisia and moved later to other countries, such as Egypt, Yemen, and Libya, toppling the authoritarian regimes and challenging the regimes in other countries, such as Syria and the Gulf monarchies. It was a tough moment for authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, as Gelvin (2018) mentions that most of the Middle East countries fit into the category of authoritarian regimes, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit in their Democracy Index in 2010.

The Arab uprisings represent a milestone in the region as it marks the rise of sectarian narratives again fueled by the two rival powers in the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran. A clear example of sectarianism is the reaction to the demonstrations in the Kingdom of Bahrain (Bahrain). Following the uprising in Egypt, another protest sparked in Bahrain, a small island in the Persian Gulf linked to Saudi Arabia by King Fahed Causeway. Bahrain is ruled by the Sunni minority that makes up 30- 40 percent of the population according to Pew Research Forum estimates in 2012. The demonstrations took the Pearl Roundabout as their Tahrir Square in Egypt, calling for political reform, but the government replied

violently. Later on, Bahrain invited troops from the neighboring countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to help restore the order and crush the opposition. Moreover, the regime forces have arrested many Shia activists and cordoned off rebellious Shia villages.

In a similar case in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, the strategically important region holding the Kingdom's vast oil reserves, and where the majority of Shia live, there were callings for demonstrations, demanding the end of corruption, the release of political prisoners, and constitutional reforms. According to Rieger (2014), the Saudi government became concerned about a spillover to the Eastern Province. This concern was reinforced by the fact that many Saudi Shias identify with their fellow Shia brethren in Bahrain, who have also been suffering under sectarian discrimination by their government. Similar protest movements emerged in Yemen, Libya, and Syria, which turned into violence, civil wars, and military interference, which created an environment where fundamentalist Islamist groups found the soil to grow and get supported.

Syria is a clear example of the sectarianism between Sunnis and Shias in the region and the ethno-sectarian lines that control life there. Syria is a Sunni-dominant country ruled by President Bashar al-Assad, who belongs to the Alawi sect. Although there are different opinions on the relationship between Alawi and Shiism, many scholars consider Alawi as "an offshoot of Shi'ism whose beliefs deviate from Islamic orthodoxy and include elements of Christianity and pre-Islamic religions" (Nasr, 2007, p. 61).

In the aftermath of the Syrian uprising, Rayburn (2014) explains how each sect worked to achieve their interests. For example, Sunnis who supported the uprisings and the

toppling of President Bashar al- Assad was supported by Iraqi Sunnis, who envisioned the establishment of a Sunni state in Syria after toppling Bashar, so the Iraqi's Sunni tribes provided material support for the Syrian opposition to support the Sunni aspirations in the region. Similarly, Shia militant groups in Iraq and Lebanon supported their counterparts in Syria through military and logistics support from Iran's IRGC or Hezbollah in Lebanon (Rayburn, 2014, pp. 230-231).

4.1.3.1 The response to the Arab uprisings

As part of my argument about the contest for influence and political ambitions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, both countries adopted different approaches toward the uprisings. These demonstrations were met by violent repression from the governments of both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which played the sectarian card and accused the protests of receiving foreign support from Iran to achieve Shia supremacy in the region (Salloukh, 2017).

On the one hand, Iran welcomed the Arab uprisings, except in Syria. Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called the Arab uprisings "the Islamic awakening." Moreover, he mentioned that the Arab uprisings were a significant defeat for the United States and Israel (Abdo, 2011). Also, the Iranian President Ahmadinejad praised the demonstrations and condemned the Saudi reaction of sending troops to Bahrain, equating it with Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (Hiro, 2018).

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia was challenged and threatened by the Arab uprisings. It saw the change was coming to the kingdom following the electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and al- Nahda Islamic Movement in Tunisia, so the Saudi

government acted as an enemy to the uprisings from the beginning. Hiro (2018) mentions many examples, such as the kingdom's offer to host the ousted Tunisian President Ben Ali in the kingdom. Also, the kingdom supported Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak by offering him refuge as well. The Council of Senior Ulama and the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al- Sheikh, in 2011, according to Reuters (2011), described the demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia as the chaos that comes from the enemies of Islam and the Grand Mufti argued the demonstrations would lead to bloodshed and instability. He also claimed that demonstrations are forbidden religiously.

Furthermore, the Saudi government responded to calls for demonstrations in the kingdom by threatening the demonstrators with punishment. Hiro (2018) highlights some events when the Saudi government crushed supporters of the Arab uprisings, arrested many of them, and prohibited media coverages or appearances for many of the Arab uprisings' supporters. The government used the sectarian card and the state intelligence agency destroyed to hack several Facebook pages, which called for demonstrations. The government added Shia references to the content of these pages to support its narratives and show that Shias, who are supported by Iran, were behind the demonstrations.

4.1.4 Iran Nuclear Deal

Iran's ambition to have nuclear weapons and become a regional power started before the Islamic Revolution during the Shah's rule through the "Atoms for Peace" program in cooperation with the U.S. (Entessar, 2017; Kinzer, 2011). Following the 1979 Revolution, most of the international nuclear cooperation with Iran was cut off. In the 1990s, Russia formed a joint research organization with Iran, providing Iran with Russian

nuclear experts and technical information. In the last few years, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has passed several resolutions calling for Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities and comply with its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) obligations and responsibilities. Entessar (2017) mentions the motivations for Iran's nuclear program, such as security reasons raised from the U.S. military presence on its borders, Israel's nuclear weapons, and the absence of Iran's strategic allies in the region. Iran has suffered from economic sanctions and isolation, partly because of its nuclear ambition, which threatens other regional powers.

In July 2015, Iran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as "Iran Nuclear Deal," after long and secret negotiations. JCPOA was a turning point in the Middle East. The deal was signed between Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council, United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, plus Germany, and the European Union. Under this deal, Iran agreed to restrictions on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The deal marked the end of isolation and sanctions on Iran, through which it started to have regular relationships with the international community and to use the international banking system. The deal unlocked about \$100 billion to \$150 billion in frozen Iranian bank accounts (Makovsky & Levitt, 2015).

Ayoob (2016) and Nasr (2016) explain how the success of JCPOA affected regional tensions. Nasr (2016) mentions that Saudi Arabia interpreted the JCPOA as a gain to Iran and all Shia and as a change in the U.S. policy in the region. Also, Ayoob (2016) argues that Saudi Arabia was afraid of Iran's rapprochement with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was

worried about the economic empowerment of Iran as a competitive oil producer, so Saudi Arabia escalated the regional tensions and played the sectarian card by executing the Shia cleric Nimr al Nimr in January 2016, escalating the intensity of war in Syria, and adopting more aggressive strategy in Yemen. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia confronted Iran diplomatically by opposing the nuclear deal with Iran and pressuring the U.S to withdraw from the deal through political lobbies against the deal and Obama administration. Recently, it welcomed the withdraw of the U.S. under President Trump's administration.

4.2 Religion as a political tool

Religion has a vital role in Middle Eastern societies, where people respect religion and look at it as the right way and the guide for their life. Authoritarian regimes and monarchies in the Middle East are aware of this fact, so they use religious text, historical events, and religious institutions to add legitimacy to their decisions.

On the one hand, Al-Atawneh (2009) describes the Saudi regime as “a theomonomy, that draws power from longstanding religio-cultural norms” (p. 721). Saudi Arabia has become a viable nation, not by implementing Muslim norms but by using religion as a mask. Avalos (2005) mentions that “in the name of Islam, the state introduced changes that would otherwise be unacceptable to a population less inclined to engage in the modern world” (p. 286). Also, many fundamentalist Sunni clerics, sponsored by wealthy Sunnis from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, have popularized anti-Shia slurs. For example, Saudi Arabia has the Supreme Council of Muslim Scholars or the Council of Senior Ulama, a religious institution that signs all the royal decisions and justifies them using many verses from the Quran. Also, it is popular to see the Grand Mufti of Saudi

Arabia, asking the citizens to obey the rulers and avoid any revolution against him.

Furthermore, the religious institutions in Saudi Arabia have played an essential role in justifying the war in Yemen as a war on Islam and delegitimizing the opponent. Opatow (1990) highlights that de-legitimization denies the adversary's humanity and serves as a psychological permit to harm and to fight the rival group (as cited in Bar-Tal, Oren & Nets-Zehngut, 2014). Another example of the use of religion in changing the political dynamics of the Middle East is the fatwa by the influential Sunni scholar, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who described the Syrian regime as “heretical” and he asked to support the Syrian people as kind of “jihad” (“Fatwa in the Gulf,” 2011).

On the other hand, Shia religious leaders have used religion for political purposes as well. For example, during ISIS victory in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq’s top Shia cleric, issued a fatwa, religious decree, during a Friday sermon in 2014 to fight Sunni fighters advancing towards Baghdad. Also, he described this fight as a “sacred defense” and promised that whoever died fighting ISIS would be a martyr (Rabi & Mueller, 2018). In response to his call, Alaaldin (2017) mentions that tens of thousands joined militias and formed the Shia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to fight against ISIS.

4.3 Conflict Analysis Framework

Although there are many causes and dimensions of any conflict, Levinger’s (2013) conflict analysis framework highlights the major dimensions of conflicts, and answers the question of “why do people or states engage in violent conflicts?” According to Levinger, there are five dimensions that can motivate or prevent violence; strategic, political, socioeconomic, psychological, and cultural dimensions. He also argues that not all

conflicts are violent; instead, actors use violence as a “strategic choice” to effectively achieve their objectives.

Since the focus of this thesis is on sectarianism, Marc Lynch (2013) argues that ethnic or sectarian violence is the result of regimes, especially the authoritarian regimes, or elites, who exploit identity differences for their political goals. Also, Wehrey (2013; 2017) highlights the role of geopolitical interests in the conflict. The next pages reflect on the thesis’s scope using Levinger’s conflict analysis framework to unpack the hidden reasons for sectarian violence in the Middle East.

4.3.1 The strategic dimension

The strategic dimension of the conflict focuses on issues of power and international security between states. Iran and Saudi Arabia have supported competing factions in different parts of the world to enhance their global influence and further their interests through their engagement in proxy conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. From the perspective of the security dilemma, Kenneth Waltz (1979) argues that any actions taken by one state to enhance its security will necessarily decrease the security of other states (as cited in Levinger, 2013).

On the one hand, Saudi Arabia started a military coalition named The Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) in December 2015 by the defense minister, at this time, Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud. According to the official website of IMCTC, it aims to form a unified Pan-Islamic front against terrorism through joint work. This coalition has questions about its own main goals. One of these questions is the exclusion of Iran, which is an Islamic country, from the coalition. Also, the coalition does not include

Iraq, which is led by a Shia government with a conflict with Saudi Arabia at this time. Winter (2017) highlights the Sunni nature of the alliance could deepen the Shia-Sunni divide across the Middle East, and make the world perceive this coalition as a proxy to fight Shia, particularly Iran and its alliances and proxies in the region.

Another point from the strategic dimension is Saudi Arabia's strategic military partnership with the U.S. According to the official website of the White House (2017), Saudi Arabia signed billions of dollars of military and industrial deals with U.S. companies. In May 2017, President Trump and King Salman signed deals of \$110 billion worth of defense capabilities and \$350 billion over ten years. Additionally, President Trump and King Salman signed a Joint Strategic Vision Statement, promising close collaboration to counter violent extremism, disrupt the financing of terrorism, and advance defense cooperation. Also, the U.S. supports the Saudi-led coalition against Houthis in Yemen with assistance in intelligence, armaments deals, and logistics. According to new data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in April 2019, Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest five military spenders in 2018. Also, it is one of the highest military burden (military spending as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product, GDP) in the world in 2018 with a proportion of 8.8 percent of GDP.

On the other hand, Iran has a long history of supporting proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and Yemen to further its interest. Also, Iran succeeded in starting partnerships with Russia, Turkey, and Qatar as a way to increase its security and encounter Saudi's movements in the region. Hiro (2017) highlights the strategic importance of Iran, which represents the transit country for trade between Qatar and Turkey. Also, Iran shares

agreements with Russia on the Syrian conflict, and both countries support President Assad.

Moreover, Iran has military cooperation with Russia that is explicit in the \$ 900-million-dollar contract for five Russian S-300 missile batteries. Also, Russia used the Hamadan military base in Iran to launch aerial strikes on a range of targets in Syria in August 2016 (Hiro, 2017). Iran adopts a “forward defense” strategy, as Nasr (2018) explains, because of the threats from Israel, the U.S. militaries in the region, and the hostile Arab neighbors. He also argues that Iran’s foreign policy is pragmatic, which is driven by national interests.

When it comes to the issues of power, Iran uses its nuclear program to deter its enemies, as Barash and Webel (2014) explain the basic premise of deterrence. Saudi Arabia and other countries are worried about the nuclear program and Iran’s ballistic missiles program, which threaten their security. That is why Saudi Arabia started to think of having nuclear weapons as Iran. In an interview with program *60 Minutes* on CBS in March 2018, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman threatened that the kingdom would not hesitate to get a nuclear bomb if Iran obtains one. Moreover, Saudi Arabia calls on the international society to cut off any sources of financial support to Iran.

Saudi Arabia has supported the isolation of Iran. That is why it was against the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOPA) agreement in 2015. Saudi Arabia thought that this agreement would boost Iran’s power in the region (Dempsey, 2019). Saudi Arabia spared no effort to convince the U.S. and other countries to pull from the JCOPA. Recently, Saudi Arabia was one of the few countries in the world to praise President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal in 2017. Last but not least, each country has accused

the other of destabilizing the region. For example, Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of supporting Houthi rebels in Yemen, threatening maritime shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, the primary energy transport waterway in the world, and blocking the delivery of humanitarian aid in Yemen while Iran accuses Saudi Arabia of financing terrorism and support radical groups in the region.

4.3.2 The political dimension

The political dimension of the analysis concerns the competition for power within individual states. Nasr (2016) argues that the leaders of both countries see political interests in exploiting the sectarian divide between Sunni and Shia to defend their rule and protect their interests. Lynch (2016) explains how the Saudi regime systematically uses sectarianism in order to control the Shia citizens. For example, when masses took the streets during the Arab uprisings, they were demanding freedom and dignity, without any reference to sectarian demands, but the regimes in the Middle East framed their demands into sectarian political narratives.

Also, authoritarian regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, suppress opposition by providing open channels to their supporters to market their narrative only, which supports the political interests of the regimes. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the Sunni Wahhabi clerics are given the freedom and opportunity in the media to attack Shia without any interference from the government. For example, the hate speech against Shia by the Grand Mosque preacher in Mecca, who states “our war with Iran, say that out loud, is a war between Sunnis and Shiites...Our disagreement with Rafidh will not be removed, nor our suicide to fight them... as long as they are on the face of the earth” (Mohammed, 2015,

para. 3). Additionally, authoritarian regimes use some strategies of ethnic favoritism, such as providing high positions and social services for the exclusive benefits of their ethnic groups. For instance, high positions in the government and military are exclusive for Sunni in Saudi Arabia and similarly for Shia in Iran.

Moreover, political and official state institutions can act as dividers, provoking sectarian divisions, such as the Commission of Promotion for Virtue and Prevention of Vice and the Committee of Senior Ulama in Saudi Arabia, which explicitly attack Shia. In addition to the fact that both countries seek regional hegemony, they depend on nationalism for their political interests. Nasr (2018) and Hiro (2018) highlight the rise of nationalism rhetoric in Iran to restore the glory of the Persian Empire, which controlled a vast area in the region, and how these aspirations influence the political dynamics in the conflict. Also, Saudi Arabia uses the nationalism narrative when it comes to Iran as not a real Muslim or Arab country, but Persian one, so it demonizes Iran and demonizes the Shia population by associating them to Iran. All these sectarian policies and discrimination serve as dividers in the prolonged conflict.

Matthiesen (2009) explains another form of the political dimension of the conflict, which is the rise of succession movements. For example, in Saudi Arabia, there have been some calls for the succession of the Eastern Province, especially in 1978 and after Biqua clashes in 2009, besides the emergence of anti-government groups to denounce the discrimination against Shia, such as the Free Youth of Qatif, the Organization of Islamic Revolution, and other group that advocate for the armed struggle against the government, such as Hezbollah Al Hejaz.

4.3.3 The socioeconomic dimension

The socioeconomic aspect plays a vital role in conflict dynamics. Stewart (2004) argues that inequality is a threat to social cohesion within the state. Through his studies, he found that economically underprivileged groups that did not have access to political power had taken some actions to assert group interests ranging from nonviolent protest to rebellion (as cited in Levinger, 2013). The availability of petroleum in both countries makes high expectations of high income and social benefits for all citizens, but this is not the case in both countries. Collier (2000) argues that the availability of lootable resources such as petroleum in a country motivates conflict (as cited in Levinger, 2013).

On the one hand, Matthiesen (2015) illustrates the history of the Saudi Shia as citizens of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is characterized by otherness with discrimination against them at many different levels. The Shias of Saudi Arabia, as Perazzo (2012) examines through surveys, have been classified through the social, political, and religious spheres as second-class citizens with unequal fair access to job opportunities and public services. Also, according to Nasr (2007), they are not allowed key positions in the government, armed forces, security services, or significant companies or the military.

On the other hand, the Sunni Muslims in Iran, which constitute about 5-10% of the population, according to the CIA World Factbook in 2019, face systematic discrimination in Iran. Faramarzi (2018) highlights that Iran has failed to adequately integrate its Sunni population into the political system. For example, there has never been a Sunni minister, and there is a low representation of the Sunnis in the parliament that does not reflect the actual Sunni population. Moreover, in Iran, the president should be Shia. According to

article 115 of chapter nine in the Iranian constitution, the president of Iran should believe in the fundamentals of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country, which is according to article 12 of chapter one, the official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja'fari school of Shia religion.

Also, in both countries, each minority group feels stigma to pray freely, and they are subjected to the social stigma that they have to hide their identity (Faramarzi, 2018; Perazzo, 2012). Furthermore, Sunnis do not have mosques in large cities such as Tehran and Isfahan, and their areas are undeveloped. Similarly, Shias in Saudi Arabia have many restrictions on building mosques, hussainiyyat, and community centers (Matthiesen, 2015). Dabashi (2018) argues that the negligence of the central government in Tehran through the last decades is responsible for the anger among minority groups in Iran, and Gengler (2016) argues that the regime marginalizes some groups and rewards others with economic benefits for political reasons.

4.3.4 The psychological dimension

It is essential to understand how the psychological dimension affects the dynamics of the conflict. The psychological dimension, according to Levinger (2013), illustrates how each party in the conflict perceives the other parties and the role of collective images of the other groups in shaping groups' attitudes and conduct toward their rivals. In our case study, the psychological factors in the Sunni- Shia conflict serve as dividers that escalate and sustain the conflict.

For example, Sunnis look at Shias in a suspicious way as traitors to Iran or not real Muslims. Many Sunni clerics, such as late Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Abdul Aziz Bin

Baz, described Shia Twelvers as Rafedha and Ali worshipers. Moreover, notable Saudi Scholar, Ibn Jebreen, issued a fatwa “not to marry or eat with Shias and not to allow Shias to pray in Muslim mosques” (as cited in Perazzo, 2012). Maida (2017) highlights the level of hate speech, incitement to hatred, and discrimination against Shias and how the religion curriculum in the educational system employs anti-Shia rhetoric.

Another point regarding the psychological dimension is the role of the collective image. Bar- Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut (2014) talk in their article about the psychological dimension in the intractable conflicts. They argue that societies involved in such conflicts form conflict supportive narratives to justify the intergroup conflicts and satisfy psychological needs through significant themes, such as de-legitimization of the opponent or victimization of the group. Bar-Tal (2013) identifies collective narratives as “social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community’s collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective’s symbolically constructed shared identity” (p. 22). Also, he highlights the importance of collective memory in the construction of group identity and the formation of any society or group. This is evident in the Sunni- Shia conflict through the Battle of Karbala, as explained in Chapter Three.

Karbala is an excellent example of what Volkan (2001) describes as the chosen trauma, which is “the shared mental representation of a negative event in a large group’s history in which the group suffered catastrophic loss” (p. 7). He adds that chosen trauma is an essential part of group identity as it helps identify a common enemy of the group. The story of Karbala, which is passed from generation to generation, represents powerful

experiences and shared feelings of humiliation, vengeance, and hatred. Over the years and till the recent proxy wars in the region, Karbala has been used by Shia Muslims to encourage them to fight their Sunni enemies.

4.3.5 Cultural dimension

The cultural dimension of conflict, according to Levinger (2013), involves issues of collective identity such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, or language. The identity is an essential dimension in fueling violence in our case study. Both countries claim exceptionalism (Hiro, 2018). On the one hand, the Iranian claim rests on 6000 years of civilization with a unique sense of history, civilizations, empires that stretched to control many areas (Hiro, 2018; Tekayah, 2006). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's claim of exceptionalism rests on having the largest oil corporation in the world, number one exporter of oil, and home to the most sacred sites in Islam in Mecca where Muslims from all sects perform pilgrimage and point their faces while praying, and Medina where the Prophet is buried (Hiro, 2018).

Also, Saudi Arabia and Iran are different in ethnicity, religious sect, and language, so there is a large portion of identity aspects and nationalism in the conflict. Identity is an essential element in the cultural dimension of the conflict. Although it is a broad concept, and it is hard to define, this thesis focuses on sectarian identities. Sectarianism refers to the presence of multiple sectarian identity groups in a state (Phillips, 2015). Anderson (1995) argues that mutual cultural identity central to nationalist groups is merely fictional and invoked by political leaders for political goals. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other authoritarian systems, according to Kressel (2002), try to cover their failures by creating an internal or

external enemy of the nation to grab attention to fight this enemy instead of focusing on criticizing policies.

Nationalism has played an essential role in the Saudi-Iranian conflict. Van Evera (1994) defines nationalist group as “a set of individuals holding their most important loyalty to their ethnic or national group, with this superseding other loyalties (such as political ideology, religious ideology, etc.), although these additional influences may contribute to their cultural identity, which in turn may be central to their nationalist identity” (p. 5). Conversi (2006) argues that discriminatory acts against competing nations, such as assimilation, marginalization, and genocide, are because of the exaltation of a dominant nation as superior to all other nations. Shaw (2015) explains that nationalists see the ideal format of state-building is based on ethnicity, which means the strength of the nation allows one form of culture only. Anastasiou (2008) argues that this nationalist environment provokes the conflict and even “imposes a particular way of treating and processing pain. It entails a kind of shared superego, specifying how an ethnically defined society or community ought to respond to the suffering resulting from ethnonational conflict” (p. 125). For example, Shia in Saudi Arabia had to counter the accusation of Saudi-Wahhabi propaganda to them as Persians, not Arabs, through proving their authentic identity that rooted in Arab culture and history (Al-Rasheed, 1998).

Another form of the cultural dimension of the conflict is cultural annihilation, which may encompass, according to Conversi (2006), a physical dimension of murder, like the elimination of the intellectuals and professional cadres. The execution of Shia cleric, Nimr al Nimr, and other Shia activists is an excellent example in Saudi Arabia.

Language represents a crucial cultural dimension in the Sunni- Shia rivalry. On the one hand, Sunnis describe Shias in the Gulf countries as “Safawis,” a term that paints them as Iranian agents (from the Safadi Empire) and hence, traitors to the Arab cause. Also, hard-liner Sunni Islamists have used harsher historical terms, such as Rafdaha, rejecters of the faith, and Magus, Zoroastrian, or crypto Persian, to describe Shias as heretical. On the other hand, Iranian officials, Iraqi politicians, and Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, routinely describe their Sunni opponents as takfiris (referring to the doctrine embraced by al-Qaeda of declaring fellow Muslims apostate) and Wahhabis (referring to the puritanical Saudi sect). This cycle of demonization has been amplified throughout the Middle East and has its devastating effects on many levels. Last but not least, framing the conflict in sectarian terms has affected the stability of the region and caused the emergence of new areas of influence based on sectarian and ethnic identities (see Figure 6).

4.4 Stakeholder analysis

As mentioned in the literature review, the Iranian Revolution, invasion of Iraq, the Arab uprisings, and the Iran Nuclear Deal have changed the power dynamics in the region and the dynamics of the political and economic landscape in different ways. Nasr (2016) argues that Saudi leaders see Shiism as a threat to their faith and Iran as a threat to their security. Although Nasr excludes the possibility of a direct war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, both countries continue to fight in other areas in the region to protect and further their interests. For example, Clarke and Smyth (2017) explain how Iran succeeded in expanding networks and recruited Shia from Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Iran included sectarian narratives in the recruitment process so that some

fighters joined to protect the holy Shia shrines in Syria.

The indirect fight or proxy wars have become the evident form of confrontation between both countries (Gause, 2014; Nasr, 2016). Both countries have sought to expand influence in other countries. A member of the Iranian parliament, who is close to Khamenei, said that Iran controlled four Arab capitals: Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and Sana'a (as cited in Byman, 2018) in an evident example of Iran's strategy in the region.

Mumford (2013) defines proxy wars as "the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome. They are constitutive of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and their chosen proxies, which are the conduit for weapons, training, and funding from the benefactor" (p.11). Additionally, he adds that proxy intervention can only occur if the benefactor state takes no active role in combat, and if the benefactor state acts to support its proxy surrogate in a non-allied or quasi-allied context. Moreover, Frederic Pearson (1974) identifies primary reasons for states' intervention in other countries: territorial acquisition, protection of social groups, protection of economic interests, protection of diplomatic or military interests, ideology, or regional power balances (as cited in Mumford, 2013). In addition, Mumford (2013) adds other motives, such as the perception of probable success or perception of conflict escalation.

Based on Mumford's definition, we see that both Saudi Arabia and Iran are a good case study. Both countries fund local groups to achieve their interests. We have never seen a direct confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran; both armies have not reportedly

fought, or there were never any missiles directed by an army against the other. Moreover, Mumford also suggests that proxy wars are typically conducted by states hoping to exploit localized events to create a “shift in the wider geopolitical environment” (p. 11). This is proven in our case study by many scholars such as Gause (2014), who frames the current situation in the Middle East as a cold war between main actors, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and other states and non-state actors. He also highlights the fact that both countries take advantage of the weak states and sponsor non-state actors on the battlefields of weakened Arab states. Also, Salloukh (2017) explains how the contest between Saudi Arabia and Iran shaped the geopolitics of the region.

Iran had the opportunity to fill the postwar vacuum in Iraq based on its religious relationship with the Shia majority in Iraq and its geographical location as a neighboring country (Rayburn, 2014). The increase of the Iranian influence has sparked the concerns that Iran will have Shia Crescent in the region, which links Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Iran (see Figure 7). The term “Shia Crescent” was first coined by King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2004 (Hiro, 2018; Salloukh, 2017). While describing the regional development using the sectarian language, King Abdullah II alarmed Saudi Arabia and other Sunni countries to take action. So, Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, has sided with a group of Arabic countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. Also, Israel has become part of this side, as indicated later in this chapter.

On the other hand, Iran extended its alliance to include other non-state actors in the region, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (Salloukh, 2017). Iran supported non-state actors for many reasons. Takeyh (2006)

and Razavi (2013) argue that Iran supports Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Palestine to have a voice in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and gain a degree of popularity among the Arab world. Also, Ward (2005) highlights that Iran depends on proxies to deter or attack its adversaries because of its outdated military capacity. Saudi Arabia and Iran extend their rivalry by supporting proxy wars in other countries in the region. The next few pages elaborate on the proxies and the stakeholders engaged in the conflict using the framework mentioned in Chapter Two.

4.4.1 Lebanon

Lebanon, with its diverse population and 18 recognized religious sects, has become a battlefield for the Saudi-Iranian geopolitical contest. According to the CIA World Factbook in 2019, the Shia Muslims constitute 28.4% and Sunni 28.7% of Lebanon's population. Also, “the constitution consecrated confessional groups and sects as the main pillars of Lebanese society” (Salloukh, 2017, p. 219). In Lebanon, the president is Maronite Christian, the speaker of the parliament is a Shia Muslim, and the prime minister is a Sunni Muslim.

Lebanon, which suffered from long civil war 1975-1992, passed through many significant milestones, such as the assassination of the former Sunni Prime Minister Rafiq al- Hariri in 2005 in Beirut. Following the assassination of Hariri, Salloukh (2013) highlights the tensions in the country, which became more divided between a Sunni camp and Shia camp. Lebanese society split into groups. On the one hand, the March 14 Coalition led by Sunni-dominated Future Movement with support from Saudi Arabia, Gulf states, USA, and France. On the other hand, the opposing Shia side consists of Iran, Syria, and

Hezbollah.

A recent update that reflects the war between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Lebanon is the resignation of the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al- Hariri, under the pressure of Saudi Arabia, in a way to destabilize Iran's ally, Hezbollah, which has a powerful military and political power in the country (Ignatius, 2017). Hariri mentioned that he could withdraw his resignation if Hezbollah agreed to abide by Lebanon's policy of disassociation from the conflicts ravaging the region, primarily calling on the Shia group to pull out of Yemen, Syria, and Iraq (Blanford, 2017). This new situation reflects the sectarian dimensions and proxy wars in Lebanon. Iran has a strong influence in Lebanon. Zainulbhai and Richard (2015) mention that more than nine-in-ten Lebanese Shia Muslims (95%) express a favorable opinion of Iran. Lebanon is vital to Iran as one of the Shia crescent countries with a border with Israel, which is a security threat to Iran.

4.4.2 Hezbollah

Hezbollah or the "Party of God" is Formed in 1982 in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. According to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) in 2015, Hezbollah is a Lebanon-based Shia terrorist group, which advocates Shia empowerment globally. Moreover, it is the most capable armed group in Lebanon. It receives support from Shia, some Christians, and receives considerable support from Iran (CIA, 2018). Also, many scholars, such as Kindt (2009), argue that it is a "state within a state" with a dominant position. For example, In July 2011, the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) indicted four Hezbollah members, including a senior Hezbollah official, for the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al- Hariri, but Hezbollah Secretary-General, Hasan

Nasrallah, publicly stated that Hezbollah would not allow any members to be arrested in a challenge to the state.

Hezbollah is Iran's tool in Lebanon. According to the US Treasury under-secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Sigal Mandelker, in 2018, Iran directly funds the group with approximately upwards of \$700 million a year. One of the missions of Hezbollah is to advance the Shia agenda through funding, training, and weapons. The Lebanese Forces Website (2009) published audio of Hezbollah's leader stated that the party's ideology is modeled on the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini regarding the Islamic government. Hezbollah is allied with Iran's regional policy in the region. Hassan Nasrallah publicly indicated that Hezbollah was supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime by sending fighters to Syria (Cowell & Barnard, 2013). Also, Nasrallah stated in one of his speeches that "we are open about the fact that Hezbollah's budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, come from the Islamic Republic of Iran" (Rafizadeh, 2016, para. 2).

Moreover, Hezbollah serves Iran's agenda in the region by fighting Iran's enemies. Salloukh (2017) and Makhzoumi (2010) argue that Hezbollah supported Shia groups in Iraq and trained them on guerrilla warfare against U.S. troops. Similarly, Salisbury (2015) mentions that Hezbollah supported the Houthis in Yemen against Saudi Arabia. According to the International Crisis Group's report in 2018, Hezbollah has an arsenal of tens of thousands of rockets and missiles that can reach deep into Israel. Karam (2019) reflects on the partnership between Hezbollah and Iran. Recently, during a celebrating of the 40th anniversary of Iran's Islamic Revolution in Beirut in February 2019, Hassan Nasrallah

threatened America to launch a war if the U.S. attacked Iran.

4.4.3 Syria

Syria is an essential country for Iran as a gateway for its influence in Lebanon and Palestine (Abdo, 2011; Mabon, 2016), and it is the front line of defense against the United States and Israel (Abdo, 2011). Assad's family, which is Alawi, runs Syria. Goldsmith (2012) argues that Alawis, who comprise roughly 13 percent of the population, have been instrumental in maintaining President Bashar al-Assad's hold on power as they form the main state apparatus. Syria is one of the Shia crescent countries with a strong relationship with Iran, which worries Saudi Arabia and other Sunni allies. For example, Syria refused the Iraqi invasion of Iran, which was supported by Saudi Arabia and other Sunni countries. Moreover, in the aftermath of Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia and Iran had different approaches towards the uprisings in Syria and each country tried to impose its interests through sectarian lenses to the degree which makes the Syrian's war, according to (Lynch, 2016), is the most significant incubator of sectarianism.

On the one hand, Byman (2019) argues that the Saudis have long wanted the ousting of the Alawi Assad, who rules over a majority Sunni state, so Saudi Arabia supported regime change in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Also, in order to cut the way for Iran to transfer weapons to Hezbollah and prevent the Shia crescent, Saudi Arabia supported rebels and Salafi jihadists. Moreover, Saudi Arabia supported the ousting of Syria out of the Arab League. Salloukh (2017) illustrates how the relationship between Syria and Saudi Arabia has intensified to the degree that Syria explicitly accused Saudi Arabia of interfering in its domestic policies and financing Salafi groups and jihadists in the region.

On the other hand, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has made it clear that Tehran supported Assad and saw the uprising in Syria as U.S. and Israeli ploy (Abdo, 2011). Also, Iran committed significant resources to shore up the Assad regime. Byman (2019) highlights the forms of Iranian support to Assad, such as deploying thousands of IRGC members and Shia fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight in Syria. Moreover, he mentions some estimates that Iran has spent over \$15 billion on the Syrian war to support its geopolitical interests.

4.4.4 Iraq

Iraq has a strategic location in the Middle East, with borders with Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iraq had been an important player in regional politics for decades. Following the U.S. invasion in 2003, the emerging of political violence and sectarian strife over identity and legitimacy were the main themes in Iraq. Haddad (2017) defines the sectarianization of Iraq because of "the dynamics between Shia-centric state building and Sunni rejection of this state-building" (p. 116). Also, following the state's collapse in 2003, Gause (2014) highlights that Iraq became a battle-ground of sectarianism in the region and citizens looked to their co-religionists for support, so according to Dodge (2012), Shia groups looked to Iran and Sunnis looked to Saudi Arabia (as cited in Gause, 2014).

As explained in Chapter Three, following the U.S. invasion, Iran succeeded in posting itself as a key player in Iraq's politics by supporting the majority of Shia allies in many different forms. Recently, Irish and Rasheed (2018) mention that Iran succeeded in transferring missiles to Iraqi-Shia militias and succeeded in developing the capacity to build more locations for missiles' factories in Iraq to further its regional interest. Also, this

report claims that the ballistic missiles' ranges could reach to Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, and Tel Aviv, the capital of Israel, in a clear threat to Iran's regional foes. Moreover, Clarke and Smyth (2017) explain another dimension of Iran's influence over Iraq through the foreign fighters' network. Iran recruited many Shia fighters who have been fighting alongside Iranian troops in Iraq.

Gause (2014) argues that the Saudis failed to constrain Iranian influence in Iraq although several attempts, such as supporting some Salafi groups, such as al-Sahwa (Awakening) movement in 2006, or backing the Iraqiya Party in the elections. Similarly, Hegghammer (2007) follows the participation of Saudi citizens in the Iraqi insurgency. He mentions that there were many Saudi citizens who participated in fighting in Iraq in jihadi groups and committed several suicide bombings against Shia targets in Iraq. Also, according to Cooper (2007), Saudis reportedly sent money and foreign fighters to support Sunni insurgents in Iraq while the government did not do anything to prevent the flow.

4.4.5 Yemen

Yemen has a strategic location at the south entrance of the red sea and the Gulf of Aden (see Figure 1). It shares about 1307 km of land borders with Saudi Arabia, according to CIA World Factbook in 2019. Salisbury (2015) and Laub (2016) trace the recent war in Yemen to 2014, when Houthi rebels from north Yemen took control of the capital, Sana'a. Houthis are Shia Muslims, who belong to the Zaydi sect of Shiism. Although Zaydi Shiism is distinct from the Twelver Shiism, found in Iran, Saudi considered them as proxy agents of Iran that threaten its southern border, so Saudi Arabia led a coalition of allied countries under the name of the "decisive storm" to launch a series of airstrikes against Houthis.

According to Riedel (2017), the monthly cost of the war in Yemen for Saudi Arabia is at least \$5-6 billion a month.

The Houthis have responded to Saudi airstrikes with missile attacks on Saudi Arabian infrastructure and territory, including oil tankers, facilities, and international airports in the Southern Province. Stewart (2017) mentions that Iran supported the Houthis with short-range ballistic missiles. Also, Riedel (2017) says that Iran's proxy, Hezbollah, also assisted the Houthis. According to the Global Conflict Tracker in 2019, The Saudi naval blockade succeeded in intercepting numerous Iranian weapons shipments to Houthi rebels in the Gulf of Aden. As a result of the proxy war, Yemen lives now in the worst humanitarian crisis, as described by the United Nations. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) in 2019, the war has killed more than 91,000 since 2015.

4.4.6 Israel

Sachs (2019) and Takeyh (2009) explain how the relationship between Israel and Iran turned from friendship, before the Islamic Revolution, to enmity. The Iranian Revolution came with calls of the extinction of Israel and described it as a little Satan. Teitelbaum and Segall (2012) gather some quotes from Iranian leaders against Israel. These quotes call on the elimination of Israel from the region, killing the Zionist regime, and laying out the legal and religious justification for the destruction of Israel. For example, in December 2000, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who repeatedly attacked Israel, said: "Iran's position, which was first expressed by the Imam Khomeini and stated several times by those responsible, is that the cancerous tumor called Israel must be uprooted from the

region” (p. 6).

Although Iran has no borders with Israel or any history of armed conflicts, Iran maintains a hostile relationship with Israel for reasons of power and regional hegemony. Iran wants to introduce itself as the defender of the Muslim world against Israel’s crimes in the Muslim world. Also, Iran succeeded in establishing strong ties with Israel’s neighbors, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas in Palestine, through the Axis of resistance. This axis of resistance represents the most significant security threat to Israel.

Salloukh (2017) explains that Iran’s relationships with this axis of resistance are strategic in order to deter Israel or its allies from attacking Iran, fearing retaliation of its proxies. Wermenbol (2019) explains how the Iranian proxy activities in Iraq and Syria have threatened Israel's security, so that Israel was pressured to prevent arms transfers to regional proxies in Lebanon and Syria. Moreover, Sachs (2019) argues that Iran and Israel's enmity is beneficial for both countries. On the one hand, Iran uses the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a tool to introduce itself as a leader in the Islamic world, interfere in the Middle-Eastern affairs, and compete with Saudi Arabia, which prided itself as the main actor in this conflict. Sachs also argues that Iran wanted to make the point that the Palestinian- Israeli conflict is not exclusive to Arab countries, but rather an Islamic cause. On the other hand, Israel benefits from the enmity in starting a new cooperation with the Arab states by diverting attention from domestic affairs, including political corruption and human rights abuses.

Saudi Arabia and Israel do not have official diplomatic relations, but the strategic and pragmatic shared goals created a rapprochement between two countries, as Sachs (2019)

expresses, “my enemy’s enemy can be my friend.” Many scholars explain the reasons behind this rapprochement, such as Sachs (2019) and Hiro (2018), who argue that both countries are against Iran’s nuclear deal and Assad in Syria. Moreover, Abadi (2019) highlights other reasons, such as Saudi’s desire to maintain its ties with the U.S., a strong ally of Israel, and for security concerns. Also, Israeli high-tech companies have provided crucial security products for Saudi intelligence (Rabi & Mueller, 2017).

At this point, the relationship is secret. According to Mabon (2016), the relationship detracts from Saudi Arabia’s narrative of Islamic legitimacy as such cooperation is against the Muslim cause because of Israel’s bad reputation in the Muslim world.

4.4.7 The United States

The United States has a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia and a deteriorating relationship with Iran. Saudi Arabia is the largest importer of U.S. weapons, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in March 2019. Also, President Trump visited Saudi Arabia on his first presidential trip in May 2017. He pulled the U.S. out of JCOPA in support of Saudi requests.

Moreover, the U.S. officially designated IRGC in 2019 as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO), which made it hard for any company or people to do business with Iran. According to a statement by the White House in April 2019, this designation will be the first time that the U.S. has ever named a part of another government as FTO. Furthermore, the U.S. also sanctioned Iranian state-owned banks to pressure the Iranian economy (Schanzer & Salter, 2019).

Kinzer (2011) explains the tensions in American-Iranian relationships. He

highlights that the Iranians did not forget the American government's role in setting Iran on the road of dictatorship by overthrowing the first-ever elected democratic Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in a coup planned by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1953, and other milestones in the relationship between both countries, such as the Islamic Revolution, and the hostage crisis.

Last but not least, by withdrawing from the JCPOA, the U.S. has re-imposed sanctions on Iran. President Trump, in a statement in August 2018, he mentioned his decision is due to Iran's activities in supporting terrorism, developing the ballistic and nuclear weapons programs, and interference in the affairs of other countries in the region. These sanctions have a catastrophic impact on Iran's economy and Iranian daily life. Also, the sanctions forced Iran to adopt more aggressive policies in the Middle East.

4.4.8 Russia

Although Russia is not a country in the Middle East, it has played an essential role in the power dynamics in that region. MacDonald (2019) and Wormuth (2019) identify Russian interests in the Middle East, particularly Syria. They argue that Russian presence in Syria granted it access to a Mediterranean seaport, airbase, and a place to test new weapons. In addition, Russia sees the engagement with the Middle East is a way to re-establish itself as a great world power and reliable partner in confrontation with the United States.

Russia partnered with Hezbollah and Iran to support President Assad in Syria, and they succeeded in saving his life and fighting his opponents (Clarke & Tabatabai, 2018). Although Russia's support to Assad was against Saudi's will, Russia has good relationships with Iran and Saudi Arabia. According to Wormuth (2019), Russia sold arms and weapons

to both countries. Russia's role as a stakeholder in the Middle East is merely motivated by its geopolitical interests.

4.4.9 Egypt

Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab world, with about 90 % of the population Sunni Muslims, according to the CIA World Factbook in 2019. Egypt has a better relationship with Saudi Arabia than Iran.

On the one hand, the diplomatic ties between Egypt and Iran were severed in 1980 when late President Anwar al Sadat gave asylum to the overthrown Shah, Mohamed Reza, after the Islamic Revolution. Bahgat (2009) identifies the milestones in bilateral relations, such as Egypt's support to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war. Moreover, Iran and Egypt broke diplomatic relations in 1979 after Iran condemned Egyptian President Sadat for signing the Camp David Peace Accords with Israel. In April 2006, former President Hosni Mubarak said in an interview that Shias across the Middle East are more loyal to Iran than to their own countries. This statement angered Shia populations in the Middle East and intensified the tensions between Egypt and Shias in the region (Green, Wehrey, & Wolf, 2009).

On the other hand, Egypt has strong ties with Saudi Arabia at all levels. Recently President Sisi made clear statements that the Egyptian army will support the Gulf states against any threats (Reuters, 2018). Also, Egypt is part of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, led by Saudi Arabia.

4.4.10 Turkey

Kirişci (2019) explains the development of relationships between Turkey and Iran. Before the Iranian Revolution, Turkey hosted Khomeini during his early exile as well as

other Iranian dissidents. After the Revolution, bilateral relations continued to have tensions because of Turkey's secular governmental approaches and military partnership with Israel, which were against the core principles of the Iranian Revolution. Recently, following the Syrian conflict, both countries sought to further their interests by arming and assisting their supporters on the ground. Clarke and Tabatabai (2018) explain how the two states managed to develop a pragmatic relationship, as they felt threatened by the Kurds' separation movements in both countries. Moreover, according to Kirişci (2019) and Hiro (2017), both countries have good economic cooperation, although there are sectarian differences between them.

Turkey and Saudi Arabia are both Sunni-majority countries. Both countries agree on toppling President Assad in Syria (Gause, 2014), so Turkey's border became the gateway for jihadists and extremist Islamist groups to fight in Syria against President Assad (Spencer & Sanchez, 2014). Nevertheless, there has been a clash between Turkey and Saudi Arabia over the leadership of the Sunni world and the support of Muslim brotherhood. Hiro (2017) explains how Turkey is looking forward to leading the Sunni world as an heir to the Ottoman Empire. Also, he highlights a recent update about Turkey's relationship with Qatar. Turkey has backed Qatar after Saudi Arabia and other Arab states cut all economic and diplomatic ties. Turkey sent food and troops in support of Qatar, which caused anger in Saudi Arabia. In October 2018, the killing of the Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul in Turkey severed the relationship between Turkey and Saudi Arabia as Turkey accused Saudi Arabia of violating the Turkish sovereignty (Alterman, 2018).

4.4.11 Gulf states of the Gulf Cooperation Council

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in which Saudi Arabia plays the leadership role, has passed through difficult times since its establishment. Harb (2017) explains that the ongoing intra-GCC crisis between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain against Qatar, has increased Iranian influence in the region, and it has affected the unity of the GCC. The next few pages highlight some points for each country.

4.4.11.1 The United Arab Emirates (UAE)

UAE has borders with the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Ulrichsen (2017) describes the bilateral relations between the UAE and Iran as multidimensional relations. Wehrey et al. (2009) highlight one of the most conflictual points between both countries, the territorial dispute over Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs islands. Also, the UAE has high numbers of Iranian expatriate population and Iranian investment, which complicated the relationships.

Given the fact that the UAE has seven different emirates, their rulers have struggled at times to draw one policy towards Iran. Ulrichsen (2017) and Wehrey et al. (2009) give examples of two emirates, Dubai and Sharjah, that have economic relationships with Iran, and they both are keen on keeping good relationships, whereas Abu Dhabi has a different standpoint against Iran's activities in the region. Saudi Arabia and the UAE remain strategic partners. Both countries agree on many various issues, such as the war in Yemen, the boycott on Qatar, the opposition of Iran's regional activities, and the reaction to the Arab uprisings.

4.4.11.2 Bahrain

The Kingdom of Bahrain (Bahrain) is an archipelago in the Arabian Gulf, east of Saudi Arabia, with a strategic central location in the Arabian Gulf. Until 1970, Bahrain was under Iran's sovereignty, but Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi abandoned sovereignty's claims after secret Anglo-Iranian negotiations (Alvandi, 2010; Ulrichsen, 2013). There has been a long tension in the bilateral relationship between Bahrain and Iran. Wehrey et al. (2009) give an example of a failed coup attempt in the early 1980s, after the Iranian Revolution, when some Shias, who received training and funding by Iran, according to the government of Bahrain, planned a coup before the government discovered it. Also, Iran is critical of Bahrain as it hosts the fifth fleet of the U.S. Navy, the Great Satan.

On the other hand, Bahrain is a strong ally of Saudi Arabia. There has been a long history of support between the two monarchies to the extent that Bahrain, according to Downs (2012), is a puppet of Saudi Arabia.

4.4.11.3 Qatar

Wehrey, Karasik, Nader, Ghez, and Hansell (2009) explain the Saudi-Qatari relationship. On the one hand, there has been a history of tensions between the two states in the early days of state-building when Ibn Saud claimed on Qatari territory besides the disputes between the two states about GCC leadership. Also, Qatar used its powerful media tool, Al-Jazeera channels, to frequently criticize the Saudi regime, which contributed to high levels of tension between both countries. Hiro (2017) discusses the recent tensions in bilateral relationships when Saudi Arabia, among other Arab countries, U.A.E, Egypt, and Bahrain, demanded that Qatar curbs diplomatic ties with Iran and closes its diplomatic

missions beside other demands, which Qatar ignored. So, these Arab countries imposed a boycott on Qatar, severed diplomatic relations, and banned Qatari airplanes and ships from utilizing their airspace and sea routes.

On the other hand, Wehrey et al. (2009) highlight the bilateral relations between Qatar and Iran. Qatar has worked with Iran on several fronts in Lebanon and Syria. Also, Qatar was the only country to reject a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for Iran to halt uranium enrichment in 2006. Additionally, Kamrava (2017) gives other examples of the close relationship. For example, both countries share the world's largest natural gas structure, and they hold bilateral high-level meetings between both officials. Recently, Iran supported Qatar by sending food supplies and opening its airspace to Qatari flights, following the recent boycott on Qatar.

4.4.11.4 Sultanate of Oman

Sultanate of Oman or Oman has borders with the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, and Persian Gulf, UAE, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia (See figure 1). About 45% of the Muslim Population of Omani citizens are Ibadhi and Sunni, and about 5% are Shias, according to CIA World Factbook in 2019.

On the one hand, the Sultanate of Oman has a warm and close historical relationship with Iran (Valeri, 2017; Wehrey et al., 2009). Valeri (2017) traces the reasons behind the warm Omani-Iranian relations to the military assistance Oman received from Iran in the 1970s to settle the uprising in the Dhofar War. Also, Oman shares a vast gas field in the Gulf with Iran. Moreover, Oman tries to avoid sectarian tensions with Shia groups who have been invaluable allies of the rulers. Oman has played the mediator role in many

different contexts. Schanzer and Salter (2019) highlight the role Oman played as a channel in the Iran–US secret talks, which resulted in the JCOPA nuclear deal in 2015. Also, Al-Muslimi (2017) highlights Oman’s role as a mediator in the recent crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

On the other hand, Oman has a historic relationship with Saudi Arabia, and both countries share a long borderline. Recently, Oman refused to join the Saudi-led coalition against Yemen. Nazemroaya (2015) argues that the reasons behind this decision were Oman’s worry about Saudi’s use of sectarianism to ignite a confrontation with Iran.

4.4.11.5 Kuwait

Wehrey et al. (2009) explain how Kuwait is different from other Gulf countries. Kuwait succeeded in integrating its Shia citizens in the community so that the sectarian tensions had no place in the political agenda of Kuwait. When it comes to the relationship with Iran, Reuters’ report in 2017 details the milestones in the bilateral relations, which have been mainly shaped by geo-political forces. For example, after a raid on the so-called “Abdali cell” in 2015, Kuwait convicted 23 men, one Iranian and the rest Kuwaitis, of spying for Iran and Hezbollah. In 2017, Kuwait ordered the expulsion of the Iranian ambassador and 14 other diplomats for alleged links to “spy and terror” cell (Westall, 2017, para. 1). Also, another milestone in the bilateral relationship was Kuwait’s support to Iraq in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War.

Kuwait is a strong ally to Saudi Arabia. Albloshi (2018) explains that the shared threats from Iraq during the 1990s cemented Kuwaiti-Saudi ties. Both countries agree on many cases, such as their criticism of the Arab Spring, but Kuwait disagrees with Saudi

Arabia about the JCPOA. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Kuwait welcomed the agreement and did not endorse the U.S. withdrawal from JCPOA.

4.6 Conflict mapping

Given the complexity of the conflict and the large number of stakeholders, relative powers, and influences, the next part uses the framework developed by Matthew Levinger (2013), as suggested in Chapter Two, to provide understanding about the critical dynamics of the conflicts. Figure 8 presents a conflict map between Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other stakeholders, using graphical elements.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This thesis aimed to explain the contemporary rise of sectarian violence in the Middle East by examining the milestone events that have contributed to the sectarian violence through a case study between Saudi Arabia, as a representative of Sunni Islam, and Iran, as a representative of Shia Islam. Choosing Iran and Saudi Arabia for the case study was because of their contest for regional hegemony and their claims for exceptionalism. Also, both regimes rest on religious authority besides a similar social contract between the government and the people.

This research identified and analyzed many dimensions of the sectarian conflict in the Middle East based on a qualitative analysis of the history of Islam, theories of Conflict Resolution, literature of International Relations, and the response of Saudi Arabia and Iran to recent regional events, such as the Iranian Revolution, the U.S. led invasion to Iraq, the Arab uprisings, and Iran Nuclear deal. The Iranian Revolution brought the clerics to power with a doctrine of exporting revolution to other Islamic states and delegitimizing the Arab monarchies in the region.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq changed the long-established power dynamics in Iraq and empowered the Shia of Iraq, who were supported by Iran, so that other Sunni countries worried about the Iranian influence in Iraq, which threatened their regimes by emboldening the Shia citizens in the Gulf countries. The Arab uprisings inspired other countries to revolt against discrimination and corruption, and threatened the Arab monarchies who quelled the demonstrations in their countries and translated these demonstrations into sectarian narratives. Last but not least, the Iran Nuclear Deal with its consequences, alarmed Saudi

Arabia and other Sunni states about the empowerment of Iran in the region. This thesis does not suggest that these events are the only reasons of the rise of sectarian violence; instead, this thesis argues that the combination of these events with the history of colonization, and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, besides the role of external factors and conflict entrepreneurs, who have interests in sustaining the conflicts.

Given the complexity of the conflict and instead of using single theoretical approach, the multi-dimensional Conflict Analysis Framework by Levinger was used to analyze the Saudi-Iranian rivalry through investigating strategic, political, socioeconomic, psychological, and cultural dimensions of the conflict to provide multidisciplinary understanding to policymakers, who could make decisions, contributing to the stability of the Middle East. As illustrated through the conflict map and the stakeholders' analysis, the conflict is complex, with different actors. The rivalry between the two powers has affected the stability of the Middle East. Many stakeholders are motivated by economic interest or political interests, such as secession or territorial partition. The proxy wars and the strategic partnerships in the region, as analyzed in Chapter Four, prove the geopolitical interests are more considerable than the ideological ones.

Furthermore, this thesis concludes that political interests are important factors to consider when understanding and analyzing the rise of sectarian violence in the Middle East. The political use of religion succeeded, directly and indirectly, in shaping sectarian narratives in the Middle East. The use of religion in the sectarian conflict has been a characteristic element in the Middle East conflicts. Given the wide interpretation of the Quran and the empowerment of clerics through the state, religion has been a tool to shore

up regimes and increase sectarian narratives. Through the clerics and religious scholar, Islam, appeared as a tool to justify the violence and give rulers impunity.

Each country has its own significant circumstances, such as the state apparatus, the relationship between the government and the people, and the geopolitical interests, so giving a recipe to deal with all conflicts is hard. Conflict resolution is a long term process that addresses the root causes of the conflict and understands the positions and interests of each party in order to reach a resolution. Solutions should be tailored to the specific conflict. In our case study, the Shias have witnessed a long history of grievances, horizontal inequalities, and discrimination. Also, Shias in Saudi Arabia have been a partner in the country, so part of the resolution is reintegrating them into society, giving them religious freedom, and including them in the governmental positions. Another crucial recommendation is conducting a community and national dialogue to bring all parties together to share and listen to each other. In addition, ending hate speech against Shias in the media by activating laws against hate speech. Also, the education curriculum should be revised to ensure the values of diversity and respects to others. Acceptance of the rights of others and equitable distribution of resources are two pillars of positive peace, according to the Global Peace Index (2019).

Many scholars talk about the possibility of having peace and end the sectarian violence in the Middle East. Gause (2014) argues that the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran could happen if the leaders of both countries have the political will. Also, Al-Badi (2017) highlights the importance of shared economic interests as a way to reduce tension and contribute to confidence-building measures between the two rivals. Bahgat,

Ehteshami, and Quilliam (2017) argue that the Iranian relationships with its Arab neighbors are not uniform, and there are many forces that could shape the future of relationships in the coming years, such as the change in the leadership and changes in energy markets.

The negative effects of Saudi-Iranian rivalry on the international peace and security are evident, including destabilizing the Middle East region, anti-Shia sentiments spreading to other parts of the world, such as Nigeria, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the humanitarian and immigration crisis, fragile states, and the empowerment of fundamentalist groups. The United States and other world powers should reconsider their roles in the Middle East and re-identify their interests in the region. The U.S. policy should take into consideration including, not excluding, Iran in crafting the vision for the Middle East by using diplomacy, not force, and third-party intervention. Oman could play this role, based on its history of mediating regional conflicts, besides its good relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Building trust through an inclusive peace is a long-term process that requires the efforts of the international community and the political will of all parties of the conflicts.

Finally, based on these conclusions, scholars should consider doing fieldwork and interviews in Saudi Arabia and Iran, to test and track the peoples' narratives on the factors indicated in this thesis. Also, to better understand the implications of the contemporary sectarian conflict, future studies could analyze social media platforms in the Middle East to understand how sectarianism is voiced via social media. Further research is needed to determine the effects of future political changes on the conflict, such as the upcoming U.S. presidential elections in 2020, the Iranian presidential elections in 2021, and the potential change in the Saudi royal family.

Figures

Figure 1. Map of the Greater Middle East
Source: (Izady, 2010)

Figure 2. Map of Saudi Arabia
Source: (CIA, 2018)

Figure 3. Map of Iran
Source: (CIA, 2019)

Figure 4. The political power structure of Iran
Source: (BBC, 2009)

Figure 5. Saudi Arabia's Royal family tree.
Source: (Middle East Eye, 2015)

Figure 6. The Sectarian Balance of Power in the Middle East
Source: (Stratfor, 2015)

Figure 7. Shia Crescent
Source: (Parchizadeh, 2018)

Figure 8. Stakeholders Map
Source: (Eltally, 2019)

References

- Al-Badi, A. (2017). Saudi-Iranian Relations: A Troubled Trajectory. In A. Ehteshami, N. Quilliam, & G. Bahgat (Eds.), *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours* (pp. 189-209). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Anderson, B. (1995). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso.
- Asquith, C. (2009). *Sisters in War: A Story of Love, Family, and Survival in the New Iraq*. New York: Random House.
- Al-Muslimi, F. (2017, August 7). Master of the Middle. *Carnegie Middle East Center*. Retrieved from <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/72715>
- Abdo, G. (2017). *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*. Oxford University Press.
- Abdo, G. (2011, August 25). How Iran Keeps Assad in Power in Syria. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2011-08-25/how-iran-keeps-assad-power-syria>
- Anastasiou, H. (2008). *The Broken Olive Branch: Nationalism versus Europeanization* (Vol. 2). Syracuse University Press.
- Avalos, H. (2005). *Fighting words: The origins of religious violence*. Prometheus Books.
- Albloshi, H. H. (2018, August 10). Kuwait's careful balancing act with Iran, Saudi Arabia. *Al-Monitor*. Retrieved from <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/05/iran-jcpoa-nuclear-deal-gcc-saudi-kuwait-reaction-division.html>

- Alterman, J. B. (2018, October 22). The Implications of Khashoggi's Death for Saudi Arabia. Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/implications-khashoggis-death-saudi-arabia>
- Aghaie, K. S. (2004). *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. University of Washington Press.
- Anderson, L. & Stansfield, G. (2005). *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan Trade.
- Ayoob, M. (2016, January 19). Iran Nuclear Deal Fuels Tension With Saudi Arabia Inflaming New Conflicts. Retrieved from <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/iran-nuclear-deal-fuels-tension-saudi-arabia-inflaming-new-conflicts>
- Al-Atawneh, M. (2009). Is Saudi Arabia a theocracy? Religion and governance in contemporary Saudi Arabia. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(5), 721-737.
doi: 10.1080/00263200802586105
- Al-Rasheed, M. (2010). *A history of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Rasheed, M. (1998). The Shi'a of Saudi Arabia: A minority in search of cultural authenticity. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 121-138. Retrieved from <http://stats.lib.pdx.edu/proxy.php?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/docview/205381867?accountid=13265>
- Alaaldin, R. (2017). Containing Shiite Militias: The Battle for Stability in Iraq Policy Briefing (Policy Briefing). *Brookings Doha Center*. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/shiite_militias_iraq_english.pdf

- Alvandi, R. (2010). Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question, 1968–1970. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37(2), 159-177.
doi: 10.1080/13530191003794723
- Arango, T. (2016, April 28). With Iraq Mired in Turmoil, Some Call for Partitioning the Country. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/29/world/middleeast/with-iraq-mired-in-turmoil-some-call-for-partitioning-the-country.html>
- Ambler, T., & Wilson, A. (1995). Problems of stakeholder theory. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 4(1), 30-35. doi: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8608.1995.tb00107.x>
- Anti-government Arab group claims responsibility for attack on Iran military parade. (2018, September 22). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-military-attack-responsibility/anti-government-arab-group-claims-responsibility-for-attack-on-iran-military-parade-idUSD5N1W400K>
- About IMCTC. (n. d.). Retrieved from <https://imctc.org/English/About>
- Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*. Tampa, Florida: Anol Bhattacharjee.
- Blanchard, C. M. (2009). Islam: Sunnis and Shiites, *Congressional Research Service*. Retrieved from [1.https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a494842.pdf](https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a494842.pdf)
- Byman, D. L. (2019, February 28). Can Syria return to the regional stage? *Brookings Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/02/28/can-syria-return-to-the-regional-stage/>

- Byman, D. (2018, December 13). How the U.S. Is Empowering Iran in Yemen. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-07-26/how-us-empowering-iran-yemen>
- Barash, D., & Webel, Charles. (2018). *Peace & conflict studies*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.
- Bar-Tal, D., Oren, N., & Nets-Zehngut, R. (2014). Sociopsychological analysis of conflict- supporting narratives: A general framework. *Journal of Peace Research*, 51(5), 662-675. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/stable/24557448>
- Bar-Tal, D. (2013). *Intractable conflicts: Socio-psychological Foundations and Dynamics*. Cambridge. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bahgat, G., Ehteshami, A., & Quilliam, N. (2017). Conclusion. In G. Bahgat, A. Ehteshami, & N. Quilliam (Eds.), *Security and Bilateral Issues Between Iran and Its Arab Neighbours* (229-240). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Bahgat, G. (2009). Egypt and Iran: The 30-year Estrangement. *Middle East Policy*, 16(4), 47-54. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2009.00413.x>
- Bazian, H. (2019). The US' Sectarian Playbook in the Muslim World. *Daily Sabah*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/hatem-bazian/2019/01/02/the-us-sectarian-playbook-in-the-muslim-world>
- Burton, J. (1990). Conflict: Human needs theory. *Conflict series*, 2. New York: St. Martin's Press. doi:10.1007/978-1-349-21000-8

- Barzegar, K. (2010). Balance of power in the Persian Gulf: An Iranian view. *Middle East Policy*, 17(3), 74-87. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2010.00452.x>
- Blanford, N. (2017, November 20). Saudi-Iranian conflict wreaking havoc in Lebanon. *The Hill*. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/361104-saudi-iranian-conflict-wrecks-havoc-in-lebanon>
- Bush - War in Afghanistan. (n.d.). *C-Span*. Retrieved from <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4776097/bush-war-afghanistan>
- Cordesman, A. H. (2018, January 11). The Crisis in Iran: What Now? *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Retrieved from https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180112_The_Crisis_Iran.pdf?436140qcZULx2.FP2LQLcbaW0c4ZC5Y
- Cowell, A., & Barnard, A. (2013, November 14). Hezbollah Chief Says His Forces Will Stay in Syria. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/15/world/middleeast/syria.html>
- Clarke, C., & Smyth, P. (2017). The Implications of Iran's Expanding Shia Foreign Fighter Network. *CTC Sentinel*, 10(10), 14-18. Retrieved from https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2017/11/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss10-18.pdf
- Clarke, C. P., & Tabatabai, A. M. (2018, October 31). Is Major Realignment Taking Place in the Middle East? *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2018-10-31/major-realignment-taking-place-middle-east>

- Conversi, D. (2006). Genocide, ethnic cleansing, and nationalism. *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, 320-333. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781848608061.n28>
- Cooper, H. (2007, July 27). Saudis' Role in Iraq Frustrates U.S. Officials. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/27/world/middleeast/27saudi.html?auth=login-google>
- Crawford, N.C. (2018). Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency. *Cost of War project*. Retrieved from <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2018/Human%20Costs%20Nov%208%202018%20CoW.pdf>
- Crawford, N.C. (2017). United States Budgetary Costs of Post-9/11 Wars Through FY2018. *Cost of War project*. Retrieved from https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2017/Costs%20of%20U.S.%20Post-9_11%20NC%20Crawford%20FINAL%20.pdf
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2019). Egypt. *In The world factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2019). Iran. *In The world factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2019). Lebanon. *In The world factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2019). Oman. *In The world factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

- Central Intelligence Agency. (2019). Saudi Arabia. In *The world factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2018). Saudi Arabia. In *CIA MAPS*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/cia-maps-publications/Saudi%20Arabia.html>
- Dinham, A., & Francis, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Religious literacy in policy and practice*. Policy Press.
- Dodge, C. H. (2019, April 23). *Key Differences Between Shia and Sunni Muslims*. Retrieved from <https://www.learnreligions.com/difference-between-shia-and-sunni-muslims-2003755>
- Davis, E. (2008). Reflections on Religion and Politics in Post-Ba’thist Iraq. Taarii Newsletter. Retrieved from <http://fas-polisci.rutgers.edu/davis/ARTICLES/DavisReligionPoliticisIraqTAARII.spr08.pdf>
- Dabashi, H. (2018, September 25). Is it Ahvaz or Ahwaz - and what difference does it make? *Al-Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/ahvaz-ahwaz-difference-180925145037386.html>
- Dempsey, J. (2019, June 26). Europe's Absence in the Middle East. *Carnegie Europe*. Retrieved from https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/79382?lang=en&fbclid=IwAR1KB8j2dJGsO6-aulPYGIO2iGbmRJrqdY_iBeYXo-hV67_XgP2Iod5SkYo
- Downs, K. (2012). A theoretical analysis of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in Bahrain. *Journal of Politics & International Studies*, 8, 13. 203-237.

- De Mascia, S. (2016). *Project Psychology: Using Psychological Models and Techniques to Create a Successful Project*. CRC Press.
- Entessar, N. (2013). Iran's nuclear program and foreign policy. In T. Juneau & S. Razavi (Eds.), *Iranian Foreign Policy Since 2001: Alone in the world* (pp. 84-100). Routledge.
- Fürtig, H. (2007). Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The interregional order and US policy. *The Middle East Journal*, 61(4), 627-640.
- Fisher, R., Ury, William, & Patton, Bruce. (2011). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in* (Third edition, revised ed.). New York, New York: Penguin Books.
- Faramarzi, S. (2018, April 6). Iran's Sunnis resist extremism, but for how long? *Atlantic Council*. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/iran-s-sunnis-resist-extremism-but-for-how-long/>
- Fatwa in the Gulf, signed by Yousuf Al-Qaradhawi: Syrian Regime Is 'Heretical'; Sever Ties with It. (2011, August 22). *Middle East Media Research Institute*. Retrieved March 7, 2019, from <https://www.memri.org/reports/fatwa-gulf-signed-yousuf-al-qaradhawi-syrian-regime-heretical-sever-ties-it>
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press.
- Gartzke, E. & Gleditsch K. S. (2006). Identity and Conflict: Ties that Bind and Differences that Divide. *European Journal of International Relations*. 12(1): 53-87.

- Gause III, F. G. (2014). Beyond Sectarianism: The new Middle East cold war (Analysis Paper). *Brookings Doha Center*, 11, 1-27.
- Gelvin, J. (2018). *The new Middle East: What everyone needs to know*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gengler, J. (2016). *The political economy of sectarianism in the Gulf*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Goldberg, J. (2015, March 9). The Iranian Regime on Israel's Right to Exist. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/Iranian-View-of-Israel/387085/>
- Gettleman, J. (2004, April 9). The Struggle for Iraq: Alliances; Ex- Rivals Uniting. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/09/world/the-struggle-for-iraq-alliances-ex-rivals-uniting.html>
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Sage.
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of peace research*, 27(3), 291-305.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of peace research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Green, J., Wehrey, F. & Wolf, C. (2009). Understanding Iran. *RAND Corporation*: Retrieved from https://www.rand.org › dam › rand › pubs › monographs › RAND_MG771
- Goldsmith, L. (2012). Alawites for Assad. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2012-04-16/alawites-assad>

- Gasiorowski, M., Long, D., & Reich, B., (2014). *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*. Boulder: Westview Press, 126
- Grimble, R., & Wellard, K. (1997). Stakeholder methodologies in natural resource management: a review of principles, contexts, experiences and opportunities. *Agricultural systems*, 55(2), 173-193.
- Guide: How Iran is ruled. (2009, June 9). *BBC*. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8051750.stm
- Global Peace Index 2019: Measuring Peace in a Complex World. (2019). *Institute for Economics & Peace*. Sydney. Retrieved from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/reports>
- Global arms trade: USA increases dominance; arms flows to the Middle East surge, says SIPRI. (2019, March 11). Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2019/global-arms-trade-usa-increases-dominance-arms-flows-middle-east-surge-says-sipri>
- Hussein, A. A. (2012). *So History Doesn't Forget: Alliances Behavior in Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1979-1990*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.
- Hubbard, B. (2015, October 1). Number of Iranians Killed in Hajj Stampede Grows to 464. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/02/world/middleeast/iranians-killed-hajj-stampede-mecca.html>
- Hiro, D. (2018). *Cold war in the Islamic world: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the struggle for supremacy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Hiro, D. (2017, December 7). Russia-Iran-Turkey Alliance Puts the US on Back-Foot. *Yale Global*. Retrieved from <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/russia-iran-turkey-alliance-puts-us-back-foot>
- Hadad, F. (2017). Shia-Centric State Building and Sunni Rejection in Post-2003 Iraq. In F. Wehrey (Ed.), *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The roots of sectarianism in a changing Middle East* (pp. 115-134). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haddad, F. (2013). *Sunni-Shia relations after the Iraq War*. United States Institute of Peace, Peace brief, 160. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.
- Halm, H. (2007). *The Shiites: A short history*. Princeton: Markus Wiener.
- Harb, I. K. (2017, September 18). *The US and the GCC: A Steep Learning Curve for President Trump*. Retrieved from http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/the-us-and-the-gcc-a-steep-learning-curve-for-president-trump/
- Hurd, I. (1999). Legitimacy and authority in international politics. *International organization*, 53(2), 379-408.
- Hurd, I. (n.d.). Legitimacy. Encyclopedia Princetoniensis. Retrieved from <https://pesd.princeton.edu/?q=node/255>
- Hazleton, L. (2010). *After the prophet: The epic story of the Shia-Sunni split in Islam*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hoffman, M. (2014, April). *Religion, Sectarianism, and Democracy: Evidence from Iraq*. In AALIMS Annual Meeting.

- Hashemi, N. (2019, January 25). The Cold War between Iran and the Arab World (K. Ziabari). *Fair Observer*. Retrieved from https://www.fairobsERVER.com/re-gion/middle_east_north_africa/iranian-arab-relations-iran-arab-world-news-middle-east-politics-saudi-arabia-28031/
- Hashemi, N. & Postel, D. (2017). *Sectarianization: Mapping the new politics of the Middle East*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Haider, N. (2014). *Shi'i Islam: An introduction*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996). The West unique, not universal. *Foreign affairs*, 28-46.
- Huntington, S. P. (1993). The Clash of Civilizations. *Foreign Affairs*. 72 (5): 186-94
- Hegghammer, T. (2007). Saudi militants in Iraq: Backgrounds and recruitment patterns. *Norwegian Defence Research Establishment*, 5.
- Humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the worst in the world, warns UN. (2019, February 14). *UN News*. Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1032811>
- Ignatius, D. (2017, November 10). Saudi Arabia forcibly detained Lebanon's prime minister, sources say. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/saudi-arabia-forcibly-detained-lebanons-prime-minister-sources-say/2017/11/10/b93a1fb4-c647-11e7-84bc-5e285c7f4512_story.html
- Irish, J., & Rasheed, A. (2018, August 31). Exclusive: Iran moves missiles to Iraq in warning to enemies. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us->

iran-iraq-missiles-exclusive/exclusive-iran-moves-missiles-to-iraq-in-warning-to-enemies-idUSKCN1LG0WB

Izady, M. (2010). *Atlas of the Islamic World and Vicinity* (New York, Columbia University, Gulf 2000 Project: 2006-present). Retrieved January 14, 2019, from http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Grt_Mid_East_Political_lg.png

Islamic Republic of Iran. (2018). *The World Bank Group*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>

Iran military parade attacked by gunmen in Ahvaz. (2018, September 22). *BBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45611411>

Israel, Hizbollah and Iran: Preventing Another War in Syria. (2018, February 19). *Crisis Group*. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/east-ern-mediterranean/syria/182-israel-hizbollah-and-iran-preventing-another-war-syria>

Interactive: Saudi Arabia's royal family tree. (2015, March 10). *The Middle East Eye*. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeasteye.net/infographics/interactive-saudi-arabia-royal-family-tree>

Iran says ambassador to remain in Kuwait despite row. (2017, July 24). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-kuwait-diplomacy/iran-says-ambassador-to-remain-in-kuwait-despite-row-idUSKBN1A91CC>

In Iraq, Regional Players Try to Gain Influence. (2015, September 18). *Stratfor*. Retrieved February 10, 2019, from <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/iraq-regional-players-try-gain-influence>

Iran: Who holds the power?" (2009). *BBC*. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/iran_power/html/

Juneau, T., & Razavi, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Iranian foreign policy since 2001: Alone in the world*. Routledge.

Keresten, C. (2014, January). *Shia-Sunni Schisms – World View*. Retrieved from <https://liveencounters.net/january-2014/january/dr-carool-kersten-shia-sunni-schisms-world-view/>

Kechichian, J. A. (2000). Saudi Arabia's will to power. *Middle East Policy*, 7(2), 47-60.

Kirişci, K. (2019, April 4). Post-revolutionary Iran and Turkey at 40: Pragmatism and convergence. *Brookings Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/04/04/post-revolutionary-iran-and-turkey-at-40-pragmatism-and-convergence/>

Kamrava, M. (2017). Iran-Qatar Relations. In A. Ehteshami, N. Quilliam, & G. Bahgat (Eds.), *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours* (pp. 167-187) Palgrave Macmillan, Cham

Kindt, M. T. (2009). Hezbollah: A State within a State. In B. Schneider, J. Post, & M. Kindt (Eds.), *The World's Most Threatening Terrorist Networks and Criminal Gangs* (pp. 123-144). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kressel, N. J. (2002). Can anything be done? In N. J. Kressel (Ed.), *The global rise of genocide and terror* (pp. 213- 244). New York: Westview.

- Kirmanj, S. (2013). *Identity and Nation in Iraq*. ProQuest Ebook Central. Lynne Rienner Publishers. Retrieved from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/detail.action?docID=3328954>
- Kinzer, S. (2011). *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's future*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Karam, S. (2007). The Multi-faced Sunni Insurgency: A Personal Reflection. *Civil Wars* 9(1):87–105.
- Karam, Z. (2019, May 17). Iran could rally regional proxies in case of war with the US. *AP News*. Retrieved from <https://www.apnews.com/4c33fda1bb6b4d7ab676fa62cbb4ddd1>
- Lederach, J. (2014). *The little book of conflict transformation: clear articulation of the guiding principles by a pioneer in the field*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.
- Linz, J. (2000). *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Lynch, M. (2016, January 4). Why Saudi Arabia Escalated the Middle East's Sectarian Conflict. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/04/why-saudi-arabia-escalated-middle-east-s-sectarian-conflict-pub-62398>
- Lynch, M. (2013, November 13). The Entrepreneurs of Cynical Sectarianism. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/13/the-entrepreneurs-of-cynical-sectarianism/>

- Lipka, M. (2014). The Sunni-Shia divide: Where they live, what they believe and how they view each other. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/18/the-sunni-shia-divide-where-they-live-what-they-believe-and-how-they-view-each-other/>
- Levinger, M. (2013). *Conflict analysis: Understanding Causes, Unlocking Solutions*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Academy Guides.
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed methods, Arts-based, and Community-based participatory research approaches*. Guilford Publications.
- Laub, Z. (2016). Yemen in crisis. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis>
- Maida, A. (2017, September 26). They Are Not Our Brothers: Hate Speech by Saudi Officials. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/26/they-are-not-our-brothers/hate-speech-saudi-officials>
- Mumford, A. (2013). *Proxy Warfare: War and conflict in the modern world*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Marschall, C. (2003). *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami*. Routledge.
- Makovsky, D., & Levitt, M. (2015, July 14). Keeping Iran's Feet to the Fire. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/14/the-nuclear-deal-doesnt-mean-the-end-of-sanctions-iran/>
- Makhzoumi, F. (2010). *Lebanon's Crisis of Sovereignty, Survival*, 52:2, 5-12.
doi:10.1080/00396331003764298.

- Munson, H. (2011). Religion and Violence: An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 12:1, 101-103.
doi: 10.1080/21567689.2011.564406
- Momen, M. (1985). *An introduction to Shi'i Islam: The history and doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Morgan, P. M. (2017). The concept of deterrence and deterrence theory. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.572>
- Mohammed, R. (2015, April 2). *Muslim Cleric Calls for 'All-Out War'*. Retrieved from <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2015/04/02/Muslim-Cleric-Calls-All-Out-War>
- Mabon, S. (2016). *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Power and Rivalry in the Middle East*. New York. IB Tauris.
- MacDonald, S. B. (2019, February 19). The Unlikely Convergence of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. *The National Interest*. Retrieved from <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/unlikely-convergence-russia-iran-and-turkey-44617>
- Mason, S., & Rychard, S. (2005). Conflict Analysis Tool. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); Conflict Prevention and Transformation Division (COPRET). Retrieved from <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Conflict-Analysis-Tools.pdf>
- Matthiesen, T. (2015). *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism*. Cambridge University Press.

- Matthiesen, T. (2009). The Shi'a of Saudi Arabia at a Crossroads. *Middle East Report Online*, 6. Retrieved from <https://merip.org/2009/05/the-shia-of-saudi-arabia-at-a-crossroads/>
- Mapping the Global Muslim Population. (2009, October 7). Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/>
- Nazemroaya, M. D. (2015, March 31). The Geopolitics Behind the War in Yemen: The Start of a New Front against Iran. *Global Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-geopolitics-behind-the-war-in-yemen-the-start-of-a-new-front-against-iran/5439431>
- Nasr, V. (2018, March). Iran Among the Ruins. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-02-13/iran-among-ruins>
- Nasr, V. (2016, January 22). The War for Islam. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/22/the-war-for-islam-sunni-shiite-iraq-syria/>
- Nasr, V. (2007). *The Shia revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future*. New York: WW Norton & Company.
- Nakash, Y. (2006). The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World: Reaching for Power. *National Counterterrorism Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.dni.gov.edgekey-staging.net/nctc/groups/hizballah.html>
- Nakash, Y. (1994). *The Shi'is of Iraq*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Perazzo, B. (2012). On Being Shia in Saudi Arabia. *Gulf Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.gulfinstitute.org/wp-content/pdfs/shialifeinsaudiarabia.pdf>

- Phillips, C. (2015). Sectarianism and conflict in Syria. *Third World Quarterly*, 36(2), 357-376.
- Parchizadeh, R. (2018, February 28). The Shiite Crescent: The Middle East's Arc of Crisis [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2018/02/28/the-shiite-crescent/>
- President Trump and King Salman Sign Arms Deal. (2017, November 9). *The White House*. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/president-trump-king-salman-sign-arms-deal/>
- Quandt, W. B. (1981). *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil*. The Brookings Institute.
- Riedel, B. (2017, December 6). *In Yemen, Iran outsmarts Saudi Arabia again*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/12/06/in-yemen-iran-out-smarts-saudi-arabia-again/>
- Rayburn, J. (2014). *Iraq after America: Strongmen, sectarians, resistance*. Hoover Institution Press publication; Number 643. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press.
- Rose, M. (2016, October 1). The Political System of Iran. *Our Politics*. Retrieved from <https://ourpolitics.net/the-political-system-of-iran/>
- Rafizadeh, M. (2016, May 26). In first, Hezbollah confirms all financial support comes from Iran. *Al Arabia*. Retrieved from <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/2016/06/25/In-first-Hezbollah-s-Nasrallah-confirms-all-financial-support-comes-from-Iran.html>

- Rieger, R. (2014). In search of stability: Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring. In Saudi Arabia and the Arab Uprising: national, regional and global responses, Gulf Research Meeting. Retrieved from https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/182104/GRM_Rieger_final__09-07-14_3405.pdf
- Razavi, S. (2013). Iran's Levantine ambitions. In T. Juneau & S. Razavi (Eds.), *Iranian Foreign Policy Since 2001: Alone in the world* (pp. 134-153). Routledge.
- Rahnema, S., & Behdad, S. (Eds.). (1995). Introduction: *Crisis of an Islamic State. Iran after the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State* (pp. 1-18). I. B. Tauris.
- Rabi, U., & Mueller, C. (2018). The Geopolitics of Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 12(1), 46-65.
doi: 10.1080/25765949.2018.1436129
- Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High. (2014, January 14). Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/01/RestrictionsV-full-report.pdf>
- Salloukh, B. F. (2017). The Sectarianization of Geopolitics in the Middle East. In N. Hashemi & D. Postel, (Eds.), *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (pp.35-52). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Salloukh, B. F. (2017). The Architecture of Sectarianization in Lebanon. In N. Hashemi & D. Postel, (Eds.), *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (pp. 215-234). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Salloukh, B. F. (2013). The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East. *The International Spectator* 48, no. 2 (2013): 32–46

- Said, E.W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Schanzer, J., & Salter, N. (2019, May 10). Oman in the Middle. Retrieved from <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2019/05/09/oman-in-the-middle/>
- Shaw, M. (2015). *War and genocide: Organized killing in modern society*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sachs, N. (2019, January 24). Irans revolution, 40 years on: Israels reverse periphery doctrine. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-fromchaos/2019/01/24/irans-revolution-40-years-on-israels-reverse-periphery-doctrine/>
- Stewart, P. (2017, December 15). In first, U.S. presents its evidence of Iran weaponry from Yemen. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-arms/in-first-u-s-presents-its-evidence-of-iran-weaponry-from-yemen-idUSKBN1E82J6>
- Salisbury, P. (2015). Yemen and the Saudi–Iranian ‘Cold War’. Research Paper, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 11. Retrieved from https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20150218YemenIranSaudi.pdf
- Spencer, R., & Sanchez, R. (2014, September 12). Turkish government co-operated with al-Qaeda in Syria, says former US ambassador. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/11093478/Turkish-government-co-operated-with-al-Qaeda-in-Syria-says-former-US-ambassador.html>

Steven, W. (2005). The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine. *Middle East Journal*, 59 (4), 559-576.

Saudi top cleric blasts Arab, Egypt protests-paper. (2011, February 05). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-saudi-idAFLDE71403F20110205>

Statement from the President on the Designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. (2019, April 8). *The White House*. Retrieved May 22, 2019, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-designation-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-for-foreign-terrorist-organization/>

Saudi Arabia. (2019). *The world Bank Data*. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/saudi-arabia>

Statement from the President on the Reimposition of United States Sanctions with Respect to Iran. (2018, August 6). Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-reimposition-united-states-sanctions-respect-iran/>

Saudi crown prince: If Iran develops nuclear bomb, so will we. (2018, March 15). *CBS News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/saudi-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-iran-nuclear-bomb-saudi-arabia/>

Stakeholder Analysis. (n. d.). *The world Bank Group*. Retrieved from <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/PoliticalEconomy/stakeholderanalysis.htm>

- Teitelbaum, J. (2013). *Saudi Arabia and the new strategic landscape*. Hoover Press.
- Teitelbaum, J., & Segall, M. (2012). The Iranian Leadership's Continuing Declarations of Intent to Destroy Israel. Retrieved from <http://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/IransIntent2012b.pdf>
- Takeyh, R. (2006). Iran, Israel and the Politics of Terrorism, *Survival*, 48 (4), 83-96. doi: 10.1080/00396330601062691
- Takeyh, R. (2006). *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*. Macmillan.
- Takeyh, R. (2009). *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford University Press.
- Tyler, T. R. (2001). A Psychological Perspective on the Legitimacy of Institutions and Authorities. In J.T. Jost & B. Major (Eds.), *The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations* (pp. 416-435). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity. (2012, August 9). Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>
- Ulrichsen, K.C. (2017). Iran-UAE Relations. In A. Ehteshami, N. Quilliam, & G. Bahgat. (Eds.), *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours* (pp. 211-228). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Ulrichsen, K. C. (2013). Bahrain's Uprising: Regional dimensions and international consequences. *Stability. International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(1).

- Under Secretary Sigal Mandelker Speech before the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. (2018). U.S. Department of the Treasury. Retrieved from <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0406>
- United States Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. (2018). *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran*. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iran/>
- Valeri, M. (2017). Iran-Oman Relations Since the 1970s: A Mutually Beneficial Modus Vivendi. In A. Ehteshami, N. Quilliam, & G. Bahgat (Eds.), *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours* (pp. 149-166). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Van Evera, S. (1994). Hypotheses on Nationalism and War. *International Security*, 18(4), 5-39. doi: 10.2307/2539176
- Volkan, V. D. (2001). Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity. *Group Analysis*, 34(1), 79–97. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/05333160122077730>
- Volkan, V. (1985). The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: A Developmental Approach. *Political Psychology*, 6(2), 219-247. doi: 0.2307/3790902
- Wormuth, C. (2019). Russia and China in the Middle East. Rand Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT500/CT511/RAND_CT511.pdf

- Winter, C. (2017, November 26). *Saudi-led Islamic military alliance: counterterrorism or counter Iran?* Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/saudi-led-islamic-military-alliance-counterterrorism-or-counter-iran/a-41538781>
- Wehrey, F. (2017). *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The roots of sectarianism in a changing Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wehrey, F. M. (2013). *Sectarian politics in the Gulf: from the Iraq war to the Arab uprisings*. Columbia University Press.
- Wehrey, F., Karasik, T. W., Nader, A., Ghez, J. J., & Hansell, L. (2009). Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for US Policy. *Rand Corporation*. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG840.pdf
- Wermenbol, G. (2019, August 26). *Countering and courting Iran: Israeli-Palestinian objectives in Iraq*. Retrieved from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/countering-and-courting-iran-israeli-palestinian-objectives-iraq>
- Westall, S. (2017, July 20). Iran ambassador ordered to leave Kuwait over spy case. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kuwait-iran/iran-ambassador-ordered-to-leave-kuwait-over-spy-case-idUSKBN1A510U>
- Ward, S. R. (2005). The continuing evolution of Iran's military doctrine. *The Middle East Journal*, 59(4), 559-576. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3751/59.4.12>
- Yemen War Death Toll Exceeds 90,000 According to New ACLED Data for 2015. (2019, June 21). *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*.

Retrieved from <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/06/18/press-release-yemen-war-death-toll-exceeds-90000-according-to-new-acled-data-for-2015/>

World military expenditure grows to \$1.8 trillion in 2018. (2019, April 29). *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2019/world-military-expenditure-grows-18-trillion-2018>

War in Yemen: Global Conflict Tracker. (n. d.). *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen>

Zenko, M. (2016, March 5). Remembering the Iraqi Uprising Twenty-Five Years Ago. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/blog/remembering-iraqi-uprising-twenty-five-years-ago>

Zainulbhai, H., & Richard, W. (2015). Iran's Global Image Mostly Negative. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/06/Pew-Research-Center-Iran-Report-June-18-2015-FINAL.pdf>

حسن نصرالله: أنا أفخر أن أكون فرداً في حزب ولاية الفقيه، وولاية الفقيه أن تأتي ونقول قيادتنا وإرادتنا وولاية
أمرنا وقرار حربنا وقرار سلمنا هو بيد الولي الفقيه. تنمة (2009, May 29). Retrieved from
<https://www.lebanese-forces.com/2009/05/29/49160/>