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How Yemen Became and Has Remained a Territory of Strategic Importance

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Abstract

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Yemen has been at the center of geopolitical and economic rivalries for at least the colonial era, and this literature-based thesis shows the continued strategic importance of the country. We will also analyze the strategic significance of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen from the historical past. It is imperative to examine geopolitical factors involved in Yemen's regional relations, especially those of Saudi Arabia and Iran, given their complexity. Due to its strategic location along the Bab al-Mandab strait, Yemen has played an important role in geopolitics in the region. This is followed by a critical comparison of arguments and theories. This leads to a substantive dialogue concerning the background of geopolitics and the major arguments that are introduced. Following the introduction, a literature review will provide a more comprehensive overview of the research topic. A critical evaluation of the arguments and theories, together with a background on Yemen and the Saudi-led coalition, will be included in the review.

This will be followed by a discussion of the objectives, questions, and main findings. A discussion of the research methods and methodology will follow. We will conclude the research with a preliminary conclusion. While my research questions are answered through a review of theory, I will nevertheless rely largely on qualitative research based on secondary data in this thesis, such as previous research regarding Yemen in different nations and states.

Keywords: Saudi-led Coalition, Houthis, Geopolitics, Proxy War, Humanitarian Crisis

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Dedicated to Yemen

1 Introduction

1.1 Research topic

Studying the situation in Yemen, which is deeply entrenched in politics, is the focus of this study. The conflict dates back to the Arab Spring of 2011 when a rebellion forced long-time authoritarian president Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand power over to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. In Yemen, one of the poorest nations in the Middle East, the political transition was once supposed to restore stability, however, Hadi struggled to deal with many problems, including militant attacks, corruption, food insecurity, and the persistence of loyalty of many navy officers to Saleh. The war began in 2014 when the Houthi Shia Muslim insurrection motion moved to take control of the new president and take over northern Saada province and its surrounding areas.

Mr. Hadi was forced into exile abroad after the Houthis captured Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. The hostilities escalated radically in March 2015 when Saudi Arabia and eight other conventionally Sunni Arab states - backed by the United States, UK, and France - launched airstrikes against the Houthis to restore Mr. Hadi's government. Lawlessness eventually prevailed in Yemen. It has been classified as the world's worst humanitarian crisis by the UN. There are more than 24 million affected by the crisis. Importing aid has been challenging because of the logistics involved. An agreement among the parties has been sought several times by the UN. The region has been gaining a lot of attention within the country due to its economic value and military investments and thus is considered to be of strategic importance. Both the Saudi and Iranian strategic rivalry and the longer-term significance of Yemen act as a geopolitical asset.

1.2 Motivation

Yemen is a subject I have decided to discuss more in-depth since it seems there is not enough attention paid to it. As I have never been to Yemen, I am not a Yemeni and I have no contact with anyone from Yemen. The humanitarian issues they face are too important for me not to talk about them and shed some light on them. In the future, I plan to visit Yemen and I wish to work exclusively for the UN. International attention has rarely been given to Yemen and Yemenis. Rarely do they have the chance to tell their own stories, to share their struggles, their resilience, or their talents. We haven't

heard much about Yemen for too long, a crisis we have forgotten. I want to bring awareness to this issue. Yemen must be discussed, and above all - Yemenis should be listened to. There have been numerous warnings from aid agencies over the worsening health situation. Government officials have largely kept quiet about it. We must not ignore this humanitarian crisis. The government must speak out about this neglected issue.

1.3 Structure of the research plan

This Bachelor's Thesis is a literature-based study that aims to demonstrate the enduring strategic importance of Yemen, which has been at the center of geopolitical and economic rivalries since at least the colonial era. The evaluation will include historical past information about the Saudi-Arabia-led coalition and its strategic significance in Yemen. Accompanied by essential comparison of the arguments and theories, leading to the dialogue involving the geopolitical background, where major arguments are introduced and discussed. The literature review that follows the introduction will provide a more comprehensive background of the research topic. Providing background details on Yemen and the Saudi-led coalition in conjunction with a critical evaluation of the arguments and theories will be part of the review. Following that, we will outline the objectives, questions, and key findings. Following that, the research method and methodology are discussed. The research will be concluded with a preliminary conclusion.

2 Background

2.1 A brief history of the new geopolitics

The fighting in Iraq, following the US-led coalition's invasion of that country in 2003, has reshaped the world's geopolitical landscape in many ways, some of which might not become apparent for years or even decades to come. America's relationship with Europe and the Middle East has been altered as a result. The impact, however, goes beyond that. The fighting demonstrates that Eurasia's south-central location is the new pivot of world opposition to US hegemony. The area has become a flashpoint in a more global revival of geopolitically-driven strategy and international relations. At first

glance, "geopolitics" appears to be an expression from every other era, beginning with the late nineteenth century. This refers to the competition between great powers and aspiring great powers for control over territory, resources, and vital geographical locations, such as ports and harbors, canals, river systems, oases, and other structures of influence and wealth. (Klare, 2003)

It can be seen that this kind of contestation has been a major force in world politics, especially in world conflicts, over the past few centuries. During the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, geopolitics was very popular as a mode of analysis. In its modern form, it is said to originate from the work of Halford Mackinder, a British geographer who made it his life's work to defend and strengthen the unity and hegemony of the British Empire. Of particular relevance to this project is Mackinder's claim that "if a single power dominated the Eurasian heartland, it could attain global hegemony" (Layne 2020). This vision has informed, in more recent times, the work of President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, whose *The Grand Chessboard* was aimed at explaining the continued strategic importance of the Eurasian heartland (Brzezinski 1997). During this period, Brzezinski worked as a consultant for the US oil firm Amoco (Morgan & Ottaway 1998).

It is evident from Cold War records that the covert conflicts that took place had a geopolitical orientation from an American point of view. Middle East oil had to be managed by the United States. As a result of its mineral wealth in copper, cobalt, and platinum, the United States had to manage parts of Africa. That's why the United States supported South Africa's apartheid regime. In terms of U.S. interest in controlling the Pacific Rim, the Korea War and the Vietnam War may be understood to the most sensible degree. (Klare, 2003) Given the growing rivalry between China and the United States, Russia's refusal to deny its great power status, and the local rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, an increasingly, once again, relevant way to understand what's going on in Iraq, central Eurasia, the Arabian Peninsula, and around the world is from the perspective of geopolitics.

2.2 A brief history of Yemen

Yemeni politics are still complicated by its tribal, religious, and geographic divisions due to those of the 19th century, when the political contours of today's Yemen began to emerge, having distinct northern and southern regions. A British protectorate was established in 1839 around Aden, a port city in southeastern Yemen, as part of the British Empire. As Manfred Wenner (1988: 259) explains: Under British administration, Aden became one of the busiest ports in the world, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal [in 1869] made whoever controlled Aden an automatic 'player' in the contest for influence and ascendancy in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa regions. Such influence stems partly from Aden's possession of two strategically located islands: Socotra, about 120 miles southeast of Aden, and in theory capable of controlling access from the Indian Ocean to the straits known as Bab al-Mandab; and Perim, located in the middle of the straits. Bab al-Mandab derives its significance from the fact that it is the southern access point to the Red Sea, and therefore a potential 'choke point' for Red Sea traffic. Essentially, this means that one could, by controlling Bab al-Mandab, control access to the Suez Canal and affect traffic to Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, North Yemen, and Ethiopia. During the Second World War, Shia imams led a revolution against the Ottoman Empire and declared independence from it in North Yemen. During the 1960s, Yemenis revolted and the civil war lasted six years. Saudi Arabia and Egypt supported opposite sides as the British began withdrawal in 1967. This led to the overthrow of the Kingdom of Yemen and the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic. Britain withdraws from southern Yemen in 1967, and the People's Republic of Southern Yemen is born. (United Nations Foundation, 2022).

The Yemeni People's Republic becomes the Marxist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1970, also known as South Yemen, a client state of Moscow. There are frequent civil uprisings and restive tribes in both the north and south of Yemen, which challenges their leadership. Yemen undergoes a profound change in 1990 as a result of the end of the Cold War. In the aftermath of the collapse of communist subsidies, the two Yemenis merged. In 1990, after Yemen unified, President Ali Abdullah Saleh provoked a crisis between Yemen's Gulf neighbors and the United States by refusing to condemn the August invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein. A civil war erupts in the south in 1994, as President Saleh sends his armed forces to crush it. In October 2000,

17 U.S. service members are killed in a bombing of the USS Cole in Aden, which led to an international focus on the threat posed by terrorist organizations based in Yemen, such as Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). (United Nations Foundation, 2022).

President Saleh launches a series of brutal battles with the Iran-backed Houthis, whom he accuses of separatism and of trying to impose their religious beliefs on the state, in 2004. The United States and other nations pressure President Saleh to target AQAP. The Houthis, meanwhile, say that Saleh's autocratic rule has resulted in discrimination and disenfranchisement. Approximately half of Yemen's population is Zayidi Shia, while the remainder is Sunni Muslim. Zayidi Shi'ism is distinct from Shi'ism in Iran. (United Nations Foundation, 2022).

In 2011, a drone strike kills AQAP leader (and U.S. citizen) Anwar al-Awlaki. Drone strikes have been criticized as killing civilians. The Yemeni civil war has created security vacuums in many parts of the country, making AQAP still a threat today and being used by the United Arab Emirates and others to justify their presence in southern Yemen. During Yemen's variation of the Arab uprisings, protests in Sana'a initially center on corruption and economic hardship. As a result of the heavy-handed government response, widespread demands for structural government changes grow. As a result of her role in organizing demands for respect for human rights, Yemeni journalist Tawakkul Karman becomes the face of the protests and she later shares the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize with fellow Yemenis. To prevent instability in Yemen, the region's Gulf neighbors use their financial muscle to pressure President Saleh to resign in favor of Vice President Al-Hadi in a transitional arrangement known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative. 2012 as part of the GCC initiative, President Saleh is immune from local prosecution, and President Hadi runs unopposed to serve as transitional president for a two-year term. The Yemeni government in exile remains under the leadership of Hadi, who has been recognized as president since 2007. Jamal Benomar, UN Special Envoy for Yemen and Strategic Advisor to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) facilitate the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which includes Houthi political party Ansar Allah representatives. (United Nations Foundation, 2022).

As a model of compromise and inclusive representation, the NDC outcome is praised both within and outside Yemen. Several other things are also incorporated into the NDC document, including a year extension for Hadi to oversee the transition,

guaranteeing 50-50 representation between north and south in a legislative body, and ensuring freedom of religion. Following a brief hostage crisis with the Houthis, Hadi and his cabinet fled to Saudi Arabia, leaving the Houthis in control of the state's institutions practically if not legally. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia began military operations in Yemen to reverse the Houthi military conquest of Yemen, secure Saudi Arabia's southern border from Houthi raids and airstrikes, and prevent outside interference (e.g., Iran). UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2216, recognizing the objectives of Houthi military surrender and UN-mediated political talks while denying itself the right to take military action (United Nations Foundation, 2022).

Today, Yemen, which imports the bulk of its goods, has been devastated by the war, in which a Saudi-led coalition has clashed with the Houthis (Holland, 2021). According to sources, the Iran-aligned Houthi movement in Yemen announced it had captured new territory in the energy-rich provinces of Shabwa and Marib. The attack is likely to complicate further international peace efforts in Yemen. Yahia Sarea, a senior Houthi military spokesman, says Houthis have taken three districts in southern Yemen's Shabwa region and two more in Marib, the last Saudi-backed government stronghold in the north. "Flagrant disregard for the safety of civilians" is how the U.S. State Department characterized the Houthi escalation in Marib, the host of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people. Yemen's Mahrib region is the country's largest gas field, while in Shabwa there are several oil fields and the only terminal for liquefied natural gas. Residents and local authorities confirmed that the Houthis hold Assilan, Bayhan, and Ain districts in Shabwa as well as al-Abdiyah and Harib in Marib, while fighting continues in al-Jubah and Jabal Murad. In the aftermath of the Houthis' ousting of the internationally recognized government from power in Sanaa, the internationally recognized government now controls Marib City and one other district (Reuters, 2021).

2.3 Yemen's descent into war

18 million Yemeni citizens lack access to clean, clear, drinkable water and sanitation. More than 70% of the Yemen population is suffering from famine. Between April 2015 and October 2018, more than 85,000 Yemeni children died of starvation. Throughout Yemen's multifaceted civil war, various actors have weaponized famine, denying

specific civilian population segments and pockets access to food and medical care to gain their political objectives. There will be a staggering number of mental health concerns in the future. Violence and refugees have flooded into Saudi Arabia and the Horn of Africa as a part of the chaos that has spread beyond Yemen's borders. Al-Houthi fighters have effectively brought the conflict to their Saudi enemies' territory with the help of Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah referred to as the rebels' external sponsors. By attacking strategic targets in Saudi Arabia as well as reportedly the UAE, the Houthi rebels display their advanced drones and missile capabilities. The increasingly frequent attacks have demonstrated this. While Saudi Arabia spent enormous amounts of money on its defense systems, it was incapable of thwarting such attacks, showing the IAEA's inability to deal with asymmetric low-tech systems against high-tech air defense systems.

The unprecedented missile and drone assaults on Saudi Arabia's oil plant at Abqaiq and its oil field at Khurais on Sept. 14, 2019, underscored the kingdom's susceptibility to regional rivals. Al-Houthi militants also claimed responsibility for a drone strike on Abu Dhabi's international airport, while Emirati officials rejected the incident. Such strikes, according to the al-Houthi, were vital to bringing the fight into Saudi Arabia, raising the stakes internationally while forcing Riyadh to make severe concessions to the Iran-allied rebels at the negotiating table. Yemen's best chance for change is a political compromise reached via discussion rather than prolonged violence. All main protagonists in the conflict, including internal and foreign parties such as GCC member nations, the United States, Iran, Russia, and the European Union, will need to compromise and establish confidence to end Yemen's multi-sided civil war. China is expanding its strategic interests as well. Yemen has always been viewed as an Arabian state that must function inside Riyadh's geopolitical area of influence. Officials in Saudi Arabia are concerned that a breakaway state with Aden as its capital would jeopardize the Kingdom's interests and, as a result, its ability to promote hegemonic goals throughout the Arabian Peninsula. (Karasik, 2019)

During the Yemeni civil war, Russia maintained good relations with the major actors operating in the country, adjusting ties with both domestic and external groups while advocating for a political (rather than military) solution. Russia's Yemen policy, based on nuclear non-alignment and multipolarity, is essential to its involvement in the Arab

world, in part due to Yemen's location near the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden, and the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula (Karasik & Cafiero, 2019).

With the UAE's decision to withdraw its forces from Yemen, hard realities are exposed in Middle Eastern geopolitics. The withdrawal could be a response to the potential US military confrontation with Iran in which the UAE and Saudi Arabia could play a key role (Dorsey, 2019).

Saudi Arabia is proposing a peace deal to end Yemen's almost six-year conflict if the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels agree. According to the Saudi proposal, the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, must reopen its airport and experience a nationwide ceasefire. The war has inflicted a great deal of hardship and Saudi Arabia is searching for a way out. Reports indicate that Houthis responded negatively to the initiative, saying it offers "nothing new," because it does not include lifting the blockade on Sanaa's airport or the port city of Hodeidah completely. Both the United States and the United Nations are working to end the worst humanitarian catastrophe in history. Biden has committed to using diplomacy to end the war and to allow more refugees to enter the country. The UN spokesperson Farhan Haq noted in a briefing that he welcomed the Saudi proposals and that UN Special Representative Martin Griffiths has been working toward these goals. Griffiths will be in touch with all parties to discuss Saudi Arabia's proposal moving forward, Haq said in response to Griffiths' inquiry about Houthis rejecting the Saudi offer. Yemen's population is at risk of starvation due to years of armed conflict, which has left 80% of Yemeni residents dependent on aid (Wamsley, 2021).

2.4 Geopolitical curse

Due to these complicated circumstances, it is essential to examine the geopolitical factors at play in Yemen's regional relations, particularly with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, and Turkey. Because of its strategic location along the Bab al-Mandab strait, Yemen has long played a significant role in regional geopolitics. Connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Gibraltar separates Yemen from Djibouti and Asia from Africa. Through the decades, this famous gateway has

witnessed various wars, conflicts, and struggles, such as when Iranian oil tankers heading to Israel were blocked during the 1973 October War. As a result of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Bab al-Mandeb's importance grew dramatically, leading to an increase in the volume of international maritime trade. With the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula and the increase in trade from East Asia, its importance rose once again. The Indian Ocean and East Africa are connected through the waterways, which form an important global transportation route. Yemen's strategic location makes it an obvious candidate for China's "Belt and Road" initiative, otherwise known as the "New Silk Road." Yemen's islands and its ports - Aden and Mocha - are ideal for establishing partnerships and acquiring business opportunities that will guarantee Yemen's economic vitality. (Ashwal, 2021)

The official withdrawal of Abu Dhabi's troops from Yemen was announced in February of 2020, but it is anticipated that Abu Dhabi will maintain influence in strategic areas of Yemen, either directly or indirectly. Despite vacating most of its facilities in Eritrea, the UAE has begun construction on a military base with an airstrip on the island of Perim. Among the countries entangled in Yemen's war are the UAE, Turkey, Iran, and Qatar. In Yemen's tragedy, the frantic conflict between countries is the direct result of greed and regionalism that have destroyed Yemen and may very well lead to its fragmentation (Ashwal, 2021)

A recent development has made Yemen one of the most important centers of activity in Western Asia, launching many actors at the local, regional, and transnational levels to achieve the desired outcome during the developments. Among the most important questions surrounding the developments in Yemen are the reasons for the emergence and continuation of this crisis, as well as the principal strategies and motivations of the various actors involved. A critical geopolitical viewpoint is taken in the present research to answer this question: Why have regional and transnational activists intervened in Yemen? This study hypothesizes that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have looked at strategic areas of Yemen such as Iran, the United States, China, and Israel, and have acted in response to the importance of the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb, the Gulf of Aden, and other strategic Yemeni ports. Despite the Houthi and SUnited States' ideological differences, the Yemeni crisis appears to be more than a result of an ideological disagreement in hopes of dominating Yemen's strategic sectors, reducing

their dependence on the Strait of Hormuz and controlling Aden, Mukalla, Mocha, Al Hudaydah and Mion Island, and the maritime hubs of Zuqar and Hanish. Iran and China, however, have adopted the strategy of undermining the goals of the invading countries (Jawad, 2010)

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are engaging in a war in Yemen, which is just one tragic example of an Arab state struggling with geopolitical transformations. In the 1960s, Egypt and Saudi Arabia used Yemen as a location for a proxy war and transcontinental empire. Although Yemen is currently at war with Saudi Arabia and Iran, it is not a proxy war. This tragedy reflects the change that has occurred in the Middle East regional order since the Arab uprisings of 2011, from an order organized around and against a dominant system dominated by the United States into a multipolar order lacking the shared norms, diplomatic channels, or balancing mechanisms that previously constrained inter-regional conflict. It is not the cause of this conflict in Yemen, but its symptom; the Middle Eastern geopolitical order is experiencing its kind of free fall (Hazbun, 2018). By way of the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, or the "Gate of Tears" in Arabic, forms a vital strategic link in the Mediterranean Sea-Indian Ocean trade route. The Arabian Peninsula lies on the other side of the narrow strait. In contrast, the Horn of Africa has been plagued for decades by terrorism, piracy, human trafficking, and smuggling operations, among other forms of violence and instability (Calabrese, 2020). Yemen and the Horn of Africa are the origin, transit, and destination of hundreds of thousands of migrants, some of whom travel irregularly, often relying on smugglers to aid their crossing of the Gulf of Aden to reach the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (IOM, 2022).

It is possible that the consequences of the Saudi Arabian and United Arab Emirates (UAE)-led war against the Houthis in Yemen extend beyond the Gulf and have reached the Horn of Africa as well. Although the Gulf monarchies and their Horn of Africa allies have established a more concrete security partnership with the military intervention in Yemen, this partnership has now evolved beyond narrow security interests into a burgeoning partnership. In addition, internal rivalries between Gulf countries have spilled over into the Horn of Africa. It has intensified an already bloody struggle (Mahmood, 2019).



Figure 1. Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa is a region of eastern Africa. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia make up this region, which lies on the eastern edge of Africa. Culturally, these nations have shared many traditions throughout their long history. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and some other countries are excluded from other definitions of the Horn of Africa. In addition to all the countries listed above, there are also broader definitions including parts or all of Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. (Britannica, 2020) As you can see from Figure 1 above.

2.5 Yemen and its oil

The country has sufficient oil and natural gas resources for both domestic use and export, despite not being a major producer of hydrocarbons in comparison to several other Middle East countries. Yemen's difficult security environment, however, makes the production and transportation of those resources difficult. Yemen has been engulfed in a civil war since 2014 between a Saudi-backed government and Houthi rebels. Yemen's Houthis have carried out airstrikes against Saudi Arabia's oil giant Aramco facilities, as well as Saudi Arabia's Houthi targets. Saudi Arabia was forced to suspend oil shipments through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, a strategic chokepoint at the entry to the Red Sea, following an attack by the Houthis on two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea in July 2018. In June 2020, the Saudi-backed government of Yemen and southern separatists came to an agreement to cease fighting and begin peace negotiations. However, the violence in southern Yemen has continued. The energy sector was greatly impacted by the spread of Houthi control across the country and the deteriorating political climate. A number of foreign firms in Yemen ceased operations or evacuated their staff. Nearly all oil and natural gas fields in Yemen were shut down in 2015. Production of petroleum and other liquids has declined from 125,000 barrels a day (b/d) in 2014 to 18,000 b/d in 2016. Production has been slowly increasing in the past few years. Approximately 61,000 barrels per day of petroleum and liquids were produced in 2019. Yet, production of natural gas fell from 328 billion cubic feet (Bcf) in 2014 to 3 Bcf in 2018 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2020).

PetroMasila, the state-owned company that operates is the primary operator of current crude oil production from the Masila Basin. More than 80% of the country's oil reserves are found in the Masila Basin. Under state operator, PetroMasila was reopened in the summer of 2016. Activating Yemen's oil-rich Marib Basin, Yemen's state-owned company Safer Exploration & Production restarted production in 2018. The company sold its stake asset in 2019. In 2015, Yemen ceased production due to fighting. It was once Yemen's second-largest oil-producing block. It was Indonesia's Medco Energi that restarted operations in Yemen in 2019, going between the Shabwa Basin and Masila Basin (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2020).

There is a lot of change happening in the energy sector of Yemen. Since 2009, Yemen's natural gas sector has experienced positive growth despite declining oil production and frequent attacks on its energy infrastructure. Having a difficult security environment in Yemen makes it difficult to find, produce, and transport energy resources, including LNG, which could threaten the country's emerging export sector (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2020).

3 Research question, aims, and objectives

3.1 Research question

How and why Yemen has been used as a strategic platform?

3.2 Research aim

The aim of the research is to detect and determine the history surrounding Yemen and its neighboring countries. The significance importance of the geopolitical history surrounding Yemen.

3.3 Research objective

My goal is to raise awareness about the ongoing war in Yemen. Yemen and its neighboring countries will be studied to determine the history surrounding them. We will examine the importance of the geopolitical history that surrounds Yemen.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research method

I will nonetheless rely largely on qualitative research based on secondary data in this thesis, such as previous research regarding Yemen in different nations and states. In addition to case studies, journals, studies, articles, websites, and previous academic publications on the subject, I will gather statistical data and data from other sources to obtain a broader perspective on the topic. In addition to Yemen's history, the

discussion will cover the new geopolitics in the region. We will analyze and synthesize the statistics to provide the reader with an understanding of Yemeni history and how the Saudi-led coalition has affected the economy.

5 Findings

According to Deutsche Welle (2021) there is an inherent curiosity toward Yemen, especially in light of its unique position in such a wide range of countries. As early as the 1920s, Saudi Arabia began to gain interest in Yemen as a way to secure Yemen's borders and control its tribes. The Yemeni capital Sanaa is situated on a strait that connects the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and is Saudi Arabia's primary oil export route. However, oil exports have decreased significantly due to an ongoing conflict. Saudi Arabia remains deeply interested, even obsessed, with developments in Yemen. The government cannot stand by and allow an Iranian-backed militia to take control of Yemen. Cities are heavily affected by wars in terms of infrastructure that supplies health services, electricity, fuel, and subsistence items such as food and water. Because of the depth of the conflict, the insurgents are mostly fighting in their territory.

Thus, identifying their target is problematic. To avoid defeat, Yemen accepts extraordinary losses. That ultimately results in extreme consequences. The government of Yemen was led by Ali Abdullah Saleh. For more than 30 years, he ruled the country. In, after he was forced to leave the office, Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi struggled to find balance with the political landscape. As a result, Yemen became essentially lawless and ruled by a variety of different terrorist groups. As a result, the coalition led by Saudi Arabia has had a significant impact. As a result of the Saudi air campaign, Saudi Arabia's relationship with Yemen has been strained, as Yemenis hold Saudi Arabia responsible for the deaths and injuries of thousands of Yemenis as well as for the trauma suffered by tens of thousands more. (Feirestein, 2017)

It is a significant win for the Iranian government that the Coalition was unable to defeat the insurgents and restore the legitimate government in Yemen. As compared with the financial, human, and reputational damage that the Coalition has suffered, Iran's support for the Houthis is very cost-effective. A number of weapons, in some

instances highly sophisticated weapons, were smuggled from Iran to Yemen for the Houthis (Feirestein, 2017) The conflict in Yemen between Saudi Arabia, is the region's dominant power, and Iran, its principal opposition figure. An all-out war between Saudi Arabia and Iran may result if Iran joins the Houthis in battle.

The specific research problem entails a critical analysis of the arguments for Yemen's strategic significance. The stability of Saudi Arabia, along with the other Arab Gulf states, is vital to the United States. Yemen is only one part of a broader strategic equation between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in terms of Yemen. In order to contain Iran in the Gulf, it is critical that the United States and Saudi Arabia work together and build deterrence. The United States, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf Cooperation Council members remain committed to close cooperation regardless of any nuclear agreement. According to CSIS (2015). U.S. assistance will be needed for Saudi Arabia to maintain its lead in Yemen. Airstrikes are being conducted by Saudi Arabia and its allies in Yemen in an attempt to halt the advance of Houthi militias with strong ties to Iran. A coalition of over 10 countries has been formed by Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it took the lead in getting Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to sign a joint statement supporting Saudi Arabia's announcement of military action as well as to inform Saudi Arabia that it is considering sending ground forces. Although the United States has already committed to providing logistical and intelligence support throughout Yemen, it may well become necessary to go beyond this. (CSIS, 2015)

A major factor contributing to the strategic importance of Yemen is the remote location of its mountains and desert plains, which have served as a prime haven for terrorists. The instability of the region will have an adverse impact on future and ongoing investments and business sentiments, as well as lead to a major armed conflict between the major powers of the region. (Business Insider, 2015) Following this, international communities have been interested in working on peaceful and diplomatic solutions that would include all significant and relevant parties. This is especially true when it comes to Yemen. Furthermore, Yemen's oil production is a major concern because of its proximity to other oil-producing countries and because of its location at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, also known as Bab el Mandeb. In other words, it is a strategic link between the Mediterranean, via the Suez Canal, and

the Indian Ocean. (ARF, 2015) It's only a matter of time until everything erupts. A new approach may be required to resolve the conflict.

According to BBC News (2018) civilians affected by all of this are facing a huge dilemma. For them, finding their way to safety could be very challenging. There's a hunger among more than half of the population. As Corona spreads faster in Yemen, famine and epidemics of disease are on the horizon, and it has proven challenging to control a population where nothing is promised. The Saudi-backed government forces began an attack on the main rebel-held port of Hudaydah in June 2018 - the primary entry point for food aid into Yemen and a lifeline for starving Yemenis. Yemen's humanitarian catastrophe could be worsened by the offensive, according to aid agencies. Located in rebel-held territory, Hudaydah is essential to the population due to its role as a major point of entry for the basic supplies used to prevent famine and a repeat of the devastating cholera epidemic. Nearly two-thirds of Yemen's population relies on food, fuel, and medicine imported from Hudaydah's port. Nevertheless, both are under fire because the conflict has only escalated. According to BBC News (2018), there is no guarantee for health, finances, education, supplies, and much more related to the future, making it harder for everyone. Problems with the economy, unemployment, and a lack of food, water, and medical resources. Yemen's conflict has evolved beyond a battle between two rival coalitions for political control and is now much more complex. (Feirestein, 2017) There is now a new peace plan being proposed by Saudi Arabia, a truce to end the six-year war in Yemen. This would be implemented as soon as Houthi rebels agreed to it. The Houthi rebels, however, have complained that the offer did not go far enough to lift the blockade. In the event that both parties agree on the plan, it would be supervised by the UN and help move the offered proposal forward. (BBC, 2021)

Yemen's strategic location in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a natural link between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, is one of the world's most active shipping lanes. Bordered by the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, Yemen is situated on the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The country has numerous natural resources including petroleum, fish, rock salt, marble, small deposits of coal, gold, and fertile soil in the west. The current environmental issues in Yemen are primarily related to freshwater shortages, soil erosion, and desertification. Many people

are on the brink of hunger, the health system is non-existent, and thousands of civilians have been killed or injured in direct battles, or as collateral damage in bombings. In the period from 2016 to the spring of 2019, 60,000 Yemenis were killed. Yemen is currently in its eighth year of a so-called "civil war". In the midst of Yemen's worst humanitarian crisis, the world seems more concerned with issues of less importance. (Matoi & Pricope 2019)

5.1 United Nations and other partners

5.1.1 EU

As the conflict has escalated, the EU has been utilizing all the political, humanitarian, and development tools available to sustain the social fabric among communities in Yemen, as well as to assist crisis-affected populations in adjusting to the current conditions. Over the past two years, the EU's overall contribution to Yemen has surpassed €588 million, including over €347,3 million in development support, making it one of Yemen's largest development donors. Action by the EU in the country is based on a synergy of its political, humanitarian, and development activities (European Commission, 2022).

With a focus on agricultural livelihoods to improve food security, basic health, and social protection services, EU-funded development cooperation primarily supports the resilience capacity of crisis-affected households, communities, and individuals in rural and urban areas. These interventions are intended to address the most pressing challenges facing Yemen's people today, including severe food insecurity and malnutrition, exposure to preventable diseases without access to health care services, and a lack of access to basic services such as safe drinking water and social protection for the most vulnerable. Furthermore, the ongoing development program has been successful in supporting small businesses, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (including community reconciliation and people-to-people diplomacy); and small-scale commercial enterprises (European Commission, 2022).

Yemen's citizens and local institutions must maintain trust between each other throughout the conflict and maintain the social fabric within communities. As a result of

EU assistance, 187 village cooperative councils have been reestablished, 400 self-help initiatives have been adopted, 224 small community projects have been made possible, and 187 community resilience plans have been developed. Furthermore, the EU is investing €26 million in Yemen's health services and infrastructure, including projects that combat malnutrition and create a network of community health workers to help prevent the collapse of Yemen's health system. The conflict has forced more than 3 million Yemenis to flee their homes. More than 1 million people have been able to return, but their homes and communities have been destroyed. There are nearly 2.5 million internally displaced people. The European Union has recently launched a new action worth EUR 30 million to support the recovery of IDPs and the communities hosting them (European Commission, 2022).

5.1.2 UN

United Nations and its partners have been providing life-saving assistance and protection on the ground since 2015. More than 8 million Yemenis receive food from the UN World Food Program (WFP) each month at over 5,000 distribution points. More than 300,000 cholera vaccines have been delivered by WHO and UNICEF. 250,000 girls and women have received sexual and reproductive health services from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Coordinate humanitarian action across all levels of government and humanitarian partners with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (United Nations Foundation, 2022).

A global call to action that aims to end poverty, protect the earth's environment and climate, and ensure that people can live in peace and prosperity are the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN is working toward these goals in Yemen as you can see from Figure 2.



Figure 2. UN set goals for Yemen

There has been limited progress in UN-backed peace negotiations. A battle in the port city of Hodeidah was averted by the 2018 Stockholm Agreement, but its provisions have not been fully implemented. These include an exchange of more than 15 thousand people and the creation of a joint committee to de-escalate violence in Taiz. The conflict between regional actors like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE could prolong the war, say, observers. A missile attack against Saudi oil facilities by the Houthis in late 2019 exacerbated the situation. In contrast, the Saudi-led coalition blamed Iran for the attack, which UN monitors concluded did not take place. Abu Dhabi's forces threatened to be drawn back into a conflict it has tried to leave for over a decade when the Houthis began attacking the UAE in early 2022, a rare move (Robinson, 2022).

A two-month truce for the holy month of Ramadan, the first nationwide ceasefire since the Houthis and the coalition forces allied in April 2022, gave peace efforts a boost. In addition, the new governing council could be a catalyst for inclusive negotiations by bringing together anti-Houthi forces. Such talks, according to experts, would be more productive than considering the war a proxy war between two countries of the UN Security Council (Robinson, 2022).

5.1.3 NRC

Yemen's humanitarian crisis has largely ignored the education sector. Two million children have been denied an education due to displacement, attacks, and misuse of schools. The situation has also resulted in half of all teachers being unpaid. In addition to losing an educational opportunity, children who are out of school also forfeit the benefits of valuable social networks that provide support, protection, and a sense of normality. Since schools have closed due to Covid-19, this has only worsened. NRC emphasizes the inclusion of displaced children in formal education, as well as ensuring that children who have been denied an education have access to it. Among Yemen's leading education partners, NRC excels at offering quality education for children. The NRC works with ministries, the Education Cluster Mechanism, authorities, and communities to ensure the health and wellbeing of children (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2021).

5.2 American Policy in Yemen

The United States deployed aircraft over Saudi skies to deter Egypt and reassure Saudi Arabia following Egypt's 1962 invasion of North Yemen when it backed the nationalist forces against the Saudi-backed royals. During this time, President Kennedy encouraged restraint, but the United States deployed aircraft over Saudi skies to deter Egypt. Despite a belief among many US officials that the United States had no interest in the conflict except to show its support for Saudi Arabia, the Obama administration played a crucial role in supporting Saudi Arabia's campaign in Yemen. Despite claims that Obama is shifting US strategy in the region to contain rather than confront Iran, the United States has a direct role to play in Yemen's tragedy. Direct US involvement in Yemen is reflected by drone strikes and Saudi coalition support (Hazbun, 2018).

Despite Saudi Arabia receiving massive arms packages, US policymakers remained skeptical about the war in Yemen, which added to the tragedy. In the meantime, many of Washington, as well as media outlets, centered on policy-backed Saudi and Emirati interests. In 1982, this country supported Israel's invasion of Lebanon with its support

for the Saudi-Emirati war in Yemen. In both cases, the United States was dragged into humanitarian tragedies by an ally without serving its regional interests (Hazbun, 2018).

During Egypt's 1962 invasion of North Yemen, the United States stationed aircraft over Saudi territory to deter Egypt. Saudi Arabia increased its regional influence and cooperated more closely with Israel. Riyadh's actions have backfired: by pressuring Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri into resigning (later reversed) and continuing the Yemen war, Riyadh has increased Iran's leverage in the region. Saudi Arabia and the UAE did not co-opt Qatar's efforts to rebuild GCC consensus policymaking since 2013, rather they forced Qatar to accept a subservient role. This resulted in the fragmentation of the GCC as a regional organization and a further split in the once-powerful Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia (Hazbun, 2018).

According to reports, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel together seem to be offering USA a vision for regional order that involves coercing the weak Palestinian Authority into accepting the Israeli-dominated territory status quo in an attempt to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These plans would not be feasible even if these parties agreed on the prospect that is uncertain. Saudi Arabia has failed to create a popular and social base to establish a new regional order because of societal and regional opposition to such plans. Due to Iran's increasing influence in the region and Hizballah's increased military assertiveness, Israel has also become more aggressive. Attacks on Hizballah assets in Syria and drone attacks over Lebanon are part of this. The threat of an escalation comes from drone strikes. The US has withdrawn from the Iran deal rather than trying to resolve both pressing security threats and long-term strategic challenges through negotiations with rival regional powers. As part of his efforts to coerce Iran, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has escalated rhetoric regarding regime change and economic sanctions. Consequently, US support for the Saudi-led counterrevolution has increased tensions between the two countries. As a result, regional conflicts have intensified, increasing regional instability and increasing the likelihood of further escalation (Hazbun, 2018).

While there are no winners in Yemen's war, famine advances rapidly, so the United States struggles to justify its support for the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against the Houthis (Ardemagni, 2018)

5.3 Yemen and Ukraine

The war in Yemen is entering its eighth year as the world is focusing on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Saudi Arabian government has completely failed in its campaign to defeat the Zaydi Shia Houthi rebels, who hold the capital of Sana'a, most of northern Yemen, and most of the population, 80% to be more exact. A war that seems to have no end is costing the Yemeni people a terrible price (Riedel, 2022)

Yemen's intervention by Saudi Arabia recalls the Russian invasion of Ukraine in many ways. Saudi Arabia underestimated its opponents, as did the Russians. Operation Decisive Storm was initially referred to as the Saudi mission; it is anything but decisive. The average Yemeni cannot flee the war and seek refuge outside of the country, unlike Ukraine, where over 3.6 million people have fled to neighboring countries like Poland and Moldova in recent months. Approximately 3.6 million people have been internally displaced as of December 2020 and are living in camps. They are facing severe poverty (Riedel, 2022).

There has been a massive humanitarian crisis as a result of the partial Saudi blockade of Yemen. The majority of Yemen's food and medicines are imported. As many as 2.3 million Yemeni children - at least half of them under five years old - are at risk of malnutrition, according to the World Food Program. It has been estimated by the United Nations that 377,000 people have died from malnutrition in seven years, most of whom were children. The conflict in Ukraine is threatening the export of grain from Ukraine and Syria, which together represent a third of global wheat exports. This in turn has increased food prices, and the poorest country in the Arab world will suffer (Riedel, 2022).

Additionally, fuel cannot be imported into the country. In Yemen, fuel imports are down to a tenth of what they were before the war. That has a direct impact on the country's educational and health systems. By firing missiles and drones at Saudi targets, the Houthis continue to take the war to them. Houthis attack Riyadh and other cities along the border with Yemen, but most of their attacks are near the Yemeni border. The war in Ukraine and the war in Yemen differ fundamentally in one important way. Houthi leaders were not elected democratically. Houthi leaders have

been accused of grave human rights abuses on countless occasions. The invasion and blockade of Yemen by Saudi Arabia have rallied support and sentiment for them. The government includes other parties and leaders, however, they are not democratic. There is good reason to be paying attention to Ukraine: President Joe Biden says it could lead to World War III, which we must avoid. Additionally, we must take every possible step to end the war in Yemen. In the immediate future, the blockade must be ended, as it harms the most vulnerable, namely Yemen's children, who need the help and protection of the United States (Riedel, 2022).

6 Discussion

6.1 Answer to the research question

Yemen has been used as a strategic platform, which raises the question of why and how? The answer to this question is not as straightforward as it first appears. Considering the complicated nature of Yemen's regional relations, it's imperative to examine the geopolitical factors involved, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, and Turkey. Yemen has long played a significant role in the geopolitics of the region thanks to its strategic location along the Bab al-Mandab strait. The Strait of Gibraltar separates Yemen from Djibouti and Africa from Asia, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Many wars, conflicts, and struggles have taken place here through the years. Upon discovering oil in the Arabian Peninsula and increasing trade from East Asia, the Arabian Peninsula began to gain importance once again. East Africa and the Indian Ocean are connected by waterways, which serve as a major transportation link in the world. Aden and Mocha are ideal for establishing partnerships and acquiring business opportunities that will ensure Yemen's economic vitality due to Yemen's strategic location on China's "Belt and Road" initiative. Yemen's islands and ports make it the perfect candidate for China's "Belt and Road" initiative. (Ashwal, 2021)

Throughout the years Yemen has become one of the most important centers of activity in Western Asia, bringing together many actors at the local, regional, and transnational levels in an attempt to achieve the desired results. It is essential to understand the reasons behind the emergence and continuation of the crisis in Yemen, as well as the

main strategies and motivations of each of the various actors involved. To answer this question, this research takes a critical geopolitical perspective. Through this thesis, we have demonstrated that.

6.2 Interpretation of findings

Due to Yemen's unique position in such a broad range of countries, there is an inherent curiosity about the country. During the 1920s, Saudi Arabia became interested in Yemen to secure Yemen's borders and control its tribes. In Yemen's capital Sanaa, a strait between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean connects the Red Sea with the Indian Ocean and is Saudi Arabia's primary oil export route. The ongoing conflict has, however, resulted in a significant decrease in oil. The Saudi Arabian government remains concerned and even obsessed with Yemen's development. Yemen's government cannot allow a militia backed by Iran to take over the country. In addition to health services and electricity, war has a tremendous impact on cities' infrastructure that provides fuel, food, and subsistence items. The insurgents are mainly fighting on their territory due to the depth of the conflict. As a result, it is difficult to identify their target. As a result, Yemen accepts extraordinary losses in its attempt to avoid defeat.

Yemen's remoteness and desert plains, which have served as a haven for terrorists, contribute greatly to its strategic importance. As a result of the instability in the region, future investments and business sentiment will be adversely impacted, as well as a major armed conflict between the major powers. The EU has been working to provide support to communities in Yemen as the conflict escalates, as well as to help crisis-affected populations adapt to current circumstances. To maintain the social fabric of communities, citizens and local institutions in Yemen must maintain trust between each other throughout the conflict. NRC ensures that displaced children are included in formal education and that children whose education has been denied can have access to it. With years of experience offering quality education to Yemeni children, NRC is one of Yemen's leading education partners. The US struggles to justify its support for the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against the Houthis (intelligence and mid-air refuelling), not only in the public's eyes but also in the eyes of Congress. Yemen's war has no winners. In addition, we must do what we can to prevent the war from continuing. US assistance and protection are needed in the

immediate future to end the blockade because it harms the most vulnerable, namely Yemen's children.

The war in Ukraine prevents fuel from being imported into the country. Compared to before the war, fuel imports in Yemen have declined by a tenth. This directly impacts the educational and health systems of the country. Saudi Arabia continues to be targeted by missiles and drones fired by the Houthis. There is one fundamental difference between the war in Ukraine and the war in Yemen. The Houthis are not democratically elected. Human rights abuses have been alleged against the leaders of the Houthis countless times.

6.3 Limitations of the research

Due to the limited amount of information available on Yemen's ongoing war, I had to rely on a variety of articles, statistics, and additional research sources. Although I will use a large amount of secondary data in my thesis, such as past research regarding Yemen in different nations and states, I will still rely heavily on the qualitative method in this thesis. To obtain a broader perspective on this topic, I will collect statistics and data from other sources other than case studies, journals, studies, articles, websites, and previous academic publications. Along with Yemen's history, this talk will discuss new geopolitical developments in the area. To understand Yemeni history, as well as how the Saudi-led coalition has affected the Yemeni economy, the statistics will be analyzed and synthesized.

7 Conclusion

A realistic assessment of the needs and interests of different states and broader political, economic, and social needs of a region suffering from decades of war and social collapse are vital to maintaining conflict management and de-escalation in the Middle East in light of the current geopolitical situation. The United States once proclaimed its support for the uprisings in the Arab world but has now joined the reactionary forces of the counter-revolution led by the Gulf. Its fight against ISIS has

also returned to the War on Terror paradigm that dominated after September 11 (Hazbun, 2018).

Obama failed to take the initiative in addressing regional security issues despite the Iran nuclear agreement, which led to the Iran deal being reversed by Trump. On a more general level, the United States has refused to support meaningful peace-making efforts in Palestine, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere. As a result, the United States and other external powers have made use of domestic and regional divisions to exert influence and leverage in the region, including through economic sanctions (against Iran), military intervention (in Libya, Syria, and Iraq), and military support for regional interventions (in Yemen, Bahrain, and elsewhere in the region). There are few signs of exhaustion in the threat of insecurity and regional rivalry, and the possibilities for an escalation remain abundant. If social forces in the region can mobilize again and contend with political elites who are suppressing the popular will and disregarding the humanitarian concerns of the region's residents, a different order is possible. As a result of the reactionary repression of the 2013 counter-revolution, the concentration of power by regime elites, and the shifting priorities of external forces, many social movements have been decimated and demoralized. As a result, diverse organizations and militias seeking survival often accept support from any willing party - support that is extended with ulterior motives.

We will have to make sure cuts are made to US weapons sales and tactical support for the Saudi-Emirati war in Yemen until societies throughout the region, the United States, and elsewhere can mobilize opposition to reckless government policies. There could be a common cause between the anti-war left and libertarian right, as well as centrist critics of liberal hegemony, in advocating a strategic policy of restraint in the region. Furthermore, the United Nations and other actors must work toward building norms of restraint and conflict resolution and fostering regional negotiations that are inclusive. In the absence of US hegemony, a pluralist regional order must be the priority while addressing immediate humanitarian needs (Hazbun, 2018).

If we don't act Yemen will face catastrophic consequences. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA] (2017), seven million people will face starvation. More than 8 million people will lack access to

drinking water and sanitation. The health system will completely decline. Nearly 1.2 million malnourished children could die. Millions of people will face grave threats to their basic rights. Landmines and other explosives will threaten lives and delay assistance.

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