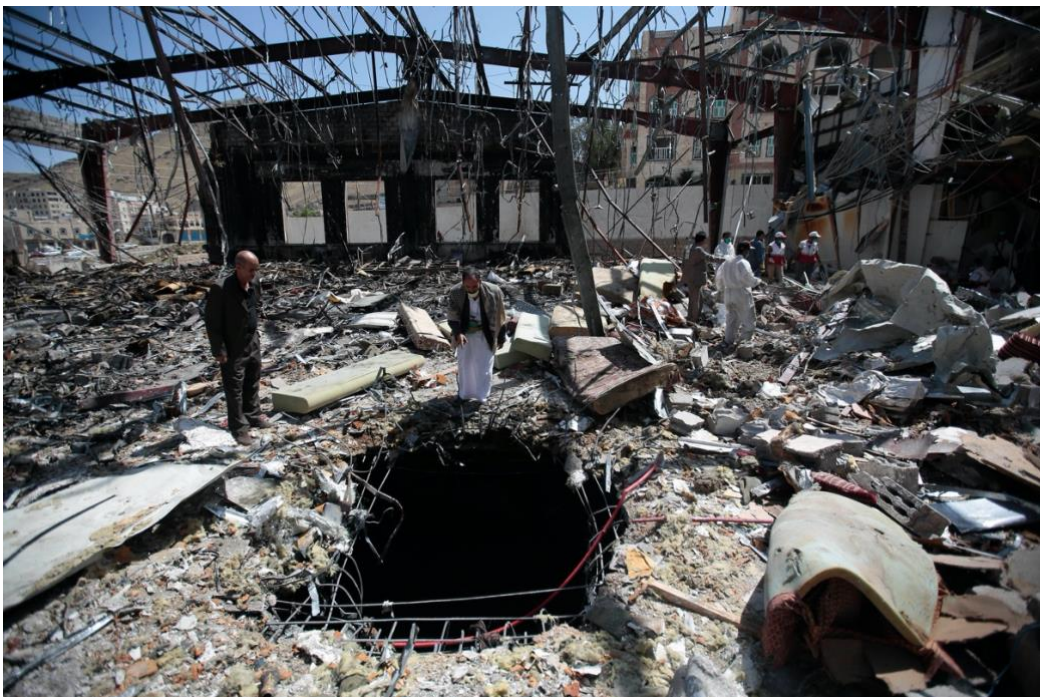


The United States involvement in Yemen

*A case study with rational and humanitarian reasoning
of the involvement, influence and its objective*



Why Bombs Made in America Have Been Killing Civilians in Yemen, (Hani Mohammed, 2020)

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Dept: Peace and Development

Level: Undergraduate

Term: Autumn 2020

Course Code: 2FU33E

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine why the US is involved in Yemen's civil war and what factors are contributing to its involvement, particularly if the US involvement in Yemen is based on self-interest or humanitarian motives. As a qualitative desk study, this research uses rational choice theory and the humanitarian intervention framework as its analytical framework. The research results highlight that the US objectives are first and foremost following an "America first" approach, with specific economic and political benefits, such as maintaining a good bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia, arms sales and the purchase of oil which are clearly prioritized over humanitarian aspects to protect the civilians in Yemen.

Keywords

United States, Yemen, Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Responsibility to protect, Rational choice theory

Acknowledgements

I am truly and deeply thankful for my supervisor, Manuela Nilsson and her guidance during this process. Furthermore, I wish to thank my friends for your endless support and inspiration. As well as a big thanks to the Peace and Development Department at Linnaeus University for providing an education in my subject of interest.

List of abbreviations

CRS: Congress Research Services

GCC: Gulf cooperation Council

IS: Islamic State

NGO: Non-Governmental Organizations

STC: Southern Transitional Council

UAE: United Arab Emirates

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

US: United States of America

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

R2P: Right to Protect

RCT: Rational Choice Theory

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1. Introduction

Viewing from a global perspective, there are many ongoing conflicts in the world. Conflicts could occur on all levels, individual to international conflicts. Conflict tends to be prone and centralized in some regions, the Middle East is a centralized area for conflicts and has some of the poorest and richest countries located within the area. The extraction of oil is important for the economic growth and development in the Middle East. Political actors and the international markets to the Middle East have been exploited because of the high value of resources in the area. The lack of economic and political development has created dissatisfaction and irritation among populations. Some of the current conflicts in the Middle East is in Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey and Iraq (Cederman and Pengl ETH Zürich, 2019). One of the ongoing conflicts in the region currently occurs in Yemen, a country where that The Saudi-led coalition has intervened and resulted in thousands of killed and injured civilians, violating laws of war, humanitarian law and human rights law while using munitions sold by international actors including the US. Between 2015 and 2019, the direct number of killed and injured in Yemen was more than 17 500 according to the Yemen data project (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Viewing actors at the international arena, the United States of America (US) has not given Yemen much attention historically (Rugh 2010). Recently the US has shown an increased interest in Yemen, but the US departments has been divided about the approach to the situation, both giving aid and humanitarian help and selling weapons to Saudi Arabia ending up killing Yemenis (LaForgia and Bogdanich, 2020).

1.1 Research problem and relevance

The research problem is the US involvement in Yemen and investigating the humanitarian and rational reasoning. Furthermore, the US objective could be viewed as contradictory because of the emergency and humanitarian aid in Yemen while supporting the coalition through military support, which has resulted in targeting and killing civilians.

Therefore, the research problem is a lack of knowledge and investigation of what the US wants to achieve from their involvement. Because the unclarity of the US actual intentions in Yemen. The earlier research provides a ground for the research since it does not focus on this approach to the conflict. But there is a gap in the current research about the US objective behind their involvement in Yemen.

This research is relevant because the US involvement in Yemen is a case study of international actors being involved abroad and what their objective to do so. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate international actors' involvement and use of power abroad. Murray (2013) describe that international actors often use humanitarian objectives to disguise real motives, often very much

related to national political, economic or security interests. Therefore, the theoretical framework is relevant, counterpose each other and covering both the rational and humanitarian approach.

1.2 Objective

The objective of this research is to analyze the objectives of United States' involvement in Yemen, as messages from Congress and US government actions seem somewhat contradictory. Therefore, the objective is to analyze if the US involvement is of humanitarian or rational reasoning.

1.3 Research Questions

How is the US currently involved in Yemen and how does that influence the ongoing conflict in that country?

What objectives do these acts of involvement indicate?

1.4 Disposition

The thesis starts with describing previous research in a concluded manner. This component points out where the research problem is within the topic. Thereafter the theoretical framework will be presented which is the Rational Choice Theory and the Responsibility to Protect. The theoretical framework is in the second part summarized and applied to the case study of the research. The thesis continues with the methodology chapter to describe for the reader through what method the data is collected. The research is a qualitative case study with an abductive approach using predominantly materials, analyzed through the case study method and text analysis. Thereafter the data collection and source criticism are described. The background section describes and presents relevant knowledge to the research covering different topics and its relevance. The findings chapter highlights materials contributing to the research and the data obtained during the research is presented. Thereafter the data will be analyzed through the theoretical framework. Finally, the study results, the identified knowledge and accomplishment from the research, as well as future research directions are presented in the concluding chapter.

2. Literature review

There is an extensive amount of literature regarding the US and Yemen. The literature includes research regarding the US and Yemen relations and US humanitarian aid in Yemen. The Situation in Yemen is comprehensive, and several actors are involved with different agendas, therefore the selection of literature is of high importance. Previous literature is from non-governmental

organizations (NGO), governmental institutions, universities, newspapers and other experts in the area. The authors have different professional and academic disciplines as a background.

Earlier research such as Jeffery S. Bachman's (2019) article "A 'synchronized attack' on life: the Saudi-led coalition's 'hidden and holistic' genocide in Yemen and the shared responsibility of the US and UK", map out how the US and other actors could be responsible for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. The Saudi led coalition has contributed to a number of Yemeni being killed and victims of violence and discusses if the US and United Kingdom (UK) have contributed to genocide. In other words, the support from international actors such as the US and UK, has enabled the coalition to exercise violence. This article describe how the US and UK share a responsibility but do not describe the US individual participation (Bachman, 2019).

Another relevant research is written by Sandra Sadek (2020) describing the "War in Yemen: cost and benefits to the United States" explains that the US is involved in the Saudi Arabia selling of weapon and the economic benefit. The research discusses topics such as production and selling of petroleum, selling of weapons, terrorist organizations and potential legal problems the US could face. By supporting the selling of weapons, the US has become involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity (Sadek 2020). These two studies do not highlight if the US is acting rational or humanitarian and do not aims to explain the US objective in the conflict (Sadek 2020).

Jeremy M. Sharp (2020) is the Middle Eastern Affair specialist in the US Congressional Research Service (Sharp, 2020). In "Congress and the war in Yemen: oversight and legislation 2015-2019" Sharp (2019) discusses the Congress' role in US policy, armed forces, support to the coalition, coalition's air campaigns, international law, humanitarian assistance, a wider government assessment of the US policy, counterterrorism and Iran's role in supplying the Houthi movement. Although this article highlights the US Congress and the war in Yemen it focusses more on the legislation and oversight over the span of 2015 to 2019 rather than the US Congress and its effect on the Yemen Conflict, it also views the mater form a prone-US approach (Sharp, 2019).

William A. Rugh (2019) the author to "America's Yemen Policy" is analyzing the US perspective towards the conflict and discussing the involvement of support to the Houthis, in context the US and Iran is not having the ultimate relationship. The US involvement in Yemen is fueling Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State (IS) expansion of activities, which is a major policy for the US objective. Simultaneously, the Saudi Arabia have continue doing airstrikes, the US officials claim that they have made announcement to Saudi Arabia to avoid human suffering, but nothing has been changed, resulting in criticism about contributing to the situation of human suffering in Yemen. The US participation is both direct and indirect and is being discussed from a policy perspective. The article highlight how the US has become involved in

unintended business resulting in unexpected effects. The overall perspective in the article is that the US had a good intention in its interference and did not intend to be caught up in criticism of its policy and approach to the Yemen conflict. However, the article does not further discuss RCT neither R2P (Rugh, 2019).

An earlier thesis is written by Amanda Nääf (2011) " *Droning toward a shift in the morality of war?*" about the US use of drones in way of terror regarding if there has been a shift in morality of war. The essay discusses the research debate with the Just war theory and RCT. Doing a case study of the war zone in Yemen using drones to kill terrorist, meaning that it does not legitimate violation of International human rights law and International humanitarian law. This research focuses more on a perspective of international law and drones and is not up to date (Nääs, 2011).

In view of the previous literature, it highlights US policy in Yemen, cost and benefits, historical context, discussing the US and UK hidden and holistic attack on Yemen as a genocide and the problematic approach to the US using drones. The earlier research does not emphasize the RCT and R2P as the theoretical approach used in this research. The approach that will be described in the thesis aims to further discuss the RCT and R2P in context of why US is involved in the Yemen conflict. Therefore, the existing literature provides information regarding the conflict and some core pillar, however there is no literature answer the research problem of this study. Neither has the latter's theoretical framework been applied to earlier research.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study uses Rational Choice Theory (RCT) as well as the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) as analytical lenses to analyze the US involvement in Yemen. Both lenses are presented below.

3.1 Rational Choice Theory

One of the theoretical frameworks that will be used is the Rational Choice Theory (RCT). There is a wide range of the definitions concerning the term *rationality*, depending on who you ask, a variety of answers can be given. In the following part of the text a few of the common definitions will be presented. The Cambridge University (n.d.) define rationality as "*the quality of being based on clear thought and reason, or of making decisions based on clear thought and reason*" (Cambridge, n.d.).

The Nationalencyklopedin (NE) (n.d.) encyclopedia highlight rationality as *sensible* or *reasoning* (NE, n.d.). Shafir and LeBoeuf (2002) describe rationality from a more technical perspective

discussing the actor's wider range of preferences, opinions and beliefs and that the individual must act defensible to justify the use of the theory (Shafir and LeBoeuf, 2002 p.491-517).

Further discussion of the term rational choice enables a further understanding of the content. Nee et al. (2013) describe it as actors having available options in their choice, choosing the option that is most probably to enable them fulfillment of the consistent goals. While Eriksson (2011) state a broader perspective of rational choice, highlighting some common elements in the rational framework describing agents as " *have consistent preferences*", " *make expected utility*", be " *instrumentally rational*", " *make decision on the basis of cost and benefits calculations and/or strategic reasoning*" and to be " *self-interested*" (Eriksson, 2011 pp.16-18). Quackenbush (2010) describes the role of assumption in the theory and focusing on the most preferred or desirable outcome, then the actor makes rational choices to reach these (Quackenbush 2010).

As presented above, the term rational choice refers to the framework of human behavior and argues that actor's decision-making is made from a set of alternatives. Therefore, actors use their preferences and beliefs to maximize the outcome from expected utility. The RCT assumes that decision is made by observable components. Discussing the content of the theory, RCT contains psychological limitations, institutes and cultural influences and that the behavior contributing to the result is dependent on these variables (Eriksson, 2011 pp.17,18). It is originated in a micro level, the theory starts to explain individual values and can therefore analyze structural behavior as well as actors with high political positions. (Quackenbush, 2010, pp.92).

As a theory that concerns primarily the micro level, RCT looks at actors' decision-making in an attempt to understand factors contributing to the decision-making process. The theory is often applied on a set of disciplines, some disciplines that use RCT are economics, political science, sociology and international relations. Although the theory is mainly used to operate at the individual level, in this study it will be applied on the national interest and on international relations. (Quackenbush, 2010, pp.88). Many international actors often involve many sub-actors on all levels, thus this study will look into the observable behavior of acting and US objective in Yemen (Eriksson, 2011, pp.16,18).

Discussing international relations, a state's decision making could be applied on RCT, looking at possible gains, the state desires maximization of the utility according to the RCT. The approach can on the other hand result in competition and contradiction between actors. Looking at the world the

result is in conformity with the world order layout (Quackenbush, 2010, pp.87-107). Quackenbush (2010) describes that international relations and their interactions are based on factors such as the actor's values, norms and relationships, contributing to the framework of decision-making. By applying the RCT it gives a further knowledge of understanding actors' motivation based on their preferences and values (Quackenbush, 2010, pp.89). Using the RCT enables an understanding of the actor's different alternatives and why an actor chooses a certain alternative that the actor views as most rational. The theory also aims to explain the underlying factors contributing to a certain outcome. Looking at actors in leadership level, in some contexts the actor could be limited to make rational choices from a set of variables, therefore the rational choices can be processed with the national objective.

The international arena is influenced by the leading system in the world, namely liberalism and capitalist economic system. The RCT enables a discussion of the reasons why actors are involved in other actors' own matter, and if it is rational for that actor's preferences and beliefs (Quackenbush, 2010, pp.89). To further discuss RCT, the perception of rational acting is the actor's preferences to reach the most desirable result. To take other less desirable outcome into account, from the actor's subjective judgement. This choice is made from the argument of desire to increase the value, actors that don't act rational will contain less of the value, called the *money-pump argument transitivity* (Eriksson 2011, pp.20).

The RCT has its limitation in making assumptions covering actors' motives, that is something that can only be guessed by a second actor. Since the actor itself is the only one how knows the full context and therefore, some error can be recognized in the theory about assumption making (Eriksson, 2011, pp.16,18).

3.2 Responsibility to Protect

The principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) primarily highlights the state's obligation to protect its own population. The principle secondarily highlights the international community's responsibility to ensure no genocide, war crimes or ethnic cleansing and crimes are committed against humanity. The principle therefore puts the state's responsibility first and foremost. If the state is not able to protect the population, other actors in the international community have the responsibility to be involved to protect the civilians. The doctrine is relevant due to actors and their responsibility as well as the international community to protect all civil population. The principle is a global political commitment and was in the 2005 World Summit endorsed by all states that is a

member in the United Nations (UN). The principle of R2P is about the responsibility to protect all populations, the underlying premise the sovereignty carries and the responsibility the international community carry (United Nations, 2020). The shared responsibility is built on the pillars,

“The responsibility of each State to protect its populations (pillar I); the responsibility of the international community to assist States in protecting their populations (pillar II); and the responsibility of the international community to protect when a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations (pillar III).” (United Nations n.d. *The Responsibility To Protect*).

The R2P concerns international law to protect the population within a state. Actors contributing to R2P give some legal rights for the security council, regional organizations and coalition of the willing to protect by military means (Amnéus, 2008, pp.180). With that said actors can use military means to ensure the populations security involving the legal rights the principle provide. The collective action highlighted in R2P was presented in the UN Secretary General’s Agenda for Peace in 1992/1995, concerning the globalized and independent cold war (Amnéus, 2008, pp.180).

Due to the crisis in the world some believe that R2P have failed (United Nations n.d. *The Responsibility To Protect*). Although there are difficulties in the R2P doctrine and implementation to prevent violation of R2P through efforts in support of states. In the use of methods, the military force should only be considered as a last resort, the advocated method should instead be humanitarian, diplomatic and political measures. Development in the network concerning this responsibility that wants to ensure protection and prevention of harm. The R2P aims to increase the protection of all populations (Amnéus, 2008, pp.185,187). Lohrgenstahl (2011) mention that it can be difficult to know how long to wait and collect information before an intervention. It could also be difficult to know the line between peaceful and military means and what is suitable for the involvement. Therefore, it is also a choice of path between respecting the state sovereignty and protection of human rights, namely the *intervention dilemma*. As mentioned above, the use of military means is not justifiable, if prevention with peaceful means could be successful. A military intervention is not defensible in the R2P doctrine if the state could solve the issue itself. Concerning the R2P doctrine, it is unclear how the distribution of responsibility is arranged. Since there is no definite distribution of responsibility globally, it raises questions about which actor that should be accountable. Highlighting this subject, the discipline of R2P also concerns ethical and legal considerations (Lohr gen Stahl, 2011, pp.30-36).

3.3 Use of the frameworks

The study objective is to analyze the case study, namely why the US is involved in Yemen. With using the theoretical framework to emphasize what variables contribute to the US involvement and their objective to Yemen. With that being said the reader should get further knowledge about humanitarian and rational acting. To extend the knowledge of how R2P and RCT work in the international community and its relations. Furthermore, the theory of the RCT and R2P will be used to get a further knowledge of the US involvement in Yemen.

The theory of rational choice will be used to study the RCT and benefits, discussing what possible outcome will maximize the US expected utility as a reason contributing to the US behavior patterns. The theoretical framework will contribute understanding of how the US have chosen a certain approach from the set of possible alternatives. In RCT, the US norms, values and relationships are important aspects of the decision-making. The framework will bring attention to how the US values, norms and relationships has contributed to them acting rational in the context of Yemen, starting with discussing the US values and preferences. Using key assumptions and logical formulation such as the US behavior from what is most profitable for them. As well as emphasize the US motives, foreign policy and national interest to understand their national predetermined approach regarding a numerous of aspects such as economic interest, the war against terrorism and so on. From the approach of the US motives, foreign policy and national interest, analyze with the RCT, if and how the US objective and its involvement is rational and correspond with the definitions described in the section of Rational Choice Theory.

R2P embraces a humanitarian approach focusing on human rights. The R2P discipline enables a debate regarding what aspects contribute to the US taking responsibility and being involved in Yemen. The R2P gives the right to use military means within the regional and international community. It is also relevant to discuss if the US has thought of all of the humanitarian, diplomatic and political methods possible before supporting the Saudi-led coalition with military means. Another important topic to cover is the intervention dilemma about the often combining and separation in state sovereignty and human rights.

To conclude what the two aspects will contribute together, the RCT and R2P highlights the rational actor while R2P looks further into the humanitarian and human rights aspects. Since the two aspects cover different approaches, they are suitable and enable a discussion of where US intentions are in the involvement in Yemen, and what US intervention is based upon. Considering the two discussed approaches, the two lenses can be a feature highlighting separate angles of the involvement. With this in mind, the two separate angles can oppose each other, national goal has a tendency to oppose

human rights in context of the approaches highlighting different agendas. Therefore, the two frames offer two different perspectives to look at the objectives international actors might have to intervene in the internal affairs for other countries. According to Murray (2013) the humanitarian is the most attractive argument for an intervention but describes that the anarchic international system pressure states to do rational calculations. States are unlikely to intervene within the R2P doctrine without national self-interest and reaching their objective. The approaches will be used to look further into if the human rights perspective could be used as a cover to fulfill the US objectives and national interest in Yemen. Meaning that potentially the human rights perspective could be a method to put the US in a better light in front of the international community, but the US still operates from its national interest and motives. However, there could be some difficulties to apply the framework since it is hard to get access to deliberations and protocols outlining the decision-making process of governments since that information usually is classified. With this in mind the research outlines the US objective through the historical involvement, the Middle Eastern policy, the approach to the Yemen conflict, different actors within the US state machine, newspaper, NGO, human rights organizations and the academic community to determine if the US are rational in their decision-making or not (Murray, 2013).

4. Methodology

In this chapter the methodology used in the research will be presented.

4.1. Qualitative case study

This study will examine material in debt concerning a case study, covering information from published materials. The research questions are open-ended questions and emphasize words rather than numbers. The research questions are formulated to get an in-debt answer covering the describing about a certain case study (Bryman, 2012. pp.565-566).

To collect material to this research the method that will be used is the case study. The case study enables us to identify a specific form of inquiry. Since the method provides the researcher room to look into a specific subject and study it in depth it is suitable for the research objective. The method includes the case being studied at a detailed level. So instead of gathering small information from a number of cases to reach an overview of some subject, the case study research method allows the research to process a large amount of information about one case. The qualitative research with the case study method conducts making general conclusions. Case studies look further into individual cases and situations and therefore it also enables a widened understanding of that case. Having the

research problem in mind it is suitable to use the qualitative desk study method since it views the concerned subject in depth (Bryman, 2012. pp.66-71).

The other method that will be used in this qualitative research is text analysis. This method helps understanding the text's profound meaning as well as detailed patterns in a variety of texts and materials. Using the text analysis method, the technique enables a quantitative description of the information through systematic, objective and qualitative content. Using different information of depth contribute viewing patterns and trend analysis of the literature by information extraction. Using large text collection, it is possible to identify relationships and behavior patterns. To present background knowledge helps the structured collection of research become clearer in its context. Involving information from different sets of literature the text will be used as data for analysis (Bryman, 2012. pp.35, 290-291).

4.2. Abduction

The abductive reasoning approach is relevant since it views an incomplete observation and aims to understand the pattern of behavior of the actor. Abductive reasoning is used to make probable conclusions of what is already known. To enable further knowledge the abduction reasoning uses observing and interpreting to get a new conceptual framework of the subject. The abductive reasoning empowers the meaning to a larger context and events in relations. The reasoning views both individual phenomena and general structures. Furthermore, the reasoning goes from logical interference to guessing and is then making an explanation of the observation. The reasoning is relevant in the research since it goes back to the emerging theory and view logic in the largest sense and a set of ideas and from there the reasoning concludes a new set of ideas. Grounding theoretical understanding of the context being studied and studying the perspectives view of the world. Explaining the most likely explanation possible from the most feasible theory. The abductive inference highlights the interference and how it is broadening, what is already known as well as stimulating the research process. The reasoning provides definite truths through deeper knowledge of the case study and then tests the theories in the general structures. Also, the approach to conduct research is stating facts and the research process is about understanding and explaining the case study. The abductive reasoning will contribute to understanding of the topic being studied through the subject's view of the world. This methodology will provide support to study the case study in its context and perspectives. The content will consist of documents, reports, and articles and other relevant sources of data such as research, policy papers and dissertations (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen and Karlsson, 2002. pp.88-95).

4.3. Data collection and source criticism

The process of gathering information concerning the topic to answer the research questions will be using earlier published data. Likewise, data collected for the research will be used with its relevance to the US and its involvement in Yemen. Ensuring accuracy and truthfulness is essential for the research. The quality of the data is essential to ensure a fair result of the research. The integrity of the study will be maintained through using different perspectives of already existing data within the study. The sources that will be used are newspaper articles and press material but also moving images regarding what secretaries of state and other stakeholders in the US have expressed regarding the subject.

The sources will be both updates in news about what the stakeholder have expressed, the US state and its official statement and policy approach towards the situation in Yemen. To cover another perspective regarding the update of the case study other sources will be used such as news updates, publications, country reports, and articles by experts in the field, human rights organizations and other actors within the US state machine. Looking into the Foreign Affairs committee records, and USAID and State Department documents and news updates to cover higher number of aspects in the research. Furthermore, the use of primary sources is statements from the White House, Congressional records and interviews. In order to provide a higher credibility of the data. Another component in the data collection is the timeframe of the published sources, the used sources aim to be as new as possible. However, since the conflict in Yemen escalated in 2014, the data in the findings chapter will be between 2014 to present time. The subsequent decisions and arguments can therefore be based on valid data (Weller, 1988).

4.4 The reliability of the method, limitations and delimitations

The limitation of the research is that it is mostly secondary sources such as newspaper and reports, while having fewer primary sources from Congressional meeting and statements from the Trump administration. However, the research does not involve the US internal documents or draft regarding the decision-making process nor information regarding the US government's internal discussion of the topic, which would have contributed to the research, but due to the limitation of research these documents they are not included in this research. The research will only concern officially published material. Therefore, the research method is limited to the already published and processed material.

Likewise, methods reliability of being a case study enables viewing the research in depth with a wider approach on the already published material, using both primary and secondary material.

Furthermore, the use of a qualitative method enables an in-dept answer for the research question to a larger extend.

Only focus on the US as an actor in Yemen has its limitation but also contribute to the reliability highlighting the structures and different views of the US interest. However, since a number of international actors are involved in the conflict it could be bad to only look at how the US is affecting the war, since the Saudi-led coalition consists of a number of actors. On the other hand, the approach of doing a case study of just US involvement provides a deeper understanding of one singles actor role in the conflict. The abduction approach enables the researcher to further observe the case study and interpreting that into a new conceptual framework. The abduction reason does also provide a guidance regarding the research question and meaning in relation to a larger extent. The use of text analysis provides a method where a number of texts is being processed to view patterns of the US involvement in Yemen, which is suitable for the study. Therefore, the delimitation is conscious made to narrow down the material in the research to already published ones.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The desk study is only using predominantly secondary material therefore, it is no ethical considerations involved. However, to remain as neutral as possible the researcher will embrace research that includes validity to maintain the integrity of the research. Furthermore, the research will adapt literature covering different perspectives of the conflict to get a wide perspective in the pressure to be as inclusive as possible.

5. Background

5.1 Yemen historical background

The area of Yemen has, from a historical context being a relatively small but important actor. There has been a conflict over power between South Yemen and North Yemen. After the unification Ali Abdullah Saleh became the first president of the new republic. Saleh prioritized the interest of the northern part of Yemen and improving its foreign relations with the west. After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon 11 September 2001, the relationship worsened. The US then started the war against terrorism and Saleh had to balance the growing anti-American sensibility and strong Yemeni nationalism together with US demand for full support against terrorism. The international pressure continues handling terrorism as well as the intern problem resulted in further dissatisfaction and anger. Leading to the norther Shia Islamic political

movement called Houthi alliance backed by Iran phrase discontent about its social and political discrimination (Schmitz and Burrowes, 2017).

The election in 2011 increased the political tension in Yemen and the Arab spring appeared. The national demand tried to force Saleh to step down as president, governmental change, increased human rights, decreased corruption and promoted economic development. The security forces resisted against the demonstrators resulting in hundreds of deaths after a few months which provided AQAP the space to act more freely and increase its territory (Horton, 2017).

In April 2011 the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) approached Yemen with a plan to solve the current crisis. Other neighboring countries were concerned over how the instability would affect them and the GCC used US economic support to force Saleh to resign from his presidential post. Saleh did without being put before trial leave the power to the vice president Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi and a new government to a transition period (International Crisis Group, 2011). The solution was recognized by the international community as well as the United Nation Security Council (United Nations, 2011), while the opponent thought the solution was too mild on Saleh. After a turbulent time of the president being hurt in an attack and travel to Saudi Arabia for health care, Hadi became temporary president. Saleh returned and in November signed the agreement to transfer the power to Hadi as the GCC plan (Freedom House, 2012).

In 2014 Hadi transition period was prolonged since the objectives of the transition period were not fulfilled. The economy and security within Yemen were worsening and resulted in the Houthi movement losing patience over change and starting to expand its territory (Schmitz and Burrowes, 2017). The population continued to suffer during Hadi rule, and the same old elites returned to power. The US continued fighting terrorism and AQAP and the IS continued attacking (Horton, 2017).

In 2015 the humanitarian situation was worsening resulting in bad access to safe water and sanitation, as well as a hunger crisis and cholera started spreading (Oxfam International, 2015). The Houthis and Saleh forces became allies and took over a large part of Yemen including Sanaa in a coup and forced Hadi to flee to Saudi Arabia putting the Hadi-government in house arrest, placing the Houthis in control. A coalition was formed by Saudi Arabia to return Hadi to power, Saudi Arabia's interest was to protect and contain its border to prevent Yemen from fragmenting and contain the perceived growing influence of Iran. In March 2015 the Saudi-led military intervention started an airstrike and naval blockade of the Yemen ports (Schmitz and Burrowes, 2017). Human

rights groups have accused the Saudi-led coalition of hitting civil targets, killing and injuring thousands of civilians. The coalition has used weapons from international actors such as the US, UK and other actors (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). In April 2015 the Security Council adopted resolution 2214 and 2216 and demanded the end of violence in Yemen. The resolution state that the Houthis should” immediately and unconditionally end violence and refrain from further unilateral actions that threatened the political transition.” (United Nations, 2015).

In 2016 Yemen’s economy lost its resilience due to the public budget deficit and its inability to give salaries to the employee as well as the foreign exchange salaries being depleted resulting in basic social services being disrupted. The printing of banknotes and the traditional economic policy is not sustainable and resulting in essential matters becoming harder to access due to the increasing price (Yemen Socio-economic Update 2016, 2016). The affected areas are to name a few” water, sanitation, health care, education, agriculture and veterinary services” (OCHA, n.d.).

In 2017 after the Saleh forces and the Houthis had been allies because both parties opposed the UN-backed government, the Saleh forces shifted its support to the Saudi-led coalition and was thereafter killed by the Houthis (Schmitz, 2015).

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) have complained about the unequal distribution of wealth and lack of development in the southern parts of Yemen. STC demands a part of the south being carved out as a state. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) supports the STC and it has captured territories resulting in further dimensions of the conflict in Yemen. The GoY insist that the group is only a representation of the group itself and not the mass. The GoY have also highlighted that the STC activities should be condemned by the international community (Kumar Pradhan, 2020).

In Simpson (2020) report in Human Rights Watch, it is described how civilians face hardship in Yemen. Hindering, delay, refusal, regulation, obstruction of aid supply and assistance in the Houthis controlled areas is common and hinder aid agencies reaching civilians in need. The Houthis want to control the assistance, but it would then compromise the aid agencies humanitarian principles of humanity (Simpson 2020).

5.2 The situation in Yemen today

The UN described the situation as the” largest humanitarian crisis in the world” and claims it’s getting worse (United Nations, n.d. *The United Nations In Yemen*). With a country in crisis and

demand for humanitarian aid and protection covers 80 percent of the population (United Nations, n.d. *The United Nations In Yemen*).

The safety and security for people living in Yemen is very deficient. To reach a ceasefire and start the process to peace is essential to not risk further lives in Yemen. The situation in Yemen is as close to collapsing as possible and the UN humanitarian affair chief, Mark Lowcock describes the aid received to be far away from enough with only 18 percent of the economic resources being granted. Without further funding, the situation in Yemen will continue worsening and the demand will increase. To reach a nationwide ceasefire is essential to de-escalate the violence in Yemen (UN News, 2020. *Yemen: Crisis Reaches*). The conflicts on national and local levels, control over resources, the desire of power and revenge together with a corrupt system, a weak government and police force with other factors such as low trust, lack of authority and no rule of law have influenced the environment in Yemen. The civil society is under a lot of pressure and faces lack of security and safety needs, above all vulnerable groups are oppressed such as marginalized groups, women, children and youth (Al-Shami, 2015).

Regarding the water, sanitation and hygiene assistance in Yemen the current situation faces serious challenges due to the capacity to provide basic survival needs for the population. The absence of help from the government and the ongoing conflict results in the civil population having to rely on NGO (UN News, 2020. *Funding Shortfall Affecting*). The Yemen's Humanitarian Response Plan of June to December 2020 states that 17.9 million in Yemen require health care and health services emphasize the aspect of the collapse of public institutions. With only some health facilities functioning at full capacity it is essential to strengthen the health system and expand the range of health services (Humanitarian Response Plan, 2020).

The emergency in Yemen has led to the United Nations World Food program putting its largest emergency response in the world. The level of hunger is unprecedented and brings consequences for millions of people. Malnutrition for children is the highest globally with no improvement near. The high demand for acute malnutrition with special nutrition support is essential. More than half of all families are buying food on credits and the payment of the public sector has not been transferred since 2016. If the extreme fragile humanitarian situation would be disrupted by further critical components, it could result in millions of people closer to starvation and deaths (WFP, 2020).

The conflicts escalation has resulted in people displaced, in the essential shelters social distancing is hard managed highlighting the Covid-19 pandemic. About 7.27 million people are in need of shelter and it is essential to stabilize, improve and upgrade the housing conditions (Humanitarian Response Plan, 2020).

5.3 Oil and weapons

High oil demand has resulted in the resource contributing to increase the strategic factor of the Middle East. Due to the oil's political commodity and the resource affecting the international economy. The oil has influenced the Middle East international relations, domestic politics and power balance within the Middle East. Important to mention is that oil is not equally distributed among regions or areas, oil is highly concentrated and creates a polarization between states. It has shaped the relations between the Middle East and the west's actors such as the US, UK and France. The US entered a close relationship with Saudi Arabia, although the US has stated to decrease its reliance on import, yet it has not led to disengagement by the US to the Middle East. Oil is neither the only interest in the region by the US. On the national level, oil extraction enables a state becoming rentier, being financially independent and no need to seek legitimacy through democratic representation (Fawcett, 2019).

Yemen is one of the most armed countries in the world. The actors in the conflict receive weapons from different directions, the supply of weapons and arms are fueling human rights violations. In SIPRI's report on Trends in international arms transfers 2019, the arms transfers had increased to the Middle East between 2015 till 2019. The country's foreign policy seems to color the weapon export. About 51 per cent of the US total export was to the Middle East. The country that imported the highest number in the area is Saudi Arabia. The US is the largest supplier to Saudi Arabia, followed by the UK. There has been a discussion covering violation of international humanitarian law and Saudi Arabia military intervention in Yemen. However, the import of weapons continued (Wezeman et al., 2020).

5.4 Failure in the peace process

The efforts to reach a lasting peace in Yemen have been large but without much success. One successful agreement was the Stockholm Agreement 2018 where parties agreed on the city and ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Issa," An executive mechanism on activating the prisoner exchange agreement." and a statement of understanding on Taiz." (OSESFY, 2018). The involved actors violated the agreement shortly after the agreement was signed. The parties have also accused each other of violating the agreement. Events and attacks have resulted in the UN failing to monitor

the situation and the GoY stated in April 2020 that the Stockholm agreement had collapsed. After a time of the agreement being violated by the parties, the GoY and Houthis signed an agreement to release 1081 conflict-related individuals (UN News, 2020. Yemen's Warring Parties). Despite all the efforts made, reaching peace in Yemen is far from close since parties continue to use violence (Kumar Pradhan, 2020).

5.5 Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the STC and the GoY

As presented in the chapter covering Yemen historical background, Saudi-Arabia and Yemen have a complicated history together. With the current situation in Yemen, Saudi Arabia is according to Manea (2012) concerned over Yemen being too weak, potential spillovers and AQAP doing attacks on Saudi-Arabia, therefore Saudi-Arabia objective is to stabilize Yemen (Manea 2012). After the Houthis shot missiles to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and UAE continued bombing infrastructure resulting in killing and injuring civilians contributing to violating international humanitarian law and war crimes. A total of 42 documented airstrikes from the coalition have resulted in 433 civilians being injured and 518 civilian deaths in March 2020 according to Amnesty International (Amnesty, 2020).

The Saudi-led coalition has supported GoY to decrease the Houthis power (Kumar Pradhan, 2020) through naval blockade in 2015 to cut the providence of weapons. The naval blockade affected the humanitarian situation because the civil population did not receive aid, leading to further humanitarian distress and starvation (Fink, 2017).

The UAE faced fragmentation with Saudi-led in 2019 because of the different strategies toward the STC-forces. UAE supports STC through airstrikes on the government forces resulting in several deaths. The conflict escalated and was viewed as a coup. The act directly meant that the UAE supports different sides of the conflict adding further complexity. UAE and STC control Aden and the island Socotra which are important international shipping lanes. The UAE aims to decrease the Houthis power and return the Hadi-government to power (Kumar Pradhan, 2020).

5.6 Iran and the Houthis

Since the Houthis expanded and took over Sanaa in 2014, the group's expansion and territory has increased through the military of neighboring countries, coalitions and the GoY security forces. (Amnesty, 2020). The Houthis strong military capability has enabled the continued fighting. The group continues holding Sanaa, Al Bayda, Al Jawf, Hajjah and Amran to name a few. The Houthis

refuse to start a negotiation with the coalition until the naval blockade has been removed. (Kumar Pradhan, 2020). Iran supplies the Houthis with monetary means, military support and weapons. There is a conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the Houthis are in Saudi-Arabia perception in a war proxy. Iran aims to keep actors such as the US and Saudi Arabia away from the geographical location because of the actors' involvement and dominance. (Laub and Robinson, 2020).

” Yemen has been a theatre of a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran with both countries militarily supporting the rival factions. While Saudi Arabia supports the Hadi government and wants the Houthis to withdraw, Iran wants a better deal for the Houthis where they would be major stakeholders in Yemen’s future.” (Kumar Pradhan, 2020).

Iran has suggested Houthis having larger space in the negotiations and political process in shaping the future of Yemen. The strategic advantage for Iran would increase towards the contradiction to Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Iran calls for ceasefire, humanitarian assistance and the dialogue in Yemen for national unity in Yemen (Kumar Pradhan, 2020).

5.7 The AQAP, IS and US

The complex situation has provided a beneficial environment for AQAP and IS. AQAP benefit from its local presence and conflict situation as well as attack from the GoY and US to spread its territory. IS aims to imitate AQAP success but their short presence in Yemen has resulted in more resistance from other established groups and actors. AQAP and IS have had several violent clashes in Yemen (Kumar Pradhan, 2020).

Actors fighting terrorism with the use of drones and special operations have resulted in killing key leaders but not limited the rapid growth. AQAP have used” the country’s failed political transition and civil war, it has exploited state collapse, shifting alliances, a burgeoning war economy and growing sectarianism to expand its support base, challenge state authority and even govern territory at times” (Longley Alley, 2017). The Yemen political elites and Sunni jihadist such as AQAP have a close relationship. Since the elite support AQAP, it adds a further dimension to the conflict. Elites using AQAP for their own economic and political profit. The Saudi-led coalition has focused on combating the Houthis and Iran. Giving AQAP economic-financial benefits and the possibility to govern large areas over extended periods (Longley Alley, 2017).

6. Findings

6.1 The US historical involvement in the Middle East and Yemen

The US is often viewed as the most powerful country. As a global hegemon, the US has a big responsibility (Schubert, Dye and Zeigler, 2014). In 2019 the US had the largest military spending and it remained stable (Statista, 2020). The US was therefore in a position to protect the global system's stability, human rights and working with other countries and multilateral organizations (Schubert, Dye and Zeigler, 2014). The first time the US encountered the Middle East was in the 1800s during the Ottoman empire, where the US wanted to protect their trade (Schmitz and Burrowes, 2017). During World war two and the Cold War, the value of the region became clearer. Countries including the US became more dependent on Middle East oil, resulting in US Middle East policy being a higher priority. Another factor was fear of Russia increasing influence and weakening British and French imperial positions. US relations with Israel became strong and they had similarities resulting in complicated US relations with the Middle East. During the Cold War when Yemen was divided, the US supported the Northern part of Yemen while the Soviet Union supported the Southern part. The US has historically sent aid to Yemen, but their relations have not been very stable. US diplomatic relations with Yemen have been implemented from a historical perspective but no permanent US mission has been established (Riedel, 2018). In 1979 US and Saudi Arabia cooperated, and provided support for the Yemen Arab Republic with security assistance. In 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait, US Reduced its presence involving military cooperation and non-humanitarian assistance in Yemen (Schmitz and Burrowes, 2017).

The attack in 9/11 shaped US relations with the Middle East, involving Yemen. After 9/11 President Saleh travelled to Washington DC meeting George W. Bush to manifest his support fighting terrorism (Riedel, 2018). In the post 9/11 period, the general attitude of the US mass towards aid was improved, with the assumption that it can contribute to improving the situation in the Middle East and therefore decrease the probability for further terrorists' attacks on the US (Hastedt, 2018). After 9/11, the US started to use their capacity abroad to counterattack terrorist groups and state sponsors. The US also embraced the battle on foreign land instead on the domestic war of terror. The new emphasis includes direct attacks, attacks on nations that harbor terrorists and preemptive attacks on regimes that threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. The US started intelligence gathering to adapt to the new warfare of technology and increase the use of drone warfare (Schubert, Dye and Zeigler, 2014). Some long-term observers expressed in 2014 concern that Yemen's security problems could remain despite increased US and international support. The US has over the years assisted Yemen with 353 million dollars in 2012, 216,23 million dollars in

2013 and 221 million dollars in 2014 (Sharp, 2015). In 2019 there was an attack on two oil tanks which the Houthis took full responsibility for but other actors believe that Iran was involved since the Houthis do not have the capacity to perform such an attack.

6.2 The US Middle East policy

The US has a huge military capacity but is also involved in partnership and international alliance. The US has a veto in the United Nations Security Council whose primary goals are peace and human rights. NATO is a military alliance covering protection of all the member states. During the Trump administration, the US has withdrawn from the Paris agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, started the process to build a wall along the Mexican border as well as challenge multilateral trade. This has resulted in a disagreement of the Trump administration's policies that has been expressed in the global community. Trump's foreign policy core consists of "America first" and the desire to decrease the US part in globalization and liberal policies. Trump's policy covers arrangements of areas consisting of foreign policy, immigration, security, jobs, and income further declaring that those areas will not suffer from the effects of globalization (Mansbach and McCormick, 2019). US foreign policy to the Middle East emphasizes US national economic growth, oil price, national security, nuclear threats, arm reduction and terrorist threat being shortly presented below (Shubert, 2014). The US has used economic sanctions to advocate US interests. Being used on countries such as Iran but also towards people in Yemen that the US believes threaten peace and security in Yemen (Hastedt, 2018). Saudi Arabia is one of the US allies, a part of the relationship is that Saudi Arabia needs to keep the price of oil stable and low. On the other hand the US is contributing with military operations in the Middle East (Sharp, 2015).

The Trump administration had done little to establish and stabilize relations in the Middle East, looking beyond its allies. The adopted policy has resulted in other actors such as Russia and Iran increasing their presence (Mansbach and McCormick, 2019). The US bilateral relations with the Middle East have been problematic and the good alliance with Israel has been wobbly concerning nuclear agreement in Iran dividing the states. Arms reduction aims to reach a balanced and mutual assured destruction to decrease the risk. However, today threats such as nuclear are rising from non-deterrable sources such as terrorist groups. Most notably, US efforts to the Middle East is decreasing terrorist threat. Global terrorist network uses a different method than typically conventional war forces since the network is disturbed and radicalize Islam for their political plans (Shubert, 2014).

The Trump administration policy to the Middle East is largely influenced by the US relations with Saudi Arabia and the desire to block the increased Iranian influence in the region. The US and Iranian relations are hostile, due to the anti-nuclear deal created by the US. Iran behaving provocatively and the lack of diplomatic relations has made the relationship more difficult. The Trump administration has neither been shy to tell their contempt for Iran (Mansbach and McCormick, 2019).

6.3 The US approach to the Yemen conflict

There are numerous actors within the US state machine therefore it is relevant to present the different actors' different approaches to understand the overall position of the US concerning the Yemen conflict. Important to mention is that this structure is to divide the US state machine and their approach to policy implementation. However the different parts in the US state machine have different mandates to policy action.

6.3.1 The US Congress

The US Congress is divided regarding the involvement in Yemen. They are discussing lack of humanitarian access, Iranian support to the Houthis and the US counterterrorism operation in Yemen (CRS Report, 2020). The Congress Research Services (CRS) published data about the US aims to stabilize and unify a Yemen where transnational terrorists no longer operate. The recent development in Yemen regarding mass killings of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition and worsen humanitarian situation has raised the question in the Congress of the US policy (CRS, 2020). The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 recorded by the Congress, highlight the concern regarding civilian casualties from the conflict and that Iranian aggression will not be tolerated, and it is necessary to counter it effectively (House of Representatives, 2019).

A new approach could be helpful for the US since some parties claim that the humanitarian situation does not justify weapons sales, further discussing what kind of emergency that is required to bypass weapons sales is raised (Congress.Gov, 2019). The US Congress tried to implement a ban regarding sales of weapons to Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, but President Trump vetoed, resulting in the Congress unable to force real change (Shesgreen, n.d).

6.3.2 The Trump Administration

President Trump recognizes that the relation with Saudi Arabia is complex. Trump's statement emphasizes "always America first" and to "make America great again" (Shesgreen, n.d.).

Therefore, the US will continue selling weapons and other military equipment to Saudi Arabia, since it otherwise could mean that other countries such as Russia and China would instead have the opportunity to sell the military equipment and make economic profit, showing characteristic of making a *cost-benefit analysis*. Trump expressed that Saudi Arabia has continued to help keep the oil prices low, thus if the US broke the alliance with them the oil prices would increase, whereas Trump voiced concern over that the economy would be destroyed (Shesgreen, n.d.). Furthermore, President Trump vetoed the Congress resolution proposal to stop US involvement in Yemen saying, “This resolution is an unnecessary, dangerous attempt to weaken my constitutional authorities, endangering the lives of American citizens and brave service members, both today and in the future,” (Tharoor, 2019).

President Trump made a statement at the White House (2018) describing that Iran is considered “the world’s leading sponsor of terror” (The White House 2018) and have killed both Americans and innocent people in the Middle East further describing that

“On the other hand, Saudi Arabia would gladly withdraw from Yemen if the Iranians would agree to leave. They would immediately provide desperately needed humanitarian assistance. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has agreed to spend billions of dollars in leading the fight against Radical Islamic Terrorism.” (The White House 2018).

6.3.3 The US House of Representatives’ Committee on Foreign Affairs

The US House of Representative’s Committee on Foreign Affairs has an ongoing discussion on the situation in Yemen and urges the Trump Administration to keep the humanitarian assistance flowing to Yemen due to the Global pandemic. Since the US is one of the largest aid givers to Yemen, an abruptly ceasing aid would exacerbate an already tragic humanitarian crisis (House Foreign Affairs Committee, 2019). In the Foreign Affairs 2019 Subcommittee hearing the humanitarian catastrophe was addressed. Ms. Zimmerman, a researcher for American Enterprise Institute emphasize the selling of weapons and that Saudi Arabia and UAE do not need the US financial support and therefore can buy weapons and expertise from other actors who do not share US values. If the US would further push Saudi Arabia and UAE in the trade, it would damage US interest and remove restraint on their military sanctions. It is essential to improve the US and its partners mutual understanding to reaching a long-term political resolution. Mr. Konyndyk, Senior policy fellow for Center for Global Development, highlights that Saudi Arabia and UAE has repeatedly targeted locations the US urge them not to, specifically targets that have no military purpose. The US official has treated those attacks as a result of a weak system. Arguing that if the civilian killings were unintended, the US engagement, training, support, and arm sales have not led

to improvements. But if the Saudi and the UAE airstrikes were intentional, the US has directly enabled war crimes (House Foreign Affairs Committee, 2019).

6.3.4 The US Department of State and USAID

The US Department of State recognizes the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and had in October 2019 provided 721 Million dollars in humanitarian assistance since 2017. The Intervention cover areas of emergency food assistance, medical treatment and vaccination support for children, emergency obstetric services for women, blankets and household goods for displaced families, and hygiene kits and water treatment supplies (United States Department of State, 2019). The US Department of State claims that humanitarian pledges must be met, and parts of the international community demand the Houthis to stop with its aggression and hindering humanitarian support and enable peace and stability for the people of Yemen (United States Department of State, 2020).

Tom Malinowski, a former top State Department official discussed the relation with Saudi Arabia and the strikes on Yemeni civilians saying, “They have precisely continued to strike targets that we have precisely identified to them as being on a no-strike list”(Wong, 2020).

In the Department of State Mission Statement, the US foreign mission is presented as followed between the years of 2018-2022:

On behalf of the American people, we (US Department of State) promote and demonstrate democratic values and advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous world. The U.S. Department of State leads America’s foreign policy through diplomacy, advocacy, and assistance by advancing the interests of the American people, their safety and economic prosperity. (USAID, 2018).

USAID supports the UN-led negotiations and provide support for the international recognized GOY to promote a resolution of the conflict. USAID Yemen programming approach aims to enable a strong foundation for durable peace, conflict prevention and addressing humanitarian needs through support of vulnerable groups, geographic and security considerations. Other components are improving collaboration and coordination and conflict sensitivity and “do no harm” approach. USAID states that humanitarian assistance will not solve the resilience of Yemen's social and economic institutions. Therefore, USAID has increased activity focusing on recovery, stability and growth of the economy to improved access to deliveries and services through improved governance and social cohesion (USAID, 2020).

6.4 Other sources and their approach to US involvement in Yemen

6.4.1 Newspapers

Most newspaper articles focusing on the US involvement in Yemen are very critical. They focus particularly on the humanitarian costs of the involvement. LaForgia and Bogdanich's (2020) article in the *New York Times* discusses how the US is selling weapons which are killing civilian Yemenis. In the article, it is pointed out that the Trump Administration advocates selling weapons to Saudi Arabia but do not prioritize how they are being used, resulting in prolonging the conflict and destabilization. US weapon companies sell weapons to Saudi Arabia, approved by US officials and following State Department policy. The Obama administration initially sold weapons but quit after witnessing the consequences. When Trump became president the foreign military aid increased. The manufacture of weapons creates jobs and profits the US economy. The Congress and the State Department is concerned because the administration does not care about human rights issues, basic arm deals, or the consequences on national security and foreign policy. Trump's position is quite clear, Trump values US defence firms like Raytheon, Boeing and Lockheed Martin over the Yemeni. The arms sales are from the Trump Administration's perspective defensible since it provides job growth and economic development. The National Security Council spokesman John Ulliot said that "Iran and its Houthi proxies" target Saudi Arabia and US, and further mention "We remain committed to supporting Saudi Arabia's right to defend against those threats while urging that all appropriate measures are taken to prevent civilian casualties," (LaForgia and Bogdanich, 2020).

Another article published in the *New York Times* by Wong (2020) discusses the Trump Administration's relationship with Saudi Arabia and whether it reduces civilian killings, the US State department opposes this matter. The US assists and advises Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States in their use of the sold weapons, while the Administration claims its involvement reduces civilian casualties (Wong, 2020). The article discusses why the US continue selling weapons when their ally keeps doing horrific acts; killing a thousand civilians. Saudi Arabia is however in a training program run by the US military worth 750 million dollars and the State Department has sent Larry Lewis to advise Saudi Arabia on civilian harm, although Lewis was later punched out by Trump administration officials. A "no-strike" list was prodded to the coalition, but lack of knowledge by Saudi pilots using lethal weapons did result in the killings according to President Trump. Causing a response increased partnership with the Saudis to address the moral and legal pitfall regarding civilian killings. Abigail Spanberger, former CIA officer, mentions that if the State

Department had made sure the weapons did not kill civilians, they would not have to cover up not preventing the deaths (Wong, 2020).

In an *Aljazeera* article by Preve (2020) the atrocities in Yemen and US participation with Saudi Arabia is presented. UN experts have accused the US of committing war crimes, but the US continues to support the Saudi-led coalition. The civilian suffers a violation of basic human rights and continues being killed and injured repeatedly by all parties in the conflict. Saudi Arabia has assured the US of the increased measured protection of civilians although, not being credible due to the killings (Preve, 2020). In a *CNN World article* by Elbagir (2020) the humanitarian situation in Yemen and the lack of aid result in challenges of food assistance, medical supplies and health care services. The US, Saudi Arabia and UAE were the biggest aid donors to the UN response in Yemen during 2018 and 2019. With the humanitarian situation in Yemen getting worse the workload increases for the clinics, resulting in the remaining aid actors being overloaded, Dr Ali al Ashwal informs CNN, who also explains the situation as when a child could survive but the circumstances do not allow it (Elbagir et al., 2020).

In the *Washington Post*, an article by Tharoor (2019) presents the US efforts to reach a diplomatic solution, cease-fire and lasting peace but not succeeding because of the US involvement in the complex conflict. The newspaper acknowledged in March how if US support would stop, the war would be forced to end, being the contrary to US response (Tharoor, 2019). Some argue that the resolution was mostly a manifest, others think it shows the Saudi regime its support. Trump has declared that US military dominance needs to be unquestioned resulting in a gesture of brute dominance (Tharoor, 2019).

The article by Robiou (2019) published by *Frontline* discusswa the arm sales deal Trump has made with Saudi Arabia and the emergency with Iran. The Trump Administration claim that Iran is an urgent and imminent threat to Saudi Arabia and UAE. Some are critical regarding if the emergency is warranted due to the lack of escalating threat of Iran. The Congress was not in favor of the arms deal because it cut out the congress, anger after the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi and concern over US involvement in Yemen (Robiou, 2019). In a *Responsible Statecraft* article by DePetris (2020) discussing the new UN report reminding of US complicity in Yemen. Saudi Arabia military campaign that started in 2015 was not seen to be long-lasting but is now a “never ending nightmare” (DePetris, 2020). Although the US does not bomb the Houthis, the diplomatic intelligence and military from the US to the Saudi-led collation is helping perpetuate the conflict.

The US help Saudi Arabia with an “indiscriminate, bloody, and ineffective military campaign that has produced nothing but tens of thousands of civilian deaths, massive displacement, a catalogue of war crimes (one case more heinous than the next), starvation, and a further degradation of Yemen’s already poor public infrastructure.” (DePetris, 2020). It is relevant to question why the US is an ally to Saudi Arabia since their policy is dysfunctional prioritizing economic benefits over human rights and security concern. US two-faced approach of negotiate political solution and ceasefire while selling defence equipment for billions of dollars is problematic “The U.S. is, in effect, pretending to play peacemaker while it feeds the beast.” (DePetris, 2020).

Vox (2016) published a video stating that the US may be aiding war crimes in Yemen that Saudi Arabia felt threatened by the effects of the nuclear deal in terms of increased economic and political power by Iran. US wants to prevent the spread of terrorism and potential attack on US domestic land. Depending on what approach you take it gives different approaches on the conflict. The Houthis have expressed being discriminated and mistreated by the government and want to be treated fairly. Other actors perceive it as the latest front of Saudi Arabia and Iran fighting overpower in the region. The video also highlight that US support is beyond military sales because US help Saudi Arabia to refuel their plains from an airbase in Turkey and the Arabia sea contributing to longer range and increased lethal (*Vox*, 2016).

On the website Council on Foreign Relations section Global Conflict Tracker, describing the worsening conflict status and US interests’ impact being limited. US continue fighting counterterrorism operations and violent extremism in Yemen and has since 2000 collaborated with the GoY. The Houthis is not a direct threat to the US, but it threatens an important ally since they are attacking Saudi Arabia territory and their infrastructure (CFR, 2020).

6.4.2 NGO and Human Rights organization

NGO and Human Rights organizations focus mostly on the situation in Yemen for the civilians, refer to international laws, pointing towards if the US is acting legal and how US involvements affect the already critical humanitarian conflict. The *UN Human Rights Council* (2019) report about the US as one of numerous actors that needs to follow International Humanitarian Law, the four Geneva Conventions above all Article 1 and Customary International Law. Covering states influence and support to parties in the conflicts should not encourage, aid or assists armed conflicts, but rather possibly stop violations. In the Targeting law, the broad interprets of contribution and military advantage. US has made endeavors contributing to sustaining the warfighting capacity,

therefore it is questionable if the US have taken all possible measures to stop violations in Yemen. Yemen has natural resources and terrorist originations being motives of US involvement. 2015 US presented the starting providence of support for the coalition including logistical and intelligence support. The US has a close relationship with Saudi Arabia being a factor to the involvement in Yemen (UN Human Rights Council, 2019).

Human Rights Watch (2020) described the US as one of several actors selling weapons and intelligence support to the coalition contributing to Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations. The coalition has tried to defeat the Houthis by blocking and impeding humanitarian access affecting civilians, indirectly supported by the US. The abuses on the civil population and attacks could be war crimes. It is also known that aid agencies faced political orders from US not addressing the most urgent areas (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Mwatana for Human Rights (n.d.) explain the US and Europe role in civilian deaths, destruction and trauma describing the coalition has targeted civilians. Although the US is hundreds of miles from Yemen they are actively and indirect participating in unlawful bombings. The US weapon companies sector highly benefiting from the sales. Trump has claimed that the defence sales to Saudi Arabia has the value of 110 billion dollars although experts say it is less (Mwatana for Human Rights, n.d.).

Lewis (2019) describes in CNA a public release about what could be learned of the US provided security assistance in Yemen and if better result could be achieved. The US reputation has been damaging from being immoral in Yemen. The Trump Administration strengthen the bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia through the weapon sales contribute to the disaster in Yemen. US providing of security assistance help Saudi Arabia to address instability and potential threats without their involvement. US policy consist of managing regional stability and promoting US interest consisting of counterterrorism and deterring Iran. The increased US partnership with allies has asymmetric advantage and promotes US hegemony (Lewis, 2019). The Crisis Groups (2019) has warned about the risk for Yemen:

“Crisis Group has warned repeatedly that absent a wide-ranging political process, including direct Huthi-Saudi talks aimed at de-escalating cross-border attacks and opening political space for intra-Yemeni discussions, Yemen will become more deeply enmeshed in the regional Cold War and become either a trigger for a regional hot war or the target of a U.S. attempt to strike at a symbol of Iranian expansionism. Military escalation on the part of the U.S. or its allies in Yemen would likely prove counterproductive, intensifying and

lengthening the civil war to the detriment of Yemeni and Saudi Arabian civilians alike, and to any hope of a stable region.”. (Crisis Group, 2019, After the Aramco Attack).

The Crisis Group (2019) informs in another publication that it does not serve the US interest to be involved in the conflict, but President Hadi being a partner to combat terrorism was positive for the US, but the Houthis opposed that. Hence, Saudi Arabia got sympathized with because the Houthis incursions. The US official had the illusion of changing the operations to more humane. After Obama administration period, the Trump administration cast aside the previous administrations learning drew closer to Saudi Arabia supporting its regional agenda with political and financial support. When Jamal Khashoggi was killed the conflict got more attention, but the US keep doing as before, covering the coalition and blaming Iran, not taking responsibility for its actions. The Trump administration saw Saudi Arabia as an “Arab NATO” handling regional security. Discussing if decreased partnership between Saudi Arabia and the US could mean a more stable Middle East. The Crisis Group highlight that the US does not hold the key to end the Yemen conflict, but can contribute more than now (Crisis Group, 2019, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*).

6.4.3 The academic community

In the academic community’s there have been a discussion on what US motives in Yemen covering a human rights perspective. The academic community is critical towards US involvement affecting civils for their own interest (Bashman 2019).

Bashman (2019) informs of US and UK synchronized attack on life describing it as hidden and holistic. The US has increased relationship with Yemen has contributed to committing genocide while having a close relationship to perpetrators. Bashman highlight that genocide in the south part of the world is often because of the Northern interest in terms of economic, ideological, political and geostrategic interests. The US contribute to massive sales of military weapons and technology to the Saudi-led Coalition, pointing the out the Trump administration interests. Due to the criticism of massive civilian deaths, the US has supported the coalition with targeting precision and giving a non-strike. Another aspect is providing fuel and refueling the warplanes offered by the US. The US and other states national interest have been essential for the military campaign resulting in killings of civilians. Therefore, the US and other states share the responsibility for the genocide in Yemen (Bashman, 2019). Moreover, Armed Conflict Survey (2019) describe US humanitarian and financial aid as a weapon of war exporting democracy and capitalism during the cold war to export economic and political influence. Actors in the Saudi lead coalition has given aid to Yemen to increase their influence in the region and counter Iran influence and the Houthi rebel movement.

While the coalition has done airstrikes, Yemen have increased the demand for humanitarian assistance. In a limited period between 2017 and 2018, the coalition blocked a port cutting the aid and goods pipeline by half, using starvation as an instrument of war. Since the US is supporting and is a part of the coalition, they are also indirect contributed to this instrument of war (Armed Conflict Survey, 2019). Blumi (2019) journal present the US one in the west that is interested in the resource-rich south resulting in the multipolar war and affecting Yemenis. Yemen's resource is agriculture, oil, gas and fish being reliable for US business companies in 2010 and 2011. Blumi describes how the global community lead US have been seen as a friendly actor to return Hadi back to power and reinforce the regional stability. The Article state that many actors and experts claim to contribute to the stabilization in Yemen referring to the crisis and chaos in the country. Yemen is portrayed of factors not idealistic should be there, Iranian outputs, humanitarian disaster and AQAP presence. Criticizing the generation of ignored colonial epistemologies by portraying the west from its divergence namely Muslim and eastern (Blumi, 2019). What the academic community agree on is criticizing towards the US way of affecting Yemen. Through contributing to genocide and starvation, implement the US national agendas for their self-interest and criticizing Yemen for its divergence in contrary to the west. Moreover, not contributing enough to improving the humanitarian crisis and conduce with conflict resolution but rather worsening the already bad circumstances in Yemen.

This chapter has presented a wide array of opinions concerning the US objectives related to the US involvement in Yemen, using government sources as well as independent media and research.

Overall, a number of objectives have come forward as strongest is the putting "America first" and the national interest through selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and UAE is economically profitable for the US manufacture firms. Provide non-strikes list, educate the Saudi in the use of weapons and giving aid in Yemen manifest the humanitarian approach.

Furthermore, the continuance of being allies with Saudi Arabia carry stable oil prices and political position in the Middle East. Establish security on all levels through fighting terrorist organizations and prevent attacks on the US. Fighting Iranian influence in the Middle East and the Houthis through supporting the coalition. Another key thing is the US continuance of being a global hegemony with great power while internally trying to decrease the effects of globalization (Crisis Group, 2019, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*).

7. Analysis

This section will apply the theoretical framework, including R2P and RCT, to the US objectives in its policy towards Yemen.

7.1. RCT

The findings put forth several factors that, overall, place the US' Yemen policy well within the framework of rational choice. As presented in the findings chapter, there are numerous opinions about the way the US is acting in Yemen. In the following chapter RCT will be applied on the US objective to analyze the US economic and political arguments in rational decision-making.

The selling of weapons to Saudi Arabia and UAE follow US objectives due to the economic profit to US manufacturers of weapons and the increased job opportunities and occupation. By putting "America first" US act from their objective defensible since it is rational and improve for the actor himself. Eriksson (2011) describes one definition of RCT as being "*self-interested*" is well describing US decision-making of "America first" to maximize the utility and the state interest. The relationship also includes Saudi Arabia helping the US keeping low and stable oil prices therefore providing economic advantages for the US. Eriksson (2011) describes RCT as having *consistent preferences*, manifested in the US objectives through Obama selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, ending his presidential period after Trump became president, he started selling weapons. The two presidents have very different political standpoint, but there is a consistency of selling weapons, ending up killing Yemeni and making economic profit (Eriksson, 2011). The characteristic of making a *cost-benefit analysis* is mentioned by President Trump, to continue selling weapons and other military equipment to Saudi Arabia or other countries such as Russia and China could make that economic profit (Shesgreen, n.d.).

US prioritizing and protecting its relationship with Saudi Arabia provides the US with political advantages for the US in the Middle East region. The US Saudis relations have a long historical relationship showing the aspect of rational consistency (Eriksson, 2011). The US foreign objective consists of Iran and terrorist groups having similar political interest; therefore, the bilateral relationship provides political advantages form US own interest. Since the US relation with Saudi Arabia is of high importance for the US reaching its objective and maximizing its utility, and Saudi Arabia thinks Yemen if of high importance it has resulted in Yemen being of increased importance for the US, but Yemen does not really provide anything to the US and is only interested because Saudi Arabia is. The US desire to continue having great power on the international arena being a

global hegemon promoting the US political interest, their involvement in Yemen also enable them influencing the Middle East with political power. Due to the historical event in 9/11, the US sees it as rational to work preemptive of the transnational terrorism expansion to protect the security of the US citizen covering the aspect of expected utility in RCT. Covering cost-benefit analysis for the US, the fear of decreased presence in Yemen could increase Iranian and transnational terrorism organization presence, therefore it is better for the US national objective to be involved (Quackenbush, 2010).

7.2. R2P

In terms of the R2P approach applied on the US motives and activities to cover the humanitarian intervention in Yemen, the approach is not completely adaptable for the case study. This author assumed the US to belong to the many other countries (including previous US administrations) covering their national interest behind the humanitarian intervention. The expected outcome was therefore that the US would do the same with the Yemeni activities. However, the humanitarian card was never really played by the US administration, from the data the research has come across, it shows that they did not use the argument of R2P. In other words, the only measure the US has taken to protect the civilians of Yemen is providing aid, non-strike list and sending an expert on civilian harm. What was found in this study was a growing discussion within the Congress regarding human rights violations through the support and arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The R2P is used as a counterpoint of human rights and protection of the civilian population to the rational choice and their national interest. Although the US have not officially used the R2P in the case of Yemen, as they did in the invasion of Iraq.

Looking at the theoretical framework, rational choice and humanitarian action do not necessarily exclude each other. According to Murray (2013) states can be morally responsible if the rational calculation allows it. States make calculations of the national interest and it is unlikely for a state to intervene within the R2P doctrine without involving a rational calculation. In the US reaching their objective, their course of action has allowed the US to satisfy their objective to Yemen (Murray, 2013). The theoretical approach of RCT and R2P provides a framework between rationality and humanitarian approach, between transferring weapons and aid which clearly appear antagonistic.

The US is one of many countries being politically involved in foreign nations for its own self-interest. The international system of competition over power makes the US do calculations of actions based on interest, capacity and intentions. The US continue to prioritize their allies and

rational decision-making to ensure their continuance position of power and influence. It is interesting comparing RCT and R2P to the intention of the intervention. In the RCT, the actor will not intervene if the possibility for success is limited in contrast to the R2P doctrine being grounded in the protection of civilian lives but often used as a legal ground of intervention and other states using the framework for the national interest. The R2P doctrine aims to do good, but when applied in the international system states as the US it contributes to making rational calculations on the national objectives (Murray, 2013).

To put another way the US weapons sales could be questioned from a humanitarian perspective, but they certainly act according to the RCT and their self-interest. President Trump's policies clearly do not follow a humanitarian approach although Congress has tried to embrace that perspective. Instead, the US foreign policy in Yemen is following their general Middle Eastern policy rationale for the US interest but still gives aid, thereby fertilizing a conflict while pretending to stop human suffering (Shubert, 2014).

8. Conclusion

This study argues that US involvement in Yemen is the result of decision making based first and foremost on rational choice. The US is involved in Yemen for a number of reasons. Having a historically long bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia, supporting the Saudi-led coalition enables them to increase their power in the Middle East, selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and UAE contributing to providing a good economic profit and jobs in the US weapons manufacturers sector and Saudi Arabia is stabilizing the price of oil for the US. Another aspect is supporting Saudi Arabia and fighting Iran through fighting the Houthis, counter-terrorist organizations such as IS and AQAP to prevent future attacks on the US domestic land. The US is increasing its great economic power over the oil-rich Middle East and remains a global hegemon. It is definitely possible to get alternative interpretations from this research by excluding or including some actors or aspects or using other sources. Looking at Murray's (2013) study, a state's intervention of rationality, responsibility and humanitarianism is not a new global phenomenon. The two-faced approach is actually something that is not specific for the US in this case, but may other states claim to do humanitarian intervention while having a national interest and being contradictory (Murray, 2013). The research problem about why the US is involved in Yemen from RCT and R2P framework and the expected contradiction of support of both humanitarian aspect and the Saudi-led coalition. The expected result was inspired by the US policy to the intervention of Iraq, but the surprising result of

this study is that it is not really having any humanitarian components, the US involvement in Yemen is rather of rational interest.

Looking into the US future involvement in Yemen the election of autumn 2020 resulted in Joe Biden as winner, starting his president period in the beginning of 2021. This will perhaps change the US approach. The Biden-Harris administration has released a statement about changing the relationship with Saudi Arabia and start prioritizing democratic value and human rights over arms sell and purchase oil. Biden views the involvement as fighting an unwinnable war and desires a changed approach (Biden Harris, n.d.). The analytical framework posing rational choice against humanitarian action, and Murray's argument that both are not incompatible, could provide a good analytical base from which to analyze other international actors' involvement abroad. Iran Press TV (2021) released a report about the German government approving a 1.4-billion-dollar arm sales to countries involved in Yemen and Libya. To put it another way, the German arm sales indicate that the US is not the only country using the situation in Yemen for national interest (Iran Press TV, 2021).

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