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Chair of International Relations

**Middle Eastern Geopolitics: How the U.S. Interventions
in the Region Impact Iran's Foreign Policies**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acronyms and Initialisms</i>	5
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER 1 - MIDDLE EAST: THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION	9
1. MIDDLE EAST: A MILESTONE IN HUMAN HISTORY AND CULTURE	10
1.1 ETHNICITY	11
1.2 RELIGION.....	11
2. RELEVANT ACTORS	12
3. IRAN	14
3.1 RELIGION AND SHI'ISM IN IRAN	14
3.2 ECONOMY AND TRADE.....	15
3.3 GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETAL FRAMEWORK	15
3.4 IRANIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES.....	16
3.5 A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY	17
4 THE WESTERN PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST	19
4.1 THE UNITED STATES.....	19
4.2 THE EUROPEAN UNION.....	21
5 THE ASIAN PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST	23
5.1 CHINA.....	23
5.2 INDIA	24
5.3 RUSSIA	25
6. PURPOSE OF THE THESIS	26
CHAPTER 2 - THE PAPER'S THEORETICAL AND FOUNDATIONAL GROUNDWORK	28
1. RESEARCH DESIGN	29
2. VARIABLES	30
3. USA – IRAN RELATIONSHIPS	31
3.1 AN “ODI ET AMO” PERIOD: 1979 - 2013	31
3.2 THE UNEXPECTED TURNING POINT (2013).....	33
3.3 THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION	34
3.4 THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION	36
4. U.S.-IRAN RECIPROCAL PERCEPTIONS	36
5. THE ROLE OF ISRAEL AND SAUDI ARABIA	38
6. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES	39

CHAPTER 3 - CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS	42
1. THE CASE STUDIES	43
2. THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT	43
2.1 THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: U.S. INVOLVEMENT	47
2.2 THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: IRAN INVOLVEMENT.....	49
2.3 THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: ISRAEL, SAUDI ARABIA AND RUSSIA	50
3. THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT	52
3.1 THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: U.S. INVOLVEMENT	56
3.2 THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: IRAN INVOLVEMENT	58
3.3 THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: SAUDI ARABIA AND OTHER FOREIGN ACTORS	59
4. COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: THE SYRIAN AND YEMENI CASES	61
4.1 COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: U.S. AND IRAN IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR.....	61
4.2 COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: U.S. AND IRAN IN THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR	62
4.3 COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: FINAL REMARKS	63
5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS	64
6. FINAL OBSERVATIONS	66
CONCLUSION	68
FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	72
WEBLIOGRAPHY	74
SUMMARY	81
INTRODUZIONE	82
I TRE CAPITOLI NELLO SPECIFICO	83
CONCLUSIONE	89

Acronyms and Initialisms

<u>Acronym/Initialism</u>	<u>Definition</u>
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AUMF	Authorization for Use of Military Force
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
ECO	Economic Conference Organization
e.g.	exempli gratia = “for example”
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
GCP	Gulf Cooperation Council
i.e.	id est = “that is”
INSTEX	Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LDF	Local Defense Forces
MENA	Middle East North Africa
NDF	National Defense Forces
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Council
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exchange Countries
PKK	Kurdistan Worker’s Party
PMC	Private Military Companies
PYD	Democratic Union Party
RCC	Redeployment Coordination Committee
RQ	Research Question
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SPV	Special Purpose Vehicle
U.S.	United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Social Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
YPG	People’s Defense Units

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary geopolitics has always been characterized by economic, political, and military challenges, thus geostrategic challenges which need to be faced carefully. Challenges which range from intra-states conflicts to inter-states wars, thus almost certainly involving more actors and having a direct effect on the entire international community, as the currently ongoing Syrian and Yemen Civil Wars. However, these phenomena are not limited to direct military confrontations per se, it could rather be something more politically or economically based, something similar to the Cold War between Washington and Moscow, where the psychological threat and proxy wars occurred, rather than the direct military intervention.

In this context it is possible to insert the long-standing (d-)evolution of the relationships between the United States and Iran. In particular, the continuous and pervasive presence of the U.S. in the Middle East led to the tensions which favored the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The causes and the aftermath of this revolution do still have an effect nowadays. As a matter of fact, with the exception of the period 2013-2018, when tones between Washington and Tehran softened, the relationship between the two countries can be perceived as a real devolution.

Unlike most of the literature, which focuses on specific events between the United States and Iran, or on an analysis from a domestic and/or global perspective, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the means by which the White House influences the Iranian regime's regional political decisions. Washington's activity in the Middle East is irrefutable, although its mode of action and the impact it has on Iran's regional policies have not received in-depth analysis. The Middle East, a region of deep interest to the author, is composed of a large number of prominent geopolitical actors – Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran – which is why the American presence certainly has more regional implications than domestic ones.

This paper could be relevant to future studies on such major regional issues or new scenarios that might emerge. In addition, other experts in the field could be inspired and encouraged to further elaborate this research with regard to new events concerning the United States and Iran.

Importantly, tensions between Iran and the United States have a direct impact on world geopolitics, causing the direct involvement of the international community, of which the United States itself is a pillar. The analysis will therefore enable readers to understand the ways in which the United States acts in the Middle East and the influence it exerts on the government in Tehran, while also considering how the latter reacts to American political, economic, and military actions.

The thesis has a clear structure and will be based on unbiased data from authoritative and academic sources, through which it will be possible to insert many details useful for a 360-degrees understanding. Unfortunately, the author was not able to access some classified data, whose content would have been of great help for an even deeper investigation and analysis. To go more into detail, the Chapter 1 will serve as basis for the entire dissertation. In fact, it will provide the readers with a general presentation of the Middle East, intended for the purpose of this paper as the area between Egypt and Iran – from West to East – and between Türkiye and the Arabian Peninsula – from North to South –. In this first chapter there will also be a focus on ethnicity and religion, which constitute two core aspects of the regional tensions, and on the relevant regional

actors. Later on, a large part of Ch.1 will be devoted to deeply examine Iran, from its cultural and societal traits to its contemporary history, between the 20th and 21st centuries. The last two sections of the Chapter will be focused on the illustration of the Western and Asian presence in the region and especially the relationship with Iran. Specifically, for the Western component, the United States will be briefly presented from a mere military point of view, while the European will be presented in terms of policies conducted and in relationship with Iran. Instead, the Asian powers considered in this paper, namely China, India and Russia, will be mainly evaluated in terms of military and economic cooperation.

After the research question is introduced, Ch.2 will follow, where the research design and the variables are disclosed. After that, a very detailed report of the U.S.-Iranian relationship will be provided, followed by the reciprocal perceptions. This historical part will serve as proof of the devolution of the relationship between the two countries, with the aforementioned exception of the 2013-2018 period, during which the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was firstly negotiated and then drafted. Trump's withdrawal shuffled again the cards on the table. Nonetheless, this deal will serve as supporting case study for the final analysis. Before the case studies are briefly presented, the role of Israel and Saudi Arabia, considered as loyal American allies, is examined with the goal of providing other data useful for the final analysis and for a clear idea of their intervention in the case studies selected.

The last Chapter of the dissertation, Ch.3, will be entirely devoted to the attentive investigation of the case studies. In particular, the two case studies selected for this dissertation are: the Syrian Civil war and the Yemen Civil War. Both represent a very fertile ground since both the U.S. and Iran played and are still playing a crucial role in the evolution of the two wars, even if unfortunately, in a negative way. As a matter of fact, both countries are involved militarily, either directly or by proxy, leading to the death of thousands of innocents. The two case studies will pave the way to a compare and contrast analysis between the two conflicts, useful to investigate the differences and similarities between the interventions. Lastly, the author's final analysis will follow, aimed at answering the research question and discussing the findings of the research, thus confirming or denying the author's hypothesis.

A general conclusion of the dissertation will conclude the entire thesis, with the purpose of recapitulating the work conducted and the final findings.

CHAPTER 1

MIDDLE EAST: THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION

1. MIDDLE EAST: A MILESTONE IN HUMAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Middle East is generally considered as the cradle of modern civilization and the region where the 3 Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) were born¹. Its history can be intended as a derivation of what the ancient Sumerian, Assyrian, Akkadian, and Babylonian civilizations have built and developed. This area was and still is crucial for the entire world, due to its strategic position for commerce, linking Asia to Europe and Africa, and thanks to its abundance of natural resources, especially natural gas and oil². Not to mention that, in this geographical area the first urban centers grew. It is, in fact, in Syria, Tell Brak, that in the 4th millennium BC, one of the first settlements with urban characteristics probably was established³.

During the course of history many scholars and politicians have tried to define the Middle East in a fixed manner, even if no common ground has been found. The Middle East has been termed for the first time during the 19th century by the British which linked this term with other Eurocentric-coined definitions of the region, namely “Near East” – to identify only the closest part to Europe – and “Far East” – to refer to the Asian countries as China, Japan, etc. -. However, a unique geolocalization of the modern Middle East cannot be found due to the amount of different perceptions about the region.

For the purposes of this thesis, the author agrees with the definition provided by Greta Scharnweber, who states that “The most common but exclusive definition of the Middle East at the time of writing extends to Egypt in the West, Iran in the East, the Arabian Peninsula in the South and Turkey in the North”⁴. This definition is also represented in the map below (**Map 1.0**).



MAP 1.0⁵

As it can be seen in **Map 1.0**, the Modern Middle East is composed of 17 nations with a total population of about 410 million people and over 60 different languages spoken⁶: Iran is the main actor of this thesis, while Israel and Saudi Arabia represent the epicenter of many controversies between Tehran and the U.S.

¹ Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, *Introduction to Islam*, (Washington D.C.: American Arab Affairs Council, 1985).

² Monshipouri, M., *Middle East Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 2019).

³ Harvard University, “Tell Brak (Syria)”, Harvard University, <https://bit.ly/3195nrH>.

⁴ Greta Scharnweber, *What and Where is the Middle East?*, Middle East Policy Council.

⁵ Amber Pariona, “How Many Countries Are There In The Middle East?”, *World Atlas*, October 3, 2020, <https://bit.ly/31O7YQB>.

⁶ Michael Izady, “Infograps, Maps and Statistics Collection”, the Gulf/2000 project (Columbia University), 2006-present, <https://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml>.

1.1 ETHNICITY

Ethnicities are one of the main causes of contrasts in the region, reasons why a brief excursus is necessary. Ethnicities are based on, but not limited to language, religion, traditions, and social groups. In the Middle East there are about 50 ethnic groups⁷, aspect which is worth considering, since many times people are used to refer to the population of this area with the umbrella term of “Arabs”, even if this term must be referred just to those inhabiting the Arab peninsula. Among the major ethnic groups are in fact: the Persians, Turks, Kurds, and Azerbaijanis⁸.

Kurds, among all the others, deserve to be briefly introduced, since they will be recalled in the case studies of this dissertation, having actively participated in many regional conflicts, often with the support of U.S.-led coalitions.. The circa 25-30 million Kurdish⁹ people living in the Middle East are divided mainly between Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, and Türkiye in an area which, if unified, touches all the four countries and is claimed by the Kurds to be their land, Kurdistan¹⁰. Kurdistan now represents just the idea of a nation, where all people belonging to this ethnic group can find brothers having shared customs, but it has never been a state in legal terms. Moreover, Kurds are often discriminated or attacked by the countries surrounding the area. In particular, the Kurdish military forces (Peshmerga, Kurdistan Worker’s Party PKK, People’s Defense Units YPG, and Democratic Union Party PYD) are considered as terrorist groups by Ankara¹¹, thus making them subject to multiple attacks from the Turkish army and air force. Not to mention the presence of over 35 Turkish military bases in Iraqi Kurdistan¹²; bases which are illegal but still justified as means to prevent terrorism. Kurds, however, played a great role in the defeat of ISIS¹³, since they fought in the Middle East against the Caliphate and their victories, along with the Western ones, contributed to the end of the Islamic State. Nevertheless, ethnicity is not the only cause of tensions.

1.2 RELIGION

Religion as well as ethnicity is largely heterogeneous. Due to the many religious beliefs practiced which, in addition to political instability and lust for hegemony, are at the basis of many regional conflicts, an analysis of this aspect is mandatory. The Middle East is characterized by a net prevalence of the Islamic religion (93% in 2010 with a projection of up to 94% in 2050)¹⁴. The 3 major Islamic derivations are: Sunnism, Shi’ism, and Ibadism¹⁵, where Sunnis constitute a majority in Saudi Arabia, Shi’a is the State religion in Iran, and Ibadism is present almost only in Oman¹⁶. With regard to Sunnis and Shiites, they are both represented, with variable numbers from country to country, even if not always the majority is ruling¹⁷. Before explaining what distinguishes Sunnis by Shiites, it is fundamental to point out that every Muslim community believes

⁷ Michael Izady, “Infograps, Maps and Statistics Collection”, the Gulf/2000 project (Columbia University), 2006-present, <https://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml>.

⁸ John A. Shoup, *Ethnic Groups of Africa and the Middle East: An Encyclopedia*, (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011).

⁹ J.P. Jongerden, *Governing Kurdistan: Self-Administration in The Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria*, *Ethnopolitics*, November 22, 2018.

¹⁰ Ibidem

¹¹ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “PKK”, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.en.mfa>.

¹² Erman Çete, “Why does Turkey have 38 illegal bases in northern Iraq?”, *TheCradle.co*, January 28, 2022, <https://thecradle.co/article-view/6255>.

¹³ Sardar Aziza and Andrew Cottey, *The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga: military reform and nation-building in a divided polity*, *Defense Studies* (Routledge, April 3, 2021).

¹⁴ Conrad Hackett, and Phillip Connor, and Marcin Stonawski, and Vegard Skirbekk, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050* (Pew Research Center, 2015), 154.

¹⁵ Michael Izady, “Infograps, Maps and Statistics Collection”, the Gulf/2000 project (Columbia University), 2006-present, <https://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml>.

¹⁶ Illinois Library, “Ibadi Islam: History”, Illinois University Library, last updated August 12, 2022, <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/ibadiislam>.

¹⁷ Nathan Gonzalez, *The Sunni-Shia Conflict Understanding Sectarian Violence in the Middle East*, (Nortia Press, 2009).

and follows the same precepts, the so-called “Five Pillars”¹⁸, and have in common the four Holy Cities of Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and Damascus.

Instead, the difference between these two branches of the Islamic religion was born and is still based on the different opinion about who should be the guide of the Islamic world and the leader of Islam. Sunnis believe that the successor of Muhammad as leader of Islam should be appointed through election and consensus of the worshippers, while Shiites believe that the successor should come from the same bloodline of Muhammad, thus being his descendant. Shiites - not by chance - identified as Muhammad’s successor Ali, his cousin¹⁹. Moreover, while Sunnis focus mainly on the Islamic tradition and the prophet’s acts and teachings (Sunna), Shiites pay much more attention to the character of the Ayatollah, seen as a God on Earth. Sunnis accuse Shiites to be heretical for this aspect, while they are accused to have paved the path to the formation of extremist sects, such as the Wahabis. Lastly, Shiites firstly consider as important pilgrimage cities also Karbala, Qom and Najaf, and, in addition to the five pillars, follow other practices.

Even if Shiites are influential and powerful thanks to their majority and guiding role in Iran, Sunnis constitute the 85-90% of the Muslim world, with both branches splitting into smaller derivations among the doctrine itself²⁰. The interests of the Islamic community are represented in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), where 57 Islam countries participate. The Organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world. It endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslims in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world²¹

The religious intra- and inter-state dispute between Sunnism and Shi’a are elements exacerbating the tensions in the Middle East²², constituting one of the main causes of the civil wars which broke out and sadly still persist. These wars later assumed an international character. In fact, the United States, and the European Union, intervened directly or by proxy. For instance, supporting Israel or Saudi Arabia, which are their main allies in the Middle East.

2. RELEVANT ACTORS

In this section, a brief overview of the Middle Eastern countries shall be presented, since not every country follows a unique line of conduct and with same attitude towards its neighbours. The religious adversity between Sunni and Shiites involves also other countries of the Gulf like Qatar and Bahrain. Bahrain, majorly inhabited by Shiites, is ruled by a Sunni government, in good terms with Riyadh, and is seen by Iran as a lost province of the Persian country. Qatar, instead, even being a Sunni ruled country, is accused to be closer to Iran and to support rebels in the Yemen civil war²³. Accuses coming not only from Saudis, but also from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and, not surprisingly, Bahrain. Bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister

¹⁸ Sheikh Saalim Al-Azhari, “Five pillars of Islam”, Islamic Relief, October 26, 2021, <https://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/five-pillars-of-islam/>.

¹⁹ Nathan Gonzalez, *The Sunni-Shia Conflict Understanding Sectarian Violence in the Middle East*, 2009.

²⁰ Ibidem

²¹ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, “History”, https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en.

²² Ibidem

²³ Tuqa Khalid, “Qatar’s policies in Yemen are ‘in line with Iran-backed Houthi coup’: Yemeni minister”, Al-Arabiya News, last modified November 19, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3YXaWAc>.

of Saudi Arabia, passed from having a consideration of Qatar as a lost province, to expressly consider it as an error of history²⁴.

Another aspect which deserves mention is the ISI's (Islamic State of Iraq) rise in 2006. ISI was a terrorist organization which took control of part of the Iraqi territory after the protest of the population against the bombing by US President Bush. In 2011, after the Arab Spring, the ISI expanded in Syria exploiting two different events: the burst of the Civil War and the U.S.'s withdrawal from Iraq. With this expansion the ISI became known as ISIS, or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria²⁵. ISIS has been at the center of many terrorist acts all over the world such as the ones in Paris in 2015²⁶. Nowadays, the presence of this terrorist cell is marginalized, also thanks, as aforementioned, to the Kurds.

In addition to ISIS, another important regional actor is the Gulf Cooperation Council. "The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman". The GCC was established in Riyadh in 1981, with the shared objective of obtaining unity among its members based on their common goals and their similar political and cultural (Arab/Islamic) identities.. "The GCC also has a defense planning council that coordinates military cooperation between member countries"²⁷. The Gulf Cooperation Council is relevant since the United States has a positive relationship with all the countries of this organization, thus making it, in a certain sense, an adversary of Iran.

Finally, Lebanon should be briefly mentioned, specifically for its strained relationship with Israel, one of the greatest allies of Washington. Constraints which resulted in a harsh conflict in 2006 when Israeli troops had to fight against Hezbollah, the terrorist group based in Lebanon. Hezbollah had been supported also by Iran. This support led to the signing of the 2008 military and economic agreement between Beirut and Tehran; agreement which seems to follow the logic of "the enemy of my enemy, is my friend". Before this pact, the relationship between Beirut and Tehran was not particularly good. Nowadays, the tension between Israel and Lebanon has softened a little, since on October 27, 2022, a maritime US-brokered deal has been signed by the two countries²⁸.

The author purposely avoided mentioning Saudi Arabia and Israel, for them being presented in chapter 2 as secondary variables.

²⁴ Nova Lectio, "La Guerra tra Sunniti e Sciiti: chi controlla il Medio Oriente?", published April 18, 2022, video, 10:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ztQynjDf7Q&t=198s&ab_channel=NovaLectio.

²⁵ A. T. M Shamsuzzoha, *The rise of Islamic State (IS) and its impact on Asia*, June 2019.

²⁶ Ibidem

²⁷ E.A. Nakhleh, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Policies, problems and prospects, January 01, (Praeger, 1986)*.

²⁸ Antony J. Blinken (U.S. Secretary of State), "Historic Agreement Establishing a Permanent Israel-Lebanon Maritime Boundary", Press Statement, October 27, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/historic-agreement-establishing-a-permanent-israel-lebanon-maritime-boundary/>.

3. IRAN

Iran – and specifically its domestic and foreign policies – represents one of the two main variables of this paper, reason why, also having a key role in the Middle East, deserves a separate description. Iran is located in a strategic position for commerce, being linked to Europe and Asia via land and having access to the Persian Gulf and in particular the Strait of Hormuz, where many commercial routes pass. Furthermore, Iran is abundant in natural resources, in particular natural gas and petroleum. It has, in fact, the 3rd largest oil and 2nd largest gas reserves in the world (2021), in addition to being the 5th largest oil producer in the OPEC and 3rd largest gas producer globally (2020)²⁹.

The Persian ethnic group is predominant, speaking the Farsi language³⁰. Nonetheless, Persians themselves have mixed origins coming both from Arabs and Turkic groups as the Azeris. As aforementioned, also many Kurds live in Iran, and this proportion of Kurds in particular resisted the government's actions to eliminate the Kurd ethnicity.

3.1 RELIGION AND SHI'ISM IN IRAN

The majority of Iranians are Muslims and in particular believers of the Shi'a branch of Islam. More in detail, they are the so-called Twelver, named in this way due to their belief on the Twelve Imams³¹. Additionally, due to the presence of a multitude of ethnic groups, also different beliefs are widespread in the country, beliefs ranging from the other branch of Islam, Sunnis, to small communities of Christians and Jews³². Nonetheless, a deeper analysis of Shi'ism is necessary, since it will result to play a key role in many of the political choices of the Iranian regime, both internally and externally.

Shi'a Islam is the official religion of Iran since it has been introduced by the Safavids (1501-1736) with Ismael I. This branch of Islam is based on 2 milestones:

1. The promise of the return of the 12th Imam, now still hidden but who will appear and act according to divine will;
2. The veneration of his martyred forebears³³.

The absence of an Imam led to the establishment of a society characterized by a strong clergy dominant in particular from the 1979 revolution.

Among the Shiites, the key figure is the "Grand Ayatollah". This is the person who becomes model of emulation due to his excellent knowledge of the canon law and who, from 1979, is the Supreme Leader of Iran.³⁴

Regarding the religious minorities, religious toleration has always been a delicate topic in Iran, even if it was respected during the Pahlavi monarchy. After the 1979 revolution, tolerance came to an end and equal

²⁹ U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Country Analysis Executive Summary: Iran*, last modified November 17, 2022.

³⁰ Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, (Westport (CT): Greenwood Press, 2001).

³¹ Pierre Tristam, "Twelver Shiites and the Cult of Martyrdom", *ThoughCo.*, last modified February 28, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3Ie8U85>.

³² U.S. Department of State, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran*, May 12, 2021.

³³ Elise Perry, *The Rise of Shi'ism in Iran*.

³⁴ Brendan Koerner, "So You Want To Be an Ayatollah", *Slate.com*, April 06, 2004, <https://bit.ly/3KkDFLU>.

treatment was not assured to everyone, even though minorities of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians are recognized by the 1979 constitution³⁵.

3.2 ECONOMY AND TRADE

The Iranian economy represents a crucial aspect since it is characterized majorly by isolationism. Tehran never planned to be too interconnected with the international community, factor which caused limited access to modern technology and foreign investments³⁶. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider this choice not only as a decision of the supreme leader, rather also as the result of the heavy sanctions received, in particular by the United States. Among them the most important acts sanctioning Iran are the 1996 “Iran and Libya Sanctions Act”³⁷.

Economic independence, respectable living standards, and the reduction of unemployment are the primary goals of the Islamic Republic since the revolution. Notwithstanding, Iran’s government is still heavily dependent on oil and gas, in addition to suffering an exponential population growth (around 1.30 in the last few years)³⁸. Moreover, any economic action or law acting against the Islamic principles has been declared null and void³⁹.

Finally, Iran’s imports are very high due to scarcity of raw materials and industries, nonetheless the great amount of oil and natural gas exported, creates a surprisingly positive trade balance - \$82B of export and \$77B of imports in 2021⁴⁰. Tehran’s leading economic partners are China, the UAE, Iraq, Germany, and Türkiye. In particular, Türkiye and EU countries are linked with Iran from 1971 by the railway system. Lastly, Iran has always been active in many economic organizations of the region, namely: The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO – ended in 1979) with Pakistan and Türkiye, and the Economic Conference Organization (ECO) with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Türkiye, and central Asia countries⁴¹.

3.3 GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETAL FRAMEWORK

The Iranian regime can be claimed to be a theocracy, reason why a brief illustration of its main roles is important to understand how the regime is perceived by the world powers. Iran has a mixed form of government where the main branches (executive, parliament, and judiciary) are controlled by bodies which in turn are dependent on the clergy. At the top of the entire system there is the so-called “*Rahbar*”, that is the leader, who nowadays is the Ayatollah Khamenei. This system was introduced after the 1979 revolution by the former leader the Ayatollah Khomeini, who based the political regime of Tehran on the concept of “*velāyat-e faqīh*”⁴², literally the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, where the “*faqīh*”, the jurist, has political

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, “2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran”, May 12, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran/>.

³⁶ Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, (Westport (CT): Greenwood Press, 2001).

³⁷ Authenticated U.S. Government Information (GPO), *H.R.3107 - 104th Congress (1995-1996): Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996*, August 5, 1996.

³⁸ Worldometer, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iran-population/>.

³⁹ Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, Yale University Press, 2017.

⁴⁰ Macrotrends, “Iran Exports 1960-2023” and “Iran Imports 1960-2023”, <https://bit.ly/3Kgonr7> and <https://bit.ly/3Kk67gf>.

⁴¹ Louise Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East, Third Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 193.

⁴² Kasra Aarabi, “What Is Velayat-e Faqih?”, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, March 20, 2019, <https://institute.global/policy/what-velayat-e-faqih>.

power, after being recognized as the best leader for the entire community. The *Rahbar* is chosen by the Assembly of Experts, made of experts of canon law⁴³.

The leader has the power to appoint officers for many important roles, as the judiciary or the Revolutionary Guards, for which it is also the commander⁴⁴. His mandate has no limits, but he can be removed by the same assembly who elected him if he breaches the Islamic law or does not fulfill his duties.

The head of the executive is the Iranian President who, as later will be explained, is the one having direct relationship with the leaders of other countries. After the abolishment of the figure of the PM in 1989, the president gained more powers and importance, always being second to the *Rahbar*. As most of the heads of the executive do, he can appoint his ministers and he is also chairman of, the Supreme Council for National Security⁴⁵.

The legislature, instead, is managed by the unicameral Islamic Consultative Assembly, composed of 290 members called *Majles*, who passing laws aside, might impeach the president.⁴⁶

3.4 IRANIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Before the revolution, Iran had a renowned powerful army which collapsed after Khomeini came to power. In mid and late-1980s the military industry started modernizing by developing contemporary weapons which will be followed at the beginning of the 2000s by medium-range missiles⁴⁷. The development of a great arsenal of missiles represents for Tehran the alternative to a weak and inefficient Air Force⁴⁸.

Today Iran counts over 1 million active and reserve personnel – number above all other Middle Eastern countries apart from Türkiye and Egypt – even if compared to regional neighbours as Israel or Saudi Arabia are quite underequipped⁴⁹. Albeit the sanctions received in the past years, a strong military industry is always at the center of the Iranian policy – internal and external security – as it can be witnessed by **Figure 1.0** and **Figure 2.0** below:

Military Expenditure

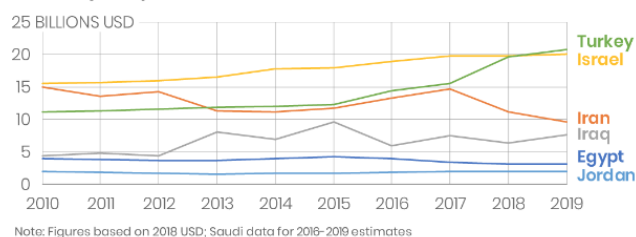


FIGURE 1.0⁵⁰

Military Spending As Percentage of Government Spending

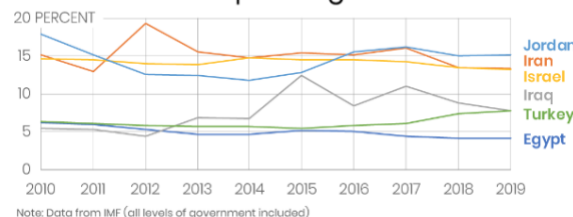


FIGURE 2.0⁵¹

The army is the largest branch, followed by the Revolutionary Guards which, nevertheless, has the largest expertise and variety of assault techniques. It is formed by very devout personnel⁵² and it is divided into

⁴³ Emma Borden, “Everything you need to know about Iran’s Assembly of Experts election”, Brookings, February 9, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3SeNXPi>.

⁴⁴ Iran Chamber Society, “The Structure of Power in Iran”, https://www.iranchamber.com/government/articles/structure_of_power.php#top.

⁴⁵ Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, (Westport (CT): Greenwood Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Ibidem

⁴⁷ Behnam Ben Taleblu, Arsenal “Assessing the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Ballistic Missile Program”, FDD, February 15, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3IgiNIE>.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, “Iran Military Power Report Statement”, November 19, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3ZW3d6l>.

⁴⁹ Omar Lamrani, “Iran’s Conventional Military Capabilities”, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, July 9, 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/iran/irans-conventional-military-capabilities/>.

⁵⁰ O. Lamrani, “Iran’s Conventional Military Capabilities”.

⁵¹ O. Lamrani, “Iran’s Conventional Military Capabilities”.

⁵² CFR.org Editors, “Iran’s Revolutionary Guards”, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), last modified May 6, 2019, <https://on.cfr.org/2KBr3lw>.

Ground Force, Air Force and Navy. Its elite group are the Quds Force whose General Soleimani has been killed by the U.S. in 2020 – event analyzed in Ch.2 -. Internally, the notorious *Basij*, and the Guidance Patrols, or morality police, makes the law and the Islamic customs be respected in cities. Any breach of the Islamic code is harshly punished⁵³. These military capabilities are further implemented through the support to militias and terrorist groups active in the region, which act as proxies of Iran.

3.5 A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY

The contemporary history of Iran can be divided in the pre-revolution period, where the monarchy of the Pahlavi dynasty was ruling, supported by the Western powers, and the post-revolution period, which is still ongoing maintaining more or less the same features introduced by the Khomeini in 1979. Hence, the two periods will be discussed separately, also to let the reader understand the shift in the relationships with the United States, which moved from playing a great role until 1979 and then lost its importance in the Persian country.

3.5.1 THE PRE-REVOLUTION PERIOD

From 1925 to 1979 the ruling family in Iran, officially a monarchy, was the Pahlavi dynasty. This period has been characterized by the loosening of the influence of religion in everyday customs and political life. Some key Islamic principle that nowadays are considered too strict were removed, such as the obligation for women to wear the veil or to forcefully accept the marriage at early ages⁵⁴. Moreover, in order to expand trade channels, Reza Shah, the first “*Shah*” (monarch in Persian regimes), traded with Germany, occurrence which, however, served as a pretext for the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941⁵⁵.

The successor of Reza Shah, his son Mohammed, had immediately to face the foreign occupation of his country. The missing authority of the Shah left the door open to the formation of new clerical factions, who joined nationalists and left-leaning parties under the National Front, guided by Mosaddeq, whose goal was to reduce both monarchy and clergy power in Iran. In 1951 he was nominated Prime Minister (role that as already stated does not exist anymore) and to fulfill the promises he immediately nationalized Iran’s oil industry going against the United Kingdom which soon imposed an embargo. The UK asked the U.S. for an intervention to re-establish the Shah after his escape in 1953. With this purpose, a coup founded by the CIA (Operation Ajax) removed Mosaddeq, despite the popular consent he received, and the Shah returned⁵⁶.

After the failure of the nationalization, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) increased its oil production. A major event to consider is the 1957 formation of the SAVAK, the Shah’s secret police, whose creation was fostered by the U.S. and Israeli secret services and whose role was to strictly supervise dissidents⁵⁷.

The Shah then started in the early 1960s a series of reforms which will be known as the “White Revolution”, representing an aggressive modernization program which lasted until 1979⁵⁸. This program was meant to

⁵³ BBC, “Who is in charge of Iran?”, October 8, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57260831>.

⁵⁴ Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, (Westport (CT): Greenwood Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ Sandy Pyke, “1941: The Lessons Tehran ‘Forgot’ About the Anglo-Soviet Invasion”, *Iran Wire*, July 20, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3XDFztr>.

⁵⁶ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “64 Years Later, CIA Finally Releases Details of Iranian Coup”, *Foreign Policy*, June 20, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2IQe2jL>.

⁵⁷ Richard T. Sale, “SAVAK: A Feared and Pervasive Force”, *Washington Post*, May 9, 1977, <https://wapo.st/418USgF>.

⁵⁸ Iran Chamber Society, “White Revolution”, https://www.iranchamber.com/history/white_revolution/white_revolution.php.

upend the wealth and influence of the traditional landowning classes, alter rural economies, fastening urbanization and Westernization, detaching even more from Islamic values. The program was economically successful, but the benefits were unevenly distributed, while changes to social norms and traditional institutions were pervasive and criticized by many, among who Khomeini (member of the ulama). The latter, after a speech against the Shah was forced to flee away reaching France as final destination⁵⁹, where he started promoting the *velāyat-e faqīh* doctrine. During the '60s Iran started engaging more with the international sphere, and in particular with Türkiye and Pakistan in the CENTO and RCD (Regional Cooperation for Development)⁶⁰.

Notwithstanding the UK concession to the control of the national oil (1973), social discontent grew, after the reveal of many hidden issues. Not by chance, the great economic expansion led to high levels of inflation, followed by censorship and pervasive control by the SAVAK. The excessive control, in addition to the diffusion of Khomeini's speeches fueled the masses to revolt⁶¹. Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi was threatened by demonstrations and tried to repress them causing more violence in the streets, where protesters were coordinated by Khomeini. In 1979 the Shah fled and the PM, Bakhtiar unable to find a solution, was forced to welcome Khomeini's return in February 1979. On February 11th troops declared neutrality accepting the end of the monarchy, while the Bakhtiar resigned⁶².

3.5.2 THE POST-REVOLUTION PERIOD

On April 1st Khomeini declared the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, returning to the traditional values annulling almost all the social reforms of the Pahlavi dynasty. Khomeini also founded the notorious Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or IRGC, the religious militia still active today.

An anti-western sentiment diffused, in particular against the United States which were the promoters of the westernization of Iran under the Shah. The material proof of this sentiment was the late 1979 hostage crisis, when in November, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was seized by revolutionaries who asked for the extradition of the Shah who was living under asylum condition in the U.S. to undergo medical treatments for cancer. The crisis was solved in 1981 by the release of the hostages after Algeria's brokerage. Nonetheless, the aftermath of this event, has seen a progressive worsening of the relationships between the two states.

Later, the Iran-Iraq war started in 1980 and ended in 1988 after the UN resolution was accepted. After some years of health issues, the Ayatollah Khomeini died, and Ali Khamenei was nominated his successor. Khamenei's nomination was astonishing since he did not have great recognition, but he later gained success. He is still in charge today. From that day on, a series of presidents in turn ruled Iran. Among them there is Khatami whose first mandate was characterized by accusations towards his ministers and mayors and overall, by the student demonstration in 1999 against the figure of the Rahbar and the censorship. After his second mandate he was succeeded by the conservative Ahmadinejad, who continued with an accentuated censorship,

⁵⁹ Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, (Westport (CT): Greenwood Press, 2001).

⁶⁰ Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa, *The Formation of RCD: Regional Cooperation for Development*, Middle Eastern Studies, July 22, 2009.

⁶¹ Stephen Zunes, *The Iranian Revolution (1977-1979)*, International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), April 2009.

⁶² Ibidem

while failing in the control of inflation and unemployment. In 2009 he was re-elected even if with large suspect of fraud; this scandal was followed by an investigation which, however, brought no evidence⁶³.

In 2013 the moderate conservative Rouhani was elected as new president. During his first term the country achieved a sort of economic stability, controlling inflation and having growth. This was favored also by the reintegration of Iran into the global economy following the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, limiting the Iranian nuclear program⁶⁴. Rouhani's government, reelected in 2017, found difficulties in managing the economic stability when in 2018 the U.S. under Donald Trump abrogated its commitment to the JCPOA and re-imposed the sanctions. In 2021, Ebrahim Raisi, the current president of Iran, took office. Apart from the COVID-19 parenthesis, the government allocated a significant increase in funds to the Revolutionary Guards and other defense institutions, therefore indicating that Raisi's priority was ensuring the regime's security.

Lastly, what can be generalized about all Iranian leaders since 1979 is the unique line of conduct in the international affairs. Iran, in fact, opposed to join the UN in the defense of Kuwait during the Gulf War, opposed the peace between Israel and Palestine supporting extremists in territories under the Palestinian Authority and overall, allegedly gave financial support to Islamic activists, both Sunni and Shi'a, in Algeria, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan⁶⁵.

4 THE WESTERN PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The western presence in the Middle East has always been led by the United States, both militarily and politically, due to the effective greater influence of the country with respect to the other western powers of the European Union. Moreover, the United States has a more direct relationship with its two allies in the Middle East, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. In the following paragraph, the United States will be evaluated in a general way, since a more detailed analysis will be provided in chapter 2, while the role of the European Union in the Middle East will be analyzed on the basis of the main occurrences and interventions. These two sections have the goal of presenting the western policy towards the Middle East.

4.1 THE UNITED STATES

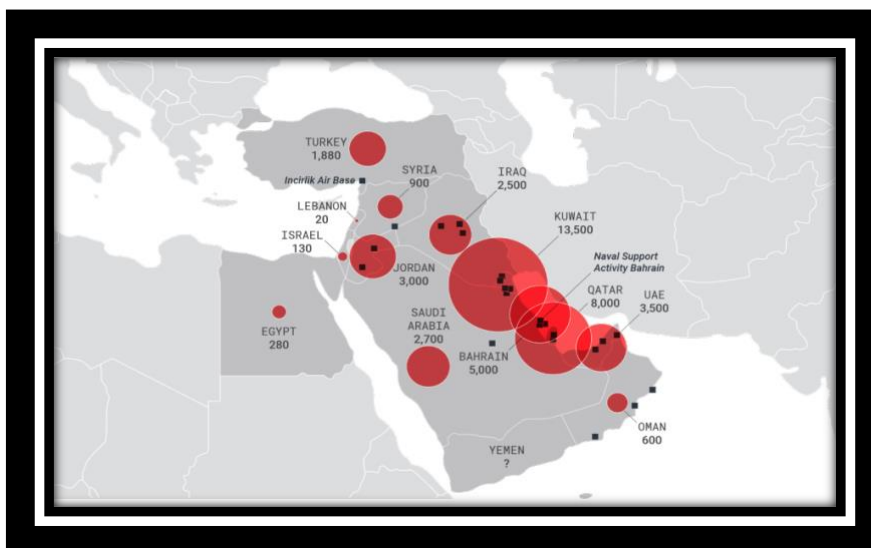
The United States has a clear foreign policy with regard to the Middle East: to be always present directly and through the allies in the peacekeeping in the region and in the fight against terrorism and any other security threat⁶⁶. To maintain security in a direct way the U.S. has military bases and troops (**see Map. 2.0**) all over the Middle East, making it one of the regions with the most foreign forces and bases.

⁶³ Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, "Ahmadinejad won. Get over it", Politico, June 15, 2009, <https://politi.co/3YIH0bw>.

⁶⁴ Kali Robinson, "What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?", Council on Foreign Relations, last modified July 20, 2022, <https://on.cfr.org/3SbIIAK>.

⁶⁵ Abbas Amanat, "Iran: A Modern History", Yale University Press, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19prqm>.

⁶⁶ The Policy Circle, "Foreign Policy: The Middle East", https://www.thepolicycircle.org/brief/foreign-policy-brief-the-middle-east/#section_5.



MAP 2.067

As witnessed from the map, the U.S. is largely present in the Middle East, with many bases and troops, as also witnessed by the comprehensive investigation conducted by Professor Vine. This investigation is also based on the Pentagon’s “Base Structure Report”, and other sources⁶⁸, especially in the Gulf States. The largest base is the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar which was built in 1996⁶⁹.

In addition to the aforementioned military structures and to the strategic interventions described in the previous paragraphs, the most remarkable Iran-oriented operations conducted by the United States in the Middle East deserve to be briefly mentioned, since they affected the development of the U.S. policy in the region:

<u>OPERATION</u>	<u>DEVELOPMENT</u>
“Operation Staunch” - 1983	This operation takes place after the election for Ronald Reagan and the release of the hostages in the U.S. Embassy of Tehran. Reagan refused to sell directly weapons to Iran and through this operation convinced some of the U.S. major allies to stop selling weapons to Iran, considered as a sponsor of terrorism. ⁷⁰
“Operation Earnest Will” – 1987/1988	This operation was guaranteed the American protection to Kuwaiti-owned tankers from Iranian strikes during the Iran-Iraq War's Tanker War phase. ⁷¹
“Operation Nimble Archer” - 1987	This operation was carried on against two Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf as retaliation for Iran's missile attack three days earlier on the MV Sea Isle City, a reflagged Kuwaiti oil tanker anchored off the coast of Kuwait. The incident occurred during the Operation Earnest Will. Iran then petitioned the International Court of Justice for damages against the United States and the Court concluded that the United States Navy's retaliatory assaults on some Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf in 1987 and 1988 constituted an unlawful use of force but did not breach the 1955 Treaty of Amity. ⁷²
“Operation Eager Glacier” - 1988	A secret U.S. action to spy on Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. The result was the sharing of classified data to Iraq ⁷³

⁶⁷ Benjamin Denison, *Bases, Logistics, and the Problem of Temptation in the Middle East*, Defense Priorities.

⁶⁸ David Vine, *Lists of U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1776-2021*, American University Digital Research Archive, 2021.

⁶⁹ Adam Taylor, “As Trump tries to end he “endless wars”, America’s biggest Middle East base is getting bigger”, Washington Post, August 21, 2019, <https://wapo.st/2Z7NhTs>.

⁷⁰ Bryan Gibson, *Covert Relationship: American Foreign Policy, Intelligence, and the Iran-Iraq War*, (Praeger, 2010).

⁷¹ Harold Lee Wise, *Inside the Danger Zone: The U.S. Military in the Persian Gulf 1987–88*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007).

⁷² Harold Lee Wise, *Inside the Danger Zone: The U.S. Military in the Persian Gulf 1987–88*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007).

⁷³ Peniston, Bradley, *No Higher Honor*, 2006.

“Praying Mantis” - 1988

This operation was conducted “against Iranian targets in the Arabian Gulf in retaliation for USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG-58) mining four days earlier”. The U.S. firmly answered with what has become one of “the largest of five major U.S. Navy surface actions since World War II”, resulting in a massive missile shooting. “In the one-day operation, the U.S. Navy destroyed two Iranian surveillance platforms, sank two of their ships, and severely damaged another”⁷⁴.

Besides the military presence and interventions in the region, as anticipated, the U.S. mission in the Middle East is to keep peace among the countries of the region. Washington has acted in this direction multiple times mediating agreements. The most recent one is the “Abraham Accords”: these are a series of treaties normalizing diplomatic relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain, facilitated by the U.S. administration. After the signing, Sudan, Morocco, and Kosovo decided to re-open the dialogue with Israel, softening the tense atmosphere between the states⁷⁵.

This general overview about the American foreign policy for the Middle East and the military aspect were sufficient to understand the importance for the United States to be active in the Middle East. The nuclear agreement with Iran, JCPOA, and a more detailed analysis of the relations between Washington and Tehran will be provided in the next chapter.

4.2 THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European countries’ attitude towards the region, and specifically Iran, is mostly independent from the policies of Washington. Interesting fact, considering the remarkable influence of the U.S. to these countries, for example through NATO.

A first remarkable occurrence is the shared decision undertaken during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, when the EU sanctioned Iraq following the U.S. decision while militarily supporting Washington. France and Britain also promoted the no-fly zones established by the USA. Nevertheless, European decisions were split in 2003, in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq after 9/11. The British after the failing UN Resolution 1441⁷⁶, decided to intervene directly on the side of the U.S, later supported by Italy (Berlusconi), Spain (Aznar) and East European countries. In juxtaposition, France and Germany, instead, immediately opposed the invasion without UN authorization⁷⁷. Economically, the EU has different agreements and agendas with the GCC. “The EU is the most important destination for exports from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)”⁷⁸, and Europe is one of the largest buyers of natural resources of the region. Moreover, “Israel’s primary market is Europe”⁷⁹, factor which is not particularly appreciated by the Iranian regime, being Israel a historical adversary. In addition, the EU projected to create a Euro-Mediterranean economic zone by 2010 to remove all trade barriers and facilitated commercial affairs.

⁷⁴ Naval History and Heritage Command, “Operation Praying Mantis”, August 07, 2015, <https://bit.ly/3Z3HJ6R>.

⁷⁵ Abrahams Accords Peace Institute, “Story”, <https://www.aapeaceinstitute.org/story>.

⁷⁶ Security Council, *Resolution 1441 (2002)*, United Nations, November 8, 2002.

⁷⁷ Tuomas Forsberg, *German Foreign Policy and the War on Iraq: Anti-Americanism, Pacifism or Emancipation?*, Security Dialogue 36, no. 2: 213–31, (SAGE Publications, 2005).

⁷⁸ Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*, 353.

⁷⁹ Ibidem

Now focusing more on Iran, a first element of connection between the EU and the Persian country is the 1990s adoption of a common EU strategy toward Iran through which European countries “favoured dialogue over isolation”⁸⁰, therefore trying to establish a solid and long-lasting dialogue with Tehran. From this strategy followed that in 2002 with the Iranian President Khatami, “negotiations began for an EU-Iran trade and cooperation agreement, and a dialogue on human rights was initiated”⁸¹.

Two years later, in 2004, the European Union launched a policy which, even addressing many regional matters in the Middle East, played an important role in the relationships with Tehran. This policy is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP followed the EU enlargement from fifteen to twenty-five members and aimed at complementing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The ENP applied to EU’s immediate neighbours by land or sea, with bilaterally agreed action plans for partner states + **EU3**: a diplomatic initiative involving Britain, France, and Germany to encourage Iran to curb its nuclear enrichment program⁸².

In the last decade, the most relevant point of contact between the EU and Iran is the drafting of the JCPOA. Before 2013, the EU supported the sanctions imposed on Iran for its threatening nuclear program development, but in 2015, the European Union backed France, Germany, and the UK in the drafting of the JCPOA, agreement which is believed to be crucial for the future of Iran and the global security. When in 2018 the United States abandoned the agreement asking for more strict limitations, the “European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini cast doubt on the new US policy as an adequate replacement for the safeguards in the JCPOA”⁸³. Furthermore, the United States’ new sanctions included new penalties for countries and businesses still trading with Iran and at that point the EU was forced to create the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to avoid penalties for companies⁸⁴. Nowadays, according to Cornelius Adebahr (2020), the EU sets the foundations of its goals towards Iran on 3 pillars:

1. to peacefully prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon (for non-civilian purposes);
2. to avoid a regional war involving Iran;
3. to demonstrate the EU’s ability to act on the international scene.⁸⁵

These 3 aims were already promoted with the JCPOA, even if the U.S. withdrawal from the deal left the EU in a dangerous situation, namely in the middle between a superpower and historical ally – U.S. itself – and a radical and not properly cooperative country – Iran –. Nonetheless, the EU has always maintained a neutral attitude towards the two countries and has always been active player in resuming the relationships, with the goal of limiting Iran nuclear program on the one side and cooperating economically with it on the other side.

⁸⁰ Ibidem

⁸¹ Ibidem

⁸² Ibidem

⁸³ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

⁸⁴ John Irish and Riham Alkousaa, “Skirting U.S. sanctions, Europeans open new trade channel to Iran”, Reuters, annuary 31, 2019, <https://reut.rs/2S3s0XD>.

⁸⁵ Cornelius Adebahr, *Europe Needs a Regional Strategy on Iran.*, 2020.

5 THE ASIAN PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Asia has taken a central role in the Middle East nowadays, both because of the population growth ongoing in the eastern world, and because of the reduced presence of the United States in the Middle East. The phenomenon of Asian development and entering in others world region's affairs "has come to be known as the Asianization of politics and economy"⁸⁶. This phenomenon particularly refers to the Middle East since the Asian industries need the natural resources of the other region and vice versa. The process of Asianization here considered is focused mainly on China, India, and Russia, since these 3 countries are shaping the development of the Middle East in a form which is even more distancing from Washington.

5.1 CHINA

After Mao, China started looking at the Middle East with a mere economic sight. The region is full of natural resources and Chinese manufactories need them to keep high productivity rates to increase the amount of materials exports in the world, exports representing a vital source of economic gains⁸⁷. A relationship with Muslim countries is also fundamental to China, in order to contain the Uyghur Muslim separatists. Many Middle Eastern countries consider the linkage with China of great importance not only to counterbalance the U.S.; it is Iran, indeed which considers the "relations with Beijing as fundamental and strategic", as witnessed also by the presence of China in the mediations of the JCPOA⁸⁸. Moreover, Beijing is open to the idea of creating economic cooperation zones with Middle Eastern countries, while embracing the possibility of the entering of new members in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)⁸⁹.

In 2016, China has conducted a series of remarkable activities in the Middle East, namely: the construction of the first foreign military base just off the tip of Yemen in Djibouti, the renovated help promises to the Assad regime, a large investment in the Suez Canal, and the signing of an agreement to send Chinese drones in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Beijing proposed itself as mediator between Riyadh and Tehran⁹⁰. Nevertheless, Beijing never intervened in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict⁹¹.

Another reason for the great value that China gives to the Middle East is the risk of scarcity of enough energy to satisfy the needs of every person, since the population is very numerous (1.41B - 2021)⁹², and the industry necessitates a lot of energy to keep high levels of productivity⁹³. As a consequence, China has direct relationship for example with Iran, having growing stakes in its energy sector and showing the importance of this factor by contesting the sanctions imposed on Tehran.

Moreover, an historical agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been reached in March 2023, after Beijing's brokerage. Tehran and Riyadh had closed the relationships in 2016 after the protests and damages to the Saudi embassy and no relationship has existed since then. In mid-March 2023, after the agreement reached, the two countries announced the re-opening of the respective embassies promised not to interfere

⁸⁶ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

⁸⁷ Ellen Zhang and Ryan Woo, "Chinese economy's export pillar shows cracks from global slowdown", Reuters, September 15, 2022, <https://reut.rs/3xzfbqf>.

⁸⁸ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

⁸⁹ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) "General Information", <http://eng.sectsc.org/cooperation/20170110/192193.html>.

⁹⁰ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

⁹¹ Ibidem

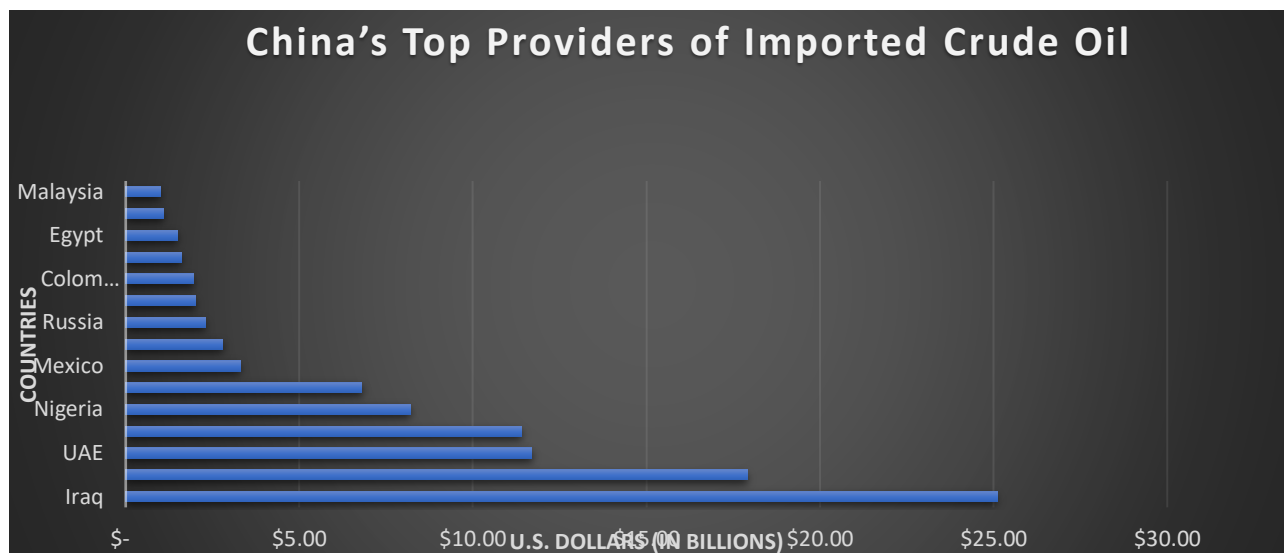
⁹² World Bank, "Population, total - China", <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=CN>.

⁹³ Center for Strategic and International Studies, China Project "How Is China's Energy Footprint Changing?", <https://bit.ly/3IHQaX>.

anymore in the other country's domestic policy, but rather to cooperate⁹⁴. This agreement is the witness of the rising importance of China in the Middle East, rise thus contrasting even more the role of the USA as a superpower.

Apart from Iran, China has 5 Middle Eastern countries among its top ten suppliers of oil. These numbers can be shown by the **Tab 1.0**, created by the author of this dissertation on the basis of reliable data:

Tab 1.0 Crude Oil Imports into China 2021⁹⁵



Lastly, China's interests in the Middle East are strictly related to the creation of the so-called New Silk Road or "One Belt, One Road", later became one "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)"⁹⁶, initiative launched by the Chinese president Xi Jinping. The plan is based on 50.000 miles high-speed railway aimed at "facilitating train connections between Beijing and Istanbul, Karachi, Kolkata, London, Madrid, Moscow, Riyadh, Singapore, and Tehran in a matter of a few days"⁹⁷.

5.2 INDIA

New Delhi started getting interested in the Middle East mainly as a response to the increasing Chinese involvement in the region and, in particular, thanks to the opportunity which India could have from being included in a part of the "New Silk Road". Moreover, Narendra Modi, the Indian PM, has visited multiple times the Middle East to draft oil and security defense pacts with many countries of the Arab peninsula, among which Saudi Arabia⁹⁸ and Qatar⁹⁹.

Nevertheless, the Indian relationship with the region is not limited to the Arab peninsula; in fact, "India has also become Israel's largest arms buyer"¹⁰⁰ deal struck by Modi to be protected internally by Islamic terrorism¹⁰¹. In addition to security matters, India as well as China, needs large amounts of energy resources,

⁹⁴ Samuel Stolton, "China brokers deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia after 7-year dispute", Politico, March 11, 2023, <https://politi.co/4295dcu>.

⁹⁵ Daniel Workman, "Crude Oil Imports by Country", World's Top Exports, June 23, 2022, <https://www.worldstopexports.com/crude-oil-imports-by-country/>.

⁹⁶ James McBride, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzky, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative", CFR, last modified February 2, 2023, <https://on.cfr.org/2Hd4b8K>.

⁹⁷ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

⁹⁸ Asian News International, "Beginning of important visit aimed at strengthening ties with valued friend: PM Modi visits Saudi Arabia", India Today, (Riyadh) last modified March 24, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3IEJd1X>.

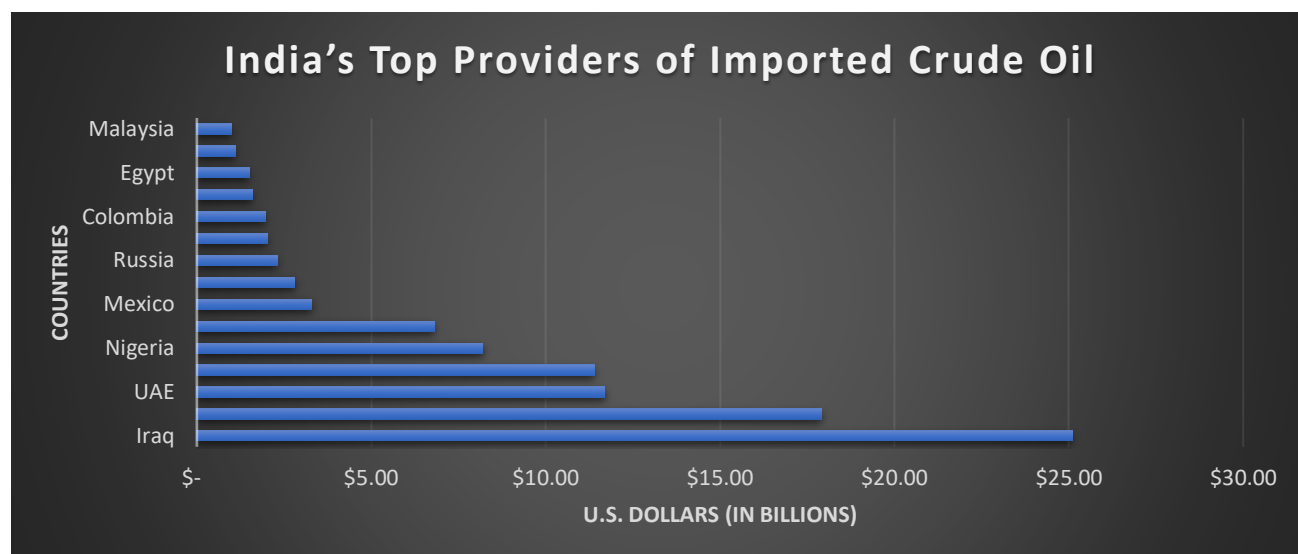
⁹⁹ PTI, "PM Modi arrives in Qatar, economic cooperation high on agenda", The Indian Express, (Doha) June 5, 2016, <https://bit.ly/41bEVGI>.

¹⁰⁰ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

¹⁰¹ Sameer Patil, "The deepening of India-Israel defence ties", Observer Research Foundation, June 07, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3IfJaIM>.

namely oil and natural gas, to continue dominating the negative outcomes of the 2008 crisis¹⁰². Just like Beijing, India has 5 Middle Eastern countries among its top suppliers of oil as can be shown in **Tab 2.0** below (as the previous one, this table has been created by the author on the basis of reliable data):

TAB 1.2 Crude Oil Imports into India 2021¹⁰³



India¹⁰⁴ is expected to increase these numbers becoming - together with China¹⁰⁵ - one of the largest commercial partners of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Lastly, another similarity with Beijing is the support for the Assad regime in Syria, delicate choice undertaken by New Delhi to face the concerns for the terrorist threat of the Middle East. An interesting event linked to this worry about security matters is the suffering by India of the “largest evacuation in history when 200,000 Indians were airlifted out of Kuwait during the 1991 Gulf War”¹⁰⁶.

5.3 RUSSIA

Russian influence in the Middle East started increasing during the post-WWII period when the USSR supported different factions in the 1960s-70s Arab revolutions and started selling weapons to those countries, even becoming one of the Iran’s largest suppliers of military equipment¹⁰⁷. However, Russia suffered from the bias of being perceived as enemy of the Muslim countries after the Soviet-Afghan war of 1980-1989, period in which the countries of the region favored the U.S.. When in the early ‘90s the USSR collapsed, Moscow was forced to withdraw from the Middle East, leaving more room to the Americans who exploited that occurrence to implement their influence.

Moreover, as well as Xi Jinping, the former Russian president Medvedev feared that the 2011 Arab Spring could inspire Chechen or Islamist minorities in Russia causing internal security issues.

¹⁰² Rajiv Kumar, and Dony Alex, “The Great Recession and India’s trade collapse”, CEPR, November 27, 2009, <https://bit.ly/3EoxwtR>.

¹⁰³ Daniel Workman, “Crude Oil Imports by Country”, World’s Top Exports, June 23, 2022, <https://www.worldstopexports.com/crude-oil-imports-by-country/>.

¹⁰⁴ Naina Bhardwaj, “India’s Trade and Investment Ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)”, India Briefing, January 31, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3Ku3w3L>.

¹⁰⁵ Giulia Interesse, “China and the GCC: Bilateral Trade and Economic Engagement”, China Briefing, August 25, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3kieRsT>.

¹⁰⁶ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

¹⁰⁷ GlobaSecurity.org, “Iran’s Arms Imports”, <https://bit.ly/3Z5008P>.

Moscow has strong relationship with the regime of Assad, as witnessed by the opposition to the international sanctions on Syria and the military-political relationship between the two countries.

According to Mahmood Monshipouri, “military sales and supplies to China and the Middle East were central to Putin’s plan for the national economic revival, even as such transactions were likely to undermine Russia’s relations with the West”¹⁰⁸.

Nonetheless, the strong linkage with the Assad regime is not meant just to preserve the economic outcomes, “rather to re-establish the Soviet global influence at the expenses of the U.S.”¹⁰⁹. Not by chance, the Syrian campaign represents for the Russian air force the largest one since WWII.

Lastly, Russia still has a close relationship with Iran. The latter was in fact forced to favor the Soviets, since after the 1979 revolution, the United States started cooperating with Saudi Arabia¹¹⁰. It is necessary to mention also that the JCPOA has affected Russian decisions, since after the removal of sanctions and the subsequent increase of Iranian oil production, market prices plummeted. This made Moscow suffer significant losses in revenue¹¹¹. Notwithstanding this risk, Moscow and Tehran continue with their cooperation, which is also helping Iran in its nuclear project. Other issues between the two could emerge only if the competition to enter and have success in other markets is not well managed.

To have a final general look, it can be said that “Moscow has found the Iranian and Syrian regimes, and their regional proxies such as Hezbollah”. These actors have a central role in lessening the U.S. importance in the Middle East¹¹².

6. PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

The detailed description of the current geopolitical situation in the Middle East, provided in this chapter, had its main focus on the reasons of its continuous high tensions. Tensions which firstly derived from the Sunnism-Shi’a dispute and that, nowadays, are instead more the result of a pervasive foreign intervention, which undermines people’s security and countries’ cooperation. The foreign powers are not the only one to blame, since the instability between regional actors of the Middle East derive also from their own willingness to find agreements with foreign powers to improve their wealth and to always be better of their neighboring countries. However, when foreign powers, as the United States, find a way to penetrate other countries’ governments, it is difficult to stop them due to the fear of repercussions.

The first chapter raised many questions and curiosities to the author, especially considering the intervention of Washington in the Middle East and the power of Tehran which seems to be as hammer and anvil relationship, where, apart from some glimmers of a peaceful co-existence, they are hell-bent in hammering each other’s interests. Between these questions, the one that surged immediately, that is:

How do the U.S. actions in the Middle East influence the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region?

¹⁰⁸ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem

¹¹⁰ Dmitri Trenin, “Russia and Iran: Historic Mistrust and Contemporary Partnership”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 18, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3IMRbx3>.

¹¹¹ Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*.

¹¹² Ibidem

The research question, which will find an answer in the last chapter (Ch.3) of this dissertation after a respectable and elaborate analysis, inspired chapter 2, where the author will present the research design and methodology, and the main variables involved. Methodology and variables which will be tailored to reach a thorough and irrefutable answer.

CHAPTER 2

THE PAPER'S THEORETICAL AND FOUNDATIONAL GROUNDWORK

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The first chapter was necessary to set the foundation for a more detailed presentation of the relationship between the main actors of this dissertation. Relationship which will be examined in a very attentive manner being the starting point of the following analysis whose aim is to answer a precise research question, that is:

How do the U.S. actions in the Middle East influence the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region?

The question has been conceived to be a “how question” rather than a “why question” from the moment that the United States’ interests in the Middle East has already been highlighted and analysed by many geopolitical scholars in the international scenario and also in the first chapter of this paper.

The author decided to focus on the response of the Iranian regime, mainly in terms of foreign, and specifically regional, policies adopted by Tehran. This decision derives from two different aspects: the first one is that in practical terms having the possibility to write just a limited number of pages, it is not possible to analyze both internal and external Iranian responses. Consequently, regarding the second aspect, the author believes that the foreign, and especially regional, policies are of higher interest and importance. This opinion derives from the development of the modern geopolitics, where states are even more interconnected. In a region like the Middle East, where there is a large quantity of influential geopolitical actors – Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, etc.– foreign policies surely have more regional implications than domestic policies, which however are still of great importance. This premise was necessary to let the readers understand the reason why the paper is not focused on Iranian domestic policies.

With regard to the research design of this thesis, multiple steps and methodologies will be followed. First of all, the main variables will be presented; specifically, they will be confronted with one another in consideration to their role in the Middle East and the reciprocal relationship. An impartial description of this type is strictly necessary to have a 360-degrees understanding of the current situation and of the major events of the recent past. Technical data will be also provided to let the reader acknowledge some crucial military occurrences in such an anguished region, characterized by a great melange of worrisome. Data showed in this paper will be those freely accessible to everyone, even if there is also a large number of classified acts containing high valuable intel. Moreover, a section will be dedicated to other variables, in a certain sense secondary for the purposes of this thesis, but which have a great influence in the relationship between the two main ones.

Following this, two relevant case studies will be briefly introduced in order to have a more concrete and practical guideline which will lead the author of this dissertation to chapter 3, that is the chapter in which the two case studies will be presented in depth, followed by the author’s analysis. The case studies will be presented as follows: development, and investigation on the involvement of the main variables in the event – always considering the secondary variables -. The case studies will also be examined with a compare and contrast methodology, to achieve a deeper understanding of the possible presence of recurring patterns or the differences in the approach to the various events.

Finally, as anticipated, the author will provide the readers with an elaborate consideration of the case studies paving the way for an answer to the research question.

The author's hypothesis regarding the answer to the research question, previously presented, is direct and clear: *the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region are influenced by the United States' direct, or by proxy, activity in the region.* Activity which, as mentioned above, is the result of Washington's willingness to thwart the Iranian hegemony in the Middle East. The White House has all the wherewithal to settle in the region; in detail, the presence of two of its greatest allies, Israel and Saudi, as proxies to overwatch Tehran's actions and plans remarkably facilitate the process.

This hypothesis is yet to be proved and the author of this thesis will try to do it with the case studies previously mentioned, even if a rejection will be warmly accepted and will leave the floor to interesting considerations.

2. VARIABLES

As it can be understood from the topics discussed in chapter 1 and the actors mentioned in the previous section, there are two main variables and two which can be considered secondary for the purposes of this paper. The main ones are represented by the Middle Eastern policies of the United States and the foreign (mainly regional) policies of Iran. However, the two countries do not hold the same theoretical position for this paper. In fact, on the one hand, the Middle Eastern policies of the United States represent the independent variable, with the direct permanence of U.S. troops and the establishment of military bases are legitimized by the international community as measures to control and impede the development of a more dangerous form of terrorism. This reason, in addition to the "heart-felt" need to protect Middle Eastern citizens from the heinous dictatorships ruling them, gives Washington the self-established authority to be meddlesome in the region, intervening also directly in local conflicts.

On the other hand, the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region represent the dependent variable, with Tehran's attitude towards the other regimes of the Middle East seeming to be shaped in response to the U.S. influence and activities in the Middle East, also considering Israel and Saudi Arabia. Harsh response of Tehran which does not properly appreciate a foreign presence in the Middle East, especially the American one. The result of this is witnessed by the intervention in the local conflicts in support of the opposing party of those sustained by the USA and its allies.

Instead, the secondary variables which will be considered in this dissertation are the influences and/or policies of two regional proxies of the United States, namely Israel and Saudi Arabia. These two actors are very influential since the U.S. threat perceived by Iran is not always direct, rather it also comes from the policies and military actions of Saudi Arabia and Israel. For this reason, they will have a distinct section in this chapter, where the relationship with Washington will be analyzed; in addition, a brief excursus on their reciprocal relationship and the one with Tehran will be provided.

3. USA – IRAN RELATIONSHIPS

This section will be dedicated to illustrating some of the major events characterizing the relationship between the two previously anticipated variables of this dissertation. These events will be very helpful as support to the case studies and on which the analysis in chapter 3 will be laid out. The section is going to provide the readers with an understanding of the (d-)evolution of the relationships between Washington and Tehran, depending on the different Presidents at the White House and also the ones in Iran, always considering the succession of Khamenei to Khomeini.

3.1 AN “ODI ET AMO” PERIOD: 1979 - 2013

As aforementioned, the period before the 1979 Iranian Revolution is a period of cooperation between the two countries with the decisive support of the USA to the Pahlavi dynasty, witnessed by: the CIA coup of 1953 to overthrow Mosaddeq, the beginning of the “Atoms for Peace Program” under President Eisenhower – to guide developing countries as Iran to a correct use of the nuclear power –, and the Nixon protection to Iran and the Middle East against the Soviets¹¹³. However, being too pervasive in other countries’ domestic affairs has been proved not to be the best strategy for Washington. In fact, after some years of protest and the diffusion of Khomeini’s words, 1979 was marked by the revolution, which ended with Khomeini self-proclaiming as Iran’s Supreme Leader. All the good premises suddenly disappeared. The perceivable tension between the U.S. and Iran manifested in the same year when the so-called Hostage Crisis occurred. On November 4, 1979, more than 50 Americans were taken hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran after the protest of the Iranian youths who asked Washington to extradite the Shah. The head of the White House at that time was the democratic Jimmy Carter who resulted unable to solve the crisis and free the U.S. citizens, promoting a failing and deadly operation – Operation Eagle Claw -¹¹⁴. It was, in fact his successor, the Republican Ronald Reagan who, thanks also to the mediation of Algeria, in his first day as President was able to take his citizens back home after the Algiers Accords. These accords limited the more pervasive control of Washington in the Persian domestic affairs, in addition to removal of the Iranian assets’ freezing and sanctions.¹¹⁵

After this solved crisis, until the end of his presidency, Reagan had to deal with the the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted from 1980 to 1988; a war deriving from a long-standing border dispute between Baghdad and Tehran, among the main reasons¹¹⁶. The war acquired a different shape in 1987 when assaults on oil tankers increased, receiving the name “tanker war”. The involvement of Washington brought further tensions especially when in 1988 the USS Vincennes, convinced of having shot down a fighter jet, instead shot down the Iranian Airbus flight 655, which was destroyed and led to the death of 290 people¹¹⁷. The war ended with the UN cease-fire Resolution 598¹¹⁸ the same year. This conflict left in the Iranian regime the willingness to strengthen the already established radicalism in the Islamic Republic. In the meantime, in 1985 the Iran-Contra

¹¹³ CFR.org Editors, “U.S. Relations With Iran”, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-iran-1953-2022>.

¹¹⁴ U.S. Army Airborne & Special Operations Museum, “Operation Eagle Claw”, <https://www.asomf.org/operation-eagle-claw/>.

¹¹⁵ Government of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, *Algiers Accords*, January 19, 1981.

¹¹⁶ Mahmood Monshipouri, *Middle East Politics*, (Routledge, 2019).

¹¹⁷ Ibidem

¹¹⁸ Security Council, *The Situation between Iran and Iraq*, United Nations, July 20, 1987.

affair happened. In particular, the Reagan administration started selling weapons to Iran to free seven Americans held hostage by the terroristic group of Hezbollah, which was backed by Tehran. Money gained from the sale of weapons was used to fund the right-wing rebels in Nicaragua. The scandal resulted in the taking of responsibility by Reagan and the death of two Americans, with the other hostages released after some years¹¹⁹. The aforementioned Operation Praying Mantis – examined in Ch.1 – followed before George H.W. Bush was elected as new President of the USA. He is remembered for the order which brought to the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War (1990-1991). In the meantime, also Iran saw a change in the ruler of the regime. In 1989, in fact, Khomeini died, and Ayatollah Khamenei became the new Supreme leader, following the footprints of his predecessor. In 1993, Bill Clinton became the new president and just 3 years later implemented the sanctions already imposed by President Bush to Tehran. In this context, the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act was promoted.

From that moment on the relationship between Iran and the U.S. got slightly better. It is sufficient to think about the “détente” in 1998 when the U.S. Secretary of State Albright met (at the Six-Plus-Two talks)¹²⁰ with the Iranian Foreign Policy minister Zarif to discuss the Afghan crisis and find an agreement to cooperate in aiding the Afghans. This meeting paved the way for the 2001 Bonn Agreement¹²¹ under the George W. Bush administration.

Nevertheless, this softening of the relationships between the two countries fell short of the international community expectations. At the beginning of 2002, in fact, Bush labelled Iraq, North Korea, and Iran an “axis of evil”¹²². This statement came some months after the 9/11 attacks which hit Americans hearts in a lasting manner. Bush was convinced that Iran – and the other two countries – was actively researching and building weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and that it could utilize them. Resentment and revenge brought the U.S. to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. During the latter, Saddam Hussein was captured and killed. Nonetheless, already a year later, studies will show that Bush was wrong and no WMD was present in Iraq¹²³.

At this point, the newly elected Iranian President, Ahmadinejad, tried to resume contacts with the White House and in 2006 wrote a letter to Bush, in which he did not yield to Washington request of slowing the nuclear program¹²⁴. Bush’s answer was the Iran Freedom Support Act, where \$10B were destined to civil groups to overthrow the regime and establish democracy in Iran¹²⁵. Ahmadinejad tried to impose himself also at the UN general Assembly in 2007 condemning the UN Security Council (UNSC) requests to stop the enrichment of uranium.

¹¹⁹ CFR.org Editors, “U.S. Relations With Iran”, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-iran-1953-2022>.

¹²⁰ Laura Meyers, “Albright, Iran Minister Meet”, AP News, September 22, 1998, <https://apnews.com/article/488a93df59d83d4644b00a819edf486d>

¹²¹ CFR.org Editors, “U.S. Relations With Iran”, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-iran-1953-2022>.

¹²² The New York Times, “The ‘Axis of Evil’ Speech”, published November 5, 2001, 01:03, <https://nyti.ms/3IQly62>.

¹²³ Julian Borger, “There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq”, The Guardian, October 7, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/07/usa.iraq1>.

¹²⁴ Peter Walker, “Ahmadinejad’s letter to America”, The Guardian, November 29, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2006/nov/29/lettertoamerica>

¹²⁵ Authenticated U.S. Government Information (GPO), *Iran Freedom Support Act*, September 30, 2006.

3.2 THE UNEXPECTED TURNING POINT (2013)

The juxtaposition of the relationships between the U.S. and Iran throughout the years, has been in a way inspiring to Bush’s successor, the democrat Barack Obama. The remarkable shift considered in this dissertation, is the one in which the newly elected American President called the Iranian President Rouhani (newly elected too), to discuss about the nuclear program¹²⁶. This has been an unexpected turning point from the moment that the previous administration annihilated all the possibilities of rapprochement between the two countries. Surprisingly, thanks to the diplomatic attitude of both presidents, after a short time Iran and the 5 permanent members of the UNSC, plus Germany – the P5+1 – reached a preamble of what in 2015 would have become known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).¹²⁷

3.2.1 THE JCPOA

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as Iran Nuclear Deal, has been concluded after two years of negotiations and has been signed on July 14, 2015, known as “Finalization Day”. October 18 has been chosen as “Adoption Day”¹²⁸. As its “preamble” has been signed by the P5+1 and set as main goal the nuclear non-proliferation of Iran, working with same goals of the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT); hence, to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and technology and to limit the use of nuclear technology to peaceful civilian purposes. Iran, in exchange for slowing the enrichment of uranium and allowing regular controls to its structures, obtained the lifting of sanctions both from European Union and especially, the United States. The JCPOA was not meant to bring immediate results in absolute terms, rather to gradually reach several goals and over a period of time. As a matter of fact, on January 16, 2016, the Implementation Day has been reached after that, as reported by the U.S. Secretary of State, the “IAEA verified that Iran had fulfilled its commitments”¹²⁹. The verification has been followed also by the lift of the sanctions as established. The last two steps of the JCPOA should have been the Transition Day in 2023 and the Termination Day in 2025¹³⁰. The author uses the conditional tense (“should have been”) since as will be explained in the following subsection, results are much different with regard to the pre-established program.

Notwithstanding this, before forwarding this dissertation, it is crucial to mention some of the main provisions of the JCPOA, to allow the readers’ comprehension of the fundamental nature of it. To go more into detail, the JCPOA dictates the following general provisions¹³¹:

<u>FIELD</u>	<u>PROVISIONS</u>
ENRICHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reduction of operating centrifuges and no production of new ones for 10 years- Excessive centrifuges stored under IAEA monitoring
URANIUM STOCKPILE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reduction of stockpile for 15 years

¹²⁶ Dan Roberts and Julian Borger, “Obama holds historic phone call with Rouhani and hints at end to sanctions”, The Guardian, September 28, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/27/obama-phone-call-iranian-president-rouhani>.

¹²⁷ Kelsey Davenport, “Iran, P5+1 Sign Nuclear Agreement”, Arms Control Association, December 2013, <https://bit.ly/3JN1zNz>.

¹²⁸ Strategic Communications, “Nuclear Agreement – JCPOA”, European Union External Action (EEAS), August 18, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3FTVwpw>.

¹²⁹ Strategic Communications, “Nuclear Agreement – JCPOA”, European Union External Action (EEAS), August 18, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3FTVwpw>.

¹³⁰ Strategic Communications, “Nuclear Agreement – JCPOA”, European Union External Action (EEAS), August 18, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3FTVwpw>.

¹³¹ European Union External Action (EEAS), “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”, <https://bit.ly/3THQXnT>.

	- Excess enriched uranium → sold, shipped abroad for storage or diluted to natural levels
MONITORING AND VERIFICATION	- For 25 years continuous monitoring of Iran’s uranium mines and mills and for 20 years continuous monitoring of Iran’s centrifuge production facilities
JOINT COMMISSION	- For 25 years Joint Commission (P5+1, EU and Iran members) for quarterly meetings.
UN SANCTIONS	- UN Resolution 2231 → termination of all previous sanctions targeting Iran’s nuclear program
U.S. SANCTIONS	- Cease of economic sanctions against Iran’s oil and banking sectors
EU SANCTIONS	- End of all provisions of the EU Regulation related to Iran’s nuclear program

These provisions reported above have the aim of providing the readers with a general overview of what has been decided in the JCPOA. Hence, they do not represent the entirety of the provisions included in this historical deal.

3.3 THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

2018 marked another turn in the American domestic and, above all, foreign policy. The election of the Republican Donald Trump at the Presidency of the White House is pivotal for the purposes of this paper since it shaped the recent relationships between the two main actors. Two are the major occurrences which deserve to be mentioned: the U.S. exit from the JCPOA and the killing of Soleimani.

Starting with the former, on May 8, 2018, Donald Trump declared that the USA would have withdrawn from the Iranian Nuclear Deal¹³². The withdrawal also meant the reintroduction of the sanctions to Iran, which from 2015 was trying to rebuild its economy. This decision was taken by Trump to fulfill the promises of his electoral campaign in which he considered the agreement as flawed and not effectively limiting Iran as it was expected. In fact, “Trump said the agreement failed to address Iran’s ballistic missile program and its proxy warfare in the region”¹³³. Tehran’s answer has been critical of Trump’s decision, even if Iran decided to abide by the deal as well as the EU¹³⁴. As mentioned in chapter 1, the EU also had to create the INSTEX to guarantee safety of trade for companies who wanted to carry on trade exchanges with Iran. INSTEX was necessary since the U.S., in addition to the previous sanctions to Iran, decided also to promote a new pack of sanctions for all those trading with Iran.

¹³² Mark Landler, “Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned”, The New York Times, May 8, 2018, <https://nyti.ms/2lrMPGA>.

¹³³ CFR.org Editors, “What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?”, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-iran-nuclear-deal>.

¹³⁴ Mark Landler, “Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned”, The New York Times, May 8, 2018, <https://nyti.ms/2lrMPGA>.

Today's Iran facilities to carry on its nuclear program are distributed as in **Figure 3.0**¹³⁵, accompanied by a **Figure 4.0**, representing the Isfahan's Uranium nuclear site¹³⁶

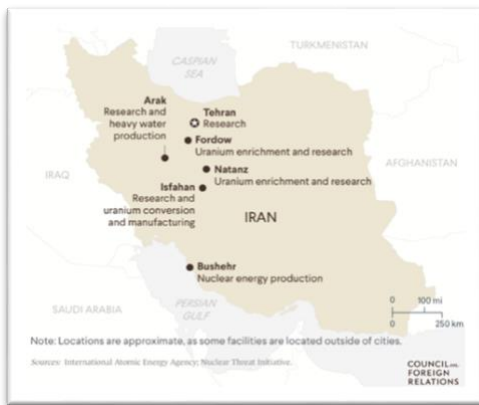


FIGURE 3.0



FIGURE 4.0

As it can be seen in **FIGURE 3.0** due to the JCPOA nowadays Iran nuclear facilities are limited with respect to other countries, however they certainly allow the production of a great amount of weapons of mass destruction, as also reported by the UN¹³⁷. This is because after the choice of Trump to leave the JCPOA and impose new sanctions, Iran felt betrayed and even if initially the situation was kept stable with the UN, it then started breaching the promises of the deal and enlarged its enrichment of uranium.

This decision taken by Tehran follows also the second major occurrence under the Trump presidency: the assassination of Iran's General Soleimani. Qasem Soleimani was considered by many the second most relevant figure in Iran after Khamenei and was the chief of the *Quds force*¹³⁸, an elite unit of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), labeled as a terrorist group from 2019 by the USA¹³⁹. His role, according to the BBC and many other media, was not limited to the IRGC, rather he coordinated every military activity in of Iran in the Middle East, such as the participation and attacks in the Syrian War as will be presented later in this chapter. Soleimani was killed on January 3rd, 2020, at the airport of Baghdad were the US Air Force, under the executive order of Donald Trump¹⁴⁰. The latter identified the Iranian general as the leading cause of many U.S. military deaths in the region, due to his influence in the Lebanese terrorist group of Hezbollah. Tehran and Khamenei's reaction was very direct, with the Supreme Leader stating that "severe revenge awaits the criminals"¹⁴¹. The U.S., with the support of Israel considered the attack as a self-defense act because according to Washington, Soleimani was organizing an imminent attack to the U.S. members in Middle East. However, UN's special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings defined the killing as unlawful under the international law, because no effective threat could be proved¹⁴².

¹³⁵ CFR.org Editors, "What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?", Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-iran-nuclear-deal>.

¹³⁶ Institute for Science and International Security, *No Visible Evidence of Explosion at Esfahan Nuclear Site; Adjacent Facility Razed*, December 8, 2011.

¹³⁷ Jon Gambrell, "Iran has enough enriched uranium to build 'several' nuclear weapons, UN says", PBS, January 26, 2023, <https://to.pbs.org/3noSAAdT>.

¹³⁸ BBC, "Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike", January 3, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50979463>.

¹³⁹ Phil Stewart, and Lesley Wroughton, and Steve Holland, "U.S. to designate elite Iranian force as terrorist organisation", Reuters, April 6, 2019,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-iran-idUKKCN1RH2I2>.

¹⁴⁰ BBC, "Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike", January 3, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50979463>.

¹⁴¹ BBC, "Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike", January 3, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50979463>.

¹⁴² BBC, "Qasem Soleimani: US strike on Iran general was unlawful, UN expert says", July 9, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53345885>.

Khamenei's response was also harsher 5 days later when Iran launched a missiles attack to the U.S. bases of Erbil and Al Asad in Iraq to avenge the killing of Soleimani¹⁴³.

These occurrences in addition to the assassination of a prominent Iranian military scientist – at the center of the nuclear program -, for which Israel was blamed¹⁴⁴, made Tehran feel free to restrict the IAEA's monitoring and to boost uranium enrichment.

3.4 THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Changing the destiny of U.S.-Iran relations after the mandate of President Donald Trump was practically impossible for the newly elected democratic Joe Biden. Regarding his policy in the Middle East, he decided to continue the strict alliance with Riyadh and the UAE regarding the war in Yemen and with Qatar and Oman as Gulf partners¹⁴⁵. In 2021, some months after his election, he took the important decision to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, leaving the country in the hands of Taliban who immediately set a strict regime, despite the promises to the Western powers.

Since Saudi Arabia and Israel will be analyzed in the upcoming section, after only two years that presides over White House, Biden did not achieve much; however, for the purposes of this paper it can argued that in 2021 he tried to resume negotiations for the JCPOA. Nevertheless, the talks reached a deadlock status when Raisi was elected as new president in Iran in August 2021¹⁴⁶.

This section is purposely short, since it aimed only at providing the readers with a brief and general excursus of the Biden Administration, which is not at the core of this dissertation.

4. U.S.-IRAN RECIPROCAL PERCEPTIONS

This section has been thought by the author with the aim of providing the reader with some final considerations on the tense and long-standing contrast between the United States and Iran. Considerations based on the reciprocal perceptions of the two countries and their activities in the Middle East.

Someone who approaches for the first time the discourse related to U.S.-Iran relationships would say that the two countries despise each other and there is no possibility of a normal cooperation. In reality, this thought is ill-founded, because this is just a matter of how the two countries are perceived and how they perceive themselves reciprocally, also considering their military expenditures – the U.S. spends 100 times more than Iran per year¹⁴⁷. This difference in expenditures and the run to the nuclear by Iran are the classical example of the realist “security dilemma”; that is the theory according to which when a country arms itself just to be protected and ready for self-defense, is perceived as a threat by the other countries, especially its enemies, and this leads them to arm themselves too. This weaponization causes the insecurity of citizens and of the international community. Thereby, United States and Iran are a clear example of the security dilemma: the

¹⁴³ Paul Iddon, “Operation Martyr Soleimani: Iran's missile strike against US in Iraq was more symbolic than lethal” January 9, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3LR29g0>.

¹⁴⁴ ALJAZEERA, “Iran says ex-official had role in death of nuclear scientist”, January 12, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3FSUOc4>.

¹⁴⁵ Khalil Al-Anani, Yara M. Asi, Amal Ghazal, Imad K. Harb, Khalil E. Jahshan, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, “The Biden Administration and the Middle East in 2023”, Arab Center Washington DC, January 4, 2023, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-biden-administration-and-the-middle-east-in-2023/>.

¹⁴⁶ Euronews, “Iran nuclear deal is 'dead', claims US President Joe Biden”, last updated December 20, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3LTnoxU>.

¹⁴⁷ Abbas Maleki and John Tirman, U.S.-Iran Misperceptions, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 12.

U.S. implemented its presence in the Middle East and secured alliances with regional powers – Israel and Saudi Arabia – to fight terrorism and avoid the Soviet meddlesome presence, but this caused the concern of Tehran which felt threatened by a possible westernization of the Middle East, and started developing a nuclear program, which today is the main source of tension between the two countries. Furthermore, Khamenei maintains an iron fist on the nuclear since he believes that no agreement with U.S. is possible, since the U.S. would not just limit Iran on it, but they would like to remove completely any nuclear capacity thus not leaving space neither for civilian purposes. This is unacceptable for the Persian regime.

Obviously the conflict between these two powers is not all about that. As anticipated, for Washington it is also the Iranian support to terrorist groups as Hezbollah and the aspirations to dominate Middle East that makes the Persian country a threat for the world. While for Tehran it is the American opposition to Shi'ism and the great support to Israel that threatens the regime.

Not to forget that the level of mistrust among the two countries is very high, although Iran seems to have a point, since most of the times the U.S. have been the first to end an agreement or to fail to keep a promise (e.g., JCPOA). The perceptions of each other may be true, but they are also the leading cause of failed agreements and lack of cooperation. If the countries – i.e., the relative governments and/or rulers – try to comprehend each other freeing themselves from any bias and just listening to one's own necessities, probably the situation would be better. For sure there are points of disagreement, but many others that are there because of misperceptions would be removed with a totally diverse approach, since at the present, maintaining and improving one's own interests is the primary aim rather than establishing a solid long-lasting relationship.

As aforementioned, Israel represents one of the main concerns for Tehran, which supports Palestine in the conflict. The Supreme Leader believes that to have a democratic solution, a referendum for the Palestinians should be held to make them decide about their own future¹⁴⁸. The U.S. are labeled by Tehran as cause of the war due to the firm support to Israel and its government.

Nonetheless, Khamenei has always explicitly affirmed that he would be open to any kind of agreement and cooperation with the United States, but with the condition that it is true and without any secondary purpose, such as the elimination of the Islamic Republic, because this would be a harmful relationship¹⁴⁹.

Washington, however, perceive Iran as one of the greatest threats which goes against any provision or regulation of the international community and already during Obama administration the Congress was ready to end any form of diplomacy. A proof of this is the letter of 76 senators exhorting Obama to be stricter with Tehran¹⁵⁰ also considering the numerous attacks on U.S. troops or bases – to Washington allies included – for which Iran is blamed. Not to mention, as already stated, the Iranian sponsorship for terrorist groups, as also the former U.S. Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman stated: “Iran is the world's foremost sponsor of terrorism, which it uses as a strategic tool of its foreign policy [...] Iran fund, trains, and equips these terrorist

¹⁴⁸ Reuters Staff, “Iran's supreme leader calls for end to “murderous” Israeli regime”, Reuters, July 24, 2014, <https://reut.rs/3THUToE>.

¹⁴⁹ Abbas Maleki and John Tirman, U.S.-Iran Misperceptions, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 47.

¹⁵⁰ Abbas Maleki and John Tirman, U.S.-Iran Misperceptions, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 62.

organizations [...] to use in attacks around the world. This clandestine network [...] threatens regional security”¹⁵¹.

To conclude this section, an interesting fact could be that when the Middle East is not undergoing a regional crisis – i.e., civil war... - the U.S. and Iran diplomatic gap would tighten. The opposite is true as well¹⁵².

5. THE ROLE OF ISRAEL AND SAUDI ARABIA

Israel and Saudi Arabia, along with Iran, represent indeed the most active and relevant actors of this region and not only.

Israel has always been a great ally for the United States and has been firmly supported by Washington starting from the aid in establishing a home for the Jews, immediately recognizing in 1948 the State of Israel after the UN Resolution 181 dividing the area¹⁵³. In a more general view, the United States has always participated in the establishment of good relationships between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries of Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. A practical example are the Camp David Accords – November 17, 1978 – between Egypt and Israel with the mediation of the U.S.¹⁵⁴. These resulted in the improvement of the relationships between the two countries that until then were firmly against each other. Hence, it is comprehensible that the relations with Israel are of great importance to the U.S. because they have the (in)direct possibility to control the hostility in the region counting on a loyal ally to which it also provides large amount of monetary assistance and weaponry. Under Trump the relationships with Israel improved due to the very similar political approach of the American President and Netanyahu, while nowadays Biden does not particularly appreciate the Israeli PM, thus leading to a slight worsening of the relationships between the countries, which however, due to the large amount of Israeli lobbies in the USA, is still very strong. This has been showed also by the UAE-hosted Negev Forum, which had the goal of promoting regional cooperation between Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, with the presence of the U.S.¹⁵⁵. This Forum can be seen as a sort of continuation of the Abraham Accords of 2020.

Saudi Arabia, instead, had established his relationship with the United States mainly on economic terms, specifically on the large amount of oil exported from the Aramco establishments to the United States¹⁵⁶, which in order to satisfy its economic needs, seemed and seems to purposely blind itself to the lack of democratic regimes in the Arabian peninsula. Moreover, the U.S. provides a large amount of weapons to the Arab country, more precisely in 2017 a \$350B agreement was drafted under Donald Trump’s term¹⁵⁷. In addition, together with Israel, Saudi Arabia represents a great ally to the U.S. with regard to the fight against terrorism. Nonetheless, from 2018 the relationships between the two countries became lightly more strained after the end of the American support to Saudis in the Yemen Civil War. As a matter of fact, Bin Salman

¹⁵¹ Abbas Maleki and John Tirman, U.S.-Iran Misperceptions, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 67.

¹⁵² Abbas Maleki and John Tirman, U.S.-Iran Misperceptions, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 89-90.

¹⁵³ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “1947: The international community says YES to the establishment of the State of Israel”, <https://bit.ly/3LSleP5>.

¹⁵⁴ U.S. Department of the State, “Camp David Accords and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process”, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/camp-david>.

¹⁵⁵ Antony J. Blinken (U.S. Secretary of State), “The Negev Forum Working Groups and Regional Cooperation Framework”, U.S. Government, <https://www.state.gov/the-negev-forum-working-groups-and-regional-cooperation-framework/>

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), “Oil and petroleum products explained”, <https://bit.ly/3FT7z6j>.

¹⁵⁷ Mythili Sampathkumar, « Donald Trump to announce \$350bn arms deal with Saudi Arabia – one of the largest in history”, The Independent, May 17, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-saudi-arabia-arms-deal-sale-arab-nato-gulf-states-a7741836.html>.

refused Washington's request for an increase of oil production. Oil request which was further promoted by Biden when in October 2022 the OPEC (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries – from 1960) decided to reduce the production of oil to have an increase in prices to contrast the drop resulting from the Russia's invasion of Ukraine¹⁵⁸. Nevertheless, coming back to the support in Yemen, Biden decided to resume it in 2022 in order to keep a stable relationship with Riyadh, always more open to Beijing.

Saudi Arabia and Israel never had a good relationship with Tehran, both due to the alliance with the United States and, in particular for Saudi Arabia, because of the contended hegemonic role of the Middle East.

An unexpected turning point happened in March 2023, when after some devoted Chinese brokerage, Tehran and Riyadh agreed on resuming the diplomatic relationships closed in 2016. In that year, the immediate trigger of the breakdown – also result of the culmination of longstanding historical, religious, and geopolitical tension – was the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia. Al-Nimr, great critic of the Saudi government and its treatment of the Shia minority, was executed under the order of Riyadh, along with 46 other individuals on terrorism-related charges on January 2, 2016¹⁵⁹. The execution resulted in the burst of protests in Iran and across the Shia world. Protesters in Tehran attacked the Saudi embassy, setting it ablaze and causing significant damage. In response, Saudi Arabia announced the severing of diplomatic ties with Iran on January 3, 2016, and recalled its diplomats from Tehran, later followed by other Gulf countries. In mid-March 2023, Riyadh, Tehran and Beijing unexpectedly announced the re-opening of the respective embassies in the two countries and promised not to interfere anymore in the other country's domestic policy, but rather to cooperate for the growth of the Middle East. Naturally, this agreement can show Washington as loosening its influence and importance in the region, coming always closer to Asian powers, as anticipated in Ch.1. On the other side, the situation with Israel remains still very tense and it will remain as such until the Israel-Palestine conflict goes on and the U.S. will provide support to Israel.

6. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES

The purpose of this chapter was to present to the readers the research design, therefore, to lay out how the investigation will be conducted; investigation which has the objective of answering the aforementioned research question. In the research design the author also presented his hypothesis which, as here is re-proposed, is rooted on the belief that “the foreign policies of the Iranian regime are influenced by the United States' direct, or by proxy, activity in the region”. This hypothesis, as anticipated, can be rejected and/or reversed, outcome which will be unveiled only in the third chapter after a devoted analysis.

Moreover, the variables involved in this research have been presented, with Iran and the U.S. being the two main ones around which the entire research orbits. However, two secondary variables, them being Israel and Saudi Arabia, have been presented, playing a key role in the Iranian's policies in the Middle East.

¹⁵⁸ BBC, “Opec: What is it and what is happening to oil prices?”, October 5, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61188579>.

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Stolton, “China brokers deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia after 7-year dispute”, Politico, March 11, 2023, <https://politi.co/4295dcu>.

Subsequently, the relationship between Washington and Tehran has been deeply covered. In fact, a general overview of the pre-2000s era has been provided, underlining the different attitudes of the two countries with respect to the different rulers they have been governed by. While an in-depth analysis of the JCPOA and the Trump administration have served to present the profound devolution of the relationship between the two countries in the last 10 years.

With these premises done, the author shall structure chapter 3 in a way which it will reach a gradual answer, not deriving it merely from his knowledge and the topics previously discussed in this dissertation. The objective, indeed, is not to confirm nor reject the hypothesis, rather to present a genuine and reliable answer which stems also from the analyses of two case studies, which will constitute the first part of Ch.3. The two case studies have been chosen on the basis of the involvement of the two main variables (direct or by proxy), also considering Israel and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, they will be presented in an impartial manner which focuses on the description of the main events, the policies, and/or actions undertaken by Iran and the U.S.. The two case studies are: the *Syrian Civil War* and the *Yemen Civil War*.

On the one side, the Syrian Civil War is an ongoing violent struggle in Syria between pro-democratic revolutionaries and Syria's long-running dynastic rule of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Since 2011, year in which the so-called Arab Spring erupted in several MENA countries, the conflict has been a major cause of instability in the region, with the civilian displacement and refugee migration resulting in one of the greatest humanitarian disasters in modern history. The war easily escalated in an international conflict, when foreign actors such as Russia, Iran, the USA Saudi Arabia and Türkiye intervened to support one of the two factions involved and to fight against the terrorist organization of the ISIS.

The Syrian Civil War represents a fertile ground for a case study of this dissertation since the U.S. and Iran played – and are still playing – a crucial role in its evolution of the war. In detail, Iran, due to a combination of geopolitical and strategic goals, as well as ideological and religious concerns, has been a crucial ally of Syria's government, offering military and financial help, as well as training and assistance to pro-government militias. The United States, in turn, has been involved in the Syrian conflict since it began in 2011. Washington first offered non-lethal aid and support to the Syrian opposition before expanding its engagement to include combat operations against ISIS and other extremist organizations in Syria. For this reason, in chapter 3 the Syrian Civil War will be deeply analyzed considering all factors and actors involved.

On the other side, also the Yemen Civil War is an ongoing violent struggle in Yemen which began in 2014, wreaking havoc in the country. The war mainly involves two factions, namely the Yemeni government, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, and the Houthi rebel group, also known as *Ansar Allah*. The struggle broke out when Shia Muslim Houthi rebels gained control of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and caused President Hadi to flee to Riyadh. The war, due to these occurrences and as well as the Syrian case, easily escalated in a military intervention in favor of President Hadi by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the US and other regional and non-regional countries. In juxtaposition, Houthi rebels according to international scholars and geopolitical/military experts are supported primarily by Iran, with the Syrian government being alleged to

provide further support. Russia and China, officially, have only sent humanitarian aid and supported a pacific resolution of the conflict. The difference with the Saudi-led coalition is that the latter has officially confirmed the support both ideological and military, while the Houthi-sided countries have just confirmed the ideological and political support never expressly stating the dispatch of weapons and military equipment. Nevertheless, as will be further explained in chapter 3, Iran in particular has been caught multiple times in sending weapons through dhows.

Also, the Yemen Civil War represents a fertile ground for a case study of this dissertation since the U.S. and Iran played – and are still playing – a key role in the progression of the conflict. In detail, differently from the Syrian Civil War, are not directly involved in the conflict, rather they act via proxy. In particular, the U.S. has concluded multiple transactions for the sale of weapons to Saudi, which conducts the military operation – the U.S. only directly attacked Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula -, while, as anticipated, Iran is alleged to provide military training and financial assistance the Houthi rebels.

These reasons, in addition to the copious implications which will be discussed later in this dissertation, made the author of this paper ponder whether or not the policies and/or actions the U.S. – considering the two cases aforementioned – reflect a particular response by the Iranian Regime.

CHAPTER 3
CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS

1. THE CASE STUDIES

As Chapter 2 was dedicated to the research design and the examination of the variables of this dissertation, Ch.3 is instead devoted to the examination of two case studies which will pave the way for the final analysis of the author. The first part of this chapter has been designated to deeply explain the development of the two case studies – using a wide range of data – and to conduct an unbiased investigation on the involvement of the main variables. After the two case studies are examined per se, the author will proceed with a first analysis based on a compare and contrast methodology, with the aim of achieving a deeper understanding of the possible presence of recurring patterns and/or the differences in the development of the two cases. After this first analysis, the author will provide the readers with an elaborate consideration aimed at reaching the answer to the research question.

As aforementioned, the two case studies elected for this dissertation are: the *Syrian Civil War* and the *Yemen Civil War*. Both countries are in the Middle East and are dealing with a perpetual state of tension and peril since the burst of the relative civil wars.

In detail, the two countries are located as showed in the maps below:



MAP 3.0 – Syria¹⁶⁰



MAP 4.0 - Yemen¹⁶¹

2. THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

The Syrian Civil War is the conflict which has been devastating the Middle Eastern country since 2011 when, during the rise of the so-called Arab Spring, the opposers of President Bashar al-Assad started protesting against the government due to the harsh living standards and the mismanagement of Assad. Even if the protests were pacific, the government of Damascus responded by repressing the remonstrances with military intervention. From that moment on, the history of Syria has radically changed. No complete truth can be

¹⁶⁰ Worldometer, “Syria”, World Maps, <https://www.worldometers.info/maps/>

¹⁶¹ Worldometer, “Yemen”, World Maps, <https://www.worldometers.info/maps/>

claimed while talking of such delicate topics, also considering the different perspectives of the authors talking about these kinds of conflict, reason why many of them are contradictory with one another.

In any case, how did Syria end up in this tense situation? Syria achieved its independence from France in 1946 after that at the end of WWI Paris had obtained it through the Sykes-Picot agreement with the UK¹⁶². Syria has always been prevalently Sunni (70%¹⁶³) even if the Shi'a minority is the one ruling. The sect at the power is the one of Alawites and this religious division caused great instability in the '60s – also due to the U.S. intervention – leaving the floor to the pan-Arabist party of Baath. From this party emerged Hafiz al-Assad, father of the current President¹⁶⁴ of the Arab Republic of Syria. Assad – and the Baath party in general – were notorious for the perpetual violations of human rights and the repression against any kind of hostility, thus representing an authentic autocracy and everyone against the regime was persecuted by the secret services – the *Mukhabarat*. Assad, even being part of a religious minority, drafted an agreement with Sunnis and the population was satisfied of the government. Moreover, Hafiz al-Assad was alleged to be close to the Russian sphere of influence, thus causing the discontent of many Western powers – in particular the one of Washington –, in addition to alignment with the Iranian regime and the support to Hezbollah in the war against Israel¹⁶⁵. Nevertheless, with the collapse of the USSR, Syria got closer to the USA during the Gulf War, betraying Saddam Hussein and strengthening the relationships with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Notwithstanding this, when Hafiz al-Assad died in 2000, the events have taken a different course. Hafiz has been succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad¹⁶⁶ who, initially, was seen with optimism by Western media because of his possible inclination towards democracy. However, the Alawites did not want to leave power to the Sunni majority and Assad's way of ruling in the first years mirrored his father's approach. Despite some economic reforms, the drought which hit Syria from 2006, in addition to the alarming estimates about the country's poverty and the semi-capitalist policy of Assad caused great discontent among the population. In the meantime, Syria had been isolated and sanctioned by the United States, after Assad's attempt to destabilize the U.S. occupation in Iraq. This isolation paradoxically was more problematic to the U.S., since it caused the strengthening of relations with Iran which is part of what Bush called "Axis of Evil"¹⁶⁷.

When in 2011 the so-called "Arab Spring" rose in many countries of the MENA, Syria has not been spared. The first protests burst in the city of Daraa, when a group of youths was arrested and tortured after having intimidated Assad through a wall art¹⁶⁸. The demonstrations emerged after the arrest and torture of the young people and spread also in the cities of Homs, Hama and Damascus. As expected, they were brutally repressed by the police which did not hesitate in committing serious crimes. In the meanwhile, a new "army" merged in Syria, that is the Free Syrian Army¹⁶⁹, de facto composed by members of *Al Nusra*. The latter, also known as the *Al-Qaeda* of Syria, "is a Sunni opposition umbrella group [...]" formed in 2011 when *Al-Qaeda* in Iraq sent some of its members to establish new cells in Syria. It "[...] aims to overthrow the Assad regime

¹⁶² John McHugo, *Syria: A Recent History*, (London: Saqi Books, 2014).

¹⁶³ M.Izady, "Syria: Religious Composition in 2010", https://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Syria_Religion_Detailed_Ig.png

¹⁶⁴ John McHugo, *Syria: A Recent History*.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem

¹⁶⁸ Aziz ur Rehman, *Syrian Civil War & Struggle for Survival of Assad Regime: and its Impacts on Wider Middle East*, (Mauritius: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2020).

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem

and establish an Islamic Emirate in Syria”¹⁷⁰. Easily, due to the “heart-felt” need of foreign actors to intervene in other countries’ civil wars, foreign investments, both in military and financial assets, increased. Moreover, in 2013, another ethnic group entered the scene, the Kurds. The latter – leading Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – exploited the possibility of entering Syria from the north, while the government was also distracted by the incursions of extremist jihadists from the east. 2015 represented the real lowest point of the regime, when 1/3 of Syria was under the control of ISIS – which entered in Syria already in 2013 – and the Kurds have consolidated their control in the northern part of the country¹⁷¹. After the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015), United States, France and United Kingdom decided to intervene against the jihadists reaching, also considering the following years, more than 11.000 air strikes against ISIS. Not to mention that, after some years of media hypocrisy during which any kind of mission has been denied, Washington admitted the existence of an authorized program called “Operation Timber Sycamore”, which had the goals of providing Syrian rebels with military training and weapons¹⁷². Nevertheless, about two years later the program was suspended because it fell short of the expectations of the Congress. Details of this program are for obvious reasons classified. Assad tried to contrast the foreign intervention pushing the media channels where he proclaimed himself defender of the Syrian people, but the harsh repressions of the governmental forces naturally shaped the public opinion of Western powers towards the willingness to remove Assad from the regime.

With the diffused international intervention in 2016, the Caliphate (ISIS) started losing territories and from 2017 Assad start regaining territories both at the expenses of jihadists and rebels (the last rebel enclave in Aleppo was captured in 2016¹⁷³) bringing Syria to the current division in 4 main areas: the area on the Western side of the Euphrates controlled by Assad, the north-east still controlled by the Kurdish forces – the famous region of Rojava –, the Idlib governorate managed by the so-called “Syrian Salvation Government”, and the north-west controlled by Türkiye from 2016 when Erdogan decided to intervene¹⁷⁴. For the purpose of this paper, it is also crucial to highlight the presence of the U.S. military base of Al-Tanf in the south-eastern desert; the base hosts 200 American soldiers, and which is considered as a “deconfliction area” beyond which the U.S. is convinced there are Iran-backed forces, exacerbating more the tensions between the two states¹⁷⁵. In more than 11 years of war two main international factions have formed:

- the U.S.-led coalition supported by the United Kingdom, France, Türkiye, Qatar and naturally Israel and Saudi Arabia; coalition against Assad and, by extension, against Iran;
- the faction composed by Iran, Hezbollah (Iran-backed), Lebanon and Russia; faction which supports Assad through military and financial aid.

¹⁷⁰ Mapping Militant Organizations, “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham”, Stanford University, last modified June 2021, <https://stanford.io/44gOB4o>.

¹⁷¹ Sam Dagher, *Assad or We Burn the Country: How One Family's Lust for Power Destroyed Syria*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2019).

¹⁷² Stephen R. Weissman, “Covert Action, Congressional Inaction”, *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/covert-action-congressional-inaction>.

¹⁷³ Joselyn Reding, *The History Of The Battle For Aleppo And The Syrian Civil War*, 2021.

¹⁷⁴ William Hale, *Turkey, the U.S., Russia, and the Syrian Civil War*, *Insight Turkey* 21, no. 4 (2019): 25–40.

¹⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, “Al-Tanf, Syria”, April 12, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list/flashpoints/al-tanf-syria>.

This war represented and still represents one of the greatest humanitarian disasters after the two World Wars, due to the shocking number of deaths and displaced caused by the conflict. Below, **Tab 3.0**¹⁷⁶ shows the number of “Documented deaths by civilian status and year”:

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Unknown	1024	3120	3691	2289	2884	2869	2374	3044	1306	514	1	23,116
Contradictory	1697	12220	13923	10531	3094	1419	516	889	260	199	20	44,768
Civilian	5694	31075	25920	19123	17351	16239	10940	9055	4644	2526	783	143,350
Non-civilian	1690	14458	14998	14650	26630	24590	20501	10384	6114	4490	470	138,975

This tragic number of deaths must be added to the incredibly vast amount of displaced, who have been “forced to flee their homes in search of safety”¹⁷⁷. According to UN estimates, more than 6.8 million Syrians are internally displaced, while about 5.5 million live in the neighboring countries of Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Naturally, many displaced also reached the European union, with Germany as the leading host country¹⁷⁸.

It is necessary to mention that many diplomatic talks to reach peace have taken place. Among these talks there are the “Geneva peace talks” of 2016, “a UN-backed conference for facilitating a political transition led by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura”¹⁷⁹, which failed in finding acceptable terms for both the parties involved. The following year 2017, another round of talks started resulting in a stall. Lastly, also in 2017, the peace talks initiated in Kazakhstan and involving Russia, Iran, Türkiye, and Syria’ representatives resulted in a cease-fire agreement and de-escalation zones. Nonetheless, the Assad regime conducted attacks against rebels resulting in the umpteenth failure of diplomatic talks¹⁸⁰. Other talks took place from 2019 to 2022, each of which failed. Furthermore, in 2021, “Assad won re-election as President, in a poll condemned by the US, UK and EU as unfair and unfree”¹⁸¹.

For these reasons, the Syrian Civil War is still an ongoing conflict which has no clear and certain outcome; in the last few years the situation has not changed and there are active confrontations between the government and the rebels, which unfortunately result in many casualties, mostly civilians. In September 2022, the head of the U.N. Investigation Commission on Syria, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, stated that "Syria cannot afford a return to larger-scale fighting, but that is where it may be heading".¹⁸²

This first section of the Syrian Civil War was meant to provide the readers with a general framework of the war per se and will now be followed by a detailed description of the involvement of the USA and Iran, followed by a brief excursus of their main allies’ intervention.

¹⁷⁶ UNHCHR, “Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic”, Report of the United Nations, June 28, 2022.

¹⁷⁷ USA for UNHCR, “Syria Refugee Crisis Explained”, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem

¹⁷⁹ Centre for Preventive Action, “Conflict in Syria”, last updated February 15, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria>.

¹⁸⁰ H. Alkshali, and S. Sirgany, and L. Smith-Spark, “Syria: Russia, Turkey, Iran agree on safe zones at ceasefire talks”, CNN, <https://cnn.it/41vAkig>.

¹⁸¹ UK Parliament, *The Syrian civil war: Timeline and statistics*, House of Commons Library.

¹⁸² Maya Gebeily, “Syria may 'return to larger-scale fighting,' U.N. warns in new report”, Reuters, September 14, 2022, <https://reut.rs/41Xgblb>.

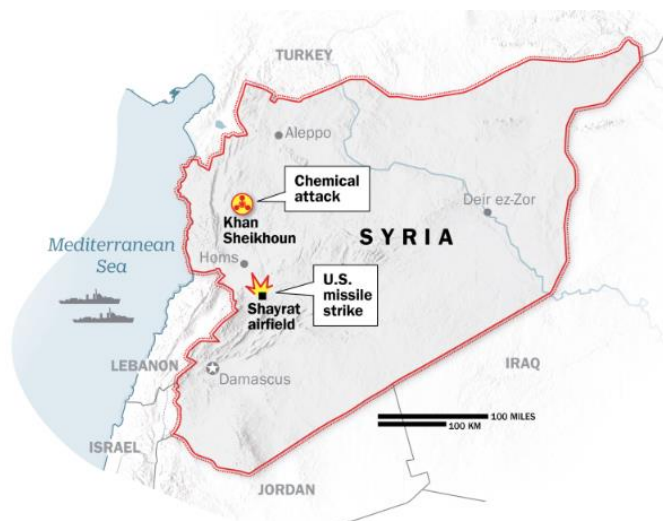
2.1 THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: U.S. INVOLVEMENT

The United States has been involved in the Syrian War since it began in 2011. The U.S. initially provided non-lethal aid and support to the Syrian opposition, but later expanded its involvement to include military operations against ISIS and other extremist groups in Syria. The main reasons behind the intervention of Washington were: the possibility to make Syria enter in the Western sphere of influence (since, together with Iran, it was the only country not being under the control of the Western powers)¹⁸³, the willingness to stop Iran and Hezbollah, and to limit China's and Russia's influence in the Middle East¹⁸⁴.

In particular the U.S. provided support to the opposition groups including logistical equipment and humanitarian assistance. Later, Washington also began providing military aid and training to select the best members to engage the Syrian army – as expected by “Operation Timber Sycamore” –. In addition to this kind of support, the White House also put a great effort in providing weapons, training, and other forms of assistance to the newly created SDF (2015) and has worked closely with them in carrying out operations against ISIS. Instead, regarding a more direct intervention, the U.S. has been active with air strikes and troop deployment. To go more into detail, Washington has carried out thousands of air strikes against ISIS targets in Syria, in particular under the Trump administration, often in coordination with ground operations by Syrian Kurdish and Arab fighters of the SDF. The initial attacks against the jihadists were aimed at protecting Americans in Erbil and assisting Iraqi forces seeking to retake Mosul Dam. The following alleged strikes intended to address the humanitarian catastrophe of Yazidi people trapped by IS on Iraq's Sinjar mountains.

Among the air attacks, it is worth mentioning few:

- April 6th, 2017, strike with Tomahawk missiles on Al-Shayrat Air Base, that is the one “from which the chemical attack on Syria's Idlib province was launched”¹⁸⁵, attack ordered by Assad against his own people. This U.S. attack was then followed, in 2018, by a second direct attack in coordination with France and UK always to stop chemical attacks by Assad – locations showed in **Map 5.0**¹⁸⁶ –.



MAP 5.0

¹⁸³ Ahed Alhous, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards Syria: Perceiving Syria*, (Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy, 2015).

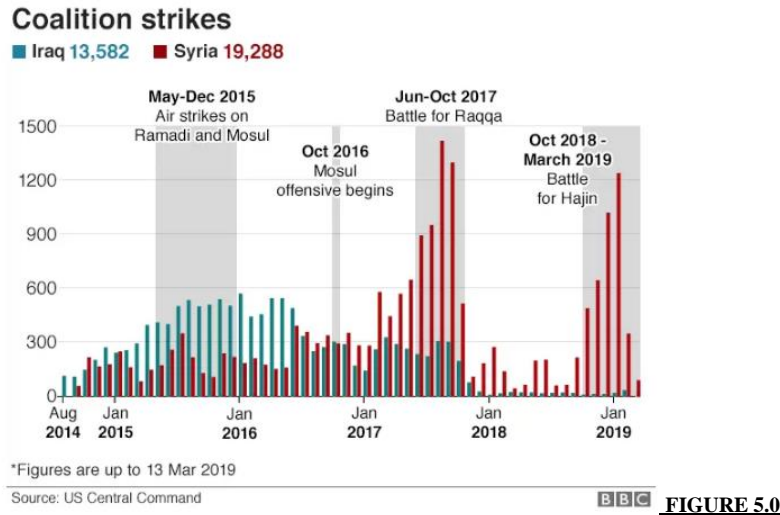
¹⁸⁴ Carla E. Humud, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, Congressional research Service, November 8, 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Jim Garamone, “Trump Orders Missile Attack in Retaliation for Syrian Chemical Strikes”, U.S. Department of Defense, April 6, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1144601/trump-orders-missile-attack-in-retaliation-for-syrian-chemical-strikes/>.

¹⁸⁶ Aric Jenkins, “This Map Shows Where the Syria Chemical Attack and U.S. Missile Strikes Took Place”, Time, April 7, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3N4tFY9>

- The 2021 attacks – in February and June – to facilities controlled by Iranian-backed militias. Attacks authorized as response to the attacks on the American coalition and personnel in Iraq.
- The recent attack – August 24, 2022 – to facilities used by militias linked to Tehran in the area of Deir Ez-Zor, in response to the drone attacks by Iranian-backed militias to the base of al-Tanf¹⁸⁷.

“The Trump administration relied on a notion of ancillary self-defense under the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs to provide a legal basis for attacks on Syrian and pro-Syrian government forces that it deemed a direct threat to counter-IS operations, including Iranian-backed militias”¹⁸⁸. Hereby, **Figure 5.0**¹⁸⁹ witnesses the incredible amount of air strikes per year, conducted by the U.S.-led coalition.



Instead, with regard to the troops directly deployed in Syria, the U.S. has deployed many troops to Syria (approximately 2000), primarily to support the fight against ISIS and it has also established several military bases in northeastern Syria, where it has collaborated closely with the SDF.

Nowadays, with a little uncertainty due to the classified acts and data, the United States maintained several military bases in Syria to support its operations against ISIS and other extremist groups.

To provide the readers with some technical data about the deaths caused by the U.S.-led coalition, **Tab 4.0**¹⁹⁰ below, shows the number of deaths throughout the war.

TAB 4.0: Documented deaths by actors/groups alleged of causing the death and year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Coalition Forces³⁰	0	1	9	126	292	583	1,488	273	59	5	23	2,859

In the recent years the United States has partially pulled out from Syria with respect to its previous engagement, also considering the tensions with Ankara considering Washington’s support for the Kurdish YPG, and because the White House retains that the ISIS has been defeated. However, also under President Biden, it still

¹⁸⁷ DW, “US airstrikes target Iran-backed militia in Syria”, August 24, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/us-airstrikes-target-iran-backed-militia-in-syria/a-62905530>.
¹⁸⁸ Tess Bridgerman and Brianna Rosen, “Still at War: The United States in Syria”, Just Security, April 29, 2022, <https://bit.ly/41L1X6Y>.
¹⁸⁹ BBC, “IS fight: US-led coalition says it killed 1,300 civilians in Syria and Iraq”, May 31, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48473979>.
¹⁹⁰ UNHCHR, *Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic*, Report of the United Nations, June 28, 2022.

maintains troops (estimated 900¹⁹¹) in the country to continue to fight against ISIS – according to “Operation Inherent Resolve” –, to limit Iran’s hegemonic lust in the region, and to support Israel.

U.S. involvement in the Syrian War has been controversial, with critics arguing that the U.S. has not done enough to support opposition forces and that its focus on fighting ISIS has swayed efforts away from the broader Syrian conflict. Others argue that U.S. involvement has contributed to the destabilization of the region and has failed to achieve its objectives in the fight against ISIS¹⁹².

2.2 THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: IRAN INVOLVEMENT

As well as the United States, Iran has been immediately involved in the Syrian Civil War, providing weapons, training and financial assistance to the Assad regime. Before going more into detail, it is necessary to reiterate the reasons for the involvement of Iran in such conflicts. From a strategic point of view, Syria is a key ally for Iran for two reasons: firstly, Syria has been the only Arab country to support Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, and secondly Syria facilitates the weapons’ trade between Tehran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Moreover, Khamenei also sees the conflict in Syria as part of the regional tensions with Saudi Arabia which, as will be presented, supports opposition forces and seeks to contain Iran's influence¹⁹³. This last aspect is linked with the ideological point of view, according to which the conflict the Syrian enters in the broader conflict between Sunnis and Shiites and being Assad from a branch of the Shi’a Islam – the Alawites –, Iran feels the need to protect the current regime.

In practical terms, Iran has supported the government of Damascus both directly and by proxy. Starting with the latter, Tehran immediately started training pro-regime forces, in addition to supplying them with weapons and monetary support. Recalling General Soleimani, he was one of the Generals in charge of the training of soldiers through the Quds Force and in general the IRGC. Among the forces trained there is the Fatemiyoun Brigade, a group of Afghan Shia fighter formed in 2014 to support Assad¹⁹⁴. More in general, the forces “created” by Iran to defend Syria are the: National Defense Forces (NDF) – dismantled in 2016, and mainly operational in Homs –, the Local Defense Forces (LDF) – formed by fighter from Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa, and considered as part of the Syrian army – and other local and foreign militias¹⁹⁵.

Regarding the direct involvement, the same IRGC and Quds force have fought along the pro-regime forces, becoming an “integrated component of the regime’s backbone”¹⁹⁶. The immediate presence of Iranian troops in Syria, along with the territories in control of Iran-backed militias, is witnessed by the 2013 **Map 6.0** below, which updated to 2020 (**Map 7.0**) – considering the substantial withdrawal of U.S. troops – shows a net increase in the territories controlled by Iran for the Assad regime¹⁹⁷.

¹⁹¹ Carla E. Humud, “Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response”, Congressional Research Service, November 8, 2022, <https://bit.ly/41BFh9m>.

¹⁹² Cathrin Schaer, “What does the US actually want in Syria?”, DW, August 31, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/what-does-the-us-actually-want-in-syria/a-62982425>

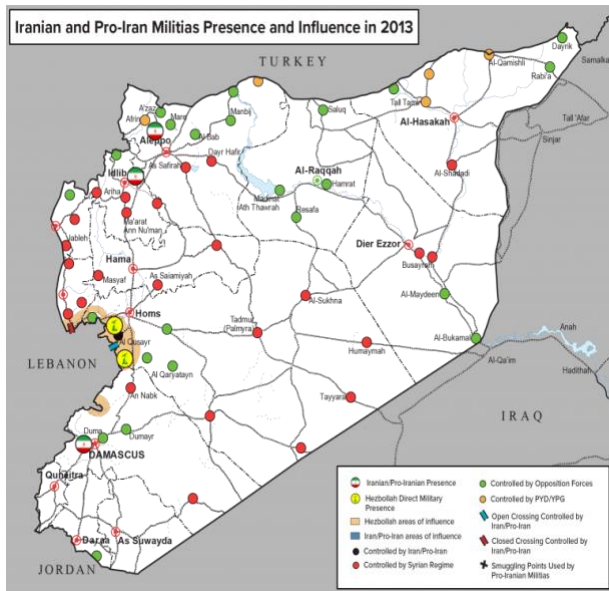
¹⁹³ Paul Bucala, *Iran’s New Way of War in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War, February 2017.

¹⁹⁴ Ahmad Shuja Jamal, “Mission Accomplished? What’s next for Iran’s Afghan Fighters in Syria”, War on the Rocks, February 13, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/mission-accomplished-whats-next-irans-afghan-fighters-syria/>.

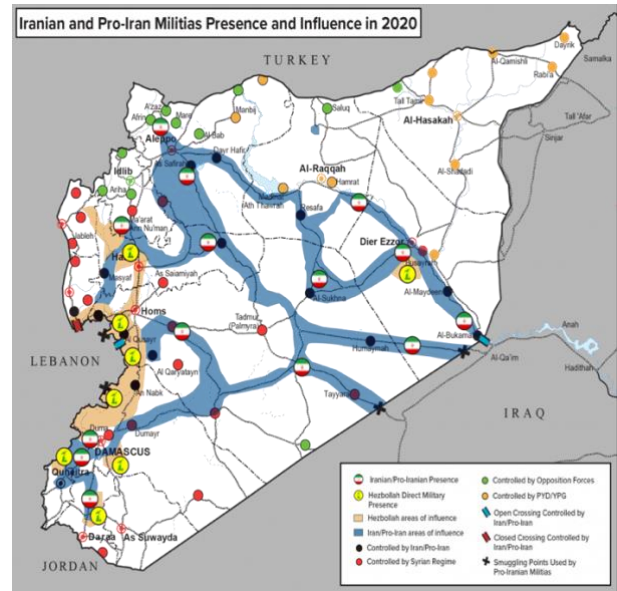
¹⁹⁵ Navvar Saban, “Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria”, Atlantic Council, November, 5, 2020, <https://bit.ly/41AaIWZ>.

¹⁹⁶ Israel Defense Force, “The History of Iran in Syria”, January 24, 2018, <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/iran/the-history-of-iran-in-syria/>.

¹⁹⁷ Paul Bucala, *Iran’s New Way of War in Syria*.



MAP 6.0¹⁹⁸



MAP 7.0¹⁹⁹

The maps show the areas controlled by Iran (Iranian flags) and the ones controlled by Hezbollah (yellow and green flags) in addition to the government territories (in red).

The Iranian intervention in the war has also showed direct conflict with the United States, which can be interpreted also as a continuum of an already exacerbated relationship caused by the withdrawal of Washington from the JCPOA, which caused Tehran’s wrath and the restart of some nuclear activities. The attacks were directed to U.S. troops and bases by Iran-backed militias but with Iranian military equipment. As reported by **Tab 5.0**²⁰⁰, Iran, along with the pro-regime forces, Russia and the other allies have caused the highest number of casualties in the war, particularly high if compared to the one of the U.S.-led coalition.

TAB 5.0: Documented deaths by actors/groups alleged of causing the death and year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Government and allies	3,958	25,132	25,747	15,910	20,881	19,654	11,330	8,882	3,936	1,780	319	137,529

2.3 THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: ISRAEL, SAUDI ARABIA AND RUSSIA

This section is devoted to the brief analysis of the interventions in the Syrian War by the main allies of the U.S. and Iran, namely Israel and Saudi Arabia for Washington and Russia for Tehran.

Starting with Israel, it has largely stayed out of the civil conflict between the Syrian government and opposition forces, even if it regularly conducted air strikes in the Syrian territory against Iranian and Hezbollah targets which have been identified as a threat to its security. More specifically, in the early years of the Syrian conflict, Israel primarily deployed air strikes to prevent Iranian weapons shipments destined to the terrorist groups of Hezbollah in Lebanon²⁰¹. Starting from 2017, when the Assad government regained the control of large portions of Syria’s territory, the Israeli government expressed intentions to prevent Iran from constructing and operating bases or advanced weapons manufacturing facilities in Syria. The Israeli attacks to

¹⁹⁸ Navvar Saban, “Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria”, Atlantic Council, November, 5, 2020, <https://bit.ly/41AalWZ>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem

²⁰⁰ UNHCHR, “Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic”, Report of the United Nations, June 28, 2022.

²⁰¹ Helle Malmvig, *Israel’s Conflicting Interests in the Syrian War*, Danish Institute for International Studies, 20.

Iranian targets in Syria seem being at the base of many Iranian strikes to U.S. troops, as a form of retaliation²⁰². This “neutral intervention”, aimed only at self-protection, resulted in very few casualties caused by Israel. Moreover, this is witnessed by a UN report which integrates the Israeli-caused killings together with those caused by the Jordanian Border Guard, as showed in **Tab 6.0**²⁰³ below:

TAB 6.0: Documented deaths by actors/groups alleged of causing the death and year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Israeli Forces and Jordanian Border Guard.	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	85	39	128

It is important to consider that Israel has not been so invasive in the Syrian Civil War since the situation between the two countries is already tense due to the territory of the Golan Heights. It refers to the border region subtracted by Israel from Syria during the 1967 Six-Day War; the land has been held by Israel since then and was subject to de facto Israeli annexation in 1981. However, from 1974 there has not been confrontations and in 2008 talks between Syria and Israel had started, even if they had been interrupted due to the Syrian Civil War²⁰⁴.

Regarding Saudi Arabia, instead, it can be argued that it has assisted, in coordination with the Gulf States, the Syrian rebels and some Islamist militant groups, both financially and militarily by providing them with arms²⁰⁵. The Saudis has also provided support to the U.S.-led coalition in the operations against ISIS. The main reason for the intervention of Riyadh, was aimed at going against Iran, whose involvement in the war has been perceived as a way to increase its impact in the Middle East and moving closer the hegemony of the region. For this reason, Riyadh desires to replace Bashar al-Assad with a pro-Saudi, anti-Iranian leader. As the fighting progressed and became harsher, Saudi increased its supply of weapons to rebels to facilitate the overthrow of Assad. Saudi is reported to have also participated in the “Operation Timber Sycamore” with the United States. Furthermore, when Russia entered the conflict to support the regime, Saudi increased again the support to anti-government groups²⁰⁶. Regarding the number of deaths caused by Saudi Arabia, even if most of the intervention of Riyadh was by proxy, it has been confirmed that Saudi Arabia’s air force participated in U.S.-led coalition bombings against ISIS. The number of deaths is reported in the previous **Tab 4.0**, since in such a scenario it is very difficult to count them per se.

Lastly, since the paper is focused on states as actors – not to involve too many variables in the paper –, only Russia will be considered in the context of Iranian allies, even if other groups as the Lebanese Hezbollah have supported Tehran in its actions. Russia, as described in the background, has been a long-standing ally of the Syrian government since Hafiz regime. It supported Syria politically, economically, and militarily since the Soviet era. From the birth of the war in 2011, Russia has confirmed this support to Assad, and the intervention of Moscow happened in 3 different phases: a first phase of diplomatic support in

²⁰² Helle Malmvig, *Israel's Conflicting Interests in the Syrian War*, Danish Institute for International Studies, 20.

²⁰³ UNHCHR, “Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic”, Report of the United Nations, June 28, 2022.

²⁰⁴ BBC, “Golan Heights profile”, January 17, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14724842>.

²⁰⁵ Benedetta Berti, and Yoel Guzansky, “Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy on Iran and the Proxy War in Syria: Toward a New Chapter?”, July 29, 2015, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/23739770.2014.11446600?needAccess=true&role=button>.

²⁰⁶ Laila Bassam, and Tom Perry, “Saudi support to rebels slows Assad attacks: pro-Damascus sources”, Reuters, November 6, 2015, <https://reut.rs/44aWaJV>.

international forums and at UN meetings, sided with the supply of weapons and other military equipment²⁰⁷; a second phase where a direct military intervention took place. From 2015, indeed, Moscow launched a full-scale military intervention including airstrikes against ISIS and other rebel groups, as well as the deployment of troops to help the Syrian army, justifying the intervention as defense to the Syrian sovereignty²⁰⁸. It is also argued that the Syrian War was for Russia a fertile ground to try new weapons, such as the chemical weapons supplied to Assad, in addition to the geopolitical willingness to limit the U.S. influence in the Middle East. The result was the regaining of territories by Assad in 2017. Remarkable is that Russia has also maintained a significant military presence in Syria, with bases such as the Tartus naval facility, active from 1971. Lastly, Russia has actively participated in the talks to promote the end of this war. The involvement of Moscow was also aimed, in a certain sense, at supporting Tehran in its rise to Middle East hegemon. As for the other countries, Russian intervention caused many casualties, which however as for the case of Iran are reported by the UN in the same field of the killings of “Government and allies”, as showed in **Tab 5.0**.

This section was necessary to briefly present the involvement of U.S. and Iran. Before moving on to the analysis, the second case study will follow.

3. THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

The Yemen Civil War is a complex ongoing conflict which began in 2014, leading the already poor country to a social and a political-economic collapse. Despite the foreign intervention – later analyzed – the primary dispute is between the Yemeni government, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi and supported by a Saudi-led coalition, and the Houthi rebels, also known under the name of *Ansar Allah*²⁰⁹ (Partisans of God), from northern Yemen and backed by Iran.

Yemen is one of the oldest inhabited places on earth, always important pole of maritime exchanges to which the Romans referred with the term “Arabia Felix”²¹⁰. The strait of Bab el-Mandeb is notably important for its strategic position linking the Mediterranean and the Red Sea with the Indian ocean and South-East Asia. The British noticed this advantage and in in the mid-19th century they occupied the port of Aden, transforming the city into a colony²¹¹. After the independence from the Ottomans and the coup planned by the Egyptian President Nasser, the country became known as the Arab Republic of Yemen²¹², principal cause of the following conflicts. When in the southern Yemen the Europeans left the country, the new People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was proclaimed²¹³. It was influenced by Marxist ideas, reason also why Yemen is the only republic in the peninsula. Only at the end of the ‘70s, the north-south disputed was “solved” and the Colonel Saleh, supported by the General People’s Congress, made himself the leader of Yemenites, apart from the *Al-Akhdam*, that is a caste marginalized. In the ‘90s after the collapse of the USSR, the real unification of north

²⁰⁷ William Hale, “Turkey, the U.S., Russia, and the Syrian Civil War.” *Insight Turkey* 21, no. 4 (2019): 25–40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26842776>.

²⁰⁸ Samuel Charap, and Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, *Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria*, Rand Corporation, 2019.

²⁰⁹ Bruce Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?”, Brookings, December 18, 2017, <https://bit.ly/41xjfta>.

²¹⁰ Robert Lambert Playfair, *A History of Arabia Felix or Yemen*, (HardPress, 2017).

²¹¹ Ibidem

²¹² Ibidem

²¹³ Ibidem

and south took place, with Saleh as leader. The south was, however, excluded despite having the largest number of oil fields and gas reserves. A failed coup by southern Marxists was repressed but led to the emergence of one of the current factions: the Houthis. Founded by Hussein al-Houthi, this group is ideologically very close to Iran, being majorly formed by believers of a branch of Shi'a Islam, the Zaidi branch. Moreover, al-Houthi has always been in direct contact with Khamenei²¹⁴. This group later will be known as *Ansar Allah*. In 2004 the harshest struggle yet occurred, when Saleh was accused by the Houthis to be corrupted, too close to Western governments and especially to Saudi Arabia, considered as foreigners and invaders. The latter point helped the Houthis to receive support and recruit new “soldiers”.

As the Syrian Civil War, this conflict reached its deepest point after the 2011 Arab Spring, which led to the ouster of long-time president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who transferred power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, in 2012²¹⁵. Hadi was expected to re-establish stability in the country, premise which unfortunately has not materialized, since the failure of reaching an agreement with Houthis and the following cut to subsidies increased the tensions. In January 2015, the Houthis asked Hadi to resign and unexpectedly returned to Saleh, who, to regain power, was expected to guarantee them recognition in the government. Due to the increasing pression, President Hadi had to leave the power to the ad-interim president of the Parliament, close to Saleh²¹⁶. Notwithstanding this, the Houthis did not recognize the government, and in February transferred the power to a revolutionary committee in the north of Yemen. Saleh's loyal military members, supported by the Houthis and despite the help foreign allies, in September seized control of Sana'a, causing the flee of President Hadi to Aden. Here he declared to be the only legitimate and internationally recognized President of Yemen, and proclaimed Aden as transitional capital. The new leader of *Ansar Allah*, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi affirmed to continue fighting against the terrorist cells in the peninsula, including the members of the *Al-Qaeda* in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and surprisingly the supporters and closest persons to Hadi. The latter, after the seizure of Aden, was forced to flee to Riyadh where he still lives²¹⁷.

In response, Riyadh and a coalition of Arab states initiated a military intervention in March 2015 to reinstate the Hadi government and counter the Iranian influence in the region, whose goal was again to establish itself as hegemon of the Middle East – in this case influencing groups in the Arabic Peninsula –. Under Hobbesian lenses, the reaction of Riyadh was merely due to fear. In fact, the tensions with Iran could have been brought to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and Yemen in the hand of Houthis could have meant the closure of the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb. The result of the stop in exportations of petroleum, the consequence of which would have been the loss of power and richness by Saudi, thus a crisis. Consequently, “Operation Decisive Storm” was carried on by the Riyadh²¹⁸. The Saudi-led coalition received large logistical and intelligence support from the United States, United Kingdom, and France, with Washington in particular supporting Saudi and its allies to counter Tehran's ambitions. In 2017 another remarkable event occurred: the assassination of Saleh. As matter of fact, the latter promised to stop the attacks of his soldiers if Riyadh and

²¹⁴ Marieke Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²¹⁵ Adam Baron, *Civil War in Yemen: Imminent and Avoidable*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015.

²¹⁶ Ibidem

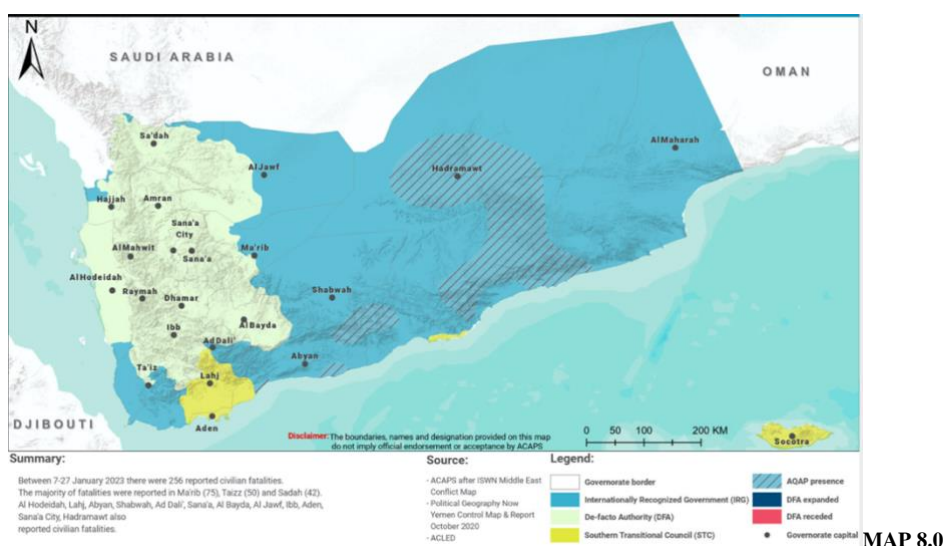
²¹⁷ Ibidem

²¹⁸ Ginny Hill, *Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Abu Dhabi would have removed the embargo and stopped the military interventions. This promise has not been well accepted by the Houthis who, indeed, decided to kill him while he was escaping²¹⁹. This assassination has not been welcomed by Saleh’s supporters who, in fact, got closer to governmental groups fighting *Ansar Allah*. In April 2017, an internal fracture in the group led by Hadi occurred, leading to the creation of the Southern Transitional Council, with an independent government in Aden aimed at replacing the one in Sana’a. During all this period, despite some “ceasefire agreements”, the struggle never stopped also because of the tensions between Washington and Tehran for the Iranian nuclear program. When Trump withdrew from it, he also asked Khamenei to retreat the support to Houthis so that negotiations could resume, but the *Ayatollah* refused, and nothing changed in the Yemeni scenario. Another key event occurred in 2019, when the United Arab Emirates decided to retire the support to Sana’a, due to the high costs, difficulties encountered and the diverse goals with regard to Saudi Arabia²²⁰.

The development of the warfare has been further exacerbated when also other two actors entered the scene, exploiting the Civil War to wreak even more havoc. These actors are: as in the Syrian case, ISIS, and the so-called *Al-Qaeda* in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)²²¹. The AQAP rose in 2009 from Yemenites and Saudis branches of *Al-Qaeda* already established in those countries²²², and during the Yemeni conflict diffused in the governorates of Marib and Hadhramaut. Nonetheless, its intervention has been harshly repressed by the counterterrorism attacks of Abu Dhabi and especially those of Washington, which already in 2015 killed with drones the leader and founder of the AQAP, Nasir al-Wuhayshi. The attacks on AQAP and ISIS represent the only direct intervention of the U.S. in the Yemen Civil War²²³, even if also the Houthis have been considered terrorists by the USA from 2017 when President Trump decided to consider them as such – idea later changed under Biden –.

Here below, **Map 8.0**²²⁴, shows the current division of Yemen according to the different parties involved:



*With “De-facto authority”, scholars mean the Houthis.

²¹⁹ Gerald Feierstein, *Is There a Path Out of the Yemen Conflict?: Why It Matters*, PRISM 7, no. 1 (2017): 16–31.

²²⁰ Jeremy M. Sharp, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*, Congressional research Service, last updated September 17, 2019.

²²¹ *Ibidem*

²²² Mapping Militant Organizations, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.” Stanford University, last modified February 2020, <https://stanford.io/3Nq7yfo>.

²²³ *Ibidem*

²²⁴ Humanitarian data Exchange, “Yemen: Areas of control”, <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/yemen-areas-of-control>

It may seem that no concrete effort to achieve peace has been done, even if facts would tell otherwise. In fact, many peace talks have been conducted with the UN at the center. Some of these talks have also been more concrete, and specifically three: the Stockholm agreement, the Riyadh agreement and the Joint Declaration. In detail:

- I. The Stockholm agreement, agreed in Sweden on December 13th, 2018, consists of three parts: “a ceasefire around the port city of Hudaydah, a prisoner swap, and a statement of understanding that all sides would form a committee to discuss the war-torn city Taiz”²²⁵. The coalition and the Houthis agreed to move their forces outside of Hudaydah city and port as part of the agreement. To redeployment had been planned to be overseen by the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC). This agreement did not succeed completely, however brought some results in a hopeless conflict.
- II. The Riyadh agreement, signed on November 5th, 2019, between the government of the Republic of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council. It included political, security, and economic provisions, such as the “formation of a new government, the disarmament and integration of militias and military formations under the auspices of the ministries of defense and interior, support for the Yemeni economy, and the demilitarization of Aden”²²⁶.
- III. The Joint Declaration, signed in 2020, and promoted by the U.N. Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, sets the negotiation between Houthis and the Government of Yemen in three areas: “a nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian measures, and the resumption of political processes aimed at comprehensively ending the conflict”²²⁷. Among the provisions, free access to ports and airports is guaranteed, with prior control of the means/people accessing. Also, this declaration has stalled due to impossibility of finding an agreement.

Nevertheless, despite the numerous attempts of finding a peaceful agreement, the Yemen Civil War continues to rage on, being characterized by its brutality and for the lack of a clear winner²²⁸. At this point, all parties have acknowledged that in this way no one is going to prevail, because neither the Saudi-coalition attacks nor the drone strikes to Saudi oil establishments by Houthis have had any real successful result. In 2022 Hadi, still in Riyadh, left the power to the Presidential Council hoping for a change; choice welcomed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE which decided to economically support to rebuild Yemen.

Both sides faced and are facing accusations of human rights abuses and violations of international law. The Saudi-led coalition has faced criticism for airstrikes causing numerous civilian casualties as reported by Human Rights Watch²²⁹, while the Houthis have been accused of deploying child soldiers, indiscriminate shelling, and planting landmines. Interesting to be mentioned is the request of further investigations regarding war crimes, presented by the Netherlands to the United Nations²³⁰. This request, after external pressures – Saudis, Americans and British – was withdrawn, even if there were all the motivations for such an investigation

²²⁵ Jeremy M. Sharp, “Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention”, Congressional research Service, last updated September 17, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3UYtkYV>.

²²⁶ Ibrahim Jalal, “The Riyadh Agreement: Yemen’s new cabinet and what remains to be done”, MEI, February 1, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3L07Hmh>.

²²⁷ United Nations, *Letter dated 22 January 2021 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council*.

²²⁸ Kourosh Ziabari, and Charles Schmitz, “There Are No Clear Winners in the Saudi War on Yemen”, Fair Observer, July 28, 2016, <https://bit.ly/41XlqRX>.

²²⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Yemen – Events of 2019”, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/yemen#f43786>.

²³⁰ Patrick Wintour, “Renewed calls for inquiry into alleged human rights violations in Yemen”, The Guardian, September 19, 2016, <https://bit.ly/40ts7dj>.

since the list of war crimes is very long. War crimes committed both by the coalition and by Houthis, who multiple times have used rockets against civilian targets.

The Yemen Civil War has led, according to the United Nations, to “world’s worst humanitarian crisis”²³¹ in modern times. As of 2021, the United Nation Development Program estimated that over 370.000 people have died by direct or indirect (60%) effects of the war, with at least about nine thousand being civilians²³².

Estimates for 2030 are even more tragic, with 1.3 million people expected to die if the conflict continues²³³. Millions have been displaced, and the country's infrastructure, including healthcare, education, and health systems, has been severely damaged, if not completely destroyed. The situation has been exacerbated by a Saudi-led coalition blockade that has restricted the flow of food, fuel, and medical supplies into the country. Cholera outbreaks have aggravated the strain on the already limited healthcare system. This has been followed by a dramatic phenomenon according to which people try to sell organs to receive money for buying food. Organs later re-sold to Gulf countries with a price increased tenfold²³⁴. If nothing changes and the conflicts halts, “Yemen will become the poorest country in the world”²³⁵.

Fortunately, a beacon of light has risen; as a matter of fact, various ceasefires are and have been put in place. In detail, in April 2023, “Saudi and Omani delegations held talks with Houthi officials in Yemen's capital Sanaa”²³⁶. These talks have to be counted as a continuum of Omani efforts during the last years to settle a peaceful solution to the war. Lastly, it is crucial to remember the new Chinese-brokered agreement between Riyadh and Tehran which will surely contribute to the easing of relations between the two countries also in the context of the Yemen Civil War.

This first section of the Yemen Civil War was meant to provide the readers with a general framework of the war per se and will now be followed by a detailed description of the involvement of the USA and Iran, followed by a brief excursus of their main allies’ intervention.

3.1 THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: U.S. INVOLVEMENT

As for the Syrian Civil War, the United States has been involved in the Yemeni conflict since its early stages, primarily through support for the Saudi-led coalition. Nonetheless, the intervention of Washington in this war has been much more limited. In fact, the U.S. has practically provided only military and intelligence assistance, including logistical support for Saudi-led airstrikes, as well as arms sales to Saudi Arabia and its allies. However, there are also allegations regarding the possible deployment of mercenaries through the Private Military Company (PMC) “Blackwater”, also known as “Academi”.

The interests of the United States in the Middle East are mainly economic and strategic ones, with a total lack of interest in the conditions of people inhabiting these lands, where most countries register poor or no respect of human rights. In the context of the Yemen Civil War, the U.S. has carried on its policy already from the

²³¹ WFP, “Yemen – The world’s worst humanitarian crisis”, <https://www.wfp.org/yemen-crisis>.

²³² Taylor Hanna, and David K. Bohl, and Jonathan D. Moyer, *Assessing the Impact of War in Yemen*, UNDP, 2021.

²³³ Ibidem

²³⁴ Charlene Rodrigues, and Fuad Rajeh, “Desperate Yemenis sell organs to survive”, Al-Jazeera, September 15, 2017, <https://bit.ly/41VlktI>.

²³⁵ UNDP, “Prolonged conflict would make Yemen the poorest country in the world, UNDP study says”, September 26, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3V10FCm>.

²³⁶ Aziz El Yaakoubi, “Saudi, Omani envoys hold peace talks with Houthi leaders in Sanaa”, Reuters, April 9, 2023, <https://reut.rs/3Aml2Am>.

Obama presidency, later expanding the intervention under Trump, and finally limiting it during the Biden administration.

To go more into detail, in March 2015, when the Saudis started “Operation Decisive Storm”, President Obama announced the launch of a "Joint Planning Cell" with Riyadh to provide logistical and intelligence support to the Saudis in their military campaign in Yemen²³⁷. This assistance included aerial refueling, tactically very important for the coalition air force which could be able to spend greater time over Yemen. Moreover, in this period, Washington has also been accused of having supplied cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia, thus making it largely criticized, since cluster munitions are considered very dangerous and their use as a war crime. The White House never entered the “Cluster Munition Coalition”, the goal of which is to ban this kind of munitions; for this reason, the U.S. has not breached any international obligation.

With President Trump, the first raids took place, some of which presumably already planned under Obama. These strikes were part of the U.S. fight to terrorism in the Middle East, thus aimed at hitting AQAP or ISIS targets. Undoubtedly such attacks cannot rarely result only in military casualties; in fact, many civilians were killed during the storms. Furthermore Trump, as explained in Ch.2, concluded a \$350B agreement for the supply of weapons to Riyadh, weapons which were and are surely used in the conflict, thus making Washington an indirect party involved. The Congress tried to stop the U.S. intervention, but Trump’s veto and the low number of voters, did not allow this²³⁸.

Lastly, under Joe Biden, the U.S. decided to halt the American support to the Saudis. In fact, in early 2021, President Biden announced that the U.S. would cease support for offensive operations in the Yemeni conflict, including weapon sales to Saudi Arabia and other coalition members. In addition, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, removed the Houthis from the list of terrorist groups for the USA. Notwithstanding the premises, Biden did not implement immediately this withdrawal, and even if Biden announced a review of the weapons’ sale agreement drafted under Trump, the current President never explicitly stated when the U.S. will retreat from Yemen and has also assured the UAE that he will take into consideration to reinsert the Houthis in the list of terrorist groups. In December 2022, Bernie Sanders tried to threaten the White House by using a War Powers Resolution to require the administration to end U.S. support for Saudi military actions in Yemen, but the administration answered that a War Powers Resolution was not necessary and could even heighten the conflict. Later Sanders withdrew the resolution, also because he failed in receiving enough support²³⁹.

In any case, the continuous involvement of Washington in such regional conflicts, simply to protect its interests, has once more resulted in the death of many, whose number will never be complete, since it is hidden by the Pentagon. Biden caused few deaths, while Obama and Trump contributed more to the death of civilians, hitting also crucial infrastructures. Hereby, with **Figure 6.0**²⁴⁰, the author would like to present a comparison between the three American Presidents involved in the fight against terrorist cells of AQAP and ISIS during

²³⁷ Ali al-Mujahed and Karen DeYoung, “Saudi Arabia launches air attacks in Yemen”, The Washington Post, March 25, 2015, <https://wapo.st/3mZgZqQ>.

²³⁸ Ed Pilkington, “Dismay as Trump vetoes bill to end US support for war in Yemen”, The Guardian, April 17, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2XkObq3>.

²³⁹ Alexander Ward, “The votes weren’t there for Sanders’ Yemen resolution”, Politico, December 14, 2022, <https://politi.co/3An1SdJ>.

²⁴⁰ New America, “The War in Yemen”, <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/americas-counterterrorism-wars/the-war-in-yemen/>.

Yemen Civil War; while **Figure 7.0**²⁴¹ is intended to show how effective the strikes were, considering that “other deaths” also include civilians, among which a large majority are children:

Administration	Strikes		Deaths		
	Total	Civilians	Unknown	Militants	Total
Bush	1	0	0	6	6
Obama	185	88 – 101	33 – 52	973 – 1,241	1,094 – 1,394
Trump	106	36 – 49	29 – 37	221 – 291	286 – 377
Trump (insufficient detail)	82	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Biden	4	1	0	7	8
Total	378	125 – 151	62 – 89	1,207 – 1,545	1,394 – 1,785

In 2017, U.S. Central Command stated it had conducted 131 air strikes in Yemen, but New America has only been able to identify location and date information for some of those strikes. The strikes for which such information is lacking are labeled as “insufficient detail.”

FIGURE 6.0

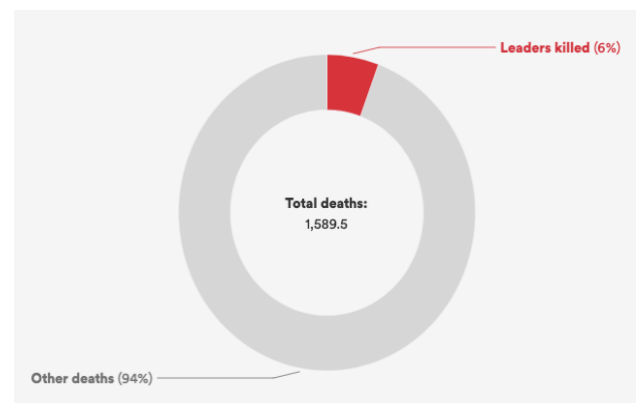


FIGURE 7.0

Naturally, the U.S. has faced criticism for its role in the conflict, particularly over concerns about civilian casualties and the insufficiency of “compelling interest in Yemen that would justify being implicated in one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises”²⁴². Amnesty International stated that “The US should have no part in war crimes in Yemen”²⁴³. This comes from the fact that there is “the absence of domestic legal authority for U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition’s operations aimed primarily at Houthi rebels”²⁴⁴.

3.2 THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: IRAN INVOLVEMENT

As well as the United States, the Iranian intervention has been much more limited in the scenario of the Yemen Civil War. Moreover, it is necessary to point out that there are no official data regarding Tehran’s involvement in the conflict since Khamenei and the Iranian Presidents have always denied their military and financial support to the Houthis. This denial was also carried on by a senior spokesman for the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, who in 2020 stated: “We provided them (Yemenis) with the experiences in technology in the defense sphere...”²⁴⁵. The only kind of support which has always been publicly announced by Iran, is the political and ideological one. The majority of Houthis are believers of a branch of Shi’a Islam, the Zaidi branch, which even being different from the Twelver branch of Iranians, is still part of Shi’a Islam, factor which pools the two actors. For this reason, and also for regional interests, Iran has also firmly criticized the Saudi-led coalition’s operations.

Recalling the military support, as in the Syrian context, Iran is also alleged to have provided military training both directly to Houthis and to fighters who were trained in Iran and later left for Yemen²⁴⁶. Many of these trainees were part of the Houthis’ siege of Sana’a in 2015, which forced Hadi to flee²⁴⁷.

²⁴¹ New America, “The War in Yemen”, <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/americas-counterterrorism-wars/the-war-in-yemen/>.

²⁴² Annelle Sheline, “Ending Counterproductive U.S. Involvement in Yemen”, Qi, February 21, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3oHxcBh>.

²⁴³ Amnesty International, “The US should have no part in war crimes in Yemen”, <https://bit.ly/2wAn7Z1>.

²⁴⁴ Luke Hartig, and Oana A. Hathaway, “Still at War: The United States in Yemen”, Just Security, March 24, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3H9D3FV>.

²⁴⁵ United Nations, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, 2021.

²⁴⁶ Yara Bayoumy, and Mohammed Ghobari, “Iranian support seen crucial for Yemen's Houthis”, Reuters, December 15, 2014, <https://reut.rs/3LrccYo>.

²⁴⁷ Ibidem

Moreover, according to the UN, Iran and the Houthis already cooperated militarily before the burst of the war. When in 2015 the United Nations passed Resolution 2216 – imposing “Sanctions on Key Figures in Militia Operations”²⁴⁸, Iran was expected to halt this cooperation. However, allegedly this halt did not occur. As a matter of fact, even considering all the denials from Tehran, there is evidence to confirm the supplying of weapons to Yemen from Iranian individuals or state entities through Iran-flagged dhows intercepted and directed to Yemen. The first interception already occurred in 2015 by the Saudi Navy when a vessel, whose crew was completely Iranian, was carrying weapons and rockets to Yemen²⁴⁹. Other interceptions occurred as reported in **Tab 7.0**²⁵⁰, based on UN data:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Interdiction Authority</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Seized material</u>
25 June 2018	United States Navy	Gulf of Aden	2,522 type 56-1 assault rifles
25 June 2019	Australian Navy	Gulf of Oman	476,000 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition and 697 bags of chemical fertilizer
25 November 2019	United States Navy	Gulf of Aden	21 9M133 anti-tank guided missile launch containers, two 358 surface-to-air missiles, components for Quds-1 and C802 cruise missiles, uncrewed aerial vehicle and waterborne improvised explosive device parts
09 February 2020	United States Navy	Gulf of Aden	150 9M133 anti-tank guided missile launch containers, three 358 surface-to-air missiles, various optical sights
17 April 2020	Saudi Arabian Navy	Gulf of Aden / Arabian Sea	3,002 type 56-1 assault rifles and 4,953 matching cartridge boxes, 9 AM-50 anti-material rifles, 49 PK-type light machine guns, various optical sights
24 June 2020	Saudi Arabian Navy	Gulf of Aden	1,298 type 56-1 assault rifles, 200 RPG-7 launchers, 50 AM-50 anti-material rifles, 5 RPG-29 launchers, 385 PK-type light machine guns, 60 heavy machine guns, 21 9M133 anti-tank guided missile launch containers, 160 Walter air rifles, various optical sights and other components

Lastly, it can also be argued that Iran sees *Ansar Allah* – whose members also believe to be – as the “axis of resistance”²⁵¹ against the U.S. and Israel. Nonetheless, it is crucial to clarify that, according to some scholars, differently from Iraqi and Syrian fighters, Houthis are not dependent from Tehran, and they maintain their independence in the decisions.

3.3 THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR: SAUDI ARABIA AND OTHER FOREIGN ACTORS

As largely presented in the section 3, Saudi Arabia is surely the main actor involved in the conflict, obviously together with the Yemeni Government and the Houthis. Riyadh, with the support of the UAE and other Arab countries (e.g., Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt), formed a military coalition which has conducted air strikes and ground operations against *Ansar Allah*. The primary goal was and still is to re-establish the Hadi

²⁴⁸ UNSC, “7426TH MEETING”, <https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11859.doc.htm>

²⁴⁹ BBC, “Yemen conflict: Iranian boat 'carrying weapons' seized”, September 30, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34401246>

²⁵⁰ United Nations, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen”.

²⁵¹ Ibidem

On the other side, Russia and North Korea are alleged to have supported the Houthis side-by-side with Iran. However, Russia compared to the Syrian case, has limited the supplying of weapons and military advise, and it has focused more on diplomatic efforts²⁵⁹. North Korea, as reported by the UN, has tried multiple time to sell weapons to Houthis, also exploiting the cooperation with Assad in Syria²⁶⁰.

These first two descriptive sections (2 and 3) were necessary to present the case studies selected for this thesis at 360-degrees. What follows is a compare and contrast analysis focused on the United States and Iran to evaluate similarities and differences in the two interventions and also between the two states. After that, the author will provide his final considerations, paving the way to the answer to the research question either confirming or rejecting his hypothesis.

4. COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: THE SYRIAN AND YEMENI CASES

This fourth section of Ch.3 will pave the path to the author's final analysis. As a matter of fact, in the following subsections, the purpose of this thesis is to directly compare the interventions of Iran and the United States in the two cases presented above. From this comparison, similarities and differences will be evaluated, also in terms of areas of influence, deaths, and efficiency. Lastly, some final remarks will also underline the similarities and differences between the interventions of the states per se. This section will be very useful to answer the research question and to confirm or deny the author's hypothesis.

4.1 COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: U.S. AND IRAN IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Starting with the similarities, it is fundamental to highlight that in the Syrian context, both the United States and Iran have been involved from the beginning and in both direct and indirect ways. The reasons for the respective interventions are the same, even if with a different purpose. This means that their interests are symmetrical but in an opposite way. In fact, if Washington decided to join the conflict to make Syria enter the Western sphere of influence and to halt the Iranian's hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East, Tehran, on the other side, joined the conflict to halt the American influence in the region and to support a long-standing ally – also ideological ally –. Influence which was spreading both directly and through U.S. main allies, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Hence, the two countries' intervention was finally aimed at limiting the opponent and the respective allies.

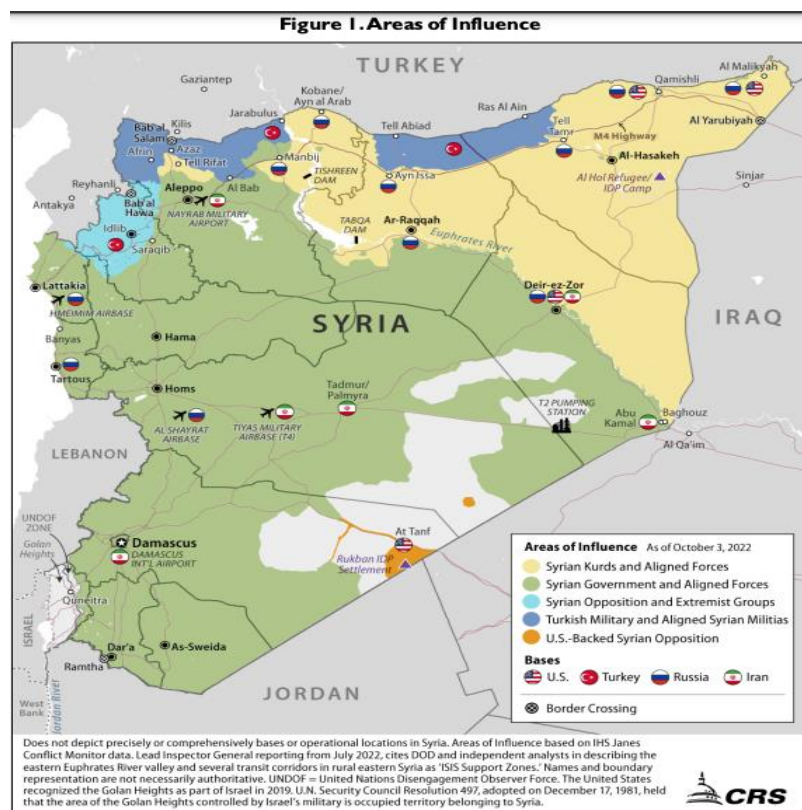
Regarding the practical/tactical similarities, both countries have firstly trained local militias, rebels, or pro-regime forces, and provided them with a large quantity of weapons and financial assistance. The United States conducted military training through "Operation Timber Sycamore", while Iran trained pro-regime militias through the Revolutionary Guards led by General Soleimani. During this period of training, it is remarkable that both Iran and the USA favoured the creation of new forces, as the American sided SDF or the Iranian sided NDF and LDF. Later, instead, Washington and Tehran directly deployed their own troops and weaponry,

²⁵⁹ Itxaso Dominguez de Olazabal, and Leyla Hamad, "Russia's Multidimensional Approach to the Yemen War" ISPI, December 20, 2019, <https://bit.ly/40xSVc7>.

²⁶⁰ Arab News, "North Korea trying to sell weapons to Houthis, secret UN report reveals", last updated August 4, 2018, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1350851/world>.

also bombing the Syrian territory, naturally with different targets. Both countries have strenuously fought against the jihadists of ISIS who, as discussed earlier, represented an important variable in the conflict.

On the other hand, the differences are more focused on the casualties derived from the respective interventions and the area controlled in the country, always considering the involvement of allies. In particular, the U.S.-led coalition has conducted an incredible number of air strikes which caused the death of many people including civilians. This number, added to the deaths derived from the logistical support and those caused by U.S. troops in the battlefield, amount to almost 3.000 people. Regarding Iran, it is clear that the casualties caused by the pro-regime forces, thus also the Revolutionary Guards, is enormously higher. In fact, as reported also in **Tab 5.0**, the fatalities derived by the government and its allies amount to over 137.000. Instead, regarding the areas controlled by Washington and/or Iran, always keeping into consideration the local militias allied with them, as can be noted in **Map 9.0**²⁶¹, nowadays are clearly in favor of pro-regime forces, also because of the partial withdrawal of the United States.



Interesting to point out again in this dissertation is that from 2016, the United States has a base in the desert, that is the base of Al-Tanf.

4.2 COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: U.S. AND IRAN IN THE YEMEN CIVIL WAR

As well as in the Syrian cases, both Iran and the United States have been involved in the Yemen Civil War from its early stages. It would be even more precise to specify that they both supported the factions involved in the conflict from before the struggle burst out. This can be explained by the fact that the U.S. has always been an ally of Saudi Arabia – an authentic faction of the conflict aside the government –, while the

²⁶¹ Carla E. Humud, "Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response", Congressional research Service, November 8, 2022, <https://bit.ly/41BFh9m>.

Houthis, from the group's birth, have been supported by Tehran and have also established cooperation agreements. A similarity between Iran and the USA in the Yemeni conflict, is that both had a much more limited role, limiting the intervention to the supply of weapons. Naturally there are exceptions by both sides: the U.S., indeed, in addition to the Joint Planning Cell with Riyadh, also directly bombed Yemen. Nevertheless, the strikes involved only the areas controlled by the AQAP or ISIS and Houthis have never been directly targeted. Moreover, Washington is also alleged to have financed mercenaries of the PMC Blackwater to intervene. However, the U.S. denied any accusation, helped by the lack of concrete proof. Whereas Iran, is alleged to have also trained militias from Yemen in homeland, and then deployed them in the conflict.

On the other side, the most noteworthy difference between Iran and the U.S. in the Yemeni case is that the U.S. has never denied their sale of weapons to the Saudi-led coalition and the attacks to the AQAP and ISIS. While Iran has never confirmed the allegation of their military support to the Houthis, and it has always rejected claims of involvement other than ideological. Furthermore, while the U.S. allies were heavily involved – except for Israel –, differently from the Syrian case, Tehran's allies as Russia or North Korea, have had a very limited impact, with few weapons' supplies.

Lastly, it is crucial to highlight that, despite uncertainties, the deaths caused by the USA can be quantified – about 1500 –, while the ones derived by a potential Iranian involvement cannot be computed, due to the lack of official data.

4.3 COMPARE&CONTRAST ANALYSIS: FINAL REMARKS

As showed in the two previous sections, the interventions of Washington and Tehran have been very similar for certain aspects, while totally different for others. However, it is clear that they are in a certain sense interconnected and that probably Iran intervened mainly to mirror and respond to the U.S. intervention. The only common ground between the two countries is the fight against ISIS in the Syrian case, which has been continued by the U.S. also in Yemen and in general through Operation Inherent Resolve. This common aspect has some implications: first of all, it could mean that both countries are willing to stop the spread of international terrorism at its root, by killing the leaders of terrorist militias before they plant attacks. Secondly, both Iran and the USA do not want extremists to take control of the Middle East, reason why they have been bested since the beginning. Thirdly, it could be something to consider reaching an easing of the tensions between the two countries. Nonetheless, regarding the first point, it is reasonable to doubt Iran's interests in stopping terrorism, from the moment that Tehran strongly supports Hezbollah and Hamas, which are two internationally recognized terrorist groups. Hence, the fight to terrorism from the Iranian point of view has to be taken with a grain of salt.

Regarding the military involvement, the U.S. has been much more active in the Syrian case, while limited it had and has indirect the involvement in the Yemeni conflict. So did Iran.

An essential difference, which stands out from the analysis of the two cases, is that if in the Yemen Civil War, no direct contrast between Iran and the USA has occurred, the same does not apply to Syria. In the Syrian scenario, in fact, as witnessed in section 2.1 and 2.2, the two countries have had direct military face-off. As a

matter of fact, Iran attacked U.S. troops multiple times and vehicles as a form of retaliation for the Israeli attacks on Iranian targets. Naturally, these strikes – majorly drone strikes – received a resolute response by Washington which stormed many facilities controlled directly by Iran or through Iran-backed militias. Strikes justified by President Trump the U.S. as a form of self-defense.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The author would like to conclude his dissertation with two sections representing the focal points for the readers: the discussion of the findings, based on the answer to the research question (RQ), and the confirmation or rejection of the hypothesis. This section in particular is dedicated to the research question. The answer that the author will provide derives from the attentive analysis of the two case studies presented above as well as an observant investigation of what has been stated in Chapter 2. As a matter of fact, the (d-)evolution of the relationship between Iran and the United States can be intended as a supporting case study on which part of the final analysis is rooted. Moreover, due to its importance in the last decade, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action can be considered as a further and more specific case study, whose implications had and surely will have an impact on the Iranian-American diplomatic relationships.

Certainly, the answer to the RQ will be as much impartial as possible, however the author's interpretation is what distinguishes this paper from the ones of other scholars. The research question is hereby reposed: *How do the U.S. actions in the Middle East influence the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region?*

As aforementioned, the RQ is a “how” question, since the presence of the United States in the region is something extensively underlined in various studies and already witnessed by the numerous interventions conducted by Washington in this region. Also, the reasons behind this regional involvement have been already presented and reiterated along the dissertation, focusing on the White House's “sincere” need to protect Middle Eastern citizens from the outrageous regimes of the region and the strenuous fight to terrorism, aimed at halting terrorist cells at their roots. Even if the reality is different and shows that the U.S. is actively present in the Middle East to monitor the development of its long-standing opponent, Iran, which in the last decades is willing to develop – and it is already well underway – nuclear weapons, and a real nuclear plan through which it could accomplish its regional hegemonic plan.

Instead, the practical means and the policies through which Washington influences the Iranian Regime are not so clear and the purpose of this paper was precisely that of clarifying them. The research question shall be analyzed in two parts before reaching an answer: firstly, a focus on what is intended with “U.S. actions”, and secondly an examination of “foreign policies of the Iranian regime”.

Starting with the U.S. actions, the author believes that the term “actions” must be intended both in military and political terms. In military terms, the U.S. actions refer to the massive presence of troops - over 15.000 soldiers in the region²⁶² - and the large number of permanent bases as showed in **MAP 2.0**. Not to

²⁶² David Vine, *Lists of U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1776-2021*, American University Digital Research Archive, 2021.

mention the participation in every civil war burst out in the region, which further highlights the invasive nature of the American intervention, which seems incapable of not getting into other states' affairs. Intrusiveness which resulted as deteriorating the development of regional conflicts or tensions. A tangible example is the Yemen Civil War, where the justification of the fight against the AQAP and ISIS led to the death – direct or indirect – of many civilians, surely avoidable as suggested by many humanitarian organizations.

While in political terms, the U.S. actions refer to the constant and persistent support and cooperation with its regional allies, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Cooperation which ranges from economic/financial agreements – e.g., with Saudi for petroleum – to the brokerage of accords, as witnessed by the recent Abraham Accords or the Israel-Lebanon agreement of October 2022. In this framework, also the JCPOA can be inserted. In fact, this deal was meant to limit the development of the Iranian nuclear program, perceived as a real threat to regional and global stability, since Iran would have been the 10th country in the world with nuclear deterrence²⁶³. Moreover, the author of this dissertation believes that the Iranian urgent need for nuclear weapons stems from the fact that the U.S. tends to overthrow only countries which lack nuclear weapons or in phase of development of a WMD's arsenal. Therefore, WMDs represent for Khamenei the safety of the regime as well as a lever through which gaining more power in the Middle East, possibly materializing the hegemonic plan of controlling the region. In any case, the agreement failed since President Trump withdrew, arguing that “the agreement failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its proxy warfare in the region”²⁶⁴.

On the other hand, the “foreign policies of the Iran regime” have to be intended primarily in a regional way and only later in a global perspective. This because the primary goal of Iran is to become the hegemon of the entire Middle East, beating Saudi Arabia and expelling the United States from the region. This paper focused on the foreign policies, since the author is firmly convinced that they involve more implications than their domestic counterpart. In fact, considering a regional point of view, means involving many actors, some of which opponents and also powerful. It is clear that Iran, supported by its allies is trying to overcome all the opponents' resistance, the one of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Türkiye. According to the author, the success of such foreign policy would represent an incredible turning point in the world geopolitics, since then Iran would acquire the status of “powerful country”, status which currently lacks. Through its plan, Iran would receive the deserved consideration in the global decision-making processes, always keeping in mind its clear anti-Western position. This is the reason why Tehran is always responding to the U.S. actions in the Middle East, not being found unprepared, but rather sometimes even more prepared and structured than the United States.

To conclude the author argues that from the analysis of the two case studies and the supporting arguments of Ch.2, it is possible to answer the research question, by saying that the foreign policies of the Iranian Regime are proved to be influenced by the United States' direct, or by proxy, activity in the region, both economic-political and military. In detail, the American influence on the Iranian policies occurs through specific means: firstly, the drafting of economic and military agreements with Saudi Arabia, most of which

²⁶³ ICAN, “Which countries have nuclear weapons?”, https://www.icanw.org/nuclear_arsenals.

²⁶⁴ CFR.org Editors, “What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?”, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-iran-nuclear-deal>.

had a crucial impact in the relationship between Riyadh and Tehran, specifically during the Yemen Civil War. Secondly, the relentless political support to Israel and its regional policies, most of which are against the interests of Iran. Such political assistance triggers the Iranian anger and retaliation with regard to U.S. personnel and interventions in the region. Lastly, the U.S. meddlesome intervention in regional conflicts; the aim of such involvement is that of overthrowing anti-democratic regimes with sympathies and relationships with Tehran. Washington's expectations from this kind of policy are the strengthening of U.S. relationships and influence in the region.

The author believes that the persistent U.S. Middle Eastern policy is not resulting in an acceptance of its "lower status" by Iran, which could stop its plans due to the fear of harsh measures against it. Instead, Tehran decisively responds to the threats and measures and seems to counter them, getting even closer to other superpowers, as China. Noteworthy is that the author considers this confrontation on such a delicate issue a tangible example of what the realists call as "security dilemma". A theory rooted on the idea that when a country starts arming itself more for protection and self-defense, it may be perceived as a threat by other nations, particularly its adversaries. This increase in weaponization contributes to the insecurity of citizens and the international community, causing geopolitical instability. In the context of this paper, the U.S. established its presence in the Middle East and formed alliances with regional powers, to combat terrorism and prevent Soviet interference and Iranian expansion. However, this raised concerns in Tehran, which felt threatened by the potential Westernization of the region and subsequently began developing a nuclear program. For this reason, weapons are considered by the author not the best solution to solve tensions.

6. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

This section, destined to the examination of the author's hypothesis, concludes a thorough work, devolved at providing the readers with a well-rounded analysis of the U.S. policies in the Middle East and their effects on Iran. The hypothesis, written a priori, before all the topics have been discussed and the analysis conducted, is hereby reposed: "*the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region are influenced by the United States' direct, or by proxy, activity in the region*".

From the answer to the research question, it is understandable that the author's hypothesis is confirmed in all the aspects involved and that there is no space for any kind of denial. Nonetheless, if it is left under such formulation, it would be incomplete. As a matter of fact, it is slightly unprecise in the second part of the sentence, the one in which the author refers to the U.S. "activity in the region". "Activity" is a broad term which could indicate literally every kind of action, such as simple economic transactions between governments. Thus, it is fundamental to clarify what the author refers to with the term "activity". The latter has to be intended, as explained in the previous section, both in political and military terms. In particular, in military terms it has to include: all the authorized and non-authorized interventions, the deployment of troops and the establishment of permanent bases in a foreign territory, in this case the Middle East. Instead, in political terms it has to refer to talks, agreements and cooperation with Washington's allies and non, thus also including

the talks and agreements with Iran, such as the later failed JCPOA. For this reason, a more comprehensive hypothesis would thereby be written as follows: *the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region are influenced by the United States military, economic, and political activities in the Middle East, conducted both directly and/or by proxy*. The hypothesis would still be confirmed and result as more precise.

This thesis served as a proof to demonstrate the linkage existing between the policies of two important sovereign states, Iran and the United States. What can be generally thought after this dissertation, is that the U.S. adopts a predictable foreign policy towards rising states, reason why nothing new is expected to happen. Whereas Iran has acquired a considerable role in the world geopolitics only in the last decade, reason why its future plans are volatile. As a matter of fact, the Chinese-brokered deal between Riyadh and Tehran came unexpectedly. For this reason, the author would like to conclude with a thought-provoking citation from former U.S. President Barack Obama, who already acknowledged this unpredictability: “Iran is the latest expression of a deep, ancient, powerful culture that's different than ours. And we don't know how it's going to play itself out”²⁶⁵.

²⁶⁵ James Fallows, “The President Defends His Iran Plan”, The Atlantic, August 7, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/08/barack-obama-iran-deal-congress/400661/>.

CONCLUSION

The final part of the dissertation is intended to provide a finale to the entire thesis. It will be structured in order to provide the readers with: a general overview of the paper, the restatement of its purpose and the theoretical and analytical methodologies applied, and the reassertion of the final answer to the research question. Lastly, the author will concisely conclude with some final findings and critiques, the aim of which is to underline the way in which the thesis itself can be bettered to be more detailed, and thus more precise and how it can pave the way to future studies on the same topic.

The author divided the dissertation into 5 parts: an Introduction, three main Chapters, and this Conclusion. The Introduction was meant to capacitate the readers with an understanding of the structure of the thesis, the reason behind the choice of the U.S. Middle Eastern action and the Iranian reactions, what the paper was aiming at, and the methodologies that has been applied. Then, Chapter 1 was intended as a preamble, before the readers got to the heart of the thesis, rooted in Chapters 2 and 3. As a matter of fact, in Ch.1 the readers have been introduced to an overview of the Middle East, considering ethnicity and religion, before moving to an in-depth examination of Iran's history and cultural-societal features. Later on, the foreign presence in the region has been investigated, focusing on the United States, European Union and the Asian superpowers. The chapter ended with the presentation of the research question, hereby reposed: *How do the U.S. actions in the Middle East influence the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region?*

Chapter 2 and 3 represented the core of the thesis, with in particular Ch.2 being the foundational groundwork. After the explanation of the research design, the variables were introduced officially, with the Middle Eastern policies of the United States being the independent variable, and the foreign policies of Iran being the dependent one. The two countries have not been chosen in a general way, but with the specificity of the Middle East and the American regional influence on Iran's foreign policies. This specificity has been purposefully chosen, since it is considered by the author as an omitted aspect in other academic papers, which focus more on the global and/or domestic scenario, rather than the Middle Eastern one. Scenario which, as aforementioned, has multiple implications due to the presence of many important international actors. In this context, the author's idea was that of investigating the United States' activity in the region and to analyze how it does influence the regional policies of the Iranian Regime, also considering the reactions of the Persian country. In the same chapter, the author expressed his own opinion, which is hereby reiterated: *the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region are influenced by the United States' direct, or by proxy, activity in the region.*

Later on, this chapter presented an in-depth analysis of the U.S.-Iran relationship over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, with an attentive consideration of the reciprocal perceptions and a special focus on the JCPOA, being a supporting case study for the final findings. Before the two case studies have been briefly introduced, the role of Saudi Arabia and Israel was highlighted, serving as secondary variables of the dissertation. The last chapter, Ch.3, focused on the highly detailed description of the case studies selected to answer the research question. In detail, the case studies that the author considered as the best suitable for this dissertation are the Syrian and Yemen Civil Wars. Both mirror what the author was looking for, that is a case in which both Iran and the U.S. were involved, direct and/or by proxy, and where political or military direct contrast between them occurred.

The last part of Ch.3 represents the analytical bulwark of the dissertation, where after a brief compare and contrast analysis between the two case studies, the author illustrated his personal analysis, based on the examination of the two case studies, but also on the JCPOA and the U.S.-Iran relationships presented in Ch.2. The findings are clear: the foreign policies of the Iranian Regime are proved to be influenced by the United States' direct, or by proxy, activity in the region, both economic-political and military. These two case studies also allowed the author to confirm his hypothesis.

Lastly, the Conclusion is intended to provide some final remarks and considerations with potential suggestions on the improvement of the dissertation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the main objective of this dissertation was to dive deeper into “how” the United States Middle Eastern activities might have influenced the Iranian regional decision-making process, this section will serve to the reader as a conclusive hat to the findings. As mentioned above the findings are clear, with the United States having economic, political and military means to influence the Iranian Regime's foreign policies.

In economic-political terms, it is possible to refer to the economic agreements with its ally Saudi Arabia, but also to the sanctions against Tehran for the nuclear program. Whereas in military terms, it is possible to refer to the U.S. meddlesome intervention in regional conflicts aimed at strengthening the American influence in the area.

Regarding the hypothesis, despite its confirmation, the author did not limit himself to simply accept his first formulation. He rather questioned and criticized it, reaching at the very end of Ch.3 a new hypothesis which would have been much more comprehensive. The new hypothesis is herewith repropounded: *the Iranian foreign policies in the MENA region are influenced by the United States military, economic, and political activities in the Middle East, conducted both directly and/or by proxy*. This second version is more complete from that moment that it takes into consideration all the three fields of influence, otherwise left apart in the first hypothesis.

Ultimately, the author believes that this thesis could inspire other scholars in their studies on the American influence in the Middle East, and in particular in Iran. It could also be possible to modify the focal point by unifying all the three scenarios in which the United States influence Iran. In particular, it could be conducted a more comprehensive work based on the analysis of the American influence on Tehran in the global, regional and domestic scenarios. Such research would allow to have a 360-degrees understanding of the activity of Washington focused on Iran, but also the general reaction of Iran, thus not only in one context. It could also be possible to elaborate a compare and contrast analysis among the three geopolitical frameworks, to investigate both on the differences of the U.S. actions depending on the context they are exercising them, and on the differences of Tehran's reaction depending on geopolitical frame.

Additionally, the author is strongly convinced that it would be possible to improve this work by having access to further data, especially the secret military interventions and political decisions, even if it is highly improbable due to the high privacy on such delicate data. Moreover, interviewing actors from both sides could

be another way to improve this research, since it would enable to understand in a deeper way the reciprocal perceptions of the two states and also how the respective governments act in reaction to the external pressures.

Lastly, the author looks forward to further literature and data on the influence of U.S. actions in the Middle East on the Iranian Regime.

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SUMMARY

INTRODUZIONE

La geopolitica contemporanea è sempre stata caratterizzata da sfide economiche, politiche e militari: ovvero sfide geostrategiche che possono essere guerre interne agli stati o conflitti tra più nazioni, e che spesso coinvolgono più attori, avendo un effetto diretto sull'intera comunità internazionale. Un esempio pratico sono le guerre civili siriana e yemenita attualmente in corso. Tuttavia, questi fenomeni non si limitano di per sé a scontri militari diretti, ma potrebbero avere radici più profonde, di natura politica e/o economica, come nel caso della Guerra Fredda tra Washington e Mosca, dove si sono verificate minacce psicologiche e conflitti per procura, piuttosto che scontri diretti fra i due protagonisti.

In questo contesto, è possibile inserire la duratura involuzione delle relazioni tra Stati Uniti e Iran. In particolare, la presenza continua e pervasiva degli Stati Uniti in Medio Oriente ha portato alle tensioni che hanno favorito la rivoluzione iraniana del 1979. Infatti, ad eccezione del periodo tra il 2013 ed il 2018, quando i toni tra Washington e Teheran si sono ammorbiditi, le relazioni tra i due Paesi hanno avuto ad oggi un vero e proprio deterioramento.

A differenza della maggior parte della letteratura, concentrata su eventi specifici, o su un'analisi dal punto di vista domestico e/o globale del rapporto tra Stati Uniti ed Iran, questa tesi ha come scopo quello di indagare i mezzi attraverso i quali la Casa Bianca influenza le decisioni regionali del regime iraniano, in termini politici, economici e militari. L'attività di Washington in Medio Oriente è irrefutabile, sebbene il suo modo di agire e l'impatto che ha sulle politiche regionali dell'Iran non hanno ricevuto un'analisi approfondita. Il Medio Oriente, area che suscita il fervido interesse dell'autore, è composto da alcuni attori geopolitici di spicco – Turchia, Arabia Saudita, Israele, Iran –, motivo per cui la presenza americana ha sicuramente più implicazioni regionali che domestiche.

Questo studio potrebbe essere rilevante per nuovi scenari in tema di politica regionale, e potrebbe ispirare esperti della materia a portare avanti questa ricerca in merito a nuovi eventi riguardanti gli Stati Uniti e l'Iran. Come già sottolineato, le tensioni tra Iran e Stati Uniti hanno un impatto diretto sulla geopolitica mondiale, di cui gli stessi Stati Uniti sono un pilastro. Quindi, l'analisi permetterà ai lettori di comprendere le modalità di influenza degli Stati Uniti in Medio Oriente e la conseguente reazione di Teheran.

La tesi ha una struttura chiara e si basa su dati imparziali provenienti da fonti autorevoli e accademiche, che forniscono numerosi dettagli utili per una comprensione a 360 gradi. Il Capitolo 1, punto di partenza della tesi, fornisce ai lettori una presentazione generale del Medio Oriente, qui inteso come l'area compresa tra l'Egitto e l'Iran - da Ovest a Est - e tra la Turchia e la Penisola Arabica - da Nord a Sud -. In questo capitolo sono prese in considerazione anche le principali etnie presenti nella regione che, insieme alla religione, costituiscono due aspetti centrali spesso alla base di tensioni regionali. Una breve sezione è stata dedicata ad ulteriori attori regionali, mentre gran parte del primo capitolo riguarda uno studio ricercato dell'Iran, dai suoi tratti culturali, sociali e burocratici alla sua storia contemporanea. Le ultime due sezioni sono, invece, incentrate su un approfondimento dell'attività regionale occidentale – Stati Uniti ed Unione Europea – e di quella asiatica – Cina, India e Russia –, con particolare riferimento al rapporto tra queste potenze e l'Iran.

Prima di entrare nel vivo della tesi con il capitolo 2, in cui sono stati illustrati il progetto di ricerca e le variabili, l'autore ha presentato la sua domanda di ricerca. Dopo aver descritto le due variabili – con le azioni statunitensi in Medio Oriente come variabile indipendente, e le politiche estere iraniane nella regione MENA come dipendente – è stato fornito un report molto dettagliato delle relazioni tra Stati Uniti e Iran, seguito dalle percezioni reciproche tra i due stati. Questa sezione storica ha dimostrato il graduale deterioramento delle relazioni tra i due Paesi, con la già citata eccezione del periodo 2013-2018, durante il quale è stato prima negoziato e poi redatto il Piano d'Azione Congiunto Globale (PACG), più comunemente noto come Accordo sul Nucleare Iraniano, utilizzato dall'autore come caso di studio di supporto per l'analisi finale.

Prima di presentare brevemente i casi di studio, l'autore si è soffermato sul ruolo di Israele e dell'Arabia Saudita, considerati fedeli alleati americani e variabili secondarie nel contesto della presente tesi. L'obiettivo di questa sezione è quello di fornire altri dati utili sempre per l'analisi finale, soprattutto nei casi di studio selezionati.

L'ultimo capitolo della tesi, il Cap. 3, è stato interamente dedicato all'approfondimento dei casi studio. I due casi selezionati sono: la guerra civile siriana e la guerra civile yemenita, dove sia gli Stati Uniti che l'Iran hanno giocato e giocano tuttora un ruolo cruciale nella loro evoluzione, anche se purtroppo in maniera negativa. I due casi di studio hanno gettato le basi per un'analisi di confronto tra le differenze e le similitudini degli interventi degli USA e dell'Iran nei due conflitti. L'attenta analisi dell'autore nel terzo capitolo ha lo scopo di rispondere alla domanda di ricerca e di esaminare i risultati dello studio, confermando o smentendo l'ipotesi dell'autore. Una conclusione generale della dissertazione ha chiuso l'intero elaborato ricapitolando e ribadendo i risultati finali. In più, l'autore ha sinteticamente aggiunto alcune critiche per sottolineare come la tesi stessa possa essere ancora più dettagliata e come, nello stesso tempo, possa aprire la strada a studi futuri sullo stesso argomento.

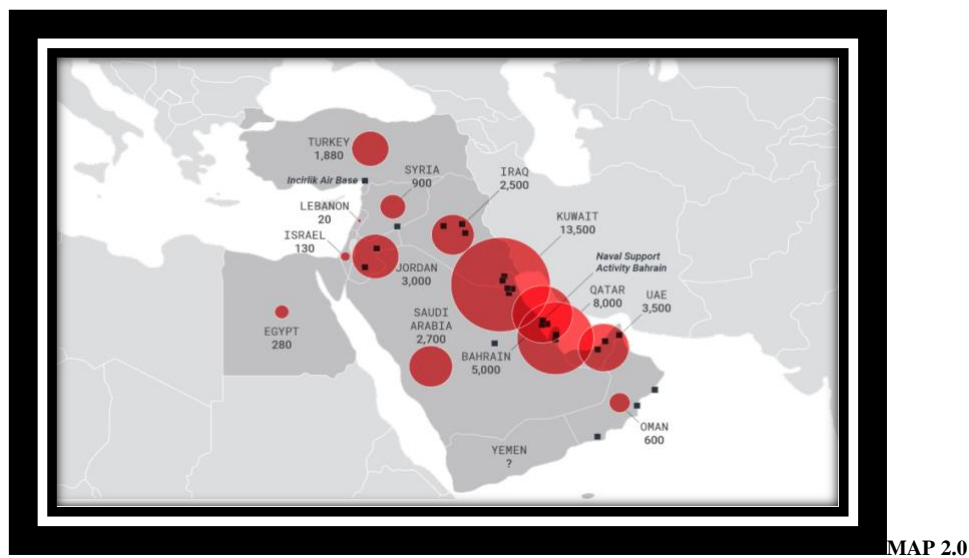
I TRE CAPITOLI NELLO SPECIFICO

Partendo dal primo capitolo, è importante evidenziare che nel corso del tempo sono molte le definizioni che sono state attribuite al Medio Oriente. Tuttavia, l'autore concorda con la definizione fornita da Greta Scharnweber, secondo la quale "la definizione più comune, ma esclusiva, di Medio Oriente al momento della stesura del presente documento si estende all'Egitto a ovest, all'Iran a est, alla Penisola Arabica a sud e alla Turchia a nord". Secondo questa definizione, il Medio Oriente include 17 nazioni, per una popolazione totale di 410 milioni di persone. Gli stati geopoliticamente più di rilievo sono l'Iran, l'Arabia Saudita e Israele. I primi due rappresentano anche la testimonianza diretta della scissione tra sciiti e sunniti. In Arabia Saudita i sunniti sono la maggioranza, mentre in Iran lo sono gli sciiti, e le differenze di credo hanno spesso portato a tensioni regionali e conseguenti conflitti religiosi.

Il Medio Oriente, comunque, è rinomato soprattutto per le sue grandi ricchezze di petrolio e gas, le cui riserve sono possedute maggiormente dai paesi del Golfo, i quali dal 1981 formano il Consiglio di Cooperazione del Golfo. Tra questi vi sono, oltre all'Arabia Saudita, Kuwait, Emirati Arabi Uniti, Qatar, Bahrain e Oman.

Ritornando agli attori principali, nell'elaborato la storia dell'Iran è stata ampiamente descritta. Il paese ha subito un cambiamento radicale alla fine degli anni '70 quando, dopo essere stato guidato a partire dal 1925 dallo scia Reza Shah e poi dal figlio Mohammed – con il costante supporto di Stati Uniti e Regno Unito – ha visto l'avvento dell'Ayatollah Khomeini, il quale dopo aver diffuso le sue idee dall'esilio in Francia, ha portato l'Iran alla rivoluzione del 1979 che ha visto la nascita della Repubblica Islamica dell'Iran. Dopo la guerra con l'Iraq, durata dal 1980 al 1988, Khomeini morì e fu sostituito dall'attuale Ayatollah, Khamenei. Ad oggi l'Ayatollah è la guida suprema del paese con al suo seguito il Generale delle Guardie Rivoluzionarie, che da molti è considerato ancora più importante del Presidente stesso.

Se è vero che i tre paesi chiave sono Iran, Arabia Saudita e Israele, è anche vero che la presenza straniera nella regione è da sempre elevata. In particolare, gli Stati Uniti sono sempre stati molto attivi militarmente nella regione, al fine di mantenere salda la propria influenza e per limitare le mire egemoniche dell'Iran, il cui piano è sempre stato quello di contrapporsi a Riyadh. Oltre alle molteplici operazioni militari, gli Stati Uniti hanno un elevato numero di basi militari nel Medio Oriente, con circa 15.000 uomini. Le basi statunitensi, per lo meno quelle identificate e i cui dati non sono classificati, sono mostrate nella mappa qui sotto.



L'Unione Europea, invece, è sempre stata più aperta nei confronti dello stato persiano, con il quale ha infatti stipulato molti accordi, come la Politica Europea di Vicinato (PEV). Alcuni paesi dell'Unione, inoltre, si sono spesso allontanati dalle decisioni militari di Washington, tanto da condannarle. Ne sono un esempio la Germania e la Francia nel contesto della guerra in Iraq iniziata da Washington nel 2003.

Per quanto riguarda le tre potenze asiatiche precedentemente menzionate, è importante fare una distinzione. La Russia è da tempo influente nella regione con lo scopo di contrastare l'influenza americana. Questo avviene tramite accordi economici, maggiormente con Siria ed Iran, e con l'invio di armi durante i conflitti regionali. L'India, da parte sua, si sta aprendo al Medio Oriente negli ultimi decenni in risposta all'apertura della regione verso la Cina. Nuova Delhi ha, infatti, cinque paesi mediorientali come suoi principali venditori di petrolio ed è il maggior compratore di armi da Israele.

La Cina, infine, decisa anch'essa a contrastare la grande influenza americana, si sta sempre più addentrando nella regione. Pechino ha, come l'India, cinque paesi mediorientali come principali venditori di petrolio. Inoltre, il Medio Oriente rappresenta per la Cina una regione di grande importanza per completare la "Nuova Via della Seta", una rotta commerciale che amplierebbe il mercato cinese esponenzialmente, collegando la Terra del Dragone all'Europa. Per ultimo, un accordo storico tra Iran e Arabia Saudita è stato raggiunto nel marzo 2023, proprio grazie alla mediazione di Pechino. Teheran e Riyadh avevano chiuso i rapporti nel 2016, dopo le proteste e i danni all'ambasciata saudita, e da allora non esistevano più relazioni ufficiali. A metà marzo 2023, dopo l'accordo raggiunto, i due Paesi hanno annunciato la riapertura delle rispettive ambasciate, promettendo di non interferire più nella politica interna dell'altro, ma di collaborare. Questo accordo è la testimonianza del crescente potere della Cina in Medio Oriente, che contrasta sempre di più il ruolo di superpotenza degli Stati Uniti.

Al termine di questo capitolo è stata presentata la domanda di ricerca, ed è la seguente: *In che modo le azioni degli Stati Uniti in Medio Oriente influenzano la politica estera del regime iraniano nella regione MENA?*

Passando al secondo capitolo, durante la presentazione del progetto di ricerca, l'autore ha espresso anche la sua ipotesi in merito alla domanda di ricerca, affermando che *"le politiche estere del regime iraniano nella regione MENA sono influenzate dall'attività diretta, o per procura, degli Stati Uniti nella regione"*.

Fino al 2013, il rapporto tra Washington e Teheran può essere definito come un rapporto di amore e odio. Come già accennato, il periodo precedente alla Rivoluzione iraniana del 1979 vede una solida cooperazione tra i due Paesi con il decisivo sostegno degli Stati Uniti alla dinastia Pahlavi, testimoniato anche dal colpo di Stato della CIA del 1953 per rovesciare l'oppositore Mossadeq. Tuttavia, l'eccessiva interferenza negli affari interni di altri Paesi si è dimostrata non essere la strategia migliore per Washington. La tensione percepibile tra Stati Uniti e Iran si manifestò proprio nel 1979, quando ci fu la cosiddetta crisi degli ostaggi durante la quale più di 50 americani furono presi in ostaggio nell'ambasciata statunitense a Teheran, dopo la protesta dei giovani iraniani che chiedevano a Washington di estradare lo scià, negli USA per cure mediche. Solo con l'avvento di Reagan e con la mediazione dell'Algeria fu possibile risolvere la crisi giungendo alla firma degli Accordi di Algeri, che limitarono il controllo più pervasivo di Washington negli affari interni persiani e garantirono la rimozione del congelamento dei beni iraniani e l'eliminazione delle sanzioni.

Prima dell'elezione di Obama nel 2009, due eventi nello specifico hanno deteriorato ancor più la relazione tra i due paesi: In primis nel 1988, quando la USS Vincennes, convinta di aver abbattuto un caccia, abbatté invece il volo 655 dell'AirBus iraniano, che fu distrutto e causò la morte di 290 persone, facendo crescere la rabbia di Teheran. In seguito, all'inizio del 2002, quando il presidente americano Bush junior definì Iraq, Corea del Nord e Iran un "asse del male"; cosa che non fu ben accettata da Teheran.

Fu proprio con l'elezione del democratico Barack Obama nel 2009, che il rapporto tra i due paesi tornò a migliorare, poiché nello stesso anno Obama chiamò il Presidente iraniano Rouhani (anch'egli neoeletto), per discutere del programma nucleare. Si è trattato di una svolta inaspettata, arrivata grazie all'atteggiamento diplomatico di entrambi i presidenti, dopo poco tempo l'Iran e i 5 membri permanenti del Consiglio di

Sicurezza delle Nazioni Unite, più la Germania - il P5+1 - hanno raggiunto un preambolo di quello che nel 2015 sarebbe diventato il Piano d'Azione Congiunto Globale (PACG). Il PACG ha fissato come obiettivo principale la non proliferazione nucleare dell'Iran, in linea con gli stessi obiettivi del Trattato di Non Proliferazione (TNP): nello specifico, impedire la diffusione di armi e tecnologie nucleari, limitandone l'uso per scopi civili e pacifici. L'Iran, in cambio, ha ottenuto la revoca delle sanzioni dall'Unione Europea ed anche dagli Stati Uniti.

Il 2018 ha segnato un'altra svolta nella politica interna e, soprattutto, estera americana. L'elezione del repubblicano Donald Trump alla presidenza della Casa Bianca è rilevante per questa tesi, in riferimenti alle recenti relazioni tra i due attori principali. Due sono gli eventi principali che meritano di essere menzionati: l'uscita degli Stati Uniti dal PACG e l'uccisione del Generale Soleimani. In primo luogo, l'8 maggio 2018 Donald Trump ha dichiarato che gli Stati Uniti si sarebbero ritirati dall'accordo nucleare iraniano. Questa decisione è stata presa da Trump per mantenere le promesse della sua campagna elettorale in cui riteneva "che l'accordo non ha affrontato il programma di missili balistici dell'Iran e la sua guerra per procura nella regione". La risposta di Teheran è stata dura, anche se il paese persiano ha inizialmente deciso di rispettare l'accordo così come l'UE, che ha dovuto creare l'INSTEX – uno Special Purpose Vehicle – per garantire la sicurezza del commercio per le aziende che volevano effettuare scambi commerciali con l'Iran. In secondo luogo, l'assassinio del generale iraniano Qassem Soleimani ha scosso l'Iran, in quanto considerato da molti la seconda figura più importante dopo Khamenei, essendo il capo della "Forza Quds" (un'unità d'élite delle Guardie Rivoluzionarie) e lo stratega militare in tutto il Medio Oriente. Gli Stati Uniti, con il sostegno di Israele, hanno considerato l'attacco come un atto di autodifesa perché, secondo Washington, il generale stava organizzando un attacco imminente ai membri degli Stati Uniti in Medio Oriente. Tuttavia, il relatore speciale delle Nazioni Unite sulle esecuzioni extragiudiziali ha definito l'uccisione illegale ai sensi del diritto internazionale, perché non essendo stato possibile dimostrare una minaccia effettiva. Per vendicare l'assassinio di Soleimani, cinque giorni dopo l'Iran ha lanciato un attacco missilistico alle basi statunitensi di Erbil e Al Asad in Iraq.

L'elezione di Biden nel 2021 non ha portato a nessun cambiamento nella relazione tra i due stati, nonostante i tentativi – vani – di riaprire i dialoghi per il PACG.

Ciò che caratterizza l'attuale impossibilità di un punto d'incontro tra Stati Uniti e Iran è la mancanza di fiducia reciproca, dove l'Iran potrebbe avere dalla sua vari episodi in cui Washington non ha mantenuto le promesse o gli accordi.

Nel terzo ed ultimo capitolo, la risposta alla domanda di ricerca sarà basata sull'analisi di due di casi studio accuratamente scelti: la guerra civile siriana e la guerra civile yemenita.

La guerra civile siriana è una lotta violenta in corso in Siria tra i rivoluzionari filodemocratici e la lunga dinastia del presidente siriano Bashar al-Assad. Dal 2011, anno in cui ha avuto inizio la cosiddetta Primavera Araba in diversi Paesi dell'area MENA, il conflitto è stato una delle principali cause di instabilità nella regione, con lo sfollamento dei civili e la migrazione dei rifugiati, che hanno causato uno dei più grandi disastri umanitari della storia moderna. La guerra è facilmente degenerata in un conflitto internazionale, quando attori stranieri,

come Russia, Iran, Stati Uniti, Arabia Saudita e Turchia, sono intervenuti per sostenere ognuno una delle due fazioni coinvolte e per combattere l'organizzazione terroristica dell'ISIS. In merito ai due attori principali, l'Iran, per una combinazione di obiettivi geopolitici e strategici, nonché di preoccupazioni ideologiche e religiose, è stato un alleato fondamentale del governo siriano, offrendo aiuto militare e finanziario, in aggiunta ad addestramento e assistenza alle milizie filogovernative. Mentre gli Stati Uniti, coinvolti nel conflitto siriano sin dal suo inizio nel 2011, hanno dapprima offerto aiuti non letali – logistici ed economici – e sostegno all'opposizione siriana, per poi espandere il suo impegno alle operazioni di combattimento contro l'ISIS e altre organizzazioni estremiste in Siria. Inoltre, sono avvenuti anche degli scontri diretti tra i due paesi sotto forma di bombardamenti a truppe o strutture.

Anche la guerra che dal 2014 affligge lo Yemen e la sua popolazione è ancora in corso, coinvolgendo principalmente due fazioni: il governo yemenita, guidato dal presidente Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, e il gruppo di ribelli Houthi, noto anche come *Ansar Allah*. La lotta è scoppiata quando i ribelli musulmani sciiti Houthi hanno preso il controllo della capitale dello Yemen, Sana'a, causando la fuga del presidente Hadi a Riyadh. A causa di questi eventi, come per la Siria, la guerra è facilmente degenerata in un intervento militare a favore del presidente Hadi da parte di una coalizione guidata dall'Arabia Saudita e sostenuta anche dagli Stati Uniti. In contrapposizione, secondo esperti, i ribelli Houthi sono sostenuti dall'Iran. Russia e Cina, invece, ufficialmente hanno solo inviato aiuti umanitari e sostenuto una risoluzione pacifica del conflitto. La differenza è che la coalizione a guida saudita ha confermato in maniera ufficiale il sostegno sia ideologico che militare, mentre i Paesi schierati con gli Houthi hanno solo confermato il sostegno ideologico e politico, senza mai dichiarare espressamente l'invio di armi ed equipaggiamenti militari.

Ciò nonostante, l'Iran in particolare è stato più volte colto in flagrante nell'invio di armi attraverso imbarcazioni con bandiera iraniana intercettate sia dalla marina statunitense che saudita.

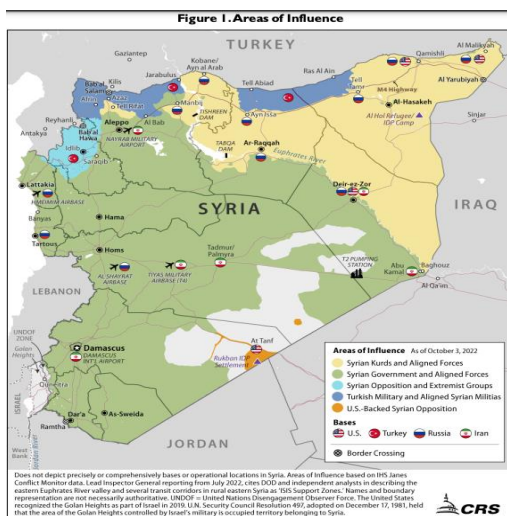
Nel dettaglio, a differenza della guerra civile siriana, Stati Uniti e Iran non sono direttamente coinvolti nel conflitto, ma agiscono per procura. E mentre gli Stati Uniti hanno concluso molteplici transazioni per la vendita di armi all'Arabia Saudita, che conduce le operazioni militari - gli Usa hanno attaccato direttamente solo Al Qaeda nella Penisola Arabica - l'Iran, come anticipato, avrebbe fornito addestramento militare e assistenza finanziaria ai ribelli Houthi.

Analizzati dunque i due casi di studio, è possibile trarre le somme in merito a differenze e similitudini tra l'intervento statunitense e quello iraniano.

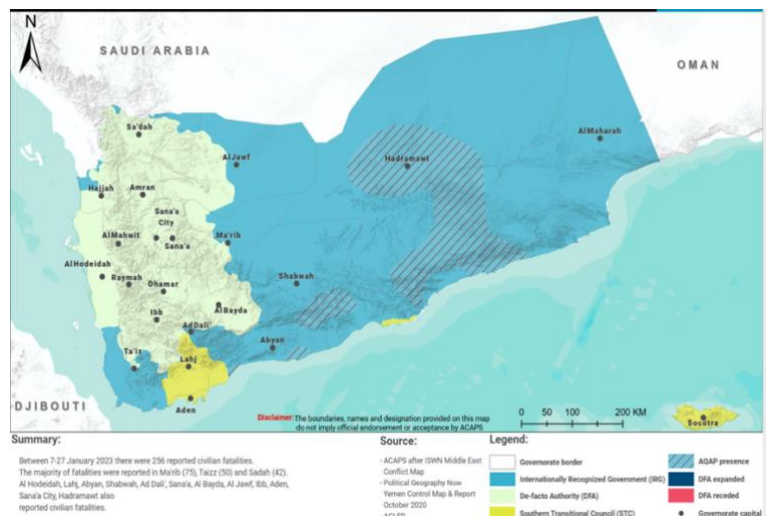
- Nel contesto siriano, entrambi i paesi sono intervenuti sia direttamente che per procura, fornendo gli Stati Uniti armi ai ribelli (tra cui i Curdi) e l'Iran al governo di Assad. La differenza sta nelle vittime causate. Nel dettaglio, la coalizione guidata dagli Stati Uniti ha condotto un numero incredibile di attacchi aerei che hanno causato la morte di quasi 3.000 persone. Per quanto riguarda l'Iran, è chiaro che le vittime causate dalle forze pro-regime, quindi anche dalle Guardie Rivoluzionarie, sono enormemente superiori, infatti ammontano a oltre 137.000. Per quanto riguarda, invece, le aree controllate da Washington e/o dall'Iran, sempre tenendo conto delle milizie locali loro alleate, come si

può notare nella **Mappa 9.0** sottostante, oggi sono nettamente a favore delle forze pro-regime, anche a causa del parziale ritiro degli Stati Uniti.

- Nel contesto yemenita, invece, entrambi i paesi hanno avuto un impatto apparentemente più limitato, dovuto al fatto che non sono mai intervenuti direttamente e gli attacchi americani sul campo erano contro Al Qaeda nella Penisola Arabica e non contro gli Houthi. Dall'altra parte, le differenze qui sono attribuibili al fatto che gli Stati Uniti non hanno mai negato il supporto militare e gli attacchi all'AQAP, mentre l'Iran non si è mai esposto se non politicamente. Per questo motivo, le morti causate sono quantificabili solo dal lato USA, con circa 1500 vittime. Sotto la **Mappa 8.0** rappresenta la divisione attuale dello Yemen, con gli Houthi a controllare i maggiori punti strategici del paese, dove non possono essere presenti Iran o Stati Uniti, in quanto attori via procura.



MAPPA 9.0



MAPPA 8.0 *Con "autorità de-facto", gli studiosi intendono gli Houthi.

Il terzo capitolo si conclude con le due sezioni più importanti dell'intera tesi: una dedicata alla risposta alla domanda di ricerca e l'altra dove l'ipotesi viene esaminata. La risposta che l'autore ha fornito deriva dall'attenta analisi dei due casi di studio presentati e da un'attenta indagine di quanto esposto nel Capitolo 2. Certamente, la risposta alla domanda di ricerca sarà il più possibile imparziale, ma l'interpretazione dell'autore è ciò che distingue questo studio da quelli di altri accademici. L'autore sostiene che le politiche estere del regime iraniano nell'area MENA risultano nettamente influenzate dall'attività diretta, o per procura, degli Stati Uniti nella regione, sia a livello economico-politico che militare. Influenza che avviene attraverso strumenti specifici, quali: la stesura di accordi economici e militari con l'Arabia Saudita, l'incessante sostegno politico a Israele e alle sue politiche regionali, la maggior parte delle quali sono contrarie agli interessi dell'Iran, e l'ingerenza degli Stati Uniti nei vari conflitti regionali. L'obiettivo di tale coinvolgimento è di rovesciare i regimi antidemocratici che hanno simpatie e relazioni con Teheran.

Sebbene sia facile pensare che l'Iran possa accettare il suo presunto "status inferiore", al contrario Teheran risponde alle minacce e alle misure contrastandole, avvicinandosi ancora di più ad altre superpotenze, come la Cina. Degno di nota è che l'autore considera questo confronto un esempio di quello che i realisti chiamano "dilemma della sicurezza". Nel contesto di questa tesi, gli Stati Uniti hanno stabilito la loro presenza in Medio

Oriente e hanno stretto alleanze con le potenze regionali, per combattere il terrorismo e prevenire l'espansione iraniana e l'interferenza sovietica. Tuttavia, ciò ha sollevato preoccupazioni a Teheran che, sentendosi minacciata dalla potenziale occidentalizzazione della regione, ha iniziato a sviluppare un programma nucleare. Motivo per cui le armi non sono considerate dall'autore la soluzione migliore per risolvere le tensioni.

In riferimento all'ipotesi, nonostante sia stata confermata in tutto e per tutto attraverso i casi studio e l'analisi degli stessi, l'autore non si è limitato ad una sua prima formulazione. Bensì, l'ha messa in discussione e criticata, giungendo proprio alla fine del capitolo 3 a una nuova ipotesi più completa e precisa, che prende in considerazione tutti e tre i campi di influenza, altrimenti tralasciati nella prima, e formulata come segue: *“le politiche estere del regime iraniano nella regione MENA sono influenzate dalle attività militari, economiche e politiche degli Stati Uniti in Medio Oriente, condotte direttamente e/o per procura”*.

CONCLUSIONE

Questa dissertazione ha voluto dimostrare il legame esistente tra le politiche di due importanti Stati sovrani, l'Iran e gli Stati Uniti. Ciò che emerge dalla sua lettura, è che gli Stati Uniti adottano una politica estera prevedibile nei confronti degli Stati in ascesa, motivo per cui non ci si aspetta nulla di nuovo. Mentre l'Iran ha acquisito un ruolo considerevole nella geopolitica mondiale solo nell'ultimo decennio, per cui i suoi piani futuri sono imprevedibili. In effetti, l'accordo tra Riyad e Teheran, mediato dalla Cina, è giunto inaspettato. Per questo motivo, l'autore conclude il terzo capitolo con una stimolante citazione dell'ex Presidente degli Stati Uniti Barack Obama, che già riconosceva questa imprevedibilità: "L'Iran è l'ultima espressione di una cultura profonda, antica e potente, diversa dalla nostra. E non sappiamo come andrà a finire".

In definitiva, l'autore ritiene che questa tesi possa ispirare altri accademici nei loro studi sull'influenza americana in Medio Oriente, e in particolare in Iran, anche unificando tutti e tre gli scenari in cui gli Stati Uniti influenzano la regione. Dunque, si potrebbe condurre un'analisi più specifica sull'influenza americana su Teheran negli scenari globale, regionale e domestico, cosa che permetterebbe di avere una comprensione più profonda dell'attività di Washington mirata ad impattare l'Iran. Si potrebbe anche elaborare un'analisi di confronto e contrasto tra i tre quadri geopolitici, per indagare poi sulle differenze delle azioni statunitensi a seconda dell'ambito in cui vengono esercitate, e sulle reazioni di Teheran a seconda del quadro geopolitico. L'autore è fortemente convinto che sarebbe possibile migliorare ulteriormente questo lavoro, avendo accesso a dati riservati su interventi militari segreti e decisioni politiche, anche se è altamente improbabile a causa dell'elevata privacy su dati tanto delicati.

In più, intervistare attori politici (diplomatici) di entrambe le parti potrebbe dare un notevole contributo, poiché permetterebbe di comprendere in modo più trasparente sia le percezioni reciproche dei due Stati, sia come i rispettivi governi agiscono in reazione alle pressioni esterne.

Con lo scopo di allargare la conoscenza di questo fenomeno e degli attori coinvolti, l'autore si impegna a portare avanti questo studio, aggiungendo nuove informazioni dopo aver analizzato altri eventi e dati.