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From Mass Protests to a Long-Lasting Conflict:

Explaining the Yemeni Civil War

Comparative Politics and International Relations

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Abstract

The events occurred in these last months in the Red Sea due to the attacks committed by the Houthi organization has shifted the attention of the international community towards a more careful attitude regarding what has and is still happening in Yemen, a country in a condition of civil war for almost ten years. The thesis has the purpose to focus on the internal conditions in Yemen aiming to develop a specific approach to understand what has brought this country in a situation of devastating crisis which, in 2017, was defined by the United Nations as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. On a first level, the work is going to collect the several data existing in the literature regarding the theories on the causes of civil wars; in order to do this, the thesis has significantly taken into account the theories introduced and supported by scholars of the calibre of Collier and Hoeffler, Fearon and Laitin, flowing in the adoption of a more specific approach focused on the origins of the civil war in Yemen. This has been a gradual work built putting the attention both on the arguments brought by the literature about civil wars and on the dynamics, features and history that characterized Yemen in the curse of the twentieth century, topic of the second chapter. Indeed, in order to have a better understanding of the causes of the internal conflict in Yemen it is fundamental to analyse its internal developments and structures through the years. This will involve an explanation about the Houthis and why they became strong and supported by a huge part of the Yemeni society, up to be the most powerful opponent to the central government. In the third chapter the thesis is going to deal with another aspect of this war: the common vision of the war in Yemen as a proxy conflict caused by the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, so external causes. This belief will be strongly put into question in this work arguing that the reasons that pushed Yemen in a condition of civil war are above all internal.

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Introduction

In the first hours of January 12, 2024, a coalition led by the United States and Great Britain launched attacks on Yemen, in Sanaa, with sixty bombings aimed to hit the bases under Houthis' control. Beyond the United States and the United Kingdom, the coalition is composed by other eight states: Australia, Barhein, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and South Korea. In order to explain this decision to militarily intervene in Yemen we should go back a few months. On October 17, 2023, Houthis began to attack numerous merchant cargo ships which were travelling across the Red Sea to flow into the Mediterranean Sea; more specifically, Houthis have taken under surveillance the Bab-al Mandab strict, which is a fundamental point that links the Asian continent to Europe. This is one of the many relevant zones monitored by the United States, very active in the supervision of the world naval trade. The consequences of this manoeuvre are full-fledged global. Indeed, these attacks have compromised global trades because the Red Sea represents an important link that allows ships to reach the destination countries in not so long time. However, after the military actions by Houthis many cargo ships were forced to circumnavigate the entire Africa, increasing the travel times and the transportation costs.

The reasons that have pushed Houthis to organise these attacks are strongly connected to the current conflict between Israel and Hamas. Indeed, Houthis have always declared to be totally hostile towards the United States and Israel, expressing instead huge closeness to Hamas, Iran and, more generally, the defence of every part of the Arab-Muslim people against the West. It is not a case that on October 31, 2023, Houthis officially declared war against Israel. Moreover, with these strikes Houthis have also the purpose to show their strength as an actor and to be an affirmed organization.

The United States launched several warnings to Houthis, intimating them to stop immediately the attacks that compromise the navigation in the Red Sea. But Houthis did not stop; on the contrary, they affirmed that new attacks against the cargo ships headed for Israel would have occurred every twelve hours. The American administration has assumed a leading role in the operation "Prosperity Guardian", created on 19 December 2023; a multilateral coalition composed by the western allies of the United States and Israel and some Arab countries. In detail, the coalition was composed by United States, Bahrein, Canada, France, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Seychelles and Spain. However, this has not stopped Houthis which affirmed that they would have continued with their military actions until Israel's attacks against Gaza stopped. The

escalation continued and the consequences are exploded very few times ago with the reaction by the United States in January: the bombings against Houthis' bases. One week before the bombings the United States tried a last time to order to Houthis to stop their blockade in the Red Sea launching an ultimatum. The American administration communicated that there would have been huge consequences if they would not put an end to the attacks against the cargo ships. Indeed, Biden has affirmed that the decision to bomb has been made after several attempts to reach a diplomatic solution and the United States, together with its allies, will not tolerate further actions whose aim is to put in danger one of the most important commercial routes worldwide. Moreover, Biden has confirmed the purpose to launch other measures if necessary to protect the global trade. Unlikely the operation Prosperity Guardian, which was aimed mainly to be a police operation to monitor the area, in this coalition Italy has not participated because of its unwillingness to be involved in military actions abroad without the previous consensus by the Parliament. Although this operation is not supposed to develop in an extensive military campaign but a single attack with the purpose to harm the Houthis' forces, the rebel organisation has affirmed that the attack by the US-led coalition will not go unanswered. In this regard, Houthis responded launching a missile against a US owned ship off the coast of Aden.

Even before the bombings by the coalition the Yemeni ambassador in Iran affirmed that the United States with its intimidations wanted to prevent Yemen from giving support to the people in Gaza against Israel. Despite the airstrikes' aim to compromise Houthis' abilities, there may be reasons to believe that they may be come out strengthened. One of these is that Houthis at the moment are the principal force in Yemen. At the same time, as I am going to argue in the thesis, the situation within the country is very complex and Houthis are meeting great difficulties in maintaining control and providing services to the population in some areas. But a point in which all the Yemeni citizens agree regards the importance to support the Palestinian people in Gaza against their Israelian invader; indeed, several protests took place in Yemen about this. A strategy used by Houthis could be to put an emphasis on the situation in Gaza to strengthen themselves also internally, acquiring more consensus from Yemeni people. Furthermore, the US-led attack was not supported by states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; these are hostile to Houthis, and they were a part of the coalition which intervened in Yemen in 2015, after the outbreak of the civil war, aimed to fight against them to restore the Hadi's government, the elected president after the 2011 uprisings whose government was recognized by the majority of the international community. In this case, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are not showing

support to the United States and its allies emphasizing the priority to avoid an escalation and to make the commercial routes navigable again.

But the question is, who are Houthis? Why are they so important and why they have become so relevant? Although many people became aware of their existence only after the events of these last months, it is a movement born at the beginning of the 1990s and, by analysing the Yemeni case, we will uncover that they are an organization that had and still has a lot of influence within the Yemen's territory. They have become more and more strong with time at the expenses of the central government. We can say that at the moment Houthis are the most powerful actor existing in Yemen since they control the majority of its territory: the north-western part, the capital Sanaa and the coast overlooking the Red Sea. Houthis are the main opponent force against the internationally recognized government in the Yemeni civil war.

With the regard to the causes of this civil war, in this thesis we are going to face an aspect, related to external actors. Indeed, a lot of scholars tend to consider the Yemeni civil war as mainly driven by the influence of external states and, in the literature, it is seen as a proxy war between the two historical adversaries of the Middle East, which are Iran and Saudi Arabia. These two states have two different religious orientations, Iran is Shiite while Saudi Arabia is the spokesman of Sunnism; their ideological battle for hegemony in the region is well-known. As a result, Yemen is often considered as a true set of battle among these two powers; Saudi Arabia has intervened to support the Hadi's government, defined as the only internationally recognized authority in Yemen, while Iran is said to back Houthis, giving them weapons and resources. In virtue of their similarity from a religious perspective, since Houthis are Zaydi but Shiites, because Zaydi is a branch of Shiism, many scholars consider both of them as part of the same foreign policy in Yemen within which Houthis are used by Iran as instruments in order to expand its dominance in Yemen at the expenses of Saudi Arabia. Although these rooted beliefs, in this thesis it will be argued that it is not really like that. One the one hand, it is wrong to affirm that Houthis have nothing to do with Iran because Iran effectively gave a real assistance to them with the provision of several instruments and ideological support; looking also at today's events we can see that the linkage among the organization and the Islamic republic has been strengthened. At the same time, in the specific case of Yemen, it is too simplistic to assume that in this civil war Houthis are simple Iranian proxies and that they have acted in this way because they are supported by Iran. Houthis already had their agenda and aims before the outbreak of the civil war, albeit some connections with Iran, and they already enhanced their capabilities. They were united by their common hostility towards Saudi Arabia, United States and Israel, but their overall purpose was different,

and we are going to see it more specifically in this thesis. For Iran Yemen is a set to increase its power but at the same time Yemen does not represent a priority for the Iranian foreign policy unlike other countries, so it is quite strong to say that the Yemeni one is a proxy conflict. Moreover, the religious orientation among them is not so strong as it was made to believe because Houthis and Iran are part of two different branches of Shiism and Iran generally does not choose its allies basing only on the religious component; one of the examples is, as we have cited before, the support by the Islamic republic towards Hamas, which is a Sunni organization but it is against Israel and the United States and its policy in the Middle East.

Of course, nowadays the Houthis' purposes have evolved, and their actions have extended also externally with a regard to the conflict in Gaza, the necessity to be recognized as a strong actor and their increasingly strong connections with Iran. It is fundamental to emphasize that Houthis have adhered to the Resistance axis, composed by Shiite forces against the United States and Israel. Houthis have always put an emphasis on their hostility towards the United States and Israel, as Iran did. However, the Yemeni civil war represents a different case which should not be considered as caused by external forces.

In my work I am going to explain what the causes of this civil war have been, retracing the historical development of the country and understanding the importance of some permanent characteristics of the country, such as its tribal structure, which facilitated the outbreak of the conflict. On a first level, we are going to examinate and compare the different visions in literature regarding the reasons that can push a country to fall into a civil war and then on the basis of these arguments we are going to develop a theoretical approach that will seem the most suitable to explain the origins and reasons of the Yemeni conflict. This is going to be made through an examination of the country's problems and features. The thesis is going to illustrate the greed and grievances theories of civil wars and we are going to take into account both of them; the first emphasizes the importance of greedy and materialistic motives that push people to rebel against the government while the second more attention to the fact that people may decide to join a civil war basing of collective grievances, so in order to redress some perceived injustices with the use of weapons and violence. I am going to support a solution involving both approaches since it is not reasonable to choose one theory or the other. An event like a civil war is too complex to be reduced just to a set of causes in order to give it a precise identification. On the contrary, both of them are reflected in reality and should be equally taken into account because in the majority of cases a civil war is triggered by both greed and grievances: in many cases these two approaches cannot be separated since for an event like a civil war, the avidity of the rebels may not be enough

to resort to violence, but it must be added to a feeling of perceived injustice and marginalization within the living society. Above all, in the Yemen's conflict both of them play a role but with a focus not only on the wartime but also on the pre-war period given the existence of some permanent features within the country; so, an approach which takes into account also the behaviour of the government and the institutions. This can push people to rebel and to give more support to the rebel organization, in this case Houthis, which oppose the incumbent and gradually increases its resources and capabilities as a group. This enables Houthis to oppose themselves as a valid and true opposing force against the government. In the curse of the thesis and examining the Yemen's history through the twentieth century, I will argue how the greed applies not so much from the rebels' side but from the government's behaviour, especially under the government of the president Salih, elected in 1978. This generated grievances within the society and allowed Houthis to acquire consensus basing on these grievances. In Yemen this kind of approach is strongly linked to three characteristics belonging to this country: its tribal structure, the weakness of the state's apparatus and the social marginalization applied by the central authority. As I will argue in this work, in Yemen tribes always had an important impact, both during the Zaydi Imamate and the republic established in 1962. This was a problem for the central authority because tribal dynamics and loyalties did not allow the government to enforce its laws across all the territory. Above all, during the republic the government was very concerned to exclude especially the Zaydi tribes from the society; this was due to the fact that after the abolition of the Imamate, the Zaydi doctrines and principles were completely rejected. This attitude by the republic increased the grievances of these tribes and contributed increase the support towards the Houthis, a Zaydi revivalist group which emphasized its purpose to reaffirm Zaydism. This was added to the grievances developed by other parts of society like the youth, which constituted the majority of the Yemeni population, and the southerners that, although the unification in 1990, felt completely ignored by the president Salih's greedy behaviour focused more to protect his power through a patronage network rather than to improve the country's conditions and to favour employment.

Chapter I: Civil Wars

First Part

1.1- The Growing Importance of Civil Wars as a Study.

It can be said that Civil Wars are a feature of our international system, and it is very difficult to analyse states and international politics without taking into account one of the most common phenomena in our contemporary era. The importance of civil wars is ascending since it has acquired more and more relevance with time. Since 1945 civil wars have been the most common type of conflict in the world. It can be assumed that a huge change in active warfare occurred: from the second part of the twentieth century, international conflicts have become a rarer phenomenon, less frequent than civil wars. Furthermore, the duration of civil wars tends to increase[1].

During the Cold War, civil wars were perceived mainly as a consequence of the bipolar system in the rest of the world: the two superpowers considered civil wars as proxy wars; in the vast majority of cases the UN Security Council had no possibility to intervene to address these crises due to the split among the permanent members. The superpowers helped and financed the central government or the rebels to prevent them from losing[2]. After the end of the Cold War, a huge attention has been devoted to find some ways to mitigate and solve civil conflicts, together with other security issues such as counterterrorism, counterpiracy and non-proliferation[3].

For what concerns the frequency of internal conflicts, they remained on a constant value during the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century. Then, a significant rise between 1950 and 1999, so during the decolonization period; during this time frame there have been registered 2.8 new conflicts per year[4]. More specifically, the incidence of civil wars arose between 1950 and 2000, although this has not been a steady process, but an important peak was reached in 1990[5] [6]. Seeing the real number of wars began during these periods, between 1816 and 1849 44 wars took

[1] P. Collier, V.L. Elliott, H. Hegre, A. Hoeffler, M. Reynal-Querol & N. Sambanis, *Why is Civil War so Common? Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, 2003, pg. 93.

[2] B.D Jones & S.J Stedman, *Civil Wars & the Post- Cold War International Order*; *Daedalus, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, 2017, pg. 33 ss. pg. 33.

[3] B.D Jones & S.J Stedman, *Civil Wars & the Post-Cold War International Order; Daedalus, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, 2017, pg. 33 ss. pg. 37.

[4] J. Grieco, GJ. Ikenberry & M. Mastanduno, *Introduzione alle relazioni internazionali: domande fondamentali e prospettive contemporanee*, 2017, pg. 203.

[5] P. Collier, V.L. Elliott, H. Hegre, A. Hoeffler, M. Reynal-Querol & N. Sambanis, *Why is Civil War so Common? Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, 2003, pg. 93 ss., pg. 94.

[6] The incidence of civil war is the proportion of countries that are at civil war at any one time.

place: between 1850 and 1899 a total of 64 wars in the frame of time 1900-1949, 65 wars. In these given periods conflicts average number of wars per year was steady, equal to 1.3. Between 1950 and 1999 a rise without precedents with a total of 141 new conflicts[7] and an average number of wars per year increased to 2.8. This shift may be due to all the changes that involved the international scenario in those years; despite in the 50s many countries were still colonies and colonialism had a negative impact on the possibility of civil war, the overall rise in the incidence of civil wars was the result of new independent countries[8]. The fact that they are independent countries for a short time, having weak institutions and affected by the legacies of decolonization makes them strongly more prone to experience civil wars[9]. Since 1950, each year a third of countries in the world have been characterized by a civil war[10]. At least, the frequency was diminished between 2000 and 2007 when the average number per year of civil wars decreased until 2.5. However, this trend has been reversed in 2015 with the highest number of civil wars since the 90s (Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Ukraine[11]). It might seem that with the rise of intrastate wars, a significant increase in the number of deaths has occurred. But this is true in cumulative terms; it does not mean that the number of human losses for each conflict in greater just because a war takes place in the period in which civil wars are more frequent. The frame of time between 1950 and 1999 should be the one with the highest number of deaths due to the great number of conflicts, but, looking at the single wars, the number of victims per war is just about 8.000. On the contrary, the first half of the twentieth century has provoked almost 60.000 victims per war although in that period only 65 wars took place[12]. This is the result of the Correlates of War dataset. 2014 and 2015 are considered maybe the deadliest years since the end of the Cold War, due to the conflicts in the Middle East and episodes of violence by ISIL and Al Qaeda[13].

There is a recognition of the fact that poor countries have been much more likely to experience civil wars than middle-income countries, and middle-income countries much more likely than rich

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[7] J. Grieco, GJ. Ikenberry & M. Mastanduno, *Introduzione alle relazioni internazionali: domande fondamentali e prospettive contemporanee*, 2017, pg. 203.

[8] P. Collier, V.L. Elliott, H. Hegre, A. Hoeffler, M. Reynal-Querol & N. Sambanis, *Why is Civil War so Common? Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, 2003, pg. 93 ss., pg. 94-95.

[9] P. Collier, V.L. Elliott, H. Hegre, A. Hoeffler, M. Reynal-Querol & N. Sambanis, *Why is Civil War so Common? Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, 2003, pg. 93 ss., pg. 98.

[10] M. Couttenier & R. Soubeyran, *An Overview of the Roots of Civil Wars: Natural Factors and Economic Conditions, G-MonD Policy Paper* 2013, pg. 5.

[11] *United Nations University, Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflicts*, 2017, pg. 2.

[12] J. Grieco, GJ. Ikenberry & M. Mastanduno, *Introduzione alle relazioni internazionali: domande fondamentali e prospettive contemporanee*, 2017, pg. 204.

[13] Ibidem

countries[14]. The capability of government to resist to insurgencies significantly affects the probability that a state experiences an internal war. As a consequence, for the rich countries is less frequent to have a civil war; a strong government generally has more advanced resources in terms of intelligence, so that it can identify and supress potential dissident groups. Poor countries are often more likely to be characterized by poor governance, marginalization and significant resentment by its society. Also, fragmented societies can be vulnerable to internal strife: the degree of inclusion in state's institutions of all the sectors of society is crucial. In those highly fragmented societies in which governments tend to favour a group at the expense of another one, there will be a higher probability that the situation flows in violence. This argument is closely connected to colonialism: the great European powers traced the borders not on the basis of the ethnic groups, but in a way considered coherent with their power and in a way that favoured the extraction of natural resources, without paying much attention to the economic growth of these countries. For this reason, after their colonial experience, states of Sub-Saharan Africa are characterized by strongly variegated societies, and this makes more difficult to maintain the internal stability.

The Middle East and the Arab Springs have represented a huge obstacle in the international cooperation aimed at dealing with internal crises, especially with the failure of US invasion of Iraq. The Arab Springs are another important problem of political instability due to the division of the powerful states on several occasions, as the decision by Russia to intervene militarily in Syria to help of the Assad's regime. Moreover, the intervention on these wars by external actors such as Iran and other Gulf states[15].

Despite the large consensus by the literature on some definitions of civil war, sometimes they have been considered too straightforward: on the one hand it's important to refer to an overall meaning of the term, on the other each case is different and may have its peculiarities, for example what kind of organization is required by the sides involved or how many deaths a civil conflict must provoke in order to be considered in this way[16]. At the same time, in order to avoid relying on simple subjective perceptions, it's important anyway to give some definitions of the term "civil war" as a starting point: Civil War can be defined as *an armed combat within a sovereign state between an incumbent government and a no-state challenger that claims full or partial*

[14] J. D Fearon, *Civil War since 1945: Some facts and theory*, 2005, pg. 1 ss. pg. 2.
[15] B.D Jones & S.J Stedman, *Civil Wars & the Post-Cold War International Order; Daedalus, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, 2017, pg. 33 ss. pg. 37-38.
[16] N. Sambanis, *What is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition, The Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 48, n. 6, 2004, pg. 814 ss., pg. 816.

sovereignty over the territory of the state [17]. Sometimes, the main goal for the non-state challenger can be a governmental goal, so the aim is to acquire full governmental control of the state. In other occasions, there can be a territorial goal, so the aim of the challenger would be to secede or to increase its influence over a part of the territory[18]. This is also called civil war of secession, as that in Sudan where the insurgents of the southern part of the country fought against the central authority and obtained their independence with the creation of the Republic of South Sudan[19]. More specifically, there are some key elements that should be included in every possible definition of civil war: first of all, the goal of armed groups is power and the instrument to achieve it is violence. The groups participating in a civil war must be organized; then, these clashes should take place within a sovereign nation state and one of the parties involved must the government[20]. However, scholars have given more definitions to the term Civil War; Small and Singer defined a civil war as a *military action that is internal to the metropole, requires active participation by the national government and affective resistance by both sides*. So, a parameter that distinguish civil wars from other types of conflicts is that violence is sustained and reciprocated by both the government and the insurgents[21]. For this reason, there would be another type of internal war, the intra-community war, but it is not properly a civil war because it does not involve the participation by the central government as an active part of the conflict, against the insurgents; these are conflicts in which people belonging to different religious communities within a country use large scale violence against each other[22].

According to Doyle and Sambanis, another criterion to assess the existence of a civil war is related to the number of people dead, more than 1000 battle deaths. Besides, the insurgents should be considered as able to inflict great losses to the incumbent; there must be this mutual confrontation. This seems to distinguish civil wars from genocide and other types of unilateral violence.

1.2- *Old and New Civil Wars?*

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[17] We should distinguish civil war from other forms of violence in which the state does not participate in combat in a direct way.

[18] L. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2017, pg. 3.

[19] J. Grieco, GJ. Ikenberry & M. Mastanduno, *Introduzione alle relazioni internazionali: domande fondamentali e prospettive contemporanee*, 2017, pg. 202.

[20] S.N. Kalyvas & P.D Kenny, *Civil Wars, International Studies Encyclopaedia*, 2010, pg. 3.

[21] N. Sambanis, *What is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition, The Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 48, n. 6, 2004, pg. 814 ss., pg. 816.

[22] J. Grieco, GJ. Ikenberry & M. Mastanduno, *Introduzione alle relazioni internazionali: domande fondamentali e prospettive contemporanee*, 2017, pg. 202.

According to several scholars, there has been a huge change in civil wars after the Cold War; due to the fact that the end of the Cold War has represented a shock for the international system, a debate occurred, around whether civil wars have changed. These differences concern three dimensions: motivation, the degree of support and the scale of violence. More specifically, old civil wars are thought to be caused by collective grievances, so political and ideological motivations and noble intentions, such as social change. For this, they would enjoy a high level of support by the local population, or at least one side of the conflict. For what concerns the third point, old civil wars are considered as fought with a controlled violence, especially by the rebels, since the aim was to solve and address collective grievances and the intentions were noble. As opposite, new civil wars are said to be caused by private motivations, by the desire of the rebels to gain private loots without any kind of political or ideological objective, so, completely depoliticized. Secondly, differently from old civil wars, the new ones lack popular support and lack any kind of popular basis. Lastly, in new civil conflicts violence is not controlled but it's indiscriminate, horrific and criminal, without rationality; it is committed by undisciplined militias, private armies and independent warlords for whom winning may not even be an objective[23]. This border between old and new civil wars coincides with the end of the Cold War. These conclusions have been drawn especially in light of recent conflicts in Liberia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Sierra Leone. For the conflict in Sierra Leone for example, the rebels were believed as violent criminals and not political revolutionaries[24]. In Bosnia, the principal aim of the Serbian forces was ethnic cleansing.

Kaldor argues that old civil wars were focused on political and geopolitical ends. Another difference stressed by Kaldor is linked to the economy of conflict: in old civil wars there was external assistance from the US or URSS. In new civil wars external assistance plays a role but the primary economy is created, through the looting of the regions in which the combatants maintain control[25].

However, the case of Nigeria seems to indicate a different conclusion from the one made by the new civil war's advocates. In terms of motivation, one would expect this war to be depoliticized and focused on economic benefits. However, the motivations that led the rebel group, Boko Haram to a conflict can be linked to the history of the group: the demand for Islamic principles in governance was ignored to facilitate the creation of the democratic Nigerian state. This exclusion

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[23] S.N. Kalyvas, *New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss. pg. 102.
[24] S.N.Kalyvas, *New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?, World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss. pg. 100.
[25] T. Geschwindt, *New and Old Civil Wars*, pg. 7.

led to the formation of a strong Islamic identity in the society of Northern Nigeria. Another important event is a funeral for a Boko Haram member in which almost twenty people were killed by police, so Boko Haram bombed the police's station. This led to the capture and murder of the leader of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf. So, it can be argued that the motivations behind the actions of Boko Haram were mainly characterized by collective grievances rather than private greed, especially regarding the institutionalization of sharia in Northern Nigeria[26].

Regarding popular support, Boko Haram did not have broad support, but neither limited; local population sometimes can hide loyalty towards the rebel organization, but tacitly support it. Moreover, two Senators and a Police Commissioner were accused of financing and supporting Boko Haram members[27].

The final dimension concerns the differentiation in the levels of violence, it has been demonstrated that Boko Haram intentionally targeted civilians with the aim to create fear. According to the Institute of Economics and Peace, the 77% of the victims of Boko Haram were private citizens. Also, the kidnapping of young girls and boys was a practical strategy of the group. Despite that, this is not enough because kidnapping and indoctrinating children into rebel armed forces against the armed forces of the state is not a characteristic of the new civil wars, it has been a feature of many old civil wars. So, although the Boko Haram use of an indiscriminate level of violence, this does not indicate that it's a new type of war[28]. The same actions were committed in Afghanistan, Peru and China[29].

In the same way, Kalyvas is very critical towards this distinction between old and new civil wars; according to him, there are some differences but not so much as stressed by some scholars who argue that new civil wars lack purpose entirely.

Kalyvas assumes that these findings are often based on incomplete or biased evidence derived from journalistic reports. In general, the concept of looting is already problematic because it's not clear if people wage war in order to loot or viceversa; secondly, it's not always clear who is doing the looting, if elites, rebels or autonomous militias. Many researchers conducted lengthy fieldwork in war sones and provided a very different thesis from the classical collective grievances/private looting dichotomy. According to them, rebel motivations are various and can go beyond the simple looting. In new civil wars rebels can have ideological motivations, even if sometimes these

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[26] T. Geschwidt, *Old and New Civil Wars*, pg. 8.
[27] Ibidem.
[28] T. Geschwidt, *Old and New Civil Wars*, pg.11.
[29] T. Geschwidt, *Old and New Civil Wars*, pg. 12.

motivations are not easily visible[30]. Rebel organizations in Africa were often portrayed as criminal groups but they develop a complex apparatus of rule, which is not so different from the order implemented by rebels which want to pursue justice[31]. This reasoning works also for the old civil wars: these ideological motivations stressed are often distorted and the main actors were frequently engaged in criminal activities[32].

Kalyvas stresses that there is a tendency among scholars to give an ideological significance to civil wars, mainly because they for first are primarily led by ideology; there is an excessive emphasis on ideological factors[33]. The belief to the incidence of ideological motivations is considered too simplistic by Kalyvas; furthermore, according to him, microlevel studies demonstrate that local motivations tend to overtake ideological ones. More specifically, people who fight are sometimes motivated by local circumstances such as groups pressures, concern for their reputation, respect for their leaders and the desire to contribute to the success of the group[34].

Old civil wars were supposed to be based on a good level of support, while new civil wars are supposed to be fought by actors who lack any popular support and have the objective to destabilize the country. Such beliefs are supposed by Kalyvas to be based on biased information. Many researchers collect data taken only by those area controlled by the incumbent government, so it's quite obvious that there the rebels lack support. As opposite, there are some areas which are controlled by the rebel group, for example more rural territories, in which population supports the rebels[35]. In addition, it is not so completely true that old civil wars had a considerably great degree of support: popular displacement is considered by Kalyvas a quite permanent feature of any civil war. For example, in Vietnam, the Vietcong used an extensive coercion towards the civilian population[36].

Also, violence is new civil wars is described as senseless and horrific, compared to violence in old civil wars. For example, the massacres in Algeria in 1997 were described as senseless[37]. According to Kalyvas, this difference in violence comes more from a cultural point of view: the definition of violence that everyone gives it culturally defined, and the main vision that prevails is the Western one, especially given the fact that the majority of the studies come from scholars

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[30] S.N. Kalyvas, *New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 104.
[31] S.N. Kalyvas, *New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 105.
[32] S.N. Kalyvas, *New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 106.
[33] Ibidem.
[34] S.N. Kalyvas, *New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 108.
[35] S.N. Kalyvas, *Old and New Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 110.
[36] Ibidem.
[37] S.N. Kalyvas, *Old and New Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 113.

belonging to the Western world. From a Western perspective, an airstrike or a bombing on a state seems to be less scandalous than killing a person with a machete; despite this, an airstrike makes much more victims than a machete. So, it's not so true that in the old civil wars' violence was controlled compared to the new civil wars, but the instruments used in each case can arouse more or less indignation depending on culture, which is mainly the Western one. Violence is an essential component of all kinds of civil war[38]. Violence, even if it seems more gratuitous, is never senseless, there's always a logic and a reasoning behind it. An example of exception to the distinction thesis is given by the war in Algeria where violence was highly selective and strategic. The same for the war in Sierra Leone: food shortage and captives may have caused a defection in the rebel movement, so to prevent such defections rebels had to stop the harvest[39].

Civil wars of course present some differences since the end of the Cold War: the demise of global superpowers and, so, external legitimation, leads to put an emphasis on national and local resources. At the same time, Kalyvas says that this is not enough to assume the existence of profound differences in terms of motivations, support and violence. It is possible that the emphasis put on the presumed criminalization and depoliticization of new civil wars is attributable more to the collapse of the conceptual categories typical of the Cold War than to then end of the Cold War in itself[40]. If we think about our object of study, the Yemeni civil war, we will see that the argument based on the distinction between old and new civil wars is even more simplistic; the Yemeni one falls into the category of the so called new civil wars since it has begun in 2015. Nevertheless, the thesis will demonstrate that the aim of the rebels was not exactly connected to a private gain but was more based on collective grievances. Moreover, the rebels acquired significant support by the local population, leaning on these grievances. For what concerns violence, always taking into account the huge number of civilian deaths provoked both by the rebels and the forces loyal to the government, in the Yemen's case it is particularly important to note that the moment in which collateral damages occurred the most was after the intervention of the Saudi-led coalition. Raids and airstrikes by the coalition, which was in favour of the Hadi's government, caused a fateful extension of the conflict, increasing the number of civilian casualties because the airstrikes hit both military and nonmilitary infrastructures. So, the discourse about the indiscriminate violence in this case regards especially the actions committed by external states rather than just the rebels.

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[38] S.N. Kalyvas, *Old and New Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 114.
[39] S.N. Kalyvas, *Old and New Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 116.
[40] S.N. Kalyvas, *Old and New Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction? World Politics 54*, 2001, pg. 99 ss., pg. 117.

But this may pass into the background because according to a Western point of view airstrikes are considered less horrific than other types of killings.

1.3- *Degree of Violence and Tactics of Warfare.*

A relevant part of the literature on civil wars is linked to the study of violence during these conflicts; how violent are civil wars, under what circumstances violence can escalate and which tactics of warfare are used.

Kalyvas dedicated a huge part of his studies on this topic. According to him, the literature has been too much focused on the possible causes of civil war without taking into account the dynamics that occur during these, shifting to the concept of civilian victimization[41]. Kalyvas argues that the degree of violence on the ground depends on the level of control of the territory by both the sides of the conflict: if the government or the rebel group has full control of the territory, the level of violence is lower, due to the lack of information asymmetries. On the contrary, if the territory is only partially controlled by the incumbent government or by the rebels, the degree of violence is higher. As a consequence, in those areas in which neither side of the war has full control, also civilian victimization will be most pronounced[42]. Talking about the instruments and tactics used by the rebels, Kalyvas argues that it depends on the relative strength of the rebels compared to that of the government. If the rebels are relatively stronger than the state, they are more prone to use conventional tactics of warfare with a higher number of fatalities. Otherwise, if a state is relatively stronger than the rebels, the rebels will have greater incentives to use different instruments such as terrorist methods or hit-and-run attacks, causing a lower number of fatalities. ETA for example, was a rebel group that used terrorism as a tactic. So, terrorism can be seen as a strategy to face the government, knowing that the government is stronger. A rebel organization uses terrorism because it's aware that it cannot afford to fight against the government using traditional instruments.

Violent acts against civilians are generally perpetrated more by the governments rather than the rebels. Governmental forces which feel threatened by guerrilla insurgencies are more likely to

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[41] L.E. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 11-12.
[42] L.E. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 12.

target civilians in order to eradicate the rebels' popular support, so trying to solve the problem starting from society and population[43].

For what concerns civilian violence by rebel organizations, it depends on what that rebel organization is based: there are some organizations which are dependent on civilian cooperation, so they would have only damages in targeting civilians. On the other hand, those rebel groups that are endowed with natural resources can attract by themselves a lot of members which are interested in material gain. So, they are more likely to abuse civilians[44].

When it deals with the tactics of warfare, scholars recognize four types: conventional, irregular, symmetric non-conventional and urban. It is important to stress that the type of warfare can have a significant impact on the duration and severity of the conflict[45]. First of all, it is appropriate to give a definition to all these tactics of warfare. A conventional war is a war fought by armed actors which are equally strong; irregular wars are characterized by huge power asymmetries; wars fought by equally weak armed actors are symmetric non-conventional wars[46]. Last, we have a fourth category, the category of the urban warfare, which refers to a confrontation in an urban context with different tactics such as urban terrorism, urban uprisings, riots and protests[47]. It could be argued that the type of warfare is not a category in its own right but it is linked to a series of other dynamics, such as the causes and the characteristics of a state, for example irregular wars are supposed to characterize those relatively stronger states, while symmetric non-conventional are more correlated with weak states since the two parts of the conflict are equally disorganized[48]. Similarly, the type of warfare should have implications also for the internal factors of civil war, such as how long a war lasts and how it ends[49].

Generally, irregular wars tend to last longer than all the other types of civil wars and symmetric non-conventional wars tend to be more lethal in terms of violence[50].

A frequent observation which has been made in the literature is that irregular wars are very common differently from conventional wars: conventional wars are considered a rare phenomenon[51]: it is quite rare the existence of a complete parity between the incumbent and the

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[43] Ibidem.
[44] Ibidem.
[45] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 1.
[46] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 2.
[47] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 7.
[48] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 4.
[49] Ibidem.
[50] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 1.
[51] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 5.

rebels for what concerns high resources. Despite this, using a dataset which includes 144 civil wars, the distribution of the conflicts according to the type of warfare shows a little variation: first, it is true that irregular war is the dominant type of warfare; although, it cannot be considered the only type of warfare since it represents just the 54% of civil wars. But the true difference regards conventional wars, which are not so rare: taking into account all the four types, conventional wars represent the 24%. The rarest one is the urban warfare, which accounts for less than 10% of cases[52].

Two dimensions must be considered: the degree of resources of the incumbent and the presence of parity between rival actors; in presence of parity, we could suppose face-to-face confrontations between the rival armies across frontlines. When it deals with conventional warfare, it can be defined as a conflict in which rival actors have a relatively high level of resources and are characterized by parity with each other. On the contrary, when it comes to irregular warfare the incumbent has a relatively high level of resources and the two rivals lack parity; a possible sign of irregular war can be the decrease in the number of direct confrontations between the two sides and the absence of a clear frontline[53].

When it comes to the third type of warfare, the symmetric non-conventional one, the rival sides have parity. The incumbent and the rebels have a similar level of resources but this time in a negative way: the state and the rebel group are equally weak. This can be manifested in a low military sophistication[54].

Although the importance of these distinctions, the reality is much more complex: most wars can be the result of a combination between different kinds of warfare. The Vietnam war was first of all an irregular between the government of South Vietnam and the US on the one side and the Vietcong rebels on the other; however, it has been defined also a conventional war when the North Vietnamese army invaded the South[55].

Very connected to the issue of warfare is the severity of civil conflicts. Generally, it is taken for granted that conventional wars are less lethal than the other types, because armies are on a similar level, and they are more able to enforce rules against violence on civilian population; but this assumption is quite weak. Conventional wars may be less dangerous towards non-combatants, but

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[52] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 8.
[53] L. Balcells & S.N. Klayvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 5-6.
[54] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 6.
[55] Ibidem.

they may be much more severe on the battlefield[56]. On a first level, data may suggest a relationship between type of warfare and lethality of civil wars. However, type of warfare is not necessarily a determinant: civil conflicts that take place in democratic states are less violent and, of course if a war lasts longer this will lead to a higher number of fatalities. The total number of deaths can be misunderstood, especially in light of the duration of the conflict. As a result, irregular wars tend to be longer than other kind of war, so this may distort the perception of severity. On the contrary, symmetric non-conventional wars are associated with a greater number of victims although shorter[57]. In addition, data suggest that, differently from irregular warfare, symmetric non-conventional and conventional wars have a positive impact on human right violations perpetrated by rebel groups[58].

For what concerns duration, irregular wars tend to be longest type of war because they are based on the premise of evasion. Adaptation and survival that erupt in isolated and peripheral areas with difficult terrain[59]; so, they are consistent with attrition and protraction[60]. Another cause is that irregular wars entail the emergence of higher quality rebels able to develop strong relations with civilian population and build resilient institutions of governance[61]. Furthermore, urban warfare seems to be longer than expected and both conventional and symmetric non-conventional tend to be shorter: they are more likely to produce frontal clashes that could force an outcome[62]. In general, conventional wars are associated with shorter wars because they are more likely to provide a mutually hurting situation, generating incentives to end the conflict in a faster way[63].

Finally, symmetric non-conventional wars are considered something between conventional and irregular: on the one hand they involve non sophisticated technology, so they are less likely than conventional wars to produce decisive and hurting outcomes; on the other hand, they are always symmetric wars so this can make them shorter than irregular wars. So, it comes to hypothesize that symmetric non-conventional are something in the middle, shorter than irregular wars but longer than conventional ones[64]. However, empirical analysis shows that technology of war has a

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[56] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 16.
[57] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 18.
[58] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 21.
[59] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration and Outcomes of Civil Wars, The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2014, Vol. 58, n.8, pg. 1390 ss. pg. 1395.
[60] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Warfare in Civil Wars*, 2007, pg. 22.
[61] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration and Outcomes of Civil Wars, The Journal of Conflcit Resolution*, 2014, Vol. 58, n.8, pg. 1390 ss. pg. 1395.
[62] Ibidem.
[63] Ibidem.
[64] L. Balcells & S.N. Kalyvas, *Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration and Outcomes of Civil Wars, The Journal of Conflcit Resolution*, 2014, Vol. 58, n. 8, pg. 1390 ss., pg. 1396.

very robust impact; as a consequence, symmetric non-conventional wars are not necessarily longer than conventional ones[65].

1.4- *The International Aspect of Civil Wars.*

Another important issue is the so-called internationalization of civil wars. Despite civil wars could seem a purely internal phenomenon, it's not true. It has very important international implications and their consequences affect in a significant way external states and the whole international community; this make civil wars a topic that should be studied and analysed. On a first level, just because they are intrastate conflicts, this does not mean that they make few victims compared to the interstate conflicts; civil wars can cause as many victims as international wars. The main reason for this is the high number of victims among the civilian population that the internal conflicts are inclined to provoke, due to the clear intention to kill people belonging to the opposite faction. This happened in Rwanda, where Hutu killed 800.000 Tutsi in few months. Furthermore, intrastate wars can have important impacts for international peace and security, in several ways: they can spread to neighbour countries since the rebels can take refuge in a bordering country and fight the government from there. An example are the Talibans which moved to Pakistan from Afghanistan after the American invasion and started to fight against the United States and the new Afghan government, sponsored by US.

A country in war can induce refugee flows to other states and this can provoke an escalation of violence in the destination countries.

Moreover, a state divided by a conflict can become more aggressive towards other states; this may be due to the fear of hostility by other states or the willingness to shift the internal attention from the local government to the international arena. An intrastate war can attract other states; on the one hand, an external state can think that a country is particularly vulnerable due to its internal war. Another type of external intervention is related to humanitarian issues: a civil war can provoke starvation, chaos and the collapse of the sanitation system. In some of these cases, external countries intervene with the use of force, aiming to put an end to these violences; with this basis the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect was developed.

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[65] L. Balcells, S.N. Kalyvas, *Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration and Outcomes of Civil Wars, The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2014, Vol. 58, n. 8, pg. 1390 ss. pg. 1402.

During a war, one or more states may decide to intervene giving assistance, resources to one or more factions involved in the conflict, such as military personnel, but without being totally responsible of the clashes. These interventions were much less frequent during the Cold War. Sometimes the international and the domestic dimensions can be closely interconnected. An interstate war can make an internal strife more likely. When a conflict becomes internationalized, this may entail some important implications. First of all, new resources: a conflict is internationalized even in the case in which an actor intervenes from outside. Such external actors can bring new resources to the war, extending the duration of it. Secondly, the involvement of international actors makes more difficult to achieve a final and definitive resolution: the external parties can have their own interests and different ambitions from the domestic actors. These assumptions are significantly coherent with the Yemen's situation, in which the interests of Saudi Arabia and Iran, although in a different degree, brought other purposes on the ground; furthermore, the Saudi-led intervention had a fundamental impact on the duration of the conflict. Talking about internationalization, the case of Arab Uprisings is crucial: the presence of external actors played an important role for the continuation of violence. In the Syrian civil war internationalization involves more dimensions: beyond the six million people internally displaced, the rest got away to Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey. Almost all neighbouring states became involved in this conflict, such as Iran which supported Assad's regime. At the opposite, Turkey took side with the opposition forces. In September 2015 Russia intervened. Russian intervention was caused by several factors: the concern of possible connections between terrorists and the Middle East, the need to come back to the forefront in international politics. The Russian strategy was based on attacking non-jihadist opponents; this would accelerate the jihadist threat and would leave the United States with little choice but to accept a continuation of the Assad's regime[66].

Another important internationalized case, in which external interventions caused an increasing duration of the conflict, is the Libyan one. The country was divided between two forces: the Libyan National Army, led by General Khalifa Haftar, and the Government of National Accord, supported by UN. In April 2019, Haftar's objective to crush Islamists brought him the support of the neighbouring countries like Egypt, which supported him with weapons and resources. Consequently, the Government of National Accord received support from Turkey, in order to prevent Libya from falling under the control of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates[67].

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[66] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, 2022, pg. 221.
[67] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, 2022, pg. 221-222.

The internationalization is crucial especially for the Middle East and North Africa because of the influence that external powers have on these regions. During the Cold War, countries in the Middle East and North Africa were used by the two superpowers to affirm their power position; some of them were closer to United States and others were closer to the Soviet Union. After the Cold War, United States emerged as the unique superpower, and it had the opportunity to reshape the world order according to its own interests and values. So, those countries that had previously received support by the Soviet Union had no choice but to adapt to the new international system[68]. Aligning with the US was seen more as a requirement for both the traditional allies and the rivals. An important aspect is democracy promotion: the assumption was that democracies solve the disputes more peacefully and cooperate more, creating also better living conditions for their citizens. The attempts made by United States to reshape the regions were effective at the beginning, but then they began to face some problems; some countries preferred to offer some different alternatives and values such as Iran. Iran began to develop strong relations with China. Also, Russia began to require some grounds after the collapse of the Soviet Union[69]. Moreover, the belief and commitment to favour a democratized environment can create some contradictions; democracy means free and competitive elections. Sometimes elections can bring victories to political forces which are incompatible with the values of the West, as it happened in Algeria with Islamists. Especially after 11 September, the US administration felt the need to establish more specific policies in the Middle East, aimed at promoting democracies. However, in order to fight against terrorism, United States allied with several autocracies in the region since the enemy perceived was always radical Islamism[70].

The ties between United States and the Middle East concern also an economic aspect. The end of the Cold War represented an opportunity to modify the economies of these countries in order to integrate them into the international system and the United States realized important economic reforms such as privatization, free commerce and fiscal policies[71].

Beyond United States, also the European Union has developed a role in the Middle East, mainly with a policy of constructive engagement, based on the belief according to which the regional problems existing in the Middle East are given especially by the internal problems which are typical of the countries in that zone, such as violence, authoritarianism and political radicalism. So, this would provoke threats to international peace and security and the European Union has an

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[68] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, 2022, pg. 228.
[69] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, 2022, pg. 230.
[70] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, 2022, pg. 218-219.
[71] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, 2022, pg. 237-238.

interest in preventing this using its own values and promoting democracy and development and trying to intervene in violent crises[72].

Second Part

2.1- When Countries are more Prone to Civil Wars.

Given the relevance of internal triggers of civil wars, it is also important to look at the international dimension. Civil wars are not completely isolated from the international arena, but there is an interconnection.

There are a couple of systemic conditions that can influence internal wars; it has been already mentioned the role of Cold War and the proxy wars promoted by the two superpowers, especially in the weakest states. Also, the role of colonialism has been mentioned, with the colonies populated by very fragmented societies.

Interstate wars can make more probable the possibility of war in one of the parties of the conflict; an example are the wars fought by Russian monarchs in the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century. The defeat of China by Japan in 1895 caused a series of internal reforms by the Qing dynasty, but all these reforms weakened the central governmental authority and led to a period of revolutions between 1911 and 1949.

A huge part of literature is focused on the factors that make countries more prone to civil wars, so an analysis at the country level. A lot of attention has been paid to the role of history and the past of a state: a country that experienced a civil war in the past is more likely to have wars in the present. This would create a conflict-trap. However, this does not mean that history has a true determinant value for the conditions of a country: just because a state had war in the past, this does not make it intended to have conflicts. There is still hope for peace in post conflict societies. The duration of the peace time can be crucial: the longer the peace lasts, the less likely is for a country to experience another civil war. A possible explanation is that maybe the capital accumulated by the rebels during the conflict has been destroyed or depreciated in peace time, and as long as peace lasts, the country is rebuilt and economic recovery can make the opportunity

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[72] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, 2022, pg. 239.

cost of participation higher, making more difficult to recruit rebels[73]. This discourse is half valid if we apply it in Yemen: before the current war, Yemen was subjected with other civil wars in the past creating somehow a conflict trap. At the same time, the country was not able to break this conflict trap and provide a rebuilding and development of the society.

Another factor taken into account is economic and is the income. Income has been examined considering several aspects, the level, the growth, the structure and distribution of income[74].

Cross-country results show a significant relationship between the level of income and the likelihood of civil war, in a negative sense: the lower is the income and the more likely is a civil war although it is not sure this can be interpreted for sure as a causal relationship. It has been stressed that countries that had war in the past are more likely to have wars in general, so the income of a state may be low for this reason[75].

Another factor strongly correlated with civil wars is the income growth. Miguel, Satynath and Sergenti presented a way to evaluate this hypothesis: they analysed the case of civil conflicts in Africa, where growth is generally due to rainfall. African growth is to a great extent determined by agricultural output which is produced by rainfed agricultural activity[76]. When it comes to structure of income, a number of scholars, like Fearon and Laitin, argue that that oil producing countries tend to have a weaker institutional capacity; they may not be able to distribute their wealth equally, causing grievances and civil war. Oil wealth may be considered as an important motivation for rebellion[77].Income distribution is one of the most commonly cited causes of conflict. This is related to the concept of inequality and frustration. However, this assumption has been contested: Stevenson and Wolfers suggest that individuals give more importance to their absolute rather than relative income. It has been argued that those commonly used measures only pay attention to vertical inequalities, so inequality between individuals, but inequality between groups, so horizontal inequality matters more[78].

The problems related to ethnicity are considered other important triggers of civil wars. Those highly fragmented societies are more conflict prone. About that, it is important the constructivist

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[73] A. Hoeffler*, On the Causes of Civil War, Draft Chapter for the Oxford handbook of the Economics of Peace and Conflict*, 1998, pg. 12.
[74] Ibidem.
[75] A. Hoeffler, *On the Causes of Civil War, Draft Chapter for the Oxford handbook on the Economics of Peace and Conflict*, 1998, pg. 13.
[76] Ibidem.
[77] A. Hoeffler, *On the Causes of Civil War, Draft Chapter for the Oxford handbook on the Economics of Peace and Conflict*, 1998, pg. 14.
[78] A. Hoeffler, *On the Causes of Civil War, Draft Chapter for the Oxford handbook on the Economics of Peace and Conflct*, 1998, pg. 17.

argument. Constructivists stress the importance of the socially constructed nature of ethnic groups: people have to imagine themselves as part of a group and on this basis they can trace the border between "us" and "the others", they do not interact on a "one on one" basis with all the others. This means that people need to rely on this constructed sense of community in order to foster a common identity[79]. However, more than a cause of civil war, ethnicity is evaluated more as a tool for mobilization: it's not convenient for the rebel group to recruit randomly among the population, ethnic groups provide an ideal pool. Members of the same ethnic group share the same experiences and possibly the same real or perceived discriminations. So, it is easy to motivate the members of one group[80]. When ethnic groups are concentrated in a rural area, they are more likely to turn into violence; distance from the capital makes difficult for the government to control the activities of an ethnic group[81].

The importance of ethnicity as a potential source of war, however, may depend on the degree of polarization: group size and cultural distance between groups matter. If a group is very small, it may lack the capacity to mobilise sufficient support. There is some evidence according to which the existence of a dominant large group is crucial and is associated with a high risk of conflict; despite this, the simple condition of a dominant group is not enough. The minority has to be large and not be composed by many small different groups. For this reason, countries with a bipolar distribution of ethnic groups have the highest level of polarization[82]. Some scholars conclude from these assumptions that more polarized societies are more at risk of conflict. Nonetheless, the concept of polarization seems to be more linked to the duration of a civil war rather than its onset: polarization is strongly related with fractionalization and, according to some evidence, fractionalization prolongs civil war[83].

However, all these characteristics of states are very important, it is more difficult when the hypotheses are tested, since they can be an influencing factor but not necessarily a direct cause of conflict. Moreover, these attempts to attribute to these conditions a connotation of causality seem to portray civil wars more as a static process in which we have cause and effect automatically. Instead, civil wars are very complex and it's important to see them not as isolated events caused by something in a deterministic way, but as social processes that involve dynamics between the

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[79] A. Hoeffler, *On the Causes of Civil War, Draft Chapter for the Oxford handbook on the Economics of Peace and Conflict*, 1998, pg. 19.
[80] Ibidem.
[81] A. Hoeffler, *On the Causes of Civil War, Draft Chapter for the Oxford handbook on the Economics of Peace and Conflict*, 1998, pg. 21.
[82] Ibidem.
[83] Ibidem.

actors involved, which can be both internal, external and non-state actors. These dynamics include pre- and post-war events, not just what happens within the period in which a conflict takes place. Pre-war conditions can be very helpful to understand what the origins of a conflict are; more, they may affect the development and the progression of civil war and the post-war events[84]. So, pre-, war and post-war periods are significantly correlated and mutually influence each other, they are not separated phases. For example, one of the links between pre-war and wartime period is the organization and mobilization of non-state armed groups, the degree of support towards them and their relationship with the other actors. These dynamics can have effects also on post-war periods[85]. Lukemann emphasizes that social relations are an important part of the conflict and develop dynamically within it; pre-war process have a great impact on wartime and on warfare. This means that, in order to understand civil wars, it is useful to pay attention also to peacetime[86]. According to Mampilly, the actors involved are state and non-state armed groups, civilian population, external actors and international organizations which interact; these interactions start before the outbreak of war because of the attempts of nonstate organizations to mobilize support[87].

So, theoretically speaking there may be more structural conditions that bring a country to be more prone to a civil war. In practice, the correlation between these conditions and a conflict is not so automatic; a role may be played by a mix of these factors but should also be considered the internal dynamics between actors in a state in peace time, interactions that can be conflictual, creating a context that are neither full war nor durable peace, and escalate in war, whose dynamics and relations affect also post-war time and a following probability of internal strife[88]. Looking at the Yemen's case, it is true that the existence of more civil wars in the past has affected the country's propensity to conflicts; however, the origins of the current conflict are very hard to understand if we do not take into account the events and dynamics developed in peacetime, regarding both the behaviour of the government and the support gradually acquired by Houthis.

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[84] A. Shesterinina, *Civil war as social process: actors and dynamics from pre- to post-war, European Journal of International Relations 2022 Vol. 28(3)*, pg. 538 ss., pg. 539.
[85] A. Shesterinina, *Civil war as social process: actors and dynamics from pre- to post-war, European Journal of International Relations 2022 Vol. 28 (3)*, pg. 538 ss., pg. 540.
[86] A. Shesterinina, *Civil War as social process: actors and dynamics from pre- to post-war, European Journal of International Relations 2022 Vol. 28(3)*, pg. 538 ss., pg. 543.
[87] A. Shesterinina, *Civil War as social process: actors and dynamics from pre- to post-war, European Journal of International Relations 2022 Vol. 28(3)*, pg. 538 ss., pg. 544.
[88] Ibidem.

2.2- *Greed vs Grievances.*

The literature has made several attempts to explain and to address what are the factors that cause a civil war.

Maybe the most famous debate in this fields regards the confrontation between the greed and the grievances advocates. These two approaches have been examined for a long-time in an exclusive way, as the one excludes the other, but both of them have empirical support.

The approach based on greed has been adopted and emphasized especially by Collier and Hoeffler[89]. According to the greed approach, individuals are more likely to organize a rebellion and to challenge the state if they have a personal economic interest in joining a rebellion, so, they know they can gain something if they decide to join the opposition. These achievements are purely materialistic, such as money, resources, diamonds, political power. This approach is based on the so-called vertical inequalities and on a rational calculation of the costs and benefits of resorting to arms. According to this, civil wars are more expected to erupt when the opportunity costs of fighting are low because of poverty, and when wartime leads to personal enrichment, financing rebels' activities from looting of natural resources[90]. So, economic factors are the main drivers of conflicts; they are created by a combination of lootable primary commodities, low education levels and a high proportion of unemployed people in declining economic conditions[91]. Therefore, some people could benefit from conflict and may have a personal interest in the initiation and duration of conflict[92].

On the other hand, there is the grievances approach, which is based on the relative deprivation theory: the latter can be defined as the discrepancy between what people think they deserve and what they can actually get. This awareness can generate frustration and so, grievances. However, the mere existence of grievances is not enough to motivate people to initiate an internal conflict: people must perceive these grievances and this sense of injustice in order to be incentivized to rebel against the government. This approach is linked to the perception of horizontal inequalities between groups within a society. The relative deprivation theory was advanced especially by Gurr

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[89] L. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 6.
[90] Ibidem.
[91] J.L. Cabrera, *The Incidence of Civil War Outbreak: Balancing Greed and Grievances, PRIAD Policy Paper, Partnership for Research in International Affairs & Development*, 2012, pg.3.
[92] Ibidem.

which, together with his colleagues, was inspired by phycological theories of conflict[93]. He attempted to capture group inequality and discrimination state policies[94]. The grievance approach has been neglected for a long time in the literature, with the assumption that inequalities and unequal wealth distribution have no significant relationship with internal conflict[95].

According to many of the greed theory advocates, grievances cannot explain the outbreak of rare events like civil wars because grievances are immaterial and are ubiquitous; to the utmost they can be used as an ideological excuse by greedy rebels which aim to personal gains rather than being motivated by altruistic or political ideas[96]. As important examples of the greed theory, conflicts in Africa are considered very important[97]; furthermore, the conflict in Sierra Leone has recently been used to justify the importance of economic factors and how rebels are motivated by their avidity[98]. Another argument is introduced by Fearon and Laitin, according to which a civil war is more likely to start in weak states; more specifically, they emphasized the role of natural resources. It deviates a bit from Collier and Hoeffler's thesis because it shifts the attention from the rebel motivations as the key point to political and institutional factors. Oil extraction leads to bad governance: governments can make rent seeking rather than investing in taxes and public good[99]. The Fearon and Laitin's approach has become the dominant explanation of intrastate conflicts in the literature, with a total discharge of the grievances 'theory[100].

However, grievances still remain relevant in analysing the motivations for rebellion. The dismissal of grievances would mean excluding all the possible protests caused by inequalities and injustices and this could be too risky. First of all, it would be better to focus on the civil wars fought between ethnic groups rather than grievances on an individual level; horizontal inequalities between entire groups may be more relevant than inequality measured along individual lines[101]. Stewart and her colleagues proposed an interesting way to see the link between inequality and conflict as they contrast individual/vertical inequalities with horizontal inequalities[102]: Stewart argues that

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[93] L.E. Cederman, N.B Weidmann & K.S. Gleditsch, *Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison, American Political Science Review* Vol. 105 n. 3, 2011, pg. 478 ss. pg. 478.
[94] L. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 9.
[95] Ibidem.
[96] L. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 6.
[97] J.L. Cabrera, *The incidence of Civil War Outbreak: Balancing Greed and Grievances, PRIAD Policy Paper, Partnership for research in International Affairs & Development*, 2012, pg. 5.
[98] J.L. Cabrera, *The Incidence of Civil War Outbreak: Balancing Greed and Grievances, PRIAD Policy Paper, Partnership for research in International Affairs & Development*, 2012, pg. 6.
[99] L. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 6-7.
[100] L. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 8.
[101] L. Cederman & M. Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War, Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, pg. 9.
[102] Horizontal Inequalities can be defined as inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups.

scholars have failed to capture inequality as a source of conflict because of their reliance on individualist, rather than group-based measures of income levels.[103] Moreover, the majority of internal conflicts are between organized groups, especially groups with particular shared identities or goals to attack others in the name of the group. They are not a matter of individuals[104]. Horizontal inequalities capture more dimensions, political, economic, social and cultural dimension: political inequality is considered as the limited access to the decision-making authority in the state; economic inequality is the unequal distribution of wealth among the households; social inequality means unequal access to opportunities such as access to education; finally, cultural inequality concerns those group-inequalities with reference to symbols, for example religious rights[105].

Horizontal inequalities do not automatically translate into grievances: grievances are intersubjectively perceived phenomena, differently from horizontal inequalities. First of all, grievances need to be linked to social identities: once the identity of the group is clear and becomes evident, there is the tendency to make social comparisons based on the distinction between the members of the groups and others[106]. The perception of such inequalities can generate resentment, which can be defined as the feeling of being politically dominated by a group that has no right to be in a superior position. Resentment based on horizontal inequalities between social groups can provoke marginalization[107].

For what concerns economic inequalities, the argument can be considered valid for both poor and rich people: poorer groups often desire to react regardless of the costs, because they perceive themselves to be disadvantaged compared to their wealthier compatriots. But this perception of disadvantage can also characterize members of some relatively wealthy groups, especially if they feel like the fruits of their success is denied[108].

In light of this, especially the fact that grievances still have an important role for the outbreak of civil conflicts and cannot be ignored, the traditional distinction greed vs grievances has begun to be seen as too tight: a more integrative approach to conflict causality is emphasized. So, not just

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[103] L.E Cederman, N.B. Weidmann & K.S. Gleditsch, *Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison, American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, n.3, 2011, pg. 478 ss. pg. 480.
[104] Ibidem.
[105] Ibidem.
[106] L.E Cederman, N.B Weidmann & K.S Gleditsch, *Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison, American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, n.3, 2011, pg. 478 ss. 481.
[107] L.E Cederman, N.B Weidmann & K.S Gleditsch, *Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison, American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, n.3, 2011, pg. 478 ss., 481-482.
[108] L.E Cederman, N.B Weidmann & K.S Gleditsch, *Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison, American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, n.3, 2011, pg. 478 ss. 483.

choosing to believe to the greed or the grievances approach but to validate both of them: both of them can be very relevant for civil wars. Furthermore, sometimes they don't have to be seen as absolutely separate but an interrelated dynamic between greed and grievances can be formed. Adopting this approach is crucial especially for the object of this thesis. Grievances can be generated by the greedy behaviour of governmental elite[109] and the war in Yemen is a proof of this. Moreover, the revisionist literature pushes for a rebalancing towards the importance of grievances and an interaction between greed and grievances, since it deals with complex phenomena. What the revisionist literature criticizes of the greed thesis is its limited capacity to explain the causal process through which civil wars are triggered[110].

Charles Cater uses the example of the conflicts in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to reinforce his approach. According to him, the primary reason for the rebels' mobilization in both countries was related to the grievances generated by decades of corruption by the state's elite. Rebels' avidity had to be considered more as a consequence of this mismanagement[111]. Good governance is postulated as an important factor that could explain why civil wars can erupt; the key point is that the structural environment created by the actions of the governing elite matter for the study of conflict onset. The state can be the principal perpetrator of grievances among the population, creating the incentive for rebels to expropriate economic resources[112].

So, despite the attractiveness in explaining civil wars with just one category of causes, a more comprehensive and integrative approach is needed, also taking into account the main characteristics of the given state.

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[109] J.L. Cabrera, *The Incidence of Civil War Outbreak: Balancing Greed and Grievances, PRIAD Policy Paper, Partnership for Research in International Affairs & Development*, 2012, pg. 7-8.
[110] J.L. Cabrera, *The Incidence of Civil War Outbreak: Balancing Greed and Grievances, PRIAD Policy Paper, Partnership for Research in International Affairs & Development*, 2012, pg. 8.
[111] J.L. Cabrera, *The Incidence of Civil War Outbreak: Balancing Greed and Grievances, PRIAD Policy Paper, Partnership for Research in International Affairs & Development*, 2012, pg. 9.
[112] Ibidem.

2.3- Rebel Recruitment, Mobilization and the Role of Ideology.

Very relevant is the topic of recruitment, how to recruit individuals and push them to join a rebel movement. Strong and consistent groups are needed if the aim is to rebel against the government or to obtain some concessions.

According to some scholars, the grievances approach is very useful to understand the logic of recruitment: a significant number of people could share the same grievances, from an economic, social or cultural point of view; they could decide to join rebellions in order to address the injustice. However, this argument has been deeply criticized in the literature for its simplicity. It is likely to over-predict rebellion. More specifically, injustices and grievances are much more widespread phenomena than rebellions; on the one hand grievances can be very pervasive, but on the other hand this does not mean that for sure that will flow into a rebellion. The use of force is not the only option: people could show their dissatisfaction and complaints also in a peaceful way. If this is possible and if the unique aim is to reduce grievances, then the use of peaceful means may be preferable for people[113].

Moreover, there are some doubts also concerning that if the rebellion is successful, the benefits derived from the rebels' victory will be accessible to everyone, this is the so-called free riding problem: participating in a rebellion has costs, sometimes very high costs, I could lose my life, so I prefer not to participate, to avoid risks. In case of victory, I will benefit from the gains acquired. Horowitz argues that a possible way to overcome the free riding problem could be the exclusion of people from the group. On the other hand, according to Kalyvas and Kocher, the free riding problem does not exist since civil wars are risky for everyone. Everybody face the same threats, both civilian population and rebels, all of them are in a threatening situation.

According to Hechter, a way to deal with the free riding problem can be the willingness by rebel organizations to offer some selective incentives to participants, to motivate them to join. This can be made both with material incentives, so for example the possibility for participants to gain more during and after the war. The conflict in Sierra Leone is a significant example of this situation: the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) turned against the government primarily motivated by its resentment. It was a group of young, marginalized men. However, the poor state capabilities made the exploitation of the diamond resources logistically viable by rebels; diamond rents provided

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[113] S.N. Kalyvas & P.D. Kenny, *Civil Wars, International Studies Encyclopaedia*, 2010, pg. 13.

opportunities to finance the costs of rebellion[114]. Beyond this, there are also nonmaterial incentives, such as increasing prestige or the recognition of the attempt to redress a grievance[115].

The problem of many of these findings is that they do not take into account the specific context in which people are. The context in which people live can play a very significant role for their decision to rebel; in addition, the decision to mobilize and to take part of a rebel group could be not so individual[116]. Worthy of review is also the argument about the risk: generally, it is assumed that civil wars are risky and that this risk is high. But sometimes the level of danger could be not so high as people normally think. There are cases in which groups of rebellion are very huge and people decide to join these groups for protection, because they feel safer inside a group than outside. If the risk of joining a civil war is not so high, then also recruitment will be easier[117]. Also, the degree of stability that a rebel group has in a given territory can be influential: a rebel organization that is state in a territory can attract more trust by people, and it may not be perceived as a threat to the government, so individuals may decide to join the group[118].

Although it's important to try to understand what pushes people to take part to a rebel organization against the government, there are some cases in which recruitment is not voluntary, it can be a coercive recruitment: so, people may be forced to take part to a rebel group. In any case, coercive recruitment is rarely used, voluntary recruitment is the most frequent type. Coercive recruitment has some costs: if you oblige people to join, they are going to be less loyal, with less discipline and they may make resistance. Generally, coercive recruitment is used when there are economic shocks and a loss of external fundings, or when a military defeat is very close and new recruits are needed.

A factor that must be considered talking about civil wars and recruitment is related to ideology. A great number of works on these topics ignore the impact given by ideological issues: what mattered the most for scholars was the observed behaviour of the parties involved. But ideology should be taken into account first of all because some groups are committed to an ideology and can be based on that: so, a group emergence or behaviour cannot be understood without paying attention to its ideological values[119]. Ideology mainly refers to a more or less systematic set of

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[114] J.L. Cabrera, *The Incidence of Civil War Outbreak: Balancing Greed and Grievances, PRIAD Policy Paper, Partnership for Research in International Affairs & Development*, 2012, pg. 7.
[115] S.N. Kalyvas & P.D. Kenny, *Civil Wars, International Studies Encyclopaedia*, 2010, pg. 14.
[116] Ibidem.
[117] S.N. Kalyvas & P.D. Kenny, *Civil Wars, International Studies, Encyclopaedia*, 2010, pg. 15.
[118] Ibidem.
[119] F.G. Sanìn & E.J. Wood, *Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond, Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, Vol. 51(2), pg. 213 ss., pg. 213-214.

ideas that includes the identification of a referent group[120] and demarcates the borders that identify that group from the others. In the Houthis' case, they presented themselves as a revivalist Zaydi group whose aim was to reaffirm the Zaidy dominance in Yemen after that in 1962 the new republic changed the situation. The exclusion of Zaydi system, together with the huge grievances and frustrations generated by the republican government pushed people to increase their support towards Houthis with time. So, it was a very relevant instrument used by the rebels for recruitment. The importance of ideology can be somehow linked both to the concept of recruitment but also to give a partial explanation to some extreme episodes of the history: genocides such as the Holocaust of the tragedy in Rwanda are very difficult to explain without thinking about the role that ideology has played. More in detail, mass killings can be framed as necessary to create a new society or to defeat an enemy: in Rwanda Tutsi were considered dangerous enemies for the Hutu and genocide was seen as a way to establish social order[121]. Ideologies can have several effects on conflict and the propensity to make war: they influence actors' threat perceptions or strategic propensities. In addition, ideology can affect the willingness of using violence: some types of ideologies may be against the use of violent tools[122]. Because of this, the principal way for ideology to have an impact on conflict is to be internalized in the individuals: so, people should have sincere beliefs and values that influence their cognitive processes and decision-making[123]. As a consequence, ideology is important not just as an instrument but as a real normative commitment: on the one hand it is crucial to attract support, a way to interpret the world that pushes people to align themselves with a rebel organization. So, leaders may decide to adopt a specific ideology as a mean to obtain something without any normative or moral commitment. On the other hand, it is necessary for ideology not to be just instrumental, but a real commitment. Not all combatants fight for instrumental reason; some groups need ideologically committed combatants in order to survive. Leaders cannot choose just any ideology, but they should choose those that are seen as relevant ideologies among people[124].

Once recruitment is made, rebel groups may create a system of governance in the territories they control, so they may create a political order in contrast with that of the state. Rebel governance can occur only if a rebel organization has the total control of a territory, also creating institutions

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[120] F.G. Sanìn & E.J. Wood, *Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond, Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, Vol. 51(2), pg. 213 ss., pg. 215.
[121] F.G. Sanìn & E.J. Wood, *Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond, Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, Vol. 51(2), pg. 213 ss., pg. 217.
[122] J.L. Maynard, *Ideology and armed conflict, Journal of Peace Research*, 2019, pg. 4.
[123] J.L. Maynard, *Ideology and armed conflict, Journal of Peace Research*, 2019, pg. 5.
[124] F.G. Sanìn & E.J. Wood, *Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond, Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, Vol. 51(2), pg. 213 ss., pg. 220.

with the aim to manage the relationship with the population, with a taxation system. According to Arjona, rebel governance occurs when rebels have long-term goals; short-term goals are associated with disorder. If rebels do not have long-term goals, they cannot create a system of governance even if they militarily control the territory. There are some other situations in which rebels may not have the ability to create a system of governance. Furlan talks about a series of factors: inclusivity, so the extent to which the government practices, norms and rules defined by a rebel group apply to the entire community or only a part of it; whether to include civilians in the governance system as active participants or whether to relegate them in to a subordinate position; compliance, so the way in which a group that implements its rules within a territory can make sure that the community complies with those rules. It's also important to see how the ruling group decides to respect the governance structures and practices consolidated by the previous ruler and the personnel employed by the previous regime; the level of bureaucratization with some written documents that describes the movement's purposes, a list of the members and the internal division; the executive style, a group can take its decisions and enforce its rules hierarchically or non-hierarchically.

2.4- *Effects of External Actors on the Duration and Outcome of Civil Wars.*

Globalization and the increasing interconnectedness among opposite parts of the world make states more interested in what happens in other states. Moreover, the rise of questions and doubts about a possible intervention in the affairs of another state, the emergence of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine[125] has brought more and more states to intervene in a country which is experiencing a war or a dangerous situation, in order to help the population of that country. So, it is worthful to analyse what are the effects of external interventions on civil wars and their termination and outcome. Despite the fact that civil wars are within the territory of a state, there is often a significant level of external influence. Foreign countries sometimes intervene to cess the hostilities helping the sides to negotiate, or to militarily support one side, maybe sending

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[125] Responsibility to Protect is a principle introduced by International Law and adopted by UN on World Summit in 2005. It's considered an emerging norm, in the middle between the existence and non-existence. It's a different doctrine from the humanitarian intervention and it's based on three points: first, a state has the duty to protect its own population from war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Second, the international community should support and encourage states to exercise this responsibility. Third, if a state is unable or unwilling to exercise this responsibility, the international community can act on a first level and intervene to be sure that these obligations are fulfilled.

weapons or military forces[126]. Many doubts arose among scholars, about what are the real goals of an intervention: many states stress the importance to intervene to protect citizens or to protect international peace and security but, in many cases, states intervene in order to pursue some specific objectives. But whatever it is the motivation of the intervention, external states have an impact also on the outcome and the duration of a conflict.

In general, a war can end in more ways: with a military victory, negotiated settlement or a continuing in fighting[127]. These outcomes have relationship also to the internal dynamics of the conflict since the parties involved rarely will make a negotiation if they do not perceive any benefits. But if actors are rational, the decision to continue the fighting depends on the possibility that one side has to win the battle, otherwise it is too costly to continue to fight; there may be more incentive to negotiate. External states can intervene in a war leveraging on the possibility to reach a negotiated settlement, so helping negotiations, or affecting the capability of one of the parties to fight and win[128]. There are some cases in which an attempt by the party to negotiate is not considered credible by the other one, due to rivalry or lack of trust. So, the presence of an external actor intentioned to enforce peace can be very helpful[129].

On the other hand, external states can intervene from a military point of view, affecting the possibility that one of the parties win the war; in this case, it depends on how many states intervene and to support who. In an internal conflict there may be the intervention of one state or a group of states in favour of just one side. In this eventuality, Barch-Lindsay and Enterline argue that conflicts tend to be shorter because just one party has been supported and enforced, so there are more possibilities that it will reach a military victory. In other cases, external actors can intervene to support both the parties, so both of them receive military support, this is said to lead to longer wars, it's more difficult for one side to win[130]. More specifically, there are some differences among scholars on this: there are scholars who think that interventions lead to an increase in conflict duration in any case; secondly, some scholars which argue that the party an intervening actors takes sides is crucial; some argue that competitive interventions by more actors lengthen the war and lastly, those who argue that the effect of an intervention on duration depends on the

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[126] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47(2)*, 2010, pg. 115 ss., pg. 115.
[127] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47(2)*, 2010, pg. 115 ss., pg. 116.
[128] Ibidem.
[129] Ibidem.
[130] Ibidem.

motivations behind it[131]. Regan affirms that most of the interventions prolong civil wars, despite some cases in which an actor intervenes on behalf on either the government or the opposition forces. About the second point, Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan argue that an intervention in favour of the rebels leads to shorter conflicts, since the presence of strong rebels represents a greater threat for the government. However, some authors find that there is a negative connection between an intervention and the risk of failure; so, according to this, with an intervention the risk of failure decreases and the conflict is longer[132]. About the competitive intervention, there is a tendency among scholars to affirm that the conflict is longer: since we have support on both sides, the risk of failure decreases for both of them, so the conflict becomes unlikely to end soon[133].

Sometimes it is taken for granted that external states intervene in order to support one of the parties and their goals. Some scholars focus on the motivations behind intervention as an important determinant on its duration; Cunningham challenges the assumption according to which states intervene in civil wars because they really want to help one side or facilitate negotiations and peace. He focuses on states which intervene with an independent agenda[134]. Sometimes states intervene to reach some independent objectives in the war, different from the objective of domestic actors within the country in war. So, they are less inclined to genuinely help one side[135].

According to Cunningham, independent interventions generally have a greater impact on the duration of conflict[136]. However, this has an implicit condition: the external state must have the capacity to continue the conflict. Otherwise, if they are just marginal participants their interventions will have a lower impact on the duration of war; but this is considered almost as an exception since, in the majority of cases, if a state intervenes in another state is because it has the physical and material capability to do so. A state already has its strength, resources and

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[131] S.E. Mouritsen, *External Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars, The Cupola Scholarship at Gettysburg College*, 2020, pg. 2.

[132] S.E. Mouritsen, *External Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars, The Cupola Scholarship at Gettysburg College*, 2020, pg. 4.

[133] S.E. Mouritsen, *External Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars, The Cupola Scholarship at Gettysburg College*, 2020, pg. 5.

[134] S.E. Mouritsen, *External Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars, The Cupola Scholarship at Gettysburg College*, 2020, pg. 6-7.

[135] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47 (2),* 2010, pg. 115 ss., pg. 116.

[136] S.E. Mouritsen, *External Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars, The Cupola Scholarship at Gettysburg College*, 2020, pg. 7.

combatants, differently from a rebel group which may be weaker. If an external state has the capabilities and has independent objectives, it will have a huge impact on war[137].

An important theoretical principle is that with an independent intervention, the external state brings an additional set of issues into the conflict that have to be addressed in order to settle the war, so resolving a war becomes harder: there are more combatants with different preferences and, secondly, external states tend to perceive less benefits from negotiation than domestic actors. Solving and ending a conflict is already difficult when there are few actors involved, in presence of these external interventions the situation gets even more complicated. Beyond the presence of a greater set of questions to address, there are also other complexities linked to independent interventions: if we have more combatants with divergent interests and more issues, the likelihood for them to win the conflicts will be harder to be measured; this is quite risky because in most of cases a conflict begins because the parties overestimate the possibility for them to win the war[138]. Furthermore, when there are more parties involved in the conflict, making an agreement is more difficult: there is a broader set of interests' and preferences, the hope of obtaining a better agreement increase, in order to be the last signer. So, actors tend to be less flexible. Negotiations in these types of conflict are more difficult to obtain and to last due to the existence of shifting alliances[139].

The propensity for the actors to make negotiations varies, it depends on how the parties perceive an agreement as more as a cost or as a benefit. An important factor can be connected to information asymmetries: so, when one of the parties does not have a clear idea of the other actor's intentions regarding the contested issue, this lack of transparency is like a barrier which affects in a negative way the propensity to find an agreement[140]. Generally, external states prefer to continue the conflict because they sustain lower costs from fighting. Indeed, the war takes place in the territory of another country, the external state is just an intervening actor; since the conflict is not in the soil of the external state, this will bear less costs in term of human life first of all. On a second level, the foreign country avoids all those typical effects of a war, such as economic costs, destruction of infrastructures and welfare system. Of course, the intervening states face some costs

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[137] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking Resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47 (2)*, 2010, pg. 115 ss., 119.
[138] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47 (2)*, 2010, pg. 115 ss., 117.
[139] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47 (2)*, 2010, pg. 115 ss., pg. 118.
[140] S.E. Mouritsen, *External Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars, The Cupola Scholarship at Gettysburg College*, 2020, pg. 8.

in terms of loss of human life and economic costs, but nothing comparable to the losses faced by domestic actors. This does not mean that there are no circumstances in which external states face higher costs from an intervention aimed to continuing a war: the international community can make pressure and push the foreign actors to withdraw[141], also with the eventuality of inflicting significant economic and trade penalties. As opposite, negotiations seem to have important economic benefits for domestic actors: once an agreement has been reached, domestic actors can transform their objectives into political movements to pursue these goals with non-violent means; these negotiations are often accepted because they try to satisfy more or less all the parties, so they guarantee a power-sharing among the sides. This can alleviate resentment and the feeling of exclusion; the external state rarely will have this possibility since domestic actors are more prone to share the power with other domestic actors rather than foreign actors[142].

It's important to understand with certainty if a state is intervening to pursue separate objectives or to really help one side: for example, seeing the internal allies of the intervening states. External actors can decide to shift their alliances in every moment to choose those allies who are considered more suitable for their goals, as it happened in the Democratic Republic of Congo where Rwanda and Uganda supported different groups, bringing Laurent Kabila to power in 1997 but then starting a rebellion against him in the following year[143]. There are some other situations in which the foreign states say directly that their intervention is not aimed to help someone but to pursue independent goals outside the conflict. Despite that, this is a quite rare situation because a state declaring that its intervention is to provide help to one side or to encourage negotiations implies a higher level of legitimacy and recognition by the international community. If a state intervenes to reach its own interests, it may be accused of violating sovereignty. Another method is related to the historical sources, the reports and documents explaining the circumstances and goals of a specific intervention[144].

Talking about the intervention of external states in particularly important for this thesis. As we know, in the Yemeni conflict other countries have contributed: the Saudi-led coalition intervened with a series of airstrikes, and this had a great impact on the course and duration of the conflict. The coalition was in favour of the Hadi's internationally recognized government, so against Houthis; in this specific case, the external intervention for sure prolonged the war, modifying the

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[141] Ibidem.
[142] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47(2)*, 2010, pg. 115 ss., pg. 119.
[143] D.E. Cunningham, *Blocking resolutions: How external states can prolong civil wars, Journal for Peace Research 47 (2)*, 2010, pg. 115 ss., pg. 120.
[144] Ibidem.

situation. Before the arrival on the scene of the coalition Houthis could have more easily won the war: they had enhanced their capabilities acquiring also a significant support by Yemenis. In light of this, the Saudi-led coalition had quite rebalanced the forces in play. The result has been a prolongment of the war because despite the military campaign in favour of the government, Houthis have improved their strength as well, with also a contribution by another external state, Iran. Regarding a possible independent agenda, pursued by the foreign actors, Saudi Arabia has motivated its intervention putting an emphasis on the need to protect Yemenis and to help the Hadi's forces against Houthis because of their closeness with Iran. Although talking about an independent agenda seems quite strong, in the next chapters we will have the opportunity to analyse their interests and the reasons of their involvement.

Third Part

3.1- The Argument in Brief and its Consistency with the Yemeni Crisis.

The principal aim of my argument is to show all the complexities related to civil wars and the necessity to avoid any determinism. It is always too easy to link the events and the causes of an incisive phenomenon like civil war; people feel the need to find immediately a precise cause that can act as the model to analyse all the cases of civil war from one country to another. This has been demonstrated by the emphasis of scholars to find which one of the greed or grievances approach best explains the outbreak of civil wars. Many scholars have taken some cases in which greed have played an important role and extended this argument on all the other cases, as if all the conflicts have the same characteristics. But looking at the literature in a more accurate way, I had way to realize that this distinction is not only too reductionist and simplistic, but nor it takes into account other possible conditions and circumstances that can be crucial for an explosion of violence. For what concerns the first point, the possible grievances suffered by a population cannot be ignored anymore by the literature. The goal to pursue some materialistic benefits can be strong and, in some cases, may be able to arouse rebellion more than grievances, but this does not mean that it is the only factor; or to better say it, it depends on the war and the conditions of a country, conditions that exist before the outbreak of the conflict. Grievances remain very important despite the attempts by some scholars to ignore them; otherwise, it would be very difficult to understand why civil wars generally occur in the poorest countries, where inequalities are higher and equal representation is more compromised. So, the concept of relative deprivation is very relevant. What

causes civil war is more likely to be a dyadic interplay between greed and grievances. In a significant number of cases, greed can be seen from another perspective, not that of the rebels but that of the government: a greedy and selfish government in these less developed countries tend to benefit and favour its patron client relations at the expense of the whole population, creating huge grievances. Talking about the influence by other circumstances typical of a specific country, it is important to mention the governance; this is linked to the previous point about the incisiveness of a greedy elite, which can be the greatest cause of grievance from citizens. This, mixed with other structural characteristics of a country that maybe are not directly causal of conflict but combined together can be very relevant. The importance of avoiding determinism is valid also for the issue of recruitment: sometimes grievances are not enough to mobilize people due also to the costs of fighting. Selective incentives can be offered to persuade people to fight. However, this does not want to discredit the impact of ideology for mobilization, often dismissed. Civil wars are very fragmented events that cannot be considered just at the moment of combat but have to be analysed as a process that begins with all the pre-war dynamics and the relationship between the incumbent and those who will revolt against it. In addition, external interventions from other states are not automatically motivated by the true attempt to help one side or to solve the conflict but it can hide other objectives and interests that sometimes are not for sure in favour of the damaged state.

The argument, the findings by the scholars and all the exceptions and complexities that are linked to civil conflicts seem to somehow reflect the crisis in Yemen. The Yemeni one is a particularly complicated case in which even less we can make reliance on one or a couple of causes. It is a very difficult crisis to understand, that involves a significant number of actors, all of them trying to pursue control of the area: the principal actor, apart from the Yemeni government were the northern rebels, Houthis, but also the Southern Separatist Movement (Al-Hirak), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Islamic State (ISIL) and some external actors such as Saudi Arabia Iran and United States. Especially Iran and Saudi Arabia are the two historical enemies of the Middle East; Saudi Arabia motivated its intervention in the Yemeni conflict talking about the ideological nearness between the Houthis and Iran, and the support provided by Iran towards the group. However, in the next chapters we will have the possibility to argue that Houthis are supported by Iran, but this does not make them an Iranian proxy; this will put into discussion the Saudi affirmations about an intervention made in order to protect Yemen from Houthis and Iranian propaganda. At the same time, with the conflict in Yemen maybe the issue of independent agenda can be translated also on the internal level: this is due to the fact that, at the beginning, Houthis were against Saleh. Although, after its departure and the election of his vice president Abd Rabbih

Masur Hadi, Houthis seen that the situation for them was not changing and decided to change their position and to ally with Saleh, this time against Hadi.

The Yemeni civil war officially has begun between the end of 2014 and the first months of 2015; however, it is very important to consider the previous situation of the country and the pre-war dynamics, both regarding the Arab Springs of 2011 and all the significant aspect that built the Yemen's history. The Yemeni one is a case in which more than never the need to consider in a dynamic relation both greed and grievances is urgent, with a particular focus on the existence of a greedy government led by Ali Abdullah Saleh. Linking my theoretical approach to the Yemeni case more specifically, we can affirm that both greed and grievances have an important presence; for what concerns greed, these can be seen in the second perspective we have described, so not so much on the part of the rebels but on the part of the government. The central authority has always met difficulties in perpetrating its rules and laws in all the parts of the territory; this is strongly connected to the tendency of the ruler to create a close network system appointing only those people who were considered as strongly loyal to him and favouring some sectors of society at the expense of others. The purpose was to build a dense network of legitimacy around him to not put his position of power at risk. Under Salih this was truer than ever. He built patronage relations with the armed forces, not allowing the southerners to reach control over the military and sidelining political and military opponents. Very soon Saleh's relatives took control over all the military apparatus, destroying any semblance of power sharing[145]. This mechanism did not stop with the Salih's resign but continued under Hadi: at the beginning his position was very weak because the networks in favour of Salih were still alive and he had to do something to foster his position. The result was a clear attempt to create the same patronage relations. In the meanwhile, the overall situation of Yemen was deteriorating. This was the greed part.

The assumption about the fact that the government has never been able to control all the territory is closely connected to a structural condition that is typical in Yemen which has favoured the outbreak of the civil war, albeit not being a direct cause. This is the tribal structure. The tribal structure is what for centuries made impossible for the central authority to reach all the population; the division of the citizens into tribes had put a strain on the incumbent's activities, during both the Imamate and the republic.

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[145] H. Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters, A Society in Transition,* part two*: Ties that Bind and Divide: The "Arab Spring" and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations* by Adam C. Seitz, 2014, pg. 56-57.

Regarding grievances, this is a very important aspect, and it is a consequence of the greedy activities of the government. Many sectors were marginalized, such as the Houthis that began to acquire more and more consensus while the governmental legitimacy in the eyes of the Yemenis decreased. The hostility against Salih was typical not only among Houthis but also among the members of al-Hiraak, an opposition group aimed to realize the secession of the southern part of Yemen due to their feeling to not being adequately taken into consideration by Salih; this was proven by the fact that despite the fusion between the northern and southern armies after the unification, Salih was very concerned to impede the condition that would allow the southerners to acquire too much control. Furthermore, another group which became hostile to the government was the young population, strongly excluded by the Yemeni society although they represented the vast majority of Yemenis. All these forces joined their forces to overthrow Salih's government with the 2011 uprisings and they succeeded. However, as we have affirmed between 2012 and 2014 the new government caused almost the same grievances since the NDC treated the Houthis' and the southerners' issues with scarce importance, beyond the new patronage network created by Hadi that did not show differences from his predecessor.

A set of such things combined together explain the outbreak of the civil war; an approach focused on the scarce efficiency and ability of the state caused also by the importance of the tribal aspect in Yemen that cannot be ignored; this favoured greedy choices and policies by the central government which gave life to social marginalization and grievances.

3.2- *Houthis: Creation and Evolution of the Movement.*

Although we will have the opportunity to deepen in the following sections of this thesis, it is worthy of attention to give an initial picture of the Houthi movement. It is important to analyse the history and the development of this organization; this is especially useful to try to address the causes that may have escalated into a revolt against the regime. Furthermore, it will help to understand why grievances and ideology cannot be dismissed by the literature.

Houthis born as a revivalist group of Zaydism, which is a branch of Shiism. Zaydism is a characteristic unique to Yemen and involves one-third of Yemeni population. Things began to change in the 70s and the 80s. The majority of Yemeni population worked in Saudi Arabia: here a lot of them began to convert to Wahhabism and, as a consequence, this shift perpetrated also into the Yemeni society. The regime strongly supported this. This situation pushed an organization,

which afterwards will become Houthis, to revive the Zaydi identity. Then, the groups acquired a lot of popularity and, through the group of Believing Youth, focused on social activism. The government did not agree with the success of this group: attrition between the two sides began to escalate and in 2004 the regime arrested the leader of the movement, Hussein al-Houthi and killed him[146]. Moreover, the regime began to arrest thousands of people that were shouting ant-US and anti-Israel chants; this was a clear reaction to the unpopular decision by Salih to align Yemen with US in the war on terror[147]. He was considered by Houthis more as a puppet in the hands of US. From this event several rounds of conflict between Houthis and the regime characterized the period from 2004 to 2010. The regime tried more times to dismantle completely the Houthi movement, focusing on the areas of North Yemen in which it was believed to exercise a major leadership. During these struggles, the regime used indiscriminate violence against Houthis and stayed on the offensive for all time[148]. As a consequence, these clashes led to a destruction of infrastructures and the displacement of more than 250.000 civilians. Beyond this, the regime and Houthis were involved also in another type of conflict: they competed for who was the most legitimate representative of Yemen. Salih tried to say that Houthis were close to Al Qaeda and portrayed Houthis as an organization whose aim was to undermine Yemen's unity and republic and create an imamate backed by Iran. On the contrary, Salih portrayed the regime as the protector of Yemen emphasizing the importance of the unity of the country, in order to maintain a unique Yemeni identity. On the other hand, Houthis accused Saleh of wanting to please America and Israel with the blood of his own population[149].

During the first years, Houthis did not have a clear political agenda: their aim was simply to resist against repression and limitations perpetrated by the government. Then, the movement grew more and more in terms of size and support. Moreover, the patronage relations between Saleh and the military played a role, in a negative way: important positions were assigned to Salih's relatives or to people very close to the regime. Key elite actors used the military to extend their patronage[150]. Salih also disregarded northern Yemen for what concerns infrastructures, security, education and social welfare. As a consequence, the discontent among the population increased while the support

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[146] M.L. Clausen, *Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2018, Vol. 29, n. 3, pg. 560 ss., pg. 563-564.
[147] M.L. Clausen, *Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2018, Vol. 29, n. 3, pg. 560 ss., pg. 564.
[148] G.M. Longoni, *Storming the Palace: The Houthi Insurgency in Yemen, Close Encounters in War Journal 1: "Close encounters in irregular and asymmetric warfare"*, 2018, pg. 45 ss., pg. 50-51.
[149] M.L. Clausen, *Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2018, Vol. 29, n. 3, pg. 560 ss., pg. 564.
[150] M.L. Clausen, *Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2018, Vol. 29, n. 3, pg. 560 ss., pg. 565.

towards Houthis grew more and more; also, some regions of the country fell within their control. Houthis in the meanwhile developed capabilities and obtained some services such as health, education, electricity and water. Houthi began to be seen by citizens as a reaction against the regime' s negligence[151]. Saleh always favoured some tribes and some parts of society at the expense of others: there were some tribes, as Houthis, who were completely excluded from the distribution of services. Due to years of social and economic marginalization, Houthi asked for Saleh's resignation[152]. Another factor that allowed Houthis to enlarge support from population was the strong appeal to a common Zaydi identity: they portrayed themselves as the main essence of Zaydism and this played a crucial role in attracting population of North Yemen. So, they developed a narrative around this, talking about an insurgency as a necessary act to protect their confessional and constitutional rights[153]. The Zaydi people perceived the threat towards traditional Zaydism by the regime starting from 1962, year in which the Zaydi Imamate was overthrown to establish the republic. It can be argued that ideology here played an instrumental role to attract support, but there is also a strong commitment both by Houthis, which are a Zaydi group, and Zaydi people. Salih helped the spread of Wahabism with the aim of undermining the power position of Zaydi elites: he created networks of popular support to back the Wahabi intrusion[154].

Consistently with the Kalyvas' argument about the relative power of the rebels and of the state, initially power was more in the hands of the regime, Houthis used an extensive set of guerrilla tactics-based ambushes and attacks against army units, in order to seize the resources and weapons of the government and harass officers. Then, Salih formed his coalition, and the rebels could rely on several defectors that withdrew their support from the regime; in the meanwhile, they became stronger. They provided information and knowledge to rebels; as a consequence, they shifted from a simple guerrilla strategy towards a more hybrid and conventional warfare[155].

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[151] M.L. Clausen, *Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2018, Vol. 29, n. 3, pg. 560 ss., pg. 565-566.

[152] G.M. Longoni, *Storming the Palace: The Houthi Insurgency in Yemen, Close Encounters in War Journal 1: "Close encounters in irregular and asymmetric warfare"*, 2018, pg. 45 ss., pg. 53.

[153] G.M. Longoni, *Storming the Palace: The Houthi Insurgency in Yemen, Close Encounters in War Journal 1: "Close encounters in irregular and asymmetric warfare"*, 2018, pg. 45 ss., pg. 53.

[154] G.M. Longoni, *Storming the Palace: The Houthi Insurgency in Yemen, Close Encounters in War Journal 1: "Close encounters in irregular and asymmetric warfare"*, 2018, pg. 45 ss., pg. 52.

[155] G.M. Longoni, *Storming the Palace: The Houthi Insurgency in Yemen, Close Encounters in War Journal 1: "Close encounters in irregular and asymmetric warfare"*, 2018, pg. 45 ss., pg. 54.

Chapter II: The Yemeni Historical and Political Development through the Twentieth Century.

1- Yemen as an Exception in the Middle East and the Years of the Imamate.

As we know, Yemen is located in the Middle East, in the South-Western part of the Arabian Peninsula and shares a border of 1800 kilometres with Saudi Arabia, the most important neighbour for Yemen. Middle East has an history of ties with the European powers; the vast majority of the twenty-three countries in the region has been dominated by these external states for fifty years, from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. More specifically, the European actors that had a significant role were Great Britain, France and Italy: eleven of the Middle Eastern countries came under the control of the British administration, six under French rule and Libya was controlled by Italy. Although the borders established by the colonial powers began to be perceived as legitimate with time, the territories remained very diversified from a cultural, linguistic and religious point of view. Moreover, this caused a series of territorial claims were made by these states, which felt amputated of some territories, like Syria with Lebanon and Iraq with Kwait[156]. On the contrary, some countries in the region remained uncolonized, these are Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan[157].

Yemen can be classified as a particular case since on the one hand it has not been fully colonized by a single power, on the other hand there has been a partial colonization in of the country by two different entities, the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. The presence of the Ottomans was mainly in the northern part and occurred in two phases, in the middle of the sixteenth and in the nineteenth-twentieth century. Despite the huge efforts by the Ottomans to control Yemen, they met an important obstacle, the tribes. Indeed, Yemen has always been characterized by a tribal structure and this has made the Yemeni society very fragmented. Tribes proved to be an obstacle both to the Ottoman dominance[158] and subsequently to the establishment of an effective administration and rule of law[159]. All the difficulties met by the central authority in the establishment of its own power, in the provision of services for all the segments and groups of society and in proving its legitimacy is a problem that, although in different ways, covers all the

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[156] V. Durac & F. Cavatorta, *Politics and Governance in the Middle East*, 2022, pg. 17.
[157] B. Gilley, *The Case for Colonialism in the Middle East, The Middle East and the Islamic World*, 2022, pg. 2.
[158] In addition to all the problems represented by the tribes, the Ottoman occupation in Yemen came to an end in 1918, with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat in the I World War.

phases of Yemen's development, from the Imamate and also through the Republic proclaimed in 1967; moreover, it is strongly connected to the outbreak of the civil war. The tribal structure in Yemen is favoured also by its geographic features and by the multifaced nature of Yemeni territory; the huge diversity of its landscape has caused the dispersion of the population in different settlements; this has facilitated the development of autonomous communities with a strong sense of belonging whose authority began to be somehow parallel to the central one. The high level of loyalty and common identity between the tribesmen has contributed to reinforce their degree of solidarity[160]. Beyond this, tribesmen have to show obedience and devotion to their tribe: a person within the tribe does not exist as an individual but as a part of a common group, so a sense of collective responsibility[161]. A crucial consequence given by this important role of the tribes and the subsequent failure by the Ottomans is the continuation of the dominance by the Zaydi Imamate, which ruled Yemen from the 897 until 1962. However, it is important to reiterate that the independent nature of the tribes represented to some extent a problem also for the Imam.

The other power in Yemen was Great Britain. The British took control of Aden and other territories in the south from 1839 to 1967, year in which the Arab nationalist wave promoted by the Egyptian Nasser involved the Middle East and this led to the leaving of Yemen by the British rule without conditions[162]. The British occupation, unlike the Ottoman one, lasted until 1967 and, although it cannot be defined as a total colonization since it covered just the southern side, it represented an important source for modernization in Yemen which accelerated the Yemen's path towards change and revolution in 1962. In this regard, the British control in Aden provided an example of efficient administration for the rest of the country, able to enforce the law. Moreover, in contrast with the Imamate which was accused of not providing the typical services of a modern state, the British presence proved to be a crucial connection between Yemen and the outside world[163].

Coming back to the Imamate, despite a brief interruption due to the Ottoman occupation, the Zaydi Imamate in Yemen lasted from 897 to 1962 under the Hamid al-Din dynasty which ruled the country for 900 years. From 1918 to 1948 the charge of Imam was covered by Yahia Hamid al-

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[160] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 21.
[161] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 21-22.
[162] During the years in which he was in power, Nasser was the spokesman and supporter of the pan-Arabism, which put an emphasis on the importance of the Arab nationalism as an instrument for all the Arab countries to contrast any potential invader. He talked about Arabs as a unique nation. His administration coincided with the process of decolonization that involved many countries in the region and Nasser was engaged to help these countries in establishing their independence from colonial powers. For this reason, he sided with the revolutionaries in the Yemeni civil war (1962-1968) that ended with the proclamation if the Republic. Beyond Yemen, he supported also the rebels in other states, such as in Algeria and in Kenya.
[163] J. Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 73-74.

Din. His reign was based on a principle of patrimonial regime putting an emphasis on the existence of long-standing values; he wanted both to protect the principles and doctrine of Zaydism and to concentrate the political power in his hands and those of his family[164] since Imam was considered not only a religious leader but also a political guide, which had to be able to govern the state and to enforce the law[165]. Yahia attempted to exercise his power in the most exclusive way possible and he tried to recover the more duties he could and, for those tasks which he could not fill, he appointed men who were perceived as close and loyal by him, such as some members of his family[166]. The tribes were a weakness for him, despite his attempts to appoint only people belonging to his own circle, there were still some tribes which were not in his favour. He was very frustrated for his dependence on the tribes; for this reason, he invested a lot in the creation of a strong and efficient army giving it the responsibility to keep the order and supress the riots[167]. The Yahia's Imamate was characterized by the crucial role of personalities: Imam Yahia was at the top of a rigid hierarchy in which, below him there were his sons and a group of secretaries selected on the basis of their personal characteristics[168]. The most important among his sons also became his successor, Sayf al-Islam Ahmad: he was known at first for his abilities as a military commander conducting some important military operations such as that of lower Tihama which was perceived as a success[169] but, at the same time, it brought his government to overestimate its real abilities and to commit mistakes. Indeed, Yahia claimed over the Narjan oasis, an oasis located in the southern part of Saudi Arabia and for this reason the interests of the two countries collided. The Imamate was abruptly defeated[170]. In terms of administrative assistance, the two men that he trusted more in the last period of his Imamate, so until 1948, were Qadi Abd Allah Husayn al-Amri and Qadi Muhammad Raghib Rafiq Bey. Their position was entirely dependent on the Yahia's patronage; al-Amri conquered the role of Prime Minister in 1930 and he was considered the man whose position was the closest to the Imam's one. He was considered the dominating person in Yemen, he controlled everything of the administrative matters and his knowledge was essential for any decision in this field. He was very important for Imam because he had a role of consultation for every matter of importance. Al-Amri had also been a fundamental figure when

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[164] Zaydism is one of the branches of Islamic Shiism and finds its place in Yemen and it was the main religious current in the country, on which the Imamate is based. Zaydism has always ruled in Yemen, prevailing on the other religious current in the country, which is Shafism, a branch of the Islamic Sunnism. According to Zaydism, only a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad, *Sayyids*, can lead the Islamic community.

[165] N. Haider, *Zaydism: A Theological and Political Survey, Religion Compass*, 2010, pg. 436 ss., pg. 438-439.

[166] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 40.

[167] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 53.

[168] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 40.

[169] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 57-58.

[170] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 59.

Imam's sons were in charge during their father illness: e helped them to find possible enemies of the regime and conspirators. As it happened with Imam Yahia, he was assassinated[171]. Moreover, another group of people particularly important for Yahia were the *sayyid* families, which represented the highest part of the Yemeni society; a huge number of Imams in Yemen came from these families. Furthermore, the *qadis* were very important for the administration; *qadis* were those individuals educated and licensed enough to perform important administrative and judicial tasks. They were less prestigious than *sayyids* but however relevant for the administration[172].

Some innovations were implemented during Yahia' Imamate, such as the development of a press which dealt with the publishing of the Imamate's official newspaper, *al-Iman*. In addition, a postal service, a telegraph service. Also, several trunk roads were built. In 1937 it was created the Ministry of Health with Sayf al-Islam Qasim as a minister; he had to procure medical care for the population[173]. However, the innovations introduced by Yahia were very limited and concentrated mainly in urban areas, the countryside remained quite marginal and tribal resistance was still a problem, his aim was to maintain control, and this pushed him to make only limited concessions. Yahia believed that the best way to preserve the Zaydi religious identity was isolation, so the pursuit and maintenance of an isolationist policy was seen as the best one; he did not allow the modernizing character of the twentieth century to influence the Zaydi Imamate. Yahia provided a minimum set of services that did not include paved roads, motor transportation and highways. So, many parts of the country remained isolated[174]. He was very suspicious towards foreign states, and he wanted to protect the Yemen's traditions and the identity in a serious way; as an example, he refused to accept the access of Westerner companies in the territory. He spent all his life inside Yemen without ever living outside and he did not appreciate the modern ways of life that were lived in most of the Arab countries[175]; so, it can be affirmed that, despite his attempts to conquer territories that were previously in the hands of the Ottoman influence, he was not able to make his power legitimate in the eyes of many tribes.

Moreover, at the end of the 1930s influences from outside began to have an impact in Yemen and many Yemeni students began to go to Egypt in order to have a higher education; a part of these students joined the Muslim Brothers before returning to Yemen and so, Muslim Brothers had an

[171] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 45-46.
[172] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 49.
[173] J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 2017, pg. 55.
[174] U. Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2015, pg. 24.
[175] A.Z. al-Abdin, *The Free Yemeni Movement (1940-48) and Its Ideas on Reform, Middle Eastern Studies*, 1979, pg. 36 ss., pg. 36.

influence in Yemen teaching their doctrine[176]. Furthermore, young intellectuals started to be active during these years, especially through the creation of clubs aimed to spread modern ideas. Yahia reacted with repression and arrests because he saw these movements as a threat to his authority. From the middle of the 1930s also the Free Yemeni Movement became active and contributed a lot in making the population aware of the backwardness of the country; the possibility to overthrow the Imam's regime became more and more real with the cooperation between the Free Yemeni Movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, united by this common objective. On a first level they attempted a diplomatic solution with the presentation of a petition to Yahia in which reforms were requested; Yahia responded with the imprisonment of the supporters of this petition. So, Yahia invested a lot to preserve Yemen's isolation and to maintain its agrarian economy.

After Yahia's assassination, the situation did not improve that much with the election of his son Ahmad. He decided to enhance his army creating a National Army; the National Army became more important with time, with the increasing tension between the central authority and the tribes. Ahmad was still not in favour of the revolutionary Arab ideology, but he was also intentioned to make his Imamate to step forward, in the international scene but especially within the Arab world: Yemen became part of the Arab League in 1954 and, on this occasion, Yemen signed a defence pact with Egypt sending numerous Yemeni officers in Egypt in order to be trained; Ahmad believed that joining the Arab League would bring to him more legitimacy and more allies from a strategic perspective. But this decision had some important consequences: again, the Yemeni officers who were trained in Egyptian territory absorbed and internalized socialist ideas and realized how much Yemen was underdeveloped in certain fields. So, these officers became sturdy opponents of the regime[177]. In this regard, it is worthful to reiterate that in Nasser, at the head of a group of soldiers known as "Free Officers", was able to revert the monarchy governed by Faruk. The aim was to initiate a modernization and industrialization process in Egypt, in order to favour the development of the country making it less dependent on Western powers; these purposes were made impossible by the previous monarchy[178]. As a consequence, Ahmad severely criticized Nasser, identifying his ideology as anti-Islamic. Nasser decided to intensify his propaganda against the Imamate as a response and he began to support the opponents of the Ahmad's regime[179]. Unlike Yahia, Ahmad tried to mitigate this isolationist policy and to bring Yemen

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[176] U. Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2015, pg. 24.
[177] U. Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2015, pg. 27.
[178] G. Del Panta, *Egitto tra rivoluzione e controrivoluzione: Da Piazza Tahrir al colpo di stato di una borghesia in armi,* 2019, pg. 91.
[179] U. Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2015, pg. 38.

closer to the rest of the Arab world, but his efforts were too limited and came too late to stop the incumbent revolution.

Neither Yahia nor Ahmad, although the latter on a lesser extent, were able to invest enough in the building of efficient institutions and modern measures of administration. They focused more on the tribes rather than the creation of strong institutions because both of them started from the assumption that the tribes did not accept the Imam's authority; so, they were more concentrated to acquire the loyalty from the tribesmen[180]. Furthermore, the external pressures for change aggravated the situation. The twentieth century the influences for economic and political change affected all the countries; so, it was impossible for Yemen to completely avoid this; Yemen strongly needed the help cooperation from other countries due to the scarcity of its resources; linked to this, the importation of Western products such as cigarettes and medicines, as well as the establishment in Yemeni territory of trading offices by British and Italian firms played a role; this favoured the change from a subsistence economy to a cash economy[181]. Some services introduced by the Imamate was telecommunications and radio, but they soon revealed as instruments for change: a huge number of Yemenis used radio covertly, and so they had the possibility to be informed about the events of the world and therefore they became more aware of the world beyond the borders of their state. Citizens developed a closer identification with the citizens of other Arab countries[182]. Another element which favoured the revolution has already been cited before and is the British administration in Aden, able to attract many Yemenis due to its efficient services such as modern press, electricity, roads and a significant freedom of thought[183].

After the Ahmad's death on 19 September 1962 due to a worsening of his health conditions, his son Muhammad al-Badr was elected as Imam but the revolution at this point was just around the corner; he lasted just one week because on 26 September a group of armed officers led a coup and initiated the civil war which would have reversed the system of Imamate[184].

2- *The Civil War 1962-1968.*

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[180] U. Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2015, pg. 39-40.
[181] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 68.
[182] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 69.
[183] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 73.
[184] U. Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2015, pg. 38-39.

The Yemeni civil war began on 26 September 1962, when the revolutionary forces overthrew the Imamate of the Ahmad's son, Muhammad al-Badr, and proclaimed the Yemen Arab Republic. The revolutionary forces were led by Colonel Abdallah al-Sallal[185]. In theory the Yemeni civil war should have to bring the creation of a new state capable to ensure political, economic growth and development in the long run; however, in practice despite the formal victory of the Republic over the Imamate, this did not necessarily bring to an efficient administration, as it will be subsequently demonstrated. Besides, the transition from the Imamate to Republic did not happen automatically nor in a clear manner. In the previous chapter it has already been mentioned the international dimension of civil wars and the impact that external powers can have on domestic conflicts; this war is not an exception due to the participation of other countries to provide support to the revolutionaries or the royalist forces. These external states are mainly Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which intervened in two opposite sides. In this war, the Egyptians participated in the conflict to help the revolutionaries against the Imamate and Muhammad al-Badr while Saudi Arabia sided with the royalists, albeit not with military instruments. Egypt in particular had direct involvement in this war because it was the cornerstone of Arab nationalism and already during the Imamate had an important role due to the education given to young Yemeni students travelling abroad. Nasser made a significant speech in which he emphasized the importance for Egypt to intervene in the Yemeni civil war to defend the revolution and that the revolution in Yemen was an Egyptian revolution[186]. Strategically, the Yemen's geographical position would have enabled to Egypt to retain an important portion in the Arabian Peninsula; furthermore, this would have meant the possibility for Egypt to put pressure on Saudis for economic help[187]. Saudi Arabia's support to the Imamate was also due to the fact that Saudi Arabia and Yemen were neighbour countries and having a neighbouring country which has become a Republic was not so suitable for Saudi Arabia; it would have meant risking that the Arab revolution could come to its southern border, and this would have been a danger for the monarchies of the Arab world[188]. It considered the Egyptian intervention as an opportunistic act. With the interest of these external countries, it became clear that this civil war could not be considered as purely internal, but it acquired a regional dimension[189]. The British, contrary to the expectations, sided with the Imamate; despite the British and the royalists had always been the example of two different administration, the Imamate would have meant the minor threat for them. Indeed, Aden represented a priority for the

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[185] Uzi Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2014, pg. 41.
[186] Uzi Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2014, pg. 44.
[187] A. Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War*, 1962-68, 2017, pg. 7.
[188] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 89.
[189] Uzi Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2014, pg. 44.

British and in case of victory for the Republic, Abdallah al-Sallal would have promoted a type of policy against any form of foreign presence in the country[190], while during the Imamate the British presence in Aden had always been able to resist and to show its potential. Since the beginning of the Yemeni civil war, the British were concerned to deal with the use by the revolutionaries of neighbour villages to launch attacks against the Aden's Protectorate[191].

The period after September 1962 was affected by the evolution and the changes that occurred with the civil war. Yemen became a country characterized by divisions between the supporters of the new Republic and the Imamate's advocates: in the lower Yemen such as Sanaa, Taizz and al-Hudayda, the new Republic's power was effective. On the opposite, in the northern part of Yemen, al-Badr tried to continue to carry on his Imamate basing on tribes' support and Saudi help. But there was also another part of the country which was mainly controlled by tribes which maintained their autonomous life even during the conflict; so, it was not only a matter of division between two warring forces, but tribal factors continued to play a role[192]. In the north, attempts were made to establish an effective government with a proper administration and ministers, but these efforts proved to be ineffective because the Imamate did not have any authority on its territories. Each tribal land was controlled by its own *shaykh* without intromissions from outside. The civil war had a really negative effect for the Yemeni population: this is true taking into account the number of deaths, but also counting wounded people and those which remained homeless[193]. In 1963, the revolutionaries reached significant advantages and in June of that year the National Liberation Front was created. The revolutionaries also asked to review the existing constitution and to introduce some liberal provisions. This provoked a negative reaction by Egypt. Egypt believed that it would have been able to impose to Yemen its type of government in a short period of time and without too many efforts; indeed, the Egyptian intervention gave little space for national politics. Egyptians penetrated in every part of the Yemeni civil life because they occupied entirely the state apparatus; but, the Egyptian type of government was not very suitable for Yemen's peculiarities mainly because the Egyptian army was not well equipped to deal with the Yemeni climate. Moreover, the Yemen's structure and geology proved to be an obstacle for the Egyptian troops because the mountains favoured attacks against them by tribal forces from the north and this meant significant losses for Egypt. In 1963, the Egyptian control extended only to Sanaa; the

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[190] Uzi Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2014, pg. 45.

[191] C. Jones, *Among Ministers, Mavericks and Mandarins: Britain, Covert Action and the Yemeni Civil War 1962-64*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2004, pg. 99 ss., pg. 101.
[192] Ibidem.
[193] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 88-89.

army then tried to place some bases in North Yemen in order to expand the spirit of the revolution but without any success due to its low equipment and the attacks by guerrilla forces[194]. After three years after the beginning of the revolution, Egyptian soldiers in Yemen reached 70.000 men. This involvement by Egypt raised the question regarding the origins and the initiators of the civil war; however, the Egyptian intervention does not indicate that Nasser organized and prepared the event but the civil war was more the result of decades of feelings against the Imamate inside Yemen[195]; the British and the royalists tried also to delegitimize the new Republic, making it seem as a part of an Egyptian plan. Even before the outbreak of civil war, in the first months of 1962, the British already believed that Nasser was thinking to intervene and undermine the government in Yemen and this belief was reinforced by the Italian Minister, Amedeo Guillet, that informed the High Commissioner of Aden that Nasser was preparing a new operation in Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia; he was very close with Imam Ahmad. Nasser's brother-in-law, Abd al-Rahman al-Baydani worked and cooperated with the Yemeni revolutionaries.

During all this conflict, both the Revolutionaries and the Royalists faced huge material and human losses and it is reminded as one of stronger experiences in the Yemeni history[196]. In the struggle many Yemenis found none of the two alternatives as a preferable solution[197]. In addition, two leaders of the two sides began to establish a dialogue to find an acceptable solution: these two were Qadi Muhammad al-Zubayri, who had some ministerial charges in the government of the Yemen Arab Republic, and *Sayyid* Ahmad al-Shami, the royalist Foreign Minister. They attempted to find the common point between the two different positions, agreeing about the need to mitigate the Imam's figure and the necessity to expel the Egyptians from Yemen. One of the fathers of the Yemeni nationalism was Ahmad Muhammad Numan; he had also been the Prime Minister of the Yemen Arab Republic; in the Khamr Conference of 1965 he tries to reach a compromise with the Zaydi *shaykhs*. This action of taking away the extreme features of both sides did not solve the problem of legitimacy of that which became the new government[198]. Nasser was obliged to withdraw his army from Yemen after the defeat in the Arab Israeli war in 1967 because the forces were too weak; but, although the withdrawal of Egypt, the royalists were not able to win and in 1970 an agreement was reached to keep the new republican regime, which was composed by some members of the previous Imamate[199]. After Abdullah al-Sallal, the first President of the Yemen

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[194] Uzi Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2014, pg. 54.
[195] A. Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War*, 1962-68, 2017, pg. 11.
[196] Uzi Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, 2014, pg. 48.
[197] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 91.
[198] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 91-92.
[199] H. Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 6.

Arab Republic was Qadi Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani. He was chosen for his prestige and popularity but in the next years his legitimacy decreased due to the weakness of the government; it was not able to provide the most basic services to the population and to maintain control over the citizens and the political elite[200].

These evolutions and the replacement of the Imamate with the Republic occurred mainly in the northern Yemen because the Imam had control in the northern part of the country. At the same time of the Imamate, in the southern part of Yemen, as mentioned, there was the Aden's Protectorate, a territory under the control of the British Empire; it was located in the hinterland of the Aden's Colony. In 1962 Great Britain created the Federation of South Arabia, a group of states in the southern part of Yemen. But after few times, in 1963, the armed struggle against the British began, caused by the huge wave of nationalism that invested also the south Yemen; this was also a huge fear of Great Britain. in the 60s the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen, FLOSY, was operating. It was led by Abdullah al-Asnaj, which was very closed to Nasser from an ideological point of view. The main rival of the FLOSY was the National Liberation Front, NLF led mostly by young people living in rural areas, so it had a particular strength in those zones defeating FLOSY. This strength was also due to the announcement by Great Britain to withdraw its forces. Another factor that incentivized the withdrawal of British forces was the strong pressures exercised by insurrectional groups supported by Nasser; this gave a strong push to the supporters of nationalism and independence. So, in November 1967 Great Britain and the National Liberation Front negotiated for power and then Great Britain definitely left the Federation of South Arabia. Immediately after, the National Liberation Front enhanced its power more and more, ousting its rivals and renamed the country as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), the only Marxist state in the Middle East until the unification[201].

At this point, Yemen is divided between north and south: the north is governed by the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) while the south was the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The communist orientation of the PDRY provoked its isolation from the external world and the suspicion by the rest of the Middle East states.

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[200] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 91.
[201] H. Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 7-8.

3- The Two Yemens: The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

Starting from 1967, Yemen was divided in two. This division existed until 1990, year of unification of the country into just one entity, the Republic of Yemen. The YAR and the PDRY were very different from each other: the PDRY was a communist state and represented a novelty in the Arab landscape. These differences became strengthened by the Cold War: The Marxist orientation of the PDRY ensured that Yemen was strongly fragmented politically and ideologically, as it was for Vietnam and Korea. The YAR had a political model that matched more with the Western ideas, while the PDRY met the characteristics favoured by the Soviet Union and its allies.

The years after the coup were characterized equally by division and transformations at the same time. The new government emphasized the importance of modernism, and the main victims of the revolution were those personalities that had more power during the Imamate.

As explained before, the YAR was the result of the willingness to change the form of government in Yemen because the previous situation of underdevelopment due to the isolationist and reactionary policies of Hamid al-Din dynasty, by Imams Yahia and Ahmad. So, the necessity to provide a different system of government and political model was felt very strongly. After the civil war, for the first time Yemen obtained a constitution. This new political system was born through an agreement between Revolutionaries and Royalists; according to this agreement, the Royalists and tribal forces could join the Parliament, the Consultative Council, in which the tribal leaders had the majority of seats and could use it as an instrument of power. So, despite the transformation of the Imamate into a republic, the Royalists could at least retain some power and were not completely cancelled from the high positions.

Another important point is that the Yemeni society has been characterized for centuries by features that were by them profoundly rooted in the Yemeni culture, so they could not be completely abandoned: the Zaydi tribes continued to have a predominant role in the state[202]. The tribes still remained a problem for the government since the tribe as an entity maintained its importance: all the discourse about the internal loyalty of tribes was still valid during the republic; for the tribesmen the tribe came always before all the rest. So, a true national loyalty and consciousness

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[202] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 286.

did not exist. The internal struggle between the willingness of the republic and the interests of the Zaydi tribes was still alive, but with a difference: during the Imamate this was a problem but, among the tribes in which the Imam had a significant strength and control, he was considered a spiritual guide and the head of power. In the republic this did not exist[203]. The fact that some tribes were independent means that they were also very strong, so the problem to obtain their support and loyalty still persisted; however, this situation was very unstable since the government had the support by the independent tribes until it would not act against their interests. Their independency was due to their self-sufficiency from an economic point of view. If they possessed cash, they had the possibility to import products from abroad; if not independent, they were depended on food and financial assistance provided by the government, and this could represent an advantage for the central authority to exercise pressure and to undermine the independence of the tribes[204]. As I will argue, in the curse of the republican era the government was very concerned to exclude the Zaydi tribes due to the refusal of Zaydism and its principles which characterized the previous Imamate. Tribes maintained an important role especially in the northern region of Sadaa where tribal elites continued to dominate through their political patronage causing an incomplete process of state building[205].

One of the main innovations represented by the YAR was the abolition of *sayyid* aristocracy: this was made through the confiscation of their power and properties. They did not completely disappear from the country, some of them still occupied important charges; however, in the new republic they were choose basing on their ability rather than their blood's descendance; the others were persecuted through imprisonment and execution. They were attached as a social class because of their relative wealth compared to other citizens and because some of them were linked to the previous reign of Ahmad and his oppression[206]. Also, actions against *qadis*[207] were taken but in this case regarding the specific individual rather than *qadis* as a class; this mainly because they were not considered so identifiable with the past regime, and they were seen more as servants of the state rather than agents of the Imam. However, other individuals such as Husayn al-Halali were persecuted, in his specific case because he had been one of the most significant servants of

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[203] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 287.

[204] Ibidem.

[205] M. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*, 2017, pg. 7.

[206] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 98.

[207] As a remind, in the Yemeni society *qadis* were those people considered enough qualified to cover important administrative tasks. During the Imamate, this privilege was granted only to those which were considered trusted officials of the Imam. *Qadis* acquired more local power over centuries, sometimes in a position of rivalry with *sayyids*.

Ahmad[208]. Another cause that ensured that *qadis* were not punished as a class was the fact that many of them opposed the Imam and their action was necessary for a proper administration. An equally important class were the *shafis* who opposed the Imam for a long time, as mentioned; many of them migrated in Aden in search for better opportunities. They proved to be an important force in the revolution and in the YAR they obtained important ministerial charges[209]. Another sign of change after the revolution was the huge increase of the population in the most famous cities in Yemen, so Taizz, Sanaa and Hudayda; this enlargement was related to the acceleration of the economic sector and the decrease in droughts, which was stronger in the years of the Imamate. Nonetheless, agriculture continued to be the main livelihood for the population without too many changes[210].

Despite these changes, the new republic had some characters that made it lose its coherence: although the coup of September 1962 was carried out by a restricted number of people, the spectrum of the opponents of the Imam was very much bigger. The connotation of "Septembrists"[211] covered both the categories. So, the movement of Septembrists was composed by a broad variety of people from different generations and different orientation: it came from the old traditionalists and conservatives to the younger progressists. This made very difficult for the civilian population that had supported the establishment of the republic to remain united and coherent. As a consequence, there was not a common idea on how to manage the government, the only common point between all these different people was the organization of the revolution. Thus, the new issue became how to deal with the multitude of ideas in the republic, ideas whose number reflected the number of people interested in overthrowing the Imamate. Principally, they can be classified in four categories. The first is that of the *Sallatists*; the name derived from Abd Allah al-Sallal because they strongly cooperated with Egypt and were part of the harshest grip on Yemen. The most famous of them was of course President Sallal; also, his vice-president, Abd al-Rahman al-Baydani was very important. He was closely associated with Egypt also because he spent a vast part of his life outside Yemen[212]. The second category were the moderate republicans. They were too many to have a narrow definition but as a common feature they opposed the Egyptian intervention. Another group was that of the radical republicans: they not only opposed to the Egyptian influence, but they were also against any compromise with Royalists. Many of

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[208] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 99.
[209] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 99-100.
[210] R.W. Stookey, *Social Structure and Politics in the Yemen Arab Republic, The Middle East Journal*, 2014, pg. 248 ss., pg. 249-251.
[211] People considered responsible for the establishment of the YAR.
[212] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 100-101.

them were *shafis* that feared a reestablishment of the Imamate. The final category was composed by apolitical centrists[213].

After Sallal, Abd al-Rahman Iryani was elected president in 1967. His reputation as a long-standing opponent of Yahia and Ahmad brought to him a considerable prestige and respect; at the same time, he also had a *qadi* past, so the provision of services to both Zaydis and Shafis. But his too accommodating attitude just weakened his power position[214]. He tried seriously to establish a compromise to meet the preferences of all the groups; the more progressive forces and the radical republicans were not satisfied with this decision, and they lost a part of their influence. For this reason, they were completely against this approach towards the Royalists. This behaviour affected negatively the strength of the government which did not invest so much on infrastructure, health and education[215]. These divisions provoked a stalemate in the progress of the country, mainly a schism between traditionalists and modernists. The most traditionalists were the *shaykhs* which were very concerned about the maintenance of the religious order and considered modernisation as a threat to their traditional values and their positions. As said before, the tribes continued to exist and to have a role, so *shaykhs* continued to attempt to exercise their influence in the government[216].

After Iryani, al-Hamdi took power in 1974 and he tried to fill these grievances and the lack of credibility provoked by Iryani. He represented the interested of the progressists, who had been disappointed by the previous ruler. Al-Hamdi believed that, in order to have progress and to meet all the socio-economic demands, the key was to reinforce the power of the central government and to limit the power of the tribes. He made these issues as a priority. With al-Hambi the army returned to have a prominent role. He had the aim to make the army a central instrument for the consolidation of the central authority against the tribes' influence; the most relevant positions within the armed forces were occupied by the representatives of the biggest tribes. But al-Hamdi attempted to remove these officers and replace them with progressive soldiers. Despite the initial success of this approach, the exclusion of important tribal men made sure that al-Hamdi turned several powerful tribal leaders against him. This represented the beginning of his failure in 1977 [217] and on 11 October of the same year he was murdered.

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[213] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 101-102.
[214] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 108.
[215] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 288.
[216] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 111.
[217] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 288-289.

Al-Hamdi was succeeded by his vice president, Ahmad al-Ghashmi; he remained in power between the end of 1977 and July 1978. For the months in which he had power, the Yemen Arab Republic was characterized by an increasing conservative ideology, at the point that a doubt arose about the reintroduction of the *shaykhs* in the major government positions. In the meanwhile, the process of development came to a stalemate. However, there were some regions in the YAR, that were still supportive towards Hamdi's type of policies. So, opposition and dissidents towards the new regime began to grow, especially in the southern regions of the YAR. In order to deal with these dissident groups, Ghashmi concentrated a lot on the building of a strong system of loyalty within the army, ensuring to have the protection of the major tribesmen and removing Hamdi's supporters and Septembrists from their positions. A very important threat for Ghashmi was Abd al-Alim, one of the fiercest supporters of the assassinated previous President and close to the Soviet Union for his ideology. Things became complicated when Ghashmi organized several manoeuvres to reinforce his power and relegated Abd al-Alim to a mere military role as a commander of a single brigade and the government forces obliged Abd al-Alim and other opponents to cross the border towards the PDRY. There, he joined the National Democratic Front, NDF, which was an organization composed by several opposition movement to the government in North Yemen[218]. The dangerous factor was that the National Democratic Front had connections with Aden, and this enabled the movement to harmonize and to refine its strategies. So, a mistake made by Ghashmi has been to push Hamdi's supporters into opposition and provoke a solidarization with other opposition forces[219].

In the meanwhile, the PDRY revealed itself as an independent and strong rival for the YAR and was able to not be absorbed by the republic in the northern part of the country. It developed as a cohesive Marxist state in its ideology[220]. The PDRY was a democracy in which power came from the working class; the ruling party was always that which promoted revolution, the National Liberation Front that after renamed itself as the Yemen Socialist Party, YSP, in 1978. With time, the ruling party evolved from a nationalist party seeking autonomy from the colonial power into a true Marxist entity[221]. As mentioned before, the National Liberation Front forced the British to withdraw and in 1967 the Southern Yemen became independent after 128 years of British influence. The National Liberation Front had been able to defeat and outclass its rivals such as the

[218] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 121-122.
[219] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 290.
[220] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 108.
[221] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 296-297.

FLOSY; so, the British delegated power to the National Liberation Front which, thanks to this event, began to increase its power and prestige among the population. In 1975 the National Liberation Front merged with other two progressive parties: the People's Vanguard and the People's Democratic Union. From this new alliance originated the United Political Organization National Front, UPONF. So, the UPONF was composed by all the progressive forces of Southern Yemen. After the transformation of the UPONF into the Yemeni Socialist Party, the latter became the only recognized party and received support from everyone within society. The aim was to transform the society according to a Marxist-Leninist basis; with time, among the effects generated by this one-party system were collective leadership, democratic centralism, the removal of non-revolutionary factors and prohibition of criticism and free discussion[222].

From a policy perspective, the expenditures sustained by the government led to an improvement in the condition of the population and the extreme poverty decreased. Also, a better medical sector contributed to raise the living standards. Furthermore, great attention had been devoted to the creation of an efficient educational system with a huge reduction of illiteracy. These social improvements were openly recognized, even in some regions of the northern Yemen, especially those which were located near the borders with the PDRY[223]. The first president of the PDRY was Qhatan ash-Shabi; he adopted some kind of policies such as agrarian reform and a foreign policy characterized by neutrality. But he was strongly criticized from the most extreme Marxists because he was considered too moderate. Their dissatisfaction led them to take the power in 1969 with Abd al-Fattah Ismail; he was the leader of the PDRY from 1969 to 1980. It is not a case that most of the reforms that occurred in the southern Yemen were during the 70s[224]. Among the many reforms, an important place was taken by the nationalisation of the industrial and financial assets and the creation of a new Constitution in 1970. This new Constitution gave the legislative power to a Supreme People's Council. The new programme included the expansion of the public sector, education and emancipation for women[225]; the education system was able to cover the whole country and reached also the university level and dependent on teachers imported from Palestine and Sudan; for what concerns the health, the regime established a system devoted to it with the capacity to operate across all the country. This health system was supported by China and Cuba

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[222] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 297-298.

[223] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 298.

[224] H. Lackner, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Unique Socialist Experiment in the Arab World at a Time of World Revolutionary Fervour, International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2017, pg. 8.

[225] H. Lackner, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Unique Socialist Experiment in the Arab World at a Time of World Revolutionary Fervour, International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2017, pg. 8.

with the provision of resources[226]. The purpose of the regime was to eliminate the private property and the big landowners; moreover, in order to accelerate the agricultural production, an agrarian reform was approved favouring the abolition of the feudal system. More specifically, the Agrarian Reform Law was promulgated in 1970; it confiscated the lands of former rulers and limited the holdings to twenty acres for irrigated and forty acres for rainfall per individual. In 1972, it was declared the Co-operative Law, allowing for almost all arable land to be controlled by state farms. This reform also covered the fisheries sector, the retail trade and the handicrafts sector[227].

Also, the armed forces were completely changed since many soldiers had still been trained by British people. In order to fill this gap, it was created the People's Militia, an army composed by students and workers that were completely indoctrinated politically. Under Ismail any source of opposition within the Party completely disappeared while the power of extremist forces increased[228]. The Ismail's extremism and the Marxist ideology of southern Yemen led it to be close to the Soviet Union and to promote liberation movements across the globe[229]. The Soviet Union considered the PDRY as its biggest Arab ally and was determined to provide support to it with weapons; the relationship between the two states remained strong until 1990, year of unification, despite some weak moments such as the government by Gorbachev and his reforms; these reforms entailed a reduction in the commitment of the Soviet Union to help international allies[230]. There was a strong propaganda against the PDRY in the outside world, especially from Saudi Arabia which represented an important refuge for many exiles that emigrated from Yemen in 1967, after the independence from the British. But Saudi Arabia not only gave refuge to the exiles but in the 1970s also supported armed invasions across the border with Yemen against the PDRY. For this reasons, diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia were established only in 1976[231].

As time passed, the differences between the PDRY and the YAR became more and more intense, especially due to the fact that the PDRY was partially in favour of an eventual unification, but only upon its conditions. The tension between the two governments escalated in 1972 when a war

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[226] H. Lackner, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Unique Socialist Experiment in the Arab World at a Time of World Revolutionary Fervour, International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2017, pg. 12.
[227] S. Bikas & Y. Lahcène, *Higher Education and Employment in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, International Institute of Educational Planning*, 1985, pg. 14.
[228] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 295-296.
[229] T. Koszinowski, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Lo Spettatore Internazionale: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, pg. 285 ss., pg. 301.
[230] H. Lackner, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Unique Socialist Experiment in the Arab World at a Time of World Revolutionary Fervour, International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2017, pg. 12.
[231] H. Lackner, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Unique Socialist Experiment in the Arab World at a Time of World Revolutionary Fervour, International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2017, pg. 5-6.

broke out between them; another war with the YAR broke out in 1979, under Saleh's government in the YAR. The two wars demonstrated the strength of the army of PDRY. These wars ended with the establishment of formal agreements between the two countries for unification and, especially the war in 1972 terminated thanks to the mediation of other Arab states[232] [233].

Regarding the YAR, after the death of al-Ghashmi, the colonel Ali Abd Allah Salih took power. An aggressive lobbying and a military background resulted in his election as President on 17 July 1978. He came from the Sanhan tribe, a small tribe belonging to the *Hashid* confederation and located in the south of Sanaa; he had been able to increase his power thanks to Ghashmi's patronage and his ability to make political manoeuvres because he had little knowledge about the government and the administration; for this reason from the start his legitimacy and his worthiness to govern were put into question[234]. Since the beginning of his government, he located his brothers in the most important positions, in order to secure his survival[235]. So, he immediately attracted a lot of dissidents: the first coup occurred in October 1978, only after three months from his election, but it was a failure. This coup was still led by the Hamdi's supporters which received support from Libya. After the lack of success of the coup, many suspected people were arrested, and the leaders were punished with the execution. Another revolt was organized in 1979, from February to March, in occasion of the already mentioned war with the PDRY; the particular factor was that in this fight the YAR had to face both the PDRY and the National Democratic Front. The YAR showed scarce ability and many defected towards the National Democratic Front. As it happened with the previous war, also in this case the conflict ended especially thanks to the pressure exercised by the other Arab states that claimed the need to have a united Arab world. After this border war, President Salih decided to seek to reach a political solution with the National Democratic Front and to normalize the relationship with the PDRY. Salih was aware that the resources and aids from the other Arab states were essential for development and, to this purpose he knew that improving the relations with the PDRY would have worth the risk. In May 1979 he created a new Presidential Advisory Council and in this body two appointed officials were two persons that had been absent since the al-Hamdi's presidency. He also declared that in February 1980 would have been held free and public elections[236]. But these promises were not maintained

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[232] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 108-109.
[233] H. Lackner, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Unique Socialist Experiment in the Arab World at a Time of World Revolutionary Fervour, International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2017, pg. 6.
[234] R.D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abd Allah Salih Regime: 1978-1984, Middle East Journal* Vol. 39, 1985, pg. 287 ss., pg. 289.
[235] J. Peterson, *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*, 1982, pg. 124.
[236] R.D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abd Allah Salih Regime: 1978-1984, Middle East Journal* Vol. 39, 1985, pg. 287 ss., pg. 301.

by Salih: the talks with the National Democratic Front did not result in an agreement and the elections promised in early 1980 did not take place; this was mainly due to the inability of Salih and the NDF to reach an agreement. At this point it was inevitable to postpone the elections since Salih could not risk a disruption or a manipulation of the electoral system by the NDF. He had made the promise of the election because he thought that the NDF could have been easily won, but it was a tactical miscalculation. This aroused the belief that he was not doing that much to consolidate his position because the postponement of the elections and the failure of the dialogue with the NDF came strongly into contrast with the building of a strong and efficient political system. In February, he established the National Pact explaining the role of this instrument as an important guide for the political action in the YAR; together with this Pact, in May he approved the creation of a National Dialogue Committee, NDC, with the aim to develop negotiation and dialogue with all the elements of the country[237].

This Salih's desire to secure regime's survival affected in a negative way the ability to take even moderate decision to improve the development of the country day by day. There was a strong perception that the government was not doing its duty in dealing with the social and economic growth in a rational way and this caused the opposition by many Yemenis which, in large part decided to stop to invest new capital in Yemen. The situation and the attitude towards the NDF began to change in 1982; NDF proved to be unwilling to carry on its opposition according to the conditions established by the regime. So, Salih became more convinced that it was the moment to take military actions against the NDF. The Salih's intentions to use military instruments against the NDF was reinforced by the decision of the NDF to shoot down two planes belonging to the YAR. Even in this case external Arab states tried to mediate as it was happened for the two previous wars but in April the YAR launched an attack against the NDF who was abruptly defeated; the only hope was an intervention by the PDRY. At this point, since the possibility of a military confrontation between the YAR and the PDRY was higher, the two states decided to establish a dialogue in a summit on May 5, 1982. In this summit Salih agreed to forgive the NDF and for those NDF's members which were willing to accept his condition, he would have involved them in the political system. On the other hand, PDRY's President accepted to withdraw his support for the NDF. About this agreement between the two Yemeni states there were contrasting views: on the one side in the YAR there were those which strongly opposed this compromise. In the meanwhile, in the PDRY many people began to see this dialogue as a premise for an eventual

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[237] R.D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abd Allah Salih Regime: 1978-1984, Middle East Journal* Vol. 39, 1985, pg. 287 ss., pg. 301-302.

unification, and this would have represented the possibility for them to try to expand the revolution and its principles in all the Arabian Peninsula[238]. For what concerns development policy, Salih was determined to continue to receive monetary support from Saudi Arabia, a very important benefactor for Yemen. About the position of Saudi Arabia, as said before the Arab states on more occasions claimed the necessity to have a cohesive Arab world, mediating also in the wars between YAR and PDRY. However, Saudi Arabia was also concerned to suggest to Salih to not develop so close relations with PDRY, to avoid the risk of a spreading of a Marxist ideology. Salih was very concerned to the building of a strong political system and to reach legitimacy; it is very important the drafting of the National Pact and, on 24 August 1982 he founded the General People's Congress, deciding that it would have been a permanent body elected every four years with plenary sessions every two years. According to Salih, the delegates after the drafting of the National Pact, should also develop a system of political action suitable to protect that Pact[239].

In the following years, a significant optimism developed around the idea of giving to the YAR a significant development and political and economic growth. The perception was that an efficient state apparatus could be built in a context of control by the GPC. Also, the relationship between the two Yemeni states had improved and the borders stabilized between 1982 and 1988. Connected to this, significant achievements had been made such as guaranteeing the free movement among the two Yemens. This was transformed, in 1989, into a desire for unification[240].

These first twenty-three years of Republic demonstrate that the shift from the old political system was anything but linear. Different ideologies and orientations characterized the presidents and there was not a so coherent linkage among them, from the Iryani's accommodate policies, passing through al-Hamdi's more progressive attitude and the al-Ghashmi's more conservative one. The passage towards republic did not mean that every aspect of the Imamate was abandoned; on the contrary, the line dividing the two systems proved to be quite thin without any clean cut and some old aspects, such as the Zaydi tribes, maintained their importance. For what concerns Salih, his purpose was to ensure the survival of his government. To pursued this, he made a somehow double play: through an increasing closeness with the PDRY and the NDF. At the same time, he

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[238] R.D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abd Allah Salih Regime: 1978-1984, Middle East Journal* Vol. 39, 1985, pg. 287 ss., pg. 308-309.
[239] R.D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abd Allah Salih Regime: 1978-1984, Middle East Journal* Vol. 39, 1985, pg. 287 ss., pg. 310-312.
[240] R.D. Burrowes, *Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic 1962-1990, International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23, 1991, pg. 483 ss., pg. 500.

maintained the relations with Saudi Arabia, very important for Yemen. All these efforts had a negative impact on the development and growth of Yemen in the long run, to the benefit of Salih.

4- The Yemeni Unification: The Republic of Yemen.

The developments that had occurred in the South represented an additional incentive for Sanaa to move further towards unification. External powers such as Saudi Arabia did not seem so contrary anymore to a unification; from an economic perspective, there were rumours that the southern Yemen contained more oil than what could contain the northern Yemen and a unification of the two countries would have allowed Salih to have an access also to the south's market[241]. In addition, the unification would entail benefits also from the south that could expect major opportunities in terms of resources and investments in its areas[242]. In May 1988 an important summit between Salih and Ali Salim al-Baidh took place, in which they had the opportunity to agree about a project for a joint oil exploration. In November of the same year was established a joint company, the Yemen Company for Investment in Oil and Mineral Resources, the YCIOMR; the aim was to manage together the exploration of the border area[243].

Other actions aimed to pursue unification took place in 1989 with the decision to connect the national telephone networks and to improve the roads' links. On the other hand, some difficulties deriving from a unification still remained: despite the willingness to carry on the merging plans, they were still two different political systems, with different armies, bureaucracies and economic structures, so, it was a delicate process that would have required more than a year to be realized. The process required a series of joint meetings between the two Presidents in which a significant number of discussions took place about the form that should have the new unitary system and the time within which the unification should occur; to some extent, another hypothesis was to organize the new entity into a federation, but then the winning alternative was unification. About the timing of proclamation of the new Republic of Yemen, YAR and PDRY disagreed: while the PDRY pushed to have the long transition, the YAR wanted unification as soon as possible. These contrasts caused an advancement of the day of the proclamation, from November 1989 to May

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[241] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 66-67.

[242] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 69.

[243] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 67.

1990; in addition, it was established a period of 30 months to be able to organize all the new institutions and set the political administration in the new Republic[244].

The unification of the YAR and the PDRY into the Republic of Yemen occurred on 22 May 1990. It was decided that the new government would have taken place in Sanaa by a Presidential Council composed by five members and among them it would have been selected the President and Vice-president. The cabined would have been composed by 39 members coming from both cabinets of the YAR and PDRY, and the new House of Representatives would have been composed by 301 members, 159 of which from the YAR and 111 from the PDRY. Most importantly, it was decided that the President of the new state was always Salih; indeed, he claimed more times to be the most legitimate representant for Yemeni people since the most populated areas in Yemen were the northern ones although the south was wider, but also because in the South the ruling party, the YSP, did not have any more huge level of power among the citizens. This was due also to external events such as the collapse of the communist parties in Europe[245]. The possibility of success of the unification would have depended on the ability of the new entity to merge the army units and the security apparatus of the previous two states in an effective way. An eventual failure of the process would have entailed worsening relations between the two parts of Yemen and the enemies of the united state could have taken advantage for this. Moreover, this could have undermined the legitimacy of the new leaders of the Republic[246]. As mentioned, the armed forces of the two countries merged and also the foreign missions were unified[247]. The new constitution was approved in May 1991, although it was very contested. At the end of the transition process, the main political forces were the GPC, the YSP and the conservative Islah. The Islah was one of those groups which wanted to make Islam the only source of law and this is one of the reasons why the constitution was strongly opposed. The GPC was the major party, and it was considered a party containing all the political tendencies: it was composed both by modernists and conservatives. Instead, the YSP represented the social democrats' interests, a leftist party. It protected the interests of those Yemenis whose living standards were worsened after unification and who feared a too great rise of the Islamic fundamentalism. The issues that more than others caused contrasts regarded the availability of alcohol in the southern regions and the status of

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[244] R.D. Burrowes, *Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic 1962-1990, International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23, 1991, pg. 483 ss., pg. 501.

[245] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 71.

[246] R.D. Burrowes, *Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic 1962-1990, International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23, 1991, pg. 483 ss., pg. 502.

[247] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 70.

women; more specifically, Southerners were very concerned about the situation of women since the south had hundreds of women judges while the north no one: President Salih guaranteed the principle of equality among men and women in terms of duties and rights, this also regarded the political life and the possibility to obtain political charges[248].

For Yemen, things got even more complicated with the Kuwait crisis in 1990. Yemen decided to oppose the international operation aimed to expel the Iraqi forces from Kuwait and this provoked very much clamour; Yemen was the only Arab state that had a seat in the UN, an opposite position to that of Saudi Arabia ad United States; as affirmed, Saudi Arabia was very important for Yemen. Yemen had almost two million people which had migrated in other Arab states in search for opportunities and work and remittances from abroad were very important for Yemen. With the crisis and the Yemeni position Saudi Arabia decide to expel 800.000 Yemenis, many of them returned home and the level of unemployment in Yemen increased. Moreover, Saudi Arabia stopped all its transfers and aids to the Yemeni government and so did the United States. This contributed to further compromise the economic situation. The central government tried to encourage economic growth through a strategy of economic liberalization, incentivizing the private sector to invest in agriculture, industry and fisheries, the main productive sectors, trying to reduce the prices of the most basic commodities. However, while the government was attempting to decrease the price for some resources, this provoked instead a huge increase in the cost of other resources after unification; this situation was also due to the fact that after unification the services had to be distributed across all the country but the transportation costs to transport these from north to south were very high. This instilled a significant discontent among the southerners that began to organize protests and strikes, claiming all the rights that they had before the unification. All these aspects combined together deterred foreign investors to act. This very difficult financial situation prevented the government from adopting and providing the necessary services for the population, provoking distrusts and creating a context in which the only measures to face this problem were nothing else than patronage networks[249].

As we have already affirmed, a further complicating aspect in Yemen are the Zaydi tribes, the majority in the north part of the country. With the republic, every aspect of Zaydism, that had ruled Yemen until 1962 was completely rejected and considered not in line with the features of the new republican system. This provoked the complete exclusion and marginalization of the

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[248] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 71-72.
[249] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 73-75.

tribes by the government. Indeed, the central authority considered them as dangerous because they could have attempted to overthrow the republic trying to reestablish the Imamate. In order to avoid this, the government excluded the tribes limiting as much as possible the services for them and the possibility to acquire control.

Another aspect worthy of being addressed is the Salih's patronage network. Since his own military service Salih created strong relations with the armed forces and this gave him important opportunities; especially from the unification the policies by Salih became increasingly exclusionary. He made a series of structural changes that negatively affected the YSP: on the one hand the two armies of the YAR and the PDRY merged due to the unification, but at the same time Salih had no intention to allow to southerners eventually to acquire control over the military. At the end, the two armies rather than being completely merged had a simple exchange of troops[250]. The military was literally controlled by Salih's relatives despite the formal appearance of high skilled officers and the illusion of sharing power with the YSP. Salih decided to disarm the southern security forces and replaced them with northern forces loyal to the GPC; this dismantled the power sharing with the south and increased the grievances of the southern military forces[251].

Since the unification, first elections in Yemen occurred in April 1993, but these elections took place in a context of increasing tensions between north and south, especially because the south was feeling as its interests were not sufficiently being protected by the government. The campaign was far from being totally transparent and was characterized by violence and intimidations. As a result, the GPC was the major party, winning 123 of the 301 seats, followed by the Islah with 62 seats and lastly the YSP, with 57 seats. Another relevant factor that favoured this result was that the GPC and the Islah decided to ally and to form a coalition together; this was a strategic choice to attract the vote by as many people as possible thanks to the plurality of political views that these two parties combined merging together. Since this event the rivalries and the mutual distrust among the parties escalated. So, there were two factions: on the one hand the GPC and the Islah and on the other the YSP. After elections, the southerners were ousted from public jobs, the army, land redistribution and from the income derived from the energetic sector. The disagreements between the YSP and the Islah for what concerns the role of Islam as the only possible source of law still persisted. Another source of grievances was the political violence: a huge number of YSP members had been murdered and al-Baidh asked explicitly an implementation of security and the arrest of the responsible; the YSP had the perception that Salih was taking too much power.

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[250] H. Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 56.
[251] H. Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 57.

Moreover, al-Baidh began to have the suspicion that behind the assassinations there could have been the President Salih, together with other members of his administrations[252]. The tensions escalated and culminated in a civil war on 27 April 1994. For this conflict, no one of the parties wanted to take responsibilities for its attacks, attributing to the other side the fault of having initiated the war for first; the YSP withdrew its members from the Parliament. The southern forces believed in their ability to defeat the northern army within their own territory; on the one hand Salih made clear his willingness to reach an agreement and a mediation with the south, on the other he acted clearly to take Aden without showing too much hesitation. Al-Baidh wanted the secession of the previous PDRY from the united country: there were several reasons for this objective. As affirmed, it was clear that the south for some time since the unification was feeling put aside and marginalized, especially because of the already precarious economic conditions of the republic. It began to develop the belief that the south would have benefited more as an autonomous entity, rather than as a part of a unique republic, also due to the fact that the vast majority of the oil fielded were located in the south. In the meanwhile, the UN approved a Security Council's Resolution asking for ceasefire; as a response, Salih declared several unilateral ceasefires but without really stopping the northern advance towards Aden; the southern army was not being able to stop the northern offensive and on 28 June the water and electricity supplies in Aden were stopped and Salih began to bomb the city. After the bombing, Salih's forces decided to retake Aden in their hands entering in the city at the beginning of July and providing food and water to its population. The failure of the YSP was caused by some miscalculations first of all about the strength of the northern forces and their ability to put forward; on a second level, there were some forces supportive of the previous southern President but were based in the north. They played a very important role in the northern offensive since they knew the strategies and the systems of defence in the south. Also, an external element must be added given the pressure by United States for the maintenance of the Yemeni unity[253]. A variable that should be taken into consideration is the economic situation in Yemen after the civil war which was characterized by a continued deficit spending which reached 1.5% in 1996, and huge foreign debts that was estimated to be almost 10 billion in 1995. In order to try to deal with this situation Yemen needed to reestablish good and stable relations with its neighbours, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Furthermore, the necessity to return to a great percentage of expatriate employees was very

[252] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*,1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 77-80.
[253] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*,1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 81-84.

important, to fill the financial deficit and to reduce the high level of unemployment. The governments had also to maintain control on its spending and, in the meanwhile, receive aids from the World Bank and the IMF[254].

As it was anticipated before, and especially after the war given the YSP'S previous intentions to make a secession, Salih began to put aside his political and military opponents[255]; the GPC and the Islah excluded completely the YSP from power in the new government formed in October 1994, so it became as an opposition party; the representatives of the south were no more YSP elements, but people chosen accurately by the GPC. At the same time, despite the solid alliance between the GPC and the Islah, Salih was very concerned to develop a balance within his administration since he wanted to avoid that the most radical Islamist side of the Islah took too much power, and he was very concerned to maintain peaceful relations with Washington. In this regard, the relations between Yemen and the United States improved with the war on terror; more specifically the US had the aim to eradicate the presence of Al-Qaeda in Yemen, the AQAP[256], which in the meanwhile was taking advantage of the decreasing strength of the government to establish its operational bases starting from 2009.

The Islah party was gradually cast aside in favour of the GPC[257]. So, he decided to establish more ties with southerners and non-Islamist elements. In the meanwhile, Salih was also active to rebuild the links with Saudi Arabia through an official condemnation by the President of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the years before[258]. Dissatisfaction from the south increased; the southern people had a vision of unity as the creation of a system in which the incumbents of the previous YAR and PDRY would have shared the power equally. An important role in this field was also played by the legacy by the PDRY: for many people the PDRY provided a strong and efficient system with good services and an effective authority able to cover the whole country with a low level of corruption.

Also, the young people in the south wanted the power to have their own state and to determine their own future because few of them had true memories of the PDRY[259]. This attitude from the young was also a result of a serious problem in Yemen that affected the life of many people: this

[254] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 87-88.
[255] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 56.
[256] Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.
[257] Ibidem.
[258] H.A. Jawad, *The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond, The Middle East in the New World Order*, 1997, pg. 61 ss., pg. 84-85.
[259] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 138-139.

was unemployment, a huge obstacle in all the Arab states. The youth in Yemen became strongly marginalized since the 1990s, especially after the Gulf War, which worsened the Yemen's economic conditions through a cut of the international aids and the repatriation of almost a million of Yemeni migrants. This created an unstable environment of the youth which began to be gradually marginalized. This situation was a problem since the Yemen's population was one of the youngest in the Middle East and under the right conditions, a lot of young people could foster economic development but Yemen's problems for what concerned natural resources, human development and education deteriorated the economic conditions impeding the youth to increase their potential[260]. Indeed, despite the differences between urban and rural level, a general exclusion of the youth existed across all the country. Especially, people residents in rural areas and women faced significant problems since the majority of them dropped out before finishing basic education. Among the factors that prevented most of the women to be involved in the educational system was the fact that many families were reluctant to push girls in a system dominated by males without women teachers and traveling long distances. Furthermore, for those young which had the possibility to obtain some education, its quality was very poor, with rote memorization in the teaching; indeed, a frequent complain made by employers was the lack of people with some critical capabilities, or practical and computer skills. Also, many classes took place in inadequate and unsafe facilities, or open-air rooms[261]. Males who had completed higher levels of education were more likely to work in the public sector; at the same time, having pursued a high level of education did not necessarily entail the certainty to find a work, this was true especially for women[262]. Another important constraint for Yemen is the water scarcity: especially in rural areas women spend many hours of the day waiting for water at wells when they could when they could spend their energy and time in more productive activities[263]. This contributed the enhance opposition to the regime; in 2002, this growing unpopularity pushed the Islah and the YSP to ally with smaller parties to form an anti-GPC coalition, the Joint Meeting Parties, JMP; in the 2006 presidential election the JMP reached the 22 per cent of the votes and the government, alarmed, decided to reintroduce the compulsory military service in order to combat the high level of unemployment since the military was the greatest employer of the country. However, the regime postponed the implementation of this policy, and this provoked even more hostility towards Salih;

[260] R. Assad, G. Barsoum, E. Cupito & D. Egel, *Youth Exclusion in Yemen: Tackling the Twin Deficits of Human Development and Natural Resources, Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper*, 2009, pg. 10.
[261] R. Assad, G. Barsoum, E. Cupito & D. Egel, *Youth Exclusion in Yemen: Tackling the Twin Deficits of Human Development and Natural Resources, Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper*, 2009, pg. 6-7.
[262] R. Assad, G. Barsoum, E. Cupito & D. Egel, *Youth Exclusion in Yemen: Tackling the Twin Deficits of Human Development and Natural Resources, Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper*, 2009, pg. 22-23.
[263] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 17.

in 2007 the Military Association was created, asking for greater compensation and then it became known as al-Hiraak, another important element of the opposition with the purpose to realize the secession of the southern Yemen from the rest of the Republic[264].

So, given all these facts, Salih of course believed in the Yemen's unification when it occurred, establishing initially a close cooperation with al-Baidh and the merging of the distinct sectors of the two previous countries, as the armed forces. However, in the long term Salih began to take more power with strategic choices, taking advantage of the heterogeneity of the GPC and using this condition to attract the loyalty of the Islah, in a clear attempt to ensure the defeat of the YSP and expel its members from the government. In addition, the precarious financial situation in the country and the scarcity of resources contributed to erode the support base for the government and to increase the discontent from the south which strongly felt the consequences of the weak economic context and their exclusion in many sectors. For this reason, discontent and tensions increased and culminated in the attempted coup by the southern forces, but without success. Salih was determined to reinforce his own position using also the aids and support by Saudi Arabia. He monopolized the power through the GPC, but this provoked a further escalation.

5- *The Birth of Houthis as Opposition Against Salih: Ideology and Political Thought.*

During the 90s in the north-west of the country, most specifically between Sadaa and Sanaa began the development of a religious group, founded by the Zaydi Husayn al-Houthi. To understand their rise, it should be also remembered the replacement of the Imamate in 1962. In order to give an historical and political context, the Houthis enhanced their position because of the already described fragile situation in Yemen. Since the revolution in 1962, Yemen had been afflicted by a huge economic and political instability and, especially with the political rise of Salih, it had been demonstrated how an incumbent could act to increase his own power, marginalizing and ousting all the other forces.

After the 1962 civil war, a new narrative developed: the new republican regime portrayed the previous Imamate as something evil and medieval, while the Republic represented a revival and an era characterized by modern values and the Zaydis were defined as a threat to the new Republic and its values. According to these narratives, for centuries the Imam and the *sayyids* treated the

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[264] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 59-60.

Yemeni people as servants imposing their ideology and the revolution of 1962 had represented a moment of change in the relationship which gave people a new freedom. For these reasons, after 1962 *sayyids* had to be carefully kept under control to avoid an eventual regain of power. On the contrary, people that had not been *sayyids* had the concern to maintain their acquired autonomy and wanted to protect it at all costs. This narrative was perpetrated by the republican regime in all the possible ways through books and education at school. As a consequence, many Zaydis began to develop a strong sense of victimization and exclusion; they did not want to renounce to manifest their religious and political belief due to the republic. These feelings of marginalization were effectively the factor which contributed to enhance the strength of the Houthis: many Zaydis felt protected and represented by it[265]. The founder of the movement, Husayn al-Houthi was well aware of the Yemen's conditions and was very frustrated by the situation. For him, Zaydi people were extremely marginalized, and this marginalization was worsened in particular under the Salih's presidency. Husayn al-Houthi was previously a member of Hizb al-Haqq, a Zaydi political party that was created after the unification to represent the Zaydis interests; this was possible mainly because, although the Salih's attempts to increase his authority, the political environment was still relatively open. This until the civil war in 1994, after which Salih began to develop divisive political actions: political violence increased. Al-Houthi's frustration and grievances grew and in the late 90s he was involved in a Zaydi revivalist movement called *al-Shabab al-Mumin*[266]. Al-Houthi helped the growth of this group by organizing meetings, activities and helping with the publication of manuscripts. This movement was quite ideologically close to Iran and al-Houthi admired the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini, especially for what concerns the necessity to provide an Islamic revival rejecting the Westerner doctrines. Moreover, the perception by the Islamic world towards the West worsened even more after the attacks of 9/11 which caused an intense American response through the war on terror. This response promoted a negative attitude towards not only Yemen, but all the Islamic states and al-Houthi portrayed these attacks as direct attacks against Islam and took this occasion to make another critique to Salih due to the fact that Salih allied with the United States in the war on terror, also in order to maintain a good relationship with Saudi Arabia which, as already affirmed, represented the most important donor for Yemen[267].

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[265] A. Hamidaddin, *The Houthi Movement in Yemen, Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf*, 2022, pg. 5-6.
[266] The Believing Youth.
[267] A. Hamidaddin, *The Houthi Movement in Yemen, Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf*, 2022, pg. 18-21.

In examining the al-Houthi's political tendencies, particular attention must be devoted to the importance of the guidance of the Quran. For him, Quran contained all those elements that were necessary to allow to the Muslim community to empower itself. Al-Houthi was firmly convinced that the Quran was an essential instrument to overcome all the contrasts and all the within the Muslim world. He thought that the Muslims had deviated from what were the teachings of the Quran and this deviation would have been caused by jurisprudential theory and theology; divisions regarding jurisprudence, he affirmed that it had a wrong approach because it produced rules with no connection with each other, so it was the main cause of the existence many contradictory laws and views. A consequence of this is that the Quran was sometimes interpreted as it had multiple meanings, without catching its truth, and al-Houthi strongly blamed this. In addition, al-Houthi strongly criticized the instrumental sciences[268] because they deprived the Arab language of its meaning. These factors would have caused conflicts among the Muslims that following the high principles expressed in the Quran would not have occurred. For al-Houthi, the Quran presents a vision that is essential for the creation and development of both the individual and the collective society. In his vision, the Quran had a unique, coherent and unequivocable message that could not be subjected to different interpretations[269].

Houthi were a Zaydi revivalist group and, albeit not of a tribal extraction, they prove to be able to emphasize common positions with the Zaydi tribes regarding the marginalization applied by the government and with time to attract their support. Houthis had a view more based on Khomeinism, focused on the contempt towards the United States and focused on the need to redress the corruption in the Salih's regime and poor governance[270]. Belonging to the Houthis' is the belief that the most important components of identity are the nation, homeland and Islam; these factors define the political form of identity and can be used to achieve several gains. The Houthis used the term "Umma"[271]; Husayn used a lot this term in his discourses to define people, while the word "Yemenis" was used in a second time because for him Yemenis were just a part of the Islamic people. The Umma represented all the Muslim people, the Yemenis only a part of it. Husayn emphasized the existence of a huge hostility towards the Umma, which was represented by the Jews and Christians, so by Israel and America. America and Israel were the very first enemies he identified. For what concerned Saudi Arabia, he considered it as a close ally of the United States

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[268] The instrumental sciences are usually grammar, morphology, syntax, rhetoric.
[269] A. Hamidaddin, *The Houthi Movement in Yemen, Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf*, 2022, pg. 22-24.
[270] A. Hamidaddin, *The Houthi Movement in Yemen, Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf*, 2022, pg. 26-31.
[271] The term "Umma" refers to those people belonging to the community of the faithful.

and so, one of the enemies of the movement. Indeed, behind the existence of global enemies, the Houthis were convinced of the existence of some others local enemies, so, countries that supported America and Israel, the external enemies; America was described as the main cause of all the Yemen's problems that had provoked an aggression also by Saudi Arabia[272]. As mentioned, the Houthi movement was quite close to Iran from an ideological perspective; al-Houthi expressed more times his admiration for Khomeini. He considered Khomeini as the ideal leader to follow because of the Iran's ability to resist and reject the Western tendencies and to remain loyal to its values. Husayn also thought that Iran was the only nation able to protect the Umma thanks to Khomeini's ability to humiliate his enemies[273].

Clearly, Houthis needed to acquire consensus by enhancing their own legitimacy as a movement; al-Houthi was aware of the fact that simple coercion on the population was not enough to perpetrate Houthis' rules across the country. The true power lied in the presence of consensus about its legitimacy; basically, the movement had to conquer the minds of the population in Yemen[274]. In the previous chapter it has been already mentioned that Houthis bet a lot on three elements to obtain consensus from the population: the appeal to a common Zaydi identity, the formulation of compelling causes and the development of captivating narratives. Despite the fact that Houthis were a category in itself which preferred to follow the Qurans teachings in an undisputed way, the appeal to Zaydism was a very important resource for them. The context should be taken into account: Salih's regime became more and more based on patronage relations with time, favouring some groups at the expenses of others and creating huge grievances among people. So, there was a part of the Yemeni citizens that strongly regret the times of the Imamate. So, the Houthis' claim to be direct descendants of the Zaydi Imams revealed as a very useful method to enhance legitimacy for their power. The Houthis exploited this resentment to ask for more political and economic inclusion and they were able to obtain the support from those tribes which had been excluded from Salih's network. These causes were enhanced by an effective narrative describing the regime as pro-America and pro-Saudi Arabia; these motivations were used by Houthis to affirm that their opposition against the government was aimed at protecting the Yemenis' rights and identity[275].

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[272] A. Hamidaddin, *The Houthi Movement in Yemen, Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf*, 2022, pg. 44-47.
[273] A. Hamidaddin, *The Houthi Movement in Yemen, Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf*, 2022, pg. 47.
[274] A. Hamidaddin, *The Houthi Movement in Yemen, Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf*, 2022, pg. 58-59.
[275] G.M. Longoni, *Storming the Palace: The Houthi Insurgency in Yemen, Close Encounters in War Journal,1: "Close Encounters in Irregular and Asymmetric Warfare"*, 2018, pg. 45 ss., pg. 52-53.

Tensions between Houthis and the regime escalated until the outbreak of a civil war in 2004, when the Salih ordered the arrest for Husayn al-Houthi and hundreds of his followers that were shouting chants against Israel and against United States. This reaction by the regime caused an open confrontation with the Houthis; in this occasion, al-Houthi was killed by the regime's forces; subsequently, Salih decided to dismantle completely the Houthi movement with operations in North Yemen, because he believed that Houthis were hiding there. Salih started to attack the Houthis officers indiscriminately; an apparent ceasefire was reached in 2008 but it was interrupted by the kidnapping of some foreign aid workers in Sadaa and the Houthis were accused of this. Salih had a huge reaction and used also the resources and forces provided by Saudi Arabia. Although this huge deployment of forces and external aids for the regime, the Houthis were able to resist, and the ceasefire was reached in February 2011[276]. Because of the mentioned factors about the consensus towards the Houthi movement, in the course of this war between the Houthis and the government some dynamics could be observed: on a first level the majority of the tribes and the *shaykhs* sided with the government and this can be considered mainly as a consequence of the many years of patronage system. Moreover, some other tribes in 2004 were still neutral and simply wanted the end of the hostilities; but, with time several tribes gave their support to the Houthis due to the many economic and political neglects of those years and the collateral damages of the conflict represented by many civilian deaths[277].

6- *The Arab Springs: The Insurgency of 2011 and the Transition.*

The Yemeni revolt begun in January 2011 and are part of the numerous insurgencies to overthrow the incumbent regimes that involved the Middle East. All the previous mentioned movements, the coalition of the JMP, al-Hiraak, the Houthis, young people and students represented the main protagonists of the insurgency due to the numerous grievance they had against Salih. The protesters were inspired by the events in Tunisia and began to ask for regime change. The protests acquired a significant impact in February, after the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and hundreds of activists began to manifest taking the streets across all the country. Salih responded

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[276] G.M. Longoni, *Storming the Palace: The Houthi Insurgency in Yemen, Close Encounters in War Journal,1: "Close Encounters in Irregular and Asymmetric Warfare"*, 2018, pg. 45 ss., pg. 50-51.
[277] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 113-114.

with the order to the armed forces to occupy the Tahrir Square[278] in Sanaa, filling it with supporters of the regime. This action occurred in a significant moment, few days after the President of Tunisia, Ben Ali's resignation, on 14 January. As a consequence, the opponents occupied the street in front of the university renaming it Taghir[279]; it became the main centre of the protests. Similarly, riots took place also in Taizz where the activists set up tents in the city centre and renamed it Hurriyah[280]. In addition, also Aden and al-Mukalla were occupied by protesters. For what concerned Sanaa, half of the residents of the new camp outside the university represented the Yemeni Youth Movement and defined themselves as activists in favour of democracy that had nothing to do with the traditional political currents. These people were able to organize themselves and in March they created a huge movement called the Civil Coalition of Revolutionary Youth, composed by the main four youth organizations in Yemen: The Alliance for the Youth's Revolution, the Alliance of the People's Youth Revolution, the Alliance of Youth and Students for a Peaceful Revolution, and the Peoples Youth Revolution. As already said, these protesters were supported by the Houthis and by the Hiraak movement. The Civil Coalition prepared several demands asking for the immediate dismantle of the Salih's regime and the punishing of those involved in political violence and corruption; another claim was to transform the system from presidential to parliamentary with full transparency. The protesters affirmed that their aim was to manifest for the development of a state able to deal the challenges of the modern world and to provide to its citizens equality, human rights and freedom of speech and opinion[281]. They were called "The Revolutionary Youth", *shabab*; their type of protesting was peaceful, and they became a socially constructed category but not only for their age: they developed new forms of protests with a number of new practices such as the organization of peaceful sit-ins in the Change Square. The Revolutionary Youth included a mass presence of young men and women that exhibited images of slogans and flags painted on faces and bodies. The fact that the *shabab* was composed mainly by young people allowed also to rebalance the regional equilibrium extending the protests both in the north and the south of the country; especially Taizz became the centre of the modernization process because it represented a third political entity between the tribal ideology of the north and the socialism of the south[282]. A huge part of the protesters was

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[278] This preventive action by the regime can be considered as the product of what happened with the revolts in Egypt, when a group of Egyptian activists organized a gathering in Tahrir Square, where 25 thousand of people participated asking for political and social reforms. After three weeks, Mubarak was forced to resign.
[279] "Taghir" means Change.
[280] "Hurriyah" means Freedom Square.
[281] V. Durac, *Yemen's Arab Spring: Democratic Opening or Regime Maintenance? Mediterranean Politics*, 2012, pg. 5.
[282] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 95-97.

from fifteen-to-thirty years old people which had never known any other leadership and university students; they occupied the Change Square in Sanaa performing music and dance and reading poetry, making posters and street art. These gatherings around the University increased because many villagers and tribesmen from other areas joined; this enlargement was so big that a true encampment was created, with its own services, medical sanitation, food and water supply. The women were involved in these riots as never in the history of the Arab world: they also walked on the streets mocking Salih. Furthermore, many of them wore a black veil, others wore baseball white caps and others red baseball caps; the aim was to create the visual effect of the Yemeni flag, extending for more than one kilometre. There was also another episode occurred after a series of attacks against women by the security forces; the women decide to adopt a particular form of protest burning a pile of head-coverings called *maqrama* as a sign to witness the massacres carried out by Salih[283].

At the beginning the coalition of the JMP stayed on the sidelines, but then it began to side with the opponents also looking at the response to the protesters by the regime[284]. More specifically, the Islah party was one of the driving forces of the revolution and with time individuals close to Islah became the first organizers of the sit-ins; but these Islamists exponents ended up with imposing to the revolutionary movements their political views and agenda and this was against what the *shabab* was intentioned to bring, so gender equality, individualism, free exchange of views and tolerance. A practical example of the turn that the situation was taking was the space given to women in Change Square; gender separation was imposed during the manifestations[285].

For what concerns the response by the regime, Salih had a violent reaction towards the protests with the harassment and arrest of the revolutionaries. The political violence was conducted more and more indiscriminately killing also protestors that did not have the majority age. This violent attitude increased on March 18 when Salih's supporters opened fire against demonstrators which were leaving Friday prayers, killing thirty people. These answers had of course a negative impact on the attitude of the protests and on the attitude of the opposition because if on a first level the opposition believed to the concrete possibility to establish a dialogue with the regime, after these episodes of violent repression the opposition announced that a dialogue with the Salih's forces was impossible. But, most importantly, the behaviour showed by the incumbent in dealing with the protesters caused mass defections from the GPC: indeed, around twenty members of the party

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[283] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 33-34.
[284] V. Durac, *Yemen's Arab Spring: Democratic Opening or Regime Maintenance? Mediterranean Politics*, 2012, pg. 5.
[285] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 98-99.

resigned, together with half of the Yemen's ambassadors. Maybe the most important defection was the one of the General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, one of the leading military figures for the country and Salih's cousin. He had a crucial role in the Houthi insurrection in the previous years and was considered one of the most powerful men in society. His defection was very important for protesters since it represented a significant protection for them; subsequently all the Al-Ahmar family withdrew its support from the regime[286]. Ali Mohsen's defection was one of the crucial factors that contributed to the Salih's dismissal and the beginning of the transition process because his family belonged to the *Hashid* confederation, the most powerful tribal network in the country, necessary for Salih to protect his presidency. This internal split in the regime allowed opposition forces, so Houthis, al-Hirak, the JMP and also the AQAP to prosper[287]. People did not take part of one side or another in the regime struggles, they rather wanted to dismantle all of them, and they used Taizz and its rich agricultural area to their advantage because it served as a link between the southern Hiraak movement and the manifestations of Change Square in Sanaa. Taizz was considered by some people as the epicentre of the uprisings[288].

The violent situation on the ground attracted the international attention and Salih was pushed to negotiate with the opposition forces. More specifically, Saudi Arabia feared a lot the revolutionary events in Yemen. So, in May 2011 Saudi Arabia and the other monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council persuaded Salih to allow his dismissals and to renounce to his political power in exchange for immunity from prosecution for him and his family. This plan was also supported by the United States and other western entities. Nevertheless, Salih was not immediately convinced to follow the plan; however, the international pressure began to have a significant impact especially after the human rights minister, Houria Mashhour publicly took position against the crimes committed against the Yemeni people and the lack of a stronger attitude by the GCC countries against this. In this regard, on October 21 the Security Council of the United Nations approved a resolution in which it condemned the human rights violations committed by the regime and other actors and invited all the sides to implement a peaceful transition of power, according to the plan established by the GCC[289].

Finally, on November 23, 2011, Salih officially signed the GCC plan; according to the terms of the pact, immunity from prosecution would have been granted to Salih and his family and he could

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[286] V. Durac, *Yemen's Arab Spring: Democratic Opening or Regime Maintenance? Mediterranean Politics*, 2012, pg. 6-7.
[287] K. Salmutter, *Why did the Transition Process in Yemen Fail? SciencesPo, Kuwait Program*, 2017, pg. 6.
[288] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 35.
[289] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 38-39.

remain president until the elections on February 2012; moreover, he maintained his role as the leader of the GPC[290]. The elections of February 2012, whose organization was then put into question for their hastily arrangement and uncontested nature, the charge of president was assumed by Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, the Salih's vice president; at this point, he had to deal with the reconstruction of the country and with the many social, economic, political and security problems[291].

Although the dismissal of Salih as a president, many activists were not completely satisfied because of the immunity granted to him[292]. Hadi began to lead a new national unity government equally divided between the GPC and the *Islah*-led JMP. Very important is the development of a National Dialogue Conference, NDC, composed by all the identities in Yemen, included al-Hiraak and the Houthis; it was an inclusive initiative by the GCC plan. It consisted in a series of peace talks to try to deal with the several internal contrasts which characterized Yemen. However, this initiative was undermined by some factors. One of the crucial issues was related with the southern secession asked by al-Hiraak: about this, the GCC Initiative decided for a federation rather than a secession. Moreover, federation was considered an unacceptable solution for the northern Yemenis because they feared to lose the important economic resources located in the South. Hadi proposed a controversial solution with the creation of a federation composed by six regions; but this solution was disputed both by Houthis and al-Hiraak because they saw it as a way to separate them from the southern resources. So, it was not a consensual solution within the NDC, but it was mainly imposed from above[293]. Another negative element was that although the Houthis participated in the National Dialogue with a number of representatives, they felt like the NDC was giving decisional power only to actors that had been a part of the Salih's relations' network, such as Ali Mohsen and his family[294]. The NDC began to be perceived more as a distraction from the negotiations that were occurring among the elites and in the meanwhile the population had even weaker access to basic services than before[295]; GDP remained below the level of the year before the revolution and the unemployment, especially among the youth, continued to increase while food, water and other goods were in short supply[296]. In this context, Hadi decided to cut the

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[290] V. Durac, *Yemen's Arab Spring: Democratic Opening or Regime Maintenance? Mediterranean Politics*, 2012, pg. 8.
[291] H. Leckner, *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, 2014, pg. 39.
[292] Ibidem.
[293] K. Salmutter, *Why did the Transition Process in Yemen Fail? SciencesPo, Kuwait Program*, 2017, pg. 9.
[294] M.L. Clausen, *Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2018, pg. 561 ss., pg. 566.
[295] K. Salmutter, *Why did the Transition Process in Yemen Fail? SciencesPo, Kuwait Program*, 2017, pg. 10.
[296] A. Al-Tamimi, *Arab Spring in Yemen: Causes and Consequences, Quarterly Bi-lingual Research Journal*, 2020, pg. 59 ss., pg. 62.

subsides; this provoked a huge rise of the prices and increased the public discontent about the transition. The Houthis exploited this situation of distrust towards the new government to regain control in the North and expand even more; at this point, they were able to emerge as the main military power in Yemen and to attract the consent by many citizens also due to the number of civilian casualties they had endured with Salih[297].

So, the failure of the transition process promoted by the GCC initiative was mainly due to the fact that despite the facade of the NDC as an inclusive instrument with which consensual decision could be reached, the decisional power was always in the hands of the elites without safeguarding the interests of all sides. The elites were more concerned in short term negotiations rather than in facing the difficult conditions in Yemen. Furthermore, despite the uprisings and the revolution, the subsequent transition was not really perceived as a transition given the immunity for Salih; this meant that only a president's shift occurred, not on dynamics of power[298].

The 2011 protests represented the culmination of a reign characterized by corruption and patronage relations, at the expense of the economic growth of the country and the development. Salih was so concerned to enhance his position and power that he fell to antagonize all those forces which had cooperated with him, *Islah* for example. Although the many political differences between the main political ideologies, *Islah*, the YSP, Houthis and the Yemeni Youth, they were able to be united by the aspiration to overthrow Salih's government and redress the grievances and economic degradation it caused. The revolution of 1962 did not represent the beginning of a true and equal republican system, but it gave the go to just a facade of a republic in which corruption and political violence were a permanent feature. Also, elections on many occasions that were supposed to be free became subjected to fraud and intimidations, especially under Salih.

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[297] M.L. Clausen, *Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2018, pg. 561 ss., pg. 567.
[298] K. Salmutter, *Why did the Transition Process in Yemen Fail? SciencesPo, Kuwait Program*, 2017, pg. 11.

Chapter III: The Yemeni Crisis.

1 - The failure of the Transitional Process and the Hadi's characteristics.

We concluded the previous chapter arguing that the transition process and the NDC revealed itself as a failure for its inability to address the most important challenges, rooted since many years in Yemen, but instead acting more as a way to hide the negotiations between the several existing elites. The NDC was supposed to be an inclusive instrument composed also by the Houthis and al-Hiraak, but at the same time the positions and the requests of both the groups were treated with a marginalized importance; Hadi had tried to accomplish the requests of al-Hiraak by proposing to divide the country in a federation of six regions rather than allowing the complete secession of the southern side of Yemen. But al-Hiraak saw this more as a way to silence the dissidents rather than to really solve the most serious problems within the country and ensure the population's trust towards the new government. Al-Hiraak was against this proposal especially because, due to the way in which the project was presented, it appeared as a way to keep the southern movement separated from the southern regions, richer in terms of oil. The solution was not appreciated by the Houthis as well since it was a disadvantage also from a strategic point of view: indeed, the territory that should have represented the Houthis' heartland according to the NDC had not access to the natural resources existing in Yemen, oil and gas nor to the Red Sea. Moreover, this division would have caused serious problems for the Houthis to maintain their position because of the small number of Houthis' supporters in those places[299].

These were some of the reasons which led to the failure of the transition, but it is important to go beyond analysing the details and to talk about all the other factors that shaped negatively this process. As affirmed in the previous chapter, in the period between the uprisings in 2011 and the NDC in 2013, new elections were organized in February 2012, an uncontested ballot that led to victory Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi; however, Salih's resign did not impede him to maintain his role in the Yemeni politics and his leadership in the GPC, together with his allies in the military apparatus. This will strongly compromise the success of the transition[300]. The National Dialogue Conference had been created as an inclusive instrument, including all the parts of the Yemeni society, so the Houthis, al-Hiraak, but also those groups which had represented a significant part

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[299] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 60.
[300] K. Salmutter, *Why did the Transition Process in Yemen Fail? SciencesPo Kuwait Program*, 2017, pg. 7-8.

of the popular uprisings of 2011, so women and the youth. It was composed by 565 members distributed among the many political forces: there were 112 members from the GPC and 129 came from the JMP parties. Furthermore, the 28 percent of the members were women and young people and composed the 20 percent; about the Houthis we have already mentioned that they were represented with 35 of their components while the southerners were very slightly represented with a number from five to eight people. The southern issue was just one of the main topics faced within the NDC: the discussion revolved around other themes such as good governance, how to regulate the relations between the Houthis and the central government, economic development, freedom and rights, military and security affairs and justice. The fact that the NDC had the aim to deal with all these topics all together represented the main problem of the transitional process, as we will soon argue. The NDC was established the 18 March 2013 and at the beginning it was supposed to last six months but at the end it lasted ten, until January 2014.

As said before, the attempt to fill the southern question was a failure. But problems existed also for other issues as that of justice and how to ensure it; this was considered a crucial issue from the uprisings in 2011, when many participants in the protests were shoot and killed by forces loyal to the regime. After the end of the work of the NDC, in January 2014, the decisions taken should have been the common denominator where to start for the tasks of the Constitutional Drafting Committee, CDC, aimed to give to the country a proper constitution. However, problems arose also for what concerned the membership of the CDC since some political groups such as the Socialist Party, the Islah and the youth movements complained a lack of representation for them in the CDC. Moreover, the Southern problem remained unsolved together with other topics such as women's participation and the role that should have had the *Sharia* in the constitution. The CDC was accused several times of obstructionism by southerners. The CDC organized meeting for nine months and on 3 January 2015 the new constitution was ready, but it was not appreciated by the vast majority of people and triggered an escalation of discontent[301].

The main problem related to the NDC was a huge gap between its aims and expectations and what it could realistically achieve. Paradoxically, another problem was the huge number of groups involved within it, bringing divergent ideas and different priorities. As a consequence, the topics covered were many: the purpose was to solve a huge quantity of problems within the terms of less than a year, it was not realistic, especially the issues of Houthis and southerners. These were questions that could not be solved in a few times and mixed with a number of other problems,

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[301] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 63.

they required more time, more discussion and smaller and more realistic objectives. What the NDC failed to take into account was that the topics involved were very different from each other and each one of them required specific time[302]. The NDC was also characterized by disagreements and rivalries between its members, especially between the GPC and *Islah*, so it became difficult sometimes to reach effective solutions. Additionally, despite its inclusion the NDC was not very effective in representing the Yemeni society in a proper way and did not take so much into account the real situation of the Yemeni citizens; this was also due to the fact that most of the meetings of the NDC took place in hotels located in the richest parts of the country, with a scarce attention of the people living in rural areas. Also, the UN played a significant role in the transition: although it claimed not to be willing to influence the transition process because it was an internal Yemeni affair, in reality it managed the events providing experts of different areas but deciding, together with the NDC, to give the priority to issues that were not crucial to build a good transition, at the expense of others[303].

Although the importance of NDC in understanding the failure of transition, this was not the unique element of the process: it involved several dimensions. One of these was the security apparatus and the failure to develop a good security and military reform. One of the causes was related still to Salih: we have already clarified that, despite his agreed resignation, he was protected with immunity and maintained the leadership of the GPC, so it was impossible to say that he was completely disappeared from the political scene in Yemen. It has been explained in the previous chapter that during his government he had been able to create a strict network of alliances in the military and security sector and this guaranteed to him loyalty by many officers and soldiers[304]. This argument is closely connected to the Hadi's features and his presidency. A consequence of this rooted loyalty to Salih was that Hadi never enjoyed full support from the military and security apparatus which tried more times to undermine Hadi's power; this situation regarded also the Hadi's position within the GPC. Although being his party Hadi was not completely able to gain the support and loyalty of the other members[305] and this was reinforced by the fact that Salih was continuing to maintain the leadership of the GPC in the meanwhile. This to reiterate how was still impactful the figure of Salih in Yemen and how the overthrow of his government concerned only the physical person who ruled rather than the entire political and social system. In this regard, a

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[302] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 61.
[303] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 61-62.
[304] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 57.
[305] M. al- Madhaji, *How Yemen's Post- 2011 Transitional Phase Ended in War, Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies*, 2016, pg. 6.

series of rebellions began to occur against Hadi by several officers and members of the military and situations in which the soldiers refused to follow the indications of their leaders. As a consequence, Hadi decided to adopt an atypical approach[306]; he began to cut Saleh's influence by removing people belonging to Salih's family or to his network from key positions in the military and security sector. In addition, despite the Hadi's objective to remove all the Salih's forces from relevant positions, he strongly believed that Mohsin could still be very useful and so decided to remove him from the position of commander and appointed him to the role of military adviser[307] [308].

This was an attempt by Hadi to build more protection and support around him because he had taken the power as a weak figure from a political and military point of view[309]. However, the situation became soon analogous to the previous one under Salih: Hadi decided to remove Salih's loyalists from important positions to dismantle completely his network of alliances, but then, in the clear aim to create a strong basis of support, Hadi began to appoint all those people belonging to his own governorate, so people for sure loyal to Hadi. So, Hadi started to be accused of the same things Salih was accused of; the new government was operating with the same patronage relations typical of the government before the transition, it can be said almost the same kind of system with a different leader. Due to this problem of lack of support within the military and security apparatus, he felt safer appointing people which belonged to his governorate[310].

Another factor that marked the definitive failure of the transition was the economic situation of the country: the transitional government did not provide any improvement in the already precarious economy in Yemen; as we affirmed, the transition revealed to be more concerned to conduct the negotiations among the elites rather than thinking to a possible long term way to revive the country and favour its development, apart from involving economic development within the NDC but it was mixed with many other problems and required more time and more specific and realistic actions to be solved. On the contrary, the condition of the population continued to deteriorate; at the beginning, after the 2011 uprisings and the Salih's resignation,

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[306] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 57.
[307] S. Arraf, *The Armed Conflict in Yemen: a Complicated Mosaic, The War Report 2017*, pg. 3.
[308] It is important to remember the character of Ali Mohsin: he had been a very important element also during the Salih's administration since he was the military commander of the First Armoured Division, and he conducted the military operations in the hostilities with the Houthis in 2004. Nonetheless, the relations with Salih begun to deteriorate with the years due also to their rivalry in establishing which would have been the Salih's successor among their two sons. In occasion of the 2011 protests Ali Mohsin defected from the regime deciding to protect the opponents.
[309] Ibidem.
[310] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 57-58.

people believed that the new government would have been concerned to favour more equity in the economy and new jobs to deal with the problem of unemployment, as well as the provision of more available electricity and water for the citizens. But none of these tasks was fulfilled. Initially there was some support from some external states towards the transition and this made to think that foreign actors would have financially contributed to the building of a good governance; however, many states and many investors retarded this purpose explaining this decision as caused by a lack of transparency of the institutions in Yemen, together with a weak absorption capacity. These elements represented a disincentive to invest in the territory. In addition, Hadi decided to raise the diesel prices and, together with the already mentioned decision to cut the subsides, this contributed to increase the frustration and anger of the people[311]. This situation on the ground is quite strange if we consider the fact that there was a number of international actors very active in Yemen; indeed, the GCC initiative's countries offered significant support towards the new Hadi's government, they recognized his administration as the only legitimate one in Yemen. It was an unlikely situation because that of Hadi was considered a legitimate government from an international point of view, but it did not enjoy the same degree of support internally. However, it should be also noted that, although the support from external states, they did not implement more specific instruments or mechanism to improve Hadi's internal legitimacy and power; but all the failures by Hadi were not made known that much in the international arena, mainly due to the cooperation of the president with the United States for the war on terror. This was another cause of the growing internal frustration towards Hadi, because it seemed like once again the feelings and the conditions of the citizens were pushed aside to appease with western states that were active in Yemen essentially to pursue their own interests[312].

All this to say that, despite the initial success of the uprisings in terms of departure of Salih, this did not necessarily mean that the subsequent transition was a successful project; on the contrary, a transition should not be characterized by the formal resignation of a president, especially if that president still remains a present figure in the political scene of the country. All the networks created by Salih during more than thirty years of power were profoundly rooted in the country and could not be completely dismantled with a simple shift of person. As a consequence, Hadi faced serious difficulties in acquiring control and support for himself; on the other hand, Salih's patronage generated a kind of chain reaction because Hadi began to appoint only people loyal to him because he felt threatened and in danger, albeit with not much success. The other element of

[311] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 63-64.
[312] M. al- Madhaji, *How Yemen's Post- 2011 Transitional Phase Ended in War, Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies*, 2016, pg. 7-8.

the transition, the NDC, although its initial inclusion, did not face the problems in the correct way since it pretended to solve all the challenges in Yemen in few months and this brought it to leave several topics unanswered. Furthermore, due to the number of parties involved and the diversity of their positions, it became soon an arena of negotiation among the elites rather than a true instrument aimed at solving the most persistent problems.

2- The escalation of violence and the Saudi-led Intervention.

All the problems faced by the new Hadi administration and the failure of the transition contributed to increase the frustration of the population and the lack of trust towards the institutions. In this context, the Houthis took advantage of the situation to acquire consensus from citizens. People for sure could not be satisfied with the outcome given by the transition, especially given the fact that the NDC had done nothing to ameliorate the economic condition and to provide better job opportunities. In addition, the Houthis, although included in the NDC were not satisfied; the point that represented the definitive break with the transition was the proposal to make Yemen a federation composed by six regions. Houthis presented themselves as being true representatives of the population and its grievances and doing so they increased not only consensus but also their power and military apparatus. Furthermore, another important event enhanced the Houthis' power: the alliance with Salih in 2014. Although it seems paradoxical given the historical enmity between Houthis and Salih, thinking about the characteristics of the Salih's past regime he had always attempted to reinforce his power in many ways. Salih was always somehow linked to the Yemeni politics as we have seen, and he wanted to take power and political legitimacy back; seeing the increasing consensus around the Houthis, it is not so surprising that he decided to ally with them to come back at the centre of the dynamics. It is also easy to suppose that he had a kind of pending account with Hadi, which had decided to remove all the forces loyal to Salih from the key positions. It can be affirmed that, with the Houthis' alliance with Salih, the definitive failure of the NDC was recognized[313].

The decision by Hadi to cut the fuel subsidies pushed the Houthis to make an appeal to Hadi: the leader of the movement, Abdulmalek al-Houthi asked to the President to withdraw this decision, otherwise they would have organized an uprising as opposition. In August 2014, Houthis occupied

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[313] M. al- Madhaji, *How Yemen's Post- 2011 Transitional Phase Ended in War, Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies*, 2016, pg. 11.

Sanaa to protest and on 19 September hostilities broke out in the capital between Houthis and the military forces of the government led by Ali Mohsin[314]. At the beginning, Hadi did not adopt a strong attitude towards the Houthis in their advancement to Sanaa because he believed that he could manipulate them to weaken the Islahi part of his government, that, as affirmed in the second chapter, it was composed by forces distributed among the GPC and the Islahi side of the JMP. Hadi did not support Islah, despite it was the dominant part of the post-2011 government, and he thought he could use the Houthis as an instrument to put aside the Islahi component of the administration. However, Houthis' primary objective was not that of getting rid of Islah, nor this would have accepted an act as a mere instrument of Hadi and to withdraw their forces once achieved this result[315]. Connected to this, on 21 September the forces led by Ali Mohsin withdrew and the Houthis took control over Sanaa and on the same day an attempt was made to reach a peaceful solution between the Houthis and the government, which was the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, PNPA. This agreement led to the immediate resignation of the government; the aim was to develop an inclusive government, composed by representatives from Houthis and Hiraak as presidential advisers. Moreover, the agreement promoted important economic and social reforms such as the rehabilitation of the fuel subsidies. After the signing of the PNPA it seemed like the Houthis were included in the security system; however, the situation deteriorated when the draft constitution containing the creation of a six-region federal state was on its way to be delivered. The Houthis occupied the Presidential Palace and claimed Hadi to accept Houthi candidates as potential vice-president together with the presence of Houthis ministers in most of the ministries. Furthermore, Houthis asked to have more than 160 officials in the most important positions in security sectors. Despite all these conditions and their opposition against Hadi, they still wanted to keep him as a president because he was always the internationally recognized President, and this would have potentially guaranteed a continuing financial support from the other states. But Hadi did not accept these conditions by the Houthis and wanted to resign because he did not want to be a mere object in the Houthis' hands; as a consequence, he was put under house arrest. In this context, it began to emerge the first contrasts among the Houthis and Salih because of the diverging opinions about the Hadi's fate: on the one hand Salih wanted the Houthis to accept Hadi's resign, on the other Houthis believed that this

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[314] S. Arraf, *The Armed Conflict in Yemen: a Complicated Mosaic, The War Report 2017*, pg. 4.
[315] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 64-65.

request was an attempt by Salih to regain power since Hadi's resignation would have meant the speaker of the Parliament, a Salih's ally, becoming president[316] [317].

Houthis and Salih were unable to reach an agreement about the leadership after resignation so the Houthis announced the dissolution of the Parliament and they proclaimed an interim authority, called the Supreme Revolutionary Committee, SRC, which would have run the country for two years. The SRC announced the intention to establish a Transitional National Council to replace Parliament and a Presidential Council composed by five members to replace Hadi; but none of these two initiatives was put into practice[318] [319]. In the meanwhile, Hadi was always under house arrest.

On 21 February, Hadi managed to escape house arrest and he was able to leave Sanaa towards Aden: in Aden, he established a new government and claimed that his authority was the only legitimate one in Yemen, affirming also that Aden was the new capital of the country. This decision was supported by most of the Gulf states which moved their embassies from Sanaa to Aden. As a response, Salih's and Houthis' forces began to push themselves more and more southwards arriving also to Aden. In March 2015 the situation moved to Aden where an armed struggle took place between the alliance and Hadi's forces and the Hadi's palace was bombed. Hadi's forces lacked military forces, and this led him to search for a way to escape and he decided to escape to Riyadh, in Saudi Arabia, through Oman. There, he explicitly asked for help to acquire power again in Yemen and he asked also for military assistance to GCC states[320] [321]; the intervention of external states had become crucial for Hadi because without it Salih-Houthi alliance would have taken the control of the entire country[322]. After all, the GCC states had an important role for the transition process in Yemen, although its failure to bring an efficient government. They pushed for Salih's resignation and encouraged the elections that brought Hadi to power, despite the fact that these elections were composed by just one candidate in practice. Moreover, they were united by the common hostility towards the Houthis, which Saudi Arabia argued to be an Iranian proxy to take control over the Arabian Peninsula.

So, this escalation already offers us an initial picture of how multifaced is the Yemeni conflict and how is impossible to give it a deterministic cause to the decisions and the alliances developed

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[316] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 66-67.
[317] S. Arraf, *The Armed Conflict in Yemen: a Complicated Mosaic, The War Report 2017*, pg. 4.
[318] Ibidem.
[319] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 67.
[320] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 67-68.
[321] S. Arraf, *The Armed Conflict in Yemen: a Complicated Mosaic, The War Report 2017*, pg. 4.
[322] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 69.

during it. In the Yemen's crisis the actions were mainly guided by the self-interests of the actors involved. That the Yemeni context was characterized by egoistic and self-advantageous decisions was already clear looking at the Salih's administration, but the alliance between Houthis and Salih is a further example.

On 26 March 2015, the Saudi-led coalition intervened on Hadi's request. It was a coalition composed by nine Arab countries, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Marocco, Qatar and Sudan. They started the so-called Operation Decisive Storm. The motivation given by the coalition, especially by Saudi Arabia, was indeed, that of countering the Houthis' advance and restoring Hadi's government. The operation started with air strikes the first day, followed by four months of ground strikes. Saudi Arabia intervened principally with air strikes while the UAE was more concentrated on the ground forces in the southern part of the country with the aim to take back the Bab al-Mandab strait and the Red Sea Coast. UAE had the purpose to establish a significant intervention in Yemen in the long run with the building of bases in order to train Yemeni forces. Also, the UAE decided also to invest in the building of civilian and military infrastructures[323]. The operation Decisive Storm launched by the coalition was very strong in its scope: since its beginning until 2017, more than 90,000 troops were employed. In the first hours of the operation the Yemeni air force that was controlled by the Houthis-Salih forces was completely destroyed. The leading force of the coalition, as it is easily understandable, was Saudi Arabia, which has always been a present country during Yemen's history, as we have narrated in the previous chapter. Moreover, Saudi Arabia was the main financier and architect of the operation. The huge size of the intervention was also due to the involvement of the United States. The Operation Decisive Storm lasted from March to April 2015. In April 2015, a new political phase begun: the American administration and the Saudi Kingdom decided to open a new aspect of the intervention, launching the Operation Restoring Hope[324]. This operation was aimed to provide not only a military solution attempting to defeat the Houthis, but also a political one, trying to relaunch the political process in Yemen and provide humanitarian aids. However, the clear intention to continue to bomb Houthis' bases remained valid. Nevertheless, Houthis continued to enhance their capabilities and were able to resist to the attacks and to invade the city of Ataq and, few months later, to take control of the entire Shabwah governorate. In the meanwhile, the Saudi forces were able to retake Aden from Houthis and so President Hadi could

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[323] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 71.
[324] This American push for a political solution and promotion of humanitarian aids could be also due to Obama's attitude which, compared to his successor, was more concerned to limit the indiscriminate attacks on civilian sites and in the last part of his administration he really made this.

come back in Yemen. In April 2016, United Nations tried to push both the Houthi forces, with Salih, and the Hadi's government to negotiate but it was all compromised by the interception by Saudi Arabia of a missile launched against the Riadh's airport. In 2017, an important upheaval of balances took place: the alliance established between Houthis and Salih came to an end. Salih began to bear less the increasing force of the organization which, at the same time, became very suspicious towards him, thinking that he was secretly negotiating with the Saudis. This is what effectively happened since Salih openly promised to the Saudis that the advance in Yemen would have stopped in exchange for a stop of the military operations by the Saudi-led coalition. Houthis immediately reacted and just two days after this declaration by Salih, he was assassinated by the organization. This further complicated the situation since the Salih's supporters shifted their position against Houthis. Moreover, the AQAP forces were always present in the territory and took advantage of the chaos on the ground to spread in the Hadhramaut and Marib governorate. Nonetheless, AQAP's offensive has been quite dammed by some American operations.

The Southern Separatist Movement, al-Hiraak was always present in the territory and in January 2018, it reattempted to establish an independent South Yemen seizing control of Aden and causing many other humanitarian damages; this action was hugely supported by the United Arab Emirates and effectively, in August 2019, the Southern Transition Council[325] took control of the Aden governorate, together with the Abyan and Shabwa ones. At the same time, Houthis went ahead with the attacks and continued to launch missiles against targets in Saudi territory. In April 2020, Saudi Arabia began two weeks of cease fire in order to mitigate the risks of Covid-19; however, few times later both the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition were accused of carrying out with new attacks. Subsequently, the Southern Transition Council decided to give up its secessionist ambition and to develop negotiation with the Hadi government to find a way to share the power; the agreement was signed in December 2020. But the struggle with Houthis was far from over and few weeks later the Southern Transition Council and the Hadi's government blamed Houthis for conducting another attack against Saudi Arabia; the situation worsened especially because of Trump's presence within the American administration[326]. In the course of 2021, strikes between Houthis continued to escalate and the withdrawal of active military support by the United States under Biden's administration made possible for Houthis to organize several attacks on Saudi soil, causing also many deaths among civilians, and to gain ground against Hadi government. At the beginning of 2022, Houthis launched some unprecedented attacks against the United Arab

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[325] The secessionist organization formed by the movement al-Hiraak.
[326] As we will soon specify, on January 2021 Trump designated Houthis as a terrorist organization.

Emirates and Saudi Arabia, receiving a condemnation by the United Nations' Security Council, given the collateral damages on civilians of these attacks. These attacks caused a retaliation by Saudi Arabia through a bombing campaign in Sanaa. In order to try to face this situation, the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council began to ask for talks among the parties in Riadh, but the Houthis refused affirming that Saudi Arabia was not a neutral country to be set of negotiations. In April 2022, the United Nations established a two months cease fire as a step towards peace. Since this ceasefire, the attacks on large scale in the country are diminished but the humanitarian situation remains very serious.

3 - The Involvement of the United States and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

The United States had a clear interest in restoring Hadi's power. Yemen has been for a long time a matter of concern for the American government: although we know that Yemen is a country where resources are scarce its position is strategic due to its closeness to the Bab al-Mandab strait and to Saudi Arabia, that is one of the major world's oil producers[327]. In addition, United States represents for Saudi Arabia the most important partner for what concerns trade, and, in the same way, Saudi Arabia is very important for the United States from a geo-strategic perspective. For Saudi Arabia and for the rest of the international community, the Hadi's government was the only legitimate one in Yemen and, as a result, the purpose of contrasting the Houthis-Salih forces was perceived as crucial. The protection of the legitimate government for the United States was also connected to another issue, AQAP. We know that AQAP is the most powerful Al-Qaeda's affiliate, and its main headquarters are located in Yemeni territory. It's already known that after the 9/11, the Bush administration began the war on terror, so a series of military operations aimed at fighting terrorism and those groups or organizations believed to offer help and support to terrorists. Given this premise, it is quite easy to understand why the United States' motivations and the intentions to protect Hadi's administration from Houthis are credible; just to have a brief clarification about terrorism, terrorist groups tend to be present in those places in which the central authority is unable or unwilling to extend the rules, legislation and services over all the territory. This is the only way in which terrorism can hope to prosper, taking advantage of the weakness of the central government; at this purpose, this is the reason why terrorist groups are not located everywhere but

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[327] J.M. Sharp, *Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations, Congressional Research Service: Informing the Legislative Debate since 1914*, 2015, pg. 1.

in the so-called failed states[328], and Yemen is one of these states and this is easily understandable if we think about all its history especially during the twentieth century, matter of the second chapter: the central authority in Yemen has always struggled to have an effective control over all the territory and this eased the formation of groups that acquired more and more consensus with time and were able to challenge the government and to make revolution, we have seen this both with the Imamate and the Republic. Beyond these groups, also AQAP and since 2009 and the Islamic State took significant advantage of this situation establishing control in some zones of the country. Furthermore, AQAP attempted several times to make terrorist attacks against the United States. So, AQAP had two principal enemies: the United States which was the external enemy, and the Hadi's government, the internal one. Moreover, AQAP considered as enemies also the Houthis, defined as Shia heretics calling for Sunni Arab recruits to wage holy war against them[329]. AQAP used people's fear of Shiism and Iranian influence to acquire consensus against the Houthis, destroying any suspect of complicity with them and putting the rivalry in sectarian terms, so emphasizing the difference between Shia and Sunnis. AQAP affirmed that in case of victory for the Houthis, in any case they would have to deal with the Sunnis on many occasions[330]. The main objective for them was the release of all non-Muslim people from the Arab world, the establishment of a local emirate and a global califate[331].

AQAP was born from the fusion of Al-Qaeda's Saudi and Yemeni branches. We can affirm that for what concerns the consensus, AQAP has used a similar tactic as that of Houthis: it attempted to mobilize people providing a full picture of the Yemenis' grievances and problems. At the same time, AQAP also proposed solutions for these problems. It provided a narrative that was coherent and consistent with the ideology of the organization: it put a strong emphasis on this persecution faced by the Muslims in the hands of corrupt local governments which have revealed to be unable to protect their citizens and to provide for their safety while their living standard were strongly deteriorating due to the rise of prices, the misappropriation of lands and the absence of someone

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[328] It is well-known by the International Law that a country must have four requisites in order to be defined as a state: the existence of a population, a well-defined territory, a central authority with the capability to provide services and to enforce the rule of law in all the part of the country and the ability to have international relations with other states. When there is a lack of these characteristics, we can say that we are in front of a failed state.

[329] Sunnis and Shias represents two opposite currents of the Islam, which provoked tensions and conflicts for centuries: among the two, the Sunni branch is the majority while Shia is the main minority side of Islam. This division arose for the first time with the death of the Prophet Muhammad, when it came to decide his successor: the Sunnis supported Abu Bakr, which was a Muhammad's friend and father of his wife. On the other side, the successor should have been a Muhamad's blood relative, and they supported his cousin. Among the two factions, the Sunnis prevailed.

[330] A. Harris, *Exploiting Grievances: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2010, pg. 7.

[331] Ibidem.

willing to defend their rights as citizens. Moreover, AQAP provided an opportunistic support for the southern secessionist movement affirming that the government had the aim to obscure them, destroy their pride and humiliate them[332].

At the beginning, the Bush administration considered Yemen not as a threat for United States, but as an important partner because it cooperated with the Yemeni government in contrasting terrorism in the area. This assumption resumes a previously made discourse which had something to do with Houthis and their criticism towards the Salih's government before the uprisings, accused of being a mere instrument of the United States. Indeed, during the Bush administration the United States organized a strike in Yemen in just one occasion: on 3 November 2002 when the main target was Qaed Salim Sinan Al-Harithi which was believed to have had a leading role in the organization of the attack on the USS Cole in 2000. Things began to change with the Obama administration, especially in 2009 when AQAP was formed: the United States began to perceive an increasing threat by it which conducted several attacks in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, at the end of 2009 a man trained by AQAP, Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab, tried to pull down an airplane which was flying over Detroit, but the attack failed. AQAP also attempted several times to attack the American aviation. These events generated a great concern by the United States about AQAP as a potential global threat. As a consequence, the United States began to conduct direct and unilateral attacks in Yemen and the country became a scenario of the war between the United States and Al-Qaeda; the American administration combined air-strikes with the willingness to train Yemeni forces asking for support to the Yemeni government[333].

When the hostilities broke out in 2015 and the Saudi-led coalition intervened, the United States strongly supported this intervention with the provision of weapons and resources although not being directly a member of the coalition. The United States aimed to help to retake Hadi to power and, at the same time, continuing the war against AQAP. The US air force is almost considered an active participant in the hostilities given the fact that without the American support many war actions would not have been occurred. This is also a negative aspect because the United States in more occasions led also operations which caused the death of civilians and the destruction of civilian facilities. This is the reason why at the end of his administration, Obama decided to stop

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[332] A. Harris, *Exploiting Grievances: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2010, pg. 6.

[333] D. Sterman, *America's Endless Counterterrorism War in Yemen, a Strategic Assessment, New America*, 2022, pg. 15.

to provide to this war some types of weapons due to the accusation of perpetrating human rights' violations[334].

The subsequent Trump administration radically changed this situation because the air-strikes on Yemeni territory increased in number since the first weeks of the new administration and the attacks were more aggressive. Another innovation was that, before any operation, the commanders did not need the approval of the White House anymore. Of course, this meant that the concern of the American administration for civilians was even less: very few times after he was elected president, on 25 January 2017, Trump launched the first raid: this raid targeted the village of al-Ghayil, within a central Yemeni governorate, taking it by surprise. The Trump's administration initially affirmed it had killed 14 members of AQAP denying the involvement of any civilian. However, after some days the United States reviewed this declaration saying that some noncombatants were effectively killed; more specifically, the village's inhabitants affirmed that seven women and ten children had been killed by the raid. Despite these casualties, Trump in several declarations classified this attack as successful. This episode was followed by other attacks: on 2 March the United States launched twenty strikes across Abyan, Shabwa and al-Bayda Governorates. The day after it launched an attack with other strikes and on 29 April, during another attack, an individual was killed, named Muhammad al-Idhal, member of the Murad tribe. So, the American administration especially during Trump organized a lot of attacks and in many cases the target was achieved with the killing of AQAP members, but this caused also several casualties among the tribesmen. On the one hand this could ensure that tribesmen did not provide any help to AQAP members, but on the other the number of noncombatants victims involved could be used by AQAP for recruitment[335].

Both the Trump and the Obama administrations expressed huge support for the Saudi-led coalition and affirmed that the support by the United States was necessary because it entailed a minor number of civilian casualties, even if this assumption is hard to demonstrate since the Saudi-led coalition has never operated without the American support. Moreover, the civilian casualties caused by the Saudi-led coalition still existed: in August 2018 a Saudi-led attack targeted a school bus causing the death of more than forty children[336].

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[334] H. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict. Fragile Hope*, 2023, pg. 73-74.
[335] G. Johnsen, *Trump and Counterterrorism in Yemen: the First Two Years, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, 2019, pg. 5-8.
[336] G. Johnsen, *Trump and Counterterrorism in Yemen: the First Two Years, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, 2019, pg. 11-12.

Another important issue is related to the fact that Trump completely dismantled the restrictions for battle established by Obama and nominated three provinces in Yemen as areas of active hostilities in March 2017; this meant that in this period many other airstrikes were launched against suspected AQAP members in all these three provinces. Things began to change in April 2019 when the Congress agreed to approve a resolution to put an end to the United States' involvement in the hostilities in Yemen when the operations were not authorized by Congress, reminding the president that the power to declare war is only in the hands of this legislative body. Furthermore, it affirmed that the United States's forces, located outside the territory of the United States and without a declaration of war, should be removed. Despite this resolution, Trump blocked its adoption thanks to his veto power; as a motivation he affirmed that if the United States had withdrawn their support for the Saudi-led coalition, China and Russia could have taken advantage of it by providing help to the coalition. Moreover, Saudi Arabia represented a fundamental market for the United States, as said before. He strongly affirmed that the involvement in Yemen was necessary to contrast terrorism and Houthis, suspected to be backed by Iran and so impeding to Iran to expand its influence[337]. During the last period of the Trump's administration the number of strikes declined; however, covert attacks continued and were always present in 2020 and 2021[338]. This emphasis put on his consideration of the Houthis as an instrument of Iran to dominate the Arab world led him to put the Houthis inside the list of terrorist organizations. From all these facts we can affirm that Trump, rather than towards Yemen, established a policy that regarded the threat represented by Iran and Houthis; this led him not to have much concern about Yemen's conditions while the tensions with Iran increased[339]. Under Trump, the United States had also been accused of transferring weapons to Yemen illegally; moreover, a notification of multiple violations has been made by Amnesty International which affirmed that the Saudi-led coalition had committed numerous violations of International Law[340]. In 2019, CNN notified the accusation that the United States, together with Saudi Arabia and UAE would have transferred vehicles to Yemeni armed forces violating the end-user provisions.

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[337] Y. Abderrahim, *The U.S. Role in the Yemeni Conflict Under Donald Trump Administration, Journal of Rights and Freedoms*, 2022, pg. 10-12.

[338] D. Sterman, *America's Endless Counterterrorism War in Yemen, a Strategic Assessment, New America*, 2022, pg. 15.

[339] *The Impact of Biden's Policy on Yemen War, Abaad Studies & Research Center, Political Analysis Unit*, 2021, pg. 7.

[340] According to the organization, secret prisons would be located in the Yemeni territory, and they would be set of numerous tortures and human rights violations and attributed these locations to the custody and control of the UAE and the United States. The existence of these places had already been denounced in 2017. Amnesty International also talked about several tens of people which had been arrested and taken in those prisons and would have resulted as missing.

After Trump, Biden was elected. One of his promises made during the electoral campaign was to end the support for the armed intervention by the coalition in Yemen. In his first speech as a president on February 4, 2021, he defined the characteristics of his foreign policy towards Yemen which would have been composed by several points: first, as already said, put an end to the military offensive and to the support to the coalition with the sale of weapons and resources. However, the United States would have continued to provide defence and support for Saudi Arabia with weapons and missiles, protecting its sovereignty from Iranian expansion; Biden also guaranteed that the United States would have work with United Nations and with all the parties to search for a diplomatic solution. Furthermore, Biden communicated his decision to cancel Trump's attitude eliminating Houthis from the list of the terrorist organizations; he strongly believed that this decision would have push the Houthis to decrease their attacks encouraging them to the dialogue. What Biden aimed to demonstrate with these points was that Yemen was not among the priorities for the United States; so, it was important to remove the American troops and support on the ground. At the same time, it was urgent to guarantee to United States' allies continuing protection, so towards Saudi Arabia with the establishment of new military bases in Saudi territory to protect the country from Houthis' attacks. However, the end of the involvement in Yemen is related to the support for the Saudi-led coalition in terms of weapons and the selling of resources to Saudi Arabia. But, for what concerns AQAP and ISIL, the United States would have continued to target their members to be sure that these groups would not represent a threat for America.

However, this new approach cannot be considered as an end of the war since the United States has continued to guarantee protection to Saudi Arabia which is responsible for human rights' violations and strikes against civilians. Biden has tried to shift the focus of his American policy towards Yemen from an initial offensive approach to a defensive one, backing Saudi Arabia in its conflict against Houthis. So, Biden's promise about his willingness to withdraw the United States from the war in Yemen is not so consistent with the real situation: maybe the war for the United States could have ended from an offensive perspective but this does not impede a continuation of the complicity by the Biden's administration. United States may not have directly intervened anymore with Biden, but it has endorsed an offensive operation, that of Saudi Arabia and the rest of the coalition, which have bombed another country; between 2015 and 2021, Saudi Arabia conducted more than 23.000 air strikes killing and injuring 18.616 civilians. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has established a blockade aimed to stop the entrance of fuels in the Hodeida port, controlled by Houthis: blockades are offensive operations and the Biden's administration has done

nothing to impede and to challenge this Saudi act affirming that it represents an important condition for negotiation with Houthis[341]. Another important factor was that the Biden's decision to stop providing weapons for the coalition did not push the Houthis to negotiate, as it was initially believed; on the contrary, it encouraged them to go further generating a violent escalation. Houthis believed that with the withdraw of the American support they would easily have won the war not considering that the United States still had the aim to protect Saudi territories and remained somehow always present in the scene. So, they did not stop; also, the Houthis did not feel that much the consequences of being designated as a terrorist organization, the biggest losses were for civilians. So, the Biden's decision the revoke the previous Trump's action did not have the expected effect.

In late 2021, after the Houthis too control of Marib, they also took control of three districts in the northern Shabwa. This ultimate action caused a reaction by the UAE which moves its troops and pushed the Houthis outside this territory. As a consequence, the Houthis reacted with a series of bombings against the UAE and the United States intervened using missiles to stop the Houthis' bombings inside the Emirati's territories. So, at least the United States remained involved in this conflict at the point that Biden began to reconsider the idea of putting again the Houthis in the list of terrorist organizations[342].

So, despite the fact that the United States are among the countries providing more humanitarian assistance, it also favoured offensive interventions by Saudi Arabia, interventions that caused the death of thousands of civilians, although in different forms the three administrations more or less favoured a continuation of the hostilities. Through the years, especially with Trump, the American involvement in Yemen became less clear; indeed, Trump decided to put aside the restrictions established by Obama and started to increase the bombings on the Yemeni territory causing a huge number of civilian casualties. The losses among the noncombatants were so high that there were some doubts about the real objectives of the involvement. Trump motivated the actions saying that it was necessary to contrast Iran and decided to design the Houthi as terrorists in his last days of presidency. He argued that Iran was using Houthi as an instrument to contrast Saudi Arabia and to expand its influence in the Arabian Peninsula; however, given the decisions made by Trump it can be suspected the same, so that he was using Yemen as a set to show to Iran the capabilities to defeat the Houthi, especially given the level of civilian deaths. With Biden the situation did not

[341] A.R. Sheline & B. Riedel, *Biden's Broken Promise on Yemen, Brookings*, 2021.
[342] G.D. Johnsen, *The Best of Intentions: How the Biden Administration Tried and Failed to End the War in Yemen, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, 2023, pg. 11.

improve that much: although the statement that the war in Yemen had to come to an end, this did not favour a termination of the hostilities. A reason was that the Biden's promise did not find real application in reality because the United States continued to legitimize Saudi Arabia' s attacks in Yemeni territories, attacks which provoked other casualties among the population. This time United States did not act openly in an offensively but in a more hidden way; however, this did not impede decisive measures by the American administration such as that of legitimizing the Saudi blockade in territories controlled by Houthi. Another aspect that should be considered is that the United States did not catch the fact that the conflict in Yemen is more complicated than the expectations; so, Biden's decision to stop the support for the coalition attacks hoping that this would have brought to a cessation of hostilities can be considered as a way to not being associated to the human rights violations but without really doing anything to stop the war; as a result, the United States remained involved in an endless conflict.

4- Saudi and Iranian Interests in the Yemeni Crisis.

Now we have to deal with another very important aspect that is always associated with the conflict in Yemen: the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Indeed, the war in Yemen is seen by any scholars also as a part of a proxy war between the two states because both of them want to dominate and to expand their influence in the Arabian Peninsula. This proxy war is said to be an obvious consequence of the internal situation in Yemen because Houthi are associated with Iran while Saudi Arabia has clear interests in contrasting this Shia group trying to restore Hadi's government. Yemen represents an important point for the Saudi foreign policy due to the fact that the two countries confine and also due to the strategic position of Yemen and its linkages with global trade because the Bab al-Mandab strait links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

However, this vision of the Yemeni conflict as a proxy war is considered by other scholars as misleading since it takes into account both Saudi and Iranian roles as the same in Yemen, as both of them had the same level of interests in the country and especially as the war in Yemen had the same relevance for both of them. But this is not completely true, Yemen for Saudi Arabia has a relevance that is not the same of Iran. Saudi Arabia has developed for a long time a close relationship with Yemen; as we stressed in the previous chapter, the Saudi Kingdom has always influenced Yemen in the course of its history. In the twentieth century Saudi Arabia represented a very important backing for Yemen from an economic point of view: it is important to remember

that for Yemen, remittances coming from its Saudi neighbour were crucial since many Yemeni citizens found employment there and, in this way, Yemen could face its unemployment problem. Indeed, in the 90s, Yemen decided to oppose the international intervention to expel Iraq from Kuwait, going against the position of the United States and Saudi Arabia; so, after this decision Saudi Arabia decided to expel almost 1 million Yemenis making them return to Yemen. As a consequence, Yemen found itself already to face the problem of unemployment because a huge number of Yemenis was returned in the market. But beyond this, Saudi Arabia has always wanted somehow to control the events in Yemen, also conducting diverging policies: on the one hand it did not want Yemen to be too weak but on the other it did not want it to be too strong. With the outbreak of the revolution in 1962 the Saudi kingdom supported the royalists, so it opposed the establishment of the republic, mainly because Yemen would have represented the only republic in the Arabian Peninsula and, due to its neighbouring with Saudi Arabia, the kingdom feared that it could inspire some revolutionary movements also on the Saudi territory. At the same time, when the Republic of Yemen was established and in occasion of the uprisings of 2011, Saudi Arabia, together with the other states of the GCC engaged so that things did not change so much and promoted a transition that guaranteed immunity to the previous president of the Yemeni republic, Salih, giving him the possibility to maintain the leadership of the GPC and significant powers, even if resigned. This approach designed to control Yemen has emerged especially with the rise to power of the King Salaman in 2015, adopting a policy of containment and maintenance: the Saudi Kingdom amplified this feature since it began to see the emergence of other young powers as a direct challenge to its hegemony. Yemen had not to be too strong to represent a threat for the Saudi security, but it had also to ensure that Yemen would not compromise regional stability[343].

The Saudi motivations for the intervention in 2015 were related to the protection of the Yemeni government from the Houthi and the achievement of security for the Yemeni citizens. According to King Salaman, it was important to be involved in Yemeni affairs because Houthi were seen as backed by Iran; so, fighting against Houthi for the Saudis would have meant to fight against the Shiites, supported by Iran. Saudi Arabia tried to explain its actions in Yemen as the result of a regional effort aimed to face the Iranian threat[344]. The Saudi Kingdom has always wanted to present itself as the unique symbol of the Arab world and so exercising regional influence.

[343] Y. Koshaimah & X. Zou, *An Analysis of Yemen's Geostrategic Significance and Saudi Iranian-Competition for Regional Hegemony, Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 2023, pg. 251 ss., pg. 261.
[344] M. Darwich, *The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status, Insight Turkey*, 2018, pg. 125 ss., pg. 129.

Another discussed reason of the Saudi intervention in Yemen is that of status. Status' argument brings us to analyse this involvement also from another perspective. According to this assumption, Saudi Arabia would have intervened in Yemen since 2015 for reasons related to its status in the Arab region: states in the international arena develop their identity and this identity is also shaped by that which is considered their role in the global community. How strong a state is perceived and how it behaves towards others matters. Sometimes states can develop certain expectations about their status in the world or in a specific region, but these expectations could not be completely shared by other countries; these disagreements about status can lead to conflicts and violence and the events in the Middle East are an example. Saudi Arabia intervened several times in the Arab Uprisings, such as in Bahrain to supress the riots; also, in Egypt it supported the reaction against the Muslim Brotherhood and the reestablishment of the regime. Muslim Brotherhood strongly put into question the Saudi hegemony and its belief to be the leader of Sunni Islam; in general, Arab Uprisings represented a significant challenge for Saudi Arabia and its predominancy[345]. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia tried to emphasise its role as a leader assuming a guiding role of the GCC Initiative, an attempt to design a transitional government because many important elements had defected from the regime and it was impossible at this point to maintain intact the previous administration; but at the same time the GCC Initiative promoted a shift in the leadership but without bringing so much evolution in the new government given the fact that Hadi began to establish patronage relations as his predecessor. Furthermore, Salih maintained a sort of power in any case. So, this to say that, although sometimes with more efforts and compromises, Saudi Arabia in many cases successfully intervened and this shaped a lot its perception about being the dominant power in the Middle East. The push to consider the intervention by Saudi Arabia as driven by status reasons is also the fact that the Saudi-led war against Houthi caused many collateral damages, especially for what concerns civilian casualties; the coalition's actions involved airstrikes to destroy Yemeni defence and dismantle the infrastructures to compromise the Houthi's capability to move; but, all these strikes had negative repercussions on the civilian population at the point that the legitimacy of the intervention began to be questioned in the international arena. In addition, despite the huge attacks against Houthi, they were not weakened, and they continued to fight and resist[346]. These statements enhance the status argument because in this context rationality is weakened. The way in which the Saudi-led coalition has intervened in this war, the high number of noncombatants deaths and the fact that the enmity with Houthi

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[345] M. Darwich, *The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status, Insight Turkey*, 2018, pg. 125 ss., pg. 133-134.
[346] M. Darwich, *The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status, Insight Turkey*, 2018, pg. 125 ss., pg. 136.

increased, makes us to think that there are other reasons that pushed Saudi Arabia for an intervention, which are not rational reasons. In some cases, prestige can be more important for a state than security[347]; in this regard, constructivism can be very useful. So, the existence of ideas and symbolic elements can be crucial for the adoption of certain decisions.

We can argue that another fact that reinforces the belief that Saudi actions are driven by status more than by a true desire of protect Yemen contrasting Houthi, considered as an Iranian proxy. But, to explain this we should rely also on the other side, Iran, and its interests for Yemen. As we have said before, it is erroneous to think about the Iranian and Saudi interests in Yemen as the same, because they are not. The war in Yemen does not represent a priority for Iran, contrary to many expectations. The emphasis on the assumption that the Houthi were an Iranian proxy was strongly used not only by Saudi Arabia as an explanation but also by United states during the Trump administration. Moreover, the vast majority of states in the Middle East has been and still is concerned about Iran. Besides, Iran has always pursued a particular type of foreign policy and while for Saudi Arabia the Arab Uprisings represented a challenge for its status, Iran had great hope for these riots. The belief that Houthis are supported by Iran is easy to be shared if we think about the foreign policy that Iran has always conducted. In this regard, Iran has always had the tendency to intervene in states characterized by an unstable situation and by an unsatisfied part of the population: Iran intervenes in those countries in which the central authority is not strong and then exploits the dissatisfied actors because of their marginalization by the incumbent. But despite the well-known divergence between Iran and Saudi Arabia, caused by centuries of religious hostility[348], what matters more for Iran is to support groups that can somehow upset the traditional order; the actor that shapes and defines this order is the United States and so, it is an order in favour of Saudi Arabia, its main partner in the Middle East[349]. This explains why Iran cooperated with actors such as Hamas and Talibans, which are Sunni groups; although different from a religious perspective, these organizations shared with Iran the desire to overthrow and to change the status quo; for what concerns the Talibans for example, Iran for a long time has had a negative relationship with them. Indeed, Iran has never been so much interested in helping the Talibans to reacquire power, but the real aim was to counterbalance the American influence in that area[350]. So, the religious orientation of the actors is not enough to explain a potential Iranian involvement;

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[347] M. Darwich, *The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status, Insight Turkey*, 2018, pg. 125 ss., pg. 131.
[348] Saudi Arabia is considered the main representative of Sunnism in the Arab world while Iran is Shiite.
[349] T. Juneau, *Iran's Policy Towards the Houthis: a Limited Return on a Modest Investment, Oxford University Press*, 2016, pg. 647 ss., pg. 648-649.
[350] T. Juneau, *Iran's Policy Towards the Houthis: a Limited Return on a Modest Investment, Oxford University Press*, 2016, pg. 647 ss., pg. 649.

maybe an actor can be Shia as Iran but usually this is not the only reason, it must worth the risk. The objective to counter the American influence was very important for Iran because, especially with the beginning of 2000s, Iran found itself in a position of isolation, due to the growing polarization between Sunni and Shia and also to the fact that Sunni represents the vast majority of the Islamic world. Iran generally attempts to establish some links with non-state actors to secure an access to some areas from which it can organize attacks against United States or Saudi Arabia, in order also to restrict the possibilities of actions for its enemies[351].

The argument according to which the Iranian government support groups which want to change the status quo regardless of their religious belief meets a somehow exception for Lebanon and Hezbollah which is a Shia group, albeit the existence of other conditions that foster the Iranian involvement. Another important actor for Iran is Syria even if here the situation is a bit different: in Syria the Assad's regime is mainly composed by Alawites, a branch of Shiism but it also composed by Sunnis; so, the religious link with Iran is quite weak. However, the strong importance of Syria for Iran derives also from the fact that the Syrian territory is very important to allow Iran to bring forces and support to Hezbollah, and this is the reason why Iran supports the Assad's regime[352]; the establishment of another type of government could potentially compromise the possibilities for Iran to send help to Hezbollah[353]. In this regard, the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia had been further compromised with the Syrian civil war because Syria represents a priority for the Iranian foreign policy[354] and Saudi Arabia had decided to side with the rebels[355]. Accusations against Iran to support Houthis exist by then since Salih's government, so before the alliance between them, when the group was an opposition movement against Salih; already in 2011, the United States' government began to be seriously concerned about a possible transfer of Iranian weapons to Houthis and in the same year the press affirmed more times that Iran was providing a lot of money to them. These accusations towards Iran reached a higher point in 2013 when a vessel operating in Yemeni water had been loaded with numerous types of Iran-made weapons. More specifically, according to the report to the United Nations' Security Council's Iran Sanctions Committee, Iran had begun to transfer some amounts of

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[351] Ibidem.
[352] While generally Iran wants to oppose to the status quo.
[353] T. Juneau, *Iran's Policy Towards the Houthis: a Limited Return on a Modest Investment, Oxford University Press*, 2016, pg. 647 ss., pg. 649-650.
[354] Another important thing that must be stressed regarding the relationship between Iran and Syria is that they have a bilateral alliance and a close relationship since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when Khomeini transformed the country from being a monarchy to a Shia republic. In the same way, the Syrian regime is characterized by a Shia oriented government. The two countries have developed this relationship also due to the common isolation that has been created by external actors. So, they have clear interest in supporting each other.
[355] W.A. Terrill, *Iranian Involvement in Yemen, Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2014, pg. 429 ss., pg. 435.

weapons to the Houthis already in 2009 while in 2011 an Iranian vessel was kidnapped by Yemeni authorities and inside it 900 anti-tank and anti-helicopter rockets were found, all made by Iranian operators. So, it can be affirmed that since 2011 there was an increase in the Iranian support towards Houthis and effectively some help was provided to them. Moreover, the support was further increased after the takeover of Sanaa by the Houthis and the Saudi-led intervention in 2015; the United States' intelligence office in 2014 stated that some Iranian units were training the Houthis and in 2015, several exchanges through cargo ships between Iran and Yemen were notified. In February 2015 the Iranian Foreign Minister affirmed that Houthis had attempted with all their possibilities to restore justice and peace in Yemen, and so offering support to them. In March some Houthi officials returned from Teheran affirming that Iran had promised to help Yemen from an economic point of view, to expand the ports and to provide oil supplies[356].

It would be misleading to deny some sort of involvement and support by Iran to Houthis: effectively Iran provided some support and weapons to Houthis and this support has grown through the years; it was both a political support and a resource support. There are some similarities among the two actors: we should not forget that, as Iran, the Houthis were interested in changing the status quo and this guaranteed them a good relationship with the Islamic Republic. Both of them are a part of the Shia Islamic community and this can explain why many western states consider them as two entities cooperating in the Yemeni conflict. However, they are part of two different branches of Shiism: Iran is Twelver Shi'i while Houthis are Zaydis. Even before the increasing of Iranian support in 2011, Iran represented a sort of save haven for Houthis; we have already stressed that after the 1962 revolution the Zaydism and the previous Imamate were seen as backward and were negatively seen[357]. As a consequence, the Houthis began to be marginalized from the institutions and this increased their dissatisfaction; they were pushed to search for external actors which could have similar ideologies and understand their position and found in Iran a potential supporter also because it offered a haven for the leader of the movement in that period, Husain al-Houthi, to help him to escape from Salih's repression[358]. Moreover, there is some convergence between Houthis and Iran in their strategic interests: both of them have the aim to reduce the Saudi influence. Nevertheless, there is a limited extent of this: for what concerns Iran we have said that more than Saudi influence in Yemen the aim was to reverse the order in general, an order established and shaped by the United States and its Middle East allies, among

[356] T. Juneau, *Iran's Policy Towards the Houthis: a Limited Return on a Modest Investment, Oxford University Press*, 2016, pg. 647 ss., pg. 657.
[357] The Yemeni republic after unification in 1990 became predominantly Sunni.
[358] M. Saif, *Shades of grey: The evolving links between the Houthi and Iran, CRU Policy Brief*, 2023, pg. 3-4.

which Saudi Arabia. So, the Iranian interests go beyond Yemen in itself. Regarding Houthis, they wanted to dismantle the Saudi effect, but this was not the core aim of the movement; on the contrary, this was a part of a broader strategy aimed to establish their dominance in Yemen again, and the defeat of Saudi Arabia in that sense was part of the strategy because of the Saudi support to the government before and after the uprisings.

In addition to Houthis, in 2012 Iran would also have been accused to providing help to the Southern Secessionist Movement, al-Hiraak[359]: it is important to remember that since the unification in 1990, the southern part of Yemen was not satisfied also because Salih excluded any possibility for the southerners to have control over the military and the south felt like its interests were completely ignored by the government. As the Houthis, also the secessionists took advantage of people's grievances to overthrow the Salih's regime in 2011 and, at the same time were very concerned that the government could possibly link their actions to those of AQAP, justifying a more severe repression. This accusation to Iran was also made by the new President Hadi. However, the President of the former PDRY, Beidh, strongly denied having received and there are not clear and overwhelming proofs of this support, so the links by the government seem to be exaggerated[360].

So, we can affirm that Iran offered some support to Houthis. Some signs of similarity can be found even before the 2000s, after the revolution and during Salih's government; for sure, both Houthis and Iran have in common the desire to change the situation and share a similar identity focused on the willingness to free themselves from oppression and to re-acquire their dominant authorities. Nevertheless, they do so at different levels: Houthis want to require dominion in Yemen and reestablish Zaydism as the main religious belief and this purpose pushes them to take position against Saudi Arabia; on the other hand, Iran's aim to overcome its Saudi rival and to change the status quo pushes it to take a favourable position towards the Houthis, especially after 2011. Regarding the other components, we have seen that Iran and Houthis do not share that much in terms of religious identity: it is true that both of them are Shia but belonging to two different branches. So, the religious argument can contribute only to a small extent to explain the support from Iran also given the fact that Iran has often chosen its allies not on a religious basis but evaluating if they represented a minority which wanted to overthrow the current situation and to oppose to western allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel. However, the help given by Iran to Houthis remained quite limited to shape the internal events: Iran was aware about the fact that Yemen did

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[359] W.A. Terrill, *Iranian Involvement in Yemen, Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2014, pg. 429 ss., pg. 437.
[360] W.A. Terrill, *Iranian Involvement in Yemen, Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2014, pg. 429 ss., pg. 438.

not represent a priority as it was for Lebanon[361] and Syria so it could not afford to be involved in the same way also in Yemen. Furthermore, the Islamic Republic knew that Yemen was a priority for the other actor, Saudi Arabia and an explicit attempt to extend its influence also in Yemen could have caused a reaction by the Saudi Kingdom and maybe an action by the United States. For sure, Houthis and Iran were united by their adversity towards Israel and the order shaped by the United States which favours its allies in the Middle East, and this brought Iran to publicly express political support and to provide resources to the movement. Nevertheless, Iran's actions and interests for Yemen remain too limited to define the Yemeni conflict as a mere proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran like if Yemen had the same importance for both of them.

We have analysed the interests of Saudi Arabia and Iran and the reason of their involvement in Yemen. Regarding Saudi Arabia, the motivations given have been focused on the rivalry with Iran and the need to protect the population from Houthis because they were considered as Iranian proxies; but, considering the situation on the ground, the humanitarian damages and the fact that Saudi Arabia has always put itself as the leader of the Arab world can make us to think that the main motivation for the Saudi intervention is related more to status and the willingness to show its power by controlling the events in Yemen. After all, Saudi Arabia has always had some kind of influence in Yemen to ensure it would not become too strong nor too weak. This argument is supported by taking into account the Iranian attitude towards the Yemeni situation: for Iran Yemen was not an issue of vital importance and Houthis cannot be defined as Iranian agents in this crisis. The reason is that Houthis are not a part of an Iranian policy towards the conflict but have their own agenda. Both of them are characterized by the enmity towards the West and Israel, so it is quite easy to assume a priori that Houthis act on behalf of the Iranian regime. But in reality, the contribution that Iran gave to Houthis was not so decisive; Houthis were already strong and had already enhanced their capabilities through the years. They should not be considered as an Iranian proxy because, after all, they have different aims and their common hostility with Saudi Arabia does not mean they are part of the same policy.

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[361] Regarding Lebanon, Iran has a significant influence in the country thanks to Hezbollah which has the most powerful party in the region and represents a strong actor despite not being a sovereign state. Iran invested a lot to help Hezbollah and to contribute to make it a powerful actor. It planned an involvement in long-term seeing the organization growing and enhancing its capabilities. As said before, the Iran's objective is to counter the American influence in the area reversing the power of its Middle East allies, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Hezbollah is a movement which opposes to the Israelian state since its birth and fights it. So, offering support to Hezbollah means for Iran to fight against Israel without directly attacking it. Beyond the fact that Hezbollah is a Shia organization which was born to represent the interests of the Shias that were increasingly marginalized, in this case it was worth the risk and the interests were multiple.

If I have to draw my own conclusion, it is quite misleading and simplistic to exclude one hypothesis or the other: the status thesis has proven to have some evidence and feedback in reality but this does not mean that the other argument has to be excluded. It is difficult to deny that the reasons that pushed the Saudi Kingdom to intervene have nothing to do with status, but status in itself does not count that much and maybe does not push a state to intervene in a territory with airstrikes if there is not another power perceived as a threat. In this case, the two hypotheses can interact more than the expected. Despite the quite weak ties among Houthis and Iran in this crisis, the Arab context is characterized by the historic rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and this is difficult to ignore. After all, Saudi Arabia has intervened several times during the Arab Uprisings because such uprisings were a threat and a challenge to the status quo while Iran wanted to revert it. Maybe there was not a decisive and explicit support from Iran to Houthis, but the events that occurred since 2009 and the declaration of the Iranian Foreign Minister in 2015 were in favour of them and, in a context characterized by recognized hostility with Iran, these can somehow be sufficient to push Saudi Arabia to intervene in Yemen for reasons that are beyond status. Another issue that should be taken into account is the decline in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and United States. Indeed, it is true that Saudi Arabia represents an important actor for the United States in the Middle East; moreover, Riadh has always played an important role for Washington in the war on terror, despite the existence of some accusation, through the years, in which the United States affirmed that its Saudi partner was not doing enough to contrast this phenomenon. However, in the last decade the relations among them have become quite swinging. With Obama the situation among the two states was anything but easy. Obama was very decisive to pursue towards Iran a type of policy more focused on dialogue and negotiation rather than hostility because, according to him, an isolation would only have contributed to a tightening of the already precarious equilibrium. He pursued a policy of engagement putting an emphasis on the importance of diplomacy as a preferable solution over the use of force against adversaries. This calmer approach led Obama take part to a crucial step: in July 2015 the United States, together with the other four members of the United Nations' Security Council[362] and Germany, decided to stipulate with Iran an important agreement, the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, known also as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action[363]. All these actions by United States led to an

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[362] The five permanent members of the United Nations' Security Council are United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia and China.
[363] The issue of nuclear for Iran has been a crucial issue for decades, and motivation of dispute with western powers; through the years there were more attempts by these powers and by Israel to stop or to slow down the Iranian nuclear programme. The main fear was that Iran could use its nuclear energy to military ends against the west. The agreement predicted the willingness for Iran to give up the reserves of enriched uranium and to limit the enrichment activities.

estrangement from Saudi Arabia which began to feel more and more isolated in its competition with Iran. This discourse makes sense because, feeling like the support from the United States was decreasing, Saudi Arabia could feel more vulnerable and more exposed with Iran. So, it could be quite easy to think that, given all these conditions the Saudi intervention in Yemen may be caused by the Saudi desire to counter the Iranian threat; this considering the tightening of the relationship with the United States. The continuation of this intervention may be favoured by decisions such as that of the stipulation of the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, sign of cooperation between Iran and United States. Saudi Arabia' s intention to fight and defeat Houthis was due to the aim to impede to Iran to further expand in the Arabian Peninsula, attributing the Houthis to the Iranian republic.

However, this policy oriented to cooperation was intended to end with the election of Donald Trump in 2016: he withdrew the United States from the agreement. According to him, the ultimate purpose should not be a cooperation with Iran to limit its nuclear capabilities but to permanently delete the possibility for Iran to be a nuclear power. During Trump's presidency it can be said that there was an improvement in this sense: in this regard it is important to remember that the Trump's policy was characterized by a more open hostility towards Iran. Between 2016 and 2020 the American involvement in Yemen became more active and characerised my more operations, with a resulting major number of casualties; Trump has always motivated this increase in attacks as caused by the Iranian influence in Yemen and the willingness to fight Houthis because they were considered as agents backed by Iran. For Trump, the Iranian Republic was a huge threat for the United States also because of the anti-Americanism, a crucial part of its policy; furthermore, the American administration claimed the Iranian Republic offered an important support for terrorists and a base from which they could target the American territory. Things changed again with Biden due to its policy focused on dialogue with Iran and the criticism by the American administration towards the Saudi kingdom for what concerns human rights.

Given this unstable relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, it is not necessarily a mistake to think about an intervention aimed to impede to Iran to expand its power. In this case, like in many others, it is quite difficult to assume the existence of a single cause; on the one hand the assumption according to which Saudi Arabia is involved in Yemen in order to counter the Iranian threat finds some evidence due to the historic hostility between the two states and the strange relationship between Riadh and Washington. On the other hand, in this conflict Houthis

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Moreover, the agreement talked about several measures to be taken to verify the true intention by Iran to respect the conditions established in the pact.

are not to be considered as Iranian proxies: we have demonstrated that the Yemeni conflict is a complicated issue and has its roots in the history, weak governance and societal structure of the country. Houthis were already strong before the outbreak of the civil war and the Iranian instruments were not so essential to contribute to their own enforcement. Moreover, their aim was not to fight against Saudi Arabia but to re acquire power. Another component which favours the status' argument is related to the huge number of humanitarian losses, increased even more with the Saudi-led intervention: it is quite strange to think that Saudi Arabia has intervened to protect civilian population from Houthis when this intervention has led to a prolongment of the war with more human casualties. This has proved to be particularly valid under the Trump's administration, a period in which the cooperation with Saudi Arabia was very strong and in which the airstrikes targeted many civilian infrastructures or caused civilian deaths as collateral damages.

To make a note about Houthis; it is true that they cannot be defined as Iranian proxies for all the factors we have illustrated and for the fact that the Yemeni crisis has more profound roots eradicated in its history. At the same time, it can be also misleading the contrary, so considering them as completely disconnected from Iran. If we think about it, the main Houthis' objective was to re acquire power a to affirm back Zaydism in Yemen, but there are some common features between them and Iran that go beyond the Yemeni civil war, like the anti-Americanism and the anti-Israelism. So, Saudi Arabia which decides to intervene in Yemen aiming to fight Houthis because it considers them as backed by Iran is not absurd to believe.

The point is that, despite some links and support from Iran to Houthis, the Yemeni civil war cannot be defined as a simple proxy war among two external states. We know the importance that external actors can have in civil wars, but here Saudi Arabia and Iran have intervened in a situation in which the conflict was already exploded. The Yemeni one is a war mainly caused by internal factors that have characterized the country for centuries, so it is impossible to explain this war ignoring these factors. The tribal structure is what for centuries had impeded to the central authority to penetrate in all the parts of the Yemeni territory and to properly enforce the law. This had created important consequences in these last years: during the Republic and especially under Salih, the government has always taken decisions aimed to foster its position and its network of alliances rather than favouring the growth and development of the country. The Zaydi principles were completely refused, and this created dissatisfactions by the Zaydi tribes. This attitude by the government caused huge frustrations and grievances among the local population, for example the desire of secession of the southern movement; Houthis, an already marginalized group, took advantage of these grievances to enhance their legitimacy and capabilities and becoming a true

opposition movement against Salih; they portrayed themselves as a Zaydi revivalist organization. The tendencies of the central authority of being more concerned to its own power rather than in securing the recovering of Yemen can be seen in more phases, one is during Salih's government as we have seen previously; the other is during the transition after the 2011 protests when, despite a formal change in the leadership the mechanism created was the same. Hadi, in order to dismantle Salih's network and to create legitimacy around him, began to appoint in the relevant positions only those people closely loyal to him, like Salih did before him. This put in the background all the most important issues such as improving the situation and the economy of a country already strongly compromised. Another occasion was the alliance between Houthis and Salih during the civil was although their historical enmity; but Salih wanted to regain power in Yemen and an alliance with Houthis represented an important opportunity to reach that albeit its subsequent failure. The intervention of other states can be important and can somehow change the course of the conflict, as it was in this case because the intervention by the Saudi-led coalition for sure prolonged this civil war. But this occurred during the war, it did not make the war to start; this was caused by the internal dynamics which we have just talked about, that are impossible to ignore and are crucial to understand why the situation escalated in this way.

5- *A Never-Ending Civil War and its Consequences.*

In the curse of the years, the conflict developed more and more in favour of the Houthis. Although the intervention by the Saudi-led coalition, the recognized government located in Aden proved to be not very able to reject the Houthis' attacks. In April 2022, the United Nations imposed a six-month ceasefire among the parts with the aim to loosen the humanitarian catastrophe caused by this war. However, in October 2022 the ceasefire expired, and Houthis refused to extend it. But, in the meanwhile Saudi Arabia recognized that the objectives that hoped to achieve entering in the conflict in 2015 had to be resized because the intervention proved to not be enough to defeat Houthis and the coalition was coming out defeating. Houthis acquired control of the north-western part of Yemen, including Sanaa and the majority of the territories close to the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia came to the conclusion that it was no longer possible try to pull away those territories from the Houthis' hands and further prolonging the conflict; instead, the Saudi Kingdom began to think about the possibility to coexist with a Yemen even more controlled by the organization. So, in order to try a quite peaceful exit from this war, in April 2023 Saudi Arabia and Houthis decided

to open a dialogue talking about a further prolongment of the ceasefire. Moreover, an exchange of a significant number of war prisoners occurred between the two parts.

Although the internal origins of the civil wars, Houthis in the last years have continued to strengthen. They are now the entity that control a huge part of Yemen. The same can be said about their relationship with Iran. Houthis have also become more active externally for what concerns its hostility towards the United States and Israel. Houthis have joined to the "Resistance axis", together with Hamas, Hezbollah and the Shiite forces coming from Iraq and Syria. This is an alliance composed by Shiite militias in clear anti-Israel and anti-West terms. This is reinforced by the attacks against some ships linked to Israel, which could have lethal causes for the global trade. The action has been interpreted as an act of retaliation caused by the Israelian invasion of the Gaza strip, following the attacks by Hamas. The United States has decided to launch the operation Prosperity Guardian to stop the Houthis' attacks creating a coalition composed by ten states; however, these measures have remained unheard by Houthis. This has caused an escalation culminated with the attacks by the United States and the United Kingdom against Houthis' stations in Yemeni territory.

At the end of the previous chapter, we have mentioned the huge number of civilian losses caused by this war. In this regard, it is worthful to affirm that beyond all the suppositions about the interests and the reasons that bought external states to intervene in Yemen, these interventions and this external involvement have contributed to a higher number of human casualties and have exacerbated the humanitarian situation. Indeed, the data show a significant escalation in the targeting of civilian objects after the Saudi-led intervention, so since 2015; with the attacks by the Saudi-led coalition there was a huge increase in the attacks on the agriculture facilities, but also health facilities, transportation and water. Irrigation systems for villages were largely affected[364]. Between 2011 and 2015, most of the attacks were conducted mainly by non-state actors, including Al-Qaeda and other tribes, and targeted gas and oil infrastructures; the aim was to deprive the central authority of the export revenues, in a clear attempt to challenge the Salih's government[365].

The situation in Yemen was already precarious before the outbreak of the civil war; we've seen that especially at the end of the twentieth century Salih's government was more focused on extending his power and control through patronage networks and this did not foster the economic

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[364] J.L. Sowers & E. Weinthal, *Humanitarian Challenges and the Targeting of Civilian Infrastructure in the Yemen War, International Affairs*, 2021, pg. 157 ss., pg. 163-164.
[365] J.L. Sowers & E. Weinthal, *Humanitarian Challenges and the Targeting of Civilian Infrastructure in the Yemen War, International Affairs*, 2021, pg. 157 ss., pg. 167.

development of the country. The conditions did not improve under Hadi's administration after the uprisings; in this regard, it is important to remember his decision to cut the subsidies. Yemen was and still is the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula. For sure the conflict only worsened the situation in terms of weak governance and the lack of a proper rule of law. The Yemeni crisis was defined in 2017 by the United Nations' secretary general for human affairs as the largest humanitarian crisis in the world[366]; the conflict has particularly hit women, which were subjected to gender-based violence, displacement and difficulties in obtaining food and basic services for themselves and their sons. For this out of 170 countries, Yemen was classified third last by Women, Peace and Security Index of 2021/2022. In 2022, according to the Global Peace Index, Yemen has to be considered as the second least peaceful country in the world, after Afghanistan. Some periods were characterized by a more intermittent peace due to the drafting by United Nations of a brokered truce in the same year with a significant reduction in airstrikes, fighting and civilian deaths[367].

However, the fighting has never completely ceased and the situation on the ground continues to be strongly compromised also due to the several international crises. Civilians continue to face problems and dangers such as the exposition to landmines which are weapons that can easily cause civilian damages. For what concerns the displaced persons, in 2023 it has been recorded a total number of 4.5 million people: among them there are 3.1 million people in need. They are living in hosting settlements where they are subjected to harassment and violence; the vast majority of the displaced met serious difficulties in paying rent[368]. Although the scarcity of recent information regarding disabled persons, the World Health Organization estimated the existence of 4.9 million people with disabilities in Yemen; however, this number is supposed to be increased after the outbreak of the conflict due to the impact of some weapons on the population, such as landmines. With the conflict, many of them are left behind when their family is forced to leave home and the lack of adequate infrastructures precludes the existence of safe facilities where they can go since the services to disabled persons have been suspended in Yemen since 2015: this has also effect on their future, because the health and education sectors do not dispose of the adequate instruments

[366] G. Coppi, *The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Assessing the Security and Humanitarian Situation, International Peace Institute*, 2018, pg. 5-6.
[367] *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen, Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, 2023, pg. 13-14.
[368] *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen, Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, 2023, pg. 27.

to help them[369]. As a consequence, their opportunities are strongly compromised, and this strengthen a lot their exclusion and marginalization[370].

The intensity of the fighting has contributed to the identification by international observers of the actions committed during the war as war crimes and the vast majority of the civilian casualties due to the conflict have been attributed to the bombing by the coalition. Another phenomenon was the recruitment of children by the parties to the conflict, which involved also under-sixteen children, and, for the girls, the child marriage has remained a frequent phenomenon for two third of the girls in Yemen. This represented an increase in the phenomenon since before the conflict, 50 percent of the girls was subjected to early marriage; this is particularly common in those areas characterized by a huge number of internally displaced persons[371]. All these events of course affected the economy; the basic services and public institutions collapsed. Moreover, as we have seen, Yemen is a country that is dependent on import for the 90 percent; so, it is also very vulnerable to global market fluctuations because this brings to an increase of the prices of services in local markets such as for food[372]. On the one hand in 2022 a reduction of the displacement of people caused by the conflict, but on the other hand the global climate change triggered an increase in climate disasters of 93 percent. Yemen has experienced several negative events that did not improve the conditions of its people: indeed, 2022 was characterised by a huge decline in rainfall and an unprecedented rise in temperatures. In the second part of the year heavy downpours affected the country causing damages to 74.000 households.

Despite the importance of economy, an essential sector which was further compromised by the conflict was the healthcare system which was already a compromised sector before the crisis due to the low quality of the governance and the lack of investments, but the civil war caused an escalation of the situation; the health in sector in Yemen is not an independent sector, based on domestic resources but it is dependent on international aids. So, a system like this cannot be considered as strong; moreover, a huge number of infrastructures and facilities were disrupted by the hostilities or damages due to the frequent lack of electricity and instruments[373]. Nowadays, the health system in Yemen remains a problem with only half of facilities being available and

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[369] According to a recent study made by Humanity & Inclusion, before the escalation of the hostilities, there were 300 organizations on the territory providing assistance to people affected by disabilities. With the conflict, just a small part of these is still operating.
[370] *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen, Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, 2023, pg. 29.
[371] G. Coppi, *The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Assessing the Security and Humanitarian Situation, International Peace Institute*, 2018, pg. 7.
[372] *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen, Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, 2023, pg. 15.
[373] G. Coppi, *The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Assessing the Security and Humanitarian Situation, International Peace Institute*, 2018, pg. 7-8.

there are also badly distributed in the territory for almost half of the population. So, often a public hospital requires a lot of times to be reached. Moreover, the birth of new projects in this field is threatened by a low level of funding. Additionally, this inefficiency generates other diseases such as maternal mortality that remains very diffuse in Yemen: especially in rural areas women have a very limited if no absent access to adequate health reproductive services, only in less than half of the cases births are assisted by skilled personnel and almost in less cases the births take place in a true health facility. Also, the education system is a sector that, despite the already previous backwardness and fragility, has been completely destroyed by the conflict; since 2015, 2,783 schools in Yemen were destroyed, damaged or used for other purposes. Many displaced children have been obliged to see their instruction interrupted and the 47 percent of the 2.7 million of children out of schools are girls[374].

Another factor that has not facilitated the health system is related to Covid-19; of course, the virus has had a more devastating impact in Yemen than in other countries due to the lack of efficient infrastructures to isolate the affected people and to provide them proper treatments. A significant number of healthcare professionals in the country were obliged to leave their duties due to the lack of funds and equipment. Furthermore, the virus has also affected the healthcare providers, so those people with are fundamental to fight against Covid-19; many workers, pharmacists, medical directors and disease experts lost their lives because of the virus. This decrease in the number of experts had further devastating effects on the population that, together with the limited availability of facilities met also serious difficulties in finding someone able to cure them. This component inevitably contributes to an escalation because if the system is not able to protect and to guarantee safety to the workers, it will hardly be able to attract new skilled workers in the health sector. From these assumptions, we understand that Covid-19 for a weak country as Yemen for sure will have a very negative impact in the long-term in the medical sector and its rebuilding: first of all, the medical infrastructures have been made unusable from the hostilities and from the attacks both by the coalition forces and Houthis. So, their reconstruction would require a new period of peace and stability in the territory. Moreover, the rebuilding does not only regard the facilities but also the importance to reequip this sector with new experts and medical workers, but this is quite difficult to achieve given the lack of protection for them, aggravated by the virus[375].

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[374] *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen, Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, 2023, pg. 23-24.
[375] J. Odey, *Great Disaster: The Impact of Covid-19 on Yemen, Liberty University Journal of Statesmanship and & Public Policy*, 2022, pg. 3-5.

In addition to the healthcare system, Covid-19 has had an impact on the economic structure in every part of the world, so Yemen is not an exception, especially considering the fact that Yemen is among the poorest countries in the globe and around 80 percent of its population is above the poverty line. We already know that for Yemen the support from external states in essential, not only in terms of importations but also regarding remittances; remittances from Yemeni people who work in other states represent the 12.6 percent of the total GDP. Covid-19 compromised the entire world economy due to the restrictions put by the countries. It caused a huge decline of remittances sent to Yemen: more specifically, from 2019 to 2020 the decline of remittances from abroad went from 58 billion to 47 billion. This reduction of remittances had an effect especially on the working people inside Yemen because they saw a reduction of their annual income of 20 percent. Furthermore, the numerous restrictions activated by the countries had an effect on Yemen and its imports and caused an internal inflation on the price of the local products. Also, the export sector was affected because Yemen strongly relies on its oil-exports; in 2020 Yemen should have export 30 million barrels of oil but at the end the government had not the possibility to do that due to all the economic restrictions generated by the pandemic. This entailed repercussions also on the internal economy because oil-exports represented an essential part of government revenues, and this decline limited a lot the attempts by the government to support the enterprises in the country[376].

Finally, but equally important, it is impossible to not take into account the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Yemeni crisis. Yemen is one of the countries more affected from the Ukrainian-Russian war. The strong dependence on foreign actors proved to be unfavourable also in this case; indeed, Ukraine and Russia were very important for Yemen because their contribute filled almost half of the Yemen's needs for what concerns wheat. The outbreak of this war caused a closure of the supply of these resources and the local production of food; this deleted the supply of wheat for Yemen[377]. As a remedy, Yemen tried to look for alternative solutions trying to import the wheat from alternative sources, such as India, but the expedition did not work out because New Delhi blocked the departure of the shipments. Furthermore, the Ukrainian-Russian war compromises also the other countries in the MENA region: indeed, these countries are very important for Yemen because their products represent 12 percent of Yemen's imports. Nonetheless, with the crisis between Ukraine and Russia the problem arose also for the Yemen's MENA partners because

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[376] J. Odey, *Great Disaster: The Impact of Covid-19 on Yemen, Liberty University Journal of Statesmanship and & Public Policy*, 2022, pg. 6-7.
[377] A.A-Ati Al Naggar, *The Consequences of the Ukrainian-Russian Armed Conflict in Yemen, International Congress on Afro-Eurasian Research VI*, 2022, pg. 238 ss., pg. 239.

generally the products and food that they export to Yemen are made with resources bought from Russian and Ukrainian markets, resources that they are not more able to reach. For this reason, these countries have decided to cut their exportations towards Yemen and to think about their own need since they have been affected by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as well[378].

The already fragile situation in Yemen further escalated and deteriorated since 2015, with the civil war which caused many long-term problems to the society due also to the many collateral damages to civilian and health infrastructures both by Houthis and coalition. In a similar context it becomes very difficult to think about a possible future for people in the country since many facilities that should have been should have been able to protect citizens and provide for their education have been damaged or destroyed. A way to try to reconstruct the country could be a final peace between the parties since the rebuilding of a state requires peace; however, the continuing of hostilities both on a higher or lower intensity has made this very difficult; thinking about a possible peacebuilding becomes more difficult when the most basic elements of human security are damaged and when civilians are not safe either as if they were an active part of the hostilities. As we have said before, for sure the attacks, like bombings and airstrikes against the territory have caused deaths and damages to many civilians and infrastructures, but all the internal diseases like malnutrition, internal displacement and collapse of services have made Yemen a country in which people are more likely to suffer and die because of these indirect effects than from direct attacks[379]. Moreover, in these last years the impact of Covid-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war has further compromised Yemen and its economy based for a huge part on imports of food and wealth from Russian and Ukrainian markets.

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[378] A.A-Ati Al Naggar, *The Consequences of the Ukrainian-Russian Armed Conflict in Yemen, International Congress on Afro-Eurasian Research VI*, 2022, pg. 238 ss., pg. 242.
[379] J.L. Sowers & E. Weinthal, *Humanitarian Challenges and the Targeting of Civilian Infrastructure in the Yemen War, International Affairs*, 2021, pg. 157 ss., pg. 158- 161.

Conclusions

In this thesis I have explained the causes of the Yemeni civil war. I started analysing the several explanations of civil wars in general, then flowing into the specific case of Yemen. To do this we have analysed the most important aspect of the Yemeni development through the twentieth century. Basing on this latter aspect and on the different visions existing in the literature we have figured out the main pushing factors to understand the outbreak of the civil conflict in Yemen. First of all, civil wars are complex phenomena caused by a set of different issues. We cannot classify a civil war within the greed nor the grievances argument: it is not possible to choose a theoretical approach about the reasons of the outbreak of a war inside a state and then apply it for all the cases, for all the existing civil wars worldwide. For sure, if a state is in a condition of civil war, it is more probable that it is more a weak than a strong country; however, every country has different characteristics and those features that in a state prove to be an important triggering factor for a civil war it does not mean it is the same for all the other states. But what is true is that a civil war is caused both by greed and grievances causes which combine together in different ways depending on the specific case. Greed and grievances must be used together as they were a part of the same theoretical approach, with an additional focus on the behaviour played by the government and the institutions. Regarding the greed theory, it is often described as something belonging to the opponents who decide to act against the central authority. Nevertheless, there are some cases in which a greedy behaviour is exercised by the incumbent and his way to enforce the law and to manage the country.

Yemen falls exactly in this conclusion: I emphasized how greed and grievances arguments must work together in a new and different approach paying the attention to several pushing conditions existing within the country. These are the tribal structure, a weak state apparatus and social marginalization. Yemen is a country with a so complex and difficult situation internally that causes related to greed and grievances have both a crucial role. In the second chapter, before the coming of the republic in 1962 we have talked about the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. We have stressed the difficulty of the Ottoman Empire to keep its dominance in Yemen due to the existing tribal structure. This structure resisted and had an impact also during the Imamate; it drove the country in the curse of its history. Indeed, Yemen has always been characterized by a tribal setting, this is also facilitated by the geography which favours a distribution of the population on different settlements; as a consequence, many tribes are located in Yemen. Once a person is part of a tribe he does not exist so much as an individual but as a part of a tribe; tribal

loyalty is very important. Tribes develop as a sort of independent communities parallel to the incumbent authority. Some tribes are more independent than others: if a tribe is independent and strong, it can represent a threat to the central authority, which encounters difficulties in enforcing laws. This is the reason why the Imam was dependent on the tribes, he had to acquire their consensus in order to not risk losing his power. This situation continued even after the establishment of the republic in 1962 because, although the rejection of Zaydism and a shift in the type of government, tribes maintained an important role because the tribal structure was a too rooted characteristic in Yemen. It could not be dismantled with a simple change of authority. The tribal structure can be considered a structural feature in Yemen which facilitated the civil war, albeit not being a direct cause; it generated other conditions that triggered a civil war. Another aspect that must be considered in Yemen is the fact that more than one civil war had been fought in the past. Although a country may be able to exit from this conflict trap, we have seen that it is not the Yemen's case.

Before Salih, the several presidents of the new republic faced a lot of problems in obtaining the consensus by all the groups in society. A reason for this was, as affirmed, the continuation of the tribes' power and influence; even in its republican era Yemen continued to be influenced by tribal dynamics and loyalties. After the civil war, the new republic did not succeed in the building of a modern nation state due to this patronage by tribal elites in the Sadaa area; a combination of the weakness of the state's apparatus and the Yemeni tribal structure. Furthermore, the movement which had overthrown the Imamate was very broad and composed by many political tendencies among which the only common purpose was to establish a republican regime. But once this was obtained, the various groups fought one another. The situation worsened with the election of Salih in 1978: since the beginning of his presidency, he appointed the members of his family in the most important positions in the government, to secure his survival. After the unification in 1990, despite the formal fusion of the YAR and PDRY armies, Salih did not want the southern forces to acquire too much power and he decided to exclude the southern elements in the army replacing them with northern officers. As a consequence, the southerners felt that their needs and interests were completely marginalized and this caused hostility and grievances, which culminated in the 1994 civil war. In the meanwhile, Houthis began to emerge as a movement aiming to reestablish Zaydism in Yemen, whose principles were completely excluded in the republic at the expenses of the Zaydi tribes. They were able to attract consensus also by some parts of the tribal north, marginalized by the republican government because the central authority feared a possible rebellion by that part of the country, aimed to rebuild the Imamate; this behaviour by the

government can be considered as a greedy component. Houthis were another marginalized organization and with time acquired more and more consensus among those citizens who were unsatisfied with the incumbent's behaviour. This is the reason why the tribal structure revealed as one of the pushing factors of the civil war. Here, the tribal issue and the social marginalization combine with each other generating grievances. In occasion of the uprisings in 2011, these grievances were added to those of other groups such as the southerners and the youth. After the uprisings, the issues brought to light by the opposing forces were faced by the new president Hadi with a marginal importance; in the meanwhile, Houthis further strengthen their resources and capabilities, and this flowed into a civil war in 2014.

So, looking at these things we have learnt that we can notice how both greed and grievances have played a role: a greedy behaviour of the government, focused mainly to build a strong network of alliances around him to maintain his power position, has fallen to address the already fragile economic and social conditions of Yemen, triggering huge grievances among the population which, given the situation with the republic, began to regret Zaydism and the Imamate. This enabled a marginalized Zaydi-revivalist group like Houthis to become stronger. In Yemen greed is more on the side of the incumbent which generates grievances in the society.

Given the importance of the internal reasons we have described, we can disprove a very common view among scholars about the origins of the civil war. According to this view, the Yemeni civil war has been caused by external states, principally Saudi Arabia and Iran, due to their competition for regional hegemony. We have learnt that of course Houthis have not been completely disconnected from Iran in this war because the Iranian authorities have expressed ideological and material support for Houthis and their actions in Yemen. At the same time, this is not enough to consider Houthis as Iranian proxies because be a proxy would mean that Houthis are strong only thanks to Iranian assistance, but this is not the case: Iranian help contributed to strengthen Houthis as an opponent group, but they were already strong before the Iranian provision of aids. Since 2011 there has been an increase in the assistance to the organization from the Islamic republic, but this assistance has not been crucial for the Houthis. This is also given by the fact that Iran has some interests in helping Houthis; indeed, seeing the situation in a regional perspective, Iran has constantly sought to change the traditional order shaped by the United States and, as a consequence, in favour of Saudi Arabia which represents a strategic partner for the United States in the Middle East. Houthis' purpose was to replace Salih's government which they considered as too accommodating towards the American administration. At the same time, Yemen is not so important for Iran as Syria and Lebanon, so it would not be reasonable for Iran to act in an

intensive way risking an overreaction by Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Iran and Houthis may have had some common interests but they overall objective was different: in that moment, Houthis wanted to retake power in Yemen with the revival of the Zaydi doctrines, this was their priority. For Iran the main purpose was another one: to expand its power in the Middle East at the expenses of Saudi Arabia. Yemen of course could represent a set to reach this aim, but it was not so important like other countries.

These conclusions about the Iranian interests put into question the Saudi Arabia's motivations of its involvement based on the need to protect the Yemeni citizens and to fight Houthis, defined as Iranian agents. This, together with the huge humanitarian catastrophe especially after the Saudi-led coalition's intervention has made to think that the reasons of Saudi Arabia's interests in Yemen may be related more to status, so the importance of showing Iran to be able to shape and control the events in the countries of the Middle East, and Yemen is not an exception. However, as we have argued, even in this case a different approach should be adopted: Saudi Arabia may have intervened also for status, to show the world and Iran to be the only hegemon power in the region. At the same time, the push to intervene could have been not so strong without the perception of a threat by Saudi Arabia, which is Iran. It is true that the Iranian support to Houthis has not been determinant for their capabilities, and they are not part of the Iran's foreign policy; but a support was given in any case and despite the differing objectives among Iran and Houthis, they had the same interests. Adding also the issue of the United States and the difficult relationship with Saudi Arabia, it is reasonable to think that Saudi Arabia may have felt vulnerable and alone in the competition with Iran and it might have felt the need to protect its position.

These dynamics previously described about the intervention by the coalition led by Saudi Arabia regard the period in which the civil war was already in curse, but they cannot be considered as the reasons of its outbreak. The Saudi-led coalition intervened only in 2015, when the conflict was already exploded; it is fair to affirm that especially the intervention by the Saudi-led coalition has shaped the conflict and prolonged it. But this was when the conflict had already broken out. The first emergence of the civil war is another and different thing. As argued in this thesis, it has not been triggered by external states. The factors that determined the outbreak of the conflict were principally internal and ignoring them endorsing the hypothesis of a proxy war between external actors diminishes the importance of the problems rooted in Yemen.

For what concerns the development of the civil war and the current situation in Yemen, it is crucial to affirm that from a humanitarian perspective, the situation is improved due to a loosening of the

hostilities. Indeed, in 2022 the United Nations intervened imposing a ceasefire which expired in October 2022. However, the tensions remained strong, and the parties were not able to renew it. As a consequence, in 2023 Houthis and Saudi Arabia decided to mediate talking about a possible prolongment of the ceasefire. This mediation was very important for Saudi Arabia because its intervention in Yemen, started in 2015 did not yield the desired results and a dialogue with Houthis represented a way for the Saudi Kingdom to get out of the conflict. Nowadays, the internationally recognized government seems to be the defeat side of the conflict while Houthis are controlling the majority of Yemen: more specifically, the northwestern part of the country, the capital Sanaa, and a huge part of the territories which overlook the Red Sea.

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