

Yemen Crisis in the Regional Context

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Abstract

Historically religious, tribal, racial, and lingual differences have contributed to the political chasm in Yemen. It lacks social and religious cohesion due to its primarily tribal culture; this has paved the way for regional players and trans-regional actors' interference such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United States. Unlike Saudi Arabia, the Iranian interference is not military but morall and political support. Yemen has special ideological and strategic value for the two regional players; under their direction and control, in recent years, the social groups and movements have become very active in this country.

The competition among regional powers and their attempts to expand their influence among these groups has created a power struggle among different groups. This has created much friction and tension among different groups and has prepared the context for maximum interference of the regional and non-regional powers through exploitation of the conflicts among the religious groups. In response to Islamic Republic's support of the Houthis, the Saudi government has aligned itself with the U.S. to stabilize Yemen by managing the crisis in a way to maintain political structure, or at most unchanged.

Keywords: Yemen, religious chasm, Houthis, Iran, Saudi Arabia

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Introduction

Cultures, from antiquity till today, have been a center of focus in humanity. Since the beginning of information revolution and the globalization conflicts have merged some cultures and fragmented some others. This has challenged the traditional international order. Leo Strauss believes that historically, religion has it's the power to legitimize political authority. Moreover, cultural and religious groups, at times, have considered the growth of other religions as existential threat and have reacted against them. In today's world order and in regional structures, the position of religion and culture is of paramount importance for governments' policies. Therefore, religion has remained one of the most powerful sources for legitimizing order in the Middle East. This has remained a very strong tool for projecting power and influence to gain support for the policies of the governments. However, it is a double-edged sword as the same mechanism can be manipulated by the opposition putting the governments' legitimacy in question. Therefore religion with its ability to affect governments' decisions-making can alter the political order in the world. Joseph Nye maintains that forces of regionalism and separation have been aggravated by minor issues and conflicts. Daniel Patrick Moynihan also believes that ethnic conflicts are not raised from major issues, but even minor ones can be equally problematic. Therefore minor divisions among various sects (such as Sunni and Shia) can lead to major internal conflict on the world scale (Habermas, 2009:215).

Religion plays a significant role in the Middle East, where the

world's largest religions i.e. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were emerged. Today the Middle East is the center for the Islamic world. Islam includes major sects and many different groups such as Shia, Esmailieh, Hanfieh, Shafii, Hanbalie, and Maleki. These sects are divided based on their interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, and sometimes they stand against one another (Mohammadi, 1999: 61). The competition among regional and global players and their influence on these groups has expanded the influence of groups at the expense of others; this has led to tension among them. Accordingly regional and world powers have maximized their influence in the Middle East using these conflicts and divisions for their own benefits. This study is concerned with the effects of the actions of the groups and social order in Yemen in the competitive context of regional and global powers. The paper takes it for granted that Yemen is located in geographically sensitive position in the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, in Yemen, social movements move in parallel with ethnic and religious lines; the interplay of political, social and ideological networks in this country has caused internal divisions and cracks. This, in turn, has caused competition among the regional (i.e. Iran and Saudi Arabia) and global powers that are involved in Yemen's recent upheaval.

Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country is of special significance for regional players and global ones (USA) from strategic and ideological perspective. The political implications of the recent developments in Yemen occurred under the influence of these players. The current article is concerned with the competition among these powers in the Middle East in general and in Yemen in particular. The results are driven using the concept of sociology of religion in discussing the recent events in Yemen as methodology. Since its inception religion was a part of society. Many people regard religion of having an outmost significance, thus not only religion forms their behavior on a personal and social level but it also shapes an understanding of other's behaviors and actions, Religion has

transformed societies on a enormously on the basis of people's actions and beliefs. Some religions, like Islam, exercise a significant effect on the social environment of their followers. It can be argued that religion and its social effects can play a pivotal role in the various layers of society (Shojae, 2013: 24-25). Many scholars have studied the field of the sociology of religion, among them Max Weber is the most important one. Weber saw religion as a strong social force with significant implications for society; he investigated the role of religion and religious motives in public behavior. Through the concept of sociology of religion, he sought a scientific method, by which religious manifests could lead to a social understanding. In this method religiously motivated actions were studied through the prism of the public and the society. As such the sociology of religion treats religion as a sociological force which has a specialized meaning and use (Abrahimi, 2014: 8). Therefore religion is a very strong factor in the social make-up and as Henry Bergson maintains whether religion is perceived as a private or social matter, its important role in the society is undeniable (Bergson, 1978: 8). This fact can be seen in Yemen. Since in Islamic societies religion is a socio-political element it can be stated that religion is an integral part of people's identity in the Middle East. It reflects the interests and tensions in the society and is incorporated and influential in the politics and world's political order.

I. Social Context

Yemen occupying 527,970 km² in the Arabian Peninsula includes some two hundred isles in the Arabian Sea; the largest of these is Socotra. The Gulf of Aden and the straits of Bab el Mandeb have given an important strategic position to Yemen. This country borders Saudi Arabia in the North, Oman in the East, the Gulf of Aden in the South and the Red Seas in the West. The Bab el Mandeb is located in the Southwest. Yemen is the second largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, occupying the coastline stretches for about 2,000 km. Its capital and largest city is Sana'a. Following the Second World War and

in 1934, Yemen gained its independence from Britain within the framework of East-West conflict which separated the country into North and South Yemen. In September 1962, with the aid of Eastern bloc and the Egyptian armed forces a thousand year rule of the Zaydi Imams ended in Yemen (Mohammadi, 2011: 7-24). However in 1990 the two Yemen were reunited under the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh as its president. Under his rule the Constitution mandated freedom of speech, and a democratic party based system. The members of the parliament and president were elected directly by the people setting Yemen as the first and the only democratic Arab nation. However the framework of the social and political forces and the rule of Saleh showed that democracy was not easily achievable in Yemen. The 22 million people in Yemen belong to different ethnical and tribal lines. Thus, due to divisions along ethnicity, religion, tribal origins and regionalism in Yemen, the cultural composition in this country is quite fractured. More than 93% of Yemeni people speak Arabic. Yemen has many tribes among them Hashid⁽¹⁾ and Bakil⁽²⁾ are the most important ones. Some other tribes in the North and the South are Maqil, Bariq, Banu Judhan, Banu Lakhm, Humaydah, Azd and Banu Hamdam (Karimlo, 1995: 25).

The Majority of Yemenis are Muslims (97%) and the Shiite groups (Zaydi⁽³⁾, Ismailie⁽⁴⁾, Jaffari) reside in the mountainous North with 47% of the population. The Shafi'i⁽⁵⁾ (Sunni) with a population of 52% reside in the South of Yemen. The remaining population includes Hindu, Christian and atheist. There are many divisions socially along class, ethnicity, religion, tribal, and religious lines (Karimloo, 1995: 25). This paper will study influential and destructive roles one of such elements separately. However religious divisions as stated by Agabakshi are the most problematic ones which threatens the stability of Yemen (Agabakshi, 2004: 103). To clarify the point one of the most important religious divisions leading to war during the Saleh years, will be discussed briefly.

This Shiite group is named after their religious leaders,

Alamehaye Badredin Houthi. Until 1962 Yemen was ruled through the line of the imamate and the Houthis had significant influence. This however came to an end with the coup d'etat by lieutenant Abdullah which overthrew the imamate and thus reduced the Shiite influence of the Zaydi in Yemen. Thereafter the Houthis were deprived of much economic and political power and the government concentrated its resources on the Shafi'i and central areas of Yemen. The Houthis as stated are a Shiite group which is close to the Jaffari faith. This movement emerged as a result of much injury that was done to the Shiites at the hand of the repressive governments in Yemen. After the reunification of Yemen in 1990 which united the South and the North, the Houthis acted through the organization of the Al Hagh political party. This party however never acted formally and for this reason always operated under the suspicion of the Ali Abdullah Saleh who himself was a Zaydi. Alameh Shahid Hussein Houthi succeeded in creating a political and military movement of special character called Al Shabab movement (the devout youth). Alameh Shahid made use of very novel methods pertaining to religious indoctrination in creating and organizing this group.

Alameh Hussein in considering all political, economic, social and religious angles tried to train this organization along an axis which made use of Islamic teachings and which provided a united front in all matters pertaining to the Houthis (Aman, 2015). The success of the Islamic revolution in Iran created an awakening in the Islamic world and especially among the Shiites. Like other Shiite groups, the Houthis as a Shiite movement were also affected. Alameh Hussein himself was deeply affected and inspired by Imam Khomeini whom was seen by the Houthis as a leader and an ideological source. The Houthis have a special bond with the current leader of the Islamic Republic and Hezbollah leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah (Triboun, 2015). The Jaffari Shiites and the Zaydis (followers of the four Shiite Imam) both were victims of injustices under Saleh's government and thus supported the Houthis vis-à-vis the Salifis. It can be argued that

the Houthis and the Jaffaris in Yemen have been very close owing for the most part to the person of Alameh Hussein Houthi. With his writings and thoughts, Alameh Hussain was able to reduce the differences among the groups to a minimum. This is the main reason for the spiritual influence of the Iranian Islamic Revolution on the Yemeni Shiites and their adherence to its political agenda (Mirzadeh kohshahi, 2011: 19).

From the time of unification in 1990 until 2003 the relation between the Houthis and the central government in Yemen was normal. In the war of separation in 1994, the Houthis allied themselves with the government and through the armaments provided by the government fought the separatists. In return they expected to be favored by the state for the important role they had during the conflict; an expectation which was never fulfilled. This came to the surface when in 2003 Hussein Houthi, the Houthi's leader, led a demonstration in front of the American embassy in Sana'a in opposition to American's invasion to Iraq. This demonstration was immediately condemned by the government and led to arrest of the Houthis leader; consequently persecution of the group became the policy of the Saleh government. This led to six major wars between the Houthis and the government in the coming years until 2009.

The first war of the Houthis against Saleh started in 2004 which came to an end with death of Hussein Houthi and his brother by the Yemenis army. It is noteworthy to mention that Yemeni-Iranian relations have experienced a chill since June 2004, after the first war between the Houthi movement and the regime of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Sanaa has repeatedly accused Iran of supporting the Houthis. The second war was directed by the father of Hussein Houthi, Badredin Houthi, which lasted for two months. With the continuation of the pressure by the government on the Houthis, the third war commenced in march of 2006 with the command of Abdolmalek Houthi (the current Houthi leader) and also Hussein's



younger brother. The government forces were directed to destroy the strongholds of the Zeydis who resisted. This war was expanded geographically to the towns of Saghein, Almajz, Heydan, and the geographic center of the Sana'a state. Following the fourth war in January of 2007 the government finally accepted to end the hostilities against the Houthis (Ansar Allah) in the Sana'a state through a ceasefire. However soon after March of 2008, the Yemeni forces with the military and financial support of the Saudi government waged war against the Houthis in a serious manner. In the fourth war the Houthis who now were equipped with heavy weapons started their operations against the Saleh government. This war came to an end by the armistice signed by both parties in Doha through the efforts of the Qatari government.

This war was a significant defeat for the Saleh government as it not only showed the growth of the Houthi's influence in Yemen, but that it could threaten its neighboring Saudi Arabia which was solidly anti-Houthi and anti-Shiite. In August of 2009 the sixth war was undertaken with direct intervention of the Saudi army to increase the prestige of the Yemeni army and to curb and reduce the expansion of the Houthis' power who was now accused of receiving Iranian weapons. This was the first time that the Saudis openly and directly deployed their forces outside of their territory in an active conflict. This war which became known as Operation Scorched Earth expanded to Saudi's territory. Some jet fighters and tanks of the Yemeni forces were destroyed and finally in February 12, 2010 with the acceptance and abeyance of both parties it was ended. It became evident that the real motivation behind the conflict was the competition between the Shiite and the Sunnis and that Saleh's government had used its regional ally (Saudi Arabia) to direct the conflict.

Shortly after the conflicts in Yemen popular movements in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, created a political avalanche in most of the Arab countries including

Yemen. Being influenced by the revolutions in the Arab countries, in the January 2011, the people of Yemen began a movement which aimed to overthrow the corrupt regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. With the mediation of the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council in February 27, 2012 Saleh resigned and giving power to Abd al- Rabbuh Mansur al Hadi. Eventually the revolution was unsuccessful; internal conflicts, Saudi Arabia's intervention, Iran's support for the Shiites and the increasing influence of al-Qaida in Yemen all exasperated conflict along religious and tribal lines. For understanding the role of the different groups who have powers in Yemen one should take a closer look at three strong religious currents namely: Ansar Allah, (Houthis), Wahhabis allied with Shafi'i and Al-Qaida.

II. Iran and Yemen

In the past and prior to the rise of Islam the extent of power and influence of countries in the North and the South of Persian Gulf were different (Sajedi, 1993: 75-96). After Islam, the two parts of the Persian Gulf area were not easily unified under Islam. Even after Arab defeat in the Israeli wars and given high presence of the Muslims and Arabs, the Middle East was more and more engulfed within the world of Islam. As a result, until 1979, Iran and Saudi Arabia did not have similar levels of influence in this area. However after the victory of the Islamic Revolution this trend shifted (Ahmadi, 2007: 32). Today the competition between Shiite and Sunnis is a specific aspect of regional policies in the Middle East (Vaezi, 2009: 85). The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic pursues elements which are constant and binding based on teachings of the leader of the Islamic Revolution Imam Khomeini. Defense of the Muslims, the unprivileged and oppressed in the world, fight with oppressor and exploiter are the basis for Islamic Republic. To achieve these purposes Iran's foreign policy is based on principles such as the establishment of an Islamic government in the world, repulsion of injustice, defense of the oppressed, support for Islamic liberation

movements, and the introduction of Islam and in particular support of the Shiite sect (Kazemi, 1994: 19-20). The Shiite population of Yemen (47%) which is supported morally by the Islamic Republic of Iran has allowed the Islamic Republic to bring the existing conflict with Saudi Arabia from the theater of Syria among others to the kingdom's southern front. After the downfall of Abdullh Saleh (Yemeni president) who was a staunch supporter of the Saudi government, the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran was no longer limited as it had been in the past. People's opposition to Saudis and American policies led them closer towards the Islamic Republic. Iran is believed to support the Arab revolutions in the Middle East and has an anti-Western tendency. The presence of some of the Zeydi clerics in Iran and their religious training in Qom and their subsequent influence in Yemen is further testimony to the closeness of the Islamic Republic and the Zeydi tribes in Yemen. By returning the Yemeni clerics from Qom, the Iranian government has been able to expand its influence in Saudi Arabia's southern front and inside the confines of the Arabian Peninsula.

The moral and political support Iran granted to the Houthis movement in the state of Sada in North Yemen and the influence of the Houthis in the states of Ta'izz, al Hudaydah, Ibb, Aden, Lahij, and other parts reflects the growth of Iran's influence in these areas. The increasing influence of Hezbollah in Lebanon and its explicit effort to create similar political and military structure of Hezbollah, with Iran's support, in Yemen by the Houthis has added the influence of Iran in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Yemen and its role in Yemen's developments has enabled Iran to support the Houthis which is fighting against the house of Saud. It should be noted that the support by Iran has come mainly through the spread of the revolutionary ideology of Iran among the Yemenis and not its arms. Iran through its influence in Yemen with the Houthis in Yemen has been able by a sectarian war to make some tensions to the borders of

Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that these claim (the Iranian influence in Yemen) led the former Yemeni government, Saleh and Abd Rabbuh, to accuse Iran of interfering in the internal affairs of Yemen. Even the meeting between the Iranian ambassador, Mahmoud Hassan Ali Zadeh, and Saleh Habra, the president of the political council of the Houthi movement in Sanaa on May 10, 2013 was perceived by Anti Houthi and the US ambassador as an act of interfering in Yemen's affairs with a plan to deliver weapons to the Houthi movement. However the Iranian ambassador dismissed the allegations and stated that the meeting was aimed at cooperation between the two sides for the interest of both countries.

For understanding the Houthis close relations with Iran, it should be mentioned that there is a factual cooperation among AnsarAllah, Iran and Hezbollah in resistance to Western and Israeli occupation of Palestine. Meanwhile it should be emphasized that this cooperation is just a spiritual-religious connection over these issues. It is important to know that for many Zaydis Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, has a stance similar with that of Imam Khomeini, since Ayatollah Khamenei is a Hashemite Alawite and has declared his opposition to the unjust rulers and enemies of Islam. Thus, the Houthis and some other Zaydis consider Ayatollah Khamenei, and previously Ayatollah Khomeini a legitimate leader and a fair Imam. The Palestinian cause is also another common strategic point for Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthi movement, indicating that they all want to put an end to Israeli's occupation of Palestine.

One month after the resignation of President Mansur Hadi and the government of Prime Minister Khald Bahah, the dominant Houthi movement dissolved parliament on Friday February 6, 2015 and expressed that a new interim assembly and government would be formed. The new assembly is to elect a five member interim presidential council to manage Yemeni affairs in a transitional period of up to two years. Friday's declaration also suggested that the



Houthis had taken on more powers including forming the new parliament and control over the military and security forces. This was welcomed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Unlike Iran, the Saudi government expressed its dissatisfaction over the Houthis move by suspending most of its financial aid to Yemen. This was a clear indication of Saudi dissatisfaction with the growing power of the Houthis. The Saudi government along with the (Persian) GCC states called it a coup. Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf Sunni Arab allies regard the Shi'ite Houthis with suspicion for being close to their regional rival Iran.

III. Saudi Arabia and Yemen

Saudi Arabia as the birthplace of Islam and site for the Haramain Sharifain is the most important center of the Islamic World. The presence of one fourth of the world's fossil reserves enables Saudi Arabia to financially support the extremist Wahabi groups in different countries. This has allowed the Saudi Arabia to play a pivotal role in the events and upheavals in the Middle East. Over years and before formation of the Saudi Arabia, due to the war of Taif between Imam Ahamd (Yemenis Zeydi) and the Al Saud, there was a deep sense of distrust and suspicion between these two regions which were of two different sects. Even after the passage of time and the independence of Saudi Arabia the relations between the two states did not improve. The reason was the occupation of three Yemeni states (Asir, Nejran, and Jaizan) by the Saudi forces in 1934. Although the occupation of these areas was formally recognized in 2000, sense of resentment was still predominant in Yemen.

For centuries, the relation between the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia and the Zeydis in Yemen was hostile. The Zeydi Imams ruled Yemen until 1962. Even with the Yemeni unification and ascendancy of Abdullah Saleh, Wahhabi Saudis could not approach the Yemenis. The impediment to a rapprochement between the Wahhabis and the Zeydis has deep roots in their ideology and their very different

political views (IranianNews, 2014). In the treatise made by Mohammed Ibn-e-Abdul Wahhab “Kashf al-Shubuhah”, more than twenty four times the non- Wahhabis are called infidels. Shiites are those who pray and pay pilgrimage to the Holy Shrines of great Islamic figures; these people visit shrines to get cured of sickness. Ibn-e-Abdul Wahhab calls them infidels, “Kafir” and blasphemous (Azimi, 1996: 15). For this reason the government of Saudi Arabia with the support of Wahhabi scholars has continued to resist the growth of the Shiites and in particular Zeydis in Saudi Arabia and Northern Yemen. The financial, spiritual, logistical and even military supports are granted to the tribes of Hashid and the house of Alhamr- both major tribes and adversary to the Zaydis. In all the six wars between the Houthis and the Yemeni Government the former president of Yemen (Saleh) paid a significant amount of money, to the tribes that opposed the Houthis. Establishment of Wahhabi schools and expansion of this sect in Northern Yemen, and the close cooperation with the U.S in political and intelligence matters aimed at weakening the anti-western forces and increasing Saudi’s influence in Yemen. Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy approach shows that it will never accept a powerful external unfriendly nation in the Arabian Peninsula and near its borders and would consider it as a threat to its hegemony within the Arabian Peninsula. The prominence and control of Yemen in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the special strategic importance of this passageway for the U.S. and its ally Saudi Arabia as well as the presence of the Shafi’is who support the Saudis in the South of Yemen has given the Saudis further motivation to increase their involvement in Yemen.

Many Sunni leaders of the Arab World have expressed concerns about the danger of the expansion of the Shiite crescent in the Middle East. This has led to confrontation between the supporters of the Shiite sect and the Sunnis and in particular the Wahhabis. The house of Al Saud is seriously concerned about the expansion of Shiism along its neighboring state, in a country with 1,458 kilometer

common border with Yemen. Saudi Arabia has a significant Shiite minority mostly settled in oil producing areas. These areas produce almost 90% to 95% of Saudi's oil income and accounts for 15% of the total world oil production (Ibrahim, 2007: 23). Some Shiite groups in Saudi Arabia favor Imam Khomeini ideas the principle of Velayate Faqih (Kazemi Dinan, 2009: 179). For this reason the Saudi government has tried to curb and control any influence upon its Shiite population by the Shiite groups in Iran or Yemen. In particular, the Saudi government continues to curb any contact between the Yemeni Shiite groups and its Shiite minority. Saudi Arabia maintains that the Yemeni Shiites are influenced by the Iranian Shiites and that these are in close contact with the Islamic Republic.

The September 11 attacks led the American politicians to the belief that the root of the terrorism and its consequent threat to the West is in the Middle East. In order to counter this threat and under a pre-emptive doctrine US and its Western allies attacked and occupied Afghanistan and Iraq. Shortly after the attacks it became clear that the issue of terrorism was not resolved but gained wider dimensions. So the Western policy makers noted that the politico-economic framework in the Middle East countries as one the most important causes of the growth of terrorism in the Middle East. This is as the undemocratic system and a non-productive economy in most of the countries in the region have led to extensive corruption and denying public's basic rights. In order to prevent the growth of radical movements and terrorist organizations the American policy makers presented a plan for a greater Middle East which is claimed to expand freedom and democracy in the region. Opposition to the plan by most of the leaders in the region led to disappointment in the West (Sajedi, 2007; 38-47). The onset of the popular revolts (Arab Spring or Islamic Awakening) in the Middle Eastern countries was welcomed by the US and the West. However soon after victory of the Islamic groups in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt and murder of American diplomats at the US consulate, it became obvious that the

Arab Spring would not live to expectations in the West. Consequently as the wave of the Arab Spring reached Yemen, initially the Obama administration did not pressure Ali Abdullah Saleh to leave his office. But when the demonstrations in Yemen reached a critical moment, Obama started a proactive and productive policy by attempting to leave intact the political structure of Yemen while exerting sufficient pressure to remove Saleh. The US government was concerned about the some Yemeni armed tribes who were Islamic extremists and presence of Al Qaeda in this country (in Yemen having arms is an indispensable part of local culture). The announcement of jihad by Al Qaeda in Yemen in 2009 created the most powerful area of influence by Al Qaeda in this country; Al Qaeda was successful in taking some areas of Zangebar in 2011 causing concern for the U.S. The expansion of Al-Qaeda's activities in the various parts of Yemen, including Almashraf, Alzoob, Darelnejd, Harie and etc., caused great fear and anxiety among Western countries as well as the neighboring states of Yemen (Ismaeli, 2013: 189-194).

Corrupt totalitarian states have caused grave problems for the Middle Eastern countries and in this context the fundamentalists not only see themselves as an alternative for these rulers but they see themselves as an outcry over hegemony of the West in Islamic World. The Americans in reality fear the likely successors (i.e. the anti-Western Islamic fundamentalists) will dominate Yemen and for this reason they attempt to maintain the present current political order in this country. The US support for Ali Abdullah Saleh's successor can be found in these exigencies. Presence of Al Qaeda in Yemen, the strategic position of this country adjacent to the Bab El Mandeb Strait (as a passage for around three million barrels of oil), and Yemen's proximity to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, has made it a very important country for the US government and their regional ally namely Saudi Arabia. Thus safe-keeping and controlling this strategic Strait is a major priority in US and its regional allies' foreign policy (Sajjadpour, 2012: 100).



The proximity of Yemen to Saudi Arabia (the largest oil exporter to the US) and being adjacent to the Horn of Africa, the Gulf of Aden, the Straits of Bob El Mandeb as well as presence of the Shiite Houthis, has led the US to limit the growth of the revolutionary groups which are close to the Islamic Republic of Iran. It has done so in close cooperation with its regional ally, Saudi Arabia, and as such has attempted to build a barrier to counter the growth of the Iranian influence in Yemen. For this purpose the US has given Saudi Arabia control of the events in Yemen by attempting to maintain the Saudi's hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula and constantly supplying the Saudi's with arms and military assistance. It can be stated that in Yemen the US and Saudi Arabia are close partners who make every attempt to manage and control political events to insure survival of the political order in this country.

Conclusion

Some social fissures will dominate the historical destiny in a nation. Advanced societies have experienced historical crises such as those related to religion and ethnicity that through time have become inconsequential. However in some other nations these chasms are still vitally decisive and important. This characterizes many nations in the Middle East and is of supreme importance meaning that the historical events in the Middle Eastern nations have strengthened such divisions. Historically some of these divisions have been religious, sectarian, ethnic, lingual and racial. These divisions are ubiquitous and relate to political, ethnic, religious and security related factors. However especially in the ethno-religious movements in Middle East the manner in which these different factors play out against each other is essential.

Yemen due to its tribal and social structure lacks socio-religious cohesion and this has made it possible for regional actors to get involve in its domestic policies. Religion provides the backbone of the ideology and this has made the two political actors in Yemen i.e. the

Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia influential. The competition between these two powers in Yemen has been based on advocating and empowering religious values among those groups that are most closely allied to each of these countries. Any power grab by the Houthis in Yemen is considered as a critical development in this country due to their religious and spiritual connections to the Islamic Republic of Iran. It will undoubtedly add to the Iranian power and influence in the Arabian Peninsula. However, the wide-spread poverty in Yemen is the major reason for the reliance of the Yemenis economy to the rich state of Saudi Arabia. Presence of more than one million Yemeni laborers in Saudi Arabia and the ethnic, tribal, cultural and religious binds between the Saudis and the Yemenis, the lavish financial help granted by the Saudis to some tribes, and the presence of the Zaydis in North Yemen (with its implicit security concerns for the Saudi government) has given the Saudi government a reason and a right to interfere in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia as one of the main players in the Middle East has important tools of influence in regional events. The Wahhabi government of Saudi Arabia owing to its large territory, geopolitical location, large oil income, and as a site for holy cities such as Mecca and Medina, has claims the leadership of the Arab world and the Gulf Cooperation Council and the hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula. As such Saudi Arabia naturally is considered a regional adversary for Shiite Iran which has much power in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It is fairly evident that the adversarial relation between these nations has cast their foreign policy vis-à-vis the events in Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen. Even in the post- Saleh Yemen under Abd Al Rabbuh Mansur Hadi each competing regional and non-regional power has attempted to guide the Yemeni revolution in a way that protects their influence and interests. In response to Iran's support of the Houthis, the Saudi government has used its vast military capacity and the cooperation with the American government. The US government is interested in reducing Al Qaeda's influence in Yemen and creation of

security in the vital region of the Gulf of Aden and the Straits of Bob-El-Mandeb. Both the US and Saudi governments try to manage the events in Yemeni in a way that maintains the current political order in this country or at least keep the changes minimal to retain its influence alongside those of the US government. In conclusion with death of king Abdullah at the time of writing of this paper (January of 2015), and King Salman coming to power who has assured that the policy of the Saudi Kingdom will continue as before, the areas of contention between the two states, Iran and Saudi Arabia, will remain intact in many parts of the Middle East and in Yemen in particular.

Notes

1. The Hashid (Al Hashid) is one of the most important tribes in Yemen and the tribe of Al Ahamer is one of its most important branches. This tribe was supported in the 1990's military and economically by the Saudis and has fought alongside Sale in every war against the Houthis. This tribe switched its position vis-à-vis the Houthis since 2011. The Hashed have remained supportive of the north.
2. The Bakil is another important Yemeni tribe and has been able to incorporate other tribes politically. This tribe is highly influential in the south.
3. Following the departure of the Imam Sajad, AS, the majority of the Muslims accepted the imamat of his son Imam Mohammed Bagher and a minority who tended to his other son, Zeyde shahid, became known as the Zeydies. The Zeydies have elevated Imam Ali as to the highest position of the Asahab of the prophet.
4. Following the departure of the Imam Sadegh most Shiites became followers of his son Imam mouse Kazem. But however a minority supported his other son Ismail and accepted him as the promoter of his lineage. This group became known as the Ismaelies.
5. Abu Abdullah Shafi'i was born in the town of Gaza in the year 771 after the passing of Abu Hanife. Abu Abdullah in the age of 25 achieved a high level of scholarship in knowledge and the Hadis achieving the level of Kamal. Imam Shafi'i penned many books on the Fegh and Hadis and trained many students in the Fegh and Hadis which included Ahmad ben Mohammed ben Hanbal.

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